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Winston-Salem, NC (AUGUST 20, 2015) – The past and future of southern furniture history are revealed in two new articles recently published in the *Mesda Journal*, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts' (MESDA) scholarly journal. These are the first of several articles that will be published in the *Journal* in celebration of MESDA's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Ronald L. Hurst provides an engaging appraisal of early southern furniture scholarship in one of the articles, which is entitled “Southern Furniture Studies: Where We’ve Been, Where We’re Going.” Virtually ignored by collectors and museum curators at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the appreciation of furniture made by southern cabinetmakers—and the market prices to match—has reached an all-time high in recent years. Hurst is the Vice President for Collections, Conservation, and Museums and Carlisle H. Humelsine Chief Curator at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

“Clearly, southern furniture scholarship has come a very long way since the publication of the first book on the topic nearly 85 years ago... Yet there is still much to learn, and with the advent of new research technologies, fresh findings in southern furniture will continue to appear in rapid fashion. Much of the credit for both past and future discoveries lies directly or indirectly with Frank Horton and MESDA. On this 50th anniversary of the museum’s creation, there is, indeed, much to celebrate,” writes Hurst.

The potential future of decorative arts research is introduced in the second article by Gary Albert, who is Editor of the *MESDA Journal*. In “Probability & Provenance: Jacob Sass and Charleston’s Post-Revolution German School of Cabinetmakers,” Albert employs hierarchical cluster analysis to attribute a dozen pieces of furniture to the shop of Jacob Sass, one of South Carolina’s most successful cabinetmakers during the 20 years that followed America’s War for Independence.

Albert notes that, for “researchers in the fields of decorative arts and material culture, the ability to work with large data sets has become an imperative as more and more analog databases, archives, and even monographs are being digitized” and made available to scholars for use in their research. Albert’s article provides a framework for material culture researchers to integrate a scientific tool like hierarchical cluster analysis in their own studies.

The *MESDA Journal* ([www.mesdajournal.org](http://www.mesdajournal.org)) has published groundbreaking research on early southern decorative arts and material culture since 1975. Articles in the *MESDA Journal* are available free of charge through its Web site, as are digital versions of past issues published over the last 40 years.



Image 1



Image 2

*Image 1: Desk and bookcase attributed to Peter Scott, 1740-1755, Williamsburg, VA. Walnut with oak and yellow pine; HOA: 84", WOA: 42-1/8", DOA: 24-1/2". Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Acc. 1990-219, Museum Purchase.*

*Image 2: Secretary bookcase attributed to the Jacob Sass Shop, 1790-1800, Charleston, SC. Mahogany and mahogany veneer with red cedar and white pine; HOA: 104", WOA: 55-3/8", DOA: 24-3/8". MESDA Acc. 5775; MESDA Purchase Fund and Gift of Patty and Bill Wilson.*

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### **About MESDA**

The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) is the preeminent center for researching, collecting, and exhibiting decorative arts made and used in the early American South. MESDA is one of the museums at Old Salem Museums & Gardens. The Web site address is [MESDA.org](http://MESDA.org).

### **About Old Salem**

Old Salem Museums & Gardens is one of America's most comprehensive history attractions. Its museums—the Historic Town of Salem, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), and the Gardens at Old Salem—engage visitors in an educational and memorable historical experience about those who lived and worked in the early South. Old Salem Museums & Gardens is located at 600 South Main Street in Winston-Salem. For more information call 336-721-7300 or visit [oldsalem.org](http://oldsalem.org).