

THE PAINTED FURNITURE OF FRENCH CANADA, 1700-1840. JOHN A. FLEMING, Camden East, Ontario: Camden House and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1994.

179 pp. 108 illustrations. (\$34.95 Canadian plus taxes Canadian: hardcover). ISBN: 0-921820-85-2.

Obtainable in either French or English languages directly from the Canadian Museum of Civilization Bookstore, 100 Laurier Street, P.O. Box 3100, Station B, Hull, Quebec, Canada J8X 4H2.

Jean Palardy, the doyen of French Canadian furniture, first published the popular "Larousse" of provincial Quebecois wares (**Les meubles anciens du Canada français**) in 1963. Loath to follow the path where angels fear to tread, investigators into French Canadian furniture have taken a quiet back seat during the thirty year period which followed Palardy's popular publications. That is, until now. English-speaking furniture researchers are penetrating Palardy's domain, reassessing his work, extending the boundaries of connoisseurship set by him, and introducing furniture wares never before discussed. In addition to Donald Blake Webster, who has recently catalogued the Royal Ontario Museum's French Canadian furniture collection, John A. Fleming now re-enters Palardy's world by concentrating on one aspect of Quebecois furniture, namely that of painted chairs and cabinetry. In so doing, he improves upon a number of Palardy's black and white illustrations by using new colour photographs produced with the expertise of photographer James A.

Chambers. Together, Fleming and Chambers give us a lasting and intimate record of Quebec's notable painted vernacular furniture, along with assorted lighting devices and sculpted folk decorations.

Apart from the introduction and conclusion there are four main sections within the book: settlement; styles; furniture; and surface, colour and decoration. The text is illustrated lavishly on every other page, if not more frequently, with a high quality colour photograph, cabinet-maker's newspaper advertisement, or printed design source.

Fleming provides a sufficiently general introduction to the peopling of the St. Lawrence River valley, although he omits a map of the region to set the scene. Quebec City, first settled by the French in 1608, was taken over as a spoil of war by the British in 1760. In addition, with the arrival of American loyalists after the termination of the American Revolutionary War, St. Lawrence River valley furniture styles begin to be influenced by anglo-immigrant cultures. For example, Fleming shows us a blue painted armchair from the Eastern Townships made in the last quarter of the eighteenth century which incorporates both English and French design components (page 45). In this instance, the chairmaker integrates an English style bow crest atop a pierced splat (designs familiar also to Chippendale's contemporaries in America) with a French Canadian styling of scrolled arms descending from high on the rear posts to front leg extensions which form low arm supports.

Occasionally, Fleming introduces us to hidden treasures from both public and private collections within the text. Indeed, the book cover itself details such a piece, an armchair with reinforced corners. In addition to free-standing furniture forms, Fleming informs us about a variety of unusual objects such as a painter's sample board bearing motifs of a swan, a beaver, and an eagle; representative in turn of the British Crown, Canada, and the United States. Another rare painted object is an oval box bearing decorative compass designs carved into its surface, a box which embodies traditions derived from both the province's indigenous peoples and continental France.

Despite architectural traditions not being mentioned in the title of this book Fleming does discuss the styles and features of French Canadian buildings which housed a variety of furniture. Oftentimes the illustrations at the side of Fleming's text are not the most appropriate choices, for instance, an opportunity is missed to illustrate built-in furniture (*meubles meublants*) in their original settings at this juncture.

Illustrations of Cornelius Krieghoff's paintings of contemporary domestic interiors would also have made interesting additions to the text.

Overall, Fleming's work does little in the way of reinterpreting previous scholarship. Instead, the value of this book lies in his bringing together of a variety of furniture images in colour, in the revelation of hidden away furniture from both public and private collections,

and his successful integration of illustrations within a text clearly written, accurately told, and very well-produced.

Jenny Cook

A further note on our reviewer:

Jenny Cook is completing a doctorate on the subject of Saint John River Valley furniture and is a Curatorial Research Associate at Kings Landing Historical Settlement, Atlantic Canada's largest living history village.