

WRITINGS IN MAINE HISTORY

Books

Reflections on Peter Bradford's *Fragile Structures*

by

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Governor, State of Maine: 1967-1975

It was recently noted that East Machiasport was the site of the first battle of the United States Navy in 1775 and then wasn't heard from again until Armand Hammer and Occidental Petroleum Company tried to build a refinery there. After reading Peter Bradford's excellent book, *Fragile Structures*, it became evident that East Machiasport was once again a major battlefield. This time it was the oil industry fighting to maintain their strength within government and their stranglehold over American consumers.

The events recounted in *Fragile Structures* are vivid in my memory. Having served as Governor as this amazing drama unfolded, I can say from this experience that Peter Bradford, whose great intellectual capacity and ability I deeply admire, did not yield to exaggeration. If anything, the power and political influence of the multi-national oil cartel proved more awesome than this book describes.

The recent energy crisis was not new to Maine and New England, nor was it unforeseen. In 1959, when President Eisenhower created the mandatory oil import quota program by Executive Order, New England and other areas dependent upon a supply of foreign crude oil became the victims of price and supply manipulation. Stated simply, the Mandatory Oil Import Quota program provided, under the guise of national security, that the United States could import no more than 12.2% of domestically produced crude oil. The rationale was that our Country should not become over-

ly dependent upon foreign sources. The program was administered by the United States Department of the Interior and controlled through the granting of import tickets, largely to the major oil companies.

During the years of the program's existence, the world price of crude oil ranged from \$1.25 to \$1.75 per barrel below domestic prices. Therefore, an oil company holding import tickets could realize this differential amount for doing virtually nothing while maintaining domestic prices at artificially high levels.

The Portland pipeline was a good example of the effect of this program that cost the American consumer over \$50 billion. Oil was brought to South Portland and piped to Montreal where Canadians were able to purchase heating oil, after the cost of transportation, three cents per gallon cheaper than the people in South Portland. New England, not having a refinery and accounting for twenty per cent of the national market for heating oil, was a lucrative and captive market.

Few people realize that this region, despite all of its water resources, is also dependent upon fossil fuels for seventy per cent of its electrical energy. This almost total dependency on outside sources of petroleum products made New England vulnerable to high prices and short supplies of heating oil long before "energy crisis" became a popular phrase.

Nationally, some political leaders, such as Senator Lee Metcalf of Montana, could see how ridiculous our national policy really was, and how national security was being impaired rather than enhanced by the import quota system. Senator Metcalf was one of those suggesting that the United States should cap domestic wells, store oil in salt domes, and allow our consumers access to foreign oil as long as its price remained below U. S. prices and it was readily available. Had this been done, or had the mandatory oil import quota program never existed, one wonders how effective the Arab oil embargo would have been, and how much lower the cost of gasoline, heating oil and fertilizer would be today. Would

our rate of inflation have been less? Would the national employment rate have reached 8%? One can only speculate at the millions of people who may have starved in the undeveloped nations because of the inability of struggling agricultural interests to absorb the massive increases in petroleum prices.

In 1968, the political and economic leaders of New England decided to try, in the best yankee tradition, to help themselves. Six Governors, twenty-five Congressmen, twelve United States Senators, the New England Council and several other groups agreed to take advantage of Maine's natural, deep waters and build a 300,000 barrel a day refinery to produce heating and industrial oil.

The plan asked for no government financing. It complied fully with existing law. But it required the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, who had the responsibility for parcelling out import quota tickets, as well as the Secretaries of Commerce, Treasury, and the Army, who granted licenses to operate a foreign trade zone. We were soon to discover that our laws and our government responded obediently to the demands of big oil.

In 1968, Maine filed its application for a foreign trade zone in which to locate the proposed refinery. At that time, nine zones existed in the United States. No application had ever been rejected. The required public hearing, held in Portland, drew an array of opponents, including high ranking officials of virtually every major oil company, the majority whip of the United States House of Representatives, the Governor of Colorado, the Lt. Governor of Texas, and representatives of the Governors of Louisiana, Wyoming, Oklahoma, and Kansas.

So much pressure was applied before the hearing commenced that an unprecedented second round of hearings was scheduled in Washington to accomodate the Congressmen and Senators who were being pressured to oppose the Machiasport Refinery.

The hearing process finally ended in October of 1968 and

so, too, the Johnson Administration neared its end. The game then became one of stalling. If the import tickets and the foreign trade zone permit were not granted in a little more than two months, the question would go to a new cabinet. If Humphrey and Muskie won, we had a good chance. If Nixon and Agnew prevailed, the battle was lost. Spiro Agnew, at the request of President Nixon's Secretary of Commerce, Maurice Stans, had met with a group of oil executives in Midland, Texas and had promised that the project at Machiasport would be killed anyway. But no decision could be made by the Foreign Trade Zone board until the transcript of the hearing was complete.

