

BOOK REVIEWS

New and Noteworthy

Three important works on various aspects of Native American material culture have recently been published. One can hardly not be impressed by Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton's *Native American Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Pp. 431, introduction, maps, bibliography, glossary, index. \$50.00 cloth), a fruitful collaboration between an anthropologist and an architect respectively. When one contemplates the enormity of the ethnographic literature, it becomes difficult to fathom two individuals undertaking a thorough survey of Native American architecture, although judging by the book's acknowledgements, the authors had lots of competent help.

In a breathtaking assemblage of hundreds of historical and contemporary photographs, and an equal number of superb illustrations, Nabokov and Easton manage to portray almost every aspect of the Native American-built environment, covering all the major culture areas of North America. However, by no means is their survey limited to classic forms (e.g., earthlodges and tipis of the Plains, plank houses of the Northwest Coast, and hogans and Pueblos of the Southwest); they also provide documentation of sweatlodges, gravehouses, granaries, caches, and arbors. Moreover, they frequently are able to discuss in detail such matters as methods of construction, materials, use of internal space, and associated religious practices and symbolism. Folklorists, specifically, would probably have enjoyed more discussion of the interaction of architectural ideas between Native and Euro-American cultures (e.g., the adoption of hewn log buildings; the origins of sod houses, raised caches, etc.), but such a complex issue can surely wait. While expensive, *Native American Architecture* is worth every penny, and should definitely be in the personal library of anyone interested in either Native America or material culture.

Cheryl Samuel, a weaver and teacher of weaving and art, has produced a magnificent explication of the weaving process and cultural heritage of the Northwest Coast Indian textile known as the Chilkat blanket (*The Chilkat Dancing Blanket*. Seattle: Pacific Search Press, 1982. Pp. 234, foreword, preface, photographs, illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth), a work only now being distributed by University of Oklahoma Press. This is a

wonderfully designed and illustrated book, with excellent black-and-white and color photographs and pen-and-ink drawings. It certainly bears the influence of Bill Holm's seminal work on Northwest Coast native art forms; not surprisingly, Holm wrote the foreward.

The Chilkat dancing blanket is a product of a weaving tradition that is relatively recent in the Northwest Coast native art heritage, a tradition that witnessed the merging of twining with mountain goat wool and cedar bark with painting, usually of mythological beings on wooden artifacts such as carved chests, sacred screens, and gravehouse coverings. Focusing on the Tlingit and the Tsimshian of southeastern Alaska and coastal British Columbia, Samuel does a pretty fair job of exploring the cultural roots of the blanket (i.e., its use as a ceremonial costume and especially a symbol of nobility and wealth in a sharply stratified native society), but she really comes into her own in her detailed discussions of the blanket's designs, the procurement, spinning and dyeing of the materials, and the precise nature of the weaving techniques. This book is surely to become a classic work of description in the already vast literature on Northwest Coast native peoples.

The same may be said for the next book, *Shamanic Odyssey: The Lushootseed Salish Journey to the Land of the Dead*, authored by anthropologist Jay Miller (Menlo Park, CA: Ballena Press, 1988. Pp. xviii + 215, preface, photographs, illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth; \$28.95 paper. Ballena Press Anthropological Papers No. 32). In his effort to document and comprehend the Spirit Canoe or Soul Recovery ceremony in the shamanic practices of the Lushootseed Salish of Puget Sound, Miller has marshalled an impressive amount of material from his own fieldwork, the ethnographic literature, and museum collections across the United States, especially photographs and illustrations of the rarely seen decorated planks central to the rite. This elaborate and dramatic ritual was performed by a group of shamans—exceedingly rare in Native America—for the explicit purpose of recovering the soul of an ill member of the community, and Miller provides critical summaries of perhaps every known reliable account of its original practice. But Miller goes far beyond mere description of the event, as he explores some of the complex relationships that linked the Lushootseed with the rest of the Northwest Coast culture area and Native America generally. This is an important look at Native American Indian conceptions of the afterlife and sacred potency, and especially the rare uniting of shamans for a common purpose with their dramatic use of sacred paraphernalia.

At first glance, one is excited by the well-illustrated survey offered by John A. Jakle, Robert W. Bastian, and Douglas K. Meyer (*Common Houses in America's Small Towns: The Atlantic Seaboard to the Mississippi Valley*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989. Pp. x + 238, preface, photographs, illustrations, glossary, bibliography, index. \$50.00 cloth; \$25.00 paper). On second glance, the predominance of geographical distribution maps and their percentage squares can be somewhat intimidating. On final reflection, however, folklorists can find considerable value in this ambitious work, one which is not remiss in consulting folklore scholarship. The book is essentially a fieldguide to vernacular housing east of the Mississippi, based on an extensive inventory of

17,000 structures in 20 sample small towns. While the form terminology and discussion is tailored primarily for an audience of cultural geographers, it is possible to uncover much of interest in the way of folk housing. The chapter on the study towns and their physical layout will be of particular value to anyone interested in current landscape and folklife issues.

