



*A. W. Perry Homestead Museum*

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[www.cityofcarrollton.com/museum](http://www.cityofcarrollton.com/museum)  
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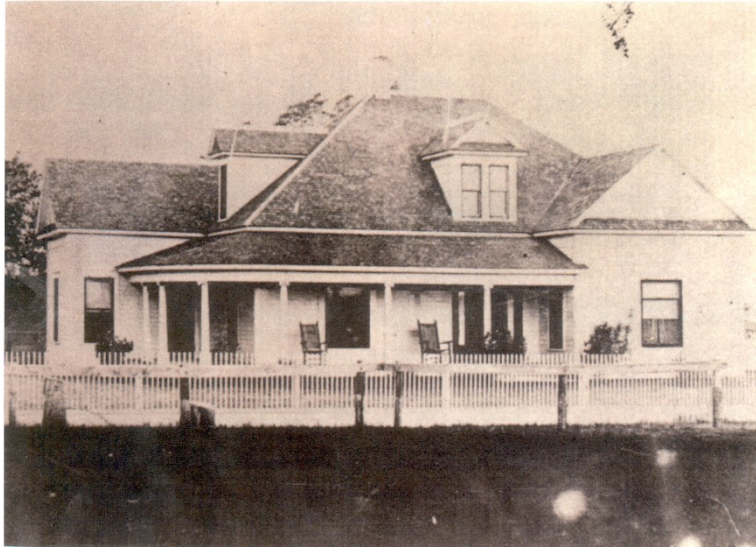
*A. W. Perry Homestead Museum*

*The Rocking Chair -*  
*From the Porch to the Parlor*



May 4 - July 30, 2011

# The Rocking Chair- *From the Porch to the Parlor*



DeWitt and Francis Perry home, 1909

## Introduction:

Did you know the rocking chair is known around the world as being distinctly American? One of our founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, was even credited with its invention. That theory has been widely disproved, but the fact remains that the colonists embraced the rocking chair and made it an essential and iconic feature of the American home.

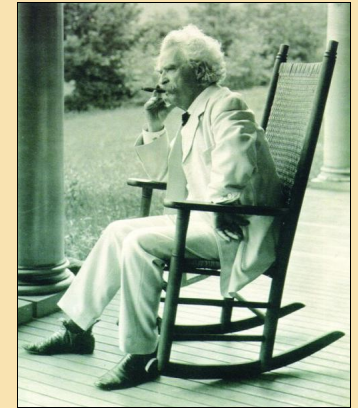
Both the cradle and rocking horse predate the rocking chair. Artwork from as early as the 13th century, through the Middle Ages, and into the Renaissance, shows evidence that people were using and depicting cradles with rockers. The term 'rocker' comes from the name given to the nurse maid who would rock an infant's cradle. The first rocking chairs probably appeared in the first half of the 1700s with people modifying existing chairs by adding rockers to the bottom of them. The Swedish, six legged "gungstol" and the English Windsor rocking chair were documented by 1740, long before a visitor to Benjamin Franklin's study in 1787 noted seeing a "large armed chair with rockers".

## *Fun Facts & Celebrity Rocking Chairs*



**Fun Fact:** Spanish artist Pablo Picasso did several paintings featuring figures in rocking chairs and was often photographed seated in a rocking chair in his studio.

Mark Twain, American author and humorist



## **Guinness World Champion**

Arulanantham Suresh Joachim (Australia) rocked on a rocking chair continuously for 75 hours 3 minutes from 24th to 27th of August in 2005 at the Hilton Garden Inn, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.



## **Fun Fact:**

The "Route 66 Rocker" is the largest rocking chair in the World!