The time for additional argument was extended by the hearing officer. C. R. Smith, the new Secretary of Commerce, told us he didn't have sufficient clerical help to speed up the typing job. We offered to send State of Maine clerical personnel to assist. When the first transcript was produced, it contained pages of testimony from another hearing. Finally, in five weeks instead of the five days it normally took to produce the transcript, the document was readable.

In the meantime, my assistant, Walter Corey, was receiving confidential information concerning Secretary Smith's relation with Dutch Shell. When information from these telephone conversations leaked out, a search revealed a small transmitter concealed in a fireplace in Mr. Corey's office.

The fall of 1968 brought the election of Mr. Nixon, and a declaration from Secretary Smith that a decision would not be made by the Johnson administration after all. An injunction against the project was sought by Governor Hickel of Alaska five days before the announcement that he would be President Nixon's Secretary of the Interior. As the clock wound down further, Secretary Smith left the Department of Commerce to be employed by, you guessed it, Dutch Shell.

At the eleventh hour Senator Muskie and I met with Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, who was no friend of the major oil companies. The Secretary pledged his help but re-

minded us that he answered to one man. The call, as feared, came from the White House. No further action would be taken by the Johnson administration. January 20, 1969 brought a new President with the Machiasport refinery applications still pending.

President Nixon's first action was to delay the processing of the foreign trade zone application. He appointed a Cabinet Task Force headed by Secretary of Labor George Schultz to study oil import controls.

Secretary Shultz is a thoroughly honest and objective man. His final report recommended that the oil import quota system be abolished and replaced with a tariff system. Bradford describes this report and the President's response: "Eleven months, twenty-five man years, 10,000 pages of submissions, a total cost of not less than \$4 Million, the first real analysis ever made of oil import problems, a 400 plus page report that all but called the quota system a \$5 Billion a year rip-off, and the President did one more thing. He replaced Secretary Shultz as Chairman with Attorney General John Mitchell.

The New England Governors next brought suit to have the mandatory oil import declared unconstitutional. In the meantime, the world price of crude oil climbed to domestic levels. The program, no longer beneficial to the major oil companies, was abolished by President Nixon. The energy crisis arrived and the price of crude oil increased from some \$3.70 per barrel to over \$12.00 per barrel in less than one year. President Ford's response has been predictable. He argues that allowing more money for the oil companies through higher prices will conserve energy and encourage the search of new sources. Big oil still rules.

We now know that the Machiasport proposal was far from an environmental sound project. A nationwide awakening to the need for environmental protection arrived at the time the oil industry wanted to build new refineries. As New Englanders continue to fight high prices, short supplies and a continuing erosion of its industrial base, the same govern-

ment and oil forces that blocked Machias began rewriting history. “It was the environmentalists that killed Machias,” they said. That is a lie. *Fragile Structures* stands as the only permanent record of the truth.

Bradford, Peter Amory. *Fragile Structures: a Story of Oil Refineries, National Security, and the Coast of Maine*. New York, Harper & Row, 1975. 392 p.

Maine Catalog: Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, Department of the Interior—A List of Measured Drawings, Photographs and Written Documentation in the Survey—1974. Compiled with and Introductory Essay “The Historic Architecture of Maine” by Denys Peter Myers. The Maine State Museum, 1974; vii, 254 pp., illus., paperback, \$8.95.

As the shadows of bureaucracy lengthened immeasurably during the New Deal, one of the few lasting benefits for antiquarians was the Historic American Buildings Survey. HABS was founded in 1933 to record significant American buildings and to give employment to architects and draftsmen. For the next eight years, many important American buildings were measured, drawn, and photographed. The project stopped during the Second World War, and since then it has been revived only sporadically. Teams worked in Maine in 1960, 1962, and 1965. The Historic Preservation Act of 1966 gave HABS another transfusion, with the camera replacing measured drawings in its work in Maine the next year.

To date, only 162 Maine structures have been recorded by HABS. These range from the State Capitol to churches, and from domestic dwellings to lighthouses, banks, and forts. Many of Maine’s best buildings are included—but not all. While a national catalogue of HABS listings was published in 1941 (with a supplement in 1959), state catalogues have

appeared only in the last decade. The catalogue entries take up just over one-eighth of this book, and they list information gathered on each of the structures inventoried. These photographs, measured drawings, and data sheets are available to the general public, with the normal delay and paperwork occasioned by any communication with a Federal office.

