

Hander Woodworking

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Re:Thordarson Mahogany, Neoclassical Chest of Drawers, Circa 1810.

SECTION I: ANALISIS

When the chest of drawers was received, its condition was moderate with a damaged front, left leg. [See Photo 1. & Photo 2.](#) The chest of drawers was built with thick mahogany veneer glued to a structural pine substrate. The finish appeared to be original shellac but conflicting hole patterns and indentations in the drawer fronts, as well as three distinct layers of patina, suggested the hardware was not original, yet, those same distinct layers, indentations and holes provided the strongest evidence that the finish was original. [See Photo 3.](#)



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

It was estimated the chest of drawers was an original of the neoclassic period which occupied the early 19th century in the United States. This was determined by the existence of many clues such as the laminated construction of the drawer's bow-fronts including the evidence of hand saw marks on the interiors of some of those fronts. See [Photo 4](#) Other evidence included the pine, hand planed paneled drawer bottoms, See [Photo 5](#) the hand dovetailed oak drawer sides See [Photo 6](#) and the hand made nails found in the interior drawer rail construction. The excellent handmade marquetry edge banding, See [Photo 7](#) as well inlay work, large widths of the cabinets single veneer flitches, and large widths of the cabinets flat, hand planed and nailed back boards (with hand made nails), helped to corroborate its approximate vintage. The indication of a different hardware and the multiple layers of patina, (under the different pulls) gave strong evidence of its originality. Most likely the original hardware was a type of ring pull such as shown in [Photo 8](#), which was consistent with the neoclassical style.

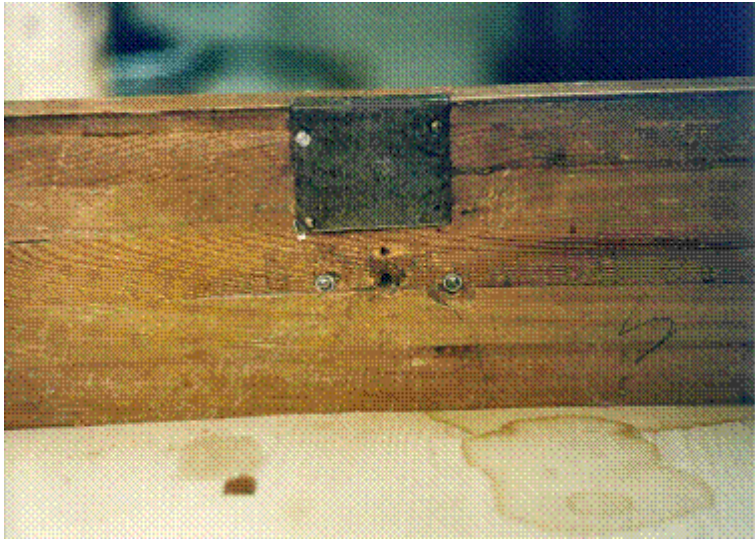


Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7

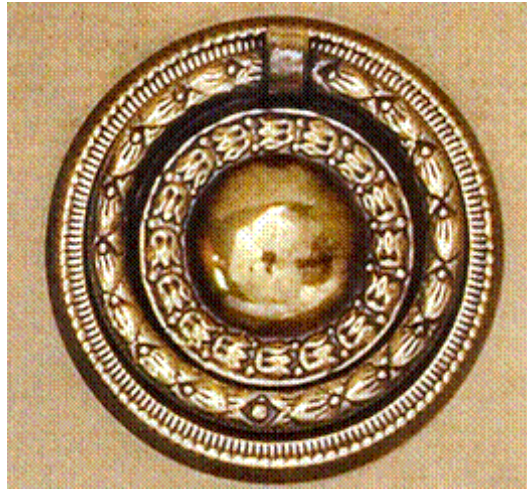


Photo 8

SECTION II: REPAIRS

Before repairs began, an inconspicuous area of finish was swabbed with a cotton swab dipped in benzene to test for wax, followed by a cotton swab dipped in denatured alcohol. The process verified the finish to be shellac.

