

Maine History

Volume 41
Number 3 *James Berry Vickery III, 1917-1997*

Article 2

10-1-2002

A Tribute to James Berry Vickery, III

Andrea Constantine Hawkes

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



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

Recommended Citation

Constantine Hawkes, Andrea. "A Tribute to James Berry Vickery, III." *Maine History* 41, 3 (2002): 193-196.
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol41/iss3/2>

This Article 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.

A TRIBUTE: JAMES BERRY VICKERY III

BY ANDREA CONSTANTINE HAWKES

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE of *Maine History* celebrates the career and influence of James “Jim” Berry Vickery III, a Mainer and a Maine historian who contributed substantially to our understanding of Maine’s history and culture and who inspired hundreds of people inside and outside the classroom. Historian Alan Taylor once told me that he had a “soft spot” for “the memory of Jim Vickery, who was very kind and helpful” to him in the early stages of his career. Indeed, just this past month a staff of the New England Historic Genealogical Society who was a student of Jim’s over thirty years ago told me with great feeling that Jim inspired his vocation by teaching him to love history. While researching and writing a history of Jim’s family *The Same Great Struggle: The History of the Vickery Family of Unity, Maine, 1634-1997* (Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, Publisher, 2003), I came to appreciate the importance of Jim’s work in life, but the breadth of his impact still astounds me. This collection of new scholarship commemorates Jim’s profound and enduring legacy.

Jim Vickery was born in 1917 in Unity, Maine, the village his great-great-grandparents settled after the Revolutionary War—a history of which he was justly proud. While other young teenage boys collected baseball cards, Jim collected family stories, genealogy, and images with an eye towards writing his town’s history. After graduating from Bates College in 1942 and serving in World War II, he began his thirty-four-year teaching career in the Portage, Lee, Dexter, and Brewer secondary schools, while also earning his Master of Arts degree in history from the University of Maine in 1950. In 1954 he published *A History of the Town of Unity, Maine*, an early model for rigorously written, researched, and documented local history. Most notably Jim used genealogy and folklore in this work to connect local events to the larger story of American history. Jim researched (his real passion) and wrote a number of articles and exhibition catalogues on local history and people. He became a notable figure in Bangor and central Maine and, acting as “official” custodian of the region’s history, he gave countless public talks. He edited *An*

Illustrated History of Bangor, Maine (1969), *A Pictorial History of Brewer, Maine* (1976), and the three volumes of *The Journals of John B. Godfrey* (1979, 1984, and 1985). He was the president of the Bangor Historical Society and served the Penobscot Heritage Museum and Maine Historical Society in a variety of capacities. Aptly, the University of Maine gave Jim an honorary doctorate in 1993 for devoting fifty years of his life to researching Maine history.

Jim was a preservationist as well, and throughout his life he diligently collected and conserved rare books, photographs, and materials relating to Maine. He donated thousands of books and hundreds of pamphlets and manuscripts (including his own research notes on what Richard W. Judd calls “infamous yellow pads”), as well as photographs, prints, newspapers, and maps—one of the largest private collections of Maine books and materials—to Raymond H. Fogler Library at the University of Maine, the Maine State Museum, the Bangor Public Library, and the Unity Historical Society. Not a day goes by that his extraordinary collections go unused. Fortunately, Jim had the “vision to preserve Maine’s cultural heritage,” as his close friend Earle G. Shettleworth Jr. eulogized, and “his spirit will live on through his life’s work to illuminate the minds of future generations.”

While the following essays celebrate Jim Vickery’s important contributions as a teacher, historian, and preservationist, they underscore elements in Jim’s life that are essential in the ambit of true scholarship—collegiality and collaboration. Each one of these essays represents a kind of partnership between the author and Jim’s work. In the lead article Richard W. Judd used Jim’s research on the colorful “outlaw” Jock Darling, who pioneered the business of hunting as a sport in Maine, to bring Jim’s final project to completion.

