

1-1-2001

## A Bibliography of Materials for Maine High School History Teachers

Roger B. Ray

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



Part of the [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ray, Roger B.. "A Bibliography of Materials for Maine High School History Teachers." *Maine History* 39, 4 (2001): 270-272. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol39/iss4/5>

This From the Collections 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](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).

*FROM THE COLLECTIONS*A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MATERIALS  
FOR MAINE HIGH SCHOOL  
HISTORY TEACHERS

A loose-leaf notebook is now available for high school history teachers in the Library of the Maine Historical Society. The notebook contains material on Maine's participation in the Civil War, selected to meet the challenge of bringing the war to life and exciting the student's historical imagination. It addresses the question of what life was like at home and on the front for the common soldier. Students who may be less than interested in knowing which general won which battle can be drawn into the history of the war if they are given some understanding of what life was like for people just like them.

At the time of the Civil War, Maine had a population of under 600,000 people. But before the war ended, over 70,000 of these Mainers had taken part in military service. While some Maine newspapers provide rich descriptions of this military experience, others—the *Eastern Argus* for example—are disappointing. Sometimes, editorials provide a sense of how Mainers reacted to, or thought about events leading up to the war. During these years, Maine people experienced some soul searching on whether they should return escaped slaves to their owners; indeed, President Lincoln tried to avert war by endorsing compromise federal legislation on returning escaped slaves. Most Maine newspapers took part in the public debate over escaped slaves, but curiously the *Argus* refrained from comment. (Some background information on the fugitive slave debate may be found in Jerry R. Desmond, "The Attempt to repeal Maine's Personal Liberty Laws," *Maine History* 20 [Spring 1998]). Even during the war, the *Argus* remained editorially silent, printing only the daily news release of the War Department. Newspapers are uneven in their coverage of day-to-day events of the war.

Where, then, do we turn for interesting original sources relating everyday perspectives on this grand-scale event? The notebook contains

information on letters from twenty soldiers from different areas and towns in Maine. Biographical background information is included along with the letters. Some letters have been published in collections, and in such cases the location of the published and unpublished letters is noted. Early in the war, soldiers' letters expressed worries about whether the family could get in the hay and sell the surplus for the proper price. Some letters express a soldier's concern about how he would comport himself in battle or how he would face death if it came.

During the Civil War, states and towns were allowed to send non-resident men to be credited to their draft quotas. This practice gave rise to a group of self-appointed "body brokers." An explanation of how this arrangement worked, and a copy of one such contract between the town of Hollis and a broker are filed under Hollis in the notebook. (See also p. 497 in Louis C. Hatch's *Maine: A History* [New York: American Historical Society, 1919]). The broker, John N. Stimpson, agreed to furnish fourteen men for \$325 each. Hollis had previously held a town meeting and had endorsed this arrangement. The selectmen received a certificate from Maine's Adjutant General for the fourteen men, which they returned to the Adjutant General as a draft credit.

Letters from the front often omit reference to the carnage of battle, the unpreparedness of the Army to cope with the huge number of wounded, or the spread of diseases. War Department news releases omitted these matters also. When Dorothea Dix of Hampden, nearly sixty years old, saw that the army was unable to care for the dead and the wounded, some still on the battleground for lack of someone to pick them up, and when she saw soldiers lying unwashed in makeshift hospitals, she offered her services as a nurse. She was rejected: An officer told her that war was no place for a woman. Dix went about the country relating what she saw and asking women to volunteer as nurses. After the battle of Manassas, the authorities realized they could not cope with this aspect of warfare. The Surgeon General gave Dix the authority to solicit, organize, and deploy volunteer nurses. A report of the Camp and Hospital Association, available in the Library of the Maine Historical Society, shows how well and quickly these volunteers were organized and how efficiently they fulfilled their mission. Women attached themselves to a regiment, usually one in which a husband or son was serving. Later in the war, nurses were paid 40 cents a day. In the notebook, there is a page for each of the volunteer nurses from Maine, together with biographical information. Although these nurses came from all over the state, Portland seems to have furnished more than most towns.

The experience as nurses helped change the way women thought about themselves in this Victorian era. Women recognized that they could organize, could operate their organizations, and could perform useful service to society outside the home. An example of nurses meeting a need can be seen in “Three Weeks at Gettysburg,” by Georgeanna Woolsey of New York. In one battle the carnage was so great that all available buildings, churches, and warehouses, were filled. In order to provide additional shelter, Woolsey asked the townspeople to open their homes and volunteer their services. Woolsey also relates that on the night before the great battle of Gettysburg, the 17th Maine, which had been fighting an Alabama regiment, was ordered to cross a field to guard against a possible Confederate flanking maneuver. The soldiers found the nurses in the field ahead of them. An astonished Confederate officer lying in the field raised himself enough to say: “But Madam, we are the enemy!” It is evident in Woolsey’s account that nurses cared for all the soldiers—Rebels and Yankees alike.

The materials in this notebook were prepared for use by high-school history teachers. They were selected to give students a sense of everyday events during the war, and to provide a mutual learning experience that will bring the past alive for both students and teachers.

ROGER B. RAY