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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Unearthed: Storied Artifacts and Remarkable Predecessors of the Saint Joseph's College Campus. By Steven L. Bridge. (Standish, ME: Saint Joseph's College Press, 2016. Pp. 344. Paper. \$30.00)

More than a century ago, the Sisters of Mercy first explored the possibility of opening a Catholic college near Maine's most populous city, Portland. As the order considered potential locations, Superior General Mother M. Evangelist Ward and Assistant Mother M. Edwina decided to visit a prospective site along the scenic shores of Sebago Lake. The property owner, Harry Verrill, had built a chapel on this land many years earlier. As Mother Ward and Mother Edwina stepped into the church, two familiar figures in the stained glass greeted them—Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Edward—their respective patron saints. The sisters believed it was a moment of divine intervention, a direct response to their anxious prayers. Since its inception to the present, Saint Joseph's College of Maine has amassed to some 474 acres. Within these property acquisitions, a rich history lies just beneath the surface. Steven Bridge has not only excavated its ruminants, but also illuminated various threads of connectivity that place the college, as well as its former residents and their artifacts, into the wider narratives of American and world history.

While some objects will interest readers more than others, the juxtaposition of the ordinary with the astonishing reveals how Saint Joseph's campus, today a religious and educational haven, has also served as a locus for American consumerism and cultural transference. A petticoat whale oil lamp, an "Edison" light bulb, a Coca-Cola soda bottle: these discovered items symbolize American ingenuity and innovation, a central theme of our nation's past. Other chapters discuss a Chinese calligraphy wash bowl, a Haviland teacup, and a stone relief of the Virgin Mary. All of these objects traveled thousands of miles to reach Standish, Maine, and represent different traditions, religious beliefs, and philosophical ideas. Their presence nicely coincides with the idea that the college, much like its physical surroundings, serves as place of social inclusiveness, intellectual exchange, and spiritual growth. As a George Washington scholar, I was particularly intrigued by Bridge's discovery of the Washington Inaugural Button. This memento links one of Saint Joseph's historic landowners with the "father of his country," demonstrating the incredible reach of political networks in early America. It also highlights the originality of Bridge's interpretation,

opting to tell the college's history through its previous owners and artifacts rather than simply as an institution. While the objects sometimes received very brief histories, the author's breadth across time and space is nonetheless impressive. It will serve as a valuable resource for Saint Joseph's faculty, students, and alumni, and one hopes it might even inspire similar efforts at other historic universities and colleges.

MATTHEW COSTELLO

White House Historical Association

Creating Acadia National Park: The Biography of George Bucknam Dorr. By Ronald H. Epp. (Bar Harbor, ME: Friends of Acadia, 2016. Pp. 432. Paper. \$20.00)

The larger-than-life, walrus-moustached, dapper-dressed philanthropist named George Bucknam Dorr, has long been treated more as a figure of myth than of fact. As the "founding father" of Acadia, Dorr has been surrounded by both local and park-ranger lore for decades, but until now, has not received a complete and thorough historical evaluation. Ronald Epp's biography of Dorr reveals the man behind the moustache and expertly sources many steps along this individual's long life by uniting scattered historical records.

Epp's work invites the reader to a genealogical adventure into the "Who's Who" of wealthy Boston families and notable figures that were influential in shaping late-nineteenth-century business, law, thought, and social circles. Into this mix of New England's aristocracy, the story of the Dorr family is chronicled through letters, school records, property development, and financial ventures. These critical sources support the intricate story of George Dorr's formative years and indicate the developing skills that he would use decades later on Mount Desert Island (MDI). Ronald H. Epp, Ph.D. has spent decades researching New England families that have been influential in creating the eastern conservation movement, and therefore brings considerable knowledge and skill to the biography of a Massachusetts-born naturalist and philanthropist. A frequent face on Mount Desert Island, Epp has worked closely with the National Park Service and Friends of Acadia to collect and craft the most extensive biography of Acadia's founding father.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenthth century, Epp's account places the reader amid Massachusetts high society and expertly uncovers the Dorr

family dynamic in this wealthy world. While exploring the family's history, we are exposed to the privilege and adventure that their place in society afforded. Ultimately, through time and tragedy, George Dorr became the sole inheritor of an immense family fortune and estate on MDI. At this critical moment in American conservation history, Dorr turned his life into a mission that would permanently change the island as well as the creation of eastern parks.

Acadia National Park lovers should recognize the extensive labor that this biography represents as it traces the roots of the park through the men that brought federal protection to the island. Epp clearly captures the great passion and relentless drive of the man that brought the project together and shepherded it through its many legal twists and turns. However, Dorr was certainly not alone in his efforts in creating the park, and Epp accurately attributes the contributions of Dorr's compatriots in remarkable detail. Those familiar with MDI will rejoice to see the depth of the account, which includes both the "cottagers" and the locals that played integral parts in bringing the park to life.

