



VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

Object Analysis Projects

Dept. of Interior Design

2021

Chest with Drawers

Tessa Trowbridge

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/oap>



Part of the [Interior Design Commons](#)

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/oap/7>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Dept. of Interior Design at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Object Analysis Projects by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.



Colonialism and The Americas

Object Analysis

Tessa Trowbridge

IDES 521 + IDES 651

12/07/21

contents

- 01 introduction
- 02 analysis questions
- 03 people + place
- 04 culture
- 05 characteristics
- 06 characteristics
- 07 effects of colonialism
- 08 trend development over time
- 09 role in the interior
- 10 tools + materials
- 11 design process
- 12 realizations + reflections
- 13 bibliography

introduction

Title: Chest with Drawers

Date: 1675 - 1700

Maker: Peter Blin

Material: White oak,
yellow pine, white cedar

Region: Wethersfield,
CT, United States

Culture: American

Dimensions: 39 7/8 x 48
x 21 1/4 in.

(Met Museum, n.d.)

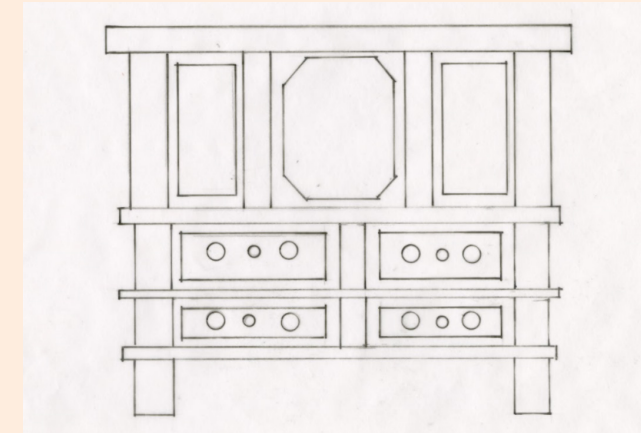


(Met Museum, n.d.)

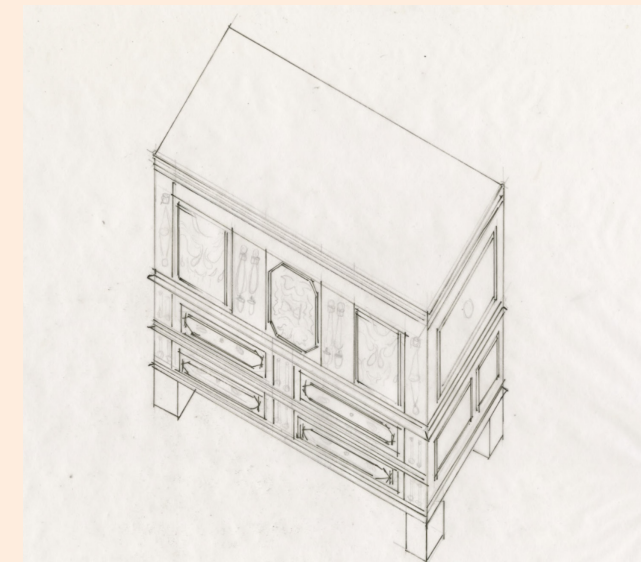
analysis questions

1. What is it? What type of object is it?
2. What is the object called - is there a title?
3. When was the object made?
4. Where is the object located today?
5. What does the object look like?
6. What are the parts that make up the whole?
7. How are the parts composed?
8. What materials are used?
9. What colors do you see?
10. What textures are used to achieve an effect?
11. What does the object do?
12. How does the object work?
13. Does the object have a social or religious function?
14. Is the object used conspicuously or privately?

15. Who is the maker of the object?
16. Are the makes of the object individuals or part of a group?
17. Where was the object made?
18. Was the object made in more than one place?
19. Can you speculate on how the object may have been made?
20. Do you know who may have paid for the object to be made?
21. Was the object commissioned for a specific purpose?
22. Who are the users of the object?
23. Do you know anything specific about the users of the object?
24. Are there unintended or other users?
25. How are you interacting with the object now that it is outside of its original context?



(Trowbridge, 2021)



(Trowbridge, 2021)

