

JOHN WARREN MOORE - CABINETMAKER

1812-1893

by Charles Foss*

John Warren Moore of St. Stephen was one of New Brunswick's most productive cabinetmakers. Between 1830 and the late 1870s as many as eight apprentices in addition to several journeymen worked in his shop on Water Street at any one time. Here it may be well to note that the furniture of New Brunswick's best cabinetmakers may be superior to that made by most Canadian craftsmen of the nineteenth century. Though working later than the province's finest cabinetmakers, Thomas Nisbet and Alexander Lawrence, John Warren Moore was a craftsman of remarkable competence.

Moore's ancestors were Scottish crofters who migrated to Ireland and later to New England. William Moore, his grandfather, was born in Londonderry, New Hampshire, about 1730; in 1785 he moved his family to St. David, New Brunswick, about 10 miles from St. Stephen. Moore brought machinery and millstones from New Hampshire to build the first mill, a two-storey structure, the upper floor for grinding grain and the lower for sawing logs. John Warren's father, Tristram Moore, took over the milling business at the age of 20 when William Moore died. Tristram married Thankful Foster, daughter of Benjamin Foster and Ruth Scott who had come to New Brunswick from Mechias, Maine, in 1800. John Warren was the sixth of their fifteen children.

More than fifty pieces of John Warren Moore's work recently came to New Brunswick from his grand-daughter, Frances Strange Flemington, and her husband, Frank Flemington, of Toronto. For more than thirty years the Flemingtons carefully

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collected John Warren Moore's furniture from family members and acquaintances. Each piece was meticulously researched, using in part an amazing collection of 200 family letters which were brought together in what may be the best documentation of any cabinetmaker in New Brunswick.

In addition to the fifty pieces of furniture in the Flemingtons' collection, there are samplers, costumes, silver and pictures as well as copies of all the original letters, documents and other memorabilia. The collection was purchased for a fraction of its real worth by the province and is currently displayed in the Hagerman house at Kings Landing Historical Settlement, Fredericton, N.B. The Hagerman house is furnished to 1870; its large, four-leaf dining table is probably the only piece slightly later than that date. Furniture collectors and students of the subject are fortunate to have this remarkable material available for study.

Other pieces of John Warren Moore's work can be found in public collections such as the New Brunswick Museum and the Ross Collection in St. Andrews and in dozens of private houses in New Brunswick.



John Warren Moore made this beautifully constructed birch bentwood box (height 7 cm), his earliest known work, with a jackknife when he was seventeen years old. He decorated the top of the lid with the carved initials MLD, for Mary Louisa DeWolfe of Windsor, N.S. Mary Louisa painted an inscription on the inside of the cover which is still clear and bright, "The Gift of an Esteemed Friend", complete with lovebirds. She was then sixteen years of age. The two were married four years later on 7 May 1833. (Photo: Kings Landing Historical Settlement)

