

Virginia Sectional Furniture: 1800 to 1860

Seating Designs for a House Divided

By Hal Stuart

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Two three section, expandable, sectional sofas, made by Green & Brother, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1837. The sectionals are on display at the Old Supreme Court Chamber, United States Capitol Building, Washington, DC. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

Cover Art: Rendering of sectional sofas based on 2014 digital photograph of the Old Supreme Court Chamber, United States Capitol Building, Washington, DC.

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Revised Edition

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Title: Virginia Sectional Furniture: 1800 to 1860.

1. Anglo-American Military Campaign Furniture. 2. American Federalist Period. 3. Neo-classical Period.
4. Antebellum Virginia. 5. Green & Brothers Steam Furniture Works. 6. Alexandria, Virginia. 7. Thomas Day.
8. Presidents-United States. 9. Political Parties-United States. 10. Supreme Court-United States. 11. American Civil War. 12. Reconstruction. 13. High Modern and Post-Modern Eras. 14. Sectional Furniture. 15. Upholstered Seating.
16. Child Labor. 17. Slave Labor.

Cover and Interior Designs by Hal Stuart

The Rhetoric of Virginia Sectionalism

“I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.” *Future (Third) President Thomas Jefferson*, letter to another future president, James Madison, Paris, January 1787.

“Here every portion of our country finds the most commanding motives for carefully guarding and preserving the union of the whole.” *First President George Washington*, from “The Address of General Washington to the People of The United States on His Declining of the Presidency of the United States,” September 1796.

“The fact, that to the north, negro slavery has everywhere disappeared, whilst to the south, it has maintained its ground triumphantly against free labor, is of itself conclusive of the superior productiveness of slave labor in southern latitudes.” Dew, Thomas R. *Review of the Debate [on the abolition of slavery] in Virginia legislature of 1831 and 1832*. Richmond, VA: T. W. White, 1832.

“The bank, Mr. Van Buren, is trying to kill me, but I will kill it first!” *Seventh President Andrew Jackson*, to future president, Martin Van Buren, July 1832.

“The alarm bell, as Mr. Jefferson expressed it, has sounded, and the sections stood in array facing each other.” *Tenth President John Tyler*, from a lecture titled, “The Prominent Characters and Incidents of our History from 1812 to 1836,” Baltimore, MD, March 1855.

“What will justify the North in efforts to involve both sections of our country in civil war and disunion, because slavery exists in one section of it?” Reverend Thornton Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1856): page 147.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” *United States Senate Candidate Abraham Lincoln*, Address to the Republican State Convention, Springfield, IL, June 1858.

“Oh, I wish I was in Dixie, Hooray! Hooray! In Dixie Land I’ll take my stand To live and die in Dixie, Away, away, away down south in Dixie” *Dixie* (Chorus), Daniel Decatur Emmett, Bryant’s Minstrels, 1859.

“The proclamation of President Lincoln was read and torn to ribbons. His reply to the Virginia Commissioners was also freely canvassed and its interpretations, this time, could not be mistaken, for war breathes in every line.” *Alexandria Gazette*, reporting on the secessionist work of James Green, Culpeper County, VA, April 20, 1861.

“We have all agreed that the seceded states are out of their proper relation with the Union; and that the sole object of the government...in regard to those states is to again get them into that proper practical alignment...Let us join in doing the acts necessary to restoring the proper practical relations between the States and the Union.” *Sixteenth President Abraham Lincoln*, final speech, Washington, DC, April 1865.

“TO BUILD UP THE SOUTH, BUILD UP AND ENCOURAGE HER MANUFACTORIES”
Green & Brother, advertising slogan, company price list, August 1871.

**The Father of Sectional Furniture Design:
James Green (1801-1880)**



James Green, album photograph, Alexandria, VA., ca. 1870. The photographic digital image was provided courtesy of the Alexandria Public Library, Alexandria, VA.



Virginia three section sectional sofas, Green & Brother, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1836-1837, mahogany veneer over black walnut with brass casters. The black and white photograph is courtesy of the Curator of the United States Senate.

Like Those You Come Across in Old Virginia Country Houses...



*Shirley (Plantation), James River, Virginia, ca. 1900, black and white, glass negative, William Henry Jackson. Shirley Plantation was one such old Virginia house with Virginia sectional seating as chronicled by *Harper's Weekly* in 1894.*

“A bright fire burns in the grate, and old-fashioned mahogany chairs are drawn up cozily around it—chairs like those you come across in old Virginia country houses, made in sets of three, with tufted horse hair cushions in the seats. Everyone is familiar with the style. One chair of each set has a straight back and no arms, and the two have one arm a piece, made stiff and straight like the back and joining it at right angles, so that the three when put together form a sofa.”¹

¹ “The United States Supreme Court,” *Harper's Weekly*, February 24, 1894: 175.

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List of Illustrations, Paintings and Photographs

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Cover Page: Art rendering of sectional sofas based on 2014 digital photograph of the Old Supreme Court Chamber, United States Capitol Building, Washington, DC.

Title Page: Two three section expandable sectional sofas, made by Green & Brother, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1837. The sectionals are on display at the Old Supreme Court Chamber, United States Capitol Building, Washington, DC. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

Face Pages:

1. James Green, album photograph, Alexandria, VA., ca. 1870, Esther H. Green Collection, Box 73A (referred to as the EHG Collection in other notations). The photographic digital image was provided courtesy of the Alexandria Public Library, Alexandria, VA.

2. Virginia three section sectional sofas, Green & Brother, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1836-1837, mahogany veneer over black walnut with brass casters. The black and white photograph was provided courtesy of the Curator of the United States Senate.

3. *Shirley* (plantation), William Henry Jackson, ca. 1900, Charles River County, VA, black and white glass negative, 10" h., 8" w. Library of Congress (LOC) Collection. Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository, accessed March 10, 2019, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Shirley_plantation_loc.jpg&oldid=309919840.

Text:

1. Port Royal sectional sofa frame, unknown maker, 1835-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa frame was photographed by Elizabeth H. Fields, Freeman's Auctioneers, Philadelphia, PA. The photographic digital image was provided to the author by the auction house. The sofa is in a private collection.

2. James L. Magee, "Southern Chivalry-Argument Versus Clubs," Lithographic Print, 1856. The photographic digital image of the illustration is courtesy of the New York City Public Library, accessed July 25, 2018, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/6232540d-9d12-b4e8-e040-e00a18061bf0>. The digital image is in the public domain.

3. Salubria sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1840-1850, black walnut and yellow pine. The photographic digital image was taken in 2013. The sofa is in a private collection.

4. Sectional Settee, Conat Ball Company (for Macy's), 1934, birch and maple, 30' h., 64" w., 32" d. The sectional sofa was designed by Russel Wright. The digital photographic image was accessed July 25, 2018, <https://www.ebth.com/items/2335042-rare-russell-wright-sectional>. The photographic digital image is in the public domain.

