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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England. By Richard W. Judd. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014. Pp. 344. Paper. \$24.95)

At some point, even the most compelling arguments lose their edge. Interpretive traditions, while inspiring, shocking, counterintuitive, or simply enraging, have finite lifespans for a reading public. When such interpretive traditions hit those ends, the once radical, paradigm-shifting conclusions emerging from any given school of thought, while no less sound, lose their appeal. Rather than changing the way people see the world, such arguments appear stale, hackneyed, and predictable.

One might argue that our current suite of interpretations within environmental history has reached such an end. Capitalism has been thoroughly indicted for its ability to support human over-exploitation of non-human resources (and human ones, too, along the way). We know New England's lands are not pristine (whatever that might mean), and that our wildernesses are not as "wild" as those elsewhere in North America. In fact, most can see "nature" as a cultural construct whose tension with "culture" frames human understandings of their world. One need not accept such a premise: indeed, this writer believes that, while constructed or not, "nature" would get along and continue just as well without us as with. The field of environmental history, for the past three decades has done a tremendous job of highlighting—often in new and important ways—human abilities to shape for better and worse our non-human world. Capitalism, industrialization, cultural value systems, and colonialism impacted the environment as much as those forces shaped the people within it. We got it. Now what?

With his characteristically unassuming style, Dick Judd has laid out the next paradigm in *Second Nature*, University of Massachusetts Press's inaugural volume in its new "Environmental History of the Northeast" book series. In doing so, Judd encapsulates into a single, accessible narrative how people in this region (both pre- and post-contact) shaped their world, and how the world, in turn, shaped them. More importantly, Judd challenges us to think beyond previous analytical binaries that suggest that environmental history ended the moment Europeans felled

trees, cleared lands, and romanticized the mountains. Instead, Judd argues that New England's long post-settlement history created a new American landscape with just as much significance as the one Europeans first encountered. Judd states that, "although New England was ecologically altered and even impoverished, its landscapes nonetheless generated a vibrant sense of place, and evaluating this heavily humanized ecology . . . requires a new yardstick." (13) To understand New England's environmental history, in turn, requires that scholars engage meanings to be found in layers of human use, not just in its absence and presence. Ultimately, Judd contends, "A synthesis of human will and natural regeneration, the half-domestic, half-wild places carried powerful symbolic associations." (13) In short, Judd pushes us to understand New England's environmental history as separate from previous paradigms based on the western United States, viewing it more from the perspective of New England's people, who—spanning contact—assigned their own meanings to the region once they saw themselves as part of its ecosystem.

Judd weaves this new paradigm through a well-selected overview of the key moments in New England's environmental past: pre-contact, contact and farm building, commercialization, industrialization, conservation, romanticization, and tourism. His surveys read clearly and range from the ecological to the artistic and philosophical in their evidence. Thus does Judd present as equally important transcendentalism and market farming, folk knowledge and tourism, commerce and abandonment. This broad vision—one only possible after decades of focused work on the field—allows Judd to make sense of not only the nineteenth-century transformations of New England's lands and those working them (and to a lesser extent its seas, too), but also the complexity of twentieth-century landscape development, regeneration, conservation, and reassessment.

In the end, Judd brings his readers to a new understanding of their world: not one that has fallen from grace, but one shaped and shared by humans and non-humans alike. While some might balk at Judd's argument that, "measured by people's attachment to the land, New England environmental history is a qualified success story," few can deny the importance of how he came to that conclusion: "an unfolding dialectic of culture and nature that produced an environment by no means wild or pristine, but no less compelling to those who inhabited it." (13)

Second Nature—Judd's term for New England's new landscapes and people—lays out a new way forward in the study of environmental his-

tory. Simple binaries of human/non-human, pristine/fallen, and wild/domesticated can only get us so far. Like it or not, humans are part of the world. Judd's book challenges us to take that role seriously. So far, separating ourselves from our landscape has done neither humans nor non-humans much good.

MATTHEW MCKENZIE
University of Connecticut

Hope and Fear in Margaret Chase Smith's America: A Continuous Tangle.
By Gregory P. Gallant. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014. Pp. 386.
Hardback. \$105.00)

This fine book presents an analysis of Sen. Margaret Chase Smith's career set against the backdrop of American politics from the 1930s to the early 1970s. As the title suggests, the mood of those years was often dark, with the Great Depression, World War II, and fear of the Soviet Union and of domestic communism setting the political tone in Washington. Gregory Gallant argues that the "hope and fear" of that era defined both the senator's public career and her personal relationships, which he describes as a "continuous tangle." The senator, he writes, left "a dual legacy: a suspicious, doubting, and accusatorial individual who expected betrayal and character assassination; and a dedicated public servant who committed herself to principles by which the powers of the government should be used to better the lot of all citizens." (335) Well-known as the author of the 1950 "Declaration of Conscience" speech calling for greater civility in public discourse, Senator Smith and her aide Bill Lewis also maintained "a Nixon-like enemies list." (335)

