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### **Antiques Expertise a Christmas Gift on MESDA's Website**

Winston-Salem, NC (November 1, 2016) – Ever wonder how the experts on the “Antiques Roadshow” can so quickly identify an example of 1840s pottery or an 18<sup>th</sup>-century chair? Many of them have encyclopedic minds with years of visual memories full of details, dates, places, and names. But when an object made in the early American South comes to the table, many call on the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), considered to be the expert for antiques experts. On Christmas Day 2016 anyone with an internet connection will have access to MESDA's expertise.

MESDA's mission is to preserve the material culture of the early American South—from Maryland and Virginia down through the Carolinas and Georgia out to Tennessee and Kentucky. To achieve this goal, for over fifty years the museum has been documenting the furniture, ceramics, paintings, textiles, and metalwares made in the South before the Civil War, as well as the people who made them. MESDA's researchers and curators have gone far afield to photograph and record family heirlooms and items in private and public collections. And they've scoured countless historic documents to identify southern craftsmen and artists—both men and women, free and enslaved.

In order to benefit from the decades of research and photographs collected by MESDA, the experts at the Antiques Roadshow, private collectors, antiques dealers and auctioneers, or anyone with an interest in southern culture and history have had to travel to MESDA, located at Old Salem Museums & Gardens in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and physically flip through filing cabinet after filing cabinet of folders, photographs, and index cards. On Christmas Day, MESDA's gift to antiques collectors and historians everywhere is to make the museum's complete research archive available online, free of charge.

The launch completes a 10-year initiative to scan and make available online over 100,000 photographs, 85,000 craftsman records, 20,000 object records, as well as—for the first time—the museum's own collection of 2,000 artifacts. MESDA partnered with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Carolina Digital Library and Archives to design the project. Funding was provided through grants from the MARPAT Foundation

of Washington, DC and gifts from David and Martha Rowe and the Guild of Colonial Artisans and Tradesmen.

The *MESDA Object Database* may be the most highly anticipated archive to go online. Consisting of approximately 20,000 records of southern-made decorative arts, including photographs and data, such as materials, dimensions, makers, and provenance, the *Object Database* has been a go-to resource for many people looking to attribute an object to a known craftsman or within a geographic context and chronological period. The museum's staff continues to record southern antiques through its field research, ensuring that the *Object Database* grows each year through the addition of new records.

The *MESDA Craftsman Database* contains information about artisans gathered through primary research in public and private records. The purpose of the database is to collect and make accessible data on the lives and working habits of artisans working in the American South before the Civil War. MESDA's research associates scour newspapers, city directories, court records, probate inventories, wills, and private papers in search of information pertaining to southern craftsmen working in 127 trades. As with the *MESDA Object Database*, the *Craftsman Database* is a living archive with new records added regularly by MESDA's researchers.

Another resource that will be available online is the *MESDA Subject Database*. As they were creating the *Craftsman Database*, MESDA researchers also recorded information they found interesting or intriguing. The subject matter, generally found in period newspapers, is a rich resource for historians and material culturists. MESDA's scholarly journal, the *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, transitioned to an online publication in 2012 and is available at [mesdajournal.org](http://mesdajournal.org). And the catalog for the museum's Anne P. and Thomas A. Gray Library is also searchable through the website, [mesda.org](http://mesda.org).

### **About MESDA**

The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) is the preeminent center for researching, collecting, and exhibiting decorative arts made and used by those living and working in the early South. MESDA is one of three museums at Old Salem Museums & Gardens. The website 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 and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), along with award-winning heirloom gardens—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).

Image 1: The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts at Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina [Horton\_Center\_Exterior\_d.jpg].

Image 2: *Object Database* filing cabinets in the MESDA Research Center [MESDA\_Research\_Center\_c.jpg].

Image 3: Sample MESDA Object Database record [Object Database Record Beta.jpg]

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