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Book Reviews

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LOBSTERING AND THE MAINE COAST By Kenneth R. Martin and Nathan R. Lipfert. (Bath, Me.: Bath Marine Museum, 1985. Pp. 143. \$23.00. Paper \$16.50.)

Lobstering and the Maine Coast is a history of the lobster industry in the State of Maine. Although some information is included on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most of the book focuses on the period from the 1840s, when lobsters were first supplied in quantities to the cities of the Northeast, to the present time. The book is written in clean and concise prose and is lavishly illustrated with a selection of well chosen photographs and drawings. Most of the information was derived from secondary sources, although the authors obtained some data on the most recent decades by interviewing participants. The bibliography is very good, and contains virtually everything of importance published on the lobster fishery as well as references to manuscripts and interviews contained in archives. While the book is perhaps the best compendium of scholarly historical information on this fishery in existence, its lively style and humorous anecdotes will make it of interest to the general reader as well.

The book has five chapters. The most important theme running through them concerns overexploitation and the problems of the industry. Chapter three is entitled "Gradual but Certain Decay," while the fifth is called "Oh Gorry, What are we going to do." The titles reflect the content and message: the decline of the industry from the 1880s to the 1930s and an oral history of current problems in the industry. Two other chapters are mainly devoted to the same theme. Chapter two, "A Respectable Class of Labor," is largely a chronical of how problems for the industry began in the late nineteenth century with the advent of lobster canning; chapter four, "This is my

Ocean,” contains a good deal on law enforcement and management issues.

The emphasis on industry problems is perhaps inevitable given the written records the authors had to work with. The literature on the lobster industry has more than its share of sensational newspaper accounts with disaster scenarios, writings by biologists whose careers demand problems to solve, and interviews with fishermen, who come from a highly secretive subculture in which success is rarely revealed. However, Martin and Lipfert may well have been taken in. Despite the well advertised “problems” of overfishing the industry has ostensibly faced since before the turn of the century, the lobster catch has proven remarkably stable. Since 1947, when accurate statistics are first available, to the present, the lobster catch has varied from 15.9 million pounds in 1948 to 24.4 million pounds in 1957. It was about the same in the latter part of the nineteenth century. To be sure, catches were lower in the depression years of the 1890s and the 1930s, but then ex-vessel prices were so low (as Martin and Lipfert note) that it was difficult to earn a living in lobstering.

All of this is not to suggest that lobster fishermen have not faced, and currently do not face problems. Profits in the industry are being squeezed due to the fact that ex-vessel prices have not risen as fast as the costs of boats, bait, fuel, and other essentials. But economic problems for the fishermen are quite different from biological extinction for the lobster. Martin and Lipfert do not always distinguish between the two.

The book also contains information on technologies in use and contains the kinds of marvelous pictures of fishing boats and gear that will make the book a “must” reading for anyone interested in technological change. Chapter four, “This is My Ocean,” has some interesting information on the territorial system, which is such a marked feature of the lobster industry.

The book makes no pretense of being a well rounded ethnography of the industry. Some topics get short shrift from Martin and Lipfert. There is little on the marketing system, the

cooperatives, the social organization of fishermen and the coastal communities they come from, or their folklore and ideology. And there is scarcely any mention of the other fisheries that lobster fishermen switch into on a regular basis. Nor is there much information on the biology and population dynamics of the fishery. Nevertheless, Martin and Lipfert have produced a fine history of a colorful industry. *Lobstering and the Maine Coast* belongs on the bookshelf of anyone interested in fisheries.

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BEOTHUK BARK CANOES: AN ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE STUDY. By Ingeborg C. L. Marshall. (National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service, Paper No. 102, 1985.)

The birch bark canoe, ethnographer Frank Speck wrote in 1940, was "... the most complex and intricate product of native mechanical genius in the north." These light and portable craft represent a vital adaptive mechanism that liberated its creators to travel easily and rapidly over otherwise forbidding terrain. Birch bark canoes greatly facilitated food procurement activities, and the energy their use saved could be invested in other culture-building activities.

The range of birch bark canoes was, of course, limited to the environment of its chief component: the bark of the paper birch (*Betula papyrifera* Marsh). This important tree lives in a thousand-mile band that extends from the coasts of Maine and the Maritimes northwest across North America. It should be noted that birch bark canoes were also used in Siberian prehistory, much the same way they were in North America.

Marshall's *Beothuk Bark Canoes: An Analysis and Comparative Study* is an important addition to the literature of birch bark canoes. The Beothuk tribe, Labrador's "Red Indians," extinct since the early nineteenth century, used two types of birch canoes: One, thought to be the oldest, was for river use;

the other style was for ocean navigation. The river canoe was straight-keeled, while the larger ocean canoe incorporated a keel best described as half an ellipse. The curved design made a very deep and, when properly ballasted, very stable canoe. The Beothuk's two versions of the birch bark canoe represent unique expressions of this important technical development. Beothuk birch bark canoes differ from all others in that both models had V-shaped hulls. The more customary U shapes are those that survive in the best of the modern canoes and are familiar to all today. Beothuk models featured extremely "hogged shears." This means that the gunwales did not run smoothly from stem to stern but curved dramatically from the high, curved bow downward and then upward to a high point amidships where they plunge into another curve to the equally high and curved stern, making a gunwale line that was a double ellipse. To those familiar with the flatter gunwales of the eastern tribes, the Beothuk version seems almost incredible.

