

Gouges, Craftsmen, and The Cupola House Finial

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Editor's note: For an enlarged view of figures, simply zoom in on your computer.

In writing *The Cupola House Carver*, certain details of carving technique and carving tools were discussed to tell the story of the tools used to create Francis Corbin's set of eight mahogany dining room armchairs, the carving found on the interior and the exterior of the Cupola House, and the carving found on the piecrust, ball-and-claw, round tea table previously attributed to the Edenton furniture group displaying indented, blade-like rear talons. In an effort to make the book more readable for the general public, a more in-depth discussion of certain aspects of carving and carving tools was held for a later time. This website offers a good forum for those additional discussions.

Three additional topics will be addressed in this article. One will address which modern carving tools chosen to replicate the tools used by Samuel Black to create the set of furniture, including the eight mahogany armchairs, for Francis Corbin's dining room in the Cupola House, were needed to create the finial that was originally set in the house's front gable? A second inquiry will be, other than Peter Britt and Thomas Clarkson, who were addressed in *The Cupola House Carver*, were there other potential carvers who worked, and were therefore either

trained or influenced by Samuel Black, in his cabinet shop? Lastly, with all the various exactly sized gouges available today with slightly different sweeps and widths, are there other modern examples that could have been chosen to replicate the nine tools that have been determined, based on carefully created templates replicating the form and carving from one of the four remaining original armchairs, to have been used by Black to create the armchairs, the piecrust, ball-and-claw, round tea table, and, with the addition of one wider gouge, the Cupola House carving?

As previously discussed in *The Cupola House Carver*, this journey began when it became obvious that in replicating an armchair based on the templates created from one of the four original armchairs, the modern equivalent gouges were being used again and again on different elements of the chair, until it was determined that only nine gouges, plus a veiner and a v-parting tool, were being used to create all the elements of the replicated armchair.¹ With this discovery, and considering years of debate whether the same person who created the armchairs also created the carving on the Cupola House, it was suggested to see if the nine modern equivalent gouges chosen to replicate the armchair related in any way to the original carving on the Cupola House (Fig. 1). With the addition of only one wider gouge, the nine gouges chosen to create the armchair were the same gouges that would replicate all the carving on the Cupola House. What are the odds?



Figure 1. *The Cupola House.*

Next, having already determined the close relationship between the piecrust, ball-and-claw, round tea table and the indented, blade-like rear

talon Edenton furniture group, a comparison of the nine modern gouges chosen to replicate the armchair to the carving on the piecrust, round tea table was the next logical step. The fact that only three of the nine modern gouges would be needed to replicate all the carved elements of the tea table was a bit of a surprise. However, like the modern gouges needed to replicate the carving on the Cupola House, what are the odds, considering how many possible gouges with various sweeps and widths existed in the 18th century, that three of the modern equivalent gouges needed to recreate the armchair would be the tools needed to replicate the carving on the related tea table?

The final question first. Are there other modern examples of gouges with similar sweeps and widths to the modern equivalents chosen to replicate the armchair carving? The answer to this question is probably yes, considering how many different gouges are produced today. There should be other combinations of sweep, or curvature of the end of the gouge, and width that would create the same curvature of the nine modern equivalent gouges chosen based on the templates to emulate the gouges used by Samuel Black to create Francis Corbin's dining room set of eight mahogany armchairs. However, if these gouges differed in width from the nine gouges chosen to replicate the armchairs, the sweep would also have to differ to match the curvature of the nine chosen modern equivalents. In other words, a different width for each of the nine chosen gouges, if the sweep remained constant, would necessarily create a different curvature of the gouge, and therefore not match the curvature of the nine modern equivalents. The nine gouges chosen to

replicate the armchairs were the ones that best matched the sweep, or curvature, of the carved elements found on the templates created from one of the four original surviving Corbin dining room armchairs. The width of certain elements of the carving found on the templates determined the width of the modern equivalents chosen from those with the correct sweep, or curvature. This combination of sweep, or curvature, plus width, determined the modern equivalents chosen to emulate the tools used by Black to create the armchairs for Mr. Corbin's dining room (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. *Armchair for Francis Corbin's dining room by Samuel Black. Courtesy of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.*

