

Bringing the Outside In: Women and the Transformation of the Middle-Class Maritime Canadian Interior, 1830–1860

JENNY COOK

Résumé

Entre 1830 et 1860, la décoration intérieure dans les provinces de l'Atlantique a subi un changement radical, passant de l'austérité à la gaieté, grâce aux femmes de la classe moyenne qui ont tiré parti de la nature et l'ont amenée à l'intérieur. Ces femmes ont égayé leurs demeures en y faisant entrer des spécimens naturels, des décorations artisanales et des organismes vivants. En imprégnant la nature de significations religieuses et de références culturelles, elles sont parvenues à rationaliser leur attrait pour l'extérieur et ont donné un but à leurs efforts. Elles ont puisé l'inspiration dans des écrits scientifiques et religieux, notamment dans des revues importées et des magazines féminins. À mesure qu'elles assumaient la responsabilité de la décoration intérieure dans leur « chasse gardée » domestique, les femmes ont construit un refuge confortable contre les vicissitudes du monde du travail concurrentiel des hommes. Les énigmatiques liens multidimensionnels établis entre la religion et la science, le travail et la maison, la christianité personnelle et l'esthétique intérieure, de même que la foi et les sentiments sont évoqués dans cet article utilisant les objets façonnés comme témoignages culturels.

Abstract

Maritime Canadian interior decoration was transformed between 1830 and 1860 from the austere to the spirited by middle-class women who embraced nature and brought it indoors. Women enlivened the interior with specimens of nature, handmade fancywork and living organisms. By imbuing nature with religious significance and cultural meaning, women were able to rationalize their interest in the outdoors and give purpose to their endeavours. They found inspiration in scientific writings and religious works, including imported journals and ladies' magazines. As women embraced responsibility for interior decoration within their "separate sphere" of the home, they cultivated a comfortable retreat from the vicissitudes of a competitive masculine business world. The enigmatic multidimensional linkages between religion and science, business and home, personal Christianity and domestic aesthetics, as well as faith and feeling are touched upon in this article by using material artifacts as cultural evidence.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, scientific pursuits flourished in Maritime Canada as amateurs began systematically exploring their surroundings. Lists were compiled of animals, birds, fish, insects, fruits, trees, and flowers in an effort to order and classify the outside world. Inquisitive young men joined newly formed popular Mechanics' Institutes in the 1830s, while others dedicated themselves to professional organizations such as the Geological Survey of Canada established in

1842.¹ Such scientific explorations of nature were not met by indifference on the part of middle-class Maritime Canadian women who ventured outdoors during their growing leisure time. They embraced nature, copying flowers and leaves in watercolour paintings and sketches. Within the home, fancywork creations mimicked flora as rose petals, leaves and fruits were shaped out of wood, leather, and wax. Birds and animals were stuffed and placed on display in room interiors. As fascination with

nature combined with technological progress, living organisms were successfully introduced into the home. Middle-class women, motivated by studies of science and God the Creator, embraced nature and transformed the Maritime home by bringing the outside in.

The transition period in which nature was introduced to the domestic interior commenced in the 1830s and reached its apogee in the late 1850s. Women converted interior furnishings in the 1830s and 1840s from the spiritless and restrained to the vibrant and extravagant. This was partially due to changing responsibilities of family members. As part and parcel of the concept of "separate spheres," middle-class wives and mothers became accountable for the appearance of the home, a home that provided a retreat from the stresses and strains of the male working world.² During this same period there was a proliferation of amateur and popular organizations interested in scientific exploration, such as the Mechanics' Institutes. Women reacted to these developments by linking homely duties to fashionable studies of nature, interpreting their findings in a practical as well as Christian way. They converted home into comfortable haven by embracing nature, promoting Christian values of tenderness, compassion, and affection in the process.

The transformation in domestic decoration can be seen by studying two versions of coloured lithographs entitled "Reading the Scriptures." These mass-produced religious artworks were available in Maritime Canada, the first in the early 1830s and the second almost two decades later (Figs. 1 and 2).³ Prints and views of New York were imported into the Maritimes and sold through the Saint John American Literary Agency in 1832. Although it is not known whether these lithographs were among them, the second illustration found its way into a New Brunswick residence and is now part of Kings Landing Historical Settlement collections.⁴ The lithograph illustrates a man solemnly narrating passages from a religious text, educating his patient and attentive wife. While the theme is the same in both artworks, a remarkable transition has taken place by the time the second was produced.⁵ The alterations to the domestic furnishings show a clear and fashionable embracing of nature, even though it is apparent that the later print follows a stylized formula. Here now is sumptuous luxuriance, highlighted by the use of botanical motifs in decoration. The wallpaper, table cloth, chair upholstery, and floor covering all have floral themes, and even the carved

crests of the chairs are frond-like. On the mantle there are fewer books, replaced by two vases of fresh-cut flowers. The message is simple. The man is the head of the household, as it is he who is reading from the scriptures, but it is the woman who has miraculously turned this home into haven. She has done so in two ways: by arranging fresh flowers and by choosing luxurious manufactured goods bearing botanical designs. Embracing both nature and religion, women made the interior more comfortable and welcoming.

Women had become increasingly influential in the decoration of domestic interiors by the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, it could be said that if "a man ... should hold any decided opinions about decorations or furniture [it] was considered almost improper."⁶ At the same time that commercial prosperity and urban development transfigured Maritime towns and men turned to the business world, their wives and mothers became increasingly influential within the home, to the extent that it was now the womenfolk who selected interior furnishings. In the eighteenth century:

It was generally the owner who at great trouble and expense embellished his house with splendour, while the wife accepted what her lord and master had provided with little criticism. It was a subject beyond the mental capacity of a woman. Before the middle of the 19th century this position was entirely reversed, and it was the wives who bought the furniture and chose the curtains and carpets....⁷

Women's place within the home was confirmed as they were given more domestic responsibilities in addition to interior decoration assignments. They became accountable for the maintenance of the household, as well as the comfort, education, and Christian upbringing of the residents therein. Indeed, they were the creators of a retreat from the vicissitudes of a commercial world, providers of a comfortable and morally uplifting environment in which men revitalized themselves. The "separate spheres" evolved with men working in an external and hostile commercial world and women creating a peaceful domestic retreat from it. In accordance with these changing and distinctly separate social roles, women turned to nature in the transformation of the domestic interior in order to make the home more welcoming.

