



By
The Down East Staff

Books Every Lover of Maine Should Read

Book photos by
Mark Fleming

MAINE'S LITERARY HERITAGE

runs as deep as its coastal waters, as broad as its sweeping woodlands. From the narrative histories of the Wabanaki to the dialect stories of Sarah Orne Jewett, from the gothic novels of Sally Wood to the fantastic worlds of Stephen King, from the essays of E. B. White to . . . well, the children's books of E. B. White, there isn't a genre that Mainers haven't left their mark on.

The books on the following pages are Maine books, which is to say they're set in Maine or otherwise concern it. (There are plenty of good books by Maine authors on non-Maine topics, but they'll have to go get their own magazine feature.) These are the books we'd include on the Maine Studies syllabus, the ones we'd stow

on the interstellar spacecraft so the aliens could come to know the Down East culture and character. They're the books we would want on our desert isle, assuming we were marooned with a fairly sizeable trunk.

Of course, this list isn't exhaustive, and we fully expect our highly literate audience to quibble with our picks. But every book on the following pages will add to your appreciation and understanding of the Pine Tree State. Every one proves Stephen King's assertion that "books are a uniquely portable magic." Every one lends credence to E. B. White's suggestion that "books are people." And every one fulfills the mandate of Barbara Cooney's *Miss Rumphius*, helping to make the world more beautiful.

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What's the Great Maine Novel?

OR, AS A NEW BOOK ASKS, CAN THERE EVEN BE SUCH A THING?

YOU DON'T NEED to be an English major to appreciate *Hidden Places: Maine Writers on Coastal Villages, Mill Towns, and the North Country*, by Dr. Joseph A. Conforti — but it doesn't hurt if you're well read. Conforti's approachable lit-crit tome examines how a dozen or so of Maine's finest writers have "explored the experience of living in far-flung settings." Along the way, the University of Southern Maine professor emeritus raises a solid question.

"What I try to do in the book is ask, is there really a single book so representative of Maine that we can call it the Great Maine Novel?" Conforti says. "My argument is, there can't: the state is too big, the physical and human landscapes are too diverse. So what I try to suggest is that we need to try to think about multiple major Maine novels." We chatted with Conforti, who offered five candidates. — BRIAN KEVIN

The Country of the Pointed Firs

by Sarah Orne Jewett

"It's the work that was first considered the Great Maine Novel," Conforti says, "and in some quarters, it still is, particularly among scholars of American literature." Jewett's collection of linked stories focuses on the imaginary fishing village of Dunnet Landing, where the narrator, a Bostonian, flees in search of solitude before slowly becoming enmeshed in the community. Conforti raises questions about whether the book really holds together as a novel (Jewett wrote the chapters as stand-alone stories in the 1890s, and her original collection was posthumously rearranged and augmented with unpublished material), but *The Country of the Pointed Firs* introduces a theme common to a lot of memorable Maine writing: the relationship between outsiders and insiders. "My argument in the book," Conforti says, "is that Jewett, who spent six months a year in Boston and was part of the Boston intelligentsia, was kind of a literary anthropologist, a go-between for outsiders — tourists, summer people, those who were discovering Maine — and the country people she knew."

Silas Crockett

by Mary Ellen Chase

A sweeping historical epic, Chase's 1935 novel

traces the fortunes of a single family across four generations on the Down East coast, from the peak of the age of sail to the dawn of the tourism economy. The novel, Conforti says, stands out for its sheer scope. "It's the story of 100 years of upheaval," he says. "Chase was the first Maine writer to offer a significant critique of what outsiders were doing to the Maine coast."

Spoonhandle

by Ruth Moore

Moore's second novel was a spectacular best-seller in 1946, earning the Maine native comparisons to Faulkner along with a big-budget Hollywood adaptation. Another tale of a coastal community in transition, *Spoonhandle* is rich with complex, often funny characters navigating their island community's discovery by summer people. "One of Moore's significant achievements," Conforti says, "is that she gives you this close-up of an entitled businessman from Baltimore trying buy up one of the islands, and it's a scathing critique of a representative rich person from outside who has no comprehension of Maine and its people."

