

## Appendix: Triple Chest (1932-45-101abc) Historical Research

<b>Accession #:</b>	1932.45.101 abc
<b>Object:</b>	Chest-on-chest-on-chest
<b>Object Date:</b>	1735-1745
<b>Materials:</b>	Wood (cherry, hard pine, white cedar); copper alloy (brass)
<b>Dimensions:</b>	6 feet 1/4 inches × 41 1/8 inches × 22 1/2 inches (183.5 × 104.5 × 57.2 cm)
<b>Geography:</b>	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States, North and Central America
<b>Curatorial Dept.:</b>	American Art

### Introduction:

This cherry triple chest (or chest-on-chest-on-chest) from Cedar Grove entered the PMA collection as a bequest of Lydia Thompson Morris in 1932 and is thought to have belonged to Elizabeth Coates Paschall, who built Cedar Grove as her country house in northeast Philadelphia in 1748. Paschall was a wealthy dry goods merchant and “one of the earliest female practitioners in both homeopathy and botanical sciences” (Lindsey 1999, 40). Her recipe book is held by the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

The chest is not currently attributed to a maker in PMA’s database, but PMA curator Alexandra Kirtley’s recent catalog, *American Furniture 1650-1840: Highlights from the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, cites an entry in cabinetmaker John Head’s account book for a “walnut Chest of Drawers In – 3 parts.” The chest was purchased from Head by John Rouse in 1744 as another documented example of this rare form (Kirtley 2020, 53).

Head’s account book was discovered in 1999 by Jay Robert Steifel among the George Vaux Papers at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. The account book documents the output from 1718-1753 of the workshop of English joiner John Head, who emigrated to Philadelphia in 1717. According to Steifel, the account book has functioned as a “Rosetta Stone” for understanding and identifying Head’s work, allowing over sixty pieces of furniture to be attributed to Head’s shop, “five of which can be tied to entries in the account book” (Stiefel 2019, 6).



### Reference to Triple Chest Form in John Head Account Book:

Stiefel also discusses the PMA triple chest and the Rouse triple chest in his 2001 America Philosophical Society Bulletin:

The highest price for a single chest of drawers was the £13-0-0 debited to one of Head's New Jersey customers, Thomas Shinn (1693-1753) of Burlington and Mt. Holly, on 10/24/31. No wood was designated. It was likely of maple or cherry, as Head was charging more for those woods. Moreover, at a pound more than the Callender and Leacock maple chests of drawers, Shinn's may have been of a more complex design. Perhaps it was a triple chest like the "walnut Chest of Drawers In - 3 parts and a Little Chest of Drawers," which cost John Rouse a combined £18-0-0, on 10/27/44. Triple chests of drawers are an unusual form. One that survives is the cherry triple chest of drawers from the Morris family. As Shinns and Morris intermarried, it is tempting to speculate that the Morris chest may have been the one Shinn ordered. The Morris triple chest was given to PMA by Lydia Thompson Morris, but it is not known how it came into her family. It is believed to have been used at Cedar Grove, the home of Elizabeth Coates Paschall. The Morris chest of drawers cannot be the Rouse chest, even though each is unusual in being a triple chest, as Head explicitly described the latter as being of walnut. The "walnut Chest of Drawers In - 3 parts" made for Rouse was also the last piece of furniture recorded in Head's account book.

As such, it was fitting that Head had created something special, just as he had done with his first piece of recorded furniture, the "feneared Chest of Drawers," which was ordered by James Poulitis in 1718. Because they were his first and last pieces, perhaps he also took the time to record them for posterity with greater particularity.

(<http://www.amphilsoc.org/bulletin/20011/stief12e.htm>)



John Head account book, American Philosophical Society.  
(Image: Stiefel 2019, xxii)





Triple chest, 1780-85. Charleston, SC. (Image: Rauschenberg and Bivins 2003, 459)



Triple chest, 1780-85. Front and side views. Charleston, SC. (Image: Rauschenberg and Bivins 2003, 457)



Triple chest, late 18<sup>th</sup> century. British. (Image: [https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/storage-case-pieces/commodor-chests-of-drawers/18th-century-english-mahogany-triple-chest-on-chest-large-size/id\\_f\\_9346081/](https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/storage-case-pieces/commodor-chests-of-drawers/18th-century-english-mahogany-triple-chest-on-chest-large-size/id_f_9346081/))

