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Samuel Rowland Fisher's Catalogue of ENGLISH HARDWARE

By CHARLES F. HUMMEL

More than a generation, scholars and students of American furniture history have strongly supported the theory that the vast majority of furniture made and used by American cabinetmakers of the eighteenth century were imported from England. To be sure, advertisements indicating that brasses for Desks and Chests of Drawers" made from "the newest and most in vogue in London" did appear occasionally in colonial newspapers. However, most students agreed with the conclusions of Samuel R. Green that Birmingham and other English metalworking centers were the principal suppliers of furniture brasses to these shores chiefly through the medium of printed books of patterns.² Henry Francis du Pont and the trustees of the Museum have collected these English metal trade pattern books. Thirty-two of them are currently represented in the library at Winterthur, providing American scholars with a body of research material not readily available to their English counterparts at the Victoria and Albert Museum.³

In 1963, The Friends of Winterthur presented two hardware catalogues to the Museum Library. They were owned originally by Samuel Rowland Fisher (1745-1834), a partner of the Philadelphia mercantile firm of Rowland Fisher & Sons. The Fishers established the company about 1775; it remained active under various names until Samuel's death in 1834. Through the Fisher catalogues, a specific connection can now be

made. An advertisement of Philip Syng, Annapolis brass founder, in the *Maryland Gazette*, March 1775, is quoted in ALFRED COXE PRIME, *The Arts and Crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, 1721-1785* (Philadelphia: The Walpole Society, 1929), p. 92. See also the notice of a New York brassworker Richard Skellorn in the *New York Gazetteer*, May 18, 1775, as quoted in FA S. GOTTESMAN, *The Arts and Crafts in New York* (New York: The New York Historical Society, 1938), p. 197.

3. WOODHOUSE, "English Hardware for American Cabinetmakers," *Antiques*, XX (1931), 287-289.

4. YOUNG, *Old English Pattern Books of the Metal Trades* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1913). This descriptive catalogue needs updating badly, but is still a highly useful tool.

5. The pattern books, with other family papers, journals, etc., were kept by his daughter Deborah Fisher, from whom they passed to Esther Fisher Wharton Smith. Her son, Edward Wharton Smith, gave the catalogues to his children, including Sarah A. G. Smith, from whom they were acquired.

WINTERTHUR PORTFOLIO One

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