

It takes an expert to distinguish this 20th century copy from the 17th century original.

Constructing and Carving an Heirloom **BLANKET CHEST**

By **STANLEY D. SAPERSTEIN**



Ever since man started wearing clothes he has always had the problem of where to store it when not wearing it. It had to be mainly protected from damage by moisture.

If you think back into time, what would be a logical object in which to store clothes? A box, of course. Thus the first furniture developed was a box crudely put together to hold clothes or other valuables. This box was easily transported, doubled as a table and was sturdy.

Man being an aesthetic animal, decided this box would look nicer if it had some decoration on it. Carving being one of man's oldest arts, became a natural to decorate his box. By this time the box was now being called a chest and the first true piece of furniture was born, along with a craftsman known as a furniture carver.

Furniture carving is a specialized distinctive type of carving totally removed from wood sculpture or whittling. Furniture carving reached its pinnacle in the late 18th and early 19th centuries with such masters as Chippendale,

Stanley D. Saperstein applying final waxing to blanket chest he made and carved in traditional colonial style.

Hepplewhite, Sheraton, Phyfe, Adams and others.

The project for this issue is a Winslow three-panel oak chest.

The cabinet makers among us will easily understand the simple tongue and groove construction and the carvers will find a challenge in the intricate leaf patterns of the modified tulip and clover design.

This chest is the master work of Kalem Winslow, coffin maker to the Pilgrims. In the old days, coffin makers were also cabinet makers of great skill.

In reproducing antique furniture you must pay very careful attention to the way the furniture was constructed back in the time of the old masters. You have no freedom to work as you like; you must become a great copier. This is not an easy task, and it takes a great deal of research before you can begin to build your piece.

In the months to come I will share many years of hard research with you and give detailed drawings of authentic patterns and construction methods. Those of you who do not want to build furniture can use the carving patterns for beautiful wall plaques.

The blanket chest is the ancestor of the chest of drawers. Later chests added a single drawer on the bottom and this proved to be so convenient that more drawers were added until the open blanket part of the chest disappeared altogether by 1800 and the "chest of drawers" was born.

The three paneled is a framed chest, that is, the rails and stiles (rails are the horizontal boards, stiles the vertical ones) frame the panels. They are fitted together with tongue and groove joints on the panels and sides of

the legs. Mortise and tenon joints are used on the rails and legs (see illustration). These joints are the key to the strong construction of the chest. They can be done with a chisel or power tools (router or table saw).

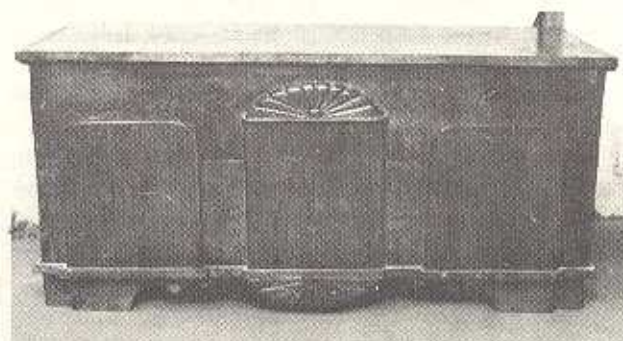
When the parts of the chest are cut to size and the joints made, the carving is added, and, of course, when the carving is done the chest is assembled.

Study the details of the drawing and you should be able to construct the chest without any problems.

Construction is the easy part compared to the carving. The chest is beautiful with no carving at all, but with carving it is exquisite. The design is 1/8-inch deep low relief carving requiring the following tools:

1—Small parting tool (used to outline the leaves).

2—Skew chisel 1/4 or 3/8 inch (used to round over



Another fine example of Stan's workmanship.

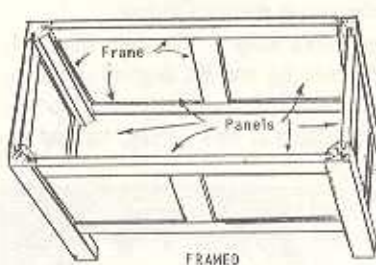
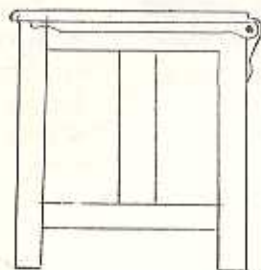
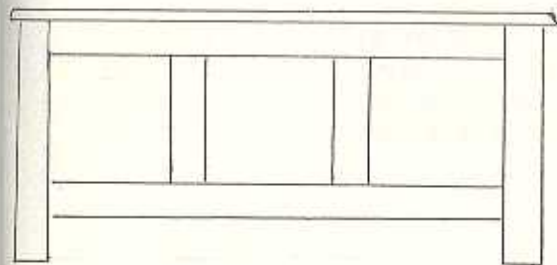
Photographs by
Jack Trafford