The specificity with which the nine modern gouges were chosen to replicate the carving on the armchair based on the templates is best demonstrated by considering two of the nine chosen gouges. Gouge #710mm was needed to replicate the setting-in and shaping of the flowers on the armchair's splat (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. *Splat of Fig. 2.*

Gouge #7-10mm also replicated original elements on the armchair's arms, crest rail, and knees. It did not, however, replicate the centers of the flowers on the armchair's splat. Gouge # 8-10mm was needed to replicate the centers of the flowers, based on the templates. These two gouges are the same width, 10mm. However, the slight difference in sweep, or curvature, from a # 7 to a # 8, determined which 10mm gouge replicated the flowers' petals and which 10mm gouge replicated the flowers' centers (Fig. 4). Gouge #8-10 also replicated original elements found on the armchair's arms and feet.



Figure 4. *Gouges #7-10mm and #8-10mm and the set-in impressions that each create.*

As stated earlier, during the process of replicating the carving of the armchairs, it became apparent that the nine chosen modern equivalent gouges were being used again and again on various carved elements of the armchair. A carver of this period created his designs based on the tools that were available to him and would not design a pattern for which he did not have the tools to implement. An example is one of the nine chosen modern equivalent gouges, gouge #5-12mm, served to replicate elements of the splat, the arms, the crest rail, the feet, and the knees of the armchair, based on the templates. This demonstrates that these elements on the original chair also would undoubtedly have been created with a single original tool.

This brought to mind observations made by noted carver and decorative arts scholar John Bivins, who observed that “All of the interior carving (of the Cupola House) shows the use of the same tool sweeps and techniques used on the exterior” and that “This degree of repetition of cuts with the same tools indicates that the carver’s tool kit seems to have been a limited one”.² This certainly matches what had been discovered of the limited tool selection needed to replicate the carving on the armchairs. Bivins also observed of the exterior Cupola House carving that “The work was all executed by the same carver” and that “the carver who executed the exterior decoration of the Cupola House also created all of the carving on both floors of the interior.”³

The nine modern equivalents chosen to replicate the carving found on the armchairs were selected based totally on the templates created from

one of the four remaining originals, with no thought at that time being given to the carving found on the Cupola House. After discovering the limited number of modern equivalents needed to replicate the carving on the armchairs, remembering Bivins' comments on the likewise limited tool kit employed by the individual craftsman who carved the interior and exterior of the Cupola House, and considering the decades long debate over whether the same carver was responsible for the carving found on the Cupola House as well as the carving and creation of the mahogany armchairs that have so long been convincingly attributed to an Edenton craftsman, it was decided to compare the modern equivalent gouges chosen to replicate the armchairs to the original carved elements found on the Cupola House itself.

When comparing the similarity of the carvings, it should be recognized that the house carving, being architectural in nature and meant to be viewed from a distance, was set-in more deeply with less detailed leaf carving than the carving found on the armchairs. The armchair carving displayed carving that was more shallow with more detailed leaf carving and was meant to be viewed from close proximity. For example, the carving on the finial was created to be viewed twenty-five feet in the air while the carving on the armchairs was created to be viewed from five feet on a level plain. This comparison of the modern gouges to the Cupola House carving led to the discovery that the same nine gouges chosen to replicate the armchairs would also replicate all the carving found on the interior and exterior of the Cupola House, with the addition of a single wider gouge listed as #7-14mm. Next, the nine modern

equivalent gouges were compared to the piecrust, ball-and-claw, round tea table that had already been linked to the Edenton carved group, and it was discovered that three of the nine equivalent gouges would execute all the carving on the tea table (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. *Piecrust, round tea table for Corbin's dining room by Black.*

The fact that the same small number of gouges would execute all this carving logically points to the repeated use of a single craftsman's limited tool kit, in this case Samuel Black's as discussed more fully in *The Cupola House Carver*.