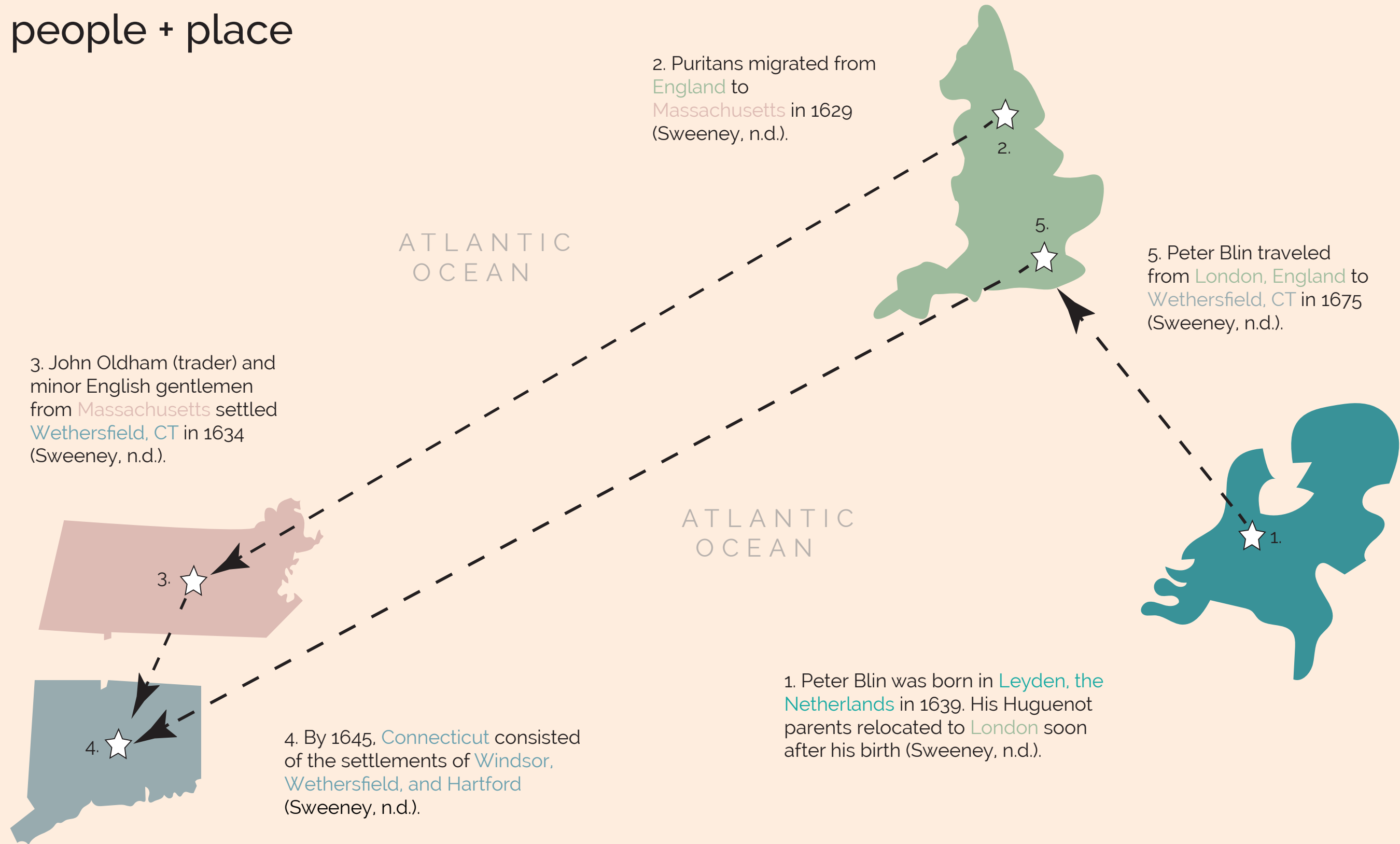


(Trowbridge, 2021)

