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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Cook, Edward M., Jr. *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-century New England*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. xviii, 273 pages. \$12.95.

Here are discovered the limitations, as well as some of the strengths, of the "new history." Mr. Cook's purpose is to analyze the sources of leadership in seventy-four eighteenth-century New England towns. By so doing, he hopes to solve some of the inadequacies of the many individual community studies that lately have been dominating a conspicuous part of American colonial scholarship. By erecting a comparative framework, a task that for obvious reasons is impossible in the study of any particular community, and then by inventing a "typology" of towns, Mr. Cook hopes to furnish a common ground for the interpretation of past and future community studies. As for the development of this genre up to now, as he says, "the interpretive advances hardly seem proportionate to the effort invested."

Mr. Cook himself has surely invested effort worthy of the Kenneth Lockridges, the Philip Grevens, the Robert Zemskys, the Michael Zuckermans, his mentor Jack Greene, and all the other makers of the tradition in which he consciously works and for which he hopes to prove a (if not *the*) focus. He has gathered statistics relative to the distribution, ages, tax standings, property holdings, descent, church membership, and so on of the principal office-holders in his seventy-four towns. This task alone, when one considers all the mimeographed code sheets and card-punching involved – to say nothing of presumed encounters with dozens of New England town clerks – ought to rank in sheer drudgery and assiduousness, I should think, not far behind the twelfth labor of Hercules.

His next job was to test all those numbers to see how they fit a potpourri of social science theories and “models” ranging from social stratification to central place.

The concept upon which he settles finally as most worthy of his attention, however, is that of “deference.” In a far-ranging and uncharacteristically brief and daring epilogue, Mr. Cook concludes that the American Revolution brought with it a shift in political culture that changed town leaders from social superiors into civil servants. Ironically, the one most interesting conclusion in the study is the one least tied to Mr. Cook’s statistics and therefore the one most susceptible to attack with the most damning epithet in his fellow social scientists’ vocabulary, “impressionism,” if you will excuse the expression.

One may fairly ask, as Mr. Cook did of the large body of community studies, what he has achieved out of all this effort. For one thing, he has achieved a dreadfully mechanical and dull book. Writing in the most tortured kind of dissertationese, Mr. Cook never looks up for either inspiration or insight from the murky waters where his data base mingles uncertainly with abstract theory.

For another, he has provided a classification of eighteenth-century towns (“typology,” which is the word he gives to his grouping, is probably too technical and certainly too pretentious for the job) that goes beyond most such classifications and will undoubtedly prove a useable device for some future scholars. It was this classification, resulting in five groupings based on the state of local development and upon stratification data including a mysterious number called “index of prominence,” upon which Mr. Cook based the selection of his seventy-four towns (including six in Maine) with a view to having his sample coincide as closely as possible with the whole number of New England towns with respect to their distribution among his five groups.

Finally, he has provided some further documentation and some further argument on the side of those who see New England town society as preeminently a hierarchical arrangement in the decades before the American Revolution. His claim, however, is that the degree of stratification, and thus of “deference,” varied according to the “type” of town in question.

All this is interesting stuff indeed for the student of eighteenth-century America – or at least potentially so. The trouble is that Mr. Cook is so tied to his numbers, and so intent upon calling in every conceivably relevant theoretical model that science has invented, that he forgets to listen with any appreciation or real insight to the recorded voices of the past. The result is a sterile concoction of various intellectual gymnastic events, all set down in a scarcely legible record book. This is not the same thing as evoking the past.

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University of New Hampshire

Hill, Alfred T. *Voyages*. New York, David McKay Company, Inc., 1977. 142 pages. \$8.95.

The Jordan family has lived in the lower Saco Valley for over three hundred years, and for the first two of those centuries family members were very active citizens indeed. In this slim volume, one of the living representatives of that distinguished clan has published and annotated the letters and logs of Captain Tristram Jordan (1798-1856) of Saco and of several of his kin: Frederic, his son, who died of typhus on his maiden voyage aboard his father’s ship *Pepperell*; his nephew, Franklin Jordan; and his son-in-law, Alfred Patterson. All were seafaring men descended from Anglican ministers who, despite their clerical calling, were

often very adept with weaponry, especially when dealing with the Indians and other native Maine fauna. Indeed, one Dominicus bore the descriptive nickname, "Indian-Killer."

