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Research Opportunities in Maine Environmental History

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associated with this port raise new issues that are inevitably a part of the modern shipping industry. They deserve close scrutiny. The port itself will offer further opportunities to study Maine's twentieth-century responses to its maritime environment and to its ongoing economic challenges.

Where does one find the information for such studies? Town records, tax ledgers, maps, reports of boards of trade, harbor masters' reports, and harbor commissioners' reports offer insights. Almost always overlooked are the reports of the Corps of Engineers, available in federal documents repositories in the annual reports of the secretary of war, especially in the earlier twentieth century. There is no better set of documents on American harbors and the needs of navigation. The reports of the Geodetic Survey are also overlooked as sources of information about hydrology and the geography of hinterlands. Coast Guard reports yield information about wrecks, conditions of navigation, and other considerations that are most valuable to the historian. With these sources, and hundreds of others, one can wheel the petards into battery and fire away at our ignorance of Maine's twentieth-century shipbuilding.

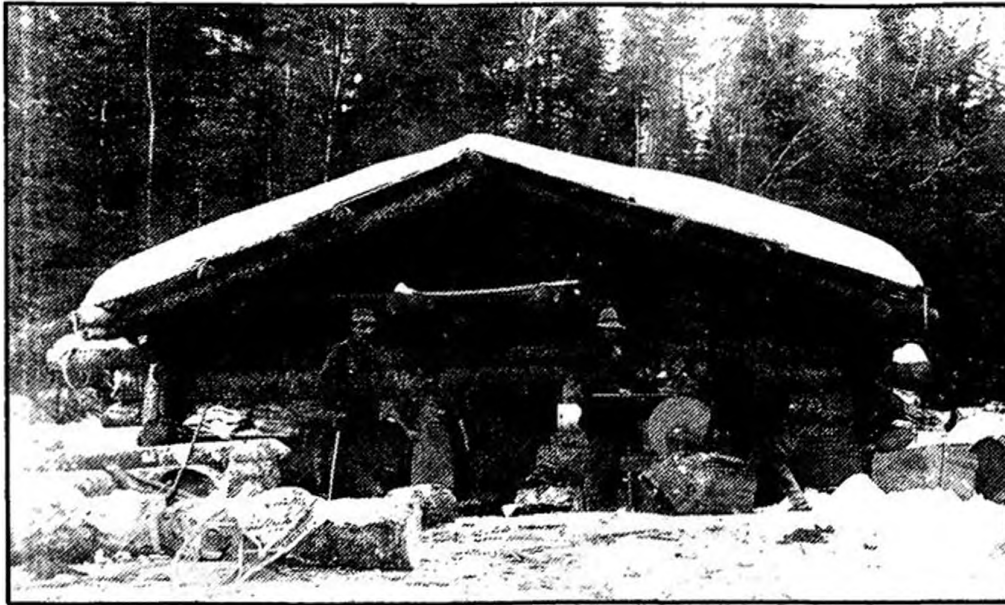
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RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES IN MAINE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

RICHARD W. JUDD

My research has been directed toward understanding the role of natural resources in the development of northern Maine. The timberlands of the upper Penobscot, St. John, Allagash, and Aroostook rivers have been in continuous commercial use for over a century and a half, and the impact of this activity on



Woodsmen pose while sharpening axes. The camp was located in the Houlton area probably in the late 1800s. Courtesy Southern Aroostook Historical and Art Museum.

the overall development of the region has been enormous. Northern Maine — Aroostook County, largely — is host to not only some of New England's finest forestlands but also to its most productive farms, and it is the interaction of human ambitions with these two natural features — the trees and the soil — that gave the region its distinctive economic character.

Researchers in Maine's forest history are fortunate in that they begin with an unusually fine body of literature at their disposal. Richard Wood, Clarence Day, Philip Coolidge, David Smith, and Edward D. Ives, among others, offer a solid chronological and conceptual framework for Maine's lumbering and agricultural traditions. With this background, I was able to develop a sharper focus: specifically, the connections between lumbering and the broader economic history of the region. Typically, the elements of forest history — the trees, the technology, the business practices, and the labor force — have been treated as though they existed in a historical vacuum. The links to other forms of economic development have not been given serious attention. Historians sometimes assume lumbermen contributed to agricultural development by clearing

forests to make room for farms; at other times they point to the legacy of marginal farming and rural poverty that the “lumbering frontier” left behind as it swept across the nation. Aroostook County, where lumbering and agriculture existed side by side for over 150 years, presents an opportunity to put these stereotypes to the test.

Lumbering in Aroostook County, I found, was part of a closely integrated frontier economy. It is virtually impossible at times to distinguish between farmer and woodsman, merchant and lumberman, or lumbering depot and emerging agricultural town. My interests included the industry’s role in creating an infrastructure for agriculture and town development, its impact on landownership and land-use patterns, its reactions to northern Maine’s changing labor force, and its financial connections with local merchants and settlers.

