

# Woodworking Patterns at the Sutherland Steam Mill, Nova Scotia Museum\*

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Fig. 1. Sutherland Steam Mill, Denmark, Nova Scotia, 1980. (Photo by R.E. Merrick, Media Services, Nova Scotia Department of Education.)

In 1974 the province of Nova Scotia acquired a steam-powered sawmill and woodworking shop in Denmark, Colchester County. After a period of research, restoration, and stabilization, the mill was returned to operating condition and opened to the public in 1979 as a branch of the Nova Scotia Museum. The Sutherland Steam Mill is one of three wood product mills operated by the Nova Scotia Museum; the others are the stave and shingle mill at Ross Farm Museum, New Ross, and the McDonald Brothers' waterpowered sawmill reconstruction at Sherbrooke Village.<sup>1</sup>

The Sutherland Steam Mill was established about 1894 by Alexander Robert Sutherland (1866-1953), a carriage

maker who operated a small carriage shop at West Branch, Pictou County, before moving to Denmark to set up the mill.<sup>2</sup> By 1902 his brother, John Thomas Sutherland, a carpenter, had joined him in the business. Sutherland Brothers and Company is listed in *McAlpine's Nova Scotia, Magdelene Islands & St. Pierre Directory ... 1902* as a sash and door factory. Thomas built several houses in the area using the products of the mill while Alexander specialized in carriage making and the operation of the mill and shop.

Alexander managed the business on his own from 1910 until 1930, when he was joined by his son Wilfred. During World War II the business responded to the great need for export lumber. By this time the demand for carriage making had all but disappeared. Wilfred continued to supply lumber, custom sawing, and custom mill work locally until he finally closed the mill in 1958 because of his health.

\* A report on work in progress on a collection of wooden patterns at the Sutherland Steam Mill. The author would appreciate hearing from anyone familiar with similar collections.

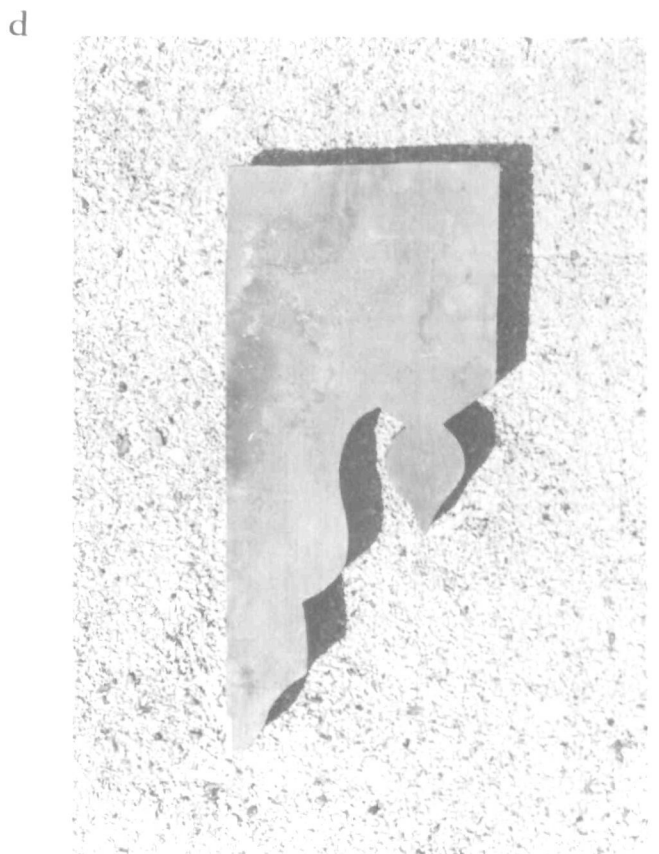
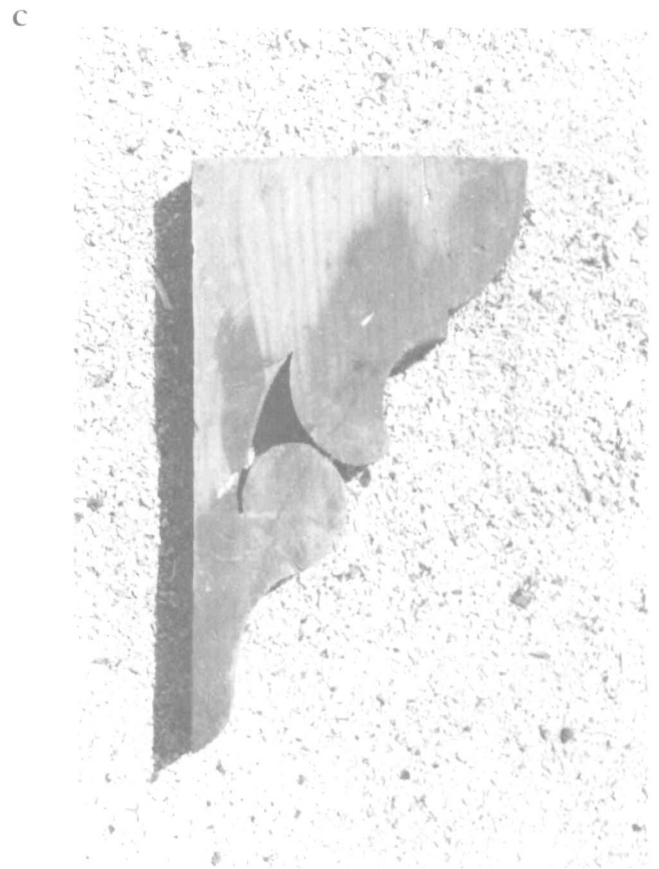
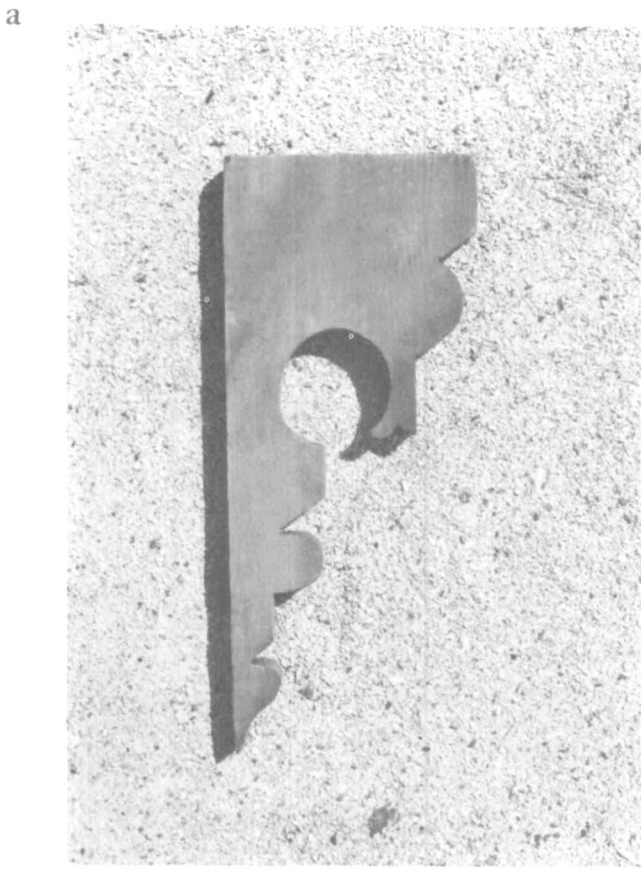


