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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Authors

Leigh Donaldson, Tina Roberts, Jayleen Roths, Stanley Russell Howe, Stephen P. Budney, and Jennifer Goode

BOOK REVIEWS

Anchor of the Soul (a documentary video about black life in Maine). Produced by Shoshana Hoose and Karine Odlin and narrated by Barbara Jordan. (Northeast Historic Film, P.O. Box 900, Bucksport, ME 04416. \$24.95.)

In 1990, according to state almanac statistics, black citizens comprised approximately .04 percent of Maine's population. While this might suggest to some that African-Americans are virtually non-existent in the Pine Tree State, a new documentary video reveals a vibrant cultural and social history behind Maine's black population, dating from the early 1800s.

Narrated by former black Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, this hour-long documentary is likely to be the most comprehensive visual examination of race relations in the state of Maine. The story begins in the 1820s, with a group of Portland African-Americans struggling to sustain a black community by founding the Abyssinian Church.

In 1826, angry black residents wrote the *Eastern Argus* protesting the treatment of blacks in Portland's churches. With the help of Ruben Ruby, a black businessman, and John Neal, a white Quaker, the Maine Anti-Slavery Society was formed. From 1830 to 1861 the Colored Convention worked to help slaves escape through Maine to Canada. Two new black churches were established: the Zion Mission Church and the African Methodist (AME). In the twentieth century, the Abyssinian Church would be renamed Green Memorial AME Church, after Moses Green, a bootblack for the local railroad station.

The video includes poignant interviews with current Maine residents, historians, clergy members, and a former African-American state legislator. Directed by Shoshana Hoose and Karine Odlin, this film displays the skilled photography of Phil Cormier. Aaron Fischer as editor and Michael McInnis as music and sound design director keep the work a relatively smooth view. The project was funded by two generous grants from the

Maine Humanities Council, as well as over ninety additional donors.

Leigh Donaldson

Headstrong: The Biography of Amy Morris Bradley, 1823-1904, A Life of Noble Usefulness. By Diane Cobb Cashman. (Wilmington, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing, 1990. Pp. Xiii + 251. Cloth. \$25.)

In the multitude of volumes on Civil War history, precious little space is accorded to the heroines of the great battles. Diane Cobb Cashman, in bringing to life the personal diaries of Amy Morris Bradley, aims to fill one of these gaps. Cashman provides Mainers, particularly Civil War enthusiasts, with a woman worthy of the adoration bestowed on the state's greatest war figures.

Cashman is full of praise for this obstinate yet objective teacher, nurse, and special relief-agent. Born in East Vassalboro in 1823, Amy Morris Bradley endured a childhood haunted by the deaths of several of her loved ones. Nevertheless she proved a top scholar in local schools, and eventually oversaw classrooms of her own in East Vassalboro, Gardiner, and Boston. The trip to Boston unbridled her wanderlust, and when the opportunity arose, Bradley set off for Costa Rica to fill a position as a nanny. The realities of the situation soon proved less than desirable, so Bradley left the position to explore San Jose, the country's capital. She easily conquered the Spanish language, and within three months opened the nation's first English school.

Bradley returned to Maine to assume responsibility for her ill father. She herself suffered poor health and to relieve her discomforts wintered in the south. There she witnessed first hand the injustices of slavery, so when war broke out, Bradley was among the first to offer her services. Her first assignment was to the 3rd Regiment of Maine Volunteers. Bradley's diaries show her to have been dedicated, formidable in confrontation

with her superiors, and indefatigable in her attempts to procure supplies and shape up the camp hospitals. Occasionally, the lengthy excerpts are distracting, yet at the same time, they convince the reader of the compassionate and caring nature of this most impressive woman.

Bradley went on to serve in the U.S. Sanitation Commission, a civilian agency headed by Frederick Law Olmsted. Fondly known as “the soldiers’ friend,” she applied herself above and beyond duty. The chapters describing this phase of Bradley’s life are simultaneously the most interesting and the most encumbered by excessive detail.

