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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Mourning on the Pejepscot. By Teresa M. Flanagan. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1992. Pp. 113. Appendices. Cloth. \$28.50.)

This small book looks at mourning practices in the Pejepscot region – Brunswick, Bowdoinham, Harpswell, and Topsham – from the seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. The author examines four major areas of mourning practice: cemeteries; gravestones; mourning dress; and jewelry and mourning art. Each of these are defined and examined first in terms of the New England region and then in the Pejepscot area. The Pejepscot practices are demonstrated by many examples, which Flanagan culls from both primary and secondary sources.

After focusing on the actual mourning processes themselves, Flanagan puts them in a larger social framework to help the reader better understand the communities in which these practices evolved. She is also careful to show the evolution of that society over time and to chart the changes in mourning practice that accompanied those changes. The appendices provide a road map of the tremendous research that went into this work and also give the interested reader locations and other information to get a closer look at some of the documentary and physical materials that she used.

The book is arranged loosely. Photos that would be better placed throughout are concentrated at the end. In many other ways it is evident that the text is still close to the original master's thesis. Nevertheless, the content and analysis are interesting, relevant, and well presented. Students of local, regional, and social history will find it compelling and useful.

Sarah Hallet
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Coastal Maine: A Maritime History. By Roger Duncan. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992. Pp. 540. Cloth. \$35.00.)

After Columbus “discovered” the Americas, it was only natural that European powers would race to claim their own piece of the new land. In the early 1600s, the French and English began dividing up the northeast coast of North America. Charters and land grants, issued on inaccurate maps, lead to confusion and dispute. The English claimed Maine to the Penobscot, the French to the Kennebec. Even among the English the issue was anything but settled. Sir Ferdinando Gorges was given the Council for New England charter in 1621, with which he attempted to colonize Maine. The Puritans were granted the Massachusetts Bay charter, with territory that overlapped into Gorges’s land grants. Gorges’s family heirs sold the titles to their Maine lands in 1677 for the sum of £1270. Thus, Maine to the Kennebec became part of Massachusetts, while the remainder was disputed between the French and English.

Coastal Maine is a seamless narrative filled with pieces of history, stories, and legends, like the one above – 500 years worth, from the first known early explorers up to Roger Duncan’s own analysis of Maine’s present fishing industry and its future.

Duncan lives in East Boothbay Harbor and has been a schoolteacher and headmaster. His style is more literary than scholarly, his project a labor of love. Yet his complete and impressive knowledge of ships and coastal geography clearly displays expertise. It would be a mistake to think of this book as solely about Maine. Duncan accurately details the French-English race for North America, not ignoring the tragedy of the Native Americans. Some events carry the reader to the Maritime provinces, to Massachusetts, and to other places around the world.

Duncan lays a solid foundation for Maine history, providing an enlightening and valuable resource for further research. He dedicates several entire chapters to the shipbuilding practices of the day, naturally paying particular attention to Maine. It is in these impressively detailed chapters that Duncan’s expertise is

most apparent. Yet his exhaustive research throughout gives a complete, if somewhat complicated, insight into the politics, business practices, and folkways of each time period. Maps and illustrations are placed effectively throughout, enhancing or clarifying some particular point.

The author's most visible success is Maine's links with our nation's history; this insight gives Maine relevance in national events. Duncan's handling of French-English relations three thousand miles across the Atlantic adds depth; Maine, he shows, carved out a niche in European affairs. As insular as the region was, its rich fishing grounds and vast forests attracted interest.

Roger Duncan provides a lengthy, detailed history of the last 500 years in coastal Maine's history. Although absorbing reading, the book becomes burdensome in a few middle chapters, especially for those not familiar with nautical terminology or local geography. Perhaps too comprehensive, it caves in under its own weight in several places. Duncan compensates, however, with his candor and his powerful storytelling ability. His use of local folklore and personality brings to life the simple yet colorful folkways of coastal Maine. The value of the book can only be fully captured by "Maine-iacs," especially those from down east, as it is their own story. But that isn't to say that "outsiders" won't enjoy or learn from this book. *Coastal Maine* is a fund of information, worthwhile for all, because Maine's history is New England's history, and New England indeed is a vital part of our nation's past. In this we all share a common bond.

