

JIM VICKERY'S CHERISHED IMAGES OF MAINE: A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

BY WILLIAM H. BUNTING

IFIRST MET Jim Vickery at his brother Eric's old Unity farmhouse on a hot and sultry day in the summer of 1974. Commencing a project that ultimately resulted in *A Day's Work*, I had sent a letter to every Maine town clerk asking for names of residents with old photographs, and Unity's clerk, of course, had forwarded my letter to Jim. When I walked into the book-stacked front hall I knew that I had come to the right place. Jim was keeping bachelors' hall with Eric. Eric was tall, lean, and silver; Jim was not. Whereas some people resemble their dog, Jim was more akin to the somewhat frowzy—yet surely very literate—overstuffed chair into which he melded in the dark, book-lined living room. Bantering and bickering with Eric, gossiping, talking of books and of day trips, and savoring a ritualistic late afternoon vodka and tonic mixed by Eric, Jim luxuriated in his summer freedom from teaching.

The last time I saw Jim he was near death. I knew it and he knew it. Many years had passed since our first meeting, and too many had passed since our last meeting. Life's complications had put my project in storage in the attic for many years, but, at last, a plan for publication had materialized. I read Jim my captions for some of his images, and told him that the book was to be dedicated both to him and to the memory of Eric, the best-read farmhand in the State of Maine. He was very pleased that Eric would be remembered. Although the circumstances could not have been more different from our first meeting, Jim nevertheless communicated a similar sense of serene contentment. After spending a lifetime looking backwards, perhaps he was now looking ahead with curiosity, acceptance, and even anticipation. What could have been a most difficult visit was instead one of quiet comfort. But then, upon hearing of his death, I suddenly missed him greatly. There were many more photographs that I wanted to show him.

Jim started collecting images related to the history of his family when a teenager. Later, returned from the army, he broadened his scope to encompass Maine history in general. Unlike the narrow-focused buff who

only collects images pertaining to his or her particular interest—I knew one once who scissored away everything but ships—Jim collected historic photographs just because he knew that they would be important to someone someday. I came along on that day, as it were, and more than a dozen of Jim’s images appear in *A Day’s Work*.

For this occasion I have selected images—some of which were among Jim’s favorites—that either have never been published, or have not recently been published. Most are by Charles Berry Cook, a Quaker Unity farmer (and a distant relative of Jim’s) who dabbled in photography in the early 1900s to very good effect. Jim gave this collection to the Maine State Museum before he died. The other images may be found with the portion of the collection Jim willed to Special Collections, Fogler Library, University of Maine. Jim’s great collection of Maine stereo view cards was willed to the Bangor Public Library.



