

Maine History

Volume 37
Number 1 *Industrial Relations in Maine*

Article 5

6-1-1997

Book Reviews

Kevin Witherspoon
University of Maine

William Miller

Gregory T. Heald
University of Maine

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

Recommended Citation

Witherspoon, Kevin, William Miller, and Gregory T. Heald. "Book Reviews." *Maine History* 37, 1 (1997): 62-67. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol37/iss1/5>

This Book Reviews 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.

BOOK REVIEWS

Motor Camps and Maine Guides: Two Studies. By Mia Boynton and Nathan Lowrey. Northeast Folklore Series no. 28 (Orono: Maine Folklife Center, 1991. Pp. viii + 110. Paper. \$10.)

This volume of *Northeast Folklore* includes two short works, Mia Boynton's "A Gift of Native Knowledge: The History of Russell's Motor Camps in Rangeley, Maine," and Nathan Lowrey's "Tales of the Northern Maine Woods: The History and Traditions of the Maine Guide." The topics are linked in that they both describe mechanisms through which city folk could experience country life. But they are different enough that each deserves its own review.

Whatever skepticism the reader might have about the historical significance of a single motor camp is quickly dissolved by Boynton's warm and engaging style. With wit and candor she brings John A. Russell and his motor camps to life, and etches for them a small but important place in New England's history. Boynton finds biographical significance in seemingly unimportant details of the architecture and design of traditional hunting camps. By relating the purpose and origin of virtually every article to be found in a hunter's cabin, she paints a vivid picture of Russell's life in the outdoors. So doing, she avoids a potentially dull recitation of the details of an outdoorsman's life, and instead provides the reader with clear and tangible images.

The camps consisted of ten or twelve cabins located only a short drive from the highway. They served as a place where city dwellers and other motorists could enjoy "a rustic vacation but...with some of the comforts of life (p. 48)." The Russells created an environment in which travelers could get away from it all - without getting away from it all.

The charm in this brief work lies with the presentation. With interviews as her chief source, Boynton could have saturated the book with lengthy quotes. Instead, she mingles timely and appropriate quotes with her own smooth paraphrasing and prose. She includes plenty of humor, especially in the description of cartoons left by hunters on the cabin walls. More

important, she conveys the tension between the rusticity of the original camps and the modernization of other roadside stop-overs. Technological advances led travelers to prefer posh hotels to dusty cabins, and eventually led to the motor camps' demise. Boynton, fortunately, managed to record the story of the camps before they faded from memory.

Lowrey follows Boynton's work with another history centered on the blurred border between urbanity and the untamed countryside. He tells the tale of the Maine guides, who accompanied "sports" on their trips to the outdoors. Unlike Boynton, Lowrey quotes liberally from his interviews, and allows the guides to tell their own story.

This work is perfect for the reader who is looking for a series of touching, humorous, and interesting anecdotes. The guides themselves relate stories of lost sports, of canoeing adventures, of artfully cooked beans, and of successful hunts. Their role as mediators between the wilderness and the untrained hunter is inferred, rather than described directly. Their skills and talents are made apparent more by their own words than by the author's commentary.

A reader unfamiliar with the guides and their skills will enjoy the stories told here, and will gain much from this work. One who is looking for a new interpretation of the guides' place in history should look elsewhere.

Kevin Witherspoon
University of Maine

“A Noble and Dignified Stream”: *The Piscataqua Region in the Colonial Revival, 1860-1930*. Edited by Sarah L. Giffen and Kevin D. Murphy. (York, Maine: Old York Historical Society, 1992. Pp. 242. \$50.00.)

A modest exhibition in the Old Gaol in York provided the impetus for this illustrated catalog, which embraces a wide view of Colonial Revival in a small triangle of southern New Hampshire and Maine – Portsmouth, South Berwick, and Ogunquit. Kevin Murphy defines the theme and, with twenty seven contributors, provides discussion of the aims and accomplishments of the Colonial Revival period. Implicit in the movement was a celebration of the quiet beauty surviving in the region, and the desire to preserve it against the inroads of modern industrial development. The pious and practical renovations of ancestral homes became ever more accurate. Architects like William Mead Howells and William E. Barry published measured drawings and plans of surviving houses. In their writings Sarah Orne Jewett and Thomas Bailey Aldrich celebrated a nostalgia for the earlier days in *American Life*. Photographers could document a building, or, with Wallace Nutting, stage sentimental tableaux in historic houses. Charles Woodbury painted motifs of local color in a comfortable impressionistic manner. And Celia Thaxter planted a colonial bouquet in her garden on Appledore.

