

**DUMBARTON HOUSE**  
**“COLLECTIONS CONVERSATION”**  
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*The Philadelphia Sofa – Its Origins and Conservation*

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**INTRODUCTION – Slide 1**

This presentation focuses on the Philadelphia sofa in the library and its conservation. The sofa is very special to Dumbarton House because it belonged to the Nourse estate in Washington, DC, and may have even belonged to Joseph and Maria Nourse, the first residents of Dumbarton House.

The primary source material used to prepare this presentation came from the object file in the curator’s office at Dumbarton House, including photos, condition reports, conservation reports, treatment reports, appraisals and other secondary source material. Conservation of the sofa frame was carried out by East Point Conservation Studio in Brunswick, Maine, under the leadership of Jon Brandon. Re-upholstery and upholstery conservation was handled by Elizabeth Lahikainen & Associates in Salem, Massachusetts. All facts, descriptions, and professional assessments (including the photos) related to the conservation and restoration of the sofa should be attributed to these two professionals. Furthermore, Dumbarton House had consulted period furniture experts Sumpter Priddy, Oscar Fitzgerald, William Weschler, Jr. and Otto Naeve for their assessment of the sofa – their observations and conclusions about style, form, date, and construction should also be credited throughout.

Where appropriate, other books and generally available references have been included at the end of each slide. These titles not only provided secondary source material for this presentation, but also serve as some excellent resources for additional information on the subject.

## **THE DUMBARTON HOUSE PHILADELPHIA SOFA – Slide 2**

### **Federal Period**

The form of the sofa is in the Chippendale style, with a serpentine or “camel-back” and boldly sloping arms. The primary wood is mahogany, and the secondary appear to be poplar and cedar. The three square molded front legs taper slightly at the base. The three back legs sweep backwards. The legs are joined in the front and center by H stretchers and across the back by two smaller stretchers that run between the rear legs. The slight tapering and the molding of the front legs are transitional elements indicating the emerging Federal style. Due to its style and construction, experts date this sofa to circa 1785, right at the emergence of the Federal style.

The Chippendale style became fashionable around 1755 until about 1790, when the end of the war with England again enabled imports of English goods in the newly popular classical style. The Chippendale style is characterized by use of ornament, shell shapes, sinuous, asymmetrical and pierced patterns. It’s analogous with the rococo style.

The Federal style, or the early classical revival, started to become popular after the Revolutionary War (ended 1783) and reached its height of popularity from about 1790 until about 1815, until it was replaced by the more archeological correct Empire style. Classical design in the United States was tied to the spirit of the New Republic, hence the name “Federal.” The style shows the characteristics delicate scale, straight lines, vibrant colors, smooth textures, classical proportions and classical ornamentation such as inlay, printed and painted decoration. In keeping with the trend for bright colors, recent paint analysis reveals people painted their walls deep tones of blue, green and red.

### **Philadelphia**

Specialists such as Sumpter Priddy and Oscar Fitzgerald examined the construction and details of this sofa and concluded that this form is typical of Philadelphia sofas of the period. The vigorous curves and boldly sloping arms were the height fashion in Philadelphia about 1785. The manner of construction is also consistent with productions from Philadelphia, that is, the back is attached to the frame by two screws through the arms and a screw through each of the three back legs. This makes it easy to remove to facilitate reupholstering. Although the seat cushion and pillows across the back are reproductions, which were added upon restoration, Oscar Fitzgerald notes that the sofa would have been fitted with a thinner seat cushion and big pillows across the back and at either end. The back pillows as they appear on the sofa now are too small.

### **Secondary sources consulted for this slide:**

Fitzgerald, Oscar P. *Four Centuries of American Furniture*. Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 1995.

Eversmann, Pauline K. *The Winterthur Guide to Recognizing Styles*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 2001.

### COMPARABLE EXAMPLES – Slide 3

Sofas were still being made in the Chippendale style in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and even 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Chippendale characteristics include the camel-back and the upholstered, scroll and sloping arms. As the style moved towards Federal, the thick upholstered ends were made thinner and the legs started to become tapered, sometimes ending in spade feet – the lines were generally lighter as in all Federal period furniture. For façades and crestings, Hepplewhite and other designers of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century relied upon the bold serpentine line for novelty. You can see these transitional characteristics in the Dumbarton House sofa.

