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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Boyles, Donna, and others. *Pownal: A Rural Maine History*. Pownal, Me.: The Pownal Scenic and Historical Society, 1977. 112 pages. \$4.75 paper.

Mention a newly published local history and the invariable response today is, "Oh, not another one!" Well, this one deserves your attention for several reasons. First, it is thoroughly researched and scrupulously documented. Second, it is always exciting to rediscover what Maine talent can do. In this case it is the combined efforts of Donna Boyles, Sherilyn Dietrich, Mary Goodman, Marjorie Mason, Kathryne Sturtevant Moore and the Pownal Scenic and Historical Society. Third, the drawings by Michael Ward are a visual delight. The illustrations are not only distinctive but tie in appropriately with the text.

Traditionally town histories are albums of someone's collection of favorite stories, and too often the coverage is restricted to a narrow range of subject matter. The authors of *Pownal: A Rural Maine History* combined personal reminiscences supplemented with the records of institutions and organizations to come up with an excellent combination of the pictorial and the printed word. For this they are to be commended. Their achievement is a collection of chapters — each self contained. Lack of space prohibits a description of every chapter so it seems best to list the wide variety of subjects covered by the authors: 1. Early Settlements and Beginnings; 2. Historic Sites; 3. Town Government; 4. Roads; 5. Fire Department and Auxiliary; 6. Business, Industry and Occupations; 7. Farming; 8. Education—"Hornbooks and Learning"; 9. Religious Foundations; 10. Burial Grounds; 11. Social and Service Organizations; 12. Rural Architecture; 13. A Rural Way of Life; also included are a bibliography and appendixes.

Of special interest is the chapter entitled "A Rural Way of Life" which relates the personal recollections of Kathryne Sturtevant Moore. One can't help but wish that the old style of caring and sharing could be revived, not only in Pownal but in all communities.

Pownal was incorporated on March 3, 1808, when Maine was still a part of Massachusetts. The town took its name from Thomas Pownal of England who was a very popular governor of Massachusetts from 1757 to 1760. The text states that descendants of the first trustees who governed in 1685, when Pownal was then a section of old North Yarmouth, are still living in the area.

In my judgement the book has two major omissions. Most obvious is the lack of an index. Hopefully the authors will rectify this in the very near future. The other is the lack of information concerning not only the military history of Pownal but also how the inhabitants fared during these times. The muster roll in Appendix V is hardly sufficient.

Pownal: A Rural Maine History is produced in a very convenient 9 x 5 format with many photographs. Unhappily, the clarity of the photographic reproductions is less than desirable. Nevertheless, they are significantly important to the text. The verses and quotes interspersed throughout are very well chosen and add to the overall charm of the volume.

Thanks to the editor, the authors, the artist, and everyone responsible for putting *Pownal: A Rural Maine History* together, we can all take pride in the town of Pownal and the galaxy of men and women whose character and achievements grace the pages of this history.

Esta Astor
South Casco, Maine

Frost, John E. *Maine Genealogy: A Bibliographical Guide*.
Portland: The Maine Historical Society, 1977. 45 pages.
\$4.00 paper.

The eighth in the series of bibliographical guides published by the Maine Historical Society since 1971, *Maine Genealogy* provides lists and comments helpful to historians, genealogists, and even laymen. Its focus, writes its compiler, "is upon . . . information that will lead to the solution of challenging problems.

Those familiar with the work of John Frost will use the bibliography with complete confidence. Always he is a thorough, meticulous researcher — whether writing a biography, a family genealogy, a history of old houses and the families living therein over a span of three centuries, or shorter studies on historical figures or events. His recording of tombstone inscriptions throughout York County is both a boon to genealogists and a model of such records. His care as to accuracy is but reinforced by his delight in learning of an occasional omission or error and his immediate effort to rectify it.

The opening essay, "The Genealogical Revolution," is stimulating to the general reader as well as of significance to the genealogist. Frost's survey of the practice of genealogy in Maine starts with a brief account of the dramatic rescue of Maine's 1798 Direct Tax Records from a fiery fate. Listing all residents and property in its twenty volumes, this source is now available for consultation at the library of the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston. Interesting too is the account of the founding (1822) and development of the Maine Historical Society which has the largest collection of genealogical material in Maine.

Dr. Frost points out three recent directions in genealogical study: "(1) the return to and thorough exploration of sources, (2) a critical approach to what has

been written in the past and even to the validity of sources, and (3) an entirely democratic approach to subject matter." At the end of this essay, for instance, are several paragraphs on the interest in French-Canadian genealogical research in Maine.

Helpful in the essay are the paragraphs on each of the larger libraries in the state that have collections of genealogical materials. Encouraging also are the various organizations and institutions involved in preserving and centralizing records before they are lost. Although the *Maine Genealogical Inquirer* has now suspended publication, there is a possibility that it may soon be continued by others.