### **Other Examples of the Triple Chest Form:**

While double chests consisting of two chests stacked on each other were a common form in Britain and North America during the eighteenth century, surviving triple chests are extremely rare. In the course of this research, I was only able to locate the two Charleston, SC triple chests shown above (center and right), and one British triple chest in the inventory of a Savannah, GA dealer shown above (right). A third Charleston triple chest is much more rudimentary, consisting of only one drawer per tier, and is not shown. Rauschenberg and Bivins suggest that these chests may have been intended for travel of the gentry between city and country destinations (Rauschenberg and Bivins 2003, 459-460). Such an intended use also seems plausible in the case of the PMA triple chest, and it also evokes later forms like campaign furniture that was designed for portability during military campaigns. All of the above examples were made decades later than the PMA triple chest's 1735-1745 estimated date range, and likely are not directly related.

### **Shop Markings on PMA triple chest (1932-45-101abc):**

During examination of the PMA triple chest in PMA's furniture lab in Fall 2020, I noted chalk markings on the sides and backs of three drawers that do not appear to be documented elsewhere. Further research, compiled here, suggests that these markings are consistent with the system of marking drawers used on other case pieces attributed to John Head and that many aspects of the PMA triple chest's construction and materials also have strong similarities to the methods and materials used on other pieces attributed to Head. In light of Head's documentation of at least one triple chest, as noted by Kirtley and Stiefel above, and given the rarity of the form (three triple chests from Charleston, SC, and one British triple chest in the inventory of a Savannah, GA, dealer were the only examples I could find in the course of this research), the connection of this example to Head's shop warrants further research.

The PMA triple chest does, however, also incorporate significant divergences in construction from other examples of Head-attributed case furniture that have been published and may represent a previously undocumented evolution of construction methods employed by Head to keep abreast of changing taste and advances in construction toward the end of his career. It should be noted, however, that the PMA triple chest could also be more tangentially related to Head's shop. For example, it could have been made by an apprentice who trained under Head's drawer marking and construction system and who subsequently set up shop on their own, continuing some of Head's methods.

The three lowest drawers (the number 7, 8, and 9 drawers when drawers are numbered from the top) of the PMA triple chest each have chalk shop markings on the outside of the drawer elements. These markings include a semicircle at the center of the top edge of the drawer backs and a slanting V shape at the rear of the PL drawer sides (indicated by arrows at right; markings on drawer sides have been partially obscured by later planing).



Number 7 drawer, view of PL and back. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101c).



Number 8 drawer, view of PL and back. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101c).



Number 9 drawer, view of PL and back. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101c).



### **Shop Markings on PMA triple chest (1932-45-101abc) cont'd:**

The number two drawer of the PMA triple chest also has chalk markings on its PL side: a 2 toward the front, and what could be the remnant of a V shape similar to those found on the PL sides of the 7,8, and 9 drawers toward the back of the drawer. The mark at the back of the drawer side has been obscured by later planing, and the drawer back has been completely planed. Most of the other drawers have also been planed during subsequent restoration campaigns.

None of the other drawers in the chest have chalk numbers, and numbering does not appear on any of the Head-attributed case pieces that I am aware of. It is plausible that the circumstance of the triple chest's three cases, each with a similar sequence of drawer heights, could account for its presence, and it is also possible that this mark was added post-manufacture.

The drawers are numbered in pencil on the bottoms, and the case is numbered in pencil on the dust boards, but these markings do not necessarily relate to the chest's manufacture. It is possible that the drawers and case were numbered in pencil during re-finishing, during restoration, or during a move.



Number 2 drawer, view of front of PL drawer side. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101a).



Number 2 drawer, view of rear of PL drawer side. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101a).

### Shop Markings on Drawers Attributed to John Head:

Drawers from case pieces attributed to the John Head shop (examples shown on this page) usually have some manifestation of the slanting V or carrot shape at the upper rear exterior surface of the drawer sides. They are also commonly marked with the semicircle at the upper center exterior surface of the drawer back.

These marks served to differentiate the individual pieces of a single drawer from each other and to help identify their intended orientation during joinery and assembly. Variations on these markings were also used to differentiate multiple drawers of the same size (<https://cstorb.com/2018/10/27/theories-of-structurethe-shop-marks-of-john-head/>).