These household responsibilities were more strongly demonstrated in middle-class households. Middle-class women could devote their

energies to collecting and reading about nature at their leisure. As husbands, fathers and sons became more active in the prosperous external commercial world, women found their niche within the home.⁸ Now time and education, rather than money, defined class. Middle-class women could distinguish themselves from working girls in that they had the opportunity to devote their energies to reading, collecting, and decorating. While working-class girls could purchase machine-made goods with their wages, they could not obtain home-produced wares such as fancywork handicrafts, which showed loving attention to detail. Without these wares in working homes, potential suitors were not as impressed with their prospective partners' abilities – for they saw little on display. Middle-class women differentiated themselves from the lower-classes by using their decorative abilities as badges of respectability and higher social standing. They were also differentiated from less educated working-class girls whose time was spent in paid employ. Some poorer households relied on extra famil-

ial income, rendering it more difficult for girls to participate in domestic fancywork traditions. However, middle-class women did have the leisure time to dedicate to a diverse assortment of pastimes and also the education with which to embrace both scientific and religious works.

The study of science was popularized in the early nineteenth century as religion and nature were linked together. Journals and periodicals published in England and the United States addressed such contemporary issues, but it was not until 1830 that a New Brunswick publisher placed a notice in the local newspaper calling for a Canadian equivalent. Saint John publisher Henry Chubb lamented the lack of monthly periodicals in New Brunswick, recognizing the need for a “channel of communication between the religious, scientific and learned men scattered throughout the province.” He bemoaned the fact that in this “advanced period of the establishment of the Province, and more especially in this peculiarly [*sic*] illuminated era of the world” that “so



Fig. 1
Reading the Scriptures, ca 1830, 25.6 cm (h) x 29.5 cm (w). Coloured lithograph by Alfred E. Baker of New York after English artist Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786–1846). Notice the austerity of the interior and the lack of floral embellishment. (Courtesy The Strong Museum, Rochester, New York, c. 1993).

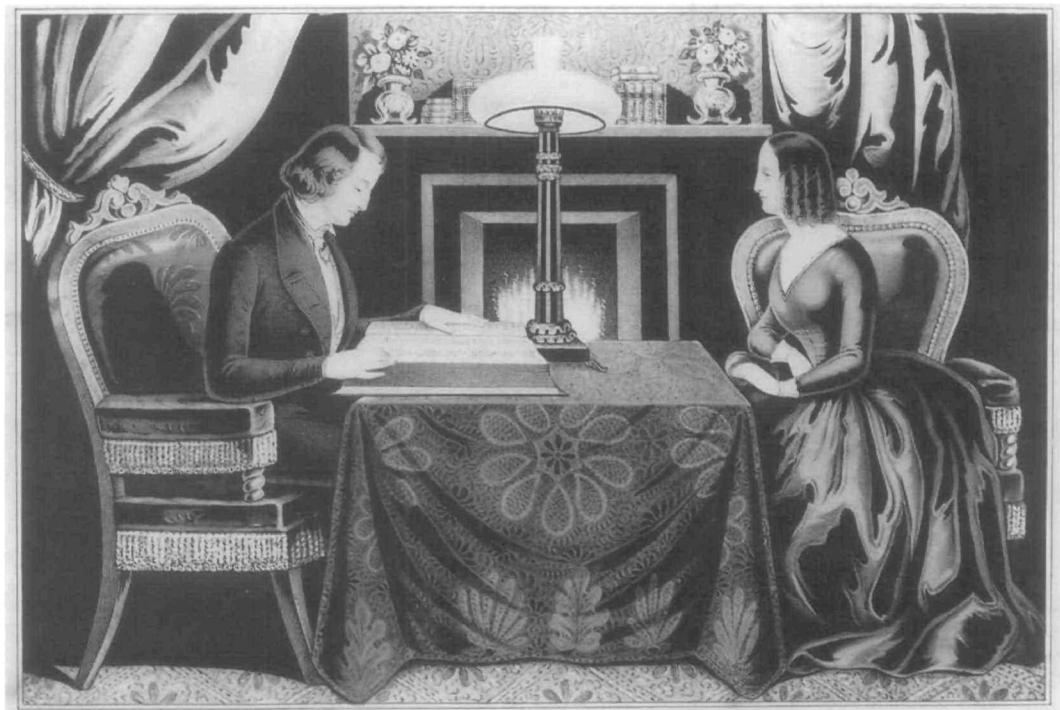
little attention is paid to, and so little anxiety evinced for, the literary improvement of this fast-increasing community." Chubb proposed a new publication entitled *The New Brunswick Monthly Magazine*, and *Christian Intelligence*, as a Maritime alternative in which "politics and that heterogeneous conglomeration [that] usually denominated news, will be excluded."⁹ Submissions discussing religious and scientific topics were called for from Maritime men.

Zoologist Philip Henry Gosse (1810–88), writing in London on the flora and fauna of Canada, likened nature to God in his *Canadian Naturalist* of 1840.¹⁰ Others saw biblical works in terms of the revelation of God's natural talents. "The Bible is not only the revealer of the unknown God to man, but His grand interpreter as the God of nature. In revealing God, it has given us the key that unlocks the profoundest mysteries of creation, the clue by which to thread the labyrinth of the universe, the glass through which to look 'from Nature up to Nature's God'."¹¹ Indeed, nature served to glorify God, for it was said that the "herbs of the valley, the cedars of the mountain, bless Him: the insect sports in His beam; the bird sings Him in the foliage; ... the ocean declares His immensity.... There is a God. All nature declares it!"¹² Such writings linking the study of nature with the study of God found their counterpart in Canadian books. By 1845,

William Thomas Wishart, Maritime writer on Christian doctrine, claimed that nature and God were so intimately linked that by 1845, his followers believed that those who studied science and failed to find God were missing the obvious. James Paterson, Church of Scotland minister, local teacher, and part-time naturalist in Fredericton, agreed, claiming that thoughts on nature could only lead to thoughts about nature's God.¹³

In Saint John, Jacob S. Mott sold volumes at his printing office in the early nineteenth century including the *Gospel of Nature*.¹⁴ Other religious works with natural history emphases were published such as *Bible Quadrupeds*, or *the Natural History of the Animals Mentioned in the Scriptures*, a volume that a New Brunswick newspaper advertiser claimed "ought to be possessed by every Christian family."¹⁵ This book, along with other religious writings, was available from store merchants G. & E. Sears on King Street, Saint John. Natural histories without any overt religious emphases were also available: *A System of Natural History, Containing Scientific and Popular Descriptions of Man, Quadrupeds, Birds, Fishes, Reptiles, and Insects*, compiled from the works of the "celebrated naturalists," could be obtained from Charles B. Cox, a Saint John merchant, in the 1830s.¹⁶ All these publications encouraged familiarity with God's nature and

Fig. 2
Reading the Scriptures,
ca 1845,
21 cm (h) x 32 cm (w).
One of these Nathaniel
Currier lithographs is
displayed in the Joslin
Farm (1860) at Kings
Landing Historical
Settlement. In this
version the interior is
transformed into a
comfortable haven as
floral motifs are used on
chairs, upholstery, and
floor coverings. (Courtesy
The Strong Museum,
Rochester, New York,
c. 1993).



became part of the Maritime literary tradition, a tradition that inspired interest in science.