While some people might prefer to examine this newly discovered evidence in a vacuum, for whatever reason, if the goal is to document the place of construction of these eight mahogany armchairs, this new and compelling evidence about the same few gouges being capable of executing the carving on the armchairs, the Cupola House, as well as the piecrust, round tea table, should be considered in the context of all other compelling evidence of the origin of these chairs. The information discovered about these gouges is simply one additional piece of evidence. Noted and respected decorative arts scholars, Ronald L. Hurst of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and Jonathan Prown of the Chipstone Foundation, in their seminal work, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830*, made a compelling case for Edenton being the place of origin and the place of construction of the mahogany armchairs in question. They also noted a possible Corbin connection. The evidence they put forward included: the rare reference to a set of "8 arm mahogany chairs", which was found in Francis Corbin's estate sale of 1767; the price the eight chairs, 8.15.00, which strongly implied they were splat-back examples rather than upholstered-back examples; the Roman numerals found on surviving examples, which ranged from II to VIII, suggesting they belonged to sets of armchairs (Hurst and Prown believed fragments of different upholstery materials and different secondary woods evidenced

they belonged to different sets of armchairs, which was discussed in *The Cupola House Carver*); and that one of the four surviving examples was owned by a late-eighteenth or early nineteenth-century Edenton resident, while another of the four had a history of ownership in adjacent Perquimans County.

Hurst and Prown also stated that furniture historian John Bivins had “convincingly attributed” these armchairs to Edenton based on their histories, the strong stylistic relationship of their carving, leg shape, apron shape, and overall design to other tables also originally owned in or near Edenton (See *The Cupola House Carver*, pages 28-30 for a discussion of the descent of these pieces). They also stated that Bivins noted that the splat pattern had not been observed on other American examples, and the armchairs’ stiles were round to oval in cross section and Baroque in profile. Bivins separately noted that “the front legs of all the chairs are oval in section just above the feet, which is unusual, for most cabriole-leg sections are round at this point.”⁴

If one did choose to ignore all the other evidence pointing convincingly to Edenton as the place of construction of these armchairs, the new discovery of the connection among the carving on the armchairs, the carving on the Cupola House, and the carving on the piecrust, round tea table is, even if considered alone, quite compelling. The only logical reason for the nine gouges selected to replicate the original mahogany armchairs being the tools, plus one additional wider gouge, which would replicate all the carving found on the Cupola House, and three of those

nine gouges being the gouges which would replicate all the carving on the related piecrust, round tea table, is that the same small set of tools was used on all three carvings, logically by the same artisan.

Let us now turn to the second inquiry concerning other potential carvers working in Black's cabinet shop. Peter Britt is first listed in Black's cabinet shop in Edenton in the 1765 Chowan County Tax List, although he could have worked for Black a year or two earlier. Therefore, he was present during the period when the later carved tables from Black's shop are believed to have been created. When Black moved to Bertie County, Britt also relocated to Bertie and is listed as a single-member household in the same Bertie County Tax List of 1767. All records of his activities in Bertie place him very close to Black's former West property, so Britt most likely continued to work in Black's cabinet shop. He appears to have remained in Bertie County and eventually worked independently as a cabinetmaker until his death in 1789. His activities as a carver are felt to be evidenced by the five lots of chisels and gouges listed in his estate inventory.

Thomas Clarkson also could have been involved in the creation of Black's later carved tables and was present in Black's household on the West property at least by 1769 when he was listed in the Bertie County Tax List for that year. He resided in Black's household at least until 1772 and probably longer. He was in Edenton, probably working in

Black's Edenton shop, by 1777. He married Black's daughter, Elizabeth, and died in 1786. The 12 chisels and gouges listed in his estate inventory point to his likely work as a carver.⁵

Other than Britt and Clarkson, were there other potential carvers working for Samuel Black in his cabinet shop? Again, the answer is probably yes. It is telling that so many craftsmen were drawn to bypass any other cabinet shops in Edenton and flock to Black's shop after he had relocated to the West property in southeastern Bertie County after his fortuitous October 10, 1765, marriage to the wealthy, thrice widowed, Elizabeth (Brice) Lee West Hardy, then Black. Black's skills as a cabinetmaker and carver were obviously well known throughout the region and he maintained as large a cabinet shop as is known in the region. Britt and Clarkson can be identified as carvers with some certainty because their inventories, taken after they had been active in their field up to their deaths, still exist and contain tools indicative of the carving profession. The survival of like records is not the case for most of the other numerous workmen in his cabinet shop over the years Black was active in Edenton, or while he was active in Bertie while still apparently maintaining an Edenton presence. Yet any of these craftsmen also could have been engaged as carvers in Black's shop. It is likely that apprentices, such as brothers Job and John Leary, would have been trained as cabinetmakers and also exposed to Black's skills as a carver.

