

Museum of Man and Nature. While a formal evaluation has yet to be done, it is safe to say that it was a project of major importance in terms of contemporary efforts by historians and museum workers to "re-discover and re-interpret the world of work."⁴ The project achieved some important goals. It necessitated the sharing of work and decision-making among many staff members. It promoted the concept of integrated programming, both with groups outside the Museum and within it. It reached deep into the community, and involved many new faces in Museum activities. And, it brought working people into the Museum, both figuratively and literally.

It is hoped that "Concerning Work" will be recognized as a serious effort to contribute toward the development of a new social and material history of Canada, one that reflects the lives of all Canadians, and not just the few.

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Designers: Bill Little, Eric Crone, Barb Roney, Cathy Wickett, David Hopper, Alan Einarson

NOTES

1. Many of the ideas discussed here were first presented by Sharon Reilly at the Canadian Museums Association's Annual Meeting (Halifax, May 1982) and at the Ontario Museum Association Heritage Conference "Industrious in Their Habits: Rediscovering

the World of Work" (Toronto, January 1983). See also the exhibition catalogue, *Concerning Work: Change in the Work Process in Canada 1850-2000*.

2. Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," *Radical History Review* 25 (1981), pp. 63-96.
3. T.K. Derry and Trevor Williams, *A Short History of Technology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 3.
4. In January 1983 the Ontario Museum Association organized a major heritage conference entitled "Industrious in Their Habits: Rediscovering the World of Work." The conference was based on the premise that although people spend much of their lives at work, this area of human history has remained relatively unexplored by museums. The conference brought together more than 25 speakers from the museum world and the academic community to examine the changing nature and processes of work in Canada over the past 150 years under the following subjects: Work in the Home, Work on the Farm, Work in Industry, Work in the Professions. The aim of the conference was to assist museum workers in using their collections to research and interpret this important facet of social history. A word-processed publication based on the papers delivered at the conference is available from the Ontario Museum Association at a modest cost. For more information please contact the OMA, 38 Charles St. E., Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 1T1 or call (416) 923-3868. (Editor's Note: The *Material History Bulletin* is publishing a number of the conference papers — No. 19: Hilary Russell, "Canadian Ways": *An Introduction to Comparative Studies of Housework, Stoves, and Diet in Great Britain and Canada*; Ian Radforth, *In the Bush: The Changing World of Work in Ontario's Pulpwood Logging Industry during the Twentieth Century*; W. John McIntyre, *From Workshop to Factory: The Furnituremaker*; Marilyn J. Barber, *Below Stairs: The Domestic Servant*. No. 20: Alison Prentice, *From Household to School House: The Emergence of the Teacher as Servant of the State*. Forthcoming: Ernst W. Stieb, *A Professional Keeping Shop: The Nineteenth-Century Apothecary*.)

Sharon Reilly

Of Men and Wood

"Of Men and Wood," National Museum of Man. Curator: Jean-Pierre Hardy. Designer: Leo Saccu. Travelling exhibit. Opened July 1982. National tour: December 1982-April 1986, 15 locations.

Veteran museum-goers often see exhibits that glorify the "marvels" of modern technology in this or that industry. Fortunately, this exhibit presents a less egregious interpretation of the history of the forest industries of eastern Canada because it reveals, as the others usually fail to do, how industrial capitalism has impinged upon the lives of workers caught up in the world of wood. The exhibit warns viewers that the reality of the lumberjack's life contrasted sharply with the romantic images spawned by songs and stories, although the reasons for this tend to remain buried in a montage of pictures, artifacts, and text. The fact that the human "commodity" in forest enterprise receives as much emphasis as forest products is certainly

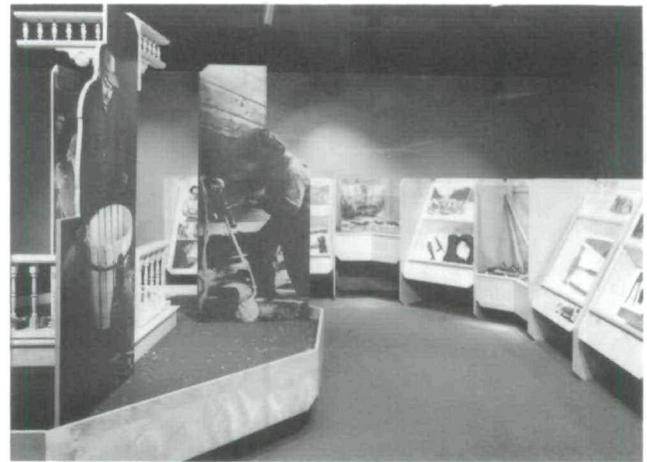


Fig. 1. Exhibit "hub" on the left showing barrelmaking and caulking. (Photo: National Museums of Canada [NMC], neg. no. 82-9443.)