The literary sources that advocated the copying of nature and the development of women's handiwork were equally diverse. An assortment of published articles encouraged women to use their hands in the construction of an extensive variety of objects. For inspiration, educated women looked to British etiquette books and less expensive American magazines, which were readily available from stores in Maritime Canada. For example, the Prince Edward Island *Summerside Journal* reminded ladies that subscriptions to the popular Philadelphia *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* had to be renewed at the cost of \$3.00 in advance.¹⁷ An assortment of foreign works, including *Harper's Magazine*, could be sent by mail to subscribers in "any part of the country," according to an advertisement in *Ross's Weekly*.¹⁸ Articles encouraging females to be creative with their time were standard in these, for it was claimed that activity and occupation of the mind induced cheerfulness and productivity. Writers warned that "indolence of habit creates gloominess of manner and acerbity in temper, and induces those diseases which create and increase the evil and prove more injurious to the character and person than sickness itself."¹⁹ This literature motivated women to undertake a variety of fancywork tasks as a means of self-fulfillment. Middle-class women turned to nature itself for further inspiration.

Maritime Canadian women collected small treasures such as shells and fossils, as well as flowers and plants, and used domestic interiors as repositories for nature. A British publication available in the Maritimes, and currently in the research collection of Kings Landing Historical Settlement, noted this universal passion for collecting and how it was changing the embellishment of the domestic interior. Henry Bohn's *Young Lady's Book*, originally written in 1839 expressly for his female friends and relatives, opens with a conversation between him and his cousin Lady Mary. A revealing description of a contemporary and fashionable boudoir (Fig. 3) then follows:

In this recess, is a beautiful cabinet picture – a charming landscape, partly veiled, but not hidden, by a common, but remarkably elegant creeping plant, which extends far enough round the corner to twine about the carved ebony frame and festoon the polished surface of an old-fashioned glass, which I prize because it was my grandmamma's; here again, you may perceive it wandering downward,

and encircling a fossil; on the other side of the window it has attached its tendrils to a tall and stately erotic, and droops from its topmost flower to garland a Greek vase.... And do not imagine, I pray, that everything here is in such a chaotic jumble as to be inconvenient; there is, in fact, order in its seeming confusion; I have a clue to the labyrinth, and can find a book or a butterfly in my boudoir quite as soon as Miss Penelope can in hers.²⁰



Having described this surprisingly well-ordered interior teeming with life, Lady Mary goes on to inquire what the editor plans on including in his book for young ladies. He exclaims:

I have only to say, look around you! ... [here are] minerals ... a sea-maid with her conch ... the insect world ... represented by groups of Oriental beetles, and splendid butterflies – the humming-bird is here, with many other of his fellow-tenants of the air, making all around them look dim by the metallic lustre of their plumage. All these remind me of sciences which are applicable to the study of young ladies.²¹

Women were encouraged to study, collect, and display nature. Despite overloading rooms with natural specimens, women were able to construct order within seemingly chaotic and confused interiors. These developments occurred at the same time that the exterior world was systematically and scientifically being categorized, and they contributed to an early Victorian desire to organize and control life.

Constant scientific revelations about nature between 1830 and 1860 necessitated revision of the *Young Lady's Book*, which described in great detail the recent findings of geologists,

Fig. 3
Domestic interiors became repositories for nature. Notice the collection of shells and glass-covered floral display. It was claimed that nature and science were "applicable to the study of young ladies." (Henry Bohn, ed., *Young Lady's Book*, 1)

mineralogists, conchologists, entomologists, and ornithologists including long lists of species classification. The work was updated before the sixth printing in 1859 "in consequence of the necessity which had arisen of revising the whole work in accordance with the improved condition of science."²² Investigative treatises on recently explored fields were announced. "Few men, or none, can thoroughly master all these branches of ... research, but everybody should be acquainted with the outlines of science."²³ In the decades preceding the mid-nineteenth century, such explorations and publications made scientific study fashionable for women and encouraged the embracing of nature at home.

Women also addressed their role as moral guides by using their familiarity with advances in science to instill in children the importance of God. They turned to educational booklets called tract primers, which embraced creationism, teaching youngsters that "God made the earth, and the sea, and the sky, and all things in them, in six days; and all that was made was made very good.... He made man and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea."²⁴ By 1860, Charles Dawson, Nova Scotian geologist and anti-Darwinian, believed understanding science was essential for interpreting God's true powers, as nature and revelation were products of the same author. Dawson wrote *Archaia; or, Studies of the Cosmology and Natural History of the Hebrew*

Scriptures in which he argued that God created earth in six days – not our days, but geological eras.²⁵ Although a revolutionary concept in its time, Dawson clung to creationism in the face of evolution by studying natural phenomena in detail. In such a cultural climate it was justifiable that women study natural history and Christian works as it brought them and their offspring closer to understanding God.

Women could impart religious teachings to their children by using nature to an advantage. Tract primers for children explained Christian social values by comparing doves with boys and girls. The birds were imbued with biblical meaning and cultural significance. For example, a Pokiok, New Brunswick-owned children's primer explained some social values by comparing doves with children (Fig. 4):

*See this Dove. It is a meek and kind bird, and does no harm. When two or more are in one nest, they live in love. John and Jane and each boy and girl must try to be good and kind. The Son of God, who died to save us from sin, can help you to be mild and meek like the Dove.*²⁶

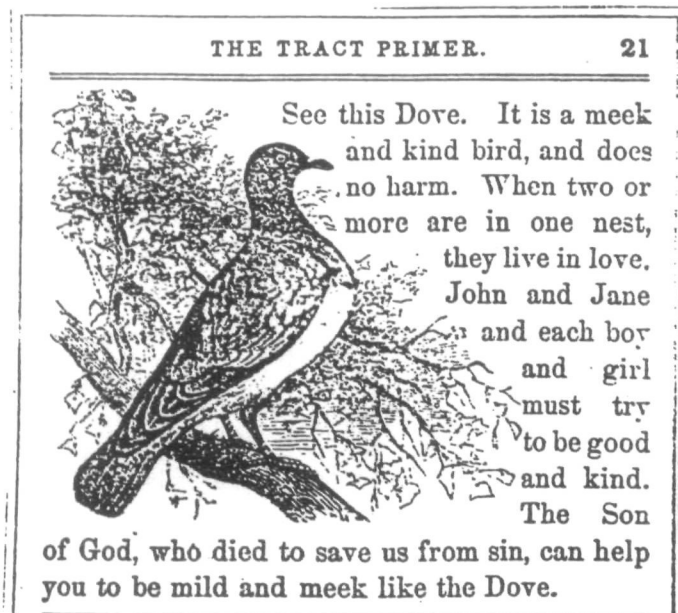
An example of such a stuffed turtle dove or ring-necked dove in a wall mounting could be seen in a New Brunswick parlour in the mid-nineteenth century (Fig. 5). Nature represented the personification of religious and cultural values, becoming an integral part of Christian household life in both educational texts and parlour displays.²⁷