The University of Georgia Press has also recently published a fascinating portrait of Americo-Liberian folk housing (Photographs by Max Belcher. Text by Svend E. Holsoe and Bernard L. Herman. Afterword by Rodger P. Kingston. *A Land and Life Remembered: Americo-Liberian Folk Architecture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988. Pp. xii + 176, photographs, illustrations, exhibition checklist, bibliography. \$35.00 cloth; \$19.95 paper). While growing up in 1950's Liberia, photographer Max Belcher noticed how many buildings seemed "special and non-African." His interest in recording these structures photographically before their demise led to a collaboration of individuals who eventually produced an exhibition and this catalogue. The result is stunning documentation of architecture constructed in Liberia after 17,000 black Americans, mostly freed slaves from the South, emigrated from the U.S. beginning in 1822 to participate in the West African country's agricultural boom, creating a unique settler society. Belcher's exquisite black-and-white photographs—often juxtaposing American and Liberian architectural details with great effectiveness—nicely illustrate the textual discussion of the diffusion of traits and show how consideration of ethnicity, acculturation, and social organization can reveal much about the continuity and transformation of architectural ideas across time and space.

Two new books on American fishing cultures have recently appeared, although both have little to offer to folklorists interested in expressive work culture. James M. Acheson is the author of *The Lobster Gangs of Maine* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988. Pp. xiv + 181, preface, photographs, illustrations, appendix, glossary, references, index. \$25.00 cloth; \$10.95 paper), an anthropological look at the traditional harvesting techniques of Maine lobstermen in the context of their manipulation of social relationships to successfully employ those methods. Carolyn Ellis is the author of *Fisher Folk: Two Communities on Chesapeake Bay* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986. Pp. xi + 202, notes, references, index. \$20.00 cloth), a sociologist's portrayal of the work rounds, family and community interaction, and patterns of social change in two fishing communities. Both of these books are very good treatments of worker and community social structure, and provide useful insights to contemporary interrelationships among individual worker, family, community, and the wider market. However, neither of these books offer the kind of contextual information on traditional occupational folklife, narrative, and belief that folklorists are most eager to see, such as that documented by George Carey, Janet Gilmore, Patrick Mullen, David Taylor, and others.

Two important works of the past decade have recently been reprinted, one with revisions. Documentary Research, Inc. (96 Rumsey Rd., Buffalo, NY 14209) has issued a slightly revised version of *Teaching Folklore* (\$16.00, \$12.00 for AFS members), edited by Bruce Jackson, reviewed in *Forum* 18(1985):98-99. Most changes are a matter of format revision or minor "editorial tinkering."

However, there are two new essays by Bruce Jackson. The first outlines Jackson's seminar on the epic, an intriguing mix of oral, print, and cinematic narrative. The second essay is an all too brief description (three-and-one-half pages) of Jackson's fieldwork seminar—surprising considering Jackson's recent 311-page book on the same subject, and disappointing considering the importance of fieldwork to folklore studies. Still, *Teaching Folklore* is a unique book, and the revision has only enhanced its value to the discipline. The University of New Mexico Press is the new publisher of a paperbound version of Charles L. Briggs well-received book *The Wood Carvers of Córdoba, New Mexico: Social Dimensions of an Artistic "Revival"* (\$22.50), reviewed in *Forum* 14(1981):149-51. UNM Press has also just issued a small but beautifully illustrated catalogue, *Santos, Statues and Sculpture: Contemporary Woodcarving from New Mexico*, by Laurie Beth Kalb (Los Angeles: Craft and Folk Art Museum, 1988. Pp. 24, notes, bibliography. \$10.95 paper). While expensive, this booklet serves as a nice introduction to the continued vitality of the santos tradition.

Finally, if you haven't seen it already, try to obtain the catalogue of Ancient City Press (P.O. Box 5401, Sante Fe, NM 87502). Over the past few years, they have published and reprinted some wonderful regional materials on the American Southwest and its folk cultures, including Marta Weigle's excellent work on the Penitentes. Additionally, their series of books based on New Deal documentation now includes *Outwitting the Devil: Jack Tales from Wise County, Virginia*, edited by Charles L. Perdue, Jr. (\$8.95 paper), a dandy little book that would be most suitable for classroom use. Its final chapter on Richard Chase and the Virginia Writers' Project is particularly worth noting.

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Elliott Oring (ed). **Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader.** Logan: Utah State University Press, 1989. Pp. xii + 384, illustrations. \$15.95 paper.

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Occasionally I envy colleagues in "popular" or "indispensable" disciplines who receive three or four new textbooks every year—textbooks such as *American Politics* or *Introduction to Psychology* which arrive complete with a study guide for students, lecture outlines for the instructor and hundreds of exam questions. It is not simply the time-saving devices that are attractive, but the luxury of choosing between a plethora of available texts. For surely the bigger the selection, the more likely it is to find the one text that suits one's teaching style. Elliott Oring noted the sparseness of folklore textbooks which inspired him to edit *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: an Introduction* in 1986 (reviewed in