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The Artisan of Ipswich: Craftsmanship and Community in Colonial New England (Director's Circle Book)

Robert Tarule

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Thomas Dennis emigrated to America from England in 1663, settling in Ipswich, a Massachusetts village a long day's sail north of Boston. He had apprenticed in joinery, the most common method of making furniture in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Britain, and he became Ipswich's second joiner, setting up shop in the heart of the village. During his lifetime, Dennis won wide renown as an artisan. Today, connoisseurs judge his elaborately carved furniture as among the best produced in seventeenth-century America.

Robert Tarule, historian and accomplished craftsman, brilliantly recreates Dennis's world in recounting how he created a single oak chest. Writing as a woodworker himself, Tarule vividly portrays Dennis walking through the woods looking for the right trees; sawing and splitting the wood on site; and working in his shop on the chest?planing, joining, and carving. Dennis inherited a knowledge of wood and woodworking that dated back centuries before he was born, and Tarule traces this tradition from Old World to New. He also depicts the natural and social landscape in which Dennis operated, from the sights, sounds, and smells of colonial Ipswich and its surrounding countryside to the laws that governed his use of trees and his network of personal and professional relationships.

Thomas Dennis embodies a world that had begun to disappear even during his lifetime, one that today may seem unimaginably distant. Imaginatively conceived and elegantly executed, *The Artisan of Ipswich* gives readers a tangible understanding of that distant past.

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