Fig. 4

Children's tract primers used nature to promote religious and social values. This educational booklet was used in a Pokiok, Queens County, New Brunswick home. (Kings Landing Historical Settlement Research Library)

Fig. 5

Mounted dove arranged with mosses, dried flowers and ferns in a glass-front wall box, ca 1840–1860, 31.1 cm (h) x 34 cm (w) x 15.3 cm (d). Originally hung in a New Brunswick home, it is now displayed at the Ingraham House at Kings Landing Historical Settlement.



Women were encouraged to dedicate themselves to their own study of nature. Horticultural diversions, delicately calculated as “elegant and interesting pursuit[s],” brought women closer to God the Creator. More than this, studies of nature inspired tenderness and caring, prime female traits. These traits were highlighted when flowering plants and trees surrounding the domicile were invested with serene and peaceful qualities: “home, that paradise below/Of sunshine and of flowers,/Where hallowed joys perennial flow/By calm sequester’d bowers.”²⁸ Residences surrounded by blossoming gardens provided havens as tranquil nature transcended the complexities associated with the working world, providing men with calming retreats at the end of their day. Women looked to nature for assistance in this task. Indeed, the garden was so imbued with comforting significance that women were encouraged to bring nature inside the family dwelling itself, after having first encircled exterior walls with foliage. For example, *The Young Ladies’ Treasure Book* advised women to grow ivy. “Whenever it is possible, climbing plants should be trained up the house and round the windows.”²⁹ Such horticultural pastimes became popular at a time when inside-outside architectural boundaries were being broken down, and it became increasingly fashionable to bring as much as possible from the outside in.³⁰ In a daguerreotype of an 1850s Saint John interior, a young lady sits by a table that is covered in a leaf-patterned fabric, while outside living foliage enwraps a window frame (Fig. 6). Contemporary literature available in the city claimed that once the house was thus enwrapped, childhood could nestle within “like a bird which has built its abode among roses; there the cares and the coldness of the earth are, as long as possible averted. Flowers there bloom, or fruits invite on every side ... this new garden of the Lord ... [with] trees of the Lord’s planting, bear ... fruit to His glory.”³¹ Women turned home into haven for their husbands and children by associating nature with nurturing in the name of God.

This flourishing interest in scientific investigation and studies of nature encouraged personal inquiry, drawing women out of the household to experience nature first hand. In Maritime Canada women explored fields and woods on daily outings, accompanied by friends and kinfolk. Sketching and painting nature became a popular pastime. In New Brunswick, Elizabeth Sophia Storie was escorted by J. E. Woolford on her excursions



Fig. 6
Daguerreotype, ca 1850,
7.3 cm (h) x 6.1 cm (w).
From the Henry Melick
family of Saint John. The
foliage trained around
the window
complements the table
cover. (Kings Landing
Historical Settlement,
M73.225.2)

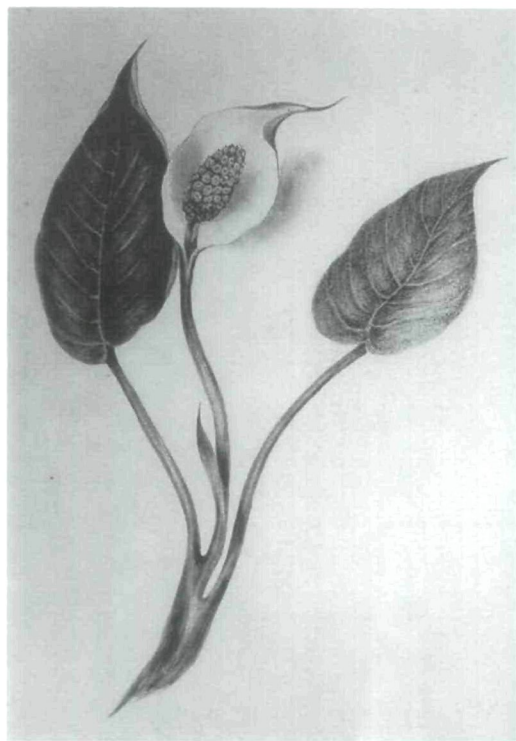
along the Saint John River Valley. She was the wife of John Simcoe Saunders, and Woolford was the barracks master in Fredericton between 1824 and 1858. Together they sketched and painted plants and flowers such as the Indian turnip, azalea, Indian pineapple, lady’s slipper, purple trillium, bloodroot, violet, and water lily (Fig. 7).³² Trees, shrubs, fruits and leaves became subjects of study. Storie painted beech and black birch leaves, and fruit from bearberry bushes.³³ Composed in the 1830s, some were framed and brought into the domestic interior. The choice of subject matter showed individual taste and refined upbringing while the display of work in the parlour showed friends and family alike the accomplishments of Christian household members. The domestic realm became aesthetically uplifting and indicative of individual achievement as homemade representations of nature painstakingly laboured upon raised the cultural tone of the Maritime Canadian interior.

In Nova Scotia, Maria E. (née Morris) Miller (1813–75) opened a drawing academy and spent many hours producing watercolour illustrations of local wildflowers.³⁴ She studied with Professor W. H. Jones of Dalhousie College and miniaturist L'Estrange. Her original watercolour paintings of flowers were collected by the Halifax Mechanics' Institute and later became part of the Nova Scotia Museum holdings. Between 1840 and 1867, three series of her paintings were printed as hand-coloured lithographs in London under the patronage of various Lieutenant-Governors of Nova Scotia. Indeed, notables such as Sir Colin Campbell and Samuel Cunard were reputed to have aided in their publication.³⁵ Local botanist Titus Smith, the "philosopher of Dutch Village," brought Miller specimens and encouraged her work. He wrote the botanical notes accompanying her 1840 edition of *The Wild Flowers of Nova Scotia*, while Alexander Forrester, Presbyterian minister, revised the text in the 1853 second series. George Lawson, of Dalhousie College and founder of the Botanical Society of Canada in 1848, revised the third edition. Such involvement by recognized figures encouraged not only Miller, but other women, to paint and study nature. Such drawings were imbued with cultural meaning. Reviews in the *Nova Scotian* effused about Miller's work of which it

was claimed that anybody displaying it in parlour or boudoir helped prove familial taste and patriotism. Capturing the beauty of the land was a fine and honourable accomplishment for Christian ladies, and when art was presented in a prominent parlour location it could not fail to impress visitors. Indeed, a romantic aesthete wrote in the same newspaper article that he would be tempted to marry the daughter of any family who displayed Miller's natural renditions!³⁶ As a key to social success the art symbolized Christian goodness and virtue. Such taste and perception of beauty was related to the moral development of the individual. Considering the connection between God and nature, could an immoral woman create such delicate artwork? Parlours increasingly reflected women's personal talents and individuality in the meticulous attention to detail their artwork displayed. Christian approbation emanated from the choice of which natural displays and fancyworks were to be found in such domestic interiors, as women brought renditions of nature from the outdoors in.

