

BOOK REVIEWS

A Kennebunkport Album. By Joyce Butler. (Kennebunk Landing, Me.: Rosemary House Press, 1984. Pp. 81. Paper. \$11.95.)

As Mrs. Butler notes in her introduction, an album of old photographs can be truly fascinating – can be, that is, if one knows something about their subjects and settings. In *A Kennebunkport Album* she has provided the right combination. Here are more than forty pictures from that town's past, each accompanied by a brief explanatory, historical essay.

The quality of the pictures themselves, as in most old collections, is not consistently high. A few, like the view of pleasure boaters on the river near what became the River Green, have a haunting loveliness; but most are not artistic, or, in one instance, even very clear. Sometimes the descriptive paragraphs are absolutely necessary for the reader to “see” what is there. It took me a long time to identify anything like a racing boat in the picture on page thirty-seven – and I still wonder what they really looked like! Obviously, selection was made on the basis of interesting subject matter, rather than on artistic quality.

The subjects vary widely. A picture of a Cape Porpoise fishhouse, with its essay on the delights of lightly salted hake, is preceded by a section on one of the last large vessels (a ferry) built at Kennebunkport, and is followed by a picture and a discussion of the gristmill that served the area from 1751 to 1939. Social events, such as a horse show, “tub races,” and a farmers' fair, get equal coverage with local buildings, a few people, and some natural features like “Blowing Cave” and a favorite picnic spot.

Originally written for summer tourists as separate features in a newspaper, the book will probably find its greatest audience among Kennebunkport visitors and residents. At

times it presumes a familiarity with the area that most of us lack. I read the volume with an atlas of Maine and a copy of the republished 1872 maps of York County at hand and found both useful. A map showing the locations of places mentioned might well have been included.

Still, the text shows careful research, and the essays are so well written as to make good reading for anyone who likes historical tidbits. While not even pretending to provide a comprehensive history of Kennebunkport, the essays do add considerably to our knowledge of that town, especially in relation to the impact of summer visitors and summer residents, for whom the hotels and antique shops were opened. The newcomers constructed summer "cottages" and the River Club, and not only made demands on the town for additions like the boardwalk between the village center and a summer colony, but also cooperated with permanent residents in the formation of a Village Improvement Society to clean up and beautify the river and the town, contributing funds for favorite projects. Insofar as similar developments took place in other vacation spots at the turn of the century, the essays make a small contribution to general history as well.

In her concluding paragraph, Mrs. Butler comments that "Tracking small town history . . . is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle." What this thin volume represents is really an unfinished puzzle, with enough small sections assembled here and there to capture one's interest and to give an impression of Kennebunkport's past. Let us hope the author continues her search and adds more later.

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A Reassessment of New England Agriculture in the Last Thirty Years of the Nineteenth Century. By Paul Glen Manyon. (New York: Arno Press, 1978. Pp. xii, 308. Cloth. \$22.00.)

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, magazines throughout the United States featured articles describing the widespread abandonment of the New England countryside. To a national readership, it seemed as if most of the region's rural population was abandoning decaying, unprofitable farmsteads for southern New England factories and western farms. In solemn and moralistic tones, these articles repeatedly portrayed a depopulated landscape, inhabited only by the old and the poor. New England readers, past and present, might be offended by this assessment, for it was greatly exaggerated. In retrospect it appears that writers outside of New England had regional axes to grind and that they took extraordinary pleasure in attacking the Yankee establishment that had long influenced national development.

For the historian, the problem of evaluating the status of New England's rural population during the last quarter of the nineteenth century is a challenging one. There was significant abandonment and rural depopulation, but there was also sustained development in various regions and population growth and prosperity in many rural areas. Consequently, in any assessment of the region's agricultural fortunes, much depends upon which farmers are observed and where their farms were located. Such a complex task requires historical objectivity and sensitivity to multiple interpretations through time.

While Paul Manyon's book does not meet all of these criteria, it does provide a valuable service by challenging the widely accepted idea that New England's agricultural regions suffered serious declines in the late nineteenth century. The author presents an economic argument, based on agricultural and population census returns from New Hampshire, demonstrating the presence of agricultural prosperity in the

late nineteenth century. His statistics minimize the seriousness of farm abandonment and economic decline during the late 1800s, and, within the narrow limits of economic interpretation, the argument is successful.

From his evaluation of New Hampshire census data, the author convincingly demonstrates that the region's farms sustained increases in most products and that the gross income of the farming population was comparable to that of manufacturing employments in New England and to that of farmers in other regions. One of the book's major strengths is its emphasis upon the many ways in which New England farmers successfully reacted to the pressures of western agricultural competition through the development of new products and markets. These strengths are, however, counterbalanced by the author's exclusive reliance upon census interpretation. Consequently, the book's hypotheses are based upon generalized data from farm production and employment figures that are not adjusted to reflect the extreme diversity of economic situations below the county level. The result is a thesis that is generally correct for the aggregate income and production of all farmers in New Hampshire but is misleading for large portions of the farming population whose declining ability to farm productively was not accurately represented by these averages.

One of the basic premises of this statistical study is that the relative success or decline in New Hampshire agriculture from 1870 to 1900 should be assessed by comparing the wealth, acreage, and production of *those who farmed* in each period. Perhaps this strategy might be employed in periods of relative population stability, but this was not a stable period. The author's many charts and figures do demonstrate that a small number of farmers, constituting a smaller percentage of the rural population in 1900 than in 1870, prospered during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But for over one-third of the rural population of 1870, farming had become so increasingly difficult by 1900 that many abandoned farming for other employment (often locally) or farmed part-

time and earned critical income through non-farming activities. As the author notes, these important outside sources of income are not adequately interpreted because of the unreliability of census returns for this type of employment.

One of the most controversial socioeconomic questions Manyon raises is whether the relative success of approximately half of the 1870 farming population and the failure, or reversal of agricultural fortunes, of the other half constitutes relative success or failure in an economic overview. This reviewer would certainly not overemphasize an interpretation of economic success as Paul Manyon has obviously done, even if the statistical averages of aggregate wealth and production were better. This constitutes a basic interpretative difference between the author's economic history and the more broadly based socioeconomic history advocated by this reviewer. But even allowing for such substantive differences, the author's conclusion seems puzzling in the face of some startling data he has collected. For example, he coolly surveys the depopulation of New Hampshire towns and observes that "more than one-quarter of the towns in the state experienced significant decreases in population [*more than 25 percent*] between 1870 and 1900," and then concludes that "the proclamation of widespread rural decay by the popular press was without empirical justification." I suppose all evaluations of data are subject to debate, but population losses of this magnitude are usually associated with wars or famines; the Black Death comes to mind as a reasonable comparison. The author carefully emphasizes that the smaller agricultural towns suffered the heaviest losses. (He does not mention the abandonment of entire villages.) Yet it was precisely these communities that felt the full brunt of agricultural competition from western states. To these farmers the story of rural decline and abandonment was certainly no myth. The author, of course, is aware of this, but, in Machiavellian fashion, he does not particularly concern himself with these "marginal" farmers

so long as those who remained in other areas continued to increase production and wealth, thus registering a gross economic gain.

Several other factors significantly influenced the success or failure of New England farmers during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, and these are not given adequate emphasis. Little mention is made of the introduction of horse-drawn machinery and new technological improvements that revolutionized agriculture for most farmers only after the Civil War. Machines, such as the reaper and the horse rake, enabled farmers to vastly increase their productive capacity. This alone would account for much of the economic increase during the period. The increase in technologically based productivity, however, involved only a small but economically significant percentage of farmers. The complex dynamics of home industry and part-time employment engaged in by a majority of the farmers of the period is mentioned but not evaluated. This is especially unfortunate. Such non-agricultural employment opportunities were often critical to farm prosperity; yet the record of this work does not always appear on agricultural census forms. Unfortunately, the increasing reliance on non-farming sources of income eventually weakened the farming sector, as the agricultural history of twentieth-century New England clearly demonstrates.