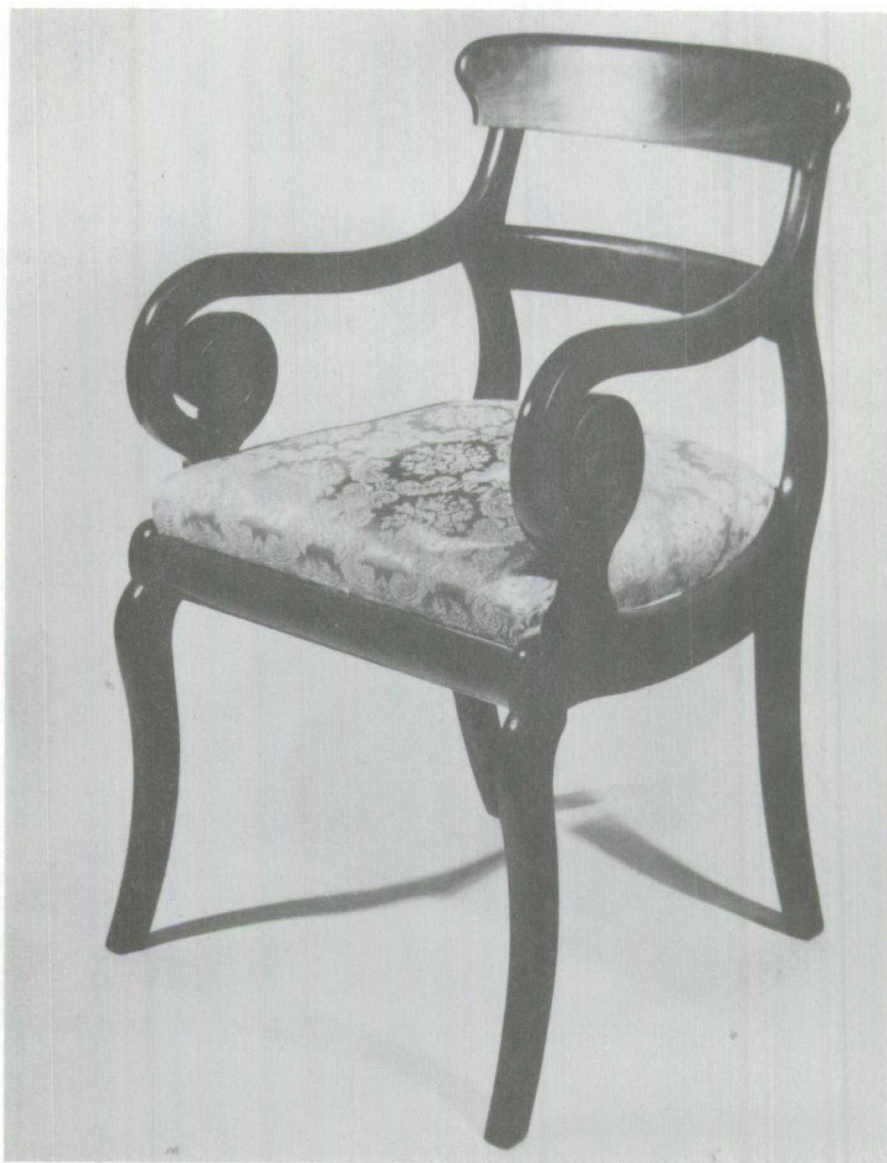


This handsome tea caddy (height 16.5 cm; length 21 cm) is another of Moore's earliest pieces. It appears that apprentices were set the task of building a tea caddy early in their careers and though references have not yet been found to John Warren's master, it must be concluded that he had one and a competent one at that.