Some other Federal period sofas (particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but not pictured here) had straight or square backs or a low, smoothly arched back, called “cabriole” – as well, many had partially upholstered carved wooden arms (with the front of the arm showing exposed wood) or totally un-upholstered carved wooden arms.

**Bottom left** – This sofa is more Chippendale in style. It would be Chippendale alone if it wasn’t for the tapering legs. Charles Montgomery, who examined this sofa, notes that the outline, shape and mass of the seat back and arms are bulkier. The vigor and size of the rolled arms and the thickness of the nicely finished stretchers are typical of Philadelphia Chippendale sofas – however, Montgomery attributes it to New England because the type of wood on the rails (birch) that is most often found on Massachusetts seating furniture.

**Top Left** – In the overall evolution of form and supports, this sofa is making steps away from the Chippendale style towards the Federal style. This sofa, compared with the previous example, reveals much thinner arms, a peaked camel-back, more dramatically tapered front legs that end in spade feet. This sofa is quite large in scale, which likely explains the substantive legs. The rear legs splay backward to give stability and to compensate for the raked back. At the time of the book’s writing, the author had no similar examples to compare to, so used the type of wood and character of the legs and feet to determine its Philadelphia origin.

The similarities to the Dumbarton House sofa are striking, except for the spade feet. As mentioned previously, the Dumbarton House sofa has tapered legs, the back legs are raked back, and the sofa has stretchers like this.

**Rutgers family sofa** – This is another example of a transitional piece, like the Dumbarton House sofa. This sofa was probably made in New York due to its provenance of belonging to the Rutgers family and its similarity to another sofa belonging to the Van Duesens, a prominent New York family. The sofa has a broad serpentine profile and bold outflaring arms with dramatic slope of the arm rests – more so than our sofa. Another feature is the eight legs, of which four in front taper to spade feet – which nods towards the Federal style.

#### Sources consulted for this slide:

Montgomery, Charles F. *American Furniture: The Federal Period in the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1978.

Sotheby’s New York. *Highly Important Americana from the Stanley Paul Sax Collection*. Auction catalogue. January 16-17, 1998.

## **COPLEY PORTRAITS – Slide 4**

These two portraits, by the American painter John Singleton Copley (1738-1815), are excellent to see the nail pattern up close and how a sofa like the Dumbarton House sofa would have been used – including the fabric and pillows. These portraits date a little earlier than our sofa, but they still yield relevant information.

Copley came to New York for six to seven months in June 1771, at the invitation of one of his patrons, Captain Stephen Kemble. While in New York, Copley painted these portraits, the one on the right of Captain Kemble's daughter – Mrs. Thomas Gage (1771). Mrs. Gage was the American-born wife of the commander in chief of the British forces in America. She is dressed in Turkish-style dress, which indicated her awareness of the London fashion for sitting for portraits in fancy dress costume.

The painting on the left (Portrait of a Lady, 1771) is probably Miss Anne Johnston, before she became the wife of a Captain in the British Army. Her identity is based on analysis of a variety of elements – such as provenance, Captain Kremble's records, and war office records. One reason this portrait was dated to 1771 (there are a few reasons) is because the lady sits on a sofa of the same form and style, but obviously different fabric, as Mrs. Gage.

Although the setting of the portrait is simple, the large camel-back sofa upholstered in plum damask indicates a prominent note of luxury and ostentation. Upholstered sofas were very expensive and rare in the American colonies. But this sofa didn't necessarily belong to this lady as many of Copley's sitters share the same background or dress. The shape of the sofa and the pattern of the nailing are the same in both portraits.

A distinctive feature of this portrait is the evidence it provides as to the use of cushions on American sofas. The lady is reclining upon both a "box-edge" cushion and a "knife-edge" cushion. The box cushion may have been either a seat cushion or (more likely) a back cushion. The knife cushion may have been one of the pillows placed at each end. Thomas Chippendale, in the third edition of the *Gentlemen and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (1762), advised that sofas "have a bolster and pillow at each end and cushions at the back, which may be laid down occasionally."

### **Secondary sources consulted for this slide:**

Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Collections Online. *John Singleton Copley, Portrait of a Lady (1771)*. "Artwork in Focus." Available at (as of June 22, 2009): <http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=focus;id=60337;type=101>.