Drawings by the author

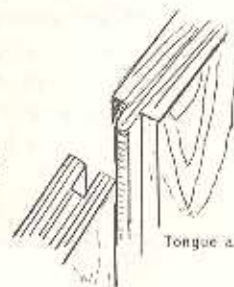
BILL OF MATERIALS					
ITEM	L	W	T	No	COMMENTS
Lid	47½	21¾	¾	1	Glue up three 8-inch boards
Rails, front and back	39	3¾	¾	4	
Rails, sides	19¾	3¾	¾	4	
Stiles	14½	3¾	¾	6	
Panels, front	14½	10½	½	6	Glue up same for back
Panels, side	7½	14½	½	4	
Legs	27	3½	1½	4	
Bottom	33	19½	3/8	1	Plywood

Note: 1. Panels are same in back.
2. Round over edge of lid.
3. Notice hinges are the wooden cleat type. See pattern. Cotter pin hinges may be used as a substitute.

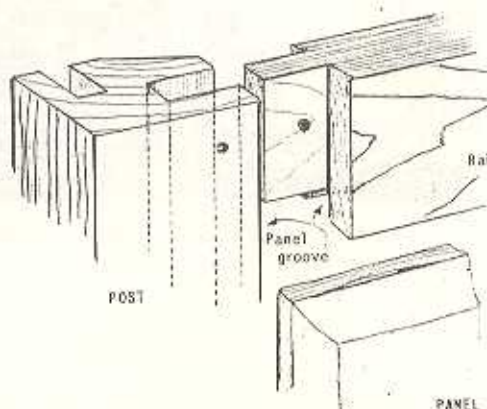
THREE-PANELED BLANKET CHEST (1614)



FRAMED



Tongue and groove



POST

PANEL

sharp edges and remove background in small areas).

3—1/2-inch #3 gouge (to remove background).

4—1/2-inch #8 or #9 gouge (for face cutting leaves).

5—1/8-inch and 1/16-inch veiner (for putting veins in the leaves).

6—Rifflers or sandpaper.

7—Background stamps (these can be made from a bolt with a file).

The carving sequence:

1—Outline all leaves and borders with parting tool to depth of 1/8-inch.

2—Remove all background.

3—Face cut the leaves and round over edges (face cutting is shaping leaf surface).

4—Add leaf veins.

5—Sand where necessary and stamp background.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Stanley D. Saperstein became interested in whittling at age 12; after a try at soap carving, he turned to making wooden letter openers and chains. By the time he was 16, he was so involved in chess playing that he carved a set of men from a broom handle. Fellow chess players greatly admired the hand-carved set so much that he started taking orders, using mahogany instead of broom handles.

His interest in carving and the desire to improve his style led him to take an art course in anatomy.

About four years ago, while attending a colonial craft fair, Stan met C. N. Grinnell, a retired master carver, who was demonstrating furniture carving. Stan showed some of his folk figurines to the carver who complimented him on the work and pointed out the shortcomings.

Fascinated by the skill and ease with which Mr. Grinnell worked, Stan prevailed upon the master to accept him as an apprentice. For three years he learned carving "at the bench."

He became so engrossed in antique furniture making and carving that he found himself researching and avidly devouring every book on the subject he could come by.

Stan has constructed and carved many fine pieces. Attesting to his skill, numerous spectators, and carvers alike, at the recent Smithville show, thought that the chests he had on display belonged to the Smithville collection of antique furniture.

The 27-year-old carver makes many of his tools from drill rods and triangle files. He holds BA and MA degrees in education and has taught in high schools, but presently he is working as a personnel officer for the State of New Jersey. He and his



Stan Saperstein carving a panel for a colonial-style Bible box.

wife, Cindy, and their infant son, live at 3 Langmoore Dr., Trenton, N. J. 08638.

Stan's artistic ability is not limited to wood. He recently designed and sculptured a collector's coin issued by the state of New Jersey commemorating the Battle of Trenton in the Revolutionary War.

The front of the coin carries the bust of General Hugh Mercer, for whom Mercer County, N.J. is named. General Mercer fought in the Battle of Trenton and gave his life at the Battle of Princeton, nine days later. The back of the coin is Stan's interpretation of descriptions of Colonel Rall's charge on General Washington's cannon position. Mercer's men, hiding behind a long fence and in houses along Warren Street, broke up the charge with small arms fire, helping to insure a decisive victory for the Colonials.

The coin is cast in the colonial metal—pewter, and sells for \$5.95. Money raised from the sale of the coins will be used by the state for restoration of historic sites in the Trenton area. Stan has made arrangements for NWCA members to purchase one of these collector coins for \$5. These orders may be sent direct to him.



