

Maine History

Volume 21 | Number 2

Article 3

10-1-1981

Book Reviews

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Recommended Citation

Craig, Beatrice, Nathan Lipfert, and Alvin Hamblen Morrison. "Book Reviews." *Maine History* 21, 2 (1981): 99-108. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol21/iss2/3>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Quiet Presence: Dramatic, First-Person Accounts—The True Stories of Franco-Americans in New England. By Dyke Hendrickson. (Portland, Me.: Guy Gannett Publishing Co., 1978. Pp. xiv, 226. Paper. \$6.95.)

Dyke Hendrickson, a journalist with the *Maine Sunday Telegram*, was prompted to undertake this attempt at informal oral history by the success of a series of articles on Franco-Americans done for his paper. Essentially, the book can be divided into three parts: historical background; interviews; and statistical appendices.

Hendrickson's journalistic approach is apparent in the organization of his material, which is sometimes repetitive. It appears as if he wrote not a book but a series of articles. His style is reminiscent of the popular press; he seems unable to avoid using pathos and melodrama for its own sake, mainly through the use of clichés like the book's subtitle. The similarities between such a title and newspaper headlines are not limited to mere wording. The reader, led to expect direct Franco-American narratives, is somewhat deceived because the author keeps interposing himself. Since about half the text is sometimes in the author's words, the results are less "true stories" of Franco-Americans than the author's perception of them, a flaw worsened by his inability to understand his interlocutors.

Hendrickson's shallowness can be embarrassing to witness, as when he keeps marveling about the absence of bitterness his subjects displayed when recalling the bad times they went through. In the case of the Mondors, a family of seventeen children, described as close-knit and loving, the author's expression of surprise that one of the grown-up daughters "shows no sign of embarrassment when they [her parents] don't understand a question or

answer in heavily accented English,” is a painful display of tactlessness, particularly when one considers that he could not conduct his interviews in French!

The selection of those interviewed also seems to reflect a bias. Some are manual workers whose socioeconomic achievements, though real and limited to the blue collar sphere, are labeled unusual. Others are academics, almost all of whom are working under subsidized programs. Many are clerics, including one bishop, or genealogists and Franco-American historians, people who rose, but within the confines of a sort of ethnic mental ghetto. One is a mayor, who is described as a maverick. The only example of a corporate success is put down as a “company man.” What happened to the Franco-American doctors, lawyers, and business executives?

Hendrickson seems to believe that a bona-fide Franco-American is an individual who keeps looking backward and who displays a congenial inability to get ahead by playing the American success game by the rules. Hendrickson does not strike me as having spent much time trying to understand Franco-Americans on their own terms, nor does he appear to have spent much time doing his homework. His historical background seems to have been hastily put together from the first sources he came across. For example, Reverend Thomas Albert, the author of *Histoire du Madawaska*, is not an authority on the Acadians. On the whole, the book seems hastily pulled together in order to capitalize on the “Roots” phenomenon, not to help anyone understand the Franco-Americans. As a result, it is a disappointment.

Béatrice Craig
Veazie, Maine

The Treasure of the Concepción: The Wreck of the Almiranta. By Peter Earle. (New York: Viking Press, 1980. Pp. 274. Cloth. \$12.95)

In Search of Shipwrecks. By Jim Jennev. (South Brunswick and New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1980. Pp. 185. Cloth. \$15.95.)

The entertainment value of nonfiction is too often compared with that of fiction. No such comparison will be made here, but I must make the point that this is as entertaining a book as I have ever read. It is also well written, well edited, well footnoted, and scholarly.

Peter Earle, a reader in economic history at the University of London and a former teacher at the London School of Economics, tells the story—really a series of stories—of the Spanish almiranta (flagship) *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*. He discusses her voyage from Cadiz to Vera Cruz in 1640; her sailing for Spain, laden with treasure, during the hurricane season of 1641; her wreck on a reef north of Hispaniola; the attempts by the Spanish and the other treasure hunters to recover the treasure; and, finally, the tale of the salvage of much of the wealth in 1687 by William Phips, whose beginnings in Woolwich are a source of pride to many Mainers, and who is a major character in this book. Tying the story together is the history of the decline of Spanish power in the Caribbean.

Although little new material on Phips's early life is presented, Earle is the first writer to actually tie together the English and Spanish ends of this story. Phips himself never even knew the name of the vessel whose treasure he recovered. Some of the book is the result of documentary evidence that has come to light only recently. Anticlimactically, Earle's concluding chapter records the discovery in 1978 of the wreck, the stern portion of which had not been found by Phips.

