

## NOTES AND COMMENTS - NOUVELLES BRÈVES

A COLLECTION IN CONTEXT: ISAAC BENNETT BAKER, ONTARIO BUILDER AND CABINETMAKER\*

by Elizabeth Ingolfsrud

Introduction

The question of provenance is one of the most important in documenting a collection; oral tradition, written or pictorial evidence, labels, stamps, brands, and signatures all assist in establishing authenticity and historical context. These kinds of evidence can lead in turn to field research, such as interviews with descendants of furniture makers or with owners of furniture, and to extended archival studies. While archival research can be carried out at any time in the future, time is running out in the search for positively documented furniture since social changes as well as public demand have resulted in widespread diffusion and destruction of the artifacts themselves. This research note presents an exceptionally rich case study of a well-documented collection of Ontario furniture.

In the fall of 1978 a newspaper article entitled "Springfield Homestead Living Museum"<sup>1</sup> came to the author's attention. It described the attempts of John Hall Stewart, a retired history professor from Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, to preserve his birthplace near Springfield, Ontario, as a museum. The house, known as the Hall-Baker-Stewart homestead (fig. 1), had been built ca. 1862 by Isaac Baker, Stewart's grandfather, and had remained in the family for three generations. The house was still furnished almost entirely with furniture of Baker's own design and construction. Moreover, Baker's original workshop (fig. 2) and tools remained on the property

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\* The author has previously written about the importance of well-documented material evidence, specifically furniture, for studies in Canadian social history in Material History Bulletin 8: 31-33. — Eds.

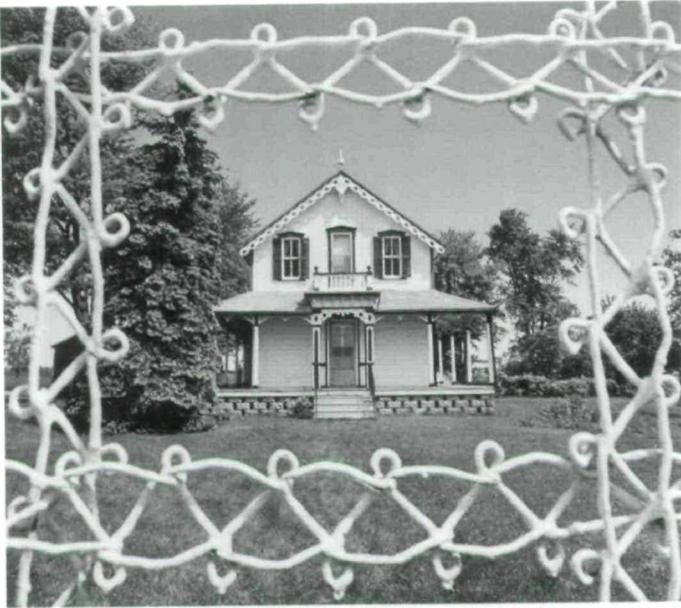


Fig. 1. This photograph of the Isaac Baker homestead as it appears today was taken looking through a section of the decorative wire fence in front of the house. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-5814.)

as did a barn well-stocked with farm implements that he had made. The newspaper article listed a sampling of the artifacts.

Not only was this treasure trove intact, but also it was for sale. Stewart's love for his home and, as he described it, his "training in historical consciousness," had given him both the necessary determination and ability to care for the homestead and its contents during his lifetime and the desire to secure its place

in Elgin County in perpetuity. Having no direct descendants to carry on, Stewart had approached several historical institutions hoping to interest them in preserving the estate as a ready-made museum. However, when he found that the property would be accepted by a foundation only if his generosity could be extended to establish a trust fund for maintenance, he was forced to sell. As the furniture and memorabilia were going to be auctioned off, there was no time to lose if they were to be seen and studied in the context of their original surroundings. A meeting with the Stewarts at the homestead was quickly arranged that same day. The following account of Isaac Bennett Baker has been pieced together from information and documents provided by Stewart and from subsequent forays to the Ontario Archives and to the Weldon Library at the University of Western Ontario.

### Biographical Information

Isaac Bennett Baker was born in 1833 in the Thornhill-Markham area of Ontario, then Upper Canada. His grandfather Abraham Baker was a German Dunkard who had come to Upper Canada from Pennsylvania ca. 1801. Isaac's father, Jacob, born 14 May 1800, owned a sawmill and also farmed. At least three of Jacob's five sons — John who settled near or in Tillsonburg, Jacob Jr. who lived somewhere east of Toronto, and Isaac who settled near Springfield — were trained as woodworkers.<sup>2</sup>

According to family tradition Jacob Baker and his wife might have moved in later years to Elgin County. In any case that is where Isaac Baker met his future wife, Nancy Hall, the eldest child of John Hall, a northern Irish stonemason who had migrated to Elgin County early in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

When Nancy and Isaac married on 31 January 1860,<sup>4</sup> Hall gave his daughter twenty-five acres, the southeast quarter of the west half of Lot 9, Concession 12, South Dorchester Township. There Baker proceeded to build their home.<sup>5</sup> The 1861 census confirms that Isaac Baker, a mechanic, twenty-eight years old, born in Upper Canada, Dunkard, and Nancy, his wife, twenty-three years old, Church of England, were married in 1860 and built a one-storey frame house.<sup>6</sup> Isaac Baker, listed as a householder on that property as early as 1861, was also helping his father-in-law with both his farms until John Hall, Jr., came of age in 1864.<sup>7</sup> In 1869 Isaac Baker was listed as a freeholder but only on 27 July 1871 did John Hall make legal, for the sum of two dollars, his twenty-five-acre gift to Nancy.<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 2. The cement path in the foreground leads from the back of the house to Isaac Baker's workshop. Beyond the shop can be seen a pumphouse and the barn as well as several tall hardwood trees that would have been there in Baker's day. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-5811.)

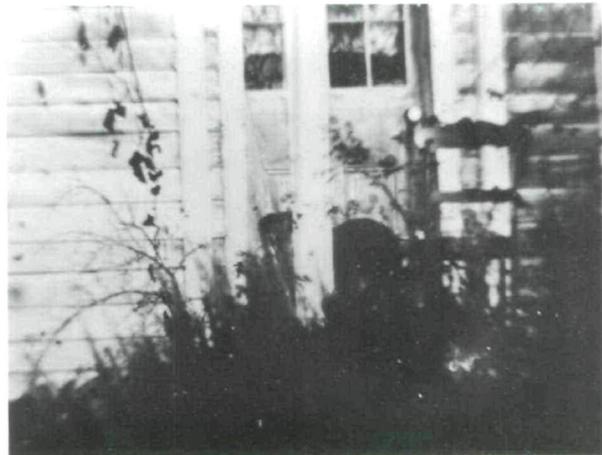
It is hard to say just when Baker would have built his workshop. Although he worked for his father-in-law, he was listed in the 1861 census as a mechanic. As such certainly he would have had immediate need for a place where he could design and make trim for the houses he built as well as furniture for his own home. In addition to the house and workshop he built a barn, woodshed, and outhouse.

