November 2013

From the Reference Desk

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4972

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Homespun Cultural Artifacts: from page 42

takes me a whole year of looking before I will make the purchase but it is worth the effort and is always a great present to myself.

"I don’t think of my collection as a significant cultural record, but it is certainly a record of the births and other events that mean a great deal to me and my family. With the births of grandchildren I still purchase special quilts for those overnight sleepovers. There is nothing more soothing than to see a little one all snuggled up in a quilt that was made with so much handwork, time, and love. I loved to watch my kids while they slept under the quilts; they always seemed so peaceful and I still see the same with T and Colby.

"In 100 years, I hope the quilts will be passed down to my children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and on and on. Till the threads are bare and there are just scraps left.”

There are scholars, of course, who think quilts are very significant cultural, albeit personal, records, along with tapestries, cross-stitch, and embroidery. As Peg intimates, a quilt can evoke a different era or even a different person; you can almost feel another set of hands tucking the child in and keeping him safe and warm.

I collected a quilt from my neighbor's trash pile this morning.
There is an index replicated in each volume and it is generally useful. But because there is so much information here and the possibility exists to miss related statistics, the index could have benefited from “see also” references. For instance, in looking for figures on Mexican immigration one can locate relevant tables listed under Mexico - Immigration From. However, this is not the full story. Unless you think to look under the broader subject Immigration, you will miss related statistical tables listed under the subheading Border Control that contain statistics on deportation of Mexican Nationals. (One would assume that the search function in the online version allows for more direct linking between related statistics.)

Nonetheless, Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition is a resource that academic libraries and larger public libraries can ill afford to be without. It is more than a collection of some 37,000 data series. This reference work is a result and a reflection of remarkable quantitative scholarship by numerous experts. It combines raw tabular data with explanations and definitions contained in chapter essays and appendices. This information, coupled with supporting bibliographies, produces a source of enduring value. It will serve as the standard for years to come.

Oxford University Press has also produced an important, but at the same time, very different work. The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature (2006, 0195146565, $495) will cause grateful smiles from librarians, library school students and education majors studying children’s literature.

While many of the entries here highlight children’s literature in the United States and Great Britain, coverage is international and diverse with 37 other countries and regions treated. Specific topics range from Elves and Fairies to Electronic Media and from Book Design to Superheroes. In addition, numerous genres and literary types are included, along with entries discussing hundreds of authors and illustrators, to produce a reference work with few, if any, serious content omissions.

Its alphabetical arrangement and topical and general indexes makes this encyclopedia accessible, as well as content rich. But use of more “see” references in the general index would also enhance this access. For example, there is no entry for homosexuality in the general index. However, there is an article on Gay and Lesbian Literature that can only be located if you look under that specific entry in the index. And another area that could use more attention in any future edition is the bibliographies. Not all entries have a list of further readings and many that do contain only one or two references. Helping to compensate is a selective bibliography of standard, general sources listed in the last volume. On a more positive note, black and white photos and illustrations help break up what is a dense and text rich set. There are also numerous lists of award winning titles, as well as a short directory of noteworthy children’s literature collections that readers will find of use.

The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature will be most at home in academic collections. However, given that many lay readers will also find it valuable, larger public libraries will no doubt be drawn to it. While covering similar territory as the well received International Companion Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature (Routledge, 2004, 0415290538, $395), the 3,200 entries in this four-volume set offer a more traditional encyclopedic, accessible approach. Comprehensive collections will want to have both of these titles. Those interested in a one volume work for either reference or circulating collections should also consider the Continuum Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature (2005, 0826417787, $29.95).

The Scribner imprint of Thomson Gale has also released a title that will strike a chord with both academic and public libraries. Edited by Stanley Wolpert, the Encyclopedia of India (2006, 0684313499, $475) is a four-volume set that is distinctive in its comprehensive treatment of this ancient and complex country. A total of 580 articles by more than 200 scholars cover a diversity of topics. Numerous articles shed light on arts, geography, politics and government, economics, history, religion, educational institutions, finance and financial institutions, foreign relations, philosophy, science social relations, and the role of women. Subjects as diverse as Central Banking and the Caste System, Environmental Consciousness and Ethnic Conflict, and Sufism and Stock Markets are given equal billing. The set is both visually interesting, as well as attractive, with eight pages of color plates in each volume along with numerous black and white photos and illustrations. Helping to provide access to the articles are a thematic outline of contents, “see also” references, and a good general index. Individual chronologies for India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka offer historic context and bibliographies for each entry provide leads to other sources. In addition, there is an annotated general bibliography of selected sources, as well as a glossary.

The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry (2006, 031332381X, $599.95) is an important set that will complement a variety of libraries. Edited by Jeffrey Grey this five-volume encyclopedia contains more than 900 articles by close to 350 scholars. However, it is the comprehensive nature of the coverage that is most impressive. From the Colonial writing of Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley to articles discussing Digital poetry and Feminist Poetics, this Encyclopedia captures the development and diversity of American poetry and its poets. The influence of movements like the Black Mountain School and the San Francisco Renaissance, as well as genres like Performance and Slam Poetry are also chronicled. In addition, other articles explore the relationship of American poetry to other types of writing ranging from Caribbean to Irish to Yiddish. Access to specifics is provided by a thorough index, an alphabetical list of all entries and lists of the pre 20th Century poets, as well as the 20th and 21st Century poets covered. In addition, thematic entries grouped by subtopics. Cross referencing is provided by bold lettering within articles and there are selected lists of primary and secondary sources at the end of each entry.

