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**A QUINTESSENTIAL GLOBAL PRODUCT:**

**Bentwood Furniture in Canada and Australia 1860 to 1945**

Virginia Wright

2017

Certificate of original authorship

I certify that the work in this dissertation has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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## Table of Contents

	List of illustrations	6
	Abstract	19
	Acknowledgements	20
	Preface	21
	Introduction: Argument for Expansion in Global Trade History of Chairs	24
1	The North American Bent Chair Company 1890 to 1914	40
	Introduction	
	The Hay Family	
	National and International Context	
	1893 Chicago Exposition	
	1900 Paris Exposition	
	Canada Furniture Manufacturers Association	
	Trade with Australia	
2	The North American Bent Chair Company 1914 to 1945	99
	Wartime Trade	
	The Effects of War	
	Post-war Manufacturing	
	Changing Economic Conditions	
3	European and North American Bentwood Designs in Canada	138
	Chair Inventions	
	Mass-production	
	Consolidation	
4	Bentwood Furniture in Canadian Life	175
	Hospitality and Entertainment Industries	
	Institutional and Commercial Buyers	
	Private settings	
5	Bentwood Furniture in Australian Homes	209
	Hidden in Plain Sight	
	The Availability of Bentwood Seating	
	The Photographic Record of Bentwood Furniture	
	Marketing Bentwood Furniture to Householders	
	Identification of Design Provenance	
	Design Influence	

6	Global Trade in Bentwood Chairs	253
	Part 1 Merchant Families and Networks	
	Canadian Furniture at Australia's First International Trade Exhibition	
	American, Austrian, and 'Vienna' Chairs	
	Imported Canadian Furniture	
	Tye and Company	
	Part 2 John George Hay in Australia	288
	Canadian Manufacturer Attribution	
	New Zealand	
	Pre-war Manufacturing and Tariffs	
	Post-war Manufacturing and Tariffs	
7	Commercial Use of Bentwood Furniture in Australia	325
	Hotels and Racecourses	
	Cafés and Tea Rooms	
	Practical Products	
8	Government Use of Bentwood Furniture and Protectionist Opposition	358
	Rapid Growth	
	The Supply of Mass-seating	
	Hospitals and Public Halls	
	Schools and Societies	
	Protectionism and Conflicting Interests	
	Conclusion	407
	Appendix	414
	1 Map of North America showing Owen Sound and New York	
	2 New Documentation of Austrian Bentwood Furniture History	
	2.1 Ungvarer Mobel Fabrik	
	2.2 Original Austrian Bent Wood Furniture Company	
	3 Eureka Trademark	
	4 Explanation of terms 'knocked-down', 'in the rough', and 'flat-packed'	
	Bibliography	427

## List of illustrations

### Introduction

Fig. 1 Assembly bench and bentwood chair, in *Chairs* catalogue 1904. The North American Bent Chair Company, Owen Sound, from the collection of Benson Ford Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 2 Railway bridge to the United States of America over the Niagara River, Ontario 1869. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. I-37303.0.

Fig. 3 The Social Order, engraving by unknown artist, Montreal 1890s. Courtesy of McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. M988X.106.

### Chapter One

Fig. 4 North American Bent Chair Company factory, Owen Sound after 1899. *Chairs* 1904 catalogue, from the collection of Benson Ford Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 5 James Hay, Woodstock, Ontario, date unknown. Courtesy of the Hay family, Owen Sound.

Fig. 6 John George Hay, 1883. Courtesy of the Hay family, Owen Sound.

Fig. 7 Archibald Bain Hay, date unknown. Courtesy of the Hay family, Owen Sound.

Fig. 8 Page of chairs in *James Hay & Co.*, catalogue 1888, from the collection of Winterthur Library, Winterthur.

Fig. 9 Library in Macdonald Physics Building, McGill University, Montreal 1893. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v2617.

Fig. 10 Ward M, Montreal General Hospital, 1910. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. II-181192.

Fig. 11 Montreal residence of Sir George Stephen, 1884. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. ii73817.