5. Rapidan Village, Orange County, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2015.
6. Sectional sofa, designed by Charlotte Perriand and Le Corbusier, manufactured by Cassina, Italy, ca. 1985, leather and chrome, 25.5" h., 69" w., 27.5" d. The photographic digital image was accessed July 25, 2018, https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/seating/living-room-sets/le-corbusier-lc-leather-chrome-living-room-set-cassina/id-f_9586553/. The photographic image is in the public domain.
- 7a. and 7b. Sectional sofa, designed by Finn Juhl (for Bovirke), ca. 1934, steel and rosewood frame, 31" h., 100" w., 31" d. The photographic digital images were accessed November 20, 2018, https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/seating/sectional-sofas/rarest-finn-juhl-bovirke-two-tone-wool-rosewood-modular-sofa-set-1953/id-f_8999461/. The photographic images are in the public domain.
8. Sofa sectional, Crandall, China, 2013. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014. Pier 1 Imports, Glen Allen, VA. The photographic digital image appears with permission from Pier 1 Imports.
9. *Portrait of President John Tyler*, George Peter Alexander Healy, 1859, Sherwood Forest Plantation, Charles County, VA, oil on canvas, 36.5" h., 29" w. The portrait is in the White House Art Collection. A photographic digital image of the portrait on the White House Historical Association (WHHA) website was accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/bios/john-tyler>. The image is in the public domain.
10. *Take Up Your Bed and Walk!!!*, William Heath, 1829, colored engraving, 13.75" h., 9.5" w., London, J. McLean, Publisher. The digital photographic image was provided courtesy of Christopher Clarke Antiques, United Kingdom (UK).
11. Campaign sofa bed, London, ca. 1800, mahogany with canvas upholster, 36" h., 78" w., 30" d. The photographic digital image was provided courtesy of Christopher Clarke Antiques, UK.
- 12a. Contemporary Gurkha-style campaign chair advertised for sale by Ghurka Trading and Design Company LLC. The photographic digital image was courtesy of Ghurka Trading and Design Company LLC.
- 12b. Roorkhee military campaign chair and kit bag, ca. 1870. The antique camp chair was offered for sale in 2015 by Christopher Clarke Antiques, UK. The photographic digital image was provided courtesy of Christopher Clarke Antiques.
13. Thomas King, attributed drawing of an upholstered corner chair, ca. 1840. The image is based on a drawing in Edward Thomas Joy's *Pictorial Dictionary of British Furniture*, page 148. The illustration is in the public domain.
14. Port Royal Sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1835-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa is in private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

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22. General George Washington's office inside his winter headquarters at the Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey. The American campaign furniture examples are the property of the National Park Service (NPS). The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
23. Campaign chair and table, Thomas Sheraton, London, ca. 1803, illustration of designs from Sheraton's *Cabinet Dictionary*, plate 8. The illustration is in the public domain. The photographic digital image was taken at the LVA, Richmond, VA in 2014.
24. Campaign table, bottle box and campaign bed with canvas canopy sit in officers' quarters at the Morristown National Historical Park in New Jersey. Furniture is the property of the NPS. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
25. General Robert E. Lee's campaign chair, Maryland Historical Society. The photographic digital image was part of an online essay titled, "Articles of War," *Baltimore Magazine*, April 1, 2011. The photographic digital image was accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/2011/4/1/articles-of-war-1>.
26. *County Map of Virginia and West Virginia*, S. Augustus Mitchell, Philadelphia, PA, 1863, 11.5" h., 14.75" w. The map is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2012.

27. Conway sectional settee, unknown maker, 1800-1820, yellow pine and possibly black walnut. The settee is the property of the James Madison Museum, Orange, VA. The digital photographic image was taken in 2014.
28. Knole settee, ca. 1620, Knole House, Kent, UK. The Knole settee is owned by the National Trust, UK. The photographic digital image was accessed August 7, 2013, <https://knoleconservationteam.wordpress.com/2013/08/19/were-still-here/knole-settee-credit-john-miller/>. The photographic digital image is credited to John Miller and is in the public domain.
29. Conway sectional settee, unknown maker, 1800-1820, yellow pine and possibly black walnut. The settee is the property of the James Madison Museum, Orange, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2015.
30. Campaign box settee-bed, British, ca. 1800, mahogany and white pine. The photographic digital image was provided courtesy of Christopher Clarke Antiques, UK.
31. Conway sectional settee, right end section, 1800-1820. The settee is the property of the James Madison Museum, Orange, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2013.
32. *View of Fredericksburg from the Washington Farm*, Henry Howe, ca. 1845, colored engraving, 3.25" h, 6.25" w., published by William R. Babcock. The engraving is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2012.
33. Conway settee, brick dust paint matching experiment. The settee is the property of the James Madison Museum, Orange County, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2015.
34. Rapidan sectional settee, unknown maker, 1815-35, cherry, poplar and yellow pine. The settee is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
35. Rapidan sectional settee, unknown maker, 1815-35, cherry, poplar and yellow pine. The settee is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
36. Clermont settee, Rappahannock County, 1820-1835, left end with twentieth-century upholstery. The sectional settee is the property of the Elizabeth Rust Williams Charitable Trust. The photographic digital image was taken in 2016.
37. Clermont settee, right end section, black walnut, yellow pine and possibly chestnut, twentieth-century repairs. The settee is the property of the Elizabeth Rust Williams Charitable Trust. The photographic digital image was taken in 2016.
38. Single corner chair, stretcher-supported legs, ca. 1830, walnut. The photograph was provided to the author by Peter Larson in 2008.
39. Salubria three-piece sectional sofa, 1840-1850, black walnut and yellow pine. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2013.

- 40a. Salubria, ca. 1757, main house, Culpeper County, VA. Salubria is owned by the Germanna Foundation. The photographic digital image was taken in 2018.
- 40b. Salubria, ca. 1757, second floor, corner bedroom, Culpeper County, VA. Salubria is owned by the Germanna Foundation. The photographic image was taken in 2018.
41. Salubria sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1840-1850, black walnut and yellow pine. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2013.
42. Rapidan three-piece sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1830-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
43. Rapidan sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1830-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
44. Rapidan sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1830-1850, black walnut, yellow pine, poplar, and black walnut. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
45. Rapidan sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1830-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
46. Port Royal sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1835-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa is in a private collection. The undated photograph was provided by former co-owner Alice Pratt-Moter in May 2007.
47. Port Royal sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1835-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa is in a private collection.
48. Norris G. Starkweather, *Camden Plantation*, Port Royal, VA, ca. 1857-1859, northeast (rear) elevation, Historic American Building Survey photograph, ca. 1933, VA 184-7. LOC Collection. The photograph is in the public domain. The image was accessed in July 17, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/hhh.va0302.photos?st=gallery>.
49. Warrenton three section sofa, unknown maker, 1835-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and possibly poplar. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image, unknown date, was provided to the author by the owner in 2013.
50. Fredericksburg three section sofa, unknown maker, 1835-1855, black walnut, poplar and yellow pine. The sofa is in a private collection.
51. Federal Hill, ca. 1790, Fredericksburg, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2019.
52. Francis Benjamin Johnston, *Federal Hill Parlor*, 1927-1929, black and white photograph, LOC Collection. The photographic image is in the public domain. The image was accessed in October 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017891670/>.

