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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Joe Scott, the Woodsman-Songmaker. By Edward D. Ives.
(Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1978. Pp. 473.
Cloth. \$22.50.)

One winter afternoon early in 1982, I walked into Sandy Ives's crowded folklore lair on the Orono campus with a problem. I was directing a series of poetry readings for the Maine Humanities Council, and although we had plenty of Maine poets from which to read – Robinson, Millay, Lowell, Eberhart – they all represented a literary stratum quite distant from the flow of ordinary Maine life. We needed a balance, I told him, something that would reflect the poetic spirit of the Maine people, more inland and more proletarian. "Joe Scott," Sandy responded immediately.

I didn't know the name, but when Sandy Ives brought Scott's poetry into our performances this spring, I heard for the first time the deliberate and moving cadences of woods poetry in the songs "Howard Carey" and "The Norway Bum." Sung slowly and without accompaniment, they captured our modern Maine audiences just as they had eighty years ago in the lumber camps around Rumford and Rangeley. They brought back an age when poetry arose from the people and spoke to them directly, when the poet had the particular function of understanding and interpreting the tragic side of life for men who had not read Sophocles but who did need, as much as anyone, the artist's vision of human events.

Professor Ives is not only a singer of Joe Scott's songs but also his definitive critic and biographer. *Joe Scott, Woodsman-Songmaker* is a major undertaking, with three successfully achieved objectives. It is, first of all, a complete scholarly collation of published and oral versions of Scott's ballads. Beyond that, it provides a dramatic reconstruction

of the historical circumstances surrounding each ballad, forming a coherent account of life in the lumber camps and boom towns of western Maine at the turn of the century. Finally, it provides an overview of Scott's life from his start as a typical lumberman from the Maritimes to his flowering as an artist who filled a unique niche in the Maine logging subculture. Ives dispatches the notion that folk ballads must be "anonymous" by reconstructing the image of an individual poet who learned to conceive of life as tragedy and to validate that experience by transmuting it into art, working within the two traditions available to him: the popular sentimental song and the folk ballad. He structures the book to illuminate not only Scott's creative process, but the process of his own scholarship from where he first hears of the poet in a Bangor bar, through nearly twenty years of detective work, which often becomes so impassioned that we feel Ives is retracing some strand of his own being in the person of Joe Scott.

A farmer's son from Lower Woodstock, New Brunswick, Scott began as one of those Canadian workers who filled the vacuum left by the westward migration of Maine men after the panic of 1873. Wandering in the logging centers of western Maine, Joe became a competent woodsman, participating in the expansive pulp operations at the turn of the century. He also lived a traumatic and eventually tragic life. Jilted by his sweetheart, Lizzie Morse, Scott took to the natural consolations of drink and whoring, which resulted in his death from the tertiary stage of syphilis at the Augusta State Hospital in 1918.

The central portion of this book traces Joe Scott's individual ballads from their origins in the rough context of the lumber camps to the finished work and its progress down through the oral tradition. Ives establishes a common basis for classical and popular poetry. By treating Joe Scott as an individual poet, in T.S. Eliot's framework

of “tradition” and the “individual talent,” he deftly bridges a large cultural gap. Whether a poet is composing “The Waste Land” or “Benjamin Deane,” the process is the same, a blend of the poet’s own experience and the artistic traditions available to him.

For the Maine historian, *Joe Scott* is a mine of information about life in the lumber camps, mill towns, and the farm country of New Brunswick where these men came from. For students of Maine poetry, there is something more, a tradition of poetry not in isolated aesthetic moments but as an organic part of the rugged work life of Maine woodsmen. Now, at a time when poetry threatens itself with alienation from ordinary life, it is a powerful instruction for poets and critics to see poetry woven back into life again. Joe Scott’s songs were born in the immediate human events of the lumbering community that was both his subject and his audience. It gave the poet a specific and necessary function in the culture. Like the tribal shaman, Joe’s work was to delve into the irrational and inexplicable – death, disease, murder, accident – and to make sense and beauty of it, even in the brawling ambience of the woods.

