

## Aaron Chapin Chest-on-Chest

*The Antiques and The Arts Weekly* newspaper, January 18, 2013 edition, featured a story about former Cheney-family furniture for sale at Bonhams, a privately owned British auction house, with offices throughout the world.

Manchester resident Rick Barrett notified the Historical Society of the impending sale by clipping the news article. We all enjoyed learning about this piece, which was to be offered at an auction in New York on January 24, 2013 at 10:00 a.m., EST. Bonhams called the auction “American Furniture, Folk & Decorative Arts and Chinese Export.”

Bonhams web site described the chest-on-chest:

“Property of various owners; The Cheney family Chippendale cherry-wood reverse-serpentine chest-on-chest attributed to the shop of Aaron Chapin, East Windsor, Connecticut, 1785-1795. Overall height 97 1/2in (247.5cm); width of cornice 44 1/4in (112.5cm); depth 20 1/2in (52cm).

“**Estimate:** US \$ 100,000 - 150,000; £63,000 - 95,000; €75,000 - 110,000.



“This chest-on-chest survives with its original sea-horse finial and is a masterpiece of Hartford County cabinetmaking. Demonstrating masterful proportions and a sculptural facade, it combines elements first employed by Eliphalet Chapin and passed down by him to his cousin, Aaron Chapin, as well as other cabinetmakers who apprenticed under him. The example offered here is nearly identical to one also attributed to Aaron Chapin and illustrated in Thomas P. Kugelman, Alice K. Kugelman, Robert Lionetti, *Connecticut Valley Furniture: Eliphalet Chapin and his contemporaries 1750-1800*, Hartford, CT: The Connecticut Historical Society, 2005, p. 367, cat. No. 168. Both chest-on-chests share several individual characteristics as to strongly suggest that they were made by the same maker; these features include the treatment of the cornice scrolls, a complex two-piece mid-molding which has been nailed from the inside, cock-beading that runs on the upper-case drawer fronts and lower-case drawer surrounds, and small quadrant blocks.

“The top board of the bottom case is faintly inscribed in graphite Rush Cheney Esq / SO Manchester; Rush Cheney was born in 1815, well after this chest was likely to

have been made. Possible prior owners include Rush's parents, George Cheney and Electa Woodbridge, who married in 1798 in Manchester and who could have acquired this piece around the time of their wedding. Alternatively, this chest-on-chest may have been owned originally by Timothy Cheney and Mary Olcott or Deodatus Woodbridge and Esther Welles, Rush's paternal and maternal grandparents. The probate inventory done at the time of Timothy Cheney's death on 27 Sept 1795 lists a Case Draws £5-; this is one of the most costly items on the inventory and is equivalent to a desk and bookcase also valued at £5; other presumably smaller chests are valued at or less than £1. Documents relating to the estates of Rush's parents and other grandparents do not survive or do not mention any pieces likely to have been this one.

“The Cheney family was prominent in Manchester, Connecticut, particularly in the second quarter of the 19th century, when it established a large silk mill; it was their textile plants that eventually formed a large industrial center once referred to as “Cheneyville” and which now forms the Manchester Historic District.

**Literature:** Ginsburg & Levy, Inc., advertisement, *The Magazine Antiques March*, 1960, p. 231

Cited in William N. Hosley, *The Great River: art & society in the Connecticut Valley, 1635-1820*, Hartford, CT: The Wadsworth Atheneum, 1985, pp. 231-232, cat. No. 112, endnote 5.

**Provenance:** Possibly first owned by Timothy Cheney (1731-1795) or George W. Cheney (1771-1829) and Electra [sic] Woodbridge (1781-1858)

Rush Cheney (1815-1882), grandson of Timothy Cheney, son of George Cheney  
Anne Wells Cheney (1849-1944), daughter

Cheney Historical Foundation, Manchester, Connecticut

Ginsburg & Levy Inc., New York, NY

Acquired by the current owner in 1960”

The information in the quote marks is from the Bonhams web site. Find out more about Bonhams at [www.Bonhams.com](http://www.Bonhams.com)

The newspaper article called the chest-on-chest “a tour de force of Hartford County cabinetmaking,” and said, “It remained in the family until the 1960s and has never been at auction before.”