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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Little Pine to King Spruce: A Franco-American Childhood. By Fran Pelletier (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2003. Pp. 190. Paper. \$15.)

Fran Pelletier's memoir of his first thirteen years (1925-1938) in Milford, Maine, offers something for all tastes. He blends character sketches, funny stories, and chapters of loss and death into his narrative of growing up. The result brings belly laugh and tears; it conveys the spirit of the Depression days and tells a timeless story. It illuminates Maine's Franco-American culture, but many of Pelletier's experiences were essentially universal.

Reasonably enough, he begins with his parents and grandparents. His mother's parents inspired the book's title, since the grandfather changed the family name—Pinette ("little pine")—to Spruce because that tree, then the "King of the Forest," sounded better to him. But these maternal grandparents play a small role, even though Grampy Spruce owned the store that allowed Pelletier's father to keep food on the table through the hard times. Instead, Pelletier's father's parents, Joseph and Dorilda Pelletier, dominate the early chapters. Joseph, born in 1865 on the Gaspé Peninsula, moved to Old Town in 1871 and became a woodsman. Although illiterate, he was very intelligent and rose to be a timber cruiser and scaler able to carry the complicated scaling figures in his head. His well-educated wife read the whole newspaper to him every day.

Gramp Pelletier's stories enthralled the author; they were clearly fond of each other. Grampy made sure that Fran got his favorite little pig to raise, and later the puppy that he wanted. He did wonders for what later generations would call the author's "self-esteem," encouraging him to read and go to college. Pelletier followed his grandfather's advice, graduating from the University of Maine and moving on to a career in the chemical coating business.

Readers will not soon forget the story of the family pigs and their escape from the pen, with the subsequent ruin of a prized pea patch during the Fourth of July picnic. In the same summer of 1936, Fran was

helping Uncle Ray haul hay when an airplane landed on the field. Three barnstormers emerged, the start of a number of adventures which culminated in the author's first airplane ride. A confirmed flying buff, he enjoyed it until his companions lost their suppers at the end of a flight! Almost as funny was a trip to Augusta with an eventful visit with Governor Louis Brann. Growing up also meant losing a grandmother. Pelletier conveys a child's struggle to understand the meaning of death, while a later death of a childhood friend and neighbor is told with restraint.

At times the reader has to wonder as these stories unfold: how can Pelletier remember so many details from so long ago? He mentions keeping a journal on a trip; were there other journals, and did they provide raw material so many years later? Some minutely detailed conversations must have happened out of his hearing. Did someone present give him a full report? Or did he do what story-tellers since Thucydides have done—put words in his characters' mouths? If so, he tells a great story, and this reader willingly suspends disbelief.

The world of Pelletier's childhood has vanished. The multi-generation, extended-family meals, with tables groaning under piles of home-cooked, mostly home-raised food, only occurred once a week, but Fran, his parents, and three siblings nearly always ate together. They all went looking for a likely pig to raise through the summer and slaughter in the fall, and the men had their cranberrying expeditions. Pelletier's transgressions were of a different time as well. When he and other boys chewed tobacco in school on a dare, the knowing teacher refused to allow them to expectorate: the sickened boys learned a valuable lesson. At Christmas time, Pelletier found the perfect tree for the classroom. He was encouraged to cut it, and later went back for others to sell. Only in the spring did he learn that he'd cut them from a plantation. At twelve he discovered girls and began his first real job hauling wood with the unforgettable Baptiste Michaud.

Pelletier's *Little Pine to King Spruce* is a classic story of growing up in Maine, told with a sense of timing and a delightful play of words that add zest and conviction to this collection of memories. Nothing conveys this better than the last chapter's epic battle with a big trout, which he catches and then releases: "I watched it go. My elation and pleasure were no longer a thing of moment. They would always be there when I thought of my trout, the one I caught and kept in my heart."

RICHARD CONDON
Farmington, Maine

This Splendid Game: Maine Campaigns and Elections, 1940-2002. By Christian P. Potholm. (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003. Pp. 241. Paper. \$25.95.)

