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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Acadia, Maine, and New Scotland: Marginal Colonies in the Seventeenth Century. By John G. Reid. (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1981. Pp. 293. Cloth. \$30.00.)

As recognition of its original contribution to Canadian history in the seventeenth century, this excellent monograph received the 1976 Sainte-Marie Prize. An earlier version of the manuscript had also won for John Reid his doctorate at the University of New Brunswick, the first to be awarded in history by that great university. The originality of Professor Reid's book may be described simply as an examination of Acadia, Maine, and Nova Scotia by comparing their respective developments and as a study of the interaction of the colonizing powers, France, England, and Scotland, with the native peoples and the environment. The strongest, perhaps the most exciting, aspect of the book is its focus on the entire area as one to be exploited and settled. The area's size, wealth, and diversity, together with its rugged beauty and terrain, made every step in its development a challenge to the pioneers.

Through the seventeenth century this northern land had only a few Europeans living in it, perhaps a little over a thousand, and several times that number of Indians. It was essentially a vacant land, but potentially an important one for colonization. Roots for truly permanent, flourishing settlements grew only in the future York County of Maine. These villages welcomed help from Massachusetts, whose inhabitants sought the timber and fur trade of the area and employed the settlers. Their institutions eventually followed models in Massachusetts, though the people were not culturally or politically sympathetic with the larger colony. Otherwise,

settlements struggled to survive and many disappeared after years of intense effort. Political division of the region contributed to the weakness of these settlements as the European powers, distracted by national concerns, frequently sacrificed the welfare of the distant colonies. Admittedly, the region remained secondary to other concerns in Europe. These marginal colonies were maintained, nevertheless, as claims upon the area.

Professor Reid thinks that the revolution and wars of 1689 and 1690 changed prevailing policies sufficiently to bring an end to the developments of the seventeenth century. The near twenty-five years of war after 1689, he asserts, were to accentuate national interest in the region and make it a battlefield. "The European governments' interest in the region," henceforth, "had an overtly military and strategic aspect, manifest in the establishment of garrisons of regular troops by both French and British, and especially in the proliferation of military installations. . . . The interest of the Massachusetts colony changed also. [The] . . . northeastward movements began to assume a more deliberate and a more popular form than fishing activities Increasingly important was the penetration of the region by organized military forces from Massachusetts, the activity of Massachusetts-based land companies, and the foundation of new towns by groups of migrants, first in Maine and then in Nova Scotia."

The application of meaning to events is an important choice for the historian. Obviously something happened in 1689, when a series of disruptive colonial wars changed the pattern of politics. Something happened, too, in 1714 when the Treaty of Utrecht ended two decades of war. Many of the changes which occurred after 1714 were happening elsewhere before 1689. It may be that the European powers finally regarded Maine, Acadia, and

Nova Scotia as important to their empires. In brief, Professor Reid seems a little too close to his subject to recognize similarities of policy elsewhere.

The book is a worthy addition to the literature on the region. It applies a comparative approach, which is not always successful, but it permits the reader to see the region as a whole. The author is more analytical than narrative, or descriptive, in his style of presentation so that only a few people like the Temples are larger than the words that describe them. Historians who like maps will enjoy the four excellent, beautifully presented ones depicting the location of settlements, rivers, and regional phenomena. An index, bibliography, and footnotes, in addition to a pleasant format, make the book an attractive scholarly tool (maybe the word "tool" should be replaced with "work of art").

John A. Schutz
University of Southern California

Faces of Maine. By Bob Niss. (Portland, Me.: Guy Gannett Publishing Co., 1981. Pp. 214. Paper. \$8.95)

The arrival of this delightful volume on the eve of Portland's 350th anniversary should be welcomed by almost everyone interested in the history of Maine. In sixty well-chosen biographical sketches, the book is a "Whitman's Sampler" of leading personalities from statehood to the present. As far as I know, this is the only modern attempt to collect such information under one cover. Such a work has long been needed; it brings to light a diverse assortment of men and women who range from the famous (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edmund S. Muskie, Winslow Homer, and Kenneth Roberts) to the now obscured (Mildred Gillars, Melville

W. Fuller, Clarence E. Allen, and Jack McAuliffe). Until the advent of *Faces of Maine*, students had to wander through a maze of books to locate information on leading personalities. The success of this work rests on several factors. First, the choices are well made and cover most aspects of Maine life. Second, the research seems to be well founded. Finally, the writing is clean and entertaining.

It is difficult to think of a better qualified person to write a book of this genre than Bob Niss. Born and reared downeast, Niss has been with the Gannett newspapers for the last decade. During that time, he has proven himself to be a popular columnist and an able cultural observer. Few individuals have been afforded the opportunity to see so much activity or to meet so many key people. It seems to me that this store of journalistic experience has proven invaluable in this project.

A reporter quickly learns to distinguish what is important and what is not. Hence, while one might quibble with a particular choice, one cannot fault him on the integrity of the choices made. As in fielding a baseball team, a manager must make cuts and hard decisions. This has been done deftly and fairly. Still, it seems probable that *Faces II* could be published without calling on the second string.

