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Book Reviews

Stanley R. Howe
Bethel Historical Society

Polly Welts Kaufman
University of Southern Maine

Kimberly Sebold
University of Maine Presque Isle

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BOOK REVIEWS

Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century. By Joseph A. Conforti. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. Pp. 384. Paper \$19.95.)

These two important books by faculty members of the American and New England Studies Program at the University of Southern Maine provide significant insights into the New England past and how it has been interpreted through the centuries. For those focusing on Maine history as part of the New England historical dynamic, there is much to be learned and analyzed here.

In *Landscape with Figures*, Kent Ryden has conducted a personal tour of selected transitions in the world we associate with New England. His work is strongly influenced by that of William Cronon regarding the meaning of wilderness, virgin land, and the level of human influence upon the natural. Ryden characterizes his quest as one to develop his “historical, topographical, and ecocritical sensibility” (page 201). For Maine readers, Ryden reviews Henry David Thoreau’s three trips to the northern part of the Pine Tree State. As an accomplished surveyor, map maker, and naturalist, Thoreau masterfully combined these pursuits with his keen observation skills and polished literary style to create his posthumously published *The Maine Woods*. Thoreau’s assessment of human impacts upon this portion of Maine’s landscape and the implications logging would have throughout the course of the state’s history are clearly evident.

From Thoreau, Ryden explores changes in the landscape by walking with Walter Hale on his farm in Sebago, Maine. The author came to appreciate the varied use of the land for agricultural and economic purposes by including in his exploration an inspection of stone dumps, a charcoal kiln site, and the impact of dairy cow operations. By the time Ryden observed the farm, most of the land had returned to forest, and it was only through Hale’s interpretation that the signs of past activity could be correctly and comprehensively “read” for their cultural, financial, and ecological implications.

Another Maine example of the historical significance of landscapes

is the Cumberland and Oxford Canal, which opened in 1830 and was largely abandoned by 1872. Designed to connect the Portland waterfront to the Sebago Lake region, this technological transportation link was supposed to be a boon for trade, but from the beginning it was plagued with financial shortages and competition from rail interests. Ryden observes what has survived from this once active technological marvel, which overcame what were, at the time, formidable natural obstacles. The legacy of these technological triumphs can be read in the ruins of stone locks, depressed areas filled with stagnant water, abandoned tow-paths, and stone abutments in forested locations.

One final example of a Maine operation, in this case made possible by the presence of the canal, was the gunpowder mill at Gambo Falls in Gorham. The sulfur and saltpeter arrived by canal boat from Portland, and charcoal was obtained from the nearby forest. Both the canal and the gunpowder mill, once symbols of the power of technology to alter the course of nature, are now obscure survivals hidden by forest growth and largely re-conquered by natural forces. "Places have valuable lessons to teach us," notes Ryden, if the observer is willing to explore the line between the natural and the cultural.

Joseph A. Conforti's *Imagining New England* is likewise a thoughtful work that will give the historian pause. Conforti begins by asserting that New England "developed as America's first strongly imagined region," due to "its early historical consciousness and high rate of literacy and cultural production." Early on, Puritanism gained an indelible imaginative hold on the region. Changes in the relationship with England and in colonial living conditions led to a Revolutionary generation that possessed "the most well-developed collective identity of any American region." In the ante-bellum period, New Englanders intensified their cultural distinction from the rest of the country. During the middle years of the nineteenth century, emphasis on Yankee values, celebration of the Pilgrims, and the ordering of the New England village, among other influences, came into vogue. Following the Civil War, the Colonial Revival provided new confidence for Yankee traditionalists faced with rising foreign immigration and new industrial and urban pressures. In the twentieth century, the "imaginary center" of the authentic New England shifted to northern New England, or what Conforti terms "Old New England." To some observers, New England appeared to be in decline after World War II, but that was not the case: as the century wore on, high technology and electronics industries revitalized the region. Accompanying this change was the creation of a number of important historical

institutions in the region, such as Plimouth Plantation, Old Sturbridge Village, and Strawberry Banke, which increased our knowledge of the New England experience.

Readers intent on learning how Maine fits into these generalizations will not be disappointed. Beginning with Capt. John Smith's characterization of the Maine coast as a "country rather to affright than delight," to Jedediah Morse's view of Maine people as "hardy" and "robust," to Timothy Dwight's vision of a place with "dissolute characters" such as loggers and fishermen, to Robert Herrick's declaration in the 1920s that Maine was the new heartland of the Old New England, there is a steady cultural evolution, according to Conforti. The rise of tourism in Maine brought the lobster into vogue as a much appreciated delicacy. The Maine coast was celebrated in the paintings of Thomas Cole, Frederick Church, Fitzhugh Lane, and Winslow Homer. In addition, Conforti focuses on Old York as an outstanding example of gentrification in a once-neglected coastal village becoming a premier exemplar of the colonial revival.

