

# Maine History

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Volume 39  
Number 4 *Television Comes to Bangor*

Article 6

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1-1-2001

## Book Reviews

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### Recommended Citation

Pawling, Micah, and Richard W. Judd. "Book Reviews." *Maine History* 39, 4 (2001): 273-277.  
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol39/iss4/6>

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival.* By Harald E.L. Prins. (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996. Pp. Xvi + 250. Glossary, bibliography, film list, index. Paper. \$16.00.)

Harald E.L. Prins's *The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival* is the first ethnohistorical work to examine ways Mi'kmaq peoples confronted change over the last 500 years. Using various survival strategies, from outright resistance, to accommodation, to self-determination and cultural revitalization, the Mi'kmaq endured an array of challenges, including European invasion, foreign epidemics, and adverse government policy. However, the author is careful not to portray the Mi'kmaq simply as victims; rather they were active, and sometimes aggressive in shaping their nation's history.

After introducing the geography of the Mi'kmaq homeland, early chapters alert the reader to the European impact on Native society. The European ideology of progressive development and growth is critical, Prins argues, in fleshing out the account of the Mi'kmaq. In addition to painting the historical context for the Mi'kmaq experience, he aims "to sensitize readers to the concept of modern tribal cultures as ongoing, open-ended, historical processes" (5). As a researcher who assisted the Aroostook Band of Mi'kmaqs to achieve state recognition in 1991, he also presents their contemporary political challenges and stresses the importance of history as a means to achieve tribal rights and government recognition.

Prins describes Mi'kmaq life before European contact by drawing upon descriptions of their diverse natural environment, on archaeological and linguistic evidence, and on a construct of their possible appearance on the eve of contact. He includes a valuable description of Mi'kmaq social organization as a family band comprised of extended kin who collectively practiced seasonal mobility across their homeland using a variety of subsistence sources. This sets the stage for a discussion of contact with Europeans. As newcomers moved onto the land, the Mi'kmaq experienced waves of deadly epidemics. Survivors, many of whom became market hunters, entered into a symbiotic relationship with French Acadians, reinforced through trade and intermarriage. In the seventeenth century, Native communities blended traditional beliefs

with the newcomers' teachings. Some Mi'kmaqs perceived baptism as an alliance ritual that might protect families from the cataclysmic European epidemics. Mi'kmaqs adopted European vessels to assert their position as dominant traders with neighboring groups as far away as southern Maine. At the same time, alcohol, coupled with intertribal conflicts, caused considerable strain among the Mi'kmaq.

As European conflicts spilled over to North America, Mi'kmaq families, though often preferring neutrality, assisted the French in fighting the English. Although the Mi'kmaq had never yielded land to the French, eighteenth-century treaty officials perceived their land as French Acadia, and ceded the territory to the English. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Mi'kmaq delegates and their Wabanaki kin experienced further fragmentation when the U.S.-Canadian border was drawn through their homeland.

Under "internal colonialism" in the nineteenth century, Mi'kmaqs resisted assimilation and asserted rights to their homeland in petitions and in personal confrontations with officials. In addition to securing portions of their ancestral land, Mi'kmaq families struggled to maintain their mobile lifestyle, sometimes also working as seasonal laborers. Prins concludes this account with contemporary Mi'kmaq issues concerning government relations, cultural revitalization, self-determination, and sovereignty. The author adds a useful list of Mi'kmaq words and an annotated Mi'kmaq film list.

While Prins has thoroughly researched the different methods Mi'kmaqs used to deal with changes in the last 500 years, he does not make clear how his discoveries revise the way we think about the Mi'kmaq. For example, the author goes to great length to illustrate Mi'kmaq involvement in intertribal conflicts and Anglo-Wabanaki wars, but readers are left to wonder about how his analytical contributions further our understanding of these conflicts. Women are also missing from this account of the colonial wars. Considering this is a case study of the ways cultures deal with change, a rigorous attempt to include women throughout could have enhanced this understanding. In addition, Prins's discussion of Mi'kmaq fur trade participation relies heavily on Calvin Marin's controversial thesis that Mi'kmaq hunters, for various cultural and religious reasons, declared "war" on the animals. Prins's explanation of the Mi'kmaq relation to animals should at least acknowledge that Martin's thesis is subject to serious debate. And finally, while Prins states that by the end of the eighteenth century Natives "were painfully aware that the old times were over" (163), it is important to remember that traditions were

still being played out. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the Wabanaki Confederacy still served as a binding force among Wabanaki peoples, and as tribal councils continued to send delegates and ambassadors to multi-ethnic council fires, multi-tribal ceremonies persisted.

Although he sometimes neglects Mi'kmaq experiences in Quebec and northern Maine, Prins, more than any other historian, extends beyond present-day provincial and international borders to embrace the Mi'kmaq life throughout their homelands. Thus despite some shortcomings, *The Mi'kmaq* is a remarkably thorough achievement, documenting over 500 years of history. Prins's attention to contemporary Mi'kmaq issues, too often overlooked by other historians, is truly commendable. His work will be a valuable asset to students, general readers, and to ethnohistorians as an important reference for a long time to come.