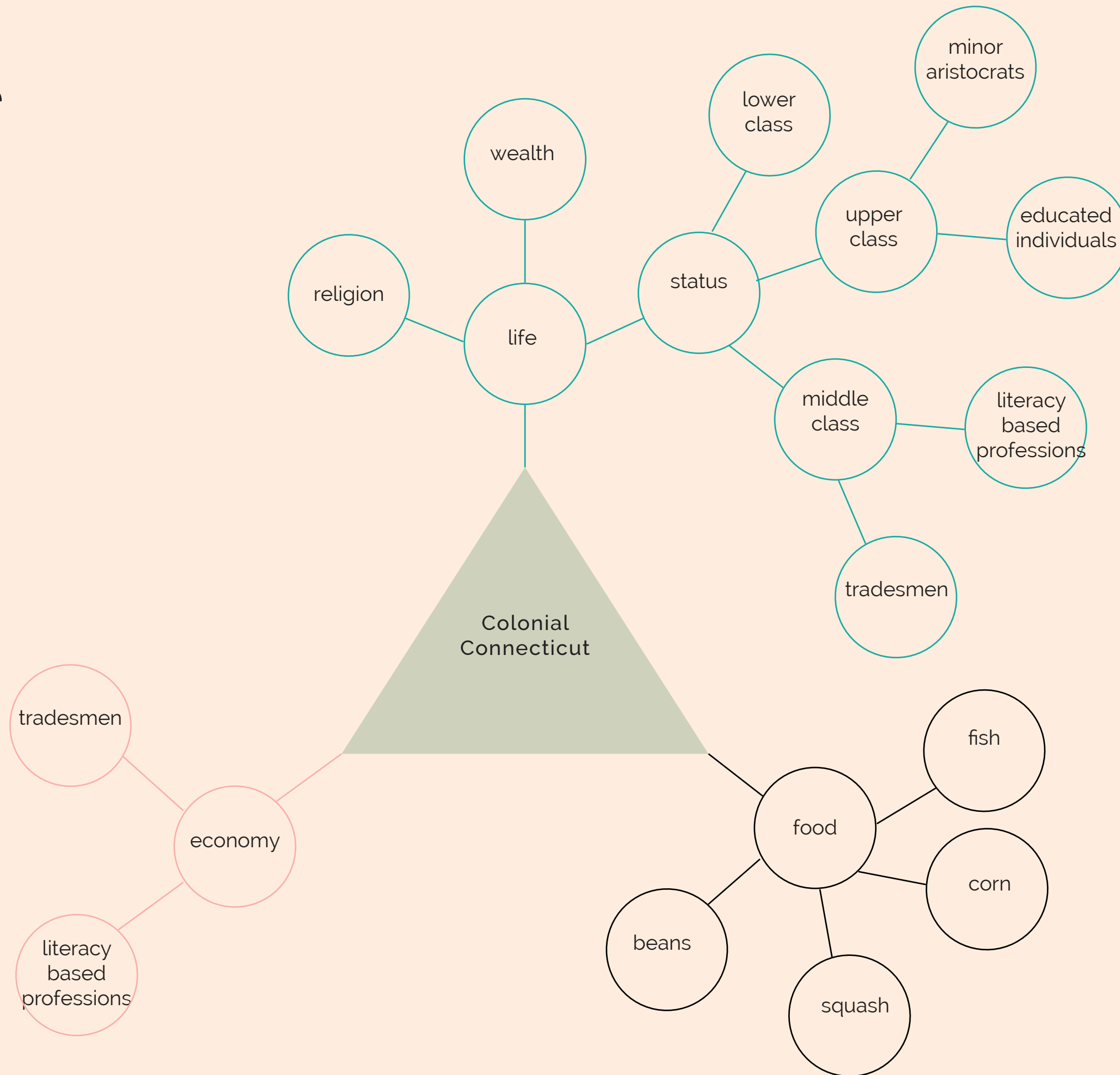
further research question:

What influenced the design of the chest panels?

people + place



culture



characteristics

"Sunflower" chests: the group of 85 carved chests from the Connecticut River Valley with similar floral carvings and features (Christie's, n.d.)



(Met Museum, n.d.)

characteristics

Discrepancies in "Sunflower" Chest Designs

- » Variation in decoration
 - Applied vs. creased moldings
 - Engraving
 - Wood species
- » Variation in construction
 - Dovetail vs. rabbet joints connecting sides and front
 - Presence or absence of locking mechanism

(Willoughby, 1994)

- » Influence of heritage and family traditions rather than regional influences

- Family organized shops utilizing father-son apprenticeships
- Family networks encouraged spread of ideas
- Different families with different construction methods

(Sweeney, n.d.)