It is difficult to fault this book in any serious way. The illustrations are well chosen and include a modern map of the Caribbean showing a track of the *Concepción's* voyage and charts of the reefs where she was wrecked. The book is heartily recommended. It does not seem likely that this phase of Phips's career will ever need to be rewritten.

Jim Jenney's book, *In Search of Shipwrecks*, attempts to instruct sports divers in the process of finding and identifying shipwrecks and the techniques of removing artifacts from them. The first part is a "how-to" section dealing with research, equipment and tools, search techniques, artifacts, recovery, and preservation. The second portion chronicles the diving and research work on four wrecks with which Jenney has been involved. The last third of the book tells the stories of sixteen wrecks that remain unfound along the New England and New York coasts. Three Maine shipwrecks are discussed in this last section.

Parts of this book are quite readable, but readers should be warned that this is not a serious work of history. The author's methods of identifying wrecks are not overly scientific, and his knowledge of maritime technology is apparently limited. For example, he does not understand the difference between tons burthen and displacement tonnage. Many of the wreck stories have been told before, and two-and-one-half pages on preserving waterlogged artifacts are totally inadequate to insure permanent preservation. The state maps are distorted and unhelpful, and the index contains not quite twice as many entries as the table of contents.

This reviewer found the writing uninspired and the editing terrible. But the book may well inspire many of its readers to find and plunder wreck sites. I believe the author has made a serious omission: nowhere does he provide a discussion of the legal and ethical problems

involved in taking artifacts from wrecks. To his credit, Jim Jenney advocates self-control in collecting artifacts, warns against the effects of drying out waterlogged items, and does not take actual treasure hunting seriously. Undoubtedly, his research work and diving have added to our knowledge of some underwater remains, but he does not seem aware that he may be destroying as much as he is saving. His team of divers, each looking for decorations for their walls and mantelpieces, can destroy the usefulness of an historic site for the archaeologist. In Maine, where such sites are public property, such treasure hunters would be committing a crime.

I cannot recommend this book.

Nathan Lipfert
Maine Maritime Museum

Indian New England Before the Mayflower. By Howard S. Russell (Hanover, N. H.: University of New England Press, 1980. Pp. xi, 284. Cloth. \$17.50.)

What the dust jacket promises, this book delivers: "In offering here a highly readable yet comprehensive description of New England's Indians as they lived when European settlers first met them, the author provides a well-rounded picture of the natives as neither savages nor heroes, but fellow human beings existing at a particular time and in a particular environment."

As an academic anthropologist with a research specialty in Northeastern Algonkian ethnohistory, I am delighted to find in Howard Russell the same high-quality scholarship that I long have admired in the work of Maine's first ethnohistorian, Fannie Hardy Eckstorm (1865-1946). Indeed, Russell's work is more cautious and less opinionated than Eckstorm's, yet their similarity is

noteworthy. In the best spirit of the independent, natural historian, both wrote from life-long personal interest and intense curiosity to learn more. While neither had university tenure, both corresponded freely with other fine minds, inside and outside academe. Both were free from the political constraints of academic schools of theory and practice, and, not being forced to publish or perish, each has produced nonstandard publications that are obvious labors of love.

Nonstandard most assuredly does not mean substandard. Russell's book is not a typical historical ethnography in the anthropological sense; there is too little in it about kinship terms and too much about ethnobotany for it to conform to that genre pattern. It is the author's emphasis on Indian horticulture that makes this study unique. The farmer's life is Russell's special interest. In 1976 he published *A Long Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England* (see *Maine Historical Society Quarterly* 18 [Spring 1979]: 254-56, for review). But, because sedentary horticulture was more important in aboriginal southern New England, the less horticulturally dependent Abenaki of northern New England are relatively minor characters in this book.

Since it is essential to know about these southern New England Algonkians and the non-horticultural Micmacs (not considered by Russell) of eastern New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in order to see the Abenaki in their proper spatial context of being in the middle of an ecological/economic continuum, this book provides a good starting point for students of Maine Indians. And, because of Mr Russell's great store of knowledge about horticulture and his easy way of relating it to his readers, there is plenty of new material for the more advanced student as well. For example, he discusses thoroughly why he rejects a recent theory that the use of fertilizer in corn hills was not a New England Indian custom. He also

explains that the Indians did not kill garden-robbing crows because they believed that Crow had brought them Corn. They were not particularly upset, however, when the white man did so. Russell presents evidence that New England Algonkians engaged in “calculated improvement,” if not in “formal cultivation,” of strawberries and grapes.

