

Wentworth Chinese Chippendale Furniture



Original Objects

2 double chair back settees:	Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden
4 Arm Chairs:	Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden
2 Arm Chairs:	Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
1 Stool:	Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden
1-3 Stools:	Missing
Possibly 2 Arm Chairs:	Missing
Other Unknown Items?:	Missing

Also missing: *Great Hall of the Residence of Alexander Hamilton Ladd*, oil on canvas by Walter Gay (American, 1856–1937), circa 1888. Shows three of the armchairs in situ in what is now the Moffatt-Ladd House.

What's missing?: Up to three stools/benches, and perhaps two armchairs. The known pieces are currently in the Moffatt-Ladd House (Figs. 1–2), Portsmouth, N.H., and Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.

Importance: Suites of English furniture of such high quality with histories of ownership in America are rare. This furniture is associated with John Wentworth (1737–1820), the last royal governor of New Hampshire, who fled the country at the time of the Revolution. The known pieces—six armchairs, two settees, and one stool—represent fine English workmanship and design and point to London as their source.

History: John Wentworth was born in New Hampshire and was appointed governor of the province during a visit to England in 1766. Wentworth's furniture and other household effects, both in Portsmouth and at his country estate in Wolfeboro, were confiscated at the time of the Revolution by local authorities and held for payment of claims until after the war. Wentworth filed papers with the English government requesting compensation for his losses but there is no itemization of the possessions he left behind.

Wentworth was one of the most fashionable residents of New Hampshire in the Colonial period. His cosmopolitan tastes and social status resulted in stylish furnishings befitting his post. These included a matching tea table and stand in the Chinese taste. He was evidently fond of this new fashion for he also papered one of the rooms in his country estate with Chinese wallpaper. The Chinese Chippendale style permeated high society, with other prominent citizens owning furniture of this design including several of Wentworth's relations: his brother Thomas owned a set consisting of four side and two armchairs (at Gore Place, Waltham, MA); his brother-in-law John Fisher owned "8 [wal]Nut Chineas fraime [Chinese frame] Chamber chairs, 2 with arms."

In 1793, Wentworth's possessions, which he never



Figs. 1-2: Armchair and matching stool from a suite of Chinese-influenced Chippendale furniture, England, probably London, circa 1765. Mahogany. Armchairs: H. 38³/₁₆, W. 29, SD. 20 in. Stool: H. 15¹/₂, W. 22¹/₄, D. 17¹/₂ in. Photography by J. David Bohl, courtesy of Historic New England Library and Archives by permission of the Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden, Portsmouth, N.H.



Fig. 3: Photograph of the Great Hall of the Residence of Alexander Hamilton Ladd. Walter Gay (American, 1856–1937), ca. 1888. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Courtesy of Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden, Portsmouth, N.H. Prominently featured are three armchairs from the suite. The original painting, known only from this photograph and a preliminary sketch, is missing and also sought.

Objects: Wentworth Chinese Chippendale furniture

Date: Circa 1765

Artist: Unknown

Origin: England, possibly London

Media: Mahogany throughout, no secondary woods except later braces in settees.

Measurements: Armchairs: H. 38³/₁₆, W. 29, SD. 20 in.
Stools: H. 15¹/₂, W. 22¹/₄, D. 17¹/₂ in.

Last known: Owned by Maria T. H. Ladd of Portsmouth, N.H., in the nineteenth century.

reclaimed, were transferred to his mother, Elizabeth (Rindge) Wentworth (1716–1794), who resided in Portsmouth. Based on subsequent history, this parlor suite of Chinese Chippendale furniture was among the possessions.

Chain: After Elizabeth Wentworth died in 1794 her son's furniture was sold at auction. Nathaniel Appleton Haven (1762–1831) of Portsmouth bought the Chinese Chippendale suite of furniture. He and his wife, Mary (Polly) Tufson Moffatt Haven (1768–1842), gave the set to their daughter Maria Tufson Haven Ladd (1787–1861), and possibly a portion to one of her two siblings. The pieces of furniture from the grouping owned by Maria were distributed to her descendants, possibly before her death in 1861.

It is clear from family photographs and the painting by Walter Gay (see Fig. 3) that at least three chairs and one settee remained in the house (the Moffatt-Ladd House) during the lifetime of Maria's son, Alexander Hamilton Ladd (1815–1900) and were inherited by his children. Others in the set may have been distributed to Maria Ladd's other children. At least one chair is clearly evident in a circa 1865 photograph of Esther Dashiell Ladd (1847–1891), daughter of Charles Haven Ladd (1812–1893), Alexander's older brother.

How many pieces were in the original suite is unknown. The furniture now at the Moffatt-Ladd House, which includes 4 armchairs, 1 settee, and 1 stool, came from descendants of Alexander H. Ladd; the other settee was purchased in 2000 from Colonial Williamsburg by Friends of the Moffatt-Ladd House. Since the origin of the two armchairs (and settee) at Williamsburg was not relayed by the seller, their source is lost. While it is certainly plausible that the suite only consisted of the known examples, it is equally likely that there were at least two more armchairs (as parlor suites could be in sets of 6, 8, 12, or more), and probably at least one more stool (a second suite owned by Fisher included four stools [as well as two sofas and 6 armchairs] so there may have been at least four also in the Wentworth suite). ●

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