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Book Reviews

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WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY
Books

Uncollected Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett. Edited with an Introduction by Richard Cary. Waterville, Colby College Press, 1971.

In these days of love of antiques and other evidences of the past, the stories of Sarah Orne Jewett appeal strongly to those who have memories of living on a Maine farm or in a Maine village. The sights and sounds and smells of the countryside permeate her work, and her characters are people we have known. We come across details and turns of speech we have forgotten for years: "to salt the sheep," "to sit on a *cricket* [hassock or low stool]", "to wear a *cloud* [veil] over a re-trimmed hat", "I've spoken for a *tease* [a kind of cab?]," "she had *heired* some good furniture." [Query: Does anyone know what is meant by *quarter* in this expression from "The Dulham Ladies: "piecrust that was, without exaggeration, *half a quarter* high"?.

Most readers are familiar only with Jewett's masterpiece, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, and perhaps a few short stories in anthologies. A quarter of a century ago it was almost impossible to buy copies of the book in sufficient quantities for class use. But the hundredth anniversary of her birth (1849) instigated a renewed interest in this writer of the Maine scene and Maine character, an interest that has continued to expand and deepen. Paperback editions of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and of *Deephaven* and a reprint of her article for the *New England Magazine*, "The Old Town of Berwick," have again made her best known works available for the public. Biographical and critical studies continue to appear as students and critics of American writing study her life, her subject matter, and her style. Now Professor Cary and the Colby College Press have made it possible to read also those stories, sketches, and essays that appeared in periodicals but were not collected into book form.

Most of Miss Jewett's work appeared first in maga-

zines and newspapers. She collected many of them into several books, such as *Deephaven*, *Country Byways* and *Play Days* (children's stories). *Uncollected Short Stories* presents in chronological order forty-four tales and sketches that she had chosen not to have republished, as well as a list of fourteen children's stories not as yet reprinted. Her autobiographical piece, "Looking back on Girlhood," written for the *Youth's Companion* in 1892, prefaces the collection. This is particularly gratifying, for it is, as Cary remarks, "often cited, yet not readily accessible."

Sarah Orne Jewett was always intrigued by the history and geography of lower York County, where she lived. A reader familiar with the locality can recognize many of the places -- rivers, roads, hills, even some old homes and other buildings -- that she wrote about. She frequently made use of local history and tradition in her stories -- the orchard that developed from a small apple tree brought from England in a tub by an early settler, Cromwell's deportation of Scottish prisoners to York and other New England areas, Indian attacks, the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the beginning of the summer resort business, the establishment of mills, and factories, and the building of the railroad. The coming of these industries brought new people into the old communities, especially French-Canadians, and Irish. Always with understanding and appreciation of the contribution made by these later settlers, she brought them, too, into some of her stories, with their traditions, their customs, and their own forms of speech.

The quality of these stories varies, as any reader will see. The endings of some, especially the earlier ones, are marred by the pointing out of the moral, or they are too obvious, too contrived, or too abrupt; some of them, however, have very effective conclusions, one or two even ending with a surprise twist that is yet logical. These are several in which the suspense is excellent. Usually the local people appear truly alive, and one easily recognizes them or their twentieth-century counterparts. Who does not know two such women as these? "You would have thought that a

very elegant blue-jay had come to make a late afternoon call upon such a brown chippy-sparrow as Miss Debby Gaines." She writes the local speech with a light, subtle, masterly touch. A person almost hears it as he reads along; he does not have to plow laboriously through phonetic spellings that hide rather than reveal what is being said.

In addition to providing the Jewett enthusiast with forty-four more stories, this collection is valuable in showing the author's development in the art of writing. The earliest tale, for instance, opens with this sentence, "This story of mine may interest some reader," and concludes with "How do you like my story?" The second one begins with a question about the title, followed by the author's replying, "I thought you'd ask me that.... Don't you dare to skip a word, because, if you should behave improperly, you might not find it [the answer to the question] after all." In time Miss Jewett learned either to keep herself out of the story or to be an integral part of the action rather than a coy or patronizing commentator on what happened or on how her reader should react. A few years later in *Deephaven*, her first book (a collection of sketches that had recently appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*), her writing had become more fluent and flexible. By the time of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* she was writing in a style -- simple, natural, clear, and full of life -- that was the admiration and sometimes envy of her contemporaries, as is E. B. White's today.

This is a book of interest primarily to the Jewett scholar and the Jewett enthusiast, who are grateful to Professor Cary for bringing together in one volume the forty-four stories and the autobiographical essay for their convenience, their study, and their pleasure. Some minor flaws distract or annoy the reader, especially such typographical errors, as "a kind of *freindly* visit," [page 285], "The first *think* I thought of" [page 22], and a couple of omissions or transpositions of lines of print. The editor's fascination with long, unusual words (horripilating, p. xvii, for example) sometimes draws attention from what he is saying, and occasionally a patronizing tone slips into his informative and helpful introduction.

In general this collection of stories reinforces Sarah Orne Jewett's good critical judgment of her own work in deciding which of her periodical publications were not to be included in her books, although, as Professor Cary observes, "more than once she left out better than she put in." He feels that seventeen of the selections in this book are "up to Miss Jewett's optimum level." This reviewer agrees with his statement, though only ten of her independent choices coincide with his.

It is to be hoped that there will be reprints or new editions of other stories and sketches of Sarah Orne Jewett's, based on those that she herself collected into books that are today so hard to find.

