

Looking Glasses

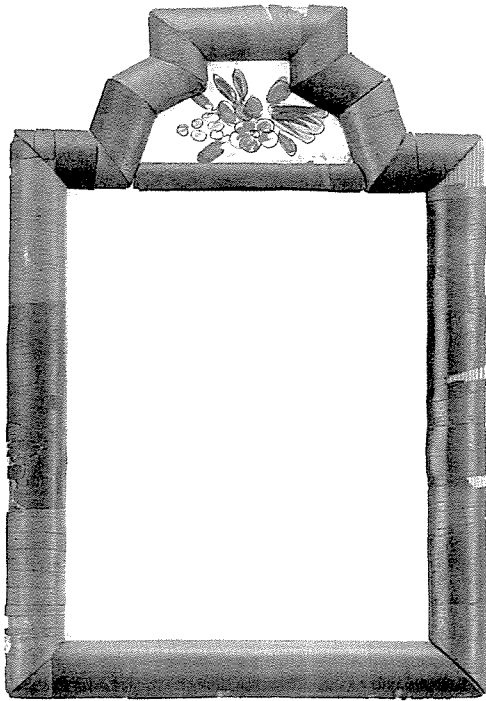
OF ALL THE FORMS of early American furniture, looking glasses pose the most difficult problems when it comes to establishing their place of manufacture. First, the quality of glass required was not made in the United States until well into the nineteenth century. Even if the frame was made in America, the glass was not. Second, looking glasses are known to have been imported in quantity from England and to a lesser degree from the continent. Third, the normal criteria of connoisseurship applied to other furniture forms do not work when applied to looking glasses. There are two reasons. Looking glass frames, except for the most simple, are made by an additive process whereby elements made abroad or by other makers were purchased and applied to achieve the desired decorative effect. Neither are the woods any guarantee of native production. The presence of white pine (*pinus strobus*), which in another furniture form might argue for American manufacture, does not necessarily prove a native provenance because white pine was often shipped from the American colonies to Britain. It is also hard to distinguish between American and European spruces. And of course British makers secured mahogany from the same sources used by the Americans. Unless there is compelling evidence in favor of American manufacture, early looking glasses were, more than likely, imported. John Elliott Sr., the prolific seller of looking glasses in Philadelphia, noted in his

advertisement of 1765 that he had “the greatest Choice in Town, and so good in Quality as can be imported.”

The preferred term for early American reflection furniture is *looking glasses*, rather than mirrors, for this is the term used in the eighteenth century. The circular convex form often known as a girandole was referred to as a mirror. Indeed, as the nineteenth century progressed mirror became the preferred term. For a more detailed account of the history and development of the looking glass, see Barquist, *American Tables and Looking Glasses*, pp. 294–98.

The first eleven of the following looking glasses have been divided into two groups by size. The first six are smaller looking glasses, averaging about 18 x 12 inches overall. (One is 28¼ inches high, but that is because of an elongated crest.) The second group averages about 33 x 18 inches. The proportions of the actual glass (height to width) differ markedly between the two groups. Although all are vertical rectangles, the glasses in the second group are markedly more vertical, with a much greater ratio of height to width than the first group.

The first two groups of looking glasses are followed by a third group of smaller glasses in various frames and mounts. A fourth group consists of hand mirrors, perhaps one of the most difficult categories in reflective furniture because so little has been published on them. These are all under catalogue number 81.



66. LOOKING GLASS

Probably Northern Europe, *1750–1780

Pine, oak, walnut veneer; glass

H. 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ " W. 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

N-100

DESCRIPTION: Rectangular frame. Eglomisé floral panel set into crest with angled sides and flat top. Pine frame veneered with light and dark strips of walnut. Frame members half-round and joined by mortise and tenon reinforced by nails. Edges on back of frame beveled. Crudely cut oak panel nailed to back. Pencil inscription on back of crest: "Mrs Sally Harris Stockwell / Had this glass at / her marriage 1797. / Born April 30 1779 Died Sept 21st 1883".

PROVENANCE: Ward, Shumway, Nadeau

COMMENTS: These small looking glasses are often referred to as courting mirrors. Looking glasses of this type have characteristics of the William and Mary style, reflecting their origins in early eighteenth-century northern Europe. This form of looking glass persisted, however, throughout much of century. Most that survive were probably made in the second half of the eighteenth century.

