

blocs de tuiles creuses et le béton pour les planchers et les revêtements, afin de protéger les poutres de fer des variations de température. Puis, au cours des années 1880, une autre solution moins coûteuse, qui fait l'objet du quatrième chapitre, fut proposée. Il s'agit de la construction à faible indice de combustibilité dérivée de la norme de construction des filatures telle que définie par les compagnies d'assurances mutuelles. Graduellement, les autorités civiles et les syndicats d'assurances contre le feu (*Fire Underwriters*) commencèrent aussi à légiférer en matière de normes de résistance au feu des édifices en hauteur et des théâtres. Cette réglementation encouragea le développement des connaissances sur la construction à l'épreuve du feu, d'où découla finalement, vers la fin des années 1890, une nouvelle méthode de construction en hauteur, celle de la charpente en acier. Rapide, exigeant peu d'espace et moins coûteuse, cette méthode fut vite adoptée dans la construction des édifices en hauteur des centres-villes américains, ce qui mena à l'éradication des conflagrations. L'auteure termine son survol au chapitre 6 en présentant les normes établies pour protéger aussi les occupants des édifices lors d'incendies, les sorties d'urgence et leur indication visuelle, les systèmes de gicleurs, les escaliers de secours ainsi que les normes d'occupation.

Tout le long de l'ouvrage, Sara Wermiel présente très bien son argumentation en partant des premières expériences individuelles de protection d'édifices contre le feu jusqu'à la généralisation de cette protection par obligation après l'adoption de lois. D'autres ouvrages ont été écrits sur le développement du design des structures de bâtiments et décrivent très bien les concepts, les matériaux et les produits (voir Cecil D. Elliott, *The Development of Materials and Systems for Buildings* [Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1994] et Donald

Friedman, *Historical Building Construction : Design, Materials and Technology* [New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1995]). Mais ils ne portent pas exclusivement sur les constructions résistant au feu. L'étude de Sara Wermiel se distingue aussi de ces ouvrages par son analyse du rôle des différents intervenants – propriétaires, architectes, manufacturiers, gouvernements, compagnies d'assurances – et par son établissement d'un lien entre l'évolution des systèmes de construction à l'épreuve du feu, dont le perfectionnement est représenté par la construction à charpente d'acier, et la fin des conflagrations.

L'auteure nous laisse cependant un peu sur notre faim dans l'étude des rapports entre les syndicats d'assurances contre le feu et les autorités civiles lors de la mise en place de normes. Mon étude récente de l'industrie canadienne des véhicules d'incendie me porte à croire que leur rôle fut très important. Sara Wermiel semble aussi avoir omis un point important dans l'évolution des bâtiments résistants au feu, soit les normes établies pour la résistance du verre des fenêtres. L'incendie de l'édifice de la Home Life Insurance à New York, en 1898, avait démontré avec succès la résistance de sa charpente d'acier mais révéla du même coup la faiblesse du verre des fenêtres qui, sous l'effet de la température élevée du bâtiment en feu, avait éclaté et permis la propagation du feu d'étage en étage. Par conséquent, le verre de bâtiments à l'épreuve du feu donna aussi lieu à une nouvelle norme de résistance au feu (John T. O'Hagan, *High Rise : Fire and Life Safety* [New York : Dun-Donnelley Pub. Corp., 1977], p. 6).

Somme toute, malgré ces deux dernières remarques, je recommande fortement la lecture de l'ouvrage de Sara Wermiel. Ce livre très bien documenté et rédigé apporte un éclairage nouveau à l'histoire architecturale des centres-villes américains en relation avec la protection contre les incendies.

Jane L. Cook, *Coalescence of Styles: The Ethnic Heritage of St John River Valley Regional Furniture, 1763–1851*

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Cook, Jane L. *Coalescence of Styles: The Ethnic Heritage of St John River Valley Regional Furniture, 1763–1851*. Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2001. 278 pp., 63 b&w plates, 13 figures, glossary, bibliography, cloth, \$45, ISBN 0-7735-2056-2.