Drawers attributed to John Head. (Image: <https://cstorb.com/2018/10/27/theories-of-structurethe-shop-marks-of-john-head/>)



Drawers from a chest of drawers attributed to John Head in a private collection. The pretzel-shaped markings on the PL top drawer distinguish the pieces from those of the PR top drawer, which uses a V mark on the sides and a semicircle at the back. These markings served to expedite assembly since the pieces are the same size but not interchangeable. (Image: Stiefel 2019, 166)



Drawers attributed to John Head.  
(Image: <https://cstorb.com/2017/01/21/chest-of-drawers-at-sothebys/>)



### Shop Markings on Drawers Attributed to John Head, cont'd:

Drawers from Head-attributed case pieces documented by Jackie Killian, from her 2015 Winterthur Program in American Material Culture thesis, are shown on this page. Captions and red arrows are also reproduced from Killian's thesis but refer to the drawer construction rather than the chalk markings in the two instances at right.

Variations on the semicircle mark are used at the top center of the drawer back exterior as in the PMA triple chest drawers illustrated previously. While various shop markings and numbering in chalk, pencil, or ink are commonly found on case furniture, these particular marks, along with those illustrated on the previous page, are thought to be unique to Head's shop (Killian 2015, 137).



Figure 4.15 Detail, Figure 4.3. Upper short drawer, view of chalk mark on drawer back. Chest of drawers attributed to workshop of John Head. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1718–44. Collection of Dr. Richard and Pamela Mones, photo by author.

(Image: Killian 2015, 139)



Figure 4.9 (left), Detail, Figure 4.3. Upper short drawer at rear, seen in profile. Extended dovetails and bottom board denoted by red arrows. Chest of drawers attributed to workshop of John Head. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1718–44. Collection of Dr. Richard and Pamela Mones, photo by author.

(Image: Killian 2015, 136)



Figure 4.11 Detail, Figure 4.2. Central drawer, view from rear. Dressing table attributed to workshop of John Head. The red arrows indicate the extended bottom board and extended dovetails. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1719–37. Courtesy Winterthur Museum, 1956.0038.143. Photo by author.

(Image: Killian 2015, 137)

### Construction of Drawers Attributed to John Head:

All Head-attributed case pieces that I am aware of use hard pine drawer sides and drawer backs and Atlantic white cedar bottoms with the grain oriented from front-to-back. Most of the Head-attributed drawers, especially full-width drawers, are consistent with Adam Bowett's designation of "second-phase" construction, common in Britain from approximately 1700-1730, illustrated on this page (Bowett 2009, 57). This makes sense given the time period during which Head would have received his training in England (prior to his immigration to Philadelphia in 1717).

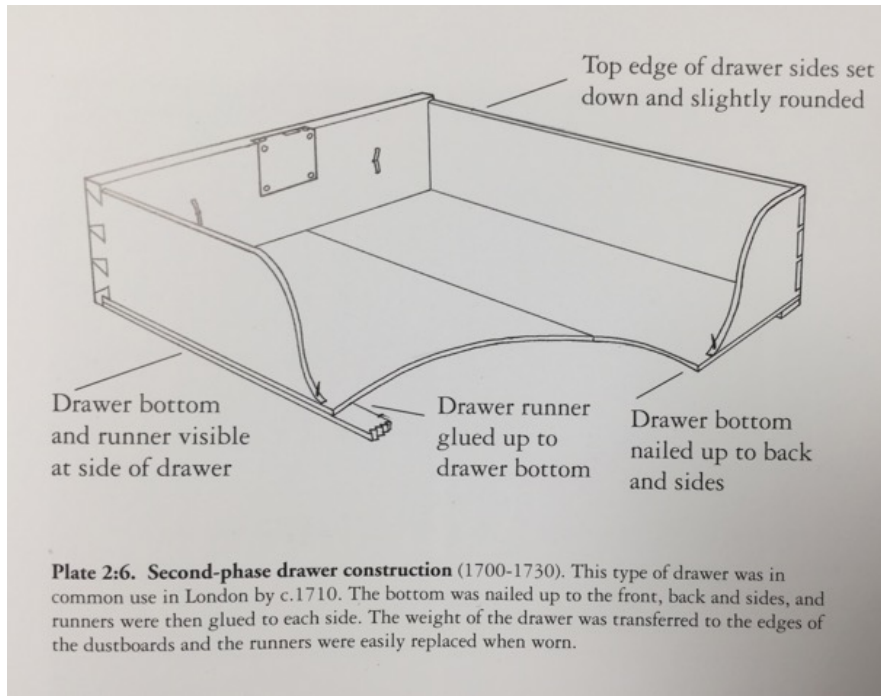
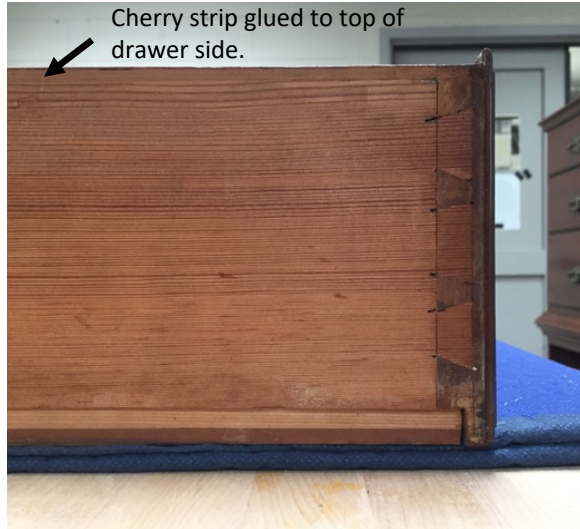


