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By the early 20th century, scrutiny of colonial art and times stimulates preservation of the buildings, not only because of association, but also because of their artistic value. Groups, like the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now Historic New England) led by William Sumner Appleton, begin developing preservation plans and processes to more accurately protect and restore original historic buildings and materials. In the late 1920s, William Archer Rutherford Goodwin and John D. Rockefeller come together to restore Colonial Williamsburg (Fig. 38-3) in Virginia. A team of architects, engineers, archaeologists, historians, and furniture experts succeeds in carrying out the first and largest attempt in the United States to preserve and re-create an entire community. Their work affects the preservation movement for decades to come. An unanticipated effect is the huge public interest in the project as a model for home design and furnishing. Following the official opening of Williamsburg in 1934, the reproduction of Colonial-style furniture, historical wallpapers, fabrics, and decorative objects accelerates. During this period, interiors in museums and restorations reflect Colonial Revival more often than actual interior and furnishing practices.

## CONCEPTS

From the mid-19th century onward, many see Colonial Revival as symbolizing America's heritage through a spirit of nationalism within the context of tradition and middle-class values. Colonial times are regarded as simpler and more stable, and Colonial people are believed to be finer in character and taste. These ideas are a response, in part, to the sweeping social and cultural changes brought by the Industrial Revolution and resulting decline in design and taste that alarm designers, reformers, and others. Supporters believe that living in Colonial-style houses will engender the same admirable qualities of the Colonial ancestors in contemporary people. This reverence for ancestors, as a reaction to the influx of immigrants and increased nationalism, causes many, particularly in New England, to build and furnish in the Colonial style to tangibly demonstrate their heritage and separate themselves from newcomers. By the end of the 19th century, Colonial Revival becomes firmly established as an American style that adapts to current ways of thinking about the home and the nation as well as trends in architecture and design.

## CHARACTERISTICS AND MOTIFS

Colonial Revival houses, interiors, furniture and decorative arts adopt or adapt the types, forms, arrangements, ornament, and motifs from English Colonial (1608–1720), Dutch Colonial (17th–19th centuries), American Georgian (1700s–1780s), and

American Federal (1780s–1820). Examples often mix attributes from several different periods and differ in design to accommodate modern lifestyles, materials, and technology. For example, Colonial house types used as modern houses often have larger windows; rooms unknown in the period, such as the living room; modern kitchens and bathrooms; and garages or carports. Similarly, interiors and furniture usually display characteristics of earlier examples but differ in materials and forms, or they may have been unknown in earlier times. Decoration, which comes from precedents, is usually simpler and different in proportion. It often combines elements from different periods. Colonial Revival inspires adaptations and reproductions of period artifacts and finishes. To accommodate contemporary use and conveniences, adaptations may alter scale, proportions, materials, construction techniques, colors, uses, details, and motifs. In contrast, reproductions copy as closely as possible, within the limitations or abilities of modern technology, a historical prototype, which can be a house, interior, piece of furniture, textile, or floor or wall covering. (However, some late-19th- and early-20th-century uses of the term *reproduction* do not fit this definition.)

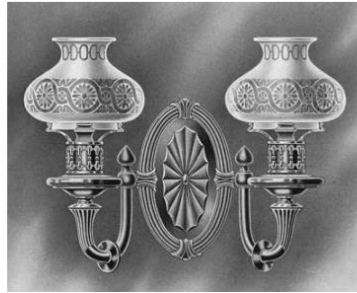
■ **Motifs.** Motifs come from precedents, but they may be simplified with less detail (Fig. 38-1, 38-2, 38-5, 38-6, 38-8, 38-22). Examples include columns, pilasters, pediments, engaged columns, lintels, stringcourses, quoins, urns, acanthus leaves, shells, rosettes, palmettes, and eagles.

## ARCHITECTURE

Some of the earliest Colonial Revival examples are an outgrowth of architects' investigations of New England's 17th-century buildings. McKim, Mead, and White undertake a sketching trip through New England in 1877. Soon after, they design broad interpretations of 17th-century houses and conduct restorations of 18th-century houses in Newport, Rhode Island. Other architects, such as Arthur Little and Robert Peabody, follow suit as they explore



▲ 38-2. West Virginia State Building, World's Columbian Exposition, 1893; Chicago, Illinois; J. S. Silsbee.