The absence of footnotes is sure to offend a few sticklers, but this is a popular work, and those individuals will find themselves in a minority. While Niss has provided a bibliography, two things did bother me slightly. There is neither an index nor a list of the people included. One or the other would have been simple to prepare and would have provided a smoother entry for the reader. This is a flesh-and-blood word-portrait of local history, and judging from the subjects well known to me, the research seems firmly grounded. Again, I suspect that years of

news coverage played a positive role. There is none of the quaint, old-school popular history, which has plagued us from the 1890s to the present. Niss reports; he gives the facts. But facts alone can be dry as bone. We have all encountered the book just hatched from the thesis: a competent listing of information that would parch even the most scholarly of palates. Here again, journalistic style comes to the fore. Niss's sketches are both tasteful and tasty. Good information is served up in style. Entirely absent is the uneven quality of treatment in presenting personalities, some living and some dead. Niss seems as comfortable in discussing E. B. White and Margaret Chase Smith as he is in introducing General Joshua Chamberlain and Neal Dow.

For the student, this collection of brief biographies seems almost indispensable as a point of departure. Rather than spoiling one's appetite, these sketches make one hungry for more. I had a general knowledge of most of the subjects but was surprised by the number of people I did not know. I was totally unaware that the once notorious "Axis Sally" was a Portland girl. Others, including Emma Eames, Payson Smith, and Laura Richards, were only names on the periphery of my knowledge. Now they have come into general focus. I knew that John Ford once lived on Munjoy Hill, just below my apartment, but I had never found the time to look into the origins of the great film director. *Faces* changes all of that. What is more, it provides visual documentation on nearly all the people included. Both the author and his publisher deserve credit for bringing out a useful, readable, and thoroughly enjoyable local history. It has assumed a well-merited place on my bookshelf.

William David Barry
Portland, Maine

Morning Was Starlight: My Maine Boyhood. By Ernest Dodge. (Chester, Conn.: The Globe-Pequot Press, 1980. Pp. xiii, 202. Paper. \$8.95)

In 1931, when he was eighteen, Ernest Dodge of Trenton, Maine, became a museum assistant at the Peabody Museum of Salem. By 1950 he had become director of the institution, a post he was to hold until his death in February, 1980. In the meantime, he became an important maritime historian; he was among the founders of the *American Neptune*, the leading journal of maritime history, serving as its editor from 1951 to 1969. He also wrote or edited several well-regarded books on maritime or exploring subjects. In this book he has taken a different tack and written warmly and nostalgically about life on a saltwater farm near Ellsworth in the years 1915-1930. Nostalgia has not clouded his historical judgment, however, and while he writes with a note of sadness for a meaningful way of life now gone forever, he has no romantic notion that it can ever be restored. "When my generation goes," he writes in his prologue, "there will be no more direct knowledge of that life than of life in medieval England," not meaning to suggest, I am sure, that the book has great historical significance.

The structure is simple and effective. After describing the physical features of the area, the author has four major chapters corresponding with the seasons; he starts with winter (when morning was indeed starlight) and carries it through in logical progression. Under each seasonal heading there are three subtopics; examples for summer are "The Berry and Clambake Season," "One Old Cat," and "Coasting Twilight." Within this framework, he describes the life and activities — mostly dictated by weather and the seasons — in which the people of Bayside participated before paved roads and other changes broke

down the isolation and self-sufficiency of their neighborhood.

His method, like his structure, is typical of the nostalgia and reminiscence genre. Rarely does he tie an event to a particular day or even year. For example, his description of a snowstorm is not of a specific storm, but of snowstorms in general; the cutting of winter firewood was essentially the same process each year; Christmas might be any Christmas, and so on. Each reader will have favorite segments. I like his accounts of the last coasting schooners on the bay, the operations of the lumber mill, and I would argue that Dodge, in a modest way, has done for the business of smelting what Herman Melville did for whaling in *Moby Dick*. Having grown up diagonally across the bay only half a generation after Dodge, I have either done, or seen, or know people who have done, almost everything that he has described, and I am willing to certify that he has painted a true picture. I suspect, however, that the Bayside neighborhood was not quite as isolated and self-contained as he implies.

Even in those days Ellsworth was a fairly cosmopolitan community, but beyond noting that he had a five-mile walk each day to high school, Dodge gives no hint as to how the high school or the city affected him. We would particularly like to know how a boy from a hardscrabble farm, educated in a one-room schoolhouse, and without attending college (except for a year at Harvard as a special student in anthropology), could grow up to “eat fish and drink rum” with S. E. Morison, Lincoln Colcord, and Walter Muir Whitehill.

In any event, Dodge became a fine writer, with a style as tangy and refreshing as an afternoon southerly in July. He knows the downeast lingo and uses many once-common words and phrases like culch, stove up, and Getchel birch, that one does not hear much anymore. He

ranges easily from beautiful descriptive passages to amusing anecdotes. He is sensitive to nature and appears to know both the common and scientific names of every tree, shrub, and bush that ever grew in coastal Maine. One suspects that he acquired this skill since his boyhood.

I have a few minor complaints. The map has some mistakes that Dodge would have caught had he lived; the illustrations, though competent, remind one of Robert McCloskey and do not capture the essence of Union River Bay; and the flowery title struck a wrong note for me, being too feminine for a book about a boy's world. Otherwise I can find little fault with this delightful book. Excerpts appeared before publication in *Down East*, and although the publication date is given as 1980, the book was not in Maine bookstores until the late spring of 1981. There is a graceful and perceptive introduction by James Russell Wiggins.

Although written by a scholar and perhaps containing an historical insight or two, this book was meant to be read for pleasure by people who enjoy reading about the Maine coast in "the good old days." Those of us who know and love Union River Bay find it especially appealing and we are grateful to our late neighbor, Ernest Dodge, for his most welcome gift and regret that he did not live to accept our gratitude.

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