

Document 1270: Regulations settled by the Union Committee

Document 1270 in the Winterthur Library's Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera is an anonymous, undated handwritten page titled "Regulations settled by the Union Committee." The document lists specifications and pricing for details of furniture manufacture. Its single page is crumpled and torn along one edge, as if it had been ripped hastily from a notebook, and it is yellowed and stained along the margins. In transmitted light, the laid paper's chain lines are visible, and the boldly imprinted watermark of *Molineux, Johnston, & A. Lee* can be seen below an image of a plumed crown, the heraldic badge of the Prince of Wales (Figure 3). The papermakers Molineux, Johnston, & A. Lee operated at the Lewes Paper Mill in Lewes, East Sussex County, England (Figure 4), about 60 miles south of London, from 1802-1825, and they were appointed the royal paper-makers to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales around 1805; the watermark thus dates the paper to sometime in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.¹ The sheet has been folded horizontally three times, and the sections that faced outward when the paper was folded are darkened and dirty as if they had been exposed to a dusty environment for an extended period of time. The manuscript is written in brown ink, with a word or two every few lines appearing darker with each dip of the writer's pen. The writing on the front of the sheet is evenly laid out with generous spacing between lines, while the reverse

¹"Molineux, Johnson and Lee," Mills Archive, The Mills Archive Trust, https://millsarchive.org/explore/people/entry/64738/molineux_johnson_lee#.Xl8mThNKiRs; Derek Stidder and Colin Smith, *Watermills of Sussex*, vol. 1 (Baron, 1997), 38; John V. Button, *The Brighton and Lewes Guide* (Lewes: J. Baxter, 1805), 47.

has ink stains and spatters with the writing spaced more tightly. The last few lines grow smaller and smaller, as if the writer were running out of space and did not wish to begin a new page (Figures 1 and 2).

The document begins with a list of furniture forms that may be made with “claws.” It specifies the thickness of starting material to be used for claws on screens, dressing glasses, music and reading stands, and various tables, depending on the eventual size of the particular piece of furniture. The prescribed thicknesses range from 1-inch thick for pole fire screens to 2½-inches thick for circular library tables with tops larger than 3 feet in diameter. Also included is a price table that details the deductions to be made in the case that any of these forms are made without claws:loo tables (a type of tilt-top gaming table) are reduced in price by 3s 6d, while a screen dressing glass with a plate above 45 inches high is deducted a full 6s if claws are omitted. While the term “claw” may initially bring to mind the ubiquitous carved ball and claw foot, in this case it refers to slender curved feet like the ones that might form the tripod base of a fire screen or table (Figures 5 and 6). Document 1270 goes on to discuss the details of other furniture forms and operations, including “a bidet framed with legs that draw out in the end of shaving stands” (Figure 7); the configuration of veneers and inlays; fitting table tops with cloth; and the correct sizes of blocks to support the tops of particular tables.

The British furniture trade during the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries operated at varying levels of complexity. Clive D. Edwards divides the models of business organization for furniture shops into four main groups:

- (a) working masters or journeymen making furniture in their own workshops for the wholesaler or retailer; (b) the integrated manufacturing firms operating from extensive premises combining a variety of skilled workmen; (c) craftsmen-shopkeepers working from their own premises and making and selling; and (d) furniture retailers with

showrooms...[who] sometimes operated appraising, auctioneering, and second-hand departments as well.²

As the scale of a shop's production increased, labor disputes tended to become more frequent. Tensions between masters and journeymen led to a rise in trade associations, or "combinations," which sought to improve the quality of workers' lives through strength in numbers and collective bargaining.³ It was not unheard of, for example, for journeymen whose demands were rejected by the masters to band together and sell the products of their labor directly to the public, often conducting their sales out of public houses.⁴ Another strategy for navigating the employer-employee relationship was the establishment of set prices for piece-work. Employees were paid by the piece, giving them a financial incentive to work harder while also allowing the employer to accurately estimate costs. Piece-work agreements for furniture recorded in manuscript form are known in England as early as circa 1746, when the "Prices for workmen in Lancaster" were written. A copy of this list was found in the account book of noted Lancaster, England cabinetmaker Robert Gillow, indicating that price agreements and piece-work were a part of his business model.⁵

In order for such set prices to be effective, they needed to be disseminated among shops. The first known printed British price book, the *Cabinet-makers' London Book of Prices*, was published in 1788 (Figure 8). Edwards argues that this publication "...was considered by the

² Clive D. Edwards, *Eighteenth-Century Furniture* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996), 17.

³ Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2000), 33-40. The term "master" refers to the owners of shops, or employers. Journeymen were skilled workers who had completed an apprenticeship but worked as employees for someone else, i.e. the master.

⁴ Edwards, *Eighteenth-Century Furniture*, 23-24.

⁵ Edwards, 27.

journeymen as a demand, rather than any example of agreed rates” and that an expanded 1793 edition “...was not accepted so readily by the masters,” thereby resulting in labor disputes and strikes during the 1790s.⁶ In 1811, a new edition, re-named the *London Cabinet Makers’ Union Book of Prices* was published by “a committee of masters and journeymen” (Figure 9).

Although the labor organizations of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain are in many ways analogous to modern trade unions, the use of the term “union” in the title apparently refers to the union of *masters and journeymen*—who had finally come to an agreement on the prices contained within the book—rather than a union of *employees*, as we typically understand the meaning of the word in relation to labor today. This new price book’s jointly agreed-upon set of standards marked an important turning point in master-journeymen relations in the furniture making industry.

The *Union Book*, like the *Cabinet-makers’ London Book of Prices* before it, is organized into entries for each furniture form. These start with a description of the dimensions, construction details, and price for a standard model, followed by a list of extras and deductions for optional features that may be added or subtracted (Figure 10). For example, the entry for “A Writing Table—No1,” on page 87, specifies that the basic model, or “start,” should be made as follows:

All solid, two feet long, one foot four inches wide, the framing four inches and a half deep; one plain drawer in ditto, without lock or beads; square edge to the top, lipp’d for cloth cross-way, and mitred in the corners; plain Marlbro’ legs.

The price of labor for making this “start” table is 6 shillings 8 pence. Listed below these base qualities are optional added features and the amount to be charged for each. These options include extending the length, width, or depth of the table; replacing the “Marlbro’ legs” with a “horse” support; adding a hinged top, lopers, candle board or book rest; and oiling and polishing

⁶ Edwards, *Eighteenth-Century Furniture*, 28.

the finished piece. At the back of the *Union Book*, following the entries for individual furniture forms, are tables to guide the pricing of operations that might apply to a wide range of furniture pieces. These include the price of fixing brass-work, working mouldings, reeding and fluting legs, and performing various inlaying and veneering operations. The *Union Book* also contains a series of plates, including illustrations of moulding profiles, designs for furniture parts like legs and claws, and depictions of full pieces of furniture described within the book. Charles F. Montgomery has compared the agreements settled on in these price books to the union contracts of the modern steel or motorcar industries.⁷ Indeed, the price structure of a base model which may be upgraded *à la carte* is analogous in some ways to the way cars are sold today, although an important difference is that furniture price books functioned as a professional agreement between employers and employees and not as retail catalogs meant for consumer use.

The date range indicated by Document 1270's water mark—1802 to 1825—as well as the title's reference to the “Union Committee” suggest that the manuscript is related to the *Union Book of Prices*, which was published in four known editions in 1811, 1824, 1836, and 1866. Compared side by side, these volumes' similarities are striking; the four editions are, in fact, nearly identical. Nearly the entire contents are reprinted verbatim across the book's fifty-five-year print run, including page numbers, price lists and prices, tables, and plates. The book's second edition, published in 1824, does, however, have one difference: an introductory segment titled “General Observations,” which lists rules of thumb that may be applied to a wide range of the furniture forms, has been expanded with an addendum (Figure 11). The first lines of this addendum explain that it was “agreed upon by the committee immediately after the publication

⁷ Charles F. Montgomery, *American Furniture: The Federal Period, 1788-1825* (New York: Viking, 1966), 19.

