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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Same Great Struggle: The History of the Vickery Family of Unity, Maine, 1634-1997. By Andrea Constantine Hawkes (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House, 2003. Pp. xix + 306. Charts, maps, photos, notes, index. \$30. Paper \$15).

This book is the product of two extraordinary historians. The first is James B. Vickery, who spent half a century collecting Vickery genealogical materials and willed this huge archive to the University of Maine at his death in 1997. The second is Andrea C. Hawkes, who fulfilled a bequest in the Vickery will by transforming this collection into a superb family history. Ferreting out the “human drama” (p. xv) in this mass of genealogical data, she brings to life not only the Vickery family but a slice of American history as well.

What makes Hawkes’s work valuable to the general reader is her transparency in explaining how she worked this mountain of material into a history. Guiding us through the documents, breathing life into obscure names that appear out of the mists of time, filling gaps in the record with thoughtful supposition and logic, she offers a primer on how to craft genealogy into a fascinating family history. The book is valuable secondly because she carefully builds a historical context around this family history, showing us how the Vickerys represented a larger American struggle.

The first Vickery arrived in America during the Puritan Great Migration of 1630-1642. Massachusetts authorities may have recruited George Vickery, a young fisherman, to ply his skills out of the village of Hull. There he settled down and married, and the resulting record shows how Puritan patriarchs and “goodwives” established firm family relations along biblical lines of authority and discipline. Since fishing brought uneven returns and took husbands away from the home, family stability depended heavily on Rebecca, whose duties included an array of subsistence pursuits and a constant round of pregnancy, nursing, and child-rearing.

During interludes between the colonial wars, the Vickerys expanded their family through birth, marriage, and migration to Duxbury, Chatham, Truro, and Boston. When Hannah Parker Vickery’s husband

died at sea, she married Joseph Weston, and the family moved to southern Maine, thereby changing the course of Vickery family history. The Westons settled in Gorham, where young David Vickery joined the militia, participated in the capture of Quebec and Montreal, and served in the Continental Army. With a large family to support, David and his wife Sarah made another fateful decision: they migrated to central Maine. Their relocation drew along relatives and neighbors through a process historians term “chain migration.”

In a chapter titled “Uniting Unity,” Hawkes traces the Vickery pioneers up the Sebasticook River and into the Unity woods. She details their struggle with harsh weather, thin soils, pestering insects, relentless debt, and commercial isolation. The vicissitudes of this “great struggle” accent the importance of family and community in the pioneering process. Farming was predicated on close cooperation between family members, and neighborhood “mutuality” was nothing more than an extension of this cooperation. Family work routines melded seamlessly into larger community rituals: attending church, participating in town politics, maintaining roads, supporting schools, and bartering and sharing. Hawkes spices this story with hints of domestic instability and abuse of patriarchal power, but she dwells considerably more on the importance of the Vickery women in this mixed-crop farm economy. Among other crucial roles, these “republican mothers” were responsible for raising virtuous sons for the new nation at a time when yeoman families were considered the most virtuous in America.

Unity was not immune to the “Ohio Fever” that eviscerated many small Maine towns in the nineteenth century. Going west, as Hawkes points out, was a means by which Mainers expressed their restless quest for self-improvement. In 1862 Charles W. Cook became the first Unity farmer to move to Montana, and several Vickerys followed, beginning an ongoing exchange of people, culture, and capital between these distant family nodes.

James Berry Vickery II returned to Unity in 1895 to manage the family farm, and it was there that James III was born in 1917. A pioneer of a different sort, James III became the first Vickery to attend college. After graduating from Bates, he served in the military then settled into a career of teaching high school. During his college years he began compiling a genealogy, no doubt feeling a sense of duty as the family’s first scholar and the last in this branch of the Vickery family. To complete a masters’ program at the University of Maine, James wrote a history of Unity, which he published in 1954. The present book, then, completes a

lifelong obligation he felt to Unity and to his family. He would have been proud of the outcome.

Genealogy invariably raises the question: why should those of us who are *not* Vickerys care about the history of this particular family? In this case, the answer is obvious: the Vickery family's "great struggle" is indeed Maine's struggle in miniature. The family itself—its systems of work and authority and its changing roles—is deeply embedded in Maine history. Moreover, Hawkes shows how this evolving family structure created community after community as the Vickerys were rooted, uprooted, and re-rooted in Massachusetts, Maine, and Montana. The major themes in this book are themes all Maine families—old and new—can claim: the emotional challenges of emigration, the uncertainties of work and family survival, and the interdependency of individual, family, and community. This book is a tribute to the Vickerys—and particularly to the last in this venerable line—but also a tribute to all Maine people.

RICHARD W. JUDD
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Canning Gold: Northern New England's Sweet Corn Industry: A Historical Geography. By Paul B. Frederic (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002. Pp. 238. \$60.00).

The fields of Maine history and historical geography benefit from scholars like Paul B. Frederic whose passion for their topic is based on personal experience balanced with in-depth research. In *Canning Gold: Northern New England's Sweet Corn Industry: A Historical Geography*, Frederic combines physical geography with agricultural history and fieldwork to document the history and cultural landscapes of the sweet corn canning industry in northern New England. He uses such primary sources such as agricultural reports, scientific data, local histories, historical photographs, meeting minutes, newspaper articles, patents, oral interviews, family memoirs, and the cultural landscape itself to explain the development and success of sweet corn canning during the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. He examines the impact canneries or "corn shops" had on rural communities and the reasons for the industry's decline after World War II.

