

WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY

Books

Sturtevant, Reginald H. *A History of Livermore*, Lewiston, Twin City Printery, 1970.

The towns of Livermore presented in this paperback history might well be a case study for the history of Maine, for any state is but a composite of towns which make it up, as national history in its turn is the story of people at the grass roots level who have patterned its course. How well the author of this book has served the interests of a Maine historian is the substance of this review.

In the preface the author has stated what he wanted to do. His design, he says, is not so much to produce a work of scholarly historical research as it is to give the public in readable form an account of the salient facts and personages of Livermore. Happily, for a change at least, this is what he has done. It is not a blow by blow treatment of the institutions of town government done according to the accepted practice of those writing town history based on town records. Not that it is done without basic research, for it is. Data on the town are included in five appendices which comprise one fifth of the total book. Moreover, in the main body are included generous excerpts from the proprietary records and material from various sources - journals, letters, and contemporary newspaper accounts touching on community life. For example, among the latter is Judge Cyrus Knapp's account of the famous 1846 flood which backed up the waters of the Androscoggin at the Falls with the same devastating results as the flood conditions which sent the Queen City of Bangor plunging into the sea that same year. The pity is that the author does not give the location of his sources nor list them in a bibliography, thus impairing the book's usefulness as a reference tool. The author's serious affliction by paralysis a few years before the publication of what he hoped would be his life's work made it difficult to overcome these deficiencies and to round out his work more fully than he was able to do. As it stands now, in format it is attractive and for those who know and love the town it contains much that will delight them, not the least of which are over 125 reproductions illustrating all aspects of community life, fascinating to any student of Maine town history.

The town of Livermore is unique. It was brought into existence in 1771 by a grant of some six square miles to the "heirs and assigns" of sixty men in the vicinity of Waltham

for services rendered in 1710 in reducing Port Royal in Nova Scotia in Queen Anne's War. The grant was located in what is now Androscoggin county, on both sides of what was then a magnificently clean river. Ports nearest to it were Portland and Hallowell both of which later furnished a useful outlet for surplus food and lumber products, and as it turned out, a way of escape from the hard chores of the farm when younger men sought a more adventurous life, either to follow the sea or seek greener pastures in the west.

Dominating the early history of the town to his death was the leader of the surveying expedition in 1773 after the grant was made, Lieut. Elijah Livermore, later known as the Deacon, for whom the town was named. A leader in all aspects of the early settlement he became one of the all-time wealthy men. He built the first saw and grist mill. As a proprietor he controlled the sale of lots and when one was sold for taxes he was smart enough to pick it up. A spacious frame house with two chimneys had as adjunct four sheds and four barns to house some fifty head of cattle and other live stock, so reported the Rev. Paul Coffin when he paused on a missionary tour. In fact, to overcome the Deacon's objections was one of the hurdles young Dr. Cyrus Hamlin had to make when he petitioned the voters to settle as their practitioner in 1793. Perhaps the Deacon took a more than critical look, since the chances were good that he would have him for a son-in-law. And he did, with interesting results. Choosing for a farm homestead a lofty site in East Livermore, he built a home which some fifteen years later was bought by Israel Washburn, Sr. after Hamlin had moved his young family to Paris, Maine, where his second son, Hannibal, was born. Elijah, named for his grandfather, we learn from another source, inherited the Deacon's papers which, if located, would contain a gold mine of information for a future historian of the town. As for Washburn, he in his turn married Martha Benjamin to become the parents of the fabled seven sons who distinguished themselves in four states of the union, returning each year to their ancestral home which became the Norlands.

Possibly a more selective process than that found in other Maine towns was used in choosing those who would live and die in Livermore. Good influences were surely at work, but living neighbor to others in a small Maine town was often something of a strain. Everything in their way of life brought out individualism. Disagreements were manifest in the trivia of town meeting, in the practise of barter which after all was so much horse trading, and in the custom of the

church to hold the individual accountable for his moral behavior. Yet in surviving frictions of this nature, true nobility of character could be developed.

As a geographical unit the town went through the usual metamorphosis. Incorporated in 1795 and well situated it quickly attracted settlers. By 1820 the population had grown from 400 to 2174 and settlements spread to Millsites, Corners, Neighborhoods, and Villages, decentralizing a town that was already subdivided into school and highway districts. Three ferries knit the two sides of the river together. Not until a branch railroad was built with its depot in East Livermore was a bridge built across the river. By that time, East Livermore, which comprised a fourth of the original grant, was set off in 1843 as a separate town, known today as Livermore Falls.

