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– FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

American by Craft: The Furniture of Olof Althin
Uncover the hidden hands of immigrant artisans in crafting American style
American Swedish Historical Museum
On view from July 23rd, 2021- January 16th, 2022

Philadelphia, PA- This exhibition organized by the American Swedish Historical Museum reunites the workshop and wares of Olof Althin (1859-1920), a Swedish immigrant cabinetmaker and antiques restorer in turn-of-the-century Boston. Amidst the wane of historic forms of craftsmanship, the arrival of skilled artisans from Sweden reinvigorated public interest in traditional craft and design. These immigrants’ highly-regarded designs, skills, and craft ideologies symbolized for many the positive impact of immigration on American society. *American by Craft* shows how these immigrant “gifts” influenced the formation of a distinctly American ethos of craft, labor, and education which survives today.

By re-assembling the well-preserved workshop of Olof Althin—including original furniture, woodworking tools, his workbench, and design sketches—*American by Craft* explores immigrant influences on the revival of “traditional” American craft in the early 1900s. Althin, trained in the ancient Swedish guild system, immigrated to America in 1881 and soon earned a reputation within the nation’s emergent Colonial Revival movement for his exceptional restoration and reproduction of early American furniture. His furniture, drawings, and writings reveal how immigrant cabinetmakers bridged the growing divide between design theory and manual skill in American craft.

Positioned at the intersection of design and manual skill, these immigrant artisans proved vital in popularizing historic forms of American furniture which echoed into the popular market and major collections of Americana at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Museum of Fine Art, Boston. Ironically, then, it was immigrant craftspeople such as Olof Althin who restored and reinterpreted “traditional” American furniture styles, creating the look and feel of American history. In bridging this gap, Althin carved a niche for himself between the demands of American craft ideology and the practicalities of running a small business in turn-of-the-century Boston.

The exhibition, American by Craft: The Furniture of Olof Althin was co-curated by Erica Lome and Trevor Brandt and was generously supported in part by a Failey Grant from The Decorative Arts Trust. It will be on view at ASHM from July 23rd, 2021 through January 16th, 2022.

Images:



Image #1



Image #2

The American Swedish Historical Museum is located in scenic FDR Park at 1900 Pattison Avenue in South Philadelphia near the Sports Complex. Plenty of free parking is available. For those taking public transportation, the Broad Street Line Sports Complex stop is within walking distance or SEPTA's Route 17 bus to Broad/Pattison.

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Image #3

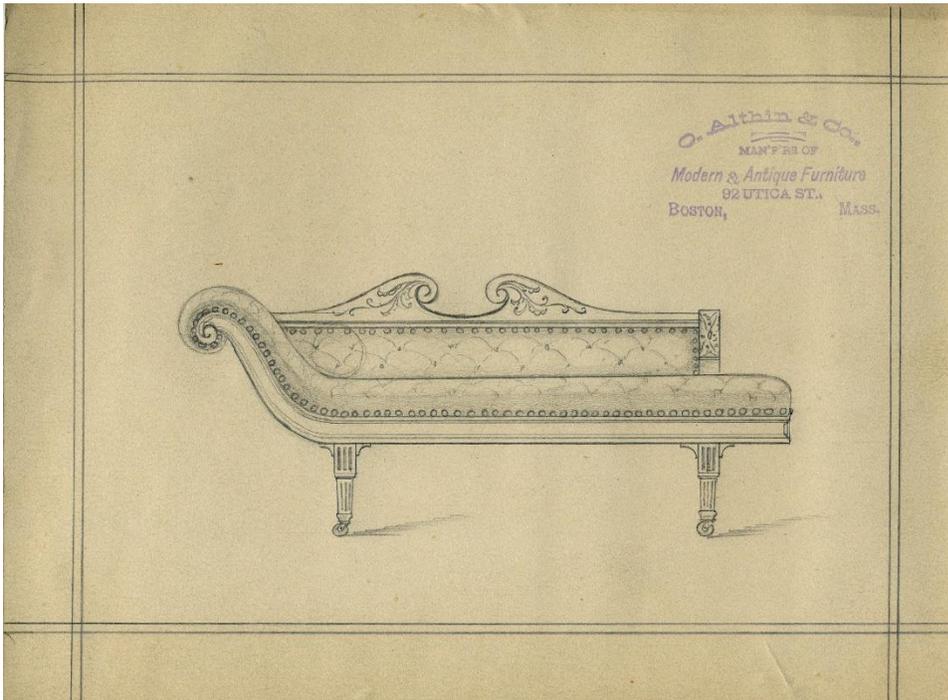


Image #4

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Image List:

1. Olof Althin—presenting himself as a successful business-owner—posing within his workshop. Courtesy of the family.
2. Exterior shoot of Althin’s workshop with workers on wagon with crated furniture. Credit: Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera
3. For this blanket chest, made in 1906, Althin consulted a book on early 1600s English furniture. He called it “Grandmother’s Old Linen Chest.” It took over 102 hours to make. Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera
4. For the design of this couch, also referred to as a récamier, Althin took inspiration from American Empire furniture made between 1815-1825, itself a derivation of French neoclassical style. Its sleek, minimalist form and scrolled end recall the furniture of Duncan Phyfe, a Scottish-born cabinetmaker in New York City in the early 1800s. Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

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