Fig. 12 Catalogue illustration published in *Owen Sound Advertiser*, 1894, reprinted in *The Trilogy*, March 10, 1976, from the collection of Bishop House Museum, Archives, and National Historic Site, Owen Sound.

Fig. 13 Dining room of Young Women's Christian Association, Ottawa 1895. Topley Studio, courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Image no. PA-027440.

Fig. 14 Masonic Hall, Toronto 1910. Courtesy of Toronto Public Library, Toronto. Image no. TPL-r-5186.

Fig 15 Reference library of Mechanics Institute, Toronto 1900. Courtesy of Toronto Public Library, Toronto. Image no. TPL-r-5967.

Fig. 16 Convent parlour, Québec 1900-1910. Courtesy of Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec, Montreal. Image no. 20668.

Fig. 17 Head-office of Canada Furniture Manufacturers Association. Copy of *Canada Furniture Manufacturers* catalogue 1907, from the collection of Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

Fig. 18 Garden party for members of Canadian Manufacturers Association visiting England in *The National Monthly of Canada*, November 1905.

Fig. 19 'Vienna' chair by the North American Bent Chair Company in *Tye & Company* catalogue, Melbourne 1898, from the collection of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 20 Chairs by the North American Bent Chair Company in *Tye & Company* catalogue, Melbourne 1898, from the collection of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 21 Dining room of S.S. Rapids King, Québec 1910. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v6540.

Fig. 22 The Arts Club, Montreal 1913. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v12969.

## **Chapter Two**

Fig. 23 Dining room of Red Triangle Hut, Montreal 1914-1918. Courtesy of Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec, Montreal. Image no. 2630783.

Fig. 24 Munitions factory in Montreal, 1915. Black & Bennett, courtesy of McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. MP-0000.2082.7.

Fig. 25 White Lunch cafe, Calgary 1916. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Calgary. Image no. NA-1469-49.

Fig. 26 White Lunch cafe, Vancouver 1918. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives. Image no. CVA 99-5167.

Fig. 27 William Grey Hay. *Canadian Woodworker and Furniture Manufacturer*, February 1922.

Fig. 28 Dining room of soldiers' infirmary at Queen Alexandra Sanatorium, London 1919. Courtesy of D. B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario, London. Image no. RC-232.

Fig. 29 Sunroom of Nurses' Home, Toronto 1924. Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives. Image no. s0372\_ss0032\_it0729.

Fig. 30 Interior of the North American Bent Chair Company, Owen Sound, date unknown. Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Negative no. BI-25, accession 1971-271.

Fig. 31 Cafeteria of Spencer's department store, 1930s. W. J. Moore, courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives. Image no. CVA 1495-26.

Fig. 32 Blue Goose restaurant, 1935. Stuart Thomson, courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives. Image no. CVA 99-4768.

Fig. 33 Hudson's Bay Company, Vancouver 1944. Don Coltmann and Steffens Colmer, courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives. Image no. CVA 586-1926.

### **Chapter Three**

Fig. 34 McGarvey's, Montreal 1857. John Henry Walker, courtesy of McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. M930.50.7.313.

Fig. 35 Ladies Rocking Chairs in *Jas. Hay & Co.*, trade catalogue 1888, from the collection of Wintherthur Library, Winterthur.

Fig. 36 Advertisement in *Canada and Her Commerce*, 1894.

Fig. 37 Presbyterian College, McGill University, 1889. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. ii89481.

Fig. 38 Dining chair no. 20, North American Bent Chair Company *Chairs* catalogue 1904, from the collection of Benson Ford Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 39 Dining chairs no. 130 and no. 4, *Chairs* catalogue 1904, from the collection of Benson Ford Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 40 Oak armchairs no. 2A and no. 1, *Chairs* catalogue 1904, from the collection of Benson Ford Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 41 Dining chair no. 1080, *Chairs* catalogue 1904, from the collection of Benson Ford Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 42 Revolving chair no. 620x, *Chairs* catalogue 1904, from the collection of Benson Ford



Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 43 Classroom at Villa Maria, Congregation Notre-Dame, 1895. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v2710.1.

Fig. 44 Postcard of student's bedroom at Villa Maria, Congregation Notre-Dame, Montreal 1899. Courtesy of Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec. Image no. 2630477.

