

## NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MAN: CANADIAN CENTRE FOR FOLK CULTURE STUDIES

Since its formation just over a decade ago, the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies has collected some 350 items of furniture and 100 smaller accessories. Included in the furniture are cupboards, chairs, tables, stands, benches, racks, churns, spinning wheels, and trunks. The accessories consist of smaller items such as game boards and shelves. The main groups represented are Hutterites, Mennonites, Ukrainians, Scandinavians, and French-Canadians. Most of the regional pieces were made in the Atlantic provinces or Quebec. The collection is divided almost equally between Canadian-made ethnic pieces and regional furniture. The ethnic furniture tends to be older and less available than the regional since the latter is still being made.

Five aspects of the collection deserve to be highlighted in this brief summary:

- over twenty-five spinning wheels, most of which are handmade;
- ninety-one trunks and chests — including a few blanket boxes — almost all of which are immigrants' trunks made outside Canada;
- a handful of rare Polish Wilno pieces comprising a trunk, cupboard, and table, all finely made;
- more than two dozen pieces of French-Canadian furniture, all handmade;
- approximately two dozen pieces of Newfoundland outport furniture and other pieces from the Atlantic provinces. The most characteristic of these are brightly painted tables and stands.

Stephen Henry Delroy

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## NEW BRUNSWICK MUSEUM

There are over four hundred pieces of furniture in the New Brunswick Museum. Ever since the collections of the Mechanics Institute and those of Abraham Gesner were amalgamated in 1842 to form the museum, there has been an

on-and-off effort to add to the furniture collection.

Many of the pieces are of New Brunswick manufacture, most of them from the second half of the nineteenth century. There are also a number of items which were brought to the province by some of the more than 14,000 Loyalists who crowded into the area at the end of the American Revolutionary war. These people all came by ship and were able to bring anything from hand luggage to entire shiploads of their own goods. Indeed, in some cases they returned to their former homes and brought extra shiploads of furniture and other necessities. Thus the museum has examples of the work of colonial American furniture makers. A fine flat-topped New England tallboy brought to New Brunswick by Dr. John Calef is of superior workmanship. In contrast is the rough pine desk (fig. 1) made for Gabriel Ludlow, who became Saint John's first mayor. A slope-front desk (fig. 2), exhibiting the work of a careful craftsman, was brought to Maugerville on the St. John River from Massachusetts by Moses Pickard in 1762. It retains its original hardware and is in good condition.



Fig. 1. Desk (height 105cm, width 70cm), pine, mid 18th century. Made by an unknown New England carpenter for Gabriel Ludlow who became the first mayor of Saint John, N.B., after its incorporation as a city in 1785. Cat. no. 14599. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)

Fig. 2. Slope front desk (height 110cm, width 104cm), maple. It is incorrectly given a Canadian provenance in Donald Blake Webster's English-Canadian Furniture of the Georgian Period (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979), p. 119. Cat. no. 57.181. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)



Early in the nineteenth century a group of trained craftsmen, mainly from Scotland, set up shops in Saint John and produced some of the finest furniture made in Canada. A fuller description of the work of some of these British-trained craftsmen is given in several publications, among them Donald Blake Webster, English-Canadian Furniture of the Georgian Period (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979); A. Gregg Finley, Heritage Furniture (Saint John, N.B.: New Brunswick Museum, 1976); Charles H. Foss, Cabinetmakers of the Eastern Seaboard (Toronto: M.F. Fehelley, 1977); Huia G. Ryder, Antique Furniture by New Brunswick Craftsmen (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965). The products of two of these craftsmen, Thomas Nisbet and Alexander Lawrence, are found in several important museum collections in Canada. A small work table bearing Nisbet's label is shown in figure 3. It is made of native woods, an exception rather than the rule for Saint John-made furniture of the time. Nisbet's son Robert made the desk shown in figure 4 for the chamber of the Legislative Council, New Brunswick's upper house prior to Confederation. Robert Green, an English cabinetmaker who worked in New Brunswick from 1815 until his death ca. 1850, also produced exceptional work. A fine banquet table bearing his label has recently been added to the collection (see fig. 5.).

