



# *Artisans of the Valley*

*Conservation Documentary*

*Circa 1750 Secretary*

# Conservation Documentary



**Piece:** Baker circa 1750-1770 Secretary  
**Style:** Chippendale; Bracket style strait feet indicate early period.  
**Material:** Case, Northern white pine, common to New England, drawers and slant top in cherry  
**Region of Origin:** Appears to be New England  
**Condition of Finish:** Fair to Poor, restoration feasible  
**Structure:** Sound, restoration feasible

## Pre Conservation Evaluation:

At start of the conservation process, the overall condition of this piece is close to poor. The slant top hinges are replacements, appearing to be 1830's and the right hinge screw holes are stripped causing the top to be unattached on that side. Previous hinges are indicated by two screw hole hinge pattern in the missing right hinge outline. There remains a broken screw in each hole.



The drawer fronts and slant top have a neatly done inlay that appears to be a light colored wood, probably maple and walnut contrast. The inside drawers are intact except for the right lower side. The right front body molding is off, but was saved by the owner and will be reattached.

The outline of the original Chippendale hardware remains on the piece. This Chippendale outline was covered by perhaps a second hardware set for the piece. It was common to change hardware as it wore out or periods changed, updating the hardware to Sheraton style would have made sense when darkening the finish of the piece.

The third set of brass, many replacements indicated by previous holes and plugged holes and the multiple outlines, is an inferior grade of brass common to the 1930's. This history defines the reasons for incorrect brass on many antique pieces. The front slant top lock appears to be a replacement sometime in the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



## Artisans of the Valley, LLC

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The colored shellac finish is very dry and significantly crazed over most of the surface, especially the sides of the piece. It appears the crazed layer is an overcoat of colored shellac, applied over the original finish, which remains intact. The original finish is a much lighter patina.

The overcoat layer appears to be button or garnet colored shellac, applied many years after the original coat. Common practice was to update a piece with changes in period and style. This second shellac finish is most likely 1820-1835, applied during the Federal Period. This theory corresponds with the hardware outlines.

There is shrinkage separation between boards on the side and apparent on the slant top. This is common to aging pieces.



The back bottom brace appears to have come loose. Screws used in repair indicate 1880-1900 for this repair.

Wheeled feet were put on to the piece also towards the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Corner braces of questionable origin are fixed on the underside of the piece. They may have been added to allow for the addition of wheels. There appears to have been a previous set of wheels using a dowel mount. The existing set is applied with machine made slot screws.

A white mold residue appears on the bottom and back of unit. This must be removed to avoid reanimation if unit encounters moisture or humidity.

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## **Conservation Plan:**

The following procedures will be completed to conserve this piece maintaining as much antique value as possible. Per client instructions, Artisans will perform all required tasks to preserve this piece to be maintained in the client's personal collection indefinitely. The piece is not intended for immediate sale, and will be presented with as a functional antique.

**The Finish:** The top layers of colored shellac will be removed through an emulsification process. The original layer will remain intact, and will be preserved. The original layer will be protected using a rubbed waxing technique appropriate to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This original layer will be preserved as close as possible to its original state.

**The Hardware:** The brass hardware will be replaced with Chippendale style solid brass. Hardware will be ordered from Horton Brasses, Inc the finest restoration hardware company in America. This company uses original brass casting molds to produce their hardware as historically accurate as possible.

**Structure:** The screws will be removed from the back brace and it will be pegged in place. The shrinkage cracks will be filled with antique wood, exactly as the repair would have been done per 18<sup>th</sup> century techniques. The corner braces will be left in place as their origin cannot be confirmed.

**Drawers:** Bottom right drawer slide will be replaced with antique wood and the individual drawers fit to function as appropriate. Missing cubbyhole slats will be replaced.

**Slant Top:** Hinges are old repair, and will be left in place. The stripped screw holes will be plugged and re-drilled.

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## **Appraisal:**

Artisans of the Valley provides appraisals for the purposes of insurance only. Actual value can only be determined by sale of the piece. In original condition, unit was estimated with a value of \$1,000-\$1,500. Restored value is estimated at \$6-12,000.

Appraisal is based on careful physical inspection of the piece, and comparison to descriptions of pieces recently sold at auction. The full range of similar units found was between \$500 and \$30,000.

Considerations when valuing this unit include:

The finish is approximately 40% original, overcoat old refinish layers were removed. Two layers of garnett shellac were applied to even the original layers.

Brass and hardware are not original.

No documented history confirming previous historic ownership.

Positive factors are that the unit is in very good structural condition. All main joints appear solid.

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*Photo by Frank Jacobs Stanley (left) & Eric Saperstein*

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