The volume relates dozens of stories and incidents involving Senator Smith's early years in Skowhegan, ME, her difficulties in finding a career, her awkward marriage to Clyde Smith, and the start of her service in Congress. She was the first woman to serve in both the United States House and Senate. Lacking some of the resources other senators enjoyed—she had no college degree and had to overcome initially strong resistance in the Maine Republican Party—Senator Smith succeeded by building relationships with particular individuals who could help her. The book explains how she worked with senators with whom she entered the Senate in 1948, such as Robert Kerr and Lyndon Johnson, to

advance her legislative interests. A group of prominent Princeton graduates in the class of 1915 (especially James Forrestal, the first Secretary of the Department of Defense) guided her thinking on military and defense policy, an important focus of her work.

Gregory Gallant is especially well-qualified to write this study. As the long-time director of the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Skowhegan, Maine, he had access to the year-by-year files and correspondence Senator Smith maintained throughout her career. The narrative is quite dense with facts and names. The reader sometimes wished the book had a little more organizational structure, such as the inclusion of chapter subheadings.

The story told in *Hope and Fear in Margaret Chase Smith's America* illuminates a critical change in American politics. Gallant shows that, during Senator Smith's years in Congress, politics in Washington proceeded along a path distinctly different from the current scene—one of coalition-building across party lines in contrast to the party polarization and frequent gridlock present today. Personal relationships in Smith's Washington were highly important. To a large degree, those connections have been replaced by ideological positioning among groups and actors, activities that inhibit communication between politicians holding differing viewpoints. In the years since she left the Senate, Senator Smith's achievements have influenced the way Maine's congressional representatives have viewed their responsibilities. But the environment in which members of Congress must operate today is significantly different from the political world in which she lived.

KENNETH T. PALMER
University of Maine

The 2nd Maine Cavalry in the Civil War: A History and Roster. By Ned Smith. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. 2014. Pp. 240. Paper. \$39.95)

The story of the Civil War is an old and colorful one filled with rich stories of valor and heroic deeds by soldiers, regiments, and leaders from both sides of the conflict. Out of this vibrant history arose a manifestation of romanticism, which holds the actors involved upon a pedestal of

glory and bravery in the annals of American history. Each state has their favored sons, who served gallantly in that terrible war and are remembered and toasted by historians and the public. While that honor is not undeserved, there were numerous other boys and men who served in units not involved in the major events of the war whose service was no less honorable or deserving of respect and remembrance. The 2nd Maine Cavalry regiment is one of those units, and Ned Smith's book *The 2nd Maine Cavalry in the Civil War: A History and Roster* does an excellent job of bringing to life the story of one of the war's lesser-known units.

In *The 2nd Maine Cavalry*, Smith shows the reader a complete history of a unit that is either little known or forgotten entirely by the public and historical community. Smith explains that part of this is because of the war theatre that the 2nd Maine was sent to. After being mustered into service in the latter half of 1863, the 2nd Maine was ordered to the Deep South to help bolster the Union's control of Louisiana. After serving admirably and honorably during the Red River Campaign under General Nathanael Banks in the Union's Department of the Gulf, the 2nd Maine was transferred to General Alexander Asboth's command near Pensacola, Florida in the summer of 1864. The regiment spent the remainder of the war conducting raids and disrupting Confederate supply lines in the panhandle of Florida and southern Alabama. Certain members of the regiment displayed great bravery and leadership during those raids and the regiment became an indispensable part of the Union strategy in northwestern Florida.

For the most part, Smith does an admirable job of tying together the history of the 2nd Maine that had rarely been discussed in other historical accounts. He takes the reader through the political and social trends in both Maine and Florida in the years leading up to the mustering of the 2nd Maine to provide context for two states truly on the opposite ends of the country from one another. Smith tells the stories and deeds of the regiment and the men who served without giving into the romanticism of the Civil War. Smith also pieces together the personal history of several members of the regiment both before and after the war and sheds light on the often-forgotten aspect of regimental infighting and political maneuvering for promotion and prestige. The inclusion of the appendices allows for those who are curious to pursue in more detail the men who served and died in service of their country.

Smith's extensive historical research and passion for the subject are apparent throughout the manuscript, and he does the spirit of the regi-

ment justice. *The 2nd Maine Cavalry* greatly adds to the historical discourse surrounding Maine's contribution in the Civil War, and the narrative is well written, easy to follow, and pleasant to read. Smith's manuscript is engaging and enjoyable to the last page.