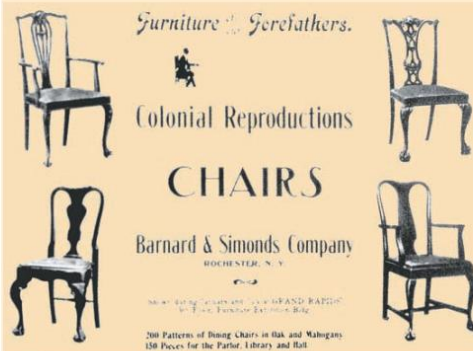
▲ 38-18. Lighting: Chandelier published in *House and Garden*, 1925, and wall bracket published in *Use and Design of Lighting Fixtures*, 1909, by the International Textbook Company.

■ *Lighting.* Lighting (Fig. 38-13, 38-14, 38-15, 38-17, 38-18) comes from contemporary or reproduction fixtures, sconces, or Colonial-style lamps. Chandeliers, common in dining rooms, entries, and large spaces in public buildings, often hang from central ceiling medallions. However, the use of chandeliers in Colonial Revival does not reflect Colonial practice when chandeliers were limited to some public spaces. Additionally, there is more illumination than in the Colonial periods. In the early 20th century, some Colonial Revivalists advocate only candles in Colonial-style rooms, but this quickly changes.

## FURNISHINGS AND DECORATIVE ARTS

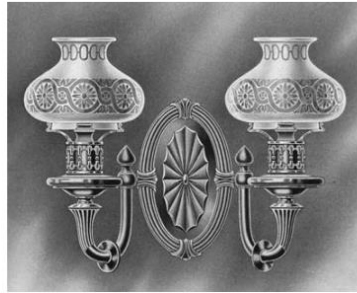
Colonial Revival furniture, which is distinguished by its resemblance to previous styles, varies from reproductions to adaptations to free interpretations of 17th-century, Queen Anne, Chippendale, Federal, and American Empire styles. Copying of historical pieces begins as early as the 1840s but does not constitute a true revival at that time. The revival occurs in earnest in the 1880s when manufacturers begin producing Colonial-style furniture, some of which they call reproductions. Most are not overly concerned with historical accuracy because the intent is to capture the spirit of the precursor image. Some do not hesitate to “improve” extant pieces in proportion or detail. Nevertheless, the best reproductions are made by hand in small cabinetmaking shops. From the 20th century forward, reproductions, particularly those licensed by museums such as Winterthur or Williamsburg, maintain as complete accuracy to the original models as possible. In its early years, Colonial Revival has certain icons or signals, such as grandfather clocks (Fig. 38-3)—a result of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem “The Old Clock on the Stairs;” paintings; and other images; rifles hanging over fireplaces; and spinning wheels. Their importance begins to fade during the 1920s.

## DESIGN SPOTLIGHT



**Furniture:** Colonial-style chairs in varying degrees of accuracy are produced by many manufacturers. This late-19th-century adaptation of a rocker (next page) in the Chippendale style shows that many manufacturers are not overly concerned with historical accuracy. It reveals an 18th-century character in its overall design, although the proportions are incorrect, particularly in the legs. The splat resembles Philadelphia examples, and the carving on the splat and knees is similar to but coarser than 18th-century prototypes. Although rocking chairs existed in the 18th century (the exact origin is uncertain), rockers would never have been made into a formal parlor chair with ball and claw feet. The rocker, produced by C. F. Meislahn & Company in Baltimore, is a product of an imaginary past.

▲ 38-19. Colonial reproduction chairs and rocker, 1875–1902; New York and Maryland.



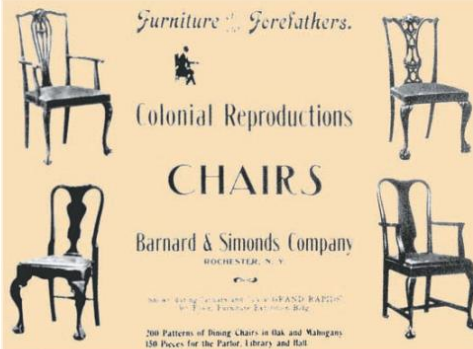
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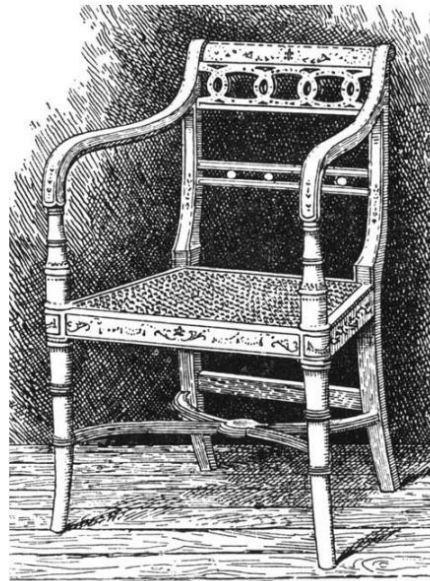
▲ 38-19. Colonial reproduction chairs and rocker, 1875–1902; New York and Maryland.