Apart from mimicking flora in paintings, handiwork was also inspired by nature. Designs for fancywork products were enhanced by ladies' journals, which encouraged copying flowers such as roses, daisies, violets, and pond lilies. Author Mrs. Jane Weaver instructed readers on how to assemble roses made from wood shavings by using wire, thread, scissors, and glue in the 1858 edition of *Peterson's Magazine*. Another newly fashionable female accomplishment was the home-manufacture of leather flowers, which were used to decorate frames for mirrors and works of art.³⁷ Sheepskin was used to make foliage as natural leaves and shaped paper cut-outs were used as guides. By no means a quick and easy task, the leather had to be prepared, shaped, softened in water, pressed in cloth, veined with a blunt pen-knife, dried by the fire, dipped in warm home-made size, dried again, and applied onto an already prepared wooden frame. Pressure was then employed using coarse silk twisted over a wooden plate or bowl as the glue dried. Several layers of varnish were applied (Fig. 8). Such attention to detail and perseverance in tasks were features of women's work. Indeed, the existence of examples in the New Brunswick Heritage Collection Centre testifies to the complex and delicate nature of such products.³⁸ Self-satisfaction and individual distinction intensified with such feminine diversions. These pastimes emboldened women at a time when they perceived their identities dimin-

Fig. 7
Indian Pineapple.
Elizabeth Sophia Storie,
ca 1830,
37.4 cm (h) x 27.9 cm
(w). Storie painted local
flora including water
lilies and bearberries.
(Kings Landing
Historical Settlement,
M76.20.5B)



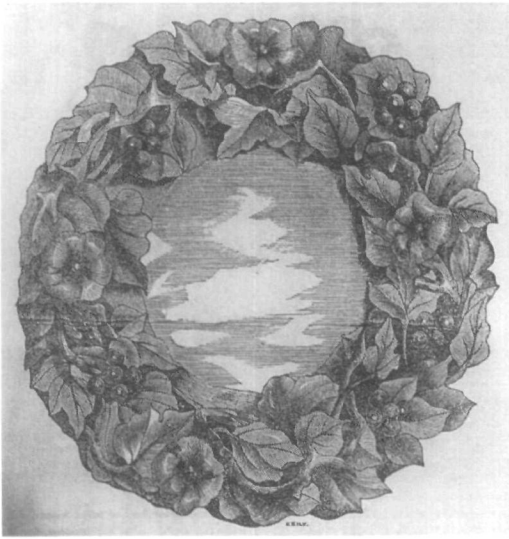


Fig. 8
Leather Work. Leaves and flowers copied into leather were cut and placed on frames of artworks displayed in the domestic interior. (Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book, November 1850, 310)

ishing in the face of competition from de-personalized, mass-produced factory wares. Women retained a sense of self-value by building up their artistic proficiency and by embracing nature in the decoration of the home.

Women rewrought nature with a controlling hand by garnering an increasingly diverse pot-pourri of accomplishments. Some persevered in handicrafts, painting on velvet, glass and ribbon, while others made patchwork quilts and needlework pictures. Artificial fruits were made from coloured cloth and knitting wool stitched over wire frames. Fruits were shaped out of wax, pastry and plaster. Mr. A. Stumbles, recently arrived in Prince Edward Island in August 1832, taught a broad range of accomplishments to the locals including the making of artificial fruits "executed with the most accurate resemblance of nature," as well as the crystallization of fruit and flower baskets.³⁹ In New Brunswick, Mrs. Clark ran advertisements in a local Saint John newspaper in October 1842 notifying the public that she had "opened a school for the instruction of young ladies in the elegant accomplishment of preparing wax fruit and flowers," which she taught in six lessons. Private lessons were offered to ladies at their own residence if required.⁴⁰ In Halifax, Maria E. Miller taught lessons in watercolours, pencil and chalk, instructing the individual how to arrange fruit, bird, and flower designs on velvet, satin, and paper. Out of the chaos of the outside world women took nature, tamed it, and presented it in an orderly manner in a way that recaptured the natural and simple in an age of machines.

By the 1840s *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* gave instructions for using shells in wreaths and bouquets to be framed under glass (which protected delicate works from dust). Procuring shells locally was easy: "they may be picked up in hedges and on banks; drawn out of ponds and rivers, along with weeds; collected on the sea-shore, or among rocks; or they may be found among the refuse in fishermen's [sic] nets."⁴¹ Maritimers were well placed to explore local shores and waterways. The collections could then be "kept in small trays, in shallow drawers of equal depth; and such specimens as are too large for the drawers, will ... [form] a handsome article of furniture arranged in a glass case."⁴² Rocks, shells, and wax flowers placed on display could last a lifetime. Such works preserving samples brought indoors could also be made by women as "Next to the pleasure of collecting in the fields, is that of seeing specimens preserved neatly and in good order."⁴³ An article in *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* in August 1858 suggested keeping floral specimens in alcohol inside sealed glass jars. Another way of preserving flowers was to coat the stems with wax and place them in porcelain jars that stood on wooden bases under glass domes (Fig. 9).⁴⁴ This ladies' magazine claimed such displays would last for a year, bringing the outdoors in

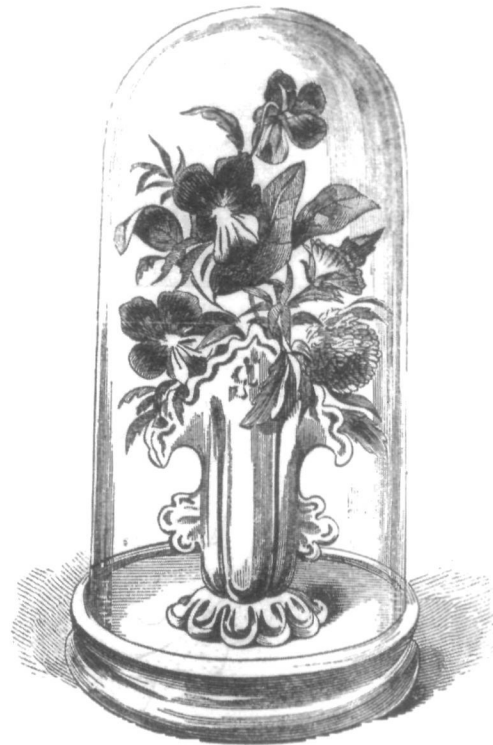


Fig. 9
Vase for Preserving Flowers, ca 1855. Such displays brought the outside in during long and barren Maritime winters. (Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book, August 1858, 164)

during sterile winters. In the Maritimes, where winters lasted five months and longer, the display of such colourful and everlasting articles was energizing. Indeed, the same author writing on the preservation of flowers in 1858 claimed that for the female invalid the vases recalled “the sunny skies and green fields of summer; ... as she looks upon them ... she can forget for a time the snow-clad, ice-bound trees and fields around her.” Women embraced nature and scientific advances as a way to transform the interior into a place of comfort and beauty year round, for the healthy and the suffering alike.



