

Water and What We Know: Following the Roots of a Northern Life

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the nineteenth century, for example, rigidly distinguished certain things from others, separating “art” objects from handcrafted goods, anthropological artifacts, and scientific specimens. Ultimately, this historically informed project aims to synthesize the relationships that exist among objects, classification, and institutional power in interesting and provocative ways.

Tangible Things features an introduction and four sections: “Things in Place,” “Things Unplaced,” “Things out of Place,” and “Things in Stories—Stories in Things.” Each section consists of case studies from the “six fundamental categories” (15) into which things have been classified since the nineteenth century: anthropology and archaeology, art, books and manuscripts, history, natural history, and science and medicine. If they reinscribe such categories, the authors also destabilize them by discussing the multivalent and mutable character of things—juxtaposing seemingly unrelated items like corncob pipes and computers, for example, and critiquing abiding cultural assumptions of distinctions between “art” and “craft” in their scrutiny of a ceramic plate painted circa 1878–1882 by Cheyenne warrior Nock-ko-ist (Bear’s Heart) for the Gilded Age tourist market. Samantha S. B. van Gerbig’s color photographs significantly enhance the project, and her essay explaining the difficulties of documenting often banal or mundane things (“fill the frame,” she advises, [194]) is, like all the essays in this collection, engaging and well written. A companion website (requiring a password) gives readers access to 406 alternative and enlarged images not included in the text.

Importantly, *Tangible Things* asks how university and college museums—and by extension archives, libraries, and museums of all kinds—might work more efficaciously to engage the public in an understanding of material-based histories. Hierarchies of taste and value remain dominant today. Recognizing how “tangible things”—from urban industrial detritus to the objects collected in Harvard’s museums—contribute to those hierarchies is crucial to a critically informed citizenry.

Water and What We Know: Following the Roots of a Northern Life, by Karen Babine. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. xi, 219 pp. \$17.95 paperback.

Reviewer Barbara J. Dilly is associate professor of anthropology at Creighton University and an Iowa resident. Her research and writing focus on, among other things, rural communities and sustainability.

Karen Babine argues for a revisionist cultural history of the northern Midwest in terms of natural environments, landscapes, and climates.

Her collection of essays blends cultural mythology with hard science in an expansive ethic of place following the perspectives of iconic ecologists such as Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson. Babine outlines an ecological methodology for recording personal and communal experiences and meanings to help us understand that our landscapes are not just physical places but mental and emotional as well. She gets our attention with experiences as emotionally deep as encountering apples, blizzards, and 500-year floods—all part of the ecological and psychological balances that are both life-giving and life-taking. As she retells the stories of weather disasters and their emotional effects on local histories and identities, she reveals an intricate narrative of landscapes we cannot control. Babine says we aren't telling our whole history if we leave out such events and only include what humans do to master their environments. Babine asks existential and spiritual questions about the value and knowledge found in local ecologies, calling human residents to more in-depth sustainable relationships with land, water, and, most of all, the weather. Through story after story, Babine reveals that it is the power of nature to shape culture that we need to comprehend. Her critical contribution is that we need to learn to think of the natural and the cultural as inseparable in order to expand our ecological consciousness and knowledge to face our futures.

Whispers and Shadows: A Naturalist's Memoir, by Jerry Apps. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015. xiv, 145 pp. Bibliography. \$22.95 hardcover.

Reviewer James A. Pritchard teaches in the Department of Natural Resource Ecology & Management at Iowa State University. He is coauthor of *A Green and Permanent Land* (2001).

With *Whispers and Shadows*, rural historian Jerry Apps offers an insightful memoir, inviting bibliophiles to visit the trails on Roshara, his 120-acre family farm in central Wisconsin, as well as places farther afield. A keen observer, Apps notes historical changes in the landscape, comprehensively interpreting a diverse natural history in pond, prairie, woodlot, and wildlife, including the endangered Karner blue butterfly.

Through actions, the author's father expressed a deep appreciation of nature. His greatest gift was an admonition to look in the shadows and listen for the whispers—to sit quietly and wait patiently, witnessing nature's subtle fascinations. The land, writes Apps, is "something that can be loved," yet it "wants to be respected, honored, and valued" (116, 130).