

devrait donner des résultats beaucoup plus probant et plus près de la réalité.

Il va sans dire que suite à ces remarques, les réponses aux questions (d'ailleurs très pertinentes) de l'auteur ne peuvent que nous laisser perplexe. Peut-être que l'amélioration des problèmes que nous avons soulevés ne donnerait pas des résultats totalement différents de ceux de M. Bernier, mais nous croyons qu'ils seraient plus pertinents dans le cadre, par exemple, d'un essai de "reconstitution" d'une boutique d'un artisan du bois au tournant du XIXe siècle.

NOTES

1. Abbé Pierre Jaubert, Dictionnaire raisonné universel des arts et métiers... Nouvelle édition revue et mise en ordre par M. l'abbé Jaubert, 5 vols. (Lyon: A. LeRoy, 1793-1801); André Jacob Roubo, L'art du menuisier, 4 vols. in 6. (Paris: Desaint et Saillant, 1769-75).

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Cabinetmakers of the Eastern Seaboard: A Study of Early Canadian Furniture. Text by Charles H. Foss. Photography by Richard Vroom. Toronto: M.H. Feheley, 1977. 156p.
ISBN 0-919880-09-6. \$29.00

Although its title suggests a study of furniture craftsmen in all four of Canada's maritime provinces, Cabinetmakers of the Eastern Seaboard is a book about New Brunswick cabinetmakers and

New Brunswick cabinetmakers alone. Charles Foss, Curator of Furnishings at Kings Landing Historical Settlement, combines his knowledge of New Brunswick history, genealogy, folklore, and craftsmanship with the work of photographer Richard Vroom to produce a very handsome volume indeed.

Too often in the study of Canadian furniture, research into the lives and work of individual craftsmen has been replaced by the simpler task of gathering "representative" photographs and writing stylistic commentaries around them. Charles Foss has tried to reverse the trend, and going further still, to document the work of several factories, and even to include the furniture of the still active craftsman, Alban S. Emery.

All this is a step in the right direction. Yet it would seem that the task was too great. Cabinetmakers of the Eastern Seaboard is a disappointment and will be of limited value to researchers and collectors.

The book begins, appropriately, with a concise account of the early settlement of New Brunswick from the days of the Acadians to the coming of the Loyalists. As the Acadians were a poor people, scattered by the expulsion of 1755, few examples of their furniture have survived. None is illustrated in the book. The Loyalists, on the other hand, often were men and women of means. Foss maintains that, unlike those who came to the Canadas, the New Brunswick Loyalists brought with them money, fine furniture, and a taste for fine craftsmanship. Among them were skilled cabinetmakers who found West Indian mahogany, brought to New Brunswick as ballast on trading ships, in abundant supply. Later arrivals, such as the Scottish-trained Thomas Nisbet and Alexander Lawrence, further helped to establish a tradition of fine furniture-making in the province.

Foss then considers the question of style. Here are numerous small errors, both in spelling and in fact, and some broad generalizations which should not go unchallenged. For instance,

it is hard to understand how "a careful look at Jean Palardy's excellent book The Furniture of French Canada, 1963, will show that the Canadian versions of the 'Empire' influence were much more sophisticated than the versions which became so popular in the new republic to the south" (pp.4-5) -- especially if we consider the work of such American masters as Charles-Honoré Lannuier or Anthony G. Querville. And there is no evidence to show that during the Regency period "some woodworking machines had been invented and were used, resulting in some deterioration of craftsmanship" (p.5). Early woodworking machinery, like the tools of old, depended on the craftsman's skilled hand and discerning eye for guidance. The nineteenth century produced some of the most technically sophisticated, finely crafted furniture the world has ever seen.

Foss's listing of Victorian styles, like so many commentaries on nineteenth-century furniture design, fails to suggest a unity which had its roots during the Regency and which thrived on a romantic, creative interest in the historical past. While whim and fashion, as always, had their way, they no more governed nineteenth-century aesthetics than they do our own.

One final comment regarding style: the author's explanation that the vogue for "cottage furniture" was based on the popular development of the summer cottage is misleading. Cottage furniture was known to furniture factories long before the advent of the lakeside or forest retreat. It described the most rudimentary types of furniture used by the working classes and did not confine itself to the painted whimsies which Foss illustrates.

