

pottery in Scotland are identified as being Christmas cards published in Montreal by Bennet and Co. Another Scottish potter, Robert Cochran, appealed to this market with the pattern "Quebec" which drew its material from photographs of that city in the 1880s. Amongst a few miscellaneous patterns Collard points out that Joseph Heath's pattern "Ontario Lake Scenery" earns its mention by its name alone because the romantic views are not related in any way to real scenes either of the province or the lake.

The book omits any mention of hand-painted scenes, but I believe it is worth mentioning the dessert services produced by Minton on bone china which were decorated

with scenes from the *The North West Passage by Land* by Viscount Milton and W.B. Cheadle (London, 1865). A selection from one of these services is in the Minton Museum, Stoke-on-Trent, and is mentioned in Collard's *Nineteenth-Century Pottery and Porcelain in Canada* (p. 172).

Illustrated with 148 black and white photographs and 23 individual marks, a glossary of terms and nine pages of notes with references, *The Potters' View of Canada* is an excellent study of how the British potter "turned the dinner table into a picture gallery."

Robert Copeland

Les Tonneliers du Québec

Marcil, Eileen. *Les Tonneliers du Québec*. National Museum of Man Mercury Series/Musée national de l'Homme, Collection Mercure, ISSN 0316-1854; History Division Paper/Division de l'histoire, Dossier, no. 34, ISSN 0316-1900. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1983. x, 122 pp., ill. Free/gratuit.

This book is made up of two elements: a descriptive account of the cooper's trade in Canada and a history of coopers in Quebec City. The descriptive portion is in the best tradition of Diderot's encyclopaedia; the author meticulously recounts all that she has learned by reading and observation about production methods, materials used, and range of products. The technical descriptions are supported by a fine array of illustrations. The reminiscences of surviving craftsmen cover the recent past.

In the historical account of coopers at Quebec, primarily between 1660 and 1860, the author is reluctant to go beyond a recitation of discrete facts and to come to general conclusions. This is a pity since no one is better qualified to place the facts in a broad context that would make their significance evident. Mme Marcil's deductive ability is evident from the shrewd suggestion that the absence of saw-horses in estate inventories indicates that many coopers bought their staves ready-made. Typical of the writer's diffidence is the modest ambition of the chapter about the consumers of the cooper's ware: it is to reveal "l'importance de ses produits dans la vie quotidienne." It is, however, evident from this and other chapters that barrelmaking was central to wholesale commerce and that the activity of the coopers mirrored the maritime traffic of Quebec City. Authors customarily overstate the importance of their subject; in this case the value of the study is understated.

The universal employment of barrels as containers for transportation is evident in the dual meaning of *tonneau*:

cast or a ton weight (the English word "tun" is equally suggestive). Before the twentieth-century barrels were the preferred containers for transporting drygoods (dry or slack cooperage) and liquids (wet or tight cooperage). The author mentions one advantage of the wooden containers: they sustained shocks that would shatter an earthenware container. It could be added that barrels were lighter than metal or pottery vessels; their construction allowed limited expansion and contraction without loss of integrity; and, as cylinders, they could be easily moved by rolling. These were reasons enough for their popularity.

The history of the Quebec coopers is a composite portrait made up of details eclectically chosen from different periods and diverse regions. There is an apparent assumption that there had been an eternal, standard cooper's world. For example, it is written that "la marque du tonnelier (voir pl. 36) est apposée sur le fond ou sur le chanfrein d'une douve, en la gravant avec la rouanne ou à l'aide d'un poinçon." The estate inventories do not list trademark punches and plate 36 illustrates the personal marks of English coopers in the early fifteenth century. Yet there is no reference to the royal assize marks stamped on wooden volume measures after 1800, even though such a mark is visible in plate 77. The celebration that marked the end of an English cooper's apprenticeship is mentioned with the remark "même sans preuve à l'appui, nous pouvons croire que les artisans de la Nouvelle-France en faisaient autant."

This composite portrait wants a strong frame. The narrative emerges bit by bit and it is a story worth telling. According to Mme Marcil, coopers (*tonneliers*) were primarily engaged in making staves, casks, and barrels for commercial enterprises. Small or white cooperage (*boissellerie*), which produced wooden vessels for domestic and farm use, was left to amateur craftsmen in French Canada. An ingenious analysis of the wood of surviving cooper's

work reveals that colonial artisans freed themselves from dependence on white oak and made serviceable containers out of native woods such as ash and cedar, and used rushes for caulking. The cost of iron in the pre-industrial period meant that most barrels were girdled with wooden hoops and vines. By the late 1800s machinery produced cheap metal hoops, staves, and cask heads. As a consequence, the cooper's work was reduced to the assemblage, repair, and maintenance of barrels. In this century wooden crates, cardboard packaging, steel drums, and, by the 1950s, plastic containers replaced the versatile barrel. Dry cooperage is dead and wet cooperage endures to make the casks in which distillate liquors are aged.

Unfortunately, the English-language "Summary" in the front of the book gives no hint of the author's findings. It merely says that "based on notarial archives, newspapers, census returns, artifacts and illustrations, this monograph provides a history of Quebec coopers, covering three centuries. Activities of the trade, stages of production, kinds of products made and the types of wood used, are described in detail."

The author is dependent on secondary sources for much of the historical background and some of the information they provided is open to question. Was wine transported in wooden casks in the Ancient World, even in the Mediterranean? I had thought that wet cooperage was per-

fectured at a later date, possibly by the Celts. I would also question the account of corporal punishments for runaway apprentices in New France, the hours of work, and the reference to a "code civil français" in the same period (the *Coûtume de Paris* and statutory decrees regulated civil matters). On the other hand, Eileen Marcil gives a lucid account of the economic evolution of Quebec City in the nineteenth century and concludes with a sentence that any writer would envy: "la ville qui avait été un port cosmopolite florissant se transforma en paisible ville de province."

Comparisons are inescapable. Jean-Claude Dupont's exhaustive *L'artisan forgeron* dealt with the folklore of blacksmithing; that aspect of the cooper's trade is not mentioned. It was, however, a craft that inspired metaphors. The best-known expression in French is the description of a spendthrift as "un tonneau percé." In English we speak of "barrelling along," of "staving off" something or of being "stove in" like a barrel. Since I was so taken with the biographies of craftsmen, the statistics on apprentices and journeymen, and the original documents in the appendix, I greedily hoped for a summation that would place the coopers in the greater social and economic order of old Quebec. This commercially important class of artisans ought to be seen in context and it is hoped that the author will have more to say on the subject.

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