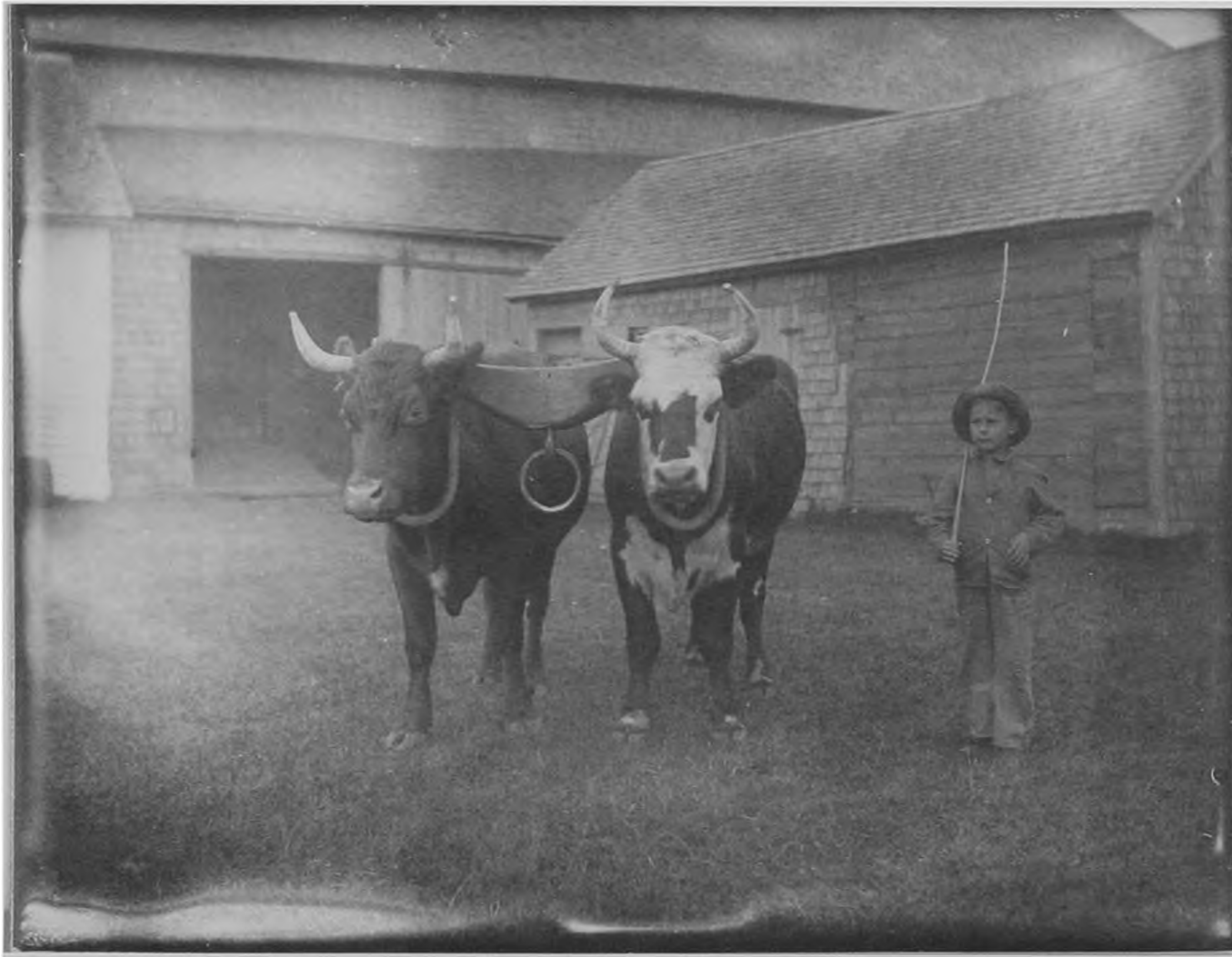
Believed to be Reuel Mussey Berry (1841-1923), a Civil War pensioner of Unity and kin to Jim Berry Vickery, by Charles Berry Cook, early 1900s. Jim once wrote to me; "I find the study of the faces of the very old persons [in photographs] revealing much of character." (Vickery Gift to Maine State Museum.)



Members of the Mitchell and Connor families, of Unity, by Charles Berry Cook, early 1900s. Curtis Mitchell (center) was a storekeeper who had gone to the Gold Rush. His son-in-law Harry Connor (standing) farmed and ran a gristmill. Mrs. Mary Connor Lawrence (standing in white); unidentified woman (standing in black); and Mrs. Henrietta Connor (sitting on grass with a nephew or niece) was a teacher. Bertha Conner (sitting in rocker) was—in Jim’s words—an “old maid.” Many “old maids” escaped the confines of the household and gained some economic freedom by teaching, or working in textile mills and shoe shops. Note the well-collared dog. (Vickery Gift to Maine State Museum.)



Graduation, 1913, Unity, by Charles Berry Cook. Preble Hatch (second from left) became a “credit man.” Helen Fowle (next to him) married John Edgerly, who became a “big farmer.” The girl next to her, unidentified—as are the rest—became a teacher. This image was one of Jim’s favorites because of the poignancy between the future lives of these country youths (particularly the future “credit man”) and the grandiloquent motto marking their passage into adulthood. 1913 was the last year of innocence before the madness of World War I, and in retrospect lent a sense of foreboding to what was at the time a joyful occasion. (Vickery Gift to Maine State Museum.)



