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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Kershaw, Gordon E. *The Kennebec Proprietors, 1749-1775: "Gentlemen of Large Property & Judicious Men."* New Hampshire Publishing Company/Maine Historical Society, 1975. xvi, 343 pp., illus. \$15.00 hardbound. \$6.95 softbound.

As 1976 draws to a close, the general reader with bicentennial interests should look into Gordon Kershaw's *Kennebeck Proprietors*. Readers with interest in the Kennebec region or students of early American business enterprise will be attracted to the book by its title. But the title does not alert the general reader to the book's significant off-beat insights into the way the American Revolution was brought on in Boston and to the eastward.

These insights are to be found particularly in chapters 9, 11, and 12: "Appeal to the King in Council," "Religious Disaffection," and "Political Disruption." To appreciate Kershaw's speculation on the role that a desperate resolution to destroy Kennebec records may have had in the furious mob demolition of Governor Hutchinson's Boston home, the reader may need to fortify himself with information from earlier chapters. But not for the rehearsal of Jacob Bailey's struggles for a score of years as an Anglican clergyman in Pownalborough, his plea of conscience before the Committee of Correspondence in defense of his continued prayers for King George and of his refusal to read the Declaration of Independence, and his final sailing in 1779 to exile in Halifax—"a scarecrow of a figure in patched rusty black coat, bedticking breeches, and greasy moth-eaten wig." Nor for the account of James Bowdoin's progress from supporter of the royal prerogative to Whig revolutionary and governor of the Commonwealth. Nor for the story of the involvement of the Kennebec proprietors and their attorney in the Boston Massacre.

The reader with special interest in the Kennebec region will find a summary of the Pilgrims' Indian fur-trade there, and chronicles of eighteenth-century settlements, fortifications, Indian troubles, and mast-trade lawsuits. The development of Frankfort (Pownalborough) is treated at length.

The student of early American commercial and financial enterprise will find dossiers on each of the nine proprietors who met on September 21, 1749, in Boston's Royal Exchange Tavern to plan the exploitation of the old Plymouth Colony grant on the Kennebec, and dossiers on most of their successors. The legal title of the group, since 1753 "The Proprietors of the Kennebeck Purchase from the late Colony of New Plymouth," was usually abbreviated to "Plymouth Company," "Kennebec Company," or "Kennebec Purchase Company." As early as 1754 shares had been so splintered by sale and inheritance that ownership was defined in terms of 1/192's of the whole. During the Revolution twenty-five meetings of the propriety were called, but no important business was transacted, even at the eleven meetings for which a quorum showed up. After the Revolution many of the Tory proprietors returned from exile, but not Dr. Sylvester Gardiner, who had earlier dominated the propriety. By 1822 the propriety's outstanding mortgages and notes were auctioned off and distribution was made of a final \$50,000.

Professor Kershaw, a specialist in colonial and Revolutionary history and head of the history department at Frostburg State College, Maryland, appears to feel some distaste for the Company "as an example of early American business enterprise in its ruthlessness, its use of political influence, and its relation to the role that greed and ambition played in the settling of this country." "As stalwart Whigs [and Tories, of course] in this eighteenth-century tradition, these Kennebec proprietors

held the rights of property supreme." The first of these quotes is from the preface, the second from the final paragraph of the book. In between, the author largely succeeds in mounting an objective exposition and rarely appeals to the attitudes of the 1960s, as in calling (p. 44) a group of proprietors "that clique."

Some of the references (pp. 63 and 152) to the settlement of the neighboring Muscongus area may mislead or perplex some readers. A reader might mistakenly attribute to Colonel David Dunbar difficulties the Kennebec proprietors had with settlers under Deacon Shem Drowne and the Pemaquid Company. The author's purpose does not require that he consider the interrelationships of Brigadier Samuel Waldo, the Twenty Associates of the Lincolnshire Company, the Ten Original Muscongus Proprietors, and General Henry Knox. Some readers might have found enlightening brief reference to the interests in other land companies of such investors as John Jeffries, Belcher Noyes, Adam Winthrop, and James Bowdoin.

The design of the book makes for easy reading—well-chosen type, margins adequate for notes, and some half-dozen eighteenth-century portraits. Your reviewer would have appreciated a foldout modern map drawn for the purpose of helping the reader follow the text.

Paul H. Flint
Tuft University

Baker, William A., Compiler. *Maine Shipbuilding: A Bibliographical Guide*. Portland, Maine Historical Society, 1974. \$4.00.

In *Maine Shipbuilding*, William A. Baker, Curator of the Francis Russell Hart Nautical Museum at MIT, has selected and organized a listing of more than 120 books

dealing with various aspects of ship and boat building from colonial times to the twentieth century. Augmenting these secondary accounts, which range from town histories, personal reminiscences, and descriptive works to technical studies on ship design and construction, are sections describing and listing other sources of information.

To set the bibliographical scene, Mr. Baker has written a preface in which he elaborates on the various interpretations or concepts associated with the word "shipbuilding". He notes that in addition to the actual construction process, "shipbuilding" can refer simply to lists of tonnage produced by a particular town or district. Also connoted with the term is the business element including: shipyard management practices, profits accrued, and the combining of the many specialized trades or crafts essential to the completion of a vessel.