Frederic explains that northern New England provides the proper growing environment for sweet corn which needs to be harvested in its

milk stage rather than its ripe stage. Other areas, such as the Midwest and the Delmarva Peninsula did not succeed in growing and canning quality sweet corn until the twentieth century when hybrid varieties were introduced that worked well with those areas' climates. Cultural factors, too, aided the growth of the industry which started in Portland, Maine, in 1839. Portland became home to several canning companies, and the technology diffused from there to other places in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Other factors that facilitated the development of sweet corn canning included "the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and the Civil War in the U.S. . . . and the pressure on food suppliers to preserve products for troops" and "exploding urban growth." (pp. 26-27)

The industry matured between 1880 and 1930 when advances were made in the canning process, agricultural methods, and hybridization. With the invention in the late nineteenth century of storage facilities called silos, sweet corn acreage replaced that of field corn on many northern New England farms as farmers found they could grow the sweet corn for cash and then use its waste as dairy cattle fodder. The economic importance of the sweet corn industry, Frederic argues, is reflected in the late nineteenth-century practice of recording sweet corn acreage for the U.S. Agricultural Census.

The sweet corn industry became extremely important to the economy of many farming communities in other ways, too. Laborers found seasonal work harvesting and canning sweet corn. Farmers' wives and children supplemented a family's income by working in the canneries every fall. When corn shop owners appeared to fix corn prices to the producers' disadvantage, farmers and other community members established their own canneries. As a result, the cannery owners recognized the importance and power of the farmer and members of the surrounding community. Frederic's oral interviews and family memoirs illuminate the relationships among all involved in the industry as well as the central place of the cannery in each local community.

The decline of the sweet corn canning industry began with the Great Depression when many owners of small farms stopped growing sweet corn because of the risks of unpredictable markets and the inability to purchase modern equipment which would allow them to remain competitive with western farmers. The farmers' problems, in turn, meant that the small local canneries began to go out of business. Remaining canneries prospered during World War II, but they again experienced western competition during the 1950s. Larger canneries such as B & M and Monmouth Canning Company diversified and canned blueberries,

baked beans, brown bread, and seafood products to remain competitive, but the last can of sweet corn was produced in Maine in 1968, and with that, “the corn shop century ended.” (p. 114)

Frederic’s book will appeal to scholars and lay readers alike. He uses technical information and geographic models to support his ideas, but intersperses information from interviews with over 175 farmers, corn shop owners, and workers, as well as his grandparents’ memoirs and his own experiences on the Frederic family farm. While the entire book contributes greatly to the fields of agricultural history and historical geography, the chapter entitled “People and Corn Shops” is most valuable as it illustrates the connections among community residents, farmers, and corn shop owners. This chapter also describes how canneries shaped the landscape, and it reveals the fate of canning industry buildings and their communities once the industry died. This is an important book on the history and geography of Maine and northern New England.

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Antiqueman’s Diary: The Memoirs of Fred Bishop Tuck. Edited by Dean A. Fales, Jr. (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House, 2000. x + 150 pp. \$15.00).

In 1885, eighteen-year-old Fred Bishop Tuck purchased his first antique, an old highboy, for fifteen dollars. Shortly thereafter, he sold the piece for seventy-five dollars, beginning a lifelong career as a purveyor of the past. In this engaging memoir, Tuck recounts his early years as Maine’s first full-time antique dealer.

The memoir, which covers the period 1890 to 1915, was written in 1930, the fortieth anniversary of Tuck’s career in antiques. Having used his own diaries, photographs, and other records to prepare the memoir, he offers the voice of a dealer in the world of antiques and collectibles. The memoir was never published (nor apparently finished) in Tuck’s lifetime. In her introduction, Martha Gandy Fales reveals that the memoir resurfaced in a Kennebunk secondhand shop in 1982 where her husband, Dean Fales, purchased it and began to research Tuck’s life.

Tuck’s memoir gives readers an inside look at the world of antiquing at the turn of the last century. Growing out of the American Centennial

and the colonial revival movement, interest in antiques blossomed in the late nineteenth century. In this setting, Tuck found two audiences: New Englanders more than happy to sell the old-fashioned furniture and household goods taking up space in houses and barns, and affluent summer visitors to Maine who were eager to buy antiques with which to furnish their summer cottages and winter homes. From the age of twenty, Tuck considered himself a full-time antiqueman. He sold antiques in Exeter, New Hampshire and in Andover, Massachusetts before opening Maine's first antique shop in Kennebunkport in July 1893. Tuck sold his goods in the busy summer season, and during the winter he bought, repaired, and restored his stock.

The memoir elicits both nostalgia and admiration. The contemporary collector cannot help but feel wistful at tales of buying Sheraton sideboards for twenty-five dollars and of simply walking up to an old house, knocking on the door, and buying a treasure trove of material. And while one might grimace at Tuck's practice of stripping the old paint off tables or refinishing the highboys (cardinal sins in the antique world of the twenty-first century), one can't help but admire this savvy entrepreneur. Tuck enlarged his shop, added a tea room (Kennebunkport's first, he claimed), and included a soda fountain. He offered furniture restoration and repair and produced historical postcards depicting antique furniture to educate, and to create, future collectors. He manufactured jigsaw puzzles and scrap books, patented the first moth-proof garment bag, and bottled and sold spring water. He had an astute sense of the market, seeking and selling goods that met his customers' ever-changing interests. While the story reminds us of days gone by, much of Tuck's memoir reads as very modern: tales of spinning a good yarn to help sell an item, auction pooling, and "improving" old furniture by adding inlay, molding, or other "creative" embellishments.

Tuck's lively memoir is filled with interesting and humorous stories of collecting and selling America's past during a period we now relegate to the past. Enhanced by more than two dozen historic photographs, a detailed introduction, and an afterword by Earle G. Shuttleworth, *Antiqueman's Diary* is a charming glimpse into the earliest days of Maine antiquing.

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