

**DUMBARTON HOUSE  
HISTORIC FURNISHINGS PLAN**

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## **FOREWORD**

Dumbarton House, built ca.1800, remains an outstanding example of Federal period architecture that brings to life the earliest days of our national capital for modern visitors. Joseph Nourse, first Register of the Treasury and one of our nation's earliest civil servants, moved into the house with his family in 1804. Standing on the fashionable heights of historic Georgetown, Dumbarton House served as the centerpiece of a working urban farm, surrounded by four acres of gardens and grounds that Nourse expanded to eight over time. During the nine years the Nourse family resided at Dumbarton House, they finished the home's interior—furnishing the property with family pieces and decorating it according to the latest fashions. Thanks to Joseph's meticulous record-keeping and thoughtful correspondence with his wife and children, the museum has been able to learn a great deal about the personality of Joseph Nourse, his relationship with his family, and their life at Dumbarton House. A desire to more accurately place their life within the context of our early capital led to the development of this *Historic Furnishings Plan for Dumbarton House*.

The historic property, then named Cedar Hill, remained the residence of Joseph Nourse until 1813, when he sold it to Charles Carroll—a cousin of the signer of the Declaration of Independence—who renamed the site “Belle Vue.” Nourse moved out of the house, taking with him, of course, the family furnishings, record books, and correspondence. The house then changed hands a number of times, until The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America [National Society] purchased the property to serve as their national headquarters and museum house in 1928. A women's non-profit organization, the National Society dedicates itself to historic preservation, patriotic service, and education. Restoring the property under the direction of architectural historian Fiske Kimball and architect Horace Peaslee, the National Society opened the renamed Dumbarton House to the public in 1932 as a historic house museum dedicated to the early history of our nation.

In the early 1990s, after almost six decades of stewardship, the National Society recognized the need for further attention to their historic headquarters. To

commemorate the organization's centennial in 1991, the organization renovated and expanded Dumbarton House—modernizing the facility and adding a program and meeting space. Centennial celebrations increased awareness of Dumbarton House and its rich history, inspiring the donation of several significant Nourse-related materials. Among the gifts, from the estate of Mrs. Charles J. Nourse—whose husband was a direct descendant of Joseph Nourse—were nearly 1,000 pages of archival material related to the Nourse family. The account books and manuscripts in the trove, including papers related to the family's residency at Dumbarton House, provided remarkable insight into 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century material culture. The National Society, through a number of dedicated volunteers, began the painstaking process of transcribing those historic documents and in 1994, under the curatorial guidance of Oscar Fitzgerald, opened the exhibition *In Search of Joseph Nourse: 1754-1841*—illuminating, for the first time, the important role played by Nourse in the early federal government.

The Nourse family became central to the museum's interpretation and in 2002 the Dumbarton House Board, led by then-chairman Nancy Fairhurst and museum properties committee chairman Janie Grantham, revised the museum's mission statement to reflect this importance. Museum curator at the time, Brian Lang, further researched the Nourse family and their time at Dumbarton House, building relationships with a number of Nourse descendants who shared the museum's interest in preserving the legacy of Joseph Nourse. To more accurately interpret the museum to the period of the Nourse residency, the Dumbarton House Board budgeted funds to create a Historic Furnishing Plan for the museum, and in 2006 the museum contracted noted scholar Ellen Donald to author the plan. Working with Lang, current curator Scott Scholz, and several interns, Donald researched Nourse family manuscripts, period Georgetown newspaper advertisements, and inventories of similar period households in order to reconstruct—as accurately as possible—the interior spaces of Dumbarton House between the years 1804 and 1813. The methodology for the study is further explained in the body of this document.

With the completion of the *Historic Furnishings Plan*, Dumbarton House will enter a new era of interpretive accuracy. This plan will serve as the foundation for a museum-wide re-interpretation—identified as a major institutional goal in the 2010-2015 Dumbarton House Strategic Plan. Nationally, sites like Dumbarton House provide a fundamental source of historic education for the American public, allowing America's citizens tangible contact with their nation's history. From their very inception in 1891, The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America has been fighting to preserve these vital sites—seeking to inspire, educate, and enrich the lives of Americans through a connection to our shared past. The *Historic Furnishings Plan* will allow Dumbarton House to bring the period of our nation's and its capital's earliest days to life, advancing the legacy of the National Society for current and future generations of Americans.

Karen L. Daly  
*Executive Director*  
*Dumbarton House*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From the author

Ellen Donald

No undertaking of this magnitude is possible without the help and support of numerous people. First and foremost, I would like to thank the Board of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, who, in adopting a mission statement which emphasized the story of Joseph Nourse and his family during the years that they lived at Dumbarton House, recognized the importance of the Nourse story to the history of early Washington. Their engagement in and patience with the research and analysis process that resulted in this report were tremendously supportive and greatly appreciated.

A report of this complexity called for an ongoing dialog with The Dumbarton House museum staff. Director Karen Daly's cheerful participation in developing the "Big Picture" for this report was tremendously helpful, as was her willingness, when needed, to focus on the small details. A special debt is due to Curator Scott Scholz, whose generous and unstinting help with everything from brain storming to fact checking to the assembling of the final report made this work possible. It is fair to say that without his assistance the *Dumbarton House Historic Furnishing Plan* would not have reached completion.

Also due special thanks is former curator Brian Lang whose belief in the importance of a furnishing plan for Dumbarton House was vital to launching the project. His knowledge of Joseph Nourse and possible surviving Nourse family furnishings significantly shortened the learning curve which is an inevitable part for all authors not previously immersed in the history of a site. His ongoing willingness to assist with nagging details and overlooked sources was invaluable both to the completeness of the report and the peace of mind of the author.

I would also like to acknowledge the insightful work of Oscar P. Fitzgerald whose essay in the catalog which accompanied the 1994 exhibition "In Search of Joseph Nourse: 1754-1841, America's First Civil Servant" served as the cornerstone for our understanding of Joseph Nourse. I would also like to thank him particularly for his willingness to share both his recollections of the exhibition materials and his files and notes from that groundbreaking enterprise.

Friends who are willing to read through the draft of a report such as this one with a knowledgeable eye and a judicious editor's red pencil are friends indeed. Susan Borchardt's thoughtful questions and willingness to help rephrase more than one awkward sentence made for

a more complete and readable report. The *Dumbarton House Historic Furnishings Plan* benefited greatly from the depth of her experience in the field of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century material culture.

And finally, but certainly not least, reports such as this one owe a deep and continuing debt to librarians and archivists whose work makes possible access to both the primary and secondary source materials which underpin the work of all historians. Special thanks is owed to Jamie Simmons at the West Virginia State Archives and Library for her enthusiastic assistance in finding the estate inventory of James Nourse; to Catherine Wilkins at the Virginia Historical Society for her willingness to help pin down the last frustrating footnote; to Susan Collins, Curator of the Jefferson County, West Virginia Museum in helping to pursue, albeit unsuccessfully, an elusive piece of furniture with a James Nourse provenance; and to Heather Clewell, Archivist and Records Manager of the Winterthur Museum archives in helping to begin the hunt for a documented Thomas Hurley wallpaper referenced in a long ago Winterthur newsletter. I would also especially like to thank George Combs and Leslie Anderson of the Alexandria Library Special Collections Branch for being a constant source of support and encouragement and perhaps most importantly, friendly faces on those days when one more session at the microfilm reader seemed more than the eyes or brain could bear.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From the Contributor

### BRIAN J. LANG

This project could not have been realized were it not for the vision and dedication of numerous individuals. First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge the Dumbarton House Board, which is committed to restoring and interpreting Dumbarton House to more accurately reflect life in the early City of Washington as seen through the eyes of its first occupant, Joseph Nourse. During the past decade, the Board has been fortunate to be guided by Mrs. John Robert Allen and Mrs. Thomas J. Fairhurst—both of whom wholeheartedly embraced this vision from the outset and were so instrumental in firmly guiding the Board in this direction—and to current Chairman, Mrs. Philip Heeth Grantham, who carried their mantle and continued to strengthen the leadership of the Board. Each of these ladies ensured continuity for the project, having previously served as Chairmen of the Museum Property Committee of the Dumbarton House Board; after years of discussion and research, current Chairman, Mrs. Richard Frederick Trismen, shepherded the project to its completion.

At Dumbarton House I was fortunate to have the generous assistance of current and former staff. In particular, I wish to acknowledge former Director, William S. Birdseye, who unfailingly worked during his tenure to elevate the stature and professionalism of the museum and always provided unflagging support for this project; Karen, L. Daly, former Director of Education and current Executive Director, also shared this commitment and has the enviable task of implementing the findings contained in this report; and S. Scott Scholz, Museum Curator, who quickly jumped in with both feet and graciously provided additional research materials as requested and who carefully edited and formatted the manuscript to its present form.

Certainly, I also wish to acknowledge Ellen Donald, whose many years of research into the social and cultural life of the early City of Washington provided invaluable context for Joseph Nourse and his residency at Dumbarton House. Grateful thanks are also extended to Dr. Oscar P. Fitzgerald, who together with the members of the former Manuscript, History, and Research Committee organized the exhibition, *In Search of Joseph Nourse, 1754-1841: America's First Civil Servant*. Through the use of rare, surviving tangible objects, the exhibition and its companion catalogue brought the Nourse family to life and increased recognition for this little-known—though highly important—civil servant during the formative years of the young



Republic. A debt of gratitude is also owed to the many descendants of James and Sarah Nourse, who remain instrumental in protecting and promoting the Nourse family legacy. Chief among these is R. Scott Nourse, whose many hours of genealogical research have helped to fill many gaps in the family's history. Having worked closely with Scott for nearly seven years, I consider him an authority on Nourse family history and have the further distinct privilege of counting him a personal friend. Gratitude is also extended to the many Nourse family descendants who have safeguarded numerous Nourse family artifacts and have generously loaned them to Dumbarton House. In particular, I wish to acknowledge Mrs. George Barry Bingham and the Rosa Williams Memorial Trust.

Last, and certainly, not least, I wish to acknowledge my wife, Kristin, and sons—Jameson, Hayden and Joseph—for their understanding and support during the many hours needed to complete the project.

## I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRIOR RESEARCH, INVESTIGATIONS, AND INTERPRETATIONS AT DUMBARTON HOUSE <sup>1</sup>

Founded in 1891, The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America (The National Society) is an organization devoted to furthering an appreciation of our national heritage through historic preservation, patriotic service, and educational projects. During the first thirty-five years of its history, The National Society coordinated and financed several important historic preservation projects, including reconstruction of the church at Jamestown, Virginia (1907); construction of a Neoclassical portico over Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts (1921); establishment of an endowment for Sulgrave Manor, England (1925); and governance of Gunston Hall, Virginia (1932). Despite these laudable accomplishments, however, by 1927 the organization felt it had not done anything “for itself,”<sup>2</sup> and began to look for an appropriate historic building that would serve as its national headquarters and museum. At the Eighteenth Biennial Council in 1927, it was “RESOLVED, that this Council authorize the President to appoint a Committee to take steps toward acquiring a home in Washington and be given power to act in consultation with the National Officers.”<sup>3</sup> The following year, The National Society purchased Bellevue (as Dumbarton House previously was named) and set about restoring the structure to its earlier glory. In the years that followed, The National Society undertook extensive research to learn more about the early history of the property and its residents. This research would help to guide The National Society as it set out to furnish and interpret the period rooms of the museum before they ultimately opened the building to members and the public in 1932.<sup>4</sup>

Over the course of many months in advance of the initial restoration, Mrs. Joseph Rucker Lamar, former president of The National Society and then-Chairman of the Headquarters Committee, researched land deeds, wills, plat maps, and other historic documents to guide the

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<sup>1</sup> The property has held several names during its more than two-hundred-year history. These include: “Belle View,” the name given the property by Samuel Jackson, the builder, and retained by Joseph Nourse during his residency from 1804-1813; “Belle Vue,” the name applied by Charles Carroll and retained by subsequent owners-occupants until its purchase by The National Society; and “Dumbarton House,” the name applied on December 9, 1931, by agreement of a majority of the members of the Executive Committee of The National Society and used to the present. For the purposes of this document—and to ensure consistency—the name “Dumbarton House” will be used throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Joseph Rucker Lamar, *A History of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America from 1891 to 1933*, (Atlanta: The Walter W. Brown Publishing Company, 1934), pp. 184. To date, this remains one of the most thoroughly written publications about the early history of The National Society.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> For a thorough discussion of the initial restoration and furnishing of Dumbarton House see, “Dumbarton House, Restoration and Furnishing,” in Lamar, pp. 204-215.

Committee with restoration decisions. While Joseph Nourse was a name that would become familiar to Mrs. Lamar and members of the Headquarters Committee during their research, little to no detailed information was discovered about how he might have furnished or finished the interior spaces of the house. The National Society also engaged Fiske Kimball, then-Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and a noted architectural historian, to consult on the proposed restoration and retained local architect, Horace W. Peaslee,<sup>5</sup> to serve as the principal restoration architect. As The National Society considered the restoration of Dumbarton House, Fiske Kimball wrote a letter to Mrs. Joseph Rucker Lamar and Mrs. Stephen Bonsal that seems rather prescient and applicable even today<sup>6</sup>:

Dear Ladies:

It has interested me extremely to learn of the purchase of Bellevue by the National Society of Colonial Dames, and of the project for its restoration. I have long known the house in its present form, and have greatly enjoyed the opportunity of seeing the old photographs showing it in two previous incarnations.

The photographs taken before 1880 show the house to have been originally (as it still is potentially, though not as it now stands) one of the very finest and most beautiful houses in the United States. May I take the liberty of urging most strongly that the house be restored fully and completely to its original condition? I am confident that no compromise short of this will ultimately satisfy you, and indeed all the ladies of your organization.

I can well understand that, since (when you purchased the house) it was handsome in its way and in excellent repair, it may not have been realized how very much the house had suffered from changes made since 1900, and thus it was not realized that any substantial sum would need to be spent in restoring it. Unexpected expenditures are naturally always unwelcome, but let me say that in this instance they would be justified and repaid by the vastly more beautiful and more valuable house which you would have if complete and faithful restoration were undertaken.

Mr. Peaslee, I am sure, would agree with me, that the admirable steps he has proposed to bring the house nearer to its original condition (steps limited by the amount of money hitherto thought to be available) fall far short of what is wise and desirable—but clearly he is not in a position to urge a large expenditure. What I write is entirely on my own initiative.

When I say a full and faithful restoration, I mean one without any compromises or concessions, many of which I judge from Mr. Peaslee's drawings may have to be made on account of expense. As an instance, I may mention the windows in the two circular bows which had been cut down into French windows, destroying

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<sup>5</sup> To date, the papers of Horace Peaslee have not been located. Efforts by numerous scholars to locate them have proved unsuccessful.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of Fiske Kimball to Mrs. Joseph Rucker Lamar and Mrs. Stephen Bonsal, April 30, 1931, in Lamar, pp. 198-200.

the moulded course of brick at that point. The compromise proposed by Mr. Peaslee (filling the lower part of the enlarged opening with a wood panel) is very ingenious and economical, but I am sure Mr. Peaslee would rejoice, as I would, if this could be built in again with brick, and the moulded brick restored. This is only one of many similar instances.

The reason I am so firm in my conviction that nothing short of a full restoration of the house, exactly as it was, will ultimately satisfy the Association, is the analogy with experience elsewhere, in similar cases. Independence Hall has been 'restored' three times, first about 1875, then about 1898, finally about ten years ago. In the first two so-called 'restorations' many compromises such as I have described (and much worse ones) were made. What was done in 1875 had proved unsatisfactory by 1898, and what was done in 1898 equally failed to satisfy a growingly informed knowledge and opinion. That is why at great expense the third and true restoration had to be undertaken. In this last one no such compromises were made. The building was put back exactly as it was at an early period, and thus there is no substantial occasion to expect that it will have to be touched again.

The only firm ground on which to stand is that of making the house exactly as it was. Then there is no question of taste or of future change of taste. Fortunately, you have ample information by which this can be done; not only the old photographs, but descriptions, etc., of the portico of 1813 which had been replaced even before the earlier photographs were taken. Such a restoration will be best economically in the long run, and anything short of it, which will later require to be done over, will be not only regrettable artistically, but wasteful financially.

I earnestly pray that you and your associates may see your way clear to putting this superb old mansion in the condition in which it was before any of the destructive changes.

Sincerely yours,  
Fiske Kimball

Space in this report does not permit a full examination of the many changes made during the 1931 restoration,<sup>7</sup> though it should be noted The National Society and its team of architects did a commendable job. As with any restoration project, however, financial and practical considerations resulted in some compromises having to be made.

With the restoration complete, Dumbarton House officially opened to members of The National Society and to the general public in May 1932. Few restorations or other modifications were made to the structure in the subsequent fifty years.

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed accounting of renovations and restorations made to Dumbarton House during the 1931 campaign, see the four binders submitted by Kerri Jurgens with her study, *A Preliminary Study of the Architectural History of Dumbarton House, Georgetown, District of Columbia, Headquarters of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America* (1998), located in the curatorial files at Dumbarton House.

By the late 1970s, as The National Society began to outgrow the existing facility and as years of deferred maintenance took their toll on the structure, The National Society explored the feasibility of constructing a new “President’s House” on the adjacent parcel of land (Square 1285, Lots 813 and 814) as well as undertaking a renovation of the existing structure. In advance of any archaeological work, The National Society commissioned a full review of all relevant land records.<sup>8</sup> In spring 1983, an archaeological study was undertaken in Lots 813 and 814, which yielded several significant features, including what were thought to be a carriage house and a well.<sup>9</sup> With the discovery of these features, it was suggested that a more thorough excavation be undertaken.<sup>10</sup> Regrettably, as no further archaeological reports have been located in The National Society archives, it is not known if the subsequent excavation(s) occurred.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the overwhelming projected cost of the new construction, in the immediate years that followed The National Society decided to renovate and expand the historic structure rather than construct a new building on the adjacent parcel of land. The work was to be completed by 1991, in time to commemorate the impending centennial of the founding of The National Society. The Centennial Campaign, which raised nearly \$3 million, funded the renovation and expansion of the historic structure. The project included the installation of a climate control system, a new roof, renovated administrative offices in the basement, construction of the Belle Vue Room and Lower Courtyard, and landscaping of the East Garden. During site preparation for the Belle Vue Room, excavating equipment disturbed a trash midden (near the location of the present-day north staircase leading from the Upper Terrace to the Lower Courtyard)—possibly from the Nourse occupancy—unearthing a large quantity of late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> century material—principally clay pipe stems, plate fragments, and other related material. Regrettably, this was not a controlled excavation, so drawing conclusions from the recovered material must be done with caution.<sup>12</sup> The newly expanded and renovated facility opened to members of The National Society and the public in 1991.

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<sup>8</sup> See Anneli M. Levy, *Results of Preliminary Research in Preparation for Archaeological Work, 2713 Q Street N.W., Washington, D.C., Lots 813/814, Square 1285*, (1982).

<sup>9</sup> Pamela J. Cressey and J. N. Leith Smith, *Dumbarton House Archaeological Project Preliminary Report*, (1983).

<sup>10</sup> Pamela J. Cressey, J. N. Leith Smith, and T. B. McCord, Jr., *Proposal, Dumbarton House Archaeological Project, Second Phase Investigation*, (1983).

<sup>11</sup> Cressey or McCord may possess their detailed original field notes and/or uncompleted reports of these excavations.

<sup>12</sup> Since it is believed that the original kitchen was located on the main floor of the east wing, and known that the house originally was located about 50-100 feet to the south of its present location, this would have been a reasonable location for a privy or a trash dump for household waste.

Shortly following the centennial celebrations in 1991, The National Society received a large quantity of archival material pertaining to Joseph Nourse and his family, donated by the estate of Mrs. Charles J. Nourse, Jr. (Margaret Strong), the spouse of a Nourse descendant. The material included many years of personal correspondence between Nourse and his many family members, including the time of his residency at Dumbarton House between the years 1804 and 1813, as well as personal invitations, bills of sale, account books, receipts, journals, and other ephemera.

Recognizing the importance of this material and the invaluable assistance it would provide in learning more about the history of the property and its earliest known occupant, the Dumbarton House Board organized a “Research, History and Manuscript Committee” to catalogue and transcribe the material to make the information contained therein more accessible. In 1994, the museum presented the exhibition, *In Search of Joseph Nourse, 1754-1841: America’s First Civil Servant*, organized by members of the Research, History and Manuscript Committee, co-chaired by Mrs. Julie Young and Mrs. Jeannette Harper, and curated by Dr. Oscar P. Fitzgerald, former Director of the Navy Museum in Washington, D.C. To complement the exhibition, The National Society published a catalogue, the first biographical study of Joseph Nourse and his contributions to the early American government.

Building on the momentum of the exhibition and the enthusiasm it generated to learn more about the history of the building and its early occupants, in 1998 the Dumbarton House Board contracted with Karri Jurgens, an architectural history graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University, to undertake a complete survey of architectural modifications made to the structure and surrounding grounds. Jurgens thoroughly examined early land deeds and recorded property transfers; auction sale notices published in the *National Intelligencer* and other contemporary newspapers; correspondence between Fiske Kimball, Horace Peaslee and Mrs. Lamar pertaining to the 1931 renovation contained within The National Society Archives and the Fiske Kimball Papers at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and archival material related to the Nourse family and its occupancy of the property contained within the Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.; the Nourse Family Papers at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia (UVA); and in the Starkey Papers at the Maryland State Archives. Her research resulted in her report, *A Preliminary Study of the Architectural History of Dumbarton House, Georgetown, District of Columbia, Headquarters of the National Society*

of the *Colonial Dames of America*.<sup>13</sup> Her paper has since served as the baseline reference on which all subsequent architectural studies have been based.

In an effort to better determine what decorative interior finishes (i.e., paint colors, door graining, wallpaper, etc.) may have been employed at Dumbarton House during the Nourse occupancy, the Dumbarton House Board retained the services of Matthew Mosca to analyze the plaster wall surfaces, door surfaces, and all decorative wood trim surrounding the windows, doors, baseboards, and chair rails. Mosca examined the first floor in 1998<sup>14</sup> and returned to examine the second floor in 2001.<sup>15</sup> His highly detailed reports will serve as the guide for future decisions regarding the decorative finishes throughout the historic core.

In an effort to learn more information about the specific usage of wallpaper by the Nourse family at Dumbarton House, in fall 2002, the museum engaged Robert Kelly, a wallpaper historian and principal of WRN Associates. Using his vast knowledge of historic wallpapers, combined with the findings from the Mosca analysis and primary source material provided by Dumbarton House, Kelly was tasked with recommending appropriate types and quantities of wallpaper for re-installation at Dumbarton House. These recommendations may be found in his report, *WRNA Report on Wallpaper at Dumbarton House (Cedar Hill)* (November 13, 2002).

To better understand room usage and room hierarchy during the Nourse occupancy, the Dumbarton House Board retained Betty C. Leviner, retired Curator of Exhibition Buildings at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.<sup>16</sup> Leviner recommended The National Society retain an architectural historian to undertake more specific examinations and commission a furnishings plan to guide decisions regarding interior finishes and furnishings.

Following this recommendation, in September 1999, Dumbarton House engaged Mark Wenger, architectural historian formerly at Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, to undertake a general survey of the architectural evolution of the historic structure in an effort to determine

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<sup>13</sup> April 28, 1998. Jurgens's report contains one significant error in her conclusions—that concerning the bows on the north façade. Subsequent research in examining the joists in the attic reveals they are continuous in extending to the sill of the bows, thus proving the bows are original to the first-period construction to the house and are not later additions. For more specific information regarding the dating of the bows, see the reports of Mark Wenger, *Dumbarton House, A Preliminary Survey, September 22, 1999* (October 1, 1999), pp. 3-4, and *Dumbarton House Investigations, August 18-20, 2000* (March 30, 2001), pp. 16-19.

<sup>14</sup> For detailed recommendations for the historic finishes on the principal floor, see Matthew Mosca, *A Report on the Historic Finishes, From Samples Collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms*, March 24, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> For detailed recommendations for the historic finishes on the second floor, see Matthew Mosca, *A Report on the Historic Finishes, From Samples Collected from the Second Floor Rooms*, (April 2, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Betty C. Leviner, *Summary of Comments from August 5, 1999, Visit to Dumbarton House* (undated).

“the degree to which original building fabric had survived the vigorous campaigns of remodeling and restoration.” His findings may be found in his report, *Dumbarton House, A Preliminary Survey* (October 1999).<sup>17</sup>

Mark Wenger returned to Dumbarton House in August 2000 to investigate and address numerous questions that stemmed from his previous study. Specifically, he attempted to determine the existence and location of an earlier chimney that serviced the east rooms on the main floor; the existence, location, and character of the original attic stair; the authenticity of the door between Rooms 308 and 309; the authenticity of the door between Rooms 305 and 306; the authenticity of the door between Rooms 305 and 307A (rear passage); the authenticity of the rear bows; the existence of visible evidence for the original main stair; whether there were rooms other than bedchambers on the upper floor; and to what degree the hierarchy of surviving trim could illumine room function. The answers to these questions are contained in his report, *Dumbarton House Investigation, August 18-20, 2000* (March 30, 2001).

Shortly after the visit by Mark Wenger in August 2000, Dumbarton House hired Brian J. Lang as its first paid, professional curator to oversee the museum collection, to organize temporary exhibitions, and to direct all research and restoration programs of the museum.

Concurrent with the museum’s preparation for the AAM accreditation process (2004-2006)—and in light of the newly gained information through these various directed architectural studies regarding the Nourse family and their occupancy of Dumbarton House—discussions were held between the Dumbarton House Board and museum staff regarding a potential revision to the museum mission statement. As early as the mid-1990s, Dumbarton House operated under a mission statement that read:

The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America is a not for profit historical and educational organization.

Its mission at the Dumbarton House Museum is to preserve the historic structure and its collections of both decorative arts and original manuscripts and to use these resources to educate the general public about life in Washington, D.C., in the early years of the Republic from 1790 to 1830. As a center for the study of the Federal period, the house and its collections provide a unique and important resource for scholars, students, and all those interested in this period.

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<sup>17</sup> The findings of this report should be compared with the report from his follow-up survey, *Dumbarton House Investigations, August 18-20, 2000* (March 30, 2001) before any conclusions may be drawn. This is particularly important with respect to the age of the central stair and the authenticity/age of the plaster cornices in the front half of the central passage (Room 307A&B) and in Rooms 305 and 306.



As the organization of administrative components of museum operations continued to evolve, and as additional information regarding the Nourse family and its occupation of Dumbarton House came to light, the previous mission statement proved too general in nature and too unwieldy to implement. Therefore, the following mission statement was adopted by the Dumbarton House Board in April 2003. The current approved mission statement of the museum reads:

The mission of the Dumbarton House Museum, a Federal period historic house museum, is to preserve the historic structure and its collections and to educate the public about life in Washington, D.C., during the early years of the Republic. Emphasis is placed on Joseph Nourse, first Register of the Treasury, and his family, and their occupation of the property from 1804 through 1813.

Synthesizing the information contained within the nearly eight years worth of architectural studies and evidence for furnishings and interior finishes at Dumbarton House during the Nourse residency, the museum curator prepared a *Preliminary Dumbarton House Furnishings and Interpretive Plan* (April 2003) and presented the document to the Dumbarton House Board for review at its spring 2003 meeting. Two notable conservation and restoration projects were also completed between 2004 and 2008. The first is the historically accurate re-upholstering of the Philadelphia sofa (97.8), between 2004 and 2006; and second, the restoration of the door that originally led from Room 306 and connected the central block to the west hyphen.<sup>18</sup>

In 2006, author and historian, Ellen Donald, was hired to complete the formal processes of a historic furnishings plan for Dumbarton House. The researching, interpreting, and writing of a final analysis of the accumulated information has sent Donald on searches through multiple states, collections, and interviews. This document is the fruition of her work, along with the aid and assistance of the Dumbarton House Board, its staff, and many others over the four-year process.

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<sup>18</sup> For documentation supporting the restoration of this door, see the report submitted by Mark Wenger (2004).

## II. METHODOLOGY

In April 2003, the Dumbarton House Board adopted its current mission statement which states in part that “Emphasis is placed on Joseph Nourse... and his family, and their occupation of the property from 1804 through 1813.” The questions resulting from this new focus set in motion the work which has resulted in this report.

The Dumbarton House Board and staff wished to address questions related to how the individual rooms in Dumbarton House would have been furnished during the Nourse family occupancy and what the furnishing choices would have said about the lifestyle and world view of Joseph and Maria Nourse. Modern scholarship in the fields of decorative arts, material culture, archaeology, and architectural history has opened a window into the domestic world of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This work, and the methodologies that derive from it, allow modern house museums like Dumbarton House to address questions not only about what was in the home and how it would have been assembled, but also how the choices reflected the world in which the residents lived. Imaginatively interpreted, an accurately furnished domestic interior allows modern visitors to connect not only to the intimate world of the home but also to the wider world in which it existed. An accurate and well interpreted interior can give visitors a personal connection that makes the past real.

The research that underpins the recommendations found in this report relied upon three types of resources. First, and most important, was the material directly related to Joseph Nourse and his family. Fortunately a wealth of Nourse manuscript documents including extensive family correspondence and significant numbers of Joseph Nourse’s private expense accounts survive. For example, room designations were determined based on information contained in Nourse family letters and on the way Joseph Nourse’s contemporaries utilized space within their homes. Also considered were a small but important group of objects with a Nourse family provenance. An analysis of the Nourse manuscript materials can be found in Chapter V of this report. Those surviving objects that bear directly on the household furnishings are discussed in the appropriate room sections. A list of Nourse manuscript materials and family objects is attached as an appendix to this report.

Second in significance was a study of early 19th-century Washington, D.C., probate inventories. This portion of the research was shaped by work done by two other area museums. Scholar Barbara G. Carson’s work for the Octagon Museum guided the inventory selection

process and the inventory database developed by Richard and Barbara Farner as part of the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study* served as the model for the detailed analysis of the inventories selected.

Probate records for the portion of the District of Columbia ceded by the State of Maryland are, for the most part, found in Record Group 21 at the National Archives.<sup>19</sup> The *Inventories and Sales* volumes begin in 1799 and run in apparently unbroken succession through May of 1826. The subsequent volume, which covers the period of June 1826 through March of 1830, is missing, as are various volumes from the decades that follow. Unfortunately, the volumes from the 1840s and 1850s, which might contain probate inventories for Joseph and Maria Nourse and their son Charles, are among the lost. However, an adequate number of inventories from Georgetown and Washington City representing the households of Joseph Nourse's contemporaries survive for a valid study.

Historians have long recognized probate inventories as invaluable tools for analyzing and understanding America's past. Usually taken in the weeks or months following an individual's death, they generally record the personal property, including household furnishings, of the deceased. Taken by court-appointed members of the community, these records represent a frozen moment in the life of a household. Recording everything from the best furniture and textiles to the everyday cooking utensils found in the kitchen, they offer an unparalleled glimpse of the material world at a particular place and time.

Employing them as research tools is not without its problems, however. Among the most difficult issues is deciding how to use them for comparison among a group of households representing differing wealth categories. While the obvious answer might seem to be comparing total values, this exercise can often skew results. Households whose total wealth was found primarily in large holdings of slaves, livestock, or agricultural products might in fact have very little in common with households of similar total value whose assets were derived from fine mahogany furniture, silver, and numerous tablewares and other consumer goods. Fortunately, Barbara G. Carson, in her groundbreaking volume, *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behaviour, and*

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<sup>19</sup> The probate materials for those sections of the District of Columbia originally located on the Virginia side of the Potomac were returned to those jurisdictions when they were retro-ceded to Virginia in 1846 and were not used in this study.

*Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington*<sup>20</sup> written to accompany the 1990 Octagon Museum exhibition “The Taste of Power: The Rise of Genteel Dining and Entertaining in Early Washington” realized that there was, for this period at least, another way of categorizing comparable households. Dining practices, and the necessary furnishings associated with dining, had, by the last quarter of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, become social yardsticks by which one could be measured for a place in genteel society.

Carson divided inventories into five categories, based on the numbers and types of dining furniture and tablewares listed. She designated these groups as:

“Simple”—No knives, forks, or spoons were listed, suggesting that the decedent ate with his or her fingers or with utensils of such poor quality as to have no value in the eyes of the appraiser.

“Old-Fashioned”—In these households, spoons were apparently the table utensil of choice. This practice did not, in many households, reflect an inability to purchase knives and forks, but rather a conscious decision to dine in a manner long out of style by even the middle of the 18th century.

“Decent”—Spoons, knives, and forks were found in the furnishings belonging to the decedents in this group, as were a range of assorted other tablewares. However, they owned too few examples to be able to serve large numbers of diners. The presumption here is that only the members of the household and perhaps a few close friends could be accommodated at table. Based on the numbers and quality of tea wares found in this group, it is likely that the tea table represented the social nexus of these households.

“Aspiring”—Entertaining at dinners was a social option for this group. They owned enough tables and chairs, plates, glasses, knives, forks and spoons, and other tablewares to entertain at least a group of ten. Matching sets was not a requirement for inclusion in this group but fashionable descriptors for this group’s household furnishings indicated that some effort was made to set a genteel table, with specialized forms indicating a knowledge of table etiquette.

“Elite”—Households in this group could seat and serve twenty or more people at the dinner table. Fashionable dining tables and large sets of chairs were the norm. Storage and serving forms such as sideboards and knife boxes were standard household furnishings.

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<sup>20</sup> (Washington, D.C.: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1990), pp. 30-52. For a detailed discussion of the inventory categories described below, see Chapter 2, “Ways to Take a Meal.”

Numerous examples of genteel, elegant tablewares, often described with terms that indicated expense and quality, were included among the wide range of consumer goods listed in these inventories. Both the members of households and their guests were expected to be confident actors in the theater of the dinner table.

Using these criteria, it was possible to assemble a group of inventories predicated upon social usage and lifestyle rather than bottom-line value. Some subjective judgment does come into play using this methodology. Because inventories were rarely taken by the same group of individuals, differences in descriptive language and format must be taken into account. How many is in a “set” of knives and forks? Does a “dozen” knives and forks mean six or twelve of each form? What effect on categorization does a listing for non-specific “glassware” or “china” have on the group into which the decedent is placed? Clearly, this method is not as objective as a strictly value-based grouping. However, knowledge of period social practices and consistency about how various types of objects are handled—i.e., a “dozen” knives and forks is always counted as 12 of each form—allows a cohesive sample to be assembled.

The framework for inventory use for the *Dumbarton House Historic Furnishings Plan* was derived from the work done by Carson, but expanded upon her core sample, which was limited to the years 1818 through 1826. This was particularly important since the period of focus for Dumbarton House is 1800 to 1813. By beginning in 1800, the Dumbarton sample includes the Nourse family’s first years in Georgetown, prior to the move to Dumbarton House in 1804. Ultimately, all known recorded D.C. probate inventories between 1800 and 1830 were reviewed in order to select the inventories used for this study. Post-1813 inventories were included as these often reflect the interiors of households assembled at an earlier date. The post-1813 inventories also provided an increased number of room-by-room examples. All inventories designated as Elite were included, as were the most detailed and descriptive of the Aspiring inventories recorded in a room-by-room format. Ultimately, a group of 28 probate inventories was assembled for this study. A list of the inventories used for this study is in Appendix V and transcribed copies of the inventories can be found in the Dumbarton House curatorial files.

One of the stumbling blocks to using even as limited a group of inventories as the 28 pulled together for the Dumbarton House study is the sheer volume of material to be analyzed. Even if one were to choose only a single category of objects, chairs for example, the number of variables to be addressed is huge. How many chairs were there in each of the selected

households? Of what woods were they made? Where were they found in the home? Were some chairs part of sets? What was the seat material? What type of finish did they have? What form of chair were they—arm, side, easy, rocking, Windsor? Multiply such questions by the numbers of different types of objects found in an Aspiring or Elite household and the range of discrete pieces of information to be analyzed and shaped into a unified group of recommendations numbers in the hundreds, if not thousands. Fortunately, the advent of the computer database has provided modern scholars with tools to address this problem.

A database program designed for the research phase of the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study* was used for the *Dumbarton House Historic Furnishings Plan*. Using an approach built around a nomenclature incorporating both decorative arts and material culture perspectives, the database was designed to organize information in a way that would facilitate analysis from a house museum point of view. Each object in an inventory and all of its accompanying modifiers—i.e., number, color, wood, etc.—are entered into separate fields of the database. Individual objects are identified by category, subcategory, and type—e.g. category—furniture; sub-category—table; type—dining.<sup>21</sup>

A majority of the inventories selected for analysis in the Dumbarton House project were recorded in what scholars refer to as a room-by-room format. This means that the appraisers clearly moved from room to room recording the furnishings in a specific space before moving to the next area. In the best of all possible worlds the rooms are identified with names that give room usage—e.g., parlor, dining room, passage, etc. In many of the examples, however, the spaces are simply identified with non-usage related designations such as by number—e.g., Room #1, #2, etc.; by color—e.g., blue room, green room, etc.; or by location—e.g., southwest room, north east room. In a few of the inventories, there was no format break between rooms but content analysis allowed for judgment calls on where such room breaks occurred. In those cases, for purposes of analysis, room usage was assigned based on factors such as specific furnishings listed, either individual objects or groupings, the relative values of room contents, or clues found in individual object descriptions. Marked copies of the transcribed inventories with the assumed room usage designations can be found in the Dumbarton House curatorial files.

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<sup>21</sup> A copy of the database on CD together with installation and use instructions for the Dumbarton House version, the *Early 19th-century Washington, D.C. Probate Database*, is on file in the curator's office.

Once room divisions for each inventory were determined, the specific furnishing forms found in each type of room were tallied, using both the database printouts and the old-fashioned pencil and paper method. The number of rooms counted for each type of space varied based on the information found in each inventory. For example, some households did not contain a formal dining room, while others lacked secondary family parlor/dining spaces. In one inventory, while the public spaces were identifiable by usage, all the bed chamber furnishings were tabulated together—i.e., all the bedsteads, all the chairs, etc.—making it impossible to determine how many chambers were found in the house and what the distribution of the furnishings was among the sleeping rooms. These types of variation led to a disparity in the number of parlors, dining rooms, passages, etc. used to tabulate the percentage of furnishing forms found with each room. However, in no category of room was the difference felt to be so marked as to invalidate the methodology.

It is important to note that all percentages cited in the report were rounded down to a whole number. Thus, calculations which resulted in a 16.2% finding and those that resulted in a 16.7% finding would both be cited as 16% in the text. While this does mean that the overall totals might not add up to 100%, it was felt that the consistency of treatment would offset the minor discrepancies. Such variations were deemed acceptable as the percentages represented but one component in determining the final recommendations.

The third research area examined the larger context in which the Nourse family home existed. Generally speaking this meant exploring local and regional primary source material such as merchant account books, newspapers, governmental records and personal papers, such as the letters and accounts of contemporaries. All of these types of records were explored to some degree. The process was both sped and hampered by the fact that the years of interest—1800 to 1813—represent a very tight time span. This period covered the Nourse family's arrival in Georgetown in 1800, their move into Dumbarton House in the summer of 1804 and their subsequent departure in the summer of 1813. This short time span, coupled with the transient nature of Washington's population from its very earliest years, significantly shrinks the number of surviving primary sources. In the early years of the 19th century, Georgetown and Alexandria, both founded in the mid-18th century, were small though flourishing communities and Washington City barely existed. Mrs. William Thornton, in her diary of 1800, noted that "Went to a shop in New Jersey avenue, to look for some black Chintz. A poor little store—there

are too few inhabitants for any business to be carried on extensive.”<sup>22</sup> Therein lies much of the problem for modern scholars—fewer inhabitants means fewer original primary sources to begin with and a much smaller rate of survival into the 21st century.

However, a systematic review of primary manuscript sources in the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and Georgetown University did yield some materials of interest. Unfortunately, the fire at the Georgetown Public Library in April 2007 occurred before a comprehensive survey of their collections could be made. Estimates of survival of the collections are projected to be roughly 80%, most of which were placed in frozen storage to lessen the effects of water damage. When conservation is completed on this invaluable collection and it is available to the public again, every effort should be made to investigate these holdings. While the collections had been used on previous occasions at Dumbarton House for other projects, an investigation focused specifically on resources pertinent to the *Dumbarton House Historic Furnishings Plan* should be undertaken.

Period newspapers for Georgetown, Washington City, and Alexandria were also utilized. Project-related surveys were made of several local newspapers including *The Washington Federalist*,<sup>23</sup> *The Georgetown Independent American*, and *The National Intelligencer*, which was the primary Washington paper of the period. Of particular help were newspaper advertisements already pulled from other regional newspapers for similar projects in the research files of Gadsby’s Tavern Museum in Alexandria and Gunston Hall.

The files of these museums also have in-depth collections of primary source materials related to the material culture of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Copies of pertinent materials from their files were made and have been placed in the Dumbarton House curatorial files.

Prints and paintings of household interiors and period objects were also consulted. These types of graphic images provide insight into period furnishing and room use practices, as well as sometimes depicting types of objects that are rare survivals in the 21st century. However, care must be taken when using these sources. Many of the surviving pictures of room interiors depict

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<sup>22</sup> Anna Maria Thornton, *Diary*, January 27, 1800, published in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Vol. 10, (Washington, D.C., 1907), p. 99.

<sup>23</sup> Intern Lana Housholder surveyed the entire surviving run of *The Washington Federalist* (1800-1809) in the holdings of the Library of Congress. She photocopied advertisements reflecting the range of material goods advertised for sale as well as any reference to members of the Nourse family. These photocopies were then sorted by subject matter and placed in the Dumbarton House research files by interns Melissa Archer and Emily Jennings.



houses of English or European aristocrats, spaces far removed from the reality of even the most elaborate American interior. Some, like the popular cottage interiors of the late 18th century, were very much the product of the story the artist wished to tell. Paintings by amateurs and school girls, though seeming more straight forward, often copied elements from popular print sources or were constrained by societal expectations of acceptable subject matter.

Trade cards, trade catalogs, and engraved bill heads were intended to be used as marketing tools. Like written records, pictorial sources are the products of the person and the society which produced them. Nevertheless, with such caveats in mind, it is possible to extract useful information about period interiors. Copies of images are included with this report and others have been placed in curatorial files for further study.

The observations in this report about the Nourse family are drawn from both what does and does not survive in the Nourse primary source record. These findings are coupled with information about comparable households gleaned from the *Early 19th-century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* and from contextual materials such as newspaper advertisements, merchant account books, personal papers and even the occasional work of fiction. Taken together, like the scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, this information has created a picture of the Nourse family's life at Dumbarton House in the early years of the 19th century and has guided the recommendations in this report.

### III. COMING TO AMERICA: THE JAMES NOURSE FAMILY

James Nourse, the father of Joseph Nourse, was born in 1731 in England at Weston Hall, Herefordshire. Under the tutelage of his father-in-law, Gabriel Fouace, James became a wool merchant in London after he married Sarah Fouace in 1753. While this profession afforded him a comfortable livelihood, he felt there was little possibility for the improvement of his fortune or a secure future for his large family.<sup>24</sup> He first went to America alone to determine the advantages for his family and to examine what could be gained by moving to America. Having seen the opportunities of the New World, James returned from America and declared, “I must go.” In April 1768, he wrote in a diary:

I have a comfortable livelihood, a want of no necessities and the enjoyment of some conveniences of life, but with little improvement of fortune, so as to enable my children to set up for themselves, and if they should, provisions so very dear and trades all so overstocked, that 'tis five to one they succeed.... By removing I expect to be able to purchase land sufficient for their maintenance, if employed with industry, to divide between them all—and as all places we find by history have had their rise and fall—it may be supposed that America (without the gift of prophecy) is a rising, Europe a declining state[.]<sup>25</sup>

Just under one year later, on March 16, 1769, James and Sarah Nourse left England on board the ship *Liberty* with their nine children—Joseph, James, Catherine Burton, Charles, Robert, William, Elizabeth, Susanna, and John—two servants<sup>26</sup>, and 116 crates of family possessions, each one individually numbered. A partial inventory of the contents of those crates<sup>27</sup> provides a rare and invaluable record of the household goods, furnishings, and personal effects brought by an immigrant family to America necessary to establish a new household. Among the contents were:

2 bags, two striped linsey, a bundle blankets, a bundle stockings, 1 ream brown [paper], 2 do. thin folio—1 do. Foolscap, 1 do. White brown, 30 wrought iron nails, porter 5 stamp I.N., seeds, cask, harness, window glass, cart harness, 2 ploughs, chaise, saddler, 2 crates stone ware, 200 lb. schott, ¼ lb. powder, 2 chests of tea, 1 barrel sugar, 3 pier glasses, 3 do., 2 card tables, 2 stools, a dining table, a do., and 3 stools, a box candles, family pictures, an escritoir, a mahogany

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Nourse ultimately would give birth to twenty-one children, of whom ten lived to maturity.

<sup>25</sup> Maria Catharine Nourse Lyle, *James Nourse and his Descendants* (Lexington, KY: Transylvania Printing Company, 1897), pp. 9-10.

<sup>26</sup> The servants, Elizabeth Cuminins and Mary Wood, most likely were indentured. In November 1770, James Nourse imported at his sole expense on the *Donald* under Captain Roberts an additional servant, Mary Hester. *The Virginia Genealogist*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Jan-Mar, 1980, p. 280.

<sup>27</sup> Lyle, p. 10.

cupboard, a spinet, 2 table clocks and a lantern, [No's] 65, 66, 67, 68, two chairs each, a bureau with books, pair of globes, a small cabinet with paper and accounts, a writing table with the paper of accounts, writing desk with do., press wearing apparel, do., do., 4 chairs, 2 chairs, 1 armchair, 1 do., a bedstead, bureau with bed furniture, box cutlery, 22 chairs, 2 stools, press with blankets, etc., a couch, bedstead, bedstead, do., 4 cheeses, a bedstead, do., do., 2 tables, bureau with apparel, a bedstead, cupboard, 2 Jacks, 2 hampers, cyder, raisin wine, do.<sup>28</sup>

The family arrived at Hampton, Virginia, on May 10, 1769, nearly two months later. Once safely in the Colonies, the Nourse family quickly realized that much of the eastern portion of Virginia had already been settled by immigrants who had arrived nearly a generation earlier. After the family's residency of one year at the Sheldon house near Hampton, James Nourse purchased property in Berkeley, Virginia (now Berkeley Springs, West Virginia). There, he established a plantation, "Piedmont," on which the family grew rye, wheat, and vegetables. By 1774, his accounts revealed he owned eighty-four head of "Horn Cattle," valued at £151.15s, and fifty-six hogs, valued at £26. To work the land and to tend the crops, Nourse utilized the labor of numerous enslaved Africans, ensuring the successful operation of the plantation.

Over the years, James Nourse developed close, personal friendships with several of his neighbors, including General Charles Lee (1731-1782), General Horatio Gates (1727-1806), and Samuel Washington (1734-1781), brother of George Washington. Nourse regularly supervised the operation of Lee's estate—"Prato Rio"—during Lee's frequent absences and often visited "Harewood," the estate of Samuel Washington, brother of George Washington. Nourse later became such a close friend to Samuel Washington that he was asked to serve as guardian to Washington's two sons, George Steptoe Washington (1773-1808) and Lawrence Augustine Washington (1775-1824), upon Samuel Washington's death. George Washington wrote James Nourse thanking him "for the trouble you have taken to bring me acquainted with the affairs of my deceased Brother of Berkeley."<sup>29</sup>

No doubt through his personal relationships with these prominent military and political figures, James Nourse became increasingly active in politics. In 1776, he was one of the thirteen

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<sup>28</sup> The Dumbarton House collection has several objects that may have been packed in those crates: a portrait of Sarah and James Nourse, believed to have been painted soon after their marriage; a 1690 bracket clock made by Henry Harper of London; a portrait of Elizabeth Gregory of How Caple, grandmother of James Nourse; and a portrait (on long-term loan from Richard Starkey) of Joseph Burton, Jr., great-uncle, godfather, and namesake of Joseph Nourse.

<sup>29</sup> Letter, George Washington to James Nourse, January 22, 1784; Library of Congress, George Washington Papers. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>

original trustees for the town of Bath, Morgan County, Virginia (now Berkeley Springs, West Virginia). During the Revolutionary War, James Nourse organized militias from both Berkeley and Frederick counties in Virginia, and was responsible for the disbursal of more than \$3,000 to support those militias. In 1778, he represented Berkeley County in the Virginia House of Delegates in Williamsburg, where he served on the “Committee of Propositions and Grievances, and afterward on various special committees.”<sup>30</sup> It is through this work as a Delegate that he obtained a first-printing copy of the Articles of Confederation. His personal copy—one of only ten first-printings known to exist—is archived in the Nourse Manuscript Collection. In 1781, James Nourse was appointed commissioner to settle the claims of Maryland against the United States government. While serving in this capacity, he lived at Acton Place, the home of John Hammond (1735-1784), located on Spa Creek just outside Annapolis. He died on October 10, 1784, living just one month longer than his beloved wife, Sarah.

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<sup>30</sup> Lyle, p. 16.

#### IV. “AMERICA’S FIRST CIVIL SERVANT”: A BIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH NOURSE

Joseph Nourse, the oldest child of James and Sarah Nourse, was the first occupant of Dumbarton House; consequently his residency is the focus of the historical interpretation of the building. The museum actively collects and exhibits decorative and fine arts once owned and used by the Nourse family, as well as comparable examples of furnishings appropriate to their residency at Dumbarton House. In addition to the museum collections and the period room displays, the educational programs and exhibitions illustrate the social, cultural, and political history of the early years of the young Republic, generally referred to as the Federal period (1790-1830).

Joseph Nourse was born on July 16, 1754, in London, England. In 1761, he began his schooling at the Streatham School and continued his education at various English educational institutions, including the Clapham School, the Loughborough House School, and the Soho Square School.<sup>31</sup> In 1768 and 1769, he apprenticed in his father’s woolen drapery business until the family’s departure for America. In 1769, at the age of 15, he came to America with his parents and siblings, and worked at “Piedmont,” his father’s farm in Berkeley County, Virginia, until he was 18 years of age. Now considered a young adult, Joseph Nourse began to explore professional opportunities. Undoubtedly, his father’s established friendships with several of his highly influential neighbors—themselves leaders in the political and military communities—would play a critical role in shaping the young man’s future career.

Two such influential neighbors were General Horatio Gates and General Charles Lee, whose plantations were near the Nourse property. Because of Lee’s prolonged absence from his estate—“Prato Rio”—due to the war, Lee asked James Nourse to manage many of his personal affairs. In exchange for this favor of management, on January 22, 1776, Gates wrote Lee a letter from Cambridge in which he asked Lee to propose Joseph Nourse for a position in Robert Morris’s shipping and banking firm, Willing, Morris and Company.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For a brief year-by-year documentation of the early life of Joseph Nourse, compiled in his own hand, see the chronology contained in Charles J. Nourse, *Commonplace Book* (Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 9, Folder dates 1754-1842, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department).

<sup>32</sup> Letter, Horatio Gates to Charles Lee, January 22, 1776; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1871, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume I, 1754-1776*, (New York: The Society, 1872), pp. 251-252.

On February 9, 1776, Charles Lee wrote Robert Morris in an effort to secure the young man a position. Lee wrote:

I have just received a letter from Gates reminding me of my obligations to Mr. Nourse who has been so active in my purchase. He says that there is a method of showing my gratitude by availing myself of your friendship in procuring a clerkship for him in some of your numerous Captains—he says he is a very capable young man—if such thing should be in your power and suit with your convenience you will add to the heap of obligations under which I groan.<sup>33</sup>

The following week, Robert Morris wrote a return letter to Charles Lee in which he said he would, “do something for young Mr. Nourse.”<sup>34</sup> Perhaps there was a slight delay in securing the clerkship, or possibly Robert Morris did not have any positions available at the time.

Sometime in the early months of 1776, Joseph Nourse joined the Continental Army. Charles Lee was named Commander of the Southern Department of the Continental Army, with Joseph Nourse appointed one of his Military Secretaries. On March 16, 1776, Nourse left Philadelphia with General Lee and “went with him on his Expedition to the Southern States”<sup>35</sup> to defend Charleston, South Carolina, from advancing British forces.

Days later, Lee commented in a letter to Robert Morris, “My two young Aid de Camps Byrd and Morris stand fire charmingly. I have a third aid de camp a Mr. Jenifer a young gentleman of about five and fifty who is no flincher, the little secretary Nourse behaved likewise very calmly and sedately.”<sup>36</sup>

Nourse must have served Lee capably during the war. In an undated letter (ca. 1779/80) to James Nourse, General Lee later wrote that “Your son Joseph in particular, whom I think I know to the bottom, has evr<sup>y</sup> substantial good quality to recommend him. He has integrity, fidelity, veracity and attachment not to be suppressed by the passion of the times or any political views of interest....”<sup>37</sup> So fond was General Lee of the young Nourse that he was variously referred to by close associates as Lee’s “adopted Son”<sup>38</sup> and “grandson.”<sup>39</sup> Years later, General

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<sup>33</sup> Letter, Charles Lee to Robert Morris, February 9, 1776; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1871, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume I, 1754-1776*, (New York: The Society, 1872), p. 281.

<sup>34</sup> Letter, Robert Morris to Charles Lee, February 17, 1776; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1871, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume I, 1754-1776*, (New York: The Society, 1872), p. 308.

<sup>35</sup> Nourse, *Commonplace Book*.

<sup>36</sup> Letter, Charles Lee to Robert Morris, July 2, 1776; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1872, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume II, 1776-1778*, (New York: The Society, 1873), p. 119.

<sup>37</sup> ...

<sup>38</sup> Letter, Mrs. C. Cuthbert to Charles Lee, undated; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1873, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume III, 1778-1782* (New York: The Society, 1874), p. 355.

Lee recalled in a letter to his sister, Sidney Lee, that he had “been particularly fortunate in my Aid-de-Camps; all young gentlemen of the best fortunes, families, and education of this Continent; They have adher’d to me with admirable zeal and affection, undergone no small persecution since the trial, and withstood many tampering artifices before the trial.”<sup>40</sup>

Following the battle, Joseph Nourse returned to Philadelphia on October 16, 1776, where he “had the Ague & Fever for a few days & on my recovery went to Piedmont.” On December 16, Nourse left Charles Lee and the Continental Army and by the end of the month had moved to Baltimore, where he worked in various capacities for the Board of War. In 1777, he recorded that he was in both Philadelphia and Yorktown with Congress. The following year, he returned to Philadelphia, “left the Public Service,”<sup>41</sup> and briefly acted as an agent for his father’s mercantile business. Working in this capacity Nourse again called on his former military commander, General Charles Lee. In a letter dated July 20, 1779,<sup>42</sup> Nourse commented on the current state of world affairs and proposed a business relationship:

Dear Sir

I have received your very acceptable Letter from Fredericksbourg and observe with a degree of concern your opinion of the doleful State, & the Idea you have of the melancholy prospect of our Republick—I think the historian Robertson at his commencement of the History of Charles the 5<sup>th</sup> speaking of the Roman empire says, the Seeds were sown in the formation of the Constitution, that eventually overturned the empire. May the Guardian Angel of America still deign to smile upon her Country with her enlightening Countenance, & prevent our fall, or rather may that kind hand of Providence who views past, present & to come, continue that protection which has been vouchsafed in this Contest, pity our Frailties, and if not for us, for the millions of unborn, that will people this Western World, establish our Governments, & render us a happy people—If the English government should take similar steps with regard to property, as Virginia has done belonging to residents in Great Britain, it may affect our family very considerably, as my Father has considerable Interest there—probably you may also be affected—Situating as I am, I am not confined either to time or place. an Idea has struck me possibly I may be mistaken but if it strikes you in the same

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<sup>39</sup> Letter, Thomas Mifflin to Charles Lee, March 16, 1780; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1873, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume III, 1778-1782* (New York: The Society, 1874), p. 417.

<sup>40</sup> Letter, Charles Lee to Sidney Lee; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1874, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume IV, 1782-1811* (New York: The Society, 1875), p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Nourse, *Commonplace Book*.

<sup>42</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Lee, July 20, 1779; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1873, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume III, 1778-1782* (New York: The Society, 1874), pp. 350-352.

light possibly I cou'd be the means of improving your fortune, and you might be of service to me—As I am acquainted with Trade, and want only the means of doing something in it, suppose you were to give me an order on your Correspondents in England, for £2,000 stg. & this money to be employed in the general Stock ; I wou'd forthwith embark, & go over to England via France, and carry even on my return such Articles as I cou'd be certain wou'd meet an advantageous profit to Holland, & thence from a dutch bottom to St. Eustatia, & send in small Vessels a proportionate part of the Cargo, making an Insurance—I wou'd keep a strict account, and you shou'd equally share in the profits and bear only a proportionable part of the expense. Such a scheme wou'd be worthy of prosecution, & possibly I might arrange your other affairs there to your satisfaction. I am not acquainted with their situation, but having heard of your having money there and your Bills having lately met due acceptance, it is a plan I have long wish'd for, and I mention it as an advantageous one wherein you wou'd be equally benefitted with myself. I can Settle all my affairs here & go out on a supercargo to the West Indies. You may have no Idea of the money being valuable, but I can assure you setting aside the exchange, which will always be in proportion to the increase, the profits are very great. I take the Liberty to enclose a Newspaper, & congratulate you on the Contents, & with my respectful Compliments in return to Mr. Eustace

I am Dr. Sir, your most humble obt. hum. Serv  
Joseph Nourse

Charles Lee must not have taken Nourse up on his offer to travel to Europe on his behalf, for later that year Nourse was named Assistant (Deputy) Auditor General for the Board of Treasury, the Congressional agency that supervised fiscal aspects of the war. Nevertheless, Lee must have favorably received the offer by Nourse to at least assist with some of his financial affairs concurrent with Nourse's duties in his new position. In a letter dated September 22, 1779, Nourse expressed his appreciation to the General for:

. . . the further commissions you have sent me. . . I need not tell you how pleasing these little matters are to me, and that you have a right to command everything of this nature that may lie in my power for the kind notice you took of me, at a time that I was altogether a stranger—it will be with singular pleasure that I shall obey, which is not altogether the case with old servants that conceive they have done with their Masters.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, not too long thereafter Nourse must not have done something or otherwise had occasion to cross his temperamental former commander. In a subsequent letter Nourse

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<sup>43</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Lee, September 22, 1779; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1873, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume III, 1778-1782* (New York: The Society, 1874), pp. 368-370.



apologized for not acknowledging in a timely manner a prior correspondence and somewhat chastised his former leader for his lack of better understanding:

You must consider that I have the duties of an office to execute and that my business engrosses too much of my time from my friends; but I do assure you, that in future I shall endeavour to be more punctual in my Correspondence—altho' I believe I may have written you letters that never reach'd you. Can you be so uncharitable as to conceive that because you are removed from the busy world, that the services you formerly rendered this Country are buried in Oblivion? That because you are a proscribed man, my Letters are either shorter or my regard less, than if you continued the favourite of Fortune? I am convinced you cannot, I do not think myself capable of such ingratitude—I am in pain to think y<sup>t</sup> you have ranked me amongst your quondam Correspondents, and more particularly so, that you do not think me consistent in my friendship. But my d<sup>r</sup> Sir, cannot friends be of a different way of thinking on some points without the breach of friendship? how far this may be the case betwixt us I cannot pretend to say—it is very true, that we differ in opinion on some subjects, and that the sentiments I communicate are not so correspondent to your way of thinking, as some Letters that you may receive; however, so long as I am honest & despise flattery I think I act the man and consistent with that friendship which I have always professed and I am sure General Lee's good sense will prevent any prejudices because my Sentiments are to a tittle correspondent with his—I am sincere when I say that I am a witness of your having rendered important Services to this Country, that in the worst of times you discovered the Warmest attachment to it, & it is with regret that I say your Services have not properly been considered. You have great reason to be out of temper, but I have always wished that setting aside personal enmities, the welfare of the Community shou'd govern all. Now if from your writings I discover anything that I may think have a different tendency, altho' not intentionally done, yet the consequences are the same, and therefore cannot correspond with my sentiments—this does not prove that my friendship is inconsistent, if I acted otherwise I should prostitute my opinion, and so far from acting the man, I should be a rascal...<sup>44</sup>

On September 19, 1781, the First Confederation Congress<sup>45</sup> elected Nourse Register of the Treasury, a position he held until his unceremonious ouster by President Andrew Jackson in 1829. In his role as Register, Nourse was charged with keeping “all accounts of the receipt and expenditure of public money and of debts to or from the United States, to preserve adjusted

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<sup>44</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Lee, October 25, 1779; *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1873, Publication Fund Series, The Lee Papers, Volume III, 1778-1782* (New York: The Society, 1874), pp. 383-384.

<sup>45</sup> The First Confederation Congress—immediate successor to the Second Continental Congress—convened in Philadelphia, on March 1, 1781 and lasted until November 3, 1781. In 1789, the Congress of the Confederation disbanded and was succeeded by the United States Congress.

accounts with vouchers and certificates, to record warrants drawn upon the treasury, to sign and issue government securities, and take charge of the registry of vessels under United States laws.”<sup>46</sup>

With the disbanding of the Confederation Congress and the subsequent election of George Washington as first president of the United States in 1789, Nourse petitioned the new president to remain Register of the Treasury. In an eloquent letter to Washington, dated June 16, 1789, Nourse wrote:

It being understood by the proposed arrangement for the Treasury Department that a continuation of the Office of Register is intended, I hope I shall be held excusable in your Excellency’s esteem in expressing my wishes to be continued in that Office, and in thus early offering to your Notice whenever the nomination and appointment to that Office may come in Form before Your Excellency—

Permit me Sir, to acquaint You that it is ten years since the keeping of the Books of the Treasury were committed to me; first as Assistant Auditor General, and lastly as Register to which I had the honor of being appointed by Congress under the administration of the last Superintendant of Finance; and since his resignation, under the present acting Commissioners of the Board of Treasury—To every of my Superiors in Office I cou’d refer your Excellency for Information with what Zeal, diligence, and to the extent of my Abilities I have endeavoured to fill my Station.

I feel myself peculiarly happy in thus addressing myself; because I believe there is no one more sincere in his professions of rendering Your Excellency his best Services, nor anyone who will with more pleasure than myself, zealously, diligently, and with the best of his Ability contribute his mite to the public welfare under the New Government over which You preside<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, Washington re-appointed Nourse to the position, as did each of the succeeding five presidents. Undoubtedly, Nourse’s re-appointments by Presidents John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, and John Quincy Adams were a testament to his fiscal acumen and his loyalty to the fledgling government. His colleague Richard Peters, who had been offered the job of Comptroller of the Treasury under Washington, would later recall that Joseph Nourse was “exceeded by none in fidelity, accuracy and intelligence.”

Just as James Nourse was undoubtedly responsible for facilitating and advancing the early career of his son, he was indirectly responsible for aspects of his personal life as well. For

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<sup>46</sup> Henry Campbell Black, *A Law Dictionary Containing Definitions of the Terms and Phrases of American and English Jurisprudence Ancient and Modern...*, Second Edition, (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1910), p. 1008. For the specific duties of the Register of the Treasury, see Rev. St. U. S. §§ 312, 313 (U. S. Comp. St. 1901, p. 183).

<sup>47</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to George Washington, June 16, 1789; Library of Congress, George Washington Papers; <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>.

it was at “Bullskin,”<sup>48</sup> the Berkeley County, Virginia, estate of John Bull, located on the Opequan Creek and near his father’s plantation, that Joseph Nourse would meet the woman who would later become his wife. Maria Louisa Bull (1765-1850) was born in Philadelphia on January 25, 1765, to John Bull (1731-1824) and Mary (Phillips) Bull (1731-1811). Maria’s father was active in both a military and civil capacity during the Revolution. From 1775 until 1776, he was Colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Pennsylvania Battalion of the Continental Army. In 1777, John Bull was elected member of the Assembly of Pennsylvania, and later was appointed Adjutant General of Pennsylvania. During the Revolution, Maria’s mother had charge of the family estate (she sold 55 acres to the University of Pennsylvania in 1776). Several of the buildings were burned by the British Army under General Howe, but it is said that the eldest daughter escaped on horseback with their title deeds. Between the years 1780 and 1784, the Bull family removed to their Bullskin property. After a period of courtship, Joseph Nourse and Maria Louisa Bull married at Bullskin on April 22, 1784.

Regrettably, Joseph Nourse’s mother was not able to attend the ceremony due to her continued poor health; his father represented the groom’s parents at the blessed event. “The presence of my father conveyed to my Soul, one of those pleasing sensations, I should have doubly felt, had my dear mother been there,” Nourse later wrote his mother. In describing his new bride, Nourse remarked she possessed:

. . . that sweet assemblage of female Virtues, joined (my dear Madam), to an imagination lively, & a Mind so liberally endowed, that I assure myself of every domestic Comfort & happiness in her charming company. To you, I need not thus enlarge, my Study in regard to her will be to merit her—mutual happiness must result—for I am satisfied, it will be hers to render me the most happy man.<sup>49</sup>

Following the ceremony, the newlywed couple removed to Philadelphia where they acquired a modest townhouse—which they named “Small Hopes”—located on South Second Street. Nourse described the house as having “two rooms on the 1<sup>st</sup> & two on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, with two large Garrets, the Kitchen is under ground which is an inconvenience.”<sup>50</sup> In furnishing the “snug house,” Nourse wrote his mother that his furniture was “all purchased so far as I can well

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<sup>48</sup> The property also has been spelled “Bulskin.”

