



Fig. 4. Textiles in the exhibit. (Photo: NMC, 28112-19.)

guilds using the modern wheels in the exhibit. An Oracle pamphlet available at the museum is interesting for children; it is unfortunate that the Mercury publication *Selected Canadian Spinning Wheels in Perspective* was unavailable. It explains in great detail the wheels, processes and principles discussed in the exhibit and was written by the guest curator of the exhibit, Judith Buxton-Keenlyside.

Overall, it was a very interesting exhibit and a real treat to see so many wheels gathered together. Although spinning wheels are often included in museum exhibits, they are usually shown in their context and rarely seen in an environment like this one where the viewer can compare various types of wheels and consider the adaptations made by different ethnic groups across the country. Most of the emphasis in textile production exhibits usually centres on weaving or textiles, making the focus on wheels all the more significant.

Catherine Cooper Cole

Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History

Passfield, Robert W. *Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History*. Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside in association with Parks Canada, 1982. 184pp., ill., maps. (Issued also in French under title: *Construction du Canal Rideau*.) Hardbound \$24.95, ISBN 0-88902-706-4.

Robert W. Passfield's *Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History* is a well-researched and welcome addition to the growing body of literature relating to the history of technology in Canada. The author is an historian working for Parks Canada, the agency now responsible for the Rideau Canal and co-publisher of "this book to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the building of the Rideau Canal. It traces the efforts of the British Army Ordnance Department to bring the canal into being and tells how Lieutenant Colonel John By struggled to complete the project in the face of a forbidding landscape and a cost-conscious, sometimes hostile government in London" (p.7).

Building The Rideau Canal is not divided into chapters per se. The first two major sections consist of two essays (pp. 13-35) dealing with origin and construction respectively. Aside from an epilogue and brief bibliography the remainder of the book consists of numerous one- or two-page essays, each commenting on one of a multitude of lock site illustrations and a lesser number of engineering drawings. Essays dealing with the lock sites are presented in their order of appearance from Ottawa to Kingston.

The first two major sections ably describe the canal in terms of contemporary needs, construction, and varying attitudes towards the project. What some now regard solely as a recreational waterway, a quaint relic of past boondoggles, was in fact part of a comprehensive defensive network and a means of dealing with pressing problems relating to the high cost of moving men and materials.

Books on the history of Canadian technology are rare and the author is to be commended for successfully discussing the operation of the canal, construction problems and, in particular, for his sensible explanations of cost overruns, design changes, and problems in estimating costs. There is also good use of original drawings from various archives although they are not as effective as they might have been.

Building The Rideau Canal is an important book which surpasses other published works on the Rideau Canal. Richly deserved praise notwithstanding, the reviewer felt that it could have been better. There are no footnotes, an

unacceptable absence in a piece of significant historical research. The writing and organization do not do justice to the author's knowledge and research experience. The format has made the story too fragmented and disjointed. Much of the book is organized around reproductions of original drawings with text limited to what will fit on the opposing page and the room beneath the picture. In addition, the pictures are arranged to present a lock site by lock site history of the Rideau Canal from Ottawa to Kingston. The linear route-oriented approach has an obvious advantage in that it should help boost local sales and local pride; each lock or settlement has its own page. The disadvantage is that various problems, techniques and issues are not brought together enough for the synthesis which is one mark of good historical writing. Thematic essays or conventional chapters would have offered more scope for the historian. The decision to eschew almost entirely modern drawings has weakened the book. Historical drawings should have been supplemented by modern drawings to explain the technology. The use of both types would have made a more readable and satisfying book. The reviewer's criticisms of *Building The Rideau Canal* should be kept in perspective; they are overshadowed by the author's achievements in researching and writing the book and I strongly recommend it to anyone interested in local or transportation history.

Norman R. Ball

The Traditional Furniture of Outport Newfoundland

Peddle, Walter W. *The Traditional Furniture of Outport Newfoundland*. (St. John's, Nfld.: H. Cuff Publications, 1983.) 200pp., ill. Paper \$14.50, ISBN 0-919095-37-2.

Readers of the *Bulletin* are probably quite familiar with Walter Peddle's writings on Newfoundland furniture. They will be pleased to know that these have finally (after long and trying years in the hands of faithless publishers and public agencies) found their full growth in a book. However, the readers may be a little surprised by the format. *The Traditional Furniture of Outport Newfoundland* comes not as a coffee-table book, nor as a compact version of same, but as an octavo paperback. This format, while it may not do justice to the author's work, well serves his purpose of reaching the general public of Newfoundland. Because the book is comparatively reasonable in price, it may be bought by readers other than the wealthy academics and lawyers who own the pieces the book illustrates.

The book follows a fairly standard pattern for most regional furniture studies in that it has an introduction (as well as a preface and a foreword) to set the framework of the material and then examines the furniture category by category. Peddle does not merely identify piece, provenance, and maker. His captions take into account the use of the item, the sources of its material, and sometimes its design. In some cases he is able to relate the piece illustrated to other pieces in that idiom or from that particular region of Newfoundland. This is possible because this book grew out of Peddle's contact with Newfoundland furniture through an antique business he ran from 1973 to 1982. (He is now education officer and associate curator of material history with the Newfoundland Museum). He knows virtually all the pieces he illustrates because they were pieces he acquired. He brings an intimate knowledge of the furniture to the book, a knowledge that would be unusual in any other regional context.

The other side of this virtue is not so pleasant: the pieces he illustrates are almost all that remains of Newfoundland furniture. This is not to suggest that there was little furniture made or that Newfoundlanders were ill-furnished. Rather it suggests that much has been taken out and that much has been thrown away. As Peddle makes clear in his preface, there has been a steady stream of pickers in the last decade—a decade which coincided with an interest in traditional furniture. Prior to that the pickers were few and were selective about what they took and, generally speaking, their markets had not gone into "pine and plants" as a mode of decoration. Of greater effect has been the local discarding of outmoded furniture—furniture not only outmoded but distinctly unfashionable.

The production of the book, while it allows for general distribution, does pose some problems in layout. Many captions are on the page beside the illustrations they relate to and, were it not for some tiny directional arrows buried in the binding, it would be difficult to determine which illustration went with which caption. This is a defect the publisher could have corrected by reducing the size of illustration or by a limited change in layout. A number of photographs are marked with scratches or similar blemishes, and the cover photograph has been printed fuzzily.

What this book lacks, and indeed what most regional Canadian furniture studies lack, is an overall sense of the place of this furniture in the context of the people who made it and for whom it was made. Too often the antiquarians of furniture history have been too satisfied with style developments, as set down in the principal style books (Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Sheraton) and repeated in the coffee-table books, to investigate the much broader range of forms and situations which influence the making of any single piece. This is not to be seen as a condemnation of Peddle's book for it must be recognized that all work must begin with description—discussion and discrimination are