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Unity College
National Collegiate Book Collecting Contest 2017
Essay

The Breath and Breadth of the Maine Woods

Maine is the most forested state in the nation. Its forests, historically, have been a great source of wonder, enjoyment, and economic value for both those native to the state, and to those from afar. Due to their great impact much has been written about them, from treatises on their nature and history, to specific works on particular logging operations, time periods, and places within their bounds, to poetry, stories of recreating, and both true and fictional accounts of all variety of adventures. These numerous books, as well as related ephemera, are the breath of the Maine woods. They are the exhalations of centuries of life in Maine, and love for its forested lands. Like many before me I love the Maine woods. Since childhood it has been a world of fascination for me, and since childhood I have been engrossed with the forests of Maine and their history. This history spans centuries, and travels from the southern tip of the state northward to its crown, from the western mountains to the eastern shores, and from such great lakes as Moosehead down vital rivers such as the Kennebec. It extends from the makers of axes to the singers of songs, from fisherman and hunters to lumbermen and farmers; the Maine woods has a breadth of uses, stories, and histories like no other place I have spent significant time. The enormity of its impact may never be known, nor any collection of books fully examine and explore its every rock or tree, every creature or personality, yet it is clear that the Maine woods form an important basis for the livelihoods, industries, and recreation that has made Maine a resilient and awe-inspiring land.

I recall my earliest memories as a child: they all have to do with the forests of Maine and the lakes and rivers, animals, people, and places within them. They are memories of driving down dirt roads with my father on our way to fishing adventures on far-off, hidden lakes, or with my mother gathering blueberries to stuff into my mouth surrounded by the Camden Hills. As a child I could often be found climbing trees and looking out over the horizon, over forest and sea, or catching frogs, tracking squirrels, or digging in the dirt and finding the bones of dead animals. I remember being on Eagle Lake with my father in a small boat, with a small outboard motor, fishing for landlocked salmon, and watching an Osprey swoop down to catch a fish - and watching an Eagle swoop down upon the Osprey to steal that fish, and fly away with it grasped in its talons. I fondly reminisce on stops in diners, where elderly men in flannel and caps would sit and mainline coffee, in thick Maine accents reminiscing themselves. I remember in detail driving down logging roads, my father occasionally checking his Maine Atlas and Gazetteer (which is now mine, and in many ways the heart of my collection) for directions, as we explored the mostly uninhabited reaches of our state. This love of Maine, this love of exploration and adventure, and my love of reading, can all be attributed to my father, who passed away May 20th, 2005. It is through his love of books, and lifelong learning, his love of the outdoors, and these influences on my development, that I began to collect books myself, and in that collecting began to focus my attention on the Maine woods, exploring it not only physically, but through the written word.

No exploration of the Maine woods would be even partially complete without touching on a wide-ranging number of topics related to its history, people, industries, and ecosystems. These many sub-topics form the different segments of my collection and illustrate the range of

important works available to a collector. While specialization and focus is important in any book collection, and selectivity is key, in this case it is also important to examine the broadness of this topic, and its continued importance to an understanding of the whole of Maine. Indeed, Maine and the Maine woods are inseparable in many ways, and this collection showcases this point with the inclusion of some broader works on Maine as a whole, which include important segments on the Maine woods, as well as a number of town histories, which are also vital to an understanding of the manner in which the Maine woods affected small town life and livelihoods. From fiction to non-fiction, from personal stories to poetry, from histories of long-ago to recent tales of hunting and fishing, and on to billheads, photographs, advertisements, and maps my collection may seem to jump around - but it does so only outside of the context of the collection. Within the context of the breadth of the Maine woods each piece fits, for the ways in which people experience the Maine woods are as varied as there are people, and as varied as there are authors to write about it.

In selecting works to add to my collection I am conscientious of their condition, rarity, and quality, as well as, frankly, whether or not they interest me. I have passed up particularly uncommon, even rare, books in order to buy a more common one in better condition, or that was more germane to my interests and overall collection. I will often, though not always, wait to obtain a first edition rather than take the first copy of a work that comes my way. Though, as is evidenced by my bibliography, that is not always the case, or a viable option. Variety is important, and if I have already bought many specific lumbering-related histories, perhaps a book on natural ecosystems may seem more fitting. I would rather obtain an apposite book of great value to me, than one unsuitable to my overarching goals as a collector. When I have the

opportunity, I will often obtain second copies of particularly uncommon or rare books. However, I endeavor to acquire books I do not yet own, giving them preference over ones which I already have. I tend towards a preference for mid 19th to mid 20th century books as they hold an appeal that many others do not, though I daresay I likely have fewer from that time period than modern ones. I am just as happy to pick up a late 20th century or 21st century work if it is something unique to my collection and that examines the Maine woods in a unique manner.

In addition to my book and ephemera collecting, I also collect signs, antique tools, and other items related to the Maine woods. These are not included here, but are worth noting, as such artifacts are important to both preserve and study in order to gain a more full understanding of the history of the Maine woods and keep that history alive for future generations. Also, in addition to my book collecting, I do a lot of writing of my own, and am currently working on a couple Maine related historical works, as well as a book of Maine based nature poetry. These, and any future writings, will be my own little contributions to the breadth of Maine and the breadth of ways people experience the Maine woods.

My collection is ever-growing, and constantly being updated. I acquire new books related to Maine on a very regular basis, many of which fit within the bounds of this collection. I am currently working on a lifelong project to travel to every town, township, plantation, gore, surplus, and grant (our various labels for Civil Divisions) in the state of Maine. Through my travels, and supported by the knowledge I am continually gaining from the works in my collection, I am able to better understand the places I explore throughout the state and its vast forested lands. I highlight each place I have been in my Maine Atlas & Gazetteer, the one which I inherited from my father, and have traveled a majority of the state by car, foot, canoe, or

otherwise. Like my constantly developing collection, I still have many steps to take to complete this journey, but as I travel I look forward to every new path I take, whether it be physically or through the written word.