



Stottlemyer Rocking Chairs

By Barbara Shanley, ASA

One of the wonderful things about moving to a new area is the discovery that there are so many regional subjects, none of which were previously known to me. It is exciting to be introduced to little-known furniture styles and have history jump out of books and into reality. I have been lucky to have an expert tour guide, who is appraiser, historian and husband. We have walked Civil War battlefields, visited small unique museums in historic towns, met old families. Bottom line—as appraisers, there is always something new for us to learn.

One of these discoveries is the work of C. C. Stottlemyer.

Christopher Columbus Stottlemyer (1857-1931), a seventh generation American, made his home in Maryland's Catoctin Mountains in the small town of Wolfsville. He and his large family made kitchen chairs, benches, stools, high chairs and cradles, but their most popular production item was the rocking chair. He became the most famous merchant in the Wolfsville area.

Stottlemyer chairs are not well known outside Frederick County Maryland, but when one appears for sale, people rush to acquire it. To the owners of his chairs here in Maryland, they are considered prize possessions and are passed down from generation to generation.

C. C. Stottlemyer learned the trade from his father, Frederick, who made only a few chairs. C.C. was assisted in the shop by his five strong sons, his wife and two daughters helped by weaving the splint backs and bottoms for the chairs. The men harvested water ash along the creeks and hammered it until rings in the wood loosened, and then, while the pieces were still green, bent them for

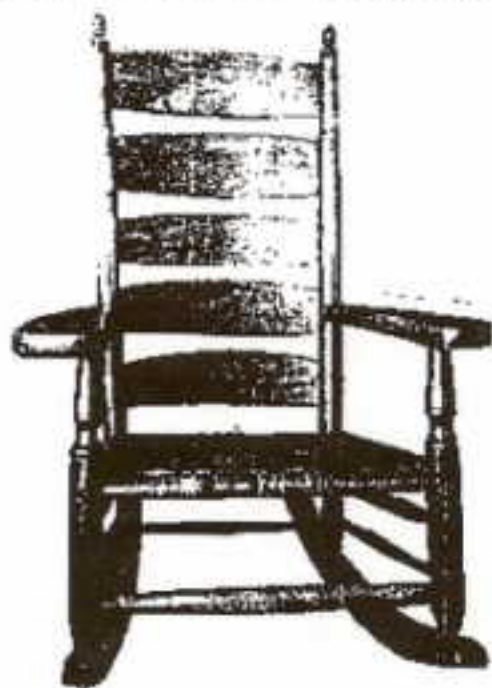


back slats. They also bought oak and other wood around the area, cut it themselves or traded chairs for their materials. This accounts for the wide variety of hardwoods found in the chairs—including oak, hickory, ash, maple and even mulberry. Until 1908, only hand tools and a foot-powered lathe were used for production. Then, a two-and-a-half horsepower steam engine was purchased to run the rip saw and later, a gasoline engine was added.

Each rocker was made of several woods, with assorted arm shapes and back design, and the sizes were adjusted to the proportions of each owner. As a dressmaker would take a customer's measurements for a dress or a suit, Stottlemyer measured his customers when they ordered chairs. One man who remembers the manufacture of the chairs says "there were some big people around and he made them big chairs." The Wolfsville rockers were treasured wedding gifts as were Stottlemyer baby rockers for the subsequent children.

The family made stock straight and "crooked" back kitchen chairs too, selling them for seven dollars a dozen. But most of the rockers were made to order and sold for more — a dollar and a half or two for those without arms, and the larger rockers with arms were three or four dollars.

The chairs were constructed of generously proportioned round members with the rear uprights ending in turned stylized





acorn finials. These proportions continued on the front leg uprights with a turned area above the seat frame. Some chairs were fitted with large paddle-shaped arms, as big as twenty by five inches at the front with an exposed peg as the ending of the upright. All the Stottlemeyer chairs I have seen have the uprights showing score marks to indicate the placement of seat frames and stretcher assemblies. Usually these are double side stretchers, single rear stretchers; one chair I appraised had a pair of ring-turned front stretchers. The runners on which these chairs are mounted are thick and long—as long as thirty-seven inches. Most of the remaining rockers have curved thin ladder back panels consisting of four or five crosspieces, but one article on Stottlemeyer indicated that the majority of his chair backs were made of woven splint or cane.

The Stottlemeyer rocker I appraised recently did have the original woven splint “envelopes” (continuous weaving for front and back of chair panel) with the same treatment for the seat. These envelopes were often stuffed with shredded newspaper and straw to enhance the comfort for which the chairs were so well known.

C.C. Stottlemeyer became ill in the late 1920’s and production of the chairs seems to have stopped about this time. The care and craftsmanship of Stottlemeyer and his family resulted in solid quality that has insured the survival of some of these chairs, but little has been written about the family (who later changed the spelling of their name to “Stottlemeyer”) or their furniture production to help the researcher for valuation. The Internet yielded the family tree of another branch of Stottlemeyers who did not respond to my inquiries. No books have been written on the subject and there are only a few magazine and newspaper articles from the 1980’s and 1990’s. The first article I read began by saying “If you happen to own an authentic chair crafted by the Stottlemeyer clan from the little town of Wolfsville, Maryland, you are indeed *sitting pretty*.” The chairs are not elegant, not fancy, but they are so comfortable. A writer in the Frederick area claims the rockers are indeed “unique”.

I next turned to the Historical Society of Frederick County in Frederick, Maryland where one of the Stottlemeyer rockers can be seen. They were most helpful and sent copies of the four articles in their library. I repaid them with a copy of an article they did not have, given to me by the descendent of the owner of the first Stottlemeyer rocker I appraised.

Only one of the articles (circa 1985) cited above mentions some values for these rockers and there are but two recent sales recorded, both in 1995. From local family estates sales in the Frederick area, one listed two ladder back rockers that sold for about \$1,100 each. The other rocker’s sale price was \$1,025.

If anyone has more information on the Stottlemeyer rockers, or has values or sales for them, please share it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbara Shanley, ASA, is a full-time independent fee appraiser of antiques and decorative arts, with accreditation in Antique Furniture and Antiques/Decorative Arts. Her offices are in Bethesda, MD and San Francisco, CA. She is presently the Chair of the International Personal Property Committee of the American Society of Appraisers and has published and lectured on the subject of identifying, valuing and restoring antiques.