

Charlotte Allen WILLIAMS, *Florida Quilts* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1992, xii + 232 p., 137 colour, 82 b&w photographs, preface, bibliography, index, \$44.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper)

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The four articles which can have an immediate and direct influence upon Canadian museum personnel are those by Taborsky, Van Mensch, Ames and Maton-Howarth. Museum workers are already challenged by the questions these authors examine. Taborsky looks at the levels of signs and their respective meanings, which museum professionals serving a diversified public cannot disregard. A multicultural society rightfully requests and expects to see itself reflected in the institutions which are supposed to represent it. Ames offers potential methods for meeting the requests for cultural empowerment from minority groups which are beginning to pressure museum personnel. Van Mensch suggests that the new tendency towards communication and research in museums has challenged traditional object-centred museology. Maton-Howarth's alternative learning system explores the potential which museums have as exciting learning environments. Museum professionals today face these challenges and the papers presented in this new journal can help in understanding and in formulating appropriate methods for positive action.

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This book resulted from a statewide survey of quilts organized by Quilters Unlimited of Tallahassee, known as the Florida Quilt Heritage Project. In undertaking this project, the group attempted "to discover, document, and preserve the history of Florida as expressed through Florida quilts and the lives and times of the quilt makers". The project's steering committee decided to include any quilts currently found in the state, rather than to restrict the survey to only those quilts made in Florida. This decision yielded information on migration patterns of both families and quilts, which remains to be analyzed.

In addition to the book, the project also involved a 1990-1991 exhibit at the Museum of Florida History, which now maintains the project records and photographs as well as the quilts which were donated during the project. This cooperative effort with existing institutions within the state, notably the Museum of Florida History, as well as the Florida Archives, facilitates research by making the project data available for further study.

The publication is organized chronologically, beginning with the first European contact in 1513 and continuing to the present (1988), and combines a history of the state with the documentation of individual quilts and their makers and/or owners. While the attempt to examine state history as a context for the production of quilts is an admirable one, the outcome is rather disappointing. A summary of five centuries, of necessity, must be brief and cursory yet this format serves to reduce the text to the point that it reads like a time line. As is too often the case in such histories, each item is given equal weight, without any sort of conceptual framework to guide readers in separating truly significant developments from the merely interesting. For example, in a chapter entitled "Post-World War II to the Space Age (1946-1975)", references to such diverse topics as an increase in the state sales tax, the integration of public schools, an extension of the Florida Turnpike, the creation of a Board of Regents for the state university system along with a higher membership in the Republican party occur all in one paragraph.

Nor are these developments clearly linked with quilt history. Each chapter begins with a summary of state history followed by a paragraph or two devoted to women's activities and concerns in that period. Discussion then turns to quilts produced during the same time with biographical information on the makers/owners. This structure allows the impression, albeit unintentional, that history is shaped by men, apart from women, whose participation tends to be detached and condensed. Greater attention to social history, as evidenced in the work of researchers such as Laurel Horton, Jeannette Lasansky, and Marsha MacDowell, among others, could have strengthened the book by situating quilt making within the context of women's activities, levels of political involvement, social expectations, and artistic expressions.

As is frequently the case with state surveys, few quilts made by African American and Native American women were registered. The author does note, however, the class and ethnic differences among women during various time periods, but does not examine the project's findings in relation to these analytical categories. There is no attempt at synthesis or any effort toward drawing even tentative conclusions about the survey.

For those interested in quilts, the book works well as a visual resource, with fine colour plates of quilts paired with black and white photographs of quilt makers and their families. Those who expect more from a study of quilt making and women's roles than descriptive details will find this an inadequate publication.

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