Two portraits emerge from this book. One is of the poet Joe Scott hammering a hard life into song. The other, even more remarkable, is of the folklorist Sandy Ives searching out every lead, tracing and retracing the routes of Scott’s life across the faces of New England and the Maritimes. By the end of the book, with its wonderful image of Joe Scott and William Butler Yeats drinking together in the afterworld, we realize we have seen two forms of the creative process: the poet making aesthetic sense of his life, and the historian making another order of sense by locating these ballads in their time and place. As Ives includes and dramatizes his own investigative process, singer and scholar become one complex figure over the course of the book, as they did for all of us in the audience

this spring when Sandy Ives sang “Howard Carey” in the elegant setting of the Wendell Gilley Museum of Folk Art in Southwest Harbor. It is a sophisticated, thoroughly modern approach to a traditional songmaker and his art. It carries the sense of having recorded something just in time, of having rescued an invaluable subject from obscurity through a joyous and visible labor of research.

William Carpenter
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Legacy of a Lifetime: The Story of Baxter State Park. By John W. Hakola. (Woolwich, Me.: TBW Books, 1981. Pp. xvii, 424. Cloth. \$16.00.)

The Spirit of Pamola, the Storm Bird of Penobscot legend, protected Mount Katahdin and prevented human ascent of the mountain. Indians “feared and revered the mountain,” leaving its ascent and exploration to those who entered the territory later, people who held different beliefs.

Perhaps this is a fitting introduction to Dr. John Hakola’s history of Baxter State Park, its mountain – Katahdin – and its benefactor, Percival P. Baxter. Written in essay style, *Legacy of a Lifetime* depicts not only the struggle of one man to save for posterity a part of Maine’s physical heritage, but it also weaves the story of the drawing mystique of the mountain, a mystique felt by the Indians as well as later European immigrants into the area, both men and women. The reader is immediately caught with the landscape and with the human interaction with it. In many ways, the story of Baxter State Park is a land-use history. Hakola has drawn together a history of the land from native use, through early exploration and

ascents, to forestry harvesting, and finally to preservation and management as a park. In this sensitive and thorough treatment of regional history, Hakola draws upon upon extensive primary source materials to construct the significance of this particular piece of land. Mount Katahdin is a special place. It drew the Indians to assign it spiritual significance. It impelled others to discover its mysteries by climbing its peaks and ridges. It so fascinated one man that he spent the major portion of his adult years working to protect it and keep it in its natural state for posterity.

Hakola describes the mountain and its influence on the people who saw it and explored its wilderness. He also describes the efforts of the many groups and individuals who worked to preserve the mountain from despoilation. But most particularly, he introduces the reader to Percival P. Baxter, a man in the preservationist mold of John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and the many others who gave of themselves totally to save portions of America's physical heritage.

The move to preserve the area encompassing Mount Katahdin did not occur until population pressures in the area had built up, resulting in increased tourism. At the same time, the paper industry began to consolidate its landholdings. It was then that efforts to preserve natural areas within Maine for public use began. During the last years of the nineteenth century, numerous people had seen the value of Mount Katahdin to Maine's history and heritage and had tried to save it from encroaching civilization and resource exploitation. The Maine Hotel Proprietors' Association, the Sportsmen's Fish and Game Association, and especially, the State Federation of Women's Clubs, all had attempted to preserve the mountain for public use, but in vain. Percival Baxter picked up on his predecessors efforts, worked with them

and others, and, as Hakola notes, “with dogged persistence, he succeeded where others had failed.”

Baxter had seen the despoilation of much of Maine’s land, areas which had once belonged to the state had been burned over and repeatedly harvested for timber. They were denuded, unproductive forest lands. He saw this happen in the areas surrounding Maine’s landmark, Mount Katahdin, and after a 1920 visit to the mountain, became committed to its preservation. As state senator and then as governor, Baxter used all his political power to have such land repurchased by the state and set aside as park land to be preserved in its natural wild state, “forever.” Yet he encountered intense political opposition from corporate enterprise and from waterpower interests. Baxter did not succeed until after he had suffered blows to his prestige and had been forced to accommodate lesser political realities. It was only through his private philanthropy that the land was preserved as a park. Baxter bought the land himself and gave it to the state. He soon found out, however, that establishment as a park was not enough to preserve a wilderness environment. Until his death in 1969, both he and park managers confronted the management problems that parks and their supporters face today – differing beliefs in appropriate use of park lands, road access, snowmobiles, motorbikes – all aspects of the problem of providing a park for public use while at the same time preserving the wilderness environment.

In discussing these issues, Hakola has also written the story of the evolution of conservationist and wilderness philosophies within one man and within a state park system. At the same time, he has provided a case study in the evolution of the conservation movement within the United States. The effort to establish Mount Katahdin as a park is a vivid example of progressivism and early twentieth-century conservation movement. Hakola’s analysis presents sophisticated application of obviously

exhaustive research. By tying the story of Baxter State Park to both Maine history and American environmental history, Hakola has presented a well-written story of a man and an event long deserving national attention.

