

artists and little detailed analysis of the ships as pictured in relation to surviving photographs, builders' plans and descriptions of vessels. Even though discrepancies have been noted, it is generally agreed that ship portraits are reasonably precise (David R. MacGregor, *Merchant Sailing Ships 1850-1875: Heyday of Sail* [London: Conway Maritime Press, 1984], p. 27). However, it has not been determined how accurately certain artists were able to depict their subjects. For a variety of reasons marine historians have been forced to assume that ship portraits were fairly truthful representations.

Understandably, this situation has arisen because comparative visual material is sparse for most surviving ship portraits, especially for the period prior to the widespread use of photography. This lack of visual evidence for authenticating individual paintings has created a problem; although ship portraits as a group are reasonably exact representations of various vessel types, it is difficult (and sometimes impossible) to determine the degree of accuracy represented in a specific painting. In fact, the research project undertaken by the New Brunswick Museum to produce "Reflections of an Era" was hindered by a lack of comparative material. Perhaps the only solution to this problem is to assess the documentary skills of individual artists and thus ascertain to what degree we can trust their works.

It was with these thoughts in mind that research commenced at the New Brunswick Museum in mid-1985 for the production of the national travelling exhibition "Reflections of an Era" and the catalogue of the same title. Following over twelve weeks of research at foreign institutions during that year, funded in part by a generous grant from the Museum

Assistance Programmes of the National Museums of Canada, a representative selection of ship portraits of nineteenth-century New Brunswick merchant vessels was drawn from the collections of the Museum for more intensive study.

Despite the documentary limitations, a surprising amount of data can be extracted concerning both the environment of which the paintings were a product and the subjects which they were meant to portray. Of even more value when coupled with other sources of historical information, ship portraits provide twentieth-century landlubbers and marine historians with a pictorial record. Spanning the period from 1830 to 1900, the forty portraits in the exhibition and the 112-page catalogue document the evolution of merchant vessels constructed or owned by New Brunswickers and indicate trade contacts and voyages of a seafaring people. They represent survivals from an age when maritime enterprise shaped the lives of a people and was of critical importance to the economy of New Brunswick.

While the curators/authors do not claim to verify the level of documentary talent possessed by ship portraitists as a group (that remains to be done through studies of individual artists), it is hoped that our audience will appreciate the faithful illustrations produced by certain painters represented in the exhibition and catalogue. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that a ship portrait is much more than an artist's flight of fancy: ship portraits were intended to record visually the identifiable characteristics of a particular vessel and for this reason they are important and pleasing reflections of an era.

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The Craftsman in Early America

W. JOHN McINTYRE

Ian M.G. Quimby (ed.). *The Craftsman in Early America*. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company for the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1984. 344 pp. Cloth \$30.00, ISBN 0-393-01856-3. Paper \$10.95, ISBN 0-393-95449-8.

The Craftsman in Early America is another addition to the H.F. du Pont Winterthur Museum's series of publications containing papers from past Winterthur conferences on aspects of American material history and the

decorative arts. This particular conference took place in 1979. The book was published five years later—surely an inordinately long time, although such lengthy delays in the publication of conference reports are all too common. In a sense, it may be read as a companion piece to Winterthur's 1973 conference report, *Technological Innovation and the Decorative Arts*. Both contain carefully researched, well-documented papers on the making of everyday objects, how the makers of these objects worked and lived, and how their working lives changed over time.

As Ian Quimby, Winterthur's editor of publications, points out in his introductory essay, we are still awaiting a major synthesis along the lines of E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*, published about twenty-five years ago. While Quimby does not make this point, perhaps the English are more comfortable with the concept of classes in society than Americans are. American research has concentrated on specific regions and specific crafts and industries. It has stressed diversity of experience and recognized the pitfalls of generalization about a group of people whose origins and whose working environments could be so different. Ian Quimby's introduction to the book acknowledges this diversity, but manages to step back from the many excellent, although narrowly focused, studies that have appeared in the past. He provides the reader with an articulate overview of some of the major concerns and findings of American scholars who have studied the work of craftsmen. Who was the "traditional craftsman"? How did the effects of mechanization and industrial capitalism differ from one craft to another? How and when did relationships between masters and apprentices begin to change? How did merchant capitalists, factory operatives and unskilled labourers affect the lives of craftsmen? To his discussion Quimby brings an extensive knowledge of both primary and secondary sources. He comes close to providing an outline for the synthetic study of American craftsmen that he called for. In fact, many readers will finish this book with the wish that there had been more of Quimby and perhaps less of some of the more specialized studies that follow.