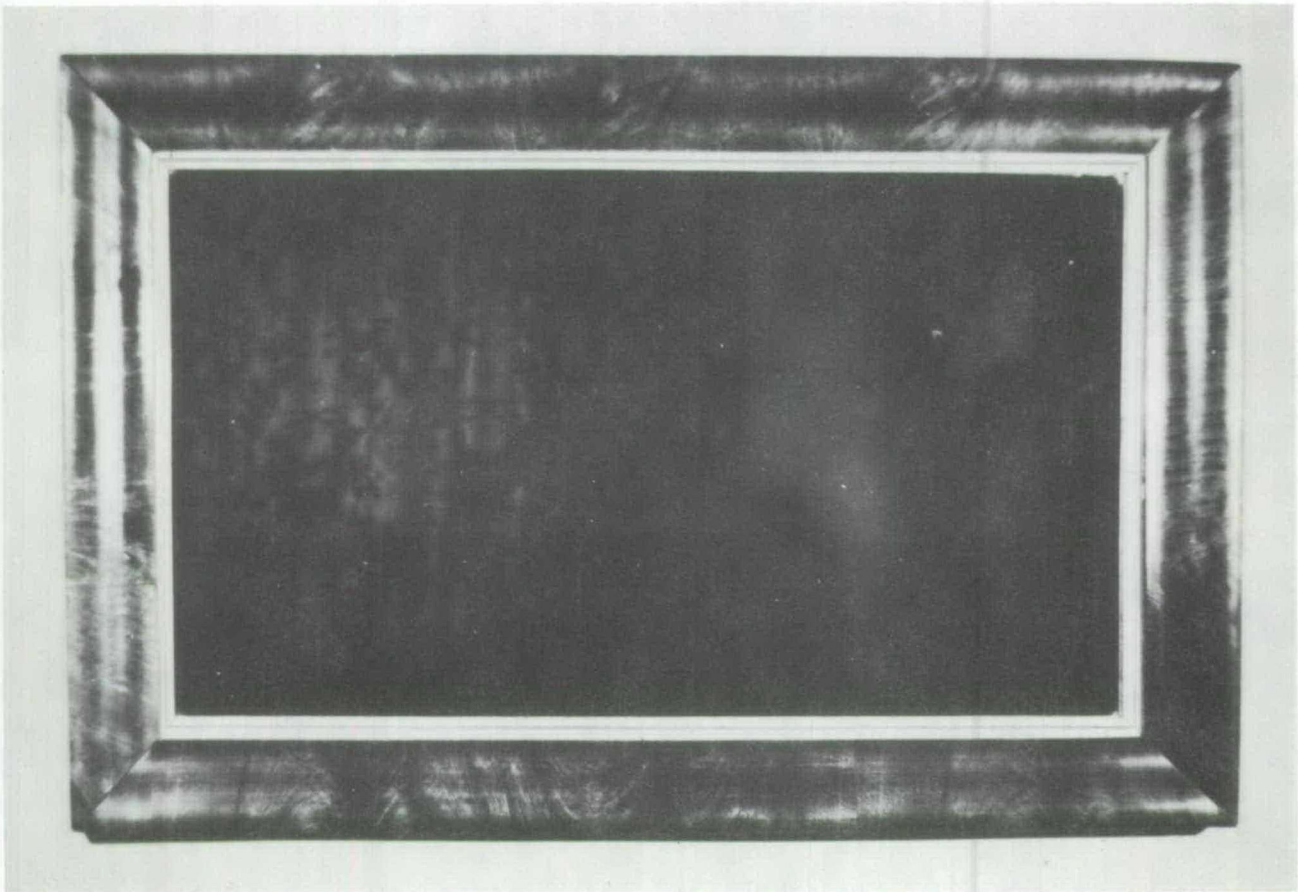
The history of the tea caddy is documented in the careful notes kept by the Flemingtons: "It was willed by his daughter, Frances Elizabeth Moore, to her niece, Melissa Nash, who in 1939 gave it to her niece, Harriet L. Strange Parker, as a wedding present. From her it came to her sister, Frances Flemington." (Photo: Kings Landing Historical Settlement)



This fine mahogany cradle (length 107 cm; width 51 cm; height 74 cm) was made before 1840 and was probably for John Warren Moore's first child, Maria Woodward, born 7 March 1835.
(Photo: Kings Landing Historical Settlement)



The mahogany arm chair (height 91.5 cm) is an early piece of Moore's work, made before 1840. Traditional in the design of that late Georgian period, the curves are tightly rolled as in the horns of a goat. Its sabre legs, much in fashion at the time, derived from the Napoleonic era when the designs of Egypt became popular in furniture. This chair is said to have been made for Moore's own use. A similar chair made by John Warren Moore is owned by Alan Parker of Meredith, New Hampshire, according to the Flemington documentation. (Photo: Kings Landing Historical Settlement)



The ogee mirror frame (length 46 cm; width 30.5 cm) has this inscription in Moore's handwriting: "This glass frame was made about 1839 with hand tools by John Warren Moore and repaired July 1884 by the same person." The frame is pine with carefully chosen mahogany veneer. (Photo: Kings Landing Historical Settlement)