<sup>49</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Sarah Fouace Nourse, April 29, 1784, in Nourse Manuscript Collection, Box 1a (Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

make at this time. In doing this, I purchased all New, and that of the best, for which, I know you will commend me.”<sup>51</sup>

Fortunately, Nourse maintained several account books in which he recorded in detail many of his household expenditures for the year 1784, including several of the furnishings undoubtedly alluded to in this letter.<sup>52</sup> From James Watkins, a joiner on Arch Street, located between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets, Nourse commissioned a four-foot dining table (£8),<sup>53</sup> a dressing chest (£10), a breakfast table (£5), six chairs (£18), and two armchairs (£10.10), for which Nourse paid a total of £51.10. From John David, a silversmith located “near the Draw Bridge,” Nourse also commissioned a set of twelve teaspoons (£4.12.3), twelve table spoons (£16), and a pair of tea (sugar) tongs (£1.18), for which he paid a total of £22.10.3.<sup>54</sup> From Blanchard & Russell, he purchased a carpet, for which he paid £15. From Captain Tingey,<sup>55</sup> he purchased a large quantity of household goods, including three bedsteads, two card tables, six mahogany chairs, various textiles for making bed furniture, a set of china, a set of bowls, six coffee cups and saucers, and three tea waiters; the cost for these goods was the substantial sum of £105.14.6.<sup>56</sup>

It would be appropriate to think the furnishings made the house quite comfortable without being garish. Given Joseph Nourse’s position of Register, one might be further tempted to think he and his young bride entertained many of the city’s socially elite. Unfortunately, a review of the extant archival record does not support such a supposition. When the couple did entertain, they principally socialized and hosted close friends and family members, a custom that would continue throughout the remainder of their lives. Names of such extended family members as Rittenhouse, Haines, Bull, Smith, and Boyd, as well as those of other close friends—Annan and Dick, among others—regularly appear in their letters of this time.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Nourse Account Journal, 1778-1803; Entry for 4 March 1784, p. 28 in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>53</sup> In 2005, Dumbarton House acquired what is believed to be the dining table mentioned in his account book. Additionally, there is a Philadelphia card table with a reported Joseph Nourse provenance—though not recorded in any of his surviving account books—in the personal collection of a direct descendant of Joseph Nourse; a similar card table to the preceding was acquired by Dumbarton House in 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Several years ago, Dumbarton House acquired on loan from a direct descendant of Joseph Nourse, one of the table spoons and two of the teaspoons. The coin silver pieces feature bright-cut engraving and bear the monogram, “JMN”—Joseph and Maria Nourse.

<sup>55</sup> This undoubtedly refers to Thomas Tingey (1750-1829), who at the time bore the rank of commodore in the merchant service. On March 30, 1777, Tingey married Margaret Murdoch of Philadelphia on the island of St. Croix. Following the establishment of the United States Navy in 1794, Tingey later was granted the rank of captain on September 3, 1798; in 1800, Tingey became the Superintendent of the Navy Yard in Washington.

<sup>56</sup> Joseph Nourse Account Journal, 1778-1803; Entry for 4 March 1784, p. 28 in Nourse Family Papers.

By March of the following year, Maria Nourse was in the late stages of her pregnancy with the couple's first child, Anna Maria Josepha Nourse (1785-1804), known as Josepha, and was staying in Virginia at the home of her parents. Meanwhile, Joseph Nourse remained in Philadelphia where he packed up their house in preparation for the removal of the federal government to the new capital in New York. By early March, Nourse had "moved most of the furniture out of the House, into a room over the Office, in which," he thought it would "be best to leave them, until the new Arrangement of the Treasury Department fixes me again in Office."<sup>57</sup> By September 1785, the family had settled in their new house on Long Island. About this time, Maria Nourse became pregnant with their second child, Charles Josephus Nourse (1786-1851), who was born on June 1 of the following year. The family remained at their rented home on Long Island until about October 1787, when they moved a bit closer to the city and rented another home in Brooklyn.

In 1790, the federal government moved back to Philadelphia from New York. From October 1790 to May 1791, the young family rented a home at #39 North Fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) Street. From May 1791 through early 1792, the family next rented a home at #276 South Second (2<sup>nd</sup>) Street. On March 16, 1792, Joseph Nourse purchased a house and lot "of Mr. Lennon."<sup>58</sup> As the yellow fever epidemic swept across Philadelphia, the family fled Philadelphia on September 18, 1792, leaving their home in the care of "Mary Porter," and traveled "unmolested thro' Lancaster, York, and Frederick to Col. Smiths in Virginia."<sup>59</sup>

As the threat of the epidemic passed, the family again returned to Philadelphia. In the years that followed, the couple would have four additional children; sadly all would die before the age of two. Joseph Nourse increasingly "became separated from the world" and passed the years "with much regards to religious duties."<sup>60</sup> A devoutly religious man his entire life, Nourse had been raised Episcopalian by a family active in church affairs. While living in New York, however, Nourse could not help but be affected by the religious revivals sweeping the United States. He converted to Presbyterianism, and helped to found a Presbyterian church in Brooklyn. When he moved back to Philadelphia in 1790 with the federal government, he served as an elder

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<sup>57</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, March 5, 1785, in Nourse Manuscript Collection, Box 1a.

<sup>58</sup> Nourse, *Commonplace Book*.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

of a Presbyterian church. In later years, Joseph Nourse would become an officer in the American Bible Society and would also help to found several churches in the young city of Washington.

Despite his rather private and reserved personality, Joseph Nourse undoubtedly continued to attend social functions as required by his political position as Register. While it is known Nourse was invited to numerous teas and dinners by each of the presidents under whom he served,<sup>61</sup> to date only one first-hand description of such an event has been located. In a letter to his wife, dated September 8, 1796, Joseph Nourse provides a rather detailed account of his fellow diners and their respective seats at a meal hosted by President George Washington:

Fryday I was at the Presidents the Company consisted of the Civil List Gentlemen. Mrs. Washington being in Virginia. The President being deprived of her aid in those Civilities which she pays to his Company and therefore was particularly attentive.—at the head M. Dandridge, foot M. Craig Secretaries. The President on the right side M. Boudinot to his right M. Francis his left, next to Mr. Boudinot, M. Pendleton of Georgia, M. Steele, M. Harrison. M. Dandridge, M. W. Pherson., M. Cone, M. Delany, M. Way, M. Nickolas, M. Nourse, M. Craig., Cap: Barry. M. Jackson I returned home about six oClock.<sup>62</sup>

Moving in 1800 with the federal government to the newly established capital in the District of Columbia, Joseph Nourse settled in well-established Georgetown, just a few miles from the Department of the Treasury, the President's House, and the Capitol building. Founded nearly fifty years prior, by 1800 Georgetown possessed an orderly grid of brick and cobblestone-lined streets containing warehouses, stores, taverns and inns, and comfortable homes. The population of the entire District of Columbia in 1800 numbered slightly more than 14,000 individuals. Of these, 2,993 lived in Georgetown, while an additional 3,210 inhabitants occupied the adjacent city of Washington.<sup>63</sup>

From Thomas Armat, Joseph Nourse first rented, and later purchased, a modest home located on West Street, near the intersection of present-day 31<sup>st</sup> and P Streets NW. Unfortunately, little is known about the house, its interior finishes and furnishings, or any outbuildings the lot may have contained. Presumably there were at least a few outbuildings extant on this site or constructed during his residency, for a review of letters subsequently written

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<sup>61</sup> Numerous invitations to these events survive in Nourse Manuscript Collection, University of Virginia Library, the Maryland State Archives, and in the private collections of several Nourse descendants.

<sup>62</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, September 8, 1796, in Nourse Manuscript Collection, Box 1b.

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cph2/cph-2-1-1.pdf>. This included the population of three places within the District: Washington (3,210), Georgetown (2,993) and Alexandria (4,971). At the time, the District included territory ceded by Virginia in 1791 but later retro-ceded to Virginia in 1846. A total of 8,144 people lived within the District of Columbia's current boundaries.

by Nourse to several individuals documents that he later moved a carriage house, stable, barn, and octagonal ice house upon his relocation to Dumbarton House.<sup>64</sup>

Upon moving to Dumbarton House in 1804, Nourse was able to rent his previous home to a “Mr. Dawson” who had agreed to take their “house for one year.”<sup>65</sup> It was not until 1808 that Nourse was able to sell the house and several adjoining lots to “Mr. A. Smith,” for which he received \$1750.<sup>66</sup> The Dumbarton House property must have been a considerable improvement over the previous Nourse residence. In the 1804 auction sale notice, the Dumbarton House property was described as being:

. . . on a high, dry, and handsome situation, and consist of a two story brick house with a passage through the center, four rooms on a floor and good cellars. The front rooms are about 17 by 18 feet—the back rooms are semicircular and are about 22 by 17 feet—the passage 9 feet wide and 38 feet long—two brick offices two stories high 17 feet 6 inches square and are connected with the House by covered ways.<sup>67</sup>

While the sale notice had advertised the premises as being “expensively improved,” shortly after occupying the home, Nourse undertook an ambitious—and expensive—decorating campaign to personalize the interior spaces and to enhance the surrounding grounds.

For the interior itself, Nourse purchased wallpaper from Thomas Hurley, a paperstainer and paperhanger in Philadelphia, for which he paid \$52.12. An additional \$0.97 was recorded for the “freight of paper for rooms and carriage.”<sup>68</sup> Physical evidence supports the installation of wallpaper in all four rooms on the first floor and the lower passage, and is further corroborated in the archival record.<sup>69</sup> In a letter dated June 7, 1804, Nourse wrote to his daughter, Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, who was then living in Philadelphia and acting as purchasing agent for her father, that when he received “the Paper you are to send for four Rooms Mr. Clarke will be fully employed.”<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, the actual pattern of the papers purchased by his daughter is

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<sup>64</sup> That he would choose to move these structures strongly suggests that Nourse paid to build these structures and did not wish to leave them behind upon relocating to Cedar Hill. For specific mention of the buildings, see the letter from Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, in the *Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers* (Maryland State Archives M 3381-102), #G 1394-13; and another dated August 9, 1804, from Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse in Nourse Manuscript Collection, Box 2.

<sup>65</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, May 31, 1804, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 2.

<sup>66</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Josephus Nourse, April 4, 1808, in *Miller Collection*, #G 1394-15.

<sup>67</sup> *National Intelligencer*, March 23, 1804.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Nourse Account Ledger, October 1, 1804, in *Nourse Family Papers*.

<sup>69</sup> For a detailed analysis of the use of wallpaper at Dumbarton House, see Robert M. Kelly, *WRNA Report on Wallpaper at Dumbarton House (Cedar Hill)*, (November 13, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, in *Miller Collection*, #G 1394-13.

unknown. However, in a subsequent letter to her mother, Josepha stated that she would do her “very best about the paper,” and that she could “get papers as handsome as the light or buff light papers with Dark bordering,” which were “at present the prevailing fashion.”<sup>71</sup> Perhaps they were similar to those he procured for the renovation of his Philadelphia townhouse in 1796. In a letter to his wife describing that renovation, Nourse proposed to paper the back parlor “of the same figure of Mr. Haines but only with a gloss in the ground which will make it more light and wear cleaner—the passage of a fashionable Octagon figure which looks plain & elegant. the front Room of a silver paper which I think you admired elegant but not gaudy.”<sup>72</sup> At Dumbarton House, physical evidence shows the wallpaper in the two west rooms extended above and below the chair rail, while the paper in the two east rooms only extended above the chair rail with painted dado below.<sup>73</sup> In the passage, the wallpaper covered the wall above the chair rail with a painted dado below and extended up the main stair only so far as the northeast corner of the landing, a convention not without precedent among Nourse and his contemporaries.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to papering the rooms on the principal floor, Joseph Nourse further wrote his daughter that, “the House is under Mr. Carmichaels whitewashing,” a likely reference to the simple finish in the upper passage and the bedchambers, as was the norm. For this, he recorded an expense of \$10.00 in his account book.<sup>75</sup> As he had done with his Philadelphia townhouse, Nourse painted the exterior brick surface of Dumbarton House, possibly to afford some protection from inclement weather.<sup>76</sup> For this, he recorded the rather large sum of \$106.75 for “painting the house.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, undated letter [ca. June 1804], 1804CND5, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 2.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, September 13, 1796, in *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-1, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799.

<sup>73</sup> As the east rooms were considered “family” and “service” spaces and therefore received a great amount of use, the fact the lower dado was not papered was likely a practical (and financial) decision as it would have been exposed to great wear and potential damage.

<sup>74</sup> Nourse similarly papered the passage in his Philadelphia townhouse. In a letter to his wife, dated September 13, 1796, he wrote “the Passage at present I shall only paper to the first landing.” (*Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-1, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799). While this was likely a cost-saving measure on Nourse’s part, far wealthier individuals papered their passages in a similar manner. For example, George Read II of New Castle, Delaware, one of the wealthiest men in America in the early-nineteenth century, papered the passage of his home (1800) only to the stair landing.

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Nourse Account Ledger, October 1, 1804, in *Nourse Family Papers*.

<sup>76</sup> In a letter to his wife, dated September 13, 1796, he commented that he “had the front and back painted. this you know is a preservation from the weather.” In *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-1, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph Nourse Account Ledger, October 1, 1804, in *Nourse Family Papers*.



Situated on the heights of Georgetown, Dumbarton House operated as a working, urban farm. Within his first year of ownership, Joseph Nourse either moved from his previous property—located approximately one third of a mile to the southwest—or constructed anew various outbuildings that would support the operations of the farm. By early June 1804, Nourse had moved a carriage house and stable, which “fatigued me, for altho. I cannot work much yet the walking about and superintending is pretty much the same thing.”<sup>78</sup> Next to be relocated was an octagonally shaped ice house, regularly referred to as the “Octagon” in letters by Nourse. This structure proved particularly difficult to relocate, for Nourse remarked “its weight forbad the Idea of attempting to move it without taking off its Roof: this Sutton went about altho satisfied of its utility with much reluctance: it was however off before night and had not the rain come on wou’d have been on its way before night.”<sup>79</sup> Two days later the ice house “which was started yesterday morning reached last evening, to about the middle of the Hill, we have been doing every thing to prevent loosing the two Cedars, and hope it will be effected. I was correct in the Idea of its [the roof’s] weight. In no way cou’d it have been moved [without removing the roof]”<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, the smaller of the two cedars had to be taken down to allow for the continued relocation of the structure. Of the difficult decision, Nourse wrote “I very much regretted on your account particularly the loss of the least of the two Cedar Trees, yet as there was no alternative and every thing done that cou’d be, I submitted to the one—The standing tree being larger, it is not missed altogether to the extent I apprehended.”<sup>81</sup>

For the placement and construction of other outbuildings in the service yard, which lay to the east of the main house, Nourse heavily relied on the opinion of “Mr. Pierce,” which undoubtedly refers to Isaac Peirce (1756-1841), a fellow Georgetown resident whose property encompassed much of present-day Rock Creek Park.

M<sup>r</sup>. Pierce called upon me this morning; he approves of the plan I had drawn of the Stables & Mares under the barn, & recommends removing the Shed in due time to the Stable yard on a Line with the Stable as it will give the warm south front to the Cattle, and exclude altogether the NW Winds from the Stable, and leave a good Yard and by being saved will safe all the Manure: the level plain north of the Stable is sufficiently large for stacking Wheat &c ... M<sup>r</sup>. Pierce and myself have concluded that the Dairy should be near the pump a little below the

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, in *Miller Collection*, #G 1394-13.

<sup>79</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, August 7, 1804, in *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-1, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804.

<sup>80</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, August 9, 1804, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

hill, and paved so as to admit of easy access to it. I have viewed Mr. Smiths nearby in the same direction in [illegible] of full, and it answers admirably: his is only 10 feet square and I propose making our 14 feet. the dairy will be so much below the hill as to admit of the smoke House over it, without so great an elevation, it saves one roof and a foundation and it may be so near to the pump as to have a cover over the pump which Mr. Pierce recommends. Mr. Smiths smoke house is over the Milk House: it is floored with Brick upon a strong joice. the Milk house at the top & sides is smoothly plastered: there is not any communication of smoke at any time and there is what must be very convenient in the middle of the floor, a proper hearth made with a few Bricks for the fire is a proper construction to spread the Smoke, which you know always ascends, and has no more communication with the dairy than if under separate roofs. it will take about 1500 bricks, so I shall have 5000 for the paved yard of which it takes 40 to a square yard of herring bone, or 36 [illegible] in running course, but the herring bone<sup>82</sup> is for the best it being stronger & ~~better~~ more handsome. You see my d<sup>r</sup>. Mia, how I am employed. Sutton is very active. and every thing goes well: the Barn not at all injured, or the least possible: the Octagon will be on its way on Monday.

On what would become a nearly eight-acre property, Joseph Nourse grew a variety of crops, which provided daily sustenance for the family and for the enslaved and free black population needed to work the farm and afforded the ability to sell surplus crops and goods at market. Fruits and vegetables referenced in various letters included: potatoes, celery, carrots, “Savory Cabbage,”<sup>83</sup> turnips, corn, wheat, rye, blackberries, apples, assorted herbs, and other fruits and vegetables. Livestock maintained on the property provided eggs, milk, cheeses, bacon, and chicken. The livestock was all contained within an enclosure of thorn hedges, which Nourse undoubtedly purchased from Thomas Main, a local Georgetown nurseryman.<sup>84</sup>

While the physical labor to maintain the farm was performed by the enslaved and free-black population, together with her husband, Maria Nourse also took a participatory and supervisory role in the operations of the house and farm. In a letter to his daughter, Joseph

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<sup>82</sup> While not contained in Levy’s 1982 archaeological report, fellow archaeologist Ted McCord orally stated to Brian Lang that he remembered encountering bricks laid in a herringbone pattern during that or a subsequent excavation. The Nourse service yard, and hence the location of the bricks laid in this manner, would approximately be at the east end of the lower garden.

<sup>83</sup> “...I sent down to Hapburn to endeavor to get Savory Cabbage, but I cou’d not get any I order’d a few more Cellery plants, which are put in and doing very well...” Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, August 9, 1804, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box ; The “Hapburn” mentioned in this letter undoubtedly refers to David Hepburn, gardener for John Mason.

<sup>84</sup> For a detailed description of the early nurseries in the District and the broader sphere in which Thomas Main operated, see John A. Saul, “Tree Culture, or a Sketch of Nurseries in the District of Columbia,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: The Society, 1907), pp. 38-62. Additionally, in the Dumbarton House archival collection there is a letter from Thomas Main to George Tibbetts of New York containing detailed information about the propagation and use of thorn hedges.

Nourse remarked that “Your d<sup>r</sup> Mother enjoys her health, and is in her usual happy spirits, very busy in the house, and in the gardens.”<sup>85</sup> While “the gardens” in the preceding quotation may refer to a vegetable or kitchen garden, it more likely refers to an ornamental flower garden. As was customary among fashionable ladies of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the cultivation of ornamental flowers was undoubtedly meant for both personal enjoyment and for exchange among friends. In fact, in a letter dated just two years after the family moved into Dumbarton House, Thomas Jefferson wrote his daughter, Martha Washington Jefferson Randolph (1772-1836), that “Mrs. Nourse has just sent a bundle of Wall flowers for you... and some tussocks of Peruvian grass.”<sup>86</sup> Jefferson apparently attempted to cultivate the grass in subsequent years, but met little success in doing so. In a subsequent letter from Thomas Jefferson to John Smith, he wrote, “I am desirous of sowing largely the next spring a kind of tall grass called Tall meadow oat, or oat-grass, and sometimes erroneously called Peruvian grass... [he wants this year’s seed since] some procured for me by Mr. Nourse which arrived too late in the first spring to be sowed [failed to germinate when started the following year]....”<sup>87</sup> Certainly while at Dumbarton House, Joseph Nourse grew tall grasses and grains that would have served as feed for livestock and may be to what Jefferson refers in the above passages.

Another plant probably grown by Maria Nourse in her garden was the common flax or linseed plant (*Linum usitatissimum*), whose various parts could be used to make dye, paper, medicines, fishing nets, hair gels and soap, and fabric. In fact, in 1812, Maria Nourse received a premium of “Thirty dollars for the best piece of Hempen or Flaxen Table Linen” by the recently formed Columbian Agricultural Society,<sup>88</sup> which was organized for the purpose of encouraging agriculture and domestic manufactures. Since the Society’s constitution required that premiums could only be awarded for manufactured items “either spun or woven in the families from which they may be exhibited,” the table linen must have been made by or under the supervision of Maria Nourse. The Society’s semi-annual exhibitions held at various locations around Georgetown—such as the Union Tavern and in “the pleasant grove the property of Thomas Beall

<sup>85</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, May 31, 1804, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 2.

<sup>86</sup> Letter, Thomas Jefferson to Martha Washington Jefferson Randolph, November 27, 1806; in Edwin Morris Betts (ed.), *Thomas Jefferson’s Garden Book, 1766-1824*, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1944), p. 237.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 415.

<sup>88</sup> The *Agricultural Museum*, the bi-monthly publication of the Columbian Agricultural Society, was the first agricultural periodical in the United States. Lasting nearly two years, the first edition appeared on July 4, 1810, printed by W.A. Rind in Georgetown, D.C., and it ceased publication in May 1812.

of George, Esq., adjoining Mr. Parrott's rope walk"<sup>89</sup>—were social occasions frequently attended by distinguished officials such as James Monroe, Secretary of State, and the British Minister. Among some of its members were John Mason of Mason's Island, Thomas Peter of Tudor Place, and other well-known families from Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

To guide him with agricultural aspects of the farm, Nourse utilized several contemporary agricultural and horticultural publications.<sup>90</sup> Together with Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and many other "Founding Fathers," Nourse was a subscriber to John Gardiner and David Hepburn's *The American Gardener*.<sup>91</sup> Also in his library was Bernard McMahon's *American Gardener's Calendar*,<sup>92</sup> which Thomas Jefferson referred to as his horticultural "bible," and which is widely, yet erroneously, credited as being the first gardening book published in the United States. Also included was an edition of James Anderson's *Essays Relating to Agriculture and Rural Affairs*,<sup>93</sup> whose three volumes contained a variety of essays about such topics as constructing enclosures and fencing, leveling ridges, the proper method of sowing grass-seeds, making hay, "hints on the economical consumption of produce of a farm," and other ruminations by the gentleman-farmer. To aid in properly caring for the livestock, Nourse consulted John Beale Bordley's *Gleanings from the Most Celebrated Books on Husbandry, Gardening and Rural Affairs*.<sup>94</sup> Bordley is particularly important in agricultural circles for having encouraged the formation of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture in 1785 as well as developing an eight field planting system, which included three fields of clover in the rotation

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<sup>89</sup> Wilhelmus Bogart Bryan, *A History of the National Capital, from its Foundation Through the Period of Adoption of the Organic Act*, Vol. 1 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914), p. 596.

<sup>90</sup> For a detailed list of books in the personal library of Joseph Nourse, see those contained in the Nourse, *Commonplace Book*; also see the transcript of a later (1836) inventory, "Joseph Nourse-Library" in the curatorial files at Dumbarton House; many of the original books survive at Weston, the home of Charles Joseph Nourse, Jr., located in Casanova, VA.

<sup>91</sup> John Gardiner and David Hepburn, *The American Gardener, containing ample directions for working a kitchen garden, every month in the year; And copious instructions for the cultivation of Flower Gardens, Vineyards, Nurseries, Hop-Yards, Green Houses and Hot Houses*, (City of Washington: Printed by Samuel H. Smith, for the Authors, 1804). Joseph Nourse's copy is in he collection at Dumbarton House.

<sup>92</sup> Bernard M'Mahon, *American Gardener's Calendar; Adapted to the Climate and Seasons of the United States; Containing a Complete Account of all the Work Necessary to be Done in the Kitchen-Garden, Fruit-Garden, Flower-Garden, Orchard, Pleasure-Ground, Vineyard, etc, etc.* (Philadelphia: B. Graves, for the Author, 1806). While not owned by Joseph Nourse, a first edition owned by Miss Beall of "Dumbarton" is in the collection of Dumbarton House.

<sup>93</sup> (Edinburgh: T. Cadell and William Creech, 1775, 1778, and 1796).

<sup>94</sup> (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1803).

plan. Of the latter, Nourse paid particular heed, as he mentions “clover Hay” in a letter of 1804 to his wife.<sup>95</sup>

Given the rigorous demands of operating the estate, it is imminently reasonable to assume that much of Joseph and Maria Nourse’s available time was spent supervising the household duties as well as managing the farm. Nevertheless, there was undoubtedly time for the couple to socialize with their Georgetown neighbors and other friends. While one might be tempted to think the Nourses socialized among their wealthy Georgetown neighbors—Benjamin Stoddert of Halcyon House, Thomas and Martha Peter of Tudor Place, Samuel Davidson of Evermay, and William Hammond Dorsey of The Oaks,<sup>96</sup> among others—a review of countless letters between Joseph Nourse and his family relations does not provide any evidence to support this assumption. Regrettably, there are few mentions of *any* interaction between Joseph and Maria Nourse and their neighbors, with most being a passing mention of an individual’s name. In fact, the only mention by Joseph Nourse of his immediate neighbor, Samuel Davidson of Evermay, is a passing reference contained in a letter to his wife, in which he recounts that “Mr. Davidson, very neighborly like permitted me to take down his fence.”<sup>97</sup> Other letters from his daughter, Josepha Nourse, do make mention of “Miss Beall” of Dumbarton<sup>98</sup> and other Georgetown residents, but these are few and far between. And Nourse records the purchase of 5,000 bricks from “R. Peter” of Georgetown, undoubtedly a reference to Robert Peter, an early mayor of Georgetown who also owned a brick kiln.

In contrast, Nourse and his wife preferred to socialize among a close circle of family members and friends, many of whom shared similar religious and educational interests. These include: Dr. and Mrs. William Thornton, whom the Nourses hosted for a New Years Eve dinner on December 31, 1800;<sup>99</sup> the Reverend Stephen Bloomer Balch, their pastor at the Georgetown

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<sup>95</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, August 4, 1804, in *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-1, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804.

<sup>96</sup> Later re-named Dumbarton Oaks by Robert Woods Bliss.

<sup>97</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, August 9, 1804, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 2.

<sup>98</sup> Letter, Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Louisa Bull Nourse, 1804CND4, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 2.

<sup>99</sup> Dr. William Thornton (1759-1828) was the first architect of the Capitol building as well as the designer of several important residences in and around the Federal city, including: The Octagon (1800), Woodlawn Plantation (1805), and Tudor Place (c. 1808). His wife, Anna Maria Brodeau Thornton (1775(?)-1865), maintained a diary in which she documented much of the early social history of the City of Washington. In it, she counts six interactions with the Nourses during the latter half of the year 1800 (August 14, September 5, September 12, November 14, December 10, and December 31). See, “Diary of Mrs. William Thornton, 1800,” in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: The Society, 1907), pp. 89-226.

Presbyterian Church, headmaster at the Columbian Academy, and a fellow incorporator of the Columbian Library of Georgetown; David Wiley, a Presbyterian minister, mayor of Georgetown (1811), editor of the *Agricultural Museum* (the publication of the Columbian Agricultural Society), and principal at the Columbian Academy who also taught natural philosophy, mathematics, geography, and Greek;<sup>100</sup> and the Reverend James Laurie, pastor of the F Street Presbyterian Church.

While few extant letters contain lengthy descriptions about the foods eaten, the guests in attendance, or other particulars about social dinners attended by Joseph and Maria Nourse, one letter from Joseph Nourse to his daughter about a dinner hosted by Reverend Laurie is worthy of mention:

Your Mother, M<sup>r</sup>. Dobbin & myself in company with M<sup>r</sup>. & M<sup>rs</sup>. Cephas dined at M<sup>r</sup>. Laurie's we did not set down to dinner until four when the rain poured down in torrents. You know the situation of their house—the stream in the front of their house soon over flowed its usual channel and we had not been a quarter of an hour up from ye Table before it entered front & back doors—with all dispatch we removed the Carpets, & other furniture, and for more than an hour the stream nearly to the top of the wash board ran through the house. It was discovered by M<sup>r</sup>. Cephas that the NE corner of the house had washed so deep in the foundation as to make it prudent for us to leave the house—this was a novelty—your dear Mother & M<sup>rs</sup>. Laurie & M<sup>rs</sup>. Cephas had to wade their way a depth of about two feet and some inches thro the Garden, and was a subject of some entertainment where this was to take place. I proposed to carry your Mama. at length our friend M<sup>r</sup>. Dobbin lead the way by taking off shoes & stockings. I followed, and your mother could not be relieved from M<sup>r</sup>. Laurie's attention otherwise she would have done very well for she put on a pair of large or jack Boots. The party again being safely on fast ground in M<sup>r</sup>. Cephas house, the revelry of the occasion enlivened our circle, and with application of Spirits to the feet &c. we escaped cold.<sup>101</sup>

If only we had additional descriptive references such as this! Despite the paucity of such references, however, Dumbarton House is indeed fortunate to possess and have access to the wealth of archival information that exists. This material not only provides invaluable information about the broader social, political, and cultural spheres in which the Nourses circulated, but contains many specific references to their residency at Dumbarton House. This archival material, combined with the numerous scientific reports conducted to date (including

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<sup>100</sup> A portrait of David Wiley (c. 1800) by Charles Peale Polk is in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery (NPG.87.244).

<sup>101</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 19, 1804, in *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-1, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804.

this report), will undoubtedly facilitate and enable Dumbarton House staff, members of the Board, and The National Society officers, to make informed decisions and guide the myriad restoration projects and interpretations affecting this unique and special historic property.

## V. PRIMARY SOURCES – FURNISHINGS & STYLE

What do the surviving primary source materials tell us about the way Joseph Nourse and his family chose to furnish their home? Fortunately, a significant number of family letters and account book entries remain to provide information about the specific choices made by Joseph and Maria Nourse, the dynamics of how those choices were made, and the lifestyle that these household furnishings supported. It should be noted, however, that there are both physical and informational gaps in the record: the first due to the vagaries of survival over time and the second due to a lack of detail in Joseph Nourse's quarterly accounts, which in the post-1800 years all too often simply listed "Furniture," followed by a dollar amount. These caveats aside, there is a wealth of information to be gleaned from the Nourse family letters and from Joseph Nourse's account books.

In letters to his mother written at the time of his marriage in the spring of 1784, Joseph Nourse provides clues that forecast his apparent lifelong involvement in the furnishings and domestic affairs of his household. In writing to her in April of 1784, he noted that "My Furniture is all purchased so far as I can well make at this time. In doing this, I purchased all New, and that of the best, for which, I know you will commend me."<sup>102</sup> In noting that he purchased "new" furniture, he was acknowledging a choice not to partake of the thriving market in second hand household goods. However, this purchase of new goods stands at odds with many later purchases that clearly show Joseph Nourse was not averse to the bargain that second-hand goods could offer. Purchases of goods at vendue (auction), which were often the result of estate sales, bankruptcies, or relocations, allowed for finding such bargains. In the fall of 1800, an account book entry records a large purchase of a variety of household goods under the heading "Purchased at Vendue Furniture &c." and an entry in 1809 records that he spent \$29 at "Erskines Sale."<sup>103</sup> Even when seeking furnishings from abroad, he wanted a good return for his money. Joseph Nourse's instructions to son Charles, in England in 1808, about purchasing "second hand" carpets and "a Glass cheap for the dining Room" make the case.<sup>104</sup>

Just a few months after his April 1784 letter, he used domestic concerns as an excuse for failing to write his mother as often as he should, noting that in addition to work, "some matters in

<sup>102</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Sarah Nourse, March 29, 1784, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 1a 1642-1789.

<sup>103</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, and Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. A7, #3490-a, in *Nourse Family Papers*.

<sup>104</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Nourse, April 4, 1808, *Miller Collection*, #G 1394-15, Folder 14.



the way of Housekeeping, that when I was at lodgings, I knew nothing about, must at present apologize.”<sup>105</sup> His attention to domestic detail runs like a thread through much of later family correspondence and in the specificity with which he recorded furnishing and household expenditures in his quarterly accounts.

It was he who oversaw the packing and moving of the family furnishings in the spring of 1785 in preparation for their move to New York, apparently giving special care to “the China and Queen’s Ware.”<sup>106</sup> In June, following the move, he wrote to Maria that “I have most of your Furniture in order—everything came safe not 5½ broke...” adding that “the Rooms are well finished... with every convenience.”<sup>107</sup> The two upstairs bedchambers were “neat,” although the smaller was “not papered,” the first clue to what would be Joseph Nourse’s ongoing emphasis on papered rooms.<sup>108</sup> Some ten years later, in 1796, during the interim return of the government to Philadelphia, he wrote to Maria of his intention to spend \$300 from rents to “make our House more comfortable in the four years providence appears to allot us in it.” He was, of course, referring to the projected move of the government to the new District of Columbia, which was set for 1800. His idea of making the house comfortable included painting various interior spaces; papering the passage, the front and back parlors, and at least one bedchamber; and buying good Brussels carpet for the two public entertaining rooms and a four-post bedstead to make a “handsome lodging room for our Friends.” He expressed particular concern about the wallpaper, noting that he could pick a pattern “to suit” either of two different pairs of preexisting curtains.<sup>109</sup>

Following the family’s move to Georgetown in 1800, he went on a veritable spending spree at auction, purchasing knives and forks and tea wares of various sorts, as well as bedding, linen yard goods, and furniture including, a sideboard and tables, looking glasses, and a clock. Subsequent household purchases included “Gause for the pier Glasses, &c,” cups and saucers, and tablecloths.<sup>110</sup> The move to Dumbarton House in June of 1804 saw Joseph Nourse involved in yet another flurry of painting and papering as well as reconfiguring the traffic flow in the house by creating a doorway as “a convenience” between the first floor bedchamber (“Mother’s

<sup>105</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Sarah Nourse, July 18, 1784, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 1a 1642-1789.

<sup>106</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, March 3, 1785, in *Nourse Manuscript Collection*, Box 1a 1642-1789.

<sup>107</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, June 15, 1785, in *Miller Collection*, #G 1394, Folder 5.

<sup>108</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, June 15, 1785, in *Miller Collection*, #G 1394, Folder 5.

<sup>109</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, in *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799.

<sup>110</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, in *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-a.

Room”) and the family “breakfast room.”<sup>111</sup> By 1808, Joseph Nourse again apparently perceived the need for additional household furnishing as his letter to his son Charles, then in England, included a shopping list of two carpets, an oil floor cloth for the passage and a “cheap” looking glass for the dining room.<sup>112</sup>

Textiles played a big part in furnishing the Nourses’ various homes and tell us a great deal about their priorities and expectations. Among the first items purchased at the time of their marriage in 1784 were both carpet and fabric for bed curtains. The purchase of carpet put them in the company of a small percentage of their fellow Philadelphians. A study of 324 Philadelphia county inventories taken between 1700 and 1775 shows that only 2.8% owned carpet.<sup>113</sup> The first entry for carpet in Joseph Nourse’s accounts following his marriage is for “a” carpet costing £15. The fact that it is noted as “a” carpet suggests that it was a pre-sewn carpet probably imported from England and offered by local merchants in a range of sizes. The cost, a third more than the dressing chest purchased at roughly the same time, is indicative of either a large size or good quality or perhaps both. His second carpet purchase is simply for “carpet” valued at 16½ 4, suggesting carpeting bought by the yard.<sup>114</sup>

The fabric for the bed curtains included both cotton furniture—printed or checked cottons suitable for upholstery uses—which were a fashionable choice at the time, and “light blue moreen,” a woolen fabric long popular for bed hangings.<sup>115</sup> What is striking about the moreen is Joseph Nourse’s description of the color. That he notes that it was “light” blue sets him apart from most of his contemporaries. His conscious differentiation between shades of blue suggests an aesthetic color awareness apparently lacking in many of his peers. Few eighteenth-century documents show American consumers specifying colors, much less differentiating between shades or tones. It is not until the end of the century and the early decades of the nineteenth, that

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<sup>111</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Josepha Nourse, June 14, 1804, in *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804.

<sup>112</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Josephus Nourse, April 4, 1808, in *Miller Collection*.

<sup>113</sup> Susan Prendergast Schoelwer, “Form, Function and Meaning in the Use of Fabric Furnishings: A Philadelphia Case Study, 1700-1775” in *Winterthur Portfolio* (Spring 1979), p. 29.

<sup>114</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington. *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-a, p. 32, 28, 36.

<sup>115</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-a, p. 34.

consumers like George Washington begin to add descriptors, such as a “pea green” background for a carpet.<sup>116</sup>

The following year, textiles probably intended for window curtains make their first appearance in Joseph Nourse’s accounts. In February of 1785, he listed a purchase of “Chintz &c” costing \$20 among other household goods purchased.<sup>117</sup> While there is no way to know how many yards were purchased, what was included in the “&c,” or how the fabric was used, it is likely that this purchase was intended for window curtains and that the “&c” (the period designation for etc.) referenced needed trim, cord, or curtain rings. Certainly, looking forward in Joseph Nourse’s accounts and letters, there is clear evidence for the use of window curtains, at least some of them chintz. In a 1796 letter to his wife about redecorating their Philadelphia home, he offers to find wallpaper to “suit either your White Curtains or the flowerd ones” if Maria wanted, and an 1800 account entry, though difficult to decipher, may well record \$17 spent for chintz.<sup>118</sup> Finally, the clearest entry of all, in July of 1804 shortly after the family moved into Dumbarton House, Joseph Nourse recorded spending \$16 for “Chintz for Curtains.”<sup>119</sup> While these curtains are not identified as to type, it seems probable that new curtains to fit windows in a new house, where size or decorative schemes might be different, would have been of more immediate concern than new bed hangings. This pattern seems confirmed by the inclusion of \$95 spent for curtains among the expenses incurred in yet another new house following the family’s move from Dumbarton House.<sup>120</sup>

Even more so than textile window hangings, carpet and floor covering purchases appeared frequently among the Nourse family household expenditures. In addition to the two carpets bought at the time of his marriage, there are four other references to carpet purchases between 1784 and 1813 when Dumbarton House was sold. In addition, an oil floor cloth for the passage was on Charles Nourse’s English shopping list in 1808.<sup>121</sup> Of particular interest is

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<sup>116</sup> Letter: George Washington to Clement Biddle, February 10, 1790 in John C. Fitzpatrick, Ed. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources*, Vol. 31 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1939), p. 8.

<sup>117</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, p.43..

<sup>118</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799.

<sup>119</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p.176, #3490-a, Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>120</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. A10, #3490-a, Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>121</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Josephus Nourse, April 4th, 1808, Miller Collection, #G 1394-15, Folder 14.

Joseph Nourse's discussion of his decision-making process in buying carpet for the family's Philadelphia home in 1796. In a letter to Maria he wrote:

I have purchased at Mr. Gallaudets Carpeting for the front & back Rooms. at first I got a Brussels & a Scotch at 8½. For the back room, but as I have had the experience of this kind in not lasting more than 4 years I have concluded we shall be better pleased with a plain figure for the back room of the quality with the other I have therefore got the other, & both made at 18 of a dollar per yard to fit the Room concluding that we ~~shall nearly~~ may wear it out by the time we leave Philadelphia (the Lord willing)... the Carpet for the front Room is 4¼ by 4¼ this will handsomely cover the Room, and a small piece near the communication door and another at the Spinet will answer almost as well as if it was made to fit.<sup>122</sup>

In this lengthy passage, Joseph Nourse illustrates a knowledge of both carpet weave and quality as well as an understanding of the fashion to have carpets "made to fit," that is to say, virtually wall-to-wall. Following the move to Dumbarton House, at least some of the carpet purchasing was delegated to son Charles who was in Philadelphia at the time. Charles wrote that "there is a very good kind about 40 cents pr yard more than Scotch call Venetian very handsome & very strong which I believe I shall get." In a presumed later but undated letter to his mother, he wrote, "The carpet I agreed for yesterday it required 36 for the room and Maria informed that you wanted some for the bottom of the carriage there being 38 [?] in the piece I had it all put up it was 1.67 \_\_\_\_ pr yard but I talked him down to 1.60 which but 12 Dolls. more in the whole than Scotch would come to & at least one half better...."<sup>123</sup>

It is clear from these various references to textile furnishings that the Nourses valued such elements of household decor. They added both comfort and fashion to a home and were clearly considered a necessary part of the Nourses' various households despite their somewhat impermanent nature.

Perhaps even more ephemeral, in the sense that it was glued to the wall and then left behind in the family's many moves, was wallpaper. Wallpaper that allowed for fashionable and colorful interior decorative schemes seems, like furnishing textiles, to have been favored by Joseph Nourse. As noted above, the lack of wallpaper in a chamber in the family's rental home in New York was considered worthy of mention, and the 1796 letter to Maria detailing the

<sup>122</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, in Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799.

<sup>123</sup> Letters, Charles Nourse to Joseph Nourse, July 5, presumed 1804, and Charles Nourse to Joseph Nourse, undated, "Philada Saturday Morning, presumed July of 1804, in Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates, 1800-1809.

redcoration of the Philadelphia house was filled with details for his wallpapering plans. He wrote that:

. . . the Passage at present I shall only paper to the first landing, if you choose it can be continued at your return, and also the Room for Mrs Haines.... The back parlor I purpose to paper of the same figure of Mrs Haines but only with a gloss in the ground which will make more light and wear cleaner. – the passage of a fashionable Octagon figure which looks plain and elegant. the front Room of a silver paper. which I think you admired elegant but not gaudy... and I have some thoughts of a handsome border to the blue in your Room like the bordering you saw in Mr Dunlaps house....<sup>124</sup>

In a teasing reply, Maria wrote back that "... your long letter of painting and papering &c I received on Tuesday and to show my obedience I echo back 'you are the dearest Pa you can do nothing wrong' all this at a distance you know I will not promise to repeat it in Philad<sup>a</sup>." Getting down to business, she then added that "the border on my blue paper I could wish to remain as it is as I have seen none I like as well...."<sup>125</sup>

Following the move to Georgetown, the family preference for wallpaper surfaces again, first in an entry for \$10 spent for "papering a room" in July 1803.<sup>126</sup> No further detail was given but the probable assumption is that this was for the house in which the family lived on P Street prior to the move to Dumbarton House.

Fortunately the record for Dumbarton House is more specific. The Nourses' daughter Josepha, then in Philadelphia, was commissioned to buy wall paper for the new house. She wrote to her father that "... I intend doing my very best about the paper, I dare say I can get papers as handsome as the light or buff light papers with Dark bordering is at present the prevailing fashion—the effect is very pretty and they have the advantage of lighting remarkably well...."<sup>127</sup> Additional information is found in a letter from Joseph Nourse to his daughter in which he anticipates the arrival of "the paper you are to send for four Rooms."<sup>128</sup> His accounts at the end of 1804 record an expenditure of \$52.12 for "Paper for Rooms."<sup>129</sup> No further clues

<sup>124</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, in Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799.

<sup>125</sup> Letter, Maria Nourse to Joseph Nourse, September 22, 1796, in Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799.

<sup>126</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p.274, in Nourse Family Papers, # 3490-a.

<sup>127</sup> Letter, Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Nourse, no date [1804?] Box 2 1800-1815, Nourse Manuscript Collection.

<sup>128</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, #G 1394-13, Folder 11, Miller Collection.

<sup>129</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 318 #3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

survive as to the appearance of the paper nor for which “four” rooms it was intended. However, the primary source materials clearly show that wallpaper was an important element in the decorations of Dumbarton House.

Other types of household furnishing purchases also speak to Nourse family priorities and life style. The purchase in 1800, probably at auction, of a sideboard and tables certainly underscores an understanding of polite dining practices.<sup>130</sup> However, both the date and low value for what were probably at least three items of furniture raise a number of questions. Sideboards had been a fashionable form in American dining rooms for over a decade by 1800. Was this the Nourses’ first sideboard or were they purchasing an additional piece to furnish a secondary space as some of their neighbors did? Did the low value reflect age, condition, or simplicity of form or did Joseph Nourse get a bargain?

Additional purchases also suggest a concern for fashionable forms and a genteel lifestyle. The same account entry that included the sideboard also listed “Glasses” which cost \$77, more than twice as much as the sideboard and tables.<sup>131</sup> An account notation the following year for “Gause for the pier Glasses &c” provides a clue as to the form of the mirrors and suggests that they were large enough, with perhaps some gilding to the frame, to need a gauze cover for protection from the flies and insects that plagued Washington summers.<sup>132</sup> The same account book entry that recorded the furniture purchases also listed a range of tea and table wares, including knives and forks, cream and sugar dishes, tea and coffee urns, and a silver waiter (serving tray).<sup>133</sup> All would have added to the luster of the social rituals centered around the tea and dining tables. Perhaps the most intriguing purchase following the family’s move to Washington was an “Egyptian Lamp,” which clearly indicates an awareness of the fashion of the moment.<sup>134</sup>

Their lifestyle, like that of most of their peers was supported by servants. These participants in the domestic world of the Nourse family are sometimes noted by name, with their work described, in letters from Joseph to Maria. Joseph Nourse’s accounts also provide clues about household help. Wages are sometimes listed for hired servants and a bell system for calling servants was among the purchases made in 1805, the year after they moved into

<sup>130</sup>Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151 #3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>131</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151 #3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>132</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 169 # 3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>133</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>134</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 317 # 3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

Dumbarton House.<sup>135</sup> Also suggestive was an 1801 purchase for “yellow Cloth Livery.”<sup>136</sup> The implication being, of course, that the Nourses’ had one or more male servants (possibly slaves) who were dressed in livery, a type of formal uniform worn by male servants who were frequently in the public eye such as coachmen, footmen, doormen and waiters. Not only did the livery mark their position in the servant hierarchy but it also made visible their master’s status and wealth.<sup>137</sup> However, there is a need to be cautious here, as the surviving Nourse letters seem to indicate a less formal service hierarchy in their household.

The “livery” purchase suggests other questions as well. Could this one entry represent an abortive attempt to run a somewhat grander household following the move to Washington, or was the explanation even simpler? Was Joseph Nourse simply shopping for someone else in their circle of family and friends? Based on the evidence at hand, there is simply no way to know. It is clear that, regardless of whether their servants wore livery, the Nourses’ life in a house like Dumbarton would not have been possible without domestic help, whether free or enslaved.

What other parts of the Nourse family’s life does the primary source material illuminate? The everyday matters of food and clothing are reflected in Joseph Nourse’s quarterly accounts. Marketing and groceries, presumably the differentiation being between fresh meats and produce bought at the local market and items such as sugar, flour, tea, etc. purchased in a store, accounted for a substantial portion of the quarterly budget. Clothing, sometimes listed as a general category and sometime with the name of the family member for whom it was purchased, was also a regular expense. It is interesting to note that when a particular person is assigned to the clothing purchase, it is rarely for Maria or their daughter. Perhaps Mrs. Nourse took care of at least some of their clothing expenses from her quarterly allowance, also a regularly listed expense.

Family was clearly important to Joseph Nourse. He was willing to spend money for furniture specifically intended for his wife and daughter as his April 1786 account entries for

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<sup>135</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p.A1, A2, and 318 # 3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>136</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p.169 # 3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>137</sup> Barbara G. Carson, Ellen Kirven Donald, and Kym S. Rice, “Household Encounters Servants, Slaves, and Mistresses in Early Washington” p. 83-84, in Eleanor McD. Thompson, Ed., *The American Home Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life*, (Winterthur, Delaware, Winterthur Museum, 1998).

“Easy Chair for Mrs. Nourse” and “Chair for the Child maria” illustrate.<sup>138</sup> Paints and possibly two keyboard instruments were expenditures for his daughter’s education as well as undoubtedly for her pleasure.<sup>139</sup> Entries also cite expenses for Charles’ education as well as what was no doubt a fee for dance lessons—lessons to prepare Charles not only for a professional life but for a genteel social life as well.<sup>140</sup>

What type of life did the Nourse family lead? Certainly they enjoyed the company of friends and family, but how much did they partake of the larger, more formal social circle composed of Washington’s wealthy and/or politically powerful social elite? The primary source material, while incomplete, does provide some clues.

A 1786 reference sketches a convivial gathering over the card table. It should be noted, however, that at least one of the “guests” was Sally Bull, no doubt a relative of Maria’s.<sup>141</sup> Dinner was enjoyed with friends, although perhaps due to the very fact that the letters usually mean that either Joseph or Maria is away from home, the documents seem most often to speak of dining away from home, rather than detailing occasions when friends dined with the Nourses.<sup>142</sup>

After the family moved to Washington, there are two references to inviting others to tea. Anna Maria Thornton, in her diary entry for June 24, 1803, wrote that “Mrs. Madison Mama and I went to Mr. Nourse’s to tea.”<sup>143</sup> Maria Nourse, in an undated letter, likely to have been written to her daughter just prior to the move to Dumbarton House, noted receiving morning calls that concluded with a visit from the ladies of Margaret Bayard Smith’s family who were entertained with bread and butter and presumably tea.<sup>144</sup> The following year, Joseph Nourse in a letter to his absent wife, wrote of a different type of visit, noting that “Mr. Foster called one evening, drank

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<sup>138</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 57, #3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>139</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, and letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>140</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal, 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 114, 117, 149, #3940-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>141</sup> Joseph Nourse, Journal, October 1786-January 1790, Entry for November 10, 1786, #3490-c, in Nourse Family Papers, (“Miss Pearson with Sally Bull My Wife &c played cards last night until 1/2 past ten O’Clock....”).

<sup>142</sup> See for example, Letter, Robt Aiken to Maria Nourse, June 16, 1800, Box 2, 1800-1815; letter, Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 19, 1804, Box 2, 1800-1815; letter, Gen J. Wilkinson to Maria Nourse, no date [1812?], Box 2, 1800-1815, in Nourse Manuscript Collection.

<sup>143</sup> Diary, Anna Maria Thornton, June 24, 1803, Anna Maria Thornton Papers, Microfilm 13,818-2P, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>144</sup> Letter, Maria Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, no date [1804?], Box 2, 1800-1815, in Nourse Manuscript Collection.



tea & imparted Mrs. Merrys regard.”<sup>145</sup> The combination of the names Foster and Merry in the same sentence leads to the conclusion that the visitor was Augustus John Foster, aide to British Minister Anthony Merry. Certainly part of Mr. Foster’s duties included maintaining cordial relationships with various members of the American government, but there was also clearly a social element to his call on the Nourse household.

What of the more glittering aspects of Washington social whirl? Did the Nourses participate and if so, to what degree? Certainly, the invitations that survive in the various collections of Nourse papers suggest that they were welcomed as expected players in the social theater of the day. Invitations to dine with President Thomas Jefferson, with the Madisons, and with British Minister Erskine, together with invitations to tea and evening parties from various other luminaries such as the Merrys and the Bagots were sent to the Nourses.<sup>146</sup> A few family letters reference attending “the Levee” – no doubt the regular presidential open house –but they seem to express no special excitement.<sup>147</sup> The one clear reference to the Nourses’ entertaining at what was presumably a large evening party, probably after the move from Dumbarton House, is found in a letter from one of Maria’s sisters. She writes “I thank you for your account of your party and am glad you contrived so as to keep awake – to send for ‘tout le monde’, just to see one sleep seems awkward.”<sup>148</sup>

If the social scene was not the focus of the Nourse family’s daily life, what was? Family seems to have filled this spot. If references to social occasions are relatively limited, those which speak of family are ubiquitous. In the early years of their marriage, Joseph and Maria raised not only their own children but oversaw the upbringing of various younger siblings and nieces and nephews. In a letter to Maria written in September of 1790, Joseph sends his “best Love to My dear little Folks & kisses of remembrance to Sister Becky & Brother Gabriel. our adopted little ones, Mona: —”<sup>149</sup> Unfortunately, it is not clear who all these “adopted little ones” were. They may have been younger siblings of either Joseph or Maria or perhaps nieces or nephews, as

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<sup>145</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, May 13, 1805, # G 1394, Folder 11, Miller Collection.

<sup>146</sup> See for example: invitations from Thomas Jefferson to dine, July 4, 1802, May 3, 1803, November 15, 1806, June 14, 1807 Box 2; also undated invitations for dinner from Madisons and Erskines, Box 2, undated invitations to teas and evening parties, Box 2, 1800-1815, in Nourse Manuscript Collection

<sup>147</sup> See for example, Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Josephus Nourse, November 12, 1809, “We were at the Levee on Wednesday evening Mrs[?] Rittenhouse was presented by your Mother...”, # G 1394, Folder 14, in Miller Collection.

<sup>148</sup> Letter, S. Young (sister) to Maria Nourse, July 2, 1813, # G 1394, Folder 14, in Miller Collection.

<sup>149</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 11, 1790, Box 1b, 1790-1799, in Nourse Manuscript Collection.

“fostering” young relatives – even those whose parents were still living – for extended lengths of time was an accepted and common period practice.

In addition, Maria travelled to spend considerable amounts of time with her mother and father and her sisters. On some occasions it was to await the birth of a child but for others it was simply to enjoy the warmth of the family circle. This visiting back and forth was apparently reciprocal, especially after they moved to Georgetown. In August of 1805, Joseph wrote to son Charles that, “We have received a Letter ... which mention[s] that Mrs. Young [Maria’s sister] and her daughter intend passing the Winter with us....”<sup>150</sup>

So what picture of Joseph Nourse’s home emerges from the primary source material discussed here? How does this picture influence the recommendations about the household furnishings that follow? How do the recommendations reflect both the specific materials in them, the gaps that exist and our understanding of their lifestyle?

Scholars often raise the question of gender bias in looking at 18th- and early 19th-century interiors. Even though it was the man of the family who placed orders and transacted other business related to the home, how was one to know whose choices and taste were really reflected? Was this another area where women’s roles were overlooked due to the nature of the surviving materials? In the case of the Nourse family, it was clearly a joint venture, but one can’t help but get the impression that it was Joseph Nourse’s enthusiasm that carried many of the decorative schemes forward.

In the wonderful 1796 letter quoted so often in this report, it is Joseph who initiates the proposed decorative changes upon receiving \$300 in rents. He states that “this I found I could spare to making our House more comfortable....” and then proceeds to describe the various painting, wallpaper, and carpeting schemes he hoped to undertake. He repeatedly affirms his desire for his wife to let him know her preferences, quickly adding that “I am so well acquainted with your taste that I can say you will be pleased with them.” He comes around again toward the end of the letter when in reference to proposed changes to the fireplace in the back parlor he concludes “I have no Choice in it but yours.”<sup>151</sup> Maria’s response is to tease a bit, state her preference about the questions asked, and then turn her attention to more humble matters. For

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<sup>150</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 11, 1790, Box 1b, 1790-1799, in Nourse Manuscript Collection; letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Nourse, August 17, 1805, #G 1394, Folder 11, Miller Collection.

<sup>151</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, in Nourse Family Papers.

her, the more important issues seem to arise from domestic pursuits—the pickling of beans, the disposition of the milk cow, items he was to bring when he came to meet her, and finally the care that was to be taken of her garden including a final admonition that in case of frost her “little” peppers were to be put in pots and brought in.”<sup>152</sup>

The household interiors were intended to please both of them, but Joseph Nourse was clearly the driving force behind what was an ongoing appreciation of furnishing textiles and decorative finishes. Based on the numerous references in the primary source documents to these facets of household decor, a sense emerges that color and pattern were key visual components of any household, including Dumbarton House, in which the Nourse family resided. Surviving examples of period furnishings, graphic depictions of period interiors, and broad contextual scholarship illuminating how these elements were combined, suggest that the color and pattern combinations chosen by Joseph Nourse would seem a bit bright and vibrant to the modern eye.

What else does the material suggest about the Nourse household? Certainly the quality of goods purchased by Joseph Nourse was important to him. His concern is openly expressed in the letter he wrote to his mother at the time of his marriage in which he noted that the furniture he had purchased was “of the best.”<sup>153</sup> It should be noted, however, this was the “best” from a less than top-tier cabinetmaker.<sup>154</sup> The same interest in the quality of goods purchased is seen in his 1796 decision to spend a bit more and get Brussels carpeting rather than Scotch for both the front and back parlors because the Brussels would wear better.<sup>155</sup> However, he was not averse to having his furnishing purchases follow, at least in a small way, the fashions of the moment, witness the purchase of the Egyptian lamp when they moved into Dumbarton House.<sup>156</sup> Perhaps the strongest impression is that Joseph Nourse was a man who valued a bargain, whether he was purchasing new or second hand, or whether purchases were guided by fashion or daily necessity.

Some of his accounts are also suggestive about household furniture by inference. Although the quarterly account entries for household furnishings are somewhat sporadic, virtually every quarter shows book purchases. The entries that list the books individually

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<sup>152</sup> Letter, Maria Nourse to Joseph Nourse, September 22, 1796, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>153</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Sarah Nourse, April 29, 1784, Box 1a, 1642-1789, in Nourse Manuscript Collection.

<sup>154</sup> I wish to thank Oscar Fitzgerald for this insight, expressed both in his essay in the exhibition catalog *In Search of Joseph Nourse: 1754-1841* and in several very helpful conversations during the preparation of this report.

<sup>155</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>156</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 317, #3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

suggest a pattern of buying three or four books a quarter. While these purchases, first and foremost, speak to Joseph Nourse's intellectual and spiritual life, they ultimately result in the practical need for the bookcases purchased in 1807.<sup>157</sup> In addition to his inner life, the quarterly entries for the purchase of clothing suggest that he also believed in an up-to-date presentation of self to the world at large. And thus, just as with books, the storage of clothing must factor into the household furnishings.

Taken all together, these glimpses into the life of the Nourse family suggest that Dumbarton House was a home alive with the color and pattern found in wallpapers, carpets, and curtains that created interiors that were fashionably furnished, though not crowded with furniture. And the furnishings, whether tables and chairs or tea and dinner wares, were the accumulation of twenty years of married life and the result of moving and reassembling their household more than half a dozen times. Newer, fashionable items such as the "Egyptian Lamp" enlivened the mix, but certainly the Nourses did not start over from scratch when they moved into Dumbarton House. Surviving family letters illuminate a lifestyle that included some participation in the more formal parts of elite social circles in the young capital but that seems to have placed greater value on a home life comfortably centered around family and friends.

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<sup>157</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1805-1818, p. 385, #3490-a, in Nourse Family Papers.

## **START HERE WITH NEXT EDIT**

### **THE MATERIAL WORLD OF JOSEPH NOURSE**

The early nineteenth-century Georgetown home of Joseph and Maria reflected a time of transition in both the manner in which they lived in their home and in the goods with which they furnished it. The division of houses into public and private spaces, begun in the mid-18th century, was firmly entrenched in upper class homes by the beginning of the 19th. However, the presence of a first floor bed chamber, especially one designated as “mother’s room,” was a clear holdover from earlier 18th-century practice that was well on its way out in fashionable homes of the day.<sup>158</sup> A room set aside for dining in the public side of the house, a decades-old practice in upper class Chesapeake homes, was becoming the norm through most regions of the country. In addition, a secondary parlor or family dining room was not unusual in early 19th-century homes. However, the Nourses’ designation of it as the “breakfast room” indicated a knowledge of fashionable terminology not found in many American homes. Clearly, how the Nourse family both used and perceived the division of spaces within Dumbarton House was a very real blending of old and new.

The variety and numbers of consumer goods available in the marketplace had proliferated to a remarkable degree by the early 19th century. Householders could differentiate themselves from their neighbors by the quality and quantity of their household belongings, offered in a range of colors and patterns unknown to consumers just a half century earlier. However, there were still norms in the trades that supplied the goods being sold and recognized fashions which helped define and guide the way in which homes were furnished, no matter an individual’s taste.

This section of the *Dumbarton House Historic Furnishings Plan* takes a quick general overview of the different categories of furnishings used by Joseph Nourse to furnish his home in the first decade of the 19th century. Thus much of the general information is not repeated in each room section.

It should be noted that by the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, Joseph Nourse had a variety of sources from which he might have acquired all of the types of goods discussed below. Merchandise of all sorts continued to be imported from abroad, both

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<sup>158</sup> Carl Lounsbury, ed., *Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture & Landscape* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1994). He notes that “By 1800 a desire for greater privacy led to the removal of all sleeping spaces from the ground floor, especially in urban situations.”, p. 69.

from England and Europe and, by the end of the century, increasingly from the Far East. Stores of all types proliferated and individual craftsmen began to offer their products not only as custom or “bespoke” goods but through stocked shelves and selling floors filled with ready-made goods available for purchase at the customer’s whim. A thriving market for auctions was developing. What was once an outlet for goods derived primarily from sales of estates or from failed businesses became a community meeting place and a venue where merchants and craftsmen could sell just imported or newly made goods as well. The streets of cities and small towns alike were abuzz with the sounds of commerce.<sup>159</sup>

### **Furniture:**

It is impossible to discuss the “furnishings” of a household without focusing on the “furniture,” which formed the basic framework upon which all the rest depended. Without “furniture,” most of the “furnishings” have no context.

Furniture enabled the rituals of daily life. It provided surfaces upon which to work, to eat, and to display one’s belongings. It allowed one to sit with others to share a cup of tea or the light of a candle. It raised one’s sleeping surface off the floor, often in a style that displayed wealth while providing warmth and privacy. It denoted a genteel awareness of hygiene and one’s appearance. It reflected light. It regulated the passing of time. It stored, often under lock and key, the multitude of belongings, large and small, which eased the course of everyday existence.

In elite households, the quality, variety, style, materials, and finish of the furniture conveyed messages about status, wealth, and one’s participation in the theater of gentility.<sup>160</sup>

In the 18th century, the furniture trade by and large followed the general craft practice of master craftsmen who ran small shops staffed by apprentices and journeymen. Orders for furniture were “bespoke” or custom, with the client and craftsman negotiating what was wanted in terms of both quality and quantity before the furniture was made. Joseph Nourse’s 1784 order

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<sup>159</sup> This section of this report draws heavily upon the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study* (footnoted below) and upon unpublished work done by Ellen Donald in conjunction with “In the Most Fashionable Style Making a Home in the Federal City,” an exhibition mounted by The Octagon Museum in the fall of 1991.

<sup>160</sup> Susan A. Borchardt, Mickey Crowell, Ellen K. Donald, and Barbara A. Farner, *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, (Board of Regents, Gunston Hall, 1999), vol. 2, p. 123.

with “J. Watkins Joiner in Arch Street” is a clear example of this practice.<sup>161</sup> His purchases at the time of his marriage to Maria Bull illustrate accepted cultural norms. He bespoke some of the basic furniture forms needed to set up his household. This type of business transaction was still a factor at the beginning of the 19th-century in Washington, as evidenced by advertisements such as that placed in 1801 by the partnership of Wilson and Handy. Setting up their shop on New Jersey Avenue, they touted their experience “in the principal shops in Europe and America” as a guarantee that their work would “give general satisfaction to those who will please to favour them with their custom,” and adding that “orders from country or city thankfully received and faithfully executed.”<sup>162</sup>

By the beginning of the 19th century, however, the way in which furniture was made and sold was undergoing substantive change. Changes in styles and in types of decorations led to a growing number of furniture trade specialists who did carving or made inlay or turned legs for a number of different cabinetmakers, rather than for just one shop. Changing, too, was the way in which furniture was marketed. Although bespoke furniture was still available, increasingly “warerooms” or “warehouses” were coming to dominate the urban furniture trade. The items for sale were not only the work of local craftsmen but also imported goods produced in the cabinet shops of other towns and cities. The various forms, such as chairs and tables and desks, came in both as “venture” cargo and through a growing network of complex business relationships tied to family connections and depending upon the flourishing coastal trade.

Despite changes in both furniture craft practices and stylish fashion, certain traditions survived this period of flux. Upholstered furniture, whether seating forms such as easy chairs, the increasingly popular sofas and couches, or high post bedsteads with yards of textile hangings, remained expensive status symbols. Chairs were still generally ordered in units of six. Inventory and invoice evidence shows a clear continuation of this practice well into the first half of the 19th century. Sets of six or twelve occur most often, but in the wealthiest households larger sets of eighteen or twenty-four chairs can sometimes be found. This practice held whether the chairs were simple ladderbacks, ubiquitous Windsors, or the most elegant high style mahogany examples. Although most sets were made in the side chair form, depending upon the size and purchaser’s budget, one or two of the set might be armchairs.

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<sup>161</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 28; # 3490-a in Nourse Family Papers.

<sup>162</sup> *The National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Advertisement of Wilson and Handy, January 16, 1801, 3-3.

Most tables with their myriad forms and usages continued to be purchased singly. However, by the middle of the 18th century, pairs of dining and card tables began to appear in households where entertaining was an expected part of daily life. Individual round or oval dining tables gave way to square or rectangular examples which could be fitted together to seat larger numbers of diners, or, with leaves dropped, be placed against the walls of passages and public rooms when not in use. By the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, pairs gave way to a “set” of dining tables which made an oval shape when demilune ends were added to one or more rectangular center sections. They, too, could be broken into their various parts and placed against the wall when the room used for dining was at rest. The custom of the dining table as the fixed star in the center of the dining room had not yet arrived in the early decades of the 19th century.