Livermore then, in this book, is not one town but two. One belongs to Maine's past, the other to its present and future. Livermore on the west bank of the river is similar in its history and economy to a number of small agricultural towns within a radius of thirty miles, whose dwindling population after 1850 is marked by empty cellar holes, scraggly orchards, and untilled fields, deserted by young men who preferred a new life in the mills of southern New England or in the mining and agricultural areas of the west to picking up rocks on a not too productive Maine farm. Hundreds left from this area. Of 475 Maine natives whose achievements in other states warranted their inclusion in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, sixty originated in this little pocket of southwestern Maine, in what are now such little known towns as Wayne, Sumner, Hebron, Buckfield, Hartford, Fayette, Chesterville and Canton, and from four larger towns whose economy survived as did Livermore at the Falls, Farmington, Wilton, Jay and Turner.

Farming as a way of life had also produced crafts such as the making of wool and linen cloth, the tanning of leather for shoes, and the making of furniture which would develop into carriage and sleigh manufacture. At East Livermore, or the Falls, this type of industry developed and as time passed and a changing mill economy took place in the state, as pulp and paper replaced in part the production of long lumber, the industry at the Falls changed to meet the changing times. In both towns specialized agriculture is still carried on.

A good deal of human interest is buried in the pages of this book, more perhaps than if the author had followed conventional lines. Now, with two earlier brief accounts done in 1874 and 1928, the time is ripe for a full scale history of the town.

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Leavitt, John F. *Wake of the Coasters*, Middletown, Connecticut, published for the Marine Historical Association by Wesleyan University Press, 1970.

Coasting schooners were perhaps more important to Maine than to other parts of the Atlantic seaboard, because the schooner was better able and longer able to meet Maine's prime transportation need: the export of raw materials. It is also true that since land transportation along the coast of Maine was (and is) more difficult than along other sections of the coast, the coasters were more important to Maine's coastal towns than to other towns in terms of basic communication with the outside world.

Maine men early recognized that their unique coast could produce large quantities of lumber, stone, lime, and ice badly needed by their countrymen to the west. All that was needed to turn these resources into dollars was a great deal of hard work -- and a fleet of burdensome vessels to carry the stuff. It is of this fleet and the men who manned it that John Leavitt writes.

Wake of the Coasters is a book that would be welcome, frankly, even if it were badly done. All too little has been written about the coasting schooners. By contrast, there are shelves of books on the supposedly more glamorous clippers and whalers.

Happily, *Wake of the Coasters* is doubly welcome because it is an exceedingly well done book. John Leavitt is a careful researcher and a good writer. And, best of all, he sailed in some of the vessels of which he writes.

Because of his first-hand experience and his natural facility with the language, John Leavitt takes the reader right aboard these homespun schooners, makes him acquainted with captain and crew, passes him a hot mug-up off the crackling wood stove, and then, if there's "a good chance along," takes him sailing a cargo among the islands and peninsulas of the coast of Maine. He tells what it was really like to do it; what the vessels were like, what the men were like, how the sails were handled, how the anchors were handled, how the cargo was handled.

And John Leavitt has liberally illustrated his book, not only with a rare collection of photographs, but also with his fine marine drawings. The caption under one of them is, "My berth in the *Alice S. Wentworth's* after house. A snug place to be on a cold winter night." It's a rare author of maritime history who was there, can write about it, and can draw it.

Nor is John Leavitt to be left behind when the pipe smoke starts to curl and there are yarns to be spun. His tale of

Captain Parker J. Hall, the legendary character who sailed coasting schooners for years with only a cat for crew, should be read by anyone interested in the sea. No mere foible, Hall's lonely cargo-carrying resulted from his being jumped for freight money by his crew of three men early in his career. Hall kept his money, but decided he'd rather cope with wind and wave shorthanded than pit himself against perverse human nature.

The lessons of sail come through strongly in this book. The men who conscientiously devoted themselves to their vessels, who spent a fine afternoon making a spare canvas hatch cover against the surely coming storm, these men kept their vessels safe and usually made money. Of course luck always plays its part at sea, but the best seamen seemed to have a way of avoiding bad luck. Another lesson that comes through strongly in John Leavitt's writing is the sense of satisfaction of moving a heavy cargo to its destination with nothing but the brains and backs and hands of a few men.

This book results from a happy combination of efforts between the Mystic Seaport and Wesleyan University Press. It is the second volume in the American Maritime Library. The first was *Glory of the Seas*, a book about the famous Donald McKay clipper, by Michael Jay Mjelde; the third volume is Ben-Ezra Stiles Ely's *There She Blows: A Narrative of a Whaling Voyage in the Indian and South Atlantic Oceans*, edited by Curtis Dahl. The three volumes have set a high standard in book publishing.

Wake of the Coasters is a particularly fine example of the art of book making. The book is well researched, well written, well edited, and well illustrated. It has been sensitively designed and well printed and bound. The publisher has advertised it thoroughly to the maritime and historical communities. We have here a fine team effort from which the reader can gain much.

The only lack in this book is an index, an oversight which hopefully will be corrected in the future printings this book deserves and will doubtless attain.

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Company