53. Fredericksburg sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1840-1860, yellow pine, poplar and black walnut. The sofa is in a private collection. The digital photograph was taken and shared by Tara Gleason Chicirda with the author in June 2007.
54. Fredericksburg sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1840-1860, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken and shared by Tara Gleason-Chicirda with the author in June 2007.
55. Port Royal sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1835-1850, black walnut, yellow pine, poplar, and black walnut. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
56. *County Map of Virginia and West Virginia*, S. Augustus Mitchell, Philadelphia. 1863, Central and Eastern Regions. The map is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2015.
57. French-style lounging sofas, Green & Brother, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1835. The sofas are the property of the Lee-Fendall House, Alexandria, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
58. Green & Brother Furniture Works, former main factory building, Alexandria, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
59. Green & Brother Advertisement, *Boyd's Washington and Georgetown Directory*, 1860, page 184. The directory is in the Special Book Collection of the LVA, Richmond, VA. The book is in the public domain. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
60. J. Creamer & Son Lumber Advertisement, *Machette's Baltimore Directory*, 1842, page 11. The directory advertisement is in the public domain. The digital image was accessed February 8, 2014, <https://archive.org/stream/matchettsbaltimo1842balt#page/n21/mode/2up>.
61. Thomas Day, serpentine back settee, mahogany, Caswell County Courthouse, ca. 1850. The digital photographic image was provided courtesy of North Carolina furniture maker and history reenactor Jerome Bias. The date of the photograph is unknown.
62. *Thomas Blanchard*, Carte de Viste, Boston, 1860. The photographic image is in the public domain. The digital photographic image was taken at the Springfield, Massachusetts Public Library in 2014.
- 63a. and 63b. *Emma Frances Green and Benjamin Franklin Stringfellow*, album photographs, ca. 1860. The photographs are courtesy of the Alexandria Public Library. The photographs are in the public domain.
- 64a. and 64b. Dr. Thornton Stringfellow and the title page of his book *Favor of Slavery*. Both images are in the public domain. The digital images were accessed July 23, 2018, <https://deadconfederates.com/2015/04/09/henry-martyn-stringfellow-a-soldiers-story/>.

65. Sideboard, Charles Koonen, Lyceum, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1830, mahogany. The sideboard is in the Lyceum Museum Collection, Alexandria, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
66. Green & Brothers Advertisement, *Boyd's Washington and Georgetown Directory*, 1860, page 160. The directory is in the Special Book Collection, LVA, Richmond, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
67. James Fisher, Sexton and Undertaker Advertisement, *Chicago City Directory and Business Advertiser*, Chicago: Robert Fergus Book & Job Printer, 1855. The directory is available online and is in the public domain. A photographic digital image was accessed September 20, 2016, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/morbid-monday-fisk-mummy-case>.
68. Sectional sofa, left end section box-base, Green & Brother, style 2, Alexandria, VA, 1835-1860, black walnut, mahogany and mahogany veneers. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image taken in 2014.
69. Sectional sofa, middle and right end section, Green & Brother, style 2, Alexandria, VA, 1835-60. The sofa was a Rust family donation to the Westmoreland County Museum, Montross, VA. The sofa is property of the museum.
70. Three-piece sectional sofa, Green & Brother, style 3, Alexandria, VA, 1835-1860, mahogany veneer over black walnut. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2013.
71. Three-piece sectional sofa, Green & Brother, style 3, Alexandria, VA, 1835-1860, mahogany veneer over black walnut. The sofa is in a private collection. Photographic digital image was taken in 2013.
72. Green & Brother, Alexandria, VA, railroad shipping form. ca. 1880, EHG Collection, 73A, 19. Special Collections, Alexandria Public Library, Alexandria, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
73. *Parlor*, Shirley Plantation, Charles City County, VA, ca. 1940. The photograph courtesy of the Carter Family. The black and white photograph is in a private collection and not in the public domain. The photographer is not known.
74. *John W. Green*, album photograph, ca. 1860. The photograph of the original image was taken by David R. Allison. The Allison image is courtesy of the Alexandria Public Library. The image is in the public domain.
75. *Old Supreme Court Hearing Chamber*, United States Capitol Building, Washington, DC. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

76. *Supreme Court Utility Payment Voucher to James Green*, February 14, 1837, National Archives Records Administration (NARA), RG 217, Acct. 71, 688, no. 6. The image is courtesy of the Office of the Curator of the Senate. The document is in the public domain.

77. "Plan for the U. S. Supreme Court," the engraving is from Casimir Bohn, *Handbook of Washington*, 1854. The handbook is in the public domain.

78. *Old Room of Vice President and Robing Room Supreme Court*, US Capitol Building, Washington, DC, ca. 1900, photograph from Glen Brown's *History of the United States Capitol*. The photographic digital image is from Brown's book. The book is available online: <https://books.google.com/books?id=eG8Yng2jxIgC&printsec>. The image is in the public domain.

79. John J. Moorman, *The Virginia Springs*, Richmond, VA: J.W. Randolph, 1857: 214. Historical Collections & Services, Claude Moore Health Sciences Library, University of Virginia. The print is in the public domain.

80. Bank of Alexandria, *Five Dollar Note*, December 7, 1812, Alexandria, VA. The note is in a private collection. A photographic digital image was taken in the 2014.

81. Hard times token, *My Victory*, 1834, copper, normal size 1.15 in. diameter. The token is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

82. Hard times token, *Woodworth's Patent*, 1834, copper, normal size 1.15 in. diameter. The token is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

83. Hard Times token, *Credit Current and Metallic Currency*, 1841, copper, normal size is about 1.15 in. diameter. The token is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

84. Hard Times token, "*Am I Not A Woman & A Sister?*," 1838, copper, normal size is about 1.15 in. diameter. The token is in a private collection. The photographic image was taken in 2014.

85. *Old Supreme Court Hearing Chamber*, United States Capitol Building, Washington, DC. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

86. Sectional sofas, Green & Brother, style 1, ca. 1837, mahogany veneer over black walnut framing, Old Supreme Court Hearing Chamber, US Capitol Building, Washington, DC. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

87. Sectional sofa, left end section, Green & Brother, style 1, ca. 1837, mahogany and black walnut, sprung seating, black horse hair covering, brass and steel casters. Attribution by the author. Reference photograph of 1996.229, Office of the Curator, Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.

88. Sectional sofa, left end section, style 2, Green & Brother, ca. 1837, mahogany and black walnut, sprung seating, black horse hair covering, brass and steel casters. Attribution by the author.

Reference photograph of 1996.230, Office of the Curator, Collection of the Supreme Court of the United States.

89. "The United States Supreme Court and Its Robing-Room," Thomas Dart Walker, illustration from photographs, *Harper's Weekly*, 1894, ink on paper, 15" h., 10" w. The illustrated page is in a private collection. The photographic digital image of the illustration was taken in 2015.

90. Miner Kilbourne Kellogg, *Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney*, Washington, DC, 1849, oil on canvas, 72.5" h., 62.5" w. Baltimore Bar Library, Baltimore, MD.

91. Writing Desk, Green & Brother, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1837, mahogany and pine, 34.15" h., 34" d., 23.75" w. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

92. *County Map of Virginia and West Virginia*, S. Augustus Mitchell, Philadelphia. 1863, Central and Eastern Regions. The map is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

93. *Portrait of President John Tyler*, George P. A. Healy, Sherwood Forest Plantation, Charles City County, VA, 1859, 35.5" h., 29" w. The portrait is in the White House Art Collection. A photographic digital image of the portrait on the WHHA website was accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/bios/john-tyler>. The image is in the public domain.

94. Cave family sectional sofa, left end section with seat cushions removed, Green & Brother, style 3, Alexandria, VA, 1835-1860. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2013.

95. Sherwood Forest Plantation, main house (front), ca. 1720, Charles City County, VA. The photograph was taken in 2010.

96. Sectional sofa frame, Green & Brother, style 2, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1845, black walnut, walnut, yellow pine, metal and porcelain casters. The sofa is property of the Sherwood Forest Plantation Foundation. The digital photographic image was taken in 2015.

97. Sectional sofa frame, Green & Brother, style 2, Alexandria, VA, ca. 1845. The sofa is property of the Sherwood Forest Plantation Foundation. The digital photographic image was taken in 2015.

98. Sectional sofa, end section, Green & Brother, style 2. The sofa is property of the Sherwood Forest Plantation Foundation. The photographic digital image was taken 2015.