Cost - \$22,000 to build

Fanning, Missouri





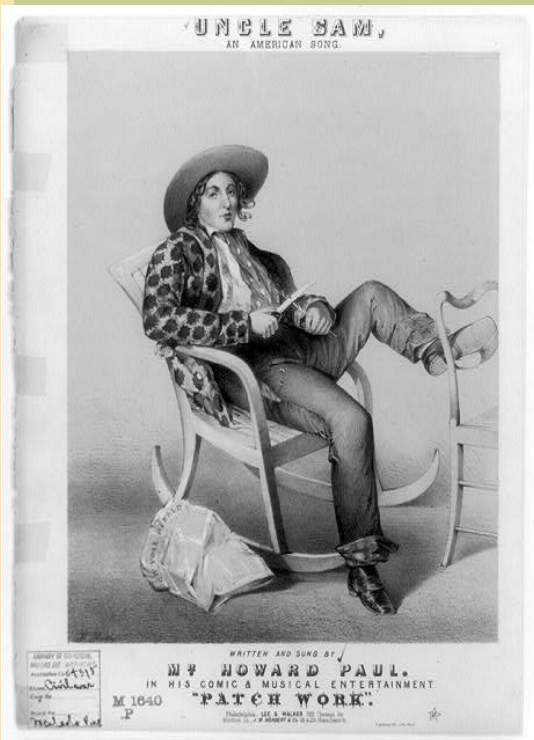
# Rocking Chairs, Distinctly American

All were not pleased with the popularity of the rocking chair. Upon returning from a trip to America in 1838, English author Harriet Martineau wrote,

“...the disagreeable practice of rocking in the chair ....How this lazy and ungraceful indulgence ever became general, I cannot imagine; but the nation seems wedded to it, that I see little chance of its being forsaken. When American ladies come to live in Europe, they sometimes send home for a rocking chair. A common wedding present is a rocking chair. A beloved pastor has every room in his house furnished with a rocking chair by his grateful and devoted people.”

Yet, not all Europeans looked down on the rocking chair. In his 1837 treatise on “The Americans in their Moral, Social and Political Relations”, Francis J. Grund wrote,

“...the New England rocking chairs, the ne plus ultra of all comforts in the shape of furniture, have acquired an European reputation. It is not so much the elegance as the excellent adaptation to the purpose for which they are intended...”



An 1854 illustrated sheet music cover for a song titled “Uncle Sam, An American Song”. Uncle Sam is portrayed as a young man in a wide-brimmed hat, whittling with his jackknife as he sits in a rocking chair.

-Library of Congress

By the early 1800s, the practice of modifying existing chairs gave way to the practice of purchasing premade rocking chairs which were becoming increasingly available in a diverse number of styles. Evolving from the Windsor style of chair, the Boston Rocker and its country cousin the Salem Rocker were widely popular. The chair known as the Boston Rocker was actually manufactured in Connecticut until 1865. Interestingly, it was common for people in the 19th century to refer to all rocking chairs as Boston Rockers. Another popular design came from the Shakers, a religious group, who began producing a simple slat-back rocking chair in the 1820s. Designed with simplicity, human scale, and comfort in mind, Shaker rockers are easily recognizable and their chairs have been frequently copied. Over time, styles and variations of rocking chairs have changed and kept up with the trends of the day. You’ll find a detailed timeline of chair styles on pages 8-9.

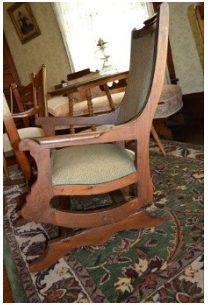
In the late 1800s and early 1900s, because of the advent of mass production, manufacturers could offer a wide variety of designs and make them available to the middle class through catalogs like *Sears, Roebuck and Co.*, *Montgomery Wards* and others. As you walk through the rooms of the Perry home, you’ll discover that the rocking chairs on display combine features of multiple style movements and types of chairs. This was an eclectic period, when revival styles were popular. Elements of simpler Colonial forms were combined with features of Renaissance or Neo-Classical styles, as well as new forms.

In 1838 an English builder wrote, “In America it is considered a compliment to give the stranger the rocking-chair as a seat; when there is more than one kind in the house, the stranger is always presented the best.” Indeed, the rocking chair does seem to be the best chair in the house; the dynamic one that does not just sit and collect dust but invites you to rock with it, to move it about, to even take it outdoors to enjoy a warm sunny day or a starry night. We hope that you will enjoy the exhibit.





