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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Maine Labor in the Age of Deindustrialization and Global Markets 1955–2005. By Charles A. Scontras. (Orono, Maine: Bureau of Labor Education, University of Maine, 2017. Pp. 660. Paper. \$32.50)

The arrival of *Maine Labor in the Age of Deindustrialization and Global Markets 1955–2005* by Charles A. Scontras, historian and research associate at the Bureau of Labor Education at the University of Maine (Orono), represents an impressive marshalling of knowledge and documentation and fills a yawning gap in our understanding of labor in Maine. Simply put, it stands as a landmark study of post–World War II labor, political, social, educational, and cultural history in our state. This observer’s attempt to review it in the popular press was met with the refrain that it seemed too academic. If, by “academic,” it meant it was well documented and researched, that argument is true. However, it is easy for anyone to read. It is well organized, and, given the vital importance of the subject, one hopes it finds a wide audience.

Maine Labor is arguably the writer’s best work in a constellation of fine and significant writings, and it accurately charts the history of industrial labor in difficult decades before the Orwellian governmental demolition work of Governor LePage and President Trump. Agree or disagree with the book’s conclusions the facts are set out here and all the questions presented for debate.

We are given a hard-long look at Maine and its citizens, and how we got to where we are since the mid-1950s. Scontras examines the industries, who established them, who worked in them, and how and why they moved, faded, or collapsed. We are also given insight into how corporations shaped the lifestyles and ethnic mixes of various communities and how rural and industrial workers came to understand the world and environment. This is flesh-and-blood stuff, not political baffle-gab, though enough of that and its sad consequences are exposed in the process.

The book is clearly organized into five parts, each followed by several chapters. “Labor and Challenges Faced by Maine’s Basic Industries: Textiles, Shoes and Paper” is the first part, followed by nineteen chapters. Part Two, “Labor Reform Movements,” needs but four chapters. Parts Three and Four, “New Faces and Ac-

tivism” and “The Political and Legislative Scene,” each have five chapters, and the fifth and last part, “Global Markets, Global Hiring Halls and Labor’s Struggle for Existence” rounds off with three.

This is a book that covers events that often get lost in the textbooks and the press, especially after a strike is broken or a factory is closed and demolished. It deals with ordinary Mainers who usually do not get singled out or lauded for their struggles or accomplishments (which are often viewed as self-serving). On occasion, union leaders, including Benjamin Dorsky, George Jabar, or Denis Blais, get their due here, but rarely in the mainstream. When the captain of a once prosperous and now defunct industry gives part of his earnings to a charity, he is often singled out as a pillar of Maine culture. This answers questions, such as why union women often brought children to the picket lines during

strikes. It was not simply for emphasis or sympathy, but because they could not afford baby sitters.

Most observers agree that Maine is a beautiful region, but its history is laced with difficult truths. Americans were worse off in the mid-1990s than in the late 1970s, and as Scontras observes: “we echoed in Maine as discussions and reports about income equality increased in the late 1990s and the early years of the 21st century.” (630)

Maine Labor is solid and remarkable, witnessing in its text hard footnotes and personal stories from generations of laborers and placing them all in a larger context. It is a book well and justly made, which will be consulted for years to come.

WILLIAM DAVID BARRY
Maine Historical Society

Still Mill: Poems, Stories and Songs of Making Paper in Bucksport, Maine, 1930–2014. Edited by Patricia Smith Ranzoni. (Unity, ME: North Country Press, 2017. Pp. 432. Paper. \$28.95)

Still Mill is the “swan song” of the century-long wood-pulp papermaking industry in Maine. Subtitled “*Poems, Stories and Songs of Making Paper in Bucksport, Maine 1930–2014*,” this two-pound tome is filled with 30 memory-lane images and 130 voices from across Maine, the United States, and Europe. It is strictly a people’s history, expansive and honest, and unique in its approach. Pride streams out of the book like the smoke from the mill stacks. The voices and images in *Still Mill* cover history, work (and its Maine ethic), friendships, families, fun, travail, and a cohesive community. Fortunately, that sense of community was built on generations of experience, because the demise of the mill, which dominated the city for nearly a century, could have broken weaker spirits.