99. Sectional sofa, center and right end sections, Green & Brother, style 2, Alexandria, VA, 1835-1860. The sofa is property of the Westmoreland County Museum, Montross, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

100. Three-piece sectional sofa, Green & Brother, style 2, Alexandria, VA, 1835-60, black walnut and yellow pine. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

101. *Gazette Extra*, “Horrible Calamity,” Alexandria, VA, August 9, 1873. The newspaper “extra” was photographed at the Alexandria Public Library, Alexandria, VA in 2015.
102. Rapidan sofa sections were split between residences for personal and practical reasons. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
103. Parlor chairs, unknown maker, 1840-1850, upholstered scroll leg corner chairs with casters. The photographic digital image is courtesy of Joe Headley of Headley Auctions, Berryville, VA. The photographic image was provided to the author in 2014.
104. *Arlington House*, Andrew J. Russell, Arlington, VA, June 28, 1864. The photographic digital image was accessed June 23, 2014, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004680140/>. The photographic image from a glass negative is in the public domain.
105. Arlington House, Arlington, VA, parlor or prayer room. The house and artifacts are in the custody of the NPS. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.
106. Parlor chair, unknown maker, 1835-50, Arlington House, Arlington, VA. The photographic image was accessed August 13, 2014, <https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/arho/exb/Rooms/Interior-Nine.html>. The photographic image is in the public domain. The sectional seating was donated for exhibition at Arlington House by Robert E. Lee VI in 1974. The furniture is property of the NPS.
107. Upholstered corner arm chairs, unknown maker, 1835-1850, beech hexagon legs and pine framing, overall dimensions are 30” h., 25” w., 25” d. The photographic digital image is courtesy of Sotheby’s Auction, London, UK.
108. Sectional settee end section, 1835-1850, Guinness Trust and Collections and Sotheby’s Sale 1502, April 30, 2015, lot 976. The photographic digital image is courtesy of Sotheby’s Auctions, London, UK.
109. Sitting Room (one of many), Leixlip Castle, Ireland. The photographic digital image was taken in 2019.
110. Sectional sofa end sections, unknown maker, ca 1940, mahogany and unknown secondary woods, 30” h., 28” w., 28” d., digital photographic image, 2014. The sofa is in a private collection.
111. “Wounded Escaping from the Burning Woods of the Wilderness,” Alfred R. Waud, *Harper’s Weekly*, June 4, 1864, 357, graphite pencil drawing with Chinese white on brown paper, 9” h., 14.5” w. The drawing is in the LOC Collection of J.P. Morgan Civil War Drawings. The photographic digital image is from the LOC Collection online website. The image is in the public domain.
112. *The Sacking of Fredericksburg*, Arthur Lumley, pencil on tan paper, December 12, 1862, 7” h., 9” w. The drawing is in the LOC Collection of J.P. Morgan Civil War Drawings. The photographic digital image in the LOC Collection online website. The image is in the public domain.

113. *Green Mansion House Hotel used as a Union Army hospital during the Civil War*, undated photograph, 5” h., 7” w. The photograph in the LOC Collection was accessed July 15, 2016, www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2012650182/. The image is in the public domain.

114. *Fauquier White Sulphur Springs Hotel, Virginia (vicinity), Ruins of Hotel*, Timothy H. O’Sullivan, August 1862. The glass negative in the LOC Glass Negative Collection, Lot 4165-H. The photographic digital image was accessed February 8, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018672239/>. The image is in the public domain.

115a and 115b. Two Green & Brothers furniture works advertisements, April 16 and June 10, 1869, *Alexandra Gazette*, Alexandria, VA. The photographic digital images were gained originally from microfilms kept by Special Collections at the LVA, Richmond, VA.

116. Gilbert Rohde sofa, designed for Herman Miller, ca. 1940s, 32” h., 74” w., 36” d. The sofa was advertised for sale on the *Istdibs.com* website. The image is in the public domain.

117. Former Green & Brother Steam Furniture Works, Alexandria, VA. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

118. Historic plaque honoring Green & Brother Steam Furniture Works, established 1823. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

119. Chatterton on the Potomac three-section sectional sofa, Green & Brother, style 2, Alexandria, VA, 1835-1860, black walnut and yellow pine. The sofa is in a private collection. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

120. Port Royal sectional sofa, unknown maker, 1835-1850. The sofa was photographed in 2018.

121. Green & Brother Advertising Card, ca. 1870, EHG Collection, Box 73A, 19, Alexandria Public Library. The photographic digital image was taken in 2014.

Prologue

My research into antebellum Virginia sectional furniture began in 2007 with the purchase of a raw sectional sofa frame as first seen below (figure 1). I was intrigued by the sofa's linear sectional design and simple construction, to include its mix of southern woods. The curious sofa was a revelation because I was not aware sectional furniture existed before the twentieth century. This sofa, with its elemental Sheraton-style turned legs and brass casters, was clearly made much earlier. Many questions arose, some more quickly than others. Who made the sofa? When? Where? For what purpose or purposes? As a result, I began to look for more nineteenth-century sectional furniture pieces and study them. My wife, Laura, was not as enthusiastic about the sectional sofa at first and referred to the sofa frame as a "torture rack." The sofa was eventually transformed by upholstery and illustrated in this book.



Fig. 1. Port Royal sectional sofa frame, unknown maker, 1835-1850, black walnut, yellow pine and poplar. The sofa frame was photographed by Elizabeth H. Fields for Freeman's Auctioneers, Philadelphia, PA in 2007. The photographic image was provided by the auction house.

My research methodology was straight forward: to seek-out, examine, compare and contrast, count and chronicle antebellum Virginia sectional furniture. It was not much different than what any researcher does who has a strong interest in undertaking a study of any subject from anthropology-to-zoology. Soon after the sectional sofa purchase, I began to put together a source document. In 2016, I printed 200 copies of a limited-edition collector's notebook which became a template for this book. The notebook contained photographs, measurements, statements (quotes or comments from interested and knowledgeable people), article and book references, as well as correspondence,

predominately electronic mail (e-mail). During the course of this study, I met many thoughtful and helpful people, whom I acknowledge immediately after this introduction. As my sectional furniture study picked-up momentum, I began to add to my source document related ideas to test. My goal was to create a fact-based narrative that accurately described the origin, development, distribution, and eventual disappearance of antebellum Virginia sectional furniture. Not every idea from the original source document proved valid, and this revised edition is an opportunity to make adjustments, corrections and refinements to the original document, and an introductory article published in 2014.² Now, my completed study is in softcover and digital book forms. The electronic version offers readers new information, includes an additional example of Virginia sectional furniture, and yes, only one new example.

I was educated in history from an early age to “connect” people, places and events, as well as the material things that helped provide, protect, comfort, and entertain them. I don’t believe you can adequately explain any aspect of Virginia sectional furniture, or most anything else culturally American, without an understanding of the economic, political, military, and social developments driving the evolutions, if not revolutions, of the early American Republic. I first began thinking about the larger historical connections of the early republic to Virginia sectional furniture in 2012, while driving through the Petersburg National Battlefield on my way to the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Connecting the rise and fall of “big house” plantation furniture with the rise of economic, political and social sectionalism, and the fall of the successionist Confederate States of America struck me as historically relevant, and more than a nexus of cultural and historical coincidences. The role political sectionalism had on peoples’ behaviors, beliefs, emotions, and thinking, to include creativity, and later their capacities for both destruction and reconstruction, are essential themes in this study. The American Civil War was a revolutionary force of sweeping change that affected every American in every section of the country. The war decided there would be no successful succession of southern states, the whole nation was more important than any individual state or section, and it ended slavery. Unfortunately, Americans remain as divided as ever, by race and politics, as if the Civil War had never ended. The deadly political violence in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, between Confederate States sympathizers, Ku-Klux Klan members, Neo-Nazis groups, and a loose but large coalition of counter protestors, was a shocking reminder of the bloody political and social forces still dividing the country.

