

Appendix

How People Earned a Living in Maine

The people who came to Maine before the Revolution found life very hard, largely because there are only two seasons—July and Winter. Usually men would come one summer to clear the land of trees and stones. The families would come the following summer to plant and build shelter. If they were able to feed themselves, they would come back to stay the whole year.

For some farmers sheep provided an income. In St. John Valley, Somerset County, and in Madawaska there were sheep-farming strongholds, according to Clarence Albert Day, who wrote about farming in Maine from 1860 to 1940. Madawaska had 980 sheep, more than any other community. In Exeter and North Haven Island farmers began by importing Merinos but soon preferred mutton breeds. Some had Cotswolds and Southdowns, but the large, long-wooled Leicesters were most numerous. The women carded and spun wool in addition to feeding and delivering lambs.

By 1883 there were sixty corn-packing plants, making more money than wool producers. During the Civil War the price of wool doubled, and there was a boom in 1865 with a drop again so that only lamb and mutton were in demand. Then potatoes became more profitable. In 1880 there were twenty starch

factories, selling sizing for cotton to textile mills. When the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad opened connecting Houlton, Caribou, and Ft. Fairfield, potatoes became prime income producers for northern Maine.

Ship-building, sparked by the discovery of gold in California, ignited Kittery, Bath, Damariscotta, and Rockland where seventy-seven clippers were built. The Red Jacket established a speed record of thirteen days, one hour and twenty-five minutes from New York to Liverpool. Maine clippers were famous for speed as they carried prospectors, settlers, and supplies around the horn to California. All this activity came to a screeching halt in 1954. Families receiving federal relief funds increased from 93 to 220 in Bath between 1955 and 1957, when panic erupted.

Train development was not welcome during this ship-building boom because Maine people owned sailing packets and coastal steamers. I found shops in Portland, called chancelleries, that carried relics of Jewish-owned ships. The Belfast Poultry Company, started by the Higer family, traveled with chickens to Boston. The Lipman Poultry Company used boats to transport menhaden fish from Nova Scotia to Bath, but the Maine Central Railroad connecting St. John and Bangor eliminated most of the ship transportation in the north.

Governor Joshua L. Chamberlain, after he came home from the Civil War, described Maine in a speech to the legislature as a state with virgin soil, undeveloped powers, vast forests, and vigorous men without money. He was in favor of building railroads, inviting immigration, and developing her resources.

Bangor, on the Penobscot River, became a center for the lumber industry. Between March 21 and April 24 when the ice broke, logs were tumbled into the water to be carried downstream to sawmills near seaports. More than 200 saws for boards and as many for lathes, shingles, and clapboards operated by 1848. Penobscot County produced 213,051,255 board feet in that year, making lumber the principle export of Maine. Bangor was a frontier town that Henry David Thoreau visited three times.

The land boom of 1835 brought many Massachusetts speculators and farmers who bought 230,000 acres of public land for \$1.45 per acre. With them came gamblers, sailors, builders, salesmen, and adventure-seeking men and women. Hundreds of houses and stores suddenly sprang up. In the Spring Loggers who had driven logs down the dangerous river after a long winter in the camps "thronged the grog shops on the waterfront."

New England began to build cotton and woolen mills when the embargo imposed during the War of 1812 cut off the supply of manufactured fabrics from Europe. Dams provided power on almost every river. Unskilled French Canadians came to Lewiston, Westbrook, Biddeford, Old Town, and Brunswick to spin, card, and weave until 1873, when a recession hit the United States. During the years between the world wars many of these mills moved south for cheap labor.

The paper mills also attracted immigrants to Topsham, Norway, Mechanic Falls, Canton, Poland, Livermore Falls, Brunswick, Westbrook, Gardiner, and Yarmouth. The Cumberland Mills in Westbrook produced one million dollars worth of paper in 1870; by 1880 it was the largest paper mill in the world. In fact the owner pioneered, during the shift to hydroelectric power, the eight-hour shift, profit sharing, and the Mutual Relief Society. The mill also boasted a library, a church, and 150 company-owned houses.

As early as 1841 there were paper-making mills in Portland. The C.M. Price Company, started as Day, Lyon, and Company, made paper from rags. Those who came to Maine penniless could collect old clothing or waste from textile mills, sort what they collected into cotton, silk, flax, or wool, and sell the bundles to the paper mills. Just before World War I the mills began to make paper from wood, ending the rag collector's trade.

The ground freezes four feet deep, the ponds and rivers even deeper; in fact trucks delivered heavy goods like pianos by driving on the ice. Ernest Marriner described the industry he called "Frozen Gold": "Kennebec ice was to be had right at home. No artificial restoration was necessary, no waiting for twenty years for another crop to grow (trees). The crop demanded neither seeds nor fertilizer; it just grew—year after year. If the winter stayed warm and had too many thaws, the ice was thin and spongy; if there was a long spell of intense cold, it was thick and hard. But in some quality and some quantity it came every winter. It was the Kennebec's cheapest and most valuable winter crop." In the boom years of 1840 to 1900, ice houses operated from Augusta to Bowdoinham. Electric refrigeration killed this business after World War II.