Tea tables continued to be a staple in households across the economic spectrum. Inventories reveal that some households had multiple examples of these small and often elegant tables, but they are rarely listed as pairs. They were found in nearly any room in the house, a semi-permanent feature in some rooms and a movable addition to other spaces, depending upon the practices of the household. Regardless of where they were used, tea tables were an important component of the rituals of daily life, but not, at least in wealthier homes, the social epicenter of the previous century.

Other specialized table forms began to appear in households at the end of the 18th century. Forms such as work or sewing tables and wash or basin stands began to appear, though perhaps in the case of work tables, not as frequently as Colonial Revival interiors would lead one to believe. And, mixed in among all the specialized forms, were varying numbers of small tables and stands that could be easily moved from room to room and hold everything from a candle to a breakfast tray.

Lockable storage forms continued to play an important role in households in which a steadily increasing number of small consumer goods had to be kept from the damages of dirt, light, and breakage, as well as from the possibility of theft. In some cases this meant a change in form. For instance, the mid-18th century’s serving or slab table gave way to the sideboard with its myriad drawers and compartments. This form combined the serving and display function of the slab table with a way to secure and organize a range of different tablewares deemed necessary for a well-set dining table. In other cases, it meant an increase in the number of



storage forms found in a well-to-do household. Multiple examples of chests of drawers, clothes presses, and even simple trunks appear in the documentary and visual record of households in the period of study. Desks, in a variety of forms, and separate freestanding bookcases continued to be important items of furniture, used not only as centers for letter writing and the keeping of accounts, but also to house the increasingly large libraries arising out of the growing book trade. Interestingly, inventories show that many bookcases and desks were still housed in dining spaces, reflecting a usage pattern from the previous century.

Some objects, such as looking glasses and clocks, were specialized forms that straddle the border between “furniture” and “furnishings.” They were both functional and decorative. Perhaps the most important use of looking glasses was to reflect and amplify light, a role somewhat at odds with modern expectations. A secondary function, but one of importance in a genteel household, was the ability of looking glasses to allow individuals to check their appearance before going into public. They were aids in achieving an acceptable facade as part of the genteel presentation of self. And finally, they served a decorative role. In the public spaces of upper class homes they were objects of status, speaking to wealth and knowledge of fashion through the size of their glass plates and the elaborateness of their frames.

Clocks, even by the first part of the 19th century, were not ubiquitous. The Gunston Hall Database showed a 54% ownership of clocks in the rural elite 18th-century households, which were analyzed.<sup>163</sup> The percentage increased to 60% in households included in the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database*. Clocks in the newest style, often elaborate gilt mantel forms, were beginning to supplant the tall case forms of the previous century. Even in households where the man-made division of the day represented by time pieces was considered important, the spread of pocket watches in a variety of price ranges seems to have limited, in all but the wealthiest households, the proliferation of clocks. In households which had clocks, they were most often found in public areas of the house, a location that served a dual purpose. A fashion statement was made and multiple members of the household were able to keep track of the passing of time.

### **Decorative Finishes and Furnishing Textiles: Bed and Window Curtains; Furniture Covers, Upholstery and Carpet; and Wallpaper**

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<sup>163</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, p. 173.

Color, pattern, and texture were introduced into household interiors through furnishing textiles, carpeting, and wallpaper and had become dominant characteristics of many middle and upper class households by the beginning of the 19th century. Although these elements were certainly known in wealthy elite homes by the middle of the 18th century, their use was often more restrained and the options available were more limited. As the century wore on, the use of these less durable components of household decor became increasingly popular, a popularity driven perhaps by changing fashions and an increase in disposable income for larger segments of the population.

A look at window curtain use illustrates this trend. A study of over 300 Philadelphia inventories taken between 1700 and 1775 found that fewer than 10% of the households in the study included window curtains.<sup>164</sup> However, the data from the mid- to late-18th-century elite inventories from the Chesapeake region undertaken for Gunston Hall show window curtains are referenced in 62% of the households examined. In those households listing curtains, the average number was 2.4.<sup>165</sup> Even a survey of over 400 District of Columbia inventories recorded between 1807 and 1826 across all social and economic levels, from the poorest households to the wealthiest, found some type of window covering in 47% of the sample.<sup>166</sup> While each of these studies used different criteria for inclusion and reflects different geographic areas and time periods, the marked inclusion of window curtains in increasing numbers of households cannot be denied.

Improvements in technologies for weaving, dying, and printing, coupled with increased consumer demand for brightly colored interiors, led to a marked increase in the use of fashionable window curtains, not just in bedchambers to match bed hangings, but in parlors and dining rooms as well. Upholstered furniture coverings were often done en suite with other textile elements. Bare floors gave way to a variety of carpeting and floor cloth options that were not only colorful but also added a layer of comfort underfoot. Wallpaper, an expensive wall finish available in limited quantities for much of the previous centuries, began to be produced in a range of color, pattern, and prices making it the decorative treatment of choice for increasingly

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<sup>164</sup> Schoelwer, p. 29.

<sup>165</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, p. 280.

<sup>166</sup> Unpublished manuscript by the author of this report, in conjunction with the Octagon Museum Exhibit, "In the Most Fashionable Style: Making a Home in the Federal City," p. 12. These data were used instead of the database information compiled for Dumbarton House because they included a larger number of inventories across a much broader economic spectrum.

large numbers of households. In homes like the Nourses', these three elements of household design—textiles, floor coverings, and wallpapers—complemented and contrasted with each other in ways that would seem, in many cases, a bit bright or busy to the modern eye.

### **Bed and Window Curtains and Furniture Upholstery**

Bed curtains, sometimes with matching window curtains, were, for most of the 18th century, where prosperous households most often displayed expensive furnishing textiles. Nearly two thirds of the inventories studied for the Gunston Hall Room Use Study included some type of bed curtain, with an average of four examples per household. Since the study is limited to elite households, it is the 25% of households without such references that are surprising. As the study states, bed curtains were “the crowning glory of the high post bedstead.” In this role they “offered an opportunity to make a conspicuous statement of fashion and wealth as well as providing much needed warmth and privacy.” Best bed chambers often had en suite bed and window curtains, even in households without window curtains in the public rooms of the house.<sup>167</sup>

By the beginning of the 19th century, popular English and European design books and magazines published **plates which** illustrated the latest designs in bed and window hangings. Many of these were described as being suitable to be made from calicoes, chintzes, and dimities, textiles that were becoming fashionable at the end of the 18th century. George Hepplewhite, in his influential *The Cabinet-Maker & Upholsterer's Guide For Every Article of Household Furniture in the Newest and Most Approved Taste* which appeared in three English editions from 1788 to 1794, noted this changing taste. He suggested that for bed curtains, white dimity ornamented with fringe gave “an effect of elegance and neatness truly agreeable.”<sup>168</sup>

Bed curtains, such as those described by Hepplewhite or the set of “bed and window curtain (made of very fine chintz)” advertised for sale at auction in an Alexandria newspaper in April of 1802, provide evidence that bed curtains continued to be an important component in furnishing a fashionable house.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, the purchase by John Tayloe of an English bedstead, presumably for his Washington house, the Octagon, in the fall of 1805 included not only the

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<sup>167</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, pp. 264-265, 280.

<sup>168</sup> (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969, reprint), pp. 17-18.

<sup>169</sup> *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer*, Alexandria, Virginia, April 1, 1802 Advertisement of Thomas Moore, Auctioneer.

wooden form but the curtains as well. They were listed as “Orange Coloured best marine [wool moreen] furniture, part lined full Vallins fringed Tassals lines Hooks, &Ca.”<sup>170</sup> However, bed curtains, once the pinnacle of fashionable textile use in elite homes, were losing their place to window curtains as the premiere way to display the status conveyed by expensive fabrics in the home.

As for window curtains, not only were fabrics changing but so was the style. Most 18th-century window curtains had basically been made from straight panels of fabric that hung down in front of the window. In their simplest form they were moved by hand to admit light or close out the night. In more elaborate versions, the fabric was drawn up by cords into an arrangement of either festoons across the top of the window or into swags with tails which hung down the sides of the opening. The cords were then tied off on a pair of cloak or curtain pins fastened into the wooden window surround. This form of curtain, simple to produce, continued to be popular well into the 19th century.

However, by the end of the 18th century, fashion had dictated a change of silhouette for those who wanted their window curtains in the latest style. Panels of fabric overlapping in the center of the window were embellished with elaborate swags of fabric called “drapery” and with valances which hung down from the cornice. Thomas Sheraton, in the 1793 edition of his *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer’s Drawing-Book*, included a plate showing “Cornices, Curtains & Drapery for Drawing Room Curtains”.<sup>171</sup> The same image, this one hand colored, survives among the working papers of the English cabinet making firm of Gillows. This plate shows white and gilt cornices and rich blue and pink fabrics ornamented with gold fringe and tassels.<sup>172</sup>

By 1808, English cabinetmaker George Smith, in a work entitled *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration, In the Most Approved and Elegant Taste...* illustrated a variety of such designs featuring a wide range of decorative textile options including elaborate drapery with long and complicated multicolored fringes, applied borders cut from contrasting colored velvets, and sheer underpanels ornamented with embroidery. These were hung from highly decorated cornices and curtain poles showing three dimensional elements drawing their inspiration from historical and international sources. Gilt and bronzed surfaces

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<sup>170</sup> Uncatalogued Tayloe Manuscripts, Box 2, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>171</sup> (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972, reprint), p. 106, Pl. L.

<sup>172</sup> Lindsay Boyton, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, (Great Britain: The Bloomfield Press, 1995), color plate 20.

competed with those “jappanned in suitable colors.”<sup>173</sup> Jappanned was the period term applied to the painted surfaces of wood, metals, and other types of materials.

Clues to fashionable color combinations are found in the descriptive notes that accompanied the plates of window curtains in Rudolph Ackermann’s magazine *The Repository of the Arts, Literature, Fashions &c.* Published in London beginning in April 1808 and running for nearly 20 years, *The Repository*’s fashion plates included 30 illustrations of the latest styles in window curtains. Labeled as intended for rooms, both public and private, the descriptions of color and pattern are striking. A “boudoir” curtain was “composed of ruby-coloured calico, enriched with a star-like figure of various black hues.” It was “lined with a newly invented print of an azure colour, strictly resembling a figured silk” and the drapery had “a Persian silk fringe of the colour of gold, united to a small portion of sable.” Other color combinations offered for various plates included “amber” lined with “French Gray” and “sky blue” combined with “lilac.” Small fabric swatches were pasted into the magazine, including, in August of 1810, a sample described as “cerulean blue furniture chintz” which was to be best complimented by linings of “bright yellow, rose colour, or crimson,” to be embellished with a “variegated Chinese fringe.” Found in the February 1813 issue was a piece of “olive grounded chintz-pattern furniture print” for which “pale green, blue or rose pink” were recommended as appropriate linings. The desired result of such combinations was “a pleasing and lively effect.”<sup>174</sup>

It is all well and good to look at the prescriptive literature of the period, but what does primary source material suggest about the curtains that hung in the windows of regional households? Certainly few of them would have equaled the elaborate and no doubt costly examples published in the guides to style and taste cited above. Inventory references are surprisingly scanty in their use of descriptive adjectives. Those references found in the inventories used for the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* are cited in the appropriate room sections.

More helpful is the information found in other types of primary source material such as newspapers, diaries, letters, bills and account books. Furniture chintzes, calicoes, and dimities, as well as various types of curtain embellishments and hardware, were advertised in local

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<sup>173</sup> (New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, 1970, reprint), p. 2.

<sup>174</sup> Rudolph Ackermann, *Repository of the Arts, Literature, Fashions &c.*, (London: April 1809), plate 3, (London: August 1810), p.119, (London: February 1813), p. 122.

newspapers.<sup>175</sup> Advertisements like that for Alexandrian Charles Webb, who described himself in his 1805 advertisement as an “Upholsterer and Paper Hanger” who could offer “Curtains made in and altered to the most modern European fashion,” offer glimpses of the fashionable taste of the region.<sup>176</sup> For those not looking for new curtains, second hand, sometimes quite fine, could be had at local auctions. In December of 1809, “elegant and richly ornamented Curtains” were among the property of departing British diplomat, “F. J. Jackson, esq.” offered for sale.<sup>177</sup>

The professional upholsterer or the “elegant” second-hand curtains available at auction notwithstanding, window curtains could be and often were made at home by the mistress of the house. Rosalie Stier Calvert, an émigré from an aristocratic Belgian family, wrote to her mother in 1804 that:

At the moment I am busy making curtains, slipcovers, etc. for the dining room. The Curtains [are] of that blue striped English cloth you gave me [trimmed] with a white fringe intermixed with small blue tassels... The cornices are white and gilt.... The middle bedroom has curtains and bed [hangings] of white dimity with white fringe intermingled with green and red embellishments, which is quite elegant.<sup>178</sup>

In 1816, Mary Boardman Crowninshield, visiting in Washington from Massachusetts, described in a letter home of making a morning visit and finding her hostess “making up her window curtains.” The curtains were to consist of “one green curtain drawn on one side—[and] yellow drapery trimmed with handsome silk fringe.”<sup>179</sup> The following year, Elizabeth Wirt, wife of Attorney General William Wirt, fretted about her curtains. Twelve yards additional fringe was sought for curtains already hung, and her husband, on business in Baltimore, was tasked with the purchase. He wrote home to report that his quest was unsuccessful. In her reply, she concluded that “as to the fringe if it can not be had – we must do without it – The curtains are up – But do not look as rich & full as I had expected – and I intended to add more drapery to them.” The curtains would do “without any addition – tho’ not so rich & full as they would have been with

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<sup>175</sup> See for example: *The National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., February 20, 1809, Advertisement of Baker and Riggs, November 5, 1814; October 18, 1815.

<sup>176</sup> *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, Alexandria, Virginia, July 26, 1805, Advertisement of Charles Webb.

<sup>177</sup> *The National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., December 22, 1809, Advertisement of Samuel Speake.

<sup>178</sup> Rosalie Stier Calvert, *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert 1795-1821*, ed. Margaret Law Callcott (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 78.

<sup>179</sup> Mary Boardman Crowninshield, *Letters of Mary Boardman Crowninshield 1815-1816*, ed. Francis Boardman Crowninshield (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1905), p. 51-52.

it.”<sup>180</sup> Fringe could be made at home as well as bought from a merchant. An August 1784 letter from a friend informed Ann Ridgely of Dover, Delaware, that she was receiving a gift of homemade fringe. The accompanying letter explained how the giver expected it to be used.

My dear Mrs Ridgely will not be offended with the Freedom I take in sending with this a Roll of Furniture Fringe of my own spinning and weaving. I believe that is enough for a Bed and two Window Curtains, but it is of no Consequence to me whether it is honored with a Chamber or a parlor Station provided she gives it house Room. It looks Coarse but I found the coarse fringe works so much better and shakes out when damp without Combing, that all my own is of that size and when made up has been preferred to finer.<sup>181</sup>

When James Nourse, Joseph’s father, died in 1784, he owned six sets of bed curtains, including fashionable copperplate print examples, and four sets of window curtains, at least one of which was probably intended to be en suite with a set of the bed hangings. Based on fabric descriptions, only one set, the six red damask window curtains, probably made of wool, were likely to have been found in the public rooms of the house. These listings suggest a preference for the use of textiles for bed hangings and window curtains in bed chambers over window curtains in public spaces. However, James Nourse’s choices of the fabrics—stylish copperplate prints and red wool damask—clearly indicate that he understood the ability of such textiles to make statements about status and gentility.<sup>182</sup>

In the twenty years following his father’s death, Joseph Nourse’s correspondence and household accounts included numerous mentions of window curtains. The clearest reference to the use of parlor curtains is found in the September 13, 1796, letter, so often referenced in this report, from Joseph to Maria detailing a redecoration of their Philadelphia house. In his planning for wallpaper in the “back Room now the Parlor” he made note that he could choose a pattern to suit either the set of “White curtains or the flowerd ones.”<sup>183</sup> Clearly the Nourses already owned two sets of curtains suitable for a parlor. If the bed hangings had held pride of place in his father’s household, in Joseph and Maria’s home it was the windows in public rooms like the parlor where furnishing textiles proclaimed the Nourses’ knowledge of what was fashionable.

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<sup>180</sup> Letters between William and Elizabeth Wirt, December 4, 9, 10, 11, and 12, 1818; William Wirt Papers, Roll 3, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

<sup>181</sup> Letter of E. Ferguson to Mrs. Ann Ridgely, August 15, 1784, in *The Ridgelys of Delaware and Their Circle, What Them Befell in Colonial and Federal Times: Letters 1751-1890*, ed. Mabel Lloyd Ridgely (Portland, Maine: The Anthoensen Press, 1949), pp. 33-34.

<sup>182</sup> *Inventory of the Goods, Chattles & Effects of James Nourse, January 1st, 1785*. Maryland State Archives.

<sup>183</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796 in *Nourse Family Papers*, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799.

Textile coverings for seating furniture, often en suite with the bed and window curtains in the rooms in which they were used, also played a role in this brightening of household interiors. A 1771 order placed by Virginian Robert Beverley for goods to be sent to him from London clearly shows the emphasis put on furnishing textiles as part of a fashionable decorative scheme. Having ordered a “rich yellow Paper” for the walls of his parlor, he then requested yellow wool damask window curtains and 12 mahogany chairs with matching yellow seats and “spare loose Cases of yellow & white Check to tie over them.”<sup>184</sup> In 1799, Susanna Knox in describing her visit to the home of a prosperous merchant in Winchester, Virginia, wrote to her daughter “I was only in the drawing room—that was a very handsome one, elegantly furnished with mahogany—a settee covered with copperplate calico, red and white, the window curtains the same, with white muslin falls, drawn up in festoons, with large tassels as big as my two fists.”<sup>185</sup>

And Rosalie Calvert, in the letter detailing the making of dining room curtains from the “blue striped English cloth” given to her by her mother adds that, “there is just enough material for windows and the sofa.”<sup>186</sup> Even inventories sometimes yield intriguing descriptions. Hellen<sup>15</sup> included among the furnishing of what is assumed to be the parlor a “Soffa of blue Damask mah’y frame & chintz cover” as well as “1 dozen mahogany chairs lined with Blue damask & chintz covers” which were probably the chairs bought by Joseph Nourse at the sale of the Hellen household furnishings.<sup>187</sup> Though no window curtains are recorded among the room’s furnishings, they were no doubt included among the “4 Suits [curtains] in storage a third floor chamber together with “Fringe for window curtains in the drawing room.” No fabric is given for these curtains, but it is interesting to note that the curtains in the dining room were chintz.

## Carpet and Floor Coverings

<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Linda Baumgarten, “Protective Covers for Furniture and Its Contents” in Luke Beckerdite, ed. *American Furniture*, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>185</sup> Quoted in both Wallace Gusler, “The Furniture of Winchester, Virginia,” p. 232 and Leroy Graves and F. Carey Howlett, “Leather Bottoms, Satin Haircloth, and Spanish Beard: Conserving Virginia Upholstered Seating Furniture,” p. 291 in ed. Luke Beckerdite, *American Furniture*, (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1997).

<sup>186</sup> Calvert, p. 78.

<sup>187</sup> Letter, Maria Nourse to Charles Nourse, Wednesday 27th [March, 1816], Miller Collection, Folder 16. Although no year is recorded on the letter, the probate inventory of Walter Hellen was taken in November of 1815 and the sale took place on March 26, 1816. By law, the sale could not have taken place before the probate inventory was taken.



As with furnishing textiles, floor coverings were considered a luxury during most of the 18th century. The use of expensive carpets to walk on was a very conspicuous form of consumption. Even the homes of most wealthy Americans contained only one or two examples, often a small bedside carpet in the best bed chamber, with perhaps another larger carpet in the best public room.<sup>188</sup> Contrary to entrenched Colonial Revival precepts, true hand knotted oriental or “Turkey” carpets were extremely rare. Most of the carpet that found its way to American floors was the product of English looms. Also found on the floor in some homes were painted floor cloths made from canvas covered with many layers of paint and straw matting imported from northern Africa, India, and Asia.

As with other types of consumer goods, by the beginning of the 19th century the use of floor coverings, most commonly woolen carpets, had become a key component in the overall appearance of a well furnished house. Englishman Thomas Sheraton noted in his 1803 *Cabinet Dictionary* that “carpets... have been a leading article of a well furnished house, for some years past.”<sup>189</sup>

By the mid-18th century, three types of woven wool carpets found their way to America’s homes—Brussels, a looped pile carpet; Wilton, a plush surfaced carpet resulting from cutting the loops to create a soft, velvet like surface; and Kilmarnock, Kidderminster or Scotch, a reversible, flat woven ingrain carpet that was cheaper but less durable than the first two types. By the early 19th century, yet another type entered the market. Referred to as “Venetian,” it was a dense, flat-woven carpet with striped patterns resulting from the weaving process.

Regardless of type, all of these carpets were produced in strips ranging from 27 to 36 inches wide, the size being determined by the loom on which it was woven. Stitched together, these strips could be used to make room size carpets of virtually any dimension. In the late 18th century and early 19th, these “area” carpets were finished off with a separately woven border that created a made-to-fit appearance. Sheraton’s 1803 *Cabinet Dictionary* provides a detailed description of the effort:

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<sup>188</sup> In *The Gunston Hall Room Use Study* just over half of the inventories listing floor coverings contained information that spoke to placement. “Of those so designated, 11.8% were used in passage, 34.2% were found in public rooms such as parlors and dining rooms, and a surprising 59.9% were associated with bed chambers.” *The Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, Vol.2, p. 270.

<sup>189</sup> Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary*, Vol. 1, Entry for Carpet (London: 1803; New York, Washington, London: Praeger Publishers, Reprint 1970) p. 132.

In cutting out carpets, the upholsterers clear the room of all the furniture, and having caused it to be dusted out, they proceed to line out the border with a chalk line, and making the mitres correctly in the angles of the room, and round the fire-place in particular, as in this part any defects are most noticeable. They then proceed to cut the mitres of the carpet border, beginning at the fire-place, and endeavouring, as correctly as possible, to match the pattern at each mitre.... In this manner they proceed, tacking it down, in a temporary manner, as they go on. They then take a length of the body carpet, and tacking it up to the border at one end, they take the strainer, and draw it to the other, and tack it again, taking care, as they go on, to match the pattern, which sometimes varies in the whole length, for which there is no remedy, but by changing the lengths in such a manner as to bring them tolerable near in matching.... That they may not misplace any of the lengths or parts of the border, they take sealing thread, and tack them together, where they think it necessary, in which state they are taken to the shop and completed.<sup>190</sup>

With such effort and expense involved, it is not surprising that American merchants often offered pre-stitched carpets of various sizes. It is also not remarkable that Joseph Nourse was pleased to achieve the custom fit look in his Philadelphia home with a pre-stitched area carpet that “handsomely” covered the room and two smaller pieces used at a door and at the Spinet. He wrote to his wife that this combination would “answer almost as well as if it was made to fit.”<sup>191</sup>

Very few examples of period woven pile carpeting survive and contemporary documents are seldom descriptive. Estate inventories are almost universally silent on the size or appearance of household floor coverings. Newspaper advertisements often tell the types of carpeting—i.e. Brussels or Scotch—but fall back on terms like “elegant” or “handsome” when it comes to descriptions of appearance. Merchant did advertise the quantity of carpet in stock, perhaps to reassure customers that enough was on hand for what ever size room they wished to carpet. Thomas L. M’Kenny of Georgetown began his November 1814 advertisement with the words “ENGLISH INGRAIN CARPETING.” The body of the ad gave the information that in stock was “1500 yards of Superior English Carpeting.”<sup>192</sup>

Letters are somewhat more helpful in trying to visualize the appearance of period carpets. George Washington, in 1797, wished to purchase a carpet for the parlor at Mt. Vernon. His letter concerning the purchase noted, “That as the furniture was blue, the ground or principal flowers

<sup>190</sup> Sheraton, *Cabinet Dictionary*, Volume 1, Entry for Carpet, p. 132.

<sup>191</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>192</sup> *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., November 15, 1814, Ad of Thomas M’Kenny, 1-2.

in it ought to be blue also.”<sup>193</sup> Mary Boardman Crowninshield recorded a carpet in a Washington house that she described as “blue ground crossed with rich yellow flowers.”<sup>194</sup> Elizabeth Wirt, sending her husband on yet another shopping expedition in Baltimore, commissioned him to find “a carpet rug to suit our Parlour –scarlet and sky blue – it would be better to get one – as we are in want of one and are now using the old one in the dining room. As with the curtain fringe, William Wirt had difficulties fulfilling his wife’s order, writing that “the only carpet rug I find is blue and crimson—not scarlet....”<sup>195</sup>

Fortunately the few remaining fragments of period carpeting are augmented with a rich archive of the “point papers” that delineated the patterns for the weaver. Hand colored and often dated, these drawings show that pile carpeting was made in an astonishing array of patterns and colors. Some mimicked the pavements and mosaics of ancient Rome, some incorporated the floral, foliage and wreath patterns popular in other decorative art forms of the day, and some were loosely based on the “Turkey” carpets that had been fashionable though rare in the 18th century. Patterns in the flat woven ingrain style carpet were somewhat more restricted by the weaving process which produced the yardage. Repetitive geometric and “foliage” patterns seem to have predominated based on the few surviving examples and the painted images of interiors from the period.

## Hearth Rugs

Period illustrations suggest that these small protective rugs used in front of fireplaces and might contrast with or match the room carpet in terms of color and pattern. They might also be had with or without fringe. American Sophie du Pont, in her charming water colors of life in early-19th-century Delaware shows a fringed example on what may have been a bare floor in front of the parlor fireplace. English woman Mary Ellen Best, a much more accomplished artist than Sophie du Pont, included an example which complemented the carpet in her painting of the “Green drawing room at Castle Howard.” A contrasting example is seen in the painting of an

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<sup>193</sup> Letter: George Washington to Tobias Lear, March 10, 1797 in John C. Fitzpatrick, Ed. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources*, Volume 37 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1940), p. 575.

<sup>194</sup> Mary Boardman Crowninshield, *Letters of Mary Boardman Crowninshield 1816-1816*, ed. Francis Boardman Crowninshield (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1905), p. 52.

<sup>195</sup> Elizabeth Wirt to William Wirt, December 4, 1818; William Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, December 12, 1818, William Wirt Papers, Microfilm Edition Roll 3, Maryland Historical Society.

unknown Rhode Island interior. All three types would, apparently, have been considered acceptable in fashionable households.<sup>196</sup>

## Floor Cloths

Painted canvas floor cloths were a popular alternative to wool carpeting. In homes of the wealthy, they were used as protective coverings for floors in areas such as passages, stairways and dining rooms where traffic, dirt or spilled food were likely to injure the unfinished floor boards or a more delicate carpet. Floor cloths were available in a wide range of colors and patterns. The simplest versions were painted a single color, however, many were decorated with patterns as simple as outlined borders or as elaborate as faux marble squares. A Philadelphia manufacturer, Isaac Macauley, seeing in the Washington market a potentially lucrative outlet for his products, ran a detailed advertisement in a local paper in 1811. In it, he spelled out for Washington area consumers the type of products available from his Patent Floor Cloth Manufactory. Offered were:

*Floor Cloth Carpets* of any size, square, oblong, circular, or to fit recesses however irregular made of the best materials and ornamented with the greatest number of colors:

say	4 or more	\$2.25 }	
the same with 2	do	1.75 }	per square yard
the same with 1	do	1.50 }	
plain cloths without border		1.25 }	

Old floor cloths re-ornamented at 25 cents per color and square yard.

...

The patterns are numerous and of the newest and most fashionable now in use. Colors warranted hard, bright and durable.

The canvass is of a superior quality and strong texture, being wove for the express purpose at the manufactory, seven yards wide, each web containing at least 777 square yards, consequently all cloth not exceeding the above, will be without seam, and made to any given dimensions....<sup>197</sup>

Just a month later, he came in person to solicit the patronage of Washington consumers. He wished to “respectfully inform the citizens of Washington, Georgetown, and the honorable

<sup>196</sup> See Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Kinsley, *Sophie du Pont A Young Lady in America*, (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987, New York) p. 72; Caroline Davidson, *Women's Worlds The Art and Life of mary Ellen Best 1809-1891*, (Crown Publishers, Inc., 1985, New York), p. 35; Garrett, p. 64.

<sup>197</sup> *The National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Ad of Isaac Mccauley, December 3, 1811, 3-5.

members of Congress” that samples could be seen and orders taken at Mr. Weightman’s bookstore on Pennsylvania Avenue.<sup>198</sup>

It is clear from the numerous references to carpeting found in Joseph Nourse’s letters, as well as his wish to have son Charles purchase a floor cloth while in London, that Joseph Nourse appreciated the value of floor coverings. Not only did they provide warmth and protect flooring from the wear and tear of everyday life, but they made a statement, often a colorful one, about the status and gentility of the household.

## Wallpaper

Like furnishing textiles and floor coverings, wallpapers were a highly perishable form of household decor. Pasted to walls, they might be viewed as semi-permanent but in fact they were subject to being papered over or stripped away at the whim of fashion or the changing taste of the householder. Indeed, it may have been this characteristic that was a large part of its appeal to consumers like Joseph Nourse.

Gaining in popularity as the 18th century progressed, by the turn of the 19th century a wide range of intricate and highly detailed patterns were available to consumers. Designs incorporated lush floral and foliate patterns, neo-classical urns, swags and classically draped figures, architectural elements and even significant historical figures of the day such as George Washington. All were presented in a bright color palette. French papers were particularly noted for their blue or green grounds under patterns printed in lively color combinations with pink and orange accents. Such papers were expensive, due in part to their labor intensive production. However, less expensive papers using only a few colors and simple repetitive designs such as geometric patterns, stripes or small floral sprigs were available to a wide segment of the consumer market.

In tandem with all of these papers, decorative border patterns were used to outline various architectural features in a room such as doors, windows, cornices, chair rails and baseboards. These borders might imitate molded plaster ornaments, incorporate repeating floral and foliage patterns, offer a full range of classical motifs or even include small landscape scenes. Although these borders were intended to complement the color and designs of the papered walls, the relationship is often difficult to discern from a modern aesthetic. Sometimes as puzzling is

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<sup>198</sup> *The National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Ad of Isaac Mccauley, January 14, 1812, 3-5.

the perceived appropriateness of certain types of papers for different rooms within the home. But, by the early 19th century, nearly any room in the house might be considered for the use of wallpaper. Newspaper advertisements offered for sale papers described as suitable for passages, halls, dining rooms, drawing rooms, parlors and bed chambers.<sup>199</sup>

Even by the early 19th century, the technology and craft involved in the production of wallpaper continued to reflect the production techniques developed in the 18th century. No matter the origin of the wallpapers, they shared certain characteristics, beginning with the paper. Fibers from discarded textile “rags” were reduced to a pulp in a liquid bath and then scooped out and pressed into a wooden form to dry, producing a single sheet of paper. The size of the form limited the size of the sheet of paper. After the sheets were dried and processed, they were ready for the paper stainer. Individual sheets were glued together to make a continuous strip of paper. A 1770 English appraiser’s manual noted “A Piece of *Wall-Paper*, is (in SIGHT) generally, 21 *Inches* or 1 *Foot 9 Inches* WIDE and 12 *Yards* in Length.”<sup>200</sup> These measurements continued to be the norm until machine produced continuous roll paper came into widespread production in the second quarter of the 19th century. Once the strip of paper was glued together, the colors and designs could be added. First was the application of the ground color and then the elements of the pattern were added. The most common technique was block printing that used a series of carved wooden blocks. Each color required separate application with drying time needed between each color printing. The more complicated the pattern, the more colors used in the design, the more blocks needed for its production, the more time required for drying—all these factors combined to influence the cost of the paper when it came to market.

Prior to the American Revolution, the evidence suggests that most of the wallpaper used in the colonies was of British manufacture. However, in the decades following the Revolution, papers from a variety of sources were for sale in the American market. French papers joined British patterns offered by merchants, and American manufactured papers began to compete as well. By the early 19th century, wallpapers produced in America were the beneficiaries of a local crafts tradition enriched by the design services of recent European émigrés.

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<sup>199</sup> Catherine Lynn, *Wallpaper in America From the Seventeenth Century to World War I*, (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1980), p. 154-155.

<sup>200</sup> *The Complete Appraiser*, 1770, quoted in Catherine Lynn, *Wallpaper in America From the Seventeenth Century to World War I*, (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1980), New York, p. 32.

The numerous references to wallpaper found in Joseph Nourse's papers make it clear that he was a fan of wallpaper and that wallpaper was an important feature in the various houses in which the family lived prior to moving into Dumbarton House. Personal experience would have made him a knowledgeable consumer as to the range of wallpapers available through local and regional merchants and manufacturers. His 1804 decision to purchase wallpapers for Dumbarton House from Philadelphia manufacturer Thomas Hurley was probably driven by a number of factors. Local stores in Georgetown, Alexandria, and the fledgling Washington City were, no doubt, somewhat limited as to the wallpaper choices they offered for sale. Nourse may have been familiar with Thomas Hurley from his years of living in Philadelphia. His choice may also have been influenced by the fact that daughter Anna Maria Josepha was in Philadelphia at the time and thus available to personally pick out papers that were not only fashionable but sure to please her parents' taste.

In buying American-made paper from Hurley, there is no reason to suppose that Joseph Nourse would have been settling for poorer quality papers. Thomas Hurley began his Philadelphia career in the 1780s as an upholsterer and paper hanger. In 1795, Hurley advertised that he was dropping the upholstery component of his business to specialize in the wallpaper hanging trade and by 1803 he had expanded his business by acquiring the paper-staining manufactory of William Poyntell which had been in business since at least 1790. Thus the combined experience of Hurley and the workmen employed by Poyntell would surely have guaranteed a satisfactory product.<sup>201</sup>

The only two known examples of Hurley manufactured wallpaper both date after 1804. One, which probably dates to the period just after the move to Dumbarton House, is currently known only from a written description, and the other, dated 1816, was filed for copyright protection with the United States government. Fragments of the first example were discovered in the early 1960s in an abandoned early 19th-century Virginia house. Described in a report of the discovery as an "off-white ground" with a repeating pattern of "stylized white daisies" with orange brown centers and finished with a "printed paper border edged in black and orange-brown." The center of the border was a pattern of "oak leaves and berry clusters in green." The back of one of the fallen sheets of wallpaper bore a stenciled label reading "Hurley Paper

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<sup>201</sup> This history of Hurley's manufacturing operations is detailed in Robert Kelly, *WRNA Report on Wallpaper At Dumbarton House*, November 13, 2002, p. 2, Dumbarton House curatorial files.

Hanging Manufactory No. 78 Chestnut Street Philadelphia.”<sup>202</sup> Based solely on this description, it is still possible to visualize what was clearly a stylish combination of wallpaper and border. The paper may in fact have been similar to those Anna Maria Josepha Nourse described in her letter as “light or buff light papers with Dark bordering” which she noted as the “prevailing fashion.”<sup>203</sup>

The 1816 paper survives in a sample at the Library of Congress. It shows a much more ambitious design of multicolored, leafy vines on a dark blue-green ground seen through a stonework arch. Top and bottom border accompany it showing respectively the top of the arch and the bottom of the column which support the arch. The written description notes that it was called “Forest entry.”<sup>204</sup> This example is carefully printed on a good grade of paper. While much too late for use at Dumbarton House, this Hurley copyright sample reflects a sophisticated sense of design and a concern for the quality of his product. Certainly there is no reason to presume that either of these characteristics were new to papers manufactured by Thomas Hurley.

### **Heating and Lighting: Technologies for the Home**

Two of the most important factors in creating a comfortable home environment are heat and light. While they are, in themselves, insubstantial, sometimes elusive qualities, the mechanisms and objects through which they are obtained and controlled are important elements in both the function and appearance of a home. The turn of the 19th century saw the beginnings of technological change in the methods and equipment used to create heat and light. And, as with other aspects of household furnishings, changing styles affected the materials and decoration of the objects associated with these functions.

A romantic image of early Americans gathered around the hearth sharing the warmth of the fire is reinforced by passages such those found in a letter written by Washingtonian Margaret Bayard Smith in December of 1806. She wrote to her sister that, “... I have the stand placed

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<sup>202</sup> Robert L. Raley, Winterthur Newsletter, October 30, 1962, copy of which is attached to Robert Kelly’s *WRNA Report on Wallpaper* in the curatorial files at Dumbarton House.; It is unknown whether the described wallpaper fragments survive or if they do, where they are located.

<sup>203</sup> Letter, Daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Nourse, no date [1804?] Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, The Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>204</sup> Uncataloged material, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Collection Virchaux designs #1: As this collection is, to date, uncataloged, the Library of Congress refers to the entire group as a collection of Virchaux designs.



beside the fire in the parlour and the children playing round me.”<sup>205</sup> Such passages, however, fail to convey the arduous effort that went into creating and maintaining a cheery blaze.

Fuel could be expensive and sometimes hard to obtain, whether one chose to burn wood or the coal that was becoming more commonplace in America’s urban environments. Fireplaces often failed to heat the room and chimneys smoked. Just how trying a recalcitrant fireplace could be is clearly illustrated in Mrs. Harrison Gray Otis’s description of a particularly difficult Washington February day when smoking fires seem to have been the norm. She wrote:

Yesterday was a most furious rain hail & snow storm which I should have contemplated with much sangfroid had not both chamber & Parlour chimenys [*sic*] refused to discharge one puff of smoke except at the wrong end – in [the] rain did I fly for relief to my neighbors [*sic*] all alike without recourse -- north or south were alike enveloped in the same thick suffocating cloud... We therefore sat with streaming eyes... Harper & half a dozen others came to dine with us, literally in tears but all agreed our atmosphere was resplendent [*sic*] compared to their own...<sup>206</sup>

Early on, a realization that the configuration of the firebox affected the performance of a fireplace led to numerous attempts to modify the size and shape of the opening. Benjamin Franklin, as early as 1744, had developed a cast iron insert which he referred to as a Pennsylvania fireplace intended to increase the heat output by reducing the heat escaping up the flue and by radiant heat from the cast iron. By the end of the 18th century, universally known as Franklin stoves, they were in use in many homes, including those in the nation’s young capital. French émigré, Moreau de Saint-Méry described the way these devices were used.

They stand on the floor of a room in front of the fireplace opening. The back of the stove is a piece of iron which slants forward to make an acute angle at the top of the fireplace. The smoke escapes by way of this angle. The wood is placed on andirons in the open stove, It can thus be placed far out in the room. On the bottom of the stove is placed a layer of four or five large sticks; above them as many layers, each with one less piece of wood than the last, as the stove can hold. Since the sticks are rounded and touch only at spots, the fire can pass between them and they all burn together.

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<sup>205</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society, portrayed by the family letters of Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith*, Ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906) p. 47.

<sup>206</sup> Sally Foster Otis to Sophia Otis, February 4, 1818, Harrison Gray Otis Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Microfilm edition.

This instantly makes a hot fire which can be kept up by adding a small amount of wood at long intervals. Thus the heat remains strong and constant until bedtime.<sup>207</sup>

Whether one employed a Franklin stove or not, all were familiar with the basic problem of keeping warm in winter and the range of fireplace equipment employed in homes to achieve this goal. The choices of heating equipment were shaped by the type of fuel used, the degree of prosperity of the household and the willingness of individuals to spend their money to be fashionable as well as warm.

The Nourse papers provide clear evidence that the Nourse family burned wood in their fireplaces in Washington. This information provides insight into the forms of fireplace equipment that they may have owned. Andirons, together with some combination of fire tools, were recognized as the basic kit for building and maintaining wood fires in most households. While their underlying structure remained little changed for most of the preceding century, their shapes and ornamentation were as subject to the whims of fashion as any other object of household furnishings. It is possible that the Nourse family employed Franklin stove type inserts in some of their fireplaces. In the oft-quoted Joseph Nourse letter of September 1796 concerning changes he proposed for their Philadelphia home, he queried his wife about the fireplace in the back parlor. He asked if she would “like to have the back parlor Chimney place made like the front room by having iron backs instead of the open stove....” The “open stove” may be a reference to a Franklin stove. Also tantalizing in this regard is the surviving Franklin stove with a Nourse family history currently on loan to Dumbarton House from the Baltimore Museum of Art. It should be noted, however, that there is no evidence, other than family history, to connect this stove specifically to Dumbarton House.<sup>208</sup> The letter and the existing Franklin stove do, at least, suggest that the Nourse family was familiar with these types of heating devices.

Andirons were commonly made of brass, iron with brass finals, or all iron, sometimes with shovels and tongs in matching combinations and patterns. The same fashionable motifs

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<sup>207</sup> Moreau de St. Mery, *Moreau de Saint-Méry's American Journey*, Trans. and ed. Kenneth Roberts and Anna M. Roberts (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1947), p. 326.

<sup>208</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.; for information about the Franklin Stove on loan from the Baltimore Museum of Art see the Dumbarton House curatorial files. The Dumbarton House interpretive materials refer to a reference by Joseph Nourse to there being “furnaces in every room.” However, no citation is given and thus far nothing pertaining to this reference has been found in the Nourse documentary materials.

found in textiles, furniture, and other types of housewares were found in fireplace equipment as well. Andirons might incorporate a variety of cast shapes such as fluted columns, square plinths topped with urns or turned balusters completed with oval balls or flame spiraled finials.

Engraved decoration sometimes embellished the metal work. Finely wrought andirons and fire tools added a reflective and decorative element to rooms whether the fireplace was in use or not.

Fenders, used to protect the floor from escaping sparks, also kept people, especially children, from getting too close to the fire. Burns from igniting clothing were yet another hazard of open fireplaces. Generally, fenders came in two basic forms. The first was low metal guards that served both a protective and decorative function. By the beginning of the 19th century, brass had become the metal favored by fashion.<sup>209</sup> These fenders generally stood on ball or paw feet with rounded ends. Pierced and moulded decorative features gave them an ornamental quality. Without question, they provided a stylish finish to a fireplace.

The second type of fender was composed of woven wire. They came in a variety of heights, with the taller ones intended in particular to keep children safe. This utilitarian purpose did not stop them from being decorative. The wire was often woven into patterns which were often supported at the top and bottom by a brass frame. The most expensive might have brass feet and ornamental knobs. Perhaps the most striking feature of such fenders was that the wire was sometimes painted a bright green.<sup>210</sup> Unfortunately, few, if any, survive with this surface intact today.

Bellows and hearth brushes could sometimes be found as part of the fireplace assembly. However, studies of early 19th-century Washington inventories show low levels of ownership of these tools even as the first decade of the century advanced into the 18-teens.

All of the types of fireplace equipment discussed here could be purchased locally, from merchants who imported the goods, either from abroad or from larger American cities or from enterprising craftsmen who set up shop in one of the three towns found within the bounds of the District. As early as 1801, merchant Henry Ingle advertised that among the imported English goods he was just opening at his store on “New Jersey Avenue, Capitol Hill” were brass and iron

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<sup>209</sup> Christopher Gilbert and Anthony Well-Cole, *The Fashionable Fireplace 1660-1840* (Leeds City Art Galleries, Leeds, England, 1985) p. 29; this conclusion is also confirmed by studies of Washington inventories and local newspaper advertisements.

<sup>210</sup> Christopher Gilbert and Anthony Well-Cole, *Country House Floors*, p. 29 and figure 19, p. 30.

shovels and tongs.<sup>211</sup> In contrast to Ingle's imported goods were those offered for sale by enterprising craftsmen setting up shop in Alexandria in 1797, perhaps in anticipation of the arrival of the federal government in 1800. William Fletcher, identifying himself as previously from Philadelphia, advertised to the public that he made and sold "brass Andirons of the newest fashion."<sup>212</sup> The partnership of Carver & Hall, on the other hand, offered to make "on the shortest notice... fenders, wire and iron... [and] fire irons of all kinds."<sup>213</sup> As with all other types of household goods, these items could also be acquired at auction. In such cases, if the goods happened to have previously belonged to someone of note, such as "Mr. Jones, late secretary of the Navy", the auction notice would be sure to note that the brass andirons, shovels and tongs, and fenders were "elegant" and "new."<sup>214</sup>

All such efforts and equipment notwithstanding, the battle against winter's cold could not always be won. The diary of Anna Maria Thornton records many January and February entries that refer to liquids freezing inside the house. In January of 1812 she noted that it was "the coldest weather we have had for some years – Madeira wine froze in some houses."<sup>215</sup> It is difficult to truly appreciate from a 21st-century perspective what an important role the struggle for winter warmth played in the daily life of Washington's citizens. However, the functional nature of fireplaces and the equipment used with them did not keep those who could afford them from purchasing examples that would enliven their interiors as well.

Like heating, lighting was a key element in creating a safe and pleasant home environment. Indeed, the pursuit of light, be it daylight, the uncertain and seasonal glow from fireplaces or the small pools of light from candles and lamps in many ways controlled and restricted one's activities. Artificial light, while it freed one from the constraints imposed by vanished daylight, in turn imposed certain types of spatial organization on life in the home. Expensive candles and lamp oil ensured that, whenever possible, these costly commodities were shared by members of a household. Furniture was moved to be near light sources, enforcing a type of group intimacy as all those present in a room gathered around to share the light. Period illustrations show individuals grouped at a window or around a candle or lamp. One might be

<sup>211</sup> *The National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Advertisement of Henry Ingle, October 19, 1801.

<sup>212</sup> *The Times and Alexandria Advertiser*, Alexandria, Virginia, Advertisement of William Fletcher, April 14, 1797.

<sup>213</sup> *The Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Virginia, Advertisement of Carver and Hall February 11, 1797.

<sup>214</sup> *The Daily National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Auction Notice, November 30, 1814, 3-4.

<sup>215</sup> Diary, Anna Maria Thornton, January 22, 1812, Anna Maria Thornton Papers, Microfilm #13818-2P, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, modern pagination, p. 819.

reading, while others wrote letters or did needlework. Light was also vital to the success of social events, be they the dinners, tea parties, suppers and balls which comprised much of the social whirl of upper class Washington or the less formal intimacy of family gatherings. Margaret Bayard Smith, expressed it well when she wrote about a dinner party she gave: “It was near 7 when we returned to the parlour, which was brilliantly lighted, (as I think light a great promoter of social pleasure.)”<sup>216</sup>

How was this light provided? In most American homes, candles were the primary source of artificial light until after the Civil War. However, the search for technologies that would ultimately replace the candle was well underway by the beginning of the 19th century. Francois-Pierre Ami Argand’s 1783 development of an adjustable lamp that burned oil and gave a clear bright light marked the start of great improvements in lighting household interiors. The Argand lamp and its successors quickly found a place in the homes of many well-to-do Americans. However, even in the homes that employed these newest technological marvels, lamps shared the lighting duties with candles. Neither was without its problems.

Early 19th-century candles, whether they were made from common tallow, expensive beeswax or costly spermaceti, relied upon the same type of wicking. Not self-consuming, these wicks required constant trimming (snuffing in period terms) of the charred end which was known as the snuff. If left unattended the accumulated snuff dimmed the flame and eventually fell over onto the side of the candle, causing uneven melting which wasted much of the candle. To deal with this basic problem, scissor-like implements known as snuffers with a box compartment on the blade for catching the snuff became a common household object in wealthy homes. Often accompanied with matching trays or stands, they might be made of materials as simple as tin or as decorative and expensive as polished steel or brass or even silver plate.

Candles were certainly seen as a necessity in most segments of society. Most Americans, particularly those living in urban areas purchased their candles, no matter what type, from either local candle chandlers or from merchants who procured their stock from the wide range of sources which were part of the growing national chandlery trade. The least expensive were dipped tallow candles made from animal fat. Considered a step above were tallow candles made in metal molds. The molding process gave a more uniform appearance to the candle and required the use of better tallow—a mixture of beef and mutton fat or tallow mixed with

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<sup>216</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *What is Gentility?* p. 364.

beeswax—to keep the tallow from sticking to the mold. Both types of tallow candles shared similar problems, however. A mottled yellow appearance was of less concern than the rapid burning and the unpleasant odor that accompanied an accidentally extinguished candle.<sup>217</sup>

Much better candles were made from beeswax. They burned with a brighter flame, made a more handsome appearance and lacked the disagreeable odor associated with tallow examples. They were, however, the most costly type of candle one could purchase. Only a few instances have been found documenting their use in the Washington region. Martha Ogle Forman, living on a plantation near the Maryland/Delaware border, felt it worth noting in her diary in January 1817 that among the items she purchased in Baltimore was “one box of white wax candles.”<sup>218</sup>

Spermaceti candles, made from a substance taken from the head cavity of the sperm whale, were a slightly less expensive alternative to wax candles. Spermaceti candles had a glossy white appearance and burned with a clear, bright, smokeless flame. Burning twice as long and four times as brightly as their tallow counterparts, they became the standard measurement for foot-candle power in the 19th century.

Such candles appear as an item worthy of note in regional merchants’ advertisements throughout the early part of the 19th century. In 1801, Georgetown merchant John Barnes offered spermaceti candles along with the teas, sugars, fashionable gentleman’s hats and “segars” for sale in his store.<sup>219</sup> And in 1809, the Commercial Company of Washington advertised that they had just received “from New York” a wide range of merchandise including sixteen boxes of spermaceti candles.<sup>220</sup>

The use of candles required holders—candlesticks—to keep the flame from damaging other objects and to allow the light to be moved about the house as needed. The form and appearance of candlesticks, like all other household objects, were shaped by the marketplace. Consumers demanded new and stylish versions of the centuries old form and manufacturers and merchants obliged. Candlesticks were available in all types of materials. This point is surely made by the 1810 advertisement of the Washington firm of Bradley and Edwards in which they informed the public that they offered for sale “a general assortment of Glass, China, & Common

<sup>217</sup> Monta Lee Dakin, “Brilliant with Lighting; A Reexamination of Artificial Lighting in Eighteenth-Century America: (M.A. thesis, The George Washington University, 1983); David J. Eveleigh, *Candle Lighting*, Shire Album 132, (United Kingdom: Shire Publications Ltd., 1985) p. 9; Garret, *At Home*, p. 142.

<sup>218</sup> Martha Ogle Forman, *Plantation Life at Rose Hill: The Diaries of Martha Ogle Forman 1814-1845*, Ed. W. Emerson Wilson (Wilmington, Delaware: The Historical Society of Delaware, 1976), p. 261.

<sup>219</sup> *The National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Advertisement of John Barnes, December 30, 1801.

<sup>220</sup> *National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Advertisement of The Commercial Company, February, 20, 1809.

Queen's Ware....” They added that among glass items were “very fine cut Egyptian Candlesticks of a new pattern.” Certainly glass and ceramics manufacturers were quick to exploit a growing market for such goods. As exotic as glass “Egyptian” candlesticks might have been, they and their ilk were vastly outnumbered by metal candlesticks made from brass, iron, tin, silver, and silverplate. Candlesticks of all sorts appear regularly among the goods imported to stock regional stores and among the household furnishings sold at public auction.<sup>221</sup>

Stylistically, many of the brass, silver and silverplate sticks would have been quite similar—all shaped and ornamented to reflect popular period forms and decorative motifs. Swags, festoons, and acanthus leaves draped their way around shafts that were columnar in form or shaped with reeding or fluting. Gadrooned or beaded edges made their way around bases that might be square or round or oval. In addition, silver or silverplate examples might be adapted to hold arms that could be inserted in the candle cup to create a candelabra form referred to in the period as “branches.”

A surprisingly large number of silverplate candlesticks appear among the documentary record of early Washington. A study of Washington inventories done for the Octagon Museum in the early 1990s that looked at the broad economic spectrum of households from 1807 to 1826 showed that over 20% owned one or more examples of silverplate candlesticks.<sup>222</sup> This proliferation was tied in large part to the development of fused plating of silver over copper. English manufacturers quickly exploited this new process to provide the marketplace with a cornucopia of household goods that looked like silver but were substantially less costly. By 1818 the saturation of the market was such that Georgetown merchant John Peabody could advertise that he had for sale six casks of “Sheffield Plated Ware” that included “40 pair plated candle sticks, silver edged assorted patterns” as well another 60 pair plated plain candlesticks and snuffers and trays.<sup>223</sup> Elite families such as that of John Tayloe who built the Octagon might light their elegant rooms with elaborate versions of such fused plate candlesticks but so, too, did the aspiring and far from genteel Mrs. McCarty, wife of an upwardly mobile grocer featured in a novel set in Washington during the Madison administration. Written by Margaret Bayard Smith in the 1820s, the McCarty's parlor featured “plated candlesticks and mould candles” on the

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<sup>221</sup> *The National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Advertisement of Bradley and Edwards, October 19, 1810.

<sup>222</sup> Unpublished research by the author of this report for “In the Most Fashionable Style Making a Home in the Federal City,” an exhibition mounted by The Octagon Museum in the fall of 1991.

<sup>223</sup> *Daily National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Advertisement of John Peabody, February 20, 1818, 3-4.

mantel piece” and brass candlesticks holding dipped tallow candles in use on the tea table. For Mrs. McCarty the plated candlestick were symbols of the gentility to which she aspired; they were to be seen but not used as part of everyday life.<sup>224</sup>

In addition to candles, those who could afford them increasingly augmented the lighting in their public rooms with Argand style lamps. These lamps were constructed to introduce air into the center of the flame which produced a brighter light and burned fuel, either high grade sperm whale oil or colza oil made from rape seed, more efficiently. Such lamps were characterized by narrow cylindrical chimneys and oil reservoirs located to one side of the burner that were connected with an arm which fed the oil to the lamp at a steady rate. Though they were described in the period as burning six to ten times brighter than a single candle, they were not without their problems. In 1824, Louisa Catherine Adams had used the stylish lamps as part of the decorations for a ball, mixing them among the garlands of greens which hung around the walls of the room. During the course of the evening, one of the lamps fell, dousing Mrs. Adams with oil.<sup>225</sup>

Merchants did occasionally advertise such lamps, describing them as superb or elegant. Perhaps feeling that not enough members of the public were familiar with the relatively new type of lighting device, one enterprising entrepreneur respectfully informed “the citizens of Washington, Georgetown, and the vicinity” that he would exhibit his “NEW MODE OF OBTAINING LIGHT, in a variety of THERMO LAMPS.” He planned to charge admission to this exhibit, “Tickets to be had at the door; price one dollar to admit a gentleman twice, or once and bring a Lady.”<sup>226</sup>

In appearance, these lamps were as diverse as the materials from which they could be made. Both the body and the fuel reservoir might be made from tinned sheet metal (usually Japanned), brass, or silverplate. They might be ornamented with a combination of the various popular decorative designs currently in fashion. Glass elements might include not only the chimney but shades, oil reservoirs, or prisms. The combination of bright light with sparkling surfaces made such lamps decorative focal points where ever they were used.

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<sup>224</sup> High quality silverplate candle sticks are among surviving Tayloe family furnishings with a history of being used at The Octagon.; Margaret Bayard Smith, *What is Gentility? A Moral Tale*. (Washington, D.C.: Pishey Thompson, 1828), p. 9.

<sup>225</sup> Diary, Louisa Catherine Adams, January 9, 1824, Adams Papers, Microfilm Edition.

<sup>226</sup> *National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C., Advertisement of Benjamin Henfrey, April 4, 1802.



Lighting in early 19th-century homes was both a practical necessity and an expression of gentility. The numbers and types of lighting devices used, the quality of the light they gave, the details of the settings they illuminated—all were marks of an increased importance placed upon the appearance of the home. When successfully employed, lighting devices earned praise from one's contemporaries while providing a glowing sphere of comfort for one's intimate family circle.

### **Household Decoration: Art and Mantel Ornaments**

The proliferation of household furnishings in the early 19th century was reflected in the increased presence of framed art and decorative objects in the homes of those who could afford them. In essence, they served as grace notes in fashionable interiors.

Family portraits had been venerated objects for centuries by the end of the 18th century. Sometimes they passed from generation to generation without appearing in legal documents such as wills and probate inventories or if listed, they were often unidentified except as “family pictures.” However, portraiture was not the only style of art found in genteel houses.

As the 18th century progressed, these other styles of pictures, both painting and prints, began to appear in growing numbers. Landscape paintings rubbed shoulders with prints warning of the perils of drink and idle hands. The images of pretty girls brightened previously empty walls, their fashionable dresses and surroundings representing a different season of the year or time of day. Likenesses of political worthies, military heroes, historical figures and religious leaders served dual purposes, being both decorative and didactic. School girl efforts with needle or paint brush were hung with pride. In short, framed works of art—paintings, prints, and needlework—began to make increasing appearances in the homes of those who could afford them. Whether the work of professional artists or “talented” amateurs, they were all framed and hung as part of an overall decor that bespoke a genteel home.

Regional merchants took advantage of this trend, importing prints and engravings in a wide range of subject matter for resale. In 1800, Alexandria merchant Robert Patton, along with textiles, japanned tea trays and various other household goods, advertised that he had just received from Liverpool “Elegant Prints with burnished gold frames” which included “Representations of the Battle of the Nile in four different views” as well as a number of prints

of other British military engagements and war heroes.<sup>227</sup> Five years later, auctioneer Phillip Marstellar listed among the goods to be sold:

Upwards of 1000 Pictures and Engravings by the most celebrated Artists, with some of the Copper plates, from which many more may be struck off. Among the engravings are a number of Portraits of the Late General and Mrs. Washington; of the late Lewis [sic] the sixteenth; Doctor Franklin, Doctors Rush, Wistar, and Barton of Philadelphia, Rev. Mr. Westley; the late Countess of Huntingdon; and a great variety of Fancy Pieces; the whole of which were selected with care and purchased the last summer in New York and Philadelphia.<sup>228</sup>

A few months later, Finlay and Cook, who had previously notified the public of their intention to establish “a Manufactory” to make “Fancy Japan & Gilt Furniture” where they would not only make furniture but “frame prints, drawings and needlework, in the neatest manner,” were advertising prints for sale. They informed the public that they had just received from London “a small but well chosen collection of ENGRAVINGS, from the best European artists.” Among the prints listed were “A sublime representation of the last supper, from a painting by West, historical painter to the King of England,” “A full length Portrait of Lewis [sic] the sixteenth in his robes of state by Collet, painter to the unfortunate king,” and “The Ale-House Door and the Hay-Market with a few more Fancy Pieces.”<sup>229</sup>

Spurred perhaps by the same impulse to enliven the interior in a fashionable manner, mantel ornaments and decorative ceramics began to appear with increasing frequency in household inventories in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They often joined candlesticks and clocks on mantel shelves in parlors and dining rooms. Ornamental objects are rarely mentioned in newspaper advertisements, apparently having been included in the group listings for ceramics or glass or among the other items described as “too numerous to list.” Fortunately, other types of primary sources shed some light on these objects. Anna Maria Thornton noted in her diary in March of 1804 that she “went again to Georgetown to see some marble chimney ornaments.”<sup>230</sup> A similar interest in decorations for a mantel can be found in a letter from Marylander Rosalie Calvert to her sister who lived in Europe. She asked her sister to buy for her “four of the prettiest coffee cups you can find—each cup should be of a different color but of

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<sup>227</sup> *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Virginia, Advertisement of Robert Patton, March 6, 1800.

<sup>228</sup> *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, Alexandria, Virginia, Advertisement of Philip Marstellar, March 8, 1805.

<sup>229</sup> *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, Advertisements of Finlay and Cook, May 6, 1805, and July 23, 1805.

<sup>230</sup> Diary, Anna Maria Thornton, March 20th 1804, Anna Maria Thornton Papers, Library of Congress, Microfilm #13818, Reel 1.

equal size and shape.” She concluded by noting that “I want to place them on a mantel, which is the style here....”<sup>231</sup> Indeed, it may be this fashion which is seen in a much later drawing by Sophie du Pont entitled “A Scene in peach season.” While the focus of the charming drawing is the messy consumption of ripe peaches, in the background is the mantel of the room decorated with a vase of flowers and five sketchily drawn small circular objects.<sup>232</sup>

## Conclusion

This then, was the material world of Joseph and Maria Nourse. Houses were designed with a growing specialization in room function and increased emphasis on separating the public from the private or family areas within the home. Interiors intended to echo the “understood” tastes of ancient Greece and Rome were outfitted with “classically” inspired tables and chairs and sofas. Rooms were warmed and brightened with the increasingly wide range of colors, patterns, and textures found in wallpapers, textiles, and floor coverings. New technologies made the rich shine of silver plate available in a wide range of increasingly affordable forms including tea pots and serving trays to candlesticks and snuffers. And these new silver plate candlesticks rubbed shoulders in fashionable interiors with the latest in lighting improvements ushered in by the Argand lamp and its successors. All of these elements combined to create homes that were recognizably fashionable to the tastes of the times, yet as distinctly individual as the men and women who lived in them.

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<sup>231</sup> Letter, Rosalie Calvert to her sister Isabelle, January 20th, 1807, *The Mistress of Riversdale*, p. 159.

<sup>232</sup> Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Kinsley, *Sophie du Pont A Young Lady in America*, p. 77.

## **LOWER PASSAGE**

Architectural historian Carl Lounsbury in *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* defines a passage as “A long, narrow space providing access to various rooms, apartments, or parts of a building.” He notes that the term, although in use by the end of the 17th century, did not come into wide spread currency until the second decade of the 18th century. He then goes on to state that:

The passage provided independent access to all the principal ground-floor rooms and to the upstairs as well. It also functioned as a waiting room for servants and visitors whose social credentials did not warrant an invitation to join the planter or merchant and his family in the main rooms. Soon the advantages of this space as a refuge from summer heat became evident. By the middle of the 18th century, wealthier families spent an increasing portion of their time there. In response, the passage and the stair to the upper floor tended to grow in size and became more elaborate during this period. The term continued in use well into the 19th century and was only displaced by the term *hall* at a very late period.<sup>233</sup>

Certainly Lounsbury’s description of the passage as it had evolved by the end of the 18th century seems to be embodied at Dumbarton House. The visitor entered through an impressive front entrance into a space subtly and visually divided between a spacious front passage with an imposing staircase rising to the second floor and a back section leading toward the rear garden doorway. Those visitors welcomed by the family could be led into either the public side of the house where more formal entertaining took place, or, if family or close personal friends, could be taken into the Breakfast room, which served as a more informal parlor and gathering space. Individuals not considered social equals or arriving on business could wait in the entrance portion of the space until it was convenient for them to be seen.

Elisabeth Garret in *At Home The American Family 1750-1870*, postulates an additional reason for the generous configuration of household passages. She notes that passages like the one at Dumbarton House running through the middle of the building neatly divided the symmetrical floor plan. With doors at both ends it was “commodious, lofty, and airy” and indicated a societal concern for the “healthfulness of one’s surroundings. Spacious rooms, soaring ceilings, and cross-ventilation all contributed to a lung-strengthening free circulation of

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<sup>233</sup> Carl Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape*, p. 262.

air. In winter, drafts of frosty air from the entry doors could be confined to the hallway by closing doors to the adjoining rooms.”<sup>234</sup>

Period paintings illustrate the usage of passages as a type of summer parlor, while open doors showing outdoor vistas underscore the passage as conduit for fresh air. One of English school girl Diana Sperling’s charming pictures shows her mother seated at the open passage doorway taking advantage of both the light it admitted and perhaps a bit of a summer breeze.<sup>235</sup> A small pencil sketch of a social gathering, perhaps for tea, at Wyck, near Philadelphia shows a group enjoying the advantages of an airy hallway, and Mrs. William Cooper, mother of James Fenimore Cooper, apparently chose her hall as the setting for her portrait, in part no doubt to show off her potted plants standing in front of the open windows of her upstate New York home.<sup>236</sup> Other American portraits from the early decades of the 19th century show sitters posed in passage and entry spaces in front of doors opening onto scenic landscapes. While these paintings no doubt owe something to artistic conventions and the desire to play with the contrasts of light and dark, they also reflect a period practice with which the painting’s subjects were familiar.<sup>237</sup>

Inventories are also revealing about the nature and use of passages. Convenient to all the rooms opening into it, a central passage provided a space to store furniture not needed on a regular basis or, on the other side of the coin, that was often needed in more than one space. Tables, presumably used for dining, are often among the furniture forms listed. Elizabeth Wirt, in a December 1812 letter to her husband, wrote of making room for a couch in the dining room of their Richmond, Virginia home by moving several of their tables into the entry. She noted that “It would only be a little more trouble for the servants to go a few steps further for the Tables at meal times, which I hope they would be able to live through.”<sup>238</sup> Chairs, useful for both sitting in the passage and convenient for being taken outside during good weather, were often found here. Some type of lighting device left as a permanent part of the furnishings seems to have been considered essential. This was in contrast to the typical treatment of candlesticks

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<sup>234</sup> Elisabeth Garrett, *At Home The American Family 1750-1870*, p. 31.

<sup>235</sup> Gordon Mingay, *Mrs. Hurst Dancing*, ill. 67, “Mum S. at work in the minor hall--Dynes Hall--Brisk near her dozing.”

