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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

At the Place of the Lobsters and Crabs: Indian People and Deer Isle, Maine, 1605-2005. By William A. Haviland. (Solon, Maine: Polar Bear and Company, 2010. Pp. 88. Paper. \$12.95.)

This is a difficult book to evaluate. On the one hand, the author has made a valiant and positive effort to capture the ongoing relationship between Deer Isle and its Wabanaki inhabitants over four centuries and to fill in the blanks wherever possible. As such, he adds to our sum total of knowledge about Maine's Native Americans by bringing together a large number of Deer Isle and/or Wabanaki historical facts, map names, inferences, myths, observations, comments, "titillating tidbits," guesstimates, and insights.

By its very nature—especially the long historical sweep and narrow geographical focus—this short (eighty-eight page) monograph is necessarily fragmentary, episodic, and tantalizingly brief in its observations and sourcing, as the narrative jumps from one era or topic to another due to gaps in the historical record. Recorded observations are pretty thin from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries so there are often very few data points to support a true chronology. As a consequence, it might have been helpful to have the Deer Isle fragments set more consistently in a greater Maine or New England context.

Additionally, the entire work could have used much heavier-handed editing (or an editor) to bring the many and various themes to bear in a more coherent fashion, since the chronology and tangents often become as distracting as they are illuminating. There is also another dimension that can be somewhat off-putting. The author clearly cares deeply about Maine's Native American peoples and, in laudatory fashion, makes sure that the reader is acutely—and consistently—aware of the many injustices done to them as various European and later American traders, fishermen, slavers, and settlers arrived and ultimately deprived most of them of their lives and livelihoods and, for the survivors, much of their heritage.

But at times, some of the author's analysis seems a bit tortured. For

example, the author describes how Maine's Passamaquodies killed 5,000,000 gulls a year in the late nineteenth century for the New York millinery trade and rightly points to the pressures limiting Indian traditional subsistence hunting caused by the dominant white culture. However, he also overlooks the equally compelling notion that it is quite possible that a hunting culture people liked to hunt and did so whenever and however possible, and that what seems to us as mass slaughter was in fact a golden opportunity. Because we think badly of killing seagulls—and porpoises for that matter—it does not necessarily follow that all contemporary Native Americans did, any more than that all Wabanakis were paragons of ecological virtue.

On balance, though, this is a lively and ultimately stimulating foray into Maine's history, anthropology, and social criticism, and the numerous photos and hand-drawn maps give us a feeling of intimacy and understanding of the People of the Dawn in one small portion of their historical territory. The creative adaptation of Maine's Native Americans to the often unbearable intrusions into their lives can be an inspiration for all of us.

CHRISTIAN POTHOLM
Bowdoin College

A History of the Italians in the State of Maine. By Vincent A. Lapomarda. Foreword by Salvatore J. LaGumina. (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010. Pp. 233. Hardcover. \$109.95.)

There has probably never been a more fruitful time in the field of Maine ethnic history than this, the opening decade of the twenty-first century. Witness the appearance of such sweeping, deeply-rooted volumes as *Twelve Thousand Years: American Indians in Maine* (2001) by Bruce J. Bourque, *They Change Their Sky: The Irish in Maine* (2000) by Michael C. Connolly, *Maine's Visible Black History: The First Chronicle of Its People* (2006) by H.H. Price and Gerald E. Talbot, and *Voyages: A Maine Franco-American Reader* (2007) by Nelson Madore and Barry E. Rodrigue, to name a few of the finest. Now we have an overarching, highly detailed study of Maine's Italian-Americans.

Because the book is not illustrated, not aimed at a popular readership (though it is well organized and readable), and priced at over one

hundred dollars, one feels it will be lost in the shuffle. That would be unfortunate, for the study is wide, deep, and rock solid, everything the student needs to start a dissertation, everything a down east Italian family needs to understand their heritage in general (and often specific) context.

