

of the *Post*. These were her sources; the book is truly a survey of the magazines. It is not a study of their direct impact on an increasingly materialistic America.

Despite these shortcomings, *Magazines for the Millions* is an insightful, clearly written, and well-illustrated text. Besides, it puts a whole new twist on reading *Cosmo*.

Michael S. Bird, *Canadian Country Furniture, 1675–1950*

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Michael S. Bird, *Canadian Country Furniture, 1675–1950*, Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1994. 403 pp., 704 photographs. Hardcover \$75, ISBN 1-55046-087-0.

Canadians have long awaited a definitive text on the nation's country furniture heritage. Michael S. Bird, a recognized authority on western Canadian furniture and folk traditions, has produced the first text of its kind investigating vernacular domestic wares. Ethnic groups and their North American and European roots are investigated in order to reveal the design, decoration and stylistic origins of the furniture they produced. The author also discusses which designs and forms survived transplantation and how they were adapted within the New World. Because of Bird's emphasis on the influence of foreign immigrant cultures upon cabinetmaking traditions we are left asking "what is Canadian about Canadian furniture?" Perhaps the answer to this lies in the origins of this country's peoples, and, more importantly, the way in which they interacted and adapted to their new worlds.

The main text is divided into three sections: furniture as an object of study; histories of ethnic group cultures and furniture forms in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario and the Western provinces; and an illustrated catalogue of furniture made in these same regions. Photographs therefore are divorced from their respective regional histories, and the text at the front of the book is separated from these figures by endnotes. This rather bizarre arrangement leads to the necessity of flagging pages so that the furniture, histories, and references can be more readily accessed in conjunction with each other.

Such minor irritations should not detract from the overall usefulness of this book. In the first section a brief introductory discussion on utility and beauty leads to a controversial and thought-provoking essay on defining country furniture. Bird's writing is knowledgeable and embraces a considerable understanding of the

field of furniture studies. Of more technical interest is Bird's thoughtful inclusion of a periodization of influential international styles and a glossary, the latter appearing at the end of the book (more bookmarks).

Bird includes discussions of high-style city furniture manufacturers such as Tulles, Pallister and McDonald of Halifax and George W. Hancock in St. John's, something we might not expect from a study of vernacular furniture. The fact is that there are few biographies of country furniture makers, most of whom remain anonymous and cannot be linked to their products.

Unfortunately, the text is marred regularly by petty historical inaccuracies. The reader is constantly aggravated by minor flaws, for example, when Bird claims on page 26 that Nova Scotia was divided into two regions in 1783 (rather than 1784). Errors also arise when Bird refers to details regarding individual cabinetmakers' histories. For example, when Bird speaks of the Anglo-Americans in the Atlantic provinces on page 25 he refers to New Brunswickers Thomas Nisbet of Saint John (operating 1814–1838) and Alexander Lawrence in St. Stephen (operating circa 1835–1880). In reality, Thomas Nisbet, Sr., a Scotsman, became a wright in 1813, registered as a cabinetmaker in 1814, and worked until his retirement in 1848. His son Thomas Nisbet, Jr., became a freeman in 1832, partnered with his father in 1834, and died in 1841. Alexander Lawrence (1787–1843) was a contemporary of Nisbet, Sr., a fellow Scot arriving and establishing a business in the city of Saint John in 1817. The city newspapers carried notice of Lawrence's death in 1843, but his sons Joseph Wilson Lawrence (1818–1892) and George Hunter Lawrence (1819–1880) continued in their father's footsteps, taking over the business in 1842. On the other hand, perhaps Bird is not referring to any members of the Lawrence family but to one of St. Stephen's most illustrious cabinetmakers, John Warren Moore (1812–1893). But there is no direct mention of

him and the dates do not match those referred to in the text. Perhaps consultation with works by New Brunswick furniture historians Tim Dilworth ("Thomas Nisbet: A Reappraisal of His Life and Work," *Material History Bulletin* 15, 2 (Summer 1982): 77-82) and Darrel Butler ("John Warren Moore," Master's thesis, University of New Brunswick) could have alleviated these discrepancies. In any case, these urban-based cabinetmakers are known for their high-style Victorian furniture rather than their vernacular productions.

The figures in the last section of the book focus on Bird's ethno-religious and geographic areas of expertise, namely the Hutterite, Mennonite and Doukhobor furniture of the Western provinces. His command of European and Russian folk precedents for western Canadian furniture is considerable and enlightening. He also discusses Ontario furniture in depth. In addition, he introduces us to fine examples of diverse and distinctive wares from across the country including Sibley chairs and Mi'kmaq quillwork furniture from Nova Scotia, elaborate folk carved washstands from Newfoundland, an Inuit painted cupboard from Labrador, chipped carved boxes from New Brunswick, diamond-point armoires from Quebec, sturdy linen presses from Niagara, glazed dish cupboards from Saskatchewan, five-sided hanging cupboards from Manitoba, and the boldly painted cupboards of Alberta. Unfortunately, bent-wood cedar chests and other furniture items from the indigenous West Coast peoples is glaringly omitted. Those hoping to see illustrated furniture items in person might be frustrated by Bird's frequent omission of sources.

On occasion, the accuracy of his illustration captions are questionable or not fully developed. For example, Bird claims that an Atlantic Canadian rocking chair (plate 116) embodies features of both Acadian and Irish heritages. He states that the chair's Acadian features include

the curvature of the undulating seat and the scrolled cut top edge to the upper slat. In fact, this design is quite rare: Acadian seats tend to be made from flat boards in trapezoidal shape blind-mortised together and nailed to seat rails, with top slats perhaps curved down to tenon extensions at their juncture with side posts. This particular example has Acadian features in the angling back of the rear posts from seat height and their gradual tapering, but this is not mentioned. Bird then fails to elaborate upon what Irish features the chair has, which are not readily evident to the reader, and why Acadian and Irish features should be expected to be found together in the first place.

Some photographs illustrate examples of furniture which show clear and direct similarities to foreign manufacturers. The reader is left wondering whether the furniture was imported into Canada or made in this country. For example, a lidded chest with single drawer is attributed to Nova Scotia (plate 99). The form's style and swirled hand-painted decorations are so strongly rooted in New England traditions that one cannot help but ask whether indeed it originated from there. Again, a slat-back chair from New Brunswick (plate 74) is so closely akin to coastal Connecticut examples we are left asking the same question. In this instance, Bird claims the chair style is *retardataire*, this a feature of many country Canadian furniture items. *Au contraire*, it is contemporary to Milford area productions (Robert Trent, *Hearts and Crowns*, New Haven, Conn.: New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1977).

Overall, this book is a solid compendium of ingenuous Canadian folk decoration and country furniture design redolent with roots in diverse Western traditions. However, we still await a more historically accurate study which includes those ethnic groups (such as the Far Eastern influence of Chinese and Japanese settlers upon furniture traditions of Canada's Pacific Rim) whom Bird has not yet discussed.