The following chart lists non-relative males residing in Samuel Black's household as found in the Chowan County Tax List of 1765, Bertie

County Tax Lists from 1766 through 1772, and apprentice records. The 1770 listing for Black is missing. These men were undoubtedly journeymen and apprentice cabinetmakers working in Black's cabinet shop and illustrate the size of his shop during the years much of the carved furniture attributed to his shop would have been produced. Other individuals living off-premises also could have been employed by Black, but these listed individuals set the minimum number of craftsmen present in his shop for each of the listed years. During the Bertie years on the former West property, three to five male slaves other than Rutherford, who will be discussed later in this article, were also present and could have been involved in the trade. (See *The Cupola House Carver*, pages 39-40 and 47-55, for more information on these listed individuals.)

JOURNEYMEN AND APPRENTICES PRESENT IN SAMUEL BLACK'S CABINETSHOP, 1765-1772

1765	1766	1767	1768	1769	1771	1772
Peter Britt	William Nash	Robert Gall	Robert Gall	Robert Gall	Thomas Clarkson	Thomas Clarkson
Billy Nash	Robert Forguson	Richard Epsom	William Hal...	Thomas Clarkson	Joseph Rawlings	Samuel Dunscomb
Rutherford	Robert Tem	Robert Fearn	Job Leary	Job Leary	John Leary	
Job Leary	John Rodwell	Job Leary	Several Names	John Leary		
John Leary	Robert Gall		Obscured			
	Job Leary					
	Rutherford					

Black's arrival in Edenton in the late 1750s just as the Cupola House was being framed past the second floor and the growth of his trade after his work for Francis Corbin is not unlike the journey of fellow carver and cabinetmaker William Buckland. Buckland was drawn to the colonies to create interior carving and sets of furniture for George Mason's Gunston Hall.⁶ Although Buckland's indenture with Mason

documenting their relationship survives and any potential formal indenture between Black and Corbin appears to have been lost to time, it is not logical that Corbin would have engaged in the obviously detailed level of planning that is evident in the Cupola House without securing a craftsman who could implement that vision. Like Buckland, after his work for Corbin was completed, Black grew and developed his trade to become the most prominent cabinetmaker and carver in Edenton and the surrounding region.

One other craftsman needs to be examined more closely as a potential carver trained in Black's shop. In *The Cupola House Carver*, an individual named Rutherford, an enslaved person, was noted as being present in the cabinet shop Black created and grew after his initial work for Corbin. New research has identified Rutherford as being the property of none other than Jean Innes Corbin, the wife of Francis Corbin. Rutherford is found in the Chowan County Tax List of 1765 in Black's growing Edenton cabinet shop along with the two white journeymen, including carver Peter Britt. In all likelihood, Rutherford was named for Jean Corbin's close friend John Rutherford of New Hanover County. John Rutherford's children received substantial lands, slaves, and property in Jean's will dated February 10, 1775.⁷ Jean was the widow of Colonel James Innes, a member of the Governor's Council and commissioner to Earl Granville, who died in 1759.⁸ In 1761, she married Corbin, who like Innes was an agent for Earl Granville.

This marriage would have given Corbin the ability to control the placement of Rutherford. Corbin is the only logical person to have transported Rutherford from New Hanover County to the Edenton shop of his former carver and furniture maker, Samuel Black. This was probably done to have Rutherford trained in the highly lucrative skills of a cabinetmaker and also rationally as a carver, considering Black's obvious acclaim in that branch of the trade. Considering Corbin's 1761 marriage to Jean Innes, Corbin could have placed Rutherford in Black's shop several years before the 1765 tax listing. Rutherford accompanied Black when he moved his cabinet shop to the West property in Bertie in 1765 and is listed there in the Bertie County Tax List of 1766.⁹ Upon Corbin's death on July 29, 1767, Rutherford would have obviously been under the charge of someone other than Corbin.

