

FROM THE COLLECTIONS
BUNKER'S TEXT BOOK, BY WILLIAM DAVID BERRY

On March 14, 1894, the *Kennebec Journal* announced the death of Waterville journalist and political satirist Benjamin F. Bunker:

He was a man known all over the State as the editor and proprietor of the *Kennebec Democrat*, and clippings from the witty sarcasm of his editorials in that paper have been copied in nearly every publication in the State. The paper was truly what the press of Maine chose to term it, "Bunker's Democrat," and he chose to edit and publish therein whatever his fancies suited him the best, caring not what others said, and let him beware who "cast the first stone." It was not his purpose to confine his attacks to his political opponents alone, but often those of his own party were victims of his thrusts.

The obituary continued to give an accurate, and surprisingly sympathetic account of the North Anson native. Interestingly, however, the notice failed to mention the man's scandalous overview of the Maine political and social landscape, *Bunker's Text Book of Political Deviltry* (Waterville, 1889). Now virtually forgotten, and quite rare, this 150-page volume is supposed to have offended so many downeasters that the run was bought up and destroyed. A more likely reason for its scarcity is that Bunker printed it on highly acidic paper.

Given Bunker's sharp pen, cartoon images, and range of subject matter, it is a great misfortune that students and scholars have overlooked his role in local history. Even the year of his birth is in doubt, with the *Journal* giving 1838 and other sources claiming 1837. What is indisputable is the richness of *Bunker's Text Book*, copies of which were given to the Maine Historical Society (Special Collection #3) by long-time members William B. Jordan, Jr. and Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr. A photocopy is available to researchers.

BUNKER'S TEXT BOOK

OF

Political Deviltry.

With Jack-Knife Illustrations.

MAINE'S

SMALL BORE

POLITICIANS.

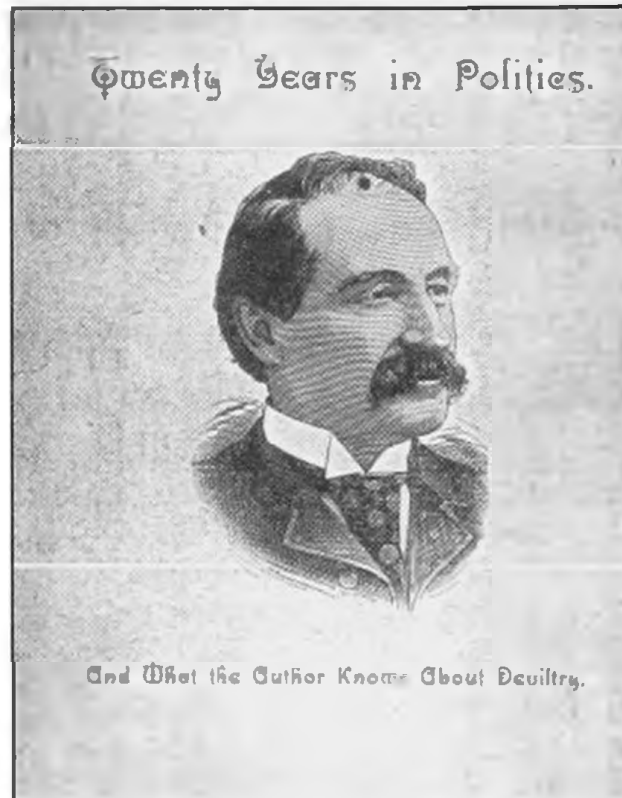
AND FACTS ABOUT

Temperance Hypocrites.



PRICE - 50 CENTS.

In the course of the book, Bunker explores the shape of the Republican, Democratic, Temperance, Greenback, and Labor parties and lances everyone from state constables to major personalities, including James G. Blaine, Eugene Hale, and Thomas B. Reed. Few observers have made more sense of the power of temperance and prohibition forces, which in Bunker's view, had been largely co-opted by the Republicans. Indeed, the *Textbook* offers a drinker's tour of Maine, showing how the major communities enforced, or more accurately, failed to enforce liquor laws; "Bangor is one place east of Boston where you can



enter a 'gilded saloon' and get an honest drink of pure liquor." Portlanders gave outward support to the temperance laws of Neal Dow, yet "the free lunch counter can be found in more than 100 places...and there are several high-toned places where prominent men take their 'red licker' and toy with the juice of the maize." Woodcut illustrations of such goings-on follow throughout.

An important chapter focuses on the Maine Insane Asylum, with the sub-title reading: "THE ROOST FOR DECAYED POLITICIANS – DRUNKENNESS AND DEBAUCHERY – GROSS IMMORALITY OF ATTENDANTS AND TRUSTEES – INCOMPETENCY AND PLUNDER – THE INSTITUTION AS A POLITICAL MACHINE – CHARGES OF MISCONDUCT, CRUELTY AND MISMANAGEMENT NEVER INVESTIGATED – SLANDERS THAT IMPLICATE PROMINENT MEN SMOTHERED – SILENCE REWARDED." Bunker launches some very specific charges here and names names, making this particularly interesting grist for social historians.

William David Barry