Colonial Revival rooms usually have more furniture in comparison to early spaces and feature more upholstery. Antiques are often freely integrated with Colonial Revival and other furniture within room settings. Furniture may mix characteristics from several styles or bear little resemblance to the earlier prototypes. Some pieces, such as coffee tables, have no earlier precedents. Colonial-style furniture often has different proportions from the prototypes because of ignorance of earlier features or design license, or because contemporary rooms are different in scale. Furniture groupings do not follow earlier examples of lining the walls. Instead, furniture is arranged throughout a space to create comfort and convenience.

### Public and Private Buildings

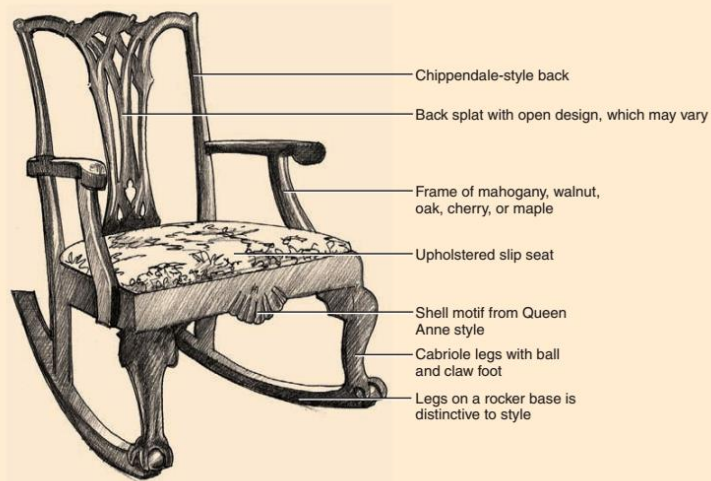
■ **Materials.** Colonial Revival furniture is made of mahogany, walnut, oak, cherry, and maple (Fig. 38-13, 38-14, 38-15, 38-17, 38-19, 38-21, 38-23); the latter is characteristic of Early American pieces and may be stained dark to emulate age. Forms of embellishment include carving, inlay, marquetry, and painted decoration.

■ **Seating.** Chairs, settees, and sofas copy, adapt, or freely interpret Queen Anne, Chippendale, Sheraton, Hepplewhite, English Regency and American Empire (Fig. 38-14, 38-15, 38-17, 38-19, 38-20). Pieces inspired by English Regency are often known as Duncan Phyfe after the popular New York cabinetmaker of the early 19th century. Early American chairs include ladderbacks and Windsors in various forms. Some chairs bear no resemblance



▲ 38-20. Fancy chair, c. 1922; Sheraton-style.

### DESIGN SPOTLIGHT



▲ 38-19. Continued



▲ 38-21. Tables, c. 1910s–1930s.

to these 18th- and 19th-century styles but may have elements of Tudor, Elizabethan, or Italian Renaissance. Spinning wheel chairs, popular in the last decades of the 19th century, are constructed of parts of spinning wheels with the wheel itself forming the back. Wing chairs are the most common fully upholstered piece from Colonial times. Unlike their predecessors that were used only in bedrooms or as invalid chairs, wing chairs are often in living rooms, family rooms, and bedrooms. Chairs with upholstered seats and backs are revived and given Colonial names. Thus, the 19th-century Lolling chair becomes a Martha Washington chair. Chippendale and Sheraton sofas also are adapted for contemporary tastes and needs in proportions to suit contemporary rooms.

