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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

An Upriver Passamaquoddy. By Allen J. Sockabasin. (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House, 2007. Pp. 160. \$15.00 paperback.)

There are numerous classic books about Maine that enlighten, amuse and tell the story of the Pine Tree state: Helen Hamlin's *Nine Mile Bridge*, Jack Havey's *West Sullivan Days*, Elisabeth Ogilvy's *High Tide at Noon*, Ruth Moore's *Candlemas Bay*; and John Christie's more recent *Sugarloaf*. But there are few that offer more profound and disturbing insights than Allen J. Sockabasin's *An Upriver Passamaquoddy*. Although it could have benefited from a more vigorous and enlightened editing, the work is essential for anyone wishing to understand Native American life in Maine.

The author outlines the often well-meaning, but ultimately destructive impact of European and American culture on the world of Native American tribes in the state. He acknowledges the power of language and its ability to rob Native Americans of their heritage. He spares no actors in his study. Sockabasin shows that Indian agents, the Catholic Church, and game wardens, among others, exacerbated the plight of Amerindians.

In addition to these somewhat predictable indictments, he frankly admits his own personal shortcomings, and the failures of his people to preserve the best in their past culture and make it a part of their present. He critiques Indians' acceptance of the welfare state, arguing that it only reinforces dependency and erodes community life. Sockabasin is unsparing in his self-criticism. During the Indian Land Claims case, he plea bargained and served six months for arson and other charges; he was present at the White House when President Jimmy Carter signed the \$81.5 million Land Claims Settlement act of 1980. To this day, he is against gambling on Indian territory and he also opposes a LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminal in northeastern Maine. Despite efforts to improve the situation of Amerindians, he continues to observe a declining standard of living among his people. He points out that their plight has gotten worse since the Land Claims Settlement, as they grapple with more drug abuse, unemployment, and tribal schisms.

Stark and revealing, Sockabasin adds detail and complexity to tradi-

tional narratives concerning Maine's Amerindians. The author's conclusions are both affirmations of his heritage and lessons to future generations: "I'm over sixty years old and I'm just now beginning to understand and accept that my creator created me to be a proud Passamaquoddy man and until he calls me, I need to live and play a positive role for our children. I don't need to drum on a tom-tom or carry an eagle feather . . . to prove my spiritually. I just need to stand tall as a 'Native-Speaking Passamaquoddy Warrior' and show our children that I don't smoke or use alcohol or drugs, that I will always respect and care for them, that I will always stand with and fight for those who are hungry and those who are in need of emotional and spiritual support, that I will never take anything that belongs to them, and that I will always protect Mother Earth." (155-156)

This is a profound and heart-felt book, one which should be read by anyone wishing to know about the true state of Maine and the disturbing and poignant history of the Native American peoples within its borders. The people of Maine, Euroamerican and Amerindian alike, owe the author a debt of gratitude. This book will simultaneously leave readers challenged, enlightened, and anxious about the future of tribes across the state.

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The Murder of Mary Bean and Other Stories. By Elizabeth A. De Wolfe. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2007. Pp. 203. Notes, illustrations. Paper \$24.95)

Elizabeth De Wolfe has published in one edition both the authentic story of the murder of a Saco, Maine, mill girl and the almost immediate printing of a dime novel version of the same story. Both renditions — the objective version and sensational offshoots — reveal the strong public reaction to the forces of societal change brought on by industrialization and urbanization in the mid nineteenth century. The two versions also show the high level of public concern about allowing young women to leave home to work in the new industries.

De Wolfe reconstructed the actual story using meticulous research in a number of sources: New England newspapers; court, factory, and

vital records; and town and family histories. Mary Bean, who was really Berengera Caswell, left the family farm in Canada with her sisters to work in the Amoskeag Mill in Manchester, New Hampshire. There she met and became intimate with William Long, a laborer in a machine shop. When she suspected she was pregnant, she moved to Biddeford where Long was then working. After she met with Long, she found that marriage was not an option. At the time, according to the author, abortion before quickening was legal without social stigma, and the couple decided to seek medical help. Using a connection at work, Long found Dr. James Smith in Saco. Long borrowed the money for the abortion and arranged for Berengera to board with Dr. Smith. When Long asked Smith if he wanted to know the name of his new boarder, Smith said he would call her Mary Bean.

After various herbs and medicines proved ineffectual, Berengera consented to the radical procedure of having Smith insert a wire instrument into her womb. It led to her death. Smith panicked and tied Berengera's body to a board and placed it in a brook near his house that flowed into the Saco River. It was late December. The body became wedged under a culvert and was not discovered until spring. Smith was soon identified as the possible culprit. During the sensational trial that followed, a young Irish immigrant, Ann Coveny, who worked for the Smiths, was the key witness. She revealed Dr. Smith's role in Berengera's death. William Long testified that he had had intimate relations with Berengera. Newspaper coverage was extensive.

Smith found a noted Portland lawyer for his defense in Nathan Clifford who was so distinguished in national affairs that he was eventually appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The prosecution and the press portrayed William Long as a seducer, Berengera as his victim, and Smith as the murderer. Although Smith was convicted and sent to prison, Clifford's legal skills resulted in Smith's release from prison on a reduced charge of manslaughter. He died soon after of tuberculosis, possibly contracted in prison. Apparently, William Long learned his lesson and soon married a Saco mill girl.

Although the societal fears presented and commented on in the press from the public trial were apparent, the lessons from the dime novels published immediately following the trial were even starker. More than cautionary tales, the novels were sensational, prurient, salacious. Under the guise of appealing to public morality by urging young women to find satisfaction in home life and young men to work hard to become providers, the novels devoted a great deal of space to sexual crimes, espe-

cially rape and seduction. The novels portrayed young men, fortified by hard liquor, who murdered respectable citizens for money, rather than finding respectable employment. These young men went from murder to seduction with no intent of marriage. Seduction led to pregnancy and death by an abortionist.