This book is actually a copy of the author's doctoral thesis for the Economics Department, Harvard University. It is unfortunate that it was not edited, at least slightly, to eliminate the repetitive thesis-data-summary structure of each chapter. In present form it will probably receive only the attention of specialists in the field of economics. This is unfortunate because there are good sections on the interpretation of specific data, like the comparisons of the wages of New Hampshire's farm laborers to those of other areas of the country.

Manyon's study overemphasizes a narrowly defined general thesis that argues that New England farmers had made economic gains during the period under study. Unfortunately, too much reliance is placed on statistical averages of

economic wealth to interpret a situation that involved both *gains and losses*. A more balanced study would have attempted to unite both extremes of what is a very complex socioeconomic equation by confronting the wrenching problems and hard times experienced by many farmers while also evaluating the significant achievements of those farmers who readapted their farms and managed to achieve a measure of success during the period. Both perspectives of New England agriculture are essential.

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The War of 1812: Land Operations. By George F. G. Stanley.
(Ottawa: Macmillan of Canada, 1983. Pp. 512. Cloth.
\$24.95.)

Canadian military historian George F. G. Stanley has written a commendable analysis of the War of 1812 from a Canadian perspective. The bulk of his work is centered on the Great Lakes and Saint Lawrence frontiers, though New England readers will find interesting the chapters dealing with the British invasion of eastern Maine and the Plattsburg/Lake Champlain offensive. The emphasis is two-fold, which in some respects prevents the book from being a comprehensive history. First, the northern land battles are assessed superbly, but distant campaigns, such as Mobile Bay and New Orleans, are barely mentioned. Second, in overemphasizing the land maneuvers, Stanley gives short shrift to the waterborne lifelines that British North America depended on to wage warfare successfully. As a result, the book falls short of becoming classic history.

The author begins his portrayal with an assessment of the war's causes, agreeing with his predecessors that rapid American settlement of the old Northwest conflicted inevitably with

the Canadian fur trade. The Indians of Tecumseh's alliance had no choice but to fight against the ever-encroaching Americans settling the fur-rich Northwest; sparsely populated Upper Canada did not pose such a threat. Seaward issues, such as the impressment of American seamen and the harsh British Orders in Council, aligned the mid-coastal merchants with the jingoistic western War Hawks. Stanley notes that the New England states, where a declining Federalist majority reigned, opposed a war that adversely affected the trading emporiums east of New York port.

In *The War of 1812*, Stanley describes the disasters suffered by the United States in 1812-13, notably at Detroit, Queenston Heights, Châteauguay, Stoney Creek, and Crysler's Farm. His analysis is correct: American militia, in contrast to the Revolutionary minuteman tradition, fought erratically, especially when led by inept commanders. Sadly for the Americans, such intrepid Revolutionary commanders as Henry Dearborn of Monmouth, Maine, William Hull of Massachusetts, and Wade Hampton of Virginia proved incapable of decisive field command in 1812-13. None compared with Isaac Brock, the British general killed at Queenston Heights. It was not until the war had raged for more than a year that aggressive American commanders like Winfield Scott, Jacob Brown, George Izard, and Alexander Macomb were promoted and the tide began to turn gradually against the British. Still, political considerations plagued the American war effort; the stalwart William Henry Harrison was relegated to an insignificant post at Cincinnati after his brilliant victory at Moraviantown in 1813.