Father Lapomarda, a native of Portland and currently Senior Professor of History and Coordinator of the Holocaust Collection and the Italian American Collection at the College of the Holy Cross, is a prolific writer on Maine-related subjects. Aside from *The Catholic Church in the Land of the Holy Cross* (2003), an illustrated history of the Diocese of Portland, his earlier works have included such important books as *Charles Nolchini: The Life and Music of an Italian American in the Age of Jackson* (1997) [see *Maine History* review, Spring 2002].

The author divides his study into eight chapters, a retrospect, bibliographical essay, and an index. Chapter topics include early explorers and visitors, society, business, law and politics, religion, culture, physicians, and sports. Though representing only five percent of Maine's present population, Italians have contributed much to the state for a long time. Lapomarda presents, for example, Giovanni da Verrazzano, the first documented European to reach and write about Maine; the great twentieth century musician Walter Piston; Governor John E. Baldacci; and the Cianchette construction family, which is known throughout New England.

He treats with equal respect unsung men and women of Italian heritage who have built up the state's infrastructure and whose contributions make society work, such as nationally acclaimed Maine trumpeter William Vacchiano or Dr. Arthur P. Caliandro, the Portland-born successor to Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. There are some names absent from Lapomarda's study but it would be churlish to fault him for not overstuffing an already excellent book. This book is a must for all Maine public and college libraries.

WILLIAM DAVID BARRY
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Beckets & Hinges: Sea Tales of Old North Yarmouth, Maine. By Captain Charles C. and Abbie B. Oakes. Edited and illustrated by Arnold H. Sturtevant. (Victoria, British Columbia, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2010. Pp. 156. Paper. \$35.)

A curious title for a curious book! But the cover says “any sea chest worth its salt must have good beckets and hinges,” and the editor soon explains that beckets are handles made of rope attached to cleats. This “sea chest,” or book, contains accounts of three long sea voyages, made in the 1890s by Abbie Buxton Oakes; chapters by her husband, Captain Charles Chandler Oakes (a cousin of the editor’s grandmother); and six appendices, contributed by the editor.

Abbie’s first voyage, made when she was a young wife, took her on her husband’s vessel, the *Governor Goodwin*, from New York to Shanghai in 168 days. She describes life in “the Concessions” at Shanghai with many colorful stories, illustrated by a full-page photo of herself, complete with parasol, in a ricksha. Her second voyage took her around Cape Horn, where heavy seas passed over the ship, ruining the kitchen, breaking the stove, and making “‘Joe’ the parrot dance gaily around on his perch, yelling ‘What’s up? What’s up?’” They reached their destination (Valparaiso, Chile) without further incident. She recorded, however, that “earthquakes are of almost daily occurrence here, but do not cause us any uneasiness.” On her third and last voyage, she gave birth to a baby daughter in Java, before sailing to Manila.

Part Two is a series of Captain Oakes’ stories, some just a few paragraphs, others a few pages, long. The first recalls some family and local history. In the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, Yarmouth boat builders launched more than three hundred vessels, and Oakes’ extended family supplied them with numerous captains. Oakes himself, the last of them, experienced a number of hurricanes and typhoons, which makes for exciting reading. In 1906, his ship rescued survivors from a storm-battered ship off Charleston, South Carolina. Much earlier, when he was a sailor on a vessel commanded by an older brother, a hurricane wrecked it. Just when all seemed lost, a British vessel appeared and saved the crew.

He made the sail-to-steam transition, commanding (among others) a steamship that carried passengers and freight to and from the Panama Canal construction site. Later, his company (the Ward Line) sent him to look after repairs to a damaged vessel outside the harbor at Halifax, Nova Scotia. While he was there, a safe distance away, a steamer collided

in the inner harbor with a French ship carrying 400,000 tons of TNT and other ammunition. The resulting explosion, or “Halifax Horror” as Oakes called it, killed more than two thousand people and destroyed 325 acres of Halifax.

