

Colchester Furniture Makers - A Study by the Colchester Historical Museum of Colchester County 19th Century Furniture Makers and Their Work.
 Sheila Stevenson. Truro, N.S.: Colchester Historical Museum and the Nova Scotia Museum, 1979. 72 p., ill., biblio., index.
 ISBN 0-9690119-0-3. \$7.00 paperbound. Reviewed by David L. Myles.

At long last we are beginning to see books that deal with individual furniture makers from a specific geographical area. The need for such a detailed publication has been expressed by many researchers who have had to refer to more general works that cover, at best, a provincial outlook. This group from the Colchester Historical Museum is to be commended for pioneering in this area of research and producing a fine publication that should inspire others to undertake similar studies.

Colchester Furniture Makers provides a listing of furniture makers working in this area of Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. The biographical information is generally quite substantial and must have involved many hours of work checking probate records, census records, directories, newspapers, and local histories. This information is further enhanced by material gathered through personal interviews with the owners of specific items and with the relatives of furniture makers. These personal recollections add an interesting and vital perspective to the publication and the introduction of this sort of local colour allows the reader to speculate and theorize with some degree of flexibility.

The authors acknowledge that there is a tremendous difference between a signed artifact and an artifact that can only be attributed. Less than a dozen pieces of furniture illustrated in the book are marked or labelled and the remainder are merely attributed to individuals on the basis of the information available. There are a few instances where information based on local tradition is not supported by documented evidence and these discrepancies have been duly noted in the text. The limitations of this type of information are well known but most readers will appreciate the excellent work that has been done by a volunteer group and its advisors.

The idea that fine early furniture was only manufactured by trained cabinetmakers is shown to be a fallacious assumption in the biographical

section of the text. In an age when improvisation was the key to survival, many different tradesmen would produce furniture for friends, relatives, and local institutions as well as for their own use. The manufacturing of furniture was a natural adjunct to a carpentry operation or a wheelwright shop. The owners had all the necessary tools to produce various articles of furniture during periods when their regular line of work was not in demand. Thus we have pieces of furniture that follow traditional basic patterns but also reflect the individual traits of a variety of tradesmen. It is these details in turnings, etc., that assist trained observers in identifying specific artifacts as the products of a particular craftsman. The photographs that accompany the text are excellent and the section dealing with chairs is particularly well done. Details that are normally only revealed in a "hands-on" situation are clearly visible in the illustrations.

There are a few printing errors that the editor missed; for example, the map of Colchester County appears on the frontispiece and not on page seven as the table of contents indicates. A more detailed map of the county would have been an asset as many of the places mentioned in the text are not indicated on the map. Searching in vain for a particular place-name was both time-consuming and frustrating.

The inclusion of furniture from highly mechanized factories which continued operating well into the present century may appear to some purists as an unforgiveable sin. However, this type of furniture is rapidly becoming very collectable and the time to chronicle such information is now, while it is readily available.

The last three sections of the book dealing with casepieces, clocks, and mantles are a disappointment and should not have been included. The few examples presented do not provide the researcher with enough working information. A considerable amount of evidence has to be gathered by any researcher if he is to make a respectable analysis and reach meaningful conclusions.

Institutions and individuals who own pieces of Nova Scotia furniture

or pieces that they believe are from the Maritimes, will certainly be able to use this book as a research tool. Colchester Furniture Makers will initiate a reassessment of many collections and should assist in the removal of the shroud of anonymity from some of the artifacts contained therein.

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English-Canadian Furniture of the Georgian Period. Donald Blake Webster.
Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, c1979. 232 p., ill., biblio.
ISBN 0-0708298-0-2. \$24.00. Reviewed by Benno Forman.

Donald Blake Webster, curator of the Canadiana Department at the Royal Ontario Museum, has published the first book devoted to furniture made in Canada in the styles, for the most part, that were popular in England during the latter years of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth centuries. The book contains 309 illustrations of this furniture, which, Webster informs us, constitute approximately 10 per cent of what remains of it. That so much is included between the covers of a book is a remarkable achievement, and the titanic labor involved in studying, photographing, and collating this material could only have been expended by a person who cares enough for this furniture to want to bring it to the attention of a wide audience.

The photographs are sharp and well-printed and the fact that they are now available will be cheered by all North American collectors and scholars who are interested in the furniture of the Atlantic community, for with this publication another of the English colonies in North America is heard from. This book fills the gap between Charles Montgomery's classic American Furniture, Federal Period and Bryden Bordley Hyde's Bermuda's Antique Furniture and Silver. The photographs are prefaced with fifty-three pages of opinions and comments that range from the extremely general to the happily specific. Observations on the types of woods that distinguish Canadian furniture from its British cousins and their importance to connoisseurship