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New Men, New Issues: The Formation of the Republican Party in Maine

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REVIEWS IN MAINE HISTORY

New Men, New Issues: The Formation of the Republican Party in Maine. By Richard R. Wescott. (Portland, Me.: Maine Historical Society, 1986. Pp. ix + 180. \$15.50.)

Since this study was accepted as a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Maine in 1966, it has served as a standard work of Maine's political history in the nineteenth century. It is fortunate that the Maine Historical Society has published it.

The author combines traditional and innovative sources to frame a sound interpretation of the beginnings of Maine's Republican party. He shows how the Democratic party in the state had the potential and then the actual capacity to rend itself asunder. He integrates the roles of the antislavery Liberty and Free Soil parties and the maneuvering of the Maine Law (prohibition), Whig, and Know-Nothing (American) parties into the narrative. In addition to showing how the various parts of the old parties fit into the new political reality, Wescott reveals the part played by Neal Dow and the Maine Law advocates. This law was, of course, one of the issues by which Maine gained national and international prominence. The final two chapters take the reader through the establishment of the Republican machinery in Maine, the attempts at political fusion that resulted in the Republican constituency, the efforts of Anson P. Morrill, John L. Stevens, and James G. Blaine, to note a few individuals, and the consolidation of the party's influence in the state.

The Formation of the Republican Party in Maine is a pioneer essay. A reviewer in a national scholarly journal faults the study because it does not employ the latest techniques in political history, namely quantitative methods, and the author did not update secondary writings in the field. Such a criticism, however accurate, slights the very important contributions the essay has made.

Over the years it has provided the backbone of Maine political history, and for that reason alone it should have been available to a wider audience long ago. It has also been the basis of one of the most recent national studies on the formation of

the Republican Party, in which Maine is one of its major examples. The reference is to *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856*, by William E. Gienapp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Not only does Wescott's work provide the basis for Gienapp's conclusions about Maine's part in the process, but Gienapp acknowledges his debt to Wescott.

There is little doubt that new light would be cast on the beginnings of the Republican Party in Maine were modern computer techniques employed to update Wescott's study. There is also no doubt that as it stands this work will remain one of the fine scholarly achievements of the last twenty-five years.

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Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820. By Alan Taylor. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1990. Pp. xiv + 381. \$35. Paper \$14.95.)

With justification historians of Maine have lamented their profession's lack of attention to the state's history. While this is still true in a general way, it is less so regarding the topic of the Maine frontier. In 1970, Charles E. Clark published his ground-breaking work on the settlement of northern New England's eastern frontier during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Five years later, Gordon Kershaw followed with his study of the Kennebec proprietors. Now comes Alan Taylor, assistant professor of history at Boston University, with a fine new study of life and agrarian protest on Maine's post-revolutionary frontier. In the spirit and style of the "new social history," Taylor brings into focus the "inarticulate" settlers — most of whom left few documents of their own. Taylor skillfully extracts his data from town and tax records, genealogical