Christian Potholm, professor of government at Bowdoin College, has produced a useful book for those interested in Maine political history from World War II to the advent of the twenty-first century. Potholm succinctly reviews each decade's major political results and analyzes various electoral trends. He focuses on a number of what he considers key political contests: Margaret Chase Smith vs. Adrian Scolten for the US Senate in 1948; Edmund Muskie vs. Burton Cross in the 1954 gubernatorial battle; Kenneth Curtis vs. James Erwin for the Blaine House in 1970; William S. Cohen vs. Elmer Violette in the race for the U.S. Congress in 1972; the Maine Yankee Referendum of 1980; and Angus King, Joseph Bennan, and Susan Collins in the 1994 governor's competition.

As an active participant in a number of contests under review (including Cohen's first Congressional race and Angus King's drive for the Blaine House), Professor Potholm provides a detailed analysis at the end of each chapter. Here we learn, among other things, about the influence of television in Muskie's first gubernatorial contest, the importance of walking the Second District in Cohen's election in 1972, and the credibility gained for Angus King's race by the appearance of his book, *Making a Difference*.

Many important details are also provided in the extensive notes at the end of the book. Potholm has put in print his own perceptive observations, as well as those of many of the participants. He also focuses on the significance of the change from September to November general elections in 1960 and the importance of the elimination of the straight ticket box in 1972, which he believes made Democrats more competitive in general and Republicans more likely to attract French-Canadian supporters.

While there is much to praise, this reviewer believes Potholm's book would have been even better had he taken the time to "flesh out" biographical details relating to more of the political figures. Some of the personalities who "also ran" were colorful characters, and in certain cases the presentation of personal data would have assisted in understanding more fully the reasons for their defeat or why their campaigns took a particular direction. For example, Potholm names Henry Bayker (this is an error, as his last name was Boyker) as an Independent candidate for governor in 1952 who garnered all of 1,639 votes in the general election

(less than 1percent). Had Potholm investigated his background, he would have discovered that during the Great Depression, Boyker, who lived from 1878 to 1961, was an avowed Townsendite (a follower of Francis Townsend, who in the 1930s advocated that every American over age sixty be given a pension of \$200 per month with the proviso that the recipient not hold a job and spend the entire amount within thirty days). Later Boyker, a former Bethel selectman, served in both houses of the Maine Legislature as a “pay as you go” Republican, who also opposed the enactment of a state sales tax.

Moreover, Polholm, in my opinion, does not place enough emphasis on the long-term impact of the Brewster-Payne US Senate primary of 1952, which brought to the fore the conservative-moderate political schism that continues to plague the Republican party to the present day. In the 1950s, it proved fatal to some major candidates facing an energized Democratic party, and it handicapped the G.O.P. in presenting the strongest nominees in a number of subsequent primaries and general elections.

Despite these reservations, I believe Professor Potholm has made a significant contribution to Maine political history. His perceptive insights into the Maine electoral process and his astute analysis of the State’s unique political culture over the last sixty years will make this book an indispensable reference for years to come.

STANLEY R. HOWE
Bethel Historical Society

Giving Voters a Voice: The Origins of the Initiative and Referendum in America. By Steven L. Piott (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003. Pp. x, 330. Cloth. \$39.95.)

Giving Voters a Voice is a difficult book to review. On one hand, it is a carefully crafted, well-researched and well documented account of the early twentieth-century origins of the initiative and referendum process in America. Interested readers will get an in-depth look at the process by which populist sentiment was transformed in a variety of ways into a provision allowing citizens to shape public policy. Citizens, groups, and the press pushed hard in some twenty-two states for the initiative and referendum, and those interested in this story will find a great deal of

scholarly material well assembled. On the other hand, the way the author organized the topic—broken down into chapter couplings such as “South Dakota and Oregon” or “Montana and Oklahoma”—is a format that may not appeal to all readers.

The section on Maine (coupled in Chapter Four with Missouri) covers only ten pages, but even in this small a narrative it is possible to gain a flavor of Maine’s populist stirrings, as citizens pushed for additional input into the political and economic processes. Much of the driving force for this reform was economic. As in other states, the large landowners and industrialists held inordinate and unfair power in the legislative process. In Maine, for example, approximately half the state was held by large-scale private timberland owners, but this group paid only 1/9 of the state’s taxes.