Fig. 2. "Square Timbers" and "Shipbuilding" sections of the exhibit. (Photo: NMC, neg. no. 82-9441.)

welcome. But its creators waffle at the end by concluding their display on an ambiguous note of concern for the forest environment rather than for today's woodworkers.

"Of Men and Wood" is a self-contained, portable display designed for easy installation in one exhibition hall. Organized in the shape of a large wheel made up of natural wood-finished cases, the hub contains a central display of

four large cut-out photographs of workers which immediately attract the viewer's attention. Each of the four is fashioning wood: one drills a piece mounted on a vise, another wields an axe in the woods, a third makes a barrel, and a fourth hammers caulk into the side of a sailing vessel. The full-scale corner of a Victorian porch railing nearby shows both the woodworker's attractive handiwork and many of the tools of his trade. The chronologically arranged cases circling these cut-out figures contain a wide assortment of maps, pictures, photos, drawings, models, and artifacts ranging over two centuries of Canadian history.

The exhibit is organized around two major themes. "Wood and the Economy" chronicles the history of North American forest resources from the rise of the square timber trade in the late eighteenth century through wooden shipbuilding and house construction to the pulp and paper industries of more recent times. The chief historical periods are effectively delineated by way of maps, pictures, ship models, and by various tools associated with these work-places, such as axes, adzes, augers, trammel points, and caulking and sailmaking tools. The purpose of most if not all these artifacts (i.e., what are trammel points?) is satisfactorily explained. To convey the atmosphere of twentieth-century forest resource factories, the exhibit relies upon some excellent photographs of the interiors of pulp and paper mills or sawmills as well as on

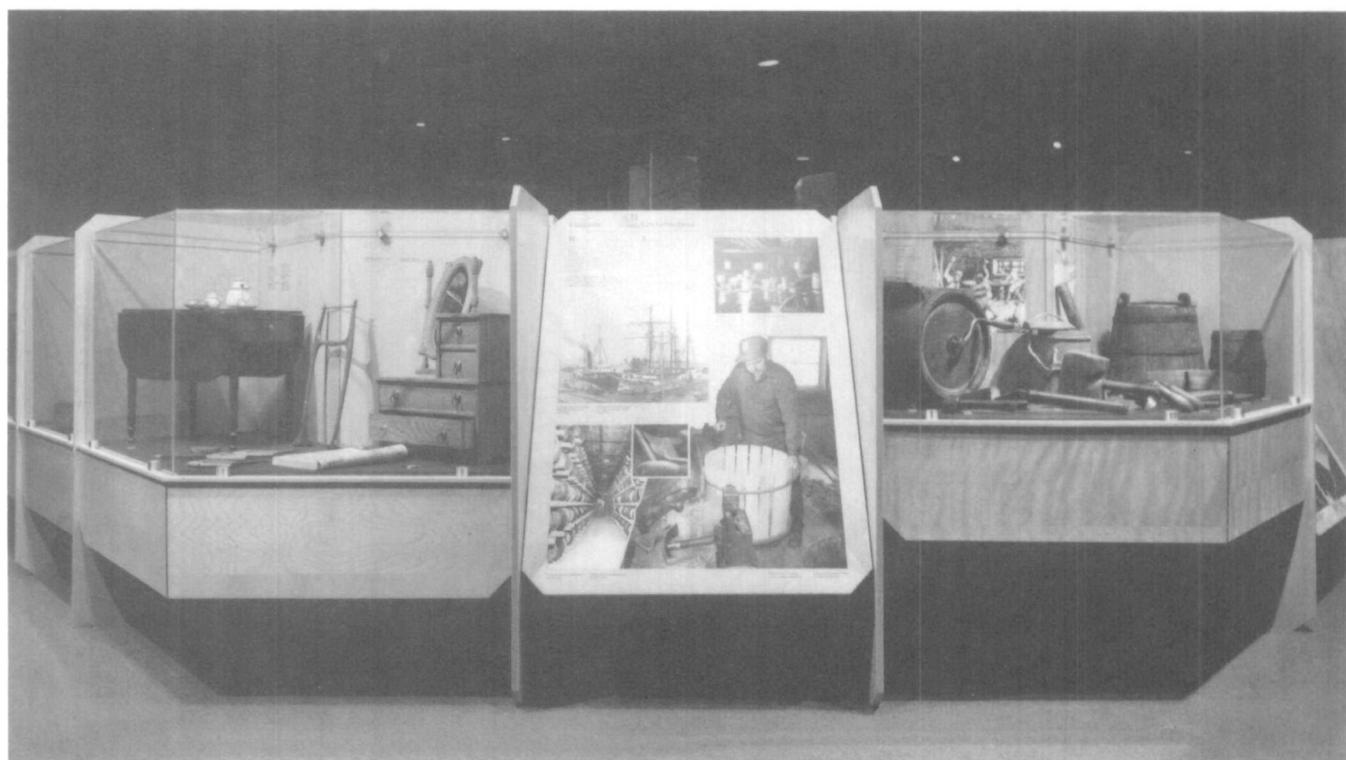


Fig. 3. "Coopers" section of the exhibit. (Photo: NMC, neg. no. 82-9444.)

