

The Bachman Family of Cabinet-makers: 1766-1897

Samuel E. Dyke

It is known that three (3) brothers, John, Jacob and Henry and one (1) sister, Barbara Bachman, were persecuted in Loraine, came to this country in 1766 and settled in the vicinity of what is now known as Willow Street, Pequea Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Of these three (3) brothers, John Bachman I is of particular interest to us because he was the father of John Bachman II who is our first documented Bachman Cabinetmaker and the one who made the finest pieces of all the Bachman Cabinetmakers.

John Bachman I has been referred to as a Cabinetmaker but I cannot document that statement. His son, John II, born in 1746 in Switzerland, came to America with his father in 1766. At this time he would have been twenty (20) years old and, therefore, have learned a trade and no doubt from his father, John I.

John the II married Mary Rohrer and settled in West Willow Township soon after his arrival in 1766. He died in 1833 at the age of 87 years. His son was John III.

John III born June 20, 1775 married Esther Greider and moved to McCartney Corners, Pequea and set up his cabinet shop. He died on November 10, 1849 at the age of 74 years. This John Bachman III is the 2nd documented Cabinetmaker.

Jacob Bachman the I is the son of John III and was born September 24, 1798 and married Mary Kindig, February 12, 1822. He died July 4, 1869, age 71 years. He is buried in the old Mennonite Cemetery, Strasburg. This Jacob is the **Third** Bachman Cabinetmaker of documentation and, contrary to earlier thoughts, was not the Bachman who made the fine Early Bachman furniture that we are going to talk about later on this evening. Jacob Bachman worked as a cabinetmaker for 48 of his 71 years; a remarkable record.

Jacob I, had a son named Christian Bachman, born May 22, 1827 and who married Barbara Buchwalter in 1855. Christian died in 1901, age 74 years. Christian worked for his father until his marriage and then set up shop in Strasburg, Pennsylvania. He retired as a cabinetmaker at age 70. He worked as a cabinetmaker an estimated 54 years. Thus, Christian Bachman is the **Fourth** documented Bachman Cabinetmaker.

Finally, Christian's son, Ellis, born August 15, 1856 became the **Fifth** Bachman Cabinetmaker but about which little is known.

Therefore, from 1766, with the start of John Bachman II thru Ellis Bachman in 1917, we have had 151 years of Bachman Cabinetmakers in Lancaster County; truly a remarkable record for any one family of craftsmen. I doubt if this record will be matched by any single family of craftsmen in any period of our history.

So much for the genealogy of the Bachman Family of Cabinetmakers. Now, let us try and place some of these remaining examples of their work in the proper period of Bachman cabinetmaking history.

Admittedly, this is very difficult, if not nigh on to impossible, because no pieces of furniture, to my knowledge, have been found dated or signed.

Mr. Charles F. Montgomery of DuPont Winterthur Museum has for study the only ledgers of the Accounts of the Bachman cabinetmakers and no doubt will later publish some additional facts regarding the periods the various Bachmans worked in the trade. I doubt very much if any signed or dated pieces of their work will show up even though they may be listed in the account ledgers now under study.

From the genealogy of this group of five (5) Bachman Cabinetmakers, it would appear to me that they worked in four periods of time.

First Period — 1766 - 1825 59 years during which John the I and John the II worked.

Second Period — 1825 - 1869 44 years during which John the III and Jacob the I worked.

Third Period — 1869 - 1897 37 years during which Jacob the I and Christian Bachman worked.

Fourth Period — 1897 - 1917 20 years during which Ellis Bachman worked.

Certain assumptions were made in setting up these dates and periods. First, that apprentices having reached age 21 were eligible to "ply their trade" and, secondly, certain facts at time of their death referred to the number of years that they were cabinetmakers.

The only period of Bachman furniture that I feel confident that I can document by remaining examples of his work is the First Bachman Period.

First Period — 1766 - 1825 John Bachman II.