When the war ended, Bradley went to work for the Soldiers Memorial Society, a philanthropic organization committed to restructuring schools and churches in the south. Bradley opened the progressive and integrated Tileston School in Wilmington, North Carolina. After her many years of “noblest usefulness,” she lived out her days in a cottage on the Tileston grounds. Even with her health failing, Bradley’s presence was felt. When she died in 1904, her praises graced front pages all along the East Coast. Buried in Wilmington, Bradley is nonetheless a Maine heroine. All who admire the strength of such a woman, or have scholarly or non-scholarly interest in the Civil War, will find her biography a pleasure to read.

Tina Roberts
University of Maine

Fifty Years of Fortitude: The Maritime Career of Captain Jotham Blaisdell of Kennebunk, Maine, 1810-1860. By Kendrick Price Daggett. (Mystic, Connecticut: Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc., 1988. Pp. xvi + 173. Cloth. \$20.)

When preparing to embark on a journey through Captain Jotham Blaisdell’s life, one should not expect a legendary hero from the age of sail. The most important contributions made by

Captain Blaisdell were the frequent reports he made to the principal owner of the ships on which he served as master. Rather than the glamour and romance of the sea, this collection of letters reveals the day-to-day decisions that nineteenth-century sea captains faced.

Captain Blaisdell of Kennebunk, Maine, went to sea at the age of twelve. Working up through the ranks, he took his first command at the age of thirty-three. For the most part, Captain Blaisdell commanded regular traders, making voyages between Boston and New Orleans, then on to European ports with cargoes of cotton. For most of his career he commanded the ships of William Lord. Daggett quotes extensively from Lord's collection of letters. While the approach may seem tedious, the voluminous quotes are appropriate: The letters reveal detailed accounts of Blaisdell's business. The ship master not only charted the vessel's course at sea but also the company's financial course. Blaisdell's letters report the constant price fluctuations in New Orleans: Should the master take a load of barrel staves, which would at least pay the ships expenses, or risk waiting a few weeks for the price of cotton to rise, and possibly make a tremendous profit for the company? A mistaken interpretation of the market could end a captain's career. Blaisdell's frequent communication with the owners was his only protection.

As well, the letters offer a personal element. Often Blaisdell submitted requests for a replacement, so that he might go home to his family – requests that frequently went unanswered. It is clear from Daggett's interpretation of the letters that Captain Blaisdell did not pursue this long life at sea simply because he longed for the feel of a stiff breeze on his face. The sea was good to him, and like many New Englanders he had salt in his blood. But most of all he went to sea because that was the life he knew. When he left home to take command of a new ship, it was to earn a living for his family.

Kendrick Daggett's title is appropriate: Captain Blaisdell was a man of fortitude, not fantasy. He had the strength to endure harsh weather, uncertain markets, and isolation from his

family. Kendrick Price Daggett bestows upon maritime historians a clear and honest picture of the routine life of a sea captain.

Jayleen Roths
University of Maine

The Civil War Letters of Capt. John Franklin Godfrey. Edited by Candace Sawyer and Laura Orcut. (Portland: by the editors, 1993. Pp. 91. Paper.)

Dearest Father: The Civil War Letters of Lt. Frank Dickerson, A Son of Belfast, Maine. Edited by H. Draper Hunt. (Unity, Maine: North Country Press, 1992. Pp. 217. Paper. \$14.95.)

"Dear Friend Anna": The Civil War Letters of a Common Soldier from Maine. Edited by Beverly Hayes Kallgren and James L. Crouthamel. (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1992. Pp. 162. Paper.)

The Civil War continues to fascinate readers. Now that Maine's Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is getting increased attention in films and documentaries, the state's role in this conflict are becoming more widely and more completely known. One means by which the involvement of Maine's people is being more fully documented is through the publication of letters, journals, and diaries of the participants. Three recently published collections deserve attention for the details they provide about individual experiences and reactions to the war.