66

REFERENCES: For a similar examples, see Comstock, *The Looking Glass in America*, nos. 4, 5; Fales, *Furniture of Historic Deerfield*, figs. 543–45. For Sally Stockwell, see Martyn, *The William Ward Genealogy*, nos. 524, 1207, 2430.

67. LOOKING GLASS

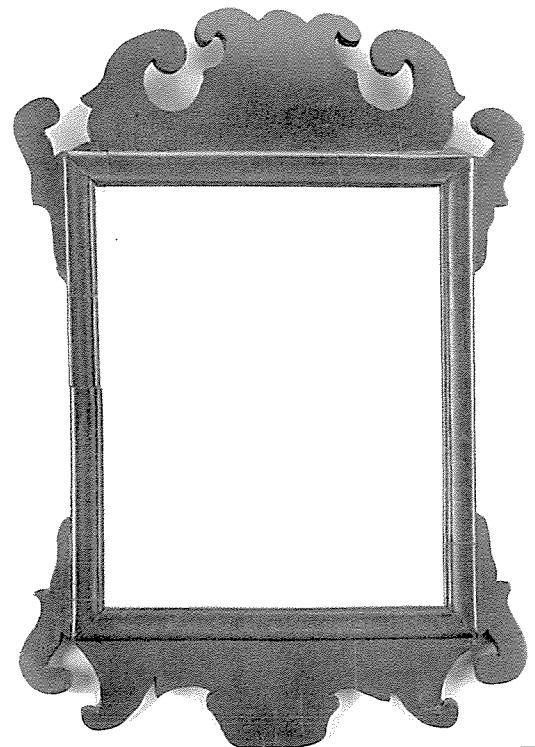
*New England, 1770–1790

Mahogany veneer, pine; glass

H. 17 $\frac{5}{8}$ " W. 12 $\frac{5}{16}$ "

N-818.3

DESCRIPTION: Crude Chippendale-style frame. Rectangular frame with mitered corners below; upper corners mitered but cut away on diagonal and triangular pieces inserted to create an odd kind of lap joint. Applied ogee molding on front. Very small arch in top center of crest flanked by small scrolls, open voids, and larger scrolls; ears have a single sprig. Bottom crest has a rather misshapen center with very crude cutouts and scrolls; ears similar to above. Mahogany feather-edged back panel.



67



68

COMMENTS: The unusual center of the crest resembles one found on a similarly sized looking glass at Historic Deerfield, which is thought to be from England or the Continent.

REFERENCE: Fales, *Furniture of Historic Deerfield*, no. 533.

68. LOOKING GLASS

*New England, 1760–1790

Mahogany veneer, pine; glass

H. 18" W. 11⁵/₈"

N-818.4

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style frame with original glass. Rectangular pine frame, rabbeted at corners, veneered with mahogany; ogee and cove inside moldings. Elaborate crest with small central arch with a single sprig and scroll each side, flanked by two large cutouts with a sprig and scroll between; ears consist of a prominent scroll with sprigs below. Inverted arch on bottom flanked by less bold cutouts; ears same as above. One-piece coarsely sawn backboard has vertical saw marks. Six reinforcing blocks glued to back; additional one added to crest to secure break.

COMMENTS: Very similar to no. 69 but somewhat cruder in execution of cutwork.



69

69. LOOKING GLASS

*America, *1760–1770

Mahogany veneer, pine; glass

H. 18" W. 11¹/₂"

N-818.1

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style looking glass. Rectangular frame with rabbeted corners, applied ogee moldings with double raised molding in center; mitered corners. Arched crest with sprigs and scrolls flanked by larger sprig and scroll resulting in three open voids; ears consist of a sprig and scroll. Lower arched crest below with simpler less complex cutwork; ears same as above. Plain pine back panel with straight saw marks. Two glue blocks at each corner; one reinforcing strip applied to back of crest. Bracket on upper left side missing.

COMMENTS: Very similar to no. 68. Both of these looking glasses resemble the type sold by John Elliott of Philadelphia which were widely available throughout the colonies: a rectangular glass enclosed in a mahogany veneer frame with an arched crest and applied scrolls, arches, brackets, and sprigs. The cutwork provided a touch of elegance and style to an otherwise simple looking glass that stood in contrast to much larger looking glasses with free-standing gilded eagles or extensive gilt rococo decoration.

