

Review of *Framing Fraktur – Pennsylvania German Material Culture and Contemporary Art*. 2015. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp. 112, full colour, hardcover, 26.2 x 21.1 x 1.3 cm. ISBN-10: 0812247450.

John Mathews

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- of Toronto Press, 2004).
2. See for example, Grekul, Lisa. 2005. *Leaving Shadows: Literature in English by Canada's Ukrainians*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.
 3. Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
 4. Ukrainian for "Peace be among Us" and "Freedom," respectively.
 5. Icelandic for "Hall of Heaven."
 6. Named after Doukhobor leader Peter Veregrin, Jewish philanthropist Baron de la Hirsch, and Hungarian immigration promoter, Paul Esterhazy, respectively.
 7. For example, Swyripa's reintroduces but does not explain her use of what appear to be Norse or archaic Anglo-Saxon letters in the spelling of Icelandic proper names, pp. 157, 167, 296, among others.

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Framing Fraktur was published in conjunction with two exhibitions that were presented by the Free Library of Philadelphia in 2015. The premise of these exhibitions was to reinterpret and reframe the library's historic fraktur collection through the lens of contemporary art. Fraktur is a manuscript-based folk art that was created by German immigrants in Pennsylvania, beginning in the later part of the 17th century. The term is derived from the Latin *fractura* (breaking) and refers to the broken style of lettering. In Pennsylvania the most common form of fraktur were birth certificates and, less commonly, marriage and death memorials. Other non-religious types of fraktur included merit rewards, love letters, music manuscripts, greeting cards, and family records. As such, fraktur was a text-heavy art form that provided a unique record of everyday life. Fraktur fuses together the styles of early-European illuminated religious manuscripts with the colourful and idiosyncratic approach of North American folk art.

The book is divided into three sections, the first of which is devoted to the history and development of fraktur tradition. Lisa Minardi's

insightful and clearly written essay explores the individuals and communities behind fraktur. She draws our attention to the ways in which the social backgrounds of the artists affected the styles and outcome of fraktur artworks. For example, illustrations by artists from the Ephrata community had very sparse and minimal content, due in large part to their cloistered lifestyle and practise of abstinence.

The second section of the book looks at a variety of 20th- and 21st-century artworks that incorporate text. At first it might seem like a leap of faith to compare the centuries-old and formalized folk art genre of fraktur with experimental artworks from the Dada, cubist and pop genres. However the author of this chapter, Matthew F. Singer, attempts to draw parallels between these disparate groups by showing how they all blurred the lines between utilitarian, commemorative and artistic painting. Singer goes onto to explore works by artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, who used the interplay of words and graphics as a way to express historically rooted identities.

The final section of the book, written by Judith Tannenbaum, looks at contemporary artworks that have direct links with the fraktur tradition such as Marian Bantjes artwork entitled, *My Dear, Can We Work Together* (2007). This work is a highly embellished hand painted manuscript that is done in the style of fraktur but the text is from a spam/scam email. Another work by Bantjes, *Lost Child* (2014), is a simple and colourful needlepoint composition that is made using hair from My Little Pony toys. Both these pieces are uncanny in the way that they blend the

traditional styles of fraktur with mass media and consumer culture.

The book could have benefitted from a larger print size because of the heavily embellished detail of the fraktur illustrations. However, as a whole, the publication helps animate these historical documents and brings to light this fairly obscure rural art tradition. The book and accompanying exhibition successfully use the filter of contemporary art to promote engagement with the museum's collection.

JOYCE RANKIN

Not Just Tea, Tobacco, and Salt

Review of

Douglas McCalla. 2015. *Consumers in the Bush: Shopping in Rural Upper Canada*. Montréal and Kingston. McGill-Queens University Press.

pp. 296.

It was not just tea, tobacco, and salt; it was boots, razors, and haircombs; axes, rakes and shovels; teapots, forks and needles. Of the hundreds of things that we use every day, many have been around for a long time and were used by early settlers in much the same way.

This book is a fascinating look at the everyday lives of people in rural Upper Canada between 1808 and 1861. By pouring through daybooks (the itemized ledgers kept by 19th-century storekeepers to track and document each transaction of the day) and the 30,000 transactions captured, and by including all seven of the known stores within the neighbouring townships, the author was able to build a comprehensive picture of the retail transactions that occurred as part of the life of the 750 households in the area. We see who bought what, when, and how much they paid for it. And we are provided with some understanding of why.

Daybooks listed the item, the price, and the buyer, so by cross-referencing the names with the tax rolls, the author was able to track the buying

habits of selected families in several communities in rural Upper Canada in the mid-1800s, including socially prominent families, farmers, labourers, and even servants.

Underlying the specifics of the data is a picture of a society in which one's word was one's bond. The charge accounts run by most families were tracked through the simple means of the day book and ledger. The buyer was obliged to trust the merchant to maintain an accurate accounting, and the merchant trusted the buyers to pay when they had cash, or when they had goods (eggs, honey, etc.) that could be exchanged. The servants of a household bought items or supplies on credit for general household use as well as for their own use, seemingly with the expectation on the part of both master and servant that the charges would be assigned accordingly.

Since most of the individuals did not receive a weekly wage and depended on variable and seasonal lump sums, and on the sale or trading of commodities, much commerce was done through credit. Items that were considered