Diagram illustrating "second-phase" drawer construction. (Image: Bowett 2009, 57)

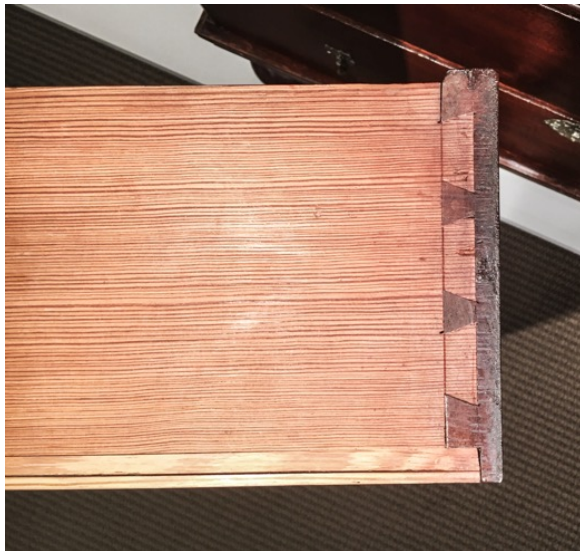


Detail of drawer from a desk attributed to John Head. "Second-phase" drawer construction attributes are apparent, including nailed up bottom with front-to-back grain orientation and glued-on drawer runner visible at side of drawer. The hard pine drawer sides and runners and the Atlantic white cedar drawer bottom are typical of Head-attributed drawers. (Image: <https://cstorb.com/2018/12/08/to-a-walnut-dask-part-i/>)





Number 8 drawer, PR side. PMA triple chest (Image: 1932-45-101c).

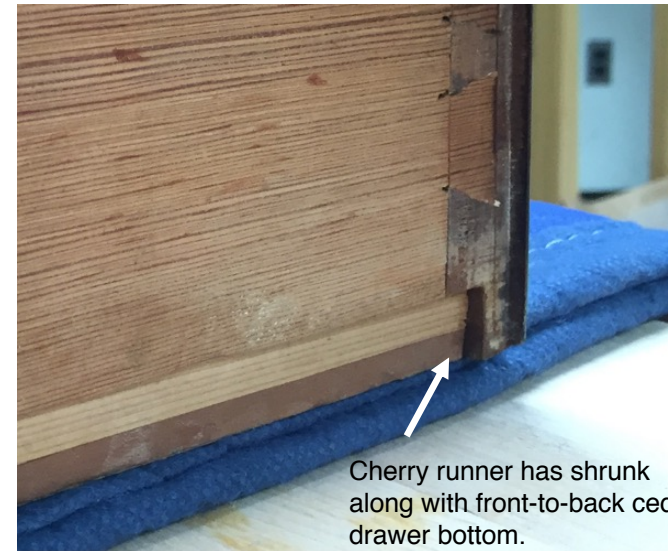


PR drawer side from a chest of drawers attributed to John Head. (Image: <https://cstorb.com/2017/01/17/to-a-chest-of-drawers/>)

### Comparison of Head-Attributed Drawer Construction to the Construction of PMA triple Chest

The PMA triple chest's drawers are consistent with most Head-attributed drawers in their second-phase construction, hard pine linings, and Atlantic white cedar bottoms. The PMA triple chest differs in its use of cherry rather than a softwood for its runners, and in its use of ovolo-lipped rather than plain drawer fronts (discussed later).

While the cherry runners may be replacements, some have shrunk with the drawer bottoms (see image at right). Some have also worn down significantly and have been repaired with laminations of new cherry wood, indicating that they are old and could possibly be original. It seems unlikely that the cherry strips glued to the tops of the drawer sides of the PMA triple chest are original. Early eighteenth-century drawers in the British tradition usually had drawer linings that were lower in height than the drawer fronts to allow for ease of operation; only the drawer fronts were fitted exactly to the drawer aperture for a neat appearance when closed (Bowett 2009, 57).