70. LOOKING GLASS

Probably New England, *1760-1770

Mahogany veneer, pine; glass

H. 21 $\frac{1}{16}$ " W. 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

N-818.2

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style frame nearly identical to no. 69, except cutouts in crest are cruder and two extra glue blocks are applied to top of frame at base of crest. Plain back panel with adze marks. All secondary woods stained a dark red. Original glass.

COMMENTS: Although similar to no. 69, it is larger and the proportions of the glass differ; here they are 22 to 15. It closely resembles a glass at Colonial Williamsburg, which in turn resembles a labeled example at Winterthur with the label of Cermenati and Bernada, a Boston maker and retailer of looking glasses.

REFERENCE: Greenlaw, *New England Furniture at Williamsburg*, no. 109.

71. LOOKING GLASS

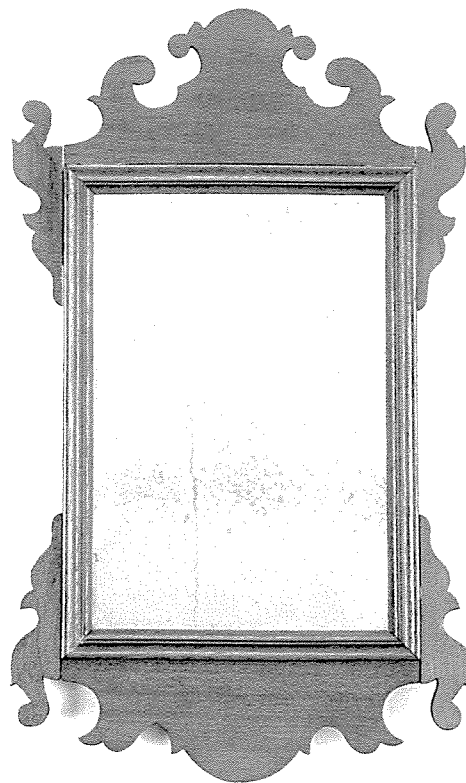
*American, 1750-1780

Maple and walnut veneers, pine; glass

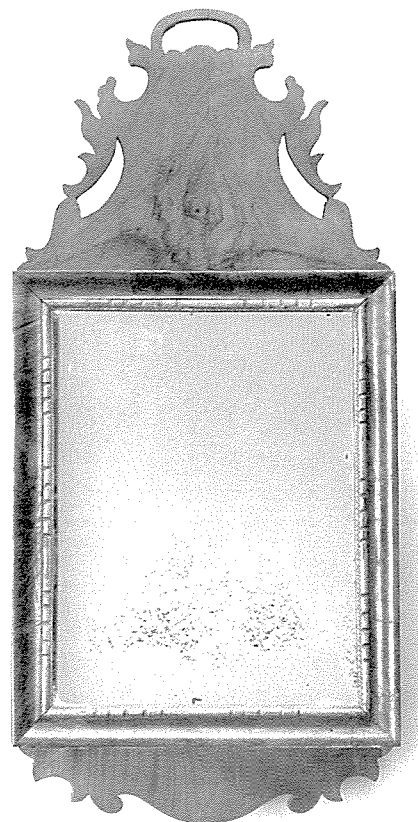
H. 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ " W. 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

N-301

DESCRIPTION: Queen Anne-Chippendale style rectangular frame with splined corners and applied ogee front molding; rounded inner portion of molding



70



71

(gilded) has slots cut cross-wise in groups of five: three sets on sides, two sets top and bottom. Exceptionally high crest with a bail-handle top and sprigs down each side; two curvilinear voids. Bottom has a shallow-arched crest with sprigs. Entire front has figured maple veneer. Plain pine back panel, very thin and feathered on all four sides. Crest reinforced by a wooden strip applied to the back. Pine with figured walnut veneer; crest veneer matched with vertical seam in center. Original glass.

COMMENTS: The exceptionally high crest with the bail handle is distinctive.

REFERENCE: Barquist, *American Tables and Looking Glasses*, no. 194, for an almost identical example.