The bibliography proper begins with six pages of federal, state, and local records available in Maine (or Massachusetts), including census and pension lists, county court records, town vital records, and church and family Bible lists. These entries are not only helpfully annotated, but are interspersed with further comments by the compiler. There follows a similar section of annotated entries and additional comments on newspapers and city and town directories as genealogical sources. Unfortunately, too few runs of Maine newspapers have been preserved. Five pages are devoted to the use of maps, and include references to proprietary maps and to 19th century county maps which identify and locate early residents. The rest of the bibliography, some sixteen or seventeen pages, consist of lists of sources, most of which are followed by lines of description and critical annotations.

Tombstones are valuable historical and genealogical sources. There are few marked 17th century graves in Maine, but 18th century ones are not uncommon in coastal settlements. Before the establishment of town cemeteries in the latter part of the 19th century, most burials were on

home property. There are thousands of small graveyards throughout the state, although many have been lost over the years by natural erosion, by neglect, by vandalism, and by other uses of the land. Copying inscriptions from all over the state has been done by many individuals, for many years. The procedure is being encouraged and organized by the Maine Old Cemeteries Association.

A bibliography, like a newspaper, is out of date as soon as it is issued, for some new sources continue to become available. This one is not only an aid to research but also a challenge to individuals and groups to assist, one way or another, in the discovery and preservation of further information. One is struck by the compiler's appeals for help in updating, or indexing, or other services that will make existing sources more valuable for research. Copies of genealogical materials — printed or typed or photocopied — are needed at all genealogical centers. Foundation and other financial aid is needed, not only for the purchase of source material, but also for providing organization, supervision, and other expenses for the copying and indexing of present holdings.

“Few areas,” challenges Dr. Frost, “are in need of more work, and anyone with a penchant for exploration and a passion for accuracy can cut a trail Apart from the appreciation of later users, participation in building a great research collection for Maine can bring a good deal of personal satisfaction.”

Hilda M. Fife
Maine Old Cemeteries Association

Sweetser, Phyllis S., compiler and editor. *Cumberland, Maine, in Four Centuries*. Cumberland, Maine: Town of Cumberland, 1976. vii, 351 pages. \$10.00 cloth.

One hundred years ago, when our nation was celebrating its Centennial, many local histories were written — most of them by non-professional historians. If one had depended upon the professionals of that era, little local history previous to 1876 would be available today.

During the recent Bicentennial observance, many professionals took an interest in writing at the local history level, but the bulk of the published work has been provided by dedicated non-professionals. Usually, writers of town histories tend to be persons whose families have lived in, or at least have been associated from “generation unto generation” with the towns concerned. Such writers have a personal interest in their subject, and their source material, both primary and secondary, is frequently more readily available to them than to any outsider.

The Town of Cumberland’s history has been produced under such conditions. The ancestors of both Phyllis Sturdivant Sweetser, the book’s capable compiler-editor, and those of her husband, came to the locality in the 1700s when Cumberland was still a part of North Yarmouth. The book’s chapters, arranged in a smooth sequence, have been contributed by knowledgeable writers, well-acquainted with the town, both past and present.

Of the four centuries mentioned in the book’s title, the earliest period is alluded to only briefly in references to ancient North Yarmouth. However, the chapter of the area’s early history does provide a good outline of the events occurring before the town was incorporated. It also explains why Cumberland’s northern boundary is so uneven. When the typical dissensions arose concerning the dividing lines between the two towns, at the time of Cumberland’s incorporation in 1821, some property

owners living along that line were given ninety days to decide which town they would chose to be in. Their conflicting decisions resulted in the irregular dividing line that still causes problems today.

The account of Cumberland's largest island, Chebeague, takes the reader from its early period when it repeatedly changed hands for speculative purposes until the time when it was settled in 1746. Its story continues through the "Stone Sloop" era, when Chebeague ships carried tons of granite and other building stones from Down East quarries to the railroad centers of Boston, New York and other eastern cities. It also tells of the town's later success in accommodating tourists during its summer resort boom.

Shipyards and sea captains receive due recognition as befits their importance in this coastal town. Typical local history chapters give information on the town's churches, schools, taverns, transportation, industries, clubs and organizations and other related subjects.

Of special interest to the steadily increasing number of people interested in historic preservation are the chapters on "Old Homes" and "Architectural Styles." The latter is especially noteworthy, singling out as it does various features displayed in the town's architecture from the early "Cape Cod-type" dwellings, through the Federal and Greek Revival periods into the Victorian era. Excellent photography enhances the text.

Especially to be commended is the inclusion of the book's final chapters entitled "Government and Politics" and "Cumberland Today." These give a good summation of the early trials and later problems — the "growing pains" as it were — of a typical Maine town. Like many other municipalities, Cumberland has found it can operate more efficiently under a council-manager form of government.

One minor error noted in the text is the reference to "Charleston," Massachusetts (pp. 10,15,49) rather than "Charlestown." Also we are left to wonder what "History of Maine" is referred to on page 68. Typographical mistakes occur in the most carefully edited work, for example, "geneology" (p.80) and "superintendant" (p.48).