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*The Richardson Lakes: Jewels in the Rangeley Chain.* By Herbert P. Shirrefs. Edited by Randall H. Bennett. (Bethel, Maine: Bethel Historical Society, 1995. Pp. xxvi + 485. Illustrations, maps, bibliography. Cloth. \$39.95. Paper. \$29.95. + \$3 shipping. Order from Bethel Historical Society, P.O. Box 12, Bethel, Maine 04217.)

Herbert Shirrefs first saw western Maine's Richardson Lakes in 1966. The following year he and his wife rented a shore-side cabin, and Shirrefs began collecting information relating to the history of the region. Twenty-five years later this mountain of data caught the eye of Bethel Historical Society's Randall Bennett, who wrote to inquire about Shirrefs's plans to publish it. Thus was born *The Richardson Lakes: Jewels in the Rangeley Chain*. Sadly, Shirrefs died in 1993, shortly before the book was published.

This informal history, written by Shirrefs and edited by Bennett, highlights the logging, sporting, and tourist activities that sustained the region's economy for over two centuries. The style is intimate, and the research is eclectic, drawn from a broad spectrum of personal, popular, and academic sources, and from a wealth of reminiscences, documents, stories, maps, broadsides, and photographs, all of which add to the immense appeal of the book. Shirrefs discusses in detail the qualifications for each of his authorities and the provenance of each of his documents.

Thus his methodology is totally transparent; we come to understand thoroughly how he pieced together this information puzzle.

Unlike many lakes in the region, civilization bypassed the Richardsons, largely because the principal landowners retained close control over resort and camp development. To the Pingree Heirs we owe the Richardson's unusually pristine character. And yet the lakes' charm—and hence the charm of this book—lies in the area's rich human history. Shirrefs concentrates on the men and women who peopled the lakeshores and gave the lakes mythical qualities, including the city folk who made this remote section of Maine a part of the northeastern urban hinterland.

Shirrefs begins with an informative survey of the various map makers whose record of the region's physical character, natural resources, and navigational potentialities guided the first pioneers to the lakes and later lured the inevitable land speculators. In 1832, for instance, George Frost Richardson acquired 24,480 acres around the lakes from Massachusetts at 12 cents an acre, and three years later he sold the same to William Willis for \$2.09 an acre. The maps draw us into the geological past, and from there we move forward to the arrival of the first humans in the wake of the retreating glaciers. The pre-contact story ends with the solitary individual Indians still living in the area in the nineteenth century, and with the archeological discoveries that revealed so much about the hunting techniques, diets, and weapons of several early cultures. The account rambles, but at the same time it offers a broad context for understanding the place of the Richardson Lakes in the geological and cultural evolution of the Northeast.

In a detailed chapter on "Others Who Saw and Wrote," Shirrefs touches on the colorful personalities of the region, including Charles Farrar, whose guidebooks enticed wealthy anglers to the area in pursuit of the legendary brown trout; George French, whose photographs for the Maine Development Commission worked similar magic in the 1950s; Frederick C. Barker, who pioneered steamboat service on the lakes; C.A. Stephens, whose *Youth's Companion* stories ensconced the lakes in the imagination of young readers; and Luther Tibbetts, who reportedly built the first of the famed "Rangeley" rowboats.

Rail service in the 1850s touched off a boom in inland lakes tourism. Shirrefs provides a lively account of the camps, camplife, guides, steamboat captains, and the "sports" who carted trunks of clothes and equipment into the woods. Women fortified themselves against black flies, mosquitoes, and other Maine inconveniences with bloomer suits, stout

boots, soft leather gloves with armllets to the elbow, and felt hats with veils fastened to the band and encircling their heads. Although less pretentious than those on the Coast, the camps and hotels were comfortable and well provisioned, and in their heyday they supported a lifestyle worthy of the elite late-Victorian vacationer.

Shirrefs reserves for last the discussion of fish and fishing. As early as the 1840s anglers were returning to the city with stories of eleven-pound spotted brook trout, but it wasn't until the enterprising George Shepard Page sent specimens to three New York City newspaper editors that the Richardsons took their place among the world's legendary fishing spots. This last chapter also offers up two pioneering women anglers: Cornelia "Fly Rod" Crosby, expert fly-caster and tireless promoter of outdoor Maine; and Carrie Stevens, inventor of the famed "Gray Ghost" fly.

Almost as soon as it began, the boom era of camps and hotels was over. The leveling influence of the auto-era vacation, coupled with changing elite lifestyles and a dwindling number of large fish, brought an end to the unique cottage culture of the inland lakes. Memories of this remarkable era faded as well, thus spurring Shirrefs's attempt to recapture them. "It seems," he relates, "that time has a way of eradicating the historical record, so that it is often only by chance that small facts, like specks of gold found in a Maine stream, come to light" (pp. 274-75).

This rationale summarizes the accomplishments and limitations of Shirrefs's book. The things that "came to light" in this twenty-five year quest appear in the text as shards of history snatched from the fading past, like specks of gold in a rushing mountain stream, and for this there is reason enough read and re-read his book. Yet Shirrefs, perhaps fearing that some of these shards might indeed be lost to oblivion, elected to present them pretty much as he found them. Thus the book will be most appreciated by those familiar with the area, whose sense of place will make each detail compelling. For others, *The Richardson Lakes* will yield a fascinating portrait of the area, but one in which the shards have not been completely reassembled as a clear picture. Nevertheless, the information is fascinating, the approach broadly conceived, and the story immensely rich. The book is a valuable contribution to the often-neglected history of western Maine.

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