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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Was Baseball Really Invented in Maine? By Will Anderson.
(Portland, Maine: Anderson & Sons, 1992. Pp. 188. Paper.
\$17.95.)

The intriguing title of this book may instantly draw a reader in, but the author is quick to admit that baseball was not invented in Maine. In fact, the book opens with an explanation that baseball was not invented at all; it evolved from several English games, primarily rounders.

This book does provide an extensive historical review of baseball in Maine. As early as 1828 Maine newspapers referred to “boys playing at bat and ball.” The first documented modern baseball game in Maine was played on October 10, 1860. Much of this subsequent history involves minor-league and semi-professional teams. Events in Maine are woven into baseball history as a whole. Pictures and photographs help bring the past to life.

Another focus of the book is the players who came from Maine. These individuals include both native Mainers and professionals who began their careers on Maine minor-league teams. There are several colorful characters in this baseball history. One example is Winthrop’s Del Bissonette, “The Babe Ruth of Maine,” who played first base for Brooklyn in the 1930s.

The final section is a nostalgic look at some of the best players to come from Maine – a Maine version of “Field of Dreams.” This book is intended for Maine baseball enthusiasts. The author caters to those who love baseball stories, stats, and trivia, but the excellent use of photographs and drawings provide even those with a moderate interest in baseball an attractive resource.

Craig Riordan
Unity College

Acadian Hard Times: The Farm Security Administration in Maine's St. John Valley, 1940-1943. By C. Stewart Doty (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press, 1991. Pp. 186. Paper. \$24.95.)

In the early 1940s, the Farm Security Administration, a rural aid component of Roosevelt's New Deal program, dispatched two photographers, Jack Delano and John Collier, to Maine's northern frontier to document the progress made by the agency's clients. The result is this priceless visual record of Acadian Maine in the aftermath of the Great Depression.

C. Stewart Doty has made a splendid effort to flesh out the stories behind the faces captured on film by the FSA photographers. The author retraces Delano's and Collier's footsteps, interviewing one hundred individuals from fifteen of the twenty families featured in the photographic project. His objective: to understand how the FSA's innovative programs impacted the lives of their clients, in this case, Acadian potato farmers. Deftly combining archival research with personal interviews, Doty creates an enlightening and informative narrative that illustrates the pivotal role of the FSA in the daily lives of these struggling northern Maine communities.

Of particular interest is Collier's photographic study of the lives of two Acadian families, the Daigles and the Gagnons. Collier captures the day-to-day rhythms of life, following his subjects from blooming potato fields to the dinner table. Industrious mothers, hardworking fathers, angelic children: the effect is nostalgic. The nature of the pictures connotes a feeling of easy familiarity, as does the frequency with which subjects reappear, from classroom to dusty roadside to hayfield. It is as if the reader is leafing through a casual acquaintance's treasured photo album. Captions usually include commentary gathered by Doty from the subjects themselves.

The work concludes with a chapter on the St. John Valley today. Photographer Jack Walas accompanied the author on his journey to Aroostook County, and his photos provide the reader with a vivid illustration of the evolution of these Aroostook

communities. On occasion, Walas located the same vantage points used by Delano and Collier. One notable example is a roadside vista photographed by Delano in 1940 and again by Walas in 1989. Delano's photo depicts cleared fields stretching away to the river, dotted with farmhouses. A forested wilderness occupies this same acreage in Walas' photo, graphically illustrating the sharp decline in farmlands in the St. John Valley in the past forty years.

Doty provides enough information on the FSA to allow for an informed interpretation of the photographs, without detracting from the book's primary subjects: the people themselves. While the text is essential, Doty wisely allows the photographs to communicate their own stories.

This work will resonate for all Mainers, as it will for those in the Valley itself. Enthusiasts of Maine history, local history, cultural anthropology, and of Maine's rich Acadian heritage will find much of interest.

Robert N. Coffey, Jr.
University of Maine

The Latchstring Was Always Out: A History of Lodging Hospitality and Tourism in Bartlett, New Hampshire. By Aileen M. Carroll. (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: for the Bartlett Public Library by Peter E. Randall, 1994. Pp. vi + 152. \$16.95.)

One might argue that there are enough books published about Maine these days, without having to look beyond state lines to find subjects worthy of review. For the most part, this is true, but Portland historian Aileen M. Carroll's new volume on tourism in Bartlett, New Hampshire, proves a notable exception.

