



Fig. 4. Two-tiered buffet (height 245cm, width 152cm), pine with serpentine pediment, late 18th century. The heart carved on the basket suggests it was a marriage piece. Gift of Miss Mabel Molson, 1938. Cat. no. 38.Df.13. (Photo: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, uncatalogued.)

Robert Little

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UPPER CANADA VILLAGE

Upper Canada Village, on the St. Lawrence River east of Morrisburg, Ontario, was developed between 1956 and 1961 by the Ontario-St. Lawrence Development Commission. The village today is operated as one of the historic sites of the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, the successor to the earlier commission.

The furniture collection at the village was formed in large part between 1958 and 1962. The guiding principle was that "representative rather than the finest examples" would be chosen to illustrate "both a general taste found through old Upper Canada and a particular taste, that of the people of the Upper St. Lawrence and the Bay of Quinte," to quote Jeanne Minhinnick in her introduction to the booklet Early Furniture in Upper Canada Village, 1800-1837 (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1964). Minhinnick wrote from experience. In

four years of intensely concentrated activity, she had assembled 600 pieces of furniture which constitute about two-thirds of the present collection.

As she described the process,

more than half the furniture of the Village was found, and some of it made, in the area. In many cases it was possible to see the furniture in its original home.... The use of looms and the choice of furnishings in Upper Canada Village has been based on research, not all of which has been documentary.

For those of us who now study the furniture at Upper Canada Village there are both research needs and opportunities. There is a need for establishing the documentary base which was not recorded during the short collecting period. General documentation must be developed for furniture and its use in the St. Lawrence Valley. And, with regard specifically to the village's collection, we must document not only our individual examples, but also the growth of the collection itself, going beyond the sometimes cryptic accession records. The question of provenance is a fundamental one for all who work with the furniture at the village.

The collection of furniture actually had begun in October 1955 when the Ontario-St. Lawrence Development Commission received the donation of a loom and a "reed chair." These came from a family in one of the villages on the St. Lawrence which was to be destroyed with the advancement of the St. Lawrence Seaway and associated hydroelectric project. The commission had been incorporated in March of 1955 to mitigate the effect on the Seaway region of the flooding of 20,000 acres. This area contained eastern Ontario's oldest villages and farms with settlement dating back to the arrival of the Loyalists in 1784.

In the early months of its existence the commission undertook "to preserve historical records, relics and landmarks associated with the early history of this district" and encouraged donations of such by advertising its interest in the region's newspapers. By January 1957, however, the commission had adopted a far more ambitious programme. The intent was to make a crossroads village by moving together a selection of buildings from the flooded area and furnishing them to show a variety of periods in the pre-Confederation life of the St. Lawrence Valley. From this evolved Upper

Canada Village. Purchase of furniture from dealers in eastern Ontario had started in 1956.

The broadened general purpose brought shifts in the programme of collecting furniture. Rather than preserving examples of furniture from the counties of Leeds and Grenville and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, the collection would grow to illustrate tastes in furnishings. Another significant change was that purchases began to be made outside the local area. During the four main years of development, furniture came from sources ranging from the Niagara Peninsula to the Eastern Townships of Quebec.

Village furniture has been used in publications, including Jeanne Minhinnick's At Home In Upper Canada (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1970), Phillip Shackleton's The Furniture of Old Ontario (Toronto: MacMillan, 1973), and most recently Howard Pain's The Heritage of Upper Canadian Furniture (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978). However, close study of the evidence incorporated in the materials and structure of the furniture has not been undertaken. Comparative studies of Upper Canada Village furniture by type, maker, or regional characteristics, in relationship with documented examples, would be welcomed.

The only labelled pieces in the collection are clocks and chairs. The Canadian clocks are Twiss tall clocks (see fig. 1), shelf clocks of Van Tassel of Brockville and Burr of Dundas, and a tall clock case marked "R. Woodruff, Burford, U.C." Marked Ontario chairs are samples of the work of Haskin of Lyn, Brooks of Mille Roches, and Buell of Brockville. There are several side chairs with the stamp of Robinson of Rochester, New York, two side chairs with the stencilled label of Robb of Wheeling, West Virginia, and a highback Windsor armchair stamped "S. Mucke" on the underside of the seat (see fig. 2).

These last three examples raise important questions about Ontario furniture, beyond the narrow problems of Upper Canada Village. What has been the movement of furniture into and out of the province? What has been the movement of furniture within the province? These questions apply not only to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century periods of settlement and development, but also to the activities of pickers and dealers in the twentieth century. Pickers have been taking eastern Ontario furniture out by the truckload since at least the 1920s. Then it was heading south; now it heads west toward Kingston and Toronto.



Fig. 1. Clock (height 210cm), "J. & H. TWISS MONTREAL" on face, cat. no. 60.7063; drop leaf table (height 61.9cm, length 111.25cm), cat. no. 59.3076; arrow-back chair (height 83.75cm), cat. no. 58.1591. (Photo: Upper Canada Village, uncatalogued.)

As a final example of the problems awaiting research, there is the case of the Windsor bench shown in figure 2 as well as in Shackleton's and Pain's publications. Last year an Ohio collector wrote to say that he had a bench which he considered to be identical, purchased from a dealer in Pennsylvania in 1962. He also directed us to a dealer's advertisement in the January 1968 issue of Antiques for a third example. Both dealers attributed

their benches to Massachusetts. Our bench was bought by an Ontario dealer at an auction in Prescott, Ontario, and came to the collection in 1958. What can be made of this information?



Fig. 2. Windsor bench (height 66.25cm, length 205cm), from Prescott, Ontario, cat. no. 58.2; rod-back chair (height 82.5cm), cat. no. 60.6337; comb-back armchair (height 106.25cm), marked "S. Mucke," cat. no. 60.7419; armchair (height 85cm), cat. no. 61.8692. (Photo: Upper Canada Village, uncatalogued.)

The furniture collection at Upper Canada Village cannot stand in isolation. The more it is related to furniture held elsewhere and to documentary material, the more it will be able to contribute to the knowledge of researchers and the public in general.

Barbara Snyder