of the former [1811] edition.” This added set of regulations consists of the very same list of guidelines recorded in Document 1270 (Figure 12). If these additional guidelines were indeed agreed upon and adopted in 1811—“immediately” following the publication of the first edition on the *Union Book*—they would have represented essential knowledge for any user of the book and would have needed to be added onto any copy of the original version that had already been purchased. Such an essential addendum must, then, have been reproduced widely in manuscript form during the years between the 1811 and 1824 editions of the *Union Book*.⁸

The fact that a new edition incorporating these additional terms was not published until thirteen years *after* they had been agreed upon points to the expense involved in producing and purchasing each edition of the book. At 1 pound 7 shillings, the *Union Book* represented a significant investment. Because it is a price book, it conveniently contains reference points for understanding its own relative cost. Compared to the book’s 1 pound 7 shillings, a “round-front inclosed pier table” cost 1 pound 5 shillings 6 pence. A card table with ovolو corners also cost 1 pound 5 shillings 6 pence. A music or reading stand cost 10 shillings for the start model—less than *half* the price of the book. Even with all of the extras added, the price of labor for this piece of furniture was still more than a shilling below the price of the book. The book itself is in fact more expensive than the labor costs of many of the furniture pieces described within it.

Given an understanding of the value of the *Union Book of Prices* to both shop masters and journeymen furnituremakers, the material details of Document 1270 start to take on greater meaning. We begin to see the folds in this single page of laid paper as evidence of its physical use as a handmade addendum enfolded within the leaves of a mass-produced labor manual. The

⁸ There was likely reason to reproduce the addendum even after 1824 as well, although the dates suggested by Document 1270’s watermark make that timeline less likely in this case.

uneven spacing of the lines of writing demonstrates the value of the paper itself. The transcriber worked to squeeze the union's added guidelines onto the space of a single leaf—a useable unit that could easily be removed from the book and consulted as needed. The protection provided by the bound volume is perhaps a reason that this dusty handwritten manuscript still survives.

It is clear that price books like the *Cabinet-makers' London Book of Prices* and the *London Cabinet Makers' Union Book of Prices* shaped all levels of the London furniture trade, but their influence was also felt much more broadly. Furniture in the American colonies and the early republic was heavily influenced by the taste and the practices of the London furniture business.⁹ Design books like Chippendale's *Director* and Sheraton's *Drawing-Book* played a major role in shaping American furniture styles. Craftspeople emigrating to America often advertised their London provenance, and they brought with them not only design sources, including illustrated price books, but also their methods of working and business practices.¹⁰ American price lists from as early as 1756 are known, and by 1772, the earliest known Philadelphia price book, *Prices of Cabinet and Chair Work*, was published. Numerous publications followed in New York, Baltimore, and elsewhere.¹¹ As in London, conflicts between employers and employees led to labor disputes and strikes in American cities, including in Philadelphia in 1796, at the same time that trade disputes were disrupting the London trade. Charles Montgomery argues that:

¹⁰ Charles F. Montgomery discusses the influence of design books outside of London; *American Furniture*, 11-18. For more on early American trade advertisements, see Alfred Coxe Prime, *The Arts & Crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland and South Carolina: Gleanings from Newspapers* (Topsfield, Mass.: Walpole Society, 1929).

¹¹ Alexandra Alevizatos Kirtley, *The 1772 Philadelphia Furniture Price Book: An Introduction and Guide* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2005). For lists of English, Scottish, and American price books, see Montgomery, *American Furniture*, 488.

Price books demonstrate that there existed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the English-speaking world a “language of workmanship” which was familiar to all cabinetmakers common to cabinetmakers...[and was] in essence the “art and mystery” of the craft learned in apprenticeship.¹²

According to Montgomery, the “language of workmanship” contained in price books served as a “mother tongue” that allowed workers to function competently in whatever English-speaking locality they might find themselves.