The best—and most important—part of *Maine Catalog* is Denys Peter Myers' "The Historic Architecture of Maine." While it escapes top billing and is termed an introductory essay, this fine exposition occupies over three-fourths of the book. The development of Maine architecture is traced through the nineteenth century, with chapters on the early Colonial, late Colonial, and the Federal periods, as well as the pre- and post-Civil War eras. The nineteenth century is featured, since it represents Maine's golden age of building. Many illustrations accompany the text, and Myers has done an admirable and competent job in producing the best scholarly architectural survey of the state yet done. Maine is not an easy state to survey, since its size and disparate development in different periods result in a lack of homogeneity that was often found in the smaller early Colonies. Each section has a good, brief historical introduction, and there is documentation in copious footnotes and a bibliography.

The author was in charge of the 1971 photo-data project in Maine and covers the entire state thoroughly. He refuses to accept blindly pat attributions. Coventry Hall in York has long been unnaturally linked with Samuel McIntire of Salem, both at the expense of some unknown local builder and in spite of the fact no documentation exists in the McIntire papers at the Essex Institute. Myers comments on this "tenuous tradition," as he attempts to unravel Alexander Parris' association (or nonassociation) with the creation of the McLellan-Sweat mansion in Portland.

There are few faults to find with the book, and they are mostly in production, not in authorship. The soft cover,

showing the handsome First Parish Church in Belfast in color, is on the flimsy side, as is the binding—especially for a \$8.95 paperback. The typography is also a bit curious, with the text set in smaller type than the footnotes, and the index boasting the largest type in the book—a strange inversion that should be a boon to readers of indices. The basic layout is attractive, with the illustrations usually placed adjacent to the applicable descriptive text. Surprisingly, the dates in the captions refer only to the date of the HABS drawing or photograph, and one must find the date of the structure itself in the text. Only recent HABS photographs are dated, with early views merely referred to as photocopies. The Maine State Museum should be credited with the publication of this volume, hopefully future works will see fewer of these vagaries.

Maine Catalog has already generated much interest in the architecture of the state. May there be more structures entered upon the HABS rolls, and may “The Historic Architecture of Maine” encourage more scholars to embark on deeper, more detailed projects on the local level, all of which will eventually enlarge our knowledge and appreciation of Maine architecture even more.

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Journals of the Gloucester Experiment. Gloucester Community Development Corporation, P. O. Box 15, Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930. 75¢ per journal. \$5.00 per entire series.

An abandoned, neglected old burying ground in Gloucester, Massachusetts, has recently been restored to beauty and dignity, a heritage of the past from those who lie there. The result is an honor to the town and a monument to the thorough study, the intelligent planning, and careful supervision, and the hard work on the part of an enthusiastic group of

men and women, youthful and adult. Now, instead of an area of fallen, tipped, broken stones and of uncut grass and bushes and trees, defaced by vandalism, Bay View Cemetery is an historic and lovely site in a picturesque old town, pointed out to visitors with pride.

A further result of the scholarly restoration is of special value to those interested in any aspect of old gravestones—history, genealogy, epitaphs, designs and rubbing, restoration, respect to those of the past, or the refreshment of a green acre of small park in a crowded modern environment. This is the *Journals of the Gloucester Experiment*, a series of eight reports on the preparations and procedures of the restoration, each on a different phase of the project by a different leader. Especially valuable are Journals #1, “The Restoration of Burying Grounds: The View Point of Grave-stone Artwork” by Peter Benes; #3, “The Gloucester Project as a Social Experiment” by Paul Cook; and #7, “The Archaeology of Colonial Burial Grounds” by Carole Lynn Sharoff. Sharoff’s, the longest one (11 pages), is especially good as to procedures; it tells concretely what to do, why to do, and how to do it. Also helpful are #2, “Laws, Regulations, and Procedures Governing Historic Cemeteries” by Coit Butler [Massachusetts, not Maine, laws]; #4, “Constructive Landscape Restoration in Old Cemeteries” by Carleton Lees, and #8, “Some Notes on Stone Conservation” by Norman Weiss. Anyone interested in involving students in a similar project will find #6 helpful, “Cemetery Restoration as a High School Course” by Elsa Martz.

Except for the two very useful articles on restoring cemeteries by Theodore L. Brown in *Maine Life* (May, 1973, and May, 1974) I find *Journals of the Gloucester Experiment* the best guide to restoration procedures to date. Although it goes beyond what the usual Maine community group or individual is prepared to do, it presents reliable background, sound information, and stimulating possibilities, as well as detailed procedures in some of the Chapters.

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