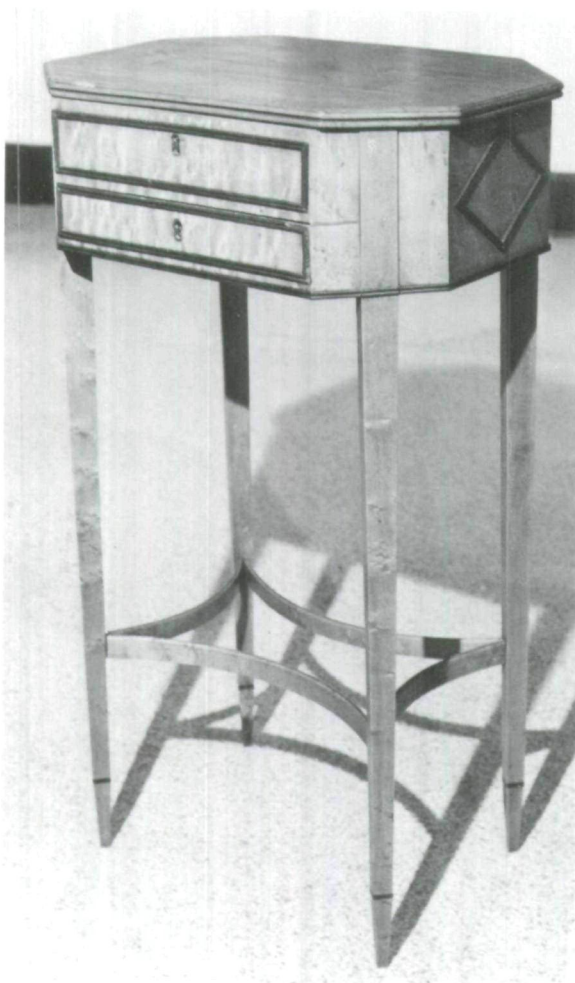


Fig. 3. Work table (height 75cm, width 32.5cm), mahogany with pine. Thomas Nisbet worked in Saint John from 1813 to 1845. Cat. no. 979.118.10. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)



Fig. 4. Desk (height 92.5cm, length 62.5cm, width 55cm), butternut. One of possibly two dozen made for the Legislative Council chamber by Robert Nisbet. Cat. no. 66.47. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)



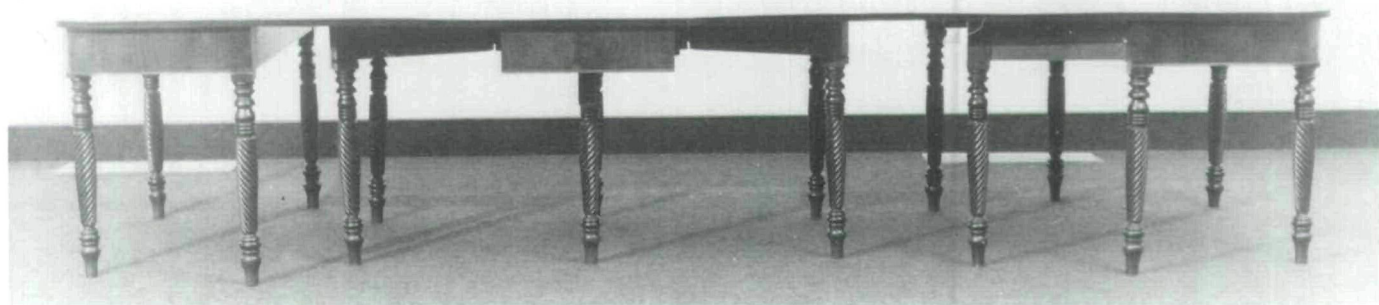


Fig. 5. Banquet table, mahogany, 1820. Uncatalogued. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)

The museum has a wide selection of more than 200 chairs, the earliest one of oak from mediaeval England. There are many examples from colonial New England — ladder backs, fancy chairs, side chairs, wing backs, and others. One chair (see fig. 6) in the collection was once the property of Benedict Arnold and was disposed of at auction in 1792 at the time of his return to England. A fine, leather-covered wing chair, once the property of Admiral Edward William Owen of Campobello Island, is fitted with a gout stool (see fig. 7). The chair is figure 8, the work of John Rogerson, a distinguished Saint John woodcarver, was made for the local St. Andrews Society in 1908 and is still used every 30 November at the society's annual banquet.

Mahogany, which came from the West Indies as ballast on trading ships in the first half of the nineteenth century and earlier, was the most common wood used in furniture made in New Brunswick. The use of other woods for fine furniture at this period is rare and seems to appear in outlying areas rather than in the coastal trading communities. A fine example is a seven-drawer chest with applewood veneer fronts on the drawers and maple banding and butternut top and sides (fig. 9). It is attributed to the Truemans, a distinguished family of cabinetmakers from the Sackville area.