The Bakers' three children were Marion, born in 1866, Milton in 1868, and Ervin in 1870.<sup>9</sup> Figure 3 shows tiny Marion holding her parents' hands in front of their home. The Greek revival design of the house was still very popular in Elgin County in the 1860s. The pleasing proportions of the building and of the small porch with their matching pediments prove that Baker was a tasteful, knowledgeable, and capable practitioner of his craft. The chair (fig. 4) that can be seen on the porch is further evidence of his ability as a woodworker.



Fig. 3. Isaac Baker built his home in 1860. This picture was taken in 1868 or 1869, a year or two before he enlarged the house by adding another storey to it. Behind the house, on the left side, part of the shop can be seen. Note the chair on the small front porch. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 79-515.)

Fig. 4. A closeup of the chair in fig. 3. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 79-519.)



Probably because of his growing family, which included his mother as well as three children, Isaac Baker added a second storey to his home ca. 1870.<sup>10</sup> A verandah on three sides of the house replaced the porch. The classical revival moulding of the eaves was supplanted by gingerbread trim topped by a spire. From the large bedroom that extended across the front of the house, a centred door led to a small porch protected by a railing over the verandah. Most up-to-date in the 1870s were the upper windows, each with only four large panes of glass rather than the multiple panes to be found on the lower, original part of the house.

In 1870 the Michigan Central Railroad was constructed through Springfield and Baker and one Thomas Winder were commissioned to build the first station.<sup>11</sup> With the coming of the railroad Springfield flourished and many mills and houses were built. No doubt Baker had as much work as he could handle in Springfield as well as in the surrounding countryside.

Isaac Baker was trained as a Dunkard to sing by note; he also learned to play the violin.<sup>12</sup> In time, his daughter Marion became a trained and unusually competent pianist, while sons Milton and Ervin were self-trained in brass instruments, the cornet and the euphonium. All three of the Baker children went to Springfield for their primary and secondary school education and then to the Model School in St. Thomas to obtain their third-class teaching certificates. Although this certificate was valid only in certain areas and schools, it gave an aspiring teacher a start. For Marion it meant a teaching position that unfortunately ended when her mother died of a spinal injury in late 1889 or early 1890, forcing the young woman to go home and keep house for her father and two brothers. In 1897 she married George Stewart, the young principal of the Springfield school, who had come to the village about 1894 from Mitchell, Ontario.<sup>13</sup> Isaac Baker was one of the school's trustees in 1896.<sup>14</sup>

Both Baker sons also taught until they had saved enough money to enter Trinity College in Toronto, Milton graduating in medicine in 1894 and Ervin in 1899. Milton practised first in Springfield, then moved to Brantford where he died in 1906. Ervin also practised in Springfield for a short time and then went north to Keewatin on Lake-of-the-Woods. He

eventually returned to the homestead in 1920, continuing to live there through the deaths of his father in 1925, his sister Marion in 1937, and her husband George Stewart in 1941. When Ervin died in 1959 the homestead was left to the one surviving member of the family, Marion's son, John Hall Stewart, who continued to use the old place as a summer residence.<sup>15</sup>

### The Material Evidence

Because Isaac Baker lived in the same house from the time he built it, because Marion returned to the house upon her mother's untimely death, and because Ervin, a bachelor, also ended up at home, there was never any reason to dispose of the furniture that Baker had made for his bride. Thus in 1978, in spite of modern conveniences such as electricity and indoor plumbing, the contents of house, workshop, and barn constituted a document of the life and work of Isaac Baker, builder and cabinetmaker, 1833-1925. In the kitchen, for example, was a late nineteenth-century, stencilled, Windsor rocking chair, a type made in Ontario furniture factories. This could well have been brought to the house by Marion and her husband. The rest of the plank seat chairs were handmade, probably by Baker. The kitchen dado was painted light blue, the colour it has always been within the memory of Stewart.

The dining-room contained a mixture of furniture. Pieces made by Baker included the following: a Victorian corner cupboard with gothic-arched panels and a rococo foliate-carved cornice (fig. 5); a heavy sideboard decorated in the Victorian Eastlake style with sawtooth motifs, turned finials, and medallions; a high Eastlake-style, drop-front desk with a bookcase on one side; a clock shelf with carved fleur-de-lis brackets (see fig. 11); and Eastlake-style window valances. The gingerbread clock and the turn-of-the-century, pressed-back chairs were products of a furniture factory.

The parlour contained a sofa and chairs, including a platform rocker, that were upholstered in olive and maroon plush. The set was made by Isaac Baker in the Victorian Eastlake style. Although their proportions were quite in keeping with the factory-made models of the day, Baker was not so successful with his pedestal tables. Perhaps he could not find a good



Fig. 5. Corner cupboard (height 229cm). Cat. no. 978.118.6. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 78-6047.)

example to copy. In any case, the centre table with the hexagonal top in figure 6 has much better lines than another, smaller table in the room.

A large upstairs bedroom was furnished with a French bedstead that had a tall headboard embellished with foliate carving and moulding (see fig. 7). Two other bedsteads of somewhat similar design but less impressive height were in two other, smaller bedrooms. Possibly because the bedrooms were relatively small and the bed therefore placed close to a wall, only the side rail that showed was decorated. Each bedroom contained an enclosed washstand and a chest of drawers in keeping with the bedstead. Also found in the large front bedroom were three upholstered side chairs (see fig.

8) identical to the one shown in figure 4 in front of the house. Likely these were the Bakers' original dining-room chairs or possibly they were made for the parlour. Although these three chairs were all that remained in the Baker home at the time of the sale, they were likely part of an original set of four or possibly six chairs. On the landing at the top of the stairs was one of the most attractive pieces of furniture in the house, the drop-front desk shown in figure 9.

In the pantry and the basement were many other pieces turned out by Isaac Baker including a potato masher, rolling pin and other treen, arrow-back and "chicken coop" chairs. Two examining tables (see fig. 10) had been made for sons Milton and Ervin Baker.<sup>16</sup> Almost any household item that Baker could make out of wood was to be found in the house together with crocks, jars, and all the other paraphernalia acquired in over one hundred years of residency.

Fig. 6. Table (height 72.7cm), walnut with mahogany veneer. Cat. no. 978.118.3. This illustration shows the table in situ prior to the sale. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, uncatalogued.)