Number 8 drawer, PR side. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101c).

Cherry runner has shrunk along with front-to-back cedar drawer bottom.

### Comparison of Head-Attributed Drawer Construction to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest cont'd:

Another characteristic of Head-attributed case pieces that the PMA triple chest shares is the presence of extended saw kerfs on drawer front interiors, where as much material as possible was removed from the pins of the half-lapped dovetail joints by sawing in order to minimize time-consuming chisel work. This practice seems to have been accepted by consumers in Britain and America, but it was by no means universally implemented.

The variation in length of these overshoot saw kerfs within Head's attributed body of work may be due to the work of different hands (e.g. apprentices or journeymen) (<https://cstorb.com/2018/12/15/to-a-walnut-dask-part-ii-the-writing-compartment/>). Even within the PMA triple chest itself, the overshoot kerfs are noticeably longer in the lowest case compared to the upper two.



Number 7 drawer, front PL interior.  
PMA triple chest (1932-45-101c).



Overshoot dovetails on drawer attributed to John Head  
(Image: <https://cstorb.com/2018/10/13/boxes-in-boxes/>)



Figure 4.12 (upper left), detail Figure 4.3. Upper short drawer, view of drawer interior with kerfing of drawer front. Chest of drawers attributed to workshop of John Head. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1718–44. Collection of Dr. Richard and Pamela Mones, photo by author.

(Image: Killian 2015, 138)



Overshoot dovetails on drawer attributed to John Head  
(Image: <https://cstorb.com/2018/10/13/boxes-in-boxes/>)



### Comparison of Head-Attributed Drawer Construction to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest cont'd:

Drawers attributed to the Head shop were assembled to fit loosely into their openings and thus were not planed to fit. This practice left shop marks and scribe lines intact, and no effort seems to have been made to erase them. Drawer bottoms and dovetails were also left proud at the back, and glue squeeze-out often remains. In plain-front drawers within thin-rail cases (known colloquially as “William and Mary” pieces), the drawer front could be fine-tuned to ensure a close fit at the case front.

Lipped drawer fronts, as seen on the PMA triple chest, essentially acted as drawer stops and also served to cover any gaps in the drawer aperture. This also allowed for a looser drawer fit which didn't require any fine-tuning of the drawer sides following assembly (Killian 2015, 135-136) (<https://cstor.b.com/2018/10/27/theories-of-structure-the-shop-marks-of-john-head/>).



Number 7 drawer, PR back. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101c).

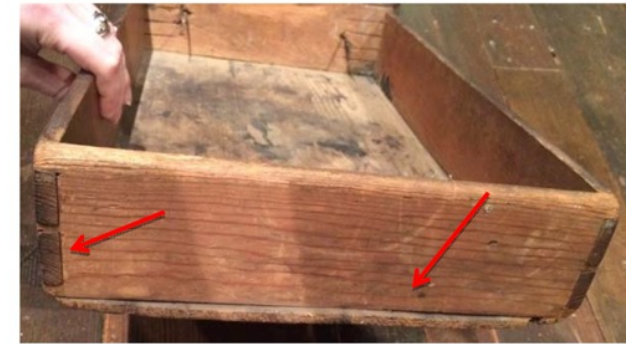


Figure 4.11 Detail, Figure 4.2. Central drawer, view from rear. Dressing table attributed to workshop of John Head. The red arrows indicate the extended bottom board and extended dovetails. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1719–37. Courtesy Winterthur Museum, 1956.0038.143. Photo by author.

(Image: Killian 2015, 137)

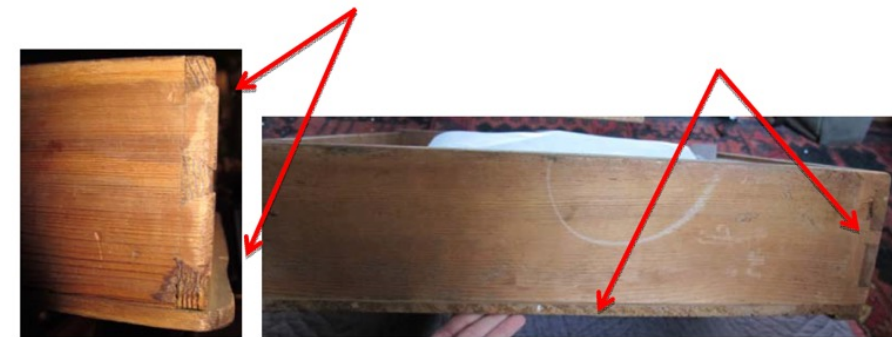


Figure 4.9 (left), Detail, Figure 4.3. Upper short drawer at rear, seen in profile. Extended dovetails and bottom board denoted by red arrows. Chest of drawers attributed to workshop of John Head. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1718–44. Collection of Dr. Richard and Pamela Mones, photo by author.