Dr. Hilda M. Fife
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Guldbeck, Per E. *The Care of Historical Collections: A Conservation Handbook for the Nonspecialist.* Nashville, American Association for State and Local History, 1972.

We like to think of ourselves as professionals as we zoom off to Mexico City to exchange parochialisms or read yet another tome on the wooden mallet-head makers of Crossed Sticks, Nova Scotia. There is a practical approach to the business of museums and I believe, *The Care of Historical Collections: A Handbook for the Nonspecialist* by Per E. Guldbeck, expresses this fact with clarity and qualification. Fear of the reactions of contemporaries, the possible use of outdated material or the potential publication of mistakes and misprints frequently provides a man with justification for not writing. To overcome these reservations an individual must be fervently committed to his purpose. Professor Guldbeck, Research Associate with the New York State Historical Association, has produced what he espouses as a working conservator under conditions not unfamiliar to many of us. In his capacity as a teacher of this subject in the classroom for the past eight years, he has accepted the responsi-

bility of interpreting and writing with a dedicated pragmatism and expertise.

The basics are illuminated in this paperback text. It is comforting to know that the American Association for State and Local History continues to maintain its obligation to the very local society. They have underwritten a workbook not a bible. Although the extraneous photographs are too small and of poor quality, the *Appendices* are complementary and pertinent as are the *Suggested Reading Lists* at the end of each chapter.

Conservation as a philosophy and a discipline has been always controversial. Any publication on the subject is not going to be inclusive of all men or ideas. Professor Guldbeck in his own words requests the reader to use common sense:

A work that attempts to précis the field of conservation encounters not only the possibility of errors, but of contrary opinions in approach to and methods of treating artifacts. For this reason I emphasize again that readers should and must make use of the reading lists and keep abreast of new literature. (page x)

Yet there are primary procedures that are universal. The first half of Guldbeck's text is devoted to these issues. Mundane but essential topics such as storage, security, fire protection, environment, documentation and the workshop area itself are discussed in a language for the layman with a churchmouse pocketbook.

I am sure the final chapters on *First Aid For Artifacts* will cause mild apprehension among some authorities. However, the text is verbose in its caution:

Keep in mind these principles no matter what materials you are working with: know as much as you can about the object, identify the problem and the required treatment, plan ahead thoroughly, and proceed cautiously. Remember that we are discussing first

aid, not major surgery - when a project is likely to take you beyond the scope of your experience and knowledge, admit it, and call in a specialist. (page 61)

Museum-oriented people have been much too casual in their interest in the object. Attitudes about our collections would be enhanced if we were to acquire even a modicum of that very rare virtue - humility. *The Care of Historical Collections* stresses the need for the understanding of the artifact. There is no doubt, after a thorough study of the book, that it was written by a man who has this understanding. The responsibilities of a collection are multitudinous and varied but none of them make sense without absolute respect for the integrity of the objects. That is what *The Care of Historical Collections, A Conservation Handbook for Nonspecialists* is all about.

Edmund E. Lynch, Director
Strawbery Banke, Inc.

Hale, Robert and Agnes. *Cushing's Island: Two Memoirs*. [Privately printed, 1971]

This is a frankly nostalgic account of an island in scenic Casco Bay only a short distance from the mainland bordering on Portland Harbor. So short, in fact, that easy commuting between the two made the island a mecca for those select few who withdrew from the city at the end of a hot summer's day to join their families and enjoy the cool breezes blowing in from the Atlantic past Portland Light, a stone's throw away. The style of the authors in describing the leisurely activities of the "summer people" seventy-five years ago is as engaging as the simple pastimes they describe. Both memoirs are delightful in recapturing the pace of a bygone day, not so far removed in point of time as in the ever accelerating tempo of the times. Charades, playing Tinkle Bell and other games, a walk to Whitehead after midnight to watch the sunrise, "the warm and windless nights" on the front lawn when the moon was full, a dip in the ocean in a swim suit that

covered well - all this in marked contrast to the frenzied activity of a go-go age of crowded beaches and state parks, of half covered bodies, and commercial amusements. One wonders how human nature could change so much. But on Cushing's Island it didn't, and that seems to be the point, "no store, no bar, no cinema, no taxi", and no wonder the last of the "old people" wondered who there was to take their place as the new. Cushing's Island could have its history over the last hundred years, because a dozen other nearby islands in Casco Bay, absorbing hundreds of "summer people", had theirs. For this we recommend, *Maine Islands in Story and Legend*, by Dorothy Stimpson from material compiled by the Maine Writer's Research Club (1960), or Herbert Jones's not too reliable, *Tales of Casco Bay* (1946). As for Cushing's Island, the Hales have given us a flavor not found in the general account.

Elizabeth Ring
Maine Historical Society

Fisher, Carleton E. *The History of Fort Halifax*.
Rockland, Courier-Gazette, Inc., 1972.

There has been a long-felt need for well-documented, readable, reasonably priced publications on our historic sites, readily available to the general public, residents and visitors alike. The need is admirably met in the case of America's oldest existing original blockhouse in Winslow, with the publication of the *History of Fort Halifax* by Maj. Gen. Carleton E. Fisher of Winthrop. Would that other historical Maine forts and sites could have similar treatment. The well-prepared and lucidly written text is enhanced by photographs taken by the author as well as proofs of ground plans, courtesy of the Maine Historical Society and the Massachusetts Archives, and an early 1900s photograph of the fort, courtesy of the State Parks and Recreation Commission which has supervised the fort since 1966 when it was turned over to the State by the Fort Halifax Chapter, D.A.R.

Dorris A. Isaacson, Editor
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