Rutherford had returned to Francis Corbin's household at the Cupola House in Edenton by late 1766 and is also listed in the Chowan County Tax List for that same year, which was apparently taken later in the year than the Bertie County Tax List. Based on his earlier training in Black's shop, Rutherford probably worked in Black's Edenton shop that seems to have also been engaged in blockmaking. He is listed in the Chowan County Tax Lists for 1768, 1769, and 1770 in the Edenton household of Jean Corbin, again undoubtedly at the Cupola House.¹⁰

Jean Corbin's New Hanover County estate inventory of April 13, 1775, sheds further light on identifying Rutherford's location after his move to Bertie County. Her estate lists approximate 90 slaves apparently divided

among her New Hanover properties. Immediately after is listed “Negroes at Edenton-not in my possession but as I am informed hired out by D. Ferguson by Mrs. Corbin’s order”. The first name listed in this category is Rutherford.¹¹ “D. Ferguson” was Dr. Walter Ferguson of Edenton, and Edenton appears to be Rutherford’s place of residence after his stay in Black’s Bertie County cabinet shop until at least 1775. Dr. Ferguson was a respected Edenton physician and was Francis Corbin’s peer and friend. He managed Corbin’s Edenton affairs during Corbin’s travels to be with his wife in New Hanover County, so it is not unexpected that Dr. Ferguson would continue to manage Jean Corbin’s Edenton affairs and property after the death of her husband. Rutherford is listed in the Chowan County Tax List of 1775 in the household of Charles Bondfield. Bondfield was one of Edenton's most prominent attorneys and may have been involved in settling Jean Corbin's Edenton estate.¹² Rutherford’s placement after 1775 is unknown, but he probably remained in Edenton where his services were hired out for the benefit of Jean Corbin's estate and heirs.

An effort has been made in the past to compare the carved feet of a case piece that includes a desk section, set on cabriole legs with ball-and-claw feet, termed a scrutoire, to the feet created by Black and in his shop which display indented, blade-like rear talons. The case piece is believed to have originated in Norfolk.¹³ Its legs are almost square in cross section and are set ninety degrees to the case front. The rear of its lower leg, which is the edge of one of the four corners of the square, extends straight down to form the back edge of an uncarved rear talon.

The balls of the ball-and-claw feet appear to be rounded and symmetrical on all sides. This is very different from the legs and feet carved by Black for the Corbin dining room armchairs. Their lower front chair legs just above the feet are oval rather than square. Black actually removed stock from the rear of the balls of the armchairs' ball-and-claw feet, flattening that rear section and visually emphasizing the rear talons (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. *Foot of Fig. 2 showing the flattened rear of the ball emphasizing the indented, blade-like rear talon.*

The same method of removal of stock from the rear of the ball to create a sharp talon was also employed on the piecrust, ball-and-claw, round tea

table whose carving could be replicated with three of the nine gouges used to replicate the armchairs for the Cupola House dining room (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. *Foot of Fig. 5 showing where stock was removed to create the sharp rear talon.*

Hopefully other examples related to the Norfolk piece and examples related to the work of Black and his shop will be discovered in the future, and these traits will more clearly identify members of each group. John Bivins noted that the carving on the Cupola House “reveals the hand of a carver not trained in urban architectural carving”, that “his style is antiquated, a vernacular extension of the English Baroque style

of the late seventeenth century”, and that “A comparison with other American architectural carving of the first half of the eighteenth century has yielded no strong parallels”. Interestingly, Bivins noted in describing the armchairs that they were “likely made in 1745-1760, although the chairs correspond with British styles of a decade or more earlier”.¹⁴ The later years of these dates correspond perfectly with Black’s arrival in Edenton in late 1758 or early 1759, and point to the fact that Black’s training most likely would have been under a master fluent in the earlier Baroque style referenced by Bivins describing the Cupola House as well as describing the armchairs. It would not be unusual for the style of an artisan’s carving to evolve from his initial training as current styles evolved and changed, especially from the 1750s through the 1760s and beyond. Whether discussing the construction of the dust boards and foot blocking of a chest of drawers, or in this case the method of forming an armchair’s oval legs and the domed balls of ball-and-claw feet, artisans often retained the mechanics of forming the various elements that compose a furniture form from their initial training, or undoubtedly from a major commission early in their careers.