72. LOOKING GLASS

Possibly New England, 1780–1800

Mahogany veneer, pine; glass

H. 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ " W. 15 $\frac{7}{8}$ "

N-1077



72

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style frame with original glass. Rectangular pine frame veneered with mahogany. Sides of frame have horizontal grain; top and bottom have vertical grain; satinwood string inlay all around. Elaborate crest with small central arch flanked by two sprigs and small scrolls; two deep cutouts create a large scroll and sprig each side; ears have scroll and sprig (right scroll missing). Bottom ears feature large scrolls (left one broken); bottom panel has a central inverted arch, flanked by sprigs, scrolls, and cutouts coarser than those above. Glass set within pine frame and covered by two thin boards which, in turn, are mostly covered by original paper. Fourteen reinforcing blocks glued to back.

COMMENTS: This and the following four looking glasses are larger than the previous examples. Their proportions also differ markedly from the preceding examples, the glass itself being much taller than it is wide.



73

73. LOOKING GLASS

New England, *1770-1790

H. 30½" W. 17"

N-804

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style rectangular mahogany frame with original glass. Cove molding has bead on outside with repeated chip-carved design; inner and outer portion has a chip-carved design of darts and circles. Elaborate crest with a small arch in center flanked by "wings" with a distinctive keyhole cutout below; large flanking scrolls with deep cutouts; applied ears with one large scroll and two small sprigs. Bottom has reverse arch with missing drop in center; scroll and sprig each side (one broken); ears have large scroll and small sprigs. Solid pine board, with grain running across, nailed into back of frame. Twelve reinforcing blocks glued to back of crest; two metal plates held by screws added at a later date.

COMMENTS: The unusual keyhole cutout in the crest has not been found elsewhere.



74

74. LOOKING GLASS

Possibly New England or New York, *1770-1790

Mahogany, pine; glass

H. 31⅜" W. 17⅜"

N-326

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style rectangular frame with original glass. Mahogany bead and ogee outer moldings; inner molding gilded wood with irregularly spaced punchwork suggesting gesso. Arched crest has four irregular voids over which is attached a gilded gesso spread-winged eagle (head broken off); each side of arch cut out with sprigs and scrolls; ears also cut with sprigs and a single scroll. Cutout decoration on bottom has a different profile of sprigs and scrolls and lacks voids and eagle. Mahogany frame. Solid pine back panel with feathered edges nailed to frame. Ten reinforcing strips glued to back; one later strip glued to each ear. Right upper and lower ears replaced.

COMMENTS: The frame cutouts bear a close resemblance to

those on a looking glass at the Yale University Art Gallery that has a history of ownership in New Haven, Conn.

REFERENCE: Barquist, *American Tables and Looking Glasses*, no. 169.

75. LOOKING GLASS

New England, possibly Boston, *1770-1790

Mahogany, pine; glass

H. 36½" W. 18¾"

N-220

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style rectangular frame with original beveled glass. Mahogany ogee outer molding; gilt gesso inner molding with pairs of punched impressions. Arched crest with four irregular voids over which is attached a gilded gesso spread-winged eagle; cutouts with sprigs and

85

scrolls on sides. Ears cut out with sprigs and scrolls. Cutout decoration on bottom repeats top, except no voids nor eagle. Solid mahogany. Solid pine panel with feathered edge nailed to frame. Eight reinforcing strips glued to back. Upper crest bends backwards.

COMMENTS: The frame cutouts and the eagle are very similar to a looking glass at the Yale University Art Gallery that is attributed to New England, possibly Boston.

REFERENCE: Barquist, *American Tables and Looking Glasses*, no. 171.



75



76

76. LOOKING GLASS

*America, 1770–1790

Mahogany veneer, pine; glass

H. 36½" W. 19"

N-104

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style rectangular frame with original glass. Mahogany ogee outer molding, gilt gesso inner molding impressed with abstract plant forms between vertical lines. Arched crest cutout in sprigs, scrolls; ears on sides curvilinear with sprigs and a single scroll. Lower cutouts repeat top. Backboard consists of three horizontal boards, but there is space for a fourth. Twelve reinforcing strips on back. Top and bottom curve toward back. Mahogany veneer over pine.

COMMENTS: A very handsome glass, it once had the printed label of John Elliott, Philadelphia, in English and German. (The label was lost during loan of the glass to a museum.)

