

BOOK REVIEWS

The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835. By Nancy F. Cott. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978. Pp. xii, 225. Paper. \$3.95).

Sarah M. Grimke wrote to Mary Parker that they were connected to one another "in the bonds of womanhood." Nancy F. Cott, Assistant Professor of History and American Studies at Yale, incorporates this statement by the 19th century women's leader into her book.

Several perspectives are offered in evidence of the "Bonds of Womanhood": work, domesticity, education, religion, and sisterhood. What results is a fine, if low pressure, interpretation of the life of the New England woman in the years 1780 to 1835. The evidence is presented so deftly that the reader may find himself convinced by the sheer magic of the narrative.

Martha Moore Ballard, a Maine woman, is quoted as saying, "A woman's work is never done . . ." (certainly an old, if shopworn, principle). In their work, women were adjunct and secondary to men in economic life; the husband provided, the wife used the resources thus given to her. Man worked in an extended sphere, woman in a more limited one.

By 1830 industrial developments in particular began to change the sphere of woman. Industrial manufacture replaced home spinning and weaving in New England; but, in spite of this development, married woman's work remained centered on household management and family care. Woman's sphere was "separate" not only because it was at home, but also because it seemed to elude rationalization and the cash nexus.

Domesticity belonged to woman as well. The home contrasted with the world outside the home. Child rearing was a major part of domesticity. Woman was engaged here in a vocation in the home to stabilize society by generating and regenerating moral character. This division of spheres supplied an acceptable kind of social distinction. Sex, not class, was the basic category.

Women were educated mostly along the lines set forth by Benjamin Rush's *Thoughts on Female Education* (1787). Woman's education was for social utility: to create a good companion for man, to rear an efficient household economist, to train a teacher of Christian morals, and *inter alia* to foster capable motherhood. Of course, "female" education became a double-edged sword; educated women predominated among the feminists who are remembered today.

Religion provided an opportunity for woman to show her worth. Some women were involved with religion because they feared death in childbirth, others perhaps because they had no other pressing commitments. Harriet Martineau, the English writer, concluded that the reason for the presence of women in religion was because they were constrained from exercising their full range of moral and intellectual powers in other areas.

Sisterhood resulted from the identification of women with the heart, emotion and sensibility. Peer relationships in this period were replacing those based upon hierarchy.

The author ends her study with the conclusion that by 1830 "different" had overwhelmed "inferior" in usage to depict woman's place, bolstered by the leverage of belief in the "woman's sphere." Throughout the 19th century, feminists saw woman's progress not in opposition to but at one with esteem for home and family; their radical demand was to include a role in the civil and public sphere among woman's rights and prerogatives.

This is a good book. It presents some old, some new, perspectives on woman's life in New England at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Its evidence is sound, its conclusions mildly surprising.

This reviewer has only one *minor* criticism, if it is that. It would have been nice if the author had integrated two of my favorite Maine women into a text which has several good Maine references: Helen Coffin Beedy and her *Mothers of Maine* (Portland: The Thurston Print, 1895) and Elizabeth Oakes Smith's Autobiography (edited by Mary Alice Wyman as *Selections from the Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakes Smith*, Lewiston: Lewiston Journal Company, 1924).

Professor Cott has done a service for those who wish to try to understand the "place" of women in New England in the years 1780 to 1835. I highly recommend this book to all Maine readers who are at all interested in the lack of material about the history of women.

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Wildfire Loose: The Week Maine Burned. By Joyce Butler.
(Brattleboro, Vermont: Durrell Publications, Inc., 1978.
Pp. xviii, 246. Hardcover. 12.95).

Mainers who were around when the Great Fires of 1947 occurred will relive the fears, the concerns, and the excitement of October, 1947, when they read *Wildfire Loose*. Those who were not living in Maine, or who were too young to remember those unforgettable days, should read this chronicle of an especially traumatic week in the life of the state we all love. They will come away feeling fortunate

that so much beauty remains — but, more importantly, they will come away with a deeper understanding of the fortitude of human beings, particularly Maine people, under great stress.

In short, Joyce Butler, the author, has done a competent job — even a somewhat outstanding one — of recreating more than thirty years later the suspense, the drama, the heroism, and, yes, the tragedies, personal and communal, of those fiery Indian summer days. There are recognizable inaccuracies; there is some careless proofreading. The Gannett Publishing Company owned a Grumman amphibian — not a “Goodyear amphibian;” there is no turnpike in Yarmouth and wasn’t then. There are some inconsistencies also. But these seem minor and in no way obscure Butler’s skillful weaving of scores of different tales. Even while noting the author’s writing skills and “raconteurship,” many readers will also recognize the tremendous work, the careful research, and the numerous interviews involved in preparing the book. It probably is not fair to single out a few tales from among many. But then a taste may induce a bite!

This reviewer was, with Brooks Hamilton of the *Daily Kennebec Journal*, now of the University of Maine Department of Journalism, responsible for coverage of the Bar Harbor fires in all five papers owned by the late Guy P. Gannett. Although we were quite close to the horrors which overtook York County in southern Maine, the time we spent on the island of Mount Desert resulted in an intimate familiarity with the people and area during this terrible time. Authoress Butler has uncovered detail, drama and tales of human fortitude at Bar Harbor of which there was no published knowledge at the time of the fire. But they all ring true; they fit into the pattern evident to those who were there.

Christine Rowell, the Bar Harbor dowager is vividly recaptured. Dame Agatha Christie might have used her as a prototype in one of her tales of Hercule Poirot in England; maybe she met her on a visit to Mount Desert Island. One can picture her comforting her several domestics and gardener; one can see her entrusting valuables to the Express office — for shipment to New York — especially her grandchildren's Christmas presents, bought more than two months ahead of the day when they would be opened! A paragraph about Dot and Fred Smith almost comes to life: "The Smiths got out the garden hose and soaked their house completely, Dot packed their Studebaker with some of the things they wanted to save — her husband's telescope and paintings, her checkbook and income tax records."

If one could ask anything more from this account, one might wish that Butler had climbed inside her people even more than she did, and tried to capture their inner thoughts. With her research and background, a bit of fantasizing would have been no more than permissible artistic license! Joyce Butler has done her fellow Mainers — and their children and grandchildren — a real service in her fine work *Wildfire Loose: The Week Maine Burned*.

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The Peoples Lewiston-Auburn Maine, 1875-1975. By John A. Rand. (Freeport, Maine: Bond Wheelwright Co., 1975. Pp. xii, 116. Hardcover. \$9.95. Paper. \$7.95).

Begun as a history of the intertwining of the development of a mutual savings bank with the development of the community which it serves, *The Peoples Lewiston-Auburn Maine, 1875-1975* is a fascinating chronology of the second largest community in Maine during these hundred years. While focusing on the economic and physical development of the Twin Cities, it also reports on their social development: the changing leisure time activities, the activities of the churches, voluntary organizations, schools, medical and social services. The great disasters which befell the community are well chronicled.

All of this is told with verve and intriguing detail; the cotton mills reducing their work week to 53 hours a week in 1904; the first performance of the Lewiston and Auburn Symphony in 1922 in the Strand Theatre; the Twin Cities being connected, in 1912, to Portland by the state's first major surfaced highway.

The author, John Rand, is undoubtedly responsible for the verve and organization of the material but the compelling pieces of information are the product of a life-time of research by Ralph Skinner, the dean of Lewiston-Auburn's local historians. It should be noted that in the process of implementing the original concept, the history of the bank became attenuated and left this reader with a host of questions about the development of the bank, its depositors and its investments and loans over the years.

The author has problems with the chronology of events among the Franco-American population. For instance the distinctions between "Bloc Dominicain," "L'Association St. Dominic," "St. Dominic's High School" and "St. Dom's

Arena” are not made, so that events occurring in one are attributed to the other. It was the arena which burned not the high school. He also dates the completion of the exterior of the upper-church of Sts. Peter and Paul in 1930—five years before it actually took place. For a short, accurate chronicle of this parish written from the parish archives the reader should consult Antonin Plourde, O.P., “Cent ans de vie paroissale: SS Pierre et Paul de Lewiston” *Le Rosaire* Nos. 854-855 (aout-septembre 1970) pp. 1-57.

As the introduction points out, *The Peoples Lewiston-Auburn* is not explicit interpretative history but it should be added that this volume does have a point of view—that of owners and management. For instance, labor history is either ignored (the establishment of the Local of Textile Workers Union of America-CIO) or chronicled from management’s point of view.

Reading *The Peoples Lewiston-Auburn Maine, 1875-1975* is like reading the front and back pages of a well-written local newspaper covering the hundred years. It is interesting, it provides a record of the significant and interesting public events of the community, and it makes you want to know more. For its intended readers, the local citizenry, this is a recommendation of the highest order. For the local history buff this is a particularly attractive volume, well-written, well-indexed, and illustrated with over eighty well-chosen photographs. For the interpretive historian it is a chronicle of events waiting to be put into the context of the themes and currents of the history of the larger American society.

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Big Dreams and Little Wheels. By Ruth Crosby Wiggin.
(Camden, Maine: Downeast Enterprises, 1976. Pp. 94.
Paper. \$3.50).

Big Dreams and Little Wheels is a fascinating account of one of Maine's narrow-gauge railroads, which was conceived in the mid-1880s, and until 1933, was very much alive. Maine had many "two-footers" — with the last one folding in 1941. Some merged, others struggled alone. The one which was nicknamed the "Big Dream" was originally called the Wiscasset and Quebec, and the proposed two-foot pike was to run from the Atlantic Ocean to Quebec, 241 miles distant. However this most ambitious dream of all of Maine's "little wheels," when completed, was a much abbreviated railroad.

Canadians and citizens of the United States, meeting in Augusta, were confident that Wiscasset harbor was an ideal terminal for ocean-going vessels to be loaded with produce for shipment to the world's markets. The drama of its construction, and the stories of the many individuals involved, makes a most interesting saga. Having had a firsthand connection with another of Maine's diminutive lines, I noted that the problems of one were much the same as with the others. Had the Wiscasset and Quebec Railroad been completed as "dreamed," it would have been many times longer.

From its incorporation in 1854, its construction in 1890, its new name, Wiscasset, Waterville and Farmington, and its operation from 1895 to 1933, the story is shadowed with mystery. It was supposedly laid out to follow an old Indian trail from Wiscasset to Quebec. When the road was surveyed, the path of least resistance and the shortest distance between two points were generally ignored.

Before the first regular train commenced operation, much of the rolling stock had been mortgaged to replenish the working capital. Frequent excursions were run to help

swell its income, but, as it was running at a loss, the Wiscasset and Quebec went into receivership in 1899. The financial condition worsened, and in 1900 it was reorganized. Finally, the line was extended to Burnham, but by then the promoters had exhausted their vigor and there was no money left in the till. In the spring of 1898, the Wiscasset and Waterville Railroad was chartered. Mysteries and mistakes continued to follow, and the Wiscasset and Quebec folded up entirely when the two finally merged as the Wiscasset, Waterville and Farmington which tottered on until 1933. Among "Stories Told and Retold" are some dandys, especially concerning snow plowing, derailments, etc.

Big Dreams and Little Wheels is a well-done, well-illustrated chronicle of a bygone era of narrow gauge tracts and Model T snowmobiles. One does not have to be a railfan to enjoy it.

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