Another of Jim's much loved images for what it said about a vanished way of life, by Charles Berry Cook, early 1900s. Young Howard Cornforth poses with a pair of "mismatched" steers. The "off" steer is a red Durham; the "nigh" one, next to Howard, is a "brockle face" or "brockle head," most likely the result of an assignation between a Durham cow and a Hereford bull. (Vickery Gift to Maine State Museum.)



Posthumous portrait, by Charles Berry Cook, early 1900s. People often forgot to have a photograph taken of a family member until after he or she died. Jim surmised that this unfortunate fellow had been kicked by a horse. (Vickery Gift to Maine State Museum.)



A wonderful interior study, by Charles Berry Cook, early 1900s. Note the contrast between the buttoned-up woman and the scantily-clad nymph, or whatever, in the framed picture behind her. Note also the blocked-off old open-hearth fireplace. (Vickery Gift to Maine State Museum.)



Presumably the Christmas tree in his Unity farmhouse, by Charles Berry Cook, early 1900s. Doll's clothes and accessories, books, and a five dollar bill—no small gift—adorn the small tree. This is a scene but rarely recorded. (Vickery Gift to Maine State Museum.)



Crew of loggers in their camp taken by the light of flash powder, late 1800s. Despite the appearance of the men with neckties, it is perhaps better that we can see this group rather than smell them, as loggers often wore the same unwashed clothes all winter. Note the kittens left foreground, and the proud fiddle player behind them. (Vickery Gift to Fogler Library, University of Maine.)



The Haynes & Chalmers Company, Exchange Street, Bangor, "The largest Hardware Store in Eastern Maine," late 1800s. Items advertised include blacksmith's bellows, anvils, vises and farriers' tools; dynamite, Winchester rifles, doors, windows, frames; white lead, bar iron; steel wheels, spokes, and rims; paints, oils and varnishes. Hardware stores then sold tools and supplies required by Mainers for their weekday vocations, not for household tasks on weekends and vacations. (Vickery Gift to Fogler Library, University of Maine.)



A sailor on the 277-foot Boston to Bangor steamer *City of Bangor*, 1894. Most of the white crewmembers on the line—black men were employed in the stewards department—were natives of upper Penobscot Bay and the river valley. Many returned year after year to what was considered to be entertaining employment. Some cautious bay and river folk, however, refused ever to take the “Boston boat” for the very justifiable fear of fire. (Vickery Gift to Fogler Library, University of Maine.)



The ladder wagon "Champion" attending a Bangor fire, 1890s. Fire was the great leveler of village and city. This is a fine example of the relatively rare "unposed" or candid images that Jim particularly enjoyed discovering. (Vickery Gift to Fogler Library, University of Maine.)



A rare early photograph of Captain Charles B. Sanford (with beard), and a boon companion, 1860s. Connecticut-born Sanford, who ran the Boston-Bangor line after the death of founder Menemon Sanford in 1852, became the most famous of Maine steamboaters. In 1921 a Bangor newspaperman who knew him recalled "his picturesque ways and breezy manner," and his extreme generosity. In 1920 steamboat historian Francis B. C. Bradley wrote: "He was absolute master of everything connected with his boats, and his word was law on deck or in the office. Some of his sayings and doings are remembered to this day, although he retired . . . in 1875."

I regret that I have been unable to locate my source (and Jim is not here to help me) for the tale about the time Captain Sanford, his steamer lying at the wharf at Belfast, bet a passenger that he could dive overboard and catch a codfish. The wager taken, Sanford promptly did just that, producing a very lively cod, which, it turned out, had been "salted" in a cage under the wharf.

One story related in the *Bangor Daily News*, 25 June 1921, concerns the occasion when Captain Sanford, having felt a jar while at the dinner table of his beloved steamer *Cambridge* as it sped up "the Bangor River," hastened to the pilothouse to be informed that the steamer had struck a coaster, dividing bow from stern. "That's the way to do it!" Sanford responded enthusiastically, "When you hit 'em, cut 'em right in two!" Jim was very proud of this image, and of course, relished such stories. (Vickery Gift to Fogler Library, University of Maine.)