## Sitting Room:



The platform rocker or glider rocker is an interesting offshoot of the rocking chair. Platform rockers sit atop a stationary base. Its design grew in popularity when carpets became more affordable. This was because they produced less wear on the carpets on which they sat, compared to the regular rocking chair. The one here in this room is original to the Perry home and has Grecian elements in its shape and design.



The other rocking chair in this room, with its cushioned seat and wide, flat back slats, has a simple form that is similar to Arts & Crafts or Aesthetic Movement furniture. However, notice the slightly more ornate scalloping on the top rail which carries over Victorian style as well.

## Bedrooms:

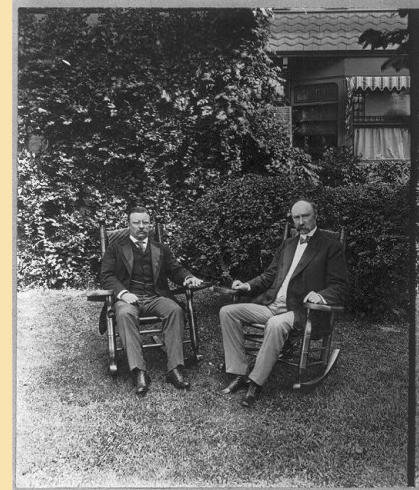
The cradle predates the rocking chair. People have been using cradles to rock infants for more than a thousands years. This cradle was handmade and was donated to the Perry Homestead by an early Carrollton family.



The small, low to the ground chair without arms is known as a “nurse rocker”, “sewing rocker” or simply a “ladies rocker”. It was designed to ease the tasks of sewing, nursing or doing other work while in the chair. It would also allow a full skirt to drape over the sides instead of being crumpled between two arm rails.



## *Presidential Rocking Chairs*



Pres. Roosevelt and Senator Fairbanks at Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay, N.Y.



Pres. Taft, seated on rocking chair facing right, with two other men



Pres. Kennedy, White House

### **Kennedy Chairs**

Rocking chairs were favored by Kennedy because of his chronic back pain. Several of Kennedy's rocking chairs have made their way to the auction market. They have been some of the most valued and sought-after of the Kennedy relics. When Jacqueline Kennedy's possessions were auctioned in 1996, two Kennedy rocking chairs were sold. One went for \$453,000 and the other sold for \$442,500. During a 1998 auction, the rocking chair from Kennedy's suite located in the Carlisle Hotel brought in a tidy sum of \$332,500.



# Presidential Rocking Chairs



Image: Ohio Historical Society

William McKinley seated on the front porch of his home in Canton, Ohio, during his campaign for President in 1896. Over 750,000 people visited McKinley on his porch during the campaign. After his speeches, his wife Ida often served lemonade to the crowds. He was elected President in 1896 and 1900, but was assassinated in 1901. Other successful Presidential porch campaigns included those of James A. Garfield in 1880 and Benjamin Harrison in 1888.



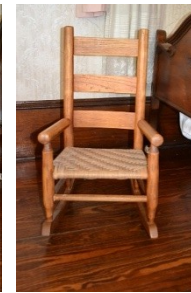
President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated while sitting in this rocking chair at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. This style of chair, a heavily upholstered arm chair on rockers came to be known as a "Lincoln Rocker".



This chair, with its low slung arms is similar to a nurse's chair or sewing rocker. But, it also has elements of various other styles, definitely borrowing features from early Colonial rockers with its multi-spindle supported armrests as found on the Windsor rocker. However, the features of the rest of the chair hint at the Neo-Classical revival styles, in which several time period influences were combined.



It would not be uncommon to use a chair until it wore out and then move it to a back bedroom or repurpose it for outside. This chair may have once had leather inserts or a cushioned seat. It has a splat-back shape but the thickness of the seat and the style of the arms suggests its design was slightly influenced by the early Boston Rocker.

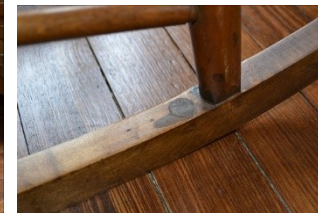


Although not made by the Shakers, this child's chair is reminiscent of their style. The Shakers produced seven different sizes of rocking chairs. Shakers felt it was important that the furniture be in direct proportion to the human body, no matter the age or stature.

