

## Letters to the Editor

Editor: *Indiana Magazine of History*

On behalf of the six authors who contributed essays to the book, *Material Culture, a Research Guide* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985) that I edited, I would like to respond briefly to Lee Scott Theisen's review of that volume in the September 1987 issue (83:3), p. 298 of the *IMH*.

Theisen writes that "Only one of the writers, Ames, is even associated with a museum. None of the rest of the contributors are museum professionals or seems to have any museum experience." This is not true. With but one exception, each of the authors in his career, has been either a staff member, a guest curator, or a consultant in numerous history museums. Several of the authors have worked in each of these capacities at institutions such as Coopers-town, The Henry Ford Museum, The Hagley Museum, the Minnesota Historical Society, The Strong Museum, the Cincinnati Historical Society, the American Labor Museum, the Detroit Historical Society, the National Society, the American Labor Museum, the Detroit Historical Society, the National Museum of American History, and the Chicago Historical Society. Three of the authors (Bronner, Upton, and Schlereth) have held National Endowment for the Humanities Research Fellowships at the Winterthur Museum for extended periods of time.

Theisen also claims that "Schlereth should be familiar with *Ordinary People and Everyday Life*, edited by James B. Gardener and George Rolle Adams (Nashville, 1983), but the work is not cited." This is also not true. If Theisen had read carefully to p. 21 of the book, he would find that this work is indeed cited. To be specific, it is found in Chapter 1, Note #60, which provides the full scholarly reference on p. 32. It should be pointed out that the Gardener/Adams anthology, while an excellent historiographical survey of recent trends in labor, ethnic, women's, political, urban and rural history, is not, as Theisen implies, a book devoted primarily to "the study of material culture." Rather it is a work written by nine social historians whose professional base is in academia, not museums. Only one chapter, that written by Barbara and Cary Carson, addresses material culture in any systematic way. That is the essay that Schlereth cites.

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Thomas J. Schlereth

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I certainly don't dispute Thomas J. Schlereth's good intentions concerning his book *Material Culture*. I would eagerly invite academics into museums, and would hope that museum personnel

would have more contact with the academic community. Both professions need more interaction with each other.

There is a frequent failure on the part of academicians to understand how to use museums and museum collections. Museums, for their part, often do not interact with the academic community.

I would add that whatever Dr. Schlereth says in his letter about the various author's museum experience is not in his book. How is the reader to know? As to the citation of *Ordinary People and Everyday Life*, I don't regard a footnote as a substitute for a bibliography. An artifact and a museum exhibition must be taken in the context of use and function. Material culture and academic research should go hand in hand.

*Indiana State Museum  
and Historic Sites*

Lee Scott Theisen