One has to wonder what brings together so many different essays between the covers of one book—or, taking the book back to its source, what brings together so many different papers at one conference. Did the papers just happen to be underway when the conference

was being planned and did the conference organizers know their authors personally? This often occurs, although in all fairness, such meetings of minds may provide an excellent opportunity for individual scholars to widen their horizons, make new contacts and discover new approaches. We are still left with the dilemma, however, of a conference-related book containing many self-contained studies having little or nothing to do with one another. In *The Craftsman in Early America*, these include "Artisans and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia" by Gary B. Nash; "Fathers, Sons, and Identity: Woodworking Artisans in Southeastern New England, 1620-1700" by Robert Blair St. George; "Boston Goldsmiths, 1690-1730" by Barbara McLean Ward; "The Transmission of Skill in the Shoe Industry: Family to Factory Training in Lynn, Massachusetts" by William H. Mulligan Jr.; "Latrobe, His Craftsmen, and the Corinthian Order of the Hall of Representatives" by Charles E. Brownell; and "The Moravian Craftsman in Eighteenth-Century North Carolina" by Paula Welshimer Locklair. If the juxtaposition of all these studies was intended to show the diversity of American crafts and craftsmanship, it certainly accomplishes that. Each study is well written and well documented in itself, but few common threads can be found among them. Also, they show a great variety of approaches. Only a few use artifacts as source materials—Barbara Ward's exemplary study of Boston goldsmiths, for example. Others rely on written sources exclusively, such as Gary B. Nash's provocative study of the political and social ideals of eighteenth-century Philadelphia artisans. The reader is left with a tantalizing question: could Nash's perceptive use of the written record have shed more light on Ward's study of Boston goldsmiths, and could Ward's familiarity with artifactual sources have enriched Nash's study of Philadelphia artisans? Since these two essays are published within the same book, they offer a good example of the potentially common ground which exists between material culture studies and the "new" social history. Yet their authors obviously were far apart in their decisions about what kinds of sources to start from—three-dimensional artifacts or written documents.

In addition to these six essays focusing on the work of craftsmen in specific geographic areas are two essays that take a broader perspective: "The Glassmakers of Early America" by Arlene Palmer Schwind and "The Business

of Potting, 1780–1840” by Susan H. Myers. Both essays draw on a substantial body of original research in order to describe the working lives of glassmakers and potters. They avoid romanticization and analyze these craftsmen as entrepreneurs and workers as well as artisans. They employ artifacts as well as documentary and pictorial sources in their analysis. Without making hasty generalizations, and despite their broad field of inquiry, they provide scholarly, well-written overviews of the working lives of two different groups of craftsmen.

Three other essays round out the book by examining sources for future research and the various approaches scholars may take. Stephanie Grauman Wolf's paper, "Documentary Sources for the Study of the Craftsman," points to the many pitfalls inherent in the use of written materials. She notes that even commonly searched sources such as census and tax records, directories, inventories and advertisements may prove misleading if used in isolation and often give a strongly urban bias to studies of craftsmen in a land where most people lived and worked on farms. She also points to the pitfalls of considering any one written document "typical." Jonathan Fairbanks's essay, "Craft Process and Images: Visual Sources for the Study of the Craftsman" should be read as a companion piece to Stephanie Wolf's paper. Curiously, however, it is far separate from it and left to the very end of the book. This may have been because it contains contemporary, as well as historical, sources and the book's editor wished to make some concession to chronological order. Its more appropriate position would be next to Wolf's paper, however, since it too points to problems that exist in analyzing commonly used research materials. It approaches pictures with the same caution Stephanie Wolf's essay approaches words, clearly showing how graphic materials from the past often simpli-

fied or romanticized the craftsman's work or workplace. He argues that the layout of a craftsman's shop and the step-by-step processes followed in that shop can rarely be explained through the medium of a still picture. He uses contemporary photographs of furniture-makers at work to show how pictures can only hint at the steps involved in producing furniture in their shops and how business and work routines are organized. These modern pictures, juxtaposed with historical engravings, add a lot to this thought-provoking essay.

The third in the trio of essays is Thomas J. Schlereth's "Artisans and Craftsmen: A Historical Perspective." Like Fairbanks's contribution, this essay also seems misplaced. It should have followed immediately after Ian Quimby's introduction since its discussion of the historiography of craftsmanship relates to and extends many of the themes brought out by Quimby. Schlereth identifies three historical traditions: researching the product, researching the process and researching the person. He discusses the work of major contributors to each tradition and ways in which their work has differed or, in many cases, overlapped. As usual, Schlereth is both thorough and articulate. His essay provides an excellent overview for anyone who wishes to become more familiar with past work on American craftsmanship.

Overall then, *The Craftsman in Early America* is an important contribution to scholarship. It contains many fine, specialized studies along with some important discussions of research techniques. Common threads may be hard to find, due as much to differing research techniques as to the variety of subjects considered. Also, the order of the essays could have been improved. But from all this disparate material, we may come another step closer to the kind of synthesis editor Ian Quimby called for in his introduction.