(Image: Killian 2015, 136)

### Alterations to Drawers from the PMA Triple Chest:

Some of the drawer sides and backs in the PMA triple chest were planed a long time after the original construction, as can be seen in the fresher, less oxidized wood in these images and the obliteration of scribe lines and possibly shop markings. This was probably done as a restoration to correct drawers which sat proud of the front of the cases, or which no longer operated easily after the cases had shrunk due to seasonal expansion and contraction.



Number 5 drawer, back, PR side. Scribe lines have been planed away at top and bottom of the joint but are still visible in lower area at center of joint along with deeper oxidation. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101b).



Number 5 drawer, PR side, rear. Scribe lines have been completely planed away from dovetail joints. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101b).



Number 5 drawer, back, PL side Scribe lines have been Completely planed away. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101b).



### Comparison of Head-Attributed Drawer Construction to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest cont'd:

The “cedar shingle” drawer bottoms, the runners, and the nailing configuration are nearly identical on the drawers from the PMA triple chest and on the long drawers of a chest attributed to John Head. It should be noted, however, that this type of construction was common and was not unique to Head, even though it does seem to have been his shop’s practice.

A worn away runner on a Head-attributed drawer reveals that Head nailed up his drawer bottoms to the drawer sides as well as to the fronts and backs (at least in this case), as was common in “second-phase” construction. Testing with a strong magnet revealed that the PMA triple chest’s drawers were also nailed up with three nails along each side (marked with blue tape in the image at right). Future X-rays could confirm this.



Head-attributed drawer bottom nailed up along the side.  
(Image: <https://cstorb.com/2018/12/08/to-a-walnut-dask-part-i/>)



Number 6 drawer, bottom view. Nail locations hidden by runners are marked with blue tape. PMA triple chest (1932-45-101b).



Bottom view of drawer attributed to John Head.  
(Image: <https://cstorb.com/2017/01/21/chest-of-drawers-at-sothebys/>)



### Comparison of Head-Attributed Case Construction to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest cont'd:

Almost all of the Head-attributed case pieces that I am aware of have plain drawer fronts and thin drawer rails with applied half round or double bead mouldings surrounding the drawer apertures. (This type of construction is often referred to colloquially as “William and Mary” style.) In contrast, the PMA triple chest has thicker drawer rails (used from the second quarter of the eighteenth century onward), and ovolo lipped drawer fronts, which were first adopted in England circa 1730 (Bowett 2009, 78-83, 99).

A form of lipped drawer front is used on the lower drawers of the Head-attributed desk illustrated below (center image). In this case, the lipping is only on the sides of the drawer and not all around. Although this desk uses thin rail construction generally, the rail which supports the fall front is thicker, although it does not have the unusual mitered end seen on the PMA triple chest rails (discussed later). Several Head-attributed clock cases use ovolo lipping at the edges of their doors, as seen below on the (image at right).



Chest of drawers attributed to John Head, with thin rail construction and plain drawer fronts.  
(Image: Steifel 2019, 168)



Detail of ovolo-lipped drawer front and thicker drawer rails PMA triple chest (1932-45-101b).



A form of lipped drawer front used on lower drawers of a desk attributed to John Head. (Image: <https://cstorb.com/2018/12/08/to-a-walnut-dask-part-i/>)



Lipped door on clock case attributed to John Head.  
(Image: Stiefel 2019, 208)



**Wistar High Chest and Dressing Table:**

Like the PMA triple chest, PMA's Catherine and Caspar Wistar high chest and dressing table (1928-7-12 and 1928-7-13) also descended in the Morris family, were once housed at Cedar Grove, and were donated to the PMA by Lydia Thompson Morris.

The Wistar high chest and dressing table are among the pieces of furniture that can be directly related to entries in the John Head account book and that also have clear and well-documented provenances. As such, they have served as the basis for many subsequent attributions (by comparison with their markings and construction methods) to Head's shop (Kirtley 2020, 48-49; Steifel 2019, 151-157).



