



Fig. 5. Artifacts from Nootka Sound, including a whaling chief's hat, a model or toy canoe, fishing implements, and two whalebone clubs. (Photo by H. Tabbers, courtesy of the Vancouver Museum, neg. no. 488-26)

"Captain George Vancouver" was a world-class exhibition. The more than sixty institutions and individuals around the world that were contacted gave encouragement and support to the project by contributing more than three hundred rare, original objects to create a "first time ever event for the world" to happen in Vancouver.

The scope of the exhibition was realized through the talent and dedication of the curatorial team. For the research, contact, and persuasion needed, these individuals had to know the subject area well, otherwise locating material would have been impossible and borrowing items would have been unlikely as a high degree of diplomacy was required for such transactions. The exhibition was interdisciplinary and the associate curators (Dan Conner – Maritime History, Susan Moogk – Ethnology, Sharon Hartwell – Botany) supplied expertise from their subject fields. The result was that many firsts were achieved for the Vancouver centennial celebration. As well, in 1985 the Vancouver Museum received from the National Museums of Canada, Museum Assistance Programmes, the largest grant awarded to date for a temporary exhibition.

The majority of the stated objectives were met, though it is unfortunate that as yet the catalogue has not been published. It is still possible, however, to supply the Vancouver city centennial celebration with a record of its finest expression in 1986 and the international lenders with a record of the good use to which their material had been put, and it is expected that the catalogue will soon be available for the Canadian public.

Lynn Maranda

## A Toast to the Fur Trade

Robert C. Wheeler. *A Toast to the Fur Trade: A Picture Essay on Its Material Culture*. St. Paul: Wheeler Productions, 2183 Payne Ave., 1985. 120 pp., 155 ill., folding map, table of contents, bibliography. Paper US\$15.95, cloth US\$25.95. ISBN 0-9614362-04.

This book is the result of Robert Wheeler's passion for the fur trade and the objects that made it possible. From this passion came not only his famous underwater searches for artifacts along boundary fur-trade canoe routes, but also many imaginative ways for making fur-trade history accessible to the general public. Bob Wheeler died in August 1986. His flair for bringing history to the people was perhaps the most noteworthy tribute then paid to his lifelong work in heritage preservation.

As *A Toast to the Fur Trade* emphasizes, the fur trade cannot be fully understood without reference to its material culture. Surviving accounts, such as inventories and bills of lading, provide a wealth of information about the diversity of articles transported into North America for the Indian trade as well as for the trading companies' own operations. The written record, however, cannot entirely satisfy our curiosity about these items, about their physical features, the materials from which they were fashioned, the place and method of their manufacture, their packaging, and sometimes even their usages.

Pictorial evidence, such as found in a Peter Rindisbacher or a Frances Hopkins painting, helps us see the object's appearance and its context, though through

the eyes of the artist. But, as Wheeler convincingly demonstrates, actual three-dimensional artifacts are necessary complements to the insights provided by written and illustrated documents. Thanks to Wheeler, many objects related to the fur trade have been located, some in remnants of their packaging, along the canoe routes to the west.

It may come as a surprise to some Canadians when they discover how much Minnesotans have contributed to our knowledge of the fur trade. Besides Wheeler's, the names of Alan and Nancy Woolworth, Grace Lee Nute, and Charles M. Gates are among those which readily come to mind. While we might flatter ourselves that Americans cannot resist the fascination of our history, the fact is that part of it is their history too. On the American side of the International Border, along the Pigeon River, lies the Grand Portage, from 1731 to 1803 the crucial link between Lake Superior and the west for the Montréal fur trade. Long ago, the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) not only recognized the historic significance of this famed carrying place but, in 1931, convinced the National Park Service to have it declared a National Monument. Today, North West Company history and fur-trade material culture are interpreted at the reconstructed depot on the original Grand Portage site.

In 1960, scuba divers hired by Minnesotan Dr. E.W. Davis brought a complete nest of seventeen brass trade kettles up from the bottom of the Horsetail Rapids on the voyageur canoe route west of Lake Superior. This discovery inspired the MHS to launch the Quetico-Superior Underwater Research Project, with Robert Wheeler at its head. In 1962, the project became international in scope with its co-sponsorship by the Royal Ontario Museum and archaeologist Walter A. Kenyon, ROM's appointee as co-director. (By tragic coincidence, only three weeks after Wheeler's death, Kenyon died in September 1986.)

A public historian rather than an archaeologist, Wheeler nevertheless was well qualified to head the search for fur-trade artifacts in the region now known as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. With the MHS since 1957, he became involved with its Montreal Merchants Project and later the first North American Fur Trade Conference initiated by the society in 1965. Besides directing the 1981 conference, he produced the MHS film *Northwest Passage: The Story of Grand Portage* (1977) and is now credited for being the "moving spirit" behind the development of three historic sites operated by the MHS for the interpretation of fur-trade and forest material culture.

*A Toast to the Fur Trade* is the culmination of Wheeler's lifelong interest in the material culture of the fur trade. "Man's creations," his foreword states, "are key to an

understanding of his needs, aspirations, interests, skills, thinking processes and accomplishments." As might be expected, the book features several finds of the underwater archaeological project, but it goes beyond those to the whole gamut of objects related to the fur trade from goods manufactured abroad to those created locally from materials found in the northern forests.

Divided into several sections around such topics as transportation, food and drink, trade goods, and the rendezvous, the book not only discusses the items in each category, but adds commentaries from primary and secondary sources about the object's use and significance. Included as well are copious line drawings finely executed by Minnesota artist and silversmith, David Christofferson. While Christofferson chose some of his models from period paintings or modern illustrations in *The Beaver*, most are museum artifacts, once the object of archaeological discovery. The section on kettles, for example, features three drawings, including the seventeen brass nestled kettles mentioned earlier. It also cites Brebner's 1955 evaluation and Denys' 1672 personal observation of the importance of such kettles to the Indians.