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General William King: Merchant, Shipbuilder, and Maine's First Governor. By Marion Jaques Smith. (Camden, Me.: Down East Books, 1980. Pp. v, 182. Cloth. \$11.95.)

More than a century and a half has passed since Maine became a state, and it has taken that long for the biography of one of the crucial figures in the movement for statehood to appear. For this we are indebted to Marion Jaques Smith, who has spent a number of years in research in order to give substance to the shadowy figure of the state's first governor. This biography is clearly a "labor of love" and should prove enjoyable for readers curious about what it was like to live in Maine during the early years. The book presents a concise narrative of the rise and decline of William King's careers as merchant, shipper, land speculator, politician, and general; the author's text is frequently enriched by extended quotations from letters and the recollections of contemporaries.

Born in Scarborough in 1768, the son of Richard King, a prominent merchant and landowner, William was educated at Phillips Academy in Andover. The family apparently decided that the young man should be directed to a mercantile career, unlike his more famous half-brother Rufus King, the lawyer-politician, member of

the Constitutional Convention, and first senator from the state of New York. As a result, William King did not attend Harvard College but, while still in his early twenties, opened a general store in Topsham. He quickly entered the lumber trade, began speculating in land, and within a decade extended his activities to Bath and Wiscasset. Before long he entered in the West Indies trade, joined with others in organizing several banks, moved to Bath, and married Ann Frazier, the sister of a Boston merchant associate. The next decades were marked by little but a sequence of successes. His political career was launched with his election to the Massachusetts General Court. He quickly secured the attention of New England Jeffersonians when he abandoned the Federalist faction, and he soon emerged as a leader in the movement to separate Maine from Massachusetts. As Anglo-American tensions grew, he was appointed major general for the District of Maine, responsible for frontier defense. Even though he had no military experience, King appears to have carried out his duties during the War of 1812 as well as could be expected and certainly better than the majority of similarly selected generals in other states. His political career peaked in the years immediately after the war. He presided over the 1819 state constitutional convention and was elected the first governor in 1820, an office he gave up when President Monroe appointed him a commissioner to carry out the provisions of the Adams-Oñis (Florida) Treaty in 1821.

William King's importance as one of the handful of entrepreneurial leaders during this formative period is clearly shown in the book. What emerges is the portrait of one of those dynamic men who combined a republican ideology and public life with personal economic interests and social aspirations. The idea of "conflict of interest" never crossed his mind or those of his contemporaries. The histories of the new western states abound with men

of this character. However, Ms. Smith also gives us a picture not only of a shrewd and frugal businessman but a rather hard, often miserly employer who never spent more than was necessary to keep his ships afloat and barely manned. King also appears to have been a parsimonious husband who provided his wife with a fine mansion in Bath but kept her there, thus avoiding the expense of having her join him during his extended periods in Boston, New York, and Washington.

By the 1830s William King's influence and wealth declined. After supporting Crawford for president in the election of 1824, he presumably remained a loyal party man, receiving the very lucrative post of customs collector at Bath from Andrew Jackson in 1829. King, however, broke with the administration and ran unsuccessfully for governor as a Whig in 1834. His land speculations also turned out badly. Plans to develop a settlement at Kingfield failed. Other ventures fell short of expectations. Age was taking its toll and competitors were proving more enterprising. King's last years were marked by public respect but little power.

Perhaps because of its brevity, this biography of King is in some ways disappointing. Ms. Smith does not analyze him as a "representative man" of his age nor does she provide a richly detailed "life and times" account that would, at long last, clarify the murky politics of the age and the business practices that brought Maine's economic structure into being. She also takes a rather charitable view of King's trading with the enemy during the War of 1812. Granting that economic pressures were great, nevertheless, for a leader of the administration party in Maine and the general responsible for its defense, this was questionable behavior. There are also some factual errors that should be corrected in another printing. To balance this there is a fine selection of illustrations, a useful list of

King's ships (when known) and their fate, and ample genealogical material on King's family.

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Picture History of New England Passenger Vessels. By W. Bartlett Cram. (Hampden Highlands, Me.: Burntcoat Corp., 1980. Pp.x, 414. Cloth. \$35.00.)