<sup>236</sup> Elisabeth Garrett, *At Home The American Family 1750-1870*; illustrations of Wyck, p. 196, and *Mrs. William Cooper*, p. 210.

<sup>237</sup> Elisabeth Garrett, *At Home The American Family 1750-1870*, Illustrations of *Mrs. Daniel Truman and Child*, p. 32; *Two Children*, p.33, and *The Children of Nathan Comfort Starr*, p. 37.

<sup>238</sup> Quoted in Elisabeth Garrett, *At Home: The American Family 1750-1870*, p. 62-63.

that were removed during daylight hours in most rooms of a house. Floor coverings intended to protect floors and stairs from the dirt tracked in from unpaved streets and garden paths, to provide winter warmth in frequently unheated spaces, and perhaps to muffle the noise of daily comings and goings were also a common feature of passage furnishings. While there is no primary source documentation as to how the Nouruses used their center passage there is no reason to assume that they differed significantly from their contemporaries in how they treated this versatile space.

The Early Federal Washington Database provides insight into how first floor entries, passages, and stairs (presumed to be leading up from 1st floor passages) were furnished. Twenty-three households (82%) in the database have such spaces, identifiable, either by naming or context.<sup>239</sup>

When analyzing the furnishing in these spaces, it is interesting to note how often the term passage is used as the qualifying descriptor. [For instance, listings for a “passage carpet” and “passage lamps” appear in the inventories, along with a reference to “two passages Sophas”](#) (Graham21). One can only speculate as to whether the inventory takers were referring to size, quality, style, form, or some combination of the four. However, they clearly expected their contemporaries to understand the inferences.

Surprisingly, it is listings for floor coverings that occur most often. Sixteen of 23 households (69%) include some indicator for floor coverings in passages, entries and stairways. The number is somewhat inflated by the inclusion of stairs, which are commonly covered in this period. Of the 16 inventories listing some type of floor covering in these spaces, three (18%) cite floor or oil cloths, 13 (81%) have a reference indicating carpeted stairs, and two households (12%) have straw carpeting. Whartn18 lists “1 India Straw Carpet” valued at 1.00 and Meigs22 includes a straw carpet valued at 4.00. Unfortunately, there are no examples that use carpet type, pattern, or color as a descriptor for first floor entries. In Scott01, both the floor cloth and carpet are described as old. Turner16 uses the descriptor “passage” perhaps an indicator of width or quality. Some inventory takers were more specific. Campbl17 lists 65 yards of carpeting “1st quality (cost 2\$)” and at the time of the inventory valued at \$100. This amount probably includes the stair carpet as well, as the next line in the inventory is for “36 Brass stair rods &

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<sup>239</sup> Two households, Barlow18 and Young22, that use the term “hall” to describe this space are included in the count.

eyes.” The listing in Chapman21 notes that there were “16 yards of stair carpeting (good)” and a set of 10 brass stair rods. Interestingly, only in Meigs22 is there a color descriptor, “red,” which described a carpet found in the second story passage. Also included there is a second carpet not described but valued at more than twice the red one, as well as stair carpeting.

Lighting is the next most common furnishing type listed in the inventories of this group. There are 15 inventories that cite a lighting device as part of entry or passage furnishings. All 15 describe the device as a lamp. Just over half use the modifier “passage” as part of the description for the lamp. One additional example employs the term “entry” as a descriptor. In some inventories, several other descriptions are used. In Peter12 they are listed as “2 glass lamps;” Camp117 cites “1 globe lamp;” Graham30 includes “1 glass passage lamp;” and Whartn18 lists not only an “Entry lamp” but also “1 pr of Japanned lamps” as part of the furnishings of the space. Only one listing, in Dghrty22 for a “passage lamp with brass chain” gives a clue as to form. The values of the lamps listed in the database range from 2.00 in Young02 to the princely sum of \$30.00 for what may have been a Japanned or painted example in Whartn18.

It is not possible to know whether the use of the term “lamp” is meant to specify an oil burning form or if is simply a language evolution from the use of the term “lantern” that had wide spread currency in the region during the 18th century. Lantern was often the term applied to hanging fixtures found in center passages and stairways. The Gunston Hall study found that approximately a quarter of the lanterns listed in Rural Elite Inventories in their database contained this type of object.<sup>240</sup> These hanging lights might have been lit with either oil lamps or candles. Examples of both types can be found in 18th-century documents from the Chesapeake region. George Washington’s 1760 order for “1 handsome glass Lanthorne for Passage w<sup>h</sup> Lamps & 10 Gal<sup>s</sup> Oyl for Do [lamps]” clearly spells out both the type of lantern he wanted and where he intended to hang it. Just over a decade later, in 1771, Marylander Charles Carroll ordered “1 neat glass lanthorn to hold 1 Candle of a globular form, open at the top with Brass lacqured furniture—&c Line & pulleys proper,” adding that “This lanthorn is for a small passage.”<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, Vol. 2, p. 218.

<sup>241</sup> Both the Washington order and the Carroll order are quoted in the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, Vol.2, p.216-217; The Gunston report does not identify which of the numerous Charles Carrolls is referred to in the cited invoice; however, the transcriber’s notes for the original letter book entries states that the volume appears to contains orders for “both Charles Carroll, Senr. (CC) and Junior (CC of C)” presumed to be Charles Carroll of Carrollton. The lantern entry is part of list of goods for “Mr. C4C.”

Tables and seating furniture are the furniture forms most commonly listed in passages. Seating forms—i.e. both chairs and sofas or settees—occur in 13 (56%) of the 23 households. As one might expect, chairs are the most commonly found seating form in passages. Eleven of the thirteen households (84%) with seating forms included chairs. When the chair forms are described, 4 of 11 inventories (36%) list Windsors. However, the descriptions and values assigned to chairs located in passages in some of the other inventories suggest that these chairs may have also been Windsors. For example, the use of the terms “armed” and “common” to describe the chairs in Whartn18’s passage, the value of 75 cents each for a dozen chairs in Whann13’s passage, or the passage listing in Peter12 that reads “3 Windsor sophas & 4 chairs,” are all suggestive of Windsor chairs.

The prevalence of Windsor chairs in passages is not surprising. Windsors—sturdy, fashionable, and relatively light weight for ease of moving—were an ideal seating form for passages. The suitable nature of Windsors for this space was recognized by homeowners early on. In 1770, Virginian Mann Page ordered English examples of “1 dozn Windsor Chairs for a Passage”<sup>242</sup> and in 1777 a notice in the *Virginia Gazette* included “green Passage chairs” among the objects listed for sale at a Williamsburg house.<sup>243</sup> They were acceptable seating for what any class of visitor needing to wait in a passage. Their painted surface could be easily wiped down or even repainted as the dirt and usage of being passage furniture demanded. And the proximity of the passage to the outdoors made it easy to carry them outside when one wished to enjoy the garden or the porch. As early as 1760, Virginian Robert Bolling, when seeking to court his lady love, found her “seated in a large Windsor Chair in the Piazza.”<sup>244</sup> Early 19th-century drawings of Point Breeze, the New Jersey home of Napoleon’s brother, Joseph Bonaparte, show Windsor settees on the porch and individual Windsor chairs drawn up to the outdoor balustrade overlooking the river, and a ca. 1818 sketch by Charles Willson Peale of a gentleman reading on his porch shows him comfortably seated in a Windsor chair.<sup>245</sup>

Of the thirteen passage inventories with seating forms, five (38%) list sofas or settees. It is difficult to know exactly what form these pieces took. It seems unlikely that many householders would have exposed expensive upholstered sofas to the wear and tear and dirt of

<sup>242</sup> Quoted in Nancy Evans, *Windsor-Chair Making in America*, p. 340.

<sup>243</sup> Quoted in Nancy Evans, *American Windsor Chairs*, p. 562.

<sup>244</sup> Quoted in Nancy Evans, *Windsor-Chair Making in America*, p. 362.

<sup>245</sup> Illustrated in Nancy Evans, *Windsor-Chair Making in America*, p. 363-365.



busy passageways. It is possible that some listings, such as Scott01, for 2 sofas valued at \$20 for both, might refer to an upholstered form. However, it is probable that some, if not most, were Windsor furniture. In fact, the examples in Peter12 are described as “Windsor sophas” and this may also be the inference in Graham21 in the listing for a “passage Sopha.”

Just over half of the 23 inventories in this group included some type of table among the passage furnishings. In seven of the inventories, the tables are described with the term “dining.” In two instances, (Young02 and Turner16) the listing is for a set of dining tables. Six of those inventories also list dining rooms, which contain one or more dining table, clearly indicating that the “dining” tables in the passages were placed there for convenience or perhaps, as was the case in the Wirt letter quoted above, to make room for some other configuration of furniture in dining rooms. The only other inventory that designates the form of the tables in the passage is Dghrty22 that includes two card tables among the furnishings of the space assumed to be the dining room but then notes the card tables are “(in passage).” The clear implication is that the tables, although considered part of the dining room furnishings were, like dining tables in other households, sometimes kept in the passage.

In a few of the inventories, the list of passage contents included other furniture forms as well as various miscellaneous items. A walnut clothes press valued at \$8 is the first item recorded in the entry in Forest06, and Young22 included a sideboard among the furnishings in the “Hall.” The placement of such large furniture pieces in the central passageway may have been either a function of room and house size or, in the case of Young22, an indication of how the family served its meals. A clock is found in just one passage inventory—Young22. The only reference to a thermometer is in Dghrty22. Hat racks, a form tied to changing social custom, were found in both Freeman24 and Graham30. Barlow18 is the sole inventory with clearly identified art hung in the passage; however, Whartn18, with the large quantity of art work listed not by room but by category at the end of the inventory, may also have decorated the entrance with framed art. Maps, possibly framed or displayed hanging from a roller were among the items found in both Turner16 and Whartn18.

A number of the inventories in the database also detail the furnishings in other types of passages and service areas. Passages found on upper floors are the most commonly named. The obvious purpose for these upstairs areas was to function as an access point to upper story bed chambers. However, the presence of seating furniture and carpeting would have made them

usable as secondary gathering spaces for family members, including children. In some houses they also served as a place to house storage furniture. For example, in Young02, the “Passage up Stairs” contained both a mahogany desk and bookcase and a press or chest<sup>246</sup> that held the household linens. A few inventories include items that suggest these less important passages were used as service areas. Scott01 mentions a “Passage leading to Nursery” that held “2 Cots with Mattrass,” which suggests this may have been used as a sleeping area for servants and the passage “leading to the kitchen” contained three chairs, an old table listed with a Decanter stand and a toast stand, as well as two water buckets. Clearly this was both a staging area for meals and a place where servants might wait when not needed. Cleaning tools, recorded as brooms and scrubbing brushes, a sand piggin<sup>247</sup> and dust shovel, and a slop pail were found in the “Entry in the 2d Story” in Chndlr25.

What does the Nourse primary source material reveal about how Joseph and Maria Nourse furnished their passages? There are only two direct reference to passages found thus far. While living in Philadelphia in September of 1796, Joseph wrote to Maria that “. . . I purpose to paper... the passage of a fashionable Octogon figure which looks plain & elegant.”<sup>248</sup> The choice of wallpaper as a decorative scheme for a passage was well established by the end of the 18th century. Although the practice predates the advertisements, by the 1780s, newspapers carried references to wallpapers considered particularly suitable for these spaces. In 1782, Boston merchant John Welsh Jr. wished to be sent papers with “large Figures for Halls & Entries...” and a Salem, Massachusetts, newspaper advertisement in 1783 noted that among the papers for sale was “An elegant arched pattern suitable for entries, staircases, and large room.”<sup>249</sup> By the beginning of the 19th century, papers that imitated blocks of masonry had begun to supplant what are sometimes referred to by wallpaper historians as pillar and arch patterns for use in passages. The paper chosen by Joseph Nourse for his Philadelphia house was probably an early example of these masonry or “marble” papers as they were sometimes called. It should be noted that these patterns continued to be in fashion well into the 19th century. By choosing to put a fashionable paper in his passage, Joseph Nourse clearly understood that passages could

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<sup>246</sup> The confusion in the listing suggests either a problem on the appraiser’s part or a mistake in the official copy.

<sup>247</sup> A piggin was a small wooden bucket or tub with one longer, shaped stave which projected above the rim to act as a handle. They were sometimes used as a dipper or scoop.

<sup>248</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>249</sup> Richard C. Nylander, Elizabeth Redmond, and Penny J. Sander, *Wallpaper in New England*, p. 5, 10.

serve not only the practical functions outlined in Lounsbury's definition, but that they also made that important first impression on everyone who entered through his home's front door.

The second reference is found in a letter from Joseph Nourse to London-bound son Charles. As part of a short list of items that Charles was to shop for, presumably in England was "...an oil floor Cloth for the Passage...."<sup>250</sup> Unfortunately, Joseph gives no particulars as to size, color or pattern. Nor is there any indication as to whether this floor cloth was to be a replacement, a seasonal alternative, or a covering for a previously bare floor. However, an 1801 account listing for "Furniture Carpeting Oyl Cloths & binding", though presumably purchased for the P Street house, suggests, given the portable nature of floor coverings, that these floor cloths might have been reused at Dumbarton House.<sup>251</sup>

From these and other references in the Nourse papers, there is no reason to assume that the first floor passage at Dumbarton House differed in any significant way from those found in the homes of Nourse family contemporaries. Both the furnishings and decoration of this space should reflect period norms. It should also be noted that the furnishings in the passage were subject to the ebb and flow of family life and social activity. For example, Dumbarton House might occasionally "store" components of the dining table in the passage when the dining room is displayed at rest or include a group of trunks and bandboxes piled at the bottom of the stairs to suggest the numerous arrivals or departures of family members so often referenced in family letters.

## **LOWER PASSAGE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **Decoration: Period (ca. 1804) and room appropriate reproduction wallpaper**

Given Joseph Nourse's clear predilection for wall paper and the evidence that wall paper was among the important first purchases made when the family moved into Dumbarton House, the first choice for decorative finish in this space is wallpaper. A reproduction pattern appropriate to the period and space, either available commercially or custom printed, should be selected. Paint specialist Matthew Mosca's 1998 report states that there are "...a number of samples that show glue size on the earliest surviving generation of wall plaster... [and] few paint

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<sup>250</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Nourse, April 4, 1808, MdHR M 3381-102, Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, #G 1394-15, Folder 14, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections.

<sup>251</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 168, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

finishes [are] found... on the remaining early generation of wall plaster. This presents the strong possibility of wall paper.”<sup>252</sup>

**Floor Covering: Reproduction floor cloth, pattern ca. 1808 and/or reproduction Venetian carpeting, pattern ca. 1804; brass stairs rods if stairs are carpeted.**

There are several options available to Dumbarton House concerning a floor covering for the first and second floor passages and staircase. The Nourse primary source material supports either a painted floor cloth or a Venetian carpet, or perhaps some combination of the two.

Both Joseph Nourse’s 1801 account for “Carpeting Oyl Cloth” and his 1808 request to son Charles that he purchase “an oil floor Cloth for the Passage” suggest that the Nourses were familiar with this type of floor covering; the request to Charles also indicates that it was seen as appropriate for passage use. The 1808 floor cloth purchase may have been intended as a replacement for a re-used floor cloth from the 1801 account. It is also possible that it replaced worn out carpeting, as it seems unlikely, given the prevalence of floor coverings in passage inventories, that the passage floor at Dumbarton House was bare for the first four years that the family lived in the house.

The recommendation for a floor cloth in the first floor passage does not solve the problem of what to do about the staircase and the second floor passage. It seems unlikely that a floor cloth would have been used on the stairs and second floor but, based on period usage, carpet is a likely choice. Although the correspondence concerning carpet purchased by Charles in July 1804 gave no indication for which room it was intended, the fact that it was described as “Venetian” would have meant that it was considered suitable for areas with a lot of foot traffic. Apparently commissioned to look for carpeting while in Philadelphia, Charles wrote to his father that “Carpetting I went to see today. There is a very good kind about 40 cents pr yard more than Scotch called Venetian very handsome & very strong which I believe I shall get.”<sup>253</sup> Venetian carpet was flat woven, most commonly in a pattern of brightly colored stripes. In 1836 *The Penny Cyclopaedia* described Venetian carpeting as “arranged in stripes of different colours...

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<sup>252</sup> Matthew Mosca, “A Report on the Historic finishes, From Samples Collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms”, 24 March 1998, p. 101.

<sup>253</sup> Letter, Son Charles Josephus Nourse to Joseph Nourse., July 5, [1804?], Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1800-1809, Undated Nourse correspondence, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

generally used for staircase carpets....”<sup>254</sup> Consideration should be given to carpeting the stairs and upper passage with a period appropriate reproduction. Not only would this provide protection for the floors but it would provide an interesting contrast to the floor cloth and allow for other interpretive discussion. If the decision is made to carpet the stairs, brass carpet rods should be part of the installation. Care should be taken in laying carpet that whatever means of attaching it to the floor or stairs is used does not obliterate any original period evidence such as tack marks in original floor boards.

**Lighting: 1 ceiling hung “passage lamp” with appropriate hardware, chain, pulley mechanisms for hanging and raising and lowering, ca. 1800-1810, England or Europe, glass and metal**

While it is not clear from the documentary material exactly what is described by the term “passage lamp,” seen in numerous inventories, the most probable answer is that it meant a hanging fixture in the vein of the “lanthorns” in fashion since the middle of the 18th century. While it is possible that the term lamp is a linguistic replacement for the term lantern, such usage was not ubiquitous as the database does include several listings for “lanterns” that clearly refer to hand carried types. There is also one example for a passage “lanthorn” valued at \$15.00 stored in the garret in Barlow18, a household that clearly understood the difference between this object and the “lamps” listed elsewhere in the inventory. It seems logical to assume that at least some, if not most, of the “passage lamps” occurring in the database were referring to oil burning fixtures, perhaps of the Argand style.

Among the purchases made by Joseph Nourse shortly after he moved into Dumbarton House in 1804 was an “Egyptian Lamp” costing \$10.<sup>255</sup> No further description is given to specify the form of this lamp. While it might have been a table form, the relatively high value also supports the possibility of a ceiling fixture. The description of the decorative style as Egyptian certainly speaks to the fashionable nature of the lamp. While not as popular as classical Greek and Roman motifs in the decorative lexicon of the period, Egyptian inspired decoration was mainstream enough to be included in such influential design sources as Thomas

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<sup>254</sup> Quoted in *Country House Floors 1660-1850*, Christopher Gilbert, James Lomax and Anthony Wells-Cole, Leeds City Art Galleries, 1987, Leeds, England.

<sup>255</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 317 (Credit side) # 3490-a, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

Sheraton's 1804 *Encyclopedia* and George Smith's 1808 *Household Furniture*.<sup>256</sup> Indeed, motifs perceived as Egyptian may have found their way onto a range of period lighting devices. In 1809, while assisting Dolley Madison in purchasing new furnishings for the White House, Benjamin Henry Latrobe turned to Philadelphia merchants Bradford and Inskeep for lamps for the drawing room. After some correspondence back and forth, the lamps arrived and were installed. In a letter to the Philadelphia firm, Latrobe noted that although he found the lamps satisfactory "at a proper distance... I cannot say that I admire the mixture of Egyptian, Grecian & Birmingham taste which characterizes them."<sup>257</sup> He was referring no doubt to Birmingham, England, the center of much of England's manufacturing output.

### **6-12 Windsor Chairs, Reproduction, Philadelphia, Painted wood, Ca. 1784-1810**

As the statistical analysis of the database illustrates, chairs were the most common form of furniture found in first floor passages and Windsor chairs were the most commonly identified type of chair. While the numbers in the Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Database are drawn from very small sample, this finding is also borne out through evidence, both documentary and graphic, which survives for early 19th-century households up and down the east coast. It is clear that Joseph and Maria utilized this practical yet fashionable type of seating furniture. In his account for March of 1784, at the time of his marriage, a set of a dozen Windsors, 10 side and two armed chairs, was among Joseph Nourse's purchases. In addition to this written evidence, there are also two surviving Windsor chairs with Nourse family provenances. One, ca. 1785, is on loan to Dumbarton House and the other, ca. 1800-1810, is in the collection at Weston.

**Fire Buckets, bags and a basket, all reproduction. 4 leather fire buckets, 2 coarse weave sacks, 1 large basket. These should be copied from period examples.**

Fire was a very real threat in urban setting in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. A careless moment with a candle or an errant spark from a fireplace at a neighbor's house could start a fire that in a frighteningly short time could threaten your home and family. Independent fire companies and community bucket brigades made the effort to combat this danger. Leather

<sup>256</sup> Gregory Weidman, p.131 "The Furniture of Classical Maryland, 1815-1845" in *Classical Maryland 1815-1845 Fine and Decorative Arts from the Golden Age*.

<sup>257</sup> Letter, Benjamin H. Latrobe to Bradford and Inskeep, Latrobe Letterbook, p. 389, Latrobe Papers, Maryland Historical Society.

fire buckets were kept close at hand for passing water along fire lines together with bags and baskets for carrying personal belongings and household furnishings out of burning buildings.

No evidence has been found to show that Joseph Nourse was a member of a local fire company, but his expenditures in the last quarter of 1805 included twelve dollars for an undesignated number of fire buckets. In the third quarter of the 18th century, Alexandria's Sun Fire Company required its members to have four fire buckets, two bags and a basket.<sup>258</sup> Even if not mandated by fire company regulations, it would also be logical that Nourse kept some type of bags and baskets nearby to aid in any attempts made to carry goods out of burning structures, including his own if it should come to that.

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<sup>258</sup> Draft, *Furnishing Plan, Carlyle House*, 1984, p. 67. The plan cites the minutes of the Sun Fire Company, Alexandria, Virginia, 1775-1801, microfilm reel M-97 in the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.

## **PARLOR/DRAWING ROOM**

Lounsbury, in his *Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture & Landscape* describes a drawing room as, “A large, formal entertaining space: a reception room.” He goes on to note that southern custom seems to have followed English usage and by the third quarter of 18th century the term was being used to “describe a room in which polite company was entertained.” He adds that “drawing rooms could be situated in a number of prominent locations...” and were often “located next to dining rooms and served as places to retire after dinner.” He defines a parlor as “a multipurpose entertaining and family sitting room located on the principal floor of most dwellings,” adding that “by the end of the colonial period, many grander houses had a number of parlors,” often well furnished and “reserved for formal entertainment.”<sup>259</sup>

In local practice, the difference between the two seems to have been one of semantic choice, although the use of the term drawing room does appear to increase in the early decades of the 19th century. In the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, the inventory database showed that of the 122 inventories organized in room-by-room manner, only six or (6.5%) used the term drawing room.<sup>260</sup> By contrast, in the Early 19th-century Washington D. C. Probate Database compiled for the Dumbarton House study, of the 24 inventories where public rooms intended for entertaining are named or can be assumed, one third (8) specifically use the term drawing room. Sixteen percent (4) specifically use the term parlor and in the rest there is an identifiable but unnamed (by function) space clearly intended for entertaining. For purposes of clarity, all discussions of these rooms will use the term parlor unless otherwise specified in a specific inventory under consideration.<sup>261</sup>

Only a few descriptive references to Washington drawing rooms or parlors have been found for the early decades of the nineteenth century. Harriet Otis recorded a visit to the Octagon in January of 1812 where she found Mrs. Tayloe in her “elegantly furnished parlor” doing needlework and surrounded by seven of her children.<sup>262</sup> The drawing room of President

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<sup>259</sup> Carl R. Lounsbury, ed., *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture & Landscape*, Oxford University Press, 1994, New York and London, p. 122, 260.

<sup>260</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, Vol. 1, p. 89.

<sup>261</sup> For Early 19th-century Washington, D.C. Probate Inventory Database materials, see Curatorial Files, The Dumbarton House.

<sup>262</sup> Harriet Otis Diary 1811-1814, Entry for January 11, 1812; Harrison Gray Otis Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, microfilm edition Library of Congress.



Monroe in the rebuilt President's House following the War of 1812 was cause for comment by more than one period observer. New Englander Harrison Gray Otis writing in a letter to his daughter was less than charitable, noting that "The great drawing room in the palace is as red as fire...."<sup>263</sup> But Virginian William Wirt, Monroe's Attorney General, was more impressed, writing to his daughter that "You can go to Mrs. Monroe's drawing room... and see all the President's princely furniture, which is more splendid than had ever entered into my imagination to conceive."<sup>264</sup> While all three of these period observations are intriguing, they offer little specific information about the actual appearance of the rooms being described.

Indeed, the only Washington parlor from this period described in any great detail is a fictional one. Published in 1828 but set in the early 18-teens during the Madison Presidency, Margaret Bayard Smith's novel *What is Gentility?* traces the rise of the McCarty family from their humble beginnings to their life as prosperous shop keepers. In the opening chapter of the novel, Mrs. McCarty is happily ensconced in her parlor, the room just behind the family's grocery and grog shop. The author described the scene with telling details:

The floor was covered with a very handsome carpet, at least it had once been handsome; what it now was, it would be difficult to tell, for altho' new, its colors were no longer discernible. Neither the father or his sons had ever been taught to scrape the mud from their shoes, and as... the streets were not paved, they soon brought in mud and dust enough to destroy the bright colors of the new carpet. The mahogany tables and the painted and gilt chairs, the scarlet worsted curtains, all bore marks that none of the family washed their hands oftener than they scraped their shoes. Yet to eyes, accustomed as Mrs. McCarty's had been, to the scanty and coarse comforts of the poor, this apartment was magnificent and often as she rocked herself to and fro with her foot resting on a handsome fender... she would cast round the parlour, a complacent and self-satisfied look, and wonder, 'if the President's drawing room could be any grander.'<sup>265</sup>

The parlors of the Nourses and their peers certainly would not have suffered the degradations of unscraped shoes and unwashed hands attributed to the McCartys. After all, cleanliness was one of the hallmarks of gentility. Yet Joseph and Maria Nourse and their contemporaries would, as the author intended, have recognized certain elements in the scene—the brightly colored carpet, the scarlet worsted curtains, the mahogany tables, the painted fancy chairs, and the handsome

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<sup>263</sup> Letter, Harrison Gray Otis to Sophia Otis, January 30, 1818, Harrison Gray Otis Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, microfilm edition, Library of Congress.

<sup>264</sup> Letter, William Wirt to Laura Wirt, November 27, 1817; William Wirt Papers, Microfilm Edition Roll 3 Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>265</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *What is Gentility? A Moral Tale*, (Pishey Thompson, 1828, City of Washington), p. 9.

fireplace fender—some version of all of these things might have been part of their parlor furnishings also.

Although modern perception assumes that in household hierarchies the parlor or drawing room came first with the finest decoration and furnishings, in the emotional lives of families this space sometimes seems to have made no impression. In the 1830s, John Mason, then in his sixties, took up his pen to record his memories of his childhood at Gunston Hall. He described Gunston Hall as having “four rooms and two passages on the first floor....” He wrote poignantly of his memories of his mother’s chamber prior to her death in 1773 and gave detailed descriptions of the use of what he referred to as “the small dining room” that served the dual role of family dining room and his father’s study. He also noted that in addition to the small dining room, “there was a larger one at the other end of the house which was used when there was company” or when George Mason was deeply engaged in writing. In these accounts he names and describes the use of three of the four first floor rooms. What of the fourth? Modern scholarship about 18th-century room usage allows, with some degree of certainty, for the assumption that it was the parlor or drawing room used for entertaining. Despite the use that the parlor must have received, it held no place in John Mason’s memories.<sup>266</sup>

Indeed, recommendations for the parlor at Dumbarton House are in many ways the most problematic. Joseph Nourse in his letter to his daughter prior to the family’s move into Dumbarton House clearly delineates how the family part of the house would be used but makes no reference to the rooms on the other side of the house. While there is one brief reference to a “dining room” in a later Joseph Nourse letter, thus far no specific reference to a drawing room or parlor at Dumbarton House has been found. Did the Nourses set aside one room as a formal parlor or drawing room?

It is only by combining an understanding of period custom and the physical layout of Dumbarton House with a reference found in a single Joseph Nourse letter that it is possible to postulate the presence of a room set aside solely for entertaining. Author Elisabeth Garrett noted that “many American homes between 1750 and 1870 could boast two parlors,” with one being “aloof and ceremonial.” She went on to add that “the best parlor was a reception room, the apartment to which a guest would first be shown.” It would have been “strategically located on

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<sup>266</sup> Terry K. Dunn, ed., *The Recollections of John Mason; George Mason’s Son Remembers His Father and Life at Gunston*, EPM Publications, Inc., 2004, Marshall, VA., p.63-65, 67.

the main floor, frequently at the front of the house, just off the entry hall.... The atmosphere was formal, the use occasional—for entertaining and such rites of passage as weddings, christenings, and funerals.”<sup>267</sup>

This perceived understanding about how the use of the spaces within a home were to be allocated can also be seen with the fictional McCartys. The passing years had brought increased prosperity, a house separated from the store, and children sent away to boarding schools so that they might learn to be more genteel. Upon daughter Catherine’s return, she is horrified to learn that the dinner table was being set up in the parlor where they would be expected to gather after the meal. Much dithering about how to resolve the situation ensued until Catherine tells her mother that “altho’ it would certainly be genteeler to a have a dining room, a parlour, and a drawing room, yet she knew many genteel persons who had only a dining room, and drawing room and if her mother converted this [the parlor] into a dining room, they could sit in the drawing room.” Her mother’s reply speaks volumes about period perceptions: “What? ...make an every-day room of the drawing room! Did any one ever hear the like! Why, I reckoned on that’s being opened only on high days and holidays.” To which Catherine replied “Oh! ...that would be vulgar in the extreme.”<sup>268</sup>

Thus, after looking at period practice, it becomes possible to more fully understand the implication found in one of Joseph Nourse’s letters. In a May of 1805, Joseph Nourse wrote to Maria that “Mr. Foster called one evening, drank tea & empated [*sic*] Mrs. Merrys regards.” He was no doubt referring to Augustus John Foster, aide to then British Ambassador Anthony Merry. While there was certainly a cordial social relationship between the two men, no doubt growing out of their different official capacities, there is no indication that Mr. Foster would have been treated as a close personal friend. Social custom would have dictated that Joseph Nourse entertain Mr. Foster in a more formal and public space than the family’s breakfast room. While it is true that dining rooms could also serve a parlor function, there is no evidence to suggest that the Nourses followed this practice. Therefore, if Joseph Nourse served tea to Mr.

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<sup>267</sup> Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home The American Family 1750-1870*, (Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1990, New York), p. 39.

<sup>268</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *What is Gentility?* p. 57.

Foster, it seems safe to assume that he did so in a formal parlor, a room set aside for just this type of entertaining.<sup>269</sup>

This lack of description about a parlor at Dumbarton House also carries over to the parlor furnishings. The Nourse primary source materials include only a few references to the types and numbers of furniture forms one would expect to find in a well appointed parlor. Therefore, the recommendations for the parlor rely, perhaps more heavily than for the other rooms, upon the combination of information found in the Early 19th-Century Washington D.C. Probate Inventory Database, contextual material found in other period sources, and a conservative take on what would have been considered the basic quality and quantity of furnishings for a fashionable parlor in a genteel home of the period.

In the database, seating furniture is recorded in 23 of the 24 identifiable parlor spaces. This disparity is due to the inventory of Wshgtn21 that is anomalous in that it lists no chairs anywhere in the house. Clearly this is either a recording error or reflects some disposition of the chairs prior to the inventorying of the house contents. Thus, all the statistical references for seating are figured against a total of 23 rooms rather than 24.

The average number of chairs per parlor was 13 and median was 12. These numbers are not surprising, as chairs were most commonly sold in units of six, with a set of 12 being typical for larger or better rooms in a household. In the database sample, a dozen households list what are assumed to be sets of 12, seven households have listings for assumed sets of 14, probably indicating 12 side and two matching arm chairs, and four households include larger numbers ranging from 18 to 24 chairs in the parlor. Among the chairs recorded with some type of description, there is one set of Windsors, one set listed as having leather upholstery, five sets described as mahogany, and 10 sets with modifiers indicating they were probably some type of fancy chair.

Among the more interesting of the sets described are the “1 dozen mahogany chairs lined with Blue damask & chintz covers” listed in the 1815 inventory for Walter Hellen. This reference is intriguing in its own right for the unusually full description of the textile treatments; however, these chairs take on even more significance with the realization that these are no doubt

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<sup>269</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, May 13, 1805, # G 1394, Folder 11, Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections.

the chairs purchased by Joseph Nourse at the Hellen estate auction. In a letter to her son Charles, Maria wrote that:

I never go to sales but your father persuaded me to walk with him in the morning of Mr. Hellens sale before it began. I wanted nought, not so his Honour, he sent me[?] home the blue satin chairs that M<sup>as</sup> Johan[?] brought from England with her—they are still handsome and very easy. I intend a few of them for your room.<sup>270</sup>

These chairs, while purchased too late to have been part of the furnishings of Dumbarton House, are important because they provide clues as to both Joseph Nourse's taste in household furnishings and his willingness to purchase second hand goods at auction.

Sofas were the other seating form frequently found in parlors. In *Southern Furniture 1680-1830 The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*, a sofa is described as having “an arm at each end, a full width back,” and “being intended for upright sitting.”<sup>271</sup> Expensive forms because of the upholstery, they only come into relatively wide spread use at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Even then, they are found most often in the homes of the well to do. Sixteen of the 24 households with identified parlors or two thirds of this subgroup included sofas in the primary entertaining space. It should be noted that three of the households in the group had sofas in their dining rooms rather than in the parlor, an option that might also be considered at Dumbarton House. Some of the entries provide insight into the appearances of these expensive household furnishings. Deakins05 describes the sofa as mahogany, referring to the wood from which the exposed elements such as legs were made. The upholstery elements were the focus of the description in Forest06, which cited a “Sofa with Callico Cover & pillow” among the furnishings in the drawing room. The sofa was valued at \$25.00, just five dollars less than the set of 12 side and two arm chairs with leather bottoms also in the room. Perhaps the most interesting description is in Hellen15 where a sofa of “blue Damask mah’y frame and chintz cover” matched the dozen chairs already discussed.

Table forms are found in 23 of the 24 households in this group. One household, Campbl17, lists no table forms in the parlor. However, there is a pair of card tables in the dining

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<sup>270</sup> Letter, Maria Nourse to Charles Nourse, Wednesday 27th [no year date given], MdHR M 3381-102) Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, Folder 16, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections. Although no year is recorded on the letter, the probate inventory of Walter Hellen was taken in November of 1815. By law, the sale could not have taken place before that date.

<sup>271</sup> Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830 The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*, (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1997), p. 147.

room and a breakfast table and a candle stand in what was probably the family parlor/dining room. Since all of these table forms are easily movable, it seems likely that they would have been brought to the parlor as needed.

In the parlor inventories that do include table forms, card tables are the most common form of tables found. Seventeen of the 24 (70%) households with identifiable parlors have this form and all of those having the form have more than one example. The descriptor “pair” is used in only three inventories; however, it is probable that most, if not all, of the other examples also represent pairs. In eight of the inventories, the card tables are described as mahogany. No other wood designations or descriptive terms are used.

Tea tables are listed by type in only eight (33%) of the 24 identified parlors. Five (20%) additional households with identifiable parlors have tea tables listed among the furnishings elsewhere in the house. As tea tables were small and portable it is likely that these tables would have been brought into the parlor if needed. In addition, of those households not having identified tea table forms, seven have breakfast tables (only one of which is recorded as being in a parlor) that are also easily movable and could certainly double as a tea table. In total, 20 inventories (83%) of the 24 inventories list table forms that were either designated as or could have been used as tea tables. What is clear, however, is that in most households these tables were not a fixed part of the parlor furniture.

Other types of tables that appear in parlor furniture listings include pier forms and candle stands in three inventories each (12%). Work stands occur in two parlor inventories, Dghrty22, and Clark23 which lists a “Ladies Mahogany work stand with draws.”<sup>272</sup> Other forms that appear in one inventory only include a console (Barlow18), a breakfast table with brass feet (Dghrty22), and a three part dining table (Clarke23). Although none of these forms occur with any degree of frequency, their appearance in parlors speaks to both the movable nature of household furnishings at this period as well as the individual nature of each family’s room use.

Looking glasses, while a common parlor furnishing form, are surprisingly not ubiquitous. Eighteen (75%) of the 24 households having identifiable parlors have at least one looking glass as part of the parlor furnishings. Of these 18 households, half have more than one example with

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<sup>272</sup> “Work stand” is presumed to have been a local term for a work or sewing table. In *Portsmouth Furniture Masterworks from the New Hampshire Seacoast*, the form is called a worktable and the catalog entry on page 269 describes the form as “a stand with one or two drawers which contained partitions for thread, thimbles, needles, and scissors. Frequently, a deep lower drawer or fabric bag could hold unfinished sewing.”

just over half of these having named or assumed pairs. Four of the 18 inventories employ the term “pier” in characterizing the looking glasses and two have fashionable “round”(Dghrty22) or “converse” (Key15) forms. In three inventories, the adjective “gilt” is used to describe frames and in one household (Orr22) the looking glasses are described as “2 Pier glasses with Mahogany tables to correspond.”

Twenty-one of the 24 parlors (87%) include some form of heating equipment. In addition, two other households have references to equipment that might have been used in a parlor. Both are probably the result of seasonal changes which cleared away the heating equipment during warm weather. In Barlow18, taken in June, a listing toward the end of the inventory records “andirons Shovel & tongs for the several apartments [sic].” And in Orr22, which was taken in August, the furnishings in the Dining Room, listed immediately before the drawing room, included “3 Fenders Brass mounted & 2 pr. Brass Andirons” as well as “2 Sets of Shovel Tongs & poker” and “4 Tongs & 2 Shovels” suggesting that heating equipment from several rooms had been gathered for counting. Despite the speculation about these two inventories, their entries were not part of the tabulations for parlor heating equipment.

In the 21 inventories that specify heating equipment in parlors, 17 (80%) include andirons with 8 examples (slightly less than half) cited as brass. Twenty of the 21 (95%) inventories listed shovels and tongs. These are almost always recorded together, with an implication that at least some, not most, were purchased together and therefore may have been pairs. One set was described as brass. In fact, many of those accompanying brass andirons were probably also made of brass or had brass finials. Fenders were included as part of parlor furnishings in 14 (66%) of the 21 households and of these, four were brass and one was iron. Hearth brooms occur in just over one third of the 21 households and six (28%) have listings for bellows. Fewer than 20% of the 21 households list pokers and firescreens. There are two listings for jamb hooks and one for an ash pan. There are no listings for grates but these may have been built- or cemented-in and therefore considered part of the fabric of the house rather than removable furnishings.

Given the previous century’s practice of removing lighting devices from a room when the equipment was not in use, a surprisingly high percentage of the 24 identifiable parlors include some type of lighting device. Sixteen of the inventories (66%) record some type of lighting device as part of the parlor furnishings. Among the forms are candlesticks; branches—i.e.

candlesticks fitted with arms; ornamental lusters—i.e. branched forms primary of glass or highly decorated with glass ornaments;<sup>273</sup> and lamps. Eleven (45%) of the households parlors listed candlesticks. Six of the candlesticks (54%) are described as plate (meaning plated), one as gilt and one as cut glass. Three households cite examples of branches, and three households have lusters. Only one inventory, Whartn18, contained oil lamps—a pair of “Cut Glass Globe mantle lamps” valued at \$50, a pair of “Japanned” lamps, and an “Italian Oil” ceiling lamp valued at \$20. Clearly the lighting devices found in these 16 inventories were considered a part of the furnishings of the parlor, serving both an ornamental as well as practical function.

Indeed, in some homes they may have been treated primarily as decorative, with more utilitarian brass candlesticks being used on an everyday basis. Louisa Catherine Adams, wife of John Quincy Adams, records in her diary a domestic event that turned on just such practice. She wrote that after entertaining a group of 20 at a dinner party she retired to change for the evening’s activities.

After dinner instead of going into the Drawing room I went to dress for the Ball the consequence of which was that the candles in the room were not lighted and I never thought about it until I heard their excellencies trembling over the Chin in total darkn....

When light was restored “there stood a Brass candlestick containing a tallow candle.” Her husband was dismayed because of “some ill natured observations which were made at the Presidents [where] the Servant in his hurry to prepare a third room left one of these terrible utensils on the Chimney piece.” She concluded by writing that her reaction to her husband’s “great distress” was that she “was seized with such a convulsive fit of laughter that I could scarcely Stand.”<sup>274</sup>

The presence of decorative lighting devices was just one element of the embellishment of parlors. Two thirds of the identifiable parlors included some type of ornamental objects as part of the rooms’ decor. Half of these are listed as mantel ornaments. In most cases they are simply noted as “ornaments” for the “mantle” but a few listings are more forth coming. Forest06 included “China Mantle ornaments” and Whartn18 had what must have been a very impressive seven piece “Sett of Alabaster Mantle Ornaments” valued at \$35. The second most frequently

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<sup>273</sup> Arlene Palmer, *Glass in Early America, A Winterthur Book*, (Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur Delaware, 1993), p. 314.

<sup>274</sup> Diary of Louisa Catherine Adams, February 22, 1821, Louisa Catherine Adams Diary, Adams Family Papers, microfilm edition, Library of Congress.



cited type of ornamental object was flower vases or pots. These appear to have been owned in pairs or “setts.” Generally the listings are not descriptive but Barlow18 owned “2 gilt Enameled Flower pots” valued at \$30 each, which must have been quite impressive. Although the placement of the flower vases or pots is not specified, it is probable that some, if not all, were also featured as adornment for mantles since none of the inventories include both. It may well be that the decision to characterize objects as “mantle ornaments” or “flower vases” was as much a function of the inventory taker as it was of any real difference between categories of objects. Two listings stand out from the rest. Campbl17 included an elegant “Alabaster Time Piece & ornaments,” the only reference to a clock in a parlor, valued at a startling \$225.

Objects listed in the Art category were found in 15 (62%) of the 24 identifiable parlors. Adding Whartn18 into this category brings the percentage up to two thirds of the households in this group. In Whartn18 over 100 art objects are listed separately at the end of the inventory. “Paintings” as opposed to “pictures” or prints are specified in four households. Two households list maps; Young02 owned a “Map of Maryland” and two unidentified maps were among the items found in Orr22’s parlor. One example of a framed needlework, a “Shepherdess Gilt framed worked in Silk,” is listed in Hellen15. This may well have been a piece of school girl work or have been done by the mistress of the household, as were probably the “2 painted flowers with gilt frames” also listed in Hellen15. Interestingly, none of the art recorded as being in parlors seems to have been family portraits. Perhaps these were deemed too personal to display in this most impersonal of the public spaces in a household. When subject matter is given (excluding Whartn18 since it is not possible to know which items might have hung in his parlor) the majority seem to have been what might be characterized as patriotic—i.e. likenesses (probably prints) of presidents such as Washington, Madison, or Monroe or views of military engagements or officers. Unfortunately, it is only in Whartn18 that the full range of possibilities is revealed. The works he owned included landscapes, still lifes, genre scenes, sporting prints, European views, and images of important figures. Also among his art works were examples described as “marble medallions,” one of two examples of sculptural art, the other being a “Marble Bust of Joel Barlow” valued at \$350 in Barlow18. Finally, Key15, included “one Large piece of Tapestry” valued at \$100, which is presumed to have been a wall hanging of some type.

Rounding out furnishings of parlors were the textile furnishings that were both decorative and practical but not considered necessary in every household. Carpets were present in 20 (83%)

of the 24 identifiable parlors. In addition, Whann13, which was taken in August, listed two large carpets valued at \$20 each and two hearth rugs, all presumably stored in a third floor bedchamber. If at least one of these is assumed to have been used in the parlor, the percentage rises to 87%. Three of the households (14%) describe the carpet type as “Wilton.” Another three (14%), Campbl17, Barlow18, and Orr22 record Brussels carpeting with these being the most highly valued among all the carpeting found in parlors. Two of the households include straw carpet or matting, undoubtedly reflecting options for seasonally changed floorcoverings. There is one entry each for a “good Scotch Carpet” (Clarke23) and a “Turkey Carpet” (Deakins05). It is not possible to know whether the “Turkey” carpet was actually an oriental rug or an English or European carpet woven in a “Turkey” design. The first possibility would represent a rare example, and the second would reflect a popular pattern choice available in the early 19th century. Unfortunately, out of all the carpet listings, this last is the only one to give any information about color or pattern. It is also not clear as to whether any of these carpets had borders or whether they were “fitted” wall-to-wall or were area carpets.

Of the 21 households (including Whann13), two thirds of the parlor inventories also listed a hearth rug. In two of the households with Brussels carpet, the hearth rug appears to have matched, at least in type of weave. There are no descriptions of the hearth rugs in the other parlor inventories. These small protective rugs could be bought separately or purchased, one presumes, with the room carpeting.

Evidence of window curtains was found for 15 (62%) of the 24 households with an identifiable parlor. Interestingly, the time of year that the inventory was taken seems to have had little effect on the presence of curtains in these rooms. In eight or just over half of the parlors with curtains, cornices are listed as part of the entry. Five (33%) list pins, referring to the decorative curtain pins used to tie back or otherwise facilitate the functioning of the curtains. Included is one reference to “drapery” (Barlow18) that gives an indication of style—i.e. side curtains with some type of swaged drapery at the top. There is one reference to white dimity (Whartn18), one to chintz curtains in storage which match the number of cornices listed in the parlor (Campbl17), and one reference to “green stuff” or woolen curtains (Graham30), which probably would have been considered very old fashioned by the time the inventory was taken in 1830.

In addition to the above categories of furnishings, parlors were personalized with an interesting mix of objects. Five parlors (20%) listed keyboard musical instruments. Five contained game related items—one reference to battledore (Chndlr25); one reference to loo; and three references to back gammon. Clarke23 contained “1 fire screen old,” Chandlr25 included a spy glass, and Dghrty22 kept “Medicine Scales & Medicines” in the workstand and drawers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

### **1 Set of Chairs: 12 chairs (10 side chairs, 2 arm chairs); Philadelphia, New York; Chesapeake, England; Mahogany; ca. 1784—ca. 1805**

It seems unlikely that Joseph Nourse would have differed dramatically from his neighbors in the basic furnishings of his parlor. The implication in the database was that a set of 12 would have been considered the minimum number appropriate in a fashionable parlor. Therefore, a set of a dozen with 10 side chairs and 2 arm chairs is the most conservative recommendation for the Nourse parlor. A potential problem arises when the information regarding chairs in the family primary source material is examined. The extant documents do not show, except for a set of Windsors, that the Nourses purchased a set of a dozen chairs at any one time.

At the beginning of his marriage, Joseph Nourse worked to acquire a small set of mahogany chairs. Initially intending to purchase six side chairs and two arm chairs from J. Watkins along with other pieces of furniture, he apparently cancelled the chair portion of the order noting that “The Chairs were by agreement not made for me.” At the same time he purchased six mahogany chairs, possibly from Captain Tingey, for less than half of what the new ones would have cost. However, there is no reference as to whether arm chairs were part of the group. Also in March of 1784, Joseph Nourse purchased a dozen Windsor chairs. There are other references to chair purchases in 1785 and 1799 but these account listings contain no information as to the number of chairs in the purchase, the materials from which they were made, or from whom they were purchased.<sup>275</sup> The prices of these purchases are in dollars rather than pounds and seem somewhat low, though not impossible for a set of six chairs if they were

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<sup>275</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal, 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 28, 32, 52, and Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 116, # 3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

purchased second hand. Even if each of these later references is taken as representing six chairs each, the total of 18 chairs plus the dozen windsor chairs would not be adequate for a fashionable home the size of Dumbarton House. One must postulate that in the years with missing accounts or among the post-1800 listings for “furniture” that give no details that other sets of chairs made their way into the Nourse household.

**Sofa: Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake, or England; mahogany and reproduction upholstery; ca. 1784-1805**

There is no record of Joseph Nourse purchasing a sofa. One would think that such an expensive upholstered form would have merited a specific reference in his accounts, much like the easy chair purchased from Kipp in New York. However, two thirds of his contemporaries included this important form among their parlor furnishings. In addition, there are two period sofas, one from Philadelphia and one English, both dating from roughly the same time period (ca. 1785-1790), which descend in family hands.<sup>276</sup> While neither can yet be tied directly to Joseph Nourse and Dumbarton House, their existence is evocative of general family lifestyle choices and a fondness for the form.

**Pair of Card Tables: Philadelphia; mahogany, ca. 1784**

Card tables occur in not quite three quarters of the parlors identified in the Early Federal Washington Database, most commonly in what can be assumed to be pairs. Indeed, Joseph Nourse included “2 Card Tables” valued at a substantial £9 among the “Household Furniture” that he recorded as a cash payment in the March 4th, 1784 entry in his account book.<sup>277</sup> In addition, we know that the Nourses enjoyed playing cards from a 1786 entry in Joseph’s diary.<sup>278</sup> While it is not entirely clear as to the source from which he purchased these tables, they are in the same entry noting his purchase of china from Capt. Tingey.<sup>279</sup>

<sup>276</sup> See Dumbarton House curatorial files for the family provenance and descriptions of these sofas.

<sup>277</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal, 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p.32, # 3940, Papers of the Nourse Family University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>278</sup> Journal, Joseph Nourse October 1786-January 1790, Entry for November 10, 1786, #3490-c, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department “Miss Pearson with Sally Bull My Wife &c played cards last night until 1/2 past ten O’Clock. . . .”

<sup>279</sup> It should be noted that the curatorial files at Dumbarton House record a ca. 1780s Philadelphia card table with a Nourse provenance owned by Nourse descendants.

**Tea or Breakfast Table: Philadelphia, New York, or Chesapeake; Walnut or Mahogany;  
ca. 1784-1805**

Only one third of the 24 identified parlors included a table described as a tea table. One additional household listed a breakfast table in the parlor. Taken together, these nine households place a “tea” form in only 37% of the parlors studied. However, five additional households had tea tables and six others had breakfast tables recorded not in their parlors but else where in the house. If these 11 households are added to those with tea table forms listed in parlors, 20 (83%) of the 24 households in this group owned a small, movable table considered in the period as appropriate for tea service. However, it is clear that this type of table was not viewed as a fixed part of the parlor furnishings.

Tea tables by their very name announce their function. Rectangular or round in shape they were intended to provide a center around which host and guest could gather to share a fashionable cup of tea. Breakfast tables are somewhat more problematic. A small table with drop leaves, they were also referred to as Pembroke tables, presumably after the Countess of Pembroke, who according to Sheraton, “first gave orders for one of them, and who probably gave the first ideas of such a table to the workmen.” He went on to add that the “use of this piece is for a gentleman or lady to breakfast on.” Sheraton notwithstanding, as notable a taste maker as Thomas Jefferson noted a “tea table” with “leaves” in his memorandum book and Thomas Elfe, a successful Charleston cabinetmaker, made a form that he referred to as a “pembroke tea table.” Clearly the breakfast tables found in early Washington households could be, and no doubt were, used to serve fashionable teas to both family and guests.<sup>280</sup>

Joseph Nourse’s accounts record the purchase of two tables that might well have served as tea tables. Among the furniture he ordered from J. Watkins in 1784 was a “Breakfast Table” which cost £5. Fifteen years later, in April of 1798, he recorded the purchase of a “Table round” for \$9. Unfortunately, neither table is described beyond the basic form and value. Either could have served as a tea table.

A third intriguing reference is found in his accounts for 1800. On the credit page of the ledger, the notation for September 16<sup>th</sup> includes an entry for “China & Table M Nourse” for \$22. Ten pages later a more detailed listing, again on the credit side of the ledger breaks out the cost

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<sup>280</sup> Sheraton and Jefferson quotes and other tea table information in Hurst and Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830*, p. 227.

for the individual items as “Sett of China 14 Table 8.”<sup>281</sup> The combined listing, together with the fact that the china cost more than the table suggests that this might have been a set of tea china with an accompanying tea table. Indeed, the assumption that this was tea china is bolstered by the price difference between this entry and the recorded purchase two years earlier of a “sett of table china” costing \$55.<sup>282</sup> The temptation is strong to assume that the “M Nourse” in the entry is Maria Nourse; however, the following account line clearly notes a textile entry which includes the name “Mrs Nourse.” It is possible that this entry referred to Michael Nourse, perhaps recording a repayment for a purchase funded by Joseph for this brother who married Mary Rittenhouse in June of 1800.<sup>283</sup> This interpretation is bolstered by the fact that the entries occur on the credit pages of Joseph Nourse’s ledger, an indication that they represent income rather than expenditures which normally are listed in the debit accounts.

It is also possible that among the non-specific furniture purchases recorded in Joseph Nourse’s accounts lurks yet another candidate for a parlor tea table.<sup>284</sup>

### **1 Pair Pier Looking Glasses: England or America; Mahogany frame, perhaps or partially gilt, ca. 1800**

Joseph Nourse recorded the purchase of looking glasses in his household accounts on several occasions over the years. Perhaps the most intriguing of these is the purchase (perhaps at auction) in 1800 for “Glasses” valued at \$77, making them more than twice as expensive as the Side Board & Tables listed on the line above them.<sup>285</sup> The following year while in Philadelphia, Nourse recorded spending \$14 for “Gause for the pier Glasses, &c.”<sup>286</sup> leading one to ask

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<sup>281</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 149, 159, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>282</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1778-1803, p. 109, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>283</sup> Lyle, Maria Catharine Nourse. *James Nourse and his Descendants* (Lexington, KY: Transylvania Printing Company, 1897), p. 112. In an email exchange with Brian Lang, former Dumbarton House curator, about this perplexing exchange, he wrote that, “I suppose it could refer to Michael Nourse (1778-1860), who in 1800 would have been about twenty-two years of age. Rather coincidentally, on June 21, 1800, at Washington, D.C., he married Mary Rittenhouse (1779-1867), daughter of Benjamin Rittenhouse and Elizabeth Bull. Michael Nourse worked for fifty-seven years in the Treasury Department in various capacities. And as the federal government recently moved to the City of Washington, I suppose it’s possible the china and table were purchased on his behalf to help him establish his household.”

<sup>284</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803, p. 34, 109 #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>285</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>286</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department. It should be noted that the value listed included more than the purchase price for the gauze as indicated by the &c (etc.) at the end of the entry.

whether these were the glasses purchased the previous year, and is the gauze indicative of gilt decoration. The fact that both entries are plural plus the large amount of money spent for the glasses is suggestive of a pair of pier glasses. These glasses would be later in style than the ca. 1785-1790 New York pier glass with a family history currently on loan to Dumbarton House.<sup>287</sup>

### **A Pair of Candlesticks with Branches: England or France; Silver plate; ca. 1784—1805**

Joseph Nourse recorded the purchase of silver plated candlesticks in 1784. A pair of “Plated Candlesticks” was among the household purchases at the time of his marriage.<sup>288</sup> Sixteen years later, two pairs of candlesticks were among items probably purchased at vendue.<sup>289</sup> While the candle sticks are not described, a number of the objects in the list such as a cream pot, sugar dish, and a waiter were designated as silver, either by descriptor or weight. It seems logical to assume that some of the other items in the list like the candlesticks, another cream pot, and tea and coffee urns were likely to have been plated silver, as such are forms that were becoming increasingly available in what today is referred to as “Sheffield plate.” Further evidence of the Nourse ownership of what were assuredly silver plate candlesticks comes in a note sent from Charles to his parents, presumably in 1824, imparting the news that LaFayette was coming to call at his house. Charles requests the loan of tea wares and “your four long candlesticks (not branches). . . .”<sup>290</sup>

These fused plate items were probably English in origin, but the fused plate process was not confined to British manufacturers. Two of the earlier inventories in the Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database included entries for what is described as “french” plated wares. Forest06 includes “4 large french plated Candlesticks” and Peter12 records “Plated french ware including Candle Sticks” valued at \$50 for the group. Adding to these pieces of documentary evidence are several examples of period fused plate objects that belonged to John Gadsby who ran the City Tavern and Hotel in Alexandria from 1796 to 1808. These items, a

<sup>287</sup> See Curatorial Files, Dumbarton House for a description and provenance of the looking glass on loan.

<sup>288</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803, p. 32, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>289</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>290</sup> Letter, Son Charles Josephus Nourse to Joseph and Maria Nourse, 1824, Sidwell Friends School Archives.

large dish cover and an elegant monteith are clearly marked with stamps indicating their French origin.<sup>291</sup>

No evidence has yet come to light as to how these items of French manufacture entered the Washington regional market; however, local merchants do from time to time note the importation of other types of French goods such as textiles and wallpapers. A much more speculative theory is that these goods belonged to someone in the French diplomatic delegation and were sold at auction when the individual returned to France. This type of sale is well documented in period sources.<sup>292</sup>

### **1 Pair Snuffers and Tray; England or Europe; Brass, Polished Steel or Silver Plate; ca. 1800**

A pair of scissor-like candle snuffers would have been considered a necessity in a well-to-do genteel household of the period. In the early 19th century, wicking was not self consuming and the need to trim (pinch off) the charred wick was part of the process of lighting a house with candles, no matter whether they were tallow, beeswax or spermaceti. Snuffers, with perhaps a tray or stand to hold them, were among the items that might be left out on a table or put away in a closet or drawer when not in use. They ~~are~~ were also the type of small miscellaneous item that would have been easily overlooked when inventories were taken, especially if they were tucked out of sight or removed to the kitchen, probably for cleaning, like those in Whann13. Twenty of the 28 households in the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C., Probate Database* included snuffers in their inventory listings. Not quite two-thirds (60%) of those homes having this form owned multiple examples. Six of the households ~~have~~ had snuffers described as “plated” and three included d examples described as “steel.” Perhaps most interesting is Chndlr25 ~~who~~ which struck the balance between durability and fashion with two examples of a plated tray coupled with steel snuffers, one set found in the drawing room and one in the breakfast room.

<sup>291</sup> The Gadsby items are in the collection of Gadsby’s Tavern Museum in Alexandria. The objects have a long history of ownership in the local community. The monteith which is oval with a scalloped rim is a form that was intended for cooling wine glasses by hanging their bases over the rim and suspending the bowl in cool water.

<sup>292</sup> See unpublished manuscript by the author of this report, prepared for The Octagon Museum, 1991, to accompany the exhibition *In the Most Fashionable Style: Making a Home in the Federal City*.



Under the heading of “Furniture &c” in his subordinate account for the first eight months of 1799, Joseph Nourse recorded “snuffers” valued at one dollar.<sup>293</sup> Much more costly ~~was-were~~ the pair of snuffers and tray purchased at auction in 1800, for which he paid seven dollars.<sup>294</sup> This sum seems quite substantial, particularly when compared to other items on the list, such as a silver waiter costing six dollars or a tea-pot for seven dollars. The high price suggests that ~~they~~ these were either made from ~~a more~~ an expensive material such as silver plate,<sup>295</sup> or that they were in some way more elaborate in their ornamentation or design. This pair would certainly have been elegant enough to be left out as part of the furnishing in either the drawing room or dining room. The pair costing a dollar would have been simpler, perhaps without a tray or stand, and probably made from brass or perhaps steel. ~~The~~ise snuffers would be an appropriate choice for sharing between the breakfast room and mother’s room.

**1 Pair Andirons, 1 pair shovel and& tongs, 1 fender: England or America; Brass, Brass Ornamented Steel or Iron, Plain Polished Steel or Iron; ~~ea.~~-1784 ~~-ea.~~-1810**

Joseph Nourse’s account books give clear evidence that he burned wood rather than coal in his fireplaces. There are at least two recorded purchases for andirons among Joseph Nourse’s early accounts. One pair of these appears to have been intended for the kitchen fireplace as they are listed with pot hooks and a spit.<sup>296</sup> The other is simply recorded as “Andirons” and is included in a list of household purchases ranging from bed tick and a cradle to an umbrella, chairs, and a table.<sup>297</sup> Clearly over the years, as the Nourse family moved from house to house, different configurations of fireplace equipment would have been bought as needed. Even so, it is possible that the move into Dumbarton House, which may well have been the largest house in which they had lived to that date, would have required the acquisition of additional sets of andirons and fire tools. If that were the case, ~~it is possible that~~ the fireplace equipment in the pParlor was-would have been relatively new and in the most fashionable style.

<sup>293</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 116, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>294</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>295</sup> Joseph Nourse’s failure to list them by weight would seem to rule out the possibility that they were silver, as he was careful to do with two other items in the account.

<sup>296</sup> Joseph Nourse, Account Journal 1778-1803, #3940-a, Nourse Family Papers, p. 37, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>297</sup> Joseph Nourse, Account Journal 1778-1803, #3940-a, Nourse Family Papers, p. 52, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

### **1A-Set of Mantel Ornaments or a Pair of Vases: England or Europe; Alabaster or Ceramic; ~~ca.~~1784-1810**

Mantel ornaments, often in sets with an odd number of pieces, or pairs of ceramic vases were becoming increasingly popular by the early ~~19th-nineteenth~~ century. Although there is no evidence for purchases of mantel ornaments, among the various accounts that survive from Joseph Nourse's expenditures ~~for purchases of mantel ornaments~~, it seems probable that he, like many of his contemporaries would have viewed such objects as necessary parts of household decor.

A family history of ownership also gives weight to the inclusion of mantel ornaments as part of the decor at Dumbarton House. Among the items sold at James Nourse's estate sale from Piedmont in what was then Berkeley County, Virginia, were "Images for Chimney Peice," which were probably china figurines and "1 Sett China Jars for Mantle Peice." The jars were probably a set of Chinese export garniture and the images might have been either Chinese or English. Both types would have been considered somewhat old-fashioned, even at the time of the sale in 1785. Neither was bought by Joseph, but they do suggest a ~~family fondness~~precedence in the family for such ornamentation.<sup>298</sup>

Graphic images from the period depict the arrangement of ~~such~~ decorative accessories. Sophie du Pont in a satirical depiction of the family's parlor written in 1830 described the mantel thus~~ly~~ and accompanied the text with watercolor drawing:

We have reached the chimney & have stopped to contemplate its large mirror, surrounded by time worn gilding—On each side, a small silver candlestick, with a large one to take care of it—The middle of the chimney is always graced by a tumbler containing flowers, either fresh or faded, but more frequently the latter....<sup>299</sup>

### **Wallpaper: Period (ca. 1804) and room-appropriate reproduction wallpaper and border**

The numerous references to wallpaper among Joseph Nourse's letters and accounts clearly indicate a family preference for this type of household decoration. Following the move to Georgetown, this family predilection for wallpaper~~ed~~ surfaces, first in an entry for \$10 spent for

<sup>298</sup> Copies of the inventory and estate sale record for James Nourse's Piedmont house are located in the Curatorial Files, Dumbarton House.

<sup>299</sup> Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Hinsley, *Sophie du Pont A Young Lady in America*, (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987, New York), p. 73.

“papering a room” in July 1803.<sup>300</sup> No further detail was given but the assumption is that this was for the house in which the family lived on P Street prior to moving to Dumbarton House. Fortunately the records concerning Dumbarton House are somewhat more specific. The Nourse’s daughter ~~Anna Maria~~ Josepha, then in Philadelphia, was commissioned to buy wall-paper for the new house. She wrote to her father that “... I intend doing my very best about the paper, I dare say I can get papers as handsome as the light or buff light papers with Dark bordering is at present the prevailing fashion—the effect is very pretty and they have the advantage of lighting remarkably well...”<sup>301</sup> Additional information is found in a letter from Joseph Nourse to his daughter in which he anticipates the arrival of “the paper you are to send for four Rooms.”<sup>302</sup> His accounts at the end of 1804 record an expenditure of \$52.12 for “Paper for Rooms.”<sup>303</sup> No further clues survive as to the appearance of the paper nor for which “four” rooms it was intended. However, the primary source materials show that wall-paper was an important element in the decorations of Dumbarton House.

Paint consultant Matthew Mosca, in his 1998 “Report on the Historic Finishes, from samples collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms” notes that “a number of samples... show glue size on the earliest surviving generation of wall plaster.” This evidence, glue size being a common finish under wallpaper, coupled with the fact that very few samples of paint finishes were found on the earliest layer of plaster, led Mosca to recommend wallpaper for the ~~hall~~ passage and stair ~~hall~~ passage, the parlor, the dining room, the breakfast room, and mother’s room. His findings of evidence for wallpaper in all of the first floor spaces suggests that either Joseph Nourse purchased wallpaper for the ~~fifth first floor space~~ lower passage sometime after moving into Dumbarton House in 1804, or ~~that perhaps~~ one of the rooms was already papered prior to ~~their~~ his occupancy of the house.<sup>304</sup>

<sup>300</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, 1778-1803 p.274, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>301</sup> Letter, Daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Nourse, no date [1804?] Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, The Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>302</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, MdHR M 3381-102, #G 1394-13, Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections; See also the wallpaper section in Chapter Five of this report for a discussion of Thomas Hurley, the wallpaper manufacturer from whom Joseph Nourse purchased this papers.

<sup>303</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 318, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>304</sup> Matthew Mosca, “A Report on the Historic Finishes, From Samples Collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms,” Conducted at the request of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, March 24, 1998.

