

Richard MacKinnon. *Vernacular Architecture in the Codroy Valley.*

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to have thought there is no difference between “Maritime” and “Atlantic.” There is — at least out *here* there is.

Despite the title, this Atlantic province gets short shrift. I found myself reading about episodes of regional weather, like storms, with nice details from, say, Halifax, or Digby, and thinking of the Newfoundland and Labrador reflexes of the same storms. The St. John’s townie in me was disappointed to see no reference to the (record-breaking!) snowfall we had in 2000/2001 (though that winter’s snowfall is mentioned with regard to the Maritimes). The August gales of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which led to so much tragic loss of life and property in Newfoundland — and the writing of several folksongs — are not mentioned except with Maritime Province results. In effect, this is a book about weather in the Maritimes, with some Newfoundland and Labrador additions.

I was reminded of Charlie Horwood’s *Getting to Know the Weeds* (Cuff, 1996). Both Saunders and Horwood have lived lives of aesthetic involvement with their natural surroundings, intertwined with technical knowledge. Horwood wrote about Eastern Newfoundland and more generally about all of Nature. Saunders writes about Atlantic Canada (or the Maritimes) and specifically about how weather works in our lives. If you like one, you’ll like the other.

Readers, don’t get too knotted up about regional designations. That’s not natural history. However, a word to publishers in the Maritimes: be more careful about your terminology. And perhaps buy Barber’s dictionary.

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Richard MacKinnon. *Vernacular Architecture in the Codroy Valley*. Mercury Series, History Division, Paper 2. Canadian Museum of Civilization [www.cyberboutique.civilization.ca], 2002, ISBN 0-660-18788

FEW REGIONS of Canada have had their traditional patterns of cultural life and landscape as carefully documented and analyzed by folklorists, anthropologist, geographers and social historians as has occurred in Newfoundland. In this sense the region is truly blessed. This book is another important contribution to this fortuitous process. Richard MacKinnon is a Cape Bretoner and was a member of the faculty at the University College of Cape Breton. He also holds a doctorate in Folklore from Memorial University. These facts are central to the genesis of this study, for one of the dominant settler groups to occupy the Codroy Valley were Cape Bretoners who left Inverness County in the middle decades of the nineteenth century in search of a new land frontier for their agricultural way of life. MacKinnon therefore brings a strong personal affinity and sympathy to this study, which was the subject of his doctoral dissertation. His training at MUN also establishes a solid theoretical foundation and an essential awareness of the broader context of scholar-

ship on cultural transfer and change by Europeans moving onto the North American continent over the past four centuries.

Using detailed fieldwork, MacKinnon set out to explore the building practices of the people settling in the Codroy Valley. In so doing MacKinnon takes his reader on a probing journey in which he also explores related issues of antecedent building practices, farming routines and layout, house relocation, the practical and social use of space within the dwelling, continuity and change in architectural idioms in response to new fashions in housing, the rise and wane of rural economy and life. This is a rich picture of what has too often been a narrowly conceived, or worse, a precious homage to the past house-making habits of social elites. Many readers will also appreciate that MacKinnon uses the first-person voice in narrating the process of investigation, without romanticizing it.

The strength of the book is the resolute attention to documenting these ordinary buildings, which he terms 'vernacular architecture.' One might quibble over terminology here: other scholars have distinguished important differences between what might be called 'folk architecture' and 'vernacular architecture,' emphasizing that one gives way to the other as part of a larger pattern of cultural transition. Nevertheless, MacKinnon's attention to delineating both the structural details and the spatial organization of these buildings is valuable. From a sampling of photos and floor plans and other diagrams of their placement on the land, the reader has a means to understand and compare these building with those in other regions. Also valuable is his placement of these practices into the larger pattern of house building in Atlantic Canada and beyond. For example, his assessment of a long-argued debate as to whether log building was as prevalent in the region as in other parts of North America adds an important contribution to the regional literature.

What MacKinnon finds is an agricultural community of Cape Bretoners, reproducing in the Codroy a pattern of farm-making and house and barn building that remained remarkably coherent, while also adapting to their social and economic needs. Builders emphasized the centrality of the kitchen as the hub of family life and household production, but also for entertaining. While there are perceptible shifts in construction technique as hewn timber framing gave way to sawn lumber, and as new architectural fashions were adopted, including those promoted by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) after 1950, people preserved a traditional interior plan while employing the fashionable external superficialities as expressions of evolving international tastes. What stands out is the remarkable capacity of these people to execute profound changes to the form and appearance of their buildings, including re-locating them several kilometers away from their original locations. Our modern preoccupations with home fashion and renovation and adaptive re-use are hardly new cultural practices.

The weakness of the book is in part related to the nature of the Mercury Series, which "is designed to permit rapid dissemination ... in the interests of making information available quickly, normal production procedures have been abbreviated."

A number of small flaws mar the book, including an errant photo (Figure 96). Stronger editorial guidance might also have expunged the repetitive summaries that characterize each chapter. These faults aside, this is an engaging read and one that adds an important piece in the larger tapestry of our regional past.

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Joanne Soper-Cook. *Waterborne*. Goose Lane Editions, Fredericton, NB, 2002, ISBN 0864923074

THE UNTEMPERED EXUBERANCE of Joanne Soper-Cook's earlier work has evolved into a maturity of voice that is both compelling and enticing. Her characters are complex and finely drawn and her descriptions of the sea, with its mysteries and miracles, are lyrical. The frequent use of metaphor is forgivable for its tautly visual quality ("the old cracked roads that lead back from Elsinore like corrupted veins racing away from a diseased heart"), and the weaving of real and surreal elements is handled deftly.

The novel lays bare the lives of three generations of troubled women who are sheltered, imprisoned and repulsed by a small Newfoundland outpost. There are many secrets here, sexual and emotional abuse among them, and there exists a palpable frigidity to the town and its inhabitants ("it always seemed to be winter in Elsinore"). The women are bound to each other by birth and by the ocean, in circumstances and with consequences not fully understood by them or by the reader until the closing chapters, if at all. The relationships of grandmother, mother and daughter, among themselves and others, are fractured and destructive. Personal demons manifest themselves in startling and disturbing ways, particularly in Stella Maris, the granddaughter.

Stella is by turns bulimic, self-mutilating, cross-dressing, socially isolated, sexually confused, drug dependent and so on. Her astonishing array of problems, phobias and compulsions challenges credibility, at a point in the novel when she has been established as a believable and sympathetic character. Her clear, reasoned voice, even as she engages in these behaviours, jars slightly. The reader is well aware that she is a deeply troubled, wounded individual, and for good reason, without the extremes that begin to render her a cliché of the traumatized psyche.

Soper-Cook is a writer with something to say, in a voice that becomes stronger as she progresses through the inevitable unevenness of an early career. Her work has never lacked for courage or uniqueness, and *Waterborne* marks the addition of a maturity that may carry her far in the world of Canadian letters.

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