

2-1-1971

## Book Reviews

Allan R. Whitmore  
*University of Maine Portland-Gorham*

Roger B. Ray  
*Maine Historical Society*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal>



Part of the [Modern Literature Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Whitmore, Allan R., and Roger B. Ray. "Book Reviews." *Maine History* 10, 3 (1971): 84-91.  
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol10/iss3/4>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact [um.library.technical.services@maine.edu](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).

WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY  
Books

Schriver, Edward O. *Go Free: The Antislavery Impulse in Maine, 1833-1855*, University of Maine Studies No. 91, Orono, University of Maine Press, 1970.

The most striking manifestation of the pervasive reform spirit in the *ante-bellum* North appeared in the diverse efforts to end the abomination of black slavery in the South. The understandable interest which historians have since directed toward this movement has received additional impetus from the contemporary national concern with racial relations. Seeking historical insight into current problems as well as personal satisfaction of intellectual curiosity, scholars have recorded the activities of the abolitionists, probed the motivations of the reformers, and analyzed the antislavery programs in various regions. Based on his recent doctoral dissertation at the University of Maine: Orono, Edward O. Schriver--archivist and assistant professor of history at the state university--has presented in *Go Free* the first scholarly appraisal of Maine abolitionism and, indeed, the first general treatment of the subject since Austin Willey's *The History of the Antislavery Cause in State and Nation* in 1886. Despite authoritative documentation and a potentially fascinating topic, the brief monograph unfortunately does not display sufficient imagination and thoroughness to approach a definitive analysis of the character, dimensions, and meaning of abolitionism in this state.

In a form reminiscent of Dwight Dumond's survey of the national movement in *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America*, Mr. Schriver initially analyzes the components of natural rights, social improvement, and Christian witness which formed the antislavery rationale in Maine. The focus for the remainder of the study concerns the various means through which the vanguard of Maine abolitionism--Samuel Fessenden, David Thurston, Austin Willey, and William Smyth--attacked slavery by organizing societies, delivering speeches, and leading campaigns to stimulate financial and popular support.

With the Maine movement so frail and the leadership so concentrated, the absence of a detailed assessment of these men dismays this reader. One catches fleeting glimpses of the central figures presenting addresses, expressing ideals, and attending conventions, but the men, as individuals, remain

obscure. Mr. Schriver, for example, cites Smyth as a participant in a letter-writing public exchange with a Southern divine and identifies him as an editor, a Bowdoin College "teacher of mathematics and a solid abolitionist." No further personal information about Smyth appears. The author does not draw upon, or refute, accounts of Smyth's participation in the underground railroad. In point of fact, the Bowdoin professor's assistance to fugitive slaves earned for him animosity from Brunswick shipowners and merchants trading with the South. Ultimately a devious effort to force his removal from the Bowdoin faculty inspired unusual student collaboration to save the position of the popular abolitionist professor.

With essentially minor variations, similar superficial characterization appears in the coverage of other major figures. The author chronicles their programs and rationales, but ignores the abolitionists as people. The reader wonders what qualities describe these reformers. Were they genial or moody, dynamic or dull, gregarious or introverted? Were they paternalistic or equalitarian in their social views? If sincerely concerned about the slave in Alabama, what did they think about free blacks in Maine? How did abolitionists regard white laborers, utopian communities, political reform, and the proper role of women? Was their primary goal to influence Maine public opinion concerning slavery or to end slavery in the South? Did their personalities or their attitudes toward other social questions contribute to their lack of success in the antislavery movement? What do the experiences of these four men, as well as those of such secondary leaders as Ezekiel Holmes, James Appleton, and Charles C. Cone, reveal about the distinctive character of abolitionism in Maine? Might not the 177 recorded participants (all male) in the founding of the Maine Antislavery Society in 1834 have provided a fruitful basis for more adequately evaluating reform support? The author might also have tried to relate his findings to the conclusions of other scholars of American antislavery activity. Given the directions and concerns of abolitionist historiography--as well as the interest of general readers--, a chapter systematically treating the major figures would have significantly strengthened the study. One can appreciate the limitations of available source materials, but the preface could at least express the author's perception of broader questions about his subject. Instead, his prefatory remarks about social structure and political parties demonstrate a tendency to dismiss, rather than to investigate, relevant considerations

which would increase the importance of his study.