For the past three decades, much of the scholarship on Canadian furniture has tended to focus upon a specific ethnic group and concentrate on unambiguous examples within that genre to document the several strains of culture that comprise modern Canada. National heritage seemed to be the driving force

for scholars from Jean Palardy to Howard Pain and Donald Webster, all of whom have employed the diffusionist tradition of cultural geography to map different European cultural hearths. In these endeavours, furniture serves as mere illustration of material roots.¹ Yet it is the grey areas, where cultures mingle and mix in a process of creolization, that offer the richest opportunities for scholarly focus and interpretation of artifacts. Back in the mid-1980s, Edwin Churchill and Sheila McDonald first identified the Upper St John Valley, the border between northern Maine and New Brunswick, as a ripe region for study of such interaction.² They focused their analysis on furniture made from 1820 to 1930, but Jane Cook's recent book, *Coalescence of Styles*, probes the earlier period, from the establishment of settlements along the lower valley in 1763 (following the Treaty of Paris, the end of the French and Indian Wars) until the 1851 New Brunswick census.

Drawing upon extensive field work to document local furniture in public and private collections, close study of regional manuscript materials, and judicious use of secondary literature in the fields of history and geography, Cook develops a well nuanced portrait of the region that contrasts the experiences of the upper and lower valley. For the former, she uses historical and artifactual materials to reveal the interactions of the native Maliseet, French Canadian settlers from the St Lawrence Valley, Acadian refugees from Nova Scotia, and American immigrants from northern New England (who began to arrive in the 1810s). The blending of different French forms and conventions with American details parallels the region's patois. On the other hand, a different layering characterizes the lower part of the valley. There a strong American foundation from the 1760s and 1780s supported subsequent layers of Scottish- and Irish-trained craftsmen. A more urban orientation in Fredericton, Saint John, and the lower valley is evident in the type of furniture produced and even the documents on which the author draws (probate inventories, court documents, and other official records).

Cook builds her case through close analysis of the interior structure and external appearance of the pool of surviving furniture from the region. Her discussion of the hierarchies of paint colors, the favouring of doors rather than drawers, and the different appearances of doors that accompanied the switch from the wrought iron fische hinges of the French tradition to the brass butt hinges of the Anglo tradition are just a few examples of the detailed information that she teases out in her argument. Similarly the manner in which she draws on the best of the British vernacular furniture scholarship — such as the publications of Bernard Cotton and David Jones — gives traction

to her argument on the lower valley work in the 1810 to 1851 period. The careful comparison and correlation of construction techniques and details — for example, the link to specific turned vocabularies of legs and the preference for tablet-crested chair backs — gives her interpretation proper weight.

However, this sort of comparative work depends almost entirely on the rigour of the English and Scottish sources. Cook is on weaker ground when she relies on the formal opinions of the older art historian Ian Finley, who wrote about the “sober taste” and “subtle angularity” of Scottish furniture. Such subjective descriptions obscure the differentiation between economic decisions and Scottish attitudes and undercut the sophistication of Cook's intent to explore the socio-economic base of the trade. Similarly, she comments upon the different French regional origins of the French Canadians and the Acadians, even using a map of France to illustrate the difference, but then does not follow up to demonstrate how such different origins might have contributed to distinctive furniture forms or construction conventions. Such a missed opportunity may have resulted from the paucity of scholarship on French vernacular furniture, but Cook could have pushed this material a little more. In yet another section, she pushed the material a little too far. She makes sweeping statements about the Scottishness of shouldered edges on the rear chair legs just above the seat, but such a feature can be found on many examples of American federal style chairs. Looking at the American examples raises the question whether this was a specific Scottish convention or a general Anglo practice of the period.