Timken Museum of Art, San Diego. American Art. *John Singleton Copley, Mrs. Thomas Gage (1771)*. Available at (as of June 22, 2009): <http://www.timkenmuseum.org/1-american-copley.html>.

## **DONOR AND PROVENANCE – Slides 5 & 6**

In 1997, the sofa was gifted to Dumbarton House by Sylvia Meyer Gasch, a talented harpist with the National Symphony Orchestra. The sofa was in excellent condition considering its age. It was covered in a slip cover, which was removed to reveal a rose wollen pile fabric.

Sylvia Meyer grew up in Washington, D.C. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, her parents rented what she called “Highlands Manor” from the Nourse estate. When she gifted the sofa, Mrs. Gasch reported to Dumbarton House staff (in letters and conversations) that sometime during the period when they were renting, her parents purchased the sofa from the estate of the Highlands. The property was sold to the Graysons in 1920, so the sofa was purchased by the Meyers prior to this time. The donor also reported that the sofa was in the inventory of furnishings at the Highlands.

### **Highlands – Charles and Rebecca Nourse**

“The Highlands” was originally the home of Charles and Rebecca Morris Nourse. Charles was the son of Joseph and Maria Nourse – the first residents of Dumbarton House who lived here from 1803-1814 (then called “Cedar Hill”). Charles’ wife, Rebecca Wistar Morris, was the daughter of Anthony Morris, a Philadelphia Quaker and statesman. The couple married in 1816, and after travelling to various military posts, in 1827, when Charles retired from the military, the couple settled on property that was given to them by Charles’ father Joseph. The property was on Joseph’s plantation on Mount St. Alban – the area of Washington, D.C. on Wisconsin Avenue where Sidwell Friends School is now located. Charles and Rebecca built a stone house and named it “the Highlands” after Rebecca’s childhood home near Philadelphia.

This slide shows a watercolor painted by Rebecca Morris Nourse in the 1847, when the couple lived there. Charles and Rebecca had 11 or 12 children, two of which lived at the Highlands until 1912. It was in 1912, when they began renting the house to the Meyers. The Highlands still stands and is now an administration building at the school called Zartman House. The slide on the right shows an historic photo of the parlor at the Highlands (c. 1880) – furniture is clearly seen here, some of which has made it to the collection of Dumbarton House, but unfortunately the sofa is not pictured.

### **Joseph and Maria Nourse**

Although we have not been able to locate any documentary evidence, such as house inventories, or a record of purchase in account books or ledgers, there is a chance that this sofa belonged to Joseph and Maria Nourse, and that they used it while they were living here at Dumbarton House.

As discussed earlier, the sofa originated in Philadelphia around 1785, when Joseph and Maria were living there. Joseph began living in Philadelphia in 1778 to work as an agent in his father’s mercantile business, and then started working as Register of the Treasury under the Confederation Congress in 1781. His position was then confirmed in 1789 under the new constitutional government and George Washington. Nourse held this position until 1829 when Andrew Jackson became president.

Joseph married Maria Bull in 1784 at her family estate in Virginia (although the couple probably met in Philadelphia). Right after marriage, the couple settled in Philadelphia in a small home on

South Street. Joseph recorded in his journal with great detail the furnishings he purchased in preparation for his new married home. He patronized certain Philadelphia cabinet makers and also purchased some imported English pieces. Purchases included (among other things) side chairs, dining chairs, a dining table, Windsor chairs, a breakfast table, arm chairs, a bedstead and two card tables – however, there is no mention of a sofa. Joseph and Maria moved to New York in 1785 then back to Philadelphia in 1790 as the seat of government shifted. Joseph recorded some purchases of furniture in New York, but again, no sofa – and particularly it would not make sense as the Dumbarton House sofa was made in Philadelphia.

### **Nourse Provenance – At least two potential origins**

As the sofa was purchased from the Nourse estate, there are mainly two possible scenarios concerning the provenance of the sofa:

As I mentioned, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that Joseph and Maria purchased the sofa there after their marriage (and Joseph never recorded it in his journal) or even more likely that they received it from a family member as a wedding gift. Sofas were extremely expensive and we know from archival papers that Joseph was a frugal man – so it more likely was a gift to honor the special occasion. The location and date of the sofa are obviously correct and we know Joseph kept his furniture for many years – at least for his lifetime and mostly in the family beyond, as was the custom those days.

