

material culture of Atlantic Canada, a contribution which may serve as a catalyst for the investigation of Canada's rich boatbuilding heritage by material culturalists and other scholars.

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Quilts and Other Bed Coverings in the Canadian Tradition. Ruth McKendry.
Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1979. 240 p., ill., index, biblio.
ISBN 0-442-29778-5.\$39.95. Reviewed by Leslie Maitland.

Before proceeding with an examination of this book, one serious problem should be cleared up. Quilts and Other Bed Coverings in the Canadian Tradition is not about a Canadian tradition, nor is it particularly about quilts. It is about bedding in general, with an emphasis on quilts, and it is concerned with a strictly Upper Canadian tradition. Eager readers in the West, Quebec, and the Maritimes who spend \$39.95 for a book which they assume will give them a national perspective on this particular craft are going to be disappointed by this display of central Canadian myopia, so buyer beware.

But as a material history study of bedding in Upper Canada, McKendry's book is commendable in many ways. It is refreshing to see someone presenting a craft from the point of view of material culture, attempting to set this craft within its social and economic context rather than presenting us with yet another collector's guide to a particular antique. As William E. Taylor points out in the foreward, material history is a "still young discipline," whose methodology is yet to be clearly established. Any attempt at this approach breaks new ground. McKendry's approach is to trace the production of beds and bed coverings through all stages from raw material to finished item. The availability of manufactured materials, production of homespun, the bed, the bedstead, and all the bed furnishings are examined thoroughly. In so doing the author makes clear the importance of textile and bedding production for the household and thereby brings into focus one of the many roles that women played in the family economy.

McKendry writes in an easy, relaxed style which makes the book a pleasure to read. The organization of the material by beds, bedding, bedcovers, and so forth, is fairly logical, given that quilts do not appear until halfway through the book. There is some confusion in the treatment of chronological material within these chapters, for the author often jumps from the middle to the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century, into the twentieth and back again. The reader is left without a clear picture of the progression of events in the nineteenth century. Part of this problem results, understandably, from the difficulty of dating textiles with any accuracy.

An absolute requirement in a book that deals with such a colourful artifact as the quilt is the reproduction of high quality colour plates. Here they appear in abundance. The clarity of the illustrations will prove a boon to modern quilters who wish to design quilts after the fashion of nineteenth century patterns. But even the non-quilter will enjoy the variety and splendor of the quilts, thanks to the quality of the reproduction. Overall, the handsome layout and design of this book will make it a fine addition to any coffee-table library.

Quilts and Other Bed Coverings in the Canadian Tradition is no dry account of a process of production. The author examines feelingly what quilts and other bed coverings meant to those who made them and to those who used them, although she does go a bit heavy on the myth of the struggling pioneer (who was doing very nicely here, thank you). The chapters on quilt names and symbolism in quilts make the most fascinating reading, for here the makers and the owners of these objects come alive. We finish McKendry's book appreciating quilts and bed coverings as artifacts with which people lived, dreamed, and died.

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