Fig. 10
Crescent-shaped hair wreath, ca 1860–1865, 42.5 cm (h) x 45.7 cm (w) x 15.3 cm (d). Made by Amelia Read Smith of Nappan, Nova Scotia. Hair from family members was transformed into floral bouquets. (Kings Landing Historical Settlement, M91.21.1)

Another way to occupy women's by-no-means-idle hands in the 1850s was in the fabrication of framed hair wreaths. Designs were made from hair clipped from family members, often folded into floral patterns with wire, wax flowers, dried leaves, and coloured beads. Sentimental fancywork such as this became mournful souvenirs as family members passed away; ameliorating the painful loss of a loved one. Such romantic concepts denied unexpected changes in family life, providing ways to continue the memory of familiar characters after they had been removed from the domestic landscape. Kings Landing Historical Settlement has wreaths made by Christine McAlpine of Cambridge, Queens County, New Brunswick, and Amelia Read Smith of Nappan, Nova

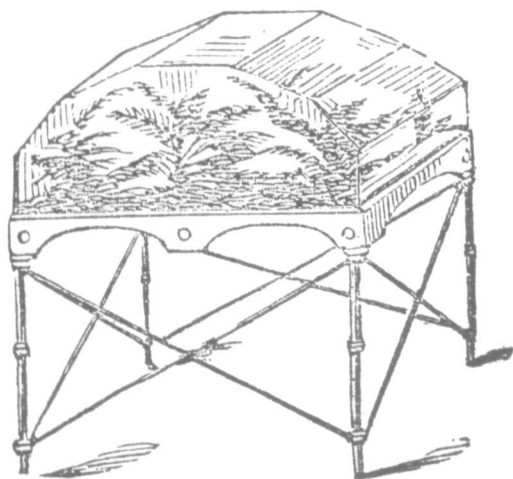
Scotia (Fig. 10).⁴⁵ Raised leaf and vine motifs decorate the gesso frame of the latter wreath. The wreath itself is fabricated from different coloured hair, hair that seemingly captures the spirit of its owners. Women having time to devote to such endeavours could laboriously lavish attention on detail, the resulting floral displays revealing their fascination with nature.

Middle-class women also manufactured an array of articles with designs taken from nature using their skills as seamstresses. They adorned articles such as sofa cushions, headrests, table covers, toilet sets, lace scarves, whisk-broom holders and bookmarks with designs inspired by nature. Small emery bags used for cleaning rust off needles were made in the shape of crabs, tomatoes, strawberries, and daisies.⁴⁶ Pincushions were made in fruit and bird shapes, and some were even fashioned in the form of rabbits.⁴⁷ Exotic birds were used as design sources, copied into brass, and plated with silver or nickel. Used in connection with clamps, such household goods were known as sewing birds or hemming grippers. These articles were used to hold lengths of cloth and netting while being hemmed by female hands.⁴⁸ A brass hemming grip in Kings Landing Historical Settlement collections, about 7 cm in length, has a swallow fastened to the top of the clamp shaft.⁴⁹ By mimicking nature in sewing projects, and using tools that were themselves decorated with birds and animals, women transformed the character of the domestic interior.

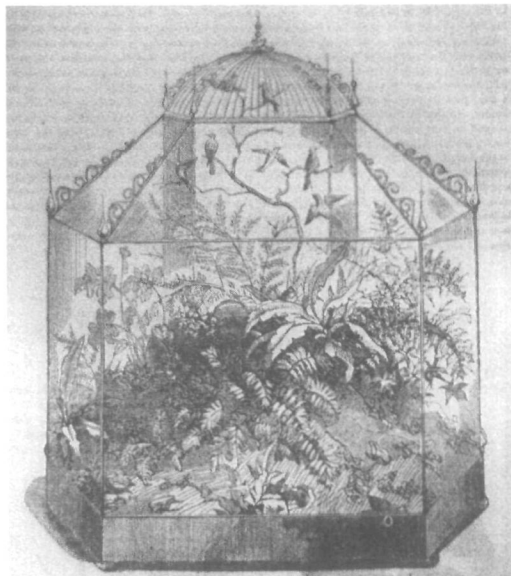
Apart from emulating nature by hand in paintings, displays and sewing, contemporary scientific discoveries made it possible to bring living organisms into the home. Although encouraged to bring nature inside, it was not until late in the third decade of the nineteenth century that framed glass cases used for growing mosses and ferns were introduced. Wardian cases, named for London surgeon Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward (1791–1868), made their appearance in 1829. Ward discovered that miniature ecosystems could be constructed within glass frames enabling the transportation and display of living plants.⁵⁰ The same scientific principles were used to decorate the interior as early Victorian wives and mothers assembled their own miniature gardens in Wardian environments displayed on stands, shelves and mantles.⁵¹ Charles J. Peterson, in *Peterson's Magazine*, commented on the popularity of Wardian cases, two engravings of which were included in the 1858 edition of the magazine. The first Wardian case shown was an inexpensive soup

plate with an ordinary bell-glass over it; the second a stand constructed by a cabinetmaker with a simple glass-framed top (Fig. 11).⁵² Described as “ornaments of Nature’s own producing,” plants and flowers suitably arranged and distributed employed the hand and delighted the eyes of Maritime Canadian women.⁵³ Such natural ornaments found their way into the domestic realm by the mid-nineteenth century; unfortunately few survive in their original state today due to the fragility of glass and the nature of their contents.

Wardian cases could be adapted to hold birds, bringing other living elements indoors.



