

The Heritage of Upper Canadian Furniture. Howard Pain.
 Toronto, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1978. 547p., illus.,
 colour plates, bibliography, appendices. ISBN 0-442-29828-5.
 \$49.95

Howard Pain's The Heritage of Upper Canadian Furniture is certainly the largest and weightiest compilation yet to appear on any aspect of early Canadian furniture. In 547 pages and 1,450 illustrations (249 in colour), Pain has gathered a record of the nineteenth-century furniture of Ontario so all-encompassing and exhaustive as to amount to overkill of the subject. It is unlikely to be superseded for comprehensiveness and sheer mass; I but wish I could say the same for excellence.

The author has isolated Ontario furniture forms and styles and organized the book according to the various cultural groups -- English, Scottish, Pennsylvania-German, Anglo-American, French-Canadian, German, and Polish -- that made up the settlement mosaic of Upper Canada. He has even included comparable European examples with his sections of illustration. The book in its divisions is thus rather balkanized along ethnic lines -- sometimes questionably, considering that English was the dominant language, that communities were not uni-ethnic ghettos, that people intermarried, and that furniture style characteristics meshed and blended. One great influence, growing nineteenth-century industrialization which drew mechanically adaptable characteristics from many styles, is ignored, yet the book includes many obviously manufactured pieces, particularly chairs.

In surveying all of the forms of furniture produced in nineteenth-century Ontario, the text outlines the settlement patterns of the different ethnic groups and describes their main furniture types and characteristics. The range of coverage swings, with little qualitative discernment or apparent plan, from the elegant to generic "country" to home-made necessities, leaning heavily toward the latter. (The title of the U.S. edition is The Heritage of Country Furniture.) The reader thus gains the

impression that the book is a fishing-net sweep, including everything that fits rather than a selection of pieces about which specific points can be made. While this leads to a massive compendium unbiased by subjective judgment, the absence of selectivity also means great similarity and even near-duplication of illustration. Considering the present early state of Canadian decorative arts studies, photographic overstatement may be justified but it has resulted in a very expensive book.

In another and more serious realm this book is misleading. Ontario furniture, given the same native woods plus geographic proximity, is often very close in form to furniture of New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. By the nineteenth century, in fact, many of these forms were thoroughly homogenized and common to all of northeastern North America. The author has seen fit, however, to identify nearly every illustrated piece by the county where it was found in Ontario, implying that this was its origin. Though he may by happenstance be right in many instances, present-day location is unacceptable as any conclusive indicator of origin considering the movement of people and goods on this continent over the last two centuries. There is no evidence of county-to-county differences in Ontario furniture or any stylistic reason for this. It is merely a fine, old, but meaningless, Ontario habit in describing furniture. In employing this approach blindly, Pain has thus taken into his net some unquestionably New York State and Quebec pieces and others of most uncertain ancestry.

Overall, this is a book which, at first skimming, appears to be more than it is. Certainly it goes beyond anything yet published in exploring the transition of Pennsylvania-German traditional forms to Ontario and the adaptation of Anglo-American forms to production by English and Scottish makers and factories. It can be a valuable and useful book, but it must be approached with caution and vigilance. The text is rather verbose, and the captioning flossy, adjective-laden, and inadequate. Raising as much uncertainty as the county-of-location designations is the fact that the book is full of petty errors of carelessness which

should have been caught at the information-recording and text-editing stages. These individually trivial faults seem to increase with each re-reading, like fresh stones in a spring field, and gain significance only collectively.

The photography in this book is generally excellent, the effort involved clearly very great, and the product is handsome, colourful, and monumental. Its shortcomings, however, from flawed approaches to language and terminology to myriad small mistakes, do not inspire much confidence in its reliability, and that is what a book of this sort should be all about.

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West Coast Logging: 1840-1910. Mary Shakespeare and Rodney H. Pain. Ottawa, National Museums of Canada, 1977. (National Museum of Man, Mercury Series, History Division. Paper No. 22). 84p., illus., bibliography. ISSN 0316-1900. Free

The publication of an intelligent and comprehensive history of early British Columbia lumbering has long been overdue. Unfortunately, West Coast Logging: 1840-1910 by Mary Shakespeare and Rodney Pain does little to fill the void. Pain and Shakespeare's is an enthusiastic work, but one without clearly defined purpose or coherent organization -- a work showing little evidence of strong editorial guidance.

In their seventy-odd pages the authors attempt to describe the major technological developments that affected the British Columbia lumbering industry in its formative years. Archival photographs and photographs of logging artifacts support the text. Pain and Shakespeare begin by discussing the first (late eighteenth century) non-aboriginal use of the forest resource.