I chose to open this book with a mix of historical quotes, some of which deal with sectional divisions, and others involving period economics and politics, highlighting the true spirit of the times, or *zeitgeist*. People in the South were looking for economic, political and social control over their lives, and that began at home where they sat and socialized but extended to the legislative and judicial chambers of Capitol Hill where men sat and debated. We must remind ourselves that nothing happens in a vacuum, even the development of sectional furniture. The push and pull of cause and effect are real everyday forces in people’s lives and the history of nations; even if people don’t immediately feel the economic pressures on them, understand the social tensions arising between them, or the raw emotions that surface because of these cumulative pressures and tensions. If

² Hal Stuart, “The Virginia Triangle of Sectional Furniture,” *Maine Antique Digest*, (July 2014), 14-15D.

uncontrolled, these powerful forces manifest themselves in divisive political acts, and in the most extreme circumstances, in violent protests and even civil war.

I view the beginning of the antebellum period in the United States differently than many American historians. I believe it began when President George Washington doubted the ability of the Union to endure because of differences over states' rights, slavery and the economic power of the federal government. My start time for the antebellum period is about 30 years earlier than many historians. However, I became convinced of my view after reading Ron Chernow's, *Washington, A Life*. The critical passage for me was a paragraph discussing "the rising tide of criticism against Washington originating from his home state of Virginia," where he was viewed by many as a traitor to the cause of democratic republicanism. Chernow writes:

What made the rising tide of criticism more troublesome for Washington was that much of it originated in Virginia, where he was increasingly regarded as an apostate. Edward Thornton, secretary to the British minister, observed in April 1792 that Washington "has very few who are on terms of intimate and unreserved friendship" with him and "what is worse, he is less beloved in his own state than in any part of the United States." Three years later Washington told Edmund Randolph that, if the Union were to break up into North and South, "he had made up his mind to remove and be of the northern." That Washington had now identified himself with northern finance, commerce, and even abolitionism would have major consequences for American history. Had he sided with (Thomas) Jefferson and (James) Madison, it might have deepened irrevocably the cleavage between North and South and opened an unbridgeable chasm seventy years before the Civil War.³

For many in the decorative arts world, the interconnectedness of the economic, political, military, and social history of the early American Republic to the origin, development, use, and demise of Virginia sectional furniture remains difficult to accept. However, I ask the reader to keep an open mind and think about the number of times people could not agree on the shape of a conference table at peace talks, the conflict over seating arrangements for important political meetings or social events, or even the sight of an opponent in the same room or on the same street, and what resulted.⁴ The early American Republic was such a polarized place, where duals were fought over competing ideas of the role of the federal government in the daily lives of its citizenry.

Sitting Vice President Aaron Burr's fatal wounding of former Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton in 1804 is an extreme example, but not the only one. The canning administered in the United States Senate of abolitionist Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner by pro-slavery and states' right advocate South Carolina Representative Preston Brooks was another act of extreme violence by a man who could not accept the presence of a political opponent in the same building. Sumner criticized Brooks' cousin, Senator Andrew P. Butler, and several other senators who had supported the "popular sovereignty" section of the *1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act* in a speech on the

³ Ron Chernow, *Washington, A Life*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 676.

⁴ Joanne B. Freeman, *The Field of Blood*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018). Freeman details more than 70 violent acts between members of Congress between 1830 and 1860. Much of violence sprang from sharp sectional divisions over slavery and states' rights.

Senate floor (figure 2). Brooks entered the Senate chamber to avenge the criticism of his cousin and beat the Northern senator unconscious. The Gabriel, Nat Turner, and John Brown slave uprisings mark and mar the first 70 years of the republic, and all three revolts occurred in Virginia. These different examples of violence for holding and expressing opposing views played out in American history in a much bigger way in a bloody and prolonged civil war. Originally, the first sectional furniture allowed for the separation of people by age, class, gender, politics, race, and religion, in private spaces creating specialized seating in a segregated nation. However, by the late 1830s this specialized seating was institutionalized in the United States Capitol. Virginia sectional furniture pieces became physical symbols for the multiple and divergent forces pulling at the economic, political and social fabric of the nation, and separating into armed camps the northern and southern sections of the country. We should also ask ourselves if antebellum sectional furniture was much different from Jim Crow era seating on a Montgomery, Alabama bus or Richmond, Virginia lunch counter politically and socially? Perhaps, like most material things, it is all about who developed the object and its history of use.

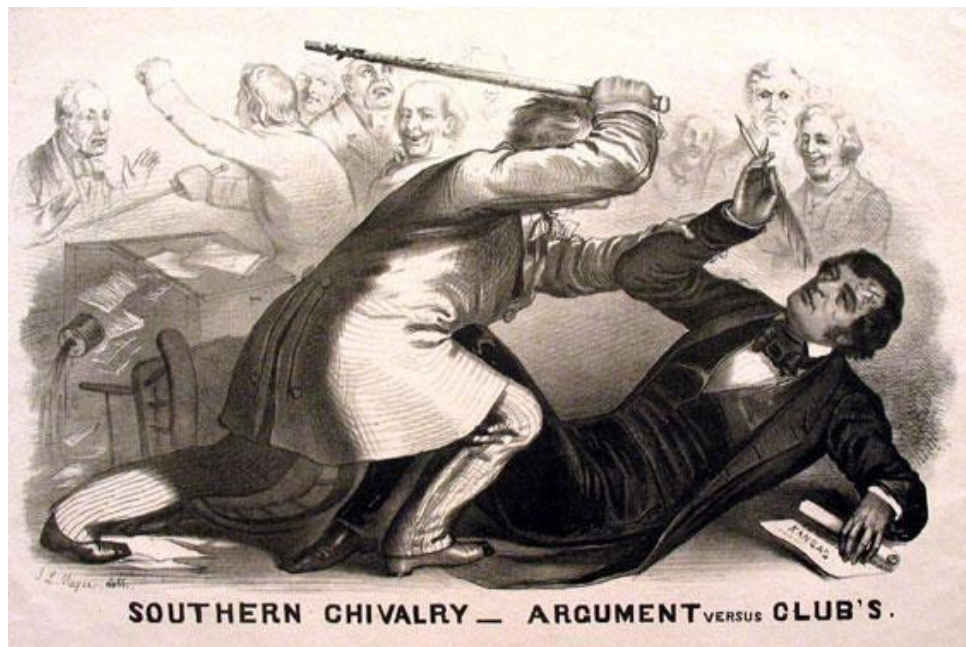


Fig. 2. James L. Magee, “Southern Chivalry-Argument Versus Clubs,” Lithographic Print, 1856. Illustration image courtesy of the New York City Public Library.

To visually document this study, photographs were taken “in-place and as is” as a journalist might do. I took most of the photographs presented, and where not, the photographs of others are identified as such. My photographs were taken journalistically to document the furniture’s current use, as well as any environmental challenges and condition issues faced by any of the sectionals. I opted for the journalistic form of photography also because it is a better way to convince people, especially those who live outside of Virginia, that antebellum Virginia sectional furniture exists. I purposefully avoided artificial staging. As of the completion of this study, all of the sectionals are believed to be Virginia-made sectionals, with the possible exception of one sold in 2015 at an auction in the United Kingdom (another historically class conscious society, at times deeply divided,

and later a “cloaked” supporter of the secessionist Confederate States of America). At every opportunity to view each piece of sectional furniture, I took careful measurements for the sake of contrasting and comparing each sectional included in this study. The sectionals detailed in the following pages are in a variety of designs and styles reflecting the different decades of the nineteenth century in which they were constructed, as well as the evolving tastes of the original and current owners, how they were intended to be used, and in some cases restored and repurposed. Virginia sectional furniture was designed and framed in two or more sections, reasonably portable, and versatile in use, which is not the case in much of the modern or contemporary sectional designs, such as the Le Corbusier designed sectional settees and sofas, which are sectional in upholstery only.