After chronicling Dorr's passing, Epp revives a quote from then-park superintendent Ben Hadley, predicting that Dorr's name would likely be forgotten in two generations. Epp follows this quote: "it is this author's hope that this biography will be security against the realization of that prediction" (303). Based upon the extensive nature of the research and quality of the storytelling, it is likely that *Creating Acadia National Park* will stand as the definitive work on Dorr and the formation of Acadia for many years to come, hopefully disproving Ben Hadley's statement. Through an exhaustive and thorough search of records far and wide, Epp has created a groundbreaking biography for the founding father of Acadia. Locals and park enthusiasts now have an opportunity to "meet" the man credited for cobbling together a unique patchwork quilt of donated land and bringing federal protection of land east of the Mississippi to an island in Maine.

SEAN COX
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The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History. By John R. Gillis. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pp. 256. Cloth. \$27.50)

The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History, John R. Gillis's magisterial account of maritime shores, begins and ends by invoking Rachel Carson (1907–

1964). Gillis and Carson have much in common. Although Carson is best known for *Silent Spring*, an exposé of the unacknowledged dangers of DDT, her contemporary renown was due to three best-selling works on the ocean: *Under the Sea Wind* (1941), *The Sea Around Us* (1951), and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955). Gillis, who shares Carson's ecological worldview, advances Carson's mission to bring "millions of readers to the edge of the sea, reintroducing them to the precious environment that lies on both sides of the tide line" (2). By revealing just how "precious" shores are, Carson and Gillis both convey urgent messages to their contemporaries. Gillis also enjoins his readers to "live *with* our shores not just *on* them" (6, my emphasis).

The Human Shore, much like Carson's work, is subversive in its own right by revealing new knowledge that demands a new paradigm of economic, social, environmental, and political history. Iconoclasm, however, is not new to Gillis. He has built his distinguished career by exploding cultural myths through revealing the material and cultural truths that contradict them. Works like *For Better, For Worse: British Marriage, 1600 to the present* (1985) and *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (1996) challenge sacred convictions about marriage and family. Even his *Development of European Society, 1770–1870* (1977), which uses insights from "third world" countries in the twentieth century to understand Western development, undermines Western dualistic and hierarchical thinking. His works (like Carson's) repeatedly interrogate dualism and teleologism. *The Human Shore* also demands that we revise our conventional myths about the sea and the shore.

According to Gillis, Carson "inverted" our sacred terracentric beliefs about the "relationship between land and sea" when she declared that "life itself began in the sea" (18). Gillis argues that the landlocked Garden of Eden and other myths have promoted and perpetuated a false sense of our origins and that early humans (*Homo littoralis*) were oriented towards the sea. Early thalassocracies (*vide* the English and the Dutch) possessed a "distinctly archipelagic rather than a continental spatiality" (55). Fostering "continental" and "nationalistic" biases, our terracentric paradigms give unwarranted emphasis to the importance of agriculture to early humans and underestimate our hunting-gathering heritage. Gillis—like other revisionists, from William Cronon to James C. Scott—emphasizes the overlooked importance of hunting and gathering to our early history. Early humans were "aquatic foragers" who lived in mobile societies oriented towards the sea (9). When they turned to agriculture, these amphibians did not abandon the sea; rather, they combined part-time fishing and foraging with part-time agriculture.

Our terracentric biases have blinded us to an accurate sense of our own development and have also shaped the dualistic paradigms that distort our thinking. Our earliest ancestors thrived on the coasts in “ecotones,” regions where two biological communities overlap. They did not choose between land *or* sea. Their perspective saw things as *both/and* rather than as *either/or*. They saw no dichotomy between sea and land and did not construct coasts as borders *between* dualities. Gillis chooses his title *Human Shore* deliberately to refute false dualities and insist on the interdependence between humans and nature.

Continents were, thus, “hinterlands” before they were “heartlands.” This means that “nationalism” is a sort of “original hubris” based on a pastoral, agricultural ideal that supplanted a more fundamental and sustainable way of life oriented around coasts. Gillis’s revelations shatter treasured concepts, including our historical sense of the traditional “fishing village.” The idealized fishing village never existed. In reality, the “seaman’s life” was typically a “phase” of development: adolescents went to sea to learn a trade or as apprentice merchants and then settled down in inland dwellings safe from the ravages of storm and tide. When specialization and industrialization created a special class of people who supported themselves by work on the sea, these people were exploited proletarians who eked out meager and unpleasant existences in shantytowns, what Gillis calls the “great era of the proletarianized waterfront, roughly 1850–1950” (113). Then with increased industrialization, huge fishing vessels launched from even larger ports and came to represent “a full-time largely proletarian deep-sea occupation” (115). While early coastal dwellers thrived by fishing, gathering, and farming in ecotones, industrialism and capitalism brought a fishing monoculture that held the seeds of its own destruction. Our romantic picture of stable fishing communities with friendly villagers living in harmony with nature and each other is a myth of the nineteenth century—what Gillis calls “a long process of cultural colonization” (120) which denied the true nature of impoverished, unstable fishing communities.