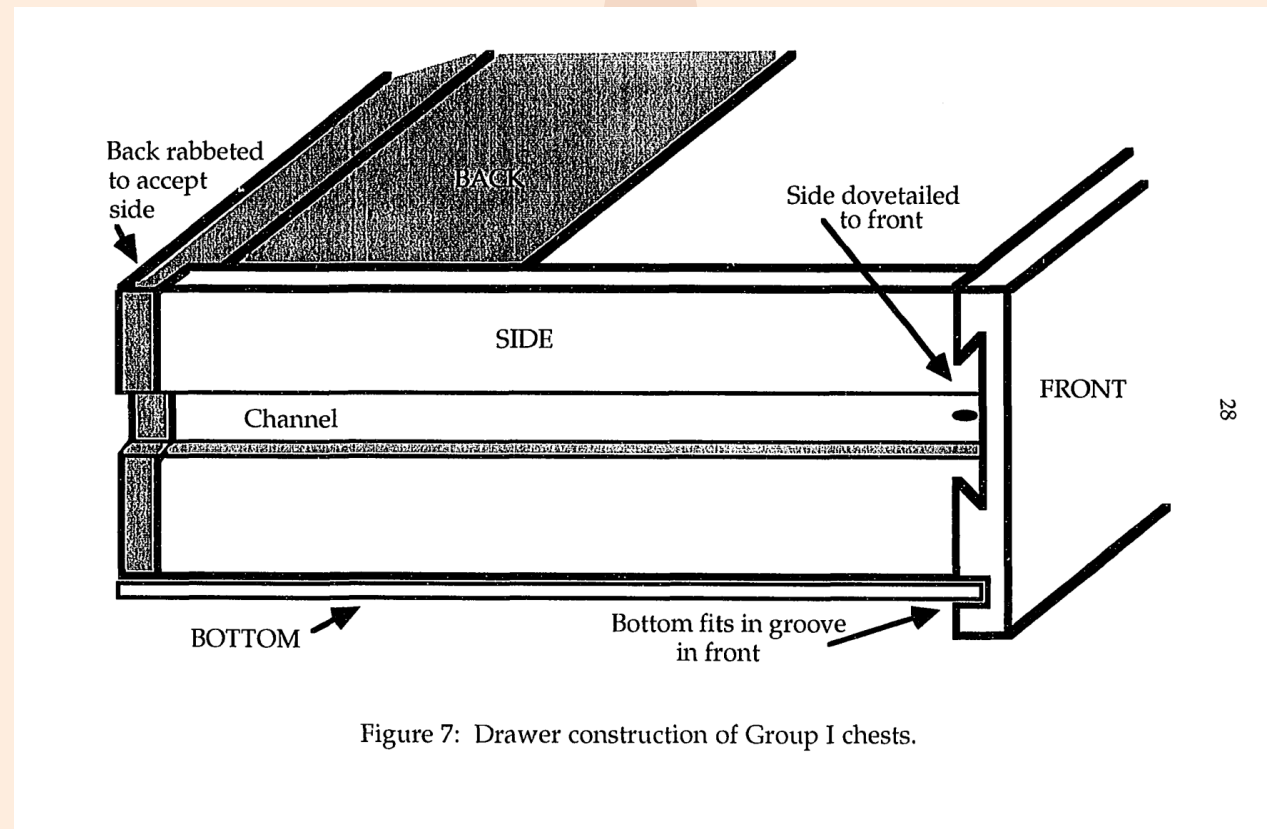
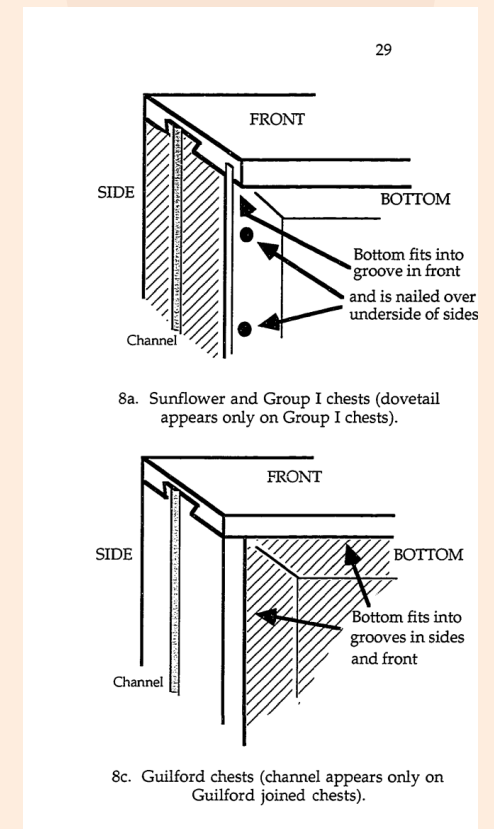


Figure 7: Drawer construction of Group I chests.

(Willoughby, 1994)



8a. Sunflower and Group I chests (dovetail appears only on Group I chests).

8c. Guilford chests (channel appears only on Guilford joined chests).

(Willoughby, 1994)

effects of colonialism: chest panel designs

Chest Panels as a New Interpretation of Embroidery Patterns

Late Mannerist Style

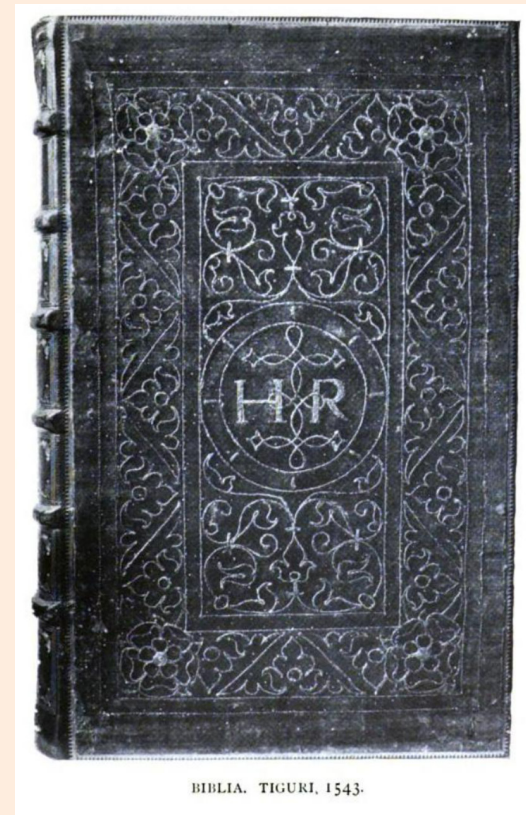
- » Floral motifs
- » Naturistic elements found in textiles, silver, and other crafts
- » Tulip and leaf pattern
- » Acanthus and grape vine pattern