Jeff Meiczinger
University of Maine

The Libby Family in America, 1882-1982. Edited by Wilma Libby Rodgers and David Jotham Trafton. (Portland, Maine: Libby Homestead Corporation, 1993. 2 books. Pp. 1686. Cloth. \$100 plus \$4.65 shipping. Order from Libby Homestead Corporation, P.O. Box 11365, Portland, ME 04104. Maine residents add 6% sales tax.)

Begun in 1959 and delayed in publication by both technical and financial difficulties, *The Libby Family in America* is a fitting yet frustrating "supplement and companion piece" to Charles Thornton Libby's earlier work, *The Libby Family, 1602-1881*. The story of the Libby family, especially in Maine, is a fascinating one. Scarborough pioneer John Libby arrived at Richmond's Island in 1637. Readers are provided with detailed background information on the family, the older and newer genealogies, and the John Libby Family Association/Libby Homestead Corporation in a fine introduction written by Ernest Steven Libby. Organized at Somersworth, New Hampshire, in 1904 as "The Sons and Daughters of Benjamin Libby," the family association continues to carry on the traditions of its turn-of-the-century founders by holding reunions, organizing an archives, and publishing the latest history of John Libby's descendants.

Many early Maine families have seen later generations spread throughout the country, and the Libbys are no exception. But for those interested in the demographics of Maine towns, the well-documented presence of many of John Libby's offspring in the Pine Tree State from the mid-seventeenth century down to the present should prove of much worth beyond the value of a standard genealogical record. Better than many works of this type, *The Libby Family* presents individuals as real people, noting not only their educational, religious, and military activities, but many of their habits, hobbies, and personality traits. Although panegyric sketches abound, more often than not the editors have dared to impart a human element to much of the biographical information, to their great credit. Since many of the Association's members descend through female lines, the inclusion of this information (there are three indexes - two of names and one of

places) seemed only natural to the compilers of this second volume. This adds much to its usefulness as a reference source.

However, certain decisions made years before this update appeared may be cause for reflection on the part of its users. In 1980 the Association voted to follow the format and overall appearance of Charles Thornton Libby's nineteenth-century volume in arranging and producing the present work. While the aim was to create a true "companion" to the 1881 work, the adherence to what is now a non-standard numbering system (which in Book 2 gives some individuals as many as twelve digits in their identification numbers) and the exclusion of certain citations will frustrate modern-day researchers. Admittedly, contributions to this work, in their raw form, varied greatly regarding citations, and this information is presumably available in the Association's archives. Moreover, including source references would certainly add many more pages to what has obviously been an expensive project for this farsighted and ambitious organization. Nevertheless, the omission gives the present work an amateurish quality that detracts from the great effort behind its publication. Despite these shortcomings, *The Libby Family in America* deserves much praise for telling the unique story of a prominent and prolific Maine family.

Randall H. Bennett
Bethel Historical Society

Politics of Conscience: A Biography of Margaret Chase Smith. By Patricia Ward Wallace. (Westport: Praeger Press, 1995. Pp. 245 + xv. Notes, bibliography, index. Cloth. \$24.95).

In her book, *Politics of Conscience: A Biography of Margaret Chase Smith*, Patricia Ward Wallace discusses the political career and personal life of Margaret Chase Smith. Smith, a skillful politician, never missed a vote or roll call during her three decades in office. Moreover, Smith found pride in her ability to overcome her gender so that her colleagues acknowledged her as a U.S. Senator first and a woman second. "Never a feminist, Smith did not practice sisterhood or work for significant women's legislation of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead she worked for Maine and the nation as a cold warrior and became an unrepentant proponent of the military-industrial complex and of nuclear power." (ix-x) Wallace uses this theme as the focus of Smith's biography.

Wallace begins with the arrival of Smith's paternal and maternal relatives in Maine and the eventual marriage of Smith's parents. She then turns to Smith's life. She details Smith's relationship with her husband, Clyde Smith, and how his death-bed wish for Smith to take his place in Congress led to her political career. Wallace highlights all of the Senator's political accomplishments from her establishment of military bases in Maine to her "Declaration of Conscience" speech against McCarthy to her work as a cold warrior. The biography also traces the activity of Smith's five campaigns for the Senate as well as her negative reaction to those politicians, reporters, and constituents whose actions she deemed slanderous. Moreover, Wallace profiles Smith's relationships with the people—her mother, Carrie Chase, Clyde Smith, William Lewis and May Craig—who shaped both her life and her political career.