John Elliott Sr., an English cabinetmaker, came to Philadelphia in 1753. He is known chiefly for his labeled mahogany looking glasses, on which three different labels are known. In 1784 his son and namesake joined the business. Following his father's death in 1791, John Jr. carried on the business, using his own label, in English only, until 1803. In 1804 his two sons joined the business. They used a label that identified the firm as "John Elliott & Sons" from 1804 to 1809. The English portion of a John Elliott Sr. label makes clear that the new looking glasses he sold were imported from England:

John Elliott, At his Looking-Glass Store, the Sign of the Bell and Looking-glass, in Walnut Street, Philadelphia, imports and sells all sorts of English Looking-glasses, at the lowest Rates. He also new Quicksilvers and Frames old Glasses and supplies People with new Glass to their own Frames.

REFERENCES: Bjerko, *Cabinetmakers of America*, p. 89. Comstock, *The Looking Glass in America, 1700-1825*, pp. 96-103.



77

77. DRESSING BOX WITH SWINGING GLASS

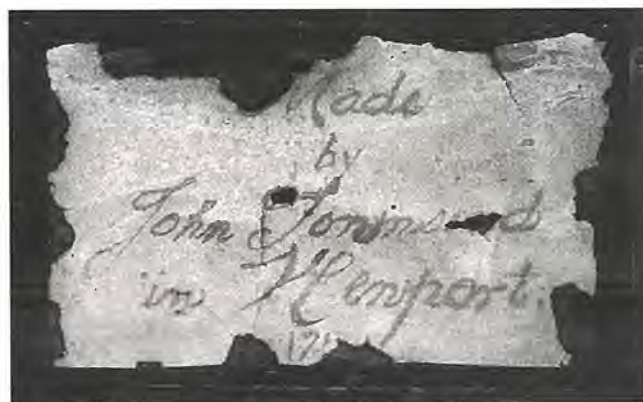
John Townsend, Newport, Rhode Island, ca. 1785

Mahogany, pine; glass

H. 19½" W. 12¾" D. 7"

N-805

DESCRIPTION: Chippendale style rectangular case with one drawer mounted on four ogee bracket feet. Front curves out at bottom. Drawer has two brass handles consisting of a single ring mounted on a post; keylock in center; front dovetailed to thin sides; sides nailed to very thin back panel; drawer bottom nailed to sides. Two tapered standards, rectangular in section and double scored, set into top panel of case in a raked back position; brass onion finials. Standards support a swinging rectangular frame with original glass; arched crest flanked by a series of cutout sprigs and scrolls; outside ogee molding, inner gilded gesso molding. Pine back panel secured by nails. Handwritten paper label on back: "Made / by / John Townsend / in Newport / 17[?]"



77A



77B

PROVENANCE: Ward, Shumway, Nadeau

COMMENTS: John Townsend (1732–1809) of Newport, R.I., had a long and distinguished career as a cabinetmaker. He is known primarily for his fine block-front shell-carved mahogany case pieces that we associate with the Townsend-Goddard school. This dressing box is an elegant example of a rare form. Dressing boxes with ogee feet are at Colonial Williamsburg and Yale University Art Gallery. Several handwritten paper labels signed by Townsend and bearing a date are known, but no other dressing glass by Townsend is recorded.

REFERENCES: Barquist, *American Tables and Looking Glasses*, no. 207. Bjerko, *Cabinetmakers of America*, pp. 216–18. Comstock, *The Looking Glass in America*, nos. 54–55. Heckscher, *American Furniture*, no. 204. Moses, *Master Craftsmen of Newport: The Townsends and Goddards*, p. 100 for illustrations of labels.



78

78. SWINGING DRESSING GLASS

New England, ca. 1800

Maple; glass

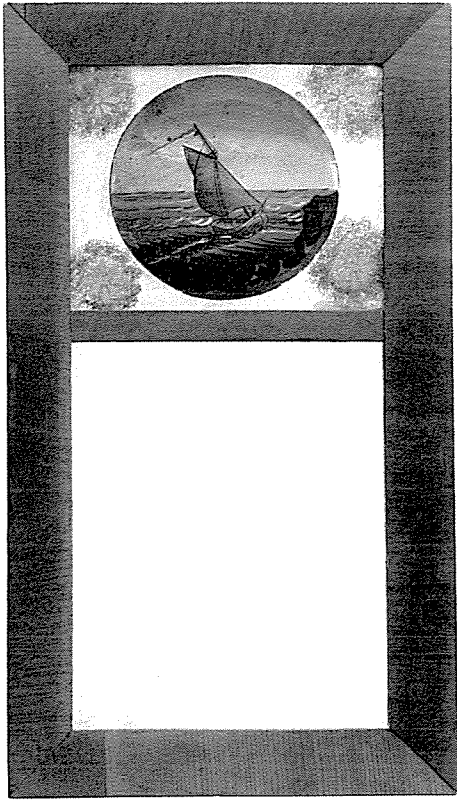
H. 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ " W. 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ " D. 9"