Since 2007, my wife, Laura, and I searched for comparable nineteenth-century sectional furniture throughout much of the Western World. We traveled as far south as St. Augustine, Florida and as far north as Quebec City, Canada. We traveled to and contacted antique furniture experts in Europe and the United Kingdom too. In 2014, we traveled to Belgium, France and the Netherlands and were repeatedly told, “Sorry, we have no furniture like that here.” The negative results were much the same during trips to the United Kingdom in 2018 and Ireland in 2019. During 12 years of research, we have not found a significant population of sectionals anywhere that compare to the antebellum Virginia sectionals in age, portability, versatility, and variable design, with one exception. A Sotheby’s of London Collections Auction, held April 30, 2015, sold what the auction house described as an “Unusual Pair of Beech Upholstered Corner Arm Chairs, Late Victorian.”⁵ After receiving a heads-up from Virginia antiques dealer Bill Beck, I contacted Sotheby’s by e-mail and shared with Thomas Williams, a synopsis of my research. He wrote back “fascinating stuff.”⁶ The “pair of chairs” sold in London are relevant and related seating, and are discussed later in the study for comparative purposes.

For sake of clarity, names were given to each sectional based on their historical connection to a geographical or historic place, well known Virginia family, or public institution to help keep them as easily distinguishable as possible. In addition, I avoided associating the names of current private owners of sectional furniture out of concern for safety and security, unless otherwise instructed. As important, I have not placed any monetary values on any of these unique pieces of Virginia furniture. They are all priceless in their own way, and like anything else, value is determined by what the market will bear, something this study does not seek to influence.

As the author, I wanted to write a comprehensive study that would allow the reader to access many if not all of my Internet website sources. With the help of my wife, we tried to make every Internet website address used in this study actively available in the e-book version. Most cited websites are easy to access, however, there are a few that may require a key words search (words from the citation) to gain access, and some sites may have changed addresses over time just enough to make an immediate connection impossible (for example from .com to .net). You can also contact

⁵ *Sotheby’s London*, “An Unusual Pair of Victorian Beech and Upholstered Corner Arm Chairs, late 19th Century, Lot 976,” accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/collections-115304/lot.976.html>. The “chairs” are similar in design to several antebellum Virginia sectionals furniture settees. The auctioned pair of “chairs” were likely American-made.

⁶ Thomas Williams, *Sotheby’s London*, e-mail correspondence with the author, April 14, 2015.

me by e-mail if you have a question about a specific source or citation. My e-mail address is hoggar93@aol.com.

There remains honest skepticism about the origin and existence of antebellum Virginia sectional furniture, predominately from people outside of Virginia in New York and New England who don't recognize any ingenuity but Yankee ingenuity. Others, mostly in the American South, are not sold on applying the description of sectional to furniture made during the antebellum period because of its association with slavery, states' rights and the Civil War. There are people eager to dismiss my researching thinking falsely that I was born a Northerner with a sectional bias against the culture and history of the South. None of this is true. I was born in Idaho, not Massachusetts. I lived most of my life in the South—Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Virginia. I learned about the South by living throughout this unique section of the country and not just by reading about it. For example, I attended grade school at Jefferson Davis Elementary School in Biloxi, Mississippi. On weekends in the 1960s, I fished for catfish with my family at Beauvoir, the retirement estate of defeated Confederate President Jefferson Davis. As a boy scout, I visited well-known Civil War battlefields such as the Vicksburg National Battlefield Park and many smaller ones, like the spectacular ruins of Fort Massachusetts off of Mississippi's Gulf Coast. Dealers, collectors and curators of southern furniture get uneasy discussing furniture in the cultural and historical contexts of sectional divisions involving the Civil War, civil rights, slavery, and states' rights, as well as racial barriers, social norms and class differences. This is unfortunate because it obscures basic human truths, impedes historical understanding and delays social healing. Regardless, I hope people will keep an open mind about this study. I believe if you give this work a chance, the material, cultural and historical connections made will become clear and meaningful.

In the future, a more formal catalogue, a third stage of research could be accomplished by a younger person. A formal catalogue could include studio quality photographs that concentrate solely on each of the sectionals detached from their immediate environments, and a technical analysis of each with regard to craftsmanship or manufacture, to include materials, such as the varieties of woods, hardware, finishes, and upholstery. Readers of this now concluded field study should regard my work as done, although to be honest no research is ever really finished; it just occasionally pauses for new information, better ideas and younger people to carry on the research.

Hal Stuart
Bowling Green, Virginia
2019

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Louise dejarnette Jesse (1949-2016) wanted to edit my "copious notes and bountiful pictures," as she generously called them in 2015. Sadly, Louise's cancer remerged shortly thereafter. She passed away in July 2016. Louise would have been perfect for the job of editor. Louise grew-up at historic Epping Forest on Virginia's Northern Neck. She was from a longstanding, well-established Virginia family. Louise developed a keen sense of the Old Dominion's history, especially as it related to its material culture. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University majoring in fun, as well as the decorative arts. Her death was a triple loss to me. She was an excellent source of antiques, a solid supporter of this project, and an all-around good sport. Louise is missed by many people for her knowledge of regional antiques, love of animals and lively sense of humor.

I wish to thank those who purchased a compilation of my notes in 2016. These were the notes that I hoped Louise would help me edit into a proper book. As stated, she became too ill to undertake the task. I turned to a commercial publisher who created problems and then tried to sell me solutions, which only created more problems. This same publisher outsourced a preliminary draft to the Philippines without my knowledge. When I found out about the outsourcing, I ended the business and publishing relationship. Unfortunately, my early draft was later pirated and sold in Asia online for up to 400 dollars. I did not want anyone buying a pirated copy of my notes for so much money. I then decided to print a limited edition of what I had produced, and let people buy copies to see what I was working on and have input into a final product. I benefited from getting information out to interested parties, and by getting another sectional settee to view, study and include in a final version. I hope my finished work will be satisfactory and worth the wait.

Since my research has gone on for more than 12 years and stretched from the United States into Eastern Canada, as well as Belgium, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands, I may have missed thanking someone somewhere who was also helpful. If so, I apologize.

Chapter 1: What the Modernist Didn't Know

After 1920, High Modern era designers such as Le Corbusier in France, Kaare Klint in Denmark, and Russel Wright in United States, were credited with the development of sectional furniture.⁷ These attributions are a decorative arts myth and an honest historical mistake.⁸ This study reverses decades of thinking regarding the origins of sectional furniture. The evidence presented will show sectional furniture has been under us and around us in America, and more specifically in Virginia, since at least 1800 and perhaps earlier. Antebellum Virginia sectional furniture was both shop-made and factory-produced. To date, 16 sectional settees and sofas were discovered in Virginia and Washington, DC, as well as one curious outlier in London. When possible, I took notes, measurements and photographs of the furniture, or asked for photographic images and other supporting information (figure 3).