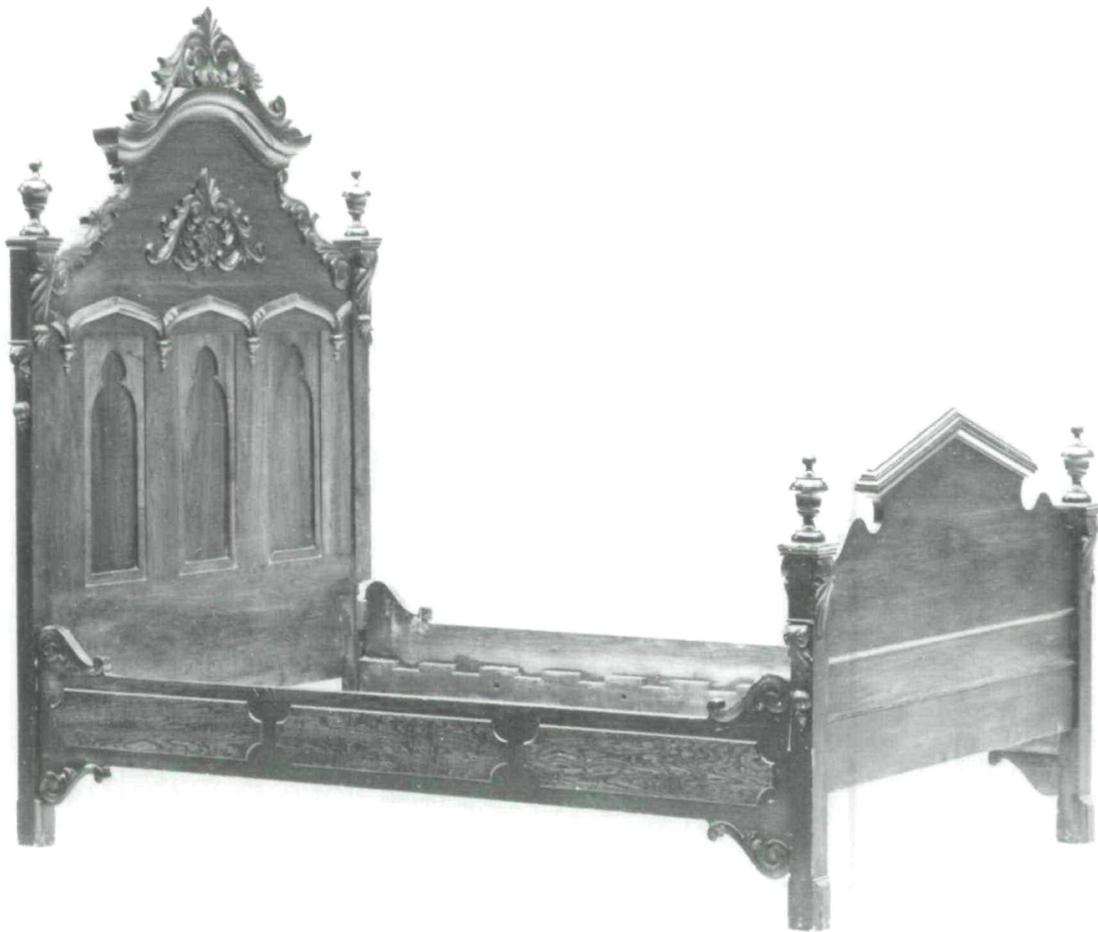


Fig. 7. Bedstead (length ca. 206.4cm, width 136cm, height of headboard 170cm). Cat. no. 978.2a-f. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-10796.)



Fig. 8. Chair (height 85cm), walnut.  
Cat. no. 978.118.5. (Photo: National  
Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-10799.)

Fig. 9. Drop-front desk on chest  
(height 172.5cm, width 101cm,  
depth 50.6cm), foliate-carved  
cresting on cornice, foliate-  
sawed motifs applied to drop  
front panels. Cat. no.  
978.118.8. (Photo: National  
Museums of Canada, neg. no.  
79-2073.)





Fig. 10. Examining table (height 78.3cm, length without leaves 98.3cm), leather-covered drop leaves. Cat. no. 978.118.4a-c. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-10798.)

The shop's contents included paper and wooden patterns and pieces of moulding and trim which verified the origin of Baker's furniture (see figs. 11,12,13). Here were the patterns for the gothic-arch trim on the headboard of one of the beds, the piecrust moulding and the quarter-circle trim on the sideboard and desk, and even the pattern for the clock shelf. Many of these patterns were hanging on the walls along with chisels, bits, and other small woodworking tools. On the west wall in front of a many-paned

window was a treadle lathe; on the opposite wall, running the full length of the shop, was a work bench and vise. A window gave good light and a view of the back or kitchen section of the house. Baker's large woodworking tools, many of them branded with his name, were all there along with patterns for house trim. On the floor were chests filled with more tools, patterns, and trim. Everything that he needed for construction was in that shop.

A trip to the barn revealed more of Baker's work. The hay rake, wheelbarrow, grain cradle, and almost all of the farm implements were of his manufacture, fashioned with great skill and of excellent design. Nor had Baker forgotten his children. The red sled in figure 14 served two generations well and is still sturdy enough to carry several more. One of the most interesting items found in the barn was a handsome drop-front desk on table (fig. 15) with one of the pigeonholes labelled "Blank forms for medical examination." This desk was made by Baker for the Springfield medical office of one of his sons and no doubt was brought back to the homestead for storage when the office was closed.

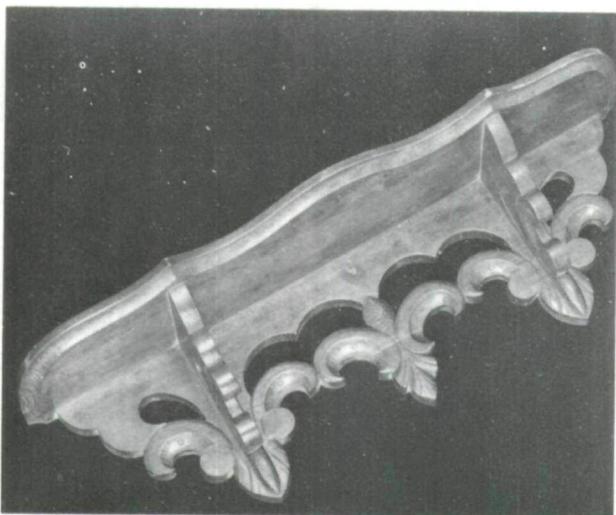


Fig. 11. Clock shelf (length 74.4cm), walnut. Cat. no. 978.118.1. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-10794.)

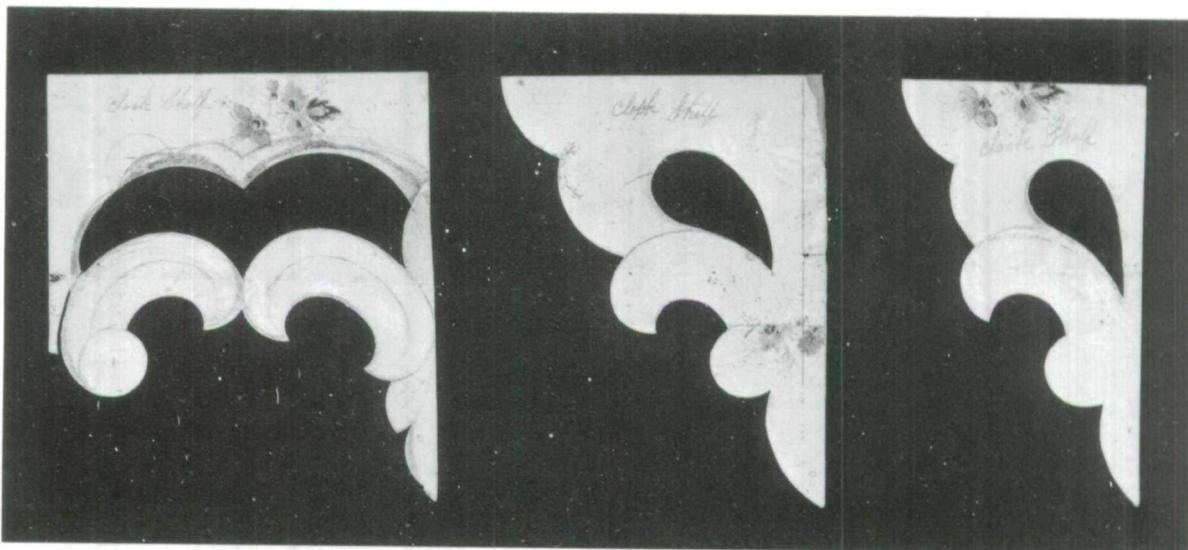


Fig. 12. The decorative back of the clock shelf in fig. 10 was designed from the three patterns illustrated. Cat. no. 978.105.55. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-10795.)