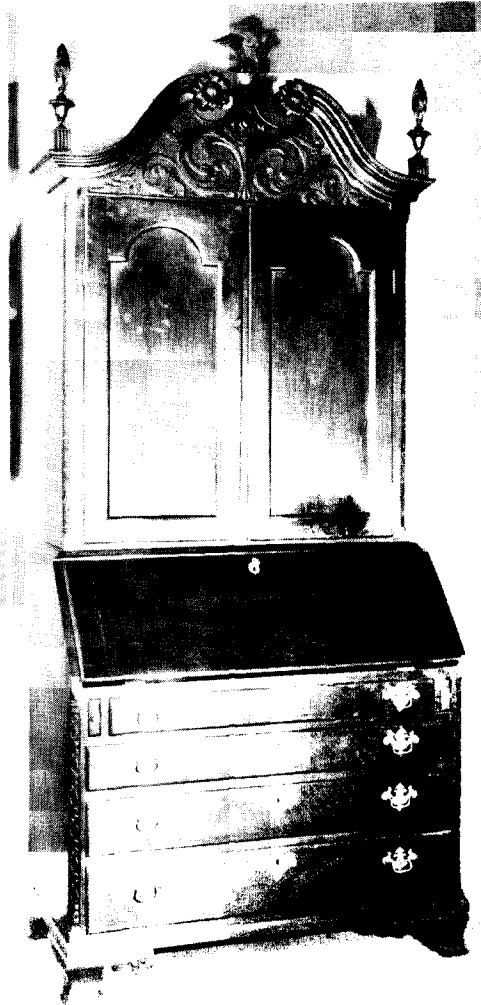
My experience with Bachman furniture started with the finding of a secretary desk in the attic and 2nd floor of a house on New Holland Avenue next to the Armstrong closure plant. This desk started me on a research trail that finally led me to Strasburg and the home of the present generation of Bachmans.

Thru the courtesy of this family, I was permitted to examine, among many things, the work bench that belonged to the early Bachman family of cabinetmakers, and also some of their remaining tools. In the hall of



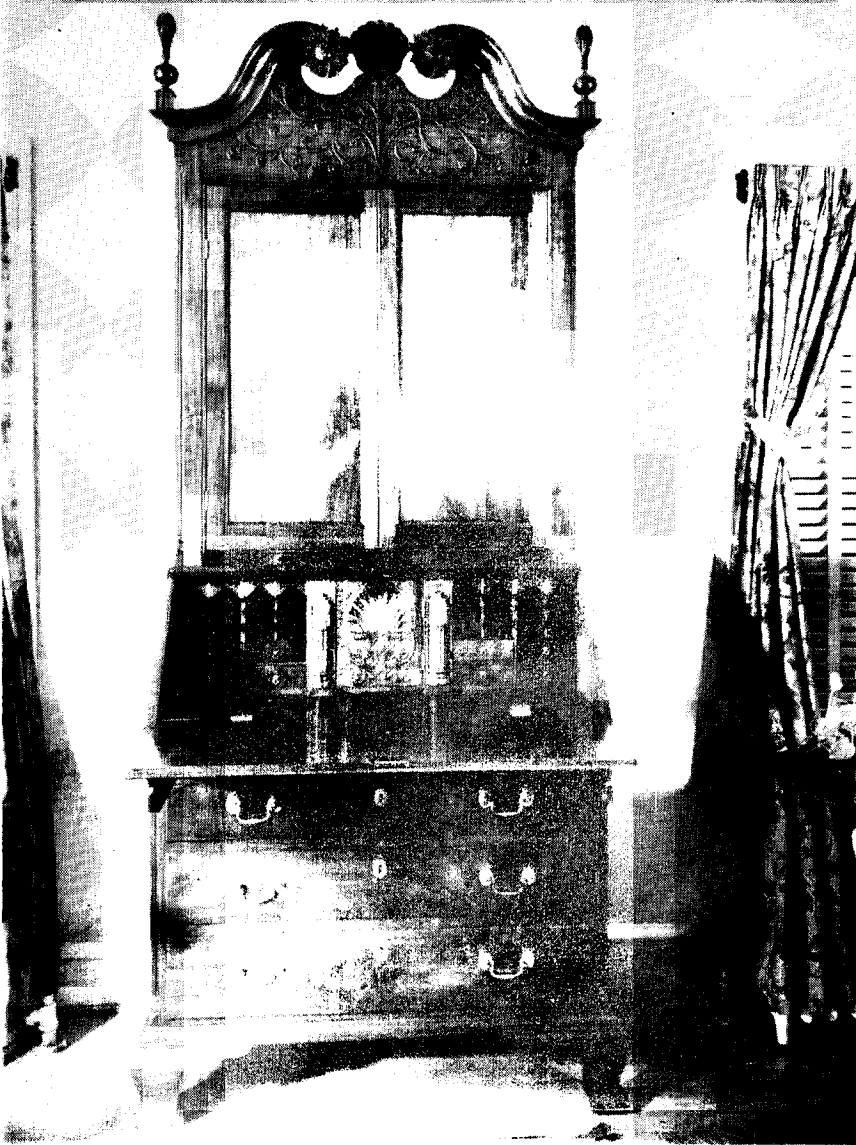
(left)