Fig. 3. Salubria three section sofa, 1840-1855, black walnut and yellow pine with brass casters. At the time of this photograph, a twentieth-century slipcover was fitted over mid-century modern upholstery. The sofa's three sections are light weight and easily separated for ease of portability and seating.

This study will provide economic, military, political, and social contexts for the development of Virginia sectional furniture, and provide fact-based explanations for its development, distribution

⁷ Paul Connelly, "Modernity in the Sequence of Historical Eras," *Historical Eras*, (2008), accessed September 20, 2012, <http://www.darc.org/connelly/religion5.html>. Connelly's definition of the High Modern era runs from 1905 to 1948. Upon studying the Connelly definition, I adopted it for use in the narrative and it is referred to as modern era. "High Modern era" is used sparingly in the text although the meaning remains Connelly's concept. Also see Fitzgerald, e-mail to the author, October 29, 2012.

⁸ Judith Miller, *Furniture: World Styles*, (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2005), 385-447. Miller discusses the Art Deco and Modernist eras through the evolution of furniture styles, some of which were influenced by World War I and post-war industrialization. There was also an effort by some designers, some of whom did not serve in the war, to attach themselves to those who did serve by using campaign furniture designs as models for what they thought were new styles of furniture that would resonate with war veterans and the broader public. However, instead of calling a campaign-style chair a "Gallipoli chair," the designers advertised more exotic escapist descriptions, such as the safari settee and butterfly chair. The furniture was familiar in style to veterans, but not emotionally and psychologically jarring.

and eventual disappearance from Virginia's decorative arts scene, until the form was "re-invented" by modern era designers of the 1920s. A significant decorative arts aspect of this study is an examination of the influence eighteenth-century British furniture designs, to include military campaign furniture, had on nineteenth-century Virginia sectional furniture. Campaign furniture's durability, flexibility and portability made "camp furniture" the perfect model for Virginia sectional furniture; a furniture innovation that parallels the influence nineteenth- and twentieth-century campaign furniture had on modern era designers, even if their modern sectional furniture designs often became as static as the traditional sofas and settees they sought to replace. However, contemporary sectional furniture is again becoming more portable and versatile, as life styles change, and in much the same way Virginia sectional furniture evolved, and yet for very different reasons, which this study describes (figure 4).



Fig. 4. Sectional Settee, Conat Ball Company (for Macy's), 1934, birch and maple, 30" h., 64" w., 32" d. The sectional was designed by Russel Wright. The Wright settee is similar to Virginia sectional settees in that it allows for separate seating. The modern settee is heavier and not as easily portable. A three-seat sectional sofa was also made by Conat Ball for Macy's Stores.

The first time I noticed this style of chair indoors was in the movie, *The Candidate*, a biting political and social satire released in 1972. The film showed warfare by other means, chiefly by political action. The display of campaign furniture in the film was not likely a coincidence of style by Director Michael Ritchie, but more likely an inspired collaboration with veteran set designer Patrizia von Brandenstein and script writer Jeremy Larnier. Campaign furniture has generally been about moving-out, if not necessarily moving-up.

The first Virginia sectional furniture developed in the Rapidan River area of Central Virginia, in Orange and Culpeper Counties, between 1800 and 1820. The Conway settee appears to be the first early American Republic sectional known.⁹ The popularity of the first sectionals spread among economically, politically and socially connected families east and northeast within the "Old Dominion" because of the sectional's portable utility in large, multi-storied plantation houses. The

⁹ *Deed of Gift*, "Sectional Settee," James Madison Museum, Orange County, VA, (accession 1976.003.0010 A-B), July 1, 1976. A copy of the deed was gained from the museum on October 12, 2012.

variety of styles of the documented sectionals are reflective of the evolving tastes of the diverse British and European immigrants who settled in Northern, Eastern and Central Virginia during the first 70 years of the American Republic. During the course of the antebellum period, two types of sectional furniture emerged: shop-made and factory-manufactured sectionals. Almost nothing is known about the makers of the earliest shop-made sectional furniture. However, by at least the mid-1830s, Green & Brother, a well-known and respected furniture manufacturer in Alexandria, Virginia was making and selling their own line of sectional furniture to select clients.¹⁰ The Green sectionals were bought and used by wealthy and politically prominent families, large businesses, and powerful public institutions.¹¹ Central Virginia, as a singular place of origin for Virginia sectional furniture could eventually prove invalid, and yet there is compelling evidence this innovatively flexible and durable furniture began as “big house” plantation furniture for the Virginia’s landed gentry in the Rapidan River Valley.

The Rappahannock River Valley is less likely area of origin for Virginia sectional furniture but cannot be discounted. A number of families moved from Virginia’s Northern Neck and Upper Tidewater Regions westward as farm land became increasingly available in Central Virginia during the eighteenth century. Eastern Virginia farm land became increasingly poor for planting because of the repeated cultivation of tobacco, a crop that drained the soil of critical nutrients. Also of importance, as families grew and once large landholdings were divided multiple times over generations within families, many people moved further west for new lands large enough to sustain them. Some Eastern Virginia families resettled along and or near the Rapidan River in Culpeper and Orange Counties (figure 5). A branch of the Conway (or Conaway) family is a good example of a family that moved from King George County to Orange County after the American Revolution. The river towns of Port Conway in King George County and Port Royal in Caroline County are contenders for the origin of the first Virginia sectional, because all the materials for the settee’s construction were naturally available there and the sectional seating easily transported.¹² However, information on families relocating westward is fragmentary, and at times contradictory, to include verifiable knowledge of their movements and what personal property they took with them.

¹⁰ Author’s note: Green & Brother and Green & Brothers refer to the same Alexandria, Virginia furniture company, but at different times during the nineteenth century.

¹¹ Oscar Fitzgerald, *The Green Family of Cabinetmakers: An Alexandria Institution, 1817-1887*, (Alexandria, VA: The Alexandria Association, 1986), 10. Fitzgerald, e-mail to author, August 6, 2014. Fitzgerald agreed the sectional furniture on display in the Old Supreme Court Chamber inside the United States Capitol Building came from Green & Brothers. Fitzgerald cited the Green’s quirky furniture styles.

¹² Brian Conway, *Grand Pocket’s Blog, Genealogy, Family, Poetry and Peeves*, accessed on October 31, 2014, <http://chelledge.wordpress.com/elledge-conaway-genealogy/conaway-family-history/virginia-line/>.



Fig. 5. Rapidan Village, Orange County, Virginia, 2015. After the Revolutionary War, settlers flocked to Central Virginia to build plantations and farms on rolling hillsides near lush forests. Pasture land for livestock was plentiful, timber abundant, and the waters healthy.