Over half of the space is devoted to Tristram, who sailed on some forty-five different voyages between 1816 and the day he was swept overboard in a gale in the North Atlantic, a scant two days from London. Some of the letters give considerable detail on contemporary trade, navigation and shipboard life as well as the ambitions and concerns of this very active farmer-captain. He attempted to run a coastal Maine farm and to conduct his trade full time, an impossible feat without the help and hard labor of his brother, his industrious wife Catherine (*nee* Merrill, of Wiscasset), their six children, and various other relatives. It is easy to forget the laboriousness of pre-modern life, supportable only through the whole-hearted and well-organized cooperation of the extended family. Documents such as these bring back that half-forgotten life-style. Hard work was simply accepted as everyone's lot. The Tristram Jordans were a devoted family and their feelings as well as their labors come through the letters' Victorian formality.

The author, a retired educator, was the executive director of the Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges for a dozen years and has published before in his career field. This is his first venture into history, and it is clear that he is caught up in his subject. There are nearly thirty pictures and much added information in the way of clarification and comment. Dr. Hill's enthusiasm makes up for any heaviness in his handling of the material, and his running commentary is useful and straight-forward, if sometimes a trifle patronizing.

In brief, the book is a pleasant introduction to Maine maritime and family life of the last century. It is to be

recommended to anyone interested in the subject. An additional reason to buy the book is that part of the proceeds will go to the York Institute, a particularly worthwhile cause.

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Ray, Roger B., comp. *The Indians of Maine and the Atlantic Provinces: A Bibliographical Guide*. Portland, Maine Historical Society, 1977. [87] pages. \$4.00.

It has been a commonplace for scholars of native America to deplore the lack of authentic Indian documentary resources. Such complaints partially reflect an inability to ask meaningful questions of such records as do exist. They also defuse potential criticism for failing to write from an "Indian point-of-view." Without such documents, it is frequently contended, scholars must rest content with intellectual perspectives which emphasize the issues of Indian-white relations. Yet exclusive, or even heavy reliance on the records of military, political and administrative relations between native and Euro-americans is no longer adequate. At the very least new questions must be asked. As Roger B. Ray's *The Indians of Maine and the Atlantic Provinces* indicates, the sources for northeastern Indian culture and history are incredibly rich and diverse. Ray leads the way for revision in emphasizing the regional connections of both Indian history and the surviving archival records.

While Ray's bibliography does not provide an exhaustive analysis of either American or Canadian institutions with important Indian records, it does survey most of the major collections. It is an especially important overview of

the significant holdings of the Maine Historical Society. Both general readers and specialists in native American research will find Ray's guide broadening. This revision of the 1972 edition has significantly extended references to both primary and secondary materials. Ray has included a wide range of recent studies on Indian archaeology, folklore, history, linguistics and recent relations between the tribes and local and national governments.

A few important omissions should be noted. They include my dissertation "The People of the Dawn: The Abnaki and Their Relations with New England and New France, 1600-1727," University of Maine, Orono, 1975; Alvin H. Morrison's dissertation in anthropology, "Dawnland Decisions: 17th Century Wabanaki Leaders and Their Responses to the Differential Contact Stimuli in the Overlap Area of New France and New England," State University of New York, Buffalo, 1974; various biographical sketches in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; and Jeanne Guillemin's path-breaking study of contemporary urban Indians in the northeast: *Urban Renegades: The Cultural Strategy of American Indians*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.

In general, however, Ray's bibliography is an extremely useful guide to northeastern Indian peoples. Specialists may quibble with some of Ray's annotations but most of his comments indicate that views about Indian culture and history are rapidly changing for the better. The Maine Historical Society is to be complimented for continuing to encourage a multi-disciplinary approach to Indian studies. This latest edition of the *Indians of Maine and the Atlantic Provinces* is a solid contribution to that development.

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Wilkins, Martha Fifield. *Sunday River Sketches: A New England Chronicle*. Edited with an introduction by Randy L. Bennett. Rumford, Maine; Androscoggin Publications, 1977. 316 pages. \$12.00.

When Woodrow Wilson said that the history of a nation “is but the history of its villages writ large,” it is possible that he did not have in mind a village quite as small as Riley, Maine. Lying on the New Hampshire border up the Sunday River above Bethel and Newry, Riley (or Ketchum, as it was called before its organization in 1842) wavered between 32 and 43 residents in the years 1860-1890 before dropping to a population of 13 in 1900 and 10 in 1910. The highest total vote recorded in available records seems to have been the figure of 15 ballots cast in the state election of 1849. By 1912, the *Maine Register* reported that the plantation organization of the village had been given up, and more recent issues of that publication report accurately that Riley is “a wild land township largely owned by the International Paper Company.”