The myths surrounding these fishing communities have shaped many twentieth- and twenty-first-century individual and regional identities. A nostalgic longing for a connection to the sea that can revitalize souls and livelihoods inspires people to build homes and choose vacations at the seaside. “Life now imitates art, even at the expense of life itself. From Scotland to Newfoundland, fishing villages survive, even thrive, in the absence of fishing” (121). Our society is becoming more and more “coastal,” with more than “half of the world’s population resid[ing] within 120 miles of the sea” (174).

Although Gillis does not directly mention it, Carson can help us face

the dilemma posed by our loss of myths and identities. We currently live in perilous times facing unparalleled human-induced environmental threats. Carson's sea books celebrate evolution and the implausible adaptability of shore creatures. In the face of the most threatening environments, sea life manages to adapt, change, and thrive. We should recognize that both sea creatures and our coastal forebears have endowed us with a heritage of adaptability and flexibility. By championing our true inheritance and following Carson's and Gillis's injunction to go "back to the sea" (v), we can use our flexibility and inventiveness to shape new paradigms and to solve the problems that we face.

Gillis cites a few examples of successful and sustainable practices, including some in Maine. The state of Maine figures importantly in *The Human Shore*. Gillis, himself, summers on Great Gott Island, Maine. Gillis reminds us that Maine's Wabanakis were "also an edge species" who defined themselves according to their habitation of the edge, the "People of the Dawn, living on the eastern edge of another great island" (84). Gillis also vividly captures Mainer's distinctive sense of time which is "not linear but diastolic, pulled by centripetal and centrifugal currents . . . tides and currents set the tempo and scale" (98). As with other coastal areas, Maine's population of farmer-fishers and mariners have been reduced: "only 25 of 5,300 miles of coastline any longer serve public purposes" (189). Contemporary Maine fisherfolk, nevertheless, are discovering innovative ways for sustainable living. Mainer's in Port Clyde remind us of the early connections of fishing to agriculture by drawing on models of local agricultural cooperatives. "Port Clyde Fresh Catch, [is] a community-supported fishery . . . based on selling directly to local customers" (176). These Mainer's are one small example of the flexible, resourceful thinking that Gillis calls for in order to "better understand not just our terraqueous planet but also ourselves" (198).

LAURA COWAN
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Orion on the Dunes: A Biography of Henry Beston. By Daniel G. Payne. (Boston: David R. Godine, 2016. Pp. 500. Hardcover. \$29.95)

Orion on the Dunes: A Biography of Henry Beston successfully presents a full-length study of the author's literary output in the context of a life lived in observation of nature. As Daniel G. Payne demonstrates, Beston adamantly maintained throughout his career that humanity was a part of

the natural world (xx). While previous studies of Beston's work have focused on the importance of *The Outermost House* (1928), a pivotal work in twentieth-century nature writing, Payne successfully argues for the importance of this theme to most if not all of Beston's major works. Daniel G. Payne is an English Professor at SUNY College at Oneonta. His expertise in American and environmental literature contributes to this study's critical insights into Beston's life and works in the context of American nature writing.

Readers may be surprised to learn that Beston's oeuvre includes memoirs, biographies, and children's fairy tales in addition to his more well-known examples of nature writing. Through a critical study of Beston's literary themes, Payne provides ample evidence for the author's role in the modern environmental movement where, alongside individuals like Aldo Leopold, he helped to shift "the focus of early twentieth century conservation to a more expansive gaze" (xxiv-xxv). Beston's unifying theme of humanity's place within the natural world often challenged "anthropocentric perspectives concerning nature" while displaying "the link between the cycles of nature and humankind's yearning for a spiritual bond with the world," a connection disrupted by "the dangers presented by our industrial, consumerist culture" (xxv).

The study makes extensive use of archival resources, including the Beston Family Archives at Bowdoin College and the Elizabeth Coatsworth papers at the University of New England, among those of other institutions. Use of correspondence is married to historical and textual analysis in order to provide an expansive picture of Beston's significance to modern environmental thought.

The book traces Beston's development as an author from his youth in Massachusetts and his Harvard undergraduate days to his volunteer ambulance service in World War I. His volunteer experiences became the basis for his first major work, *A Volunteer Poilu* (1916) (27). Beston's subsequent attempts to come to grips with his experiences in the conflict included several books of fairy tales for children such as *The Firelight Fairy Book* (1919) as well as biographies of individual artists and authors in *The Book of Galant Vagabonds* (1925). If *The Outermost House* (1928) became Beston's best known book, Payne's approach demonstrates how Beston's subsequent works also sought to build connections with nature and to find hope in a world fraught with uncertainty (121). Subsequent chapters show how Beston's disillusionment with America's changing cultural climate continued to grow through the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War.

By providing the reader with literary and historical contexts, the biography effectively places Beston's nature writing in the context of twen-

tieth century environmental thought. Payne demonstrates how Beston's focus on humanity's place in the natural world, as shown in *The Outermost House*, continued to appear in later works such as *Herbs and the Earth* (1935), *Northern Farm* (1948), and *The St. Lawrence* (1942). In conclusion, Payne offers a definitive biography that argues for a more significant place for Beston in the literary canon of American nature writing by providing readers with a larger appreciation of the scope of Beston's creative output. The work will interest scholars of environmental literature and environmental history as well as the general reader.

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