The *London Cabinet Makers' Union Book of Prices* and books like it facilitated the dissemination of English taste through the exportation of British trade customs, business practices, and actual furniture. These trade books were also intimately tied to a tremendous influx of raw materials and to the powerful trade networks of the growing British Empire. Mahogany is mentioned fifty times in the *Union Book*, while deal, or dimensional softwood—the next most frequently mentioned species—has only fourteen mentions in the text. The book thus makes clear which wood was “king of the cabinet woods”: mahogany was imported from the Caribbean islands and Central America in increasingly large quantities beginning in the 1720s. The trees were harvested and transported across dangerous terrain by enslaved workers under the harshest conditions. These trees made fortunes for the English merchants who transported them back to Britain for use in the furniture trade.¹³ Many of the other woods mentioned in the *Union Book* were also imported to Britain from great distances. Rosewood, satinwood, coromandel, kingwood, tulipwood, and amboyna all came from the far reaches of the British Empire and are a testament to Britain’s relentless worldwide colonial reach. Even the humble deal, which was

¹² Montgomery, *American Furniture*, 19-26.

¹³ Adam Bowett, *Woods in British Furniture-Making, 1400-1900* (Wetherby: Oblong Creative Ltd. in Association with Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, 2012), 121-129.

used to make unseen parts of furniture and functioned as a substrate for mahogany and other exotic veneers, was imported from northern Europe to Britain in incredible quantities.¹⁴ The *Union Book*, then, like much of British life, was inexorably connected to the wider world. The timber market that supplied cabinet shops in England depended upon global factors—politics, warfare, and global trade—well beyond the control of any single shop master. Given these wild variables, it is not surprising that the masters of furniture shops were willing to negotiate for predictable wages for their employees; predictable payrolls served both masters and journeymen within a system of fluctuating material supply.

Although brief, Document 1270 embodies the worldwide scope of the British furniture trade in the early nineteenth century. It also, most essentially, carries a complex history of the relationship between furniture makers and shop owners. This object documents the fairly agreed-upon prices of journeymen's labor, but it also documents the value of the book itself in which these protections were contained. *The Union Book of Prices* was worth far more than the labor for making a pier table or a card table, and the mutual agreement held within its costly printed pages was worth carefully addending by hand.

¹⁴ Bowett, *Woods in British Furniture-Making*, 285-295.

Images:

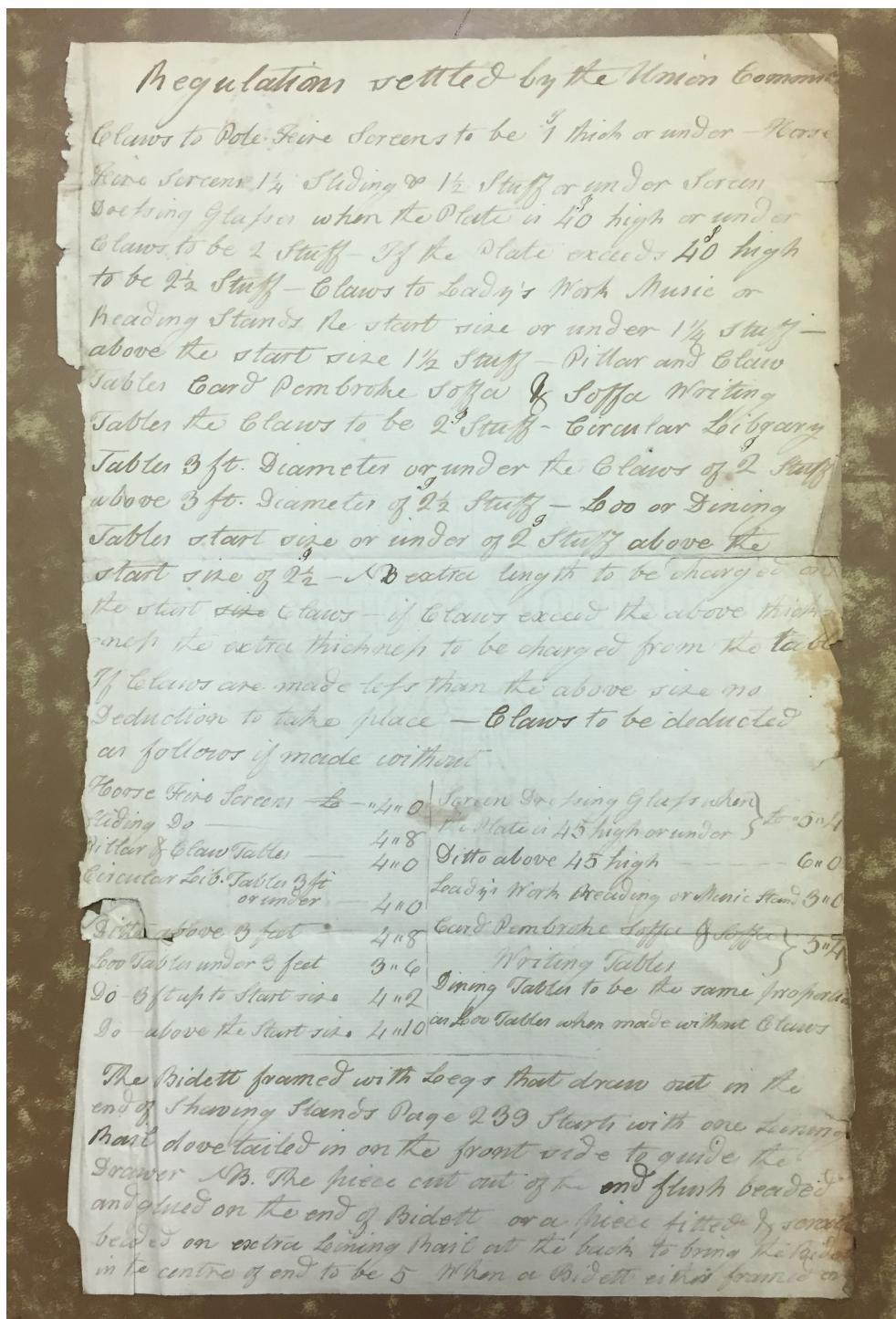


Figure 1. *Regulations settled by the Union Committee*, front. Winterthur Library, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Document 1270.

5 - Middle Depth Block is introduced as an extra to be paid
for Molding 3 - Scratch reading the top of the block from
the drawing Standard 2 - Ditto the front see page 295
Molded framed Molding is introduced in the end of a molder
and is to be charged for the carriage forward to the bottom

6 - a Ditto framed up into the Middle Part 3 - Boards
are considered in all work only where an internal Mitre or
Step occurs carrying the moulding band or any other work
round the returnable side of Legs Projections or Canted
corners on Seats Boxes &c. are not considered or to be
charged as Brackets - When brackets in Panels are each
not to be reckoned two Brackets but to be charged
each crooking in line $\frac{1}{4}$ in band $\frac{3}{8}$ wide or wider including
the butt points $\frac{1}{2}$ - If the band is divided at the crooking
to be paid for as Table 32 - When segments of Circumfer-
ential formed by string intersect each other two crooking.

7 - To ~~any~~ ^{any} ~~square~~ ^{square} ~~but~~ ^{but} ~~each~~ ^{each} crooking $\frac{3}{4}$ when
the mentioned borders are by half to be cut out Pannels intersecting
each other to be charged from the half corner or Pannel
including the stations end as Table 32 and the above
crooking added as they may occur - Where single or
double round end Pannels intersect each other add the
crooking as above - Mouldings or plain corners being
left filled in to be charged as Mouldings bent round page
583 exclusive of Mitres or Butt Points - When solid
Table top are sunk or hollow to be charged the same
as crooked or swelled without deducting the Glazing.
The extra work on the side of a chamber is included
in the cost when underwritten - When the work is done
upon the extra blocks above the start size - The solid
square blocks page 222 line 5 is considered one block
a half thick - each extra inch in length or width above
1 ft 8 in 2 ft 2 in when cutted up in 2 in thickness for
framed or solid block of $1\frac{3}{4}$ in 2 ft 2 in to be 2 ft 2 in
when leap'd or formed & blocked in the corner each one in length
is to above 1 ft 8 in 2 ft 2 in to above 2 ft 2 in - Each extra half
inch in thickness when above 1 ft 8 in - If the blocks are double
timbered into the blocks 6 - when there blocks are laid in
a square as page 219 - The block in Ditch & Glue Cost of making
is considered 3 times less the extra thickness to be charged over the
latter - No deduction to make place on drawers introduced in a case when
carrying the cost of a square & triangle block when Linda board or similar
material 6 ft 2 in wide 2 inches 6

Figure 2. Regulations settled by the Union Committee, back. Winterthur Library, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Document 1270.



