



Rockingham Ware in American Culture, 1830-1930: Reading Historical Artifacts

Jane Perkins Claney

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Rockingham ware was an inexpensive brown-glazed ceramic that was ubiquitous in America from the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century. Popular as an antique today, it is regularly sold at venues ranging from flea markets to antique shows. Despite its prevalence in American life for nearly a century and its continued presence as a collector's item, little has been written on this subject of vast interest to collectors, museum curators, historians, and archaeologists.

Jane Perkins Claney has written the first and only full-scale study of Rockingham ware to consider not just its history as a manufactured object but also its role in domestic life. Both an artifact study and a case study in material culture interpretation, this volume offers a totally comprehensive approach to the study of Rockingham ware and serves as a model for future studies of similar objects.

Following a chapter on her methods of identifying and interpreting historical evidence, Claney describes the physical characteristics of Rockingham ware and its production history. She places Rockingham ware within the context of nineteenth-century design and discusses its "Americanization" by U.S. manufacturers. Turning next to usage and meaning, Claney shows how certain Rockingham-ware vessels were used in the expression and maintenance of cultural identity and the enactment of social roles. Exploring gender and class ramifications, she demonstrates that although the ceramic was used at all social-class levels and in all types of communities from urban to rural, the choice of vessel forms and decoration differed markedly. Rockingham-ware teapots, for example, were favored by working-class women and rarely appeared in middle-class homes, while middle-class men living in cities formed the market for Rockingham-ware pitchers decorated with hunting scenes. Rockingham-ware spittoons, on the other hand were used universally—even by women. With the specific cultural roles of Rockingham-ware vessels so clearly understood, the vessels themselves become texts through which to interpret the past.

The book features fifty halftones, fourteen of which are presented also in color, and an extensive archaeological database.

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