Fig. 45 Lecture room in Nurses Home, Toronto 1924. Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives. Image no. s0372\_ss0032\_it0727.

Fig. 46 Sitting room of Nurses Home, 1924. Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives. Image no. s0372\_ss0032\_it0732.

Fig. 47 Dining chair no. 1871, *Chairs* catalogue 1923, from the collection of Bishop House Museum, Archives, and National Historic Site, Owen Sound.

Fig. 48 Dining chairs no. 1850 and no. 1950, *Chairs* catalogue, Owen Sound 1923, from the collection of Bishop House: Museum, Archives and National Historic Site, Owen Sound.

Fig. 49 Commercial offices, Montreal 1924. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v21081.

Fig. 50 Jasper Room, Chateau Laurier, Ottawa 1929. Topley Studio, courtesy of Library and Archives Canada. Image no. 3348474.

#### **Chapter Four**

Fig. 51 Maison Ethier restaurant in *Canadian Illustrated News*, Montreal, April 18, 1874. Courtesy of Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec. Image no. 2743796.

Fig. 52 Massey Hall, Toronto 1894. B. W. Kilburn, N. H. Littleton, courtesy of Toronto Public Library. Image no. r-4116.

Fig. 53 The Gananoque Inn, Thousand Islands 1902. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v3521.

Fig. 54 Hotel Abbotsford, Vancouver 1920. Stuart Thomson, courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives. Image no. CVA 99-77.

Fig. 55 Hotel Europe, Vancouver 1931. Stuart Thomson, courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives. Image no. CVA 99-3894.

Fig. 56 British Columbia Woodworkers Association annual banquet, Ambassador Cafe, 1924. Stuart Thomson, courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives. Image no. CVA 99-5253.

Fig. 57 Cafeteria at The Refectory, Niagara Falls, 1927. Alfred Pearson, courtesy of City of Toronto Archives. Image no. s0071\_it5265.

Fig. 58 Halifax School for the Blind, 1921. Courtesy of Archives of Nova Scotia. Image no. NSARM199900131.

Fig. 59 Students' reception room, Congrègation Notre Dame, St. Thérèse, Québec 1915. Courtesy of Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec. Image no. 0003769361.

Fig. 60 Immigration centre at Halifax or Québec, in *The National Monthly*, June 1905.

Fig. 61 Private dining room of immigration centre at Grosse Île, Québec 1911. Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada. Image no. 3380424.

Fig. 62 Dining room of Canadian Pacific Railway station, Winnipeg 1884. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v1427.

Fig. 63 Office of Canadian Pacific Railway station, Winnipeg 1884. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. ii136538.

Fig. 64 Sir William Van Horne, President and Chairman, Canadian Pacific Railway, Montreal 1904. Courtesy of Library and Archives Canada. Image no. a182603.

Fig. 65 Anson McKim advertising agency, Montreal 1903. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. ll-145305.

Fig. 66 Bell Canada telephone exchange, Toronto 1910. Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives. Image no. f1244\_it0138.

Fig. 67 'The Enthusiast', a cartoon in *The Kodak Salesman* trade journal, Toronto 1920.

Fig. 68 Bruce and Jim Hunter in homestead shack, Dog Pound area, Alberta, 1897. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Calgary. Image no. NA-3961-4.

Fig. 69 Bedroom in Chester Massey residence, Toronto 1909. Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives. Image no. f1244\_it1716.

Fig. 70 Lady Lansdowne at Rideau Hall, Ottawa 1884. Topley Collection, courtesy of Library and Archives Canada. Image no. 3421974.

Fig. 71 North-West Mounted Police Assistant Surgeon Charles Selby Haultain and wife Henrietta in dining room of their residence, Regina 1891-94. Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Calgary. Image no. ND-37-6.

Fig. 72 Summer residence of Hugh Paton at Bord-a-Plouffe, Québec 1902. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. ii142865.

Fig. 73 Garden of Robert Meighen residence, Montreal 1908. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v8764.

Fig. 74 Ballroom of Sir Hugh and Lady Allan's residence 'Ravenscrag', Montreal 1914. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. v14013.

