

Maine History

Volume 42
Number 4 *Maine and Washington in Peace and War*

Article 7

7-1-2006

Book Reviews

Jean F. Hankins

David Chaplin

Chris Potholm
Bowdoin College

Joyce Butler
Maine Historical Society

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hankins, Jean F., David Chaplin, Chris Potholm, and Joyce Butler. "Book Reviews." *Maine History* 42, 4 (2006): 276-282. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol42/iss4/7>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

Mill Girls and Strangers: Single Women's Independent Migration in England, Scotland, and the United States, 1850-1881. By Wendy M. Gordon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. Pp. 234. Cloth. \$68.50. Paper. \$22.95.)

This slim book is full of good surprises. Although it is a scholarly study based on the author's dissertation, and although it is crammed full of graphs and charts, it reads well, without too much pedantic hair-splitting, and the charts are easy to understand. And although it covers female mill workers in three different English-speaking locales—Preston in England, Lowell in the U.S., and Paisley in Scotland—it bears out Gordon's belief that those interested in only one of these cities can learn a great deal by reading about the others. For me, the two biggest surprises were that the book served as a good introduction to a complicated topic, and that much of what I thought I knew about mill girls was, in fact, wrong.

Gordon's major conclusions, all new to me, are important, and she states them clearly: 1) she found little evidence of class conflict, and no labor protests during this period; 2) women at this time did not agitate for their rights; 3) the "mill girls" came almost entirely from respectable middle-class rural backgrounds and moved to urban centers with the understanding that they would continue to uphold good moral standards; 4) the typical migration pattern was characterized by a chain or a network of friends, usually from the same community, whose letters served as inducements to draw their friends to the city; and 5) although migrant women in the city were vulnerable, they were not helpless. Lowell was not much like Dickens' London. In Gordon's words, the mill girls "used the opportunities they found to extend the boundaries of their lives, asserting independence from their parents and moving toward their own adulthood."

In Lowell, she tells us, the mill company constructed boarding houses and recruited the respectable adolescent daughters of Yankee farmers, like Emma Page and her friends from Readfield, Maine, who traveled south by coastal steamer. The girls' living atmosphere appears to have been similar to that in a college dormitory. Unlike the girls migrating to Preston and Paisley, the Yankee girls were nearly all literate, a fact

that lent itself to their becoming effective proselytizers. In addition to the good image Lowell maintained, the city's main attraction was the opportunity to earn good wages, at least better than a young woman could expect in women's traditional spheres of domestic service and school teaching. A second motive for migration was the spirit of adventure and independence, which Gordon sums up as "friends, diversions, and fashion." She states that the experiences of migration and wage-earning took many young women out of their traditional family dynamic of subservience to parents and community. Although most women, she implies, worked in the mills for a limited time before their marriages, these years of independence changed their lives.

In 1889 Lucy Larcom published a now-classic account of working in a Lowell mill. Titled *A New England Girlhood*, it describes her experiences as a mill girl from 1835 to 1845, somewhat before the period of Gordon's study. Larcom shows Lowell as a place of education and good discipline, a "rather select industrial school for young people." One is tempted to dismiss Larcom's Pollyanna picture as an inaccurate product of the time in which she wrote. Surprisingly, Wendy Gordon, writing more than a century later, characterizes the Lowell experience in much the same way. She too argues, convincingly, that the city acted as a strong, safe magnet for young girls from Maine hamlets. Although Gordon strictly limits her subject and covers it thoroughly, still we finished reading her book with the notion that it might be possible to see the migration pattern from a reverse direction. In the period she covers, Maine had a fair number of cotton and woolen mills that had to find workers, probably most of them young women. Who were they, and where did they come from? Why, we wonder, did Emma Page go to Lowell and not Saco or Biddeford? What percentage of Maine girls in each community heeded the siren call of the city? These and similar questions deserve investigating. In historical research we never have all the answers, but we do have ever-expanding circles of questions. We leave Gordon's excellent introduction to migrant mill girls with the final hope that Wendy Gordon, or someone like her, can do a similar study from a Maine perspective.

JEAN F. HANKINS
Otisfield, Maine

Hauling by Hand: The Life and Times of a Maine Island. By Dean Lawrence Lunt (Frenchboro, Maine: Islandport Press Inc., 1999 Pp. 479. Cloth. \$35.)

Lovers of Maine local histories will be very grateful for this bountiful addition dealing with Long Island located near Swan's Island, eight miles south of Mt. Desert Island. It is more commonly referred to by its only village of Frenchboro. This book takes off from C. B. and C. E. McLanes' extensive, but *Islands of Mid-Maine Coast*, published two years earlier, which covers in summary fashion every rocky outcropping in Penobscot Bay (and later in other areas). Lunt dives deep into the story of one "special" place noted the the McLanes. While Lunt includes most, but not all, of the McLanes' coverage of Long Island, he leaves few other stones unturned with his very balanced and authentic approach. As a descendant of the major founding family eight generations back, he systematically covers its waterfront as well as interiors.