Another potential option would be that it belonged to Anthony Morris – the father of Rebecca (Charles' wife) and he gave it to his daughter. Anthony Morris stayed most winters with Rebecca after 1817 when he returned from diplomatic duties in Spain. A National Society member, Laura Belman, has done significant research with the Nourse and Morris papers, correspondence and archives. As of 2004, she did not come across any records regarding the purchase or ownership of a sofa. Mrs. Belman tried to discover if there is any information about a sofa like this having been at the Philadelphia Highlands (the Morris family home), but it appears there is not. Morris was forced to sell the Highlands in 1808 due to financial hardship. Another option is that if Anthony Morris purchased or received the sofa as a gift, he may have given it to his daughter at some point – and then it would have made its way to her residence at the Highlands here in Washington.

So in conclusion, the sofa is certainly a Nourse family sofa because it was purchased by the donor's parents from the Nourse estate, where Charles and Rebecca resided. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure that if it belonged to Joseph and Maria Nourse and if they used it at Dumbarton House.

### **Secondary sources consulted for these slides:**

Dumbarton House, Headquarters of the National Society of the Colonial Dames. *In Search of Joseph Nourse, (1754-1841): America's First Civil Servant*. Exh. cat. October 18, 1994 – May 27, 1995

Zug, James. *The Long Conversation: 125 Years of Sidwell Friends School, 1883-2008*. Washington, DC: Sidwell Friends School, 2008.

## CONSERVATION – Slide 7

In 2004 through 2006, conservation of the sofa took place. The sofa frame was conserved by East Point Conservation Studio in Brunswick, Maine, under the direction of Jon Brandon, who also made the reproduction green Windsor chairs in the lower passage of the museum. The technical analysis and re-upholstering of the sofa was done by Betsy Lahikainen of Salem, Massachusetts. The forthcoming explanation of the condition, description and other technical details of the sofa's construction and upholstery was derived from the curatorial file here at Dumbarton House and should be attributed to reports done by East Point and Betsy Lahikainen. Additional condition details were derived from a condition report provided by Sumpter Priddy and an appraisal by William P. Weschler, Jr.

**Condition (Textile and Springs)** – The sofa as it was received was, in general, very good condition. The “before” photo reveals the red wool upholstery fabric. Ms. Lahikainen noted that the textiles were in fair condition, but the presentation was inaccurate –both in fabric appropriateness and profile. Seen in this photo, the seat springs were falling out of the bottom. These seat springs are a result of a later re-upholstery, as it was not until the mid 1840s that coiled wire springs were generally used in comfortable seating furniture.

Although there was no documentation of this in the object files, the original support of the sofa was likely created out of some sort of woven linen or jute material.

Ms. Lahikainen also noted the profile of the arms was compressed from use and required some reshaping – it was clear this piece had been reupholstered a few times. Sumpter Priddy examined the sofa before de-upholstery and determined it was probably reupholstered about three times. After the sofa was examined and proper notes were made, the upholstery was removed and modern upholstery materials, comprised of jute (a natural plant fiber), were removed as well.

## **CONDITION OF FRAME – Slide 8**

When the sofa arrived at East Point Conservation Studio, most of the upholstery had been removed. The padding and scrim on the arms was still in good condition so it was left in place. Scrim is the reinforcement woven material that holds the padding in place. The conservators examined the frame thoroughly in both normal and ultraviolet light and could not find a maker's mark.

East Point reported that the frame was pretty unstable without its upholstery and racked from side-to-side. However, the original frame of the sofa was considerably intact. The seat rails remained in fair condition– all six legs with their original height (although one rear leg appears to have been reattached) – all but one of the original stretchers intact – and possibly the original finish on the legs and stretchers. The curved medial seat brace was present (seen here in the middle running from front to back), but two other front-to-back seat braces were lost. They were presumably removed to allow springing of the seat at some point.

Aside from this, the frame was not altered to accommodate modern upholstery techniques and has been upholstered in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century manner, with the back done separately and set into place. In the left hand photo, it can be seen that the back frame was removed for this picture. The only restoration is of the medial stretcher, which is an old replacement.

## **DAMAGE TO FRAME – Slide 9**

**Two top photos** – As can be seen in this photo, there was significant damage to the frame due to repeated nailing from various applications of brass tacks. The wood was splitting in certain areas and it was left unstable because of all the holes. The wood profile on the ears of the sofa back was also damaged by nails.