Small birds surrounded by miniature forests formed compact ecosystems. One such display was presented in an imported *Peterson’s Magazine* in the 1850s (Fig. 12).⁵⁴ Suitable species were suggested for captivity including singing birds such as canaries. However, the Maritime Canadian resident could acquire birds from closer to home, for example, the cardinal and the “cedar bird” or cedar waxwing. French Canadians in New England referred to the cedar waxwing as the “Recollet” from the similarity of the crest to that of the hood of the religious order; once again linking nature to God.⁵⁵ Elegant enamelled birdcages were imported by F. A. Cosgrove in Saint John;⁵⁶ other shipments of fancy birdcages arrived the next year from New York.⁵⁷ This fascination with birds occurred at a time when public gardens were becoming popular. Indeed, Maritime Canadians could study birds in the first zoological garden in British North America by visiting Andrew Downs’ 1847 exhibitions on Halifax’s North West Arm.⁵⁸

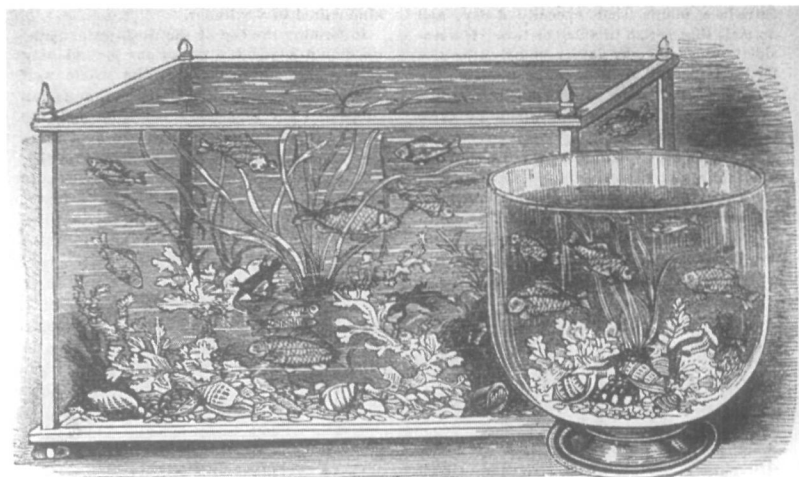


◀
Fig. 12
Fern Case with Aviary, ca 1855. Such miniature ecosystems combined plants with birds and small animals such as frogs, bringing many elements of the outside in. (*Peterson’s Magazine*, February 1858, 161)

Fig. 11
Wardian cases, used for bringing mosses, ferns and small plants indoors, were first introduced in 1829. (*Peterson’s Magazine*, January 1858, 79)

Plants and birds were not the only living entities brought indoors. Goldfish had been introduced to the Americas in the late seventeenth century, but it was not until a hundred years later that circular goldfish globes became fashionable.⁵⁹ Each globe was referred to as a sort of “crystalline Hole of Calcutta” by one ladies’ journal writer because limited oxygen transfer in small-necked jars made life difficult for the fish within.⁶⁰ Such globes were obsolete by the 1850s by which time scientific studies had proven that rectangular and bowl-shaped aquaria incorporating oxygen-producing plants provided more successful environments (Fig. 13). Such developments facilitated the creation of healthier miniature ecosystems, making it possible to maintain live specimens

◀
Fig. 13
Marine and Fresh Water Aquariums, ca 1855. Maritime streams and shores provided bountiful sources for stocking newly designed rectangular aquaria. (*Godey’s Magazine and Lady’s Book*, January 1858, 51)



indoors successfully. Women were able to create and control their own fresh-water and salt-water aquaria, collecting specimens from local streams and shores. It was possible to use their talents as nurturers and civilizers, believing it worthwhile "to domesticate" gobies, blennies and wrasses.⁶¹ Women used aquaria to embrace the out-of-doors, giving "the gratification of introducing another element and its beautiful inhabitants into our very parlors and drawing-rooms."⁶² Women transformed the interior by enlivening it with nature.

Middle-class women, motivated by studies of science and religion, embraced nature and brought it into Maritime interiors. Designated to a separate sphere within the household, yet aware of the advances of the outside world, women ameliorated the strains of a society in transition by embracing nature and introducing it into the home. The transformation of the interior into a comfortable retreat was motivated by inexpensive ladies' magazines imported from the United States and etiquette books from Great Britain. Dedicating their artistic skills to the fabrication of paintings and fancywork, women produced a variety of wares for internal display, transforming the appearance of the home into a lively repository for nature. By imbuing nature with religious and cultural meaning, women promoted their position within the Christian home as nurturers, educators, and vessels of virtue. Emboldened by their exploitation of the outdoors and their proximity to God through the study of nature,

middle-class women transformed the physical landscape of the domestic realm into that of a comfortable retreat. Women abandoned the austere decoration of former years in cheerful and enterprising home embellishments that mimicked nature. The home was filled with living flora and fauna as technological advances facilitated, for example, the nurturing of fish in rectangular tanks as well as plants and ferns in Wardian cases. Without doubt, middle-class women transformed the Maritime interior between 1830 and 1860 by bringing the outside in.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Drs. Michael S. Cross, Judith Fingard, Janet Guildford, David J. Marcogliese, and an anonymous reviewer for constructive criticism of this paper. I am also indebted to Kings Landing Historical Settlement staff, in particular Robert Dallison, Darrel Butler, and Cynthia Wallace-Casey. This article is adapted from a presentation at the IXth Annual Atlantic Canada Studies Conference held at Memorial University of Newfoundland in May 1992. Contemporary texts and artifacts mentioned in this article are from Kings Landing Historical Settlement collections unless specified otherwise. Newspapers were accessed using the Canadian Heritage Information Network (Atlantic Canada Newspaper Survey database), courtesy of the Department of Communications, Ottawa.

NOTES

1. Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada. The 1982 Joanne Goodman Lectures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 18–22; Martin Hewitt, "Science as Spectacle: Popular Scientific Culture in Saint John, New Brunswick, 1830–1850," *Acadiensis* 18, 1 (Autumn 1988): 91–119. For a recent anthology on science in the Maritimes including works by Suzanne Zeller, George Rawlyck, and Martin Hewitt consult P. A. Bogaard, ed., *Profiles of Science and Society in the Maritimes to 1914* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990). For a critical review of these writings consult J. L. Cook and D. J. Marcogliese "A Partly Told Tale," *New Maritimes* 10, 2 (November/December 1991): 26–28. For a better understanding of the historiography of Maritime Canada consult Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986) and M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).
2. For a discussion on separate spheres and middle-class families consult Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) and Mary P. Ryan *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See also a forthcoming anthology edited by Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, *Separate Spheres and Maritime Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1993).
3. Kings Landing Historical Settlement, M91.27.8.
4. The American Literary Agency, under Charles S. Young's direction, also imported the *Illinois Monthly Magazine*, *Boston Traveller*, *Philadelphia Casket*, *New York Mirror*, *Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post*, and *Gambier* (Ohio