Finally, Conforti uses examples from Robb Sagendorph's *Yankee* magazine, which in the 1930s became strongly anti-New Deal, holding up Maine and Vermont after the 1936 presidential vote as the embodiment of authentic Yankee values. Sagendorph even proposed a Yankee party, while his magazine emphasized the glory of the Maine coast, the success of L.L. Bean, the writings of native son Robert P. Tristram Coffin, and John Gould's celebration of the Pine Tree State's town meeting tradition.

All of the above and much more awaits the reader attempting to comprehend the New England experience within a national context, and to understand Maine's part in keeping the this venerable tradition alive and well.

STANLEY R. HOWE
Bethel Historical Society

Katahdin: Wigwam's Tales of the Abnaki Tribe. By Molly Spotted Elk. Edited by Pauleena M. MacDougall. (Orono, Maine: Maine Folklife Center, Northeast Folklore, v. 37: 2003. Pp. Xxii + 203. Dictionary.)

If anything can demonstrate the authenticity of Molly Spotted Elk's knowledge of and devotion to her Penobscot heritage, it is her collected

folk tales. This publication of her collection and its appended dictionary of Penobscot and Passamaquoddy words referenced to both French and English is long overdue. She completed the manuscript in 1938 while in France, where she expected a firm in Paris to publish it, but the Nazi occupation changed all that. Instead, she had to leave her husband Jean Archambaud, a French patriot who died during the war, and flee with her daughter Jean back to the United States. Jean, now Jean Moore, eventually became custodian of her mother's papers and deposited them in the Maine Folklife Center. There, along with diaries and other papers, the legends sat until Pauleena MacDougall pulled them together and transcribed and edited them for this publication by the Maine Folklife Center.

Born Mary Alice Nelson or Molly Dellis Nelson on Indian Island, the Penobscot Indian Reservation in Old Town, Maine, Molly chose Molly Spotted Elk as her stage name. She became an interpretive dancer, performing in New England, New York, Texas, and eventually Paris. Her father was Penobscot and her mother Maliseet. As a young woman, she collected legends from Hemlock Joe, an invalid who told his stories in Penobscot. He acted out the parts, making believe he was the hero. Another source was Ahzalleek, a woman elder, who also spoke little English. In Molly's introduction to the legends written in 1938 and signed by her stage name, she describes how she earned her stories by doing chores for her informants.

Bunny McBride, Molly Spotted Elk's biographer (*Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris*, 1995), assesses the significance of the legends in an introduction to *Katahdin*. McBride explains that Molly was "the first insider to record them in prose that is easily accessible" (p. vii). McBride also believes that Molly collected the legends as a way of protecting "her Native self in the social arena of forced assimilation that surrounded her from the first day of her life" (p. viii).

One of the reasons for the publication of *Katahdin* at this time is the recent law requiring the teaching Maine's Native-American history in the state's public schools. In the hands of a sensitive teacher who respects the oral tradition out of which these stories originate, the collection should prove to be a useful resource. Teachers will want to select individual legends. They are meant to be interactive and should be read out loud and even turned into plays.

Most of the stories fall into two basic themes: creation and/or transformation stories and cautionary tales. Creation stories include the making of the first man by Gluskabe, described by the editor as "the great cultural hero" of Maine's four Indian peoples (n. 86, p. 135).

Gluskabe's third attempt at creating man produced "a coppery brown" man to whom "he gave the secrets of all things, furred and feathered, and the power to live among them as one." (p. 90). Battles between good and evil do not end with the triumph of good over evil so common in the mainstream cultural stories of the United States, but rather they explain the existence of some living being or a feature in the natural landscape. A young woman caught between the forces of good and evil is saved by being transformed into a cheerful grasshopper; an evil woman becomes a black crow. Mount Katahdin itself rose up when a giant copper kettle covered a couple escaping from evil; earth, rocks, and pine trees descended to cover it.

It is perhaps the cautionary tales that will have the most appeal to young people. It is rabbit (similar to coyote tricksters in Southwest Indian legends) who creates mischief, but he has to pay for it. Called *matagwess* in Penobscot, rabbit is vain, a trickster, and lazy. These characteristics cause him to lose his beautiful tail and to scurry and hide from danger for the rest of his life.

Thanks to the Maine Folklife Center, *Katahdin: Wigwam's Tales of the Abnaki Tribe* and its Penobscot dictionary will serve as an important resource for teachers and students and as a bridge between Maine's Native and white communities.

POLLY WELTS KAUFMAN
University of Southern Maine

Passing for White: Race, Religion, and the Healy Family, 1820-1920. By James M. O'Toole. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002. Pp. 284. 6 illus. Cloth \$34.95.)