Following the introduction, the author opens his catalogue raisonné with a section entitled "The Loyalist Influence." Here, as in the chapters which follow, lack of documentation proves a serious flaw. Only occasionally does Foss say why he attributes a piece to a specific maker. Is it labelled? Is it signed? Can it be related to a document? These questions must be answered if we are to take his work seriously and if in future

we are to make further attributions on the basis of similarity to the furniture he illustrates.

Even when the author has come upon an apparent gold mine of information, he seems reluctant to share it with his readers. Of the work of John Warren Moore Foss writes, "Along with the furniture, there is a remarkable record of Moore's activities, his work, and his family including over a hundred and fifty letters, beginning in 1827, written by family and friends. Over thirty letters by Mrs. Moore tell much about the cabinetmaker, his business, his problems and successes throughout his eighty-one years of life" (p.75). Why are we tantalized like this? And why is there no footnote or bibliographic reference to tell us where this remarkable record, perhaps unique in Canada, is located? Maybe the author, or his publisher, felt that the general reader just would not be interested; yet surely the study of Canadian material culture has matured to the point where now there is an audience, and a substantial one, that wants something more than a picture book.

The book's lack of documentation and footnotes could, perhaps, be more nearly excusable if we could be more certain of its author's eye for style and detail. But after even a casual examination of the book's first illustrated section, "The Loyalist Influence," we cannot put much faith there at all. The very first illustration, purportedly a 1760s wing chair, is a piece whose legs and base, and consequently its built-in gout stool, are obvious replacements -- if the chair has any age at all. There are other questionable pieces here too -- a corner chair, several Windsors, a pedestal library table, a cane-seated armchair, a cradle, and more -- which clearly date from the nineteenth century. Only tradition and family histories have given them the patina of Loyalist ancestry.

After the Loyalist chapter, the author's eye for style and period becomes a bit more reliable. Even so, several pieces attributed to Robert Chillas, Thomas Nisbet, and Alexander

Lawrence give pause when compared with the revival and reproduction work by Alban S. Emery. The five-drawer chest illustrated on page 23 and attributed to Chillies looks very much a late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century "fake."

Here, as elsewhere, the author lacks precision. No measurements are given and no attempt is made to order pieces according to date, style, or function.

Pieces of furniture are named in an arbitrary, haphazard fashion. Facing each other, on pages 54 and 55, are two mid nineteenth-century armchairs of comparable size and design; yet one is a "Gentleman's Chair" and the other simply a "Victorian Armchair." Other examples abound, all of them confusing. Probably the author himself is not too sure of the terms he uses, or of their origins. Twice the English designer Charles Locke Eastlake is referred to as George Eastlake (pp.115, 117), while another George, George Smith, is credited as the author of Thomas Hope's Household Furniture and Interior Decoration (p.5).

Finally, while Foss gives ample evidence of the woodworking skills of early furniture makers such as Thomas Nisbet and Alexander Lawrence, he does not raise the possibility that these craftsmen may have produced carved or turned parts and ornaments for use by other, perhaps less skilled, woodworkers. Nor does he suggest the complex network of business relationships which often existed between early shops and factories. Recent research in the cities and towns of New England has shown that piecework, if such it may be called, was more common than we once supposed (Margaret Burke Clunie, "Joseph True and the Piecework System in Salem," Antiques 111, no. 5 (May 1977): 1006-13). Any serious study of cabinetmaking in nineteenth-century New Brunswick must take this phenomenon into account.

Cabinetmakers of the Eastern Seaboard is, sadly, typical of most writing on English-Canadian furniture today. None has come

up to the scholarly standard of Jean Palardy's classic, The Early Furniture of French Canada, and none is equal to the best of English and American work. While other media of Canadian decorative arts, notably ceramics, silver, and textiles, have received scholarly attention during the past two decades, furniture research still is dominated by the dilettante and the dealer. While excelling in its handsome format and fine photography, Cabinetmakers of the Eastern Seaboard, like so many others before it, will fare better on the coffee table than on the library shelves.

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"A Few Acres of Snow/Quelques arpents de neige", National Museum of Man, Ottawa, Ont. Conception and storyline: History Division. Design: Design and Display Division, National Museums of Canada. Opened: October 1977.

"...those two nations [England and France] are fighting a war over a few acres of snow in Canada and they're spending more on that glorious war than the whole of Canada is worth."

At first glance "A Few Acres of Snow" seems a wry and self-deprecating approach to the first permanent exhibit of Canada's national history. From a federal institution at the height of a national unity crisis we might be forgiven for expecting to find our traditional childhood companions -- Responsible Government, the National Policy, the Undefended Border, and the Fathers of Confederation. Yet what the National