

WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY
Books

Grindle, Roger L. *Quarry and Kiln: The Story of Maine's Lime Industry*. Rockland, Maine, The Courier-Gazette, Inc., 1971.

This book represents a major contribution to Maine history in several respects. First, it demonstrates once more that a concern with local history is not inconsistent with sound scholarship and the exploration of significant themes that are usually associated with a wider canvas. Second, in an era when the passing of Maine entrepreneurship is too often and unjustly be-moaned, it is refreshing and encouraging to rediscover what Maine talent and capital could do with a natural resource less than a century ago. Third, for anyone interested in the development of Maine's coastal towns as well as their economies, this book provides useful insights. And, finally, there is a set of excellent illustrations and useful statistical summaries that tell the overall story of a significant Maine industry in graphic form.

The title of the book accurately reflects its focus: The story of Maine's lime industry. Geographically the industry was centered in Knox County because of the physical location of the natural resource. Professor Grindle clearly demonstrates, however, that the industry in the latter part of the 19th century was involved with developments in the Mid-West and on the West Coast (migration of Maine capital and technology) as well as along the entire East Coast (major urban markets such as Boston and New York City), in Canada (a source of kilnwood and competition) as well as in the United States. His approach to these developments essentially involves a series of related case-studies combining entrepreneurial, business, and industrial history with local history.

In microcosm the history of the lime industry reflected what was taking place on the national scene, though the Maine experience lagged the national one appreciably. A number of family-owned concerns developed the limerock resources of Knox County. In many instances the founders were general entrepreneurs,

involved in a variety of enterprises ranging from ship-building and chandlery to banking and general retail stores. Professor Grindle's extended study of the Cobbs of Rockland is a most interesting case in point, but he does not neglect their counterparts in Rockland, Rockport, Camden, and Thomaston.

Like the oil, steel, salt, whisky and meat-processing industries on the national scene, Maine's lime firms suffered from overproduction, stiff competition, and declining prices. And like the larger industries, the Maine lime manufacturers attempted self-regulation. But like the better known national efforts, the local ones proved inadequate.

Combination to combat instability in basic national industries was well underway by the late 1870s, but Maine's leading lime manufacturers did not adopt this approach until 1900 when the investment banking firm of Kidder, Peabody took the initiative to organize the Rockland-Rockport Lime Company. It is at this point that Professor Grindle ends his detailed study. It is an appropriate terminal point in the sense that financial capitalism and non-Maine interests had effectively supplanted the local producer and capitalist. However, for one interested in Maine's current economic problems, it could also be the starting point for another valuable study of the costs and benefits of out-of-state control of Maine industry.

Among other things, Professor Grindle traces in fascinating detail the relationships between Canada's Maritime Provinces and the Maine lime industry, ranging from Knox County's reliance on Johnny Woodboats for kilnwood to Canadian competition for the lime business. The latter was effectively squelched by tariff legislation which, as in the case of better known industries, negated foreign advantages over domestic producers. Again, the Maine experience was in microcosm a reflection of the national one.

It is impossible to summarize all the interesting insights provided by this book. They range from the problems of dealing with organized labor represented by the Knights of Labor to entrepreneurial strategies and sociological questions involving businessmen's participation in politics and community affairs. But beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and for those

interested only in the history of Rockland, or the genesis of the McLoon lobster and oil business, or Camden before it became a yachting and tourist attraction, this book also has interest and relevance.

These encomiums are not to say that the book is without defects. Professor Grindle has recognized, but not always developed adequately, the significance of some of the areas already mentioned. The integration of chapters around a central theme, and even unity of subject within some paragraphs, leaves something to be desired. But these are defects often associated with first books and particularly those that are derived from Ph.D. dissertations. They are minor compared to the book's contributions and the vistas that it opens up for comparable studies of other Maine industries. Professor Grindle has demonstrated that understanding of the past (and therefore paths to the present) can come as much or more from looking at it under a microscope as trying to extract it from a big screen panorama.