Fig. 75 Residence of Miss Phillips, Montreal, Christmas 1911. Courtesy of Notman Photographic Collection, McCord Museum, Montreal. Image no. ii189684.

Fig. 76 James Merritt Hay, Hannah Maud Hay, Jessie Louise Hay, and John George Hay, Owen Sound circa 1910. Courtesy of the Hay family, Owen Sound.

## **Chapter Five**

Fig. 77 Private sitting room of New South Wales Government House, Sydney 1859. Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. a089294h.

Fig. 78 Dining room, Brisbane 1880s. Courtesy of University of Queensland Library. Image no. UQFL10\_v12\_p0048.

Fig. 79 'Christmastide in Australia', 1883. Engraving by 'J.M'. *Illustrated Australian News*. David Syme & Co. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. mp005123.

Fig. 80 Tea on a verandah, Queensland 1887. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. 5141854988\_edcb327677.

Fig. 81 The Sutherlands cottage at Cobar, 1889. George Grill. Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. bcp\_05575h.

Fig. 82 Mrs. Donaghue. Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. bcp\_05532r.

Fig. 83 Children on verandah, Rockhampton, Queensland 1890. Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. bcp\_04118h.

Fig. 84 Albert Hume, 1876. Hume Photograph Collection. Courtesy of University of Queensland Library. Image no. UQFL10\_v14\_p0010.

Fig. 85 The Dobson family at the Chalet near Hobart, 1890s. Courtesy of State Library of Tasmania. Image no. PH30-1-9831.

Fig. 86 Mr. Smith's visitors in Melbourne, 1888. Howard Smith. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H42306/43.

Fig. 87 J. Rignold with family and friends, Sydney 1890s. A. J. Perier. Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. ON5/140.

Fig. 88 Home portrait of Florence Andrews, 1910-1920. Lilian Pitts. Courtesy of Museum Victoria. Image no. NM031176.

Fig. 89 Dining room in the Hall family home, Belmont 1903. Ralph Snowball. Courtesy of Norm Barney Photographic Collection, University of Newcastle. Image no. ASGN0634/B27.

Fig. 90 Portrait of a boy, Tilba Tilba 1895. William Henry Corkhill Tilba Tilba Collection. Courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.pic-an2499331.

Fig. 91 Dr. Charles Louis Gabriel's surgery, Gundagai circa 1900. Dr. Charles Louis Gabriel. Courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.pic-an8526479-557-v.

Fig. 92 Robinson family residence, Gundagai 1904. Dr. Charles Louis Gabriel. Courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.pic-an8526479-190-v.

Fig. 93 The Godden children 1907-1914. Harold Leopold Godden. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H2011.59/156.

Fig. 94 Olive Watson and her mother, Mrs. W. J. C. Watson, sewing on the verandah, Brisbane circa 1905. Courtesy of John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Image no. SLQ 188943.

Fig. 95 North Sydney home of Harold and Winifred Cazneaux, 1906. Harold Cazneaux. Courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.pic-vn5832893.

Fig. 96 Cazneaux residence, North Sydney 1906. Harold Cazneaux. Courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.obj-144122643-1.

Fig. 97 Ballroom of residence in Claremont, 1905. Courtesy of State Library of Western Australia. Image no. 006002PD.

Fig. 98 Furniture by Thonet Brothers, Vienna. David Jones & Company catalogue, Sydney 1895, from the collection of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 99 Chairs in Tye & Company trade catalogue, Melbourne 1898, from the collection of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 100 Edna Ewert at Inverleigh circa 1910. Harold Leopold Godden. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H2011.59/96.

Fig. 101 Postcard for Tye & Company raffle of Villa "Toronto", Malvern 1906. Courtesy of National Museum Australia. Image no. 1986.0117.3688.

Fig. 102 Girl and her dog. Sam Hood. Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. 07839h.

Fig. 103 Pat and Ned Stoker on their verandah at Vermont Station, Amby 1920s. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. SLQ 145499.

Fig. 104 Camera on a chair, Brisbane circa 1900. Taylor Family Album, courtesy of University of Queensland Library. Image no. 3681\_0019.