N-813

DESCRIPTION: Federal style looking glass with original glass in a rectangular frame of tiger-stripe maple. All frame members are beveled inward, corners mitered; grain horizontal on side members, vertical on top and bottom. Heavy paper glued to back of frame prevents observation of back panel. Looking glass swings on two tapered and curved standards which are tenoned into trestle-type feet; feet connected by a rail; bottom of feet cutout between ends; ends of feet cut into ogee curve.

PROVENANCE: Ward, Shumway, Nadeau

COMMENTS: The elegant simplicity of its form contrasts effectively with the beauty of the patterned wood. A rare and beautiful object. No other example was found in a search of the literature.



79

79. LOOKING GLASS

*United States, 1800–1820

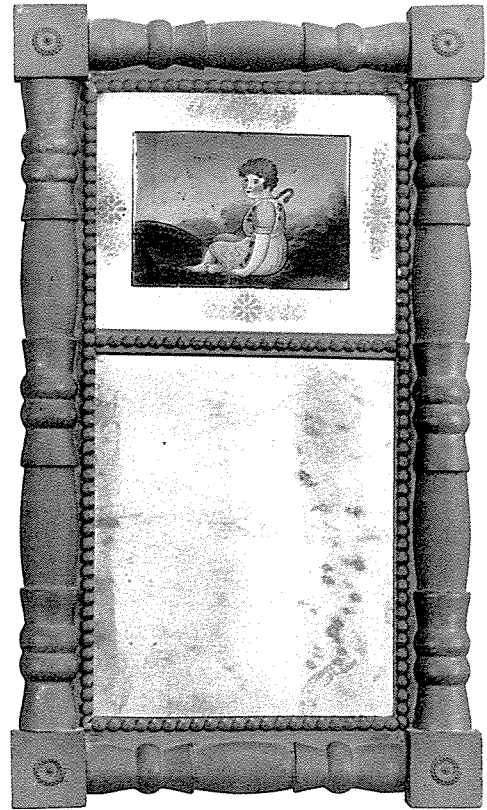
Pine; glass

H. 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ " W. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

N-822

DESCRIPTION: Rectangular frame with reflecting glass in lower portion; eglomisé panel in upper section has a roundel depicting a small gaff-rigged sailing vessel with a red pennant approaching a rocky shore; eight-petaled gilt flowers on green-sponged ground in each spandrel. Mitered frame members, beveled inward, have horizontal grain on vertical members, vertical grain on horizontal members. Plain pine strip separates eglomisé panel from mirror. Crude pine backboard nailed to frame.

PROVENANCE: Ward, Shumway, Nadeau



80

80. LOOKING GLASS

New England, ca. 1820

Maple, pine; glass

H. 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ " W. 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ " D. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

N-500

DESCRIPTION: Federal style rectangular frame with original glass in lower section; eglomisé panel in upper section depicts a seated child wearing a blue dress and holding a red shepherd's crook in her right hand; set amidst a landscape with pink clouds in the background. Pine frame covered in front with gilded split-baluster turnings and square corner blocks with gesso wreaths; textured surface on each of the elongated barrel-shaped turnings (two each side, one top and bottom). Inner border of gilded beading. Front of frame probably maple. Back of frame covered with two thin vertical pine boards nailed to the frame.

REFERENCE: Nutting, *Furniture Treasury*, no. 3088, for similar frame.

81A–E. HAND MIRRORS

Very little is known about hand-held looking glasses, which are more properly called hand mirrors. Of the few in this catalogue, it is probable that all were made in the early nineteenth century.

81A. HAND MIRROR

New England, 1810–1830

Pine; glass

L. 9½" w. 3¾"

N-333

DESCRIPTION: Rectangular frame with original glass. One-piece body and handle of white pine; curvilinear handle, narrow at neck, wide near end with hole for cord. Glass held in place by plain rectangular strips mitered at corners. Original black paint with worn spots on handle where it was grasped.