The invasion of eastern Maine is portrayed competently by Stanley, though little original research is utilized. He describes the occupation of the Passamaquoddy islands and the capture of Castine by a British amphibious force. Sir John Coape Sherbrooke and Admiral Edward Griffith sailed in small craft up the Penobscot in search of the crippled frigate *Adams*, commanded by Charles Morris. The *Adams*, moored near Hampden Academy, was attacked by the combined

British force that overran a hastily mustered militia unit. The frigate was burned by the crew, which fled overland to Unity before making Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The militia surrendered and defenseless Bangor was ransacked by the marauding British force.

Partisan politics contributed markedly to the inability of the Americans to regain eastern Maine. Madison's Republican administration would not aid the Federalists in New England. Few regular troops were made available for coastal defense; had Sherbrooke and Griffith been more ambitious, all of the District of Maine might have been conquered, possibly altering permanently the ownership of the Maine salient. As events turned out, eastern Maine did not provide the British with enough leverage at the conference table; a *status quo antebellum* treaty restored eastern Maine to the United States.

In the chapter dealing with eastern Maine, oversights are evident, again in a misunderstanding of the sea's influence. Stanley includes a description of the illicit trade in foodstuffs on which British North America depended, but he neglects to mention the influence of American privateers in disrupting the smuggling and the concurrent inability of the Royal Navy at Halifax to establish command of the sea in the Gulf of Maine. Neither does he include mention of the defeat of HMS *Boxer* by the USS *Enterprise*; on the northern lakes and on the Atlantic seaboard, the American navy frequently kept the British off balance. With command of the Gulf of Maine in limbo for most of the war, privateers on both sides disrupted commerce and kept foodstuffs at a subsistence level. Generally, the war in the east is treated in a cursory manner, as exemplified by the author's research. Stanley neglected to use the autobiography of Charles Morris and C. R. Colden's vintage biography of Sir George Prevost, commander of the combined British force at Plattsburg/Lake Champlain.

The War of 1812: Land Operations is written in the popular vein, with end notes instead of footnotes; the latter are preferred by scholarly readers. The book is well illustrated with outstanding maps and illustrations. Ample appendices serve

BOOK REVIEWS

to acquaint Canadians with their frequently overlooked military heritage. The Canadian point of view has been presented in full, though international readers will notice frustrating gaps, particularly on the relationship between naval and maritime activities and the land war. Indeed, all strategic factors in warfare are relative, all dependent on one another.

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L'enclume and le couteau: The Life and Work of Adélard Côté, Folk Artist. By Normand Beaupré. (Manchester, N.H.: National Materials Development Center for French and Creole, 1982. Pp. 98. Paper. \$9.00.)

Adélard Côté was an ordinary French-Canadian who spent most of his adult life in the Biddeford region, where he died. Very little distinguished him outwardly from other French-Canadian migrants, except, perhaps, his successive occupations as a skilled craftsman and as a farmer who also whittled. What could have been only a pastime, a way to occupy during winter months hands not used to idleness, evolved into a form of self-expression. Côté was more than a skilled craftsman, and his work was more than mere reproduction; it was an interpretation of the reality that surrounded him. This resulted in very vigorous and slightly stylized carvings, mostly of common people and farm animals. Adélard was also a blacksmith, and some of the artifacts combined metal-work with woodwork. Adélard Côté grew into a folk artist.

L'enclume and le couteau is not an abstruse treatise on folk art. It is rather a befitting tribute to the old man's accomplishments. It shows respect for and understanding of the artist as a person, while also clearly explaining the nature of his

art. Côté's work is viewed as a reflection of his values, culture, and life-style, all products of the environment in which he lived.

The organization of the text into three chapters follows naturally. The first two are straightforward, well-informed narratives about Biddeford and Côté's life. The last focuses on the artifacts and explains the meaning of some of them. The book is lavishly illustrated with pictures taken from the family album and with beautiful photographs of the artifacts. Combined with an elegant layout and great attention to detail, the result is a book that is very much like Côté's art: straightforward, honest, and æsthetic. One has the feeling that Adélard Côté would have approved of it.

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