Lunt left Frenchboro for high school and graduate education in journalism far "away," thus gaining the distance essential for his balanced approach. He faces the unfavorable images of backward undereducated isolates left behind by urban progress, so emphasized by the McLanes, not by defensiveness but by describing as wide a range of local characters as can be found anywhere. His references appear to have exhausted the widest range of scholarly sources, and he is especially impressive in relating fishing technology and markets to the Island's vitality. Another outstanding section deals with virtually all its Civil War enlistees in terms of their wartime experiences, and he discusses the War's affect on the Island's survival. He goes fully into the various options for evading the draft, which favored the wealthy—a part of Maine history not usually covered high-school courses in state history. Finally a collection of around 180 excellent photographs moves this book into the category of an illustrated history without losing the depth of its 479 pages of text. Lunt struggles with the meaning of growing up on an island off the beaten path and in sharp decline during his own lifetime, and this is the issue that will be of most interest readers of his lively book. These themes might be further pursued in the McLanes' book and on the website of the Island Institute.

This otherwise exemplary local history, edited and published by its author, does have some drawbacks, but the only really regrettable one is its lack of an index. This is crucial since it contains a marvelous quantity store of genealogical and original documentary material, such as diaries,

poems, and “plantation” meetings. In one instance in the later, in 1888 the plantation voted to arrest “any female from 15 to 70 years old found or heard quarreling, brawling or molesting any person.” The offender was to be fined \$5.00 and court costs. Regrettably we do not know who so aggravated the island’s residents. Genealogists will not find family trees in their conventional diagrams, but the raw materials are all there. Most of the censuses from 1820 to 1920 are included, with lists of names, births, and deaths (but not marriages), as are detailed descriptions of veterans.

For those concerned with the survival of Maine’s barely fifteen year-round inhabited islands with a normal range of communal services, Long Island’s survival strategies are of interest. Early on, it recruited newcomers by taking on mainland foster children, and later it promoted homesteading with some success. Still, Long Island’s uniqueness is its isolation, which also offered some protection from late-twentieth-century inflated real estate prices and taxes, as did its use of conservation easements.

DAVID CHAPLIN
Brunswick, Maine

Twelve Thousand Years: American Indians in Maine. By Bruce J. Bourque. With contributions by Steven L. Cox and Ruth H. Whitehead (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. Pp. 367. Paper. \$19.95. Cloth. \$45.)

This is an engaging and enlightening volume. Any attempt to cover such a sweep of history as 12,000 years is bound to be somewhat frustrating for the reader, due to necessary omissions and compressions. Yet Bruce Bourque has done a remarkable job in giving the reader a fascinating overview of American Indian history and their life in Maine. The work is pleasantly free of archaeological jargon and irritating in-text footnotes. Instead, Bourque provides a clear overview that melds the latest in scientific findings with previous historical sources and references.

The result is a pleasure to read, and one gets a fine sense of the changing environment and life styles through the ages as Maine’s glaciers melt and climatic change means less emphasis on megafauna and more on seacoast sources of food. The transitions from Paleo-Indian cultures to the Archaic and Moorehead phases through the Susquehanna

and Ceramic traditions, for example, are deftly presented and well-illustrated. Indeed, the photography helps greatly to make this a work which enhances understanding.

Moreover, after the arrival of the Europeans, the story gains richness and detail as the author uses comparing and contrasting colonial writings by the English, Dutch, and French and their views of the Indian peoples they encountered. Also notable is the author's refusal to bow to political correctness and make the portrait of interaction between European and Indian cultures a one-sided exploitation. Instead, this account deftly adds depth and complexity by a careful review of Indian-qua-Indian relations.

For example, the interplay among extra-systemic native American actors such as the Iroquois, Mohawks, and Hurons had an ongoing and important impact on the way the Maine and the other Maritime Peninsula peoples related to each others and to the Europeans who brought with them conflicting world (and eternal) views and life styles. The various "French and Indian" wars (such as King Philips War, King William's War, Queen Anne's War, Governor Dummer's War, King George's War), stretching for almost a century, are well covered and have a desirable clarity despite their necessary brevity. We learn a great deal about this complex and fascinating period.

The author also deftly sketches Indian relations with the United States, the state of Maine, the federal government. In more recent events, there is more information available than is used. But in fact, the "modern" period receives the lightest coverage of any, and thus the text ends on something of a downbeat.