In selecting reproduction wallpapers and borders to use in the first floor rooms ~~at Dumbarton House~~, attention should be paid to period aesthetics, particularly to what types of papers were considered appropriate for specific rooms. Factors in these fashions included the scale and motifs of the pattern as well the colors and finishes of the overall design. ~~Care must be taken to select papers typical of early 19th-century tastes and fashions and not to impose 21st-century preferences.~~

~~Reproduction~~ Carpet: Reproduction Brussels weave; ~~reproduction~~; wool; pattern ~~ca. 1800-1810~~ with borders to match

Carpeted floors were found in a little over 80% of the 24 identifiable parlors in the database study. There is every reason to believe that Joseph Nourse, too, would have considered a carpeted floor appropriate for his parlor at Dumbarton House.

References to carpet purchases and carpet choices appear numerous times in the Nourse letters and accounts over the span of years leading ~~up~~ up to the Nourse occupancy of Dumbarton House. In October of 1804, after the family's move in June, "Carpet & furniture" costing \$66.93 were among the expenses recorded in Joseph Nourse's account book.<sup>305</sup> While this expenditure may have been for the Venetian carpet purchased by Charles Nourse in Philadelphia, and therefore likely not to have been considered appropriate for the parlor, it does show a continuing interest in carpeted floors. There was another notation four years later, in 1808, of \$40 "Paid for a Carpet."<sup>306</sup> Unfortunately there is no information given to suggest for which room this carpet ~~might have been~~ was intended or what type of carpet it was. However, Joseph Nourse, in a 1796 letter to his wife, clearly illustrates an understanding of the different weaves and quality of carpets available in the market-place. His original intent to put Brussels in the front room (probably the parlor) and Scotch or ingrain in the back (perhaps the family dining room) gave

<sup>305</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse, Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 176, #3940-a, Papers of the Nourse Family University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>306</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. A5, #3940-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

way to concerns about the sturdiness of the Scotch and a change to using Brussels in both rooms.<sup>307</sup>

It is clear from his description that in 1796 he bought a pre-sewn carpet rather than having one custom-fit to the room. He wrote that “the Carpet for the front Room is 4 ¼ by 4 ¼ this will handsomely cover the Room, and a small piece near the communication door and another at the Spinnet ~~[sic]~~ will answer almost as well as if it was made to fit.”<sup>308</sup> While this was considered adequate for a house that the family would be leaving in four years for the move to Washington, the clear implication is that “made to fit” was the choice if possible.<sup>309</sup>

### **Window Curtains: Period appropriate design; reproduction fabric with period appropriate hardware; ~~ca.~~ 1800 - 1810**

Although curtains were not found in all parlors, they were a feature of slightly more than three-fifths of the identified parlors in the database. Curtains were among the household furnishings that are referenced repeatedly in the Nourse primary source material, although it is not always clear for which room they were intended. In the same 1796 letter in which he discussed carpet, Joseph Nourse went on to add “Do let me know about the back Room now the Parlor. I could ~~[sic]~~ have a proper paper put on to suit either your White Curtains or the flowered ~~[sic]~~ ones--.”<sup>310</sup> His reference to white curtains is no doubt a reference to white dimity, a fashionable choice during the period, and the flowered curtains were probably made from some type of flower patterned chintz. Chintz seems to have been a recurring choice of the Nourses. In July of 1804, following the June move into Dumbarton House, “Chintz for Curtains” costing \$16.00 was purchased.<sup>311</sup> Chintz is also one of the fashionable fabric choices recommended for some of the curtain designs illustrated in Ackermann’s *Repository of the Arts* magazine.<sup>312</sup>

<sup>307</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>308</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>309</sup> In at least some cases, “made to fit” would have been easier to come by without the use of a border. William Wirt in a December 3, 1817 letter to his wife [William Wirt Papers, Microfilm Edition, Roll 3 Maryland, Historical Society] noted that “borders to carpets are not fashionable here, according to the Presidential standard.”

<sup>310</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>311</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p.176, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>312</sup> See Ackermann, *Repository of the Arts*; Pl. 20, October 1810, Pl. 114, September 1820,

### **1 Musical Instrument: Spinet or Pianoforte; ca. 1790-1800**

Musical instruments, especially keyboard instruments, were considered appropriate furnishings for parlors. Their presence allowed family and guests to provide entertainment for each other and for daughters of marriageable age to show off their accomplishments. Catherine Wirt, daughter of Attorney General William Wirt, in a letter to her brother, ~~Robert~~ described a family party, writing that “Mother gave a party last Friday evening,” adding that there was a piano “which mother, sister Laura and Miss Dickinson, played on....”<sup>313</sup> Family letters provide evidence that the Nourses’~~s~~ daughter ~~Anna Maria~~ Josepha was among the young ladies who were able to display their talents on such an instrument. In his chatty September 1796 letter to wife Maria, Joseph ~~not only~~ noted that he would put a piece of carpet “at the Spinet,” indicating that they already owned such an instrument, ~~but and~~ that it was his intention to get a “Forte Piano for Sepha when she has learned ~~[sic]~~ to play well on the Spinet.”<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Letter, Catherine Wirt to Robert Wirt, February 10, 1821, William Wirt Papers, Microfilm Edition, Roll 4, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>314</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

## DINING ROOM

Carl Lounsbury, in his architectural glossary, notes: ~~that rooms designated as the dining room appeared in usage in the Chesapeake region as early as the middle of the 17th century. However, it was not until the second decade of the 18th century that dining rooms appeared frequently in reference to a room separate from the “Hall.” Even at this point, beds continued to be a common furnishing form of these rooms that Lounsbury notes were set aside for informal meals. According to Lounsbury, this pattern began to change by the 2nd quarter of the 18th century as the “dining room evolved into a formal setting for public entertainment.” He adds that:~~

After 1750, the escalating importance of the meal led to further expansion and elaboration of the dining space until, in a handful of larger dwellings, it became the largest and best room in the house. In the more opulent houses, a second, informal dining space was sometimes provided for private meals, variously referred to as the *small dining room*, *wainscotted dining room*, *back parlor*, or *breakfast room*.<sup>315</sup>

Perhaps nowhere is the state of flux concerning the nature of dining rooms more ~~succinctly evident stated~~ than in a scene in Margaret Bayard Smith’s early ~~19th~~nineteenth-century novel, which is set in Washington. The daughter, just returned from a fancy Philadelphia boarding school, comes downstairs after dressing for dinner.

The servant girl was setting the table when Catharine, dressed in a gay fashionable manner, returned to the parlor. --She looked at the preparations with astonishment. “Mother, you do not eat in the room where you sit, I hope?”

“Not eat in the room where we sit?” exclaimed her mother; “why where should we eat; the rooms where we lay?”

“La Ma’am, how you talk,” said Catharine, drawing up her head; “as my father told me you lived perfectly genteel, I could not therefore suspect we eat in the parlour.”

“And pray, child where should we eat then, to be genteel; for certainly, I wish to be genteel?”

“In a dining room to be sure,” answered Catharine.<sup>316</sup>

Elisabeth Garrett, in her discussion of American dining rooms in the first half of the ~~19th~~nineteenth century, ~~pulls-draws~~ from a number of sources dating through the middle of the

<sup>315</sup> Carl R. Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture & Landscape*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1994), p. 112-113.

<sup>316</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *What is Gentility? A Moral Tale* (Pishey Thompson, City of Washington, 1828), p.56-57.



century. Her composite of the descriptions draws a picture of a dining room positioned ~~on~~ in the northern side of the house, with “subdued light and reposeful tranquility” with an atmosphere “more ‘sober’ and ‘substantial’ than that of the drawing room” with “its furniture plain, neat, and mahogany.”<sup>317</sup>

While it is not clear that Washingtonians had more elaborate dining rooms than parlors, it is clear that the rituals of dining and the accompanying necessary furnishings played a large part in the social life of the region’s upper classes, though some households may still have viewed this room as a multipurpose space. Indeed in a few instances, ~~e.g., dining rooms that include i.e. the presence of~~ bookcases and desks ~~in some households~~, it appears that some families continued old-fashioned patterns of usage that dated from ~~at least~~ the third quarter of the ~~18th-eighteenth~~ century ~~or earlier~~ that saw the dining room as a masculine space.<sup>318</sup>

The information about dining room furnishings found in the *Early 19th-c Century Washington, D.C., Probate Database* contains few surprises but does underscore the importance of this space. Twenty-four of the 28 inventories had rooms that were either named as dining rooms or could be assumed to function as such. As expected, tables and chairs dominate these spaces. Of the 28 households in the database, 24 have one or more named dining tables somewhere in the house and 20 (83%) of these 24 households have a designated dining table in the dining room. In the four inventories without named dining tables, three have what may safely be assumed, either by placement or description, to be dining table forms. Peter<sup>12</sup> lists two tables in the passage; Wilson<sup>20</sup> includes one undescribed table in the dining room and two in the entry; and Chndlr<sup>25</sup> records one table in the passage and two tables in the breakfast room.

Twelve of the 28 households have an identifiable “set” of dining tables, a term that for the purposes of this study is assumed to describe an arrangement of at least three pieces—a center section with leaves that could open to make long rectangular table and two semicircular ends, which when abutted to the short ends of the rectangular table produced a fashionable oval table in keeping with period taste. That these tables could have more than one center section is ~~presumably-possibly on the~~ reason ~~the that~~ inventory takers in both Hellen<sup>15</sup> and Wshgtn<sup>21</sup> felt the need to specify that the sets of dining tables ~~that they were listing~~ contained ~~only~~ three

<sup>317</sup> Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home the American Family 1750-1870*, (Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1990), p. 79.

<sup>318</sup> Mark R. Wenger, “Gender and the Eighteenth-Century Meal,” in *A Taste of the Past: Early Foodways of the Albemarle Region, 1585-1830* (Elizabeth City, North Carolina: The Museum of the Albemarle, 1991).



pieces. That the various pieces of such sets could be moved about the house when not assembled is evidenced in Ingle23 where the furniture of the dining room included “2 mahogany end dining tables” but the “Mahogany centre dining table” was located in the “front passage first story.”

An interesting side note to the understanding of dining table sets is found in the inventory of Graham30. By 1830, this form would have been viewed as old-fashioned, but clearly some homeowners clung to it, perhaps for practical reasons. The inventory takers ~~carefully~~ noted that among the dining room furnishings in this household were “Two mahogany dinner tables with a middle piece of pine” valued at the considerable sum of \$35 despite the obvious mismatched in-fill center part.

Only three (12%) of the 24 (~~12%~~) households with dining rooms have a designated or assumed pair of dining tables. Pairs were the fashionable choice in mid- to late-18th-century Chesapeake households. Their usefulness is clear in a 1758 order placed by Marylander Charles Carroll the Barrister who wanted to be sent “2 suitable Mahogany dining Tables made so as to fit into each other if occasion Lengthways....”<sup>319</sup>

In those inventories where wood type is used as a descriptor, mahogany is used in 11 (45%) of the households with designated dining tables. Cherry, probably indicating both age and regional production, was used to describe the dining table in Young02, and pine was used for the ~~undoubted replacement~~ for the center section of the dining table set in Graham30. There is a strong possibility that the Graham30 pine dining table center section was in all likelihood a replacement.

Dining tables were not the only table form found in early Washington dining rooms. Tea tables and breakfast tables occurred in roughly corresponding numbers. Six listings ~~are~~ recorded using the descriptor tea and there were seven tables described as breakfast forms. Taken together, one of these two forms occurs in just over half (54%) of the 24 identified dining rooms. Any doubt that these two forms were thought of and used interchangeably in most, if not all households, should be ~~laid to rest~~ invalidated by the listing in Orr22 for “2 Breakfast or Tea tables at \$12 [each]”.

Three other types of tables ~~are were~~ found in small numbers in the dining rooms of this group. Three of 24 households (12%), Wiley19, Wilson20, and Young22, included ~~d~~ work stands or tables. Card tables were included in three (12%) dining rooms, with two examples in each of

<sup>319</sup> ~~Quoted in The~~ Gunston Hall Room Use Study, Vol. 2, p. 164.

the dining rooms where they occurred, ~~and~~ ~~c~~ Candle stands were listed in four (16%) of the dining rooms.

Chairs ~~are were found~~ in 23 (95%) of the dining room inventories. This number is skewed by the inventory for Wshgtn21, which records no chairs anywhere in the house. This anomaly ~~surely could possibly~~ results from some accident in the taking of the inventory or reflects some prior disposition of goods. The majority of the households with chairs show dining rooms with sets of 12 or more examples. Ten (43%) of the 23 households with chairs list 12 chairs, with another eight (34%) of the inventories recording more than a dozen chairs. Three of these eight households recorded ~~ed~~ groups of 14 chairs (probably sets of 12 side and two arm chairs), three households listed 18 chairs in the dining room, and three included 24 chairs described as Windsors.

Surprisingly, sofas were listed in six (25%) of the 24 dining rooms. Two of these six households also ~~have had~~ a sofa in another part of the house. While the use of sofas in dining rooms seems odd by modern conventions, two documents, one English and one regional ~~collaborate~~ ~~corroborate~~ this period practice. Rosalie Calvert, in writing to her mother in March of 1804 noted that:

At the moment I am busy making curtains, slipcovers, etc. for the dining room. The curtains [are] of that blue striped English cloth you gave me, [trimmed] with a white fringe intermixed with small blue tassels; there is just enough material for windows and the sofa....”<sup>320</sup>

The other example is found in the charming English school-girl water-colors of Diana Spurling. In a painting depicting dinner at the family home ca. 1812, she shows various members of the family sitting around the dining table with her mother seated on a sofa drawn up to one end of the table.<sup>321</sup>

Following tables and chairs, sideboards are, as expected for dining rooms of this period, the most common furniture form. Sideboards evolved in the third quarter of the 18th century from a side table form into the form ~~as it is~~ known today. Not only did sideboards provide an attractive surface upon which to display elegant household goods such as knife cases and a place to stage various parts of elaborate dinners, but their compartments and drawers (many of which

<sup>320</sup> Margaret Law Callicott, Ed., *Mistress of Riversdale The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert 1795-1821* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p.78.

<sup>321</sup> Gordon Mingay, *Mrs Hurst Dancing and Other Scenes from Regency Life 1812-1823*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1981) Illustration 1.

could be locked) provided a convenient and safe place to store some of the various tablewares that were part of the dinner ritual.<sup>322</sup> Indeed, sideboards are found in 27 (96%) of the 28 households in the database. In those households where a dining room has been identified, all 24 owned a sideboard, but in two of the households the sideboard was located in a room other than the dining room, probably from considerations of space or lifestyle. Just over a quarter of the sideboards found in dining rooms were described as mahogany and one example was described as “large.” Perhaps the most intriguing listing for a sideboard is found in Graham30, which includes a “marble slab sideboard.” Given the date of this inventory, October 2, 1830, this could have been either a fashionable full-blown classical piece of case furniture with a marble top or a decidedly old-fashioned slab table of the type found in elite ~~18th~~eighteenth-century Chesapeake households.

Not quite half (45%) of the identified dining rooms have some type of furniture associated with writing or books. Perhaps a carry-over from ~~eighteenth~~18th-century usage, this combination may also reflect what some scholars see as the masculine nature of dining rooms.<sup>323</sup> Of the eleven dining rooms with furnishings in this group, three (27%) list individual bookcases, four (36%) include a desk and bookcase, and four (36%) have a “writing desk,” possibly lap desk forms based on dollar values or descriptors such as “small.” Another probable lap desk form was found in Clarke23, described as a “Mahogany portable Secretary.” It should be noted that two of these dining rooms included d both a probable lap desk as well as a larger piece of furniture in this category. Doughty22 included both a mahogany desk with bookcase and a mahogany writing desk and Clarke23 listed a large ~~m~~Mahogany bookcase with “Turets”~~[2]~~ as well as the mahogany portable secretary.

Looking glasses were listed in half of the dining rooms. In the 12 households having the form, ~~a third~~four had a designated pair, two (16%) use the descriptor “pier,” referring to shape and size, and four (33%) describe the looking glasses as “gilt,” probably a description of the frame.

Knife cases or boxes ~~are were~~ found in 14 (58%) of the inventories with dining rooms. Eleven (78%) of the 14 ~~have had~~ more than one example, with nine (81%) of the 11 listing either

<sup>322</sup> Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830* ), p 262

<sup>323</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, Vol.1, pp. 83-86, See also ~~Mark R.~~ Wenger, “Gender and the Eighteenth-Century Meal,” in *A Taste of the Past: Early Foodways of the Albemarle Region, 1585-1830* (Elizabeth City, North Carolina: The Museum of the Albemarle, 1991).

a designated or assumed pair. Mahogany is used as a descriptor in six (42%) of the inventories including the form.

Heating equipment ~~is~~was found in 22 (91%) of the 24 inventories in this group. Of the two not including heating equipment, Barlow18 shows heating equipment “for the several apartments” in storage, and in Deakin05 the dining room equipment may be among the numerous examples listed with the parlor furnishings. Roughly two-thirds (15) of the 22 households record andirons with one third of those andirons described as brass. Shovels and tongs were among the furnishings in 16 (72%) of the group with one more household listing only tongs. In contrast, pokers were listed in only two households in this group. Fenders were common in dining rooms, occurring in 72% of the dining room inventories. Of the fenders listed, three (18%) were described as wire and the same number were described as brass. Hearth brushes or brooms were among the furnishings in six (27%) of the 22 dining rooms having heating equipment, but bellows were found in only two (9%) of the 22.

A somewhat surprising 54% (15) of the dining rooms in the database show some type of lighting device as presumably a permanent part of the room furnishings. This change from earlier period practice rests, no doubt, in the rise of plated candlesticks and decorative lamps that were both functional and decorative.

Indeed, in some homes they may have been treated primarily as decorative, with more utilitarian brass candlesticks being used on an everyday basis. Louisa Catherine Adams, wife of John Quincy Adams, records in her diary a domestic event that turned on just such practice. She wrote that after entertaining a group of 20 at a dinner party she retired to change for the evenings’ activities.

After dinner instead of going into the Drawing room I went to dress for the Ball the consequence of which was that the candles in the room were not lighted and I never thought about it until I heard their excellencies trembling over the Chin in total darkn....

When light was restored “there stood a Brass candlestick containing a tallow candle.” Her husband was dismayed because of “some ill natured observations which were made at the Presidents [where] the Servant in his hurry to prepare a third room left one of these terrible utensils on the Chimney piece.” She concluded by writing that her reaction to her husband’s

“great distress” was that she “was seized with such a convulsive fit of laughter that I could scarcely Stand.”<sup>324</sup>

Lamps appear in half of ~~this group of the~~ households that contained lighting in the dining room. In three of the seven households with lamps, they are referred to as “mantle lamps,” with Whartn18 having pairs of both bronze and jJapanned examples. Seven of this group of inventories list candlesticks. Of these seven, six use “plated” or silver to describe the candlesticks. Only Barlow18 refers to branches—“2 Chimney Branches \$10” and two2 plated branches kept in the dining room closet.

Floor coverings of some type were listed in 23 (95%) of the 24 inventories with identified dining rooms. There are three households with examples described as being of Scotch weave, and one each for Brussels, Wilton, straw, and oil cloth. In the 23 households with some type of floor covering, 14 (60%) have a hearth or fire rug. Two household inventoriess also listed what was undoubtedly-most likely green baize used as crumb cloths. Wiley19 included a “green baize small carpet” after the entry for the carpet and hearth rug and Meigs22 noted a “Green Crumb Cloth” following the listing for the sideboard.

Evidence of window treatments was recorded in 13 (54%) of the 24 inventories in this group. Roughly half (six) of these reference cornices and five include a listing for “pins,” meaning decorative pins (usually brass or gilded brass) used to tie off cords for raise-ableing curtains or tie-tying back those with fixed side panels. In more elaborate treatments they could also be used decoratively as part of the drapery hardware at the top of the window. Textile descriptions include chintz in two inventories (Hellen15 and Whartn18), and woolen fabrics in four inventories—Young22 used green “bombaret,”<sup>325</sup> Clarke23 and Freeman24 list moreen, and Graham30 had “red worsted marine.” In addition, Campbl17 probably used dimity, as numerous references to dimity curtains were recorded among textiles in storage, with the only non-dimity reference being to “3 chintz curtains & Drapery” which would match the “3 Elegant Window Cornices” cited as being in the parlor.

Clocks or time pieces were found in seven (29%) of the 24 dining rooms. Three examples were described as “mantle” time pieces, one as an “ornamental timepiece” and one as a “gilt clock.” It should be noted that only one inventory out of the 28 that make up the entire-

<sup>324</sup> Diary of Louisa Catherine Adams, February 22, 1821, Adams Papers, microfilm edition, Library of Congress.

<sup>325</sup> This entry probably refers to bombazet. Florence Montgomery in *Textiles in America, 1650-1870*, p.172, defines bombazet as a “Worsted cloth... which could be twill or plain weave... finished without a glaze.”

database included two examples in this category. These, an “elegant mantle time piece” and a “mahogany cased clock,” were listed in Foxall24, one of the inventories for which room division cannot be determined.

Art ~~and~~/or ornamental objects were found in 17 (70%) of the 24 identified dining rooms, with ~~ten~~ 10 (58%) of the 17 households including examples of both. Of the 17 households, 13 (~~54%~~) ~~of 24~~ listed some type of framed or sculptural art. As always, ~~this~~ the category is somewhat complicated by the large number of unassigned art works listed in Whartn18. Gilt--framed prints occurred in three households. Subject matter ~~is~~ was usually not noted; however ~~but among~~ those inventories that do note subject matter include, ~~so~~ Wiley19, with three prints listed as a likeness of Monroe, a print of the “Capture of Macedonia” and a print of “Perrys Victory,” and Dghrty22, with a picture of “General Washington,” a picture of Mr. Jay, and six pictures “(Paul & Virginia),” probably ~~a series of scenes illustrating~~ scenes from the late ~~18th~~ eighteenth-century novel by Jacque-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Only one reference is found suggesting that images of family members might be included. Clarke23 lists “5 old Gilt framed prints & portraits - 3 small 1 large family Do.” Not surprisingly, Barlow18 is the only inventory listing sculpture, citing plaster busts of Washington and Franklin among the furnishings of the dining room. Two households included maps—Young22 with a “Map of the City” and Clarke23 with a “Map of the United States.”

Ornamental objects were found in 13 (~~76~~ 54%) of the 17 households. In eight (61%) of the 13 households, the objects were designated as “mantle” or chimney ornaments. Most were not further described, but Hellen15 recorded “1 Wedge wood chimney ornament” and Graham30 ~~owned~~ included “2 plaster mantle ornaments.” Some of the other ornaments listed, such as Whartn18’s china basket with artificial fruit or Drghty22’s “peach” ornaments, also may ~~also~~ have been displayed upon the dining room mantel. In addition to those citing mantel ornaments, three dining room inventories noted flower pots, including two listings for flower pots with “glass covers [?]” and two “blue glass” flowerpots in Drghty22.

As with other rooms in the households studied, objects in the dining rooms in some houses reflect personal use patterns that may have differed somewhat from the larger group. Two households, Key15 and Clarke23, included piano-fortes among their dining room furnishings, ~~and at the other end of the gentility spectrum,~~ and Drghty22 and Meigs22 placed “spitting boxes” in theirs. Whartn18 included what was probably a wall--hung thermometer.

Both Hellen<sup>15</sup> and Wharton<sup>18</sup> included mahogany wine coolers as part of the dining rooms' furnishings. In addition, Hellen<sup>15</sup> recorded a "Backgammon Box" and "a bag of shot," presumably to go with the "Brace of horseman's pistols with holsters."

Tablewares related to food and beverage service are discussed in a separate section of this report. For the most part, they should be considered temporary furnishings in the rooms in which they are displayed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 1 ~~"Sett"~~ Dining Tables: Philadelphia or Chesapeake Region; Mahogany, ~~ca.~~ 1784-1800

There are two references among the Nourse primary source materials that could relate to dining tables. Among the furniture purchased by Joseph Nourse from J. Watkins in 1784 was a "Table 4 feet" costing £8. While no other description is given, the size and value support the assumption that this was a mahogany drop-leaf table, a form considered highly fashionable for dining purposes during the ~~3rd~~ third quarter of the 18th century. This may well be the table that was given-gifted to Dumbarton House by Margaret Robson.<sup>326</sup> However, there is no record of Nourse purchasing the demilune ends that now accompany the table.<sup>327</sup> It is certainly possible that Joseph Nourse purchased these at a later date or they may have been understood as parts of the complete "Table 4 feet."<sup>328</sup> The second possible reference to a dining table may lie in the even more enigmatic recording by Joseph Nourse in 1800 of the purchase at auction of "Side Board & Tables" for the price of \$34.75. Unfortunately, Nourse gives no information about the "vVendue" sale at which the purchase was made. Although this amount seems low for both a sideboard and a three3-piece set of dining tables, the circumstances of either an estate sale or a bankruptcy liquidation may well have provided him with the opportunity to acquire a bargain. It is also possible that the tables were meant to augment a dining table or tables that he already owned. As a side note, it is interesting that among the other objects he purchased at the same

<sup>326</sup> See the Dumbarton House curatorial file for additional information.

<sup>327</sup> Interestingly, in 1785, Boston merchant Thomas English bought a table of very similar size without the semicircular ends that would have increased the seating capacity, even though he also ordered 14 chairs, presumably to go with the table, at the same time. See Susan Stuart, "Furniture by Gillows of Lancaster for Thomas English of Boston," in *The Magazine Antiques*, June 2007, p. 96, 99.

<sup>328</sup> Interestingly, in 1785, Boston merchant Thomas English bought a table of very similar size without the semicircular ends that would have increased the seating capacity, even though he also ordered 14 chairs, presumably to go with the table, at the same time. See Susan Stuart, "Furniture by Gillows of Lancaster for Thomas English of Boston," in *The Magazine Antiques*, June 2007, p. 96, 99.



sale, were a number of items related to food and beverage service, suggesting that he felt the need to upgrade or increase ~~the~~ his furnishings related to entertaining.<sup>329</sup>

**10-12 side chairs and 2 arm chairs: Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake Region; Mahogany ~~with leather seats~~; ea. 1784-1805**

There is no known surviving documentary evidence for Joseph Nourse's purchase of a matching set of chairs for use in his dining room. However, there are missing years from his account books, and there are records of unspecified expenditures listed under the heading "furniture," either of which might account for the missing information. The recommendation for dining room chairs is based on the statistical information from the *Early 19<sup>th</sup> ~~c~~ Century Washington, D.C., Probate Database*, where the majority of the identified dining rooms included 12 chairs among the room's furnishings.

**Sideboard: American or possibly English; Mahogany, ~~c. a.~~ 1800**

Joseph Nourse's account book entries in the fall of 1800 record his purchase at auction of a "Sideboard & Tables" for the sum of \$34.75. This is not a large amount of money, particularly for both a side-board and multiple tables, ~~but the fact that they were purchased at auction suggests that they were second hand, but t.~~ This does not mean that they were in poor condition, ~~but it~~ A lower price at vendue may have meant that they were older and thus considered somewhat less fashionable, or they could simply have been a bargain at the sale.

It is also possible that this item was bought by Joseph Nourse as a secondary sideboard. However, with no other available information, —i.e., either a supporting primary source document or a surviving piece of furniture, this assumption cannot be made. Thus this recommendation reflects a conservative decision to place a sideboard representing this purchase in the dining room and none in the breakfast room where a second sideboard might have been used.

**2-3 Knife Cases, not matching: America or Britain; Mahogany or Shagreen; ~~ea.~~ 1783 - ~~ea.~~ 1800**

<sup>329</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.



The Nourse primary source materials record several purchases of knives and forks. These were among the items Joseph Nourse bought in preparation for his marriage. In November of 1783, he bought “1 Case Knives & Forks” for £3.10, a value high enough to suggest that not only were the knives and forks of good quality, probably with ivory handles, but that the case may have been not only for storage but also display. Perhaps Joseph Nourse’s purchase was something similar to the order placed by George Washington some 20 year earlier, when he specified that his order of knives, forks and spoons be “properly disposed of in neat mahogany cases for decorating a side board.”<sup>330</sup> Nourse’s case might also have been covered with ~~s~~Shagreen, the ~~18th~~eighteenth-century term ~~usually~~ applied to dyed shark or fish skin, which was often used for such cases.

Seventeen years later, Joseph Nourse recorded the purchase of four sets of knives and forks at auction, including two cases of knives ~~and~~& forks. The cases were apparently not a pair, but ~~separate~~ individual purchases as they are entered in ~~two~~ separate places in the account for different prices. They were listed as “1 Case Knives & Forks 11.20” and “1 case knives & forks 10.80.” Unfortunately, he gives no descriptions of either the knives and forks or the cases. Further complicating the picture is a notation in this account that indicates that he ~~re~~sold some of the knives and forks, recording it as “deduct so much received for Silver handle knives & forks—[\$]46.20,”<sup>331</sup> leaving modern scholars no way to determine which sets he kept and which he sold. However, as a sideboard was among the purchases at the same sale, it is reasonable to assume that the sets in cases were intended for his own dining room. The same general description ~~of as to~~ use and material as that for the case acquired in 1783 would also apply to those bought in 1800;~~;~~ only the style and shape of the case itself would have changed. Any two of these three might well have graced the sideboard in the Nourse~~s’~~~~s~~ dining room. In the recommendation, origin is deliberately general. There were a few American-made examples, although they were relatively rare. Most examples were of imported British manufacture.

**1 Looking Glass: American or British; Mahogany and/or Gilt/Partially Gilt; ~~ca.~~1784-~~ca.~~1808**

<sup>330</sup> George Washington Invoice, November 15, 1762, quoted in *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, Vol.2, p. 86.

<sup>331</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

Looking glasses, intended to be both decorative and functional, were found in half of the dining room inventories in the *Early ~~Federal-19<sup>th</sup> Century~~ Washington, D.C., Probate Database* but only a third had more than one example. It is clear that Joseph Nourse felt such a piece was appropriate, for in an 1808 letter to his son he asked, “if you can get a Glass cheap for the dining Room... please to do so.”<sup>332</sup> It is probable that the Nourse family used a looking glass as part of their dining room furnishings from the beginning. Unfortunately, from Joseph’s letter, there is no way to know whether this was to be a replacement or an addition to the dining room furnishings. Barring the finding of new primary source documentation, the conservative choice limits the dining room to one looking glass. One possibility for this space is the New York pier glass with a Nourse family provenance, ~~currently on loan~~gifted to Dumbarton House from the ~~Rosa Williams Miller Trust~~Robert “Buff” Miller in 2010.<sup>333</sup>

### **Bookcase(s)**

No recommendation is being made at this time concerning a free--standing bookcase, as this ~~question-matter~~ needs further investigation. As previously discussed in this report, the issue of book storage, and of the type and disposition of the bookcases for which payment is recorded in Joseph Nourse’s 1808 accounts requires further study. ~~The interpretative oral tradition at Dumbarton House includes a reference to Joseph Nourse paying for built in bookcases during the years that the Nourses resided in the house. However, no primary source for this endeavor has thus far been found.~~

### **1 Pair Andirons, 1 pr shovel & tongs, 1 fender: England or America; Brass, Brass Ornamented Steel or Iron, Plain Polished Steel or Iron; ca. 1800—ca. 1810**

The same parameters and supporting evidence that applied to the parlor are also ~~in force~~ for the dining room. Joseph Nourse’s account books give clear evidence that he burned wood rather than coal in his fireplaces. There are at least two recorded purchases for andirons among Joseph Nourse’s early accounts. One of these appears to have been intended for the kitchen fireplace as ~~they are~~it is listed with pot hooks and a spit. The other is simply recorded as “Andirons” and is included in a list of household purchases ranging from bed tick and a cradle to

<sup>332</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Nourse, April 4, 1808, MdHR M 3381-102, Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, #G 1394-15, Folder 14, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections.

<sup>333</sup> See Dumbarton House collection files for more information.

an umbrella and chairs and a table. Clearly over the years, as the Nourse family moved from house to house, different configurations of fireplace equipment would have been purchased as necessary. Even so, it is possible that the move into Dumbarton House, which may well have been the largest home in which they had lived to that date, would have required acquisition of additional sets of andirons and fire tools. If that were the case, it is possible that the fireplace equipment in the dining room was relatively new and ~~second only to the parlor in terms of fashionability~~ the most fashionable in the house.

### **1 or 2 Pairs of Candlesticks: England or France; Silver plate; ~~ca.~~ 1784 – 1805**

Just as in parlors, decorative lighting devices were part of the everyday furnishings in many early Washington dining rooms. While they were also functional, and were no doubt used on special occasions, they were probably not employed on a daily basis. Had that been the case, they would have needed regular cleaning and ~~would~~, like their brass counterparts, would have most often ended up stored in the kitchen or scullery areas of the house when not in use.

Joseph Nourse recorded the purchase of silver plated candlesticks in 1784.<sup>334</sup> The pair of “Plated Candlesticks” was among the household purchases at the time of his marriage. In 1800, sixteen years later, two pairs of candlesticks were among items purchased at auction.<sup>335</sup> While the candle-sticks are not described, a number of the objects in the list such as a cream pot, sugar dish, and a waiter were designated as silver, either by descriptor or weight. It seems logical to assume that some of the other items in the list like the candlesticks, another cream pot, and tea and coffee urns were likely to have been plated silver, as such ~~are~~-forms ~~that~~-were becoming increasingly available in what today is referred to as “Sheffield plate.” In fact, by the ~~18-teens~~ 1810s, plated candlesticks were imported in such numbers that one Georgetown merchant could advertise that he had for sale six casks of “Sheffield Plated Ware” that included “40 pair plated candle sticks, silver edged assorted patterns,” together with another 60 plain pairs as well as “snuffers and trays.”<sup>336</sup>

Further evidence of the Nourse ownership of what were assuredly most likely silver plate candlesticks comes in a note sent from Charles to his parents, presumably in 1824, imparting the

<sup>334</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803, p.32, #3940-a, Papers of the Nourse Family University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>335</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>336</sup> *Daily National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C. Advertisement of John Peabody, 2/20/1818, 3-4.

news that LaFayette was coming to call at his house. Charles requests the loan of tea wares and “your four long candlesticks (not branches). . . .”<sup>337</sup> It should be noted that although four (17%) of the 28 households in the database owned branches, only Barlow18 listed this form among the dining room furnishings; thus it seems unlikely that the Nourse branches were kept on display on any regular basis in the dining room.

These fused plate items were probably English in origin, but the fused plate process was not confined to British manufacturers. Two of the earlier inventories in the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C., Probate Database* included entries for what is described as “french” plated wares. Forest06 includes “4 large french plated Candlesticks” and Peter12 records “Plated french ware including Candle Sticks” valued at \$50 for the group. Adding to these pieces of documentary evidence are several examples of period fused plate objects that belonged to John Gadsby, who ran the City Tavern and Hotel in Alexandria from 1796 to 1808. These items, a large dish cover and an elegant monteith, are clearly marked with stamps indicating their French origin.<sup>338</sup>

~~No evidence has yet come to light as to how these items of French manufacture entered the Washington regional market; however, local merchants do from time to time note the importation of other types of French goods such as textiles and wallpapers. A much more speculative theory is that these goods belonged to someone in the French diplomatic delegation and were sold at auction when the individual returned to France. This type of sale is well documented in period sources.~~<sup>339</sup>

### **1 Pair Snuffers and Tray; England or Europe; Brass, Polished Steel, or Silver Plate; -ca. 1800**

A pair of scissor-like candle snuffers would have been considered a necessity in a well-to-do genteel household of the period. In the early 19th century, wicking was not self consuming

<sup>337</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse, Account Journal 1778-1803, p.32, #3940-a, Papers of the Nourse Family University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.; Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department; Letter, Son Charles Josephus Nourse to Joseph and Maria Nourse, no date[1824?], Sidwell Friends School Archives.

<sup>338</sup> The Gadsby items are in the collection of Gadsby’s Tavern Museum in Alexandria, Virginia. The objects have a long history of ownership in the local community. The monteith which is oval with a scalloped rim is a form that was intended for cooling wine glasses by their bases over the rim and suspending the bowl in cool water.

<sup>339</sup> See unpublished manuscript by the author of this report, prepared for The Octagon Museum, 1991, to accompany the exhibition *In the Most Fashionable Style: Making a Home in the Federal City*.

and the need to trim (pinch off) the charred wick was part of the process of lighting a house with candles, no matter whether they were tallow, beeswax or spermaceti. Snuffers, with perhaps a tray or stand to hold them, were among the items that might be left out on a table or put away in a closet or drawer when not in use. They were also the type of small miscellaneous item that would have been easily overlooked when inventories were taken, especially if they were tucked out of sight or removed to the kitchen, probably for cleaning, like those in Whann13. Twenty of the 28 households in the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C., Probate Database* included snuffers in their inventory listings. Not quite two-thirds (60%) of those homes having this form owned multiple examples. Six of the households had snuffers described as “plated” and three included examples described as “steel.” Perhaps most interesting is Chndlr25 which struck the balance between durability and fashion with two examples of a plated tray coupled with steel snuffers, one set found in the drawing room and one in the breakfast room.

Under the heading of “Furniture &c” in his subordinate account for the first eight months of 1799, Joseph Nourse recorded “snuffers” valued at one dollar.<sup>340</sup> Much more costly were the pair of snuffers and tray purchased at auction in 1800, for which he paid seven dollars.<sup>341</sup> This sum seems quite substantial, particularly when compared to other items on the list, such as a silver waiter costing six dollars or a teapot for seven dollars. The high price suggests that these were either made from an expensive material such as silver plate,<sup>342</sup> or that they were in some way more elaborate in their ornamentation or design. This pair would certainly have been elegant enough to be left out as part of the furnishing in either the drawing room or dining room.

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<sup>340</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 116, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>341</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>342</sup> Joseph Nourse’s failure to list them by weight would seem to rule out the possibility that they were silver, as he was careful to do with two other items in the account.

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## **Clock**

~~No clock is recommended for the dining room at this time. Clocks were found in approximately 30% of the dining rooms but based on value and description most seem to have been quite ornamental in nature. Neither the 17th-century family clock nor the one purchased by Joseph Nourse for \$3.23 at auction in 1800 seems to be a likely candidate for this use.<sup>346</sup> The family clock is included in the recommended furnishings for the Breakfast Room. No~~

<sup>343</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 116, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>344</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>345</sup> Joseph Nourse’s failure to list them by weight would seem to rule out the possibility that they were silver, as he was careful to do with two other items in the account.

<sup>346</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department; For a discussion of the late 17th-century Henricus Harper bracket clock with a Nourse family history see the breakfast room chapter.

~~supportable interpretation of the clock bought at auction is possible at this time, as the fact that it was an auction purchase served to some degree to counterbalance the cost. Any recommendation concerning this clock would currently require too much speculation.~~

### **Wallpaper: Period (ca. 1804) and room appropriate reproduction wallpaper and border**

~~The numerous references to wallpaper among Joseph Nourse's letters and accounts clearly indicate a family preference for this type of household decoration. Following the move to Georgetown, this family predilection for wallpapered surfaces, first in an entry for \$10 spent for "papering a room" in July 1803.<sup>347</sup> No further detail was given but the assumption is that this was for the house in which the family lived on P Street prior to moving to Dumbarton House. Fortunately the records concerning Dumbarton House are somewhat more specific. The Nourses' daughter Josepha, then in Philadelphia, was commissioned to buy wallpaper for the new house. She wrote to her father that "... I intend doing my very best about the paper, I dare say I can get papers as handsome as the light or buff light papers with Dark bordering is at present the prevailing fashion—the effect is very pretty and they have the advantage of lighting remarkably well...."<sup>348</sup> Additional information is found in a letter from Joseph Nourse to his daughter in which he anticipates the arrival of "the paper you are to send for four Rooms."<sup>349</sup> His accounts at the end of 1804 record an expenditure of \$52.12 for "Paper for Rooms."<sup>350</sup> No further clues survive as to the appearance of the paper nor for which "four" rooms it was intended. However, the primary source materials show that wallpaper was an important element in the decorations of Dumbarton House.~~

~~Paint consultant Matthew Mosca, in his 1998 "Report on the Historic Finishes, from samples collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms" notes that "a number of samples... show glue size on the earliest surviving generation of wall plaster." This evidence, glue size being a common finish under wallpaper, coupled with the fact that very few samples of~~

<sup>347</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, 1778-1803 p.274, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>348</sup> Letter, ~~Daughter~~ Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Nourse, no date [1804?] Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, The Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>349</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, MdHR M 3381-102, #G 1394-13, Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections; See also the wallpaper section in Chapter Five of this report for a discussion of Thomas Hurley, the wallpaper manufacturer from whom Joseph Nourse purchased this papers.

<sup>350</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 318, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.



paint finishes were found on the earliest layer of plaster, led Mosca to recommend wallpaper for the passage and stair passage, the parlor, the dining room, the breakfast room, and mother's room. His findings of evidence for wallpaper in all of the first floor spaces suggests that either Joseph Nourse purchased wallpaper for the lower passage sometime after moving into Dumbarton House in 1804, or one of the rooms was already papered prior to his occupancy of the house.<sup>351</sup>

In selecting reproduction wallpapers and borders to use in the first floor rooms, attention should be paid to period aesthetics, particularly to what types of papers were considered appropriate for specific rooms. Factors in these fashions included the scale and motifs of the pattern as well the colors and finishes of the overall design. ~~The numerous references to wallpaper among Joseph Nourse's letters and accounts clearly indicate a family preference for this type of household decoration. Following the move to Georgetown, this family predilection for wallpaper surfaces, first in an entry for \$10 spent for "papering a room" in July 1803.<sup>352</sup> No further detail was given but the assumption is that this was for the house in which the family lived on P Street prior to moving to Dumbarton House. Fortunately the records concerning Dumbarton House are somewhat more specific. The Nourse's daughter Anna Maria Josepha, then in Philadelphia, was commissioned to buy wall paper for the new house. She wrote to her father that "... I intend doing my very best about the paper, I dare say I can get papers as handsome as the light or buff light papers with Dark bordering is at present the prevailing fashion—the effect is very pretty and they have the advantage of lighting remarkably well...."~~<sup>353</sup> Additional information is found in a letter from Joseph Nourse to his daughter in which he anticipates the arrival of "the paper you are to send for four Rooms."<sup>354</sup> His accounts at the end of 1804 record an expenditure of \$52.12 for "Paper for Rooms."<sup>355</sup> No further clues survive as

<sup>351</sup> Matthew Mosca, "A Report on the Historic Finishes, From Samples Collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms," Conducted at the request of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, March 24, 1998.

<sup>352</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, 1778-1803 p.274, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>353</sup> Letter, Daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Nourse, no date [1804?] Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>354</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, M 3381-102, # G 1394, Folder 11, Rosa Miller Collection, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections. See also the wallpaper section in Chapter five of this report for a discussion of Thomas Hurley, the wallpaper manufacturer from whom Joseph Nourse purchased this papers.

<sup>355</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 318 # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department



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——— Paint consultant Matthew Mosca, in his 1998 “Report on the Historic Finishes, from samples collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms” notes that “a number of samples... show glue size on the earliest surviving generation of wall plaster.” This evidence, glue size being a common finish under wallpaper, coupled with the fact that very few samples of paint finishes were found on the earliest layer of plaster led Mosca to recommend wallpaper for the hall and stair hall, the parlor, the dining room, the breakfast room and mother’s room. His findings of evidence for wallpaper in all of the first floor spaces suggests that either Joseph Nourse purchased wallpaper for the fifth first floor space sometime after moving into Dumbarton House in 1804, or that perhaps one of the rooms was already papered prior to their occupancy of the house.<sup>356</sup>

——— In selecting reproduction wallpapers and borders to use in the first floor rooms at Dumbarton House, attention should be paid to period aesthetics, particularly to what types of papers were considered appropriate for specific rooms. Factors in these fashions included the scale and motifs of the pattern as well the colors and finishes of the overall design. Care must be taken to select papers typical of early 19th century tastes and fashions and not to impose 21st century preferences.

### **Reproduction Carpet: Brussels weave; reproduction; wool; pattern ca. 1800-1810 with borders to match**

Carpeted floors were found in 95% of the 24 identifiable dining rooms in the database study. There is every reason to believe that Joseph Nourse would have followed suit with a carpeted floor in the dining room at Dumbarton House.

References to carpet purchases and carpet choices appear numerous times in the Nourse letters and accounts over the span of years leading up to the Nourse occupancy of Dumbarton House. In October of 1804, after the family’s move in June, “Carpet & furniture” costing \$66.93

<sup>356</sup> Matthew Mosca, “A Report on the Historic Finishes, From Samples Collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms,” Conducted at the request of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, March 24, 1998.

were among the expenses recorded in Joseph Nourse's account book.<sup>357</sup> While this expenditure may have been for the Venetian carpet purchased by Charles Nourse in Philadelphia, and therefore likely not to have been considered appropriate for the parlor, it does show a continuing interest in carpeted floors. There was another notation four years later, in 1808, of \$40 "Paid for a Carpet."<sup>358</sup> Unfortunately there is no information given to suggest for which room this carpet was intended or what type of carpet it was. However, Joseph Nourse, in a 1796 letter to his wife, clearly illustrates an understanding of the different weaves and quality of carpets available in the marketplace. His original intent to put Brussels in the front room (probably the parlor) and Scotch or ingrain in the back (perhaps the family dining room) gave way to concerns about the sturdiness of the Scotch and a change to using Brussels in both rooms.<sup>359</sup>

It is clear from his description that in 1796 he bought a pre-sewn carpet rather than having one custom-fit to the room. He wrote that "the Carpet for the front Room is 4 ¼ by 4 ¼ this will handsomely cover the Room, and a small piece near the communication door and another at the Spinnet will answer almost as well as if it was made to fit."<sup>360</sup> While this was considered adequate for a house that the family would be leaving in four years for the move to Washington, the clear implication is that "made to fit" was the choice if possible.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse, Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 176, #3940-a, Papers of the Nourse Family University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>358</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. A5, #3940-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>359</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>360</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>361</sup> In at least some cases, "made to fit" would have been easier to come by without the use of a border. William Wirt in a December 3, 1817 letter to his wife [William Wirt Papers, Microfilm Edition, Roll 3 Maryland, Historical Society] noted that "borders to carpets are not fashionable here, according to the Presidential standard."

<sup>362</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p.176, #3940-a, Nourse Family Papers, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

interest in carpeted floors.<sup>363</sup> ~~There was another notation four years later, in 1808, of \$40 “Paid for a Carpet.”<sup>364</sup> Unfortunately there is no information given to suggest for which room this carpet might have been intended or what type of carpet it was. However, Joseph Nourse, in a 1796 letter to his wife, clearly illustrates an understanding of the different weaves and quality of carpets available in the market place. His original intent to put Brussels in the front room (probably the parlor) and Scotch or ingrain in the back (perhaps the family dining room) gave way to concerns about the sturdiness of the Scotch and a change to using Brussels in both rooms.<sup>365</sup>~~

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### **Window Curtains: Period appropriate design; reproduction fabric with period appropriate hardware; ca. 1800-1810**

Window curtains were listed in just over half of the dining rooms studied. It should be noted that all but one of the households having curtains in the dining room also had window curtains in the parlor. Apparently if one opted to use textile window treatments in a home's public spaces, it was considered desirable to use them in both of the primary entertainment rooms.

Curtains were among the household furnishings that are referenced repeatedly in the Nourse primary source material, although it is not always clear for which room they were

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<sup>363</sup> Letter, Charles Nourse to Joseph Nourse, July 5, [1804?] #3490-a, Box 1, Folder 1800-1809, Nourse Correspondence [undated], University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>364</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. A5, #3940-a, Nourse Family Papers, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>365</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>366</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

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intended. In the same 1796 letter in which he discussed carpet, Joseph Nourse went on to add “Do let me know about the back Room now the Parlor. I could [*sic*] have a proper paper put on to suit either your White Curtains or the flowerd [*sic*] ones--.”<sup>368</sup> It was apparently this same back room for which Nourse had originally considered using ingrain carpet, a choice that would have signaled a lesser place in the household hierarchy. Nonetheless, he expected there to be curtains. His reference to white curtains is no doubt a reference to white dimity, a fashionable choice during the period, and the flowered curtains were probably made from some type of flower pattern chintz. Chintz seems to have been a recurring choice of the Nourses. In July of 1804, following the June move into Dumbarton House, “Chintz for Curtains” costing \$16.00 was purchased.

### **1 set Mantel Ornaments**

Decorative mantel ornaments or vases were found in just over half of the 24 dining rooms in the inventory study. Examples from the inventories are cited in the body of this section. However, only just over a third of the households have examples in both parlors and dining rooms, and mantel ornaments are recommended for the Dumbarton Parlor. The lack of documentary evidence that Joseph Nourse purchased such items makes this a recommendation that is largely based on its interpretative value.

A family history of ownership does give some weight to the inclusion of mantel ornaments in both spaces. Among the items sold at James Nourse’s estate sale from Piedmont in what was then Berkeley County Virginia were “1 Sett China Jars for Mantle Peice” and “Images for Chimney Peice.” which were probably china figurines. The jars were probably a set of Chinese export garniture and the images might have been either Chinese or English. Both types would have been considered somewhat old-fashioned, even at the time of the sale in 1785. Neither was bought by Joseph, but they do suggest a family fondness for such ornamentation.<sup>369</sup>

Graphic images from the period depict the arrangement of such decorative accessories. Sophie du Pont in a satirical depiction of the family’s parlor written in 1830 described the mantel thusly and accompanied the text with watercolor drawing:

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<sup>368</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Nourse Family Papers, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>369</sup> Copies of the inventory and sale record for Piedmont are located in the curatorial files, Dumbarton House.

We have reached the chimney & have stopped to contemplate its large mirror, surrounded by time worn gilding--On each side, a small silver candlestick, with a large one to take care of it--The middle of the chimney is always graced by a tumbler containing flowers, either fresh or faded, but more frequently the latter....<sup>370</sup>

### **Framed Art**

No framed art is recommended at this time. If future research finds either documentary evidence or examples, other than portraits, of family related art works, this question can be readdressed.

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<sup>370</sup> Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Hinsley, *Sophie du Pont A Young Lady in America*, (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987, New York), p. 73.

## **BREAKFAST ROOM**

Joseph Nourse in a letter to his daughter just prior to the family's move to Dumbarton House wrote, "our breakfast room, is you know the one near the Kitchen." He added that "your Mothers room is the bow room below stairs next the Kitchen. We have therefore considered it a convenience to have a communication by breaking through the wall."<sup>371</sup> In this letter, he described what would become the private, or family side of the house. However, his use of the term "breakfast room" is perhaps somewhat puzzling. Was this really a room reserved just for eating breakfast? Carl Lounsbury in *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture & Landscape* defines a breakfast room as:

A room used to serve breakfast and informal meals. Although many large dwelling houses had two dining rooms in the late colonial period, the distinctive term *breakfast room*, to distinguish the smaller of these eating rooms, appears only in the very late 18th and early 19th centuries.<sup>372</sup>

Certainly it was not a room name in common usage in the Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C Probate Database inventories. Only two of the 28 inventories, Scott01 and Chandlr25, include this term. However, there were nine other households in the database that had an identifiable room that probably served the same function. In reality, these informal dining spaces were the result of two parallel developments in elite society. One was the evolution of a house plan that balanced two rooms on either side of a center passage. By the mid-18th century in the Chesapeake region three of the four rooms were most commonly used as a parlor, dining room, and bed chamber. This configuration resulted in a "leftover" room.<sup>373</sup> It was this space that in many houses came to serve a function related to the second development—the desire of a family to have a private space separate from the public areas of the house where one entertained. John Mason, in writing his memoirs late in life recalling his youth at Gunston Hall in the early 1770s, wrote that across a passage from his 'Mother's Chamber' was "the small Dining room

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<sup>371</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June, 14, 1804, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates, 1803-1804, Letters of Joseph and Maria Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>372</sup> Carl R. Lounsbury, Ed., *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape*, (Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1994), p. 46.

<sup>373</sup> See Mark R. Wenger, "The Central Passage in Virginia Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space" in *Perspective in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 2 (1966), p. 137-149, for a discussion of the development of this basic house plan in the 18th century.

commonly used as such by the Family.” Mason also remembered that the room served his father, George Mason as an office, which use sometimes superseded the family’s claim upon the space.<sup>374</sup>

In the Gunston Hall Room Use Study, the discussion of the “little Parlor,” as it was named in a letter written by George Mason, noted that:

A number of scholars have documented the presence of a second parlor or dining room in many elite American homes after mid-century. Upper class houses tended to have a formal dining room or parlor or both devoted principally to ceremonial activities and another space reserved for more familial functions. These second parlor/dining rooms enhanced family privacy, comfort, and intimacy in a time when the nuclear family was becoming increasingly important.<sup>375</sup>

In *At Home, The American Family 1750—1870*, author Elisabeth Garrett wrote that “many American homes between 1750 and 1870 could boast two parlors.” While one would have been “aloof and ceremonial,” the other would have been “unpretentious and informal.” In further describing these rooms she wrote:

The second parlor in an American house was variously termed parlor, sitting room, keeping room, living room, dining parlor or back parlor--the last in reference to its location behind the best parlor. The role of this apartment was family room, the intent was convenience, the atmosphere was informal, and the use was frequent.<sup>376</sup>

Her study of these “second parlors” or family spaces shows that furniture was “more diverse in type, quality, and material than that in the codified best parlor” and “there were fewer paired forms,” adding that although the furniture placement might follow 18th-century convention of pieces lining the walls, “the arrangement bespoke convenience more than symmetrical nicety and traditional formalism.”<sup>377</sup>

Information contained in Nourse family letters suggests that the family was accustomed to setting aside such a space in the houses in which they lived even before they moved into Dumbarton House. Joseph Nourse’s 1796 letter to Maria detailing his decorating schemes for their Philadelphia house speaks of front and back rooms and outlines his carpeting quandary of whether to use a lesser quality carpet in the back room—a choice which would have spoken to its

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<sup>374</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Plan*, Vol. 1, p. 130.

<sup>375</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Plan*, Vol. 1, p. 132.

<sup>376</sup> Elisabeth Garrett, *At Home: The American Family 1750-1870*, p. 39.

<sup>377</sup> Elisabeth Garrett, *At Home: The American Family 1750-1870*, p. 61-62.

secondary status in the household. Maria specifically names the room the “back parlor” in her response. In a letter written to her daughter just prior to the move to Dumbarton House, Maria describes part of her day. She wrote that “after having tired [of] my cutting out some shirts I laid by my scissors intending to take a magazine in the interval tho but in a moment I thought of my little daughter and that she would be very glad to hear how her Mama was today so instead of the book here am I with my pen....” All of these activities were ones she would have typically pursued in a casual family parlor setting.<sup>378</sup>

If one assumes that the Dumbarton House “breakfast room” was indeed a family parlor and dining area, how would it have been furnished? What types of furnishing characterized similar rooms in the homes of the Nourses’ contemporaries?

Eleven of the 24 households with identifiable non-chamber spaces included a room that seemed to fit this category. Interestingly, only three actually name the space. Scott01 and Chandlr25 included breakfast rooms and Varnum22 listed a “Sitting Room.” Lounsbury states that the term sitting rooms came into use in southern homes in the late colonial period. His definition of it was “a room... where members of a family would gather,” adding that it was used “for minor domestic tasks, reading, and conversation.”<sup>379</sup>

In this group of 11, nine (81%) have some form of seating furniture. The average number of chairs is nine and the median is ten. One inventory, that of Wshgtn21, lists no chairs in the entire household, clearly an anomaly inherent in the taking of the inventory or caused by the prior disposition of furniture. The other without chairs is Whartn18. One can only speculate that some of the 11 chairs, described as six arm and five common, listed in the Entry were carried into this room as needed. Certainly the presence of both an “Escrituire & book case” and a dining table would predicate the need for chairs in this room. Of the nine inventories that list chairs, three have Windsors. Two households included other seating forms—Camp17 included a “Cane Settee” as well as 10 Windsor chairs, and Meigs22 lists a rocking chair as part of the 13 chairs listed in the room’s inventory. The presence of the rocking chair is perhaps yet another indicator of the less formal nature of these rooms.

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<sup>378</sup> Letters, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Maria Nourse to Joseph Nourse, September 22, 1796, #3940-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department; Letter, Maria Nourse to daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, no date (1804?), Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>379</sup> Carl Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape*, p. 333.



Tables occur in 100% of the sample, with the average being two and half and the median two. Dining tables are specified in four households, breakfast tables in three households, tea tables in two households, stands in three households and card tables in one household. The descriptor “old” is used for tables in Peter12 and Hellen15 which lists “2 old tables of wild cherry.” In the case of Hellen15, both the use of “old” and the use of “wild cherry” would have been reasons for their relegation to a non-public space.<sup>380</sup> While not described as old, it might be inferred from the listing of black walnut as the wood for the two breakfast tables in Deakin05. At the very least, these tables would have been viewed as being a step down from their mahogany counterparts. Another indicator of the secondary nature of table choices for these rooms can be read in the “broken” dining table in Scott01’s breakfast room.

Storage forms were also common in these spaces. Ten of the 11 households (90%) had at least one piece of storage furniture in the assumed family parlor. Seven of 10 (70%) included a side board. Of these seven households, six also owned a second sideboard. In those six households, there is a clear disparity in value between the sideboard found in the formal dining room and that listed in the family space. In some the difference in value is striking. In Barlow18 the primary sideboard is valued at \$150 and the one in the secondary space at only \$6. More typical would seem to be Scott01, where the one in the dining room was listed at \$40, while the sideboard in the breakfast room was valued at \$12. Perhaps Wsghtn21 provides a clue to the difference in values seen in some of the inventories. In the apparent family parlor/dining room the sideboard is listed as “1 second hand mahogany Side Board” and valued at \$20, while that in the primary dining room was described as “1 Large Mahogany Side board” valued at \$50. The newer, more fashionable piece would be expected to have pride of place in the formal dining room.

Three of the houses include some form of desk and bookcase in this room and two others some form of book storage. At least two of the desk and bookcase forms were used to house large numbers of books. The inclusion of these forms appears to be a carry over of 18th-century practice that often saw desk forms in dining rooms, perhaps both as aids to conducting business and as a lockable form for the safe storage of valuable household stores and table furnishings.

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<sup>380</sup> Both cherry and black walnut were woods used by regional furniture craftsmen. Pieces made from these woods were less expensive than mahogany and sometimes older than those in the latest style, pieces made from these woods would have been considered less desirable than fashionable mahogany. Thus they were, in elite households, more likely to be relegated to secondary rather than public rooms.

Just over half of the 11 households with informal parlor/dining rooms included list a looking glass as part of the room furnishings. In two of the inventories the type of looking glass is specified. Whartn18 included a “mantle glass” valued at \$25 which made this household the exception in placing such a costly looking glass in this informal space. More typical is Chndlr25 that listed a pier glass valued at only \$2.50 in the breakfast room as compared to the two pier glasses valued at \$15 each in the drawing room.

Framed art was listed in four of the 11 rooms (36%); however, if one makes the same assumption about Whartn18 here as in the drawing room, that some of the 100 plus works of art listed at the end of the inventory might have hung in this room, then the number goes up to five of 11 (45%). Scott01 and Campbl17 each list three unidentified prints, Meigs22 lists “1 Declaration of Independence” and Varnum22 includes an unidentified map. There is, unfortunately, no way to know which of Whartn18’s 100+ works of art might have hung in his family parlor/dining room.

Three of the households included decorative objects. Both Campbl17 and Meigs22 included groups of mantel ornaments valued at \$2 for each piece and Barlow18 listed 2 “Flower Pots” valued at \$1 for both.

Clocks and watches were also among the items kept in these family rooms. Five of the eleven list some device for keeping time. Two list clocks and one lists an unspecified “time piece.” Surprisingly two include watches as part of the furnishings of these rooms. Campbl17 includes a “Patent Lever Gold watch” valued at \$175 with no apparent place to store it and Whartn18 records a silver watch valued at only \$5. Ironically, Whartn18’s watch is listed among a group of miscellaneous table wares and bottles of condiments which were no doubt kept in some type of built-in, lockable cupboard or closet.

Heating equipment was part of the furnishings of eight (72%) of the 11 family parlor/dining rooms. Three-quarters (75%) of these included andirons and not quite two-thirds had shovels and tongs and fenders. Hearth brooms and bellows were found in only 25% of these spaces. Only one household, Campbl17, recorded a Franklin stove.

Unlike parlors inventories that included a high percentage of lighting devices, only two of the 11 rooms in this group contained a lighting implement. The lack of such items suggests that the candlesticks in these rooms were probably more utilitarian (brass or tin) and used on a regular basis which have would necessitated the removal of the candle holders to a work space,

probably the kitchen, for daily cleaning. Following 18th-century practice, they would most commonly have been stored near where they were cleaned until they were needed again. In the two households where lighting devices were listed in the family parlor/dining room, the descriptions suggest they were considered decorative as well as functional. Campbl17 included a pair of plated candlesticks as well as a snuffers and tray and Whartn18, again the outlier, displayed 4 “Bronze” candlesticks, a snuffers rack & snuffers, and “1 pair gilt mantle lamps.”

As might be expected in this multipurpose space, dining related objects occur in eight of the 11 rooms. In some rooms there are only a few pieces, often waiters, but in three of the inventories substantial amounts of dining related equipment are listed. All three of these rooms included a sideboard that may have held some, if not all, of the items noted. Or, there may have been a closet or some type of built-in storage cupboard in which they were kept. Barlow18 clearly used this space to store many items that would apparently not fit in the space designated as the dining room closet. Among the items included in Barlow18 were a gilt coffee pot, a large number of ivory handle knives and forks, a tea chest and two sugar boxes, 14 glass decanters and a large assortment of glassware composed of both drinking vessels and dessert items. Whartn18, in addition to a large number of books, included a set of tea waiters, a plate warmer, a “Lott of Blue China (71 pieces),” two tea caddies and bottles of the “essence of Anchovies,” “Quice [Quince?] Sauce,” “East India Soy” and “Pepper.” Among the items found in Varnum22’s sitting room were wine and jelly glasses, coffee and tea spoons, a soup ladle, a pair of castors, and “one lot of Crockery.”

As with other spaces in the house, personal items that reflected an individual’s lifestyle also appear in some of these rooms. A foot stool was among the furnishings in Barlow18, a board and chessmen were listed in Whartn18, a gun and bird box was found in Whstgtn21’s family parlor/dining room and a thermometer, probably wall mounted, was included among the furnishings listed in Chndlr25.

Not quite two thirds (eight of 11) of the inventories in this group list some type of floor covering. Of these, three include both carpet and a hearth rug. One household, Scott01, lists “1 Flour[sic] Cloth Carpet & 2 small pieces do” and one, Whartn18, lists a Scotch floor carpet.

Window curtains were found in only one family parlor/dining room. Whartn18 embellished his room with “3 Scarlet bombazine window Curtains & trimmings” valued at \$15.00.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In general terms, the furnishings of the Nourses' breakfast room, despite its up-to-date name, should be among the older and less prepossessing of their household furnishings. Although this was an important room in the daily life of the family, it was not a space intended for the entertaining of anyone other than family or intimate friends.

### **Seating: 7-9 side chairs and possibly 1 arm chair: Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake; Mahogany or Walnut or painted Windsors; ca. 1784-1810**

These chairs should represent a mix of the chairs acquired by the Nourses over the course of their marriage. Included among them might well be some from the first set of mahogany chairs acquired in 1784, no doubt fashionable at the time but now out of date, one or more of the Windsors also bought in 1784, or some of the unidentified chairs whose purchases are recorded in 1785 and 1799. They might also represent chairs presumed to have been purchased, perhaps at auction, by Joseph Nourse after his family arrived in Washington. The goal is to have a mix of chair types suggesting the changes to the Nourses' furnishings over time, not to display an example from each of the sets.

### **2 Tables, 1 dining and 1 small for tea or to hold a candle: Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake; Mahogany or Walnut; ca. 1784-1805.**

A single dining table, perhaps somewhat old fashioned, would serve the purpose for which this room was named and would also be adequate for meals when only a small number of family members were present. This would be true for not only Joseph and Maria but even on those few occasions when Anna Maria Josepha might have been there before her death in 1805 or when Charles Nourse and John Rittenhouse, who boarded there, were present. When larger family parties were assembled, meals would have been taken in the formal dining room. The dining table might well have been among the furnishings purchased in the early years of Joseph and Maria's marriage or have been among items bought after arriving in Washington. When not in use, it would probably have stood against the wall, or perhaps even been moved into the passage, reflecting both earlier custom and the multipurpose nature of the space.

In addition to the dining table, it is probable that one of the small tables discussed as possible for the Parlor may have been a more or less permanent fixture in this space. Either the Watkins breakfast table purchased in 1784 or the round table bought in 1798 would serve the purpose. Like the dining table that speaks to the family's use of the room for meals, a small table for tea would reflect the use of the space for informal family gatherings. A small "tea" table kept here would also be close enough to be moved to any of the public rooms as needed.