Spurred by Roland T. Patten of the *Somerset Reporter*, the pro-initiative forces gathered strength between 1902 and 1906, when both Republican and Democratic parties put initiative and referendum planks in their platforms, and both gubernatorial candidates supported this essential legislation. In 1908, the recommendations passed unanimously in both houses in the Maine Legislature, and in September the voters approved the initiative and referendum by a margin of two to one. Citizens in all sixteen Maine counties voted in favor of the process: a basically conservative Maine electorate had overwhelmingly endorsed the public’s right to initiate policy and vote on Legislative proposals.

As with all reforms, the reformers soon found that the powerful opposing forces could turn them to their own advantage. Citizens had overlooked the ways in which the referendum process could be manipulated to favor powerful corporations. Regrettably, but understandably, the author does not take the Maine situation beyond 1918, and it will be left for future historians to flesh out Maine’s ballot-measure history from that date until the present.

This is definitely a book for specialists and for those interested in turn-of-the-century American populist politics. The casual or generalist reader will find the entire work perhaps too specialized for her or his tastes, although it should be purchased by libraries with a public policy emphasis.

CHRISTIAN P. POTHOLM

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The Interrupted Forest: A History of Maine's Wildlands. By Neil Rolde. (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishers, 2001. Pp. 402. Cloth \$20.00.)

Neil Rolde's *The Interrupted Forest* positions the history of Maine's wildlands within the current debates over forestry practices and the establishment of a national park in northern Maine. He also reminds us that Maine's wildlands fit into the larger global issue of resource utilization and sustainability. The first three chapters explain the complicated story behind Question 2 on the 1996 ballot, which centered on the regulation of Maine's forests. Voters favored three options: 2a, initiated by the Green Party, proposed a ban on clear-cutting; 2b, backed by the "Compact," a coalition consisting of Governor Angus King, paper companies, and mainline environmental organizations, called for reforming woods operations; and 2c, supported by property-rights' advocates, would leave forestry practices as they were. Chapter 1 introduces the issue and explains it from the perspective of the "Compact." Chapter two gives voice to the Green party and other environmentalists involved in the debate. Rolde asserts that the radical motives behind the Green Party's call for a ban on clear-cutting derive from concerns over global warming, which in turn is related to a decrease in forests worldwide. Chapter three relates the concerns of private property owners in the contested areas and considers the different factions among this group. Rolde explains that private property is not the sole issue in the national-park debate; just as significant is the fact that for decades paper company land has been used by Mainers from all walks of life as though it were public property. Any change in that status, some feared, could mean limited access or no access to these lands.

After discussing issues of concern to Mainers today, Rolde explores the history of Maine's wildlands, beginning with their geological formation and use by Paleoindians. He then discusses land use by Native Americans in the years prior to European contact. In the chapter on European contact, Rolde explains the issue of land use from both Native American and European viewpoints, showing how these different perspectives led to misunderstanding, mistrust, and war. In his effort to offer a balanced view of the past and to show the complexity of forestland use, Rolde distinguishes between different groups of English and different groups of Native Americans. Readers will quickly see that the history of Maine's wildlands is filled with conflict: Royalists vs. Puritans; French vs. English; Proprietors vs. squatters; lumbermen vs. paper company owners; woodsmen vs. foresters.

Rolde's work synthesizes information from scholarly histories, interviews, Native American oral traditions, Maine woodsmen folklore, and eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century nature and travel books. Its greatest contribution comes in pulling together all the bits and pieces found in general history books, town histories, and state histories and placing them in proper context in state, regional, and national history. The book will be beneficial to Maine scholars and lay readers alike. He intersperses fact with excerpts from relevant folk stories, poems, and local histories. Anyone interested in the history behind current issues surrounding the northern Maine woods or behind past issues concerning the Indian Land Claims Act, the creation of Great Northern Paper Company, the establishment of Maine's portion of the United States-Canadian Border, the relationship between Massachusetts land proprietors and Maine farmers and woodsmen, or the rise and fall of Maine's woods industries can find this information and more in Rolde's book. Furthermore, Rolde shows how all these events are interconnected through past and present conflict over Maine's wildlands.

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