In order, to avoid excessive repetition, the arrangement is by category rather than time period or geographical region. Following the section entitled, "General Works", the most extensive listing of secondary works is contained in the "Local Items" section. Here pertinent town and area histories are organized on a regional basis beginning at the St. Croix River and extending down (or up) the coast to the Piscataqua.

The "Vessel Description" section is concerned specifically with the products of Maine shipyards and is comprised of a *potpourri* of histories, descriptive works and picture collections. The contents of the books are described in brief annotations.

Following a short section listing works related to the trades or crafts allied with shipbuilding, such as figure head carving and sail making, subsequent sections of the guide are devoted to sources of information that will be of more interest to the serious researcher than the casual

reader. In addition to the collections of documents, records and statistics, and unpublished materials—including dissertations and theses—Mr. Baker has compiled a list of newspapers and has indicated the locations of major collections of boat and ship plans. He has also provided a list of periodicals which includes, but does not distinguish between the scholarly journals and the popular monthly publications available at newsstands.

Considering the nature of the subject and the variety of material, particularly in terms of secondary works, Mr. Baker has selected and compiled a guide that does justice to all of concepts of shipbuilding. As he himself has indicated, users of the guide will make additions to it when holdings of useful material are revealed in the course of research. To the “Records and Statistics” section, one might add the Dun and Bradstreet Credit Reporting Ledgers held at the Baker Library of the Harvard University Business School. The reports are indexed and contain many interesting notations pertaining to Maine shipbuilders and the shipbuilding business in the nineteenth century. Another source of information of a photographic nature is W. H. Bunting’s *Portrait of a Port: Boston 1852-1914* (Boston, 1971). This book contains an extensive collection of photographs of Boston’s harbor and waterfront activities, and included are a number of scenes in which downeast-built vessels are identified by name and home port.

With *Maine Shipbuilding*, we have the second bibliographical guide devoted to a once prominent industry and way of life since the publication of David Smith’s *Lumbering and the Maine Woods* (1971). My suggestion for the inclusion of additional material in no way is meant to detract from this significant and valuable addition to the guide series.

David C. Switzer
Plymouth State College
of the University of
New Hampshire System

Jordan, William B., Jr., compiler. *Maine in the Civil War: A Bibliographical Guide*. Portland, Maine Historical Society, 1976. \$4.00.

The Civil War was the central, searing experience in the lives of all Maine men and women who endured this tragic episode in the American past. No state gave more generously of her young men than the Pine Tree State. Now Professor William B. Jordan, Jr., of Westbrook College, has provided an excellent bibliographical introduction to Maine in the Civil War. He intends it to serve in part as “a memorial to Lieutenant Charles A. Goodwin (whose headstone inscription is reproduced on page 1) and thousands of other young men from Maine who perished in battle or were grievously afflicted by this war.”

Jordan modestly “makes no claims as to the definitiveness of this compilation.” Actually one can scarcely imagine the author having missed any printed source on Maine in the Civil War. General Maine histories, specialized Maine studies and Maine biographies and personal narratives crowd the pages of Part I, along with an extremely useful listing of general reference works and basic histories of the Civil War. Part II covers Maine writings on specific military units, listed in numerical order, as well as veterans organizations and the Maine Civil War Centennial.

Jordan provides helpful brief comments on each item listed. For example, he judges John J. Pullen’s *The Twentieth Maine. A Volunteer Regiment in the Civil War* “Everything that a regimental history should be! The author utilized a wide variety of primary sources and wrote a history that is not only eminently readable but succeeds as dramatic narrative,” while he pungently dismisses *Bands and Drummer Boys of the Civil War* by Francis A. Lord and Arthur Wise with, “This treatment is

uniformly poor with five photographs reproduced twice and three appearing thrice. Many photographs suffer badly from the reproduction process. Tragically nothing else is currently available. Hack work at its worst!”

The book concludes with an appendix containing a capsule history and statistical information for each Maine unit in the Civil War. *Maine in the Civil War: A Bibliographical Guide* sets forth a rich feast for Maine history and Civil War buffs alike.

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WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY

Ayers, Ruth Bridges. “Newfield and Mary Libby, 1776-1876.” *Maine Life*, Vol. 30, No. 12, June 1976.

Bennett, Randy L. “Handsome Hilton Panels Installed at Fort Western.” (Seaverns W. Hilton, Weld, Maine, artist) *Lewiston Journal Magazine*, May 8, 1976.

--- “Rev. Daniel Gould, Strong Leader in Early Maine.” (Educator and benefactor of Bethel Academy, now Gould Academy) *Lewiston Journal Magazine*, May 1, 1976.

--- “Rumford Point’s Famous River Ferry.” *Lewiston Journal Magazine*, July 10, 1976.

Blount, Edward F. *Historical Notes on the Construction of the First Universalist Church, Auburn, Maine, One Hundred Years Ago, With Biographical Sketches of Three of the Lay Leaders Who Were Active in the Building of the Church.* Auburn, Maine, 1976. 23 pages.