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THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AT JOHN BROWN HOUSE, BUILT IN 1786



52 POWER STREET, PROVIDENCE, R. I. 02906

November 12, 1964

A REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF THE EXHIBITION COMMITTEE

The enclosed letter has been sent to the prospective lenders of about 100 pieces of Rhode Island furniture. Each piece has been approved by experts in the field. Among the items requested are those with either labels, signatures, bills of sale or good documentation by the following Rhode Island cabinet makers: Job Townsend, Christopher Townsend, John Townsend, John Goddard, Joseph Rawson, Grindle Rawson, Jonathan Swett and Robert Lawton. There are many types of furniture we hope to have and, for instance, the claw and ball foot with open talons will be shown on a tip table, lowboy, tea table, card table, dining table and highboys. There will be miniature case clocks, tall clocks, bracket clocks, miniature desks, pole screens, marble top side tables, shaving stands, chests on chests and so on, and of course the block and shell. There will also be a very limited number of portraits by Feke, Stuart and Malbone.

Of course it is unrealistic to assume that each and every piece desired will be loaned. However, preliminary indications are very encouraging and we hope the owners of all these fine pieces will consent to lend them.

Again, any comments or suggestions you may have will be much appreciated. Furthermore, if you are in a position to be near the John Brown House, we hope you will come and we can review the progress to date.

If you have a desire to have your name appear in the catalog other than in the form in which it is written in the enclosed letter, please let us know.

With the enclosed letter to the prospective lenders a loan form for each piece and an additional sheet with a few notes was enclosed. These referred to the description and other details of the piece in question, insurance matters, the possibility of lending things anonymously and other appropriate information.

Joseph K. Ott
Chairman, Exhibition Committee

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Dear Mr. _____

A major loan exhibition of Rhode Island furniture will be held by The Rhode Island Historical Society at its headquarters, John Brown House, Providence, R. I., in May and June of 1965. The goal of the exhibition is to assemble, in a contemporary mansion, important examples of local manufacture that illustrate the scope and brilliance of our early craftsmen.

We hope to contribute to the steadily growing fund of knowledge about our early cabinet and chair makers by bringing together pieces not generally known to the public from recent books or exhibitions on American furniture. We shall emphasize newly discovered forms and those with documentation, labels, or signatures.

It has been the happy experience of the Selection Committee to bring to light many important Rhode Island pieces whose existence had been unknown to collectors and students. Further, each item of furniture requested fills a definite need in the exhibition and makes the whole more comprehensive and educational.

The Committee has asked me to request your help in making the exhibition a success. It has also unanimously voted to ask you to lend..... (follows a description of the Rhode Island piece or pieces, plus significance of same).

There will be a complete catalog, to be available at the opening of the exhibition, with illustrations of all pieces and appropriate text and descriptions.

Suitable protection for the furniture, including guards and other museum safeguards, will be provided. John Brown House is an impressive brick dwelling, with brick interior partitions, finished with paneling and plaster, and is termed a fire resistant building. A folder describing the house in a little more detail is enclosed.

The exhibition will open with a reception for the lenders, committee members, and sponsors on Friday, May 14, 1965. On May 15 the exhibition will open to those same groups only; and beginning May 16 it will be open to the public. It will close June 20, 1965.