The temporal context is well handled: archaeological evidence, ethnohistorical documentation, and “memory-culture” ethnographic testimony are all interwoven by the author to depict life in aboriginal New England circa A.D. 1600. This date is the ethnohistoric baseline for the study of the Historic Period of the Eastern Woodlands, because the mere handful of unique reports from the previous century is augmented suddenly and dramatically in the early 1600s by a variety of overlapping accounts by explorers, missionaries, and settlers from various European nations that can be cross-checked for details about Indian cultures. Anthropological data helps us understand cultural practices before European contact, and ethnographic fieldwork with living Indians, especially before World War II, catches the last vestiges of traditional ways and beliefs before modernization completely annihilates them. The author is well read in each category.

Mr. Russell’s command of the ethnohistorical data is particularly impressive. Because southern New England is his major concern, however, some important statements about Maine are neglected. For example, in discussing examples of occasional female sagamores in New England, the author could have added Christopher Leavitt’s “Queen of Quake” as an Abenaki case in the Portland Harbor area. Likewise, when discussing the northern limits of native maize horticulture and intertribal relations, Russell could have profited by citing more of Champlain’s comments than he did. Namely, Champlain reports that,

in 1605, natives at the mouth of the Kennebec had told him, “that the Indians who cultivated corn lived far inland, and had ceased to grow it on the coast on account of the war they used to wage with others who came and seized it.” And, in 1629, when Champlain was based on the St. Lawrence River, he devised an emergency plan for the French settlers there to use Abenaki maize, if necessary, during the British seige.

Russell refers at least four times to John Gyles of Pemaquid, who was captured in 1689 and held for nine years, mostly inland on the St. John River where maize gardening was then practiced, perhaps only as a result of French missionary influence, a possibility not discussed. He also makes repeated references to the 1609 publication of French lawyer-adventurer Marc Lescarbot. Yet, in describing the size of Indian buildings, Russell does not mention Lescarbot’s firsthand report that, at the mouth of the St. John River, within the palisaded Indian village of Ouigoudi, were “many lodges, large and small, one of which was as big as a market-hall, wherein dwelt numerous families.” However, omissions such as these are counterbalanced by many highly detailed ethnohistoric references to Massachusetts, the author’s home state and center of concern.

The book is divided into five parts: *Background; The People; The Household; The Bountiful Earth; and Interrelations*. In accordance with the author’s interests, the third and fourth parts constitute the bulk of the book, with the longest chapters being on *The Family Meals, The Season’s Round, Cultivated Crops, Preparing for Cultivation, and Household & Personal Equipment*. There is also a seven page appendix, *Uses of Trees, Shrubs, and Herbaceous Plants*.

With one exception, Russell handles repetitions, corrections, and back references admirably: If so much time was spent by so many persons at the seashore as he

claims, and as acres of shell heaps prove, who stayed home and worked so hard at carefully weeding the gardens, as is also claimed? This point is not made clear, at least to me.

On one minor point the author's command of the data slips a bit. He stresses (p. 193), "The taking of scalps as war trophies is not mentioned by the earliest writers of New England." On the contrary, Champlain tells of "quelques testes" (called heads in one translation and scalps in another) being taken back to the mouth of the St. John River by local sagamore Secoudon after a battle at Chatham, Massachusetts, in October 1604. Also, Lescarbot, in his epic poem, "The Defeat of the Armouchiquois Savages . . . July, 1607," states that after Micmac sagamore Membertou and his Maine-coast allies sacked Saco, Maine, "ils enlevent les têtes" of the dead enemy chiefs to take home for "joveuses fetes." The strong-of-stomach should read "The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping?" by James L. Axtell and William C. Sturtevant in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 37 (July 1980): 451-72, for some perspective on this grim custom.

The format of the book is attractive. There are many excellent line drawings, several relevant photographs, and maps of peoples, villages, and trails. The easy-reading text is followed by twenty-one pages of notes and a thirty-four-page bibliography that is of great value because it is topically arranged. Typographical errors are very few and simple, except for two that I noticed. On the tribes map (p. 25), *Kocamela* should be *Rocameca*, and the sentence (p. 141) beginning "In Connecticut they include, among many, Sandy Point in Norridgewock . . ." makes no sense to me. To my knowledge, there is no Norridgewock in Connecticut. In Maine, the Norridgewock mission of Father Sebastian Rale was on Old Point in the Kennebec River across from the mouth of the Sandy River.

These errors, however, are unimportant. Overall, the contribution made by Howard S. Russell is a major one. His book is a synthesis of much knowledge that previously has existed piecemeal. To fully appreciate what a fine job Russell has done, the interested reader might wish to consult relevant chapters of *Northeast* (Vol. 15: *Handbook of North American Indians* [Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978]), edited by Bruce C. Trigger.

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