John Franklin (Frank) Godfrey of Bangor, whose life spanned careers as a sailor, a shepherd in Argentina, a Union officer, and an Indian fighter, lived in four western states, married four times, and fathered five children. Most of his approximately two dozen letters deal with the Louisiana campaign. A keen observer, he was not hesitant about providing candid opinions of

various commanders. He liked General Benjamin “Beast” Butler, declaring that “no one has done so much toward the abolition of slavery as he.” He also had good rapport with General Cuvier Grover of Bethel, Maine, who recommended him for a colonelcy. Godfrey’s opinion of General Neal Dow was not so high. The Civil War “comes alive” as Godfrey describes the fatigue and emotional trauma that followed each battle. Recalling the horror after one skirmish, he wrote his parents: “I cried I believe for the first time since I was a child.”

Historian H. Draper Hunt of the University of Southern Maine has done a masterful job of editing and providing useful commentary on the seventy-seven Civil War letters of Lt. Frank Dickerson of the Fifth U.S. Cavalry to his father Judge Jonathan Dickerson of Belfast. Dickerson participated in a dozen battles, most notably Antietam and Brandy Station, the largest cavalry engagement of the war. Wounded in the head at Beverly Ford, and later ill with tuberculosis, Dickerson spent the remainder of the war behind the lines at various postings in Maryland, Wisconsin, and Tennessee. Seriously ill, and aware that he was dying, he struggled to make his way home to Belfast, but died in his father’s arms on a Boston Harbor steamer in 1866. *Dearest Father* contains informative end notes and its utility is increased by a fine index. Moreover, the book includes a “Who Was Who” that provides pertinent background for the more prominent names mentioned in the letters.

Abial Edwards, born in Casco, Maine in 1843, served in the 10th and 29th Maine Regiments from 1861 to 1866. In his 113 letters, most of them to Anna Conant of Portland, the woman he would eventually marry, Edwards provides some of the most vivid impressions of the experience of war that this reviewer has seen to date. Edwards saw action in the Shenandoah Valley, at Antietam, and in Louisiana, and served a postwar duty in South Carolina. Although an ordinary soldier, he was a good observer: He met Grant and got his autograph, saw Lincoln, and participated in the Grand Review in Washington, D.C. in May 1865. Like many in the war, he was young, had never been away from

home before, and was often homesick for, in his words, the “dear old Pine Tree State.”

In his letters to Anna, readers follow a relationship that began in a Lewiston textile mill and gradually, through the letters, developed from casual acquaintance to love. But there are also reminders of the shock and terror of war, including a passage that describes the emotions Edwards felt when drenched with the blood of a slain comrade. After one particularly frightful encounter, Edwards writes, “the groans of the wounded and dying made a scene that was awful beyond description.” The editors have done yeoman service in providing introductions, detailed notes, and an Edwards genealogy to increase the utility of this collection.

These books make a significant contribution to understanding Maine’s role in the Civil War. More of this type will undoubtedly be published – and should be. But few will rival these for their detail, interest, or quality of production.

Stanley Russell Howe
Bethel Historical Society

William E. Barry’s “Sketch of an Old River”: Shipbuilding on the Kennebunk. Edited by Joyce Butler. (West Kennebunk: Phoenix Publishing, 1993) Pp. 88. Cloth. \$25.)

William E. Barry (1846-1932) was an amateur historian with a keen interest in his native town of Kennebunk and its environs. This interest was amply demonstrated in the way his works emphasize the personality of that area. *A Stroll Thro’ the Past* (1933) followed an old stage-coach route and post road through the town of Kennebunk, noting buildings and events of historical significance. *Chronicles of Kennebunk* (1923) was yet another work that attempted to impart the unique qualities of the area. Barry penned these in the format of a travelogue, with himself as tour

guide. In each case, readers get the impression that they are out for a walk with Barry as he relates the history of various points of interest encountered along the way. First published privately in 1888, *Sketch of An Old River* was similar in style to Barry's later works, but a little less familiar in its tone.

