

Ontario housewives by the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario, Consumers Gas and assorted appliance manufacturers in the period between 1910 and 1950. While the method changed according to the tone of the times, the message remained the same: to utilize domestic technology.

According to Jellison, the subtext underlying the American campaign was to convince rural women to give up their roles as productive members of farm families and focus solely on keeping house. She attributes the motivation behind this to the patriarchic nature of farming during this period. In introducing this theme, Jellison draws on the works of one of the icons of American midwestern writers, Willa Cather. Highlighting the actions of Cather's heroine, Alexandra Bergson, who, by running her own farm and introducing scientific farming practices to her male neighbours, oversteps the bounds of her accepted role, Jellison points out that "for midwesterners of her day, farm women were not supposed to be farmers; their role as a farm producer was understood to be a limited one that remained secondary to their domestic duties" (p. xix).

Jellison makes it clear that farm women were not "Luddites"; they realized the value of household technology. In spite of the prevailing propaganda, however, they were only willing to accept it on their own terms and when it suited their needs. Rural women placed too great a value on their role as producers to adopt the goal of full-time housekeeper promoted in the sales and editorial messages, and when they did begin to adopt technology, it was with the goal of allowing more time for those productive activities. Jellison also observes that these women did not limit their adoption of technology to that being offered — if finances permitted, they utilized the technology of the

car to allow them to escape the role of housekeeper and to seek pre-packaged foodstuffs off the farm.

When, during the Second World War, advertisers of domestic equipment suggested that their technology could be used to free women to spend time in the fields, they were stating the obvious; farm women responded by simply increasing the level of their already well-established involvement in crop work. Furthermore, although the prosperity of the post-Second World War period brought technology within the grasp of a large spectrum of farm women, it was not adopted to permit them the life of greater domestic leisure being portrayed in the sales literature, but rather to allow them greater time to engage in productive labour off the farm. Jellison makes no attempt to inject modern feminist ideals into the actions of these early twentieth-century women, but instead acknowledges that they acted to preserve the economic and productive role of which they were rightfully proud, not to subvert the patriarchy in which they found themselves.

In examining the response of these women to the legislative and advertising campaigns designed to turn them into mirror images of urban domestic housewives, Jellison has done an admirable job of highlighting an aspect of agricultural history that until now has gone unacknowledged in academic circles. My only regret is that the book does not deal with the experience of Canadian women. This, of course, is not a fault of Jellison but rather a nudge to an enthusiastic doctoral student. Her contribution provides an excellent context in which to examine the current situation on many family farms, where off-farm work by both sexes is accepted because it has become necessary to keep the operation afloat.

Michael Ann Williams, *Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina*

RICHARD MACKINNON

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Michael Ann Williams' *Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling*

in Southwestern North Carolina demonstrates how oral testimony can be extensively used in vernacular architecture and material culture analysis. Through interviews with fifty people from southwestern North Carolina, the author provides a sensitive analysis of how dwellings were used in the past and what these spaces and artifacts meant to local residents. The main

purpose of her study is two-fold: to "better understand the folk building tradition and its cultural context in one distinct region of North Carolina" and to "examine the extent to which the use and meaning of dwellings are revealed in physical form" (p. 2-3). To that end, the author breaks new ground by placing people rather than the buildings in the foreground of her study. By listening closely to the words spoken by inhabitants, she tries to understand more deeply the interaction between people and the built environment.

Following the template set by many studies of vernacular architecture, Williams outlines a typology of some of the major architectural forms inherent in this region. She describes the square or rectangular single-pen house, the "big house and kitchen," the double-pen house, and the centre-passage I house, and closely examines the changes in society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that helped create these distinctive forms. Continuity and change are issues she explores; these are issues often examined by North American vernacular architecture scholars.

Her focus on oral narrative offers new insights for those wishing to understand the architectural landscape. Her discussion demonstrates how local terminology should be closely observed and understood by fieldworkers. In this region, when people refer to a "big house" they do not mean a southern mansion but rather a spatial concept closer to the single-pen house. This may refer to a one-room plan, a two- or three-room plan or even a five-room plan dwelling (p. 39). Through her interviews she deconstructs the various usages of this term "big house" by her informants, coming to a better understanding of how people's conceptions of their homes are expressed. This kind of ethnographic detail cannot be obtained through mere field reconnaissances but only through a knowledge of the area and extensive interviewing of people who inhabit the houses.

Clearly the strength of the work lies in this narrative analysis and its various applications for understanding architecture and material culture. For example, she points out that her informants "re-inhabit" their houses in the narratives told to Williams. She points out that most people do not talk about the

physical forms of their houses but rather, they recall these forms through their experiences and memories. Williams explains that one woman "seemed inclined to talk about anything except the house in which she was raised and now lives. Eventually it became apparent that it was not that she was reluctant to talk about the house, but that she was searching for the proper narrative in which to talk about it" (p. 14). Only when she remembered the experience of a storm that hit the house, did the narrator launch into a long narrative with many details of the house and farmstead. Williams analyzes these diverse narratives revealing some of the deeper meanings of the spaces and values of the rural community. Complicated issues that are sometimes difficult to contend with in material culture study, such as privacy and how strangers are treated, are sensitively discussed in her analysis.

The book will be of interest to those involved in preservation, for her work offers profound insights into people's attitudes toward the preservation of structures. The people of southwestern North Carolina do not preserve rural structures in the way architecture scholars advocate: repairing, maintaining, restoring and reusing older houses. Rather, houses of this region are sometimes destroyed or abandoned. To the people of this district, houses are symbols of the "homeplace," and meaning is represented in a well-told story or by viewing the empty site of a former home. As Williams says, "Rather than educate the rural people of southwestern North Carolina to the meaning of old houses, we should take the time to allow them to educate us to the fact that meaning is not found in the tangible form alone" (p. 143).

Originally a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, this book provides a clear sense of the continuity and transformation of a regional building tradition. This work is of interest not only to students of vernacular architecture and material culture but also to the growing group of academic disciplines interested in the analysis of narratives. It offers a stimulating and sensitive analysis of a complex regional building tradition and furthers our knowledge of the built environment and how this intersects with oral narrative.