Many of the individual poets here are covered in sources like Gale’s Multivolume Dictionary of Literary Biography and there is overlap in coverage with the Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature (2004, 0195156536, $495) in terms of literary movements, etc. However, there is no other set with the comprehensive, up-to-date focus on American poetry offered in these five volumes. Main and branch public libraries, as well as high school and undergraduate collections should give it serious consideration.

Librarians and lexicographers alike will be grateful to learn of a recent Routledge publication. The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (2006, 0415212588, $175) continues and expands the legacy of Eric Partridge, whose Dictionary of continued on page 48

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Slang and Unconventional English was published in eight editions stretching from 1937 until 1984. Partridge's emphasis was on the English of Great Britain and her dominions. The two-volume New Partridge covers this territory, as well as American slang. In fact, according to Editors Tom Danzell and Terry Victor, a criteria used in assembling the dictionary was to include words and phrases "used anywhere in the English speaking world." Danzell and Victor also focus their efforts on the 60 years since the end of World War II. Some 65,000 entries are included. And to their credit "no term is excluded because it might be considered offensive as a racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, or any kind of slur." As such, this work attempts to honestly reflect the "cultural transformations" embodied by slang and unconventional English since 1945, a particularly turbulent and change laden time. There is little doubt that some readers will be offended. But the words defined in this dictionary are used, and regardless of their offensive nature, they are part of modern culture. Each entry contains the headword or phrase, part of speech, definition, geographic location, date, examples of usage and their published sources. If a source is cited more than five times it is listed in the bibliography at the end of volume two.

The New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English will be seen by many librarians, both academic and public, as a standard source and a necessary purchase. Cognizant of the ever changing nature of slang and unconventional English, Routledge and the editors of the New Partridge, are soliciting contributions for future editions. There is a submission form along with information on how to contribute at http://www.partridge-slang.com/contribute.html. This leads to the obvious question as to if and when the New Partridge will be available electronically.

Sharpe Reference's Colonial America: An Encyclopedia of Social, Political, Cultural, and Economic History (2006, 0765680653, $499) should be welcome by students of early American history. It is the first multivolume encyclopedia to tackle North American Colonial history since Scribner's landmark Encyclopedia of the North American Colonies published in 1993 (available used from Amazon). Edited by James Climent, this new set reflects the efforts of over 90 contributors and assesses the formative years of American history in its varied and numerous guises.

The Encyclopedia is divided into four major sections with the first being a collection of seven thematic essays that discuss "arts, culture, and intellectual life; economics, business, and labor; gender issues; military and diplomatic affairs; politics and government; race and ethnicity; and religion." This is followed by the alphabetical entries covering a diversity of topics ranging from Child Rearing to the Continental Congress; Puritanism to Prostitition; and from Slave Communities to the Sons of Liberty. There are also numerous biographical sketches and entries devoted to geography, health and medicine and the colonizing efforts of the various European powers including England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. A major feature is the set of chronologies that make up the third section. These timelines relate to the seven introductory essays with an additional chronology on scientific and technological advances. In addition, there are chronologies related to the development of the original 13 British colonies and one each on the French and the Spanish colonies in North America and the Caribbean. The fourth and final section is a collection of 60 primary sources running the gamut from Columbus's Letter Announcing His Discoveries in the New World to the Declaration of Independence.

Colonial America: An Encyclopedia of Social, Political, Cultural, and Economic History is a solid contribution and a worthy addition to serious American history reference collections. While it does not replace Scribner's Encyclopedia of the North American Colonies, this new set does act to update and complement it and should garner interest from academic and public libraries.

School leadership and administration is a serious topic in education programs nationwide and a new release from Sage Publication's focuses on its complexities. The Encyclopedia of Educational Leadership and Administration (2006. 0761930876, $325) is two-volume set that offers practical and thorough coverage in more than 600 entries. Contents range from articles on administrative theory and models to biographies of those people having made a discernable impact on the field. There are articles on specific issues like Academic Freedom, Discipline in Schools and Privatization, as well as those on pragmatic concerns like Budgeting, Salary Models, and Licensure and Certification. Other articles cover concerns like school size and safety, tests and testing, and topics related to psychology and human development. The treatment is scholarly, but unafflicted and direct. Standard added value features include article specific bibliographies, a topically arranged Reader's Guide, solid use of "see also" references, and a thorough general index.

The Encyclopedia of Educational Leadership and Administration is worthy of its subject. I will prove useful for factual definitions, as well as background information on numerous relevant issues. This set will have particular appeal in academic circles with both students and faculty finding it a handy, broad ranging treatment of an essential, multi-dimensional topic. Active practitioners may also want a copy on their shelves, or possibly accessible through their school libraries.

As is our habit this time of the year, we are providing some recent "Best of Reference" lists for your edification. Most, if not all of, the titles mentioned here are items that both reference and collection development librarians will want to ponder; hopefully together.

The RUSA Reference Sources Committee's Outstanding Reference Sources 2006

Chaired by Matthew Wayman, Pennsylvania State University-Abington College Library, RUSA's Reference Sources Committee has announced its 2006 list of Outstanding Reference Sources for small and medium-sized libraries. (Check out the May issue of American Libraries p. 40-43, for brief reviews and more information)


of the slaughterhouse itself and the different jobs in which people are engaged. Additional sections describe sexual abuse and prostitution, child labor practices, and then the rise of the Socialist Party in the US at that time. What is most amazing, Johnson tells that meat packing practices today, though improved over the last hundred years, still remain suspect from human rights, safety and sanitation points of view. Vegetarianism is sounding better and better.

At the end of each chapter, the reader is provided open-ended questions that could serve as topics for student papers or even for further reflection.

If this volume is any indication, teachers and librarians are given excellent background information to knowledgeably suggest and discuss this genre of literature.

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The New York Public Library’s
Best of Reference 2006 list includes:


