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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

The McArthurs of Limington, Maine: The Family in America a Century Ago, 1783–1917. By ELIZABETH RING. (Falmouth: Kennebec River Press, 1992. Pp. 87.)

Elizabeth Ring, teacher, researcher, writer, and activist, grew up in Orono, Maine, and pursued a life that revolved around the state and its history. After receiving an M.A. in history from the University of Maine, she became one of the state's first professional local historians. Ring's teaching and love of the subject made her a prominent member in the Maine Historical Society. It was through this organization that she came in contact with the great-granddaughter of Arthur McArthur, Sr. The McArthur family correspondence enabled Ring to recreate the lives of a Maine family in *The McArthurs of Limington, Maine*.

Elizabeth Ring depicts individuals who do not exactly adhere to the popular stereotype of backcountry farmers or woodsmen. The McArthurs were well-educated, well-traveled, and well-informed on national affairs. They were neither great politicians nor wealthy merchants; they were simply upstanding citizens in a small town. This family was unique in that no matter where their journeys took them, members kept in touch through their many letters—letters that Ring effectively uses in her personal history.

Her story begins with a short segment providing some background on Arthur McArthur, Sr. In the 1820s McArthur established a law practice in Limington, and became involved in community projects and in agricultural improvement. It was here that Arthur met Sarah Prince Mil-timore. The two later married and had six children.

The couple's first child was named Arthur after his father. He was followed by William, Catherine, Duncan, Charles, and Malcolm. Right from the start, Arthur Sr. stressed the importance of education and literature to all his children. Arthur Jr. attended a school in Gorham and later Bowdoin College. While Arthur Jr. was in Gorham, the family letter collection began. When Arthur's brothers and sisters left for school, they too wrote letter home and to each other. These letters described childhood experiences and recorded fascinating observations about each other.

Each of the children attended some institution of formal learning, but the paths they chose differed considerably. Their parents encouraged their independence. Arthur, Jr. attempted to reach the California gold mines by way of the Isthmus of Panama, but difficulties were too great and he returned home. Later he traveled to the South, where he worked as a teacher until he joined the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He died in battle. Arthur's brother William was a Colonel in the Union Army and later joined his father's law practice. Catherine, the only McArthur daughter, moved to Flint, Michigan, where she taught school and worried about her brothers, who were struggling on opposite sides in a bloody war that she did not support. Surprisingly, McArthur correspondence from all over the country found its way back to the family home in Limington.

Ring pieces together the sorrows, as well as the good times, providing a realistic view of the Maine family. For instance, while the older three children were embarking on their own journeys, the spirited Duncan McArthur became a sailor; he later drowned in an accident at sea. His death greatly dismayed brothers Charles and Malcolm, but it brought the McArthur family closer together. The family met its greatest challenge in 1864 when Catherine died. The letters suggest that she had played the leading role in unifying the family, and therefore her death marks the climax in Ring's story.

Elizabeth Ring's inspired editing of the McArthur family papers creates a fascinating portrait of a Maine family connected to the world outside their community. Ring has faithfully revealed the history of the McArthurs, but she has also created a chronicle—sometimes sorrowful, sometimes humorous, but always realistic—of mid-nineteenth-century America.

JASON M. DORR
University of Maine

Allagash: Maine's Wild & Scenic River. By DEAN B. BENNETT. (Camden, Maine: Down East Books, 1994. Pp. 112. Cloth. \$35.)

Dean Bennett's *Allagash: Maine's Wild & Scenic River* examines the fragile natural balance in this beautiful section of northwestern Maine. He shows that humans are an integral part of this natural system, yet he argues that protected areas, such as the Allagash, are essential for hu-

mans to feel their connection to nature. Preserving the Allagash was a difficult and complicated project, which required the cooperation of individuals and organizations from all walks of life.

The book is divided into three sections: the headwaters; the large lakes; and the river. The beginning of each section has a detailed map showing the different geographical areas. Among the most prominent features of the book are Bennett's incredible photos. The sharp image of a hummingbird approaching a lily, or the breathtaking panorama from atop Priestly Mountain convey the beauty of the Allagash region. Bennett also narrates each section and traces the geologic development of the waterway.