Sources for understanding these connections seem almost inexhaustible. The relationship between farm and forest is revealed in records of land sales, sawmill and woods camp account books, and correspondence about lumbering roads and other forms of logging infrastructure, all available in a variety of business papers in the Maine State Library, the Maine Historical Society, and the University of Maine’s Fogler Library. Just to mention one interesting collection, we have available the Stetson-Cutler papers, which are the remains of a firm that cut timber on the upper St. John in Maine, processed it in their mills at the port of Saint John in New Brunswick, and shipped it to their wholesale houses in Boston and New York, duty free, by virtue of a special international trading agreement known as the Pike Law. These records put Maine lumbering not only in a regional perspective but in an international context as well.

Accounts from early country stores tell us much about the links between lumbering and farming; stores acted as intermediaries through which semisubsistence farmers reached out to the broader market economy; for early settlers, such stores transformed produce, woods labor, and forest products into cash, credit, or goods from the outside. They also served as labor recruitment centers, and they were frequently owned by

prominent lumbermen operating in the area. A sample of accounts from such stores can be found in almost any major state repository.

The journals and letterbooks from the state Land Office, kept in the Maine State Archives, offer the best source of information on the particulars of dividing land between farmers and lumbermen and other land-use matters. They reveal conflicts between lumbermen and settlers and the daily concerns of both groups. This key source, along with traditional materials such as newspaper accounts, annual agricultural and forestry reports, diaries, and reminiscences, provide a well-rounded picture of the relation between lumbering and farming in nineteenth-century Maine.

In the last ten years, environmental historians have turned increasingly to state and regional studies in order to understand relations between human and natural history. Maine forest history provides some interesting research possibilities along these lines as well. The surveys of the state Land Office are an invaluable source for describing upland Maine's topography, forest cover, and landownership patterns in the nineteenth century. These periodical timber surveys suggest possibilities for some interesting chronological overlays in selected townships, representing changes in the Maine woods. Impressions of Maine's early forest could also be gathered from a large corpus of travel and explorers' accounts. To mention a few, Bangor Public Library has a copy of Park Holland's northern Maine wilderness journal, recorded between 1784 and 1794, and the Maine State Library holds the journal of surveyor Eben Greenleaf's 1816 trip to Moosehead Lake. Numerous surveys were done in connection with the northeast boundary dispute between 1824 and 1842, and we have the magnificent natural resources surveys undertaken by Ezekiel Holmes, Charles T. Jackson, and Charles H. Hitchcock between the 1830s and 1860s. Other possibilities are the Fannie Hardy Eckstorm papers and of course Thoreau's classic *Maine Woods*, forerunner to hundreds of travel accounts of lesser literary note but

of great importance for providing nineteenth-century impressions of the changing Maine woods. We also have timber cutting records for northern woodlands operations going back to the 1840s. These tell in precise statistical detail what has been taken out of the Maine woods and indirectly what the human impact upon the forest has been.

The University of Maine's forestry school has been producing literature on forest theory and practice in the state since the turn of the century. This material includes a number of graduate and undergraduate projects describing state-of-the-art forestry dating from about 1907 and annual reports on a variety of topics dealing with natural changes and human impact in the forest. This literature offers possibilities for a multidisciplinary study of Maine's forest environment. Such work would be in the vanguard of today's environmental history and would have applicability throughout the boreal regions of North America.

Other projects that might be profitably undertaken include a legal history of Maine lumbering. James Willard Hurst's monumental *Law and Economic Growth: The Legal History of the Lumber Industry in Wisconsin* offers a model, but Maine researchers would have the advantage of working in a state where legal codes date from the earliest years of the lumber industry in North America. The various statutes that provided the legal infrastructure for lumbering in Maine were adopted directly from English common law. This pioneering and evolutionary dimension is absent in the Wisconsin study. Indeed, Maine law no doubt provided the precedents for the Wisconsin lumbermen. Ample opportunity to trace the evolution of legal practices exists in collections of Maine and Massachusetts legislative statutes, acts, debates, and legal proceedings. Court records abound with civil suits related to lumbering and land-use practices, and these are virtually untouched by historians.

Maine could also benefit from a survey of the industry's labor force. Certainly woods workers in the late nineteenth

century were the most cosmopolitan of all Maine workers. The shifting recruitment of native Maine, Canadian, and recently arrived European workers is a distinctive feature of the state's woods industry. Nineteenth-century newspapers often listed the names and destinations of local men going into the woods seasonally; these lists provide a glimpse of changing nineteenth-century, recruitment patterns. Business records — again, in abundance in Maine repositories — could tell us more about this. They could also put us in contact with the very obscure Maine sawmill worker and suggest the impact of changing technology and seasonality upon this important labor force.

Forest history, conservation history, and environmental history in Maine have exciting potential. They build upon a solid scholarly tradition and have a wealth of documentation at their disposal. The material is available, and the possibilities in a state with a longstanding commitment to forest research, conservation, and environmental protection, are limitless.

Richard Judd received a Ph.D. from the University of California at Irvine in 1979 and took a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Maine in 1981. He is currently an assistant professor of history at the University of Maine at Orono, and in the intervening years he served as associate editor of the JOURNAL OF FOREST HISTORY. He currently edits the MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY and has published in labor history and forest history.



RON KLEY

RESEARCHING EARLY MAINE CRAFTSMEN:
JOHN H. HALL AND THE GUNSMITH'S TRADE

John H. Hall is, paradoxically, one of the best known and one of the most enigmatic figures to emerge from the history of the District of Maine. Hall has long been recognized as the