

RESEARCH NOTE

OPPORTUNITIES IN MAINE HISTORY: A PANEL

The QUARTERLY counts among its responsibilities an ongoing effort to acquaint MHS members with current directions in Maine scholarship, to encourage communication between like-minded academic and lay historians, and to indicate new materials and opportunities available for the study of Maine history. With this in mind, we offer the following reports of research in progress. Others with projects in Maine history in various stages of completion are encouraged to submit similar reports for publication at a later time.

The papers below were delivered at the spring meeting of the New England Historical Association, held at Bowdoin College, April 26-27. Two other papers presented on the NEHA panel are not included in this selection since in the near future the authors will contribute articles based on research discussed in their reports. The fourth report below was prepared for the NEHA conference but was not delivered at that time.

The reports describe certain works in progress at the University of Maine at Orono and at the Maine State Museum in Augusta. Although the authors share a common interest in an area defined — at least geographically — by the boundaries of the state, the fields of interest they represent range from social and family history to maritime history, early Maine technology, and environmental studies. The others on the NEHA panel discussed in addition urban and comparative history and ethnic studies. It is an interesting commentary on Maine's past that such diverse interests can be accommodated under the rubric of one state's history.

There are, of course, common themes reflected in these reports as well. First, they demonstrate that Maine history offers a varied yet truly representative slice of American history. Maine scholars explore a field with broad and important implications. The possibilities for understanding America's past through local, state, and regional studies have become even more apparent in recent decades, particularly in the fields subsumed by the "new" social history — the history of ordinary people and everyday lives. Historians are finding that intensive



The April 1985 New England Historical Association meeting. UMO historian John F. Battick makes a point while colleague Yves Frenette looks on.

research in smaller geographical areas can reveal fresh historical perspectives overlooked by scholars concerned with national trends, events, and personalities. Today, researching Maine's maritime legacy, the social structure of its seaport towns, the experience of its early artisans, or the history of its changing environment offers the satisfaction of dealing with local events that have broad applications in American history.

These reports also reflect the wealth of research material available to the Maine history scholar. The state boasts excellent repositories for family and personal papers, diaries, public documents, early imprints, and newspapers. Yet the field is relatively unexplored; indeed even our wealth of published local history has not yet been synthesized into a comprehensive analysis of regional development. The researcher in Maine history, armed with new techniques and concepts, typically finds himself or herself working with materials never before scrutinized by scholars. The following reports are offered in the spirit of encouraging others to take up the challenge of Maine history. Much remains to be done and the opportunities are boundless.