I also have one major quibble with the book. Ruth Holmes Whitehead's perspicacious sixty-one page chapter, "The Traditional Material Culture of the Native People's of Maine," is termed "an appendix," and is stuck at the end of the volume, as if an afterthought. It is difficult to know exactly why, since an understanding of this dimension is critical to an overall appreciation of the Indian experience in Maine, and it includes some of the most fascinating information in the book in terms of the human and natural resources of the people known to us as "the Indians of Maine." This vital contribution would have been better placed in the middle of the work so the reader could have a better appreciation of Indian daily life as the history of the Indian peoples unfolded. But all in all, this is a very worthwhile work and should be included in the libraries of Maine; it will be useful for many years to come.

CHRIS POTHOLM
Bowdoin College

Alnôbak: A Story of Indigenous People in Androscoggin County. By Nancy Coffin Lecompte. (Auburn, Maine: Androscoggin Historical Society, 2003. Pp. 57. Cloth \$20.00.)

Recovering the history of Maine's indigenous people has always been a challenge, which Nancy Coffin Lecompte makes plain in her book *Alnôbak* (the Abenaki word for "Indian people"). Lecompte, who has Native American ancestry, was "gifted many years ago" with the name "Canyon Wolf," which loosely translated means "history teacher." She is the founder of Ne-Do-Be ("friends" in the Abenaki language), a non-profit organization whose purpose is the researching and teaching of the Wabanaki (Alnôbak/Abenaki or Dawn Land) history of Western Maine. Her book is a companion volume to *Androscoggin County, Maine: A Pictorial Sesquicentennial History, 1854-2004*.

Lecompte's purpose is to represent the impact of indigenous people on Androscoggin County from the Native American's view, which she sees as necessary because of their misrepresentation or neglect by "white" historians. She provides useful charts and maps of "culture" (historical) periods; the colonial wars (including the more commonly called "French and Indian" wars); and sites used by the Abenaki people in Androscoggin County and their seasonal activities, both historic and modern. Useful too are illustrations of Abenaki tools that have been recovered and are in the collections of the Androscoggin Historical Society and a pictorial section, in color, of Abenaki baskets, buildings (camps/log cabins), and gravestones.

Particularly important is the information she provides on individuals, especially those who have been missed by other historians. Some historic Native Americans of Androscoggin County have been written about before, such as Molly Ockett, Perepol, Sabattis (although she explains there was more than one), and Louis Sockalexix, the nineteenth century Penobscot baseball player who got his start playing for the Poland Spring team and played for the Cleveland National League team (whose team name—the Cleveland Indians—dates from his years with them). Others are newly introduced in Lecompte's work, including Obadiah Wickett, a Wamponoag Indian from Cape Cod and a Revolutionary War veteran who settled at Leeds and is buried in Greene, and John Polis, a Civil War veteran, and his wife Elizabeth, who filed for his pension benefits. A chapter on "The 20th Century and Beyond" includes census records and oral history about Soxalexix Gabriel of Turner.

These are people we want to know more about. Lecompte states cor-

rectly that in the years following the Revolution, many Native Americans melded into established communities and became “invisible,” despite historians’ efforts to learn about them. Cultural differences kept them shadowy. This book opens the door on their history and serves the important purpose of showing that their history is indeed recoverable, despite the fact that they are difficult to find in the census and the town records usually used by historians and genealogists. She makes reference to “tribal records” (p. 46), and it is tantalizing to learn that such records do exist.

Lecompte also shows how Maine’s indigenous people have been misunderstood. The term “tribe” and nineteenth century historians’ concept of Indian “villages” were alien to the thinking of these nomadic people. She warns that the terms of hierarchy applied to the Abenaki people by “white” historians, such as “chief” and “princess,” are not valid, and that the signers of many early deeds were “puppets” selected by the colonial government. These points illustrate the need for more books by Native Americans about their own history, but it also highlights the mind-set of earlier historians who included them in their histories. Such men were a product of their times. Lecompte calls for more understanding of Native American culture, which is valid, but in her own use of the terms “tribe” and “village” illustrates the dilemma of how to describe it.

The book includes a section on “how not to learn more” about Maine’s indigenous people, in which she labels most of what she has found in her research as “pure fiction” because of a lack of understanding of the Alnôbak and their culture. The book has two bibliographies. One is titled “How To Rediscover Wabanaki History & Culture.” The second is a long list of source material she used that she evidently found trustworthy. A great effort has been made by many non-native and some Native Americans to recover the history of the Wabanaki people. This book is a useful continuation of that quest, but hopefully the general history of Maine’s native people that is still needed will be less confrontational.

JOYCE BUTLER
Maine Historical Society