This is a visual feast for steamship lovers. Each page has a large black-and-white photograph of a steamer and below it is a brief history of the vessel, its registry number and vital statistics. The organization is by routes, and the author has chosen, for admittedly sentimental reasons, to start with the down-east lines of Eastern Steamship and its predecessors and connectors. The work covers large and small: the long "outside" lines such as the Yarmouth line or the Merchants and Miners company and some of the harbor lines such as Casco Bay. Maine readers will enjoy the thorough coverage of the island routes – Vinalhaven, Swan's Island, Boothbay and Passamaquoddy services.

The time period is roughly between the Civil War and World War II, when coastal cities were connected by fleets of passenger steamers, which, if slower than trains, were more comfortable and cheaper. On some routes, like those to Maine and the Maritimes, they even competed in speed due to the convolutions of the northeast coast. There were also the short lines, feeders like those between Mt. Desert Island and the mainland, harbor excursions, and ferry services. Seeing these pictures of a transportation world gone by, I cannot but wonder if the trade-off for speed which has given us the bus and the jet plane has been worth it. I think not.

Those of us of a certain age, who grew up near the New England shore, will thumb the pages immediately to the boats we rode. I found the *Steel Pier* of Provincetown Line, my first steamship experience at the age of six. *Steel Pier*, Cram tells us, started life as Henry Flagler's yacht. Then I found the last generation of Nantasket steamers, *Nantasket*, *Allerton*, and *Francis Scott Key*. These white boats were sixty years old when I rode them as a lad, hugging the rail of the top deck for a view of Nix's Mate and the ships in the outer harbor. The day might have been hot enough for short pants, but one brought a sweatshirt against the cool sea breeze. Best of all was the return trip on the night boat up the harbor to the lights of Boston.

The book has pleasing maps of the routes and a little history at the beginning of each chapter. Cram has omitted the Fall River Line in deference to the works of Roger Williams McAdams, but, given the already prodigious inclusiveness of this book, who will complain?

A fascination for me is the eerie quality of clear old photos. If you look long enough you can almost smell the salt breeze, almost feel the throb of the cylinders under the deck. From the rail of the ill-fated *Portland*, people peer out at us from the past, but they give no hint that the *Portland* and all aboard would be lost on a cold winter night.

This book will delight steamship enthusiasts and those interested in New England's maritime past.

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Colonial Massachusetts: A History. By Benjamin W. Labaree.
(Millwood, N. Y.: KTO Press, 1979. Pp. xvii, 349. Cloth.
\$25.00.)

Historians are plagued by two contrasting problems. Some, like those who seek to investigate areas of the colonial South, have relatively little material to work with. Others, especially those interested in the colonial North, are overwhelmed by sources. More than any other author for this *History of the American Colonies* series, Benjamin Labaree faced the second problem in writing about Massachusetts. The literature describing America's second oldest colony, one well populated and politically sophisticated, is vast. Not only did educated, literate settlers leave diaries and correspondence, not only have government documents survived, but professional historians, dominated for years by those who were New England born or educated, and amateurs as well, have written thousands of books and articles dealing with almost all imaginable topics in constitutional, political, intellectual, religious, economic, and social history. There are biographies and family histories, demographic and town studies. One scholar not too long ago highlighted the abundance of material by pointing out that there would soon be one town history for every forty or fifty adult males in Massachusetts in 1660. But despite these readily available materials, perhaps for a while because of them, there has been no survey of colonial and Revolutionary Massachusetts since the last volume of Thomas Hutchinson's *History* appeared posthumously in 1828. In one sense, Professor Labaree could not go far wrong. Readers would be grateful for any summation of the secondary material, some of which Labaree himself had written. In another sense, he was doomed to disappoint people in his emphasis, in what he left out, in not highlighting the findings of their own favorite secondary accounts.

The disappointed should be few. *Colonial Massachusetts* is a superb one volume history, and few other historians could have written it. It should be the first place students look for information and bibliography on any topic, and the first place they look to put particular events in a larger historical context. The details are fascinating, memorable, and always to the point: an acre of land could produce eighteen bushels of corn or eight of wheat, although wheat was largely given up before 1700, because of the plant disease, blast; early settlers lived in dugouts, wigwams, and daub and wattle cabins; Nathaniel Ames began issuing an almanac in 1725, eight years before the appearance of Franklin's *Poor Richard*, and at its height of popularity it sold 60,000 copies a year.