The criticism does not pertain to peripheral figures and topics. The author correctly alleges that a few men comprised the core of Maine abolitionism, but makes little effort to characterize these individuals. He writes of a humanitarian impulse, a religious impulse, and a political impulse, but his terminology distorts the reality that an impulse has its source and meaning in imperfect human beings.

Another instance of the author's limited thoroughness appears in his treatment of the consistent failure or microscopic successes that attended abolitionist efforts. He clearly analyzes the means which antislavery associations used to achieve their goals. He repeatedly describes the launchings of newspapers, the initiations of lecture series, the formations of auxiliary societies, and the preparations of letter-writing campaigns to influence politicians. As each brief description concludes, Mr. Schriver characteristically and accurately reports the futility of these efforts. After recording the failure of the Reverend David Thurston's speaking tour in 1837 and 1838, for example, the author observes that two other lecturers "did no better than Thurston in demonstrating to the people of Maine the urgency and righteousness of abolition," and another unfortunate orator fled the state after becoming a target for egg-throwers. The subsequent establishment of *The Advocate of Freedom* in Brunswick "met with no more favorable response than had the campaign of the traveling agents." The author then describes the formation of a petition campaign to influence the Maine legislature and comments that "the results...were as meager as the harvest reaped by the other two methods of attacking the slave system." As the recital of futility unfolds, one waits impatiently for the author to account for the stark failure of the Maine antislavery movement.

The preface asserts that Maine's distance from "the centers of the conflict" and the state's small black population render understandable the limited popular support of abolitionism. The first reason is vague; a reader is uncertain if the passage refers to the state's distance from Southern slave-holding regions or from Northern centers of agitation. Even accepting the author's two assumptions as accurate and meaningful, do they satisfactorily resolve the matter? Is not Mr. Schriver again prematurely closing doors rather than raising questions? One wonders, for example, about the cases of outright hostility, rather than of apathy, which appeared in the egg-throwing throngs of East Thomaston and Belfast, the anti-abolitionist meetings in 1835, and the

refusals of church congregations in Wells, Freeport, Saco, Kennebunk, and Brunswick, to permit abolitionists to speak. What did the existence of segregated schools and the publication of ethnic jokes about blacks in newspapers suggest about racism? Does the nativist activity in *ante-bellum* Maine not imply something about the contemporary spirit of tolerance? Were Southern slave-owners not protected by the states' rights' and localist emphases of the dominant Democratic party in this state and by the nearly universal reverence for private property? Indeed, what importance had the disposition and influence of Maine residents who themselves owned slaves or held other economic interests in the South? Do studies of sociology and racism offer insights into the Maine situation? Might not the striking growth in membership, influence, and organization of the temperance movement in that era have furnished a useful comparative model to evaluate abolitionism?

Mr. Schriver describes the rationale and programs of Maine abolitionists. He accurately identifies antislavery newspapers, meetings, debates, associations, and parties. Repetitive appendices detail local platforms and record the votes received by the Liberty Party in Maine cities and towns. Although analyzing the rationale of Maine abolitionists, he does not demonstrate in what ways the intellectual impetus differed from that in other states. The apparent absence of such distinctiveness raises questions about the appropriateness of the focus for this study.

The author treats the abolitionists on their own terms. Readers may join him in saluting the reformers for their noble principles, but is encomium sufficient? However praiseworthy their principles, did *Maine* abolitionists actually produce a change in the disposition of the state's citizens toward slavery or cause material alteration in the status of Southern slavery? Mr. Schriver does not make the case for them in the text that he states in his conclusion. By dismissing outright the antislavery credentials of Maine political leaders, the author has rejected a line of investigation which might well have demonstrated definite influence of the abolitionists in modifying, if not remaking, Maine social thought. In presenting a clear description of the ideals of the Maine antislavery movement and in recording the reform methodology, *Go Free* provides a useful introduction to abolitionism in this state, but a thoroughly satisfactory treatment of the subject requires more penetrating and imaginative analysis.