Wistar high chest and dressing table (1928-7-12 and 1928-7-13) (Image: PMA photo studio)

## Comparison of Head-Attributed Case Construction to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest cont'd:

Unlike the Wistar high chest and dressing table, which are built in a similar manner to most (or perhaps all) attributed Head pieces using the earlier thin rail case construction, the PMA triple chest uses the later thick rail construction (termed “third-phase” by Bowett) while retaining the earlier “second-phase” drawer construction common to many thin rail chests (with the exception of the lipped drawer fronts, which are also a later development).

Bowett places the emergence of third-phase thick rail case construction between 1735 and 1740 in Britain (Bowett 2009, 81). This means that the 1731 date of the chest purchased from John Head by Joseph Shinn (Head’s most expensive chest of drawers—see quotation from Stiefel’s APS Bulletin, 2001 at the beginning of this report) would be very early for a British piece built with third-phase construction, let alone an American one.

While it is probably not the Shinn chest, if the PMA triple chest was made by Head’s shop, it would represent a divergence in construction from the rest of his known output and perhaps an attempt to keep up with changing taste and to adapt to advances in furniture construction. As such, it could also open new possibilities for attributing furniture to his shop.

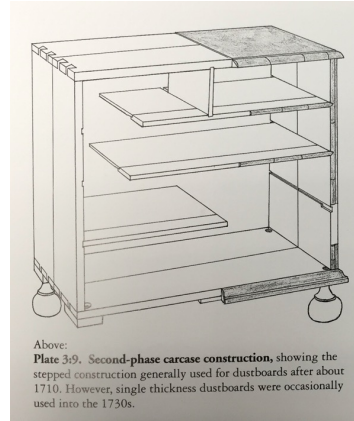


Illustration of thin rail carcass construction. (Image: Bowett 2009, 99)



Far left: Plate 2:58. Carcase damage. This photograph illustrates the key weakness of thin-railed case construction, which was that the rails had very little purchase in the carcase sides, and hence could not always prevent them from spreading. As a consequence, the dustboard has dropped out of its housing.

Left: Plate 2:59. Carcase damage. Thicker rails increase the strength of the joint between carcase and rail. Shrinkage of the carcase has caused the dovetails to stand proud, forcing off the veneer. This common problem is easily remedied by removing the veneer and planing down the protruding rail.

81

Comparison of thin rail and thick rail carcass construction. (Image: Bowett 2009, 81)



PMA triple chest (1932-45-101abc).

Wistar high chest (1928-7-12)



### Comparison of Head-Attributed Case Construction to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest cont'd:

The drawer rails on the PMA triple chest have an unusual construction in which they extend all the way to the edge of the case and are mitered at their ends so that they are not visible from the case side. In some ways this is analogous to the full-blind mitered dovetail used to join the top of the Head-attributed desk (illustrated below) to its sides. This is unusual for even the fanciest American desks of this period.

The mitered drawer blade end on the PMA triple chest allows the front of the case to be finished neatly without the use of veneer to cover the joinery at the front edge of the case side, as is common practice in English case work (Bowett 2009, 81). Alan Miller and others have suggested that Quakers in Philadelphia (like Head or Paschall) may have been opposed to the use of veneer because of its superficiality (Miller 2014). There does seem to be a preference for solid wood rather than veneered carcasses and drawer fronts in Philadelphia, whereas in New England the use of veneer in the English fashion was common.

It would be interesting to find other case pieces which use the same mitered drawer blade construction as the PMA triple chest, but as of yet I have not been able to locate another example.



Desk attributed to John Head, with full-blind dovetail joints at the top corners of the case. (Image: <https://cstorb.com/2018/12/08/to-a-walnut-dask-part-i/>)



Unusual full-width drawer blade with mitered end let into case side, PL side of chest. PMA triple chest (Image: 1932-45-101)

**Comparison of Head-Attributed Case Construction to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest cont'd:**

The case sides of the PMA triple chest are joined to the top with dovetails cut in the case sides and pins cut in the case top. The case pieces attributed to John Head were also joined in this way (it was also common for the dovetails to be cut in the case top and bottom rather than the sides). Apparently, the known Head-attributed pieces were all half-lap dovetailed at the top, concealing the joinery, even at the tops of high chests like the one illustrated at right, which wouldn't be visible from the ground (<https://cstorb.com/2018/10/13/boxes-in-boxes/>).

The PMA triple chest uses through dovetails to join the case tops to the sides, an apparent divergence from the known Head-attributed case pieces. It would be interesting to confirm whether the double chests at Wright's Ferry and Rocky Hill (shown on the following page) are through- or lap-dovetailed at the tops.