PROVENANCE: Perkins, Shumway, Nadeau

81B. HAND MIRROR

New England, *1800–1830

Maple; glass

L. 10½" w. 4"

N-1026.2

DESCRIPTION: Rectangular frame with rounded corners inset with beveled glass of conforming shape. One-piece maple handle and body. Glass inset with frame and held in place by strips resembling inlay: inner strip is oak or chestnut painted black on upper edge to resemble ebony; outer strip painted cream to resemble ivory. Curvilinear handle with narrow neck, broad base, and bluntly pointed tip.

PROVENANCE: Ward, Shumway, Nadeau

81C. HAND MIRROR

*United States, 1800–1820

Mahogany, exotic wood inlays; glass

L. 12¼" w. 4¹⁵/₁₆"

N-1026.1

DESCRIPTION: Shield-shaped frame with conforming original beveled glass outlined in bright-cut notches. One-piece handle and body of solid mahogany. Glass inset within frame and held in place by three bands of inlay: ebony flanked by satinwood (or equivalent). Handle has narrow neck, broad base, pointed tip.

81D. HAND MIRROR

*United States, 1790–1820

Mahogany or walnut; glass; brass

L. 10½" w. 6¼" (not including hardware)

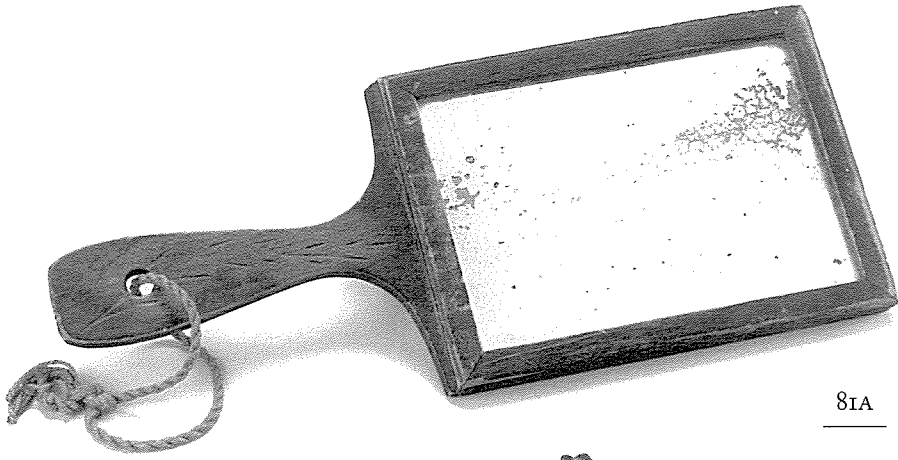
N-327

DESCRIPTION: Thick circular hardwood frame with inner bead molding and turned hardwood handle. Circular reflecting glass on both sides; one side magnifies image. Glass held in place by strips of curved hardwood (a section is missing on one side). Handle is baluster-shaped with a ring turning on narrow end (toward glass); urn turning at tip; a pair of grooves on thickest section. Brass post and ring on frame opposite handle.

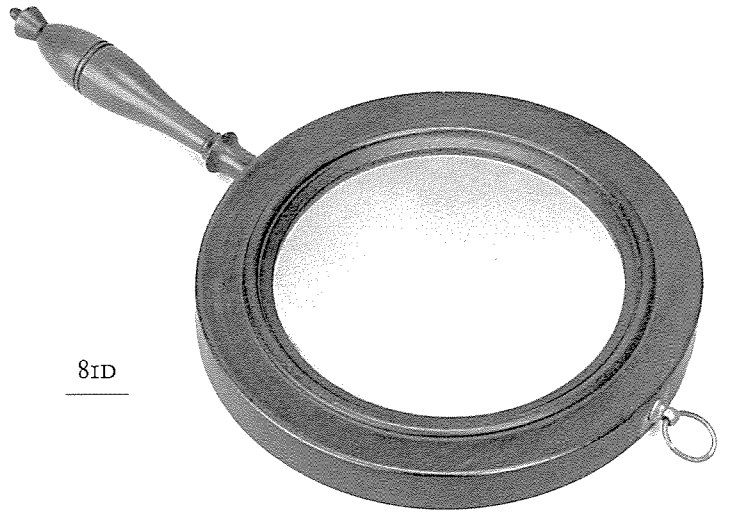
PROVENANCE: Ward, Shumway, Nadeau

COMMENTS: The delicately turned handle suggests that it was made in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. A very similar hand mirror, thought to be American because of the woods, is owned by Winterthur.