There is a good map of Abbie’s voyages, colorful paintings of all the major ships mentioned, drawings by Arnold Sturtevant, and pictures of family members and of many of the places Abbie and Charles Oakes visited. The appendices also contain a biography of Captain Oakes and a genealogical chart. Perhaps these would have been more helpful if included in the introduction, rather than at the end.

The Oakes’ memoirs, written down in 1932, are great reading. Sturtevant edited them well and deserves thanks for bringing them to a wider audience.

RICHARD CONDON
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Emeritus

Joshua Gross Rich (1820-1897): The Life and Works of a Western Maine Pioneer and Wildlife Writer. By William B. Krohn. (Orono, Maine: The Maine Folklife Center, 2010. Pp. 209. Paper. \$14.95.)

William B. Krohn’s *Joshua Gross Rich (1820-1897): The Life and Works of a Western Maine Pioneer and Wildlife Writer* will appeal to historians, wildlife naturalists, back-to-the-landers, and others interested in Maine “characters.” Krohn makes a compelling case for Rich as a serious subject of study by examining his life and writings accompanied by an equally compelling backdrop of the Rangeley Lakes region gradually being transformed from wilderness to a tourist destination for those loving the outdoors.

Joshua Gross Rich, originally of New Sharon, Maine, returned to western Maine from Massachusetts in 1844 with his wife, Mary, and their children. Initially, they settled on one of the oldest farms in the Rangeley Lakes area, their nearest neighbor seven miles distant. Rich’s endeavors ranged across a broad natural expanse and demonstrated an equally broad natural aptitude for adventure and self-promotion. Rich initially applied himself as a trapper, hunter, and fisherman, but also through the years evolved into a shopkeeper, innkeeper, journalist, pen-

sion agent for Civil War veterans, trial justice, humane officer, and regional promoter.

In this ground-breaking study, Krohn draws on numerous primary and secondary sources from various locations. The story of Rich's life and activities is based on letters, town histories, newspaper articles (some by Rich), magazine articles, court records, maps, and census records. The book is divided into three sections: the story of Rich's life, a sample of his writings, and an annotated bibliography of sources. Throughout his book, Krohn connects his subject to major historical events such as the efforts at conservation, the Gold Rush, the Civil War, and the advent of railroads. Given the amount of historical information, the inclusion of a timeline might have been helpful.

Krohn's biography describes a resourceful, perseverant, and sensitive individual. Descriptions of Rich's hunting and fishing excursions capture a time of abundance, opportunity, and growth. Much of Rich's livelihood was made from trapping, guiding hunters, and providing specimens for scientific research. Krohn includes two early advertisements Rich ran in the *Bethel Courier* and the *Oxford County Advertiser* for guide services. Rich was an early promoter of the Rangeley Lakes region, as was his acquaintance, Cornelia T. "Fly Rod" Crosby, a female guide and fellow author of newspaper articles on sportsmen's topics. Rich's boosterism presented itself in his writings on area wildlife and his call for railroad expansion.

Krohn captures the sensitive side of Rich as well. There is a limited, though meaningful, glimpse into his family life. Mary worked as hard as Rich, while maintaining a frugal household. On occasion, she assisted her husband in his fishing excursions. She gave birth to fourteen children, though the couple would survive several of them. After Mary's death in 1884, due to stomach cancer, Rich's column in the *Bethel Courier* related deep feelings of loss and loneliness. Krohn also includes Rich's words of thankfulness for the assistance of neighbors, who searched for, and found, his two-year-old grandson who went missing for more than a day.

Krohn's biographical treatment lays the groundwork for a richer appreciation of the articles provided in the second part of the book. Six selections cover Rich's experience as a pioneer, trapper, and guide, as well as his observations on wildlife. One describes a mysterious cave others have failed to locate, raising questions about its existence. On this subject, Krohn and Kasey Legaard suggest that the possible location of the cave might be determined by employing a viewshed analysis. The au-

thor's annotated bibliography provides a remarkable resource enabling the reader to identify primary sources for future research and exploration.

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