As mentioned earlier, the front left leg of the chest was broken off and the lower tip of the broken leg was damaged and missing. The torn remains of the leg's tip was ground flat to receive a new piece of wood. [See Photo 9](#)

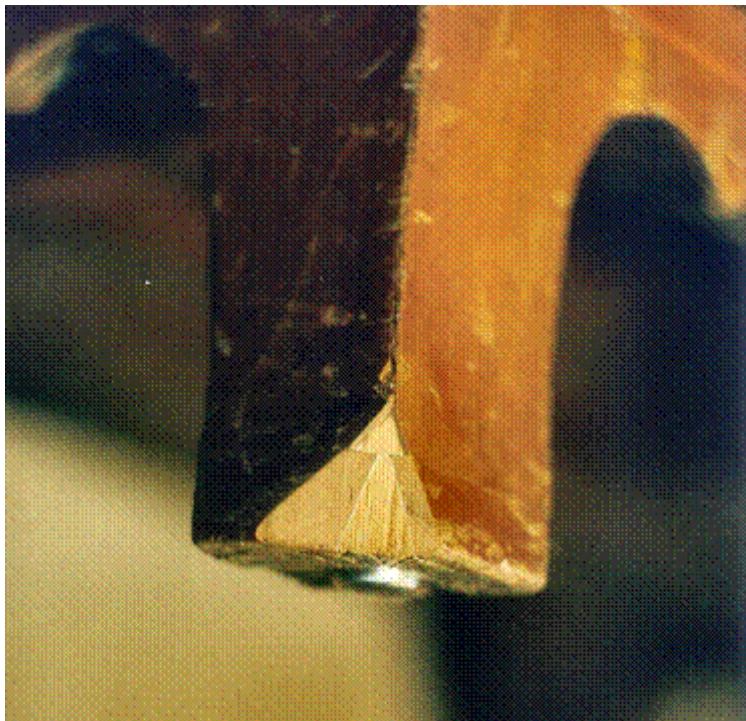


Photo 9

A new block of mahogany was glued to the toe using hide glue. The toe was then shaped out and the foot was glued and fitted into place on the cabinet. [See Photo 10 & 11](#). When that repair was dry, preparations for veneer repairs were made.

