

## A Treasury of Western North Caroliniana

by Thomas Kevin B. Cherry

What am I bid for this beautiful volume? The first in a wonderful prospective series, it contains 287 pages of fine design, straightforward prose, and classic photography.

In *May We All Remember Well*, Robert S. Brunk, president of his own Asheville fine antiques and estate auction company, has pulled together a publication that celebrates the cultures of western North Carolina. Part coffee table book, part auction catalog, part scholarly journal, and part journalism, it is a work that doesn't fit easily into established publishing categories. And that is one of its virtues.

A trained sociologist, Brunk has for years seen objects pass before his gavel for which no documentation exists.

### *May We All Remember Well: A Journal of the History & Cultures of Western North Carolina.*

Vol. 1. Robert S. Brunk, ed.  
Robert S. Brunk Auction Services, Inc.,  
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*May We All Remember Well* is his attempt at rectifying at least a bit of this problem. This first volume contains eighteen articles, including studies on architecture, decorative arts, archeology, music, photography, and commerce. It is a mixture that works well together.

The intention of Brunk's series, which is scheduled to appear once every eighteen months, is to publish research and descriptive reports on the history and peoples of western North Carolina. The plural, "peoples," is intentional. There is no western North Carolina "culture" presented here, but "cultures": Native American, African American, and Anglo-American, in addition to research on one Spanish American and a Japanese American. Most of the articles at least acknowledge the interaction between these cultures, while one or two explore them in some depth.

Another intention of the publication is to create a descriptive record, something along the lines of a published archive. In other words, you'll not find a great deal of analysis and interpretation in *May We All Remember Well*. Like the Foxfire Books, which went into a great deal more detail in

the everyday arts of mountain living, this work seeks to document that which is passing away. As editor Brunk notes, "I am struck by the rate of cultural change to which we are witness. Some people in Western North Carolina describe their childhoods in terms that detail a preindustrial, agrarian life style. Some of the same people now participate actively in a postindustrial, electronic culture." The theme seems to be, "Get it down on paper now, we'll study it later." This documentation is intended to be conducted no matter how "fragmentary the information or informal the process." Being primarily descriptive is a respectable desire, and while no publication can do everything, many of the articles could have benefited from a bit more summarizing interpretation or analysis. After all, our attempts at answering the "whys" are often implicit in our telling the "whos," "whats," "whens," and "wheres."

Since most of the information in this volume already may be found in a variety of secondary sources or are already archived — though highly scattered — this work's most successful documentation efforts are its two collections of oral histories. The first presents the memories of some of the hooked rug workers of Madison County. Like many of the articles presented here, it had its impetus in a specific item. The inspirational relic for this particular piece was a photograph identified with only the words "MHC—Rug Shop." A search ensued and stories were gathered. What emerges is one family's tale of taking a home-based industry, expanding a bit upon it, and then marketing its products to the outside world as a special mountain handicraft. This is a theme that emerges in several of the journal's articles, among them an exemplary study of the Mace family of chair makers and another featuring Sunset Mountain Pottery. The latter shows how marketing can become nearly all-important. There wasn't much "mountain" to Sunset Mountain Pottery; it was made in Seagrove and

shipped west — not unlike the “Indian” tomahawks once found at mountain roadside tourist shops; they were inevitably stamped “Made in some Asian country.”

The other oral history compilation in *May We All Remember Well* is Dellie Norton's reminiscences about her life among the leaves of Burley tobacco. As she says, “you had to do something to live.” Accompanying the interview are the fantastic photographs of Rob Amberg who has documented the sweat-hard work of mountain tobacco growers for at least 20 years. His 22 photos remind the reader of Bayard Wooten's classic shots found in the 1935 Toe River Valley study, *Cabins In the Laurel*. For that matter, a few of them could be dropped into the mountain classic and few would catch on. There is a timelessness to Amberg's style, which is clear and straightforward. He employs no tricks, weird angles, or funny lenses to heighten the power of his images, and he doesn't need to. Their power — and their timelessness — come from his subject, rural families coaxing life from the soil.

Another grouping of articles that proves to be valuable are the three on Mountain visionaries: Rafael Guastavino, a builder of Spanish origin who championed and improved upon an ancient Mediterranean form of tile construction which appears in the arches of the Biltmore house and throughout Asheville's Basilica of St. Lawrence; businessman and developer Edwin Wiley Grove, who brought Grove Park Inn into existence; and George Masa, a Japanese-born hiking enthusi-

ast and photographer, whose work was instrumental in the creation and promotion of the southern portion of the Appalachian Trail. While longer works have been, or are in the process of being, written on these men, the articles gathered here do a fine job of drawing attention to men who (perhaps apart from Grove) have not received the attention their contributions warrant.

This work's greatest strength is its look. The design is exceptional, and the use of photographs is at times stunning. Indeed, some of the best documentary work in the journal is its photography, the gathering together of those snapshots which are in private hands, and those photos of places, people, and especially artifacts that were taken for this publication.

All told, *May We All Remember Well* is a welcome addition to North Carolina studies. I can imagine students in the not-too-distant future flipping through the index in search of a North Carolina History project. I can foresee local historians doing the same, hoping to find the brief biography of an artisan. And I can predict that some poor flea-market hound, relic in hand, will check its contents, intent on establishing the provenance of some dusty find. If continued in the same strong vein, this publication should help them all. And until there is a volume two, three, and four, it will do just fine as a thoroughly entertaining coffee table book and leisurely “flip-through.”

*Going once. Going twice...*

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