

National Maritime Museum, Stockholm, Sweden
Vasa Museum, Stockholm, Sweden
The Iron Screw Steamship *The Great Britain*, Bristol, U.K.
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, U.K.
Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, U.K.
Hawaii Maritime Centre, Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A.
San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park, San Francisco, California, U.S.A.
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.
South Street Seaport Museum, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.

The bulk of the book is taken up by case histories and brief descriptions of these institutions by their Directors or Curators. I can visualize the authors sweating over the short articles whose length does not give them a chance to tell the full story of their museums, their ambitions, frustrations and the "behind the scenes" labours carried out by a faithful staff. As a result, these well-written articles are actually no more than expanded propaganda pieces as found in museum brochures and leaflets.

And then what makes a maritime museum great? Is a museum judged by the space it occupies – for example, the Australian Maritime

Museum with its gorgeous quarters but limited collections – or does a museum make the grade if it is well enough endowed to take part in this publishing venture? I know of many more museums that equal or exceed the criteria of the editors, such as the Sjöfartsmuseet in Göteborg, Sweden, the Fiskeri-og Sjöfartsmuseet in Esbjerg, Denmark, the Maritime Museum in Singapore, the Museo Naval de la Nacion in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the Polish Maritime Museum in Gdansk, Poland, and many others – every one of them a great museum in its own setting, with splendid collections and doing good work.

It would have been helpful, especially to *MHR* readers, if the editors had, at least, included a list of all existing maritime museums, their addresses, and brief descriptions of their holdings and main interests: the result would have been a quite useful reference book rather than the present unsatisfactory overview.

Great Maritime Museums of the World makes a fine coffee-table book; with its excellent colour reproductions of museum exteriors and interiors, artifacts and museum ships this is a beautiful book. Solid binding and high-quality, glossy stock add to its attractiveness. I find it difficult to recommend the volume to any serious student of material history, however.

Jane A. Evans,
A Joy Forever: Latvian Weaving, Traditional and Modified Uses

DOROTHY K. BURNHAM

Evans, Jane A., *A Joy Forever: Latvian Weaving, Traditional and Modified Uses*. Saint Paul: Dos Tejoras Fiber Arts, 1991. 178 pp., 418 illus. Paper US \$28.95, ISBN 0-932394-16-7.

This book, written by a skilled and knowledgeable handweaver, explores the visual and technical aspects of a little-known area of decorative arts.

When searching for a thesis subject for a Master Weaver's programme, the author came upon the extensive collection of late nineteenth-

and early twentieth-century Latvian textiles at the Royal Ontario Museum. Given permission to analyze some of the pieces – including the one used for the attractive book cover – she became intrigued by the variety of techniques used in the weaving of the material and couldn't bring herself to stop when she finished the research needed for her thesis. Because the author lives near Saskatoon, it was not easy to continue the research, but the fascination with the material took hold, the author was determined, and convenience had little to do with

it. The result, a considerable number of years later, is this most interesting study.

The book first provides a general historical and geographical setting for the weaving techniques, which are then described and illustrated in the following chapters. Although obviously written for weavers, these are so well illustrated that they will be enjoyed by those who don't even know the difference between warp and weft! The photographs show both the pattern and the texture of the cloth. Many readers with a Baltic background may nostalgically remember these household fabrics from their childhood.

Not long ago, weaving books were aimed at those who could cope with nothing more complex than a four-shaft loom and the basic weaves that were possible using that kind of equipment. The computer revolution has changed that. This book starts with the basic weaves, then works up gently but firmly and quite quickly to much more complex techniques. All the illustrated weavings are accompanied by clear instructions and excellent computer-produced drafts and drawdowns to facilitate reproduction or adaptation. The later chapters of this book are really an invitation to explore, and there is the confident expectation that a considerable number of readers will be adventurous enough to respond to the challenge.

As one leafs through the book one cannot help but note how many of the illustrations are of pieces in the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), with a wide variety of Latvian names recorded as donors and most of the gifts dating between 1971 and 1972. This is because a woman, even more determined than the author, is the strong presence behind the collection. Like many other Latvians now living in Canada, Nora Priverts left her homeland in a great hurry with the Germans when they retreated before the Russian advances during the second world war. She spent the next part of her life in a Ger-

man refugee camp, emigrating to Canada after the war. The secretary of the Textile Department at the ROM, he inquired of Harold Burnham, at the time curator and himself a skilled weaver, why the department held material from all over the world but none from Latvia. The answer was simple: there had never been opportunity to collect it. Nora Priverts knew that refugees such as herself took with them any textiles they could gather up and carry when they left their homeland, particularly warm things such as woollen shawls and blankets, as well as any linens that could be used for diapers if they had a baby. In many Latvian homes of the time this material was handwoven. She also knew that many examples of that kind of material were still in use among her Latvian friends in Toronto.

With the enthusiastic blessing of the curator she embarked on a one-woman crusade to get as much Latvian handweaving as possible safely in the museum before it was completely worn out. Over many evenings and weekends, she convinced first her friends, and then a much wider circle of Latvians, that they owed it to the memory of their homeland to give freely of what they had so that it might be preserved for future generations. As she brought material into the museum she and Harold Burnham worked it over carefully. With his knowledge of weaving, he recognized the various special techniques and the two of them conspired to balance the collection, assessing where gaps might be and how they could be filled. Sadly neither have lived to see the book in print. The great personal satisfaction Nora Priverts unquestionably felt was her reward for diligence and perseverance. Nor have her efforts been in vain. She was instrumental in creating a fine collection of Latvian weaving at the Royal Ontario Museum and that collection has provided the firm foundation for this excellent publication.