Although people interested in Maine history may be concerned primarily with the life of James A. Healy, the Catholic bishop of Portland from 1875 until his death in 1900, reading James O'Toole's balanced and perceptive *Passing for White* in its entirety is essential for setting Healy in the context of his times and his family. Without the account of the whole Healy family story, it would be difficult to understand James Healy's years in Portland.

O'Toole relates the story of the Healy family with clarity and excellent documentation. It is a remarkable one and full of contradictions.

The nine Healy children were born in Georgia to Michael Morris Healy, a white Irish immigrant planter, and his wife Eliza Clark Healy, an African-American slave. Because their mother was a slave, the children were legally slaves. Yet they were able to leave the South in safety well before the Civil War to pursue their education and careers. The Healy children assumed their father's ethnicity and throughout their lives, passed for white. Even in 1851, after the death of the Healy parents when the Fugitive Slave Law was in full force, Hugh Healy, still legally a slave himself, returned to Georgia and retrieved his three youngest siblings.

How were the Healy children able to successfully assume their roles as white Northerners even before the Emancipation Proclamation? O'Toole isolates two factors. First was the acceptance of family members into Catholic schools and eventually into the hierarchy of the church; second was the wealth (and the drive) they inherited from their planter father. An illustration of how they did not see themselves as slaves is demonstrated by the actions of the older Healy brothers when they settled their father's estate in the 1850s. Among the assets sold at auction on their behest were the slaves on the Healy plantation. Yet, as O'Toole points out, the Healy brothers themselves were still technically slaves.

The opportunity that made all the difference in the future of the Healy children came in 1844 when Michael Healy met John B. Fitzpatrick by chance on a steamer between Washington and New York. Fitzpatrick was a young priest at the time, but he later became bishop of Boston. Fitzpatrick told Healy about the church's plan to open a new college for young men in Worcester. Although Healy was not a practicing Catholic at the time, he was well read. He agreed to support the college that became Holy Cross and enrolled his four older boys at the end of that summer. With the exception of Hugh's foray to Georgia to retrieve his younger siblings, none of the Healy children ever returned home again.

O'Toole demonstrates how Holy Cross and the Massachusetts Catholic hierarchy served as a surrogate family for the Healys. Although they possessed some physical characteristics associated with African Americans, the Healys entered the college and the church as white and were accepted as white. The brothers eventually established a homestead in Newton for family members. The three sisters also entered the church, each studying at a school in Montreal established by the Notre Dame sisters. Before and after the Healy brothers and sisters settled into their vocations, they traveled several times to Europe, sometimes on church as-

signments. O'Toole demonstrates how the Healys soon began to view themselves as upper middle class and used class as a way of distinguishing themselves even within the church hierarchy.

The family's achievements would have been considered remarkable even if they had not been born as slaves in Georgia. Two of the sisters became nuns: Josephine with the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph in Montreal and Eliza with the Sisters of Notre Dame, where she advanced to become superior of an academy in St. Albans, Vermont. Martha became a novitiate with the Notre Dame sisters, but changed her mind and eventually married and raised a family. Sherwood was elected rector of the Boston cathedral, and Patrick, who became a Jesuit, served as president of Georgetown University. Hugh, who was making his way in business in New York, died young in a freak accident, and Michael followed a somewhat swash-buckling career in the U.S. Coast Guard, married, and had a son. Only Eugene, the youngest, was lost to history. O'Toole points out that at the time of these achievements, neither the Coast Guard nor the American Catholic priesthood was open to blacks.

When James A. Healy became bishop of Portland, presiding over a diocese that included all of Maine and New Hampshire, he already had a distinguished administrative and pastoral career in Boston. He had traveled widely and had connections in Rome. He saw himself as a patrician in the Catholic church and was resolved to carry out its doctrines. Healy identified only with his white Catholic congregation and, although his African-American background was known to some, it never defined him. His fluency in French and his Irish surname helped him identify with each of the two major and often competing ethnic Catholic congregations in Maine.

Healy's tenure in Maine was conservative and not without conflict. Two of the controversies arose from his perceived challenges to the authority of the church. One issue developed from his goal of expanding parochial education, making him dependent on the Sisters of Mercy in particular. Mother Frances Warde, their superior, had her own ideas about how schools should be conducted and had to argue long and hard to retain the sisters' authority in their own sphere. The best-known controversy during Healy's tenure was his interference with the activities of the Knights of Labor, whose secrecy Healy saw as a challenge to the church's authority. Healy had never identified with working-class people, even though a majority of his parishioners were working class. Despite the efforts of Terence Powderly, the Catholic president of the

Knights, to broker a peace, Healy came down firmly against the Knights, denouncing them from the pulpit. His stated reason was union secrecy. It was not until the 1891 papal letter, *Rerum Novarum*, endorsed the right of workers to organize unions that Healy relented.