## **Chapter Six**

Fig. 105 Dining chair advertised in *Evening News*, Sydney 1900.

Fig. 106 Furniture store of John McLoughlin, Hobart 1870s. Courtesy of State Library of Tasmania. Image no. PH30-7s\_30-7157c.

Fig. 107 Page in *Furniture Pattern Book*, W. H. Rocke & Company wholesale catalogue, Melbourne 1876, from the collection of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 108 Thonet display at Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition 1887. Courtesy of State Library of South Australia. Image no. B10212\_25.

Fig. 109 Ungvarer Mobel Fabrik display at Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition 1887. Courtesy of State Library of South Australia. Image no. B10212\_40.

Fig. 110 Pass-holder photograph No. 288, Tye & Co. Allan Tye at Melbourne Centennial Exhibition 1888. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. 181953908.

Fig. 111 Chairs manufactured by the North American Bent Chair Company in Tye & Company trade catalogue, Melbourne 1898, from the collection of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 112 Revolving chair by the North American Bent Chair Company in Tye & Company trade catalogue, Melbourne 1898, from the collection of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 113 North American Bent Chair Company models 800 and 804 in *Chairs* catalogue, Owen Sound 1904, from the collection of Benson Ford Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 114 SS Coogee and SS Port Victor at Launceston dock 1893. A. L. Green, Northern Tasmania Camera Club. Courtesy of State Library of Tasmania. Image no. 12, album no. 19.

Fig. 115 Clerks at Launceston Town Hall, 1906. Spurling Studio. Courtesy of Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. Image no. QVM:1988:P:0313.

Fig. 116 Illustration in *Wallach's Design Book*, Melbourne 1876, from the collection of State Library of Victoria.

Fig. 117 Wallach's warehouse, Melbourne 1890. Charles Rudd, courtesy of State Library of

Victoria. Image no. H12221.

Fig. 118 Williams Brothers warehouse, Hobart, in *Weekly Courier*, Launceston, June 11, 1904. Courtesy of State Library of Tasmania. Image no. 8530009990.

Fig. 119 High-chair in Tye & Company trade catalogue, Melbourne, Victoria 1898. From the collection of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney.

Fig. 120 Maori meeting house used as dining room at the Spa Hotel in Taupo, New Zealand, 1900. Auckland Star Negatives. Courtesy of G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. National Library of New Zealand. Image no. 1/2-008312-G.

Fig. 121 North American Bent Chair Company 'Diner No. 100' in *Chairs* catalogue, Owen Sound 1904. From the collection of Benson Ford Research Centre at Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn.

Fig. 122 Wellington Town Hall, 1906-1912. Courtesy of National Library of New Zealand. Image no. PAColl-9119-2.

Fig. 123 The Fernery, Frankston 1920s. Rose Series, courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H32492/3959.

Fig. 124 Poster at Wynyard Railway Station, Sydney 1932. Courtesy of Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney. Image no. 355603.

## **Chapter Seven**

Fig. 125 The Victoria Racing Club Spring Meeting, 'In The Tea Room', Flemington Racecourse, 1883. 'MJ' (or 'JM'). *Illustrated Australian News*. David Syme and Co. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. mp005090.

Fig. 126 Theatre poster "Bad Lads", Melbourne 1886. Richard Wendel, Troedel & Co. lithographers. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H2000.180/74.

Fig. 127 Messrs. Clifford, Love and Co. Tea Tasting Rooms, Melbourne 1882. *Illustrated Australian News*, David Syme & Co. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. mp004921.

Fig. 128 Parer's Crystal Café, Bourke Street, Melbourne 1887. W. Schwarze. *Illustrated Australian News*. David Syme and Co.. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. mp005843.

Fig. 129 Four floors of Parer's Crystal Café, 1887. W. Schwarze. *Illustrated Australian News*. David Syme and Co., courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. mp005844.

Fig. 130 Balcony of the South Australian Hotel, Adelaide 1900. W. S. Smith. Courtesy of

State Library of South Australia. Image no. PRG-733-442.