What could be done to preserve the Isaac Baker homestead? Here was a home, a workshop, and a barn, plus the tools and products of an early Ontario artisan, a complete package that could and should be studied and enjoyed equally by historians, craftsmen, and the public. Since the estate could not be kept intact, its contents were recorded. Exterior and interior pictures were taken of the house, workshop, and barn while the artifacts were still in place. Copies were made of early pictures of the Baker family and their

Fig. 13. These are a few of the patterns discovered in Baker's workshop. The pattern with the series of arches was used for the moulding applied to the headboard of fig. 7. Cat. nos. 978.105.29,32,40. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-10797.)

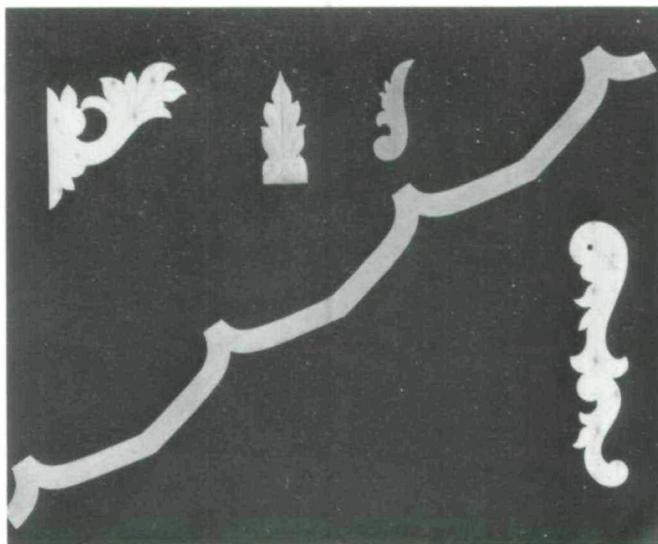


Fig. 14. Sled (length 89.3cm, width 47cm), metal runners. The original box on top is missing. Cat. no. 978.118.9a,b. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-10801.)

Fig. 15. Drop-front desk on table (height 210cm, width 138.5cm, depth 68cm), walnut. When the drop front is closed, the hinged table can be raised to reveal a large storage compartment. Cat. no. 978.118.7a,b. (Photo: National Museums of Canada, neg. no. 80-10800.)



house. Stewart was interviewed for more information about the family. Arrangements were made by the National Museum of Man to purchase many of the signed tools, patterns, trim, chests, and the lathe from the workshop. The furniture, which had to be purchased at public auction, was selected to correspond with patterns, trim, or pictures, or to represent the life of the Baker family. It was also chosen with an eye to as wide a variety as possible of woods, construction methods, styles, and craftsmanship. An axe handle and the last cross bow that Isaac Baker ever made, which Stewart donated to the museum, demonstrate the quality of Baker's workmanship as well as his versatility in creating objects other than furniture or buildings.

#### Research Findings and Potential

The benefits to historical research gleaned from the acquisition of the Isaac Baker material are many. Perhaps they can best be divided into two categories: presently verifiable facts and possibilities for the future. In the first case, family tradition and research plus preliminary archival investigation have established the existence of Isaac Baker as a carpenter in Elgin County, the identification of some of the buildings he was responsible for, and many facts about his life and his relationship to the community in which he lived. The workshop, tools, furniture, and matching patterns are proof that Baker did make his own furniture. Thus, the link between carpenter and cabinetmaker so often based on only oral tradition — "that piece was made by my grandfather [or other ancestor] who was a carpenter" — is in this instance a verified fact.

Also, the tools and furniture provide tangible evidence by which the scope and ability of this man can be judged. A cursory examination of the furniture reveals that Baker favoured walnut, cherry, chestnut, maple, and oak as show woods; the secondary woods were soft. Although vestiges of almost every recognized Victorian furniture style can be found in his work, he leaned mostly to the Victorian Renaissance and the Victorian Eastlake styles that were in favour during the period in which he made his furniture. He chose carved trim and pulls, piecrust moulding, and quarter-circle motifs which he applied to the corners of door panels and side panels. The use of engaged quarter-columns and lipped drawers on one or two pieces indicates

a knowledge of an earlier, pre-Victorian style. Perhaps this was copied from pieces in his boyhood home. The quality of his workmanship is sound and includes fat, even dovetails as well as the ability to use veneer successfully. The proportions of his furniture, especially the tables, would suggest that he did not work exclusively from pattern books, perhaps not at all.

As for future research, the material and historical evidence collected from the Isaac Baker homestead will lead the way in many directions to a better understanding of nineteenth-century furniture and its makers. Technicians can examine in detail the tools, methods, materials, and finishes used by Baker. Moreover, because the period of manufacture is known, since most of the furniture has always been in the same house (pictures even reveal its exact location), and also since almost all of the finishes appear to be original, there can be valid studies made as to the effects of time and wear and even of position on finishes.

Both the furniture and the pictures of it will provide clues to researchers as to what was likely to be found in the home of an artisan in a farming area in southwestern Ontario. Further study of the Baker family should result in expanded knowledge of the woodworker and his social relationships and position in his community. One can only speculate as to the possibilities that are offered by research of the link between Isaac Baker and his ancestors in the Markham-Thornhill area. Was he trained there? Did his father make furniture? Can his use of engaged quarter-columns and lipped drawers be tied somehow to fine examples of Ontario Chippendale-style furniture that were supposed to have been made by American-Germanic artisans in the Markham area? Only on the basis of documented collections such as this one will it be possible to answer such questions related to the material life of the nineteenth century.

#### NOTES

1. London Free Press, 23 September 1978.
2. Personal communication from John Hall Stewart to the author, 25 April 1980.

3. Interview with John Hall Stewart at the Hall-Baker-Stewart homestead, 23 September 1978.
4. Personal communication from Stewart, 25 April 1980.
5. Interview with Stewart, 23 September 1978.
6. 1861 Census, Ontario, Elgin County, South Dorchester Township, District no. 2, p.33.
7. Assessments Rolls, South Dorchester Township, Elgin County, Ontario, 1861-1864, n.p.
8. Indenture of Bargain and Sale, John Hall to Nancy Baker. Given by John Hall Stewart to the National Museum of Man.
9. Personal communication from Stewart, 25 April 1980.
10. Interview with Stewart, 23 September 1978. The 1870 Assessment Roll, South Dorchester Township, Elgin County, shows that 3 persons, aged 21-60, were living in the Isaac Baker household.
11. Grant Best, "Springfield: A Pioneer History Elgin County," in Southern Counties Journal (1896; reprint ed., Petrolia, Ont.: n.p., 1971), pp. 134-35.
12. Both his violin instruction book and his hymn book are still treasured by his grandson.
13. Personal communication from Stewart, 25 April 1980.
14. Best, "Springfield," p. 135.
15. Interview with Stewart, 23 September 1978, and personal communication, 25 April 1980.
16. Ibid.