Two devices are used to especially good effect. Each chapter opens and generally closes by focusing on one individual whose career or life experience illustrates or is affected by the events described in the chapter. Massasoit, John Winthrop, Samuel Sewall, and Jonathan Edwards are among the well-known people used, Edmund Rice and Ebenezer Mackintosh probably the least known to the general public. In the last three pages of the book, all the people who introduce chapters reappear. Just as interesting is Labaree's use of developments in many different towns to demonstrate change within Massachusetts. For the establishment of a church, Dedham is selected. Eight to ten men drew up propositions binding themselves to God by a covenant. Only six of them qualified for church membership, but by the end of the first decade three-fourths of the town's families had at least one church member. For conflicts within the towns, Sudbury is used. Conservative proprietors, wanting to divide the land to favor those already well established, were opposed by another group wishing to carve it up in equal portions. The dispute was so heated that many people boycotted church services because the pastor sided

with the old guard. For town divisions, Newbury, from which Newburyport emerged, is used. For the early formation of town government, Dorchester is introduced.

What emerges in the end is a picture of a colony that grows and changes steadily, never giving up the goals of the first generation but adapting them to serve new people and new interests. Massachusetts changes by expanding and through growing sophistication. In 1695 there were 83 towns in Massachusetts, all but 20 within a day's travel of Boston. By 1765 there were 186 towns. But that growth did not represent only movement into entirely new territory, for two-thirds of the towns formed after 1700 were subdivisions of existing ones. Dedham became six towns. The economy was diversifying. In Andover, sixty third-generation men followed fourteen different occupations in addition to farming. Farming and fishing communities on the coast became seaports. With it all, the religious emphasis of the early Puritans had to change. It had begun early with William Pynchon, "a different kind of Puritan from John Winthrop and Richard Mather" (p. 84). Pynchon moved up the Connecticut River, came to dominate the fur trade, and began marketing farmers' crops. In 1652 he produced a tract calling for greater understanding of the role of men of trade, but it was publicly burned. Labaree shows the change, too, in the growing secularization of literature, a greater interest in mankind and this world.

As all students know, Massachusetts began with an independent government. Labaree clearly describes the growing involvement of England, the Navigation Acts, the Dominion of New England, and the new Massachusetts charter of 1691. But he notes, too, that while the colony often yielded to English pressures, it did not give up its commitment to self-rule, even in the seventeenth century rejecting some British legislation with the argument that Massachusetts was not represented in Parliament. *Colonial*

Massachusetts closes with a clear and succinct account of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. “Throughout the document ran the most important theme of all – the principle of self-government” (p. 313).

No book is without flaws, and this one, however good, is no exception. One could have been avoided easily. The two seventeenth-century maps are quaint, but difficult to read and inadequate. Modern maps locating Indians, eighteenth-century settlements, and perhaps showing the density of population should have been included. Other problems are more serious. Women are conspicuously absent. Not one female is used to open a chapter. Anne Hutchinson would have been a logical choice. And those people who think that there is no problem in the use of “man” to stand for all people might learn from the distortion which creeps into readers’ minds and sometimes on to the author’s page: “Puritans accepted the Biblical evidence of man’s fall from grace...and any one of them...recognized that despite all effort his own life left a continuing trail of sinful actions and attitudes. No doubt some men led more exemplary lives than others, but neither good deeds nor devout stances could offset an individual’s burden of sin” (p. 67). Would anyone really know that women needed to be concerned about salvation?

Indians and the lower class are also slighted. In the Wessagusett incident in 1623, Labaree writes, “the Pilgrims reluctantly decided to attack the [Massachusetts] tribe’s leaders” (p. 37). Not all readers will know they were ambushed and massacred. Nor does Labaree quite do justice to the Indian’s side in King Philip’s War. He fails to mention that Plymouth had hanged several of Philip’s Indians before the onset of the war, and he does not discuss the rivalry among the New England colonies and the desire for more land that surely played a part in the

white's surprise attack against the Narraganset Indians. Occasionally Labaree mentions the lower class, as when indicating that in Dedham one of four adult males could not meet the property qualification for voting in 1750. Such information is vital for many topics. Discussing the many colonial wars between 1689 and 1763, Labaree notes that men "fought and died, for no other conscious reason than to protect their community, their province, and their nation, probably in that order of priority" (p. 203). But a large number of soldiers were poor, without land or hope. Military service, the hope for pay and plunder, inspired their patriotism. No real effort is made to indicate whether such a group played a role in the coming of the Revolution.

In most respects, the book is a delight, enjoyable to read and informative. One item in particular stands out. Describing the loyalists, Labaree writes: "Thirty years ago a wise historian of the colonial period explained the loyalists this way" (p. 277), going on then to indicate that they lacked daring and faith in Americans. He was, of course, referring to his father, Leonard W. Labaree.

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