But these instances are trivial, and Mrs. Sweetser and her capable staff are to be congratulated on this well-written, carefully footnoted volume. Their book deserves a special place in Maine's rapidly growing collection of local histories.

Benjamin Butler
Farmington, Maine

Taylor, Robert L. *History of Limington, Maine, 1668-1900*.
Norway, Maine: Oxford Hills Press, 1975. 211 pages.
\$8.50 cloth.

Scattered across Maine are many small towns, rural and sparsely populated, which a century or more ago achieved a degree of prosperity and then declined following the Civil War. These communities had flourished as long as the forests produced lumber and small farms were profitable, but with the opening of the limitless and fertile territories of the West, and the growing allures of city life, the towns, as picturesque as they were, became almost forgotten villages. Far removed from the main arteries of traffic, they soon became places haunted by vacant houses, meadows reclaimed by woods, and empty barns.

Limington, its name as pretty as a china teacup (who named it? Mr. Taylor doesn't tell), lies remote in the northeast corner of York County, in the valley of the Saco.

It is a town which has undergone this cycle of pioneer settlement, moderate economic growth, and then gradual decline. In 1870 there were 1,630 inhabitants; in 1960, only 839. Limington's quaintness remains with such place names as Hardscrapple, Ruin Corner, Christian Hill, and Goshen Pond, almost storybook names. One thinks of the country people of Sarah Orne Jewett — thrifty, industrious householders such as her herb gatherer, Mrs. Wisby — or Kate Douglas Wiggin's Waitsill Baxter.

One problem of the local historian is to find sufficient materials. Few old letters, diaries, business ledgers, and scrapbooks generally survive to lend color to writings in local history. Robert L. Taylor, of Steep Falls, has given us the first published history of Limington, and, while he draws upon town and church records, militia papers, newspapers, and other local sources, he might have used them more imaginatively.

Mr. Taylor's first five chapters, covering the early years of Limington's history, relate to Indians, disputes between proprietors and squatters over land titles, and a forest environment beset by bears and wolves, seasonal crop failures, and epidemics. In Limington, as elsewhere in the District of Maine, settlers were plagued with problems in gaining title to the land. Limington was part of the Ossipee Tract, granted by an Indian sagamore to Francis Small in 1668. A hundred years later Small's heirs brought forth this ancient deed and asserted ownership to a vast area covering what is now Limington, Cornish, Newfield, and Limerick. By that time, families, hard-pressed for land in the coastal towns of Scarborough, Falmouth, and Yarmouth, had moved inland, settling on property to which they had no title. Thirteen heirs of Francis Small subsequently formed a proprietorship, surveyed the tract, and assigned lots to the living descendants of Francis Small, and then obtained writs to eject the trespassers. Tempers flared, resulting in court suits which the

proprietors won. A few families were able to buy title to their farms, but many lost all they owned, and moved to eastern towns in the Kennebec region. There is no doubt that these disputes retarded Limington's development. For example, in 1792, when the town was incorporated, the proprietors still possessed 7,000 acres, while 690 inhabitants had only 215 acres under cultivation.

Two chapters are devoted to social history, one to Limington's churches, and another to education. During the nineteenth century, religious denominations played a dual role. They provided for spiritual needs on the one hand, and social needs on the other. The early settlers of Limington belonged to the orthodox denominations, and the Congregationalists erected their first meeting house in 1794, and a second one in 1835. The Free-Will Baptists had formed by 1810, and, through frequent revivals, they became the dominant religious body by 1835. One can only wish that Mr. Taylor had shed more light on the controversies that frequently erupted between individuals, resulting in general dissension among the rank and file. It seems apparent that the cause of many of these disputes was as much political as religious.

While ministers droned away in their Sunday pulpits, schoolmasters held sway in the district schools, where the "3 R's" and a great deal of moral suasion prevailed. In 1840 Limington's population had reached 2,200 persons and the town was divided into eighteen school districts serving some 700 eligible pupils. In 1848 prominent citizens organized a committee to build an academy which opened in 1854, offering an education to those willing to learn. It continued for over a century.

Other chapters deal with Limington's industries, principally grist and sawmills, which have long since disappeared, and with its military history, providing names of soldiers from the Revolution to the end of the

Civil War. Taylor rounds out his history with brief biographies of important figures of the town, including its ministers, doctors, soldiers, and lawyers. The final pages are devoted to genealogies of old Limington families which the author has spent many hours tracking down. For considerations of space, the genealogies are crowded, but the information is there. Some credit, however, should have been given to that pioneer genealogist, Miss Sybil Noyes, whose carefully compiled genealogical notebooks, now in the collections of the Maine Historical Society, were so helpful to Mr. Taylor.

This town history, slight as it is, is a useful resource. Although it may lack something of perceptiveness and depth, it is a welcome addition to our store of historical works on Maine history.

James B. Vickery
Maine Historical Society