Picture of desk found on New Holland Avenue by the author, before restoration.



(right)

Dr. Hammer's desk showing similarity of rosettes, raised carving under broken arch, and acanthus leaf carving on quarter columns.



Desk found on New Holland Avenue by the author, after restoration.



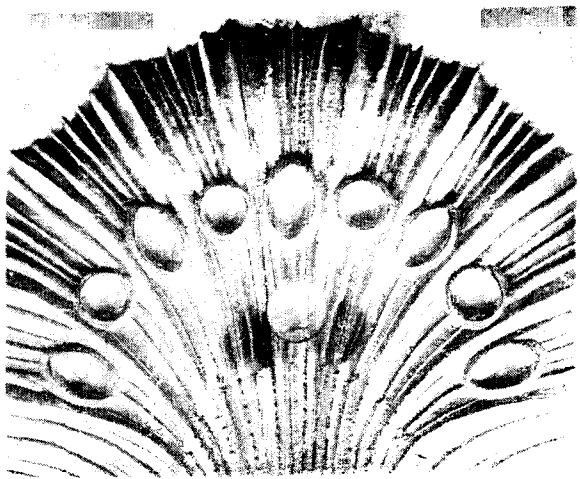
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Author's restored desk, interior and top half.

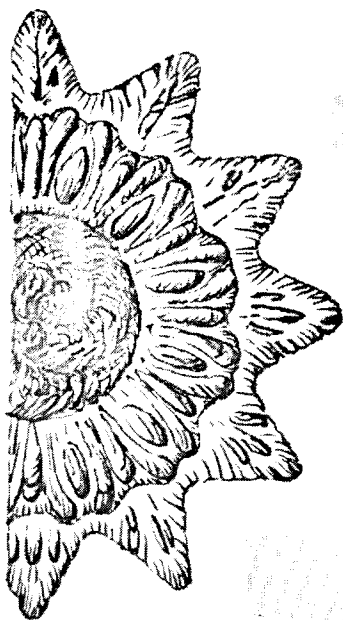
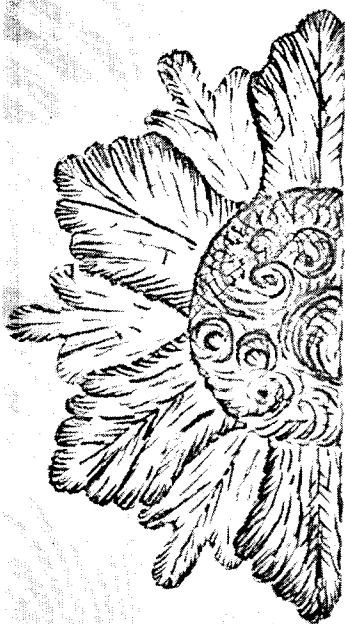
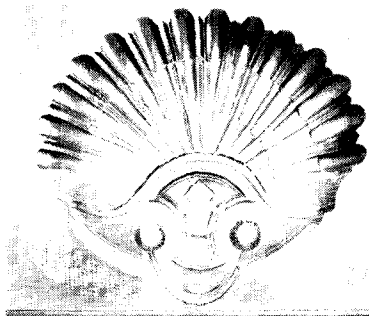
(below)

Bonnet top of same desk, showing rosettes, plume center carving, and acanthus leaf motif in raised carving.





(upper) Enlarged detail of unique oval-round embossed petals in flutings of shell. (right) New England type shell carving compared to that carved by John Bachman. (lower) Drawing of rosette showing Bachman acanthus leaf petals compared to those of the Philadelphia School. Note star-like terminals in Philadelphia School.