Figure 3. *Regulations settled by the Union Committee*, seen in transmitted light, showing the watermark of Molineux, Johnston, & A. Lee. Winterthur Library, Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Document 1270.



Figure 4. Lewes Paper Mill, headquarters of Molineux, Johnston, & A. Lee. Lewes, East Sussex County, England.
Mid-19th Century.



Figure 5. Card Table, attributed to John Goddard, Newport, Rhode Island, 1760-90. The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 6. Pole fire screen, American, 1800-1810. Winterthur Museum.
1957.0558



Figure 7. Dressing Table, New York, 1810-1820. Winterthur Museum.
1965.0073

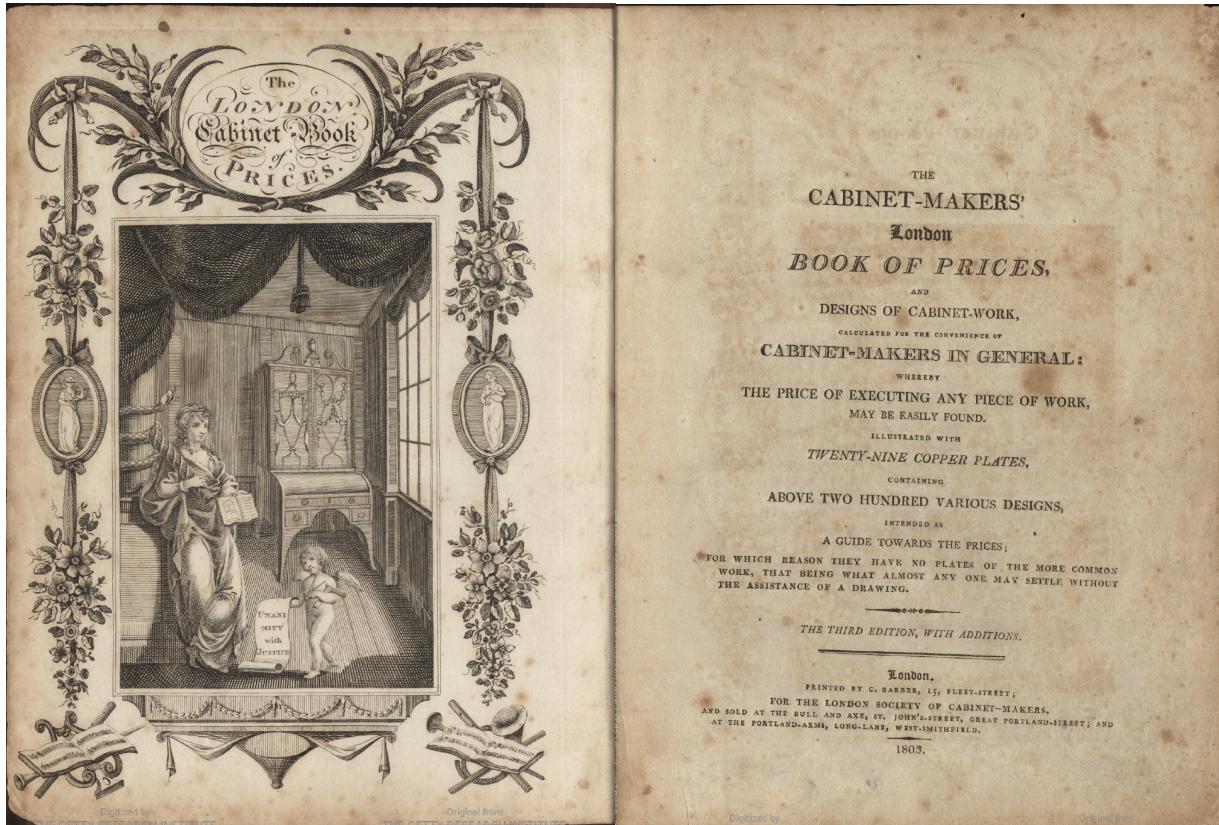


Figure 8. Title page from *The Cabinet-makers' London Book of Prices*, 1803. Getty Research Institute.