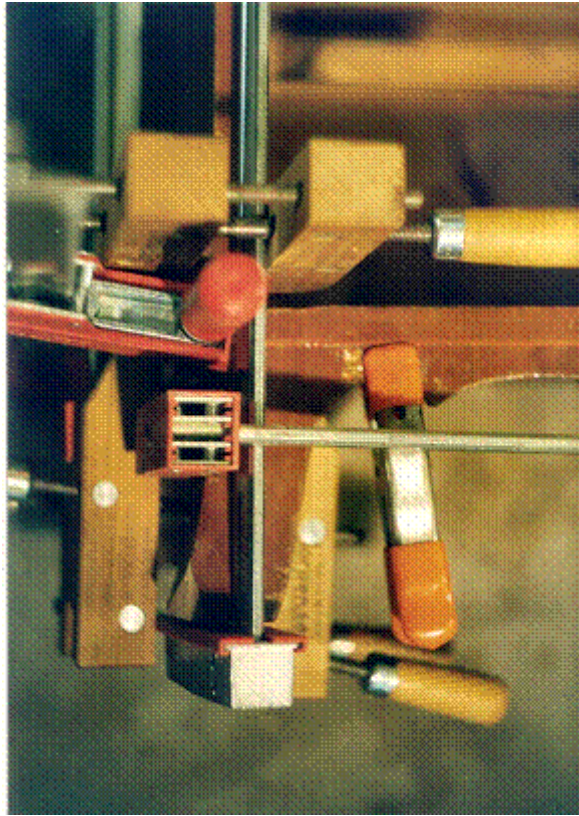


Photo 10

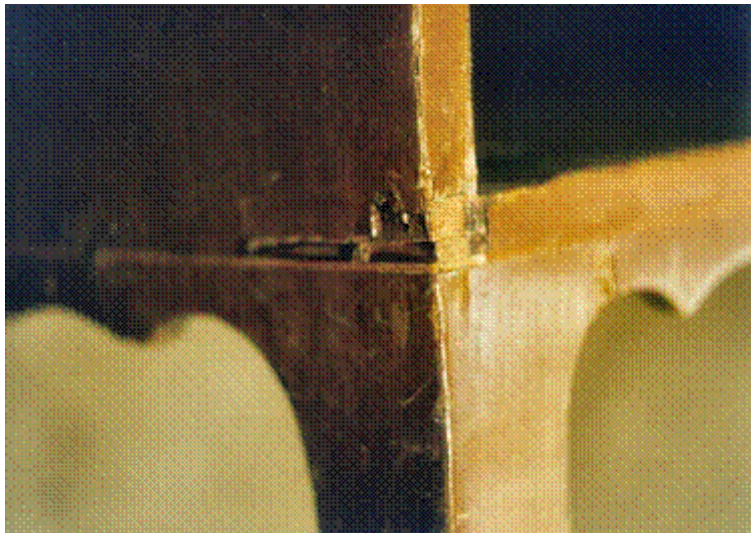


Photo 11

SECTION III: FINISH

After fairing in the repaired veneer, the new veneer pieces and toe were bleached and neutralized with vinegar as the first step in imitating the patina of the older veneer on the cabinet. The entire piece was then carefully cleaned with benzene to remove grime and wax. The touching up process on the new wood was completed with dyes, stains and shellac. [See Photo 12](#). Once this was accomplished the entire piece was French polished until the sheen and luster of the original finish was brought to satisfaction and completion. Finally, the chest was waxed, buffed and delivered.

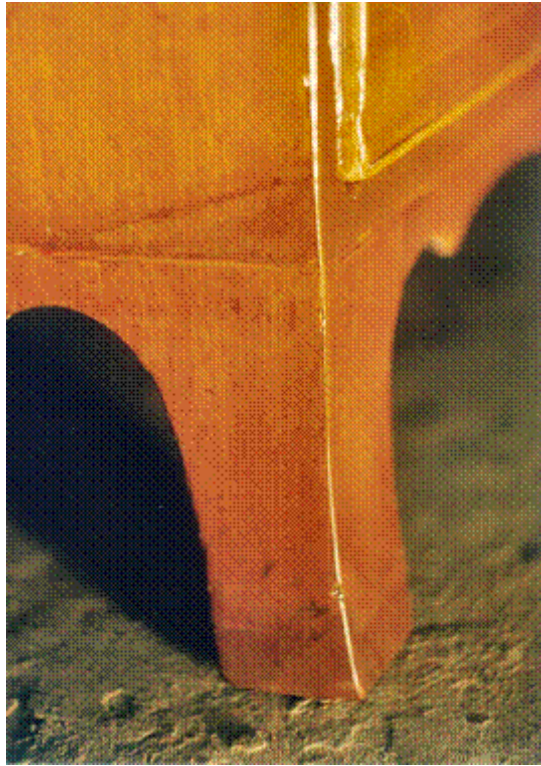


Photo 12

SECTION IV: CONCLUSION

The chest of drawers was a wonderful example of an American age of supreme refinement; a merging of expert craftsmanship, simple yet elegant design with the abundant supply of superior quality wood from around the new world, which no longer exists today. It is a functioning piece of history from a golden age of furniture making and one to be very proud of.



Thank you Mr. & Mrs. Thordarson for allowing Hander Woodworking to conserve this wonderful piece of furniture.

Sincerely,

Paul Hander

Return to Antique Conservation

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