Maine History

Volume 22 | Number 3 Article 3

1-1-1983

Book Reviews

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Recommended Citation

Barry, William David, John F. Jaques, and R.C. Richardson. "Book Reviews." *Maine History* 22, 3 (1983): 159-166. https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol22/iss3/3

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Women of Maine. By Lee Agger. (Portland, Me.: Guy Gannett Publishing Company, 1982. Pp. 237. Paper. $10.95.)

The Guy Gannett Publishing Company seems to be moving ever onward into the field of popular local history, a fact that should be applauded. Recently they have come out with Jim Brunelle's useful, yearly *Maine Almanac*, Dyke Hendrickson's *Quiet Presence*, and Bob Niss's *Faces of Maine*. Lee Agger's *Women of Maine* is the latest entry, and, I am pleased to report, it covers a lot of difficult ground.

I am well aware that serious students of history may take exception to this pronouncement. Indeed, the treatments of such significant figures as politician Margaret Chase Smith, poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Indian captive, turned religious figure, Ester Wheelwright are certainly brief and handled in more depth elsewhere. Clearly, the author makes no claim for a definitive treatment of any. Rather, she has chosen the time-honored format of brief lives, which she handles in a worklike and entertaining manner. She has obviously spent a great deal of time and energy in identifying her subjects and, rather than unearthing startlingly new material, has stuck close to the known facts. For the student, general reader, or working historian, this is a most useful and important service. As far as I know, Agger's is the first attempt at an overview since Helen Coffin Beedy's 1895 tome, *Mothers of Maine*. Clearly, much has transpired in the last ninety years, and *Women of Maine* provides as much an update as a base of operations for all future studies. This is exactly what good popular history does best.

For this reader, one of the great strengths of this book is found in the numerous illustrations. Nearly every

important woman under consideration is represented by a likeness. While images of Sara Willis Parton (Fanny Fern), Laura J. Curtis Bullard, Kate Furbish, and Margaret Jane Mussey Sweat existed, they were widely scattered among various collections. Here they are brought together under one cover and identified as to collection of origin. This is something that even scholarly works often neglect. Also included is a useful index and a superb bibliography that identifies both books and periodicals. Another section briefly explores the nature of special collections relating to the subject.

Ms. Agger, a past president of Maine Media Women, has approached her task with obvious enthusiasm and real skill. Her choices are good, focusing on women in medicine, law, science, art, literature, politics, and religion. She handles the heroism of Mary Brown Patten, who took command of a clipper ship in 1857, with the same verve that she employs in describing the entrepreneurial rise of Eva Horton in our time. So too, she gives good insights into the careers of Jean Gannett Hawley and Mary Rines Thompson, the leading media figures in contemporary Portland. Indeed, Ms. Agger's knowledge of the workings of contemporary society seem a splendid aid in understanding the past.

The only criticism I could voice would concern those who were not included. Elizabeth Ring, the state's premier bibliographer, Peggy Bacon, the extraordinary pioneer visual artist, and Charlotte Thomas, the nineteenth century patroness of Portland, should certainly pass the test of contributions to the substance and color of local society. Yet, such is the nature of this kind of study. I congratulate the author on all counts and am glad to have the volume within reach of my desk.

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Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times. By James R. Mellow. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980. Pp. xiii, 684. Cloth. $19.95. Paper. $10.95.)

James R. Mellow's *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* has sixty pages of notes, but the most interesting item for Maine historians will be a mystery that the author admits, "For the past four years, I have been trying to trace . . . . (and I still am.)" The mystery centers around the complex source for *Hawthorne's First Diary,* originally published in the Portland *Transcript* and then in book form by Houghton Mifflin in 1897. The editor, Samuel T Pickard, reported that the manuscript came from William Symmes. In a lengthy note on pages 604-5, Mellow concludes, "At this point, I can report only that the circumstantial details of Symmes's story of how he came into possession of the purported diary are corroborated in certain matters." There is a distinct possibility that the original existed, but that Symmes tried to 'improve' on it. The next note concerns Ben Ham of Raymond, who is mentioned in a Hawthorne letter now at Middlebury College and also in the diary, which Mellow calls "another of the circumstantial bits of evidence that tend to lend credibility to the diary."

Because most readers of Hawthorne might be surprised to find even two tangible results of Hawthorne's association with Maine, the library at Bowdoin named for him and his classmate Longfellow, and the building at Raymond Neck called the Hawthorne House, the comment by Mellow on page 20 will be important. Hawthorne so emphasized his strange and solitary years in Salem that biographers since Randall Stewart in 1952 have been trying to introduce new evidence about his early life. Mellow's summary shows why he wants to pin down the validity of the Maine diary: "He considered his childhood years in Maine one of the happiest periods of his life,

though he had few companions his own age except sisters." A few years later he began his college career at Bowdoin where he formed the friendships that shaped his life, those with Horatio Bridge and Franklin Pierce. Interestingly enough, his close association with Longfellow came only after they had graduated.