The strongest interpretive thrust of this volume is Cook's critique of the myth of loyalism, which privileges the lifestyles, artifacts, and *mentalité* of the American refugees of the Revolutionary war. Here Cook points out the biases in the work of cultural historians like Ann Gorman Condon, who focuses exclusively on mahogany, highly polished surfaces, and Rococo ornament to define the loyalist mindset. Such notions of refinement ignores the variety of plain and elaborated furniture owned by the elite as well as the non-elite work made and consumed in the valley. The celebratory focus upon the earliest and possibly wealthiest Anglo settlers excludes a more balanced view of the regional vernacular. Under Cook's lens, the reader sees the inadequacy of a political explanation for style and acknowledges the impact of a social economy in which Acadians and French Canadians intermarried and developed a new distinctly Madawaskan style or the way in which waves of Scottish cabinet-makers and Irish decorative painters elaborated upon the American Middle Atlantic (New York

and Philadelphia) styles that had taken hold in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. I would have liked Cook to probe a bit more why the American styles, even newer ones, persisted in strength while the Scots dominated the cabinetmaking trade. Did this result from American émigrés playing the role of tastemakers in a culturally stratified society or from the structure of the trade, in which American masters controlled skilled immigrant craftsmen?

These small interpretive points aside, the major drawback of this volume is the poor quality of the illustrations. Given that artifacts and maps carry much of the argument's proof, the publisher should have paid particular attention to the production of a clearly illustrated volume. The contrast between the sharp images in the Churchill and McDonald article and the Cook volume is considerable. The poor printing also detracts from the effectiveness of the period maps, many of which are reproduced in small, murky format. In establishing the parameters of a region, it is essential to have clear informative maps that quickly orient the reader.

Nevertheless Cook's volume is an important contribution to North American furniture history. The wide range of furniture and the interpretive angle deployed, especially in Chapter 5, link Cook's work to that of other scholars of American regional furniture.³ American furniture historians will also find Cook's comments on the popularity of the chair-table form in northern New England, the upper Hudson Valley, and the St John Valley helpful in light of the large number of surviving examples. Her explanation of the prevalent Scottish drawer arrangement in chests of drawers (an upper drawer consisting of a single tall drawer, to accommodate a tall hat or bonnet, flanked by a pair of shorter drawers on each side) should also be of interest to scholars of New England furniture since many upper sections of high chest and case of drawers made in that region feature a similar drawer configuration. The interpretive thrust and the myriad details will make Cook's volume an essential addition to any serious furniture historian's library.

NOTES

1. Jean Palardy, *Les meubles anciens du Canada français* (1963; reprint, Montreal: Cercle du livre de France, 1971); Howard Pain, *The Heritage of Upper Canada Furniture* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1978); Donald Webster, *English-Canadian Furniture of the Georgian Period* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979); and Donald Webster, *Rococo to Rustique: Early French-Canadian Furniture in the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 2000).
2. Edwin Churchill and Sheila McDonald, "Reflections of Their World: The Furniture of the Upper St John River Valley, 1820-1930," in *Perspectives on American Furniture*, ed. Gerald Ward (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 63-91.
3. For examples of work on New England, see Robert Trent, *Hearts and Crowns* (New Haven: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1977); Robert St George, *The Wrought Covenant: Source Material for the Study of Craftsmen and Community in Southeastern New England, 1620-1700* (Brockton, Mass.: Brockton Art Center, 1979); Luke Beckerdite and William Hosley, eds., *American Furniture 1995* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995); and Edward Cooke, Jr., *Making Furniture in Pre-Industrial America: The Social Economy of Newtown and Woodbury, Connecticut* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

Robert J. Belton, *Sights of Resistance: Approaches to Canadian Visual Culture*

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Belton, Robert J. *Sights of Resistance: Approaches to Canadian Visual Culture*. University of Calgary Press, 2001. 398 pp., 100+ illus., accompanying CD-ROM, cloth, \$59.95, ISBN 1-55283-011-4.

In the last several years, a variety of publications have appeared that introduce students to key

components of visual culture, and, especially, that address and develop the interstices of discourse relevant to visual cultural production in the domains of communication, cultural and media theory, art history, film studies and material culture. Such works reflect a cross-disciplinarity that can truly enrich the study of what were once discrete fields,