The Burgess Boys

by Elizabeth Strout

Conforti sometimes gets grief for preferring Strout's 2013 novel, about the fallout from an alleged hate crime

in a fictional Maine mill town, to the author's Pulitzer-winning *Olive Kitteridge*. But *The Burgess Boys*, he says, is a worthier effort. "It's an ambitious work, and it acknowledges some diversity in Maine," Conforti says. "Strout spent time studying the Somali community, getting to know some of the Somali people. They invited her into their homes. She would go and park her car at a school and see if the Somali kids and the native-born kids were interacting, if they were playing with one another. She's someone who has strong ties to Lewiston, and *The Burgess Boys* is essentially about Lewiston as a community."

Empire Falls

by Richard Russo

"Long and involved and certainly an ambitious book," Conforti says of Russo's Pulitzer winner, published in 2001. A tragicomedy about blue-collar interior Maine, *Empire Falls* feels a world away from Sarah Orne Jewett, but as with *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, the reader comes to understand the place by understanding its people. Seemingly no citizen of the titular fading factory town is denied his or her own plot arc in a novel that Conforti calls "an artful act of literary jugglery."

Hidden Places is available in hardcover and ebook from Down East Books.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

A few other titles dissected in *Hidden Places* that deserve a shout among our 100 must-reads:

Papa Martel

by Gérard Robichaud

A 1961 chronicle of a Franco-American family and its Tevye-like patriarch that Conforti calls "the best thing we have in depicting some of the interior of the Franco community in a mill city."

Come Spring

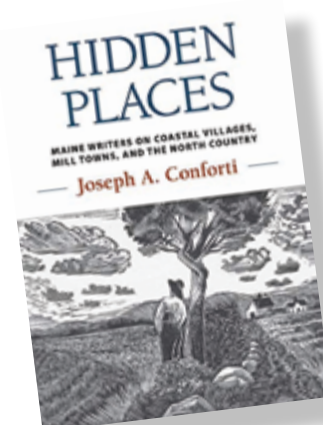
by Ben Ames Williams

Published in 1940, an epic, fictionalized account of the founding of the town of Union. Clocks in at 800 pages and reads like Steinbeck Lite.

Ernie's Ark

by Monica Wood

The poignant tale of a strike in a paper town, told from multiple perspectives. "Realistic, humane, and gracefully written," Conforti writes.



The Significance of the Beaver

AN ADOLESCENT READER, A PROBLEMATIC BOOK, AND WHAT IT HAS TO TEACH.

By Brian Kevin

When I was 10 years old, I read the young-adult novel *The Sign of the Beaver* and was moved to write a letter to its author, Elizabeth George Speare. It's the only fan mail I've ever sent, and I don't recall its substance, only that Ms. Speare wrote back. For years, her letter sat in a drawer at my mother's house with other childhood mementos. It's gone now, but I remember it was typewritten and brief, encouraged me to follow my literary ambitions, and came with a signed black-and-white photograph. Speare, who died four years later, was 80 at the time but younger in the photo, wearing a cardigan and pearl earrings, kneeling next to a golden retriever and looking every bit a patrician white lady from Connecticut — though, of course, I knew nothing then about Connecticut.

Nor about Maine, where *The Sign of the Beaver* is set. I was a bookish, little-traveled kid in a working-class Wisconsin family, making my way through the “feral child” canon of YA lit: *My Side of the Mountain*, in which an urban runaway lives off the land in the Catskills; *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, about a Native girl marooned on a California island; *Bright Island*, Mabel L. Robinson's underrated 1937 Maine classic about a free-spirited, capable island girl navigating her too-civilized mainland school.

They're all fish-out-of-water tales and, to varying degrees, survival stories. So is *The Sign of the Beaver*, about a 13-year-old named Matt, from a family of white settlers in central Maine in the late 1700s. Matt's father leaves him alone on the homestead to retrieve the rest of the family from Massachusetts, but when he's delayed, a series of misfortunes leaves Matt short on food and supplies. To his rescue comes a Native elder from an unspecified tribe, along with his grandson, Attean, who teaches Matt to hunt, fish, and forage. Matt teaches Attean to read English, and the boys become friends. When Attean's tribe migrates farther inland to avoid encroachment from settlers, Matt stays put, hoping for his family's return.

The Sign of the Beaver won a Newbery Honor, and it was long taught in classrooms as an introduction to Native cultures in New England. But it has also made lists of “books to avoid” for Speare's depiction of its Native characters, and rereading the book as an

adult, it's hard not to cringe at Attean's pidgin English and use of the word *squaw*. If not for kids, there are certainly better books to read for insight into the traditions of the Penobscot and other Wabanki peoples — among them, Frank Speck's respected 1940 ethnography *Penobscot Man* and *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man*, by Penobscot journalist Joseph Nicolai, the rare example of a 19th-century Native writer recording his people's history and oral traditions in English.