Fig. 131 Private sitting room of the South Australian Hotel, 1900. W. S. Smith. Courtesy of State Library of South Australia. Image no. PRG-733-370.

Fig. 132 PS Marion on the Murray River, 1912. Courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.pic-vn4977803.

Fig. 133 Wreckage of PS Ellen, 1923. Courtesy of State Library of South Australia. Image no. PRG1258\_1\_883.

Fig. 134 The New York Marble Bar and Ice Cream Parlor, Brisbane 1912. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. 260513.

Fig. 135 The American Bar in Gympie 1910. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. 288281.

Fig. 136 Furniture department at Trangmar's, Coleraine 1906. Courtesy of Museum Victoria. Image no. MM 2772.

Fig. 137 Women's showroom at Trangmar's, Coleraine 1906. Courtesy of Museum Victoria. Image no. MM 2768.

Fig. 138 Daniel Corcoran Grocery, Launceston 1906. Courtesy of State Library of Tasmania. Image no. PH30-1-5156.

Fig. 139 Tattersall's founder George Adams drawing winning lottery numbers, Hobart 1901. Courtesy of State Library of Tasmania. Image no. AUTAS001125883777.

Fig. 140 Portrait of Private J. W. Elshaw for Adopt A Soldier Project, 1914-1918. Dease Studio, courtesy of State Library of Western Australia. Image no. 108564PD.

Fig. 141 Private William Henry Bourke of Launceston. Darge Photographic Company, courtesy of Australian War Memorial. Image no. DA10448.

Fig. 142 Wattle Cafe at Warburton 1920. Rose Stereograph Company, courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H32492/5827.

Fig. 143 Dining room of Palace Hotel at Torquay, Victoria ca. 1940. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H32492/5471.

Fig. 144 Players checking their cards at the Lakes Golf Club, Sydney 1930s. Sam Hood, courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. hood\_06203.

Fig. 145 Busy Bee Café in Kingaroy 1929. Courtesy of John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Image no. 86-5-2.

Fig. 146 Garment workers in Sydney. Sam Hood, courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. a217004h.

Fig. 147 Victory Jazz Band at a Sydney dance-hall. Sam Hood, courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. a171027h.

### **Chapter Eight**

Fig. 148 Visitors at army camp, 1890s. Courtesy of Archives Office of New South Wales. Image no. 4481\_a026\_000701.

Fig. 149 Gundagai Court House, 1890s. Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. a020\_a020000082.

Fig. 150 Main hall in Adelaide Y.M.C.A. opened in 1884. Ernest Gall, courtesy of State Library of South Australia. Image no. B-1561.

Fig. 151 The Barry Hall, Melbourne Public Library, 1892-1900. Charles Rudd, courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H39357/114.

Fig. 152 Public Library in the Town Hall, Macquarie Street, Hobart 1890s. E. R. Pretyman, courtesy of State Library of Tasmania. Image no. NS10131185.

Fig. 153 Italian Court at Melbourne International Exhibition 1880. Courtesy of Museum Victoria. Image no. 367621.

Fig. 154 Dining room of Parliament Building, Brisbane 1906. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. 41108.

Fig. 155 Smoking and Billiards Room in Parliament Building, Brisbane 1906. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. 41042.

Fig. 156 The Tasmanian Room at Tasmanian Museum, Hobart 1900. Courtesy of Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart. Image no. AMS421\_3\_p6\_B00000.

Fig. 157 Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston 1890s. Spurling Studio, courtesy of Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston. Image no. 2010\_P\_0003.

Fig. 158 Staff of Barrow Creek Telegraph Station, Northern Territory 1906. Courtesy of Northern Territory Library. Image no. PH0756/0003.

Fig. 159 Telephone exchange in Perth, 1910. Courtesy of National Archives of Australia. Image no. K1131, X90/1.

Fig. 160 Refreshment room at Maryborough Railway Station, Victoria 1905. Courtesy of Public Records Office Victoria. Image no. 12800 P1, H2239.



Fig. 161 Refreshment room at Spencer Street Station, Melbourne 1895. Courtesy of Public Records Office Victoria. Image no. 12800 P1, H2178.