JOHN BACHMAN

PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL

the Bachman home stands a beautiful clock case fitted with Thomas Burrows clock works.

In the tool chest in the basement, there were some of Bachman's original molding planes; a tool used for shaping the heavy molding found on the arched scrolls of grandfathers clocks and secretary desks. I asked if I could match the profile of the cutting blades of the planes to profile of the finished moldings of the Bachman clock upstairs. Permission was granted and this matching is where my first proof of Bachman work came. The blades from the planes fitted the contour or profile of the curves or radii of the molding like a key fits the right lock. A perfect reproduction of molding profile on the clock to the blades. I excitedly rushed home, made a template or pattern of the profile of the molding of the broken arch of the desk I had found on New Holland Pike and returned to Strasburg to test the belief I had that they were both made by the same tools. The test proved that they were identical. I had found the first proof of who made my secretary desk and the clock in the hall at the Bachman home.

This fortunate break led me to compare other details found on these two pieces. The rosette on the broken arch pediments were very similar. Later studies of the carving on my desk to the carving of other desks, also, the scallops of the pigeon holes and the manner of the treatment of corner chamfers that gave me more assurances needed to call a piece of furniture made by Bachman.

So much for the proof of details of Bachman furniture, but now, which Bachman and in which period was the piece made? More research was necessary.

My desk from New Holland Pike was traced by sale notices in the Lancaster County Courthouse to the Leopard Hotel on East King Street where in 1810 it was sold at sheriff sale by Adam Riechard. It belonged to an early Sprecher Family according to the bill of sale of the inventory of goods sold. This information helped establish then, the ownership of the piece I had found on New Holland Pike further when compared to other pieces of the same period for style and details much documented the fact that it was made between 1770 - 1785.

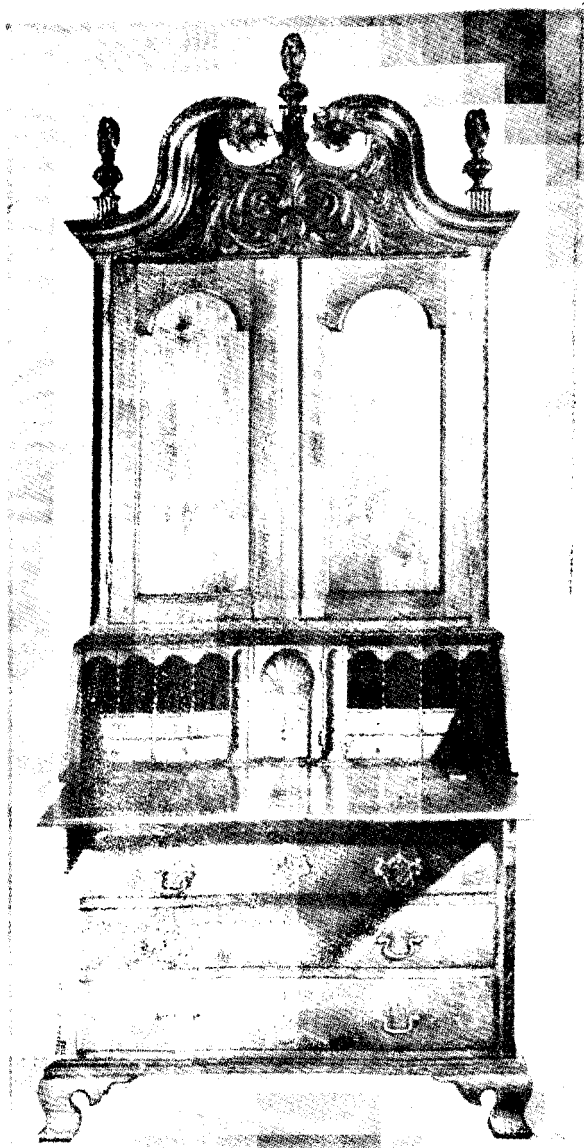
Actually, the only positive proof I have had that it was made by Bachman was the tell-tale evidence of the profile of the Bachman tool to the molding.

From the comparison of this desk to others I have examined, I have attributed to John Bachman the following pieces of furniture.

1. Dr. Hammer Secretary Desk.
2. Ginsburg & Levy Desk shown in Antiques Magazine 1945.
3. Boston Museum Tilt-Top Table.
4. The Interior of the Mair Desk.
5. The Grandfather clocks at Bachman's Home and the Herbert Weaver home.
6. Joe Kindig, Jr. Highboy.

That is the story of the discovery of John Bachman II period of American furniture. I cannot truthfully document the other Bachmans' work because I have not any clues as to how each Bachman's work differed from the other. Traditionally, usually father-son apprenticeships followed through in the same style of design but, in the later years, public demands for changes caused tradition in trades to yield to this demand of the trade.

Ginsberg and Levy,
Inc. Bachman desk
similar to Dr. Ham-
mer's desk. See page
170.



Jacob Bachman sold some Grandfather clocks under his name although he was a cabinetmaker only and made no pretense to making or assembling the works. His shop was located about a mile south of Soudersburg known later as Bachmansville. He made clock cases for both Joseph Bowman of Strasburg and Anthony W. Baldwin of Lampeter, both excellent clock makers.

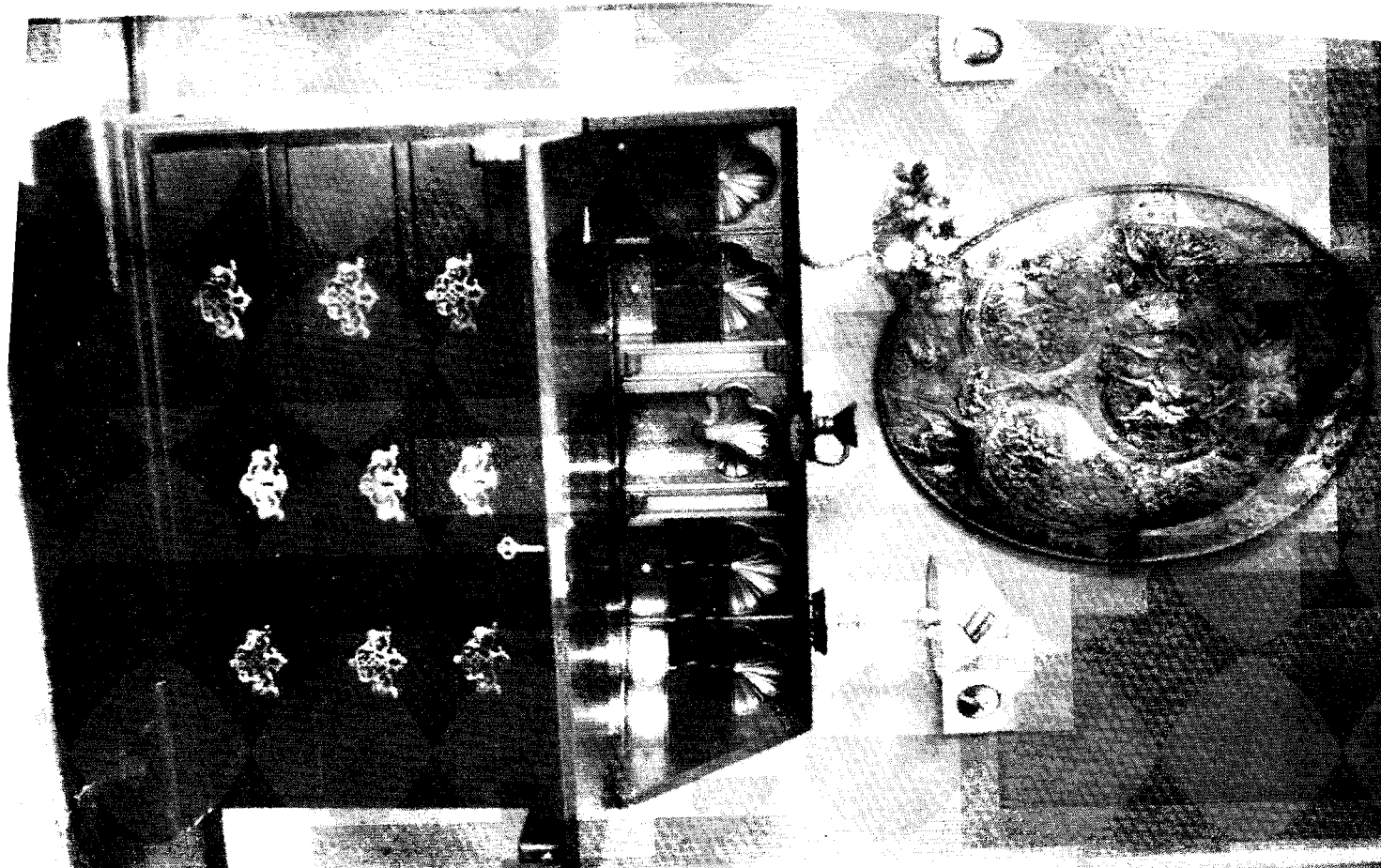
His custom was to make two cases for one set of clock works com

