

2006

Book Review of "Perishable Material Culture in the Northeast", edited by Penelope Ballard Drooker, 2004, New York State Museum Bulletin 500, The University of the State of New York, The State Education Department, Albany, New York, 240 pages, ill., maps, \$29.95 (paper).

Elizabeth S. Peña

Follow this and additional works at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha>

 Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Peña, Elizabeth S. (2006) "Book Review of "Perishable Material Culture in the Northeast", edited by Penelope Ballard Drooker, 2004, New York State Museum Bulletin 500, The University of the State of New York, The State Education Department, Albany, New York, 240 pages, ill., maps, \$29.95 (paper).," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 35 35, Article 28.

<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol35/iss1/28> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol35/iss1/28>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Northeast Historical Archaeology by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

In historical archaeology, we know that both the archaeological and documentary records are biased, and we strive to work with these different sources of information to gain an understanding of past lives. In her introduction to this volume (Chapter 1), Penelope Ballard Drooker reminds us to consider evidence we seldom see—basketry, textiles, nets, and other perishable materials.

Many of the studies in this volume are based on re-examinations of museum collections that had been excavated many years ago. Despite problems stemming from early-20th-century invasive conservation treatments (often far removed from today's minimalist conservation aesthetic), and the absence of good archaeological context, it is clear that the analysis of extant collections holds considerable potential for enlarging our understanding of these artifacts and their significance. Experts in textiles and basketry will be particu-
 Laub, J.S. Illingworth, J. H. McAndrews and D.C. Hyland, suggest that basketry and textiles might well be more significant cultural markers than the stone tools and debitage that constitute the usual hallmarks of prehistoric archaeological analysis. Chapter 6 presents evidence of cordage twist analysis from the Late Woodland Allegheny Plateau, by William C. Johnson and Andrew J. Myers, suggesting evidence of cultural continuity despite changes in ceramic technology and decoration. Chapter 7, by Christina B. Rieth, and Chapter 8, by James B. Petersen and Malinda S. Blustain, make similar points in analyzing cordage and fabrics to posit the existence of social networks; Rieth bases her work on cord-marked ceramics, while Peterson and Blustain use rare survivals of fabrics and other perishable materials. These chapters serve to remind us that all archaeologists should be mindful of artifacts that do not become part of the archaeological record, whether that absence is due to poor preservation, reuse and recycling, or specific site formation processes. Of course, historical archaeologists are fortunate in having probate records, wills, and other documents to recall elements of material culture that are often missing from our artifact counts. Regarding textiles and similar materials, the documentary record informs us about color preferences in strouds, the social significance of lace, the complex relationship between gender and sewing, and other topics that help us interpret our potsherds and pipe stems.

PERISHABLE MATERIAL CULTURE IN THE NORTHEAST, edited by Penelope Ballard Drooker, 2004, New York State Museum Bulletin 500, The University of the State of New York, The State Education Department, Albany, New York, 240 pages, ill., maps, \$29.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Elizabeth S. Peña

While textiles, basketry, cordage, and similar materials are generally poorly preserved, it certainly behooves all archaeologists to take care to look for them. DeeAnn Wymer and Virginia Wimberley, in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, examine organic preservation on Hopewell copper artifacts. Because the archaeological association of organic artifacts with metals leads to organic preservation through the formation of pseudomorphs (corrosion products that take the form of the decayed organic item) and because copper acts as a natural biocide, slowing biological degradation, it is important to examine metal objects for traces of attached organic materials. This awareness might alter the way such objects are treated in the field and in the lab.

Chapters 9 through 11 focus on finds from the 17th through the 19th centuries, and as such are likely to be of greater interest to historical archaeologists. Chapter 9 presents a description, by Margaret T. Ordoñez and Linda Welters, of textiles and leather from archaeological sites such as RI-1000, the Cross Street back lot (part of Boston's "Big Dig"), and others. Since many of us have read the associated site reports or heard about these sites at conferences, it is particularly interesting to read about these artifacts, which have been subjected to thorough analyses by the authors. At one site (Long Pond, Connecticut), the finds ranged from a wampum headband to a fragment of the King James Bible covered by a wool textile. In the following chapter, the same authors report with greater detail on one of the sites, the Seneca Road Site in Mashpee, Massachusetts, a historic era Wampanoag cemetery. The over 700 fabric samples recovered from the site suggest that the deceased were buried in fairly fine wool, indicative of a late-18th-century date. While their clothing seems to have been similar to that of other rural New England residents, appliqué and trim fragments are similar to Native American decorative techniques known from early-20th-century documents, suggesting that these characteristic decorations were in use by at least the late-18th century.

The volume's final chapter, by Penelope B. Drooker and George R. Hamell, focuses on a 17th-century New England twined bag. Drooker and Hamell combine a detailed technical description, including *comparanda*, with the object's history as teased out from various

documentary sources. The result is an interesting and informative example of the value of a multi-faceted, biographical approach to understanding material culture.

While this book's primary audience may consist of textile specialists and prehistorians interested in ancient technologies, the three chapters that relate to the historical era will be of particular interest to historical archaeologists. These contributions demonstrate the merit of careful analysis and the integration of textile evidence, however sparse, into archaeological interpretation. This book is valuable in its refusal to be limited by disciplinary boundaries, allowing readers with interests in conservation, archaeology, and ethnography to benefit from its broad perspective.

Elizabeth S. Peña
Art Conservation Department
Buffalo State College
1300 Elmwood Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14222

**ROCKINGHAM WARE IN AMERICAN CULTURE,
1830-1930: READING HISTORICAL ARTIFACTS**