## THE FURNITURE OF RUTHERFORD HOUSE

by Joan MacKinnon

Alberta is a young province with few existing buildings predating the 1890s and research into its material history has only just begun. It will take years to examine documentary records and photographs and to record the memories of early settlers in order to develop a complete diachronic picture of the differences between rural, urban, and ethnic furnishings in the province. As a preliminary examination of the styles and types of furniture found in early twentieth-century Alberta, this research note will consider Rutherford House in Edmonton, the second home of the first premier of Alberta.

Alexander Cameron Rutherford, Premier of Alberta from 1905 to 1910, was a thirty-eight-year-old Ontario lawyer when he moved west in 1895 with his wife and two children. His first home, a four-room cottage, was later expanded to include a second storey, but as the home of a premier with heavy social responsibilities it was very cramped. By 1908 Rutherford had decided to build a new house "more in keeping with his high public office."<sup>1</sup> The following year he purchased a 1.3-acre lot adjacent to the University of Alberta, which he had founded, and had the local firm of British-trained architects Wilson and Herrald prepare plans for a house. Construction began in the fall of 1909.

Rutherford House was completed in February 1911. Best described as Jacobean revival in style, it was similar to "brick houses of the first decade of the twentieth century built in eastern cities such as Toronto and Chicago."<sup>2</sup> It cost \$25,000 to complete, making it one of the most expensive, as well as one of the largest, residences in Edmonton at that time (fig. 1). However, by the time the Rutherford family moved into the house, Rutherford was no longer in power, having resigned in May 1910 as the result of a railway scandal.

Its design reflecting his social and political status, Rutherford named his house "Achnacarry," a British tradition rarely followed in Alberta.<sup>3</sup> The



Fig. 1. Rutherford House, ca. 1913, in Edmonton: Alberta's Capital City (Edmonton: Esdale Press, 1914), p.155.

house plan (see fig. 2,a,b) is formal, with a stately entrance leading into a large oak-panelled hall and wide central staircase. Carved broken pediments top the wide doorways leading to the three rooms designed for formal entertaining as well as the narrower doorway connecting the family area with the main hall. The library, dining room, and drawing room range from sixty-one to ninety-one square metres. The library and dining room are connected by sliding doors which could be left open during large gatherings or closed for smaller meetings in one room or the other. The arrangement of the furniture is also formal, but the quality of the furniture purchased at the time the family moved into Rutherford House is not in keeping with its grandeur. The selection of furniture appears to have been influenced by the family's apparently straightened circumstances, for the high cost of the house still had to be

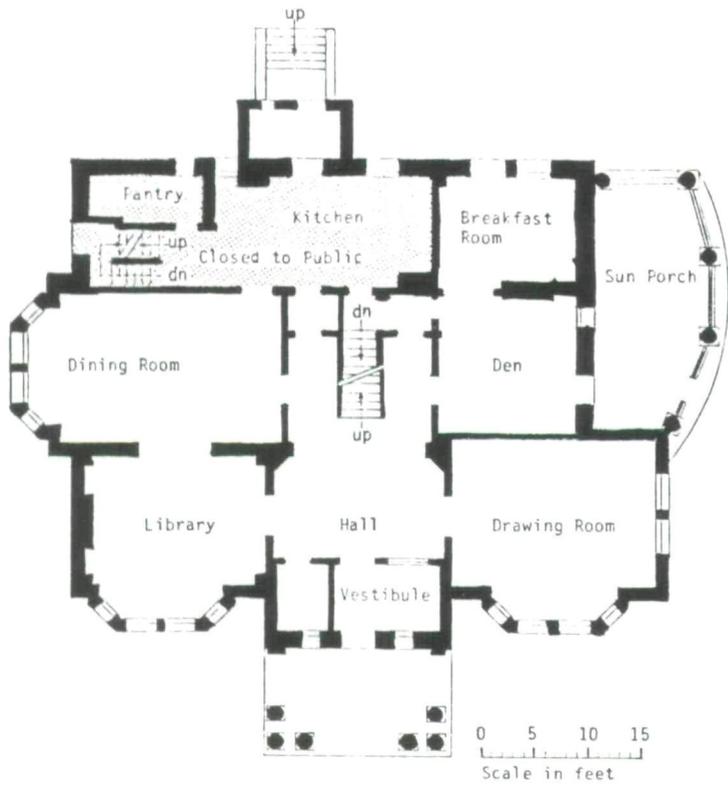


Fig. 2a,b. Floor plans for Rutherford House. (Courtesy of Historic Sites Service, Alberta Culture, uncatalogued.)

Rutherford House: First Floor



Rutherford House: Second Floor

borne following Rutherford's resignation as premier.

Like the contents of many western houses, the furniture of Rutherford House was a mixture of items, some shipped by train from the east in 1895,<sup>4</sup> others subsequently acquired for the Rutherfords' first home, and those purchased to furnish the new and much larger residence. During this period very little furniture was being made in Alberta other than the pieces, often ethnic in character, made by rural carpenters. The 1911 Henderson's Alberta Gazetteer and Directory lists ninety-three furniture dealers throughout Alberta, including six in Edmonton, but only four cabinetmakers.<sup>5</sup> Most furniture was imported from eastern Canada by furniture dealers or was purchased directly from catalogue companies such as the T. Eaton Company, Robert Simpson Company, Hudson's Bay Company, and Woodward's Department Store.

The central hall in Rutherford House was unfurnished except for possibly a chair or settee.<sup>6</sup> The Rutherfords purchased new furniture for both the library and dining room from Blowey-Henry Limited,<sup>7</sup> an Edmonton firm established in 1906. Although still in business, the company has unfortunately not retained any of its early catalogues. As none of the extant pieces bear labels, it is impossible to determine their origin with certainty, but they were probably Ontario-made. The furniture styles in both rooms are more commonly associated with an average, middle-class house than a mansion and are made of oak rather than the mahogany which prevails amongst the Rutherfords' older furniture. While this may indicate a change in taste, it is probable that financial concerns dictated the quality of furniture purchased. Finer furniture was certainly available in Alberta — witness the high quality of furniture in the provincial Government House which opened in 1913.<sup>8</sup>

The furniture purchased for the library was in the Mission style and included a large chesterfield with leather upholstery, one or more chairs, possibly including a Morris recliner, a small square lamp table, a larger table with space for books below, and a small circular oak table in the centre of the room.<sup>9</sup> A photograph taken during the 1920s (fig. 3) shows a red leather club chair which may or may not have been original to the room. Designed and named "Craftsman" by Gustav Stickley to furnish the bungalow houses he promoted, this furniture was given the name "Mission style" after another builder termed

the bungalows "Spanish Mission."<sup>10</sup> Stickley's originals were well constructed of solid oak, with straight lines and canvas or leather upholstery. Furniture manufacturers across the United States and Canada popularized the style and from the middle of the first decade of the century until about 1920 Mission style furniture was widely sold through the catalogues. It was to be found everywhere, from middle-class houses to public libraries, the lounges of the Y.M.C.A., and railway station lobbies. It was a comfortable, informal style, scarcely in keeping with one of the intended functions of the Rutherford House library as a formal milieu for meetings and entertainment. Groups such as the Authors' Club, Canadian Authors' Association, the Y.W.C.A., and the Historical Society of Alberta did indeed frequently meet there.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 3. Library, 1920s. The portrait over the fireplace is of A.C. Rutherford. (Photo: Courtesy of Mrs. S.H. McCuaig.)

The furniture in the dining room was likewise of lower quality than one might expect in such a large and costly house. The 350-square-foot dining room, with fir wainscotting, was furnished in the golden oak style. "Golden oak" was a factory-designed style which used mainly oak, with applied carvings and mouldings, although cheaper pieces were merely grained to resemble oak. It is the style which appears most frequently in catalogues of the period. The china cabinet in the dining room is in fact very similar to several depicted in the 1908 Sears Roebuck Catalogue (figs. 4,5). Its bow front, mirror-backed top shelf, and spindly curved legs are characteristic of golden oak china cabinets. The butler's trolley is likewise simple, ornamented only with slight scrollery along the sides and back. The dining table was somewhat more ornate with typically heavy legs, in this case terminating in carved turnip feet. The set of eight chairs had cabriole legs with ball and claw feet and probably resembled those termed "colonial" in period catalogues. There was also a large golden oak sideboard.

In contrast to the furniture in the library and dining room, that in the drawing room was of superior quality and woods. Many of the pieces had been purchased prior to 1906.<sup>12</sup> Drawing rooms were considered ladies' territory and Mrs. Rutherford held monthly "at-homes," numerous tea parties, and musicales. Colour schemes and fashionable styles of furniture were lighter, with Sheraton, Hepplewhite, and Adam favoured by decorators.<sup>13</sup> One of the occasional chairs in the drawing room shows Sheraton influence in its square back and tapered legs, while the other (fig. 6), also of mahogany, is American colonial in inspiration. Both have Berlin needlework seats in tones of blue, green, and pink, reflecting the rose pink walls of the room. The chesterfield and matching chair, upholstered in rose-figured tapestry, had the heavy oblong feet typical of Empire revival furniture. Several small tables and plant stands were positioned about the room although, in comparison with the much more Victorian drawing room in the Rutherfords' previous home, bric-a-brac was kept to a minimum. A rather spindly whatnot (fig. 7) stood near the door. The final major item in the drawing room was a Nordheimer piano, purchased about 1905.<sup>14</sup> All furniture was positioned around the perimeter of the room, reinforcing its air of formality.



Fig. 4. China cabinet (height 167.5cm, width 95cm), purchased for the dining room in 1911. Collection: Provincial Museum of Alberta, cat. no. H73.28.2. (Photo by the author.)

Fig. 5. China cabinet similar to fig. 4, advertised in the Sears Roebuck Catalogue 1908 (Northfield, Ill.: D.B.I. Books, 1971), p.397.

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\$22.00

No. 1K1078

No. 1K1078 This China Cabinet has full swell double thick bent glass ends and front. The wood is thoroughly air seasoned and kiln dried, specially selected, highly figured quarter sawed oak, polished golden finish. Height, 67 inches; width, 36 inches; depth, 18 inches; mirror on top, 6x18 inches. Finished back, double grooved shelves. Handsome in design, high grade in construction, beautiful in wood and finish. Price, as illustrated at factory in Northern Illinois, \$12.25. Price, with mirror in top decoration and back of top shelf, at factory in Northern Illinois, 13.85. Price, with mirror in top decoration and back of top shelf, at warehouse in Kansas City, Mo., 14.78. Price, with mirror in top decoration and back of top shelf, at warehouse in St. Paul, Minn., 14.83.



Fig. 6. Chair (height 83.75cm, width 55cm) and table (height 73.75cm), ca. 1900. Collection: Provincial Museum of Alberta, cat. nos. H73.22.4 and H73.22.1. (Photo by the author.)

The furnishings of the two family rooms on the ground floor were arranged more casually. Both the den and breakfast room are relatively small, and the difference in their function and status is also denoted by their narrower doorways and by the use of fir rather than maple flooring. Rutherford's important collection of Canadiana overflowed from the library into the den which was lined with bookcases made by the Globe Wernicke Company of Stratford, Ontario. These "elastic" bookcases were described in the 1901 Eaton's catalogue as consisting of

a series of small compartments, each ingeniously designed to interlock with another in vertical and horizontal arrangement ...The front of each compartment is provided by a dust proof door which...opens outward and upward.<sup>15</sup>

The den also contained either a chesterfield or several comfortable chairs



Fig. 7. Whatnot (height 130cm, width 90cm), ca. 1900. Collection: Provincial Museum of Alberta, cat. no. H73.22.2 (Photo by the author.)

positioned in front of an open fireplace. The adjoining breakfast room had a small rectangular table, probably golden oak in style, four chairs, a sideboard, and a built-in china cabinet. It is not known when the furniture for this room was purchased.

Most of the bedroom furniture came from the Rutherfords' earlier home. Both the guest room, the largest bedroom, and the master bedroom were furnished in Empire revival-style mahogany furniture which probably dated to the 1890s. While the guest room had a brass bed, the bed in the master bedroom was a mahogany sleigh bed with high curved headboard and slightly lower footboard. Both rooms had a high chiffonier and a lower dresser with mirror,<sup>16</sup> as well as an upholstered chair or two.

Between the master bedroom and the guest room was a sewing room furnished with wicker furniture.

Immensely popular in this period, wicker furniture was an outgrowth of the naturalist movement which also found expression in Art Nouveau and in the passion for rustic outdoor furniture. Wicker was selected in this case for its lightness, for it could easily be moved onto the adjoining balcony above the front entrance if desired.

White painted furniture, favoured for young girls' rooms, was used in Hazel Rutherford's room. As in the other bedrooms there was a chiffonier, low dresser, and bed; but here there was also a hope chest with a padded lid covered in shadow cloth and an armchair upholstered in the same fabric.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Cecil Rutherford's room was darker and more masculine. The smallest of the family bedrooms, it was crowded with a simple golden oak desk, an oak chair with pierced back splat in a tulip design, another elastic bookcase, a narrow brass bed, and a dresser, probably of oak.

At the back of the house was the maid's bedroom, tiny compared with the family bedrooms. This seven-by-ten-foot room was furnished with an iron bed, straight-backed chair, dresser, and wardrobe. The latter was the only one in the house; all other rooms had closets, a very modern feature for the time. There was also a small adjoining sitting room, furnished with an oak table, one or two chairs, a "Winnipeg" or "sanitary" couch,<sup>18</sup> and a bookcase. This room had originally been planned as a second maid's room.

During the time the family owned Rutherford House, its furnishings appear to have changed little. In 1940, shortly before Rutherford's death, the house and most of its contents were sold to the Delta Upsilon fraternity of the University of Alberta. During the twenty-nine years that the fraternity occupied the house, many of the furnishings were dispersed. Following a lengthy campaign to save the house from demolition by the expanding university, it was leased to the Government of Alberta in 1970 for restoration as a historic site. As a result, when the house was opened to the public in 1973, it contained both original items and pieces of period furniture similar to the originals.

Although Rutherford House was designed to reflect the Rutherfords' status and social position in the community, the furniture in the house is more typical of the average house of the period than one might expect. In particular, two styles of furniture found in Rutherford House, Mission style and golden oak, could also be found in the homes of people from all income levels throughout Canada. Thus while Rutherford House itself is atypical, much of its furniture was representative of the types, if not the quantity, of furniture located in Alberta homes of the era.<sup>19</sup>

#### NOTES

1. D.R. Babcock, A Gentleman of Strathcona: Alexander Cameron Rutherford, Alberta Culture, Occasional Paper No. 8 (Edmonton, Alta., 1980), p.92
2. D. Clarke, D. Bodnar, and J. Pasnak, "Architectural Heritage," Canadian Collector, January-February 1976, p. 58.
3. Babcock, A Gentleman, p. 101.

4. Ibid, p. 15.
5. Henderson's Alberta Gazetteer and Directory for 1911, vol. XXVIII (Calgary: 1911), pp. 972, 1009-1010.
6. Interview with Hazel McCuaig, Rutherford's daughter, 7 February 1972, Provincial Archives of Alberta, acc. no. 72.125.
7. Babcock, A Gentleman, p. 134.
8. Photographs taken in 1915 of several of the rooms appear in Alberta Government House, a pamphlet about the house published ca. 1979 and available from the Provincial Museum of Alberta.
9. Interview with McCuaig, 7 February 1972.
10. George Grotz, The New Antiques - Knowing and Buying Victorian Furniture (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1970), p. 145.
11. Babcock, A Gentleman, p. 134.
12. For example, the whatnot cabinet, small oval table, and one occasional chair appear in a 1906 photograph reproduced in Babcock's A Gentleman of Strathcona, p. 14.
13. Nicholas Cooper, The Opulent Eye - Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design (London: The Architectural Press, 1976), p. 15.
14. Interview with Hazel McCuaig, 13 February 1980, Alberta Historic Sites Service files.
15. T. Eaton & Co. Spring and Summer Catalogue 1901. (Toronto: The Musson Book Co., 1970), p. 224.
16. Interview with McCuaig, 7 February 1972.
17. Interview with Hazel McCuaig, 1 March 1979, Alberta Historic Sites Service files.
18. Several "Winnipeg" or "sanitary" couches, so termed because they were made completely of steel, are pictured in the T. Eaton & Co. Spring and Summer Catalogue 1915, p. 288.
19. In addition to the sources already mentioned, the following works were consulted:
 

Ames, Kenneth L. "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America." Journal of Interdisciplinary History 9 (Summer 1978).

MacKay, James. Turn of the Century Antiques: An Encyclopedia. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1974.

Stickley, Gustav. Craftsman Homes: Architecture and Furnishings of the American Arts and Crafts Movement. New York: Dover Publications, 1979.

## NOTES ON SPEAKERS' CHAIRS FROM THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA\*

By Frances Roback

There appears to be a widespread belief that the artifacts of government should be among the best documented in the historical record, perhaps because of their inherent value and high profile in the public eye. When such a badge of officialdom is scrutinized more closely, however, the results can be surprising. Such is the case of a Speaker's chair from the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

At the conclusion of the final session of the seventh Alberta Legislative Assembly on 23 April 1935 it was moved that "the chair which Mr. Speaker has occupied in this assembly for some years with so much dignity and ability become his personal property."<sup>1</sup> The motion received unanimous approval in the House<sup>2</sup> and the chair passed out of the public domain into the hands of the Hon. George N. Johnston, United Farmers of Alberta Member for Coronation and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from 1927 to 1935.<sup>3</sup> The chair briefly re-entered public life when it was borrowed by the Legislative Assembly for use as a second throne during the Royal Visit in 1939.<sup>4</sup> It remained in the possession of George Johnston until 1967 when he donated it to the Glenbow Museum. Appropriately enough O.S. Longman, who was instrumental in bringing the chair to the Glenbow, had witnessed its presentation to Speaker Johnston from the public gallery some thirty years earlier.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of its acquisition in 1967 the chair was thought to have been used in the first Legislative Assembly in 1906. It was also reported that the presentation to Johnston was the only occasion on which a Speaker's chair had been so presented by members of the assembly.<sup>6</sup> And so the matter

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\* I would like to thank D.B. McDougall, Legislative Librarian, Legislative Building, Edmonton, and R.B. Davidson, Curator of History of the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton, for their generous and courteous assistance in the preparation of this report.

rested until the Legislative Library in Edmonton recently investigated the origins of Speakers' chairs in use over time.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 1. Speaker Johnston's chair (height 162cm), varnished mahogany veneer with a leather-covered seat cushion, back cushion, and arm rests. The centrally mounted provincial coat-of-arms is flanked on both sides by the provincial flower, the wild rose (see fig. 2). The rose motif is repeated on the chair arm uprights. Stylized acanthus leaves descend in two lines down the sides of the seat back. The chair is unmarked except for a brass plaque attached to the front rail and stamped, "THIS CHAIR/ PRESENTED TO/HON. G.N. JOHNSTON/SPEAKER OF/THE ALBERTA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY/ 1927-1935." Collection: Glenbow Museum, Calgary, cat. no. C-11776. (Photo by Ron Marsh, Glenbow Museum, neg. no. P-1374-8.)

The Legislative Library study shows that George Johnston was not the only or indeed the first Speaker to have been the recipient of a chair. Similar presentations had been made to Speakers elected at the respective openings

of the first sessions of two newly enacted legislative assemblies, the North West Territories on 31 October 1888 and Alberta on 15 March 1906.<sup>8</sup> The study notes that to date no written accounts of the passage of either chair out of the assembly have come to light. The chairs themselves are in the historical collection of the Provincial Museum of Alberta. Although the author has not yet had the opportunity to examine the chairs, catalogue records and photographs serve to sketch a preliminary comparison with Speaker Johnston's chair. In appearance the three chairs seem to have little in common. Speaker Wilson's chair from the first assembly of the North West Territories is throne-like, fully 218.5 cm high, elaborately carved, and surmounted by a crown and what appears to be an orb. Speaker Fisher's chair from the first assembly of Alberta is a high-backed, swivel-based armchair reminiscent of an office chair; it was replaced by a new Speaker's chair in 1911.<sup>9</sup>