Jews who lived in Augusta, Gardiner, Hallowell, and Randolph worked on the river, cutting and hauling ice during the worst of the winter when they could not peddle. Some even cut

ice after a week of peddling because they could supplement their meager earnings and go home in the evenings. Accidents? Frostbite? Nowhere did I hear a complaint.

Apparently leather was tanned in Maine in the seventeenth century. Deer leather was plentiful and easy to sew. After the Revolution more and more leather was brought in from other states with large cow herds. Many Jews came with shoe-building skills from Europe, although it seems more likely they learned how to work with leather in the mills in Massachusetts before the mills moved to Maine. Children worked in the smelly mills until they graduated from high school or developed illnesses. Some of the big mills in Bangor and Lewiston were owned by Jews who came before World War I. During the Depression, many shoe and textile mills moved to the southern states. Those that remained were either bought out by foreign companies or lost out to South American and Asian imports.

The canning industry came to Maine with birth pangs. In the 1830s, Volney Barker, a Dane, invented machinery that made the canning of corn possible. John Winslow Jones, a nephew of John Winslow, was an early promoter of the canning industry, despite the custom of corn cutting as a domestic or even community activity. Jones obtained a patent to process corn in 1852, but he had to fight rivals until 1873 when Judge Clifford finally decided Jones had invented a special knife to cut corn as well as inventing the canning process.

Meanwhile lobsters were boiled and canned in Harpswell until 1845, when Burnham & Morrill Company bought the plant and canned in Portland. In 1875 Volney Barker invented his first plunger-type machine for cutting sweet corn from the cob. A year later Julius Wolf of New York City started the first sardine-canning plant in Maine. Wolf and his partner, Herman Rensing, were so successful selling Maine sardines in New York that they opened a canning factory in Eastport. By 1906 sardine canneries were operating all along the shore from Eastport to Lubec, from Jonesport to Bar Harbor. Wealthy people like Underwood, Holmes, and Francis H. Leggett financed these canneries.

Jews owned poultry-processing plants in Bangor, Lewiston, and Waterville (later in Augusta), but four of the five went bankrupt when President Carter punished the Russians for invading Afghanistan by withholding grain. There was no storage facility in Maine, according to the poultry processors.

There was horse trading, horse shoeing, and dairy farming on a small scale. In Old Orchard Beach there were summer hotels where Jews gathered for weddings and matchmaking, as well as vacations.

According to Robert St. John, work was considered at best a necessary evil to be avoided if possible in the Western world until late in the nineteenth century. Judaism has always tried to teach the opposite. The Bible extols the value of work and calls the man fortunate who is able to eat the fruit of his own labor. Study and work equaled virtue. Even the great teachers Hillel and Akiba worked. Study must be combined with some trade. Mishna, the digest of oral law published at the end of the second century, intones, "Laboring man has dignity as a human being, and this dignity must be respected."

"While many nations of the earth are suffering cruel oppression, we are prosperous and happy," wrote a teacher, Samuel Coleman, in the book he published in 1831. "There can be no doubt that He who made the earth intends that it shall be inhabited and cultivated by those who can make the best use of it." In the course of time, savages will disappear from all parts of the earth, he predicted. "The greatest advantage of the discovery of the New World was that it afforded a profitable and safe home to many individuals who could not find means to live comfortably in Europe and to many more who were oppressed by bad governments and unjust laws in their native land."

Coleman wanted his pupils to appreciate what previous generations had endured: "We should be thankful that we live in happier times than our fathers did. We have but faint ideas of the sufferings they endured in their long terrible wars. We are not startled from our sleep by the frightful shouts of the savages, or the flames of our houses burning over our heads. Our fathers and mothers are not murdered before our eyes, nor are children forced away from their homes into the wild forest among cruel men. The fear of the scalping knife and tomahawk is passed away, and there is safety, peace, and happiness in our borders," wrote Coleman in 1830, when there were only 400,000 people living in Maine, half of whom were under age fifteen. Native Americans were not counted.

Coleman did not tell his pupils that foreign writers referred to Mainers as a race of drunkards. It was hard work clearing the wilderness. In 1830 there were fifteen distilleries and 500 dealers

licensed to sell all kinds of drinks. More wet goods were sold (rum especially) than dry goods. Dr. Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia waged a war against drinking by recommending beer and ale should replace spirits in the army. He came to Maine where he tried to show spirits would not fight the cold: there he found too many occasions to celebrate.

In the ship-building industry blackstrap (rum, molasses, and water) was served first thing in the early morning. The raising of a stern or stern post, the hanging of the anchor, or fastening the last plank was cause for celebration. The Fourth of July, barn-raising, the launchings of ships, even ordaining a minister meant drink in large quantities. Military musters and parades also brought out the rum.

In the lumber camps there were many reasons to drink—the cold, the long working days, daily accidents and bruises, ducking in ice-cold water, sleeping on the ground, and fighting among loggers, just to name a few.

