

Schlereth, Thomas J. *Artifacts and the American Past*. Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1980. 294 pp., ill. \$13.95 hardbound.

This volume brings together ten previously published essays dealing with aspects of and approaches to the study of material history in America. For the past decade and more, Tom Schlereth, who teaches in the American Studies Department of the University of Notre Dame, has been one of the few articulate proselytizers for the burgeoning field of material history outside the museum community proper. Much of this book records his attempts to integrate material history into his teaching of American studies, that interdisciplinary hybrid so common in American universities but only recently accepted widely in Canada. As such, it often reads like a series of exercises on how to organize class-room activities dealing with aspects of the material past. It is interesting to note that the experimental nature of much of the teaching described here would probably not have been possible within more traditional departments of history.

Schlereth, an advocate of "artifactual literacy" and "material culture consciousness," attempts to liberate history from the confines of the class-room and introduce it to the innovations taking place all over the world in the field of museums and historic sites. His introduction, "History outside the History Classroom," presents a rationale for much of what follows. The sophistication of his approaches and suggestions, along with the sustained presentation of academic underpinning for his judgements, might render the volume a bit intimidating for the uninitiated. But for those practiced in the field of material history, the ground covered will seem fairly familiar.

This volume is divided into three main sections, dealing in turn with graphics and photographs, historic sites, and landscape as a source for the exploration of the material past. In all of the essays Schlereth attempts to come to grips with the new artifactual literacy which he maintains is sweeping North America. Centennials and bicentennials have raised the consciousness of the general public about their heritage in a way thought impossible in earlier years. This revolution in expectations has, he argues, created a unique opportunity for historians and material culturalists in general. The field of history now has enormous possibilities for expansion, and the museum and historic site provide the leading edge of his new process of democratization. No longer the preserve of a few old moss-backs or the exclusive plaything of the monstrously rich, important as both of these contributions may have been, the museum of today has to look to a broader audience with a more diverse set of public programming objectives. More particularly, this volume addresses itself to the fuller integration of the work of class-room teachers with the objectives of museum curators to produce a new

awareness of the material past and its importance in the educational process.

The individual essays in the collection are largely self-contained. On graphics as artifacts he discusses historical photography, mail-order catalogues and urban cartography as leading examples of material that has survived in sufficient quantity to bear examination, no matter where in North America one resides. The section on historic sites looks at houses, museum villages, and the 1876 American centennial celebrations as examples of avenues into the American past that are commonly accepted. When looking at landscapes the focus tends to be on vegetation and cultural patterns in the rural setting or on specific regional studies focusing on architecture. One essay which examines the concept of above-ground archaeology looks to the common artifacts of everyday life that have survived, especially in terms of the built environment. In some of these essays Schlereth attempts to cover too much ground, but the book is designed to make its readers read further (an intention reflected in the fifty pages of notes appended to the volume). The final essay, "Collecting Ideas and Artifacts: Common Problems of History Museums and History Texts," lists a series of fallacies concerning the interpretation of history found in the field of American history, along with a few reflections on what history should be all about. That essay encapsulates Schlereth's approach to the role of artifacts in opening up new vistas to the understanding of the American past and should be of interest to Canadian historians and material culturalists.

Schlereth's advocacy of the notion that history can exist outside the class-room and in clear view for everyone to see might get a bit wearing in repetition, but he delivers his message powerfully. Taken together, the essays present a primer for community access to its own history from a variety of perspectives. The examples he chooses to illustrate his argument may be well known and sometimes nationally oriented, but the message is clear that those resources exist everywhere in one form or another if only we have the wisdom to find and preserve them. In the Canadian context, the recent professionalization of the museum community and the emergence of material history as a sub-discipline of significant proportions have highlighted the necessity for further reassessment of current practices and future prospects in the field. The last decade or so has witnessed an expansion of the museum community never imagined in Canada. Its agents are just now coming to grips with the realities of operating the public programmes and related activities that must be a part of every museum's activities. Only time will tell if they are going to be successful in bringing museums and the general public together. Schlereth's book, though it is addressed more to the unconverted university-based historian than to the museum professional, presents a reasonable assessment of the accomplishments in a variety of fields and

points out the possibilities for further development. It warrants a serious examination from concerned members of both constituencies.

