

WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY
Books

The following review is reprinted from the October 25, 1970 issue of the *Maine Sunday Telegram* with the kind permission of the publisher:

Banks, Ronald F. *Maine Becomes A State. The Movement to Separate Maine from Massachusetts, 1785-1820.* Published for the Maine Historical Society by Wesleyan University Press.

A professor of economics at the Harvard Business School, now president of a distinguished university, once put it to me that the biggest mistake Maine ever made was to separate from Massachusetts.

Scoffing at the idea that we were proud of our independence, he pointed out that Boston still calls the shots on our financial structure, as well as in other ways, and that if we were still part of the Commonwealth, we would provide a balance of political power that could come close to calling the shots on Boston.

While the District of Maine remained within the Commonwealth, it sometimes did provide a balance of power, and eventually, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, helped to topple the conservative Federalist oligarchy for once and all, replacing it with the Jefferson Democratic-Republicans.

So far as Maine was concerned, the central motive throughout this struggle, which lasted almost 40 years, was the desire for independent statehood. Like all movements for independence it embraced several factors, economic, territorial, and to some extent, religious.

Most Maine schoolchildren have been taught that Maine was admitted to the Union as a free state to balance the admission of Missouri as a slave state in 1820, and this was a part of the picture, but of the complex history of the separation movement they have been told little or nothing. Indeed, many Maine people who are fairly well acquainted with our history have avoided the subject up to now because of its confusing picture.

Dr. Ronald F. Banks, who teaches Maine history at Orono, has put us all in his debt for his fruitful study of the separation movement. His work has been long in preparation, and its appearance, under the sponsorship of the Maine Historical Society, could not have been more timely, coming out

as it does amidst the gathering shades of our Sesquicentennial Year.

In the years succeeding the Revolution Maine was in a parlous state. With a population of about 60,000 strung out along the coast, she laid most of her troubles to the "avaricious Puritans of Massachusetts" who constituted not only the bureaucracy, but owned most of the land through the old royal grants of colonial days.

On the part of the common people, "those with watchful eyes and eloquent rumors," there was resentment against the power of the small upper class of the seacoast towns, from Kittery to Blue Hill, whose interest lay with the central power in Boston. They were characterized as the "cocked hat" set, from the cocked hat, bush wig and red cloak of appointed office-holders, the clergy, the few professional men and the more prosperous merchants.

Some of them had been lukewarm during the Revolution and there was a fear of the Tories resuming their old power.

The growing strength of the Baptists and Methodists with increasing migration into the District had shaken the power of the Congregationalists, the old established church, and eventually they were to become Jeffersonians almost to a man.

There were also some men of property who did not see eye to eye with Boston, and it was among these that the initial movement for separation began: men such as General Peleg Wadsworth, William Gorham, Stephen Longfellow, Jr., whose considerable landholdings were dwarfed by those of the great landowners, and oddly, the leading clergyman of the District, Parson Thomas Smith of Portland.

The Falmouth Gazette, our first newspaper, was founded to promote the cause of separation, its first issue being Jan. 1, 1785, but later its successor, the Portland Gazette, became the voice of opposition. Some years hence the Eastern Argus, the progenitor of these present papers, was founded and became the powerful organ of the Democrats, as well as the chief exponent of separation.

Shay's Rebellion frightened off some of the original separationists, not wanting to embarrass the Massachusetts leaders who were trying to arrest it, but a radical element persisted, led by the redoubtable Brigadier Samuel Thompson of Topsham (of Mowatt fame), who found support among those settlers, particularly the squatters in the Kennebec Purchase, who would have been satisfied to obtain a clear title to their lands.

The agitation was perfectly legal under Article 19 of the Massachusetts Constitution, and the story as Banks tells it is

full of dramatic interest, with the great mobility of personalities back and forth from one side to another, as circumstances altered, not to mention the soft-shoe shuffling by those in the center.

The Massachusetts Federalists, who opposed separation, managed to contain the situation through a number of moves. Their General Court would alleviate the worst grievances as they arose, such as exempting wild lands from taxes for ten years, establishing new terms of court when cases had backed up for as much as three years, and a decision to found a college, which eventually became Bowdoin.

But the most important measure in dampening down the separation movement was an act confirming squatters in the possession of their lands. "100 acres confirmed to them gratis will quiet them," wrote one Federalist leader in a private letter.

Meetings and conventions for separation were held frequently in the District, but economic conditions improved, and only a few continued to agitate, among them Peleg Wadsworth, of whom it was said that he "wanted little more than to become ruler of a new state." Whether true or not, few of the actors on either side were moved by anything other than self-interest, the mainspring of human conduct.

A second phase of agitation began in 1791, led by a Portland lawyer, Daniel Davis. In his pamphlet, "An Address to the Inhabitants of the District of Maine upon the Subject of Separation...", a remarkable public relations effort, one should note his recommendation that the Governor's Council be omitted from a new government, as well as Lieutenant-Governor, "a superfluous and useless officer...nothing but a death-watch to the Governour, waiting, and perhaps wishing, for his decease or removal."

