

***Adirondack Voices: Woodsmen and Woods Lore.* Par Robert D. Bethke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981. Pp. 148. \$12.50)**

Edith Fowke

Volume 3, Number 2, 1981

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081073ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081073ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Fowke, E. (1981). Review of [*Adirondack Voices: Woodsmen and Woods Lore.* Par Robert D. Bethke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981. Pp. 148. \$12.50)]. *Ethnologies*, 3(2), 161–162. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081073ar>

Malgré ces quelques lacunes, le travail de Carmelle Bégin n'aura pas été vain, car au fil des pages les connaisseurs remarqueront une évolution dans le jeu de Jean Carignan (en comparaison avec des versions endisquées par le passé) se caractérisant entre autres par une présence accrue de chromatisme, une ornementation plus sophistiquée (à la Sligo) ainsi que par de légères transformations de la ligne mélodique. Nous ne pouvons qu'espérer que cette publication entraîne dans son sillage la parution d'ouvrages subséquents dans ce domaine où tout reste à faire et à dire.

Jean-Pierre Joyal
Université de Montréal
Montréal, Qué.

Adirondack Voices: Woodsmen and Woods Lore

Par Robert D. Bethke
(Urbana: University of Illinois Press,
1981. Pp. 148. \$12.50)

This book is based on Robert Bethke's field collecting in northern New York State between 1970 and 1977. It is noteworthy because it is not only the first book-length study of New York folklore and oral traditions dealing exclusively with lumbermen, but also because it combines a number of different elements. Where most other books about lumbering deal either with songs or with the life of the lumbering men, Mr. Bethke deals with both songs and folklife, and also with storytelling and reminiscences. Further, he shares the approach that Edward Ives pioneered with his books on the singer-songmakers of the Maritimes: he writes in some detail about a colorful innkeeper-

storyteller and two brothers who were noted singers and songwriters, relating their songs to their lives and to the lumbering background. His book also has something in common with my own *Traditional Singers and Songs from Ontario* in that it concentrates on particular singers and lists their entire repertoires. He has issued a record, *Ted Ashlaw: Adirondack Singer* (Philo 1022), which enables us to hear one of his major informants, and his notes cover other versions of the songs in print or on records.

The songs reported confirm Norman Cazden's conclusions in "Regional and Occupational Orientations of American Traditional Song" (*JAF*, 72 [1959, 310-44]): that the lumbercamp setting played a key role in maintaining and transmitting traditional song, thus accounting for the notable similarity of repertoires in the Maritimes, Michigan, and the Catskill region of New York. My subsequent book, *Lumbering Songs from the Northern Woods*, offered additional evidence. There is a striking parallel between the songs in the Adirondacks and Ontario, not only in the specific lumbering songs like "Driving Saw Logs on the Plover" and "The Wild Mustard River," but also in the particular Child and broadside ballads that circulated in both areas: for example, Ted Ashlaw sang "The Braes of Yarrow" and "Willie Was as Fine a Singer," both of which are very rare in North America but are known in Ontario. Particularly interesting is a song titled "A Hobo's Life" that Ted Ashlaw credited to Charlie Cunningham, but which, as Bethke notes, is "a personalized recomposition of an eighteenth-century traditional English drinking song collected in Ontario under the title 'The Faggot Cutter'" (p. 132), and which, I might add, has also turned up in New Brunswick as "Bachelor's Song," but is apparently unknown elsewhere in North America.

Despite the remarkable similarity of the Ontario and Adirondack singing traditions, there seems to be one striking

difference: Mr. Bethke found that "traditional folksongs and folksinging have been much less durable than yarns and storytelling in the North Country" (p. 55). My experience was the opposite: I found many singers but few storytellers. This may have been partly because I was asking for songs, but if storytelling had been as common in Ontario as in the Adirondacks, I would have come across many more tales than I did. I believe the difference is that in the Adirondacks the woodsmen lived in the area where they worked while in Ontario most of the shantyboys went up to the woods in the fall and came out in the spring. Mr. Bethke emphasizes the high value placed upon talk in his area: "Appreciation of the spoken word brings people together in the foothills... Visiting is a small-group phenomenon... Visiting usually involves a mixture of information, exchange, gossip, and what amounts to talk for the sake of talk" (p. 140). Thus the woodsmen of this account form a community while in Ontario the shantyboys came from diverse communities and hence did not share the social visits that produced the great varieties of oral narratives that Mr. Bethke documents.

The narratives are both factual and fictional, including reminiscences about life in the bush (the work, the food, the weather, and the contrast between old and modern times), humorous anecdotes, numbskull jokes, local-hero yarns, and tall tales: above all, tall tales. As Bethke writes: "The Big Woods is a testing ground, big in its geographical expanse, the challenges it presents, and its role in shaping male experience. It is little wonder that woodsmen love to tell 'big stories' ('lies,' 'tall tales') about events in those Big Woods. Through hyperbole the yarns transform recognizable situations and encounters into larger than life confrontations, ones commensurate with the Big Woods as a heroic plane of action" (p. 40).

This is an excellent book. It is well written and it presents a wealth of

folklore in human terms. As Bethke notes, "Throughout the volume I stress the fusion of past and present lore with persons, places, and folk performances" (p. x), and he does that without recourse to jargon and with an obvious fondness for his informants. All in all, a nice piece of work.

Edith Fowke
York University
Downsview, Ontario.

Les croix de chemin: au-delà du signe

Par Paul Carpentier

(Ottawa, Centre canadien d'études sur la culture traditionnelle, Musées nationaux du Canada, 1981.

Collection Mercure, dossier no 39. 484 p., ill.

L'intérêt principal de cette étude réside dans sa partie documentaire: des milliers d'informateurs "qui m'ont ouvert la porte, leur mémoire et leur cœur"; les régions du Québec, entièrement visitée; deux mille huit cent soixante-trois croix de chemin formellement analysées. Le matériau est des plus significatifs, même si le fait de ne pas pouvoir tenir compte des calvaires risquait d'en diminuer la signification fondamentale. Il s'agit d'une coutume de toutes les religions de vouloir se ménager des espaces sacrés, d'y laisser des "monuments" au passage, autant pour se souvenir que pour apprivoiser ou même posséder (la croix de Jacques Cartier à Gaspé en 1534) des lieux. Ajoutons à ces mythes plus universels la peur des carrefours et la spécificité chrétienne qui consiste à valoriser la croix comme signe distinctif et tout aussi souvent décoratif.

P.C. range ses croix selon des motivations plus connues: les croix