Central and Eastern Virginia are both possible starting points for shop-made sectionals because of the furniture's composition. The woods used to make-up the frames and legs of the earliest sectionals are all native woods of Virginia, principally cherry, poplar, walnut and black walnut, as well as yellow pine. Imported Santo Domingo mahogany was used beginning in the 1830s on the factory-made sectionals giving them a more fashionable look and appeal. The hardware supporting most of the sectionals was simple: cut nails, upholstery tacks, metal and porcelain casters, and eventually hour glass-shaped coil springs. Most of the hardware was reasonably easy to obtain for sectional construction by the 1830s, even in rural Virginia, provided you were wealthy enough. Fabrics ranged from simple sack cloth and Osnaburg linen, that was sometimes bought by the bale, to elaborate and expensive cotton linens and silk damask sold by the square foot. Overall, the sectionals were relatively inexpensive to produce, with the exception of those sectionals elaborately upholstered, and much of that more expensive upholstery was applied later. From their inception, most sectional furniture pieces proved of high utility rather than high style. It was furniture of convenience and practicality for wealthy plantation owners and, within 30 years, powerful economic, political and social institutions. Regardless of who, where and how they were made, all the Virginia sectionals examined to date share common characteristics. The sectionals were linear in design and featured a symmetrically-shaped seating area larger than most chairs or sofas of the

period. All of the sectionals are relatively light weight and easily portable in sections. Most sectionals have casters for additional ease of movement. The factory-made sectionals feature larger seats, and yet they are only marginally heavier than the known shop-made sectionals. The factory manufactured versions offer the same portability and utility as the shop-made sectionals, although as one might expect, they were more uniformly produced. Many modern era sectional settees and sofas were made much heavier, and were not designed with portable utility in mind, as much as eye-catching period fashion, to include chrome, which is an important distinction (figure 6).¹³



Fig. 6. Sectional sofa, designed by Charlotte Perriand and Le Corbusier, manufactured by Cassina of Italy, ca. 1985, leather and chrome, 25.5" h, 69" w, 27.5" d. This chrome accented sofa is boxy in shape and sectional in seating, like some early campaign furniture, but it is not as easily portable or versatile in usage.

Nineteenth-century shop and factory furniture makers did not use section or sectional to describe or market furniture, even if the seating was made in individual symmetrical sections; although the words section and sectional have a Latin root (*sect-us*), and are words that were in common use in the Americas, Great Britain and France for hundreds of years. The Latin root can mean “sever or cut.” However, section can also mean “part.” In addition, the Latin root is identified with the word “intersect,” as in “meeting or crossing point.”¹⁴ Regardless what the furniture pieces were called in the nineteenth century, such as a group or suite, it also can be thought of as a section of seating, or as sectional seating, as it is today. The examples of nineteenth-century Virginia sectional furniture that appear in this study were specifically designed for sectioned-off individual seating, seating that can be added back to the whole at a specific point or place, which does not make the pieces modular (see Appendix A-3 for an example of modular furniture).

¹³ Fitzgerald, *American Furniture: 1650-1850*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 487. See figure 18.22, the sling sofa, ca. 1960. The sofa was made of chrome plated tubular steel with leather and nylon upholstery, and variations of the sofa continue to be made today.

¹⁴ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd ed., (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1985), 1109. Thomas Sheraton’s 1803 *Cabinetmaker’s Dictionary* does define “section” as a term used in geometry, but not as a furniture description.

There is important furniture that has been miscast as modular for marketing purposes.¹⁵ As mentioned above, the word section was in wide-use throughout North America: in labor, as in a section hand, in the military, as in a section of infantry, in real estate, as in a section of land, and in politics, as in sectionalism. Even in French, the word for section is section, and sectional is sectionnel, and again derived from Latin.¹⁶ It should also be noted that many people use modular and sectional interchangeably, which is not correct. Truly modular furniture is interchangeable in its exact design replication. On the other hand, sectional furniture, although flexible in arrangement and in movement, is not entirely interchangeable in design, materials or style, when it is actually exclusively sectional in design, for example, the Finn Juhl designed rose wood and wool sectional sofa (figures 7a and 7b).¹⁷ The differences will become apparent as the reader progresses through this study. There is a more detailed discussion of relevant furniture definitions using specific examples of nineteenth-century sectional and non-sectional seating in Chapter 8.



Fig. 7a. Finn Juhl (for Bovirke), sectional sofa, ca. 1953, steel and rosewood frame, 31" h., 100" w., 31" d. The four-section sectional sofa fitted together as a unified seating unit. The two end sections are required to fit together in a specific way for it to be formed and used as a conventional sofa.

¹⁵ Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s. v. "modular," accessed February 25, 2014, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=modular>. The use of the word modular is a term long used by the French and Italians in mathematics, as in "a small measure." Its definition was expanded and incorporated into modern architectural design and manufacturing to include electronics, furniture and storage beginning about 1936.

¹⁶ Sectionnel translates as sectional. *Dictionnaire: Français-Anglais*, Marguerite Marie Dubois, éd., (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1981), 683.

¹⁷ Finn Juhl designed a sectional sofa for Bovirke in 1953. The advertised sectional sofa was viewed November 20, 2018, https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/seating/sectional-sofas/rarest-finn-juhl-bovirke-two-tone-wool-rosewood-modular-sofa-set-1953/id-f_8999461/. The description of the sofa on *1stDibs* uses both sectional and modular to describe this furniture, which is incorrect. It can be one or the other, but not both at the same time.



Fig. 7b. Finn Juhl (for Bovirke), sectional sofa, ca. 1953, steel and rosewood frame. The four sections can be split into three or more distinct seating units. The upholstered sides of the left and right end sections are not designed to be removeable, and therefore the four units are not fully interchangeable like a modular sofa. The sofa has a lot in common with sectional sofas purchased by the US Supreme Court in 1837.

As we find and examine more sectional furniture, our understanding of its origin will evolve and mature. Great Britain, and later the United Kingdom, could become the place of design origin for sectional furniture. However, there does not appear to be a significant population of British sectional seating earlier than the twentieth century, even the one known example is likely American-made.¹⁸ Publication and use of this study might bring-out of obscurity new examples of sectional furniture from private residences or protected storage, and from unexpected places around the world, and specifically from older cultures. European, British and American furniture designers incorporated styles from ancient cultures when discovered, such as Chinese, Egyptian and Persian, to name a few. Contemporary versions of sectional furniture are now imported into the West from China and Indonesia, such as the “sofa sectional” made currently in China (figure 8). The contemporary sectional sofa is symmetrical in shape, portably flexible by design, and therefore functionally useful for many households and businesses.

¹⁸ As mentioned in the Prologue, Sotheby’s of London auctioned a pair of what they described as late Victorian era upholstered corner armchairs. The corner chairs are similar to several Virginia sectionals in design and size. However, they were used individually to anchor a room and not together. A photograph from Sotheby’s showed one chair in a corner of a room in a large estate house in the UK (see figure 108).



Fig. 8. Sofa sectional, Crandall, China, 2014. Photographic digital image taken at Pier 1 Imports in Glen Allen, VA in 2015. A contemporary “sofa sectional” was displayed with a left end corner chair and “lay-up” sections. See the Virginia sectional comparison in figure 70 for a similar antebellum Virginia sectional seating arrangement. Today this sectional can be transported in multiple pieces by detaching the cushions.

Increasingly, Americans are a people divided by different generational experiences, to include an evolving multi-cultural English-based language. Our understanding of words and their meanings change over time and with each rising generation. One surprise during this study was the number of young adults who could not define sectional furniture, to include people who are currently selling this furniture for a living. The problem with defining sectional furniture over the years is similar to a portion of an often-quoted United States Supreme Court opinion written by Associate Justice Potter Stewart in 1964, “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so...but I know it when I see it.”¹⁹ Over the past 200 years, people described sectional furniture in a variety of ways, and often based on their personal experience with furniture or lack of it, which contributed to keeping antebellum Virginia sectional furniture obscure, and until recently, publicly unknown, and culturally and historically underappreciated. Like Justice Stewart, we may believe we know sectionals when we see them, but we may not know how to consistently define or name them.²⁰

¹⁹ Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, *Nico Jacobellis vs. Ohio*, 378 US 184 (1964), accessed January 30, 2015, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/378/184>. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s concurring opinion is included in the online text. A portion of this case involves trying to define pornography and not furniture, although both forms of expression can be viewed differently by different people as forms of art or not.

²⁰ As novelist, Oscar Wilde, wrote in the *Canterbury Ghost* (1887), “We have really everything in common with America nowadays except, of course, language.”

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