BENJAMIN WYMAN
University of Maine

Distilled in Maine: A History of Libations, Temperance & Craft Spirits. By Kate McCarty. (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015. Pp. 176. Paper. \$21.99)

It is a rare privilege for a historian to drink cocktails in the process of reviewing historical text. I have to insist that Kate McCarty's Rum Old Fashion is drastically improved with a dash of Absinthe and that only a few of her recipes do not contain common sulfite migraine triggers. (45) However, Kate McCarty's book was thoroughly engaging and enjoyable to read, and her experiences as a food writer are apparent. Her penchant for short chapter lengths, inclusion of cocktails, and delivery of anecdotes within a framework sensitive to the broader of history of Maine, temperance, and alcohol, make this book a must-read for a general audience.

The first important characteristic of the book, which is part of the American Palate series of The History Press, is that it is a beautiful product. The image selection, layout, and quality of production make for a magnificent-looking book durable enough to spill coffee on, or perhaps a cocktail. The images engage and support her writing. The printed copy tells a story whose characters are visible and available.

Distilled in Maine as a text tells the story of alcohol in a state famous for its temperance. McCarty's attention to spirits was far from an insulated study of a niche, because her attention to distilled alcohol is placed within the broader history of Maine. She linked rum to maritime trading in the colonial and nineteenth-century trade system. While moral temperance has shifted to moral judgment regarding spirits, for early settlers through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and most of the nineteenth century, alcohol was medicine that aided "nerves, fatigue or headaches" and was administered by women as "household medicine." (23) Alcohol was medicinal and a significant source of trade, but it would become a symbol of morality.

A book about alcohol in Maine might have struggled mightily with a

state known for temperance, but McCarty's cultural food-history approach successfully negotiated prohibition. While her work celebrates distillers, McCarty provides the religious and quasi-scientific justifications, such as spontaneous combustion, for temperance. (58) She not only linked the movement to Neal Dow as founder, but also to the liberal use of medicinal spirits as well as smuggling. The legacy of post-prohibition laws relating to distilleries has had a long and restrictive impact on a recently emerging craft-spirits movement.

Her exploration of the emergence of Maine craft distillers illustrates how many of the biggest obstacles to small distillers and brewers can be linked to post-prohibition laws and temperance. A three-tiered system, mandating that "producers (brewers, winemakers, and distillers) sell their products to the distributors, who then sell it to retailers," favors larger regional breweries and distilleries. (100) This system forces local businesses to use a national system that strips profits from small local distilleries at every stage. Perhaps her most engaging chapters are in the latter portion of the book where she tells the stories of current Maine distilleries as well as thorough descriptions of the origins and flavor of their spirits. Anyone who loves history or having drinks with friends at the Old Port in Portland will enjoy this book and should gain a new appreciation for local distilleries.

While *Distilled in Maine* is not academically rigorous, it is a well-researched and impressively accurate popular history. As a popular history, it presents a historical subject to a food-conscious popular audience without sensationalizing the past. More importantly, the work helps shape a better understanding of place, a challenge with which many intellectually grounded books fall short. It makes a compelling case that stopping for drinks at Liquid Riot or toasting with Cold River Gin is neither an insignificant nor ahistorical act.

JOSEPH MILLER
University of Maine

Bangor in World War II: From the Homefront to the Embattled Skies. By David H. Bergquist. (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015. Pp. 160. Paper. \$21.99)

You could make a case that 1940 was the most significant year in the twentieth century for Bangor, Maine. The city's role as a major lumber

port command-and-control center had diminished decades earlier. It had recovered from a disastrous downtown fire in 1911. And by the end of the 1930s, Bangor was a modest service center for the surrounding economy and not much else.

Then, in the summer of 1940, the federal government designated Bangor as a primary site for aerial defense, and plenty of things started happening—fast. The United States Army acquired hundreds of acres within the city and rapidly transformed them into a military complex. The air field and its successor institutions, including Bangor International Airport, profoundly affected the small city's economy and self-image for decades thereafter.

David H. Bergquist captures the pace of these initial changes in the early 1940s in his gracefully constructed volume on the city and the air base. Dow Field became a link in the Great Circle Route of aircraft hurrying to and from Europe during World War II. Pilots and crew members touched down, trained, recuperated, played, waited, and took off at Dow. Support crews built runways, rebuilt aircraft, tended victory gardens, and even managed to participate in competitive sports and local musical groups.

But the civilians—Bangor people—are here too, and the book is at its best when it shows the connections between city and base. Three months after Pearl Harbor, the city had lined up one hundred air-raid wardens. During drills, the city not only required blackout shades and turned off street lights, police also told pedestrians to extinguish their cigarettes. When a B-17 crew member wound up at a Christmas party at the YMCA in 1944, he returned to his temporary barracks at Dow and found a gift (a green tie) on his bunk bed from a Bangor child. Schools themselves spearheaded war-bond campaigns and sometimes earned recognition with plaques on the planes. Bergquist tells of one soldier from Bangor who checked out a Dodge ambulance from his Army motor pool in France and noticed that students at Bangor's Garland Junior High had raised money for it.