High sides amidships will deflect large waves that are dangerous for canoe travelers. The Micmac and Passamaquoddy tribes had ocean going canoes that also featured hogged shears, but they were not as dramatic as the Beothuk design. The exaggerated design of the Beothuk canoes may be partly the result of fragmentary reports and limited sightings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Marshall used artifactual and archival materials to make a detailed analysis of the Beothuk canoes. An interesting point is that these canoes resemble, in their construction and hull shapes, Athabaskan canoes of the Canadian Northwest rather than their immediate canoe-building neighbors to the south in Quebec and the Atlantic Provinces.

The rather marked differences with other birch bark canoes notwithstanding, the Beothuk canoes fall within the broad North American birch bark canoe tradition. Craftsmen often adopt different designs or strategies to accomplish, in an equally successful manner, a particular objective. Our understanding of Beothuk canoes suffers because no one alive is

skilled in their use. The tribe was wiped out in the eighteenth century and the only references to their canoes are by casual observers. The canoes of the Maine and Maritime Indians were adopted by the English of Maine and the French of Canada because they were the only practical way to traverse the immense forests of the Northeast. No one ever got close enough to the elusive Beothuk to carefully observe their canoes or other features of their material culture. No white reporter ever provided the practical insights about their canoes that Champlain, Montresor, or Chadwick left to us regarding the canoes of Canada and Maine.

Experimental models of the Beothuk canoes, made to supposedly authentic dimensions, require ballast to float evenly on the water when paddled by modern canoeists. The curved-keel ocean canoes need two hundred pounds of carefully arranged rocks before the paddlers have good balance control. The river canoes need much less ballast and probably required none at all when used by the Beothuks.

Questions regarding the manner in which these canoes were actually used, particularly the river canoes, persist and represent an area of future research. What could be more exciting than to actually travel the Beothuk's old routes in a canoe patterned after those they devised? Once the physical skills required to ascend and descend Labrador's rivers in such canoes are mastered the canoe can be used to help answer many questions about life in prehistoric Labrador. Canoe travel experience through the Beothuk tribal habitat may help us understand the advantages of their peculiar canoes. This experience will be the closest modern students will ever come to encountering these vanished people.

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RECORDS OF MEDUNCOOK PLANTATION AND FRIENDSHIP, MAINE, 1762-1899. Edited by Melville B. Cook. (Rockland, Me.: Shore Village Historical Society, 1985. Pp. xiv, 136, \$45.00).

Anyone with roots in the Friendship area will find Capt. Melville B. Cook's *Records of Meduncook Plantation and Friendship, Maine (1763-1899)* a gold mine of genealogical information. Names, dates of births, deaths, and marriages (or the date of publication of marriage intentions) will provide an easy and reasonably accurate source for those who are searching out their ancestors, in spite of frequent changes in the spellings of some names. The two-column page format makes it convenient to scan rather quickly for the names one is seeking. An index of all names appearing in the *Records* is most helpful, and early maps will be of interest to many.

If research is not your intention, the historical information in the *Records* makes for interesting reading. Much of this, as well as local commentaries, is included in the "remarks" which follow many of Capt. Cook's reports of town meetings.

Cook's *Records* is a microcosm of Maine history from the exciting Revolutionary war era to the end of the nineteenth century. Early on, the town was recorded as "happy to continue loyal to Crown," but that changed as time went on and the town felt the effect of the nonimportation agreements. The plantation even had its Committee of Correspondence. Most residents were willing to "assist in defence of liberty" by paying the quota required by the General Court in May of 1774, even though the town's "indigence" was "naturally very great." During the Civil War, quotas were again raised and money was eventually appropriated for volunteers and widows of those who were killed in the war.

The record opens a window on daily life in a small town quite remote from Boston. One man complained that some town business "wasted me a day or two" — not unlike today. Litigants who took their cases to court in Pownalborough sometimes won but justice still "cost them money." One

hundred acres of land were originally set aside for the support of a minister, but the land was eventually sold to settlers because of so much contention over religion. Unsold pews were nailed up. Even the location of a meeting house was more important than remote national events.

Financial matters were a large part of town affairs, as they are today. For many years, more money was spent on roads and paupers than on schools. A woman conducting a school was paid fifteen dollars a month, and families were to provide wood for the school according to the number of scholars each sent. Men were able to work off taxes by helping to build or maintain roads. Identification marks for sheep were recorded by the town and a bounty of six cents (later eight) was paid on crows. The care of those who were unable to care for themselves was bid off by name each year. Property was required for voting rights, and spirits were allowed only for sickness for many years.

The *Record* illuminates political events as well. Although at first the town showed little interest in separating from Massachusetts, eventually Friendship chose delegates to attend the convention in Portland for the purpose of forming a state constitution. Friendship voted unanimously for Maine's first governor, William King. Warren, Cushing, and Friendship had a rotation for choosing a representative for the electoral district, and after statehood, increased interest in political affairs, both state and national, became apparent. Tax collectors were given a percentage of what they could collect, with 4½ percent being the largest amount recorded.

The Shore Village Historical Society has fulfilled one of the chief purposes of such a society in preserving and publishing these early records. Although the original records were destroyed by fire, Capt. Cook had written accounts for the local papers. We owe a debt of gratitude to the unknown person who saved most of these in a scrapbook. It is from this source that editors Ruth J. Aiken and Arthur P. Spear put together such an appealing book.

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