- Observer, which Young sold at a considerable savings over imported British journals. (*New Brunswick Courier*, 30th June 1832).
5. For an interpretation of interior decoration focusing on comfort see Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery* (New York: The Strong Museum, 1988), 14–15.
 6. Ralph Dutton, *The Victorian Home: Some Aspects of Nineteenth Century Taste and Manners* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1954), 2.
 7. *Ibid.*, 3.
 8. For a discussion on the industrial middle-class relationship in women's work and the multi-dimensional meanings of fancywork traditions consult Nancy Dunlop Bercaw, "Solid Objects/Mutable Meanings: Fancywork and the Construction of a Bourgeois Culture, 1840–1880," *Winterthur Portfolio* 26, 4 (Winter 1991): 231–247.
 9. *New Brunswick Courier*, 27th November 1830.
 10. Carl Berger, *Science God and Nature*, 34. See also Philip Henry Gosse, *Canadian Naturalist; A Series of Conversations on the Natural History of Lower Canada* (London: J. Van Hoorst, 1840).
 11. Rev. John Potts, *The Royal Path of Life: or, Aims and Aids to Success and Happiness* (Toronto: Rose-Belford Pub. Co., 1880), 427.
 12. *Ibid.*, 427.
 13. Cited in Martin Hewitt, "Science and Spectacle," 98. See also W. T. Wishart, *A Series of Outlines, or Theological Essays on Various Subjects Connected With Christian Doctrine and Practice* (Saint John, New Brunswick: V. H. Nelson 1846).
 14. *Saint John Gazette and General Advertiser*, 25th June 1803.
 15. *New Brunswick Courier*, 2nd July 1842.
 16. *New Brunswick Courier*, 24th May 1834.
 17. *Summerside Journal*, 22nd February 1866.
 18. *Ross's Weekly*, 24th August 1864.
 19. Henry Bohn, ed., *Young Lady's Book: A Manual of Elegant Recreations, Arts, Sciences, and Accomplishments*, 6th ed. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1859), 28.
 20. *Ibid.*, 10.
 21. *Ibid.*, 12.
 22. *Ibid.*, v–vi.
 23. *Ibid.*, 107d. Between 1830 and 1860, a number of men began publishing for a female audience, especially in the field of architecture and interior decoration. Indeed, J. C. Loudon presented his *Architectural Magazine* as "a fit study for ladies," as part of this movement as early as 1834.
 24. *The Tract Primer* (n.p., n.d.), 30. This particular children's primer is marked "Pokiok, York Co., July 1899," and is located in the Kings Landing Historical Settlement Research Library.
 25. Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature*, 39.
 26. *The Tract Primer*, 21.
 27. The introduction of mounted birds into interiors was part of an increasingly popular practice. Thomas McCulloch, founder of the Pictou Academy and collector of flora, fauna and minerals, impressed visitors of the likes of John James Audubon with his own curious cabinet of birds. See Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature*, 3.
 28. Rev. John Potts, *The Royal Path of Life*, 41–42.
 29. Cited in John Gloag, *Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design from 1830 to 1900* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1973), 36.
 30. For further discussion on the breakdown of inside-outside boundaries, see Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revolution and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840–1870," in Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America, 1600–1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 547. Clark suggests that this was the period during which architectural boundaries between interior and exterior were being broken down by using, for example, wide porches and rural settings for homes.
 31. Rev. John Potts, *The Royal Path of Life*, 426.
 32. Nothing could be more natural than a woman seen outdoors. A panel in the Croscup's painted Nova Scotian parlour, created between 1846 and 1848 (and reinstalled in the National Gallery of Canada), shows a woman and child in a garden with tall trees, bushes and grass surrounding them. See Victoria Baker, *The Croscup's Painted Parlour* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1990), 44–45.
 33. Examples of Elizabeth Sophia Storie's botanical drawings can be found in Kings Landing Historical Settlement collections, M76.20.5 and M76.20.7.
 34. I am indebted to Dr. Janet Guildford, SSHRC post-doctoral fellow at Mount Saint Vincent University for the following notes on Maria E. Morris Miller. Works by Ms. Miller can be found in the collections of the Nova Scotia Museum and the National Gallery of Canada.
 35. Colin S. MacDonald, *A Dictionary of Canadian Artists*, 3rd ed. (Ottawa: Canadian Paperbacks Publishing Ltd., 1979), 1224; and J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 89.
 36. *Novascotian*, 19th January 1837.
 37. *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (November 1850): 310–311.
 38. The New Brunswick Heritage Collection includes a framed colour print of "Shepherd Dogs" by F. Taylor (1858) around which have been nailed leather leaves (NB980.7.12). This example is not in good enough condition to be photographed.
 39. *Royal Gazette*, 7th August 1832.
 40. *New Brunswick Courier*, 22nd October 1842.
 41. Henry Bohn, ed., *Young Lady's Book*, 165.
 42. *Ibid.*, 166.

43. Ibid., 502.
44. "Vase for Preserving Flowers," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (August 1858): 164–165.
45. For examples of hair wreaths, see Kings Landing Historical Collections, Amelia Read Smith–M91.21.1; Christine McAlpine–M91.7.2 and M75.32.1; and Alison Coyne, "A Victorian Hair Wreath," *Kings Landing News* 14, 4 (September/October 1991): 5.
46. Mrs. T. G. Farnham, *Home Beautiful* (n.p., n.d.), 200.
47. An example of a rabbit-shaped pincushion was illustrated in *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (1858): 263.
48. Mary Andere, *Old Needlework Boxes and Tools: Their Story and How to Collect Them* (New York: Drake Pubs. Ltd., 1971), 140–141.
49. Kings Landing Historical Settlement, M69.39.1384.
50. "Flower-Stands and Glazed Cases for Window Plants," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (January 1855): 33–37.
51. John Gloag, *Victorian Comfort*, 35.
52. Charles J. Peterson, "Wardian Fern-Cases," *Peterson's Magazine* (January 1858): 79.
53. "Flower-Stands and Glazed Cases," 33.
54. Charles J. Peterson, "Fern-Case with Aviary," *Peterson's Magazine* (February 1858): 161–162.
55. "The Cedar Bird," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (March 1850): 214.
56. *New Brunswick Courier*, 21st June 1862.
57. *New Brunswick Courier*, 23rd May 1863.
58. Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature*, 3–4.
59. For a brief history of this fish, see E. J. Crossman, "Introduced Freshwater Fishes: A Review of the North American Perspective with Emphasis on Canada," *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Science* 48, Supplement I (1991): 46.
60. "Marine and Fresh Water Aquariums," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (January 1858): 51.
61. "Marine and Fresh Water Aquariums," 52.
62. "Gold Fish," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* (1855): 119.