an interesting display of paper products garbed in the colourful advertising slogans and brand names of yore. The text accurately emphasizes the historical dependence of the eastern Canadian forest industry upon British and American markets, and curiously overlooks other dimensions of dependence upon foreign capital and technique. The lumber slide, for instance, was introduced into Canada by New England forest entrepreneurs. Nowhere is data on either the volume or value of forest-related exports to British or American metropolitan centres provided, and consequently the cyclonic fluctuations of this export-led economy also go unnoticed.

The second and more original theme portrays the experiences of generations of woodworkers, detailing their seasonal work in the forests through pictures and a model of a logging camp. An excellent combination of pictures and tools conveys accurate impressions about the workplace lives of carpenters and joiners, cabinetmakers and coopers. These displays, and especially the accompanying brochure, explain why working conditions peculiar to the forest industry kept workers for the most part on the fringes of the nineteenth-century Canadian labour movement. But the pictures of individual workers taken together overemphasize isolating factors and obscure the many examples of spontaneous collective action by lumbermen and woodworkers in defence of their interests. Instead of baldly summarizing the results of the changing social relations of production, however, the exhibit concludes by pondering the impending destruction of the forest environment: "Given that today's technology renders intensive cutting more feasible than ever, can we afford to continue invading new regions and increasing the rate of exploitation?" Put this way, the exhibit suggests that technology is a purely autonomous force. Actually, profits — not technology — have always dictated both when and how machines were introduced into the wilderness work-place and also the degree to which the environment was exploited.

Despite falsely interpreting technological change as an independent variable rather than a conscious option available to entrepreneurs, I thought that "Of Men and Wood" effectually blended a wide range of artifacts, maps, pictures, and drawings into a basically accurate and persuasive historical interpretation. The single most objectionable feature about the exhibit originated in Saint John rather than in Ottawa. New Brunswick Museum officials did absolutely nothing to enhance this display. Atrocious lighting put some parts of it in a dazzling glare and other parts in deep shadow. Stark white, bare walls ought to have been draped in fabric if no posters or pictures were available. The absence of any noise associated with woodworking industries could have been overcome through a continuous tape recording of sawing, hammering, and other workshop sounds interspersed with the chitchat of workers. This viewer longed for a whiff of pine needles or cedar staves.



Fig. 4. Georges Picard in his workshop at Sainte-Louise, Quebec, 1976. (Photo: NMC, neg. no. 76-4965.)

Inevitably a few of the photographs or reproductions left me puzzled or amused. The exhibit quotes the decision of Judge Tessier in Quebec on "freedom of contract" without explaining how that doctrine affected workers. One photograph (fig. 4), presuming to be of a carpenter-joiner at work in his shop, is obviously faked. The "worker" wears polished dress shoes, his belt-powered saw is not in motion, and the interior lighting is artificially dramatic. No bona fide woodworker would be caught pushing a board over a tablesaw with his hands rather than with a forked stick.

The accompanying brochure, *Work in the Nineteenth-Century Forest Industry*, fills in some gaps in the displays by discussing the quality of life in lumber towns and the erosion of artisan skills. It hints more directly at the changing social relations of production that coincided with the rise of forest-related factories. It is also more accurate in pointing out the links between profit-making and the threatened exhaustion of the resource base. By focusing exclusively on the nineteenth century though, the brochure is unaccountably narrower than the exhibit. And by concluding on a predictably popular nationalist theme (worry over control of the Canadian forest industry by United States and British interests), it implies without any evidence that Canadian capitalists would have made different decisions that gave more benefits to workers or showed more sensitivity to environmental issues. Finally, the brochure's bibliography omits some important references of general interest, such as Donald McKay's *The Lumberjacks* (Toronto, 1978) and Michael Cross's article on the Shiner's "war" in *Canadian Historical Review* (54,

March 1973). All the items here should be annotated as well.

In sum, I would give an A-minus to the creators of this exhibit for their generally effective blend of artifacts and visual materials, for their explanatory captions, and especially for their stress on the work-place aspects of the forest resources industries. I lament their bland and misleading conclusion because it fails to point up the evolving social

relationships between woodworkers and entrepreneurs that stemmed from changing modes of production. New Brunswick Museum officials receive a failing grade for their lack of attention to the exhibit setting; perhaps it is not surprising (if unfortunate) that no one else came to look at "Of Men and Wood" during the ninety minutes I was there.