The first Massachusetts-sanctioned election on the separation question was held May 5, 1792, and was turned down by the Maine voters. Out of a population of 100,000 at this time only 4,500 voted, but many did not have the franchise because of property qualifications. York County, which has always had an affinity to New Hampshire, was solidly opposed, and indeed at a later period in the movement there were many there who favored seceding to the Granite State.

Another factor in the defeat was the concerted opposition of the shipowners, who were liberally favored under the peculiar "Coasting Laws," which Banks humorously explains.

The next impulse took place in 1797, and this time there was support from the great landowners such as General Henry Knox and Alexander Baring (later Lord Ashburton), in order to

increase their land values.

In the May, 1779 election, separation won by a small margin, 2,785 to 2,412 with the greatest opposition again in York County. The Portland vote was 26 in favor, 70 against.

The Federalist General Court ignored the result with the excuse that too few votes were cast, as they knew they could not control the new state.

The leadership of the movement now passed to William King, shipowner, who was called the "Sultan of Bath," and a solid base was laid in the growing Democratic-Republican Party, a new alliance of merchants and some professional people who agreed on one thing, that the Federalist control of political power shut them out from "patronage, land, bank and insurance charters, and the prerequisites of influence."

"The union of politics, religion, and education maintained by the Federalist Party deprived Republican Baptist, Methodists, and yeomen of opportunity to achieve success." Not forgotten were the squatters of the Kennebec Purchase.

Banks makes a good point that their emphasis was as much on economic individualism as that of the Federalists, but that past historians attempted to portray them as greedy, grubby men, who wanted nothing more than material gain.

Governor James Sullivan, of Berwick, a Democrat, our first historian, wrote that "the good man...wishes to do good unto all, who relieves the distress of the poor, in proportion to his ability, and wishes the prosperity of all men, as he does his own." In an aside, Banks adds: "While this attitude does not guarantee to produce a democrat, it is difficult to imagine one who does not possess it."

A new initiative took place in 1807, led by King and John Chandler of Monmouth, but because of a chance to elect a Democratic governor they temporized, in spite of the impatience of men like Orchard Cook of Wiscasset, who wrote to King: "When shall the old STATE OF MAINE shake off its degradation of District? How long shall the main Body be constrained by a Wing? How long shall the Trunk be in servitude & pay suit, service, homage, & tribute, to a limb long since amputated by N. Hampshire?"

Greater trouble lay ahead. The Embargo on shipping came into effect in 1807, causing 60 per cent unemployment in Maine. Soup kitchens were opened in Portland. The Federalists revived for a while, until the Embargo was repealed in 1809.

During the War of 1812 Maine was left defenseless by Massachusetts, which was opposed to the war. The British understood the situation very well, and for two years thought to conquer all of New England by kindness, but in 1814 moved in

and took over a third of Maine, from Castine to the eastward.

Banks calls the War of 1812 the watershed of the separation movement, in the sense that the accumulated grievances and frustrations became so overpowering that it was only a question of time before victory was achieved. It still took another four years, and the drama that ensued during that time was no less suspenseful than what had preceded it.

This work supersedes all previous works on the subject, and although Banks disclaims omniscience, it will be standard for years to come, exceeding by far the standard of scholarship set by his predecessors. Banks possesses an easy, lucid style and has a good eye for the entertaining quotation. His character sketches of the various actors are excellent.

One caveat that I would enter is the omission of the role of Moses Greenleaf, whose writings and maps undoubtedly made the leaders of the separation movement aware of the resources of Maine and its ability to exist independently. There is probably not a "one and onlie begetter," but I believe Greenleaf has as much claim to being the "father" of the State of Maine as any other figure.

Francis M. O'Brien

Clark, Charles E. *The Eastern Frontier; The Settlement of Northern New England, 1610-1763*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1970.

Charles Clark has written a history of the eastern frontier that is not likely to be superseded for many years to come. Encompassing in his study the land north of the Merrimack River, he has put under a microscope the minutiae of settlement from the first brawling fishermen who settled the coves and inlets of Maine and New Hampshire to the end of the French and Indian War when the settlers could move up the rivers to the interior without fear of Indian depredations. For a hundred and fifty years they had inched their way into hostile territory, cutting, planting, developing as artisans the needs of their primitive life, growing from fishing hamlets and trading posts to towns, replacing their huts with frame houses and their bushed out trails with roads.

The genius of the author is in the use he made of the massive documentary material relative to the area that he studied - for Maine, presenting us with the best comprehensive account of the colonial period that we have. Years ago this was the field that commanded the interest of Maine's best

known historians, but none of them - Henry S. Burrage, James Phinney Baxter, Charles E. Banks, William Willis, and lesser ones - ever undertook such an ambitious project of combining into a whole the social as well as the political and economic aspects of the period. Burrage came the closest to it in his *Beginnings of Colonial Maine, 1602-1658*, which indeed was the beginning, but went only to 1660. Others focused on particular localities within the state, or on the early founders, or on colonial documents in England and France dealing with patents and land grants. Yet what their scholarly investigations did was to add to the already impressive holdings of the Society's library, the results of their own lifetime of research.