(Culp & Koopman, 2021)

Tudor Style/Embroidery

- » Tudor embroidery (1500's)
- » New taste for rich clothing and decoration
- » Advancement in needle making under Queen Elizabeth
- » Large number of people could afford and make textiles during a prosperous time period
- » Textiles provided color and comfort

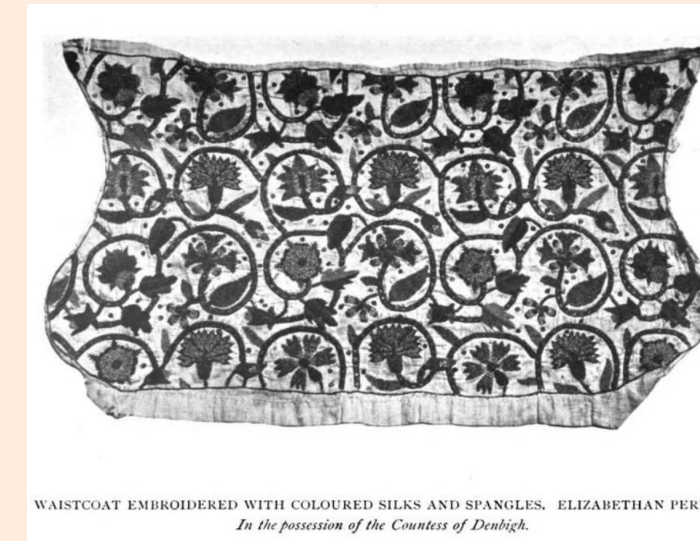
(Watt, 2010)



(Jourdain, 1912)



(Jourdain, 1912)



(Jourdain, 1912)

Commonly Embroidered Objects:

- » Residential textiles
- » Mirrors
- » Boxes
- » Cabinets
- » Tablecloths
- » Tapestries

(Watt, 2010)

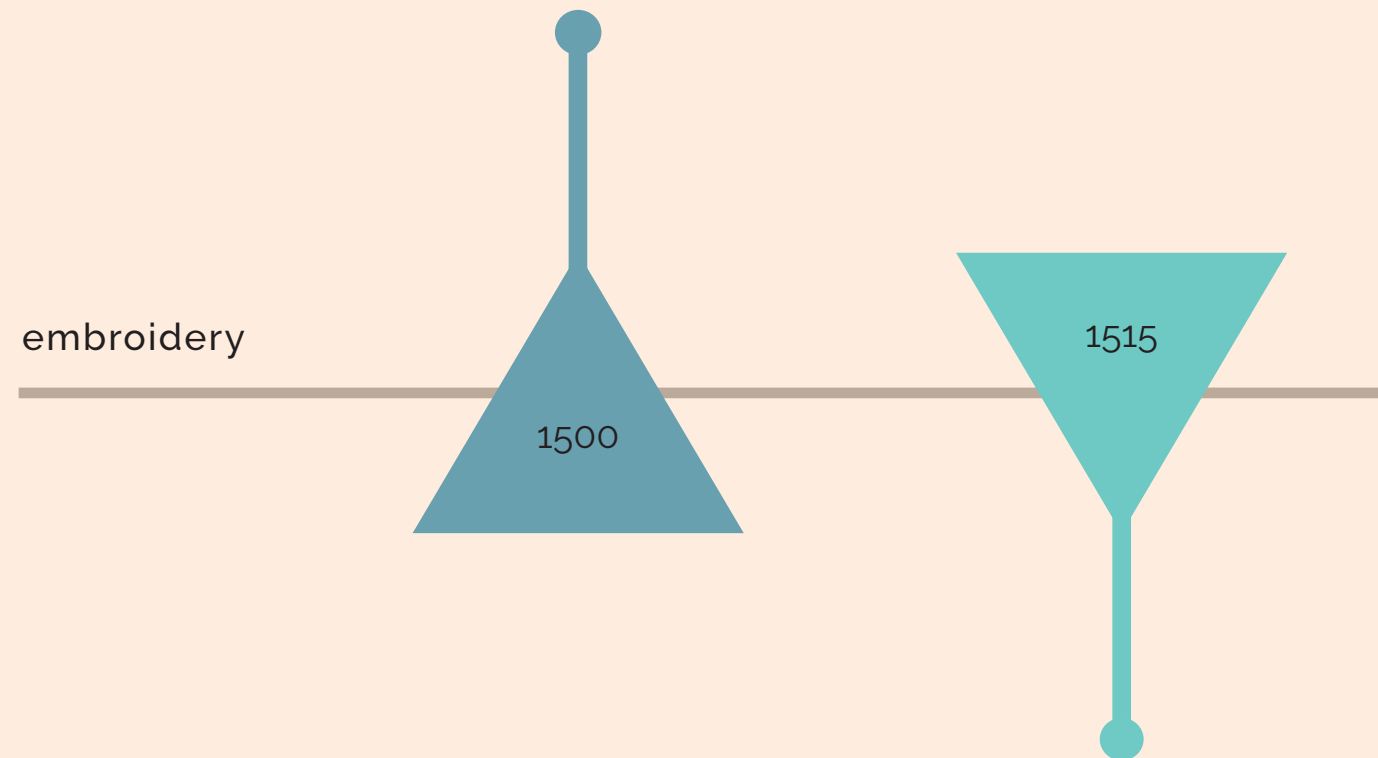
Embroidery Characteristics:

- » Geometric symmetry
- » All over distribution of continuous, scrolling stems
- » Leaves and fruits
- » Flowers referenced by Shakespeare (pansies, carnations, roses, tulips)

(Jourdain, 1912)

trend development over time

- » Growing emphasis on embroidery in England for secular use
- » Embroidery was mainly seen in textiles but was used in the decoration of small boxes and books (Watt, 2010)



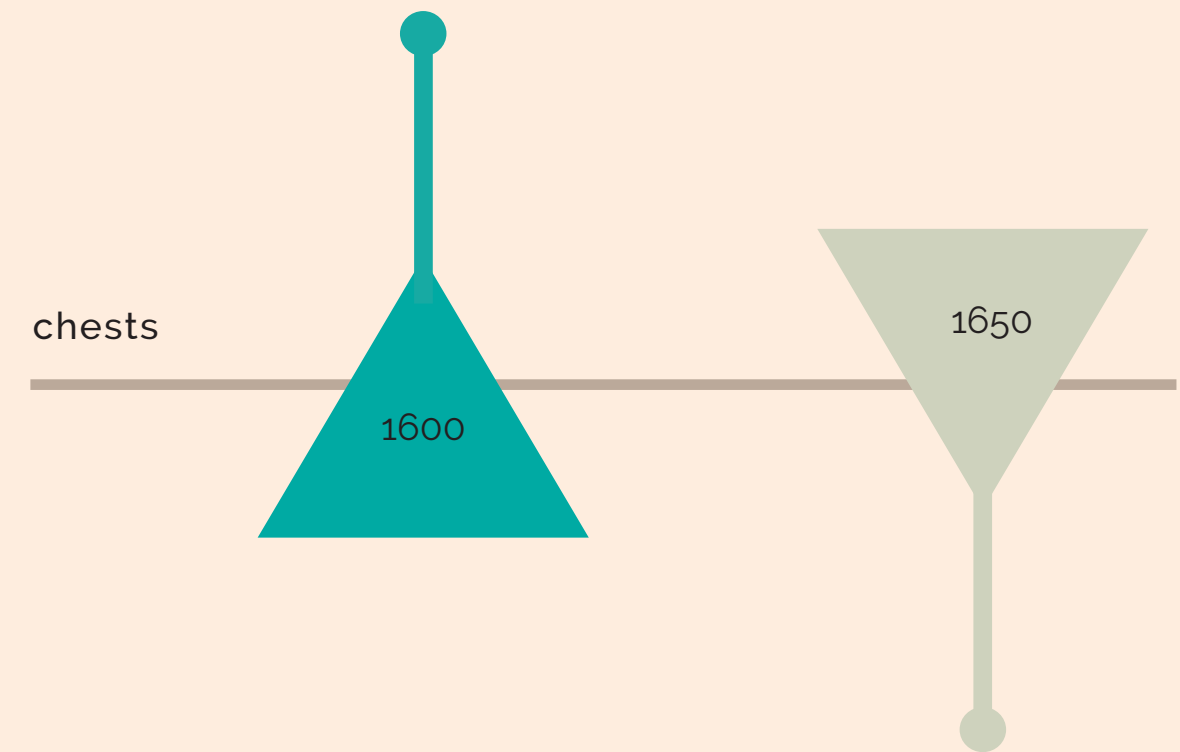
Is there a relationship between the upper class owning embroidery and the upper class owning "Sunflower" chests?

Did chest makers purposefully use a pattern well-liked by the wealthy?



- » New ruling which prohibited ownership and use of embroidered objects for all people below the rank of "Son of Knight" (Jourdain, 1912)

- » Legs and extensions added to chests to create drawing tables, seats, and benches (Scaramanga, 2016)



- » Introduction of drawers to traditional chests
- » Two or four drawers below the main compartment (Scaramanga, 2016)

role in the interior

Chest Evolution

Small English caskets were used as luxurious storage containers in England.

Elaborate cabinets were created to store precious materials.

Legs and extensions were added to the basic chest.

Chest tops were covered with textiles for use as display shelves.

Drawers were introduced for storing small items.

