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Book Reviews

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WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY
Books

Fisher, Carleton E., *History of Clinton, Maine*, Augusta, Maine, Kennebec Journal Printing, 1970.

One of the real bargains in the local history field this year is Fisher's history of the town of Clinton. Printed on glossy paper, it is a beautifully bound and nicely illustrated book. General Fisher has well earned the right to be a thorough town historian. Educated at military schools and the University of Maryland, he is past president of the National Genealogical Society and of the Board for Certification of Genealogists.

He served for many years in the United States Army, attaining the rank of colonel. Helping to organize the Maine State Guard, he later served as its commander. General Fisher, in retirement, has filled his life with the useful pursuit of preserving the heritage of our native state. His previous accomplishments include the compilation of the vital records of Clinton and authorship of the *Topical Index to the National Genealogical Society Quarterly*.

History of Clinton, Maine is a genealogical treasure house. The extensive footnoting throughout the book suggests to the reader many new historical sources. There is a detailed listing of servicemen and their records. But the author really reveals in the index the sort of painstaking work that is his trademark. It is a thorough listing of persons, place names and subjects that is rarely found in local histories. Yet, it is something of inestimable help.

Professional historians have often scorned traditional histories in two aspects. First, they accuse them of being "eulogistic and pietistic" in their attitude toward their ancestors. In this respect, Fisher is a traditional local historian. He does feel that the men of the past were generally noble and his home town generally exemplary. However, the author is devoted to the search for truth. The reader will find throughout the book many corrections of errors in earlier sources. The author has searched for his material with a careful eye and has not taken the sources of the past uncritically without cross-checking.

A second criticism that is made of traditional local histories is that they are often a "collage" in their treatment

of the facts. Instead of weaving the total fabric of the community together, local historians often assemble a loose collection of accounts with little attempt to present analysis or relationships. In particular, there seems so often to be little relevance between local history and the general sweep of larger events.

This is perhaps the greatest weakness in General Fisher's book. Clinton's churches, schools and businesses, civic organizations and fraternal orders are each dealt with separately from their beginnings to the present time. Because they are treated individually, there is no correlation between various institutions which appeared at the same time or would serve to illustrate some broader historical movement.

But weaving so many threads together is indeed a difficult task in any town. It also requires a selectivity which may leave out something considered valuable at another time or to be useful in a newer method of interpretation. Fisher, by using a more traditional method of organization, has applied his thoroughness to each organization or institution in his home town. This extensive, factual compilation with a good index affords the professional historian with the tools by which he can analyze the place of Clinton in the more general movements of our country as a whole.

In reading through the history of Clinton, several items were of particular interest to this reader. It is interesting to note that two of the town's original families were French Huguenots who came to this country by way of Germany. Clinton had its complement of Revolutionary veterans. Many veterans came to settle in Maine after the war and were buried here. But it is good to be reminded that there were men already in Maine at the time of the American Revolution and many of these also served on distant battlefields. Clinton was a town that provided some of these men.

The old idea that America was built entirely by private enterprise has come under increasing attack by historians. There were, as a matter of fact, many government subsidies and regulations from the earliest times, which modified a free market economy. Because these modifications were done by state and local actions, an understanding of them has long been neglected. But the list is growing as new studies are made and the importance of local studies is realized. General Fisher has discovered a new and significant one to add to the list. Beginning in 1814, the town of Clinton regulated fishing on the Sebasticook River. At various times, they limited the number of fish to be caught per person, they auctioned off a monopoly privilege for fishing, and they tried to fix the

price of fish being sold.

In this book, the reader will find little of the lively social rivalries or political jousting so common in Maine towns. But the genealogist will find it a delight. The local reader will find many enjoyable pictures. The social historian will find helpful information on musicians, writers and fraternities. The economic historian will find a wealth of information on everything from a bog iron foundry to the tannery for which Clinton is particularly noted. The general reader will find a continuous stream of interesting items: an Indian scare, floods and fires, and a long parade of other names, places and facts.

Roger C. Storms

Wight, D[enman] B., *The Wild River Wilderness*. Littleton, N.H., Courier Printing Co., 1971.

This book is what the title suggests - a history of a land area almost completely devoid of people in a little known part of western Maine. At first glance it would seem as profitable to construct a story about a block of unorganized townships in the wilds of northern Piscataquis or Aroostook counties never touched by civilization except for the spasmodic operations of lumbermen and the penetration of sportsmen in search of big game. Many wild unsettled regions of Maine are graced with scenery as classic as that described with feeling and charm by the author of this book. However, for several reasons the effort of author Wight in this study has merit over and above any similar effort which might be made about any wild forested area of the north.