The task Clark set for himself was a hard one. To judge how well he succeeded, one has only to read his fascinating study and the bibliographical essay at the end, which in itself is an achievement. No one who does will doubt his scholarly approach. To Society members, the essay will be a revelation as to the scope and depth of our own holdings in the colonial field and should be required reading for any student in Maine history. To be sure, in other libraries printed sources are available: the so-called Baxter manuscripts in 24 volumes most of which were copied from Maine material in the Massachusetts Archives, five volumes of the *Province and Court Records*, the numerous publications of the Gorges Society, chiefly of the early voyages to the Maine coast, the early Sullivan and Williamson histories, which are virtually source material so early were they written, Willis' work on early Portland and the Smith and Deane Journals, and a number of early town histories which would be in the same category.

But it was the manuscript collections of the Society that turned out to be the mother lode of Clark's investigation. Chief among them were the Andrew Hawes of Stroudwater collection (1682-1855) several hundred items which furnished far more than a verbal portrait of Moses Pearson and Old Falmouth, and the North Yarmouth proprietary and town records on deposit with us used in developing case histories on re-settlement. Smaller collections and fugitive items of lesser importance, account books, church and court records, and projects of such antiquarians as William Goold, Leonard Chapman, Charles Thornton Libby, and Cyrus Woodman, giants in their day, these too produced more than a pan full of gold for the indefatigable Clark.

Although essentially a frontier study, the book is not billed as such by the author. Whatever interpretation emerges as to the application of Turner's frontier thesis

"came not from doctrine but from the logic of the evidence itself". Four years ago there came from the press a book that did just that, *The Northern Frontier, 1605-1763*, by Douglas Edward Leach, one of a series of frontier studies edited by Ray Allen Billington, reviewed in the *Newsletter* February, 1967. While the two books seem to parallel, there are important differences. The Leach book is doctrinaire. Moreover, in half the number of pages he deals with an area extending from Virginia northward to Canada with results (as far as Maine is concerned) that are negligible - interesting as it was as a regional study. Clark, with his microscopic detail, has humanized the story and brought to life the people, their social institutions and habits, their growing pains in the slow and often discouraging transition from hamlet to town as they moved inland and on to new clearings. Even in 1763 Clark hated to leave these men and women, and in his final chapter, "The Breaking of the Dike, 1763-1775," he describes their trek up the valleys of the York, the Saco, Kennebec, and Penobscot rivers, no longer constrained by fear of hostile Indians.

This finely written book is proof of the validity of the challenge of ideas in their interpretation. It is regional history at its best, dictated by geography and common ancestry, unfettered by state and local boundaries arbitrarily drawn.

Elizabeth Ring
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Roberts, Al, editor. *Enduring Friendships*. Camden, published for the Friendship Sloop Society by the International Marine Publishing Company, 1970.

The Friendship sloop was once a common sight in coastal Maine harbors particularly in Penobscot and Muscongus Bays. They were usually sailed as one-man boats and used for hauling lobster traps in much the way today's motor driven lobster boats are used. Other fishing activities, such as hand lining and purse seining, were also carried on by these so-called sloop-boats when the lobstering was poor.

The gasoline engine became a convenience and almost an economic necessity for lobstermen shortly after 1900, and by the 1920's fishing under sail was a thing of the past. Some sloop-boats were already worn out and were left to rot on the beach, some were converted to power, and others were sold "up to the west'ard" for use as yachts.

Very few were built after that time, even as yachts, until the Friendship Sloop Society was formed in 1961 and started giving them lots of well-deserved praise and publicity. Since 1961 there has truly been a renaissance for this type of craft with more than thirty having been launched during that ten-year period. Each year the society sponsors a three-day race at Friendship which has grown steadily in size since its inception. A museum at Friendship was established in 1964, largely as a result of this organization and its dedication and enthusiasm.

The book *Enduring Friendships* follows *Its a Friendship* and *Ships That Came Home* as the third major publication of the Friendship Sloop Society. Although not intended to be a textbook, it does contain some rare old photographs of sloop-boats and a chapter on their history. Most of its material, however, deals with the present, being several yarns and such written by sloop owners and other society members. There are chapters on building, sailing, and repairing sloops. One chapter describes the handicapping system used for the annual races and another deals with the founding of the Friendship Sloop Society. A large part of the book is a gallery of photographs and statistics of members boats. Excellent reproductions of building plans for several sloops are contained in the appendix.

Anyone just casually interested in Friendship sloops will be enthusiastic about them after reading this book. Those already having that interest will find the book well written and entertaining.

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In the next issue of the Newsletter we hope to be able to list the many publications which have been received as a result of the Sesquicentennial observances throughout the State. It has been a rich harvest, including far more studies worthy of review than we could possibly assign in time for this issue.