Top of upper case with through dovetails, PL side.  
PMA triple chest (1932-45-101).



Top of high chest attributed to John Head with half-blind dovetails.  
(Image: <https://cstorb.com/2018/10/13/boxes-in-boxes/>)





PMA triple chest (1932-45-101abc).



Double chest attributed to John Head, from Rocky Hill collection. (Image: Stieffel 2019, 171)



Double chest attributed to John Head, from Wright's Ferry/ Von Hess collection. (Image: Schaefer and Kindig 2006, 118)

### **Comparison of Head-Attributed Case Construction to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest cont'd:**

The moulding sequence on the PMA triple chest is essentially identical to the moulding sequences on the two Head-attributed double chests above. Of course, furniture mouldings during the eighteenth were essentially all drawn or adapted from classical architectural models, but the close similarity, especially with the Rocky Hill chest, is striking. All three chests also have baseboards which are integral with the base moulding and are cut out to form either bracket feet (in the case of the Paschall triple chest) or to form a decorative ogee pattern (in the other two examples). Although the Rocky Hill and Von Hess chests retain the earlier ball feet, their cutout base mouldings are not a far jump conceptually or technically from the bracket foot. As Alexandra Kirtley has pointed out in her *American Furniture Catalog*, the PMA triple chest and the Von Hess chest share the less common configuration of a single top drawer rather than the usual two or three top drawers often found on stacked chests (Kirtley 2020, 53).

It would be interesting to inquire or to examine these two stacked chests in person to compare tracings of the mouldings, determine whether the separate chests are secured by dowels as the Paschall chest is, determine whether they have horizontal or vertical backboards, and whether the tops use through or lapped dovetails, as well as anything else that might present itself.



PMA triple chest (1932-45-101abc).



Double chest (1725-40) from Wright's Ferry/ Von Hess collection. (Schaefer and Kindig 2006, 134).



Chest of drawers attributed to John Head, with canted and fluted corners. (Steiffel 2019, 174).

### **Comparison of Case Construction of Wright's Ferry Double Chest to the Construction of PMA Triple Chest:**

The chest-on-chest illustrated at center shares with the PMA triple chest lipped drawer fronts, thick front rail construction, and integral base moulding/ baseboard sawn to form bracket feet. Both also use hard pine and Atlantic white cedar secondary woods, favored by Head, although these woods were common to Delaware valley furniture of this time. The Wright's Ferry chest above also has an inscription naming John Lamb, a name also found in John Head's account book, although he is named in the context settling his estate rather than a furniture commission (Schaefer and Kindig 2006, 135). The maple chest of drawers illustrated at right has been attributed to Head and has fluted and canted corners like the double chest above, although they have a very different character. It would be interesting to inspect or inquire after the Wright's Ferry double chest above for comparison.



### **Summary:**

- The shop marks on the three lowest drawers of the PMA triple chest bear a strong resemblance to the marks associated with the shop of well-documented Philadelphia joiner John Head.
- Head recorded at least one entry for a triple chest in his account book, although that triple chest was specified as being made of walnut, whereas this one is made with a cherry primary wood.
- The PMA triple chest's drawer construction and use of primary woods are consistent with materials and techniques thought to be favored by Head.
- The moulding sequences used on the PMA triple chest are very similar to those used in at least two Head-attributed double chests.
- The PMA triple chest's lipped drawer fronts and thick rail carcase construction are not seen in Head's known body of work. They could represent the evolution of his furniture construction methods to keep abreast of changing trends and tastes. It is also possible that the PMA triple chest was made by a cabinetmaker who trained as an apprentice or worked as a journeyman in Head's shop and adopted his drawer construction methods but went on to embrace new techniques of case construction.
- If the PMA triple chest does represent an evolution of Head's construction techniques, it could open new avenues for attributing and understanding his work.

### **Further Research:**

This report is not intended as a conclusive document, but rather as a compilation of evidence that could inform and facilitate further research:

- Examination of double chests at Wright's Ferry and at the Rocky Hill collection could shed further light on their relationship, if any, to the PMA triple chest.
- Further inquiries into the existence of other surviving triple chests from Britain or America could provide important clues about the PMA triple chest's design origins or influence.
- Examination Philadelphia case furniture with early adoption of thick rail construction could reveal other pieces with similar markings that had been passed over in previous efforts to attribute works to John Head. Alternately, such examination could suggest another possible maker for the PMA triple chest.



PMA triple chest (1932-45-101abc). (Image: PMA photo studio)

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