

William Seay's Masonic Iconography

A Research Note

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In our book, *WH Cabinetmaker, A Southern Mystery Solved*, pages 215-229, we presented and discussed a group of pieces that William Seay created for his Masonic patrons. Recently, our colleague, Peyton Collie, provided an in-depth discussion of Masonic symbolism used by Southern cabinetmakers in his article on this website, *That's Odd! Masonic Influence on Southern Furniture*. His article prompted us to think about some additional decorations that Seay used on his Masonic pieces.

One piece, that we included in our book (Fig. 346) and that Peyton included in his article (Fig. 7), was first published in 1931 by Paul H. Burroughs in his book, *Southern Furniture*. This Seay press from Burroughs (Fig. 1) has two unusual urns or chalices with stylized faces flanking a central, recognizable, Masonic eagle on its tympanum.

What, if anything, do these urns with faces represent?



Figure 1

Figure 2

This image shows two columns with the sun over one and the moon over the other. Other Masonic images show the two columns, each supporting a globe with the sun and moon above.

We suggest the urns and faces on the Seay press are, indeed, covert Masonic symbols. The urns represent the columns, and the faces represent the sun and the moon. What we believe we are seeing is a slick, neoclassical shortcut to doing actual Masonic columns supporting sun and moon faces. This approach would not be lost on fellow Masons, but it would keep uninformed non-Masons from actually seeing too much Masonic iconography.

What do you think?

Photo Credits

Figure 1 is from *Southern Antiques* by Paul H. Burroughs.

Bibliography

Burroughs, Paul H., *Southern Antiques*. Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1931.

Collie, P. E., *That's Odd! Masonic Influence on Southern Furniture*. Edenton, NC: www.ehcnc.org , 2018

Newbern, Thomas R.J. and James R. Melchor, *WH Cabinetmaker, A Southern Mystery Solved*. Benton, KY: Legacy Ink Publishing, 2009.