Such networks are of major importance to Mellow, who plans to join the tradition of scholarship associated with Ralph Leslie Rusk's monumental work on Emerson fifty years ago and the more gossipy, social history such as Van Wyck Brooks wove around his *Flowering of New England*. The next part in Mellow's planned series of four interlocking biographies will feature Margaret Fuller. The other two will add Emerson and Thoreau. The project looks promising because of the vivid presentation of Margaret Fuller from Hawthorne's prejudiced eyes. In discussing *The Blithedale Romance* and the conversations about Margaret Fuller in Rome during the years leading to Hawthorne's last finished book *The Marble Faun,* Mellow admits that Hawthorne was making "the sharpest and most critical judgment he ever made on the human clay." Obviously, Mellow's own view will be presented with modern readers in mind.

About Emerson and Thoreau, too, signs are hopeful. Comparison of the presentation of Thoreau's death in Mellow's biography of Hawthorne with the same subject in Gay Wilson Allen's gigantic biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1981), for example, shows that Mellow has more concern for a careful overview of the interrelationships. Mellow comes closer to Van Wyck Brooks than most scholars dare and writes about Hawthorne's works mostly to stress personal and social aspects. The section on *The Scarlet Letter* serves as a notable example, calling attention to the scarlet fever raging in the children's quarters, the death of Hawthorne's mother, as well as the political intrigue in the Salem Custom House controversy. The

section concludes with a careful comment about the relationship between the images of fire in the book and a dream of the author.

All in all, Mellow's pleasantly readable book, which, for example, begins with a dramatic moment in Hawthorne's courtship and literary career, moves skillfully through familiar scenes to bring a reader to appreciate wholly new and revealing insights. A good book and a promising one.

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In English Ways: The Movement of Societies and the Transferal of English Local Law and Custom to Massachusetts Bay in the Seventeenth Century. By David Grayson Allen. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1981. Pp. xxi, 312. Cloth. $27.00.)

For over a century the New England town has been a subject of considerable interest and debate amongst historians. E. A. Freeman in the Victorian period saw it as an expression of the universality of the Teutonic experience. Later, C. M. Andrews and others brought different assumptions into play and developed their own perspectives. More recently, with new research taking place on both sides of the Atlantic, S. C. Powell, K. A. Lockridge, and Michael Zukerman have made seminal contributions to the reorientation of the debate. Articles on the subject continue to appear in the learned journals at a prodigious rate.

Dr. Allen's book, therefore, joins an already crowded field. Bearing the same title, it began its life as a University of Wisconsin Ph.D. thesis in 1974. The resultant book still bears many of the unmistakable hallmarks of the original

dissertation. Though the reader is frequently referred to the thesis for supporting evidence, the text of the book is itself densely detailed and heavily annotated. It parades the extensive research effort that lies behind it. There are statistical tables, graphs, and forty-five pages of appendices containing basic biographical information on the original English settlers in the towns that Dr. Allen investigates. Yet in other respects the author, while retaining the content and structure of his doctoral thesis, is clearly aiming at a different audience. The style, by and large, is very readable and the line of argument clearly – even excessively – signposted. Parts of the select bibliography are so elementary that they read like a beginner's guide to English history and seem at odds with the detailed, monographic nature of the book itself. English readers will, no doubt, be startled by Dr. Allen's placing of Hampshire in the "West Country" and by his arbitrary transfer of Hertfordshire from the Home Counties to East Anglia. They may be surprised, too, by his contention that "nearly all of the contemporary local English sources still remain unpublished" (p. 293) and by his belief that the East Riding of Yorkshire was agriculturally static.

These comments notwithstanding, let it be said that Dr. Allen has written a useful book, which early modernists on both sides of the Atlantic will read with profit. Most of it consists of detailed case studies of five New England towns – Rowley, Hingham, Newbury, Ipswich, and Watertown – and of the English backgrounds of their earliest inhabitants. His main thesis – repeated so frequently that none but the dullest of readers can fail to grasp it – is that "Massachusetts was more a new 'England' than a 'new' England" (p. 6). The first settlers in Massachusetts accurately reproduced there the distinctive

features of the local economies, social structures and attitudes, law, custom, and government of the different English communities that they had left behind. (With the exception of Newbury, whose first inhabitants were drawn more widely from both Wiltshire and Hampshire, those who settled in Dr. Allen's towns came more or less *en masse* from precisely defined localities in Yorkshire and East Anglia.) They divided and used their new lands in the ways familiar to them, and regulated their lives and economies according to the patterns prevailing in their own particular corners of the mother country. Thus, argues Dr. Allen, far from being economically and socially uniform and homogeneous, early seventeenth-century Massachussets displayed the same rich local diversity as seventeenth-century England. It was only later that distinctively *New England* ways developed – new economic systems and habits, different modes of government, and different social structures. As population increased, as the problems of the poor worsened, as social polarization became more accentuated, and as religion diversified, the local autonomy of individual towns gave way to a centralization based on colony and province. *New England,* in the fullest sense, was homegrown, not imported.

Dr. Allen's book reemphasizes the importance of a local approach to history and such generalizations as he makes are extrapolations from the local evidence rather than ambitious historico-sociological models. By and large, his conclusions win agreement though his central thesis, by being pressed so relentlessly, appears at times a shade too mechanically deterministic. And like other historians of the American colonial period, Dr. Allen clearly finds difficulties with the *motives* for migration. In the nature of things, the evidence here is too meager, inconclusive, and intangible to allow for quantification and firm conclusions. It comes as no surprise, therefore, when, in his

penultimate chapter Dr. Allen explores the religious and economic factors in the migration, telltale words like "possibly," "perhaps," and "may have" start to punctuate his pages.

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