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Mapping the History of the State:

The Historical Atlas of Maine

by Stephen J. Hornsby

The *Historical Atlas of Maine* may well be one of the most significant scholarly achievements in the humanities to come out of the University of Maine. Conceived in the late 1990s, the atlas was published by the University of Maine Press in 2015. It represents an enormously ambitious attempt to map the historical geography of the state from the end of the last ice age to the end of the millennium in 2000. The atlas combines maps, images, and text in 76 two-page plates to tell the principal stories of the people who have lived over the past 13,000 years in the place we now call Maine. More than 30 faculty and students, mostly at the University of Maine, brought decades of scholarship, as well as a considerable amount of new research, to the project. No other U.S. university has produced such a comprehensive cartographic treatment of an individual state.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, several major historical atlases were published in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. These atlases may have influenced the late Burton Hatlen, professor of English and director of the National Poetry Foundation at the University of Maine, to conceive of a historical atlas for Maine. In the late 1990s, Burt served as interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. In that leadership position, he saw the atlas as a way of bringing faculty in his college together in a joint, interdisciplinary project that would highlight the research strengths of the college and contribute to the university's outreach mission to the state. Initial funding for the atlas came from a state appropriation in 1999 that was matched by the University of Maine System and University of Maine. The National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the largest grant UMaine has ever received from them; a smaller but essential grant from the Bernard Osher Foundation rounded out much of the funding.

Being supported by a great deal of public money, the atlas had to be accessible to the people of Maine and to anyone interested in the state's history. To tell the story of Maine, editors Stephen J. Hornsby and Richard W. Judd focused on Native peoples, Euro-American exploitation of the state's resources, and environmental

history. These themes were set in the larger regional context of New England and the neighboring Canadian provinces. Four chronological sections provided structure to the atlas: "From Ice Age to Borderland, 13,000 BP–1790;" "Shaping Maine, 1790–1850;" "Industrial Maine, 1850–1890;" and "Maine in the Modern Era, 1910–2000."

The form of the atlas was also vital. Atlas plates had to be designed so that they could be easily read. Text was reduced to a minimum, shifting the weight of storytelling to maps and images. Topics of the plates vary widely, ranging from "Exploring the Gulf of Maine," "Growth of Settlement," and "Wabanki Mapping" to "Textiles," "French Canadian Immigration," and "Vacationland." The project's cartographer Michael Hermann produced hundreds of clear and legible maps and graphs. These were supplemented by dozens of historical maps and images. Final design was undertaken by Michael Alpert at the University of Maine Press. This combination of scholarship and design proved enormously attractive when the atlas was published. The first printing of 3,000 copies sold out in a week. Maine now has an historical atlas that provides a powerful visual narrative of the state's history, and an atlas that has few peers anywhere in the world. 🐟



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