Fig. 6. Chair (height 92.5cm), painted walnut, made in Saint John ca. 1790. Cat. no. 47.12. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)

Fig. 7. Wing chair (height 117.5cm, gout stool extends 52.5cm beyond the chair), early 19th century. Cat. no. 971.5. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)



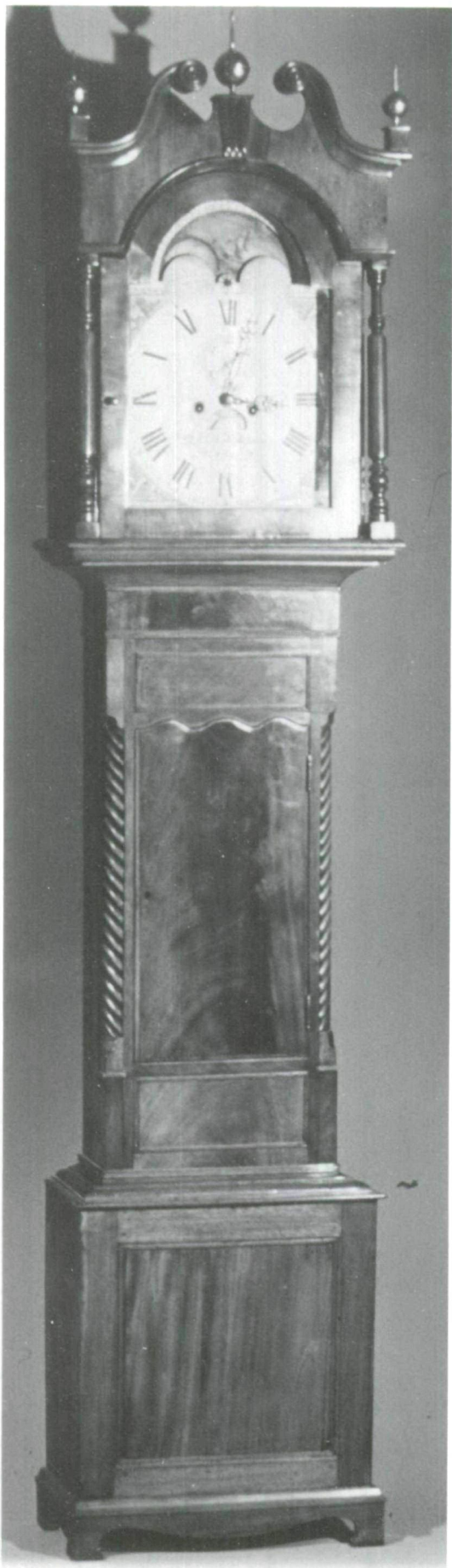


Fig. 8. Chair, Scottish oak.  
 Made by John Rogerson and presented  
 to the St. Andrews Society of Saint  
 John in 1908 by citizens of Scottish  
 descent on the occasion of the  
 society's 110th anniversary. Cat.  
 no. 23090. (Photo: New Brunswick  
 Museum, uncatalogued.)

Fig. 9. Chest (height 111cm,  
 width 113.75cm), ca. 1800. Cat.  
 no. 68.51. (Photo: New Brunswick  
 Museum, uncatalogued.)







There are a score or more clocks. Of particular interest is a fine dwarf tall case clock, dating from 1830, made by a distinguished clockmaker and jeweller who worked in Saint John for half a century. The case is mahogany veneer on pine, while the face is brass and carries the inscription "James G. Melick, Saint John, N.B." Another, the work of James Agnew who was active in Saint John from 1834 to 1850, is shown in figure 10. An angelica, the unusual musical instrument shown in figure 11, is housed in a finely crafted rosewood cabinet on a pedestal. It contains twenty-five tuned tumblers with a range of more than two octaves.

The museum's collection, begun 150 years ago, is still being added to as appropriate pieces are brought to our attention. Examples of the work of contemporary cabinetmakers, such as Alban S. Emery who has worked in Saint John for seventy years, are also being acquired. In 1978 the New Brunswick

Fig. 10. Clock (height 210cm, width 37.5cm), mahogany veneer on pine. Cat. no. 57.92. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)



Museum and the National Museum of Man collaborated to acquire a mahogany desk which was made by Emery and which had belonged to the late Senator Clarence V. Emerson of Saint John.

Fig. 11. Angelica (width 90cm), rosewood veneer on hardwood, English. Cat. no. 51.2.1. (Photo: New Brunswick Museum, uncatalogued.)



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