

Vose and Coats, Cabinetmakers

By JANE NYLANDER

THE Boston cabinetmaking firm of Vose & Coats has been heralded for the beauty of the worktable¹ inscribed with their names, but additional information about the men and their work has been scanty. We can tell that their furniture was highly regarded in early 19th century Boston, because while the listings of articles being sold at household auctions seldom mention the work of specific cabinetmakers, Vose & Coats are listed with the greatest frequency. For example, in August 1821 a furniture auction held by S.F. Coolidge included "1 patent dining table, 14 feet, made by Vose and Coats."² The sale of the contents of the "4th house in Quincy Place" in April, 1823 included a "mahogany book case, made by Vose and Coats, and cost \$60.00, . . . card tables, made by Vose & Coats . . . and 1 elegant secretary, made by Vose & Coats, cost \$120.00."³ In October, 1824 J.L. Cunningham auctioned the contents of "a House in Beacon-street, opposite Mrs. Delano's. The Furniture of a Lady breaking up housekeeping" including a "set of mahogany chairs, with hair seats and couch to match, made recently by Vose & Sons; mahogany Sideboard do."⁴ A sale in the following year included "1 set Grecian Dining Tables on castors, made by Vose."⁵ In March 1826 a sale of "a part of the Furniture of a Gentlemen giving up housekeeping" included pieces by several Boston makers: "One pair of elegant Looking Glasses, made by Doggett," "Sets of Dining Tables, made by Emmons and Archbald," "Mahogany Sofa in

haircloth, do," and one "Pair of Grecian Card Tables made by Vose."⁶

Isaac Vose, in all his various partnerships, was certainly a man associated with the highest quality and skill, his name useful in an advertisement. He was born in Milton about 1767. The son of Samuel Vose, he left Milton and was listed as a cabinetmaker on Orange Street in the 1789 Boston Directory. In 1792 he married Mary Bemis of Watertown and in 1804 purchased real estate on Orange Street.⁷ Father and son continued as Isaac Vose & Son, and the firm was known by that name for two years after the death of Isaac Vose, Sr. on May 12, 1823.⁹

On the fourth of June, Isaac Vose Jr., desiring to remain in business, inserted the following ad in the *Columbian Centinel*:

"Isaac Vose, the surviving partner of the firm of Isaac Vose & Son, tenders his grateful thanks to their customers and the public, for their liberal patronage, and respectfully solicits a continuance of their favors. The Cabinet business in all its branches will be continued by him as heretofore. He has on hand, and will continue to have manufactured by the best workmen, all articles of Cabinet Furniture, which added to their large stocks of Lamps, Looking-Glasses, and other imported articles in the *Furnishing Line*, from an assortment which he hopes will prove satisfactory to the patrons of the late firm, and the public.

The Upholstery business, in all its branches will be continued as usual, in connection with Mr. Thomas Hedges, who will give his whole attention to the business."

It is clear that Isaac Vose, Jr. was not a cabinetmaker but a furniture dealer. In succeeding years, he placed advertisements in the newspaper for both spring and fall assortments of goods, primarily lamps. However, the cabinetmaking part of the business continued, under the best supervision, according to the March 3, 1824 notice in the *Columbian Centinel*:

Isaac Vose & Son Have on hand, at their *Ware-Rooms*, in *Washington-street*, a large assortment of CABINET FURNITURE, manufactured in the most faithful manner, which they offer for sale on as favourable terms as can be purchased in the city. Their *Cabinet Manufactory* is under the direction of *Mr. Thomas Seymour*, and all orders for *furniture* will receive as good attention as heretofore. They also have for sale, at their Saw Yard, on Front street, 30,000 feet St. Domingo and Bay MAHOGANY, well-seasoned, and sawed expressly for Carpenter's use.

The complexities of the Seymour connection with the Vose firm have yet to be completely unraveled, but the significance of this association of a well known and highly skilled cabinetmaker with the firm is not to be ignored. The spring and fall advertisements from the 1824 *Columbian Centinel* give a picture of the full range of the business.

London lamps, &c. Isaac Vose & Son, have received by the London Packet, a large and elegant assortment of Lamps, &c. viz: -

Grecian and Bronzed Centre Lamps, Bronzed side and stand d°, Rich cut glass chimney d°, French shade d°, Entry lamps, of various patterns

... ALSO ...

A few pair of Chimney and Pier Glasses—rich ell wide London Chintz, with high glazed colored Linings—Crimson and other moreens—Silk Fringes—Laces—Bindings, with a large assortment of Cornices—Brass Ornaments, and every material suitable for the decoration of Drawing Rooms, and other apartments, with suitable curtains

and draperies, from the latest designs, which will be made up in the most expedient and faithful manner.

Brussels and other Carpets—Feather Beds—Mattresses—White Linen, and other Blinds, with every article in the upholstery line, executed in the best manner, and on the most reasonable terms.

They have constantly on hand, a large assortment of rosewood and Mahogany Chairs—mahogany Boards and Planks, well seasoned and of all dimensions."

"Isaac Vose & Son, Washington—street, OFFER for sale, received by the London Packet, a large assortment of new and elegant London made Lamps. By the Emerald, best Japanned Waiters; Plate Warners; patent Dish Covers; ivory handle Knives and Forks, of a superior quality, in sets; elegant brass and iron Fenders, new patterns; Planished Tin Tea Kettles and Stands &c., &c.