## Kitchen:



This is a wonderful example of how chairs could be modified into rocking chairs. This one may have started out as a simple oak dining chair, but at some point it appears to have been fitted with a pair of rockers and transformed. If you look closely at where the legs join to the rockers, you'll see the evidence that these rockers were probably once attached to another chair and were repurposed for this new combination.





## Dinning Room:



These porch rockers are original to the Perry home, having belonged to Francis and DeWitt Perry. In a 1909 photograph of this home, appearing on page 2, these are the chairs visible on the porch. The simple form and woven back and seat of these chairs are suggestive of Shaker design and values. The complementary sizes and the mushroom shaped finials are interesting features of this pair. Also, notice the high base boards in the room, they helped protect the wallpaper from being damaged by rocking chairs.



Although their designs can be exquisite, wicker, reed and rattan chairs were meant for less formal living spaces, like porches. These woven materials allowed for strong but lightweight furniture that was more resistant to outdoor conditions. Their open forms also allowed for air to circulate around the user to help cool them. Even though they were intended for informal spaces, wicker furniture and rocking chairs were definitely a luxury. The more elaborate or intricate the design, the more expensive.



Grimes family portrait. The matriarch of the family occupies the place of honor in the center of the image, in a rocking chair of course.







# Local History

## Rocking chair portraits from our collection:

Harrison and Minnie Miller Nix in their Carrollton home, which was located near Webb Chapel and Fyke Road.



G. W. Fyke and Family. The rocking chair was often considered the "best" chair in the house and was always offered to or occupied by the guest or head of



Pressed back chairs of the Victorian era, like this one, were usually made of oak and in the crest (or top) rail, a design or pattern was applied by the use of a steam press on the wood. The leather cushioning of the seat made the rocker and the act of rocking in it more comfortable.



This is a "splat-back" rocker. There are many different styles of backs that appear on rockers; the splat-back, fiddle-back, ladder-back and comb-back are just a few. This one, on loan for the exhibit, is a great example of this style.

## Parlor:



Once considered too informal for the parlor, the rocking chair worked its way into this room as well. In the late 1800s, manufacturers began marketing parlor suites which included a matching rocking chair. Rocking chairs for the parlor tended to be more elegant, ornate or finely upholstered than those in less formal areas. This platform rocker has elements of Eastern influence in its design. The peacock feathers over the piano and the Japanese inspired crazy quilt on the adjacent chair are also examples of how "exotic" influences were popular at this time in American interiors.





# Rocking Chair Timeline

Wooden, European rocking cradles appeared as early as the 14th century and are depicted in art through the Middle Ages and Renaissance.



1500



1774

Philadelphia cabinet maker William Savery bills a customer for "bottoming a rocking chair."



1740

A six legged Swedish rocking chair, or "gungstol", and the Windsor rocking chair appear in Europe.



Benjamin Franklin's "great armed chair with rockers" is noted in a journal by a visitor to his study.

1787

Shaker slat back rocker designed.



1820



1830s

Victorian era begins

1825

The "Boston Rocker" design is popularized, but actually manufactured in Connecticut.



1836

1850

Wicker rockers begin to appear.

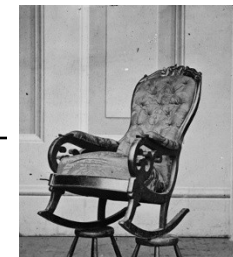
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President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated while sitting in a rocking chair at Ford's Theater in Washington D.C

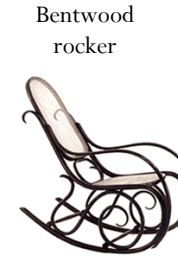
1865

1876

J. Wayland Kimball remarks in his book *Designs, Furniture and Drapery* (Boston, 1876), that "foreigners call the rocking chair a peculiarly American luxury."



Lincoln Rocking Chair



Bentwood rocker

1880s

1900



Lightweight, portable designs.

Arts and Crafts movement begins in 1880s and flourishes through 1910, continues in popularity into 1930s.