Wallace presents the material in an interesting manner, but raises some very questionable points about Smith's life. While her primary sources include manuscripts and congressional reports, much of her material comes from oral interviews which she does not place within a proper historical context; this leads

to assumptions—Smith had an abortion and a lesbian relationship—which Wallace does not prove.

Wallace also questions the success of Smith's political career. "For thirty-two years Smith railed against the party structure and transcended the Republican party in Maine and in Congress. She fitted herself into the mainstream of the United States and developed a national constituency, but for what profit? Her hopes for a presidential or vice presidential nomination were stillborn, no legislation bears her name, and despite her seniority she never chaired a committee." (199) Perhaps, if Wallace had placed Smith within the historical context of issues relevant to women from the 1940s through 1970s, she would have acknowledged the significance of Smith's career. Instead, Wallace claims that the only reason Smith is a significant historical figure is because she was female. "Had she been male, her life, including the Declaration of Conscience, would be indistinguishable from that of hundreds of other congressmen. Since she was female, as soon as she entered the Senate she was politically unique and a candidate for the history books, as all politicians yearn to be." (199) The idea that her gender made her famous is debatable; moreover, the Declaration of Conscience speech was the "most spirited Republican dissent" made within the Senate during the McCarthy era. (Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, 103) Perhaps Wallace would have taken a different view of Smith's political career if she had examined some of the recent doctoral dissertations that focused on this topic.

In the conclusion, Wallace attempts some analysis of Smith's attitude toward her gender. Wallace claims that "she became antifeminist while, like many other professional antifeminists, doing everything that feminists want all women to have the opportunity to do." (200) Wallace concludes that while Smith never requested special treatment because of her gender, she continually reminded her male colleagues that she was a lady. "Smith's demeanor was commonly ingratiating and quiet spoken, which reassured her fellow senators that she posed no threat and inspired them gallantly to open doors, pull out her chairs, and assist her. Disarmed, colleagues were surprised when Smith

revealed her iron fist in the white glove, and they blamed Lewis.” (200) Such analysis creates a different image of Margaret Chase Smith and this should have been included in the thesis.

While Wallace’s methodology is questionable, this biography does trace the life of a very important politician not only to the state of Maine, but also to the United States. Students of Maine history and American politics will find this book an interesting starting point for further research.

Kimberly R. Sebold
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Sarah Orne Jewett: Her World and Her Work. By Paula Blanchard. (Radcliffe Biography Series. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1994. Cloth. \$27.50. Paper. \$15.00. Pp. xviii + 388.)

Paula Blanchard, like most authors, adopts a conscious perspective on her world and the work of Sarah Orne Jewett. Blanchard considers Jewett’s world and her work as inseparable, and she discusses this point with reference to Jewett’s literary creations. Blanchard focuses on Jewett’s complex relationships with other women, as well as her connection to the town of Berwick, Maine.

The book begins with a brief history of Berwick and the Jewett family, rather than with Sarah Orne Jewett’s birth. This is indicative of Blanchard’s concern with the world that formed Jewett. She sees Jewett’s writing career as shaped and determined by town and family. Jewett seems most comfortable writing about places and people she knew. Blanchard also argues that Jewett’s literary vision of a community of women was primarily shaped by her extended family structure, which consisted of many older, single women and widows.

Annie Fields and Jewett's Boston network of female friends are another central theme in the biography. Blanchard makes Jewett's "Boston marriage" to Annie Fields a central theme of the book, and argues that Jewett's "deepest affections were always centered on women," yet she argues that Jewett was not a lesbian "in the strictest sense of the term" (p. 54). Blanchard appears to conclude that Jewett was asexual, and her closest friendships happened to be with women. She argues that Jewett had romantic but not sexual feelings towards other women. This conclusion is based on Jewett's letters to women friends. Blanchard does not consider that Jewett might have been expressing sexuality in the more acceptable romantic discourse of the late nineteenth century. Rather, she views Jewett as devoid of sexual feelings – for either men or women.

Blanchard's biography is an impressively researched account of the life of one of Maine's primary literary figures. She sets Jewett's fiction in a Maine context, and argues that it was profoundly related to place. Blanchard's work is truly a "literary biography," in that it is based not only upon the standard sources, but also upon an informed interpretation of fiction produced by the subject. Blanchard is familiar with much of the recent literary criticism of Jewett's works which attempts to rescue this author from the condescending obscurity to which she had been relegated. In keeping with this focus, Blanchard's biography is a serious, sympathetic portrait of one of Maine's great women writers, and the networks of family and friends that made up her world.

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