Allan R. Whitmore, Assistant Professor  
University of Maine, Portland-Gorham

Soule, William H., editor. *Prehistoric Peoples of Maine, A Maine State Museum Teacher's Resource Unit*. Maine State Museum, Augusta, 1970.

The editor of this unit is well qualified. The material is clearly written. The directions are clear. The visual aids illustrate adequately the intended steps to a directed conclusion. But I do not see how a teacher or a pupil would gain an understanding of the prehistoric peoples of Maine from this kit.

It may be that I should complain against a level of standards not against the editor. The publication bears impressive imprimaturs. Yet what must have been considered appropriate as resource material is not adequate for the teacher. If used it will promote misunderstanding. It is the sort of thing about which American Indian scholars complain. (1)

The subject of the prehistoric peoples of Maine is extremely difficult to explore. Mostly we know how much we do not know. In Maine we have quite a bit of material immediately preceding the arrival of the European explorers. But there are important gaps in what we know in the period of pre-history. Much remains for archeologists. Also we are increasingly aware that some of the conclusions of nineteenth and early twentieth century archeologists were conjecture. Historians have also misled us. For example, certain historians felt that the inhabitants of Maine in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, A.D., had direct contact with the Norse. (2) This has been thoroughly exploded by recent scholarship. (3) It was also felt that cultural development from a central source in Asia swept through Europe to the western hemisphere. Now evidence points to civilizations in several world areas which came into being without apparent communication and at about the same time, e.g. McNeill and Eliade.

The school of Boas produced some great ethnologists. One of them, the late Dr. Frank Speck, worked many years on Maine Indian mythology. But as the ethnologists worked with the myths and legends the question arose as to how far back in time can we learn from them what earlier people in Maine thought and did. It is quite possible to separate good scholarship from superficial chatter but contemporary scholars feel that many myths have been corrupted by time. Certain myths and legends need not be challenged. This is illustrated by the story of the Kiowas as written by Scott Momaday in his *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. But we do not have evidence to say that the myths of Maine Indians tell us about them 10,000 years ago. It seems probable that the roots of the all

important Kuloskap legends of Maine were known to our early inhabitants. But when? It appears that some form of this myth or legend was well known to the Micmacs. (4) Did Maine Indians learn of this legend from the Micmacs or did it come in from the west? And again when was it known in Maine?

Evidence indicates that Maine Indians in early times migrated seasonally but to well defined areas. But we are not at all sure we can call them nomadic. Indeed it is possible to consider that they had a strong sense of territory and tribe. We suspect they had a rather complex society. We do have one reference of a find near Ellsworth Falls that shows human habitation about 2000 B.C. (5) This report, which one of the archeologists involved has termed incomplete, does tell us quite a bit about the people there at that time. But from this report no scholar would want to make definite statements on the social, political, or economic structure of the people of Maine at that time.

At one point in time the Jews realized that they were not just descendents of a tribe but were a people. This is recorded in Genesis 48. The realization of this responsibility was put in the story of Jacob as he prepared to die. American Indians and Maine Indians have known this sense of people as a greater responsibility than the heritage of tribe only. They have clung to this belief despite the white man's pressure for 300 years to assimilate them into a white dominated society. Was this concept held by Maine Indians 10,000 years ago? I don't know but certainly I could not assert that at that time they were "small, isolated nomadic bands which wandered constantly in search of large game animals" as is stated in the text of this Resource Unit.

If further such Resource Units are contemplated, it is hoped that they will attain far higher standards than this initial effort.

Roger B. Ray  
Maine Historical Society

-----NOTES-----

1. Henry, Jeannette. *Textbooks and the American Indian*. American Indian Historical Society, San Francisco, 1970.
2. Kohl, J.G. *A History of the Discovery of Maine*. Maine Historical Society, Collections, Series 2, Vol. 1: Portland, 1869.
3. Jones, Gwyn. *The Norse Atlantic Saga*. London, New York, 1964.

Mowat, Farley, *Westviking, The Ancient Norse in Greenland and North America*. Boston, 1965.

Magnusson, Magnus and Palsson, Hermann, trans. *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*. New York, 1966.

