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A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF LOCAL HISTORY: THE TOWN REGISTERS OF MAINE

BY JAMES B. VICKERY, JR.

A SOURCE THAT the historian should not overlook in preparing a local history is the town register. While not every town is fortunate to have been included in such a volume, there were a great many published during the first decade of this century. From 1902 until 1912 the H. E. Mitchell Publishing Company printed at least seventy-six volumes, and perhaps more that are unavailable to the historian. (*Note: we now know there are ninety-seven Mitchell registers for Maine plus several for towns in New Hampshire and Vermont — ed.*) At this point it might be well to mention the annual *Maine Register*, which from 1870 has included a business directory of all the cities and towns of Maine. This too, is a helpful book. Of course, the *Maine Register* dates back to Maine's arrival at statehood, but previous to 1870 there was no coverage of local affairs. The following list of town registers represents a preliminary bibliography of those compiled by H. E. Mitchell and his assistants; it is probably incomplete since apparently no one has attempted preparation of a check list; nor do the major state libraries have a full catalogue of them. (*The Society believes that the updated bibliography is complete — ed.*)

While the appearance of city directories begins shortly after Maine became a state, the publication of town directories did not begin until about 1890. Portland leads the list by having issued a directory in 1823, followed by Bangor in 1834. These first directories are rare and precious items containing an enumeration of the inhabitants, their occupations, and a plan or map of the city showing sites of the public buildings. Lewiston's first directory was published with the 1851 issue of the *Maine Farmer's Almanac*. It was, however, in the 1870s and 1880s that the issuance of city directories began proceeding with any regularity.

In particular, two firms, Langford and Chase of Augusta, and Greenough and Jones of Boston, were the publishers of these city directories. The former company issued in 1868 directories of Rockland, Belfast, Camden, and Thomaston, followed by another edition in 1877-1878. Through the 1870s Greenough published directories of Bath,

Census-1906

The population of the towns of Waldoboro, Nobleboro and Jefferson has been arranged in families where that arrangement has been possible. In these families, in addition to the resident living members, the names of the non-resident members are included. It should be borne in mind that this plan does not include the names of all former residents of this town, as the names of the non-residents appear only when one or both of the parents are still living in the town. After the name of each non-resident will be found the present address, when such address has been given to us. Non-residents are indicated by the (*).

When a daughter in a family has married, her name taken in marriage appears after her given name in parenthesis, the name preceded by a small m, thus: (m).

Following the names of the population is the occupations. To designate these we have used the more common abbreviations and contractions, as follows: Farmer—far; carpenter—car; railroad service—R R ser; student, a member of an advanced institution of learning—stu; pupil, a member of a lower grade of schools (including all who have reached the age of five years)—pl; housework—ho; laborer—lab; physician and surgeon—phy & sur; clergyman—clerg; merchant—mer; teacher—tr; blacksmith—blk; clerk—cl; bookkeeper—bk kpr; lawyer—law; mechanic mech; machinist—mach; engineer—eng; maker—mkr; worker—wkr; work—wk; shoe shop operative—ss op; cotton or woolen mill operatives—mill op; weaver—weav; spinner—spin; electrician—elec; painter—ptr; carriage work—car wk; dress maker—dr mkr; insurance—ins; traveling salesman, or commercial traveler—sales, or coml trav; music teacher—mus tr; teamster—team; general work—genlwk; mariner—mar; employ—emp; retired—ret'd; telephone operative—tel op; telegraph operative—teleg op.

This Census was taken expressly for this work during the Spring of 1906, by Messrs. Daggett, Sawyer and Lawton.

Brunswick, Bangor, Biddeford, Lewiston, Auburn, Portland, Belfast, Rockland and Waterville, with a few adjoining towns included in them.

Because of the impetus of the seaside or lakeside resorts during this era, many tourist guides appeared, which in a few instances resembled a directory, but mainly they were descriptive, interspersed here and there with legends and tales of local history. Perhaps it was this sudden influx of summer residents rustivating in Maine that aroused the towns to provide some sort of publicity for themselves, resulting in the publication of directories. The gay nineties were noted for civic improvement, and a directory might have been a medium to advertise as well as to stimulate civic pride in these rural areas. Only a very few town directories appeared before 1890. One of the earliest, compiled by Poole and Yeaton and printed by the Journal Publishing Company of Bangor, is of Eastport, Lubec, and Pembroke (48 pp.), published in 1891. This company also published two county directories, Aroostook (1892-1893) and Waldo (1892) which are exceedingly scarce books. A brief business directory of each town in these counties is given. This dearth of local directories suddenly changed with the formation of the H. E. Mitchell Publishing Company.

Harry Edward Mitchell was born in New Portland, Maine, in 1877 and graduated from Bowdoin College in 1907. Evidently while he was attending college, Mitchell began compiling and publishing his town directories, for between 1902, the first year any appeared, and 1907 he published at least sixty-five of these works. (*The number totals eighty-seven in the updated bibliography — ed.*) During his entire publishing career in Maine, extending from 1902 to 1912, Mitchell and his assistants compiled, edited, and published at least seventy-six town directories — an impressive and staggering output. (*We now know that 97 were published for Maine — ed.*) When one considers that this was the horse and buggy era, and that his agents visited, canvassed, and interviewed, probably by a door-to-door visitation, in some 153 different towns, one contemplates the immensity and difficulty of their task. (*The total is now 182 — ed.*) About 1903 Mitchell seems to have formed his own publishing house, from which town registers poured forth from the presses located at Kent's Hill and Brunswick. Following his graduation he established himself at Augusta until 1910, when he returned to Brunswick and engaged in the printing business until 1912. After this, Mitchell operated a printing house at Reading, Pennsylvania, where he died in 1944.

His town registers appeared at first bound in buff, yellow, tan, or brick-colored cloth wrappers and measured 5½ inches by 8 3/8 inches. These registers contain a brief history of each town, including facts

about Indians, early settlement, industry, education, and ecclesiastical organizations. There are rolls of honor enumerating those who participated in the wars from the Revolution through the Civil War. Especially worthwhile to genealogical researchers are the census lists of each town, providing occupations and members of each family and giving the names of those who held public office.

As might be expected, other firms entered the competition, and one of Mitchell's compilers, Lawton, compiled at least three town registers, all in Hancock County. Chatto and Turner of Auburn published two — an East Somerset County Register and one that included the towns of Sedgwick, Brooklin, Deer Isle, and Stonington. Following these publications, further interest in such books apparently abated. Undoubtedly there was too little profit, and after World War I only the larger communities in Maine found that printing them was worthwhile.

It is impossible to tell how many of each edition Mitchell had printed. Probably not more than 250 of each of his first ventures, and not more than 500 of his later registers appeared, for today they seldom come onto the book market. Owners treasure them like personal mementos. Anyone coming across one of these books today finds them well-thumbed, an indication of their frequent use, and to find one in its pristine state is a rarity. At the time of publication they were sold at a modest sum — the hardbound copies brought \$1.50 — but to its owner the intrinsic value was much more. Many of the towns have no other history than that which appears in Mitchell's registers. Approximately eighty of these Maine communities have no other chronicler. For his time Mitchell, produced an incredible amount of information, and performed an invaluable service wherever he labored.