Also on hand, Piano Fortes; London Fringes, Curtain Pins, Cornice Ends, Moreens; Chintzes; Lace and other Bell Ropes; with many other articles in the furnishing line.

They have for sale (and are constantly manufacturing) a large assortment of elegant rosewood and mahogany Furniture, made by the best workmen, which they offer for sale on as good terms as can be purchased in the city.

Likewise St. Domingo and Bay Mahogany, well seasoned."

The property at this time was extensive, being composed of:

a Warehouse in front, three stories high, commodiously arranged for exhibiting furniture; a three story wooden Dwelling House adjoining, in thorough repair, and very convenient, containing four rooms on the lower floor, and nine chambers, with a good yard and out-buildings, and in the rear, very extensive workshops, with suitable fixtures, and a large space protected from the sun and weather, for seasoning mahogany.¹⁰

The mahogany yard had been in operation for some years, having supplied material for rails to James Rundlet in



**FIG. 1. CARD TABLE MADE BY ISAAC VOSE & SONS, BOSTON
1819-1825, possibly during the time the cabinet manufactory was under the supervision
of Thomas Seymour. The St. Louis Art Museum. Gift of Mrs. Daniel K. Catlin.**



FIG. 2. STENCILLED LABEL ON CARD TABLE AT THE ST. LOUIS ART MUSEUM.

Portsmouth in 1807¹¹ and for the “twist rail” in Merchant’s Hall, Boston in 1816.¹²

In 1825, Isaac Vose, Jr. apparently decided to confine his business to that of a lamp dealer and advertised for sale the stock of the firm of Isaac Vose & Son.

being the most valuable assortment of elegant Furniture in the City . . . also, their whole stock of Mahogany and other Woods . . . a large assortment of Cabinet Trimmings for Furniture, imported by them . . . They likewise offer on Lease their Cabinet Manufactory and WareRooms, which, from the great patronage they always have, and still continue to receive, and the great convenience for an extensive establishment, are superior to any in Boston.¹³

A month later, there being no takers, the stock of woods and trimmings was offered at auction by J.L. Cunningham.¹⁴ Catalogues were published, although none seems to have survived. The following week the entire stock of furniture was likewise offered at auction by J.L. Cunningham¹⁵ and at the end of the month the “household furniture of the late Isaac Vose, deceased” was similarly sold.¹⁶

These sales seem to have caused a disagreement in another prominent Boston cabinetmaking firm, that of Emmons and Archbald. On March 5, 1825, Thomas Emmons and George Archbald dissolved their partnership by mutual consent and Thomas Emmons an-

nounced his purchase of the entire "Cabinet Manufacturing Establishment of Isaac Vose & Son." Archbald continued cabinetmaking at their former stand, corner of Washington and Warren Streets and at the same time formed a partnership with Stephen Lynch to conduct the upholstery business at the late Vose Warerooms.¹⁷ To dissolve their business, Emmons and Archbald sold at auction their stock of manufactured furniture, counting room desk, and stove.¹⁸

This promising new venture was only to last six weeks, for Thomas

Emmons died on April 17th,¹⁹ and in June the entire cabinet stock was again offered at auction.²⁰

After disposing of the cabinet business, Isaac Vose, Jr., entered into partnership with his brother-in-law Charles Bemis at No 79 Market Street where they imported and sold lamps, tea trays, cutlery, Japanned and Plated Ware.²¹ He retired in 1831. Unmarried, he lived with his two sisters in Watertown and then in Newtown; he died in Keene, New Hampshire, June 24, 1872.²²

NOTES

¹ C.F. Montgomery, *American Federal Furniture*, plate #477.

² *Columbian Centinel*, Aug. 11, 1821.

³ *Ibid.*, April 26, 1823.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Oct. 27, 1824.

⁵ *Ibid.*, March 12, 1825.

⁶ *Ibid.*, March 18, 1826.

⁷ Ellen F. Vose, *Robert Vose and His Descendants* (Boston, 1932) pp. 210-211.

⁸ Boston Directories 1789-1825.

⁹ Vose *op. cit.* p. 210.

¹⁰ *New England Palladium and Commercial Advertiser* Oct. 14, 1825.

¹¹ Ralph May, *Among Old Portsmouth Houses* (Boston, 1946) p. 24.

¹² Mass. Hist. Soc., Misc. Mss 1816.

¹³ *Columbian Centinel*, Jan. 5, 1825.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Feb. 5, 1825.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 16, 1825.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Feb. 26, 1825. For a listing see the Inventory of Isaac Vose made August 30, 1823 and filed in the Suffolk County Probate Court on November 10, 1823.

¹⁷ *Columbian Centinel*, March 12, 1825.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, March 12, 1825.

¹⁹ *Independent Chronicle and The Boston Patriot*, April 20, 1825.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, June 1, 1825, *Columbian Centinel*, June 1, 1825, June 1825, June 4, 1825.

²¹ *Columbian Centinel*, July 2, 1825.

²² Vose, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

For additional information on Emmons and Archbald see *Boston Museum Bulletin*, Vol. LXX 1972, pp 92-95.