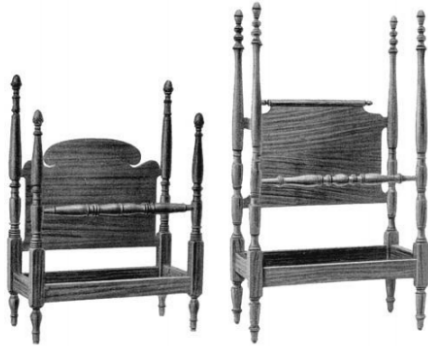
■ *Tables and Storage.* New pieces of furniture include lamp or end tables and coffee tables placed in front of sofas to hold drinks and refreshments (Fig. 38-15, 38-21). Some tables common in the 17th and 18th centuries reappear in contemporary rooms, including gateleg tables, nesting tables, and drop-leaf tables (Fig. 38-13).

Blockfront chests (Fig. 38-22), dressing tables or lowboys, and high chests of drawers or highboys are commonly used in bedrooms or entrance halls. The typical Colonial-style secretary



▲ 38-22. Chest of drawers; published in *The House Beautiful*, 1881, by Clarence Cook.

(called a desk and bookcase in the 18th century) has a broken pediment top with glass doors and a drop front with drawers that rest on ogee bracket feet or short cabriole legs. Dining tables most commonly resemble pedestal extension types that appear in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Fig. 38-14). New in the 1920s are Colonial-style dinettes, small sets of table and chairs for breakfast nooks or kitchens. A popular dining room accessory, unknown in Colonial times, is the tea cart. Other new pieces in Colonial styles include radio cabinets; Victrolas; china cabinets; bedside tables; office furniture; bookcases; and, in the late 20th century, entertainment and computer units.



▲ 38-23. Beds, c. 1920s-1930s.

■ *Beds.* Most Colonial-style beds have posts and a broken pediment headboard (Fig. 38-23). Posts may be short or tall enough for a tester or canopy. Canopies may be flat or curved. Although not draped in the 18th-century manner, most canopies have at least a net or cloth valance, if not curtains at the head of the bed. Beds are made in sizes unknown in Colonial times such as queen or king.

■ *Decorative Arts.* There are more decorative accessories in Colonial Revival interiors than was common in earlier periods (Fig. 38-13, 38-14, 38-15, 38-17). Rooms often display new items not previously known such as throw pillows and modern art. Antiques and/or reproductions of Colonial metalwork, ceramics, prints, mirrors, and clocks usually mix with new, contemporary examples. Formerly utilitarian objects, such as bed warmers, become decorative objects and are proudly displayed.



## CHAPTER 38

# Colonial Revival

1880s–1930s

Originating in the second half of the 19th century in the United States, Colonial Revival consciously strives to emulate the architecture, interiors, furniture, and decorative arts of English and Dutch settlements in North America. The style adapts elements from America's colonial past to contemporary lifestyles. Conveying associations of heritage, patriotism, and anti-modernism, the style rapidly becomes fashionable first among the wealthy and then the middle class. Colonial Revival is one of the most enduring of all styles, even maintaining popularity today.

### HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL

Throughout its long history, Colonial Revival consciously attempts to imitate, but not necessarily copy, the architecture, interiors, and furnishings of the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries. Its character and appearance come from the material culture of the English and the Dutch colonists in North America from the first settlements up to about 1840. The American Georgian image is the one that is most often repeated in Colonial Re-

*Within the last decade, however, there has been an increasingly noticeable swing back to American furniture and American styles. This is partly due to the revival of nationalism that came after the world war and to a widespread desire to build into our surroundings the qualities that we consider purely "American."*

—Nancy McClelland, *Furnishing the Colonial and Federal House*, 1936

vival, although Federal-style architecture, interiors, and furniture also are common. The revival occasionally relies on the 17th century for inspiration. Colonial Revival examples often mix attributes from several different periods and differ in design to accommodate modern lifestyles, materials, and technology.

In some parts of North America, particularly New England, 17th- and 18th-century styles never really die out. People continue to live in, build, and furnish houses in the styles of their ancestors. Colonial Revival has roots in nationalism, the Picturesque Movement, and a greater interest in the nation's history beginning in the early 19th century. Some of the early United States histories focus upon events, heroes, founding fathers and mothers, other important people, and their material culture. During the 1860s, newspapers and magazines carry stories about the colonial past and colonial towns, such as Newport, Rhode Island, which are often filled with picturesque illustrations. New England areas soon become fashionable sites for seaside vacations. The articles, along with fiction writers such as Washington Irving, begin to create an imaginary golden age filled with warm and cozy houses and fine people. At the same time, an antiquing craze leads some to scour the countryside for old furniture and other so-called relics of the past.