One novelist, “Mrs. J.A.B.,” had no compunction about calling one of “her” titles, *The Murder of Mary Bean*. Although the story ends the same way, with Mary’s death at the hands of an abortionist, there are many differences in the events. In the novel, Mary leaves her fiancé in Canada to follow George Hamilton, her seducer, to Manchester. Finding herself virtually abandoned, she accepts employment in the mills. The end comes swiftly. Mary, by then pregnant, asks Hamilton for the date of the promised marriage. He refuses and takes her to Boston to the house of a Dr. Savin “*but never was seen to come from it.*” (123) Interestingly, the novelist gave Mary’s sister, Ellen, who stayed home, a reward for her virtue. She marries the abandoned fiancé. A companion title, *A Confession of George Hamilton for the Murder of Mary Bean*, by “Rev. Mr. Miller,” delineates the downfall of George Hamilton, ending with his suicide in prison.

By publishing these stories, Elizabeth De Wolfe has helped illuminate a fascinating story framed in the context of social fears over industrialization and urbanization. Her work also provides a lens into the widespread belief that the erosion of the family was caused by the growing independence of women.

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American Silk, 1830–1930: Entrepreneurs and Artifacts. By Jacqueline Field, Marjorie Senechal, and Madelyn Shaw. Texas Tech University Press (2007)

On a recent University of Maine travel/study trip to China, our group toured a mill where we viewed the entire silk manufacturing process: from the trays of worms munching on mulberry leaves, to the display of tightly wound white cocoons, followed by the highly skilled workers unwinding the impossibly fragile strands of silk from the cocoons and reeling the strands together — twisting them onto bobbins which fed the silk threads onto seemingly ancient (but mechanized)

looms that wove complex designs into lengths of fine cloth. In the display room just outside the factory, we admired the intricate patterns and the lovely textures, but few of us could afford to buy the beautiful silk. The tour confirmed my limited impressions about silk: it is an exotic and expensive fabric made in foreign places.

But a new book on the silk industry challenges these impressions, revealing a time when American silk manufacturers produced more silk than any other country and at a price that most consumers could afford. *American Silk, 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs and Artifacts* is divided into three sections that examine the history of three silk mills. In part one Marjorie Senechal looks at the Nonotuck Silk Company of Northampton Massachusetts; in part two Jacqueline Field focuses on the Haskell Silk Company of Westbrook, Maine; and in part three Madelyn Shaw examines H. R. Mallinson & Company of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Together, these three case studies illustrate the rich history of American silk, “from moth to cloth” (p. 8).

Each of these mills specialized in a different product within the silk industry, so that collectively they reflect an accurate cross section of the industry. Nonotuck perfected production of the smooth silk threads necessary for the new (mid-nineteenth century) Singer sewing machines; Haskell specialized in good quality but basic silk “staples” fabric; while the Mallinson Company offered more style-conscious novelty fabrics. All three companies faced the challenges inherent in the industry: the vagaries of the Japanese raw silk market, the persistent impression that American silk was inferior to imported silk, and the introduction of “artificial silk” (rayon) in the 1920s, a product that hastened the decline of American silk.

While each of these case studies is a fascinating story, readers of this journal will probably be most interested in the Haskell silk mill in Westbrook, Maine. James Haskell learned the silk trade at the Nonotuck Silk Mill in Massachusetts before buying an old cotton mill on Saccarappa Falls and moving to Saccarappa (later Westbrook) in 1858. He made money in that cotton mill during the Civil War, but after the war he turned his attention to silk, building a new mill at the site in 1874. Initially, he imported raw silk from a region near Shanghai, but later he relied upon Japanese raw silk. Like the Nonotuck mill, Haskell first produced silk thread, but in 1882 he began weaving silk cloth. The mill grew rapidly, operating 75 looms in 1888, and 250 looms with 300 workers by 1902. Haskell marketed the silk first in Maine and New England, but eventually turned to larger markets across the country.

Author Jacqueline Field, a former costume curator and professor of textiles and design at Westbrook College, attributes the success of the Haskell mill to its focus on good quality staple weaves, a business strategy that allowed Haskell to market his fabric as the finest quality silk at a time when many manufacturers sold cheaper and less durable varieties. This strategy proved successful for over forty years. When styles changed in the 1920s, consumers became interested in a greater variety of silk with various finishes and newer designs. Some manufacturers, such as the Mallinson mills, responded to changing fashion with new fabrics and updated prints. The Haskell management, on the other hand, continued to manufacture the solid staples for which they were known. The silk industry as a whole faced difficulties in the 1920s when the rising cost of Japanese raw silk and an emerging interest in synthetic materials such as rayon resulted in decreased demand for silk. While some companies were able to adapt, Haskell's aging management team and inflexible production policies contributed to the demise of the company. The Haskell Silk Company went bankrupt in 1930.

This book guides the reader through the silk industry's business structures, marketing strategies, and product lines. Furthermore, the volume includes descriptions of the care and feeding of silk worms, photos of silk products, newspaper and magazine advertisements, tables on wages and prices, a glossary of silk industry terms, and a summary of silk tariffs. Left unanswered are questions about the silk workers. Did the Knights of Labor, so active in Maine during the 1880s, try to organize the Haskell silk workers? Although Haskell hired local labor initially, did the company hire immigrants when the work force grew at the turn of the century? What did the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics have to say about the silk industry in Maine?

Readers interested in American business history, and particularly the textile industry, will enjoy *American Silk*. For those interested in Maine history, the section on the Haskell silk mill significantly expands our understanding of Maine's textile industry to include not only cotton and woolen goods, but also silk of the highest quality.

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