**Bottom Photo** – Several pieces of wood had been added to the frame during previous upholstery and/or repair efforts, including pine strips nailed to the front of the seat rail, new corner blocks nailed at all four corners of the frame, and several small blocks of wood nailed to the arm structure where it joins the side seat rails. The new wood added inappropriate height to the front seat rail, raising the seat up too high. The other bits of wood (called scabs) were presumably added to aid past upholstery efforts and are also inappropriate.

## **NAIL HOLES AND NAIL HOLE PATTERN – Slide 10**

During the Federal period, two methods of decorative tacking were generally followed – either a double row or a single row of festoons (usually around a seat rail on a chair). Here you can see the photograph on the left shows the original nail holes in the original pattern. It also includes an 18<sup>th</sup> century shank that was left in the wood, which is visible in the center of the photo. A shank is like a metal screw. When compared to the modern nail holes on the right, the historic nails left a square shape in the wood, while the modern nails left clean, round holes. Nails made by machine are a more perfect and fine round shape.

East Point noted that there are a number of splits in the wood, which indicate that some of the holes were made later in the sofa's life after the wood was dry. This was likely due to some previous re-upholstery endeavor or repair at a later, but still historic, date.

At the top of this slide, there is a nail pattern study that was prepared by Ms. Lahikainen, the historic upholsterer. She examined the pattern of the holes from the historic tacks – and determined they were originally in the double row formation. This decorative pattern is consistent with the style of the time (e.g., see the Copley portrait). This plan was used to model the nail pattern that appears on the restored sofa.

## **FINISHING FABRIC – Slide 11**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, worsted materials which had smoother and more durable fibers were used for bed curtains and upholstery. These fabrics were known as embossed chamlet, cheney, harateen, moreen and grogrinett. From merchants' patterns books show fabrics that were bright colors such as red, indigo blue, dark green, and strong yellow or gold. The strong yellow-gold is the choice for the Dumbarton House sofa. But this is not to say that embroidered fabrics or silk damask wasn't used also by the wealthy, for example furniture owned by John Cadwalader. Historically in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, narrow worsted ribbon or tape that matched the upholstery was usually placed beneath the tacks to prevent tearing of the fabric and to hold it and any loose strands in place. Brass tacks were used to adorn the upholstered pieces.

The Dumbarton House sofa was re-upholstered with reproduction, hand-woven, yellow wool moreen fabric with applied moiré pattern. Moreen is a sturdy ribbed fabric of wool or cotton or a blend, sometimes with an embossed finish. Moiré is a sort of wavy pattern or texture created by varying the tension in the weaving process. This material and color choice was no accident – in fact, two small remnants of the original fabric – only about 1/4 to 3/8 inch – were stuck under the historic tacks on the frame. The color of the fabric was degraded somewhat from age and corrosion of the tacks, but the conservators could still see it was a yellow wool in a satin weave. It is not uncommon to find small bits of past upholstery fabrics when upholstered pieces are conserved or reupholstered.

This yellow wool moreen was custom made to reproduce the original fabric. The photograph shows the roll of fabric and with the wavy pattern. The letter was pulled from the object file and is an example of one document that shows the involvement of Dumbarton House throughout each step of the conservation and restoration process.

### **Secondary sources consulted for this slide:**

Montgomery, Florence M. *Textiles in America, 1650-1870*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007 (first published in 1984).\*\*

\*\* Consulted throughout the presentation for general information on period upholstery style, materials and techniques. See also slides 7, 10, 13 and 14.

## **AFTER TREATMENT OF THE FRAME – Slide 12**

The conservation of the frame was an extremely detailed and technical process, which is chronicled in the conservator's reports. In the interest of time, we'll avoid discussion of the minute details. However, it should be noted that the entire frame was practically taken apart, cleaned, put back together, reinforced, and refinished. This was done in the most respectful way and without changing the original construction of the sofa or the quality of the wood.

Here in these photos you can see some of the repairs that were made to the frame. The repairs are specifically made so that they are obvious repairs – this honest treatment of the object prevents future generations from being confused or deceived as to which parts were original and which parts were repaired on this sofa.