Bennett's book is enjoyable for both the photographs and the descriptions of the wildlife and the ecosystem. He shows that the waterway is much more than just a river; it sustains wildlife and other forms of nature, but it is sustained in turn by those elements as well. Bennett also shows the connection between human life and the environment, and argues convincingly for the importance of preserving natural areas—not just for the sake of recreation, but for the sake of wilderness itself. The Allagash is a delicate environment, and if too many people visit, it will be ruined. Bennett ends by pointing out that the waterway symbolizes America's vanishing wilderness. His tribute to this unique ecosystem carries the warning that we should approach the natural world with a humbler attitude.

ELLEN KING

University of Maine

Growing Up in Maine: Recollections of Childhood from the 1780's to the 1920's. Edited by CHARLES and SAMUELLA SHAIN. (Camden, Maine: Down East Books, 1991. Pp. 48.)

Growing Up in Maine is a captivating collection of twenty-two Maine autobiographies over a 150-year span. Every entry deals with a childhood experience that keeps the reader feeling young at heart. Each story has a personal feel that draws the reader into the historical setting. This book is a must for anyone interested in the history of Maine and its diverse people. The chronological sweep of the collection spans major events like the granting of Maine statehood in 1820, the Civil War, and World War I. Other crucial issues include immigration, changing rural

landscapes, Maine's confrontation with modernity, and family matters. The reader will be able to understand how each affected Maine children. The first depiction dates from 1786, when a young boy wrote of his move to the District of Maine. The last entry is from a girl born in 1913. Each page offers an exciting image of Maine history seen through the eyes of its youth. Topics include schooling, work, childhood games, and leisure. Some are frivolous, but others serious, dealing with childhood questions or fears.

Growing Up in Maine is an indulgent, pleasurable read. It is a refreshing look into the past, without all the complexities that tend to impede our passage through some books. The fascinating descriptions, ample illustrations, and well written introductions will take every reader back in history and perhaps back to their own childhood experiences.

Dena De Marco
University of Maine

The Best of Barnes: The Selected Articles and Photographs of Jack Barnes. Edited by SUSAN C. CONLEY. (Troy, Maine: Nightshade Press, 1996. Pp. 168. Paper. \$14.95.)

Over the years various individuals has been heard to remark that book reviewer Jack Barnes never met a writer he didn't like. This observation was not intended as a slight on his critical abilities, but rather as an affirmation of his unique strength. In his enthusiastic coverage of northern New England writers, the Hiram, Maine, resident probably manages to tell more about personalities and processes in short space than any contemporary. No journalist that I'm aware of pays more attention to small press productions and to the people who make up this region's local scene.

With *The Best of Barnes*, a publisher has at last seen fit to bring more than thirty of his articles together under one cover. What a readable and substantive gathering it is. Drawing on more than a decade's worth of work, Barnes gives readers personal insight into the work and lives of writers ranging from Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winner E. Annie Proulx, to the superb but underrated poet Betsy Scholl, to first-time novelist William Carpenter (*A Keeper of Sheep*, 1995). Barnes not only reads, absorbs and delights in each book, but makes it a point to interview, photograph, and often befriend authors.

Such an approach runs counter to current trends in critical writing, which seeks to isolate the reviewer from the author and the author's personality from the work itself. Barnes harkens back to a more genteel era. One suspects that if there are books he dislikes, Barnes simply ignores them and focuses on something he savors. One senses that he is always honest in his assessments; there is no mere attempt at boosterism. At a time when many critics strive to dazzle readers with their own perceived brilliance, Barnes succeeds in casting an even light on his subjects.

Had the book only provided useful profiles of such wonderfully diverse talents as Hancock's Sanford Phippen (*The Police Know Everything*, 1982), Nobleboro's Elizabeth Coatsworth (*The Enchanted*, 1951), New Hampshire's Ernest Hebert (*Live Free or Die*, 1990) or the late Jane Kenyon (*New and Selected Poems*, 1996), it would have been a tremendous tool for students and scholars. On that level, as a dictionary of local biography, there is nothing really comparable. However, these essays take us further. Barnes compares and contrasts books and explores connections. We learn from Carolyn Chute (*The Beans of Egypt, Maine*, 1985) about the influence of USM poet and teacher Ken Rosen. One of the sections deals with Chute and the work of still vibrant Gladys Hasty Carroll (*As the World Turns*, 1933). Barnes is passionate in his views on the worth of novels about Maine for what they tell us about life in particular eras of the state's history. In particular he defends Carroll, Robert Tristram Coffin, and Mary Ellen Chase.