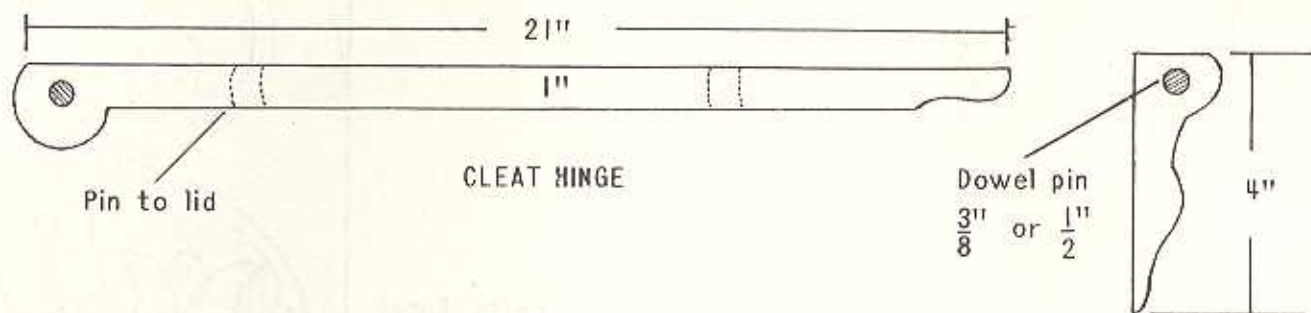
Stan designed coin commemorating Revolutionary War Battle of Trenton.

Now that the chest is carved—stain each part your desired color. Choose a dark stain to be authentic (Min-Wax-Jacobean is a good one), assemble the chest and finish with four coats of shellac thinned with 50% alcohol. Use Simmonize car wax since it has a high content of carnauba wax.

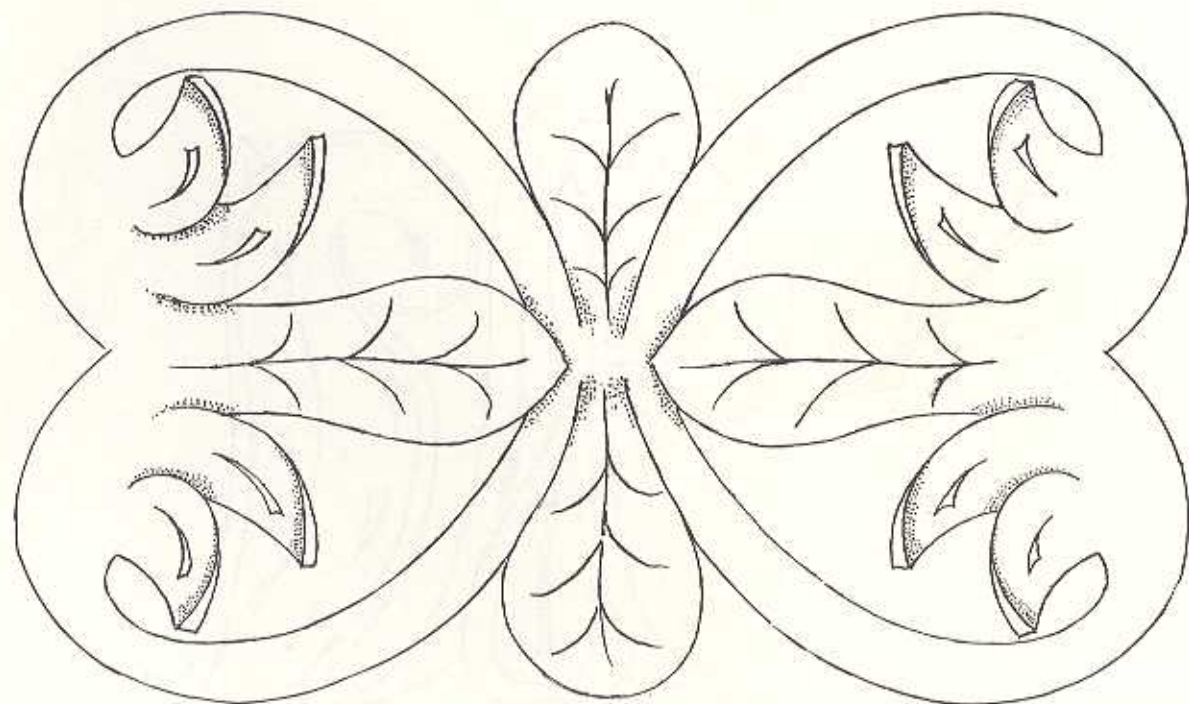
Refer closely to the patterns and construction plans and if you are experienced you should not have much trouble with the chest. I realize that this is not a project

for the novice carver or cabinet maker, but I used this example to illustrate the skill involved in making period furniture and the beauty of carved furniture.