Fig. 2. Bracket patterns at the Sutherland Steam Mill: a, length 44 cm, width 23 cm; b, length 49 cm, width 20½ cm; c, length 25 cm, width 14½ cm; d, length 32 cm, width 15 cm. (Photos by the author, uncatalogued.)

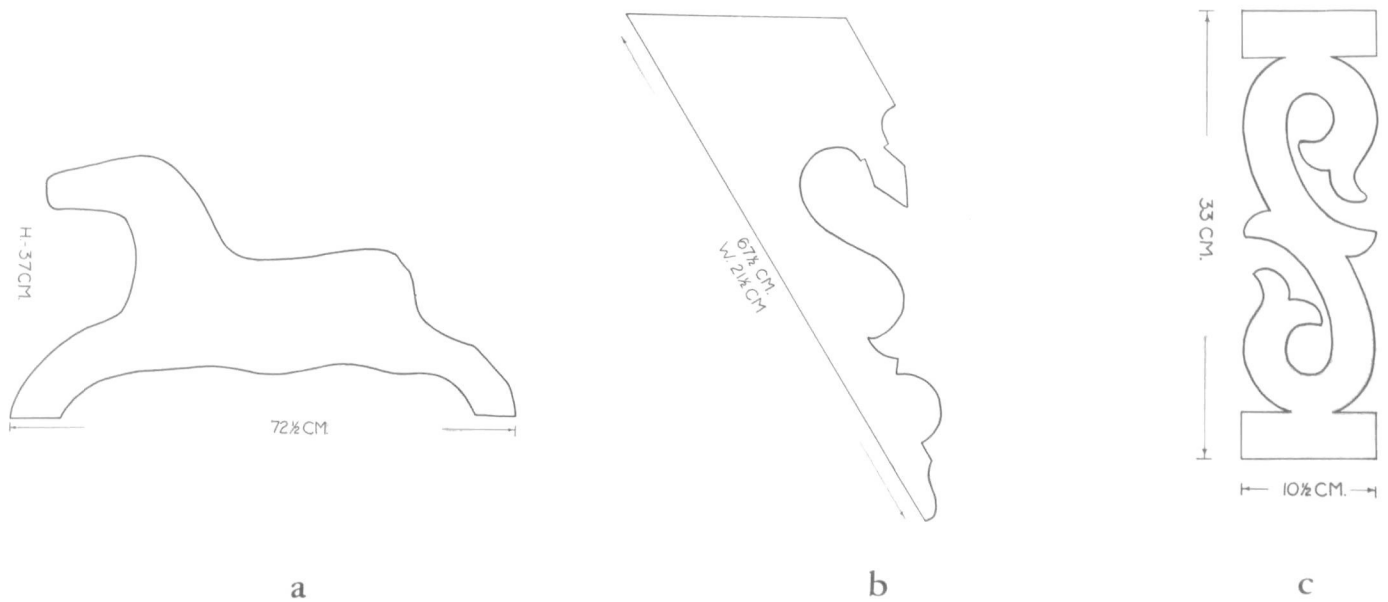


Fig. 3. Sutherland Steam Mill band-saw patterns: a, rocking-horse pattern (length 72½ cm, height 37 cm); b, verandah rail baluster (height 33 cm, width 10½ cm); c, eave bracket (height 67½ cm, width 21½ cm). (Drawings by Azor Vienneau, Nova Scotia Museum.)

A significant collection of patterns used in the production of specialty mill work in the woodworking shop have survived at the Sutherland Steam Mill. The patterns are softwood templates, ½ to 1½ inches thick, used to trace the outline of the intended product on dressed pine stock with a pencil or scribe before it was cut on either a band-saw or a reciprocating (jig) saw. Several of the woodworking machines in the mill were made by Alexander Sutherland. Included in the inventory of home-built machines are two band-saws and a jigsaw.

The majority of the patterns that remain in the woodworking shop are for various styles of exterior house trim commonly referred to as gingerbread. Other patterns include buggy-seat bases, wagon-jack parts, a rocking horse, and shelf brackets. To date approximately thirty patterns have been identified, measured, traced, and photographed. More remain to be discovered and identified amid the mass of mill ends, stock, and patterns in the shop.

The origin of the patterns is unknown but Wilfred Sutherland believes that they were copied or adapted from prevalent styles of the time. Much of the actual band-saw cutting was done by Alexander Sutherland or by apprentices under his supervision. Production of the decorative trim for houses continued into the 1930s when demand gradually tapered off.

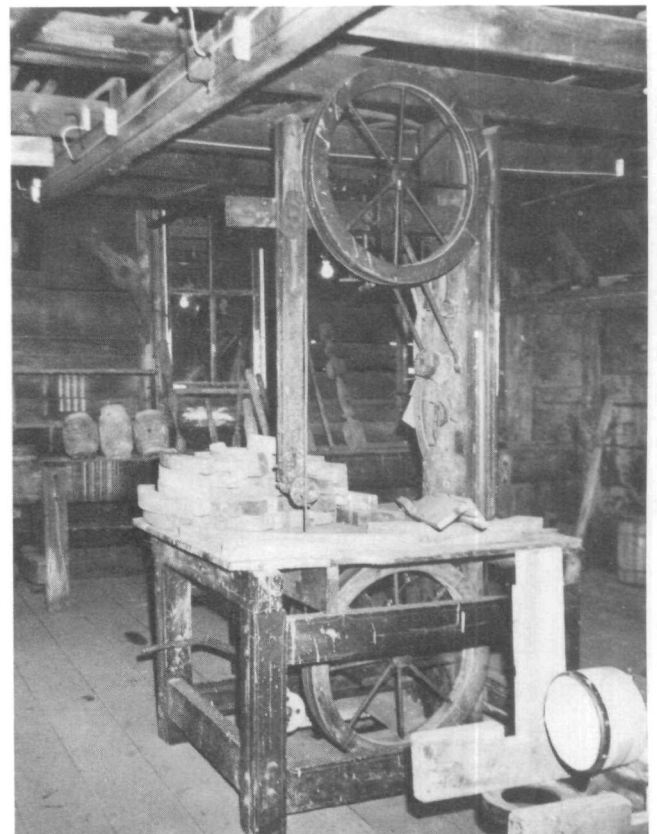


Fig. 4. Band-saw built by Alexander Sutherland; photographed in the Sutherland Steam Mill, 1980. (Photo by Barbara Robertson, Nova Scotia Museum, un-catalogued.)

Buildings in the area which exhibit decorative elements produced at the Sutherland Steam Mill include the Allister Hamilton house at Brule Point, the Denmark Community Hall, and the Alexander Sutherland and MacLeod houses in Denmark. Identification of all surviving buildings built by Thomas Sutherland in the region or built by others using decorative products from the mill has yet to be completed.

#### NOTES

1. Other mills operated as branches of the Nova Scotia Museum are Wile Carding Mill at Bridgewater, Barrington Woollen Mill at Barrington, and Balmoral Grist Mill at Balmoral Mills.
2. The author is indebted to Judy Boss and Wilfred Sutherland who supplied much of the information for this research note. (Judy Boss, "Sutherland Steam Mill, Denmark, Colchester County, N.S.," unpublished report in the files of the Operations and Development Section, Nova Scotia Museum; interviews with Wilfred Sutherland, Denmark, N.S., 1980, notes on file in the Operations and Development Section, Nova Scotia Museum.)



Fig. 5. Alexander Sutherland House, Denmark, Nova Scotia. (Photo by the author, uncatalogued.)



Fig. 6. Detail of verandah on Alexander Sutherland House showing decorative elements produced at the Sutherland Steam Mill. (Photo by the author, uncatalogued.)