Robert H. Babcock

Québec: port d'entrée en Amérique; le commerce du bois et la construction navale

"Québec: port d'entrée en Amérique; le commerce du bois et la construction navale," Parcs Canada, région du Québec. Concept and production: Division de la réalisation et la planification d'interprétation. Permanent exhibition. Opened: 21 June 1984.

How can an institution produce history exhibits organized around artifacts and avoid being called a

museum? This is a question people ask about some of the projects undertaken by the personnel at Parks Canada. It is particularly pertinent for the interpretation centre, identified by many as the "Musée du vieux port" (Museum of the Old Port), in Quebec City. Here visitors are introduced to exhibits on the history of the timber trade and shipbuilding through the use of a variety of interpretive techniques: audio-visual presentations (including a very

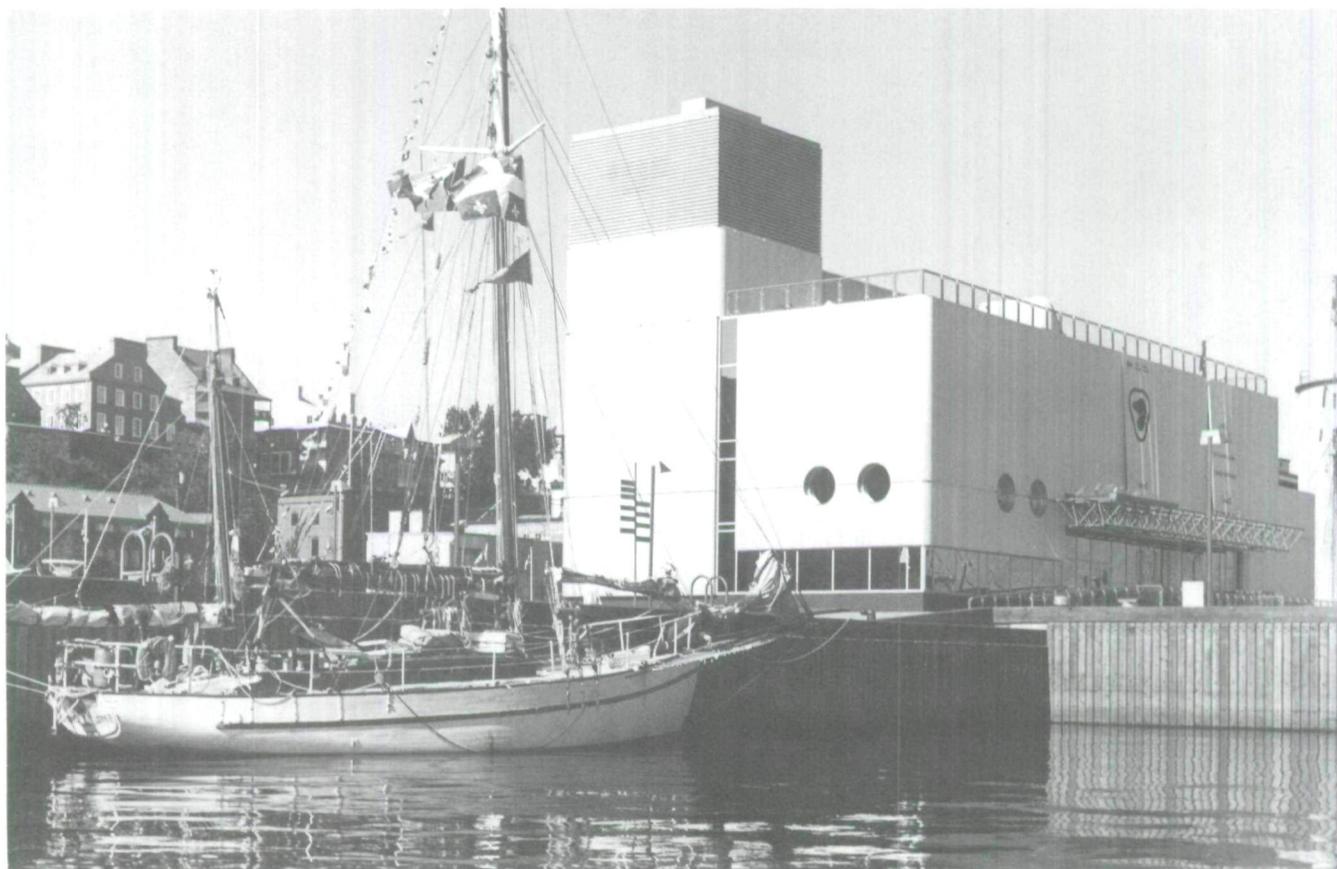


Fig. 1. The impressive site of Parks Canada's new interpretation centre at the "Vieux port" in Quebec City. Formerly occupied by a cement company, this three-storey building includes over 16,000 square feet of exhibit space. (Photo: Parks Canada.)