Although fur-trade specialists might find little new in *A Toast to the Fur Trade*, the book's great merit is the way it has collected so many features of fur-trade material culture under one cover. Historical researchers new to fur trade studies have found it an invaluable introduction to the topic, while countless amateurs or fur-trade "buffs" have enthusiastically claimed it as their mini-encyclopaedia. This is particularly true of the ever-growing legion of those fur-trade simulants in both North America and Europe who avidly relive the fur-trade past in their canoeing expeditions and rendezvous. With their concern (of most) for historical accuracy and their almost fetishistic avoidance of anachronisms, these buffs are true material historians, as evidenced by the lively commerce they have fostered in reproductions of fur-trade clothing, tools, guns and other wares.

By its subtitle, "a picture essay," the book makes no claim to be an academic treatise. Those who wish to pursue the topic more thoroughly will welcome its excellent bibliography. They can refer as well to Wheeler's *Voices from the Rapids: An Underwater Search for Fur Trade Artifacts, 1960-73* (St. Paul, 1973), co-authored with Walter Kenyon, Alan R. Woolworth and Douglas A. Birk. Wheeler served as consultant for another recommended MHS work, Carolyn Gilman's *Where Two Worlds Meet: The Great Lakes Fur Trade* (St. Paul, 1982). This catalogue of an exhibit mounted for the 1981 Fur Trade Conference is "designed both to make available to scholars the artifacts accumulated over the years of archaeological work and to explore the importance of material culture in the study of the fur trade."

The book's major flaw is its map, "Waterways of the Fur Trade," with its western and northern margins along the Rocky Mountains and Lake Athabasca. Too many maps of this type fail to show the Pacific Coast, especially south of the 49th parallel. Yet the objective of fur traders from the era of New France was the Western Sea and after the publication of Sir Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages* in 1801, the mouth of the Columbia River. It seems curious that Americans would overlook the site of the Pacific Fur Company's Astoria, which became Fort George under the North West Company or, indeed, the Hudson's Bay Company's entire Columbia Department from Alaska to California. With the waterways north of Lake Athabasca omitted altogether, the far northwest of the continent, the Mackenzie Department, fares just as poorly. This

weakness, however, is partially overcome by an excellent section entitled "Fur Trade Site-Seeing," a three-page listing of interpreted and non-interpreted fur-trade sites in Canada and the United States (including Oregon, Washington and the Northwest Territories).

Wheeler introduces his book by confessing his belief in "the power of the artifact." His belief shines through in every page of this, his last contribution to helping Canadians and Americans alike become more aware of their common fur-trade heritage. Sadly, one of his final wishes could not be fulfilled. It was to see *A Toast to the Fur Trade* reviewed in the *Material History Bulletin*.

Jean Morrison

## Teaching Maritime Studies

P.A. Buckner (ed.). *Teaching Maritime Studies*. Fredericton, N.B.: Acadiensis Press, 1986. 299 pp. Paper \$16.00. ISBN 0-919107-08-7.

This collection of essays was originally presented at the conference "Teaching Maritime Studies," held at the University of New Brunswick, November 1985. The purpose of the conference was to give a comprehensive overview of the current research in the field to secondary teachers and school administrators charged with implementing a new course, "Maritime Studies." The course was instigated by the Maritime Council of Premiers amidst controversy and concern within some school systems and provincial departments of education. The conference was intended to mitigate objections to the introduction of the course by providing educators with a concise statement of what leading academics in the field consider to be significant and current.

As a source book for teachers of Maritime Studies in secondary schools, this book is a good beginning. There are thirty-four essays here, none more than fifteen pages long. They are divided into seven sections: history and geography, ethnicity, women's studies, political economy, folklore and literature, the environment, and bibliography. The essays recapture the feeling of the conference. Their style ranges from the formal presentation of Graeme Wynn's "Beyond Capes and Bays," with numerous footnotes, carefully selected illustrations, and a lengthy bibliography, to the appropriately informal, anecdotal style of Edward D. Ives' "The Foxfire Approach: Oral History in the Classroom," and Rick Williams' excellent and impassioned first-person exposition, "Teaching Politics in the Maritimes: Challenging the Vacuum."

In his essay, "Studying the Maritimes: A Plea for an Interpretive Framework," T.W. Acheson identifies what is key to the successful implementation of this new curriculum: providing teachers and ultimately students with a critical understanding of the theoretical structures that give the facts about the Maritimes meaning. These structures must be part of the content of the course, and it is here, Acheson says, that those who have conceptualized the course have failed. Many of these essays attempt to redress this failure by providing clear statements of the theories and questions which inform the research presented.

For example, the three essays on women's studies present a content area for which many social studies teachers are ill prepared because of their training and because there are few readily accessible curriculum materials. Martha MacDonald's "Studying Maritime Women's Work: Underpaid, Unpaid, Invisible, Invaluable" provides a clearly elicited approach for examining everyone's everyday experience in terms of how the economy works, what women's role within the economy is and why, and how alternatives to this situation might be developed.

Regrettably, some of the least valuable essays for teachers are those about material culture studies. Susan Buggey's "The Built Environment: A Heritage Resource" is a lucid explanation of changes in attitude toward the value of heritage buildings and the process of identifying and cataloguing them. It does not, however, provide guidelines for answering the core questions it raises: Why should we bother to document the built environment? Why are our attitudes about this kind of activity changing?