So, it should not be unexpected that the mechanics employed early in Black’s career creating the elements found on the armchairs he produced for Mr. Corbin’s dining room would continue beyond that initial

commission. These include the armchairs' oval lower legs just above the feet, the removal of stock from the rear of the balls forming a flattened rear surface to enhance the view of the talons, and the indented, blade-like rear talons. These features continued to be employed throughout the carving by Black and his shop through the mid 1760s. The indented, blade-like rear talons appear to have been received with favor by other later Black patrons after the Corbin commission. Later examples found on various forms of tables by Black, while perhaps less bold than those created for the initial Corbin commission, continued to be created in the same manner with the purposeful removal of stock and the flattening of the rear of the balls to emphasize the indented, bladelike rear talons (Fig. 8) (Fig. 9). The same lightening of features seen as Black's work transitioned into the Rococo style in the early- to mid-1760s is also evident in a series of roundabout chairs constructed by Newport's John Goddard, as his work also transitioned during this same period from 1760 to 1762 from the more robust and bolder features of the Baroque to the lighter feel of Rococo.¹⁵



Figure 8. *Later writing table by Black. Courtesy of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.*



Figure 9. *Foot of Fig. 8 showing the flattened rear of the ball emphasizing the indented, blade-like rear talon. Compare to Fig. 6.*

These later pieces seem to date from around 1763 to a few years after, based on the like carving found in the George Blair house and the date it is believed to have been built.¹⁶

Other mechanics of construction Black continued to employ on these later card and writing tables (See Fig. 8) from his earliest years with Corbin include employing the same leg pattern used on the armchairs to form the later table legs (See *The Cupola House Carver*, page 22), similar staging and design of leaf carvings on the Corbin armchairs and on the later table legs (See *The Cupola House Carver*, page 23), the repeated use of a five petal flower, most likely a Tudor Rose, found on the tops of the armchairs' arms and on the Cupola House spandrels (See *The Cupola House Carver*, pages 104-107) , as well as half versions found on the Blair House spandrels and the upper legs of the later card and writing tables, and unusual straight line stippling found on the later table legs, rather than more standard random stippling (Fig. 10).

This same straight line stippling is also found on elements carved on the Blair house (Fig. 11).



Figure 10. *Leg of Fig. 8 showing the lower half of a Tudor Rose and straight line stippling.*



Figure 11. *Blair House spandrel showing the lower half of a Tudor Rose and straight line stippling.*

The straight line stippling actually dates back to Black's earliest work in Edenton and appears on a small section of the crest rail of the armchairs made for Corbin's dining room (Fig. 12).



Figure 12. *Crest rail of Fig. 2 showing straight line stippling.*

Also notice the similarity of the shaping and shading of the leaves of his earliest Edenton work in Figure 12 to his later work of the mid 1760s in Figures 10 and 11, when his use of triple veining becomes an even more consistent feature (See *The Cupola House Carver* pages 20-25). Before these most recent discoveries came to light, Bivins postulated that this later group could be the work of another hand, perhaps even another Edenton cabinet shop. However, the continued use of these mechanical features of construction points to the work being done by, or under the supervision of, the same craftsman, in this case Samuel Black.

Although, as we stated in *The Cupola House Carver*, the hands of other carvers trained by or heavily influenced by Black while serving in his cabinet shop, including Peter Britt, Thomas Clarkson, and perhaps Rutherford, could be involved in this later work.¹⁷

While the creation of the Norfolk rear talons would not appear to have required any more effort and therefore expense than the creation of standard carved rear talons, this is not the case with the armchairs' ball-and-claw feet. The removal of stock from the rear of the balls and the creation of Black's indented, blade-like rear talons would, on the other hand, undoubtedly have taken more time and therefore incurred more expense than a standard ball-and-claw foot. It would not be logical for a craftsman to incur this expense unless he was to be compensated. It would not be logical for a patron to be willing to pay the added expense to create these ball-and-claw feet with indented, blade-like rear talons unless they were the choice of the patron. This is especially true of the rear talons on the piecrust, round tea table (See Fig. 7). Like the armchairs, stock was purposely removed from the rounded rear of each ball to allow the sharp talon to be created, a talon that could not be seen unless the viewer was prone on the floor. This is further evidence pointing to Black's creation of a set of furniture with these sharp rear talons created at Corbin's behest to complete Corbin's vision for this dining room, his primary space of entertainment in the Cupola House. Based on the inventory of Corbin's estate sale, during Corbin's time this room also featured two square dining tables, likely with ball-and-claw

feet matching those found on the armchairs made for Mr. Corbin's dining room.

Now to the initial inquiry, which of the modern equivalent gouges chosen to replicate the armchairs based on the carefully produced templates created from one of the original armchairs, in addition to the one wider gouge needed for the Cupola House carving, were needed to create the carving found on the Cupola House's original finial? It was removed from its original location in the house's front gable at some point before 1918 and was fortuitously stored and preserved in the house's attic.¹⁸ Bivins examined the finial along with other carvings on the interior and exterior of the house. He concluded, based not only on his knowledge of Southern architecture, but especially on his expertise as an acclaimed wood carver, that in speaking of the original finial, "A close examination of the carver's style and technique revealed beyond any doubt that the same hand executed the other exterior carving still surviving on the building.... The shaping of the leaves, which in the typical carver's tradition was effected with vertical setting-in or straight-down cuts with gouges, shows the repeated application of only two radii of gouges".¹⁹ In other words, only two gouges were used to execute the Cupola House's original finial (Fig. 13).



Figure 13. *Original Cupola House finial.*

Recently, the nine gouges chosen to replicate the eight mahogany armchairs for the Cupola House dining room that also would replicate the carving on the interior and exterior of the Cupola House, with the one additional wider gouge, were placed against the carving found on

the original Cupola House finial. It was found, as Bivins had predicted, that only two of the previously mentioned ten gouges that would replicate all the carving on and in the Cupola House would be needed to replicate the carving on the Cupola House finial. The two modern equivalent gouges needed, #5-20mm and #7-14mm, happen to be the same two gouges needed to replicate the carving on the second-floor southeast chamber overmantel console. Figures 14 and 15 illustrate how gouge #5-20mm could be used to set-in a leaf of the finial with several applications of the gouge.



Figure 14. *How gouge #5-20mm could be used to set-in a leaf of the finial.*



Figure 15. *How gouge #5-20mm could be used to set-in a leaf of the finial.*

Gouge #7-14mm is shown in Figure 16 where it could be used to replicate the finial's lower vase-like elements. Figure 17 shows an original gouge set-in impression forming another leaf on the finial. The carver extended the cut beyond the end of the leaf and did not bother to remove the impression, considering the finial was to be placed in the house's gable 25 feet above the ground.



Figure 16. *How gouge #7-14mm could be used to replicate the finial's lower vase-like elements.*



Figure 17. *Original gouge set-in impression.*

Figure 18 shows the same original set-in gouge impression with modern equivalent gouge #5-20mm placed just outside of the original cut, mimicking the shape of that original gouge impression.



Figure 18. *Original gouge impression with modern gouge #5-20mm.*

Endnotes:

1. Jordan, Don, Tom Newbern, and Jim Melchor, *The Cupola House Carver*, The Elizabeth Vann Moore Foundation, Edenton, NC, 2021, pp. 91-93.
2. Bivins, John, James Melchor, Marilyn Melchor, and Richard Parsons,
“The Cupola House: An Anachronism of Style and Technology”,
Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Vol. 15, May, 1989, pp. 89
and 97.
3. Ibid, pp. 93 and 95.
4. Hurst, Ronald L. and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830*,
The Colonial Williamsburg Collection, The Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation, Williamsburg, VA, 1997, pp. 76-79.
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