**Book case or Desk and Bookcase: Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake, England; walnut or mahogany; ca. 1784-1808**

While it would be tempting to postulate a secondary sideboard for this room, Joseph Nourse is very clear about the purchase of a "Side Board & Tables" in 1800, and there is no other similar reference. Given his life long love of books and his regular recording their procurement, it seems more likely that any storage form found in this room would be related to his library. While it is clear from his letters that his primary working desk was kept in the first floor chamber, the survival of a desk and bookcase,<sup>381</sup> with a possible family history raises interesting questions about including such a piece of furniture in the breakfast room. Could Joseph have owned something similar to the "Screutore with Glass Doors" listed in the 1784 inventory of Piedmont, James Nourse's Berkeley County, Virginia home and bought by Joseph's brother William at the sale of the household furnishing?<sup>382</sup>

Where was Joseph Nourse shelving his books prior to his 1809 purchase of "Book Cases &c." for which he paid \$74.76? Could an old-fashioned desk and bookcase located in Breakfast room have served this purpose? Also in question is where the book cases purchased in 1809, apparently substantial in size and substance, judging from their cost, placed? In the end, the decision made about including one of these forms in the breakfast room will be tied to the interpretive choices made for the dining room.

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<sup>381</sup> Former curator Brian Lang recalls visiting the Jefferson County Historical Society and seeing a desk on display. However, recent conversations and emails with Susan Collins, Curator of the Jefferson County [West Virginia] Museum found no record of the desk. In an email with the author of this report, she wrote: "I have found out that in the early 1970's the Jefferson County Historical Society gave up their headquarters here in Charles Town due to financial problems. At that time the contents of the house were sold and it seems highly likely that the desk and bookcase were included in that sale." See notes in Dumbarton House Curatorial files.

<sup>382</sup> James Nourse Inventory, Berkeley County [now West Virginia] Wills, Vol. 1 p. 282-284; Sale Record, Nourse Family Papers, # 3490-a, Folder date 1784, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

## **1 Looking Glass: England, Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake; Mahogany; ca. 1784-1808**

Only half of the rooms in this group included a looking glass among their furnishings. However, looking glasses are among the items that Joseph Nourse acquired both in the early years of his marriage and after the move to Washington. These were furnishing forms upon which he was willing to spend money, and it may be presumed that other glasses were among the items represented in the various unspecified furniture purchases noted in his account books. As with the tables and chairs, it is most likely that one of the older examples would have found its way to this room.

## **Clock: Bracket Clock, Henricus Harper, walnut with brass ornamentation, late 17th century**

In a letter to Maria, detailing the minutiae of his day, Joseph wrote that “I was detained from Dinner beyond was my usual time, and the Clock struck six as I sat down to my silent repast.” In the same letter he recorded a restless night without her. “I could [*sic*] not sleep your kind attendant was wanting to compose me—in the Night a long hollow sound, called me up, and to the door, when the Clock reminded me, how still, and quiet every thing really was.”<sup>383</sup> It is not surprising that Joseph Nourse heard a clock. Clocks or time pieces occur in 60% of the 28 households in the inventory database study. Somewhere in the house, a clock sounded; however, it is unlikely that it was in the bed chamber. In none of the inventories where clock placement can be determined are they found in bed chambers. Dining rooms seem to have been the preferred setting, occurring there in eight households. But equal numbers of formal parlors and family parlors (three households each) also contained clocks. Although Joseph Nourse could probably have heard the clock from any point on the first floor, the reference to the clock striking as he sat down to dinner is suggestive though not definitive evidence. Was the clock in the room where he ate? It seems very unlikely that he would have dined in solitary splendor in the dining room and much more probable that he ate, as the family no doubt often did, in the breakfast room.

The Joseph Nourse primary sources show the acquisition of only one clock, costing \$3.23, among the auction purchases in 1800. The price seems low, even for an item bought at

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<sup>383</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 1, 1804, #3940-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804, Letters of Joseph and Maria Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

auction. However, many of the items procured seem to have been intended to fill out apparent gaps in the family's furnishings related to entertaining in the public rooms of the house. It is possible that Joseph Nourse was able to acquire a decorative time piece for a mantel at a true bargain price. If so, however, it seems unlikely that it would have been placed in the breakfast room.

The other possibility for a clock in the breakfast room is the 17th-century bracket clock which descended in family hands. It may well have been one of the two "table clocks" listed among the furniture brought to America by Joseph's father, James. Although decidedly old fashioned by 1804, indeed even by 1769 when the Nourse family immigrated to America, the family's attachment to the clock suggests that it retained a sentimental importance to the family, making it a logical choice to be placed in the family breakfast room.<sup>384</sup>

### **Wallpaper: Period (ca. 1804) and room appropriate reproduction wallpaper and border**

The numerous references to wallpaper among Joseph Nourse's letters and accounts clearly indicate a family preference for this type of household decoration. Following the move to Georgetown, this family predilection for wallpaper surfaces, first in an entry for \$10 spent for "papering a room" in July 1803.<sup>385</sup> No further detail was given but the assumption is that this was for the house in which the family lived on P Street prior to moving to Dumbarton House. Fortunately the records concerning Dumbarton House are somewhat more specific. The Nourse's daughter Anna Maria Josepha, then in Philadelphia, was commissioned to buy wall paper for the new house. She wrote to her father that "... I intend doing my very best about the paper, I dare say I can get papers as handsome as the light or buff light papers with Dark bordering is at present the prevailing fashion—the effect is very pretty and they have the advantage of lighting remarkably well...."<sup>386</sup> Additional information is found in a letter from Joseph Nourse to his daughter in which he anticipates the arrival of "the paper you are to send

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<sup>384</sup> The family attachment to the clock is evidenced in a passage on page 369 of Marian Campbell Gouveneur's *As I Remember: Recollection of American Society during the Nineteenth Century*. (D. Appleton and Co., 1911). She remembers visiting Charles Nourse's widow at The Highlands when Rebecca Nourse was "advanced in years." A highlight of the memory was "a wonderful Elizabethan clock in the hallway, which I am told is still, in defiance of time, striking the hours in the home of a descendant."

<sup>385</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, 1778-1803 p.274, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>386</sup> Letter, Daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Nourse, no date [1804?] Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, The Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

for four Rooms.”<sup>387</sup> His accounts at the end of 1804 record an expenditure of \$52.12 for “Paper for Rooms.”<sup>388</sup> No further clues survive as to the appearance of the paper nor for which “four” rooms it was intended. However, the primary source materials show that wall paper was an important element in the decorations of Dumbarton House.

Paint consultant Matthew Mosca, in his 1998 “Report on the Historic Finishes, from samples collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms” notes that “a number of samples... show glue size on the earliest surviving generation of wall plaster.” This evidence, glue size being a common finish under wallpaper, coupled with the fact that very few samples of paint finishes were found on the earliest layer of plaster led Mosca to recommend wallpaper for the hall and stair hall, the parlor, the dining room, the breakfast room and mother’s room. His findings of evidence for wallpaper in all of the first floor spaces suggests that either Joseph Nourse purchased wallpaper for the fifth first floor space sometime after moving into Dumbarton House in 1804, or that perhaps one of the rooms was already papered prior to their occupancy of the house.<sup>389</sup>

In selecting reproduction wallpapers and borders to use in the first floor rooms at Dumbarton House, attention should be paid to period aesthetics, particularly to what types of papers were considered appropriate for specific rooms. Factors in these fashions included the scale and motifs of the pattern as well the colors and finishes of the overall design. Care must be taken to select papers typical of early 19th-century tastes and fashions and not to impose 21st-century preferences.

**Carpet: Venetian, Scotch or Brussels in weave; Reproduction in a period appropriate design; ca. 1800-1804**

Given Joseph Nourse’s appreciation for carpeting, it seems reasonable that he, like his contemporaries, would have seen this as appropriate room in which to use a textile floor

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<sup>387</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, M 3381-102, # G 1394, Folder 11, Rosa Miller Collection, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections. See also the wallpaper section in Chapter Five of this report for a discussion of Thomas Hurley, the wallpaper manufacturer from whom Joseph Nourse purchased this papers.

<sup>388</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 318 # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>389</sup> Matthew Mosca, “A Report on the Historic Finishes, From Samples Collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms,” Conducted at the request of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, March 24, 1998.



covering. As this would have been considered a lesser space, it is possible that the Venetian carpet which Charles considered “very handsome & very strong” might have been used here. If not the Venetian, then probably a pre-sewn Brussels of lesser value or “Scotch” ingrain would have served.

### **Window Curtains:**

No window curtains are recommended for this room. However, the question of whether there were interior shutters should be explored as part of the architectural investigation of the room. If a window treatment is needed for light control in the south facing windows, the question of Venetian blinds should be explored. Joseph Nourse records paying to have Venetian blinds painted in March of 1805.<sup>390</sup> There is no way to know from this entry whether or not he is referring to interior slatted blinds that could be raised and lower with a cord, or whether this entry is for painting louvered exterior shutters. According to Lounsbury, the second usage was the more common through the second quarter of the 19th century;<sup>391</sup> however, as early as 1770 a Williamsburg carpenter advertised in the Virginia Gazette that he made:

the best & newest invented Venetian sun blinds for windows, that move to any position so as to give different lights, they screen from the scorching rays of the sun, draw up as a curtain, prevent being overlooked, give a cool refreshing air in hot weather, & are the greatest preservative of furniture of any thing of the kind every invented.<sup>392</sup>

Lounsbury also notes that cloth blinds were in use in the south as early as the first half of the 18th century, citing a Williamsburg example as early as 1736 and several early 19th-century examples from South Carolina. While there is no evidence of the Nourses employing this type of fabric blinds, such window treatments would not be inappropriate. It should be noted that if either of these treatments is pursued, custom reproductions will have to be fabricated.<sup>393</sup>

### **Lighting:**

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<sup>390</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p.318, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>391</sup> Carl Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape*, p. 388-389.

<sup>392</sup> *Virginia Gazette* advertisement quoted in Carl Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape*, p. 388.

<sup>393</sup> Carl Lounsbury, *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape*, p. 388-389.

No candlesticks or lamps are recommended as part of the permanent furnishings of this room. If an interpretive scenario that calls for lighting is desired, brass candlesticks, ca. 1784-1800, should be used. On the assumption that candles were used as needed in both the breakfast room and mother's room, a pair of snuffers to trim wicks should be shared between the two rooms as part of the miscellaneous furnishings of these rooms.

### **1 Pair Snuffers and Tray, England or Europe, Brass, Polished Steel or Silver Plate, ca. 1800**

A pair of scissor-like candle snuffers would have been considered a necessity in a well-to-do genteel household of the period. In the early 19th century, wicking was not self consuming and the need to trim (pinch off) the charred wick was part of the process of lighting a house with candles, no matter whether they were tallow, beeswax, or spermaceti. Snuffers, with perhaps a tray or stand to hold them, were among the items that might be left out on a table or put away in a closet or drawer when not in use. They are also the type of small miscellaneous item that would have been easily overlooked when inventories were taken, especially if they were tucked out of sight or removed to the kitchen, probably for cleaning, like those in Whann13. Twenty of the 28 households in the Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database included snuffers in their inventory listings. Not quite two-thirds (60%) of those homes having this form owned multiple examples. Six of the households have snuffers described as "plated" and three include examples described as "steel." Perhaps most interesting is Chndlr25 who struck the balance between durability and fashion with two examples of a plated tray coupled with steel snuffers, one set found in the drawing room and one in the breakfast room.

Under the heading of "Furniture &c" in his subordinate account for the first eight months of 1799, Joseph Nourse recorded "snuffers" valued at one dollar.<sup>394</sup> Much more costly was the pair of snuffers and tray purchased at auction in 1800 for which he paid seven dollars.<sup>395</sup> This sum seems quite substantial, particularly when compared to other items on the list, such as a silver waiter costing six dollars or a tea pot for seven dollars. The high price suggests that they were either made from a more expensive material such as silver plate,<sup>396</sup> or that they were in

<sup>394</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 116, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>395</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>396</sup> Joseph Nourse's failure to list these objects by weight would seem to rule out the possibility that they were silver, as he was careful to do with two other items in the account.

some way more elaborate in their ornamentation or design. This pair would certainly have been elegant enough to be left out as part of the furnishing in either the **drawing room** or dining room. The pair costing a dollar would have been simpler, perhaps without a tray or stand, and probably made from brass or perhaps steel. This snuffer would be an appropriate choice for sharing between the breakfast room and mother's room.

**Dining Equipage:**

Barring the discovery of a period closet as part of the original architecture of this room, no dining equipage is recommended as a permanent part of the room's furnishings. As with lighting, however, various interpretative scenarios depicting family meals or tea drinking might be displayed as part of the room furnishings. Table and tea wares should be drawn from those recommended in the Tableware section of this report.

## **MOTHER'S ROOM**

Joseph Nourse, in a June 14, 1804, letter to his daughter, written just prior to the family's move into Dumbarton House, clearly described the intended disposition of the family's private spaces on the first floor. He wrote that "your mothers room is the bow room below stairs next the Kitchen." He then added that they were having a doorway cut between the bedchamber and the room he designated the "breakfast room."<sup>397</sup> It is not surprising that Joseph should refer to the chamber as being his wife's room. In a period when the idea of having a bed chamber assigned to the use of just one person was still not a cultural norm, the mistress of a household was the one individual most likely to have her own room.

By locating the primary family bedchamber on the first floor together with a room intended for family dining and separating these spaces from what were the more formal areas of the house intended for the entertainment of company, Joseph and Maria Nourse chose to follow an 18th-century pattern of domestic life. John Mason, in describing his childhood at Gunston Hall<sup>398</sup> in the early 1770s, recalls the first floor room that he very clearly remembers as being his mother's chamber. From this room, Ann Mason oversaw the regulation of her household and the management of her children. John Mason vividly recalled the high chest which contained the children's clothing as well as two locked drawers that were, he wrote "devoted to my Mother's own private use and for matters of greater value." He also noted that one of the two closets in the room held "the current part of my mother's wardrobe," and the other "held the smaller or more precious stores for the table and would have, I suppose [been] called an upper pantry."<sup>399</sup> The central location of Ann Mason's chamber allowed her to note the comings and goings of family, visitors, servants and slaves.

Ann Mason's access to the passage that opened onto the kitchen yard is echoed in Joseph Nourse's comment that Maria's room was the one "next the kitchen." This placement would have provided Maria Nourse with easy oversight of the domestic activities of slaves and servants occupied with daily food preparation and other household chores. There is also a hint that Maria,

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<sup>397</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 14, 1804, # 3940-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804, Letters of Joseph Nourse and Maria Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>398</sup> Completed in 1759, Gunston Hall Plantation was the home of George Mason IV, author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights. Today, Gunston Hall is owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia and administered by a Board of Regents appointed from The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America.

<sup>399</sup> Terry K. Dunn, Ed. *The Recollections of John Mason George Mason's Son Remembers His Father and Life at Gunston Hall* (Marshall, Va.: EPM Publications, Inc., 2004), p. 63-65.

too, may have used her chamber as place to keep watch over the more precious stores intended for the dinner table. Joseph Nourse, in a letter to his wife while she was away from home included the news that “Your Black berry Jam was made yesterday. for I this morning perceived it in one corner of your chamber.”<sup>400</sup>

This pattern of room use was already being left behind by some of their neighbors. Built at roughly the same time as Dumbarton House, the Octagon, the Washington home of the Tayloe family was dramatically different in its floor plan. Some of the difference may have been due to the odd shaped lot on which the Octagon was built, but much of the interior layout reflected a more modern sensibility about the divisions of space and the removal of the private family rooms to the second floor of the home. Here, too, it is a son’s recollections that describe the interior distribution of space. In “An Account of The Octagon” he remembered that the first floor rooms served as the drawing room and dining room. On the second floor was a room he described as the library, which may have served as the family parlor and three bed chambers with five more and several “large Closets” on the third. In the cellar, down two flights of narrow back stairs from the second floor bed chambers, were the service areas including a kitchen and the servants hall. While mistress Ann Tayloe surely kept an eye on the domestic management of her household, most of the daily routine was probably left to the housekeeper whose room was also in the basement.<sup>401</sup>

Whether it was old-fashioned or not, the first floor chamber and its primary occupant figured warmly in Joseph Nourse’s letters. Only a month or so after moving to Dumbarton House, Maria left to visit family and Joseph wrote to her that “I could not sleep your kind attendant was wanting to compose me.”<sup>402</sup> A few days later his letter included the information that he was “sitting in your chamber at my desk: the Sun is declining, and after a little tea or milk I shall... retire to my slumbers.”<sup>403</sup> Similar sentiments are repeated in letters that follow. On August 5 he began his letter with “I am now come to the close of another of the days of the Son

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<sup>400</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 4, 1804, Nourse Family Papers, # 3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804, Letters of Joseph Nourse and Maria Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>401</sup> H.A. Tayloe, *An Account of The Octagon Written by my father at my request 1870* H.A. Tayloe of Mt. Airy, The Octagon Museum, Archives.

<sup>402</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 1, 1804, Nourse Family Papers, # 3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804, Letters of Joseph Nourse and Maria Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>403</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 2, 1804, Nourse Family Papers, # 3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

of Man, ...and cannot retire to your Couch, without wishing you as I always do the blessing of sweet and comfortable repose.” He continues further down in the letter, teasing that she will tire of his constant letters but then asking if she is “tired with variety and wish again to be in your Chamber with your Pa,” adding that “I answer for you in the affirmative.”<sup>404</sup> His letter of two days later again found him at work at his desk. He wrote “I this morning began arranging my private papers in the appartment [*sic*] of my Desk....”<sup>405</sup> Indeed, this seems to be his favorite place for writing his letters as his next letter also placed him there as he noted “I am now my d’ Ma at my Desk in your Chamber.”<sup>406</sup> The passage of time does not seem to have brought any change to the tenor of the household. Some four years later, in writing to his son Charles who was then on his way to England, Joseph Nourse describing the domestic scene by relating that “Your Mother... is now sitting at her Chamber fire....”<sup>407</sup> Though nearly always referring to the room as Maria’s, the fact that they shared the room is found in yet another letter. While away on business in Baltimore, Joseph wrote to his dear Maria to tell her about his day. He concluded by writing that he “had as good a Night as I could have expect without You for I always sleep well with you in our Dormitory....”<sup>408</sup> Through letters like these that exude a sense of domestic contentment, Joseph Nourse clearly expresses the sentiment that here was the emotional heart of his home.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

### 1 Highpost Bedstead; Mahogany; Philadelphia (ca. 1784) or New York (ca. 1786)

The Nourse primary source material provides two different possibilities for a bedstead choice for the first floor chamber. At the time of his marriage in April 1784, Joseph Nourse recorded the purchase of a mahogany bedstead for the sum of £10.10, probably Pennsylvania currency rather than Pounds Sterling. Just two years later, following the government’s and thus the Nourses’ move to New York, his April 1786 accounts include a listing for a “Mahogany

<sup>404</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 5, 1804, Nourse Family Papers, # 3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>405</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 7, 1804, Nourse Family Papers, # 3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1803-1804, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>406</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 9, 1804, Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>407</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Nourse, April 4, 1808, MdHR M 3381-102, Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, #G 1394-15, Folder 14, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections.

<sup>408</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, May 2, 1808, #G 1394-15, Folder 15, Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections.

Bedstead bought of Kipp.”<sup>409</sup> “Kipp” is presumably Richard Kip, New York City upholsterer, known to modern scholars primarily from his elaborate trade card that survives in the New York City Public Library. The trade card advertised that Kip made “all sorts of Festoon Canopy, Field and Tent Bed Curtains.” Although the trade card was printed in 1771, written on the card is a bill dated 1784 and on the back is a sketch showing matching festoon-style window and bed curtains.<sup>410</sup>

Neither bedstead would have been considered fashionable by the time the Nourse family moved into Dumbarton House, but there is no documentary evidence to suggest that the Nourses replaced these bedsteads with later examples of similar value. General period practice seems to suggest that bedsteads were considered major purchases, often made at the time of significant life events such as marriage. Period practice suggests that such purchases were often looked upon as lifetime investments. Indeed, evidence found in wills shows that bedsteads, usually with their bedding and hangings, were often passed from one generation to the next, usually as bequests to daughters.

**Bed Hangings; Modern Reproduction; Fabric, trim and style to be appropriate to either 1780s (wool moreen or patterned furniture cotton) or early 1800s (dimity or period appropriate chintz)**

The choice of which period to choose for the hangings on this bedstead is an interpretative one. A case can be made for either presenting the bedstead with what would have been its original hangings or for displaying hangings in a fabric and style fashionable in the early 19th century at the time of the Nourses’ move to Dumbarton House.

The textile hangings for a high post bedstead represented a substantial portion of the overall cost. These hangings seem not to have been changed frequently. Photographs of bed rooms in New England houses taken circa 1900 suggest that in some households bed hangings had not changed in more than fifty or sixty years. Thus it is entirely possible that bed curtains made from either the light blue wool moreen or the “Cotton Furniture” purchased by Joseph Nourse in 1784 still graced the Philadelphia mahogany bedstead purchased at the same time.

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<sup>409</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 57 # 3490-a, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>410</sup> Florence Montgomery, *Printed Textiles English and American Cottons and Linens 1700-1850*, (New York: The Viking Press, A Winterthur Book, 1970), p. 58, 60-61.

The same can be said about the bedstead purchased from New York upholsterer Richard Kip in 1786, although the account book entry offers no information about the hangings for this bedstead. It is tempting to postulate that the hangings for this bedstead were incorporated in the purchase price as Kip's primary trade was upholstery. This premise is supported by both information printed on the front and the sketch of window and bed curtains found on the back of his trade card.

Another intriguing possibility for either the Philadelphia bedstead or the one bought of Kip is raised by the surviving copperplate print bed valance in the "Apotheosis of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington" pattern with a Nourse family history. Could this have been one of the "cotton Furniture" fabrics purchased by Joseph Nourse in Philadelphia at the time of his marriage, or might it have been part of the hangings for the bedstead supplied by Kip?

Earlier research had suggested that this valance was part of the "1 Set red & white figured Copper plate bed Furniture" listed in James Nourse's estate inventory taken in Annapolis in December 1784.<sup>411</sup> While it is possible that James Nourse could have purchased new bed curtains when he moved his family from the Piedmont plantation to Annapolis in the early 1780s, it seem doubtful based on the inventory entry. The inventory description of the red and white copperplate set provides no age descriptor unlike the seven yards of "blue and white Cotton Furniture" which are described as new. In addition, the value for the red and white set does not suggest that there is anything to markedly set these bed hangings apart from the other textiles listed. A mere seven yards of the "new" blue and white pattern was valued at 1 pound 10 shillings, while the entire "set" of "copperplate bed furniture," which probably consisted of dozens of yards of fabric plus trim was valued at only 5 shillings more.<sup>412</sup>

Although copperplate printed textile designs had been available since the middle of the 18th century, the designs intended for the American market featuring George Washington and other figures like Franklin and William Penn date to the 1780s. Textile scholar Florence Montgomery in her book *Printed Textiles: English and American Cottons and Linens 1700-1850* very reasonably postulated that the 1783 peace treaty which formally ended the American Revolution was the likely impetus for the development of these designs. She cites a 1784 order

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<sup>411</sup> *Inventory of the Goods, Chattles & Effects of James Nourse, January 1st, 1785*, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Md.

<sup>412</sup> Even a simple set of hangings for a tent bedstead might take almost 20 yards of fabric. See the 1776 Plunket Fleeson bill to John Cadwalader illustrated in Nicholas B. Wainwright, *Colonial Grandeur in Philadelphia The House and Furniture of General John Cadwalader* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1964), p. 64.



by a Baltimore merchant for “4 pieces printed furniture in dark purple, Washington patterns,” and notes that what she refers to as the “Franklin and Washington subject” was in use in 1785 in a bed chamber at the President’s House in New York.<sup>413</sup> Thomas Shippen, while visiting his Uncle Richard Henry Lee, who occupied the house at the time, described his bed chamber as being:

... spacious and elegant one and prettily furnished. I now write in it, and which way soever I turn my eyes I find a triumphal Car, a Liberty Cap, a Temple of Fame or the Hero of Heros, all these and many more objects of a piece with them, being finely represented on the hangings.<sup>414</sup>

While it is possible that this new and highly fashionable textile might have been available in Philadelphia as early as April of 1784 when Joseph Nourse was purchasing the textiles to dress his new bedsteads. However, it seems more likely that this fabric would have been an appealing choice for the bedstead bought from New York upholsterer Richard Kip in 1786.

By the time the Nourse family moved into Dumbarton House, both the Philadelphia bedstead and its hangings and the New York bedstead, had been through more than a half a dozen moves,<sup>415</sup> it is not unreasonable to assume that the wear and tear of taking down and nailing up the bed curtains might have provided a reason for the Nourses to redo the textile furnishings of the bed chamber. Also, if curtains were hung at the windows of the room, it is unlikely that curtains from previous homes could withstand yet another redo to fit the windows of yet another bedchamber. Given the propensity for en suite decorative schemes, the Nourses’ numerous moves would seem to support the possibility that new bed and window curtains would have been needed by the time they moved to Dumbarton House. However, barring the discovery of any additional Nourse family primary evidence, either scenario—the reuse of older bed curtains or the purchase of new—would be a valid interpretation.

### **Bedding: Modern Reproductions**

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<sup>413</sup> Florence Montgomery, *Printed Textiles: English and American Cottons and Linens* (New York: The Viking Press, A Winterthur Book, 1970), p. 279-282.

<sup>414</sup> Quoted in Montgomery, *Printed Textiles*, p. 281.

<sup>415</sup> At some point toward the end of his life, Joseph Nourse sketched a brief chronological diary of his places of residence and other significant events in his life. Although some of the entries are open for interpretation, they would seem to suggest that the Nourse family, after they moved from their first home in Philadelphia, lived in three or perhaps four places while in New York in the late 1780s and in at least two or three during the 1790s following the government's move back to Philadelphia. Once the family moved to Georgetown, they lived in a least one house prior to their move to Dumbarton House.

In order for Dumbarton House to display the bed in this room with some of the covers turned back, reproduction bedding will have to be installed. The elements needed would include a mattress; one or more beds, presumably feather; a bolster; and at least two pillows. Also necessary would be a pair of linen sheets, a bolster cover, and linen pillow cases. In addition, a pair of blankets would be required to show seasonal change. Seasonal change might also be interpreted through two different types of outer bed covers, possibly a cotton or dimity counterpane for summer and a heavier quilt for winter. See the Chapter XII. *Chambers: I Shall Retire... to My Slumbers* for a complete discussion of these elements.

**1 Easy Chair: Mahogany, Appropriate reproduction period textiles, New York, ca. 1786; possibly fitted with a “chamber pot” depending upon interpretive focus**

In April of 1786, Joseph Nourse recorded the purchase of a mahogany bedstead “bought of Kipp[sic].” The next line in his accounts lists “Do [mahogany] Easy Chair for Mrs. Nourse” costing roughly a third more than the bedstead.<sup>416</sup> While he does not state that the chair was also purchased from Kip, it seems a logical conclusion, given that the principal cost in the easy chair, like that of the bedstead, was in its upholstery.

Modern scholarship has moved the easy chair from its typical Colonial Revival placement flanking the fireplace in the parlor, to a more appropriate period location in the bedchambers and private spaces in the home. In these rooms such chairs offered refuge, not only for the elderly and the ill, but also for new mothers and those simply wishing a bit of solitude.

Scholar Robert Trent, in looking at the range of individuals for whom an easy chair would have been a helpful piece of household furniture notes that such chairs were not just for the elderly. He also envisioned their use by “younger people... subject to debilitating illness, health problems and conditions.” Included among these would have been “frequent pregnancies for younger women and gout or arthritis for middle-aged men.” Such chairs would also have been employed by those “forced to sleep or doze sitting upright because of chronic pulmonary disorders, which were widespread before antibiotics or antihistamines were available to combat

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<sup>416</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 57 #3490-a, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

the common cold, bronchitis, pneumonia, tuberculosis, asthma, or allergies.”<sup>417</sup> The role of easy chairs in the lives of the infirm is underscored by the number that were fitted out as close stools.<sup>418</sup> Trent finds that this treatment, though found in earlier examples, is more common beginning about 1790.<sup>419</sup>

The purchase of an easy chair for Maria Nourse may well have been tied to the pregnancies of the early years of their marriage. The high price of the Nourse easy chair is suggestive of not only its costly textile coverings but also raises the possibility that the chair might have been fitted with a chamber pot. This function is one of the reasons that many easy chairs were provided with removable, often washable, slipcovers. Such a cover might also have been included in the purchase price. It is also likely that Maria Nourse, like Elizabeth Wirt who wrote to her husband of being “crouched... up in my easy chair determined to take a nap,”<sup>420</sup> simply used the chair as a place to retreat from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Furniture forms such as night tables, close stool chairs and bidets were expensive and rare, even in well-to-do homes. Only six (21%) of the 28 households inventories in the Early 19th Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database include an example from this category of household furniture. There is no direct evidence that the Nourse easy chair served as a close stool. Therefore, as the evidence for interpreting the easy chair in this manner is speculative, care should be taken in how the story is presented to the public.

### **1 Chamber Pot: Inclusion and type depends upon interpretation**

Even if the easy chair is fitted out as a close stool, it is possible that either Maria or Joseph might have had occasion to use a chamber pot. In addition to the basic bodily functions for which they were designed, chamber pots also were necessary for both more extreme and mundane needs. Nausea caused by infection or contaminated food, both real issues in an era that had yet to discover germs might give rise to the need for a receptacle into which to vomit. A

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<sup>417</sup> Robert F. Trent, “Mid-Atlantic Easy Chairs, 1770-1820: Old Questions and New Evidence” p. 202 in Luke Beckerdite, Ed, *American Furniture* (Hanover and London: Chipstone Foundation and University Press of New England, 1993).

<sup>418</sup> Close stool is a term used to describe a range of furniture forms, including chairs with a “built-in” or concealed chamber pot. See Robert F. Trent, “Mid-Atlantic Easy Chairs, 1770-1820: Old Questions and New Evidence”, p 205.

<sup>419</sup> Robert F. Trent, “Mid-Atlantic Easy Chairs, 1770-1820: Old Questions and New Evidence” p. 201-211 in Luke Beckerdite, Ed, *American Furniture* (Hanover and London: Chipstone Foundation and University Press of New England, 1993).

<sup>420</sup> Quoted in Elisabeth Garrett, *Americans at Home*, p. 124.

mid-18th-century satirical painting by Hogarth, “Francis Matthew Schutz in his bed” graphically illustrates a chamber pot being put to such use.<sup>421</sup> Purgative medicines, a common part of the period pharmacopoeia, might also require urgent and frequent use of these receptacles. And, in much less urgent circumstances, they might serve as a spit basin while brushing teeth.<sup>422</sup> It is also likely that if the easy chair had a decorative slip cover, there may have been times when neither of the Nourses wished to be bothered with uncovering the functional fittings of the chair.

Although chamber pots are often unlisted in inventories, it is probable that the Nourses owned a number of examples of this portable and very utilitarian type of ceramic. Four large chamber pots are listed among the items found in the hogshead of Queens Ware purchased by Joseph Nourse in 1784.<sup>423</sup> While it is highly unlikely that any of those original chamber pots survived to see use twenty plus years later at Dumbarton House, they are the type of everyday object that Joseph Nourse would have been likely to lump into the undifferentiated category of “Furniture” in his quarterly accounts.

It should be noted that chamber pots were probably not permanent features in bed chamber furnishings. Like candlesticks, they would have been removed for cleaning and then redistributed to occupied bed chambers before bed time. Young Sophie du Pont captured the hazards of both an unemptied chamber pot and the distributing of clean ones in her drawings of daily life. In one, “Pernicious effects of reeding tails” she records the unpleasant result of a overturned chamber pot caught in the “reed,” or pleated skirt of a young woman’s dress, and in her sketch “Jane McMullin and Mr McEwen” she shows the startled surprise of both Jane (perhaps a servant?) and the gentleman resting on the bed, as Jane entered to place a chamber pot in the room.<sup>424</sup>

### **1 Dressing Chest (a four drawer chest of drawers) with either a plain or fitted top drawer; Mahogany; Philadelphia, 1784**

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<sup>421</sup> See Charles Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration: Design and the Domestic Interior in England*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993), p.206-207, plate 201.

<sup>422</sup> See Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Hinsley, *Sophie du Pont A Young Lady in America: Sketches, Diaries & Letters 1823-1833*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), p. 53 “A morning scene in Vics room”.

<sup>423</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p.19, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia, Special Collections.

<sup>424</sup> See Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Hinsley, *Sophie du Pont A Young Lady in America: Sketches, Diaries & Letters 1823-1833*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), p. 50, 51.

As part of his initial purchases of furniture in preparation for his marriage, Joseph Nourse ordered a “Dressing Chest” from Philadelphia cabinetmaker J. Watkins who was described by Nourse as a joiner. Valued at £10, it cost more than the dining table also included in the purchase. The high value suggests that this item was a substantial piece of furniture rather than a portable dressing box. It was no doubt some form of chest of drawers, possibly with a fitted-out top drawer that could be used as a dressing table. Indeed, one need only to look at the English chest of drawers purchased by George Washington from Philip Bell in 1765 to see a superb example of this latter type. In his seminal work, *American Furniture: The Federal Period*, Charles Montgomery postulates that by the early 1790s Americans referred to four drawer chests of drawers as bureaus while the English appear to have used the term dressing chest. The piece supplied by cabinet maker Philip Bell for Washington was described as a “fine Mahy. Surpent. dressg Chest w’ a Slider”<sup>425</sup> The top drawer of the dressing chest served a dual function. It was fitted out with a pull out slider to be used both as a writing surface. Beneath the slider was a drawer holding a folding dressing glass and other fitted compartments to hold personal items such as jewelry and cosmetics. According to the 1772 Philadelphia cabinet makers’ price book, a fully fitted drawer, “a dressing drawer,” could add as much as £ 4 to the expense of a chest.<sup>426</sup> The 1796 editions of the *Philadelphia Cabinet & Chair-Makers’ Book of Prices* gave more detail about the prices for various options.<sup>427</sup> A looking glass alone could add £1 and for every fitted compartment such as those for a powder box, a pin cushion, a comb tray, and “a place for tooth brushes in a lift-out lined with tin foil” the cabinet maker increased the price.

Unfortunately, no wood types are named in the Watkins bill to use for cost comparisons. The 1772 price guide listed a “commode dressing table” as costing £14 in mahogany and, as noted above, would add another £4 for a dressing drawer. No prices for simple bureau or chest of drawers forms were provided. The 1796 price guide pushed the price for a commode bureau up to £16 before adding in the various specialized parts of the dressing drawer. However, the 1796 version does include a listing for a simple bureau in mahogany for £8 as the base line price. Options such as swelled brackets, quarter columns and “an upper drawer divided in two” could, of course, be added for an extra cost.

<sup>425</sup> Quoted in Ronald L. Hurst, *Furniture From “Neat and Plain” to Neoclassical* p. 155, in Wendell Garrett, Ed. *George Washington’s Mount Vernon* (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc. 1998).

<sup>426</sup> Alexandra Alevizatos Kirtley, *The 1772 Philadelphia Furniture Price Book An introduction and Guide*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2005), p.45.

<sup>427</sup> *Philadelphia Cabinet & Chair-Makers’ Book of Prices* (Philadelphia: Printed by Richard Folwell, 1796).

The date of Joseph Nourse's purchase falls exactly half way in between the publications. It is difficult to know how the war had affected the Philadelphia economy or how the expectations of craftsman and patron shaped the negotiation for the piece. Although such works were intended to "fix" prices, they were in reality simply guidelines to be adhered to by the craftsman on the honor system. Given Joseph Nourse's love of a bargain, it is impossible to just how much chest his £ 10 might have bought. While it seems unlikely that it would have included all the options of a fully fitted top drawer, it does not seem beyond the realm of possibility that it might have at least been divided into two sections or perhaps even have had a fitted looking glass.

**1 Desk, slant front form or desk and bookcase; Walnut or Mahogany; Philadelphia, New York or Georgetown, ca. 1784-1804**

As the series of August 1804 letters from Joseph Nourse to his absent wife illustrate, Joseph's desk was an important part of the furnishings of the first floor chamber. These letters, quoted in the introduction to this section, record the numerous occasions that Joseph Nourse made reference to working at his desk in "her" chamber. Its placement here, rather than in the breakfast room next door, speaks both to the nature of Joseph Nourse's business affairs, both public and private, and also to the use of the chamber as a retreat for Joseph and Maria where they might withdraw from the activities and inhabitants of the rest of the household.

Unfortunately, there is no reference in any of the known Nourse's accounts that details the source or form of this important piece of furniture. Both slant front and desk and bookcase forms that are believed to be of the correct period exist among items of furniture with possible Nourse family provenance. However, neither is in the Dumbarton House collection. The curatorial files record a slant front form in the collection at Weston, a house museum in Fauquier County, Virginia, which was owned by Nourse descendants from 1859 to 1959. There is also a reference to a desk and bookcase believed to have a James Nourse provenance that was thought to have been in the collection of the Jefferson County West Virginia Historical Society. Recent inquiries show that due to financial difficulties, the historical society sold its collection some time

ago, and there is no known record from sale. It is possible that further research into these two pieces might yield additional insight into the desk used by Joseph Nourse.<sup>428</sup>

### **1 Table: possibly a work table form, Mahogany, walnut or other, ca. 1790 - ca. 1805**

Period sources can be both wonderful and frustrating at the same time. A prime example is a tantalizing quote found in a letter from Charles Nourse to his mother written in May of 1805. Clearly having been commissioned to locate an item of clothing left behind when she traveled, he proudly wrote that “in the center drawer of the table, next the bed in your room were found the plaid silk with long sleeves....”<sup>429</sup> At first glance this seems an easy call. There was a table next to the bed. However, when one considers late-18th- and early-19th-century table forms, the question of a table form that could be described as having a center drawer becomes perplexing. Certainly, no form with a horizontal line of drawers that could be described as having a “center” drawer comes to light. If the “center” description represents a vertical placement, it is possible that he was referring to some type of lady’s work table. Although the vast majority of these tables that survive have only one or two drawers, there are extant examples that have three.

However, this assumption is problematic on two fronts. The first, that no purchase of a work table by Joseph Nourse has yet been found in the Nourse records, is of concern but not prohibitive. As discussed elsewhere in this report, the documentary record is somewhat fragmentary for certain periods and in those records that do survive, Joseph Nourse on more than one occasion simply listed the category “furniture” in his quarterly accounts. Certainly, these entries might cover an item like a laundry tub or in some that are for larger amounts, a small work table. The second issue lies in the object of Charles’s search. Clearly some piece of clothing with long sleeves, there is the question of how big it might have been and whether a dress or jacket, even one made of silk, could have been folded small enough to fit in a work table’s drawers. Unfortunately, Maria’s letter that might give more details has not been found.

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<sup>428</sup> Former curator Brian Lang recalls visiting the Jefferson County Historical Society and seeing a desk on display. However, recent conversations and emails with Susan Collins, Curator of the Jefferson County [West Virginia] Museum found no record of the desk. In an email with the author of this report, she wrote: “I have found out that in the early 1970’s the Jefferson County Historical Society gave up their headquarters here in Charles Town due to financial problems. At that time the contents of the house were sold and it seems highly likely that the desk and bookcase were included in that sale.” See notes in Dumbarton House Curatorial files.

<sup>429</sup> Letter, Charles Nourse to Maria Nourse, May 21, 1805, [Listed on the Dumbarton transcription as # 3940-A, 1805 Correspondence] the reference number marks it as a item from the Nourse Family Papers at the University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

In some senses, this recommendation is a bit of a place holder. Charles's letter makes it clear that some table form was next to the bed. A work table opens numerous interpretative possibilities and fulfills the spatial need for a piece of furniture in the required spot.

**1 Clothes Press; Walnut or Mahogany, England, New York or Chesapeake; If English, pre-1769; if American pre-1796**

The letters between Maria and Joseph often record bits of domestic life that are invaluable to modern scholars trying to understand daily life at Dumbarton House. Such is the letter from Maria to Joseph in July of 1796 in which she requests that "...I shall be obliged if you will take the trouble to take out of the drawer next the lowest of the press My [sprigd?] muslin habit and peticoat with the cuffs...." With this one sentence, she gives evidence of ownership of a piece of case furniture in which she stored clothing. She very probably followed period practice and used it to store other textiles as well. Referred to as clothes presses, they held folded clothing, the common 18th- and 19th-century method of storing clothing, and household linens by combining pullout trays, concealed behind panel doors, and drawers in a variety of configurations.

According to Hurst and Prown in *Southern Furniture 1680-1830*, the press, a form dating to the Middle Ages in England, did not begin to appear in American inventories until the late 17th century. By the middle of the 18th century, clothespresses had gained widespread popularity in the Chesapeake region but not in the northern colonies. The authors attribute this difference in acceptance of the form to the immigration of British craftsmen into receptive Southern colonies that lacked long-standing, established cabinet making traditions. They postulate that these craftsmen brought a continuing infusion of knowledge about British taste and furniture forms, which their customers readily adopted. They note, however, that, unlike the case in most northern colonies, New York cabinet makers and their patrons seem to have taken to this form, much like their Chesapeake contemporaries.<sup>430</sup>

The origin of the Nourse clothespress, like many of the pieces that would have been in the house, is subject to conjecture. According to Maria Catharine Nourse Lyle in her 1897 book, *James Nourse and His Descendants*, at least two presses, one holding wearing apparel and one

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<sup>430</sup> Ronald Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830*, p.386-389; See also Berry B. Tracy, *Federal Furniture and Decorative Arts at Boscobel*, (New York: Boscobel Restoration Inc, and Harry N. Abrams, Inc, p. 92-93, 98-99.



blankets, were among the furnishings brought from England by James Nourse in 1769.<sup>431</sup> James's Annapolis probate inventory does not include this form by name but does list a mahogany cupboard valued at five shillings. Thus far, no record of a sale of James Nourse's Annapolis estate has been found to provide evidence as to the disposition of his household furnishings. However, both the inventory and estate sale records of Piedmont, James Nourse's house in what was then Berkeley County, Virginia, do survive. Among the items listed in the inventory but not appearing in the sale listings was "1 large Press painted" valued at three pounds. There is no way to know if the missing press simply failed to sell or if it was taken away before the sale. If it had been part of the sale and sold to Joseph Nourse, a clear record of the transaction would have been included in the court records, as shown by Joseph's purchase of a horse. If Joseph's press did not come from James's estate, the question of origin must turn to other possibilities.

No such piece is listed among the items of furniture recorded in Joseph Nourse's surviving quarterly accounts; however, as previously noted, there are a number of instances in which he simply lists "Furniture" as a category. There are also gaps in the manuscript record. As the form was apparently not popular in Philadelphia, it is tempting to assume that the piece was acquired between 1785 and 1790 while the Nourses lived in New York. Additional weight is given to this hypothesis by the survival of a ca. 1790 New York clothespress currently on loan to Dumbarton by a family descendent.

In addition to the possibilities outlined above, it is also important to consider a third alternative. Joseph and Maria might have owned a regionally made press, perhaps acquired through their parents' connections to the area.

The placement of such a case piece within the house is also open to question. Unfortunately, Maria's letter does not provide any insights. Among the examples that appear in the Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database, the majority are found in bedchambers, though two are found in a passage or entry. While it is likely that the Nourses' press was located in a bedchamber, if space was a problem, it is possible that it was placed in an upstairs chamber or in the upstairs passage. However, if Maria continued to store her personal clothing in the clothespress, or if she used it as a place to safeguard household stores, then it was most likely part of the furnishings of her first floor chamber.

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<sup>431</sup> Maria Catharine Nourse Lyle, *James Nourse and His Descendants*, (Lexington, Ky: Self Published, 1897) p.10.

# **1 Wash Stand: Walnut or Mahogany, Philadelphia, New York, Georgetown/D.C. 1784-1804; Ceramic Wash basin and pitcher or bottle, ca. 1784-1804**

By the third quarter of the 18th century, wash or basin stands had begun to supplement toilet or dressing tables as a necessary component for personal hygiene. Indeed, this is the pattern seen in the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*. In that study the majority of the occurrences in Chesapeake inventories occur after 1780.<sup>432</sup> As American society became more concerned about issues of gentility, personal cleanliness became increasingly important. By the end of the first quarter of the 19th century, domestic encyclopedias and guides to polite behavior began to advocate weekly (if not more often) ablutions as an aid not only to genteel living but also to health.<sup>433</sup>

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Joseph Nourse was not averse to bathing. In an undated letter to his wife he notes that “yesterday was also very warm, but my shower bath, and general good Health (God be praised for it) enabled me to support the Heat I believe as well as anybody.”<sup>434</sup> While neither the form of the shower bath nor its location can be determined, this reference is clear evidence that Joseph Nourse and the cooling and health benefits of water were well acquainted.

This letter, coupled with the very ubiquitousness of the wash stand form among the households in Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database, supports the inclusion of a washstand with its appropriate accompanying basin and water container among the furnishings of the first floor chamber. Unfortunately there are no clues among the known Nourse papers to suggest when or where such a form might have been purchased.

As for the ceramic basin, with its accompanying water container, several possibilities present themselves. Among the forms contained in the hogshead of creamware purchased by Joseph Nourse at the time of his marriage were “12 large hand basons” and “4 large bottles.”<sup>435</sup> Like the chamber pots in the same listing, these forms were hygiene, not food related. It is unlikely, though not impossible, for one or more of these items to have survived, however their

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<sup>432</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, Vol. 2, p. 132.

<sup>433</sup> Elisabeth Garrett, *Americans at Home*, p. 130-131.

<sup>434</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, undated, #G 1394, Folder 16 Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections.

<sup>435</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p.19, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia, Special Collections.

inclusion in the purchase illustrates a genteel concern on the part of the Nourses for the washing of at least face and hands. The Early 19th-Century Washington Database shows 20 (71%) of the households in the study having these items, usually described as basins and pitchers, clearly documenting that the bottle form, though still available from manufacturers, had given way to handled pitchers in popularity. Only in Foxall<sup>24</sup> is any description given. His are described as “blue.”

These everyday items were available in a wide range of ceramic types from inexpensive earthenwares to fine porcelain. However, given that the Nourses purchased creamware in at least one instance, this type of ceramic—creamware or the slightly later pearlware—seem the most likely choice. The ca.1803/4 trade catalog of “SUNDRY ARTICLES of QUEENS or CREAM-COLOURED EARTHENWARE” made at the Don Pottery in the Yorkshire region of England shows a range of examples of such utilitarian wares, some completely plain and others in scalloped or shell-edged designs.<sup>436</sup>

### **1-2 Looking Glasses, Dressing Glass or Hanging Form; Mahogany; England, Philadelphia, New York, Georgetown/D.C. 1784-1804**

The final number and type of looking glasses for this room depends in part upon whether the dressing chest has a fitted looking glass in the top drawer. If that is the case, then one other glass, a hanging glass should be included. If the dressing chest is not fitted with a glass, then two glasses are appropriate for the room with one a dressing form placed on top of the chest. The hanging glass should be used in conjunction with the wash stand.

### **2-3 Side Chairs & possibly 1 arm chair; Walnut, Mahogany, Painted; Upholstered Seats, Cane with cushions, Windsor; Philadelphia, New York, Georgetown/D.C., 1784-1805**

An easy chair is already recommended as part of the furniture for this chamber, but what of other seating furniture? As discussed in the Chapter XII, chairs were not universal in bed chambers. Even when they were included among the furnishings, they were usually older, thus of lesser value, and not necessarily matching.

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<sup>436</sup> John D. Griffin, *The Don Pottery 1801-1893*, (Dorchester, England: Dorchester Museum Service, 2001), p.84-86, designs 188-196.

The primary source material provides evidence that there was at least one chair besides the easy chair in the first floor chamber. After all, Joseph Nourse wrote of “sitting” at his desk in this room. Period practices did not designate any particular type of chair for use at a desk. It is possible that Joseph Nourse had an arm chair or a Windsor from one of the earlier purchases, or his preference may have been for a side chair which have taken up less room and been easily movable.

In addition to a chair for the desk, there were no doubt several other chairs included in the furnishings of this room. Maria Nourse would certainly have wanted a place for “visitors,” whether family members or close friends to sit. The average number of chairs in bedchambers in the 19th-century Washington, D.C. Probate Database is 4.8. However, fewer chairs are recommended here out of concern for space, both from a period perspective and from the practical necessity of being able to allow tours into the room.

**1 Pair Andirons, 1 set shovel and tongs; Brass, Steel and Brass, or Iron; England, Philadelphia, New York, or Georgetown/D.C., 1784-1804**

Although it is clear from primary sources that not all bedchambers were heated even if they included a fireplace, a letter from Joseph Nourse to son Charles in April of 1804 shows that Maria Nourse was not one of those enduring a cold bed chamber. In detailing the whereabouts of various members of the household, he began by noting that “Your Mother... is now sitting at her chamber fire.”<sup>437</sup> That the Nourses preferred burning wood rather than the coal used by many of their urban neighbors is clear from a survey of Joseph Nourse’s quarterly accounts. Thus andirons are recommended here as they are throughout the house. However, although this is considered the best chamber in the house, the andirons would not have been the best or most fashionable pair to be found in the house. The fire tools would perhaps not been en suite with the andirons but probably would have matched each other since shovels and tongs are most often paired together in period sources.

**Lighting:**

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<sup>437</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Charles Nourse, April 4, 1808, MdHR M 3381-102, Rosa Miller Collection of Nourse Family Papers, #G 1394-15, Folder 14, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections.

No candlesticks or lamps are recommended as part of the permanent furnishings of this room. If an interpretive scenario that calls for lighting is desired, brass candlesticks, ca. 1784-1800, should be used. On the assumption that candles were used as needed in both the breakfast room and mother's room, a pair of snuffers to trim wicks should be shared between the two rooms as part of the miscellaneous furnishings of these rooms.

**1 Pair Snuffers and Tray; Brass, Polished Steel or Silver Plate; England or Europe, ca. 1800**

A pair of scissor-like candle snuffers would have been considered a necessity in a well-to-do genteel household of the period. In the early 19th century, wicking was not self consuming and the need to trim (pinch off) the charred wick was part of the process of lighting a house with candles, no matter whether they were tallow, beeswax, or spermaceti. Snuffers, with perhaps a tray or stand to hold them, were among the items that might be left out on a table or put away in a closet or drawer when not in use. They are also the type of small miscellaneous item that would have been easily overlooked when inventories were taken, especially if they were tucked out of sight or removed to the kitchen, probably for cleaning, like those in Whann<sup>13</sup>. Twenty of the 28 households in the Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database included snuffers in their inventory listings. Not quite two-thirds (60%) of those homes having this form owned multiple examples. Six of the households have snuffers described as "plated" and three include examples described as "steel." Perhaps most interesting is Chndlr<sup>25</sup> who struck the balance between durability and fashion with two examples of a plated tray coupled with steel snuffers, one set found in the drawing room and one in the breakfast room.

Under the heading of "Furniture &c" in his subordinate account for the first eight months of 1799, Joseph Nourse recorded "snuffers" valued at one dollar.<sup>438</sup> Much more costly was the pair of snuffers and tray purchased at auction in 1800 for which he paid seven dollars.<sup>439</sup> This sum seems quite substantial, particularly when compared to other items on the list, such as a silver waiter costing six dollars or a tea pot for seven dollars. The high price suggests that they

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<sup>438</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 116, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>439</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

were either made from a more expensive material such as silver plate,<sup>440</sup> or that they were in some way more elaborate in their ornamentation or design. This pair would certainly have been elegant enough to be left out as part of the furnishing in either the drawing room or dining room. The pair costing a dollar would have been simpler, perhaps without a tray or stand, and probably made from brass or perhaps steel. This snuffer would be an appropriate choice for sharing between the breakfast room and mother's room.

### **Wallpaper: Period (ca. 1804) and room appropriate reproduction wallpaper and border**

The numerous references to wallpaper among Joseph Nourse's letters and accounts clearly indicate a family preference for this type of household decoration. Following the move to Georgetown, this family predilection for wallpaper surfaces, first in an entry for \$10 spent for "papering a room" in July 1803.<sup>441</sup> No further detail was given but the assumption is that this was for the house in which the family lived on P Street prior to moving to Dumbarton House. Fortunately the records concerning Dumbarton House are somewhat more specific. The Nourse's daughter Anna Maria Josepha, then in Philadelphia, was commissioned to buy wall paper for the new house. She wrote to her father that "... I intend doing my very best about the paper, I dare say I can get papers as handsome as the light or buff light papers with Dark bordering is at present the prevailing fashion -- the effect is very pretty and they have the advantage of lighting remarkably well...."<sup>442</sup> Additional information is found in a letter from Joseph Nourse to his daughter in which he anticipates the arrival of "the paper you are to send for four Rooms."<sup>443</sup> His accounts at the end of 1804 record an expenditure of \$52.12 for "Paper for Rooms."<sup>444</sup> No further clues survive as to the appearance of the paper nor for which "four" rooms it was intended. However, the primary source materials show that wall paper was an important element in the decorations of Dumbarton House.

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<sup>440</sup> Joseph Nourse's failure to list these objects by weight would seem to rule out the possibility that they were silver, as he was careful to do with two other items in the account.

<sup>441</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, 1778-1803 p.274, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>442</sup> Letter, Daughter Anna Maria Josepha Nourse to Maria Nourse, no date [1804?] Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>443</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Anna Maria Josepha Nourse, June 7, 1804, M 3381-102, # G 1394, Folder 11, Rosa Miller Collection, Maryland State Archives, Special Collections. See also the wallpaper section in Chapter five of this report for a discussion of Thomas Hurley, the wallpaper manufacturer from whom Joseph Nourse purchased this papers.

<sup>444</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 318 # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

Paint consultant Matthew Mosca, in his 1998 “Report on the Historic Finishes, from samples collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms” notes that “a number of samples... show glue size on the earliest surviving generation of wall plaster.” This evidence, glue size being a common finish under wallpaper, coupled with the fact that very few samples of paint finishes were found on the earliest layer of plaster led Mosca to recommend wallpaper for the hall and stair hall, the parlor, the dining room, the breakfast room and mother’s room. His findings of evidence for wallpaper in all of the first floor spaces suggests that either Joseph Nourse purchased wallpaper for the fifth first floor space sometime after moving into Dumbarton House in 1804, or that perhaps one of the rooms was already papered prior to their occupancy of the house.<sup>445</sup>

In selecting reproduction wallpapers and borders to use in the first floor rooms at Dumbarton House, attention should be paid to period aesthetics, particularly to what types of papers were considered appropriate for specific rooms. Factors in these fashions included the scale and motifs of the pattern as well the colors and finishes of the overall design. Care must be taken to select papers typical of early 19th-century tastes and fashions and not to impose 21st-century preferences.

### **Window Curtains, Modern Reproduction, ca. 1804-5**

Although window curtains, even in bed chambers, were not considered a necessity in this time period, the windows of best bed chambers were often hung with curtains that were *en suite* with the bed hangings. The first floor placement of this chamber looking out over the garden also makes it a likely candidate for window curtains. Also supporting this recommendation is the fact that, as with other types of furnishing textiles, surviving Nourse primary sources demonstrate a preference for window curtains.

The choice of fabric and, to some degree, style for these curtains will depend upon the interpretive decision made about the bed hangings. If the bed curtains are to represent a set newly made to coincide with the move to Dumbarton House, then the window curtains should be made to appear *en suite*. However, if the interpretive choice is to furnish the bed with hangings from an earlier period, then the curtains might be fabricated to suggest reused or remade window

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<sup>445</sup> Matthew Mosca, “A Report on the Historic Finishes, From Samples Collected in the Hall, and the Principal First Floor Rooms,” Conducted at the request of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, March 24, 1998, Curatorial Files, Dumbarton House.

curtains. Regardless of which interpretive choice is made, the bed and window curtains should be based on period examples both as to construction and aesthetics. Most bed chamber curtains, although ornamented with decorative edging tapes or fringes were unlikely to have elaborate drapery swags or overly elaborate trims. Surviving period curtains,<sup>446</sup> together with primary documentation, offer glimpses of treatments considered suitable for bed chambers.

### **Carpet, Modern Reproduction; Bedside or whole room, and a hearth rug. ca. 1800-1810**

As discussed in the second floor bed chamber section, Chapter XII., carpets were found in at least one bed chamber in 80% of the households analyzed for this report. From the surviving Nourse source materials, it is obvious that Joseph Nourse and his family appreciated both the physical and visual warmth supplied by carpeted floors. Thus, the recommendation for carpeting for the first floor chamber seems a logical one. They might have chosen either bed side carpet—i.e. strips of carpet used beside the bed, or carpeting which covered most if not all of the floor in the bed chamber. That this chamber was probably used as a private retreat by Joseph and Maria might weight the argument in favor of a room sized carpet, while at the same time suggesting that a less expensive type of carpet or perhaps a carpet brought from their Georgetown home might be used. This later suggestion is not meant to imply that this carpeting would have been visibly worn or threadbare, but rather that it might not be an exact fit to the room, thus allowing visitors to be introduced to the many moves that characterized the Nourse family's life. Since the primary source material clearly states that the fireplace in this chamber was used and the tone of the letter suggests that this was probably a regular occurrence, a hearth rug should be placed in front of the fireplace.

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<sup>446</sup> See Abbott Lowell Cummings, *Bed Hangings A Treatise on Fabrics and Styles in the Curtaining of Beds, 1650-1850*, (Boston: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1994 reprint), Edward S. Cooke, Jr. Ed. *Upholstery in America & Europe from the Seventeenth Century to World War I*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co. A Barra Foundation Book, 1987) and the introductions to both of the works by Florence Montgomery cited in the bibliography.



### **CHAMBERS: I SHALL... RETIRE TO MY SLUMBERS**

In August of 1804, Joseph Nourse writing to the absent Maria reported that his friend Mr. Wiley had lent him “a first rate telescope” through which they had admired the “Satellites of Jupiter” among other astronomical wonders. He continued with a description of his dinner which consisted of eggs, fried bacon, cabbage, potatoes, corn, an apple dumpling and some rice – finding it “as good a dinner as I would ever wish to sit down to.” Domestic news of various sorts followed, detailing the arrival of several bags of apples being dealt with by the cook and the preparation of the garden for putting in turnips. Included among this telling of his day was the comment that “the sun is declining, and after a little tea or milk I shall (after having again viewed the little star rolling round the great Jupiter) retire to my slumbers.” Joseph Nourse detailed what he saw through the telescope, what he ate for dinner, which servant had performed which chores, and even what he planned to drink but gave no information about the chamber in which he would soon retire to his “slumbers.”

Such lack of detail about bed chambers is not uncommon in period sources. At first glance this seems of little consequence. After all, sleeping is a necessary part of everyday life. How different can a period bed chamber be? Modern assumptions about bed chambers include fixed ideas about “ownership” of bed rooms. Specific rooms are assigned to specific individuals. Cultural norms and glossy shelter magazines provide guidance as to how they should be furnished, i.e. what furniture forms should be included and how it should be arranged in the room. Gender specific decorative schemes often dominate the decor of the bedrooms of boys and girls and even the decoration of bed rooms of adults are often intended to be seen as masculine or feminine, depending upon color, pattern, and furniture choices. However, is it safe to assume that these same expectations hold true for bedrooms in early 19th-century homes? Indeed, the primary source material that relates to late 18th and early 19th century bed chambers suggests that a rethinking of most of these assumptions is in order.

Most individuals in a family, especially children, did not have their own rooms. The concept of “my” room did not become broadly entrenched until sometime in the mid to late decades of the 19th century. Even if someone had a room that they used on a regular basis, this sense of proprietorship could be upset without much warning.

Sleeping arrangements were adjusted, sometimes on a daily basis, to accommodate the circumstances of the moment. Domestic upheavals of all types, be they the arrival of unexpected

guests, the need to care for someone who was ill, or the lying-in of a mother after the birth of a child, could find virtually anyone in the household gathering up belongings and marching off to find a spot to lay their head for the night. Sophie du Pont, in her charming sketchbook dating from the 1820s and 30s, chronicled just such an evening at her family home in Delaware. She described the scene in a letter to her brother Henry and recorded the event in a light hearted sketch she entitled “The Evening Parade”:

Charlotte and I are quite in despair; because this morning we had to make a grand movement from our apartment the blue room, to the passage room, which was a vast deal of trouble! when lo! This afternoon who should arrive but Mr. Thomas Haven from Philad<sup>a</sup>! So we are obliged once more to shift our quarters, march, with our baggage & accoutrements into Vics room & encamp there.<sup>447</sup>

However, this sometimes nightly “parade” was not always seen as a bad thing. In 1787, Virginian Lucinda Lee, in a journal kept while traveling to visit relatives recorded many occasions when she shared a room quite happily. In a November 10th entry, she wrote that, “Nancy sleeps upstairs to-night with her Sister Pinkard. Milly, Miss Leland, and myself have the nursery [sic] to ourselves. We want Nancy very much, but she is obliged to sleep up stairs.” In another entry, she described an evening of fun and flirting that culminated with a veritable feast – bacon and beef, sago cream, apple pie and even oysters, eaten in bed. She concluded by noting that “We slept in the old Lady’s room too, and she sat laughing fit to kill herself at us.”<sup>448</sup> Even in an upper class household, the only person likely to have had a room that was all but permanently designated as hers was the mistress of the household. This period practice is discussed in detail in Chapter eleven – Mother’s Room.

What about other bed chambers in upper-class households? Period practice, as seen in the Sophie du Pont quote above and in numerous probate inventories, usually identify them by the color predominant in their decorative scheme, i.e. blue, green, white, etc. or by location -- the chamber over the dining room, the N.W. chamber, etcetera. The Washington inventories studied also show a tendency on the part of the inventory taker to simply number the rooms, although it seems unlikely that those people living in the house referred to their bed chambers in this

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<sup>447</sup> Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Kinsley, *Sophie du Pont, A Young Lady in America*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), p. 55

<sup>448</sup> Lucinda Lee, *Journal of a Young Lady of Virginia* (Baltimore, Md.: John Murphy and Company for the Lee Memorial Association of Richmond, 1871), p. 52, 42-43 Note: this published version of the journal mistakenly dates the original journal to 1782 instead of the correct 1787

manner. And while scholars of architectural and decorative finishes do discern levels of hierarchy in woodwork or choices of wallpaper patterns that seem to be typical of secondary chambers, there is nothing to suggest that decorations were gender specific. Neither color nor furnishing forms seem to have been gender oriented. While modern usage would automatically assume that a dressing table was a feminine form, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, dressing tables were used by both men and women. Even those examples with elaborate toilet table covers would have been considered gender neutral. To modern eyes, descriptions that included yards of gathered white fabric seem to bespeak a feminine sensibility. However, young Thomas Shippen while traveling to visit relatives in Virginia in 1783, though suitably impressed with the sumptuousness of the furnishing of the room assigned to him seemed pleased rather than taken aback that his toilet table which stood “under a gilt framed looking glass” was covered with “a finely worked muslin.”<sup>449</sup>

A growing concern with hygiene and the proper presentation of one’s person in a genteel society meant that furnishings related to personal grooming were considered essential in many well furnished chambers.<sup>450</sup> Indeed, even in the Early Federal Washington Inventory Database which covers a period when wash stands were beginning to supplant dressing tables, just over 80% of the households still have tables that either by description or context were used as dressing tables.

If having a room of one’s own was rare, and gender was not an issue in room use, was anything about a bed chamber a fixed certainty? Surely the bedstead itself could be counted upon to remain firmly in place. Alas, it wasn’t so. Bedsteads could be and often were disassembled or moved about the chamber. Louisa Catherine Adams in a diary entry noted that included among her preparations for a ball was “taking down bed and furniture of every description.” Her words imply that she was dismantling a first floor chamber in order to have enough room for her 300 guests.<sup>451</sup> Period references also speak of the taking apart of bedsteads to allow them and the chambers in which they stood to be thoroughly scrubbed and scalded in a

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<sup>449</sup> Thomas Lee Shippen to Dr. jWilliam Shippen, Jr., 30 December 1783, Thomas Lee Shippen Papers, MssD, Library of Congress

<sup>450</sup> See Richard L. Bushman and Claudia L. Bushman, “The Early History of Cleanliness In America”, p 1213-1238, in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 74, No.4, March 1988; and Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home The American Family 1750-1870*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1990), p 130-137 for a fuller discussion of this cultural development.

<sup>451</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, Diary entry January 17, 1820, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Microfilm edition, Reel 265

never ending battle against vermin such as fleas and bed bugs.<sup>452</sup> Elizabeth Wirt, wife of Attorney General William Wirt, wrote to him while he was away on business of her struggles with vermin. “I am also busied in taking down all the bedsteads in the nursery – ...I shall be... all the week in cleaning and whitewashing...” Her next day’s letter continued the saga, “I have sent out my nursery bedsteads to be painted green...” no doubt prompted by the period belief that the pigments in the paint which were derived from poisonous substances would deter the return of the dreaded fleas and bed bugs.<sup>453</sup>

Even furniture placement within a room was often not as one might expect today and even that was subject to change. Bedstead location, in particular, apparently did not always conform to modern expectation. A memoir describing a minister’s bed chamber in early 19th-century Scotland, noted that, “There was no other furniture in the room but a four post bed with dark green Moreen Curtains, which was in a corner of the room behind the door and against the wall.”<sup>454</sup> Period drawings of proposed plans for Prospect Hill, an early 19th-century house in Spotsylvania County Virginia, include fascinating and extremely rare possible arrangements of bedsteads in the chambers of the house. Included are numerous plans showing two or more bedsteads in a room, bedsteads pushed into corners, bedsteads placed with the foot of the bed in front of windows, and bedsteads placed presumably foot to foot with the head of one bedstead against the wall and the other placed out into the room.<sup>455</sup> While many of these placements would seem odd today, such positioning of bedsteads was simply an example of the period of the practice of moving furniture to suit the needs of the room’s occupants. Joseph Nourse’s own Mother, Sarah Nourse, in her diary in September of 1782 wrote that despite the heat she “slep tolerable, from haveg [the] bedstead [in] the middle of the room....” The next night, it was she, not the bedstead that moved. She recorded that “slep wth. window up & on the foot of the bed the forepart of the night.”<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Jane Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home 1760-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p.126

<sup>453</sup> Elizabeth Wirt to Wiliam Wirt, September 22 and 23, 18??, Wirt Family Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Microfilm Reel 3.