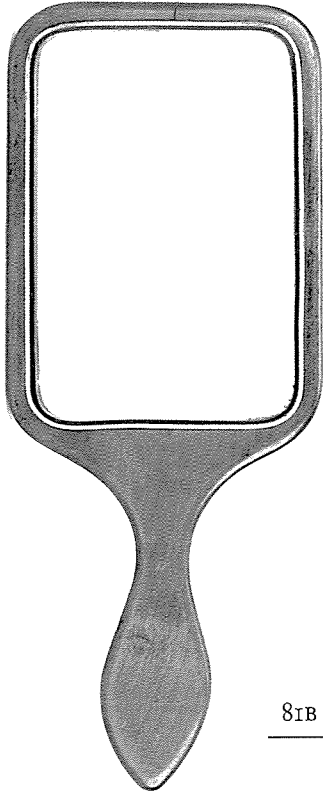
REFERENCES: Montgomery, *American Furniture: The Federal Period*, no. 258 for similar example. Nutting, *Furniture Treasury*, nos. 3164–65, for examples of circular hand mirrors with turned handles.



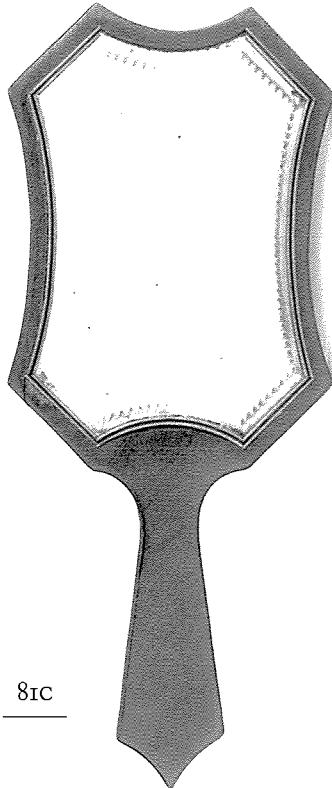
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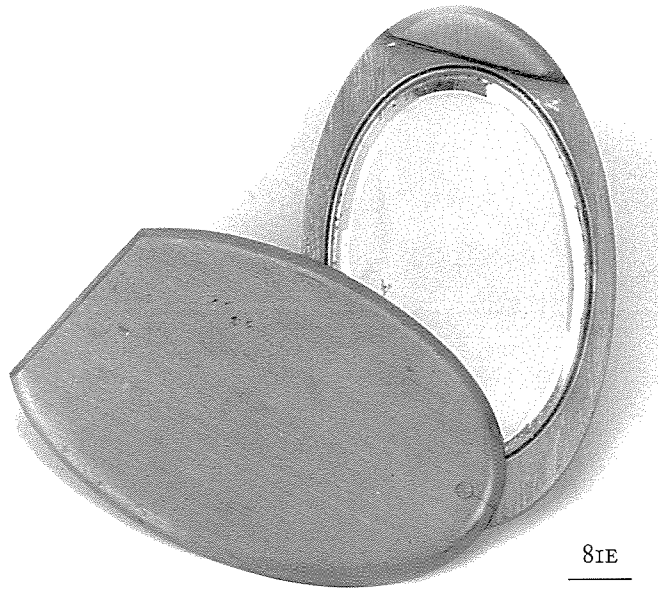
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81E. POCKET MIRROR

New England, 1830–1860

Maple; glass

L. $4\frac{5}{8}$ " W. $2\frac{3}{4}$ " H. $\frac{1}{2}$ " L. (open) $8\frac{1}{2}$ "

N-1035

DESCRIPTION: Small oval wood frame with pivoting cover. Oval beveled glass. Frame has string inlay around glass.

Cover pivots from one end; other end is beveled to fit neatly under stop. Natural finish.

PROVENANCE: Given to Ella Jane Shumway by the Shakers in Canterbury, N.H. She volunteered her legal services to the community. She was RWN's grandmother.

COMMENTS: This object has a surprisingly modern appearance, but the quality of its craftsmanship and use of string inlay suggest an early to mid-nineteenth-century date and Shaker origin.