The reader is taken upon a journey down the Kennebunk River, beginning at its source at Kennebunk Pond. Along the way Barry not only notes the shipyards along the banks, but also names many of the ships built and relates some of their histories. So too, the building process itself is portrayed with interesting elements of detail – from the sawing of oaken planks in the saw pits to the beveling of a vessel's hull ribs. Also of interest are Barry's details concerning the building and operation of the Kennebunk Lock, which regulated the river so that shipyards upstream might build vessels of greater displacement.

Barry wrote at a time when the lines between history and literature blurred, and the art of the raconteur was still a part of the historian's repertoire. Barry also lent the eye of an artist to his work, and this reprint of *Sketch* is accompanied by many of his nautical renderings. These minor conceits do not diminish the work by current standards. In the introduction provided by Joyce Butler, we are assured that Barry assiduously conducted interviews with the residents who were involved in the shipbuilding business. This oral history lends a perspective lost to current researchers. Barry also avoided the rhetorical hyperbole which often affected those enamored of their subject matter.

This work is decidedly truncated, an impression which is enhanced by the 8 X 10-inch format of the reprint. Its value lies in the fact that it illuminates an area of shipbuilding activity which has not been subjected to the magnifying glass of historical inquiry in the manner of, say, the Kennebec. The editors of this volume furnish a valuable appendix which lists the ships built in the Kennebunk yards and their specifications. This tract is an important resource for those interested in Kennebunk or in Maine maritime history.

Stephen P. Budney
University of Maine

Maine Politics and Government. By Kenneth T. Palmer, G. Thomas Taylor, and Marcus A. LiBrizzi. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992. Pp. 197. Cloth. \$40. Paper. \$20.)

Major changes have occurred in Maine in the last two decades. The demographic make-up and economic structure in the state have become diversified, and state government has become increasingly professionalized, contributing to a growing centralization of power. Despite these rapid changes, Maine political attitudes remain stable and moderate. It is this stability that Palmer, Taylor, and LiBrizzi explore in their book. This is the sixth in a series on the politics and government of each of the fifty states. Each book reviews state political development to demonstrate how political institutions and characteristics have developed from first settlement to the present. The authors' goal in this particular book is to see how the traditional features of Maine – citizen government, political moderation, and a sense of uniqueness – interact with the changing political and economic environment.

From the inception of the state's 1819 constitution, a moralistic culture dominated Maine politics. Unlike an individualistic culture, which sees politics as a form of business run by professionals, a moralistic culture adopts the idea of the state as a commonwealth whose government is citizen-run. The authors examine how the emphasis on citizen participation, as well as the frontier-like quality of the state, have influenced the development of all areas of Maine's government – executive, legislative, and judicial. They also argue that these historical characteristics continue as significant themes, even in a changing political and economic climate.

The strength of this book is the authors' ability to make complicated political discussion accessible. The writing is neither dry nor difficult, yet it remains substantial, making it appropriate for political scientists, their students, and the wider public. The only weakness is a slightly idealized version of Maine's political history, the "character" of Maine, and the

influence of these perceptions upon the average Maine voter. However, because the historical overview is necessarily general, this can be overlooked.

The most significant contribution that *Maine Politics and Government* provides is the authors' concluding observations about the direction in which the political climate is moving and the degree to which Maine's moralistic culture will fit the state's new governmental structures. Although the professionalizing and institutionalizing of Maine politics will continue to be the trend for the future, the citizens of Maine will demand a voice in that government. The professional politician will have to remain in contact with his constituents in order to remain in office. Citizens will make their voices heard through initiatives and referendums. The message is that while modernization has provided more economic opportunities, it has not altered the themes of moderate politics, widespread political participation, and a fairly activist state government. Maine may be influenced by the demographic, economic, and political trends from its New England neighbors, but "as in the past, its evaluation of these trends will be distinctly on the state's own terms."

Jennifer Goode
University of Maine