<sup>454</sup> Naomi Tarrant, *Going to Bed: Scotland’s Past in Action*, (Edinburgh, Scotland; NMS Publishing Limited, 1998), p.10

<sup>455</sup> Check with Robert Leath for citation

<sup>456</sup> Sarah Nourse Diary, 1781-1783, September 10 and 11, 1782. Nourse & Morris Family Papers, UVA-Alderman Library, Acct # 3490-b

Anecdotal materials are very useful in providing insights into behavior patterns. They also can provide descriptive information about the appearance of specific items in individual bed chambers. However, it is difficult to know from these somewhat scattered references just how typical these objects were in the larger population. It is here that the Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database comes into play. By looking at a relatively large sample of bed chambers, it is possible to develop a framework upon which to hang the information found in anecdotal and other primary source materials.

The inventories of 22 of the 28 households have rooms that can clearly be identified as bed chambers. In most cases, either name, number, or page organization provide evidence as to how the inventory listings divide into separate room arrangements. In one inventory, Key15, the order of the furnishings offered adequate clues as to where the room furnishings divided. The houses represented by these inventories range in size from one household with eight bed chambers down to two houses with only a single chamber each, for a total of 79 bed chambers. The statistical divisions discussed below represent the breakdown by both households and bed chambers – i.e. a particular object was found among the furnishings of “X” number of households or that an object occurred in “X” percentage of the total 79 chambers identified.

To state the obvious, all of the bed chambers studied contain at least one bedstead. In fact, the majority of the bed chambers were furnished with only one bedstead, although more than half of the households also had bed chambers that included multiple bedsteads. This marked pattern of one bedstead to a chamber represents a transition from 18th-century practice when many more chambers would have been furnished with two or more beds. Garrett, in her discussion of bed chamber furnishings across a wide span of time stated that “Early household inventories suggest that there was usually only one bed in the best bed chamber (although secondary chambers might well be crowded with more).”<sup>457</sup>

While counting total bedsteads (106) is relatively straightforward, the descriptions make it somewhat more difficult to determine the style of each bedstead. Most households seem to have a mixture of forms – high post, low post, cot or trundle. All but two of the households had at least one example that could be assumed to be a high post or tent form. In inventories, these forms are often determined by the inclusion of bed curtains as part of their description.

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<sup>457</sup> Elisabeth Garrett, *At Home: The American Family 1750-1870*, p. 120

What else was found in Washington bed chambers? Dressing tables and wash stands have already been briefly touched upon. Personal hygiene was clearly important in each of the 22 households, as all owned at least one wash stand intended to hold a basin and pitcher. Dressing tables, though being supplanted by wash stands, also continued to be popular. Eighteen of the inventories included a form that was assumed to be a dressing or toilet table. However, despite these high numbers, approximately one third of the tabulated 79 chambers included neither piece of furniture. Does this mean that these rooms were unoccupied or does it simply mean that those sleeping in them did their washing up and dressing in another chamber? Perhaps the pattern in those homes was like that in the du Pont household. Mornings saw the young people in Sophie du Pont's home gather in eldest sister Victorine's bed chamber where they brushed their teeth, washed up, and got dressed before assembling for breakfast.<sup>458</sup> Could it be that the four inventories which listed basins and pitchers without an accompanying wash stand hint at a mobility for these basic necessities not previously considered? Is it possible that basins and water pitchers were taken in and out of rooms and placed on any flat surface available rather than having a specialized furniture form? Indeed, in two of the bed chambers listed for Wharton<sup>18</sup>, the only flat surface upon which to place the wash basins and water pitchers would appear to have been the floor.

Bed chambers were considered an appropriate place to take care of personal hygiene. This cultural norm is evidenced by the inclusion of washstands in 100% of the 22 households in the bed chamber study group, with 86% of the households having more than one example. However, only 22% had a washstand in every chamber. When broken down by bed chambers rather than household, 46 of 79 chambers (58%) in the study included this form. Just over three quarters of the households included at least one washstand that had the basin and pitcher listed with the furniture form. Interestingly, four households have at least one chamber where the bowl and pitcher were listed without a wash stand form appearing among the room's furnishings.

Dressing tables, though beginning to fall from favor, were still found in 81% of the households in the study. However, only 13% of households had a dressing table form for every chamber. The count for dressing tables included those tables specifically described as dressing or toilet tables. The count also included references to "pine" tables listed without other qualifiers

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<sup>458</sup> Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Hinsley, *Sophie du Pont: A Young Lady in America*, p. 53 "A Morning scene in Vics room"

because many dressing tables were made from inexpensive woods and then covered with some form of decorative toilet table cover. An explicit example is found in Forrest06 that records a “Pine dressing Table” valued at just 50 cents in one of the upstairs bed chambers. Less specific, but offering an example of the importance of context, is the listing for a pine table, also valued at 50 cents, which follows the entry for a dressing glass, valued at \$8.00 in Key15. In examining the numbers per bed chamber rather than households, 39% (31 chambers) included this form.

Interestingly, slightly more than a third (27) of the bed chambers studied included examples of both wash stands and dressing tables, a combination found in just over 80% of the households examined. It should be noted, however, that the same number of the chambers in the study contained neither a dressing table nor a wash stand.

Accompanying this concern for cleaner and more genteel appearance was an understanding that a looking glass was an essential element in one’s dressing routine. Looking glasses were found in at least one chamber per household in 21 of the 22 households with identified bed chambers. Sixty-eight percent of the bed chambers have some form of looking glass. Of those listed, just over half are described as dressing or toilet forms. In six households in the database, the inventories contain bed chambers with multiple looking glasses in one or more rooms. Of those six households, four include listings that reflect both a dressing glass and what is likely some type of wall mounted glass. It should be noted here that period illustrations sometimes show small framed looking glasses leaning against a window frame or propped up on a mantel. An example of this type of practice is seen in a watercolor by English school girl Diana Sperling which depicts two ladies getting dressed. Entitled “Mrs Van murdering a spider, September 10th 1816” it shows one woman calmly looking in a small looking glass propped in the window while the other bravely reaches out with her foot to kill a spider that is climbing the wall.<sup>459</sup>

Forms that provided for the storage of clothing and household linens were another typical feature of bed chambers. Some form of storage furniture was found in 65% of the 79 bed chambers analyzed. Bureaus and chests of drawers (probably different names for similar furniture forms) were the most common examples of storage furniture, occurring in just over 90% of the households included. This percentage shows an almost 40% increase over the

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<sup>459</sup> Gordon Minay, Text, Elizabeth Longford, Foreword, *Mrs Hurst Dancing & Other Scenes from Regency Life 181-1823* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1981), plate 28

findings tabulated for Chesapeake households in the third quarter of the 18th century.<sup>460</sup> Fifteen of the 22 (68%) Washington households studied owned more than one example of this form. Eight of the study group had clothes presses or wardrobes. Nine households included a desk or a bookcase form among their bed chamber furnishings and nine listed trunks among the storage forms kept in the household bed chambers.

Was there any place to sit other than on the bed in these chambers? The answer is yes and no. Not all bed chambers contained chairs. Indeed, two households in the database show no seating forms at all in any of their bed chambers.<sup>461</sup> However, even homeowners who did place chairs in bed chambers apparently did not see them as essential to the comfort of the occupant or occupants of every chamber. Only 54 (68%) of the 79 chambers studied included some form of seating furniture. Among those having seating, 15 households have examples of easy chairs in one chamber.<sup>462</sup>

Slightly more than half of the 79 chambers had no heating related furnishings of any type, although 21 of 22 households did have heating equipment in at least one chamber. Perhaps heat was not considered a necessity in many bed chambers because most individuals shared their beds with others. Young Robert Wirt wrote to his father in January of 1816 that “. . . Mr. Uphor [perhaps a tutor?] and myself sleep very well together without any fire in the room and he gets up and throws the covers down to the foot of the bed so I may not cover myself again, and so makes me get up and dress in the cold, but this morning I ran down stairs to the fire [in the] dineing room and drest.”<sup>463</sup> It was not only the young who looked to a bed mate for warmth. George Mason, a widower at the time of a February 1780 letter, noted that “this cold weather has set all of the young Folks to providing Bedfellows... I wish I knew where to get a good one myself; for I find cold Sheets extreamly disagreeable.”<sup>464</sup>

Lighting devices were found in only six of 79 bed chambers inventoried. This low number no doubt reflects the period practice of removing candlesticks and later lamps to the

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<sup>460</sup> *The Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, p. 160.

<sup>461</sup> It should be noted that the inventory of Wshgtn21 includes no chairs any where in the household. The most likely reason for this omission is a recording error at the time the inventory was taken or a distribution of the chairs prior to the inventory being taken.

<sup>462</sup> See the discussion of the easy chair in the “Mother’s Chamber” section of this report for a discussion of the use of easy chairs in private vs. public spaces in a home.

<sup>463</sup> Letter, Robert Wirt to William Wirt, January 14, 1816, William Wirt Papers, Microfilm Edition, Roll 3, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>464</sup> Rutland, ed. *The Papers of George Mason*, vol. 2, p 618



kitchen or scullery for cleaning during the day. Considered both a fire hazard and a waste of expensive household stores, candles were not left burning in unoccupied bed chambers. In 1809, Sarah Ridg found herself the victim of this practice. She noted in her diary that:

The evening passed much as usual. Mary made a motion to go to bed, I seconded it snuffing out the candle, and it unfortunately happened to be the only one burning in the house. The family, all but ourselves, were asleep, the fire in the kitchen had gone out, and were compelled to go to bed in the dark as well as we could. We were not many minutes making preparations, and I concluded that it would be better if someone would always extinguish our lights, as it was the cause of our being so expeditious.<sup>465</sup>

How were these chambers decorated? Roughly one third of the 79 chambers show some type of window treatment. The relatively low number undoubtedly reflects to some degree the eight households in the group that had no chambers with window curtains. Carpeting is found more often, listed in just under half the chambers studied. Descriptions of the carpeting are limited. There are three references to bed or bedside carpets, three to floor cloths, two to Scotch carpet and one each to a Wilton carpet and a straw carpet. Framed art work or decorative items displayed upon mantels are found in only 21 of the 79 rooms studied, with prints being the most commonly listed type of decoration. While the subject matter of most prints is not given, a few inventories are more descriptive. One of the chambers in Hellen15 contained a small print of a hyacinth in a gilt frame. Wiley19's "front bed room" included a print of "Perry's Victory." Dghrty22 lists a veritable gallery of prints including genre scenes of the "inside and outside of ale houses," a "Painting of old Daniel Boone" and a plan of the City of Washington, raising the issue of whether some of them might have been stored in the chamber rather than being a regular part of the decor.

Having looked at period attitudes and expectations about sleeping practices and at statistical information about bed chamber furnishings found in the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database*, what can primary documents tell us about the way the bed chambers in early Washington homes might have looked? Can they provide insight into the reality of setting up and maintaining a bed chamber in a fashionable home at the turn of the 19th century?

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<sup>465</sup> Typescript of Sarah Ridg diary, Entitled "Washington in 1809 -- A Pen Picture," given by Mrs. Montgomery Schuyler, 1957. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Note: While much of the diary details a visit to Alexandria and Washington, the above incident occurred after Sarah Ridg returned home to N.J.

Among the best illustrations of the complexities of establishing and maintaining a fashionable bed chamber are found in the bills of the craftsmen and women who were patronized by Washington's elite. They charged for services ranging from producing new pieces of furniture to taking down and putting up bedsteads to sewing the textiles that graced the high post and field bedsteads and made them both fashionable and practical in the often unheated bed chambers.

In 1802, cabinet maker Thomas Webb charged John Tayloe for a variety of goods and services related to readying the Tayloe's new Washington home, known as The Octagon, for occupancy. Among the bed chamber furniture and related items he billed for were a high post bedstead and a mahogany field bedstead together with making and putting up the "furniture" for it. He charged for making a window curtain, probably to match the bed hangings, putting up the window lath and the two cloak pins for tying off the curtain cords. Also included was a mahogany chest of drawers, a sweep fronted chest of drawers, a "night drawers" and pan, "bason stands" and a shaving stand. John Tayloe III, one of the wealthiest men in early Washington spared little expense in outfitting his bed chambers, but the invoice suggests that he was not above reusing furniture he already owned. Webb's services also included "putting up the best bedsted and furniture" which cost \$3.50 in labor--\$2 for a day of his own time and \$1.50 for a helper but not for the actual fabrication of the bedstead. Finally, Webb charged for "repairing" a wardrobe and turning an "acorn," for it, probably a replacement for a missing finial.<sup>466</sup> Apparently the work done by Webb did not fill all the Octagon's bed chambers, for in 1805, John Tayloe records the purchase of a bedstead through his London agent. Its cost included "Orange Coloured best marine [wool moreen] furniture, part lined full Vallins fringed Tassals lines Hooks &Ca."<sup>467</sup>

A similar, but less extensive bill was submitted by cabinet maker William Worthington to Louis Davidson. In October of 1818, Worthington charged \$32 for a "large Curled Maple bedsted" and another \$83 for a "feather bed bolster & pillers" in addition to the \$68 charged for a "large Matrass." In November he billed for taking down two and putting up three bedsteads as well as "varnishing 2 walnut bedsteds." November was a busy month, for Worthington also apparently made a mahogany head board for a bedstead, installed a set of castors on the

<sup>466</sup> Invoice, Thomas Webb to John Tayloe, 1802, Tayloe Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Mss1 T2118d 369-413.

<sup>467</sup> Uncataloged Tayloe Manuscript, Box 2, Virginia Historical Society.

mahogany bedstead, and completed the project with a sacking bottom and cord for the same piece of furniture.<sup>468</sup>

A more common way of supplying one's home with some of the components needed for a fully dressed bedstead is seen in the accounts of Joseph Nourse's neighbor, Samuel Davidson. Davidson's day book accounts for October 30, 1801 list three different payments involved with assembling a fashionable bedstead. He recorded the purchase of "29 yards furniture Cotton 16d tape and thread 1d" for a total of \$17.00. He paid \$3.00 to "Cassandra and Hariot Smith for making Bed Curtains" and the same amount to "King for making a top to the Bedstead," presumably to cabinet maker William King for making a cornice or pulley lath.<sup>469</sup> Though not as easy as turning the entire project over to one person to produce, it may be that Davidson felt he would be saving money by purchasing his own fabric and hiring the seamstresses directly, rather than leaving it all up to the cabinetmaker or upholsterer.

Beyond the contextual materials examined above, is there information among the Nourse family papers that could cast light upon how the bed chambers at Dumbarton House were furnished? Fortunately, surviving among the Nourse family papers are a number of important clues. Included in the household expenses in 1784, no doubt in anticipation of Joseph and Maria's marriage, were three feather beds. Also bought were 3 bedsteads -- one Mahogany, costing £10.10.--, surely a high post bedstead; one a "Camp" or tent bedstead costing £5; and the third, valued at only £2.2.6, described as common, which was probably a low post form based on the value. Also purchased were three pieces of "cotton furniture," a period descriptor denoting textiles considered appropriate for bed and window curtains and one piece of "light blue Moreen," a type of woolen textile commonly used for bed curtains, quilts, and chair upholstery.

As the years passed, Joseph's accounts continue to note the acquisition of bed chamber furnishings. The purchase of a second highpost mahogany bedstead and an easy chair, probably both from New York upholsterer Richard Kip in April of 1786, were made when the Nourse family followed the U.S. government to New York.<sup>470</sup>

Following their move back to Philadelphia, Joseph in writing to Maria about decorating schemes for their home, noted that if she desired they could paper the room for Mrs. Haines, one

<sup>468</sup> Louis Grant Davidson Receipted Bills, Peabody Collection, Peabody Room, Georgetown Branch Library.

<sup>469</sup> Samuel Davidson Daybook 1801-1810, entry for October 30, 1801, manuscript division, Library of Congress.

<sup>470</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal, 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p 57, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia, Special Collections.

of Maria's married sisters. He then continues, "I wish after your return to get a four post Bedstead for that Room so as to make it a handsome lodging Room for our Friends...." While it is not clear whether this plan was implemented, it gives clear evidence of what type of furnishings Joseph Nourse considered necessary for a "handsome lodging room."<sup>471</sup>

His accounts for the last quarter of 1798, include under the heading "Furniture" a line entry which reads "Bed & Books--35.71."<sup>472</sup> Although it seems an odd combination, resulting no doubt from a presumed transfer of figures from Joseph Nourse's waste or day book which probably showed their purchase on the same day, it does document the continuing need to replenish bedding components. Just two years later, probably corresponding with the family's move to Washington, Joseph Nourse's accounts record a range of furnishings purchased "at Vendue" or auction. Among the items recorded were three entries for "Bed & Bedding" priced by the pound, a clear indication that the "Bed" pertained to a feather bed, as feathers were generally sold by the pound. The most expensive of these three beds was valued at \$50.40 with the feathers costing 56 cents a pound. The three "beds & bedding" totaled \$91.88, not quite three times the price of "2 tea & Coffee Urns" and a "Silver Waiter" which together cost Nourse \$33 at the same sale. As for the "bedding" part of the listing, it seems most likely that this catch all phrase may have referred to bolsters and pillows, as these items are often grouped together in period listings. It might also allude to sheets, blankets, etc. but the next item in the account "Bed Cloathes" costing \$9, suggests otherwise.<sup>473</sup> Among the items purchased between April 1st and June 30th of 1803, his accounts include "2 bedsteads & furniture" costing \$45 for both.<sup>474</sup> The lack of descriptive adjectives suggests that the bedsteads were not made of an expensive wood like mahogany. The middling value may reflect a purchase of either second-hand merchandise, perhaps from an estate auction, or of a simpler form or of smaller sizes, such as tent bedsteads, rather than high post forms.

In Joseph Nourse's accounts for the last quarter of 1805 one more bedstead purchase is recorded. Under the heading for sundry expenses, he lists a "Trunnell Low Stead" costing a

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<sup>471</sup> Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, UVA-Alderman Library #3940-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>472</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1780-1800, p. 115, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia, Special Collections.

<sup>473</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>474</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 174, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

mere \$5.33.<sup>475</sup> Trunnel or trundle bedsteads, intended to provide supplemental sleeping accommodations, were small and low enough to the floor that they could be stored underneath a larger bedstead when not in use. This entry is a bit of a puzzle, leading to a number of interesting speculative interpretive scenarios. As Joseph and Maria had no young children, the most common occupants of this type of bedstead, one is left to wonder if it was purchased for a long term family visitor with young children, for use by servants or for someone in the house who was ill enough to require the ongoing night time presence of a nurse. There is currently no way to answer these questions lacking additional Nourse primary source material addressing the question. However, these questions do illustrate the range of interpretive possibilities that can be spurred by household furnishings.

### **Beds, Bedding, and “Furniture”**

The terms bed, bedding, and furniture occur throughout period source materials in various combinations and contexts when describing the textile components of a bed. The evolution of language over the past two centuries often confuses modern readers trying to understand these terms, and, indeed, sometimes makes decoding their meaning in period documents challenging. In modern parlance, the term “bed” can be used to encompass the entirety of the form, including both the item of furniture – i.e. the bedstead, and the mattress, linens, covers, etc., while the word “furniture” refers to distinct movable objects -- i.e. chairs, tables, bedsteads, etc. In the 18th century, the wooden frame which supported part of the bedding was usually called the “bedstead” and the softer component upon which one lay was the “bed,” -- i.e. a large sack that could be filled with a variety of stuffing materials ranging from expensive feathers to ordinary straw. In some households pillows, bolsters, sheets, blankets, coverlets, and even bed curtains were often lumped together under the terms “bedding” or “furniture.” However, there was no set definition for these terms, leaving the items included **under their umbrella** open to interpretation. By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the evolution of language reflected a change in the usage of the term “bed.” It was beginning a shift to modern usage in some cases, further complicating the issue for modern scholars. Even within the same document, one might find examples of the term “bed” using both meanings.

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<sup>475</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1805-1818, p. 307, # 3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

Period definitions for some of these terms provide insight into the diversity and outlook of the era. A.F.M. Willich's *The Domestic Encyclopaedia*, published in its first American edition in Philadelphia in 1803, offers the following definitions:

BED, a convenience for ease or sleep.... The most elastic straw is that of *barley*, which may be easily shaken and spread, when enclosed in ticking. Various unsuccessful attempts have been made to substitute the dry leaves of trees, moss, and other soft materials, instead of barley straw, which however, is more eligible; or the leaves of Turkey corn, or maize, are still better.

A mattress filled with horse-hair is preferable to a feather-bed, which heats and relaxes the body, and disposes it to pulmonary and hectic complaints. The bolster should be stuffed with horse-hair, and covered with a small pillow filled with feathers. The bedding might consist either of sheets, with blankets and a counterpane, or a single cover, thinly quilted with cotton wool: the latter might be easily washed, and will last for several years. In very cold seasons, a counterpane quilted with a few pounds of soft feathers, might be substituted for the former; but it should not be used in summer.

BEDSTEAD, a frame for supporting a bed.

BLANKET, an article of commerce so well known in domestic economy, that any definition of it would be superfluous.<sup>476</sup>

As noted in Willich's description, the well outfitted bedstead required a bolster, a pillow or pillow, and the appropriate cases for them. These cases, along with sheets, were, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, usually made of linen. The descriptions of these items found in *The Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, though related to 18th-century bed linens, are still valid for early 19th-century households.

Bed linens – sheets and pillow cases – were made at home, part of the plain sewing skills expected of every woman. Generally made from various grades of linen, sheets were seamed down the middle and finished with tiny hems at the top and bottom, and used the selvage edges instead of outside seams. In an elite household, which would have owned multiple sets of sheets, the various sets were marked with the initials of the housewife and with numbers to aid in inventory control. Pillow cases, made of fit the square pillows of the day, were seamed at one end with small ties inside the other end to keep the pillow in place.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> A.F. M. Willich, M.D., *The domestic Encyclopaedia; or, A Dictionary of Facts, and Useful Knowledge... in Five Volumes*, (Philadelphia: Willam Young Birch, Abraham Small, and Matthew Carey, Publishers, 1803), p. 222-223, 297.

<sup>477</sup> *The Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, p 255-256; This section of the Gunston report references Judith Reiter Weissman and Wendy Lavitt, *Labors of Love: America's Textiles and Needlework, 1650-1930* (New York: Knopf, 1987), p. 101-104, for a discussion of bed linens.

Though not referenced in the Gunston report, bolsters were also fitted with cases, although sometimes made from a coarser grade of fabric.

Depending upon the season, wool blankets would have been added to the beds of those who could afford them. Though published in 1838, *The Workwoman's Guide* "By a Lady" gives a good description of early-19th-century blankets. It notes that:

...they should be thick and light, with a soft nap or wool upon them. Blankets are generally sold in pairs, or two woven together. These, for beds must be cut, in which case, the edges are sewed over in a very wide kind of button-hole stitch, with red, or other coloured wool, also a kind of circle or star is often worked in the corner with various coloured wool.<sup>478</sup>

Atop the blankets was a coverlet or counterpane or perhaps a quilt, or some combination of these forms. While modern usage differentiates clearly between them, period language is, not surprisingly, somewhat flexible. Marylander Charles Carroll of Carrollton, in a 1772 order, requested that his English agent send him "6 large callico counterpanes for summer use not quilted." Samuel Johnson, in his famous 18th-century dictionary, defines coverlet as "the outermost of the bedclothes; that under which all the rest are concealed," while a counterpane is defined as a "coverlet for a bed, or anything else woven in squares." Information recorded in the Gunston Hall database found a wide range of adjectives used to describe these various top covers including "striped, quilted, embossed, India, tufted flowered, patch, country made, summer, stamped, shag, fringed, knotted, worked, and marseilles."<sup>479</sup>

A similar range of terminology and types seems to have carried forward into the inventories of early Washingtonians, suggesting a wide range of options for bed covers. Twenty-three (82%) of the 28 households in the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* include bed cover forms, many described with the same terms found in the Gunston database. The inventory of Young02 included one patched work counterpane, two described as cotton, and two noted as "marailles."<sup>480</sup> Color descriptions are rarely given, but when used white seems to have been the most common. Quilts are listed in eight (34%) of the 23 households listing top bed covers. In some households no descriptions are given but some like Young02 include

<sup>478</sup> By A Lady, *The Workwoman's Guide...*, (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co.: 1838); Reprint, (Guilford, Connecticut: Opus Publications, Inc., 1986), p. 200.

<sup>479</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, p. 259. The Carroll and Johnson materials are quoted in the Gunston report.

<sup>480</sup> Florence Montgomery in *Textiles in America 1650-1870*, p. 289-292, describes Marcella (marseilles, marsella) as deriving from the fine quilting for which Marseilles was noted. By the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries, the term had come to refer to a loom-woven pattern which imitated to some degree the quilted effect.

examples described as patch work or marseilles. It is clear, even from this brief examination of period sources, that the topic of the uppermost layer of the well dressed bed is complex.

Joseph Nourse's 1803 purchase of "2 bedsteads & furniture" suggests that the bedsteads he purchased came already fitted out with some of the needed bedding and/or decorative textile components. However, as the overview of period practices suggests, the use of Nourse's account listings are only a first step toward recreating historically accurate bed chambers at Dumbarton House.

All of the above material will factor into final recommendations for furnishing the second floor bed chambers at Dumbarton House. There is no one correct way to furnish these rooms. Rather it is a matter of choices and combinations, just as it was for Joseph Nourse and his family. Indeed, the patterns of daily life such as the presence of both Charles Nourse and his cousin John Rittenhouse as full time boarders and the ebb and flow of often lengthy visits by family and friends will play a significant role in the final interpretation of these spaces. The interpretive decisions made by the Dumbarton House museum staff will guide their selection from the following recommendations. It must be noted that if Dumbarton House decides to furnish only one of the upstairs chambers, extra care must be given to the selections made. The furnishings in "Mother's Room" should be factored into the interpretation as a whole and choices that show some difference in the furnishings of the second floor chamber must be given serious consideration. If the upstairs room more or less duplicates the first floor chamber, visitors might easily come away with the mistaken impression that all chambers were furnished alike when, as both the descriptive materials and the statistical overview clearly illustrate, this was not the case.



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Bedsteads: 1 or 2; high post and/or tent form, Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake region; Mahogany, walnut, beech, stained or painted; ca. 1780s--1810**

Even with the placement of a mahogany highpost bedstead in “mother’s room,” there are possibly two highpost bedsteads left to be distributed among the second floor chambers. In addition, the “camp” bedstead purchased by Joseph Nourse in 1784 and the 2 “bedsteads & furniture” recorded in the 1803 accounts must be considered.<sup>481</sup> Depending upon the story line selected for the furnished bed chambers, it seems likely that at least one of the upstairs chambers was furnished with two bedsteads. It is unlikely that any of the bedsteads used by the Nourses matched in form; even the two purchased in 1803 are not described by Joseph Nourse as a pair. Although this is not a definitive piece of evidence, the concept of matching furniture in bed chambers was not a cultural norm at this period. Finally, the use of different styles and dates for two bedsteads in a single room would have a much stronger visual impact for interpretive purposes.

**1 Trundle bedstead: Locally made; pine or poplar, unfinished, stained or painted; c. 1805**

This recommendation is based on Joseph Nourse’s recorded purchase of this form. Interpretively, the trundle bedstead might have been used to provide extra sleeping accommodations in a guest chamber for children traveling with visiting relatives or might have been used for slaves or servants who shared a chamber with their master or employer.

**Reproduction Bed Furniture: Bed curtains and cover: Style and Date appropriate to bedstead; Fabric; choices include wool, furniture cotton, chintz, or dimity.**

Other than the trundle bed, all of the recommended bedsteads for the second floor chambers would have been fitted with bed curtains that were considered both fashionable and practical at this time. If the bedsteads chosen for interpretation are those referenced in Joseph Nourse’s pre-1800 accounts, it is possible that the curtains originally associated with these

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<sup>481</sup> It is unlikely that the “common” bedstead, probably a low post form, listed in the 1784 purchase found its way into the main chambers on the second floor unless one of the rooms was used for a housekeeper or upper servant. Again, unlikely, since there were two significant dependencies in which they might have been housed. Unfortunately, not enough is known at this time about the domestic structure of the Nourse household or the subsidiary or service spaces to make site specific recommendations about these aspects of daily life at Dumbarton House.

bedsteads might still have been in use. However, it is possible that the frequent moves made by the Nourse family took a physical toll on these textile furnishings, requiring replacement hangings for at least some of these bedsteads. If the two bedsteads purchased in 1803 are interpreted, Dumbarton House might chose to show these as having newer style hangings. Fabric choices for these reproduction bed hangings may well depend upon what can be bought at the time they are made, as the availability of accurate reproduction textiles is very much subject to the whims and economics of the marketplace. In addition to the main bed curtains, the bed furniture should include a bed covering (coverlet, counterpane, or quilt) appropriate to the style and period of the bed curtains. For interpretive purposes, Dumbarton House may also wish to address the period practice of seasonal change through the use of different winter and summer covers and how the bedsteads are dressed. It should be noted that there is no evidence for the use of silk for these purposes in any of the Nourse documentation. Indeed, it was rarely utilized in American households of this period. Even Thomas Jefferson seems to have preferred dimity and chintz for bed hangings and window curtains for the White House, as evidenced by the inventory of furnishings in the building at the end of his Presidency.<sup>482</sup>

### **Reproduction Mattresses, Beds Bolsters, and Pillows**

#### **Reproduction Sheets, Bolster Covers, Pillow Cases, Blankets**

These forms are discussed in the body of the text of this section. The numbers of these items will be based upon the decisions Dumbarton House makes about how to furnish the second floor chambers. Depending upon the interpretive goals of the museum, one or more of the bedsteads could be fully fitted out. Reproduction bolsters, pillows, beds, and even a mattress would give the bedstead the proper visual and physical weight and appearance. Reproduction sheets, cases, and blankets would offer the museum the option of exhibiting the bedstead with the covers turned back. While this approach is being taken by many house museums, many visitors still find the visual experience a novel one. Even if the various elements of the bedding are not to be displayed, care should be given to the underpinnings beneath the top cover, in order for an appropriate profile to be achieved.

### **Storage Forms:**

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<sup>482</sup> See the transcribed inventory in *Antiques*, Vol. XV, No. 6, June, 1929. p.485.

**Chest of Drawers/Bureau; Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake; Mahogany, walnut, cherry; ca. 1784-1810**

The only reference to this form among the Nourse papers is the 1784 purchase of the dressing chest, which is recommended for the furnishings of “Mother’s Room.” However, 68% of the database inventory group owned more than one example of chests of drawers. Given Joseph Nourse’s propensity for purchasing clothing, and the fact that both Charles Nourse and John Rittenhouse boarded at Dumbarton as young adults, it seems likely that one or more of the upstairs chambers contained an example of this furniture form. However, should Dumbarton House decide to furnish most or all of the upstairs chambers, not every room should have a chest of drawers. Of the 15 households in the bed chamber study group having more than one example, only 5 had a chest of drawers for every bed chamber identified.

**Clothes Press; See discussion in Mother’s Room Section.**

Should the museum decide not to place the clothes press in the first floor chamber it could be used to provide storage in either one of the upstairs bed chambers, probably, though not necessarily in lieu of a chest of drawers, or in the second floor hallway. If used in a public area it would have most likely to have been used to store house hold linens or out of season clothing. The locking doors and drawers would have been viewed as protection from pilferage by slaves and servants.

**Trunks: Numbers and types based on interpretation**

The 1807 American edition of *The Book of Trades, or Library of the Useful Arts* notes that “Trunks, of which there are various shapes and sizes, are generally made with wood and covered with leather, or the skins of horses or seals dressed with the hair on, and lined with paper.” Some were elegant, decorated with brass headed nails, and some were strictly utilitarian, showing more concern about function and durability than appearance. Although specialized forms existed, most were, as *The Book of Trades* states, “intended either for holding linen at home or for carrying clothes on a journey.”<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Peter Stockham, ed. *Old-Time Crafts and Trades* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992), p. 80-84. This is a reprint of the second volume of the 1807 American edition of *The Book of Trades, or Library of the Useful Arts*;

As noted in the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, trunks were often pressed into service as containers for purchased goods intended to be shipped some distance to one's home. Virginian Robert Beverley as part of a 1791 order gave instructions to his agent that "...I wish you would always send dry goods where they are not too bulky in a trunk wh [which] altho it costs something more may be of some use."<sup>484</sup> Joseph Nourse seems to have shared Beverley's sentiments following his move to Georgetown, as he included the cost for a "Trunk for Goods" among his purchases made in Philadelphia.<sup>485</sup>

Trunks are included the bed chamber furnishings of nine (40%) of the households in the study with three households showing multiple examples in the same bed chamber. In Young02 there are "5 small trunks" recorded in what appears to be the best chamber but the other two, Whann13 and Ingle23, include multiple trunks in what are third floor lesser chambers. Listings of trunks in an otherwise well furnished chamber could indicate the presence of a temporary occupant, preparations for a journey, or the need for extra storage. A charming English amateur watercolor ca. 1817 shows what is presumably a chamber devoted to the family's children. In the corner, next to a simple chest of drawers is a stack of what appears to be band boxes and trunks, presumably for the storage of clothing.<sup>486</sup>

### **Hygiene Forms:**

**1 dressing table or wash stand: Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake; Mahogany, Walnut, Pine, Painted; ca. 1784-1810**

**1 Ceramic wash basin and pitcher or bottle, ca. 1784-1804**

Although a high percentage of the households in the study group used both forms together in the same chamber at least once, these chambers represent only a bit over a third of all the chambers tabulated. Since both forms are recommended for Mother's Room, it would be more likely that most, if not all, of the second floor chambers had only one hygiene form. The choice made depends upon the interpretative focus of the room being furnished. Are the furnishings newer or older in form and style? Are the room's occupants envisioned as semi-

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<sup>484</sup> Robert Beverley order quoted in *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, p. 161.

<sup>485</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 169, #3940-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>486</sup> John Cornforth, *English Interiors 1790-1848: The Quest for Comfort*, (London: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd, 1978), p. 94, Fig. 112, The Nursery, Aubrey House, London.

permanent residents? Is the room intended to represent the best of the second floor chambers or reflect a room lower down in the household hierarchy?

As for the ceramic basin, with its accompanying water container, several possibilities present themselves. Among the forms contained in the hogshead of creamware purchased by Joseph Nourse at the time of his marriage were “12 large hand basins” and “4 large bottles.”<sup>487</sup> Like the chamber pots in the same listing, these forms were hygiene, not food related. It is unlikely, though not impossible, for one or more of these items to have survived, however their inclusion in the purchase illustrates a genteel concern on the part of the Nourses for the washing of at least face and hands. The *Early 19th-Century Washington D.C. Probate Database* shows 20 (71%) of the households in the study having these items, usually described as basins and pitchers, clearly documenting that the bottle form, though still available from manufacturers, had given way to handled pitchers in popularity. Only in Foxall<sup>24</sup> is any description given. His are described as “blue.”

These everyday items were available in a wide range of ceramic types from inexpensive earthenwares to fine porcelain. However, given that the Nourses purchased creamware in at least one instance, this type of ceramic – creamware or the slightly later pearlware – seem the most likely choice. The ca.1803/4 trade catalog of “SUNDRY ARTICLES of QUEENS or CREAM-COLOURED EARTHENWARE” made at the Don Pottery in the Yorkshire region of England shows a range of examples of such utilitarian wares, some completely plain and others in scalloped or shell-edged designs.<sup>488</sup>

### **Toilet Table Cover**

The inclusion of this textile form will be dependent upon the choice of a dressing table. If a dressing table is selected, then consideration should be given as to whether a decorative toilet table cover is appropriate. Among the factors that come into play **are the place** of the proposed bed chamber in the overall household hierarchy and the type of dressing table chosen. For example, it seems unlikely that a table with a high degree of decoration, such as a fancy painted example or one with decorative inlays would be covered with textiles.

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<sup>487</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 19, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

<sup>488</sup> John D. Griffin, *The Don Pottery 1801-1893*, (Dorchester, England: Dorchester Museum Service, 2001), p. 84-86, designs 188-196.

## **Sanitation Forms:**

### **Chamber Pots; Numbers and types depend upon interpretation**

Furniture forms such as night tables, close stool chairs and bidets were expensive and rare, even in well-to-do homes. Only six (21%) of the 28 households inventories in the *Early 19th Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* include an example from this category of household furniture. Therefore, unless additional Nourse primary source material is found, no such form can be recommended for the second floor chambers.

However, chamber pots are another matter. In addition to the basic bodily functions for which they designed, chamber pots also were necessary for both more extreme and mundane needs. Nausea caused by infection or contaminated food, both real issues in an era that had yet to discover germs might give rise to the need for receptacle into which to vomit. A mid-18th-century satirical painting by Hogarth, “Francis Matthew Schutz in his bed” graphically illustrates a chamber pot being put to such use.<sup>489</sup> Purgative medicines, a common part of the period pharmacopoeia, might also require urgent and frequent use of these receptacles. And, in much less urgent circumstances, it might serve as a spit basin while brushing teeth.<sup>490</sup>

It is probable, though chamber pots are often unlisted in inventories, that the Nourses owned a number of examples of this portable and very utilitarian type of ceramic. Four large chamber pots are listed among the items found in the hogshead of Queens Ware purchased by Joseph Nourse in 1784.<sup>491</sup> While it is highly unlikely that any of those original chamber pots survived to see use twenty plus years later at Dumbarton House, they are the type of everyday object that Joseph Nourse would have been likely to lump into the undifferentiated category of “Furniture” in his quarterly accounts.

It should be noted that chamber pots were probably not permanent features in bed chamber furnishings. Like candlesticks, they would have been removed for cleaning and then redistributed to occupied bed chambers before bed time. Young Sophie du Pont captured the hazards of both an unemptied chamber pot and the distributing of clean ones in her drawings of

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<sup>489</sup> See Charles Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Decoration: Design and the Domestic Interior in England*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993), p. 206-207, plate 201.

<sup>490</sup> See Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Hinsley, *Sophie du Pont A Young Lady in America: Sketches, Diaries & Letters 1823-1833*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), p. 53 “A morning scene in Vics room”.

<sup>491</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 19, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

daily life. In one “Pernicious effects of reeding tails” she records the unpleasant result of a overturned chamber pot caught in the “reed,” or pleated skirt of a young woman, and in “Jane McMullin and Mr McEwen” shows the startled surprise of both Jane (perhaps a servant?) and the gentleman resting on the bed, neither expecting to find the other in the bed chamber.<sup>492</sup>

**1 Looking Glass: dressing glass or wall mounted type: Mahogany, Walnut, Painted; England, Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake; ca. 1784-1810**

Bed chambers with more than one example of looking glass were rare. Only six households furnished any of their bed chambers in this way, accounting for only 10 of the 79 chambers in the study. While the modern tendency might be to pair dressing tables with dressing glasses and wash stands with wall mounted type looking glass,<sup>493</sup> the period documentation does not always support these groupings. Virtually any combination seems to have worked for the households surveyed. Wash stands were sometimes paired with dressing glasses and dressing tables with what may have been wall hung looking glasses. Dressing glasses were also found in rooms without either a dressing table or a wash stand, but with only the surface of a bureau or chest of drawers on which to place it. In Young02 there is a bed chamber with listing for a mahogany washstand immediately following a dressing glass with only the top of a chest of drawers upon which it could have been set. The same inventory includes other chambers with the more conventional pairing of dressing glass and a small table, presumably being used as dressing tables. Another mix is found in a chamber in Hellen15 which lists a toilet table, looking glass, and pitcher & basin in the same line.

**Seating Furniture: 3-5 Chairs; Mahogany, Walnut, Painted; Upholstered Seats, Rush, Cane; Philadelphia, New York; 1784-1804**

Surprisingly, only 68% of the 79 bed chambers in the database study include some form of seating furniture, with only five of the 22 households with identifiable bed chambers having chairs in every chamber. In those chambers having chairs, the average was 4.8. Chairs chosen for bed chambers were frequently older or of lesser value than those found in the more public rooms of the house. In the 13 inventories that include descriptors for the chairs in bed chambers,

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<sup>492</sup> See Betty-Bright Low and Jacqueline Hinsley, *Sophie du Pont A Young Lady in America: Sketches, Diaries & Letters 1823-1833*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), p. 50, 51.

<sup>493</sup> For purposes of this report, this includes all pier, chimney, and undesignated looking glass forms.

four include Windsors, three employ the term “old,” and chairs in two rooms are noted with cane bottoms. And, there is one instance each of the use of flag and rush in describing seating materials. Two households had chambers with walnut chairs and one included chairs described as common. Only one inventory listed mahogany chairs in a bed chamber. Indeed, the only seeming anomaly in this group is the inventory of Thomas Dougherty taken in the fall of 1822. In what is one unbroken listing, but probably the furnishings of two bed chambers, the chairs were described as “5 Fancy Chamber Chairs (Paul & Virginia)” valued at \$1 each and “4 Red Gilted chairs” valued at \$.50 each. Despite their seeming grandeur, it is possible that by 1822 these chairs were considered somewhat old fashioned, depending upon their age, or they may have been moved from their normal location and not returned before the inventory was taken.

Therefore, the chairs used in the second floor chambers at Dumbarton House should represent items purchased prior to the 1804 move. If more than one of the second floor chambers is furnished, consideration should be given to not including chairs as part of the furniture in one room.

### **1-2 Tables [not dressing forms]: Mahogany, walnut, cherry; Philadelphia, New York, Chesapeake; 1784 -1810**

Of the 79 chambers in the study group, 25 ( 31%) contained one or more tables that were not identified as toilet, dressing or washing forms. Fifteen of the 22 households (68%) included these other table forms in the furnishings of some of their chambers. Six of the 15 households include two or more examples in a single bed chamber. For purposes of this analysis, “stands” were also included in the tabulation, bringing the total examples to 37. Of these, ten were described as “small.” Three used the adjective “work.” Six were listed as “card” tables but this number is inflated by Ingle23 which included four card tables, three of which were apparently being stored along with two “mahogany end dining tables” in one chamber. There was also one example each of tables described as “breakfast,” “tea,” and “Pillar & Claw.”

The choices here will depend upon the interpretive focus of the chamber in question. If the decision is to include a table form, the most likely uses for a small table in a bed chamber would have been for taking tea or a meal, holding a candlestick to provide lighting, or serving as a place to house sewing or art supplies. For these functions, the most likely forms would be a small tea or Pembroke table, a candle stand, or a ladies work table. It should be noted however,



that fewer than one third of the of 79 bed chambers studied include an item from this group. Because these are all light weight tables easily moved into any room as needed, not just bed chambers, consideration might be given to shifting a small table form among the interpreted spaces on both first and second floor as part of a program of seasonal changes or shifts in thematic interpretation.

**Heating Equipment: (If included)**

**Pair andirons: Brass, Iron; English or American; ca. 1784-1810**

**Firetools: Shovel & Tongs, probably but not necessarily a pair; Probably not ensuite with andirons; English or American; Brass, Steel and Brass; Iron; ca. 1784-1810**

**Fender: Pierced brass or iron or Wire; English or American; ca. 1784-1810**

This set of recommendations also hinges largely upon interpretive choices. Many households in this period did not own fireplace equipment for every fireplace in the house, especially those in bed chambers. Of the 22 households whose bed chamber furnishings were studied, one (Varnum<sup>23</sup>) showed no fireplace equipment in any chamber, despite the fact the inventory was taken in early January. Of the other 21 households, only four (19%) had some type of heating related furnishings in every chamber. Not quite three-quarters (28) of these chambers had a pair of andirons, two chambers had grates listed while a third (Whartn<sup>18</sup>) probably had a built-in coal grate based upon the listing for a fender, poker & sifter. Other rooms included some type of fire tool but no mention of andirons or grates to hold wood or coal. This disparity probably reflects the portable nature of most of this type of equipment that no doubt shifted from one room to another as needed. It is also necessary to remember that it is possible to build a fire without andirons or a grate, although homes of the wealth level chosen for the database seem unlikely to have resorted to this technique.

Even when andirons and other types of fireplace equipment were part of a bed chamber's furnishings, there is sufficient anecdotal material to know that fires were not an everyday occurrence. Indeed, their presence could be cause for comment. Englishman James Woodforde, in his diary entry of January 15, 1795, wrote that the harsh cold weather, which he described as "piercing, severe frost, with Wind & some Snow," together with ill health had caused him to have a fire in his bed chamber. A second round of severe cold in February led him to record "a

fire again in My bedchamber tonight, tho I had left it off some time....”<sup>494</sup> If a single bed chamber is furnished, care must be taken that visitors do not presume that the inclusion of fireplace equipment in one bed chamber implies that it was part of every room with a fireplace, a common Colonial Revival assumption.

**Floor Coverings: large area carpet or bedside strips; Ingrain or Venetian, English; ca. 1784-1810.**

The Nourse family primary source materials show a liking for carpeted floors. This preference is reflected in the inclusion of carpeting among the recommendations for the second floor chambers. The specific Nourse primary source examples are discussed in earlier sections of this report.

Among the 55 rural elite inventories studied for the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, two thirds listed some type of floor covering. In these listings, just over half contained some type of information which allowed for a presumption about the rooms in which the floor covering was used. Of these, slightly over half were used in bed chambers.<sup>495</sup> It is not surprising, given both the date range of the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* and the urban nature of the sample that the number in this study is higher. Eighteen (81%) of the 22 households with identifiable bed chambers listed carpet in at least one bed chamber. Given the lack of heat in many chambers, it is perhaps not surprising that some type of floor covering was used in so many bed chambers.

One third of the 18 households having some type of floor covering in a least one chamber had floor coverings in every bed chamber; however, this number must be put into perspective by placing that statistic against the realization that of the 79 bed chambers identified, only 38 (48%) of them included floor coverings. Again, not all bed chambers nor their inhabitants were viewed as equal. Unfortunately, there is little specific information about the floor coverings listed in the inventories for the bed chambers. One carpet, in Forrest06, was listed as Wilton, which was an expensive weave usually found in public spaces within a house. The age or condition, though neither is mentioned in the entry, may account for its placement in a bed chamber. Two examples are described as “Scots” or “Scotch,” the flat weave referred to as ingrain by modern

<sup>494</sup> James Woodforde, *A Country Parson, James Woodforde's Diary 1759-1802, Illustrated* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 171,173

<sup>495</sup> *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, p. 270.

scholars. There is one inclusion of a straw carpet, one for a floor cloth, and one for a green carpet, perhaps a baize floor covering of the type used as crumb cloths in dining rooms.

### **Window Curtains:**

En suite with bed hangings in one second floor chamber if more than one chamber is furnished; consider no curtains if only one chamber is furnished to make the interpretive point about varying period practice.

Bed chamber window curtains were certainly not considered a necessity in the 18th and early 19th centuries, even in urban households close to the street. Joseph Nourse noted, with some degree of amusement, this state of affairs in 1790 Philadelphia, when he wrote to his wife that, “Mr Geiso had prepared me his best Room. ...The Weather here is Sultry both my windows are open and having no Curtains I might almost be in the Street, but this is customary. a nice Observer from going thro’ the Streets might have a tolerable mental acquaintance with every Family.”<sup>496</sup>

The other side of this coin is that the desire for en suite decorative schemes did give rise to the use of matching window curtains in some homes. Often this appears to have been a matter of personal taste and a willingness to expend disposable income to present a fashionable decorative scheme in at least some of the household chambers. The Nourse family documents show a family predilection for curtains but unfortunately often do not provide details as to the rooms for which they were intended.

Only about one third of the 79 identified bed chambers in this study included a listing indicating the use of window curtains. Indeed, 36% of the 22 households in this portion of the study listed no window curtains in any of the bed chambers. At the opposite end of the spectrum were the three households (13%) that had window curtains for all their chambers. Among the textile descriptions included for those having window curtains were striped, chintz, old crimson, calico, and dimity. Some entries also include information about styles and hardware, referencing “cornishs” [cornices] “drapery rods, &c.” and curtain pins.

### **Art /Household Decoration**

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<sup>496</sup> Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 11, 1790, Dumbarton House Archives

Interpretive choices should guide the decision about whether to include either framed art and/or decorative object. Such items were found among the furnishings of some, but certainly not the majority, of the bed chambers in this study. As with many other furnishing choices, their use appears to have been a matter of individual taste. In the 12 households in which framed art was listed, six also included some type of decorative objects. Only Whartn18 had mantel ornaments but no framed art, and in the case of Whartn18, it is quite probable that some of the 100 plus examples of framed art recorded at the end of the inventory were hung in bedchambers.

Only a quarter of the bedchambers in this study included examples of either framed art or decorative items such as mantel ornaments. However when looking at the number of households, not quite 60% used such items to decorate at least one bed chamber. Of the 13 households having items in these categories, 12 listed framed art, i.e. prints or pictures and seven noted ornamental objects, i.e. mantel ornaments, flower vases, busts, etc.

Subject matter is not usually mentioned in the inventory listings for prints. More often, if descriptors are used, it is the frames that are detailed, as they were perceived as a factor affecting value. Size -- large or small; or finish -- gilt or black are the two characteristics most often noted. Occasionally, depending upon the inventory taker, the subject of the print might be included in the item description.

### Personal Items

Having said that bed chambers were often not specific to the use of one individual, nevertheless it must be noted that items aside from clothing and items for personal adornment, objects that personalize the rooms do appear in both the inventory references as well as in the rare visual images that survive from the period. Young Sophie du Pont in her sketch illustrating the flurry of getting dressed to go down to breakfast shows a scattering of containers, ribbons, decorative hair combs and even a pair of scissors on the mantel of the bed chamber.<sup>497</sup>

Listed among the objects in the identified bed chambers were recreational items – a Back Gammon Table [Scott01], a **harpsicord** [Young02]; a variety of weapons including a “Double barrel gun” [Peter12], a “Gun & flash (in a case) the property of Thos. J. H.” [Hellen15], a “small fowling piece, flask & pouch,” [Key 15], “1 pair pistols & Sword”[CampBl17], and a “Sword” [Wiley19]; pieces presumed to have been moved to a chamber for safe keeping but also

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<sup>497</sup> Low and Hinsley, *Sophie du Pont, A Young Lady in America*, p. 53, “A morning scene in Vics room”.

possibly for use – a “Plated coffee pot”[Turner16], “2 Plated goblets” [Clarke23], a pair of “plaited candlesticks” [Freemn24]; as well as a few that are difficult to categorize but which seem to speak to a particular choice or moment in the lives of their owners – a “spy glass in the shape of walking cane,” [Dghrty22], a “pine medicine chest” [Ingle23], and a “Handbell” and a “Liquor case” [Freemn24].

Other types of personal objects might include medicines, spectacles, items for hygiene such as shaving equipment, as well as those related to tobacco use, and writing materials. Such items might be included among the furnishing of second floor chambers at Dumbarton House, depending upon the interpretive decisions made about the various spaces. The inclusion of such personal objects will make for a much less static presentation, enhancing the story, and helping visitors envision the lives of the people who lived at Dumbarton House in the early 19th century.

## **FOOD SERVICE AND BEVERAGE WARES:**

By the last quarter of the 18th century, increased emphasis was placed on the rituals of the tea and dinner tables and on the importance of individual utensils for the consumption of food and beverages of all types. A growing preference for matching sets of wares led to a proliferation of specialized forms and an increased numbers of such objects in well-to-do households. By the early decades of the 19th century, these trends were well entrenched.<sup>498</sup>

That both dinner and tea were observed as part of the daily schedule at Dumbarton House is clearly expressed in a letter from Joseph to Maria in which he, with a bit of gentle humor, described the tenor of the day. He wrote that "...Charles today is actually engaged in business – he dined at home, and intends returning for tea."<sup>499</sup> The importance of these domestic rituals runs like a thread through Joseph's letters and financial accounts. References to food preparations and the sharing of meals or tea with others provide a counterpoint to the recorded purchases of table wares and tea forms.

In genteel homes multiple course dinners that could last for several hours had become a favored, if challenging way of entertaining. To be either host or guest at such events required special knowledge of table etiquette in everything from how to manage the various table wares to the correct way to interact with one's fellow diners. Ralph Wormely, a member of one of Virginia's most preeminent families felt compelled to send advice on the subject to his son who was being educated in England. In his 1803 letter he wrote:

...never give in to excess; nor let the pleasures of the table or the bottle seduce you to indulge either to satiety – to select properly for the plate at table will shew whether a man is well educated or not – he will take his soup or fish first; then his roast of fowl or game, or mutton or beef, and never make a dead set at the most elegant viand at the Table....<sup>500</sup>

Even as late as the end of the 1830s, writers of etiquette books were still advising readers that "To perform faultlessly the honours of the table is one of the most difficult things in society."<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> For a much expanded discussion of this topic see Barbara Carson, *Ambitious Appetites*; and the *Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, Food Service and Beverage Sections.

<sup>499</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, October 22, 1810, Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>500</sup> Ralph Wormely to his son Master Warner Lewis Wormely, 8 September 1803, Mss1 W8945a 1-14, Ralph Wormely Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>501</sup> *The Laws of Etiquette: or, Short Rules and Reflections for Conduct in Society*. By a gentleman (Philadelphia: Carey, Lead, and Blanchard, 1839,) p. 139, quoted in Carson, *Ambitious Appetites*, p. 117.

If not as complex as the etiquette of the dinner table, the tea table had its own rules and expectations. For the female segment of the population, tea was also a more frequent social occasion. Anna Maria Thornton, wife of Dr. William Thornton, in her diary between January and June of 1803, noted herself as either guest or host at tea sixty-one times. However, she was present at only 19 dinners, which were more often male-only occasions.<sup>502</sup> While tea could be an informal family occasion at home or a casual gathering of friends, it was often the social intersection between individuals who **inhabited various finely shaded strata** defined by wealth, class, and politics in Washington society.

What do Joseph Nourse's records say about the types and quantities of table and beverage wares that he and his family owned and used? Throughout his life time, the purchase of such objects are among the goods recorded among his accounts. Family letters, though not as detailed as one might wish about these aspects of the Nourses' daily life, offer additional glimpses into these aspects of daily life.

In November of 1783, he listed in his accounts the purchase of a case of knives and forks and a hogshead of Queens Ware from "Campbell & Kingston" that he then stored with the firm until he was ready for them. No further description as to materials or numbers of items is given for the knives and fork; however, the contents of the hogshead of Queen's ware are enumerated in detail. The variety of contents and the large quantities listed for many of the items suggest that a merchant originally packed the hogshead of ceramics for resale. Indeed, given the evidence of various financial ventures seen in his accounts, it is possible that Nourse intended to keep some of the contents and sell the excess. However, even if he kept only part of the ceramics listed, he would have begun his married life well equipped for the needs of daily life. Included among the dinner forms were two soup tureens with matching ladles, soup, dinner and dessert plates, a pair of sauce tureens with stands (the dishes upon which they were set) and ladles, sauce boats and serving dishes of various sizes, and condiment forms for salt, mustard and pepper.<sup>503</sup> In December of that year, he recorded purchasing "Silver Ware" from Philadelphia silver smith

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<sup>502</sup> Barbara Carson, *Ambitious Appetites*, p. 78.

<sup>503</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, March 4, 1785, p. 19, 20, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

John David that included a dozen table spoons costing £16.<sup>504</sup> In March of the following year he recorded paying “Capn Tingey for a Sett of China 15 Dolls.”<sup>505</sup> It is not clear if this was china for the dinner or tea table. During this flurry of spending on household items, he also purchased a range of table cloths, apparently, based on cost, of different sizes and quality, and an inexpensive set of a dozen knives and forks, for which no materials are listed.<sup>506</sup> In the spring of 1785, in preparation for moving his family to New York, he noted that among the tasks was to “pack up the China and the Queen’s Ware, so that we [missing] will be ready for a remove.”<sup>507</sup>

There are few known references to what effect the wear and tear of daily life coupled with the family’s numerous moves had on the Nourses’ table wares but in the spring of 1798, Joseph Nourse recorded the acquisition of a “Table Sett China” for \$55.<sup>508</sup> In the summer of the following year there was a purchase of “Crockery Ware” probably intended for the kitchen.<sup>509</sup> It is not until the family moves to Georgetown in 1800 that Joseph’s accounts show another flurry of buying objects for the dinner and tea table. Noting that the items were bought at auction, he listed four separate purchases of knives and forks – two as “Case Knives & Forks”, one as a set of knives & forks, and one as “12 Knives & Forks” costing \$27.75, more than twice as much as any of the others. It may well be this group, together with perhaps one of the others, that accounted for the \$46.20 “received for Silver handle knives & forks” that he noted as deducted from his total. The fact that he sold the silver handle set suggests that Nourse did not see such grand dining implements as necessary for him to have a well dressed table. Also of note among these purchases were a pair of chaffing dishes costing \$4.25, probably utilitarian in their materials, but intended to help keep food and water warm in the kitchen.<sup>510</sup> Smaller unspecified purchases

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<sup>504</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, March 4, 1785, p. 26, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>505</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, March 4, 1785, p. 32, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>506</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, March 4, 1785, p. 34, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>507</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, March 2, 1785, Box 1a 1642-1789, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>508</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 109, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia, Special Collections.

<sup>509</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 116, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>510</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.



under the heading of “Furniture” recorded in the years that follow suggest probable replacements of household items worn out through regular usage, no doubt including broken tablewares.<sup>511</sup>

The hogshead of Queens Ware also contained a number of forms related to beverage consumption. Coffee forms accounted for a large portion of these. The inventory of contents listed 3 “Pint Coffee pots,” “12 Sett double Coffee [cups] & Saucers” (these were probably the extra large cups sometimes referred to in the period as breakfast cups), and another additional 2 dozen coffee cups. Two dozen milk jugs were also part of the order. As no size is given, it is impossible to know if they were of the size to be part of a tea or coffee service or were larger pitchers. Mugs in quart, pint and half pint sizes were included as were bowls, type unspecified, in two different sizes. While these might have been for food service, it is equally likely that they were punch bowls.<sup>512</sup> It is puzzling to note that no tea wares appear as part of the list of creamware, but other purchases such as a dozen silver tea spoons and silver tea tongs in December 1783 offer evidence of tea drinking as part of the Nourse family’s social rituals.<sup>513</sup>

Other beverage related forms are found in the record of payments that follow the purchase of “a Sett of China” from Captain Tingey in March of 1784. An additional six coffee cups and saucers as well as a “Sett of Bowls” costing \$12 dollars were part of the goods acquired. As with the creamware bowls, descriptive modifiers are missing from the entry. However, given period practices and the cost of the bowls, it is reasonable to speculate that this entry references a set of graduated porcelain bowls intended for serving punch. These drinking items were followed by listings for one tea waiter valued at five pounds and a pound and six pence for two additional waiters.<sup>514</sup> The difference in price likely reflects both size and materials. In 1785, Nourse’s accounts include an entry for “Black China” which, while it is tempting to interpret this as an early reference to black basalt ware in America, was just as likely

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<sup>511</sup> See for example Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803, p. 266, 277, and Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1866, p. 172, 174, both #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>512</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, March 4, 1785, p. 19, 20, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>513</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, March 4, 1785, p. 26, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>514</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, March 4, 1785, p. 32, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

to have been refined red earthenware with a black glaze. No forms are given, but it is likely that these were tea forms.<sup>515</sup>

The gaps in the records of the family's purchases for the 1790s make Joseph Nourse's spending spree at auction in 1800 stand out even more. Beverage forms accounted for many of the items listed. A silver sugar dish and cream pot costing \$23.65 were among the most costly items acquired and would have made a statement on the tea table. But, they were not the only hot beverage forms purchased. Two additional cream pots, two tea pots, coffee and tea urns, and two "Beggins"<sup>516</sup> were also listed. While no materials are given, the prices suggest that these may well have been fused silver plate. Not nearly so grand, but perhaps more useful on a daily basis were the cups and saucers and tumblers listed among goods bought in the summer of 1801.<sup>517</sup>

Joseph Nourse's references to the food stuffs and beverages he purchased, grew, and consumed also reflect on his food and beverage wares. In various letters written to Maria in 1796 he conveys news about the pickling and preserving of foods for their table, presumably in accord with instructions she gave before leaving home. He wrote that "Mrs. Duk has done your Peaches," and that he would "get the Cucumbers for Pickles."<sup>518</sup> A few days later he sent word that he would "attend to the Quinces" and that **she could not have gratified Jane more perhaps than in committing this business to her. she has requested to do the Pickles. She says she can do them in the best manner....**<sup>519</sup> Later that month, Maria, still away from home, sent further directions about stocking the larder and managing the food stuffs. She requested that he would "please to give Jane half a [peck?] of young small french beans to pickle" and that the milk cow should be put to graze while the family was away since "Juba can bring Jane a pints worth of milk every morning from market." In addition, Joseph was to bring "a bottle olives" and "a

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<sup>515</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, March 4, 1785, p. 52, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>516</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department; A beggin or biggin was a type of "drip" coffee maker. See the illustration which accompanies this report.

<sup>517</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger, 1800-1816, p. 170, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>518</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 8, 1796, Box 1b 1790-1799, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>519</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, September 13, 1796, Papers of the Nourse Family, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder dates 1796-1799, Correspondence of Joseph Nourse, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

small jar of pickled oysters” when he came to Northumberland to get her. She closed her letter with the request that “if a frost should come... have my little peppers put in pots and brought in.”<sup>520</sup> This pattern of conveying domestic details in letters continued, as evidenced by Joseph’s August 1804 letter to the again absent Maria which noted that “Your Black berry Jam was made yesterday. for I this morning perceived it in one corner of your Chamber....”<sup>521</sup>

Maria’s mention of growing peppers is just one of several that provide insights into the family’s gardening endeavors. In 1801, Joseph lists “Asparagus Seed” among the goods he purchased on a trip back to Philadelphia and in a letter of August 1804 he noted that despite no rain, “the cellery the most part is alive.”<sup>522</sup> Just a week later, he wrote to Maria that he had endeavored “to get Savory Cabbage” but although failing in that he had “orderd a few more Cellery plants” that had been planted and were doing well. He thought that the new plants, “with those **Fan** had undertaken” would provide “more than sufficient for the Table.” That same day potatoes were “receiving the Plough.”<sup>523</sup>

In writing to his wife, Joseph Nourse sometimes filled his letter with the homey details of his dinner. In August of 1804, in two separate letters, he provided his absent wife with a running commentary on the foods that had found their way to table. He noted that he had had “two eggs, fried bacon, cabbage Potatoes corn apple dumpling and boiled rice. Three days later he amplified and added to the list, writing that “You must know that until today I had no inclination for either Chicken or Ducks but today I had a Chicken boiled with milk sauce: it served me Jane & the kitchen – Fran had supplied the Table daily with Cabbage, Potatoes, occasionally Corn, 2 eggs. Dinah with fried bacon, an apple dumpling, or a rice pudding.” He concluded his discussion of his diet with a teasing note to his wife – “Your kind attention to one in leaving the old Cheese I [??] not forget.”<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> Letter, Maria Nourse to Joseph Nourse, September 22, 1796, Box 1b 1790-1799, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>521</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 4, 1804, #3490-a, Box 1, Folder 1803-1804, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>522</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 169, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department; Letter, Joseph Nourse. to Maria Nourse., August 2, 1804, Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>523</sup> Letter, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 2, 1804, August 9, 1804, Box 2 1800-1815, The Nourse Manuscript Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, D.C.

<sup>524</sup> Letters, Joseph Nourse to Maria Nourse, August 1, 1804, August 5, 1804, #3940-a, Box 1, folder dates 1803-1804, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

The final intriguing but frustrating source of information about the Nourses' diet is found in Joseph Nourse's quarterly accounts, generally referred to as his "Subordinate Account," of monies spent. Most often he simply provided a tally for marketing and groceries from now missing receipts. Occasionally, however, there is mention of a specific purchase. In listing the items purchased during his 1801 Philadelphia trip, Joseph Nourse recorded the purchase of 112 pounds of sugar and 12 pounds of tea, six of which were noted as "Souchong."<sup>525</sup> In January of 1802 the entry read "Marketing, Pork, etc."<sup>526</sup> Unfortunately, the accounts found thus far for the Dumbarton House years yield no such tidbits, but they do clearly show that substantial amounts were spent for fresh foods at market and for groceries which no doubt included items such as sugar, coffee, and tea.<sup>527</sup>

### **Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database**

In dealing with food service and beverage forms, the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* is helpful but the numbers are not as clear as in some of the other categories. The diversity of forms, the variation in language and the differences in the manner of recording the inventories by the inventory takers all combine to make the statistical results somewhat fluid. Recognizing the difficulties inherent in the range of types, some categories and sub-categories in these groups cast a relatively wide net. In a few inventories, the descriptors are so vague as to disallow counting certain households in those categories even though it is clear that table and tea wares were part of everyday life in these houses. For example, in Peter12 a listing for "Knives & forks" with no quantities given allows for the household in the count of households having the form but these items can not be included in the tally of total numbers per household. Nevertheless, the database numbers provide insight into the types and amount of consumer goods related to eating and drinking found in early Washington homes.