In early summer fish were taken in brush baskets. Later when the fish made their dash up the river to their remote spawning grounds, people would rush along the river banks and bail out the herring and salmon by the tubful. The fish could only be caught in swift running water from Tuesday afternoon to Friday morning during three to six weeks, according to local law. People came from all over the state and Canada, camping and fighting with the help of spirits, but leaving with six to twenty barrels of fish.

The temperance movement actually started before the Revolution. Women who were involved in the movement usually took care of the drunkard's family. They developed schools for the children.

Whiskey was the cure for cold, a relief from fatigue and pain. Whiskey was provided at 11 A.M. and at 4 P.M. in the lumber camps and ship-building docks. It took many meetings, pledges, and bar breakings by the Temperance Union before Neal Dow, a Quaker crusader, made Maine a dry state on May 30, 1851. Indeed Maine was the first state to pass a law against drunk driving.

Although Jews drank wine during Passover and whiskey to celebrate other holidays, there were very few drunks among them. In Bangor the Litvaks (Lithuanians) and Russians formed social groups and fraternal organizations since the Masons and other Gentile groups did not admit them. In the smaller towns Jews were invited to join Kiwanis and Masons. There were

Zionists and activities to support Jews in Russia, especially after pogroms in Kishinev, Bialystok, and other cities shocked the United States in 1903–05.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the remnants of the German Jewish community in Bangor had been accepted. Julius Waterman, Louis Kirstein, and others (like William Engle, who was elected mayor) were established citizens. A generation later the Russian immigrants felt comfortable. In elementary and high school Jews did not suffer from social restrictions because they formed their own fraternities and social groups. In college, however—at Colby, the University of Maine, and Bowdoin—Jews encountered “the social restrictions prevalent in New England institutions.” Yet in 1923 Reverend Samuel C. Beane of the Unitarian Church spoke up for the “Hebrews” of Bangor against the Ku Klux Klan.

October 22, 1843 was declared the date for the second coming of Christ by a William Miller. Many people sold all their worldly goods and stood in white robes for many hours. In 1848 the Maine Anti-Slavery Society joined the men of the Temperance Union and went wild with causes such as abolition of slavery, women's rights, school reform, the Shakers, and peace. William Ladd of Minot publicized his plan for an international government, which led to the founding of the American Peace Society.

All was not peaceful in 1850 when Catholics and foreigners were the targets of hatred. The Know-Nothings (abolitionist and temperate) burned a Catholic church in Bath and tarred and feathered a priest who protested the school committee requirement that the children of his French parishioners read the Protestant version of the Bible in the Ellsworth school.

Neal Dow, wounded and captured in 1863, spent eight months in a Confederate prison before he was exchanged for a Southern general and returned to Maine as a hero. But the anti-slavery sentiment was never unanimous. For Maine ship-building families, cotton shipping to England stopped, and intermarriage with Southerners resulted in strains on loyalty. For them the Civil War was a disaster. Many Maine vessels were captured and destroyed.

Maine historians claim Susman Abrams, recruited from Bavaria by the British to fight the colonists in the American Revolution, was the first Jew to live and die in Maine. But Natalie Ornish wrote that ninety-two years before the Pilgrims landed at

Plymouth, members of the Spanish Inquisition in Mexico City burned a Jew, Hernando Alonso, at the stake. He was accused of practicing Judaic rituals, though he belonged to the Catholic Church. He had been hired by Conquistador Cortes as a carpenter to build bridges for a march across Mexico to defeat Emperor Montezuma II. In 1521 Spain ended the Aztec nation, and seven years later Alonso was killed. It does seem possible that Jews moved north as other Jews were burned at the stake, but there is no record in Maine of the Carvajal family, though some of them were burned. Jews fought at the Alamo with Travis, Crockett, and Bowie. Some fought for Texas independence, for ideals, for promise of land, and even for revenge against Mexico for injustice.

Many secular people who failed to find refuge in Massachusetts came to Maine; Antimonians, Quakers, and Baptists also came. Cotton Mather partly succeeded in Puritanizing Maine. New churches in the country were evangelical. Anti-Calvinists promoted the rise of Free Will Baptists who were active in anti-slavery groups, founded Bates College and Maine Central Institute. Seacoast towns adopted Congregational or Unitarian religions. Many did not go to church at all. Congregationalists founded the Bangor Theological Seminary in 1814 when Bangor, a boom town, was called "City of Sin."

How did Jews manage with all these different and sometimes hostile groups? They were attached to the life they left behind in shtetls (small towns) and struggled to send for relatives and landsleit. They celebrated Jewish holidays and tried to observe the Sabbath. The synagogue was the center of social and religious activity. They taxed themselves to pay the shamos (caretaker), the head of the rabbinical court, the ritual slaughterer of chickens and cows, the cantor, and the rabbi. Why did they prosper? Rufus Lears attributes it to the Industrial Revolution, and an uncommon adaptiveness, as well as willingness to take on new occupations. They were also frugal and industrious.

How were they different religiously? Maybe the settlers could not explain the difference, but as Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver said, "Jews do not need to be saved from some original sin; man should enjoy life; all men are equal and free; and death is not better than life. To Jews, brotherhood, universal peace, unity, freedom, and compassion are fundamental."