Though the book is just 150 pages long, Bergquist succeeds on three fronts. First, he narrates the operations at Dow Field (and elsewhere) without becoming mired in the United States military's constant redeployments and realignments. Second, he captures the curiosity and enthusiasm of Bangor people aware of the demands the war had placed on them; yet he also conveys the truly frightening and sometimes tragic stories of people caught up in a violent global struggle. Third, Bergquist makes sure the story covers everybody. He includes comedian Jack

Benny's live NBC radio broadcast from Bangor and glamorous Dorothy Lamour's visit to promote war bonds. He tells us about the 350 German POWs who were briefly taken to Bangor from prison camps elsewhere in Maine. He devotes a chapter to the hundreds of women who served at Dow in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (later reorganized as the Women's Army Corps). There's even a bit about the eighty-five sixteen- or seventeen-year-old Civil Air Patrol cadets who arrived at Union Station in August 1944 for some training at Dow Field.

This book is not about Dow Air Force Base, a very different creature that stemmed from the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. That base, run by the Strategic Air Command, essentially rebuilt the World War II airfield. It would be good if Bergquist continued with a complementary work on the successor to Dow Field.

TOM MCCORD
University of Maine at Augusta

The Night the Sky Turned Red: The Story of the Great Portland Maine Fire of July 4th 1866, as told by Those Who Lived Through It. By Allan M. Levinsky. (Carlisle, MA: Commonwealth Editions/Applewood Books, 2014. Pp. 96. Paper. \$12.95)

Levinsky's volume is slight, catering mostly to those interested in popular rather than rigorous academic history. The basic facts of the case it purposes to explore are these: the fire began during Fourth-of-July celebrations in 1866. It rapidly spread from oily, wooden waterfront warehouses and boatyards until it had consumed the commercial heart of Portland, also mostly wooden, old, and highly combustible. The damage eventually extended in a rough oblong a bit over a mile almost due north from York Street to North Street, most of the damage occurring between High, India, Fore, and Congress Streets. The conflagration blazed all night and was finally extinguished on the fifth.

It was to prove the largest urban fire disaster in the United States until the Great Fire of Chicago, some five years later. Portland, which had experienced several spectacular changes in fortune over the previous two centuries, was at that time once again thriving as an *entrepot* for northern New England and Montreal via rail links that radiated out generously from southern Casco Bay and shipping interests that overspread

the globe. Further, it had become a center for industrial advancement and technological innovation, as typified by the Portland Company in its production over the decades of hundreds of fine steam locomotives of various sizes and gauges, and of advanced electrical trolley cars. There were numerous other successful manufacturers and businesses in town, too, and there was a great deal of money around. Thus, after the fire, Portland rebuilt quickly in brick. It is this reconstruction that constitutes most of the picturesque Old Port which visitors so enjoy today.

This diminutive paperback volume has quite clearly been designed with Portland's robust tourist trade in mind. It has an eye-catching red cover with a painting by the late Maine artist, William S. Paxton (1930–2007), and a dramatic-sounding title that conveys no significant information about the book's contents. Though it includes a one-and-a-half-page foreword by official State Historian Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., like many works of popular history, it does not engage with a scholarly audience, supply footnotes or endnotes, or include a substantial bibliography, which inhibits further investigation by curious readers. Much of its eighty-page length is taken up with full-page illustrations, reducing the space devoted to text even further. In the end, it supplies little if anything that is new to the knowledge base about the catastrophe, which has already been covered by various articles and by Michael Daicy's and Don Whitney's study, *Portland's Greatest Conflagration: The 1866 Fire Disaster* (2010).

The Night the Sky Turned Red should sell very well in gift shops and other establishments catering to holiday-makers and be a welcome contribution to summer-house coffee tables, beach bags, and airport satchels. As such, it supplies well a certain market segment, and readers who know nothing of the subject may find it engrossing. For Maine authors contemplating prospective subject matter, however, it would be worthwhile to consider topics that have *not* already been so extensively treated. These would include Maine's historical leadership in politics, legislation, diplomacy, and law; in technology and invention; in medicine, in agricultural and marine sciences, and in arts and literature. *The Night the Sky Turned Red* is the sort of book that, taken out of context, might reinforce the utterly false impression out-of-staters entertain that Maine is a quaint and scenic but backward place, mired in and obsessed with trifles of its distant past, and possessing little in the way of a viable future.

CHARLES P. M. OUTWIN
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