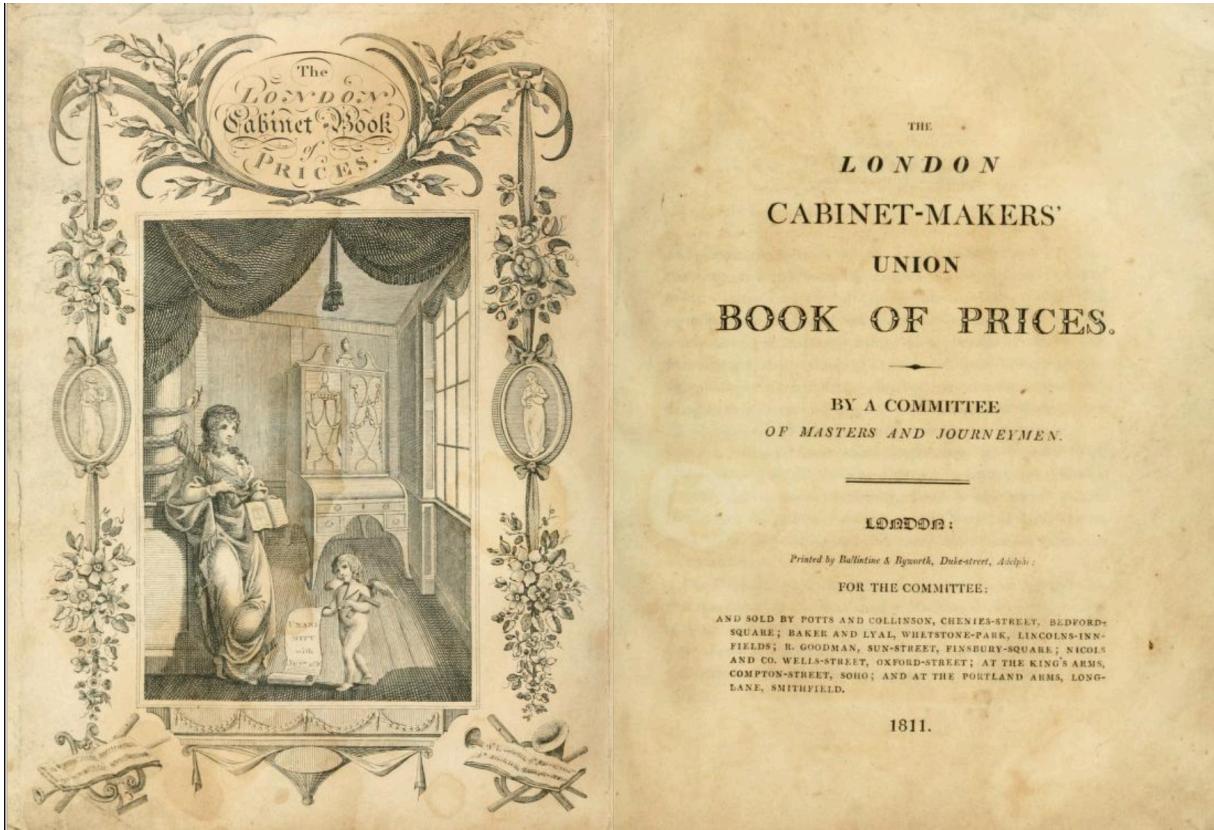


Figure 9. Title page from *The London Cabinet-makers' Union Book of Prices, 1811*. University of California Libraries.

	<i>L.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
Oiling and polishing, the start size or under	0	0	6
Ditto, when a knee-hole, with two drawers, or an extra long drawer in depth, extra	0	0	1½
Ditto every extra six inches in length or width	0	0	1
Ditto each shelf, wash-board, or rim	0	0	2

A WRITING TABLE.—N° 1.