Because of the loving care with which Martha Fifield Wilkins reported on the important and unimportant events in the lives of the people who lived in this community, however, and because of the work of Randy Bennett in editing the notes which Martha Wilkins placed in the Bethel Public Library in 1947, we have available a detailed record of life in this tiny village. *Sunday River Sketches* contains many different kinds of records – the few plantation records and voting lists of Riley which are available, entries from diaries, cemetery inscriptions, newspaper clippings, deeds, letters, notes on all sorts of family events, and a hundred pages of “family histories” involving families of Riley and neighboring Newry.

The history of Luke Reily, for whom the village was presumably named, shows a pattern familiar to students of

the in-migration and out-migration of New England towns. This immigrant reportedly came as a boy from Newry, Ireland, in the 1780s, and joined other Irish immigrants in clearing land in "Ketchum," where they saw future prosperity for themselves and their descendants. By 1844, his son Thomas Jefferson Riley was writing from his new residence in Mobile, Alabama, to his father (by this time a resident of South Newry) about the great Democratic party victory in that state.

And then there was O. Israel Fifield, great-grandfather of Martha Fifield Wilkins. Coming from Durham in the 1820s to gain a water-power site on which he could operate a sawmill and gristmill, he became a leading citizen of the young community. Three of his children died young, including the son who drowned in the pool below his father's mill. Most of his children moved to larger Maine villages or to Massachusetts, including the daughter who went to work in the mills of Lowell as a young woman. He "deeded over" his land to his daughter and son-in-law on the condition that they care for him in his old age and provide a stone for his grave; somehow the gravestone never was provided.

An excellent picture of what life was like for a Maine farm wife around 1900 is provided by the excerpts from the diaries of "Aunt Jule" (Julia Fifield Stearns), who noted the occupations of the men ("twitchin' popple") and herself ("I have lived through another day with 8 men to get victuals for"). Women (and men) of the 1970s may well feel tired to read of the things which she did in one day: "Churned, mended A's shirts and pants, picked raspberries enough for supper, drowned three kittens, watered tomatoes, folded clothes to iron, got three hot meals, and many other things." On another day, Aunt Jule "raked after four loads of hay, made butter, brushed bugs off potato vines, put up a quart of raspberries and 1 pint

cherries, mended B's shirt, made 4 beds, besides meals, dishes, cleaning, etc."

In *Sunday River Sketches* are preserved the record of some of the tragedies of small-town life. In March of 1839, the livestock of the town were turned out to trample out a road to get the body of Polly Fifield, aged 30, to the cemetery. (Of her five children, only two survived infancy, and the only one to live to maturity remained in the South after the Civil War.) Mrs. Wilkins records, too, the story of the woman in the Bethel poorhouse who worked on a quilt so that there would be money for her funeral – and who barely escaped having her wedding-ring removed from her finger after death on the grounds that a town pauper should not possess such finery. On a lighter note, a home in Riley became the depot for woodsmen going into the camps for their winter's work. Leaving their good clothes at this home in the fall, they would pick them up in the spring, discarding their winter clothes which, after being disinfected, were suitable for rags or for being darned for resale to woodsmen the following season.

Martha Fifield Wilkins seems to have total recall in the detailed pictures which she gives of the contents of each room of her grandfather's house in which she spent thirty summers before the building burned in 1924. Her word-descriptions of the "butt'ry," the parlor bedroom, the milk room, the front entry, and the summer kitchen provide the same sort of picture of this Riley home and its contents as do the photographs of Chansonetta Emmons of the houses which she knew in Kingfield and New Portland.

Martha Wilkins and Randy Bennett form an unusual team for the preservation of local history. Bennett, who was writing and publishing articles on local history while still an undergraduate on the Farmington campus of the University of Maine, was a rather small boy when Mrs. Wilkins, who never lived in Maine, died at the age of

eighty-four. The story which they have preserved is in some ways a sad one – of men and women working hard to clear and preserve farms in hilly section of western Maine, of the movement of their sons and daughters and grandchildren to larger villages and towns, and of the gradual disappearance into wilderness of the sites of their homes (which obviously were declining when Mrs. Wilkins photographed them in the 1920's). The book is by no means a polished, finished product. Mr. Bennett notes that he did not eliminate all of the repetition contained in Mrs. Wilkins' manuscript, and much material of lesser value is to be found in detail among the more valuable sections. *Sunday River Sketches* shows, however, that even a village as small as Riley enacted within its borders many of the events which, "writ large," tell the story of the nation. Many Maine villages much larger than Riley would be most fortunate to have this sort of material awaiting the writers who now are trying to record their histories.

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