Del Muisse

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Peacock, David and Suzanne. *Old Oakville: A character study of the town's early buildings and of the men who built them.* Willowdale, Ont.: White/Hounslow Productions, 1979. 138pp., ill., index. \$16.50.

Oakville, Ontario, is many things to many people. It is a gracious lakeside community, an industrialized city that is home to (among others) the Ford Motor Company, and a dormitory suburb located some thirty expressway kilometres west of Toronto. Readers of *Old Oakville* would never suspect the latter two. This recent addition to the burgeoning small-city vanity press – conceived in the tradition of Peter John Stokes's much-admired *Old Niagara on the Lake* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) – ignores much of the reality that is Oakville. It chooses instead to illustrate and describe forty-five houses and shops with nineteenth-century beginnings and locations near Lake Ontario, a safe distance from the factories and the highway.

Each building is treated to a textual character study researched by Suzanne Peacock and accompanied by an attractive and sensitive pen-and-ink drawing by her husband, David Peacock, (himself an advertising man who commutes to Toronto). Many entries are also illustrated by photographs, mostly old views or newly-taken details, or by a second drawing.

These character studies, like the town, are many things: architectural history (despite the authors' denial in the preface), genealogies of the houses and their owners, physical descriptions, and brief reports of contemporary status. The stylistic discussions are generally perceptive and sound even if the sequence of styles follows in the main the somewhat obsolescent terminology proposed in Marion MacRae and Anthony Adamson, *The Ancestral Roof* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1963). The human history is well-researched and interesting to read.

Where the book lets us down is in its failure to present the buildings as they really are (just as it failed to do the same with Oakville as a community). This omission is motivated by selectivity, not dishonesty. Drawings of the commercial buildings simply omit all details of the ground floors and their new storefronts; those of the houses often leave out certain altered portions or under-

play unwanted textures or details. In the few cases where both a drawing and a photograph are offered (for example, Potter's Folly, pp.97-99), we can appreciate the subtle interpretive changes in proportion and detail.

As a result the reader gains little understanding of the structure as historical artifact or of its contextual setting. Those primary documents, the building themselves, remain obscure. The reader is treated instead to the authors' nostalgic and idealized perception of Oakville as it might be, conveyed through seductive drawings and a text that sometimes reads like advertising copy. The James McDonald House, for example, "is endowed with a glow gained from long-time affection," and boasts hardware providing "proof that good design and good workmanship ... are forever functional and forever fashionable" (p.26). Another subtle time-warping device is the presentation of the date of the building's original construction in large 24-point type, ahead even of its name; a careful reading of the text often reveals that most of what stands today is the result of later alterations or a recent "restoration" (used a synonymous with "repair" or "renovation" since many of the restorations described do not – as the word should denote – go back to an earlier point in the building's history).

The careless approach to history is epitomized on the rear of the dustjacket. The blurb incorrectly cites the names of the Canadian Inventory of Historic Building, the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee, and the Ontario Heritage Foundation – the three institutions most central to preservation in Ontario! Editor John Robert Columbo should have caught these.

These criticisms said and done the fact remains that *Old Oakville* is a handsome book – a delight to look at, to read, and to hold. David Peacock's fine design complements his drawings. The volume reveals a great deal about Oakville's rich architectural heritage and does it with distinction.

Harold Kalman

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Summers, Jack L.; Chartrand, René; and Marrion, R.J. *Military uniforms in Canada, 1665-1970.* Canadian War Museum, Historical Publication no. 16. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1981. Also published in French as: *L'uniforme militaire au Canada, 1665-1970.* 192 pp. \$29.95 hardbound.

The questions most asked in military museum circles seem to be concerned with the minutiae of uniforms. This minutiae is of course important to those charged with re-