Often considered the initial and main impetus for the Colonial Revival, the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia acknowledges the past, but its main theme is progress, and it focuses more on modern inventions. Nevertheless, some colonial artifacts are exhibited, and several exhibition halls, such as the

Connecticut Pavilion, are vaguely Colonial in style. One of the most popular exhibits is the New England kitchen, which is inside a log cabin and features a real New England dinner served by ladies in colonial costumes. However, much of the importance of the exhibition lies beforehand in the articles and stories about colonial times, the founding fathers, and the Revolution that appear in popular periodicals; the local celebrations and expressions of ancestry, such as Martha Washington teas and colonial balls; and plays that occur around the country.

Contemporary architectural and design movements, such as Queen Anne and Arts and Crafts, also provide additional impetus for American designers to examine the English Colonial past, particularly on the East Coast. By the 1870s, following the lead of their English counterparts in the Queen Anne movement, American architects and builders in New England begin exploring their Colonial and/or vernacular heritage. Examples of 17th- and 18th-century architecture in professional publications, such as the *American Architect and Building News*, inspire designs by architects. A few, such as Charles Follen McKim of McKim, Mead, and White, remodel houses from the Colonial period. Colonial Revival in this period is largely architect-designed residences for the wealthy.

Beginning in the final decade of the 19th century, knowledge about Colonial architecture and design becomes available from an array of publications, including *Old Colonial Architecture and Furniture* (1887) and *American Architecture, Decoration, and Furniture* (1895) by Frank E. Wallis; *The Georgian Period* (1898) by William Rotch Ware; *Colonial Furniture in America* (1901) by Luke Vincent Lockwood; *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (1922) by Fiske Kimball; *Furniture Treasury* (1933, 1949) by Wallace Nutting; *American Furniture* (1952) by Joseph Downs; Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalogs (c. 1910s); and *House Beautiful* and *House and Garden* magazines.

After the Centennial, the collecting of antique furniture and ceramics, especially blue and white china, increases (Fig. 38-1). By the first decades of the 20th century, individual collectors, such as Henry Francis DuPont in Delaware and Ima Hogg in Texas, are amassing large collections of American interiors, furniture, and decorative arts. Both will later open their homes, Winterthur and Bayou Bend, respectively, to visitors. Additionally, American museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, also begin collecting and exhibiting colonial artifacts, signaling their approval of the American past.

During the first decades of the 20th century, Colonial becomes a tool for simplifying the Victorian house with its multiplicity of styles, furniture, and bric-a-brac. Decorating magazines of the time use the term *Modern Colonial* to describe Colonial-style houses. Although visual qualities come from America's Colonial, Georgian, and Federal periods, the planning, layouts, and decoration emphasize simplicity, function, and efficiency, which reflect modern lifestyles and health concerns. Examples differ from the earlier precursors in size, proportion, and planning, resulting in buildings with open plans, more daylight, and up-to-date kitchens and bathrooms. By 1920, the Colonial Revival has its own aes-

thetic and becomes increasingly popular with the middle class (Fig. 38-8, 38-14). The style also occupies a prominent place in the period house and period decoration trends as practiced by architects, interior decorators, historians, and home owners of the time.

By the mid-20th century, the Colonial or Early American, as it is sometimes called, again becomes a traditional and American style that contrasts with Modernism, which is sweeping the nation. This antithesis lessens as the century progresses. With the advent of eclecticism in design from the 1970s onward, Modernism and the Colonial more comfortably coexist as expressions of personal taste.

As a style and a phenomenon, Colonial Revival is often complex and contradictory as it affects nearly all aspects of American life and material culture. Its enduring popularity comes from its associations as an American style; its reflection of American views and lifestyles; and its ability to adapt to changing fashions, times, and technologies. No matter how it changes, it still provides a sense of place, tradition, ancestry, and heritage along with an expression of personal taste.

■ *Colonial Revival and the Historic Preservation Movement.* Colonial Revival also occupies a prominent place in and contributes to the historic preservation movement in the United States. Although some efforts occur earlier, activity increases in the second half of the 19th century when preservation of the past begins to merit serious consideration by individuals and private



▲ 38-1. "Grandmother's Cupboard"; published in *The House Beautiful*, 1878, by Clarence Cook.

groups. Women comprise many of the groups, such as the Mount Vernon Ladies Association and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). In this early period, buildings are preserved and restored primarily because of their associations with founding fathers and mothers, rather than any aesthetic or other considerations.

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