In the following issues I will supply plans on a beginning project that most persons can do. If you have questions on the blanket chest or any other furniture problems you may write me and I will either answer directly or through Chip Chats. Until next time . . . good carving!



The wooden cleat hinge was used because metal ones were not invented. The cleat part of the hinge also served as a brace against the lid warping. If you do not want to use the cleat hinge, the snipe hinge will serve. Drive holes into the lid and back of chest and drive pin into lid with chest pins interlocked. Drive chest pins into holes and cinch over ends.

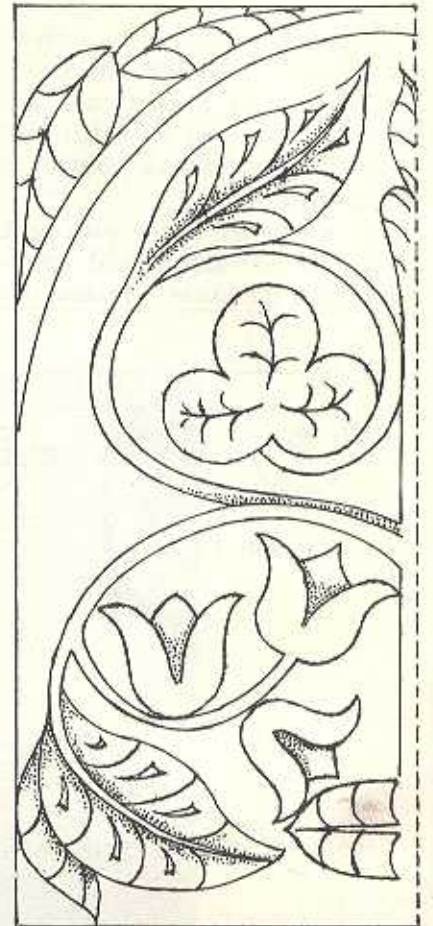


Bottom Rail Pattern (full size)

**PATTERNS
FOR
BLANKET
CHEST**

Left and Right
Panels

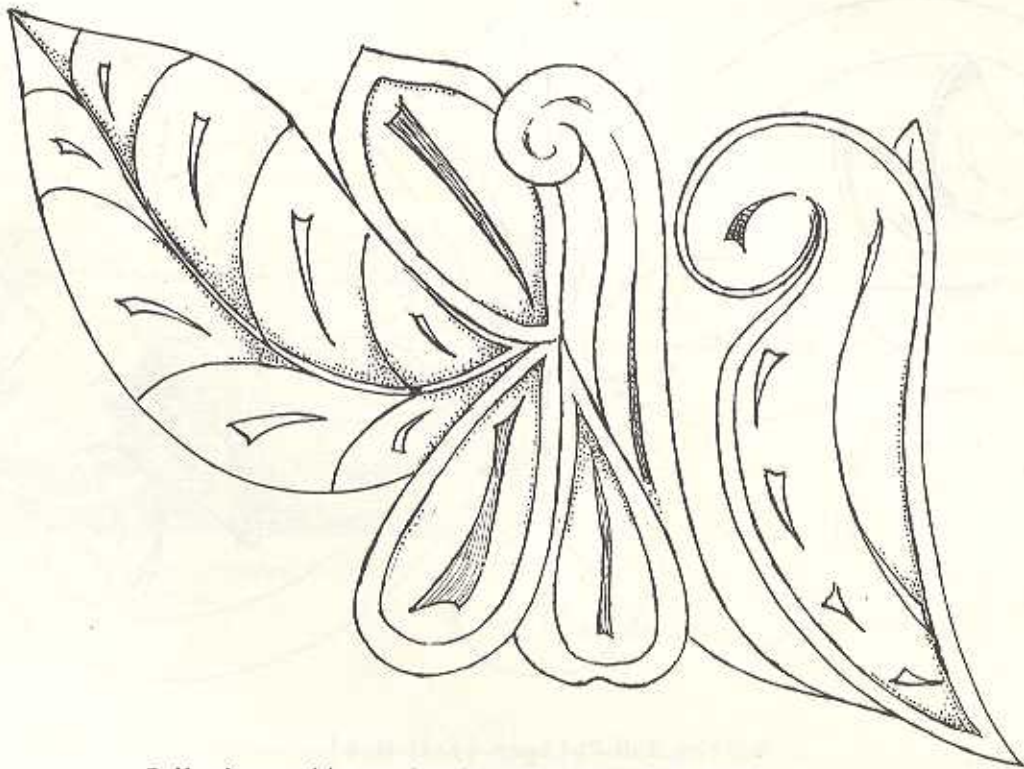
Note: Draw left
half of pattern
on tracing paper
and flip over
for right side.



Center Panel

Other leaf designs
common to period
1640-80 may be
used if these
prove too
difficult.

Enlarge panel designs to fit.



Full size pattern for leg and top rail, stiles