All solid.—Two feet long, one foot four inches wide, the framing four inches and a half' deep; one plain drawer in ditto, without lock or beads; square edge to the top, lipp'd for cloth cross-way, and mitred in the corners; plain Marlbro' legs	0	6	8
A single one, extra	0	0	9

EXTRAS AND DEDUCTIONS.

Each inch more in length or width, up to three feet three inches long.....	0	0	2
Ditto, in depth of frame	0	0	3½
If above three feet three inches long, to be taken from LIBRARY TABLE.			
Making the top to rise with a horse, fram'd or lapp'd together, a shap'd toe and straight stretcher to ditto, the under top rabbetted down the thickness of the horse			
Sinking the horse in the top, not exceeding one foot six inches long.....	0	4	0
	0	0	9
	Every		

Figure 10. *The London Cabinet-makers' Union Book of Prices, 1811*. University of California Libraries

The following are the regulations, for either deducting start claws or extra thickness of ditto, and other explanations agreed to by the Committee, immediately after the publication of the former edition.

DEDUCTIONS OF CLAWS.

A horse fire screen	0	4	0
A sliding ditto	0	4	8
Screen dressing glasses, when the plate is forty-six inches high or under.....	0	5	4
Ditto, when the plate is above forty-six inches	0	6	0
Lady's work, music, or reading stands	0	3	0
Pillar and claw tables	0	4	0
Card, Pembroke, sofa, and sofa writing tables.....	0	5	4
Circular library writing table, three feet diameter or under	0	4	0
Ditto, above three feet diameter	0	4	8
Loo tables, when under nine feet superficial.....	0	3	6
Ditto, containing nine feet superficial, and up to the start size	0	4	2
Ditto, above the start size	0	4	10

If dining tables are made without claws, to be de-
ducted in the same proportion as Loo Table.

All start claws are considered at the following sizes in their re-
spective jobs.

Pole fire screens, one inch thick and under.

Horse fire screens, one inch and quarter stuff.

Sliding ditto, one inch and a half ditto.

Screen dressing glasses, when the plate is forty inches high or
under, two inch stuff.

Ditto, when the plate exceeds forty inches high, two inches and a
half ditto.

Lady's

Figure 11. *The London Cabinet-makers' Union Book of Prices*, 1824.
Winterthur Library.

DEDUCTIONS OF CLAWS.

A horse fire screen	0	4	0
A sliding ditto	0	4	8
Screen dressing glasses, when the plate is forty-six inches high or under.....	0	5	4
Ditto, when the plate is above forty-six inches	0	6	0
Lady's work, music, or reading stands	0	3	0
Pillar and claw tables	0	4	0
Card, Pembroke, sofa, and sofa writing tables.....	0	5	4
Circular library writing table, three feet diameter or under	0	4	0
Ditto, above three feet diameter	0	4	8
Loo tables, when under nine feet superficial.....	0	3	6
Ditto, containing nine feet superficial, and up to the start size	0	4	2
Ditto, above the start size	0	4	10

If claws are made less than the above size no deduction to take place — claws to be deducted as follows if made without

Horse Fire Screens —	— " 4" 0	Screen Dressing Glass when
Sliding Do —	— " 4" 8	the Plate is 45 high or under } To " 5" 4
Pillar & Claw Tables —	4" 0	Ditto above 45 high — — — 6" 0
Circular Lib. Table 3 ft or under —	4" 0	Lady's Work Dressing or Music Stand 3" 0
Ditto above 3 feet —	4" 8	Card & Pembroke Sofa & Coffe } 5" 4
Loo Tables under 3 feet	3" 4	Writing Tables }
Do - 3 ft up to Start size	4" 2	Dining Tables to be the same proportion
Do - above the Start size	4" 10	in Loo Tables when made without claws

Figure 12. Comparison of addendum to the *Union Book* to Document 1270.
The London Cabinet-makers' Union Book of Prices, 1824. Winterthur Library.
Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Document 1270, detail.

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