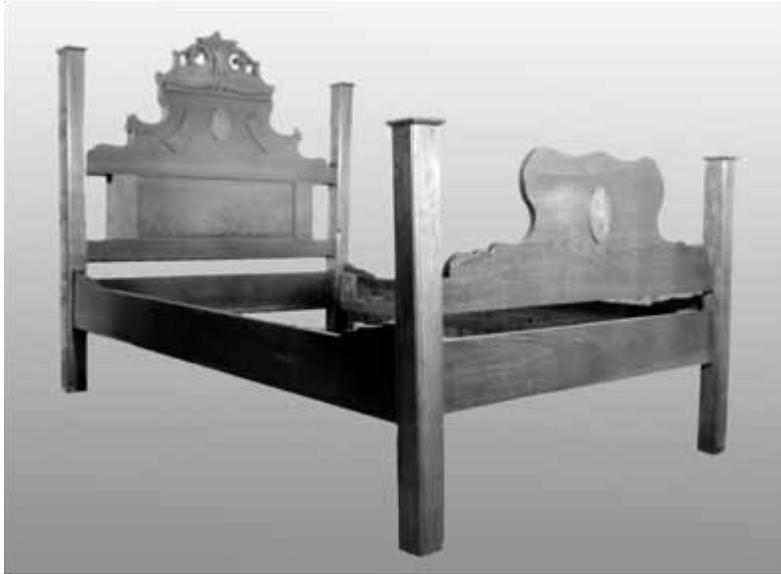


# Donation of the Month

**Object: 1860s Green & Sager Bedstead**  
**Catalog #: 1978.15.1**  
**Donors: Clara B. Kennan & Fay Kennan Robbins**



Most people spend a third of their life in one. Some folks, especially teenagers, wish they could spend all day in one. But beds are more than just a place to catch some ZZZs. They can reflect fashion and technology and hint at social history and immigration patterns.

Simon and Christian Sager and their cousin Frederick Green arrived in Benton County in 1839. For nearly three decades this skilled family of German-immigrant cabinetmakers produced bedsteads, bureaus, chairs, and other furniture pieces for their own families and for sale. The men had been trained in woodworking by the Sager's father, a cabinetmaker in Prussia, a large German state. Beginning in the 1830s thousands of German craftsmen faced with warfare, economic hardship, and increased competition from factories migrated to America. As the American frontier opened up, immigrants moved into the new territories to carve a new life and better future for themselves.

The mid-19th century was a time of growth and challenge for Benton County. In 1839 the Sagers and Green came to an area that was still a frontier for the newly minted state of Arkansas (1836). In 1838 the county seat of Bentonville had a population of 30. But the county was rapidly growing, mostly with arrivals from Tennessee; by 1860 the population had reach 9,285. At this time transportation and communication were primitive, with only two main roads crossing Benton County. The local economy was based in good part on subsistence agriculture, with tobacco as the major cash crop.

Simon Sager settled near Hico (now Siloam Springs). While he made some furniture, he primarily made his living as a farmer and cattle drover. Christian Sager and Frederick Green operated a sawmill, gristmill, general store, and cabinetmaking shop along Prairie Creek just before it emptied into the White River (northeast of what would become Rogers). According to local oral history, they used water power for sawing lumber and a hand-powered lathe to turn legs and posts. Like many German-American country cabinetmakers, Green and Sager were highly skilled craftsmen who had been trained to design as well as make furniture, often producing simplified versions of popular styles to meet their customers' needs.

The bedstead pictured here certainly demonstrates Green and Sager's considerable technical skills as well as their overall stylistic refinement and careful attention to detail. Essentially a country adaptation of the Renaissance Revival style, this 1860s walnut bedstead has applied trim and Gothic Revival-inspired trefoils on the headboard. A matching bed was thought to have been made, but if so, its whereabouts are unknown. Sadly, we have no information about who bought the piece originally or how it came to be owned by the donors.

Given the state of transportation in Benton County in the mid-1800s, it is surprising how widely Green and Sager sold both furniture and building materials. By looking at their business ledger we can see that they sold their wares both locally and across Benton County and in the Fayetteville area. About 56% of their customers were merchants, artisans, and professionals (doctors, lawyers, and ministers), a group of people which represented only 12% of the county's population. Green and Sager also sold many items to the Cherokee, one of the eastern tribes of Native Americans forced to move along the Trail of Tears through Benton County to their new home in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) in the 1830s and 1840s. Stand Watie, a prominent Cherokee leader, ordered several pieces of furniture, including bedsteads.

As factory-made furniture began to reach Arkansas in the 1850s and grew in popularity, artisans like Green and Sager faced increasing competition. The Civil War also took a heavy toll on the cabinetmakers and their family. Simon Sager and his two sons died as a direct result of the conflict, and Union cavalry reportedly camped at Green and Sager's shop. They spared the business but took the drawers from completed desks and bureaus to use as feed boxes for their horses. Recovery had only begun when Frederick Green moved west to Texas and Christian Sager died.

Today their furniture is scattered throughout museums and in private homes. Several pieces have been identified, thanks to a research project and exhibition the Rogers Historical Museum organized in 1996, but many pieces (we hope!) are still out there, waiting to be discovered. Why not make a discovery on your own? Stop by the Museum's historic 1895 Hawkins House and see our Green and Sager bedstead. But please, don't try to catch some ZZZs on it!