**Left photo** – Here the sofa is sitting straight up. The plywood deck that has been installed to support the new upholstery foundation is visible. The plywood deck is covered with ethafoam (a polyethaline foam material). The deck is Baltic birch plywood and is attached to the new seat braces using stainless steel wood screws (clearly modern and durable materials).

**Right photo** – It can be seen on the underside that two new seat braces were installed to compensate for the two lost braces. They are made of maple wood and are constructed straight, rather than curved – which is better to support the deck. The wood scabs were removed, but the replaced corner blocks were left alone. The split wood damaged by nails was also reinforced by clamping with hot hide glue. Hide glue is an organic glue and is extremely similar to the hide glue that was used originally. The white things you see are small ethafoam blocks and strips that were added to compensate for wood that was previously removed, raising the sofa back to the correct height, and to provide a surface for the new upholstery to be attached.

**Bottom photo** – Shows where the lost wood profile on the ears was recreated using an epoxy filler that is adhered to the frame using hide glue. Again, the repair of the ear is quite obvious.

## **LOW INTERVENTION SUPPORT – Slide 13**

The last photograph shows the re-upholstery before the finish fabric was applied. The approach taken to this was a “low intervention” or “minimally intrusive” method – in which historic materials are preserved as much as possible (so further deterioration is staved off) – all historic evidence is investigated and documented – and the object is interpreted and restored to its original and historically correct presentation. Furthermore, all conservation and restoration efforts, ideally, should be reversible. Although this might not be practical for regular furniture, this is certainly the best approach for a museum piece. An upholsterer (and conservator for that matter) must have knowledge of historical techniques and materials, and must be able to examine and interpret the frame thoroughly, as well as take copious notes as she goes along.

Since the springs were obviously not original, they were removed as you can see and it was determined that an ethafoam and plywood deck – was the best preservation method. Modern materials will not break down or decompose in any way that might result in damage to the original sofa, which is one reason why they are chosen over historic materials. The arms, which retained some of the original stuffing, were preserved in place and refurbished with additional traditional materials with a barrier in between. The conservator’s and upholsterer’s reports did not reveal what the original stuffing was made from. However, materials historically used for padding and stuffing included horse hair, Spanish moss, straw, chaff (husks separated from grains) or wool. Feathers were usually reserved for pillows or feather beds.

When re-upholstery is attempted, it is best to try to preserve any evidence of prior upholstery schemes, which was done here. In fact, the decorative brass tacks were not nailed directly into the frame. This obviously would cause additional damage to the wood. In this case, a plastic stencil (or pattern) was created, that fit exactly on the outside of the frame. The plastic pattern was covered in the yellow finishing fabric, the brass tacks were hand-applied to that, then the pattern was attached to the sofa at only a very few points. This process was employed throughout the entire sofa so that points of contact with fasteners (nails) was as minimal as possible.

### **Secondary sources consulted for this slide:**

Williams, Don, and Louisa Jagger. *Saving Stuff: How to Care for and Preserve Your Collectibles, Heirlooms, and Other Prized Possessions*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

American Conservation Consortium. <http://www.conservator.com/>

## **TRIMMINGS AND THE FINAL PRODUCT – Slide 14**

Finally, the end result of the restored Dumbarton House sofa is pictured together with the “before” image. At this point, some notes on the finishing should be briefly mentioned.

**Pillows** – Best efforts were made to restore the sofa to its original appearance. The mattress insert is obviously a reproduction. Tufting was sometimes, but not always used, to hold the padding in place. Ms. Lahikainen decided that three seat back cushions looked better than four, and added tufts to the mattress and pillows to keep them down. This treatment is historically appropriate. The seat cushion ended up a little higher than she had anticipated. She decided against bolsters due to the low arms and this higher seat cushion. Welting was often used in the eighteenth-century, as it is sometimes now, to define the crisp lines of a sofa, or wing chair. Welting is a covered cord of fabric can trace the rim of a pillow (as in this case) and/or edges of upholstered pieces. The material of the stuffing for the reproduction pillows was not identified in the object file, however, it is certainly a modern material that will not decompose in any way. As mentioned earlier, the back pillows should be a little larger to compensate for the depth of the seat.

In conclusion, this yellow Federal period Philadelphia sofa is certainly a beautiful and rare piece. It has now been carefully conserved and restored as close to its original appearance as possible. It is one of the most lovely items in the Dumbarton House collection – and of course, it is especially important as it belonged to the Nourse family.