Patricia Smith Ranzoni, a Mainer whose roots reach back to the original natives and settlers, solicited contributors and edited *Still Mill*. She is Bucksport’s poet laureate for life, which says as much about this historic seafaring village turned into a company mill town as it does about Ranzoni’s gift to make words whistle on

paper. Plus, the steam for such a project comes from her family history of working in Maine mills. “I have listened as hard as I could for as long as I could—my whole life,” (4) Ranzoni wrote. The first stanza of her first poet laureate poem (presented six months before the mill closed in December 2014 and prepared for demolition) leads the chorus of voices in the book and describes Bucksport’s people, with pride in their work and way of life and loss: “A wooded village at the salt mouth of Maine’s greatest watershed. / 5,000 souls more or less any given day according to who arrives / or leaves, in all the ways humans come and go, cheering and crying.” (217)

The Bucksport Mill was built beside the Penobscot River on a mound of unearthened Red Paint People (Maine Indians) relics in 1929 by Seaboard Paper Company, up and running full throttle on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1930. *Time* magazine was its first customer. Stan Marshall describes one reason the paper industry was attracted to Maine. “An advantage of northern softwoods is that because the growing season here is short the fibers that make up the wood have thin walls which make thinner paper than pulp made from southern softwoods which have thick walls because the trees are protecting the water in the wood from evapora-

tion during the longer, hot, growing season.” (184) (For a history of papermaking in Maine leading up to the period in *Still Mill*, see John H. Clark and Deryck W. Holdsworth’s “Wood Pulp and the Emergence of a New Industrial Landscape in Maine, 1880–1930” in the Winter 2017–2018 issue of *Maine History*.)

Contributor Wesley C. Stubbs wrote, “Bucksport Mill and Bucksport Paper was the number one mill and paper in the world when it was St. Regis paper.” (235) Pearl Mattson referred to papermaking as “the backbone of Maine industry,” which “gave Hancock County people (and Maine people, in general) gratifying and stable employment. Turning out rolls of paper was crucial to Bucksport’s well-being. For 84 years, the opportunities of the town’s ‘Mill’ provided families a substantial standard of living, supported good schools and was respected in business.” (353) Rick Doyle wrote that in the late 1970s the mill “was supposed to be the fastest paper machine in the world.” (144) Hans Krichels discussed the ancient and early history of papermaking: “the first papermakers, the wasps, and the Chinese after that.” (388) He recalled romping with his siblings on Sunday mornings when the Massachusetts mill where his father worked was empty, thrashing “about in mountains of cotton remnants . . . rags.” (388) Ardeana Hamlin and Jeremy Chubbuck discussed the meaning of the mill closure for the town of Bucksport, referring to it as part of the “complete death of a culture—people walking in and out of work with pack baskets (filled with their gear and lunch), or men wearing welding jackets . . . and bandanas on their heads.” (362) Women, who make up half of the book’s contributors, knew that culture inside out, some from working in the mill and most from making and pack-

ing good meals for “lunch breaks”; listening for the whistle to pick up workers; keeping the neighborhood children quiet so a night-shift man could sleep during the day; and tending widows, schools, and injured mill workers.

Ranzoni ends each written piece with an interesting, down-to-earth biography of the contributor and writes a few pages about the artists and their images. Mill work had huge minuses, some described in the bios: loss of life and limb, shortened lives, hearing impairment, environmental contamination, unclean air, and bad mental and physical health. Thomas “Tom” Gaffney, a psychologist and community health advocate, wrote: “Shift schedules in operation today were designed decades ago, before serious scientific research into the ways humans adjust when they suddenly change the time that they sleep and wake.” (163) Unfair corporate practices gave birth to a labor union. Sandra Bowden Dillon recalled, “One of the first Papermakers Unions in the country was formed at St. Regis Paper Company in Bucksport, Maine, and that contract was widely replicated elsewhere.” (260) (Dillon’s father Don Bowden was a union leader at the time.)

The two-word title of this important book, *Still Mill*, connotes the message that the mill has been quelled but it continues as living history. It is scripted on the cover of the book with lower case letters first, showcasing the four capital Ls as if representing mill chimneys (*stiLL miLL*). Still, mill, fill your hearts with lamentations. Take up the quill, still using ink, but no longer on paper from Bucksport Mill.

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