Indeed, few books illustrate so well the limitations of political boundaries in coming to grips with state history, for Bartlett was located on what was known as “the Great Road to Coos” among early Mainers. At the other end of the line, beyond Crawford Notch, it was the road to coastal markets, and its first travelers tended to be farmers and drovers from upper Coos County and Vermont.

To my knowledge very little has been written about his crucial economic lifeline between the early agricultural interior and Portland, with the exception of Elijah Kellogg’s vivid novel, *A Strong Arm and A Mother’s Blessing* (Boston, 1881). Yet, until the railroads from Boston provided other outlets for the interior, the road remained of great importance to Maine merchants. The coming of the railroad did not revive the old agrarian connection through the Notch, but it opened the White Mountains to leisure activities, and if Carroll’s study of Bartlett is at all representative, Portlanders were among the leading developers.

Among those discussed are Titus Brown, who built a one-story inn on the Bartlett Town line. In 1812, Brown moved his family to Gray, Maine, and subsequently his son, J.B. Brown, became Portland’s greatest capitalist. As early as 1833 John Smith opened a stage route from Portland, and generations of tourists began making their way into the White Mountains through the Maine port.

Using primary sources and rich accounts from travelers, including Francis Parkman, Anthony Trollope, and numerous lesser-known folk, Carroll gives what is no doubt the definitive study of Bartlett’s hospitality trade from earliest times to the present. The book is beautifully designed, generously illustrated (a fold-out map is included), and well organized. It contains an index and a bibliography, and the whole thing is carefully footnoted. This is a first-rate volume that should not be overlooked by students and scholars of Maine.

William David Barry
Maine Historical Society

A Fair Field and No Favor: A Concise History of the Maine State Grange. By Stanley Russell Howe. (Augusta: Maine State Grange, 1994. Pp. ix + 130 pages. Cloth. \$19.95.)

On September 6, 1887, the *Oxford Democrat* noted that "the Grange was organized for the intellectual, social and financial improvement of the farmer and his family, to place his occupation where God himself placed it - the best and most honored of all callings. It seeks not to buildup agriculture at the expense of any other class, but it would give the farmer an equal chance in all things. 'A fair field and no favor.'"

It is from this motto that Stanley Russell Howe, long-time director of the Bethel Historical Society and a fifth generation Maine granger, takes his title. In this well organized volume the author spotlights the role of the Grange in the context of Maine and the nation.

Founded just after the Civil War, the national order was conceived by Oliver Hudson Kelley as "a secret society of farmers, which would assist in the binding of the nation's wound by emphasizing fraternal and brotherly love." Very quickly he "responded to pressure from his niece, Caroline A. Hall, a feminist, who successfully lobbied the founders to give women equal rights within the new order." The order was founded at Washington, D.C. in 1867, where Amas K. Walker of Hampden, Maine, first joined it. When Walker returned to Maine in 1873 he brought the idea with him, and in the following year a Maine State Grange was founded at Lewiston. By the end of 1874, Maine had 64 Granges and 2,000 members. At its peak, between 1940 and 1960, it boasted 400 locals and 60,000 Maine members. Though it has declined to around 12,000 active members, the State Grange is still a vital organization, politically and socially.

Curiously, the story of the Maine Grange has not been told before. Very sensibly, Howe opts for a book that will appeal to a wide audience, including the Grangers themselves, and yet satisfy students and scholars.

The text is eminently readable, with a focus on colorful figures such as Gov. Frederick Robie of Gorham and Sen.

Obadiah Gardiner of Rockland, both men of power who gave the organization political clout and cultural status. He also gets into the role of the Grange in breaking Mainers out of rural isolation through meetings and celebrations.

Fifty pages of appendices, listing organizational officers, subordinate Granges (town and village halls), organizers of the Maine Grange, officers of the Grange, and Grange farm families, are followed by a glossary of terms and index.

A Fair Field and No Favor is a solid contribution to Maine scholarship which provides us with the first clear overview of the organization's history and its influence on the shaping of our State.

William David Barry
Maine Historical Society

Dell Turner: The Stories of His Life. By John T. Meader (Orono, Maine: Northeast Folklore Society, 1988. Pp. 126.)

Oral history has been a source of debate within the historical profession for generations. Some remain skeptical, holding that events described in hindsight are often contaminated by nostalgia, poor memory, and personal bias. Others regard the words that flow from an interviewee's lips as unadulterated primary source material. Meader, like most historians, falls between the extremes. He appreciates the insights acquired through oral history, but uses documentary sources to correct flaws and to bolster oral accounts.

The book was conceived in an oral history course in 1980. Meader interviewed his grandfather, Dell Turner, and with each interview became more intrigued. Just months later Turner passed away. Thus Meader felt even more compelled to learn

about his grandfather. The book is based on interviews with Turner, his relatives, and his friends and on documentary records such as newspapers, court and school records, and secondary sources.

Dell Turner was not a great politician, philanthropist, or military general. He was an uneducated man from Maine who toiled in lumber mills, in woods camps, and on potato farms, barely making ends meet. Meader wrote this book because he wanted to learn more about his grandfather, and he wanted to share Turner's story with others. In the process, he makes a significant contribution to Maine social history.

Turner worked as a cook in a woods camp in the mid-1900s. His accounts brim with descriptions of the dishes served to lumbermen and the techniques used to prepare them. Turner describes the well-known "bean-hole beans" – a staple of the woods camps and, to many old-timers, a delicacy: "Yes sir, beans...in the woods that's all you see...you never tasted nothing in your life any better than a good old-fashioned bean-hole beans."

Putting this book together was a remarkable task. Regarding Turner's stories, one family member explained: "You couldn't really depend on whether he was telling the truth or just...what he wanted to tell you to make the story interesting." Meader presents the accounts exactly as Turner recalled them but when necessary corrects the anachronisms and errors in detail.

The reader will leave this book not only with a better understanding of Maine social history but also with a better appreciation for the process of oral history. By examining the life of his grandfather, Meader teaches a valuable lesson: Significant history is not restricted to studies of politicians, major events, and famous people. Meader reminds us of the many insights that are revealed in the histories of ordinary people.

Diane D'Angelo
University of Maine

Hail Britannia: Maine Pewter and Silverplate: An Exhibition of Maine Britannia Ware and Silverplate, 1829-1941, in the Collections of the Maine State Museum, May 15, 1992-May 15, 1993. By Edwin A. Churchill. (Augusta: Maine State Museum, 1992. Pp. 80. Appendix, bibliography, index. \$19.99. Paper. \$9.99.)

In the eighteenth century, as the pewter historian Charles F. Montgomery often said, "everybody ate and drank from pewter," the tin alloy that was used to make the most common tableware owned by rich and poor alike. By the nineteenth century, mass-produced ceramics and glass came to dominate the high end of the spectrum. Pewter and its cousin, britannia, as well as silver-plated goods, were forced to compete for the few dollars that the middle class had to spend. After the introduction of electroplating in about 1840, the same manufacturers often began to plate the very objects they were already producing.

The makers of these wares, and their twentieth-century successors, have not received the attention of scholars or collectors to the same degree as their colonial counterparts. Yet, as Edwin A. Churchill notes, if we "glimpse beneath their utilitarian purposes," we can "see the evolutions of American technologies, tastes, and social aspirations" manifested in these humble objects (p.1). Churchill, curator of the Maine State Museum, provides a look at the industry in Maine in a study funded in part by the Pewter Collector's Society of America. While Maine was not a major factor in the britannia or silverplating industry (which was centered in Connecticut), it was home to a number of significant firms and their stories are told admirably here.

The work is divided into four chronological chapters that span from about 1825 until the beginning of the Second World War. In each chapter, Churchill offers a brief overview and a corporate biography of the major firms of the era. Changes in technology as well as in marketing are discussed throughout.

Maine's first britannia makers – Allen and Freeman Porter, Rufus Dunham, and Samuel S. Hersey – are perhaps the most

familiar craftsmen to students of early base metals. The Porter water pitchers and stately coffeepots are among the most elegant britannia objects of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Less well known are the britannia factories of the 1860-1886 period, some of which employed forty or fifty workers and produced \$100,000 worth of goods a year, while the Maine silverplaters of the 1890 to 1940 period are nearly unknown. Churchill illustrates representative examples of objects produced by many firms, and provides excellent pictures of the different maker's marks used by each firm.

Readers should not overlook Churchill's appendix on the relationship between the terms britannia, white metal, and block tin. Churchill cuts through a maze of modern assumptions and mistakes to lead us back to the original meanings of these terms. One conclusion: white metal does not mean tin, and whitesmith does not mean tin-plate worker, as the modern pewter scholars John B. Kerfoot and Ledlie Irwin Laughlin have suggested. Instead, they seem to refer to britannia and britannia-makers. If this is the case, then we must reassess our understanding of the craft of metalworking, especially in the early nineteenth century.

Over the years, Churchill has enhanced our knowledge of the material life of Maine in many ways through publications and exhibitions. This most recent contribution sheds light on a little-known corner of the decorative arts, and will be of value to collectors, historians, and all students of Maine history.

Gerald W. R. Ward
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