In location and topography the Wild River country is distinctive. Roughly, in Maine, it lies between the well-known towns of Fryeburg and Bethel; more specifically the area extends from the little-known towns of Stow, just north of Fryeburg, to Gilead, just west of Bethel before one reaches Shelburne, N.H. on Route 2. The 60,000 acres which comprise this area includes two unincorporated townships: Bean's Purchase in eastern New Hampshire and Batchelder's Grant in western Maine with parts of other grants and towns. A state boundary exists but does not divide. The area is in fact a part of the White Mountain National Forest and that attests to the fact that in the study of regional history geographical similarities are more logical than political boundaries arbitrarily drawn. Significantly, it might be said that this dissolves one-tenth of the line that binds Maine to the Union,

for unlike any other state on the mainland of North America, Maine is bounded by only one state and that state is New Hampshire.

Topographically, Wild River, fed by a multitude of mountain brooks, drains this mountainous terrain alternately ram-paging and flowing serenely to its union with the Androscoggin in Gilead. In the south it reaches almost to the Saco which, too, has its source in the White Mountains. Most spectacular of the physical features is Evans Notch, named for Captain John Evans which harks back to the last of the Indian depredations just before the Revolution.

What is there in this heavily wooded area for a local historian to write about except scenery and wildlife? What is there, indeed, and it seems a bit eerie - a town called Hastings which existed at the turn of the last century but was never incorporated and is now grown to red pine and white spruce, and a railroad fourteen miles long never chartered by either of the two states in which it operated nor mentioned in any railroad history. As ghostlike as this sounds, pictures do not lie. Over seventy are included in this brief study. Starting from scratch the challenge for the author was to connect the seen with the unseen and herein lies the value of the book. In the absence of town records there existed for the researcher only company and individual private records, newspapers and personal interviews, and routine county records of land transfers and wills. In the study of these no stone was left unturned, for the Wild River country was the country of author Wight. While neither footnotes nor bibliography as such are included, almost invariably the author gives his source in the narrative, describing his researches as he goes along. Although this method is somewhat novel to the professional historian, it serves its purpose and increases the admiration for the author who obviously persevered.

For the Maine historian in search of material, the story of the people in this area is essentially the story of lumbermen and their operations. Out of a welter of land transfers, mortgages, and other legal papers we learn that a few settlers pushed in from the Saco River towns south, that by 1820 seventeen heads of families were settled there, and that in this early period Ellis B. Usher of Hollis and Joseph Hobson of Saco bought land extensively, built sawmills, and constructed a dam which was washed out in 1860. Ten years later no families were listed in Batchelder's Grant. Shortly after this, Major Gideon Hastings and his two brothers of Bethel and Fryeburg, and later Gideon's son David, eventually controlled

25,000 acres, built a company town at "Nigger Opening" in Batchelder's grant and prospered. The town's history was short. After a score of years, the Hastings sold out to the Wild River Lumber Company and by 1904 that company ceased to operate.

Minor activities over the years are described for those interested in economic and social history. A fairly detailed table of contents and an excellent index are there to help, and end papers make it amply clear what the physical features are of this unique area. D.B. Wight, also author of *Androscoggin River Valley* (1967) was the one to write about it.

Elizabeth Ring

Smith, David C. *Lumbering and the Maine Woods: A Bibliographical Guide*. Portland, Maine Historical Society, 1971.

All members of the Society will receive their copy of this publication in August. Resulting from a decade of research on the subject, Dr. Smith, associate professor of history at the University of Maine, Orono, has compiled a fresh, comprehensive readers guide to the wealth of research materials available on Maine's foremost industry.

Dr. Smith has recently published a massive study entitled, *A History of Papermaking in the United States, 1691-1969*, and his *History of Lumbering in Maine, 1860-1930* is soon to be published by the University of Maine Press.

Lumbering and the Maine Woods is the first in a series of projected "Bibliographical Guides" by which the Society hopes to provide fresh, up-to-date surveys of materials for the study of Maine History in key areas written by specialists.

At present, Dr. James S. Leamon of Bates College is working on *Maine during the Revolution* and Dr. Charles E. Clark of the University of New Hampshire is compiling *Maine during the Colonial Period*. *Maine Indians*, a subject of intense investigation currently, has been transformed by Roger B. Ray, President of the Society, from a "preliminary inventory of materials in the Society Library" into a greatly expanded "Bibliographical Guide" to be available this fall.

Suggestions for future topics and compilers will be gratefully received from the membership. Please address all comments, suggestions, and criticisms to the Director, Gerald Morris.

Extra copies of *Lumbering and the Maine Woods* are available for \$2.00 (plus 10¢ sales tax for Maine residents).