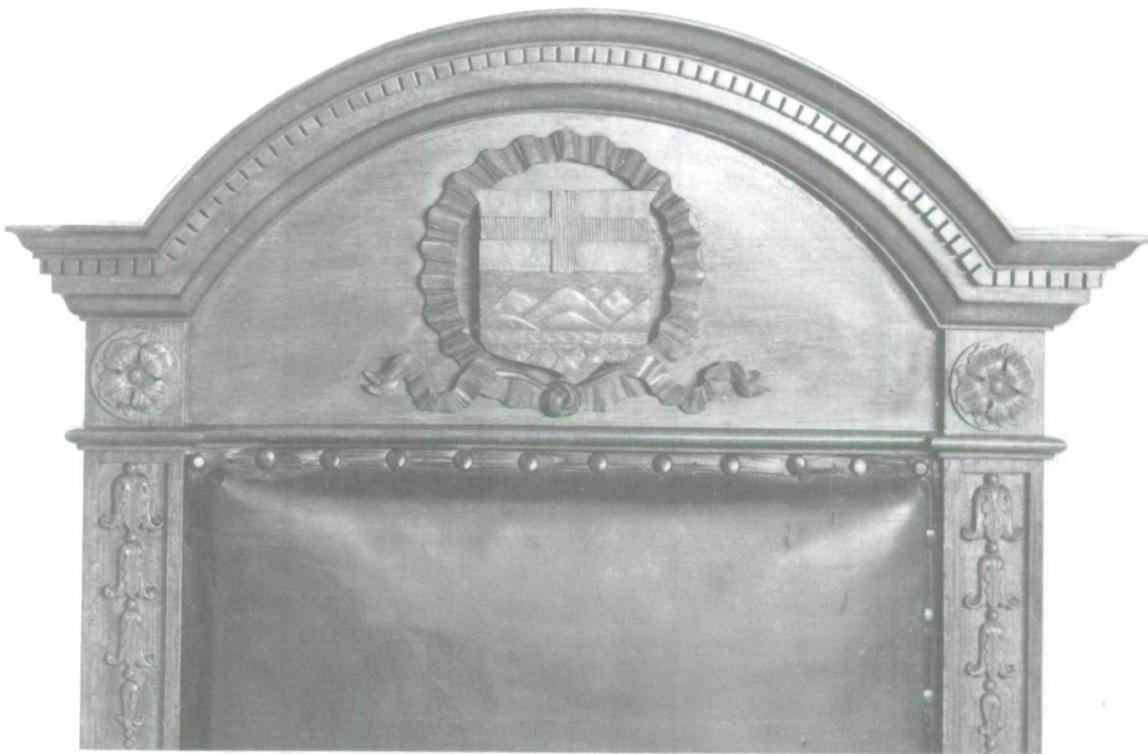


Fig. 2. Detail of Speaker Johnston's chair showing ornamental mounts of the provincial coat-of-arms and provincial flower. (Photo by Ron Marsh, Glenbow Museum, neg. no. P-1374-9.)

An as yet unverified reference to a fourth Speaker's chair is mentioned here because it alludes to motives and procedures in chair presentations.<sup>10</sup> The chair was to have been presented to the Hon. Charles S. Pingle, Member for Redcliffe-Medicine Hat and Speaker during the Liberal administration of 1920-21, but this did not take place while the House was in session. When the matter was raised during the next session the United Farmers of Alberta administration quelled the plan, for which they were labelled mean and vindictive.<sup>11</sup>

The Legislative Library study has recorded the movement out of the assembly of no less than three Speakers' chairs. The present Speaker's chair has been successfully traced back to 6 February 1936 when Speaker Nathan E. Tanner, Social Credit Member for Cardston, took office in the first session of the eighth legislature.<sup>12</sup> Documentary evidence of other Speakers' chairs and their passage from the House may yet turn up. One avenue not yet investigated is the photographic record. Official portraits, photographic views of the House in session, contemporary news coverage, and other sources may yield enough detail to follow the Speakers' chairs from session to session, occupant to occupant. A survey of museums in the province may bring to light chairs which had passed into private hands.

A final note on the origins of the chairs. Furnishings for the Legislative Building were supplied by the Department of Public Works and its predecessors, but despite exhaustive inquiries the Legislative Library's efforts to record the source of any of the Speakers' chairs drew a blank.<sup>13</sup> For the moment, the manufacturers will have to remain a mystery.

#### NOTES

1. Alberta, Legislative Assembly, Journals, Fifth Session of the Seventh Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, 32 (23 April 1935): 314.
2. Journals, p. 314.
3. A.L. Normandin, The Canadian Parliamentary Guide 1935 (Ottawa: Le Syndicat des Oeuvres Sociales Limitée, 1935), p. 357.
4. Edmonton Bulletin, 22 May 1939. Cited in Alberta, Legislative Library, "Speakers' Chairs of the Alberta Legislative Assembly," 3 July 1979.

5. Glenbow Museum, Cultural History Department, reference file C-11776.
6. Ibid.
7. Alberta, Legislative Library, "Speakers' Chairs of the Alberta Legislative Assembly," 3 July 1979. The research and conclusions contained in this report appear in the present note with the permission of the Legislative Library, Edmonton.
8. Ibid.; also Archibald O. MacRae, History of the Province of Alberta (Calgary: Western Canada History Co., 1912), pp. 438-39, 459.
9. Copies of the catalogue records and photographs of these two chairs were supplied and permission to use the information was granted by the Provincial Museum of Alberta.
10. Glenbow, reference file C-11776.
11. Ibid.; Edmonton Journal, 18 February 1920; Edmonton Bulletin, 3 February 1922.
12. Alberta, "Speakers' Chairs;" A.L. Normandin, The Canadian Parliamentary Guide 1941 (Ottawa: Syndicat d'Oeuvres Sociales Limitée, 1941), p. 387.
13. Alberta, "Speakers' Chairs,"

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#### WOODWORKERS IN KITCHENER-WATERLOO, ONTARIO, AREA

1841 - 1881

Doon Pioneer Village and Heritage Community has compiled a comprehensive list of woodworkers active in their respective trades in the Kitchener-Waterloo area of Ontario from 1841 to 1881. The list includes carriage makers, wagon makers, wheelwrights, pump makers, cabinetmakers, joiners, turners, and carpenters and covers the areas of Waterloo Township, North Dumfries Township, Berlin (now Kitchener), Waterloo, Galt, Preston, and Hespler. Most of the information gathered was taken from the census records of 1851, 1861, 1871, and 1881; newspapers, both German and English, tax assessment records, directories, credit ratings, and wills were used for cross-referencing.

The completed list provides a useful reference for anyone wishing to research individual artisans or trace styles and/or schools of craftsmanship. It also

provides background information for a comparison of the two ethnic traditions, German and Scottish, present in the area. The list has already been used to match signed pieces of furniture with actual cabinetmakers. Doon Pioneer Village itself has an extensive collection of nineteenth-century furniture made in the area.

The list was compiled by Kathy Shantz under a Summer Youth Employment Project funded by the federal Department of Manpower and Immigration. Those wishing to consult the master file should contact Eleanor Currie, Curator of Doon Pioneer Village and Heritage Community, R.R.2 , Kitchener, Ontario, N2G 3W5 (519-893-4020).