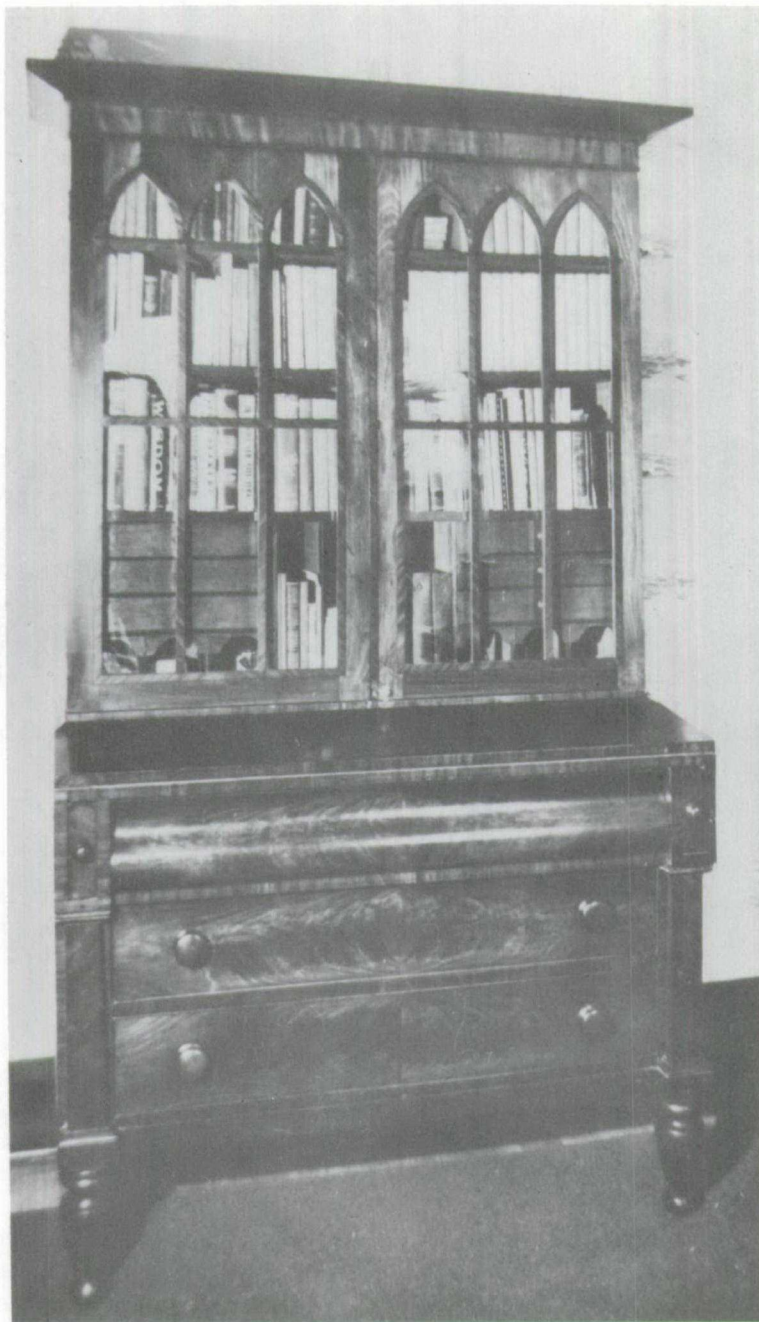
Sideboard A (opposite; height 132 cm; width 112 cm) has fretwork design with a fabric backing while sideboard B (above; height 114 cm; width 193 cm) has four doors with finely chosen mahogany panels. Both are constructed of pine with veneer. Fashionable for their period, they both have the elephantine-type leg which accentuates their presence.

Sideboard B was made for Senator A.M. Nash of Maine whose second wife was Emily Caroline Moore, fourth daughter of the cabinetmaker. It has the following shipping label written in Moore's hand:

A.M. Nash, Esq.
Harrington via
Millbridge for steamers
Houghton & Frances

The top is hand-planed and solid, not veneered. It was acquired by Mrs. Flemington in 1963 from Grace Nash, a descendant of the senator.

Many similar sideboards are in existence, one in particular in the Evans Hill house, one of St. Stephen's finest. It and other examples of Moore's work appear in Huia G. Ryder, Antique Furniture by New Brunswick Craftsmen (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965). (Photos: Kings Landing Historical Settlement)



The upright desk or secretary (height 203 cm; width 114 cm) is another fine example of the work of a top craftsman. It was made about 1840 and has this inscription on the bottom of the bookcase section: "January 5 1884. Received in Calis [sic] this secretary - a gift from father Moore who made it years ago and repaired it for us A[gnès] H[olmes] M[oores]." It also carries the signature of John Warren Moore. Agnes Holmes Moore was the wife of Moore's son, Edward. Her daughters Joe and Vesta Moore of Calais, Maine, gave the desk to Mrs. Flemington, their first cousin once removed.

A similar piece, also in the Kings Landing collection, was acquired from Mrs. Evans Hill of St. Stephen. It is in the Ingraham House which contains nothing but New Brunswick furniture prior to 1840. (Photo: Kings Landing Historical Settlement)