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MESDA Acquires Masterpiece of Kentucky Furniture

Winston-Salem, NC (December 7, 2012)—A chest of drawers that is widely considered to be the most iconic piece of early Kentucky furniture is now part of the collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) at Old Salem Museums & Gardens in Winston-Salem. The chest of drawers, made at the end of the eighteenth century by a member of the Calvert-Tuttle-Foxworthy family of cabinetmakers in Mason County, Kentucky, will go on view at MESDA on December 7, 2012.

“Over the past five years MESDA has focused on acquiring masterpieces from Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky,” said Robert Leath, Chief Curator, MESDA and Old Salem. “This chest of drawers is one of the greatest pieces of American furniture made west of the Appalachian Mountains and is one of the most important acquisitions MESDA has made in its nearly 50-year history.”

“This chest of drawers speaks directly to the western movement of Southerners in the late eighteenth century,” says Daniel Ackermann, Associate Curator, MESDA. “In addition, through its combination of bellflowers and cabriole legs, it exemplifies the creation of an antebellum South that looked as much towards New Orleans as to cities in the east like Baltimore and Charleston.”

The Mason County chest of drawers is part of a group of furniture made in the region between Maysville and Lexington, Kentucky. No other example has as much inlaid detail—including thirty-six bellflowers—making this piece a Rosetta stone for the entire group. Additionally, it is in near-original condition with its original hardware and an early surface.

J. Macklin Cox, a collector of early Kentucky decorative arts from Richmond, Kentucky, who represents Kentucky on the MESDA Advisory Board, said “The effect is music, and the piece perfection!”

The acquisition of the Mason County, Kentucky, chest of drawers was made possible by the MESDA Purchase Fund, a restricted fund created by the museum’s founder, the late Frank L. Horton, for the acquisition of important southern decorative arts objects.

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