Jim valued the artistry and understood the power of photography as a source for understanding history. In his own words he grew “ecstatic” whenever he studied “early forms of photography,” though he couldn’t explain why, and historic images were a goodly part of his collection. Earle G. Shettleworth Jr.’s latest scholarship on early photographer Henry Bailey builds on Jim’s particular enthusiasm for stereo view cards. Earle’s essay is a fitting tribute to Jim’s vigilance in rescuing so many of these now rare photographic images as they provide the single most comprehensive pictorial record of Maine during the second half of the nineteenth century.

William H. Bunting’s essay makes it very clear how important Jim’s encouragement and insights were to him while he compiled his wonder-

ful two-volume collection of historic Maine photographs, *A Day's Work*—a publication he dedicated to Jim and his brother Eric Arthur Vickery. Bill's photographic essay in this issue includes some of Jim Vickery's most cherished images of Maine (a number published here for the first time) and they poignantly reflect Jim's love of local history and appreciation of the everyday lives of common people.

Jim Vickery never married, and to most of the world it often seemed as though he acted alone in his research and collecting pursuits. In her essay Carol Feurtado illuminates the collaborative nature of Jim's scholarship by exploring his almost-forty-year intellectual friendship with his teaching colleague Ruth Shepherd Slater. Carol's essay is a powerful reminder of how women's historical role as silent supporters of men's work usually obscures their own contributions to that work.

Finally, William David Barry's essay speaks to Jim's steadfast delight in sharing his knowledge about Maine's history and the void his death in 1997 has left in Maine's scholarly community. Connecting his legacy with that of heretofore-unknown Bangor scholar William H. Grady (and posing the tantalizing question of whether Jim knew about Grady), Bill ends this volume with promise: the vibrant study of Maine history is stronger than ever because scholars like Grady and Jim Vickery have left us a solid foundation upon which to build.

Without a doubt, Jim Vickery's commitment to teaching and advancing the scholarly value of genealogy and local history, and his careful collecting and preservation of our cultural heritage has inspired, enriched, and will continue to enhance our understanding of American history, bringing us closer to understanding our own lives and times. This tribute is our way of saying, "Thank you, Jim."

CONTRIBUTORS

ANDREA CONSTANTINE HAWKES is a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Maine. She co-edited *The Civil War Recollections of General Ellis Spear* (1997), edited and wrote an interpretive essay for *The Lighthouse Keeper's Wife* (1999), and is the author of *The Same Great Struggle: The History of the Vickery Family of Unity, Maine 1634-1997* (2003).

RICHARD JUDD is Adelaide C. and Alan L. Bird Professor of History at the University of Maine, where he teaches Maine history and U.S. environmental history. He is the author of *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (1997), and, with Christopher S. Beach, *Natural States: the Environmental Imagination in Maine, Oregon, and the Nation* (2004). He co-edits *Maine History* with Martha J. McNamara.

EARLE G. SHETTLEWORTH JR. is the architectural historian and director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. He has lectured and written extensively on Maine history and architecture, his most recent publication being *John Calvin Stevens on the Portland Peninsula* (2003). He currently serves as chair of the Capitol Planning Commission and the State House and Capitol Park Commission.

WILLIAM H. BUNTING lives in Whitefield, Maine, where in the summer he farms and operates Organic Heavy Bulldozing. In the winter he writes and iceboats. He is the author of *A Day's Work* (1997) and most recently, the curator of *The Camera's Coast: Historic Photographs of Maritime New England* (2004).

CAROL FEURTADO is a volunteer at the Dexter Historical Society, focusing on Dexter genealogy and archival materials. She co-authored the book *Our Neighborly Neighbors: 200 Years of Life in Rural Dexter, Maine, 1800 – 2000* (1999).

WILLIAM DAVID BARRY is an independent scholar of Maine history and a reference assistant at the Maine Historical Society. He is a critic, and the author, editor, and curator of numerous publications and exhibitions including *The History of the Sweetser-Children's Home: A Century and a half of Service to Maine Children* (1987), *Maine: The Pine Tree State* (1997), and *Rum, Riot and Reform: Maine and the History of American Drinking* (1998).