In conclusion it may be appropriate to note that this reviewer joined the University of Maine faculty after Professor Grindle had essentially completed his work and was not a member of his committee. And it may be equally appropriate to point out that the Birds of Rockland were prominent in the lime industry.

Arthur M. Johnson
*A. & A. Bird Professor of
American History, University
of Maine at Orono*

Plummer, Francis W., Sr. *Lisbon: the History of a Small Maine Town.* Lewiston, Twin City Printery, 1970. (Available from the author at Green Street, Lisbon Falls @ \$10.50 postpaid)

In lieu of a review, the author has kindly given us permission to reprint John Gould's delightful introduction to his book:

"Among the more persistent legends of Lisbon is the one that Franny Plummer was doing a history of the town. This has gone on and on, like the deficits in

the water department, the quagmires on Summer Street and the annual increases in teachers' salaries, until the community has accepted it on about the same basis - that there isn't anything you can do but wait things out and hope for the best.

Historically, Lisbon is not the ideal subject for the historian, but this has been more than offset by the fact that Franny is no Gibbon - he is the first to admit it, and quick to defend the whole improbability by saying that the Plummers have done about everything else in their time and they might as well do this.

Franny's technique was not to select some predetermined climax, some philosophic and/or literary catastrophe, and illustrate it by trends and tendencies, building a social moral on failures and successes. This is not a history that set out to prove something. Franny's method was to work a few hours each day on the strict sequence of personalities and events, and since the town put in a full 24 hours a day at the same sequence he was losing ground constantly. His kinder friends, more interested in Franny than in a history, repeatedly implored him to draw a line somewhere, and to quit writing and settle down as an established author with a published book to prove it. Otherwise he would arrive at doddering old age still pregnant but childless. Franny liked this advice but couldn't seem to arrange an accouchement.

Well - town histories, generally (next to sermons and sonnets about bluebirds), are the poorest land to literary affluence. Some Maine Towns, here and there, have at least one golden hour, one rich moment, one solid story, around which the duller aspects of municipal movement may be marshalled. Lisbon was able to avoid such good luck. The chief cultural decision Franny had to make was if the hydraulic financing was worthy of inclusion, or should he spend more time on the location of the first jail.

Knowing, thus, that he had nothing to rank with Lamb's essays, so to speak, Franny never expected the top publishing houses to beat a path to his door. Nor was he hopeful about any wild reception of his work in the wide world of belles lettres - the history, if published, would circulate mainly amongst a Lewiston Sun audience, and this does not send an author into

ecstasies of anticipation. You might say the sales seemed limited.

He was further disenchanted when he went looking for a printer who would produce the book in pleasing manner and learned that the price of graphic arts is substantial. At this point anybody except a dogged Plummer of the true Lisbon school would have called the whole thing off. But like Max Beerbohm's cartoon of the old British statesman who, without hope of emolument, faithfully rendered the Georgics into English hexameters, Franny patiently pursued his project, surmounted all fiscal and literary problems, and the proof of his entire success is now in your hands and worthy of your perusal, admiration and respect.

This is a good history book. The greatest care was taken with the facts, and the editorializing that flavors many another more illustrious chronicle has been wisely omitted. The labor that went into this, and the time spent, can never be compensated for except in the town's gratitude and in the historian's personal satisfaction.

And the long legend about Franny's history is now historical fact."

John Gould

Oblak, John B. *Bringing Broadway to Maine: The History of Lakewood [Theatre] Lakewood, Maine*. Terre Haute, Indiana, Moore-Langen Printing and Publishing Co., 1971. (Available from *Down East Magazine*, Camden, Maine.)

A thoroughly researched, scrupulously documented history of the second oldest summer theater in the United States.

"A study of the Lakewood Theatre involves more than just an understanding of the development and organization of the theatre itself. The theatre and resort aspects of Lakewood are closely related. Without the theatre, Lakewood would be just another Maine resort; but it was the resort attractions of Lakewood that enabled the theatre to complete its seventieth season in 1970 as a legitimate theatre." (page 2)

The great masses of detail presented in this study are organized with refreshing intelligence and skill.
g.m.