Finally, few others than Barnes would have had the knowledge and wit to include a profile of the late Dorothy Healy, co-founder of the Maine Women Writers Collection, with the likes of Elizabeth Oglivie, John Gould, Kate Barnes, Cathie Pelletier, Richard Aldridge, and May Sarton. Yet it was Sarton who termed Healy "one of the most life-enhancing people I know" and described her friend's pervasive, genteel influence on Maine literature.

The *Best of Barnes* is a treasure locker that will be consulted for years to come. With luck, a second volume may pick up where this one stops, giving us the reviewer's takes on the likes of B.J. Morison, Gary Lawless, Ken Rosen, Margaret Dickson, and others.

WILLIAM DAVID BARRY
Portland

An Insider's Guide to Maine Politics 1946–1996. By CHRISTIAN POTHOLM (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1998. Pp. 373. Paper. \$19.95.)

Show me an avid reader of historical or political biography and I will show you someone who checks the index first to find out immediately how so-and-so figured into such-and-such's life.

Christian Potholm's *An Insider's Guide to Maine Politics 1946–1996* is all about the so-and-so's and such-and-such's of Maine politics. But instead of checking the index for tidbits about notable characters, you merely need to read the book itself, though you will find yourself skipping around to find a specific figure or an event from the last century of Maine politics.

But do not skip around too much or you will lose the flavor of Potholm's comprehensive presentation. Name the office holder, candidate, media figure, consultant, or backroom player who has figured into Maine politics since 1946 and Potholm has a titled passage about that person. Add the notable terms and events of the era and they too appear in alphabetized order. Sometimes there are cross references if Potholm believes the name or event warrants a second or third passage for further context.

Potholm provides almost a dictionary motif to his passages. When you read about former Governor John Reed, listed under "John Reed" as well as "The Luckiest Man in Maine Politics," it is as if you are getting a *definition* of John Reed. I choose this particular former governor (served 1959–1967) because Potholm successfully reminds the avid reader of Reed's improbable climb from reluctant state legislator to the governorship and national prominence as chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board.

Because Potholm is a political consultant and pollster when he is not teaching at Bowdoin College, his tome clearly can be read from the prospective of his profession. There are lots of terms, quotations, slang expressions, and political jargon that are defined and explained, often humorously, in the Maine political context. For instance "Garbage" defines voters who stay undecided simply because they do not intend to vote and are therefore useless to pollsters. "The Logs are Closed" tells us how negative political ads are placed just before a station closes its weekly logs to get a weekend of airings that the opponent cannot answer.

Potholm also writes a back-page summary of Maine politics over the past half century that makes some interesting points: the surprising dominance of top-of-the-ticket Republicans despite a dramatic Democratic legislative upsurge; the overall moderate nature of successful Maine

candidates; and the emergence of Franco-Americans as the key swing voters in Maine. Potholm convincingly argues his case, honed largely from his personal experience, especially in the last quarter century.

It is an understandable bias toward more recent figures and events that is my major criticism of *An Insider's Guide*. One of the most significant events in the last half century of Maine politics was the 1952 Payne-Brewster feud, but it is not covered by Potholm in the book. In fact Senator Owen Brewster (served 1941–1953) and Governor Fred Payne (elected senator in 1952 after beating Brewster in the Republican primary) are “kissed off” in two inconsequential passages apiece, when their political conflict kept pollsters, pundits, and strategists busy for many months leading up to the 1952 Maine primary. The contest mirrored the national Eisenhower-Taft GOP presidential nomination, with Brewster the conservative Taft supporter and Payne the moderate pro-Eisenhower candidate. The resulting feud was the beginning of the end of top-to-bottom GOP domination of Maine politics. Democrat Ed Muskie exploited these divisions in winning the Maine governorship in 1954. More of the terms and “color” from this period would have helped fill out Potholm’s political “time line.”

Time prejudices aside, Potholm must be favorably credited for taking on this demanding project and including so much in his book. And if the early period fades somewhat, Potholm did appreciate one of Maine’s wittiest politicians from that period, Representative Frank Fellows (served 1941–1951). Potholm captures Fellows’ wit when the latter commented on Europe after a post-World War II fact-finding tour: “They need to harden their currency and soften their toilet paper.”

An Insider's Guide to Maine Politics is an absolute must for any Maine political observer’s bookshelf. It is a book you will enjoy reading and using as a reference as Maine’s next half century of politics unfolds.

CHARLES HORNE

Brewer, Maine