Much of the early work was initiated by women, who thereby assumed control of the movement. Later, power gravitated to men – academic historians, professional architects, fund raisers and officers in historical societies. But, it will be noted in this book, the majority of patrons and contributors to the discourse are women.

In the Piscataqua region colonial revival became a leading cultural activity for summer folk and natives as well. The well-to-do were attracted elsewhere for horse-riding, yachting, and the fashions of high society; the middle classes swarmed to Old Orchard Beach, Rye Beach, and to the somewhat sequestered York Beach. While one part of the Colonial Revival was intended to attract the tourist trade, another phase became the

vehicle to reassert the propriety of early American culture and patriotism.

In one sense this book is less an exhibition catalog than an enlarged dissertation. The problem of keeping intact the many individual contributions and coordinating the whole resulted in some confusion. Several contributors remain unidentified. The illustrations are listed by catalog numbers, plates, and numbered and lettered figures; several are untabulated. Cross referencing is not easy. The small photographs lose an intended emphasis, and the color plates are a bit dingy. But this is not a coffee table book.

We continue to live with the conflict between historic preservation and commercial development, between private homes and public access. For several generations in the twentieth century, new buildings were “styled,” for better or worse, in the idiom of “colonial”; architects learned to augment the scale for office buildings, college gymnasias, and so on. It is salutary that this study points out to us the original aims and purposes of the Colonial Revival; We have inherited it, and much of it has validity today.

William B. Miller
Waterville

White Pine on the Saco River: An Oral History of River Driving in Southern Maine. By Michael P. Chaney. (Orono: Maine Folklife Center, 1993. Pp. Vii+ 88. Paper. \$15.)

Since the story of logging in the state of Maine is often garbled by mythology and sentiment, Mr. Chaney's contribution is especially welcome to those who think seriously about the state. *White Pine on the Saco River* uses oral and documentary sources to reconstruct a narrative of lumbering on the Saco River from 1920 to 1960. This era coincided with the end of river driving, and the causes of that closure are the primary focus of Mr. Chaney's investigation.

Examining the J.G. Deering and Son operations, Chaney describes twentieth-century lumbering in southern Maine. Emerson Baker's overview of the valley places the Deering Company's affairs in the context of 300 years of Saco River lumbering, and the chapters that follow deal with the successive stages in the production of lumber: timber cruising, cutting, river driving, and milling. Chaney's conclusion puts the Saco industry into the general social and economic picture.

Chaney deftly combines the oral recollections of the workers with relevant business documents, thereby crafting a coherent narrative. The liberal use of maps, diagrams, and photographs enhances the accessibility of the text. The author does not presume our understanding of logging, and accordingly provides a judicious glossary on the final page of the volume. This device offers a technical context that clarifies the voices of the workers.

According to Chaney, the small farmsteads that dotted this watershed both informed the practice of river driving and contributed to its demise. The Saco Valley was the earliest and most thoroughly settled of Maine's inland valleys. Because of this dense settlement pattern, Saco River lumbermen were usually able to return home every night. The small farmsteads that provided this labor also produced the timber used by the Deering Company. But the onset of World War II drastically changed the price of timber, and the lack of company-owned

forestlands became a major liability. The increased expense of timber, along with rising labor costs, technological changes, and the loss of valued employees, precipitated the end of the Saco River drive in the 1940s.

Those interested in lumbering will find much to savor here, but the book also recommends itself to people interested in business history, social history, and especially Maine history. Overall, *White Pine on the Saco River* provides a fascinating look inside the workings of a twentieth-century Maine lumbering operation.

Gregory T. Heald
University of Maine