(Cooper, 2008)

Textile covering would be placed on top

Analysis:

As people began to accumulate wealth, more storage methods were needed for small objects.

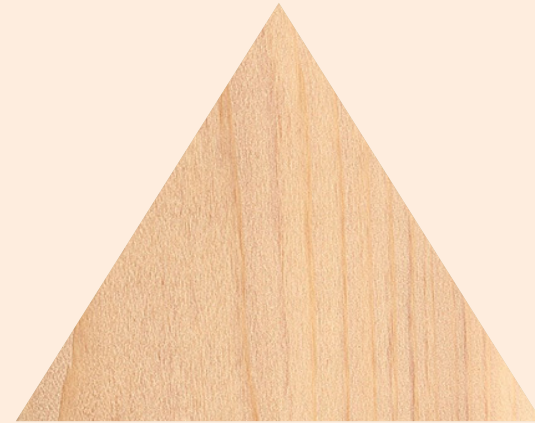
Using the chest as a display case was an indicator of wealth.

The chest turned into a focal point of the home.



(ArtfixDaily, 2017)

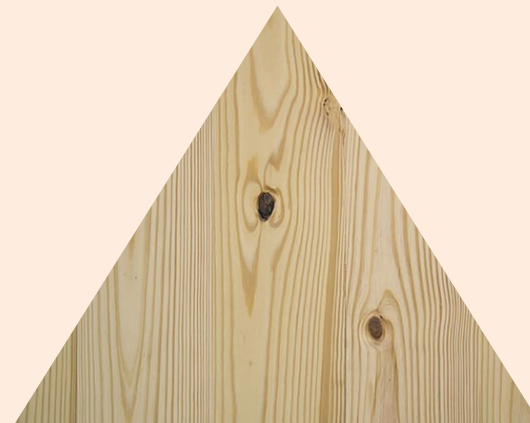
tools + materials



(The Wood Database, n.d.)



(Greenwood Flooring International, n.d.)



(Northeast Lumber, n.d.)

Wood Species



(Doody, n.d.)

Tools

White Cedar

- » Native to the New England Region
- » Good longevity
- » Resistance to insects
- » Resistance to decay
- » Good insulation
- » Used in shingles, siding, and shipbuilding

(Thombs, 2018).

White Oak

- » State tree of Connecticut
- » Comprised 40% of standing trees in colonial CT
- » Superior longevity
- » Drought resistant
- » Fire resistant
- » Used in furniture and shipbuilding

(Faison, 2014)

Yellow Pine

- » Dominant species on the East Coast
- » Used as raw material in buildings and furniture
- » Prominent color and grain
- » High density
- » Used in furniture and shipbuilding

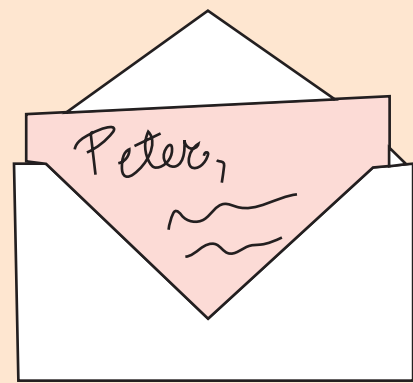
(Wood It's Real, n.d.)

Colonial Tools

- » Grindstone
- » Holdfast
- » Saw
- » Chisel
- » Gouges
- » Moulding Planes
- » Awl

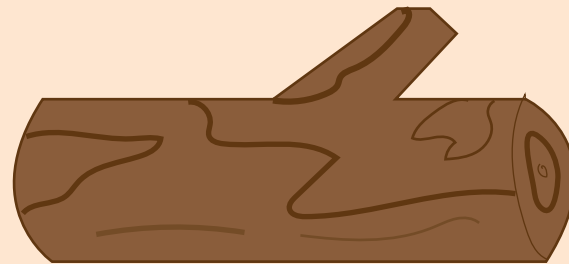
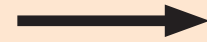
(Humphrey, 2007)

design process



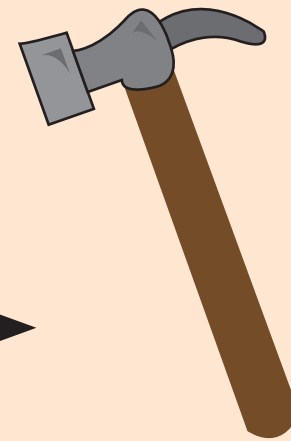
Commission

- » Wealthy individuals would pay craftsmen to build furniture pieces with carved initials.



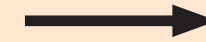
Collect materials

- » Craftsmen would obtain local materials such as pine, oak, and cedar for chest construction.



Design + Build

- » The selected shop will design the piece according to their client's needs and construct and finish it according to shop traditions.