O'Toole rightly sums up Healy's identity as that of a Catholic leader who saw Catholicism as superior to all other religions. Nor was his tenure an ecumenical one. He refused to join a local Episcopal minister in working to enforce state liquor laws. On the other hand, O'Toole presents Healy as a spiritual leader rising above institutional politics and admired for his executive ability.

The only criticism of O'Toole's study is its sparseness. Maine readers might like even more details about the professional lives of the Healys, particularly James and his skirmishes with the Sisters of Mercy and the Knights of Labor. Continuing work by Maine labor historian Charles Scontras fleshes out some of the latter controversy. The sources are there and ready for someone else to take up the stories.

O'Toole carefully spells out the significance of the Healy family story in his excellent prologue. During the period of the Healys' lives, O'Toole states, "racial categories were clear: everybody was something, in racial terms." Today, in contrast, he argues, "race is not a biological fact, but rather an elaborate fiction that society writes over time." O'Toole concludes by saying that what people "make of different individual traits, like skin color, matters more than the traits themselves" (p. 3).

The remarkable story of the Healy brothers and sisters serves to illustrate that racial categories are indeed a construction of society, permeable and unfixed. In time, with the advent of the modern Civil Rights Movement, long after their deaths, three of the Healy brothers achieved special distinction for the reason that they were black. The Coast Guard not only praised Michael as its first African-American captain, but it named a major ice-breaker after him. Patrick became noted as the first African-American president of Georgetown University, and James as the first African-American Catholic bishop in the United States.

POLLY WELTS KAUFMAN
University of Southern Maine

Russian Voices on the Kennebec: The Story of Maine's Unlikely Colony. By Robert S. Jaster. (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press, 1999. Pp.173. Paperback \$14.95.)

Robert S. Jaster's *Russian Voices on the Kennebec* puts historic events such as the Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union under Stalin, and the hardships of World War II refugees into perspective by explaining them through the experiences of individual Russian and Soviet émigrés who settled in Richmond, Maine. Through oral interviews, Jaster introduces his readers to two waves of Russian immigrants who settled in the Kennebec Valley. The first wave was composed of families of Corpus and Cossack veterans — Tsarists soldiers who fled to Yugoslavia after the collapse of Russian Empire. These men fought with the Germans during World War II in hopes of defeating the Soviet Army and restoring the Russian Empire. Upon their arrival to the U.S., these veterans and their families lived in various places and saw the Richmond Russian Community as their last stop in a long journey. Their service in the Tsarist army and their hope of defeating Communism in Russia bound them together in America. The second wave of immigrants left Russia during the chaos of World War II, only to become displaced persons whom the United Nations threatened to return to the Soviet Union, where they would be treated as war criminals. These people had a far different image of the Soviet Union than the first wave, as they had experienced Stalin's oppressive regime and the paranoia caused by the KGB. Unlike the veterans and their families, the second wave of émigrés focused on their future in America and not the restoration of the Russian Empire. These people and their children would eventually become more active in local civic affairs and distance themselves from ethnic-based activities.

Vladimir von Poushental, White Army veteran, sharpshooter, airplane pilot, entrepreneur, real estate speculator and immigrant, founded the Russian Community in Richmond in 1950. Von Poushental purchased land in the area, resold it to other Corpus and Cossack veterans, and worked to establish a retirement home in the area for those veterans who had no one to care for them. The veterans and their families established St. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Church, the center of their community, in August 1953. The Church instilled in its congregation the ethnic values of Russians before the Bolshevik Revolution; when Ukrainians came with the second wave of émigrés, this Russian domination of the Church caused a split and the creation of a second Orthodox Church, St. Nicholas. In the 1970s, a third Orthodox Church was built,

whose members looked to the Moscow Patriarch as holding religious authority over their institution.

The stories Jaster tells reveal the complexity of ethnicity and class in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as well as in the Richmond community. While the immigrants had much in common in lacking money and jobs or restoring old New England farmhouses, learning English, and changing careers, Jaster points out that the second wave did not share the first generation's world-view, and this created tension within the community.

Despite disagreements, the community managed to keep its Russian and East European culture alive. As in other immigrant experiences, the demise of the community's Slavic ethnic identity came in the 1990s when the second and third generations had fully assimilated into American culture; American-born children spoke English instead of Russian, attended public schools and universities, married outside their religious and ethnic group, and no longer shared the common bond of either fighting for the Tsar or living under the Stalinist regime.

Jaster's book is an excellent source for understanding the experiences of people who lived in Russia during the Tsarist Regime, the Revolution, and World War II. Jaster's book is also a great starting point for future scholars, who might want to compare the Russians' experiences with those of other immigrant groups in Maine. Moreover, historians and geographers could complete the story by mapping these immigrants' homes in relationship to first and/or second wave émigrés, the churches, and non-Russians, in order to tease out economic and social insights.

KIMBERLY SEBOLD

University of Maine, Presque Isle