Fig. 162 Ward of Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney 1880s. Sir Edward Knox family papers, courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. a419005h.

Fig. 163 Matron's room at Gundagai Hospital, New South Wales 1904. Dr. Louis Gabriel, courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.pic-an8526479-265.

Fig. 164 Nurses' quarters at Gundagai Hospital, 1904. Dr. Louis Gabriel, courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.pic-an8526479-441.

Fig. 165 Committee of the Tyalgum Mechanics Institute. Courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. 37000.

Fig. 166 New Lambton Mechanics Institute, New South Wales 1901. Courtesy of Cultural Collections. University of Newcastle. Image no. 3271390758\_fd0807629.

Fig. 167 City of Toowoomba Councillors 1911. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. 83764.

Fig. 168 Prahran Town Hall, 1930s. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. H2009.21/37.

Fig. 169 Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, Melbourne 1912. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. mp011939.

Fig. 170 Girls Grammar School, Maryborough, circa 1890. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. 17534.

Fig. 171 School of Arts, Sydney 1889. Charles Bayliss, courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. nla.pic-vn3098048-v.

Fig. 172 Teacher's room at Roseworthy College, 1910. Courtesy of State Library of South Australia. Image no. PRG-733-464.

Fig. 173 Gatton College, 1900. Courtesy of State Library of Queensland. Image no. 182197.

Fig. 174 Student's room at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, circa 1900. Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales. Image no. a4612001h.

Fig. 175 Classroom, 1920. Courtesy of State Library of Western Australia. Image no. 001778d.

Fig. 176 Teachers' room at Underwood Business College in Perth, 1930. Courtesy of State Library of Western Australia. Image no. 095163PD.

Fig. 177 Surveying team for new national capital in 1910. Courtesy of National Library of Australia. Image no. PIC/8470/17.

Fig. 178 Judging the Ayshire cows, Brisbane 1907. Perroux, courtesy of John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Image no. API-105-0001-0002.

Fig. 179 Trophy at Perth Royal Show 1929. Courtesy of State Library of Western Australia. Image no. 049599PD.

Fig. 180 Men under arrest, Sydney police station 1920. Courtesy of Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, Sydney. Image no. 31206.

### **Conclusion**

Fig. 181 Massey-Harris diesel engine school in Sunshine, Victoria 1952. Courtesy of Museum Victoria. Image no. MM118626.

### **Appendix**

Fig. 182 Map of North America showing Owen Sound and New York.

Fig. 183 Illustration of the Austrian Court at Adelaide Jubilee Exhibition by S. Calvert, July 23, 1887. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. mp005903.

Fig. 184 Messrs. W. H. Rocke and Co.'s New Furniture and Carpet Showrooms and Manufactory. A. C. Cooke. Ebenezer and David Syme, *The Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, January 4, 1869. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria. Image no. 10381/132463.

Fig. 185 'Chairs ready to ship - knocked down'. *Catalogue of the Tidioute Chair Company, Pennsylvania*, circa 1883, from the collection of Winterthur Library, Winterthur.

## **A Quintessential Global Product:**

### **Bentwood Furniture in Canada and Australia 1860 to 1945**

#### **Abstract**

This thesis is the first global history of an ubiquitous product, the bentwood chair, one of the most common furnishing items in 19th-century Australia. It identifies two Canadian companies that were large-scale manufacturers of chairs and other products, and traces their local production and global distribution in an integrated history of design, trade, and consumption. It posits that trade between Canada and Australia began earlier and was much larger than current accounts suggest. The thesis contributes to a new understanding of comparative economic development and nascent 19th-century industries and occupations. It analyses a wide range of sources including government reports, trade catalogues, studio and vernacular photography, business publications, family archives, shipping records, and newspaper articles and advertising. It tests the generalisation of exclusive Austrian and American ownership of the massive global trade in bentwood chairs. In doing so, it challenges the perception of a primarily English influence in British Empire trade and consumption.

Keywords: Design history - Canada - Australia - United States of America - British Empire - Austria - History - Global trade - Product design - Furniture manufacturing - Marketing - Retailing - Consumption - Protectionism - Civic life - Domestic life - 19th. century - 20th. century.

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