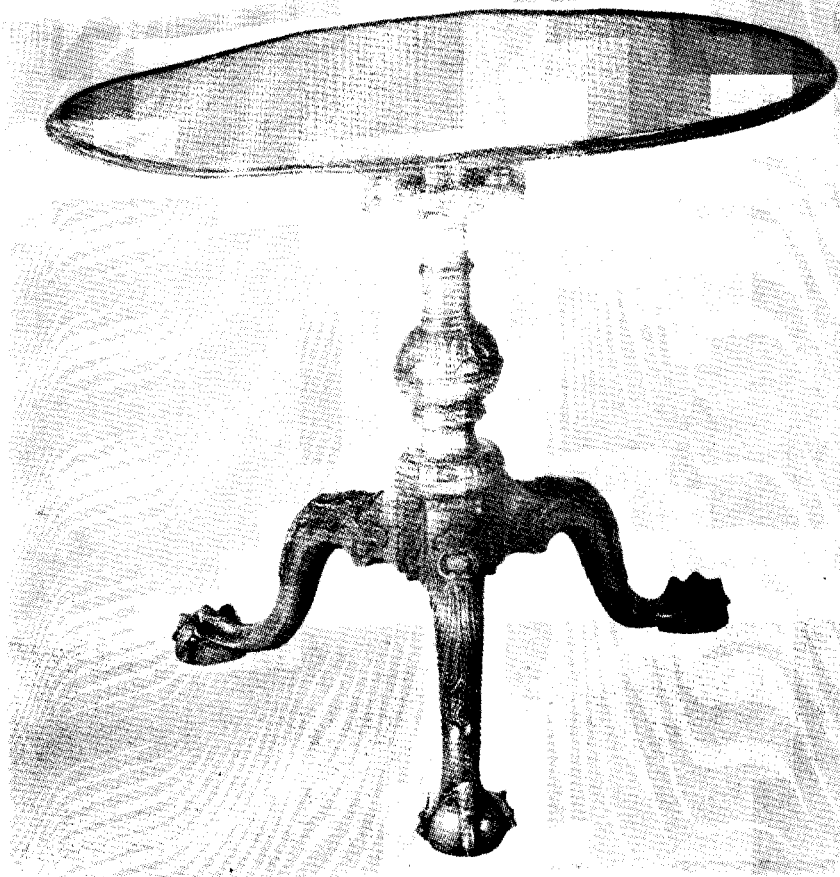


Interior cabinet of R. E. Mair's Bachman desk. Note similarity of acanthus leaf carving on document drawers to Dr. Hammer's quarter columns on lower and upper part of desk; similarity of shell carving to the Dyke desk; and similarity of curved front to the Dyke desk.

Enlarged detail showing Mair document drawer acanthus carving.







Bachman walnut tilt-top table in Karolik Collection, Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

pleted. He would make the third case and install the set of works he received from its maker and sell the complete assembly works and one case.

Most of the existing clock works made by Burrows or Baldwin that I have seen are mounted in Bachman cases.

I have given you the story of the Bachman Family of Cabinetmakers as I know them from my research. I am very indebted to the Bachman Family of Strasburg, Barbara Bachman of Lancaster, Mr. Herbert Weaver of Lancaster, Mrs. Carl Drepperd of Lancaster and Mr. and Mrs. R. E. Mair of West Chester for permitting me to examine their personal collections of furniture and documents.