



## A Little Windsor at Linwood Gardens

A joyous moment captured in 1910 shows young Theresa Gratwick sitting in a child-size Windsor with a kitten that wouldn't cooperate. This photograph was taken at Linwood Gardens in York, New York, which has a rich and interesting history that spans the decades to the present day.

Linwood Gardens was established in 1900 as a summer estate by William Gratwick, Jr. of Buffalo, New York. His children, including Theresa and son William III, spent their childhood summers canoeing, swimming, and playing on the grounds. Both ended up moving to the property in the 1930s and living there year-round, raising their own families. William III, known as Bill, was responsible for developing the unique tree peony collection in the extensive gardens, which feature Japanese, Chinese, and hybrid tree peony specimens.

Today, Linwood Gardens is maintained by Bill's daughter Lee Gratwick and several other family members. The property is open to the public for the 2018 Tree Peony

Festival of Flowers during the peony bloom season on May 19-20, May 26-27, and June 2-3, 2018 from 9am to 4pm each day. See [linwoodgardens.org](http://linwoodgardens.org) for more details.

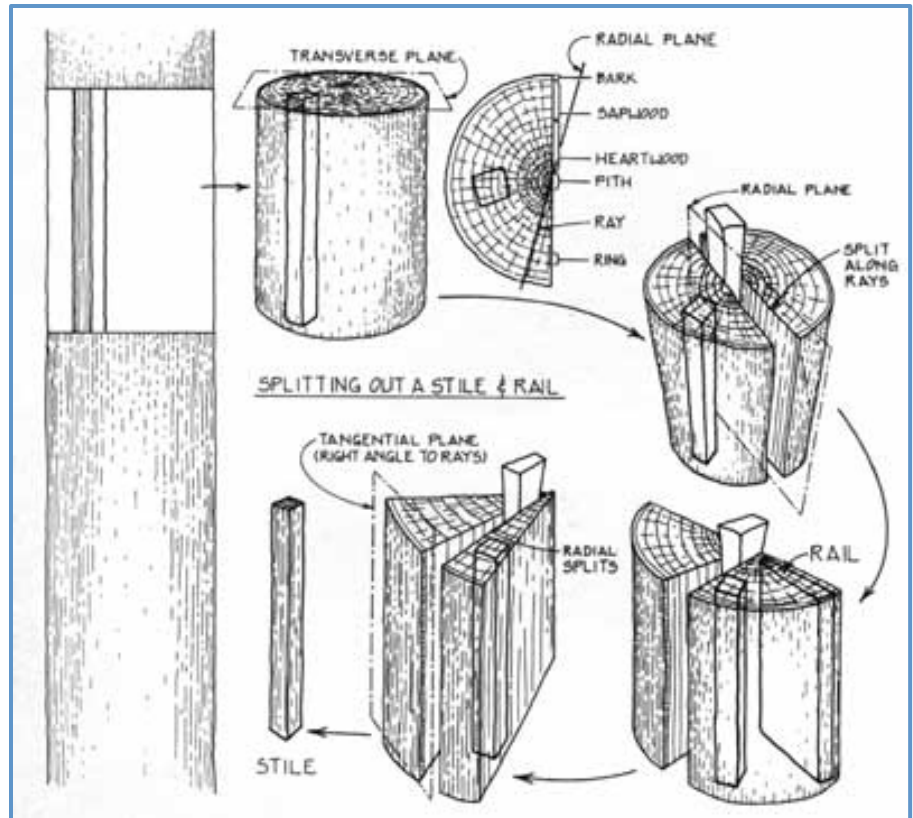
The pictured child-size Sack-Back Windsor armchair spent most of its life in Theresa's family, although the before-treatment photograph chronicles the ups and downs of a long life. The chair was forgotten about along the way and no one remembers when it lost its hoop from the back.



As a furniture conservator, what I find the most intriguing is the history behind all of the heirlooms I'm involved with treating. Most of the time only a little of the history is known and the rest has to be imagined with clues from its own unique wear and tear (character) and patina. The goal in any restoration project is to not over-treat the object. To remove those "defects" is like hitting the erase button on a tape recording of the object's life and once it's gone, it's gone forever.

In this case, the goal was to bring this chair back to presentable and usable condition while preserving as much of the original finish as possible. The oak legs, spindles, arms and the pine seat were extremely weathered with less than 50 percent of the original finish still intact. But it was determined that what original finish remained was stable enough to be preserved.

The first step was to create a new back hoop and steam bending rived oak was selected. To “rive” oak is to obtain a long enough straight piece by only splitting the log, not sawing it. This insures the maximum strength of the hoop after the steam bending process. The new steam-bent hoop was then spoke shaved to size and holes were drilled for the spindles.



Source: [greenwoodworking.com](http://greenwoodworking.com)







After gluing the hoop in place, it was treated with a weak chemical that reacts with the natural tannins in the oak and ages it a century in less than an hour.

A few other minor repairs were made and then the treatment of the surfaces began. The new hoop was brought into the color of the rest of the chair with a brown-pigmented oil stain. The existing original finish was left intact and the rest of the raw wood areas were treated with a very lightly pigmented oil stain. Excess stain was wiped completely off the

existing finish. A thin coat of shellac was applied overall, and when cured, a brown furniture wax was applied and polished.

This sweet little Sack-Back Windsor armchair is beautiful once again with a well-aged character all its own. It will be on display during the Tree Peony Festival of Flowers at Linwood Gardens this spring.



