

3-2021

## Maine, 1875-1900--An Introduction

Earle G. Shettleworth Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/oml-maine-birds-eye-view-catalogue>

---

### Recommended Citation

Shettleworth, Earle G. Jr., "Maine, 1875-1900--An Introduction" (2021). *Exhibition Catalogue*. 3.  
<https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/oml-maine-birds-eye-view-catalogue/3>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine Bird's Eye Views, 1870-1905 at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exhibition Catalogue by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu](mailto:jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu).

## **Maine 1875 – 1900: An Introduction**

### **Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr.**

The more than ninety bird's eye views of Maine towns and cities made between 1875 and 1900 provide many insights into the state's economy during the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century. Ranging from York Beach to Caribou, these remarkable prints mirror the commercial and industrial life of Maine in an age of transition from the Civil War to the dawn of the twentieth century.

On the eve of the Civil War, Maine's population numbered 628,279. The traditional occupations of farming, fishing, lumbering, shipbuilding, and maritime trade were augmented by manufacturing, especially the thriving new textile industry. When the Civil War began in 1861, the state staunchly supported preserving the union and ending slavery by sending more than thirty regiments to the field over the next four years. Approximately 73,000 Maine men served in the war, of whom about 10,000 were lost in combat or to disease. Several Maine officers, including Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of Brunswick and Oliver Otis Howard of Leeds, distinguished themselves as military leaders.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Maine faced the challenge of a shrinking population. The slight decrease in residents can be attributed to the war dead as well as to the westward migration that immediately followed the conflict. In the next decade, the state's population resumed its growth with a gain of more than 20,000 between 1870 and 1880.

This rise was due in part to French-Canadian immigrants who crossed the border from Quebec and New Brunswick to work in the cotton and woolen mills of Biddeford-Saco, Brunswick, Lewiston-Auburn, Augusta, and Waterville. The state also actively recruited immigrants to farm in Aroostook County by appointing William Widgery Thomas, Jr. of Portland as Commissioner of Immigration in 1870. Thomas oversaw the settlement of Swedish families in their own community of New Sweden. Other Scandinavians came to Maine in this period as did Italians and Eastern Europeans, many of whom found work in the granite industry.

When Joshua Chamberlain delivered his 1876 address "Maine: Her Place in History," at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, he observed that the state's cotton manufacturing equaled its lumber business. He also cited other major sources of wealth: shipbuilding, shoes, and woolen textiles, to which could be added ice, granite, slate, lime, and fishing. After an initial retraction following the Civil War, agriculture was experiencing a rebirth with potato farming in Aroostook County.

Beginning in the 1860s, papermaking grew rapidly along Maine's Androscoggin, Kennebec, and Penobscot Rivers, ready sources of water borne transportation for logs and hydropower to run the mills. Paper companies first established factories in river towns such as Topsham, Livermore Falls, Winslow, and Old Town, later expanding to create the entirely new manufacturing communities of Rumford and Millinocket.

Maine's post-Civil War agricultural and manufacturing economy depended on railroads to transport its products to market. Starting in the 1830s, rail lines grew to four hundred miles by 1860, connecting the state with Boston and Montreal. After the war, the lines tripled in length to twelve hundred miles by 1892. Smaller railroads were consolidated into two major corporations, the Maine Central Railroad and the Boston and Maine Railroad. Between 1891 and 1902, the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad built its line to Fort Kent, linking the rich agricultural region of Aroostook County to the rest of the state.

Maine's expanded railroads also opened passenger travel to thousands of residents and visitors. Coupled with coastal and river steamboats, the state's rail system made summer tourism possible. The natural beauty of Maine's coast and mountains first came to national attention in the 1840s and 1850s through the landscape paintings of Hudson River School artists Thomas Cole and Frederick Church. After the Civil War, middle and upper-class Americans used their new wealth for summer recreation and escape from disease-ridden cities. From Kittery Point in York County to Roque Bluffs in Washington County, the state's coastal villages and islands became seasonal destinations. First came boarding houses, followed by hotels and cottages. Large hotels flourished at Old Orchard Beach and Bar Harbor, and summer colonies proliferated from York Harbor to Grindstone Neck and on islands such as Cushing's, Squirrel, and Islesboro. Inland Maine hosted tourists at Gilded Age resorts at Poland Spring, Mount Kineo, and Rangeley. The Rangeley region became famous for its fishing, hunting, and boating, promoted by sportswoman Cornelia "Fly Rod" Crosby.

Maine's educational system also made significant advances in the post-Civil war period. The Maine Legislature created teachers' colleges at Farmington and Castine in 1863 that were followed by two more such schools at Gorham and Fort Kent in 1878. In 1865 the University of Maine joined the private colleges of Bowdoin, Colby, and Bates as the state's primary institutions of higher learning. The passage of the Free High School Act of 1873 resulted in the establishment of one hundred and fifty high schools across the state. In 1880 Hallowell led the way for the public library movement by opening the first community library building in Maine.

Commenting on Manie's recent progress in this era, the Portland newspaper editor Edward H. Elwell wrote in the 1892 edition of John S.C. Abbott's, *History of the State of Maine*:

With their natural resources and their related industries, the people of Maine have reason to be content with their lot. They have behind them a history of successful endeavor. Their climate gives them health and vigor. Their rugged soil compels them to thrift and industry, which ever bring their reward. Their laws and customs tend to sobriety and uprightness of conduct. The hardships of a new land, still existing in the West, to which so many of them have been enticed, are past and gone, and they have now the benefit of long-established churches, schools, colleges, hospitals, literary, social and benevolent institutions which adorn and elevate the life of a people.