Deliver Finished Product

- » The chest can now be decorated for display!

reflections + concluding thoughts

Motifs from Tudor style embroidery largely influenced the designs of chests from the Connecticut River Valley. It is possible that makers understood the value of embroidered patterns and wanted to bring this value to their furniture.

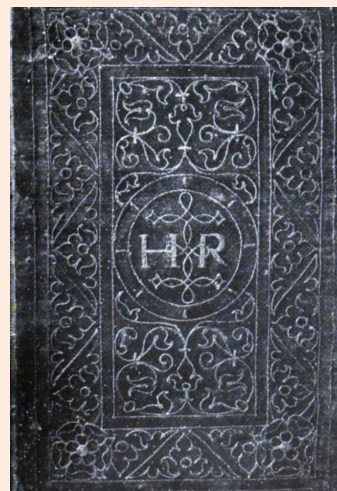
Similar to the use of embroidery to represent wealth, chests with decorative carvings were used for the display and storage of precious items in a time period of economic success.

The 85 similar chests that came from the region were made by a number of shops that were not competing but in close contact with each other.

The maker of the selected object, Peter Blin, may have been exposed to Tudor embroidery while living in London.

Unanswered Questions:

1. Who's initials are D.C.?
2. How difficult was it to obtain a "Sunflower" chest in colonial times?



(Jourdain, 1912)

+



(Jourdain, 1912)

=



(Met Museum, n.d.)



(ArtfixDaily, 2017)

bibliography

- ArtfixDaily. (2017, September 22). *Early and important Connecticut sunflower chest, circa 1703-1704, will be auctioned Oct. 21st*. ArtfixDaily. <https://www.artfixdaily.com/artwire/release/2502-early-and-important-connecticut-sunflower-chest-circa-1703-1704-w>
- Barbour, J.H. (2008). *Tools of the Trade*. Colonial Williamsburg, <https://research.colonialwilliamsburg.org/Foundation/journal/Winter08/tools.cfm>
- Cooper, H. A. (2008). *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery*. Yale University Art Gallery; Yale University Press. <https://www.aeportal.com/?id=-15371&fromsearch=true>
- Christie's. (n.d.). *A Joined and Painted Oak "Sunflower" Chest with Two Drawers*. Christie's. <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6019388>
- Culp, B., & Koopman, R. (2021, January). *Decorator's Dream*. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. <https://www.thewadsworth.org/decorators-dream/>
- Faison, E. K. (2014). *Witness Trees, Fossil Pollen, and Other Insights*. Connecticut Woodlands. https://harvardforest1.fas.harvard.edu/sites/harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/files/publications/pdfs/Faison_CTWoodlands_2014.pdf
- Greenwood Flooring International (n.d.) *White Oak Natural*. Greenwood Flooring International. <http://greenwoodflooringinternational.com/product/pal-oaw8-nat>
- Humphrey, N. (2007). *Furniture and woodwork in Tudor England: native practices, methods, materials and context*. National Portrait Gallery. <https://www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/making-art-in-tudor-britain/workshops/workshop-2-abstract-4.php>
- Jourdain, M. (1912). *The History of English Secular Embroidery*. E.P. Dutton and Company. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=W4BAAAAIAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=tudor+embroidery+scholarly+articles&ots=UkclPIDmii&sig=it4nN8m1yxuF8eW7zGDjheEiZDg#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Land of the Brave (n.d.). *Colonial Connecticut*. Land of the Brave. <https://www.landofthebrave.info/colonial-connecticut.htm>
- The Met Museum. (n.d.). *Workshop of Peter Blin - Chest with Drawers - American*. The Met. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/2019>
- Northeast Lumber Sales (n.d.). *Southern Yellow Pine Flooring*. Northeast Lumber Sales. <https://www.northeastlumber.com/products/southern-yellow-pine-flooring/>
- Sweeney, K.M. (n.d.) *Regions and the Study of Material Culture: Explorations Along the Connecticut River*. Chipstone. <http://www.chipstone.org/article.php/108/American-Furniture-1995/Regions-and-the-Study-of-Material-Culture:-Explorations-along-the-Connecticut-River->
- Thombs, D. (2018). *Northern White Cedar*. Bates Canopy. <https://www.bates.edu/canopy/species/northern-white-cedar/>
- Watt, M. (2010, May). *English Embroidery of the Late Tudor and Stuart Eras*. The Met. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/broi/hd_broi.htm
- Willoughby, M. H. (1994). *FROM CARVED TO PAINTED: CHESTS OF CENTRAL AND COASTAL CONNECTICUT, c. 1675-1725*. (Publication No. 1375146). [Master's thesis, University of Delaware]. UMI.
- The Wood Database. (n.d.) *Northern White Cedar*. The Wood Database. <https://www.wood-database.com/northern-white-cedar/>
- Wood It's Real (n.d.) *Made in America: A History of Southern Yellow Pine*. Wood It's Real. <https://wooditsreal.com/2017/03/16/1260/>