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Anita J. Slack, Editor

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Artifacts from Modern America. By Helen Sheumaker. Daily Life through Artifacts. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2017. 347 pages. Acid-free \$100 (ISBN 978-1-4408-4682-3). E-book available (978-1-4408-4683-0), call for pricing.

If one were to land on Earth from another planet and were curious about how and why Americans used microwaves, cellophane, or penicillin, one's alien curiosity might be sated with *Artifacts from Modern America* by Helen Sheumaker. This look at the twentieth century's material culture approaches each artifact in the same manner medieval farming tools might be approached: with physical descriptions of the artifacts, as well as context about the long-ago humans who might have used, seen, or experienced them.

The book is organized into ten sections ("Health and Medicine," "Religion," "Entertainment," and so on) and examines only forty-eight items. The preface doesn't explain the selection process, which this reviewer was curious about (narrowing down one hundred years of American material life into forty-eight items surely required a process worth detailing), but it does state that the book "tells the story of the 20th century in the United States through the objects that formed the texture of everyday life on intimate and public levels" (viii) and that it's "as much a history of daily life in the United States as it is an examination of the material culture of everyday experience" (ix).

Each artifact's entry includes a black-and-white photo and describes the physical object; gives a brief history of the object, its accessories, and previous and subsequent incarnations; and details its significance in the twentieth century at large. The best entries are for items that have come and gone. The entry for "Moonshine Still" is a great five-page essay on Prohibition and how Americans reacted; the entry for "Gas Ration Card, World War II" is a mini-history on the American home front's response to war. Less successful and much more awkward are the entries for artifacts that still exist. It's almost an out-of-body experience to be a modern American who owns a typewriter and read how the modern American once used an artifact called a typewriter. (Full disclosure: this review was typed on a computer.)

While an interesting assortment of items, the range of extremely broad ("Refrigerator," "Electric Chair") to extremely specific ("Bob's Big Boy," "Lorna Doone Patched Blue Jeans," "Ken Kesey's Merry Prankster Bus") makes for a tricky jumble. A part of the Daily Life through Artifacts series, the book would be more successful if it had chosen one path over the other, but as it is, the book is recommended for academic libraries at institutions with American studies or pop culture programs.—Tracy Carr, *Library Services Director, Mississippi Library Commission, Jackson, Mississippi*

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Correspondence concerning these reviews should be addressed to "Reference Sources" editor, Anita J. Slack, Liaison and Instruction Librarian, Capital University 1 College and Main Columbus, OH 43209 email: aslack8@capital.edu.