

103. Case of Drawers

Hancock or Enfield, Connecticut
Grove Wright (1789–1861) and Thomas
Damon (1819–1880)
1853

Written in ink on paper label glued to inside of case: This Case of Drawers were made by Elder Grove and Brother Thomas and placed here thursday, January 13th, 1853. It was the day our Ministry expected to return to the City of Peace, but were detained on account of the snow storm which occurred on that day. Butternut and pine, with walnut knobs h 84 w 37 1/4 d 19"

Hancock Shaker Village, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, #66-244

This signed and dated case of drawers serves as a kind of Rosetta stone in Shaker furniture. The construction features, makers' marks, and handwriting along with the paper label are instrumental in the attribution of an important group of Hancock pieces to Grove Wright, which includes two washstands (pl. 104), three counters (pl. 102), a box (pl. 105), a workbench, and the built-ins on the first two floors of the brick Church Family Dwelling House (pl. 101). From 1816 until his death in 1861, Grove Wright served continuously in the Hancock ministry. While living and working at the three communities in the bishopric (Hancock, Tyringham, and Enfield, Connecticut), he became known as a woodworker producing furniture, pails, and swifts for winding yarn.²⁹ In 1846, Thomas Damon, a joiner from Enfield, was appointed Elder Grove's assistant in the ministry. This tall case of drawers with detailed label indicates that Brother Thomas and Elder Grove worked together as cabinetmakers as well as sharing leadership responsibilities.

This piece exhibits the characteristic tapered drawer construction, lettering, and numbering system associated with Elder Grove's work. The identical style of writing is found in the twenty built-in cases of drawers on the first two floors of the 1830 Church Family Dwelling House (see pl. 101), which suggests they were made by the same hand.³⁰ The date 1831, found on one of the built-in drawers in the meeting room, indicates they were made one year after the building was started. Based on the combination of identical drawer construction details, maker's numbering system, and identifiable handwriting on both pieces, an attribution can be made to Grove Wright. More specifically, Elder Grove probably produced the drawers for both the 1831 dwelling house built-in as well as this 1853 freestanding unit, while Brother Thomas assisted on the case. Since Thomas Damon was only twelve years old at the time, it is highly unlikely that he was the master craftsman responsible for the drawers on the built-ins.



Monumental in size, this twelve-drawer case is exceptionally tall for its width. Surviving freestanding cases of drawers are unusual from Hancock, where built-ins were the normal storage form for retiring rooms in the Church Family Dwelling House. However, the configuration of four short drawers over a bank of graduated full-length drawers is consistent in both this freestanding piece and in the dwelling house built-ins. Was this a conscious design decision on the part of the community and the maker?