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# **A Guide to the Robert Bishop Furniture Research Files A0039**

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

American Folk Art Museum Archives

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	American Folk Art Museum Archives
<b>Creator:</b>	Bishop, Robert, (1938-1991)
<b>Title:</b>	The Robert Bishop Furniture Research Files
<b>ID:</b>	A0039
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1970s-1980s
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9.5 linear feet (standard document cases)
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English
<b>Abstract:</b>	The Robert Bishop Furniture Research Files contain research material related to different styles of furniture. The files are mostly secondary source material including photographs, new clippings, and articles. Bishop collected these files as a resource for his many published books about furniture, including <i>How to Know American Antique Furniture</i> (1973), and <i>Centuries and Styles of the American Chair, 1640-1970</i> (1972).

### Preferred Citation

[item description], [date], Robert Bishop Furniture Research Files, [box and folder number], American Folk Art Museum Archives, New York

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## Biographical Note

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Robert Bishop (1938-1991) was not only an influential and innovative director of the American Folk Art Museum, serving from 1977 through 1991, but was involved in creative and academic pursuits throughout his life. Born in Readfield, Maine, Bishop moved to New York City in the 1950s to become a ballet dancer. He danced in Broadway shows, and the Metropolitan Opera, and was awarded a scholarship at the School of American Ballet, where he studied from 1958 to 1960. Around the same time, he also began focusing on art and antiques, a passion that he inherited from his grandmother, who worked with antiques in Maine. Eventually, Bishop owned or co-owned three antique stores, and was spending more time dealing antiques than dancing.

Through his friendship with Cyril Nelson, an editor at E. P. Dutton and fellow folk art enthusiast, Bishop began working as a photo researcher, working with Marsha Davidson on *American Heritage's* three-volume history of American decorative arts. From there, Bishop moved on to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, where he worked as the museum editor and assistant curator of American decorative arts. Bishop continued to work with E. P. Dutton, and in the next few years, published *American Painted Furniture* (1972), *America's Quilts and Coverlets* (1972), designed by Bishop and written by Carleton L. Safford of the Ford Museum, *Centuries and Styles of the American Chair*, *How to Know American Antique Furniture* (both 1973), *American Folk Sculpture* (1974), *New Discoveries in American Quilts* (1975), *A Gallery of Amish Quilts*, and *The American Clock* (both 1976). Bishop received a PhD in American culture at the University of Michigan in 1975, where he also taught art history.

Bishop returned to New York to join the American Folk Art Museum as director in 1977, after the untimely death of Bruce Johnson. Still a small museum, leasing only a floor and half in a brownstone at 49 West 53rd Street, the American Folk Art Museum grew exponentially under Bishop's leadership. The first exhibition under Bishop's direction, *Folk Art and Funk: Andy Warhol's Folk Art World* was a highly publicized success, and the first of many popular shows to come. Bishop pushed for the growth of the museum in many directions, including securing the purchase of multiple adjoining brownstones on West 53rd Street. Bishop also established the Folk Art Institute, a Graduate program at New York University in folk art studies, which was the first of its kind in the United States. Many other museum initiatives were established under Bishop's direction, including the Great American Quilt Festival, growing the permanent collection significantly, publishing the *Clarion* as a 64-page quarterly rather than a short newsletter, traveling exhibitions internationally, and establishing a photo licensing and reproductions program. During this time, Bishop continued to publish books including *Folk Painters of America* (1979) and *The Romance of Double Wedding Ring Quilts* (1989). Bishop published twenty-three books in his lifetime.

Besides a passion for many different kinds of folk art, especially furniture, and quilts, Bishop also held a special interest in dogs. He owned and showed both Doberman pinschers and Manchester terriers, and incorporated his love for dogs into his work. His 1977 exhibition, *The All-American Dog: Man's Best Friend in Folk Art*, was another incredibly popular show.

Bishop passed away from AIDS-related lymphoma in 1991. He was 53 years old.

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## Scope and Contents

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The Robert Bishop Furniture Research Files contain research material related to different styles of furniture. The files are mostly secondary source material including photographs, newspaper clippings, and articles. Bishop collected these files as a resource for his many published books about furniture, including *How to Know American Antique Furniture* (1973), and *Centuries and Styles of the American Chair, 1640-1970* (1972).

The styles of furniture included in this collection are: General subject files; Art deco; Art nouveau; Chippendale; Colonial; Colonial revival; Country; Cromwellian; Empire; Federal; Mission; Modern; Prairie school; Queen Anne; Scrollwork; Southwestern; Victorian; Wiener Werkstatte; and William and Mary.

The files originally constituted a large subset of the subject files that Bishop created before and during his tenure at the American Folk Art Museum. Because of Bishop's particular subject expertise in furniture, these files were separated into a distinct collection.

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## Arrangement

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The files are arranged alphabetically by furniture style, and further subdivided into chronological and alphabetical categories within those styles. There is also a small amount of general furniture files arranged alphabetically at the beginning of the collection arrangement. These files regard specific types of furniture (bed, chairs, etc.), or furniture made internationally.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

American Folk Art Museum Archives

### Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research. Access to sensitive materials may be restricted at the discretion of the American Folk Art Museum.

### Conditions Governing Use

The Robert Bishop Furniture Research Files is owned by the American Folk Art Museum. The collection is subject to all copyright laws, and is dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship.

## Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Robert Bishop, 1986

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- Furniture design
- Furniture -- History

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## Collection Inventory

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Title/Description	Instances
Furniture, general - Furniture, beds and bedding	box 1
Furniture, carriage manufacturers - Furniture, seating pieces	box 2
Furniture, seating pieces - Art nouveau, tables	box 3
Art nouveau, Will Bradley - Chippendale	box 4
Chippendale, case pieces – Chippendale, seating pieces, armchairs and settees	box 5
Chippendale, seating pieces, sidechairs – Chippendale, upholstered pieces	box 6
Colonial – Colonial tables	box 7
Colonial revival – Country, 19th century painted pieces	box 8
Country, 19th century painted pieces – Empire, miscellaneous	box 9
Empire, seating pieces, chairs and stools – Federal, case pieces	box 10
Federal, case pieces - Federal, seating pieces, chairs	box 11
Federal, seating pieces, sofas and settees – Mission, Stickley, crafts	box 12
Mission, text – Modern, seating pieces	box 13
Prairie school – Queen Anne, seating pieces, chairs	box 14
Queen Anne, seating pieces, chairs – Southwestern, articles	box 15
Victorian – Victorian, Grand Rapids	box 16

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Victorian, horn furniture - Victorian, Renaissance revival, seating pieces, chairs	box 17
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Victorian, Renaissance revival, seating pieces, sofas and settees – William and Mary, case pieces	box 18
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William and Mary, interiors – Windsor, text	box 19
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