RETURNED: George Washington’s Chest-on-Chest with Original Finish Revealed!

Washington, DC -- The chest-on-chest that once stood next to the fireplace in George Washington’s bedroom has returned to Tudor Place after 6 months of conservation treatment. The chest-on-chest sits in the second floor hall at Tudor Place where it has stood for almost 200 years. The conservation took away years of grime, blended in minor repairs, and removed a poor refinishing completed in earlier years. The full conservation treatment restored the original finish and brass pulls and escutcheons. The piece looks as it did when George Washington himself gazed upon it in his bedchamber at Mount Vernon. Chest-on-chests such as this one were made to ship belongs and goods from England and Scotland to the Colonies. The piece is extremely rare as there are only a dozen documented English pieces imported to the Colonies in the mid 18th century that exist today.

Major Findings During the Assessment and Conservation

- On the rear of the upper section of the chest-on-chest is the cipher “GWFx No. 2” and on the lower section is the cipher “GWFx No. 1”. This discovery confirmed the provenance of the piece. The chest-on-chest originally belonged to George William Fairfax and is now dated to 1740s – 1760.

- The original finish was discovered under the escutcheon on the lowest drawer and further visible and longwave ultraviolet radiation indicated its composition.

- The pulls, escutcheons, and key are original to the piece. The brass escutcheons were sand cast.

George William Fairfax of Belvoir Plantation originally shipped the chest-on-chest from England. The date of manufacture is thought to be between the late 1740’s to the 1760’s. Like
other pieces of the time, it was loaded on board ship, covered, and then tied to the gunwale for transport.

Years later the chest-on-chest was purchased by George Washington at the 1773 sale of the furnishings of Belvoir Plantation. George William Fairfax, owner of Belvoir at that time, was a friend of Washington and husband to Sally Fairfax. Washington purchased the mahogany chest and drawers that stood in Mrs. Fairfax’s chamber for £12 10s. Not a fine piece of furniture, Washington would have purchased it for practical purposes. It stood in his bedroom next to the fireplace. A depiction of the chest-on-chest is seen in John Gadsby Chapman’s 1834 painting of the room in which George Washington died. The chest-on-chest was purchased by Thomas and Martha Peter of Tudor Place at the 1802 estate sale after the death of Martha Washington, Mrs. Peter’s grandmother.

###

Located in Georgetown’s Historic District, this National Historic Landmark is a house museum distinguished for its neoclassical architecture, decorative arts collection, and five-and-a-half acre garden. Built in 1816, it was home to Thomas Peter and his wife, Martha Custis Peter, granddaughter of Martha Washington. It housed six generations of the Peter family over the course of 180 years. Now, open to the public, the historic home is one of our nation’s hidden gems. For details visit [www.tudorplace.org](http://www.tudorplace.org)