4. Mallery, Garrick. *Picture-Writing of the American Indians*. Tenth Annual Report, Bureau of Ethnology, 1888-9, Washington, D.C. 1893.
5. Hadlock, Wendell S. and Byers, Douglas S. *Radiocarbon Dates From Ellsworth Falls, Maine*. *American Antiquity*, April 1956, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 419-420.

#### Briefly Noted

Bacon, Ralph M. *The Old Village of Woodstock, Maine, 1808 to 1840-50*. Bryant Pond, Maine, Woodstock Chamber of Commerce, 1970. 10 pages with map.

Bennett, Mary E., editor. *Poland: past and present, 1795-1970*. Poland Anniversary Committee, 1970. 106 pages, illustrated.

Dennett, Ronald P., editor. *Franklin County Edition -- Maine Sesquicentennial, 1820-1970*. 32 pages, illustrated newspaper.

Dingley, Robert J., compiler. *A Mini-History of Naples, Maine*. Prepared for the Naples Historical Society, 1970. 16 pages.

Drewett, Bertha K., editor. *Index to the Annals of Warren* [by Cyrus Eaton] *1605-1876*. Warren Historical Society, 1970. 47 pages.

Fisher, Carleton E. *History of Clinton, Maine*. Augusta, 1970. 409 pages, illustrated. *To be reviewed in the Newsletter*.

Griffiths, Thomas M. and Arthur M., editors. *A Pictorial history of the State of Maine on the occasion of its 150th Birthday, 1970*. Lewiston, printed by Twin City Printery in cooperation with the Maine Sesquicentennial Commission, 1970. Illustrated, maps.

Libby, F. Wayne. *Hartland, Maine, 1820-1970*. Hartland Sesquicentennial Committee, 1970. 83 pages, illustrated.

Sturtevant, Reginald H. *A History of Livermore, Maine*, with drawings by S. W. Hilton. Lewiston, 1970. 256 pages, illustrated. *To be reviewed in the Newsletter.*

*Town of Kennebunk, Maine, 1820-1970.* Special edition of the *York County Coast Star* in 8 sections with cover. Published June 24, 1970.

*Explorations in Maine History: Miscellaneous Papers. "Proceedings of the Sesquicentennial Colloquium, March 30, 1970."* University of Maine at Orono, June, 1970. 64 pages.

Includes the texts of remarks by Clifford Shipton and Francis O'Brien on the subject, "Resources for Maine History;" Ronald Banks on "Maine's Resources and the Nation;" and David Smith on "Maine's Resources and the State." In addition are the reports of six graduate history students regarding their research in Maine history.

Available for \$1.00 from Professor Arthur M. Johnson, 208 E. Annex, University of Maine at Orono, Orono, Maine 04473.

#### WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY

##### *Periodicals and Newspapers*

Compiled by Shirley E. Welch

ABBREVIATIONS: *AM* Antiques Magazine. *CLQ* Colby Library Quarterly. *DEM* Down East Magazine. *FH* Forest History. *HNH* Historical New Hampshire. *LJM* Lewiston Journal Magazine. *MT* Maine Times. *MA* Middleborough Antiquarian. *NEHGR* New England Historical & Genealogical Register. *PM* Portland Magazine. *PPH* Portland Press Herald. *PN* Preservation News.

ANDERSON, MAIZIE FREEMAN. Grammy's house...in memory of her grandmother, Bertha Tucker Lowe. *DEM* January 1971.

BARTER, J. MALCOLM. The Scott Paper Company. *DEM* March 1971.

BRUMBAUGH, THOMAS B. Horatio Greenough in the classic mold.

*AM* February 1971.

COLE, JOHN N. Who is the Maine consumer? *MT* November 13, 1970.

COOK, MARGE. Christina Olson's World. *DEM* March 1971.

CRANE, JONAS. Gale of 1839 famous in Marine history [Basis of Longfellow's "Wreck of the Hesperus".] *LJM* November 14, 1970.

----- Sea murders on rum runner never solved. [Ship "Dwight"] *LJM* November 21, 1970.

FAY, PAULINE. Serene Searsmont is rich in memories and history. *LJM* December 5, 1970.