

Signed or Labeled Furniture from the Goddard Family Shop

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Of the thousands of pieces of furniture crafted in Newport in the 18th century, few are attributable to the shop of a specific maker, and even fewer carry the label, inscription, or signature of the maker.

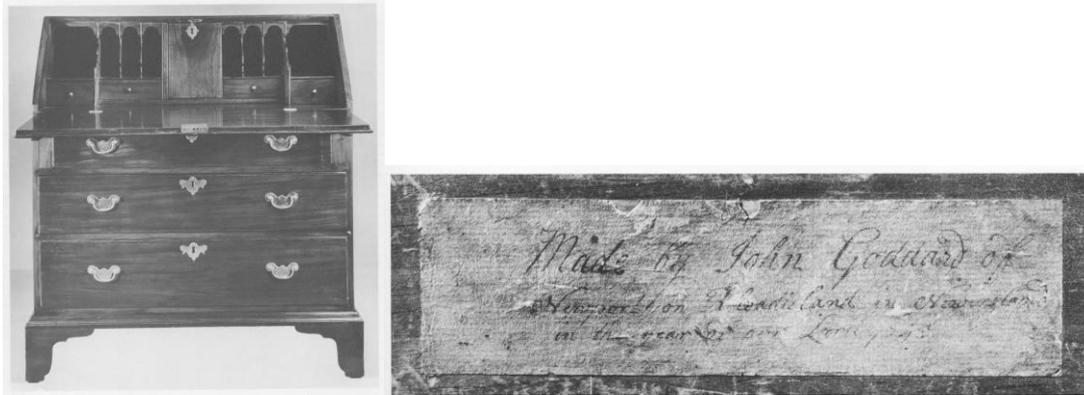
John Goddard (1723-1785) is widely recognized as one of Newport's preeminent cabinetmakers. Goddard and his sons, along with members of the Townsend family, led the development of the distinctive Newport style and were at the forefront of design and craftsmanship among Newport's many cabinetmakers. Surprisingly, John Goddard, a name that came to be synonymous with Newport furniture, appears as a signature on only three pieces, and his sons signed or labeled only three others.

Goddard had several sons who worked with him in the cabinetmaking trade. Sons Daniel, Job, and Henry left for Nova Scotia after the devastating British occupation of Newport ended in 1779 and are not known to have returned. Sons Townsend (1750-1790), Stephen (1764-1804), and Thomas (1765-1852) continued the family cabinetmaking trade in Newport after their father's death in 1785.

Stephen and Thomas are mentioned specifically in Goddard's will, wherein he gave them the use of his tools and shop along with his stock of mahogany to be made into furniture for the benefit of their mother. Invoices show sons Townsend and Stephen working together and Stephen and Thomas working together in the late 1780s. Mabel Swan noted, "There still remains to be identified some of the furniture they made from the stock of mahogany left by John Goddard to their mother", and little has been attributed to the Goddard sons in the fifty years since.

Most pieces thought to have been made by the Goddard shop are attributed by documentation, such as bills of sale, or by distinctive features such as their identifiable ball and claw feet. Of the great number of pieces they produced, only a handful bear a label or inscription. John Goddard's signature appears on three early desks. Signed or inscribed pieces by his sons are equally rare, with only one example with a Daniel Goddard inscription, one with a Stephen Goddard inscription, and one labeled piece indicating Stephen and Thomas working together.

The fact that the Goddard shop included many family members over the years meant that most pieces were the product of many hands. The group effort seems to have prevented pieces from having been signed by an individual maker, making signed examples a great rarity and indicating of the work of primarily a single craftsman.



1. Small slant-front desk at Chipstone signed and dated 1745 on a paper label inside the top drawer. The label reads: *Made by John Goddard of / Newport on Rhodeisland in Newengland / in the year of our Lord 1745*. Goddard was 21 years old and had likely just completed his apprenticeship with Job Townsend Sr. (1699-1765)



2. Slant-front desk circa 1750 with an ink inscription on the back of the prospect door reading *Made by / John Goddard / of Rhodeisland*. (private collection)



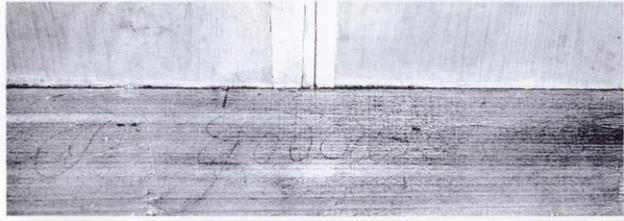
3. A more formal slant-front desk with *John Goddard 1754* inscribed on the back of the prospect door. (private collection)



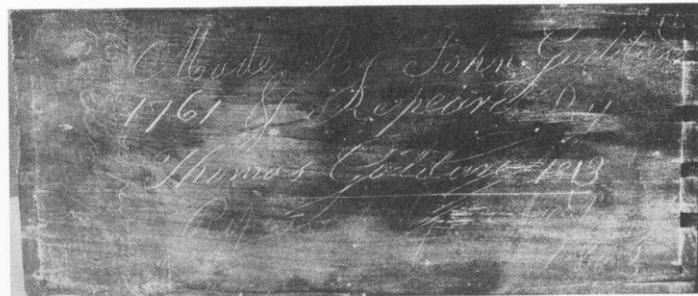
4. The only known piece with the inscription of Daniel Goddard is an elaborately carved four-shell kneehole bureau. The chalk inscription reads: *Daniel Goddard - His Draugh*, indicating his drawing or design. Secondary woods red cedar and birch are not usually found in Newport furniture and suggest this may have been made by Daniel after his 1779 move to Nova Scotia. (Dietrich America Foundation)



5. A Hepplewhite card table bearing a printed paper label stating *Stephen and Thomas Goddard Cabinetmakers carries on Said Business...in Newport*. (Metropolitan Museum of Art)



6. Slant-front desk with the recently discovered inscription *S. Goddard* in graphite inverted on an inner drawer side behind the prospect door, likely the inscription of son Stephen Goddard who apprenticed in the family shop. (private collection)



7. The Lisle six-shell secretaire bearing the inscription *Made by John Goddard / 1761 and repaired by Thomas Goddard 1813*, an inscription apparently made 52 years after its creation by son Thomas. (Museum of Art, RI School of Design)



8. Tall case clock c. 1790-1795 with the chalk inscription *Steph'n Goddard of his manuf* on the backboard. The image on the right is a high-contrast negative. (private collection)