### **Food Service**

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<sup>525</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 168, 169, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>526</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 253, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>527</sup> Accounts, see for example, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 176, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

The database category for “Food Service: Dishes” includes individual listings for “plates” and “dishes” as well as tallying references to “sets” of table china. It should be noted that, then as now, the term china was often used to refer to any type of refined ceramic and did not necessarily indicate a porcelain object. As one would expect, all 28 (100%) of the households in the study have entries in this group, but this percentage is achieved only counting the listing for “one lot of Crockery” in Varnum22. Generally, “crockery” is a term applied to utilitarian wares found in kitchens and outbuildings. However, in this case, context, – a listing which reads “one Pair of Castors, and one lot of Crockery” and its placement in a list of dining wares in the room used as a secondary dining or parlor space, provide evidence of the inventory taker’s intention. Within the larger group of 28 households, 21 (75%) include at least one “set” of what is often described as “table china.” In only two of the inventories are the numbers of pieces in the set given. Key15 has a listing for “1 set common china about 30 pieces” which was probably the remnants of what was once a larger set of matching forms. At the other end of the spectrum, Wharton18 owned “1 elegant set India gilt china” containing 341 pieces. While descriptions of the ceramics are not always given, five are noted as “Liverpool,” two as “India,” four as “blue,” and three decorated with “gilt.” Additionally two are assumed to be French and one set each is referred to as Queensware, common, and white. Nine of the 21 households (42%) owning sets have more than one and 15 (71%) of the 21 households with designated sets also include examples of various other unrelated types of plates and dishes. Even though the latter sometimes occurs in fairly large numbers, they apparently lacked the requisite quantity and forms to be considered a set. The descriptions of these items can provide insight into the mix and match nature of the forms used at table when the “set” was not in use. Deakin05 owned “1/2 doz blue edged deep dishes and 2 doz. plates” which may well have found their way to the family table as well as a set of 12 common white plates, but neither was described as a set. And Forest06 owned, in addition to his “full set table china”, nine Liverpool ware dishes and 22 blue edged plates.

Beyond the basics of plates and non-specific “dishes” are those specialized forms whose function is designated by either the piece or the food name given to them. Twenty-three of the 28 inventories contain listings for these types of objects. Soup forms including tureens, silver or silver plate ladles (often referred to in the period as soup spoons), and soup plates, what today would be called soup bowls were present in just of over half of the inventories in the database.

Japanned tin, silver plate or silver bread “baskets” or trays were found in thirteen of the households. Forms intended to bring cheese to the table and those for the serving of fruit were sometimes included as were pieces for the service of sauces such as tureens and “butter boats” and small ladles. Salad and pudding dishes, fish slices and ragout spoons, all made their appearance in a few of the households in the database. Of particular interest are the seven listings for celery glasses or dishes. These were specialized forms developed to display and serve celery, which was considered luxury vegetable throughout most of the 19th century. These are of note since Joseph Nourse mentions his efforts at growing celery in several of his letters.

There were also food forms associated with condiments and relishes. Genteel containers for serving salt, pepper, mustard, vinegars and sauces gave diners the ability to season foods at the table. This practice was considered of such importance that in 1827 Robert Roberts, in the first servants’ manual published in America, gave specific directions for checking on some of the associated wares. Concerning cruet stands and castors he wrote:

This is the most particular article that belongs to your dinner utensils; therefore you should remember to examine it every day to see if all the cruets are clean, and full of every thing [sic] that is necessary to have in them, such as mustard, oil, vinegar, catsup, soy, black pepper, and cayenne, or other sauces that you may have bottles for....

He then went on to add that “you should likewise empty out your salt, and wipe dry your salt cellars....”<sup>528</sup>

The database numbers may to some degree under represent the occurrence of these smaller table wares that were easy to overlook or lump together with other miscellaneous table wares. However, salt forms are found in 19 (67%) of the 28 inventories in the database. Two households list only salt spoons and provide no clue as to the form actually holding the salt. However, the other 17 give clear indication of the presence of open salts, often using the terms cellars or stands. Materials are described as china, glass, cut glass, silver and silver plate. The metal examples would have been protected from the corrosive effects of the salt with glass liners. These households also include listings for salt spoons. All of the inventories listing salt forms, even those with only salt spoons, list multiple examples.

As for the other types of condiments mentioned in the Roberts description, generally the forms that held dry substances such as pepper and powdered mustard were referred to as castors.

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<sup>528</sup> Robert Roberts, *The House Servant’s Directory* (Reprint of 1827 edition: Waltham, MA: The Gore Place Society, 1977) p. 37-8.

Liquids were served in bottles, often called cruets. However, blurring the picture of early Washington dining practice seems to have been a local predilection for using the term “castor” for all holders of such condiments. It is highly unlikely that none of the Washington households included in the database used liquid seasonings at table, yet no cruet forms are listed. Whatever they held, castors appear in 20 (71%) of the 28 households in the database. In those households with the form, 90% of the examples are assumed to represent a “set” and 11 of the 18 sets are silver or silver plate.

Not surprisingly as this was one of the criteria for inclusion of inventories in the database, cutlery forms, – knives, forks, and spoons – appear in 100% of the database households. One inventory, Varnum22, lists only spoons. However, given the quality and quantity of the rest of the household furnishings, this is assumed to be a recording error. Indeed, varying methods of recording make it impossible to achieve an accurate count for these forms. Language is imprecise. Just how many knives and forks are included in a set? Campbl17 owned “1 Elegant Set Knives & forks Say 100 pieces” valued at \$60 and another set “more Common” estimated at 52 pieces valued at \$20. Were these numbers typical? What interpretation should be given to a dozen knives and forks? Did this mean 12 items total or 12 knives and 12 forks? What to do about the listings for knife boxes and knife cases? Surviving period examples are found in a range of sizes with varying capacities and it is often unclear as to whether the knives, forks and even spoons recorded in inventories with these forms are the contents of the boxes or additional examples.

So what do the inventories say about cutlery forms? Knife cases or boxes were found in 16 (57%) of the 28 inventories, with two thirds of the households owning the form having multiple examples, with a median number of 2. However, it is rare for the inventory listing to provide insight into the contents.

Some knife boxes are clearly fitted to hold spoons as well as knives and forks. In some households spoons might have their own cases, however, only one example (Forest06) appears in the database. When materials for spoons are cited, just over half of “table” spoons are described as silver. In fact, it is probable that the number was closer to 100%, as silver created a spoon that was both durable and elegant. Even in households much further down the economic scale than those in the database, silver spoons occur with some degree of frequency. Knives and forks are more complicated. Only 19 (67%) of the inventories give specifics, and these are sometime less

than clear. Knife blades were almost universally made of steel inset into a handle of another material, as were most fork tines. Only five (17%) of the 28 inventories specify silver forks made entirely of silver, with the earliest of these being Hellen15. Handles could be made from silver, but only one household listing (Wilson20) suggests that possibility. When materials are cited, ivory is the most common, occurring in ten (52%) of the listings that provide descriptions. Ivory, which could be stained black or green or left plain, was considered an elegant and fashionable choice for cutlery handles. Other period choices for handles included bone, which could also be dyed, horn, and wood. Inventories suggest that it was not uncommon for a household to have knives and forks with a variety of different types of handles, some clearly more costly than others. More common forms may have been meant for everyday family use or have been relegated to servant or kitchen use. Knives and forks with steel blades and tines, unless properly cared for, were likely to rust and were often among those household items requiring periodic replacement.

Other types of specialized wares recognized in the period were those associated with breakfast and dessert. Only four (14%) had either ceramics or cutlery that were described with the adjective “Breakfast.” However 23 (82%) of the 28 households in the database have forms that are associated with dessert.<sup>529</sup> Only seven (30%) have forms either identified with pyramids, the footed glass stands which were stacked to assemble this type of dessert table centerpiece, but 23 inventories (73%) list “jelly glasses” or other forms of dessert glass which held the creams and jellies served on such a pyramid. Of course, the small dessert glasses could be used with the pyramid of glass stands. In those inventories where numbers of jelly glasses are given, the average per household was 24.

Custard cups were listed in four of the households as were serving dishes specified for use with dessert specific foods such as cake. Another type of food associated with desserts were small tarts, and the “patty pans” in which they were baked were listed in seven (30%) of the inventories. However, most, if not all, of the patty pans appear to have been utilitarian cooking forms and not the more decorative glass or ceramic ones sometimes sent to table in the previous century. Six (21%) of the inventories include items listed for the service of sweetmeats or pickles. While only one of the two terms suggests dessert usage, in practice these forms seem to

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<sup>529</sup> Of the five households without identifiable dessert wares, three have nonspecific glass ware references which might have included dessert forms or been used to serve dessert. However, these are not included in the count of households with dessert wares as the information is too general.



have been used to serve either small pickles or candied and dried fruits depending upon the course. The diminutive dishes offered diners a variety of taste and texture and used in pairs, helped to help provide the symmetrical balance deemed necessary for a well set table. Cutlery, most often silver spoons, described as “dessert” pieces were listed in 14 households (60%), with three of the households also owning dessert knives and forks. Only two of the inventories in the database list special dessert “china.” These sets were described as being “gilt” or “gold” and white.

In addition to forms that fit into a neat category, there are a variety of other dining related objects that show up in some inventories. Perhaps the most numerous are those forms related to serving a hot meal. Nine (32%) of the inventories list plate warmers, some described as tin or Japanned; these were probably forms which held clean plates to warm in front of the fireplace. Four (14%) households included dish covers that could serve the dual function of retaining heat in winter and keeping away insects in summer. Hollow dishes, often of made of pewter and designed to hold hot water to keep a specific plate or dish warm were listed in five (17%) inventories. Several other miscellaneous dining related forms occur in a few households. Crumb or table brushes were found in four inventories. Wash hand glasses or finger bowls were among the furnishings in three houses as were nut crackers. Dish crosses for keeping hot dishes off the table surface occurred in two households, and there is one example each of a “toast stand” and a silver skewer.

Waiters and trays bridge the gap between food and beverage service, as they functioned in a wide range of capacities. It is not entirely clear how period usage differentiated between “waiters” and “trays” – nor exactly when the word salver fell into disuse. However, by the beginning of the 19th century in Washington the term waiter seems to have supplanted salver except for glass examples used as part of dessert service. Trays were most often associated with the serving of tea.<sup>530</sup> However, among the inventories in the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* the terms appear to have been used somewhat interchangeably, with the word “waiter” appearing most frequently. Young02 included “1 Tea Tray” while Deakin 05 owned “4 tea waiters.” Depending upon their size, waiters might be used to pass one or more servings of food or beverage, to facilitate delivering and removing dishes at the dinner table, to

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<sup>530</sup> The term tray is also sometime used to describe an object intended to serve a particular type of food such as bread or cheese, but these forms generally had dished or deeply depressed centers and up curving sides and would not be considered a tray in modern usage.

serve refreshments at informal gatherings or to display tea wares, sometime on a permanent basis, in parlors. For example, Scott01 lists “1 Set of Tea China & Waiter” probably displayed on the tea table in the drawing room but in Hellen15’s inventory “1 Large waiter contg cups and saucers” were “In the closet on the first floor,” perhaps in or near the parlor.

The Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Database shows that 27 of 28 (96%) households owned waiters and/or trays with 100% of the 27 inventories including multiple examples. The average number of examples per household was 6.4 and the median was 6. Most inventory entries provide no descriptions, except for sometimes noting that the waiters are in sets which may imply graduated sizes. Among those with some type of identifying adjective, Japanned is the most common descriptor with red, black, and brown cited for colors. The Japanned examples were probably decorated tin or perhaps papier-mâché. There were also waiters described as mahogany (3), gilt (4), and silver (4).

## **Beverages**

For this study beverage forms were divided the type beverage with which they were associated. Period usage clearly delineated between tea and coffee forms, and forms associated with alcohol are generally recognizable by name, such as wine glasses, or function, like cork screws. There are, of course, some forms such as tumblers, pitchers, and bottles that were more general in usage.

Items associated with tea drinking were found in 100% of the inventories in the database. These range from full sets of tea china and silver teapots to broken sets of cups and saucers and old britannia teapots. As with items associated with dining, the numbers probably under represent the actual ownership totals, as tea items also fall into categories that can be lumped into “lots” by material or size or simply overlooked in an unopened cupboard or drawer. This caveat applies only to the small items in a household that are easy to overlook or that can be grouped together with nonspecific terms.

Fifteen (53%) of the 28 households have tea china identified as a set. Of the 15, five (33%) have more than one set. Tea sets might include not only the tea cups and saucers, but also one or more ceramic tea pots, perhaps with matching tea pot stands to catch drips, sugar and cream forms, and a slop bowl. Depending upon the purchaser’s wishes, there might also be matching coffee cups and saucers and one or more plates for serving bread and butter or cake.

Listings for tea china are more likely to include descriptors than regular table wares. Among the descriptions found in the database are “purple & gold” (Scott01), “Queensware” (Young02), “blue and gilt” (Forest06, Foxall24), “gilt” (Key15), “blue (nankin) china,” “brown edged” (Whartn18), “blue Liverpool” (Wiley19), “english” (Chapmn21), and “red & gilt edge” (Dghrty22).

In addition to matching ceramic tea pieces, it was acceptable, even fashionable, to have a teapot, sugar dish, and cream pot made from silver or silver plate. Half of the households in the database owned silver or silver plate tea set components. As silver (not silver plate) is often tallied by weight rather than form, the numbers of silver hollow ware forms related to tea may in fact have been higher. Whichever version of silver pieces were owned, they might have been used with or instead of ceramic examples.

Silver graced the tea table in other forms as well. Tea spoons and sugar tongs were quite common. As these were silver, not silver plate, at this period, they may also be under represented in the database. In fact, seven (25%) of the 28 inventories in the database list most, if not all, of the silver by weight only. Silver tea spoons are listed in 17 (60%) of the database households and silver tea tongs in 10 (35%). The average number of teaspoons per household is 18 and the median is 15. Silver sugar tongs were recorded in 10 (35%) households in the database. Silver forms found in only one household each are a pair of sugar spoons in Hellen15, and a tea strainer in Barlow18.

Other items identified as being used for tea include tea containers (caddies, chests, boxes) listed in ten (35%) of the 28 inventories and tea cloths specified in two (7%) of the inventories. It should be noted that here, too, the items may be undercounted as ceramic tea “caddies” were sometimes part of tea sets and “tea” cloths were probably not always differentiated when appraisers counted table cloths.

Coffee forms appear in three quarters of the households in the database. Eighteen of the 21 inventories include at least one coffee pot with the average number per household being two. Two thirds of the households with a coffee pot owned a silver or silver plated example. In the 21 households with coffee forms, only seven (33%) included specified coffee cups and saucers. However, as with tea forms, this number is no doubt an undercount for the reason discussed above and the fact that coffee cups and saucers were sometimes included in large tea sets. Like their tea cup companions, coffee cups most often were made of fashionable ceramics. On

occasion, they could be quite grand. In Barlow<sup>18</sup> the coffee cups are described as “gilt inside,” that is having gilded interiors, and in Dghrty<sup>22</sup> they were listed as “gilt footed.” Coffee urns were present in 5 (23%) of the households having coffee forms, with three of the five examples recorded as silver or plated and one urn as gilt. It is not clear what distinguished these urns from those listed among the tea wares but something in either appearance, form, or context led the inventory takers to describe them as coffee urns.

Wares related to alcoholic beverages are found in virtually all of the inventories in the database. Twenty-six of the households clearly show multiple items in this category, one inventory (Ingle<sup>23</sup>) combine all glass, silver, and ceramic objects in one entry for each type of material, but also lists a bottle case which is a clear indicator of alcohol usage. Only in Foxall<sup>24</sup> is there no category of objects that might contain alcohol related drinking or serving forms; however, this is clearly some type of recording error as the inventory lists large quantities of alcoholic beverages including “210 Bottles old maderia [*sic*] wine” and “50 bottles of Cognac Brandy.”

Drinking forms specified for alcoholic beverages – wine, punch, cordial, claret, and champagne are found in 24 (92%) of the 26 households having items in this category. The two inventories not included in the 24 lump glassware forms together rather listing individual types. Wine glasses were among the alcohol related forms in 23 (95%) of the 24 households, with an average of 29 per household among those inventories that specify number of wine glasses. Punch forms, including punch bowls and punch glasses, were the next most common, occurring in 11 inventories, followed by cordial glasses in six households, champagne glasses in five, and claret glasses in two. No clues to appearance beyond the type of beverage for which the glasses were intended appear in most of the inventories. A few entries do provide hints of wine glasses decoration – “9 green wines” (Hellen<sup>15</sup>), “23 fine diamond cut glass wine glasses” (Whartn<sup>18</sup>), “cut” or “cut glass” (Turner<sup>16</sup>, Orr<sup>22</sup>, Varnum<sup>22</sup>), and “9 fluted wine glasses” (Chndlr<sup>25</sup>). Several inventories also note that the glasses were “plain” (Turner<sup>16</sup>, Wshgtn<sup>21</sup>, Chndlr<sup>25</sup>) or “common” (Varnum<sup>22</sup>).

Decanters were listed in 25 (96%) of the 26 inventories that record alcohol forms. All households owned more than one example, with both the average and median number being eight. Capacity is the most commonly used descriptor – large, small, quart, pint, and etcetera. As with beverage glasses, a few examples provide some other clue to appearance. A small

number are described as being cut glass, and several inventories employ the term plain or common. Clearly most of the households in the study chose to decant wines into these containers which were both functional and even when plain, a step above the dark green wine bottles that continued to be used to bring wine to the table in some social settings.

Forms intended to protect the table from dripping decanters and wine bottles, described variously as decanter or bottle stands and coasters, were listed in sixteen (59%) of the inventories having identifiable alcohol related forms. These objects were also used, often in pairs, to slide bottles along the table to those gentlemen wishing to fill their glass. The average number was 3.9. Entries with descriptions note plated or Japanned examples.

Other examples of alcohol related forms occurring in small numbers in the inventories are cork screws, a wine cock, a silver siphon, punch strainers and funnels, punch ladles, bottle cases, and wine coolers. Small silver sauce pans, probably for heating brandy, occurred in two households.

Finally, under the umbrella of beverage drinking vessels are those general forms, probably sometimes used for alcohol but not so specified – tumblers, goblets, cans, etc. Tumblers are listed most often, occurring in 23 (82%) of the 28 households in the database. Six of the households have silver examples, ranging from two to six pieces. These were, no doubt, what would have been referred to as beakers in the 18th century. The rest of the examples were of glass variously described as large, small, common, fluted, pint, and cut glass. Only in one household, Whartn18, are there tumblers that stand out as different. His inventory lists two “sets” of tumblers modified by the term “sportsman”, one set gilt edged and one set of horn. In the 22 inventories where numbers of tumblers are counted, the average number is 16. However, two of the inventories, Key15 and Wharton18, in addition to the counted examples include additional examples not enumerated, thus making the actual average somewhat higher. Goblets appear in 11 (39%) of the database inventories. It is not entirely clear from the inventories how this form was used. Only five of the 11 households have goblets in sufficient numbers to allow them to have been used at table when entertaining, ranging from six to 36 examples. Cans, mugs, and tankards appear in only a small number of the total inventories and in some case, i.e. Meigs22’s silver tankard or Graham21’s “old silver mugs,” may represent 18th-century forms acquired through inheritance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The goal of the recommendations for this section is to provide sufficient forms to allow for interpretation of food and beverage consumption in the Nourse household, be it a well set dining or tea table for family and friends, a social glass of wine among gentlemen after dinner, an intimate family meal in the breakfast parlor, or a supper or tea tray in Mother's room. In keeping with the general sense of Joseph and Maria Nourse's the taste and life style, the wares recommended, both in quantity and quality are meant to represent a genteel and fashionable household, but one that is not lavish or extravagant. The recommendations rely on both the analysis of the database numbers and the information found in surviving Nourse manuscript materials. It is clear from the results of the database analysis, as noted in the section above, that not every food or beverage related form that appeared in one of the inventories should be included. A small amount of leeway might still be taken when assembling this group of objects if the museum staff feels it necessary for the interpretation of daily life. However, great care must be taken not to be seduced by the wonderful objects that survive from this period. It should be remembered that often it is the finest and rarest examples and forms that come down from past times rather than those which were more typical of everyday life in even well-to-do families.

In age, these wares should represent the accumulation of a marriage that began in 1784 and a household that had moved many times by the time the Nourses took up residence at Dumbarton House.

### Food Service:

Although the primary source material does not provide much evidence that the Nourse family entertained at the dinner table, clearly they were considered acceptable players in the theater of dining. Joseph noted in many of his letters to Maria that he dined with friends and on at least one occasion that he had been invited along with others on the "civil list" to dine with President Washington. There are other references to both Maria and Joseph attending dinners with friends as well as more formal events such as dinners with the Madisons and British Ambassador Erskine. Clearly they were satisfactory dinner companions who understood the complex rules and etiquette that governed the rituals of the table. Therefore, it is logical to assume that in addition to gathering sometimes numerous family members around their table they must have, on occasion, entertained others at dinner as well. For instance, Anna Maria

Thornton's diary entry for December 31, 1800, recorded that "Dr. T. [her husband] went to dinner at Mr. Nourse's." <sup>531</sup> To entertain at the dinner table effectively would have required the range of dinner wares included in the recommendations.

Like all breakable housewares, table china was among those items that required periodic replacement. Despite Joseph Nourse having purchased large quantities of Queens china and what may have been a Chinese export porcelain set in 1784, by 1798 his account books note his acquisition of a "Table Sett China" for \$55. <sup>532</sup> It is also possible that additional table china purchases were made and are simply not identifiable under the lump sums recorded under the heading "furniture" in Nourse's accounts.

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<sup>531</sup> Diary, Anna Maria Thornton, December 31, 1800; published in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C., Volume 10, 1907, p. 226.

<sup>532</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1778-1803, p.109, # 3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

## **2 sets “Table China”**

**1 set English refined earthen ware, either a late cream ware, possibly with overglaze decoration, or pearlware in a shell edge or polychrome overglaze decoration; c. 1798**

Although the archeological evidence for Dumbarton House is scanty due to limited excavations and the disruption of the site at the time the house was repositioned on the lot, there is one set of fragments that are of interest for this specific recommendation. Found among the sherds are several plate rim pieces in a green shell edge design. Two look as if they might have come from either the same plate or the same set, and are of a depth and design to date to a period of ownership by the Nourse family.<sup>533</sup> However, since there is limited context for these artifacts, there is no real way to attribute ownership.

### **1 set Chinese Export Porcelain; 1784-1805**

The composition of a set of table china was to some degree based on the owner’s choice; however, the following numbers represent what would have been considered a basic compilation. Within each set, the pattern should “match.” However, period usage would have allowed for “in-fill” pieces; for example, a set of green shell edge might have incorporated items with different types of molded edges as long as all were decorated with a green glazed rim.

Each set should each have a combination of the following forms:

**2-4 dozen dinner plates**

**2-4 dozen smaller plates**

**2 dozen soup plates**

**6-8 pairs of flat serving dishes (platters) in graduated sizes**

**4-6 pairs of hollow forms in graduated sizes**

**1 Soup Tureen with stand**

**2-4 sauce forms, either butter boats or tureens with stands,**

Also for consideration as part of one or both sets are specialized forms such as **pudding dishes, fruit dishes or baskets, salad bowls, and fish dishes.**

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<sup>533</sup> See George Miller and Robert Hunter “English Shell-Edged Earthenware” in *The Magazine Antiques* , March 1994 for an in-depth discussion of the evolution and dating of shell edge design ceramics.



In addition, the following dining forms are recommended:

**1 Soup Ladle:** silver or ceramic; American or British; 1784-1805

**2 or more sauce ladles:** one per piece if using sauce tureens, these might also be used with the service of dessert; silver; American or British; 1784-1810

**1 castor/cruet set:** silverplate stand and glass bottles and castors; American, British, or continental; 1784-1810

**2 pairs salt cellars or stands:** silver or silverplate with glass liners, glass or ceramic; American or British

**4 silver salt spoons:** American or British

**2 bread baskets:** 1 Japanned tin, 1 silver plate; American or British; 1784-1813

**1-2 celery glasses:** British or European, c. 1805

**2 dozen ivory handle knives and forks:** American or British, c. 1800

**1-2 dozen bone or wooden handle knives and forks:** American or British; 1784-1813

**12 table spoons:** silver; Philadelphia; 1783; maker John David

It should also be noted that the Nourses, like most families, probably still possessed the remnants of earlier ceramic sets, such as the 1783 Queens Ware purchase or items acquired in small numbers to fill out the breakage in existing sets. While not likely to grace the dining table on formal occasions, such remnants or fillers might well have been used for family meals. While no specific recommendations are made concerning these miscellaneous tablewares, such wares should be included in the overall interpretation of foodways at Dumbarton House.

## Dessert Wares:

Some of the small plates in the recommended sets of table china could have been, and probably were, used for dessert service. In addition, dessert forms would have been found among the household's glass wares.

**2-3 footed graduated glass salvers for a pyramid:** British or European; 1784-1805: although the overall numbers in the database show ownership in not quite one third of the inventories, three of the examples are in the earliest inventories taken between 1802 and 1806 and a fourth is in an 1816 inventory.

**2-3 dozen glass jelly glasses, mixed forms:** British or European; 1784-1813

**2-4 pair pickle or sweetmeat dishes**, glass or ceramic, if ceramic, some should match the dinner sets listed above; 1784-1805

**1-2 dozen custard cups**: ceramic, probably porcelain, could match the dinner china; Chinese Export, British or European; 1784-1800.

Custards did not need special serving forms; however two of the four households having custard cups were in the inventories taken in 1805 and 1806, thus giving the small sample extra weight.

**Waiters and Tea Trays: 6 waiters, various sizes; 2 silver or silver plate, 2 silver plate or Japanned, 2 lesser quality Japanned; England; 1784-1804**

Waiters were among the early purchases made by Joseph Nourse at the time of his marriage. In the list of things bought in March of 1784 was “1 Tea Waiter” valued at an eye opening five pounds, which was only 12 and a half shillings less than the set of china that was the most expensive item among the goods purchased.<sup>534</sup> No descriptors are given but the value suggests both a large size and a costly material. If it had been silver, it is likely that Joseph Nourse would have stated that fact, but it is entirely possible that it was “Sheffield” fused silver plate. *Sketchley’s Sheffield Directory* published in Bristol, England, in 1774, notes with pride that among the fashionable forms available in fused plate were “tea trays and waiters.”<sup>535</sup> The next line in the Nourse account notes two additional waiters, again with no descriptors, costing a not negligible one pound six shilling for the two. One can only speculate that like the much more expensive example, size and material made the difference. Undoubtedly smaller, they might have been silver plate but were more probably finely decorated Japanned tin. Sixteen years later, in 1800, a silver waiter costing six dollars was among the objects acquired by Joseph Nourse at auction.<sup>536</sup> However, he does not specify weight so it is difficult to know whether the form was actual worked silver or “Sheffield” style silver plate.

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<sup>534</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p.32, #3490-a Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>535</sup> Quoted in John D. Davis, *English Silver at Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1976), p, 217, note 2.

<sup>536</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1781-1800, p. 151, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

In the *The Footman's Directory* published in England in 1810, Thomas Cosnett provided instructions to servants about the complexities of serving tea. Although lengthy, it is included here for the vivid picture it paints of this important social ritual. None of the various scenarios would have been possible without tea trays and waiter.

If the lady makes tea in the drawing-room, which with small parties is generally the case, have the tea-tray well dusted, and the tea-cups and saucers put on, one for each, with a tea-spoon to each; if there be coffee, a coffee-cup and saucer for each, with a spoon to each; let tea-cups and saucers to [sic] put so as to face the person who makes the tea, with the tea-pot, cream-jug, and slop-basin behind them; and let the tea-caddy be put near: if there be an urn-rug, do not forget it.

If you have to wait at tea, that is, to hand it about to the company, you must have a small hand-waiter; if there is not one proper for the purpose, use that with which you hand the glasses about at dinner, as you do not require a large one. When you take away the tea-things, always take the urn off the first, next put the tea-caddy in its proper place, and then remove the tea-things. Always have a cloth in your pocket to wipe the table with, in case it should be slopped, or crumbs of bread, etc left on; and properly adjust the candles, if there are any on the table.

Perhaps you may have to carry the tea and coffee up-stairs, ready-made, to the company; if so, you must be careful not to slop the tea over the cups, into the saucers; see also that you do not forget the spoons, sugar-tongs, cream, or slop basin; have a tea-pot on the tray with hot water in it, in case any of the ladies' tea should be too strong. Your tray ought to be pretty large, so that you can put the bread and butter, sugar-basin, or any thing else upon it: take care to arrange them so that the ladies may take the cups with ease, and hold the tray sufficiently low for that purpose....<sup>537</sup>

### **Hot Beverage Wares:**

Tea drinking, both a source of domestic comfort and a social lubricant, was a well-established domestic custom by the beginning of the 19th century. As such, there were a number of specific forms recognized as necessary to a well-furnished tea table. Coffee was also an important part of the daily life of many households, including the Nourses.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **1 Tea Set: Ceramic; British or Chinese; 1784-1813**

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<sup>537</sup> Thomas Cosnett, *The Footman's Directory*, 1810, quoted in Peter Brown, *In Praise of Hot Liquors*, (York, England: York Civic Trust, 1995), p. 97.

The set might be of either refined British earthen or stone wares, or of porcelain or of Chinese export porcelain. It is intriguing to speculate that the “Black China” purchased by Joseph Nourse in the fall of 1785 might have been an early example of basalt tea wares but it also possible that tea wares were among the china pieces bought from Captain Tingey in 1784. Equally possible was that one or more of the unspecified account listings for “furniture” in the decades that followed included the purchase of tea items. The set should include:

**1 tea pot with lid**

**1 tea canister with lid**

**1 sugar dish with lid**

**1 cream pot**

**1 slop bowl**

**12 cups and saucers**

In addition to the ceramic tea forms, the following forms should be included in silver or fused “Sheffield” plate as per the individual recommendation. These recommendations are based on the record of Joseph Nourse’s auction purchases in 1800. While most of the items purchased are not described as silver plate, the prices paid and the specific recording of those silver objects which were recorded by weight combine to suggest that many of the objects in the list were indeed the highly fashionable silver on fused silver “Sheffield” plate.

**2 tea pots:** silver plate; British; c. 1800

**1 sugar dish:** silver; American or British; c. 1800

**1 cream pot:** silver; American or British; c. 1800

[2 additional cream pots, assumed to be silver plate, are part of the purchase but would overcrowd the tea table. They may have been simply too good a bargain to pass up.]

Also included in the purchase were “2 Tea & Coffee Urns.” It is probable that these were both hot water urns used in making tea and coffee, rather than two urns distinguished by some recognizable difference in form. Another intriguing possibility is that the coffee urn used to hold and serve coffee. It is not clear at what point this type of coffee service became fashionable, but such usage would explain the differentiation in naming what at first glance would appear to have

been the same form. While they need not both have been silver plate, it would have been a likely and fashionable material.

**1 tea urn:** silver plate or copper; British; c. 1800

**1 coffee urn:** silver plate or copper; British; c. 1800

In addition, the Nourse primary source material lists the 1784 purchase of silver tea spoons and sugar tongs from silversmith John David.

**12 tea spoons,** silver, Philadelphia, maker John David, 1784

**1 pair tea/sugar tongs,** silver, Philadelphia, maker John David, 1784

### **1 Tea Chest or Caddy: form, style and materials depending upon date; 1784-1804**

The question of a container for the loose tea at the Nourses' tea table presents a bit of a conundrum. No Nourse primary source material specifically references such a form, although it is possible that a tea chest or tea caddy<sup>538</sup> was accounted for among the account book entries for "furniture" or "sundry." Nor does the *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* information provide clear guidance. Only ten (35%) of the 28 households include a tea caddy or tea chest, yet 100% of the 28 households owned items identified with tea drinking. Eighteenth- and 19th-century prescriptive literature and modern secondary source materials alike would lead one to believe that such containers were a necessary part of the tea table ritual, yet the numbers suggest otherwise. There must have been some acceptable period practice that allowed for a genteel serving of tea without this form. Thus far no information has come to light to guide the interpretation of this tea table "mystery", therefore, a tea chest or caddy form is recommended for inclusion in the Nourse tea wares.

Coffee was also clearly an important part of life in the Nourse household, as coffee cups and saucers were among Joseph Nourse's purchases at the time of his marriage. He also bought coffee forms at auction in 1800.

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<sup>538</sup> See Tania M. Buckrell Pos, *Tea & Taste: The Visual Language of Tea*, (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 2004), pp. 121-133 for a discussion of tea chest and tea caddies.

**6-12 coffee cups and saucers:** ceramic; British or Chinese; 1784-1813

**2 coffee pots:** creamware; British; 1784

**2 coffee biggins:** silver plate; British; c. 1800

### **Alcohol Forms:**

As with dinner wares, some of the recommendations made here are based on general period usage and information from the inventory database. The Nourse primary source material provides little information about the family's consumption of alcohol or any other type of beverage beyond tea and coffee. It is possible that Joseph Nourse included purchases of wine and other alcoholic beverages among his quarterly listings for groceries. At this period alcohol-based drinks were regularly consumed by most of society. Therefore, the absence of such forms from Dumbarton House, without period source material to support the deletion, would set the Nourses apart from their peers in ways that would not be interpretatively supportable.

**8-10 Decanters:** various sizes, some pairs; British or European; 1784-1813

**2-4 Decanter stands/bottle coasters:** perhaps pairs; silver, silver plate, japanned metal; British; 1784-1813

**2-3 dozen Wine Glasses:** mixed styles and designs; British or European; 1784-1813

**3-4 Punch bowls:** graduated sizes; ceramic; English or Chinese; 1784-1813

**1 corkscrew:** British; c. 1800

**18-24 tumblers:** various sizes, styles, and designs; British or European; 1784-1813

### **Table Linens:**

**10-12 Table Cloths, various sizes and fabric qualities;**

**12-15 napkins, various fabric qualities; ca. 1784-1810**

Table linens – table cloths and napkins – were considered an important component of a genteel dining table, although inventory evidence does not show their presence in all well-to-do households. Their absence is no doubt due in some cases to personal preference, and in others to the diligence or lack thereof of the appraisers. For example, Peter<sup>12</sup>'s inventory takers lumped

together all the “Table Linen” and Barlow<sup>18</sup> simply notes “sundry articles of house linen much worn.”

Both table cloths and napkins could be ordered pre-made or could be stitched at home from appropriate yard goods – usually linen in a variety of weaves and grades of fineness. In 1784, Annapolis merchant Thomas Rutland advertised that he had received from London diaper<sup>539</sup> table cloths in three sizes in addition to yard goods that he described as “7-4, 8-4 and 10-4 damask tabling linen.”<sup>540</sup> These same alternatives are reflected in the orders placed by members of elite society in the 18th-century Chesapeake. Charles Carroll, the Barrister, during the 1760s placed several orders thorough his London agent for a range of pre-made table cloths, some quite large. Specified among his requests were “3 fine Damask Table Cloths for a Table 10 feet Long 5 feet wide” and “6 Ditto [table cloths] for a Table 5 feet Long and 4 feet wide.” In his order of 1767 he added, “1 Dozen fine Diaper Napkins.” Virginian Robert Beverley, on the other hand, chose to have such items produced locally from ordered linen. On at least three separate occasions, he included fabric for table linens among the goods to be sent from England. In the 1770s he wanted “40 yds of diaper Table linnen 6 Feet 6 inches wide”; sometime after 1789 his request was for “diaper for napkins”; and in 1790 he wished to purchase “25 yards diaper for tablecloths 7 feet ½ wide.”<sup>541</sup>

Diaper was not the only weave from which table linens could be made. Plain weave examples, probably those sometimes referred to as “coarse” or “common”, were part of daily life in many homes and at the other end of the spectrum were the damask weave examples. Damask, with a smooth finish and decorative designs or patterns woven into the cloth, was the favored choice for the finest table linens.<sup>542</sup> These woven patterns might be relatively simple or as elaborate as those available from two different New York merchants in 1804. One offered “a beautiful assortment of table cloths with and without eagle patterns,” and the other, cloths ranging in size from four-by-eight feet to 10-by-fourteen feet with patterns such as “thistle, kings, queens, and clermont patterns, the last adorned with a basket of fruit in the center.”<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> Florence Montgomery in *Textiles in America* cites the **OED** in defining diaper as “a linen fabric (sometimes with cotton) woven in lines crossing to form diamonds with the spaces variously filled with lines, a dot, or a leaf.”, p. 218.

<sup>540</sup> Quoted in *The Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, p. 275.

<sup>541</sup> Both the Carroll and Beverley materials are quoted in *The Gunston Hall Room Use Study*, vol. 2, pp. 275-276.

<sup>542</sup> See Florence Montgomery *Textiles in America*, p. 213 for a discussion of damask weave.

<sup>543</sup> Louise Conway Belden, *The Festive Tradition: Table Decoration and Desserts in America, 1650-1900*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, A Winterthur Book, 1983), pp. 13-14.

Such table linens continued to be owned by genteel Washingtonians in the early national period. The *Early 19th-Century Washington, D.C. Probate Database* shows that 22 (78%) of the 28 households in the study owned designated tablecloths but only 14 of 28 (50%) specifically listed napkins among the household linens. The average number of tablecloths was 11.9 and the median was ten, while the average number of napkins was 15 with a median of 12. Types of weave were used as descriptors, with damask appearing in half of the 22 households which included table linens and diaper in 31%. Age – either old or new, and size – large or small, were the other most often applied adjectives. The amount of wear (much worn), the fineness of weave (coarse or common), and the type of linen (Russia or homespun) also appear in one or two entries. Cotton fiber makes its earliest appearance in Whann<sup>13</sup> and is noted in a total of six (27%) of the 22 households with specified table linens.

Joseph Nourse's accounts include listings for the purchases of table cloths. Eight pre-made diaper table cloths were among the good acquired at the time of his marriage. The difference in price, ranging from 8 shilling 9 pence each to 28 shillings each no doubt reflects a difference in size and perhaps in the quality of the textile as well.<sup>544</sup> Although there were surely other similar purchases in the intervening years, in 1801 his accounts note 12 dollars spent on an unspecified number of table cloths with no descriptive modifiers to speak to fabric or size.<sup>545</sup> In 1807, there was an expenditure of \$3.45 for "Linens house use" which certainly might have included table linens.<sup>546</sup> It should be noted that no specific references to the purchase of napkins by Joseph Nourse have been found, but these might be among the generic listings like the one above. Napkins might also have been made at home from purchased yards. Table linens, like breakable dishes and glasses, were subject to the wear and tear of regular usage. And like these more fragile objects, replacements would have been acquired as needed.

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<sup>544</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Journal, 1778-1803 kept in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, p. 34, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>545</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. 171, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.

<sup>546</sup> Accounts, Joseph Nourse Account Ledger 1800-1816, p. A2, #3490-a, Papers of the Nourse Family, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department.



## **APPENDIX I: NOURSE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS**

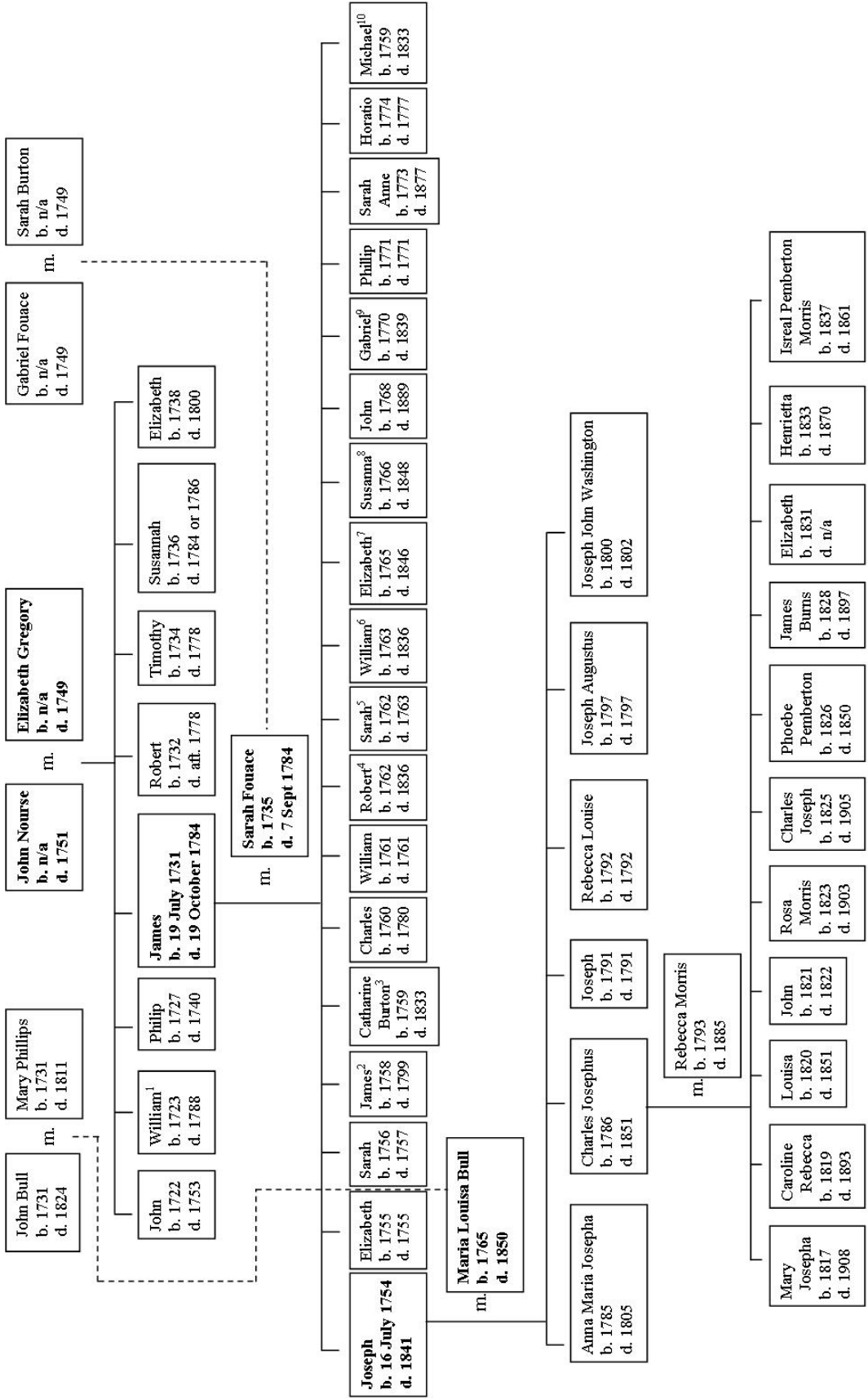
NOURSE FAMILY COLLECTION 1685-1901 (12 boxes) held by the Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. This collection includes letters, journals, daybooks, account books, scrapbooks, diaries and other documents relating to Joseph Nourse and to the Morris side of the Nourse family.

NOURSE FAMILY LETTERS 1785-1900 (approx. 900 items) held by Dumbarton House, headquarters of The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America, Washington, D.C. This collection includes about 900 letters, journals, books and other documents relating to the Nourse family. About two-thirds of these letters concern Joseph Nourse and his family and the other third concern the Morris side of the Nourse family.

ROSA MILLER COLLECTION 1792-1839 held by the Maryland State Archives, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland. This collection includes account books, religious tracts, letters and journals relating primarily to Joseph Nourse. Many of the documents are microfilm copies of documents held by Alderman Library.

JAMES STARKEY COLLECTION 1685-1921 (2 boxes) held by the Maryland State Archives, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland. These papers pertain mainly to Michael and James Nourse and include a will, letters, and other miscellaneous papers.

## **APPENDIX II: NOURSE FAMILY GENEALOGY**



1. Married Anne Mayo (n/a—1772), daughter of John Mayo of Starway in Westbury, England.  
2. Married Sarah Benois of South Carolina.  
3. Married John Esten Cooke.  
4. Married Rebecca Jameson of Mercer Co., Kentucky.  
5. Sarah (1762-1763) was the twin sister of Robert (1762-1830).  
6. Married Elizabeth Jameson of Mercer Co., Kentucky.  
7. Married Jeremiah Chapline of Frederick Co, Maryland.  
8. Married William Riddle of Virginia.  
9. Married Ann Doudle.  
10. Married Mary Rittenhouse of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**APPENDIX III: OBJECTS IN THE COLLECTION WITH A NOURSE PROVENANCE**  
**(DONATED/LOANED BY A NOURSE DESCENDANT AND/OR HAVE A NOURSE ASSOCIATION)**

**PARLOR (1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR, SOUTHWEST CORNER):**

1991.1      ***Portrait of James and Sarah (Fouace) Nourse***, ca. 1754  
 Artist unknown; England  
 Oil on canvas  
 Gift of Charles J. Nourse

1972.2      **Bracket Clock**, ca. 1690-1700  
 Henricus Harper (active, 1657); England  
 Walnut, brass, glass  
 Gift of Miss Juliet Livingston Nourse and Mr. Charles J. Nourse

This bracket clock likely was brought by the James Nourse family on their passage to America in 1769. A partial inventory of the 116 crates of family possessions list “two table clocks and a lantern.”

1997.8      **Sofa**, ca. 1785  
 Maker unknown; Philadelphia  
 Mahogany, reproduction upholstery  
 Gift of Mrs. Oliver Gasch

This sofa once furnished “The Highlands,” the home of Charles Josephus and Rebecca Wistar Morris Nourse. The structure, located on present-day Wisconsin Avenue, stands to this day and now serves as the administrative headquarters of the Sidwell Friends School. Given the date of manufacture of the sofa, it is possible it was first owned by Joseph Nourse and used in his residences in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington and then passed down to his son and daughter-in-law for use in their residence.

L1998.19      **Fireplace Bellows**, early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Maker unknown; America  
 Wood, walnut-veneer, red leather, tin  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

**DINING ROOM (1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR NORTHWEST CORNER):**

2006.24.1a-c      **Dining Table**, ca. 1785  
 Philadelphia, attributed to James Watkins  
 Mahogany, poplar, oak  
 Gift of Mrs. Margaret Robson

On 26 January 1784, Joseph Nourse entered into his account book for the commission of furniture from James Watkins, “Joiner in Arch Street between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets according to a verbal Agreement £25. being ½ of the following Articles of Household Furniture that he is to deliver by the 1<sup>st</sup> April next, the residue to be paid on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1784. Note The Chairs were by agreement not made for me.” Included in the commission was a “Table 4 feet” for which Nourse paid £8.0.0. This table has a confirmed Nourse provenance and is likely the rare survival of this commission (for additional historical background, see the Curator’s report in the object file). The two demi-lune ends, though not documented in the commission, may have been made by Watkins or acquired by Nourse at a slightly later date.

### **MOTHER’S CHAMBER (1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR, NORTHEAST CORNER):**

1967.2.1-2     **Pair of George III Mahogany Armchairs**, ca. 1790  
 Maker unknown; England  
 Mahogany, reproduction upholstery  
 Gift of the John W. Stenhouse Family in Memory of Elizabeth Simms Stenhouse

1997.7           **George III Mahogany Sofa**, ca. 1790  
 Maker unknown; England  
 Mahogany, reproduction upholstery  
 Gift of Mrs. George Barry Bingham, Jr. (Edith Stenhouse)

L1999.5         ***Portrait of Phoebe Pemberton Morris***, 1796  
 Charles Willson Peale (American, 1741-1827)  
 Oil on canvas  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

Phoebe Pemberton Morris (1791-1825) was the sister of Rebecca Wistar Morris Nourse and the sister-in-law of Charles Josephus Nourse, son of Joseph Nourse. The Morris daughters, and especially young Phoebe, shared a deep personal relationship with Dolley Madison.

### **BREAKFAST ROOM (1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR SOUTHEAST CORNER):**

L1998.16       **Pier Glass**, ca. 1785-1790  
 Maker unknown; New York  
 Wood, gesso, gilt, eglomise  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

This pier glass was purchased by Joseph Nourse during his residency in New York with the federal government. In April 1786, Nourse entered into his account book that he paid £1.10.0 “for a looking glass.”

- L1998.18     **Fireplace Bellows**, early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Maker unknown, America  
 Wood, walnut-veneer, red leather, tin  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

### **VISITOR CENTER (1ST FLOOR, EAST HYPHEN AND WING):**

- L1996.2     **Windsor Chair**, ca. 1785  
 Philadelphia, maker unknown  
 Poplar, maple, hickory  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

On 4<sup>th</sup> March 1784, Joseph Nourse recorded in his account book that he “Paid for a dozen Windsor Chairs” “10 at 12/.6 each = £6.5” and “2 at 22/.6 = £2.5” Dating approximately to that time period, this chair may be from that commission.

- M65.198ab     **Pair of Women’s Shoes**, ca. 1784  
 Maker unknown  
 Silk  
 Gift of Mrs. John W. Stenhouse  
 These shoes reportedly were owned by Maria (Bull) Nourse and may have been worn on the occasion of her marriage to Joseph Nourse on April 22, 1784.

- M66.196ab     **Pair of Gentleman’s Shoe Buckles**, ca. 1790  
 Birmingham, England  
 Steel and paste  
 Gift of Miss Juliet Livingston Nourse

According to family tradition, these shoe buckles belonged to Joseph Nourse.

- M66.197ab     **Pair of Gentleman’s Daytime Shoe Buckles**, ca. 1790  
 English, Boulton and Smithe  
 Steel and paste  
 Gift of Miss Juliet Livingston Nourse

According to family tradition, these shoe buckles belonged to Joseph Nourse.

- 1996.16     **Baby Cap**, ca. 1786  
 Cotton, silk embroidery  
 Gift of Mrs. William R. Miller

This hat reportedly was made by Maria (Bull) Nourse for her baby son, Charles Josephus Nourse, born 1786.

L2003.8.1 ***Portrait Miniature of Charles Josephus Nourse***, ca. 1815

Unknown American artist

Watercolor in ivory

Loan of Edith Stenhouse Bingham

It is possible this portrait miniature was commissioned to commemorate the occasion of his marriage to Rebecca Wistar Morris (1793-1885) on May 9, 1816, in Philadelphia.

L2003.8.2 ***Portrait Miniature of Rebecca Wistar Morris***, ca. 1815

Unknown American artist

Watercolor on ivory

Loan of Edith Stenhouse Bingham

It is possible this portrait miniature was commissioned to commemorate the occasion of her marriage to Charles Josephus Nourse (1786-1851) on May 9, 1816, in Philadelphia.

L2003.8.3-.6 **Three teaspoons and a tablespoon**, 1783/84

John David (Philadelphia, active ca. 1755-1796)

Silver

Loan of Edith Stenhouse Bingham

These spoons are a rare survival from the 1783 commission by Joseph Nourse from "[John] David near the Draw Bridge" for a set of "12 Table Spoons, 12 Tea Ditto, Tea tongs" for which Nourse paid the total sum of £22.10.3. The commission was recorded on 31 December 1783 in Nourse's account book, now in the collection of UVA-Alderman Library.

The commission was made in anticipation of the pending nuptials of Joseph and Maria Louisa (Bull) Nourse on April 22, 1784, at the Bull family plantation, "Bulskin."

L2003.8.7 **Ladle**, ca. 1781-1783

Maker unknown; Paris, France

Silver

Loan of Edith Stenhouse Bingham

Bearing a portion of the Nourse family crest, and given its date of manufacture and descent within the family, it is likely this ladle was a wedding gift to Joseph and Maria Louisa (Bull) Nourse on the occasion of their marriage, April 22, 1784 at the Bull family plantation, "Bulskin."

**UPPER PASSAGE (2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR, CENTRAL HALL):**

- L1998.7      **Shipping Crate**, early 19<sup>th</sup> century  
 Maker unknown; Mid-Atlantic states  
 Pine, poplar, paint, baize  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

This crate bears the stenciled name of C[harles] J[osephus] Nourse on the lid.

**DINING ROOM CHAMBER (2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR, NORTHWEST CORNER):**

- L1998.15      **Linen Press**, ca. 1790  
 Unknown maker; New York  
 Mahogany and mahogany veneer  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust
- 1996.12      **Bed Valance Fragment (“Apotheosis of Franklin and Washington”)**, ca. 1780  
 Unknown maker; England  
 Copper-printed linen  
 Gift of Mrs. William R. Miller

This valance fragment from a set of bed furniture may possibly be the one recorded in the probate inventory of James Nourse as “one set red & White figured copper plate bed Furniture” valued at £1.15.0

**PARLOR CHAMBER (2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR, SOUTHWEST CORNER):**

- L1998.12      ***Portrait of Elizabeth Gregory of How Caple***  
 School of Mary Craddock Beale (English, 1632-1697)  
 Oil on canvas  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

Elizabeth Gregory (d. 1751) was the grandmother of James Nourse and the great-grandmother of Joseph Nourse. This portrait likely was brought by the James Nourse family on their passage to America in 1769. A partial inventory of the 116 crates of family possessions lists “family pictures,” and the 1784 probate inventory of James Nourse documents “11 family pictures” and values the lot at £3.



### **BREAKFAST ROOM CHAMBER (2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR, SOUTHEAST CORNER):**

- L1992.27     ***Self-Portrait of Anna Maria Josepha Nourse***, ca. 1804-1805  
 Anna Maria Josepha Nourse (American, 1785-1805)  
 Watercolor over graphite on paper  
 Loan of Edith Stenhouse Bingham

This haunting self-portrait was executed shortly before “Sepha” succumbed to her lifelong battle with a respiratory illness, probably tuberculosis. She died while visiting the hot springs near Sweet Springs, Virginia, and is buried near Staunton, Virginia.

- L1996.17     **Franklin Stove**, ca. 1785  
 Berkshire Furnace Company, Wernersville, Pennsylvania  
 Cast iron, paint  
 Loan of the Baltimore Museum of Art

This fireplace insert was owned by Joseph Nourse and likely used during his residency at Dumbarton House (or Cedar Hill as the property historically was named) from 1804 to 1813. His account books list the purchase of “furnaces” for every room in the house. Firewood was listed as one of the biggest household expenses.

- 1931.60     **Linen Press**, ca. 1840  
 Maker unknown; Baltimore, Maryland  
 Mahogany and mahogany veneer  
 Gift of the Rhode Island Society

This linen press reportedly was owned by Charles Josephus Nourse, son of Joseph Nourse.

### **ARCHIVES:**

More than 1000 pages of archival information pertaining to the Nourse family and their allied families, including: personal correspondence, invitations, drawings, books, and other ephemera.

### **STORAGE:**

- M65.237     **Gentleman’s Waistcoat**, late 18<sup>th</sup> century  
 Unknown maker  
 Silk  
 Gift of Mrs. John W. Stenhouse

According to family tradition, this waistcoat was owned and worn by Joseph Nourse.

1996.13      **Seal**  
Wax  
Gift of Mrs. William R. Miller

Wax impression of the Nourse family coat of arms

1996.15      **Pincushion**, after 1784  
Silk  
Gift of Mrs. William R. Miller

A pincushion reportedly made from the wedding petticoat of Maria (Bull) Nourse.

L2005.3      ***Portrait of Joseph Burton, Jr.***  
Unknown English artist  
Oil on canvas  
Loan of Mr. James Starkey III

Joseph Burton, Jr., was a maternal great-uncle to Joseph Nourse, his godfather, and namesake. This portrait likely was brought by the James Nourse family on their passage to America in 1769. A partial inventory of the 116 crates of family possessions lists “family pictures,” and the 1784 probate inventory of James Nourse documents “11 family pictures” and values the lot at £3.

L1998.20.1-.7      **Group of assorted textiles**  
Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

Including: (1) String crotched panel with fringe (good condition); (2) Lady's black lace bolero (good condition); (3a,b) Lady's peach silk-satin skirt panel or apron and matching vest with side stays (fragile condition); (4) Lady's cotton batiste nightdress with lace panels (fragile condition); (5) Lady's embroidered muslin robe (fair condition); (6) Linen sheet (fragile condition - patched); (7) Pair cream and blue linen towels (good condition - unused).

L1999.6      **Assorted group of objects of various dates**  
Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

Includes three pieces of lace comprising: one Honiton lace head covering; one lady's lace cap with black lace and lavender ribbon trim; a silk lavender and lace detachable neckline trim; a small silk pincushion. The jewelry includes two sets of painted enamel game chips, a Georgian gold memorial brooch, Victorian mourning jewelry, spectacles, buttons, pins, pendants, wax seals etc.

- L1999.7      **Toiletry Kit**, ca. 1852  
 Tiffany, Young, and Ellis; New York, NY  
 Rosewood and brass  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

Rectangular case enclosed in brown leather carrying case with shaped tablet engraved "M.T. Kemble, New York" (Margaret Tillotson Kemble), opening to a fitted interior with an assortment of toiletry jars, glass tumblers, and boxes, all with silver covers; together with a group of unrelated mechanical pencils and a few other miscellaneous items.

- L1999.8      **Group of assorted books**  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

Detailed inventory list on file. Group includes several pocket-size Ladies Almanacks in original bindings, children's books, standard literature, etc., as detailed on inventory list prepared at time of deposit. Most in original cloth, generally in worn condition. Together 32 volumes.

- L1999.9      **Group of assorted books and papers**  
 Loan of the Rosa Williams Miller Trust

Detailed inventory list on file. Includes a group of miscellaneous letters, documents and printed items including several pages of genealogical charts, a small account book (1890), poetry (mostly transcripts), a disbound commonplace booklet of small watercolors, several printed items including an obituary of Joseph Everett Nourse, a sermon booklet of Joseph Nourse's funeral, schoolbook edn. of Pope, Portland, Maine, 1828, a large scrapbook (binding defective, containing engravings and portraits, c. 1850, an autograph letter of General Winfield Scott and a transcript of another Scott letter, family correspondence, etc.). Legend of Sleepy Hollow, 1849, by James Fenimore Cooper. Assorted group invitations to Balls. A small oblong card, L99.9b: Printed invitation to a ball given in honor of Dolley P. Madison, First Lady, by citizens of Georgetown, 2 March, 1817. Various other objects including wool carding paddles, butter paddles (one damaged), stereoptic cards, erector set, photograph albums etc.

#### **APPENDIX IV: POTENTIAL FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Future Research Recommendations by Brian Lang:<sup>547</sup>**

This document, the *Dumbarton House Furnishings Plan*, is the culmination of nearly fifteen years of research regarding the architectural history of Dumbarton House, its early occupation by the Joseph Nourse family, and the broader social and cultural sphere of the fledgling City of Washington. The purpose of the document is to guide current and future staff of Dumbarton House, the Dumbarton House Board, and The National Society in their decision-making processes regarding the interpretation of the historic core. While every effort was made to ensure the accuracy of the contents of this document, it should be mentioned that additional primary source material—manuscripts and other archival material—pertaining to the Nourse family is known to exist in the private collections of Nourse family descendants and was not available for review in the creation of this document.<sup>548</sup> Should this material be made available for future research, it has the potential to yield new, or possibly contradictory, information. Additionally, through advancements in the Internet—specifically the increased awareness and digitization of archival collections—new repositories containing relevant Nourse family documents may eventually be located. In particular, Dumbarton House staff may wish to contact historical societies in locations where collateral family members were known to relocate, such as western Kentucky and southern Ohio, which may possess previously unrecorded collections and could yield additional information

Other information regarding the early architectural history of Dumbarton House may still be found in the as-yet unlocated papers of Horace Peaslee, the principal architect of the 1931 restoration. Likewise, valuable information regarding architectural modifications made by

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<sup>547</sup> In addition to the following, the reader may wish to consult those made in the report by Karri Jurgens, *A Preliminary Study of the Architectural History of Dumbarton House, Georgetown, District of Columbia, Headquarters of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America*.

<sup>548</sup> Richard Starkey, a Nourse descendant residing in Richmond, Virginia, has stated he owns a large quantity of archival material in his attic.

subsequent owners and occupants, such as Charles Carroll, John Rogers, and various members of the Rittenhouse families, may potentially exist in yet-to-be-discovered archival collections. In particular, the papers of Benjamin Latrobe should be thoroughly researched to determine whether there exists a drawing or description of the south façade portico, commissioned by Charles Carroll in 1813, and which could potentially guide Dumbarton House staff in restoring the south porch.

### **Future Research Recommendations by Ellen Donald:**

As noted by Brian Lang, the possibility of additional Nourse-related primary source material remains as a tantalizing promise. Such materials may offer fresh insights to information already known or provide completely new information about the daily lives of the Nourse family and the furnishings of Dumbarton House. While it is the hope of the author that any new information will only reinforce the conclusions and recommendations of this report, the reality is that new sources may in some instances supersede these recommendations. In addition to the above mentioned research possibilities, top priority should be given to tracing the papers of Maria Bull Nourse's family. It is clear from the surviving Nourse family correspondence that Maria Nourse maintained a close and affection relationship with her family throughout her marriage. Not only did she travel to visit her parents and sisters, but some of them were frequent visitors to the Nourse home, often spending lengthy periods with Maria and Joseph. Once the genealogical information has been determined, a systematic effort should be made to see if there are surviving Bull family papers collections or papers under the names of her married sisters.

In the same vein of tracing possible related materials through the married names of female members of the family, additional Nourse family correspondence might be located among papers related to Joseph's sisters Catherine, Elizabeth, and Susanna under their married names. A careful search for their married names or the names of their husbands might yield useful materials. A search of related Rittenhouse and Morris family papers collections might also bear fruit.

As always with a project of this scope, there are some "loose ends" of research that remain to be pursued even as the project draws to a close. Perhaps the most dramatic and saddest for this project was the burning of the Peabody Library in Georgetown before a research

visit could be organized. Although their collections of Georgetown and Washington, D.C. primary source materials had been utilized for other endeavors prior to the launching of The Dumbarton House Furnishing Plan, no systematic search for documents directly related to the Nourse family and their period of occupancy had been done. There is hope that much of the collection was salvaged. When conservation work is completed on the surviving collections, an in-depth survey of these holdings should be a first priority of staff of The Dumbarton House.

Two other unexplored Georgetown-related collections are among the manuscript holdings of Georgetown University. The first is described as “a group of account books kept by various professionals and tradesmen, largely in or near Georgetown, dating from about 1790 to 1850.” The library catalog contains no name index or further description of this collection. Library staff was unable to locate the material during a visit to the library and a follow-up inquiry was not fruitful. However, given the scarcity of early Georgetown mercantile materials, another attempt to spur library staff to locate the materials seems in order. The second is the Nidiffer Collection of Georgetown and Washington Deeds and related papers which date from 1817 to 1886. The collection description notes that 600 hundred of the documents are deeds and that “About 100 of the documents are bills of sale of furniture, housewares, horses, farm equipment, books and even the contents of a drug store (Rose Hill Drug Store).” Again, no comprehensive list of names of individuals appearing in the collection is given. Although the date range keeps this collection from being high on the research priority list, a brief survey of the contents might yield contextual materials for life in early Georgetown.

Other unexplored materials which might contain information about Joseph and Maria Nourse’s neighbors are found in the holdings of Tudor Place and Evermay. While most of the Tudor Place materials are believed to date to the later periods of the house’s history, a survey of



the earliest materials might prove useful. Unfortunately, staff turnover at Tudor Place during the research phase of the furnishing plan project prevented such an investigation. Institutional difficulties of another kind prevented access to the Samuel Davidson papers at Evermay. Structural work at Evermay had led to the materials being placed in inaccessible storage while the Dumbarton project was underway. Unlike the Tudor Place materials, that may or may not cover the correct period, it seems certain that some, if not all, of the Davidson papers would be of interest to Dumbarton. Given the unsettled future of Evermay, an effort to follow up on this group of materials should be of the highest priority.

As mentioned above, the seemingly endless expansion of sources listed on historical society and academic institution web sites requires a regular and systematic vigilance. Beyond “Google” and the specific websites for known institutions of interest lies search engines such as “Archives Grid.” These specialized search tools are often only available through University and College libraries, but should prove worth the effort. Finally, as part of such online searches, a regular check should be made of the manuscript holdings in institutions such as the Maryland Historical Society, the Virginia Historical Society, and the Library of Congress, even though their holdings have already been searched. These institutions and others like them are both actively collecting as well as regularly entering newly cataloged materials into their online catalogs.

## **APPENDIX V: ILLUSTRATIONS**

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Specific primary source materials used for the Dumbarton House Furnishing Plan are cited in the footnotes of the report. Of special importance are the collections of Nourse family materials that are discussed elsewhere in the appendices. Of particular interest for the contextual information they provide are the newspaper advertisements from Georgetown, Washington and Alexandria papers, many of which have been copied and placed in The Dumbarton House curatorial research files.

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