Still, it smarts to find *The Sign of the Beaver* on blacklists. I know now that Speare based it on the true story of young Theophilus Sargent, the son of Milo's first settler, who survived a season in the woods with help from a Penobscot band. She once wrote that it wasn't her intent to pen a survival story, and to me — although I couldn't have articulated this at 10 — the book was indeed more than that. Where other heroes of

“feral child” tales struggle and triumph alone, Speare's story turns on a feeling of profound vulnerability in the presence of another. Matt gets by thanks not to his stubborn will but to the generosity of his Penobscot friend. And when that friend is forced to leave, Matt has a sense, if only an adolescent's sense, of his own complicity.

The book gave me my first meaningful inkling that there was such a thing as culture, that groups of people could live substantially differently from one another, and that there was much to be gained when those groups came into contact — and much to be lost. If I could write Ms. Speare another letter today, I would like to thank her for that.

Brian Kevin is *Down East*'s editor in chief.



Quiz: HDT, LDR, or LLB?

Who said it?

WE'VE PAIRED LINES FROM TWO OF MAINE'S MOST QUOTABLE WRITERS, HENRY DAVID THOREAU AND LOUISE DICKINSON RICH, WITH PEARLS FROM PERHAPS THE STATE'S LEAST-LIKELY BESTSELLING AUTHOR, L.L. BEAN HIMSELF.

1 2 3 4 5 6

There are so many, many Maines that it would take a lifetime to learn them all by heart.

Wherever there is a channel for water, there is a road for the canoe.

My life to the age of 40 years was mostly uneventful, with a few exceptions.

A pine cut down, a dead pine, is no more a pine than a dead human carcass is a man.

To those who are making their first trip to the big woods, be sure and get a shoe that will not chafe the heel cords.

While in some parts of the country, a man has to be rich or famous or both before he can afford to be eccentric, in Maine, eccentricity is a fundamental right of everyone.

1. **State O' Maine**, by adopted Mainer Louise Dickinson Rich, is a 1964 work of pop anthropology that reads as fresh as the day it was published. Dickinson Rich writes the state's history — natural and human — with a scholar's insight and a lover's fondness.

2. Henry David Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* recalls three wilderness excursions here, in 1846, 1853, and 1857. His essays about the trips, published in 1864 after his death, helped make his name at a time when Walden as a pastoral force. Many scholars point to Maine as where his wilderness ethic developed.

3. So begins *My Story*, a strange, dull autobiography by tycoon Leon Leonard Bean, who dismisses the first two-thirds of his life immediately, then mostly writes about shoes. His life and love for the state are worth reading about, but the book you want is M.R. Montgomery's 1984 *In Search of L.L. Bean*.

4. Thoreau's reflections on his river trips are full of aphorisms and backcountry newbies' enthusiasms. Back home, he experienced nature eye and ear for regional peculiarities. For a 56-year-old history text, *State O' Maine* is still really funny.

5. Bean wrote two books, including a sporting guide that sold well, despite his laconic prose and focus on footwear. Montgomery, who smartly analyzes the brand's appeal to “preppies” and “yuppies,” notes that Bean is “fond of explaining the obvious” in a “creative mixture of ungrammatical but somehow accurate English.” We can't all be Thoreau.

6. Dickinson Rich had a quick, dry wit and an accurate ear for regional peculiarities. For a 56-year-old history text, *State O' Maine* is still really funny.

5 Essential Contemporary Maine Books

THE BEST OF THE LAST DECADE, AS SELECTED BY EMILY RUSSO AND JOSH CHRISTIE, OF PORTLAND'S PRINT: A BOOKSTORE.

One Goal | by Amy Bass. The true story of the 2015 championship season of Lewiston High's soccer team, made up predominantly of East African immigrant students. Russo and Christie call it “a gripping underdog tale in the tradition of *Friday Night Lights*” that “reckons with the changes to Lewiston's population and economy in the last decade, along with how the community has flourished as new Mainers have immigrated.”

The Stranger in the Woods | by Michael Finkel. A detailed account of how Christopher Knight, central Maine's North Pond Hermit, shunned civilization for 27 years — before being forced to return. “A humane and thoughtful story about solitude, civilization, and the natural world,” Russo and Christie say.

Vacationland | by John Hodgman. The Print team compares funnyman Hodgman's dry, clever essays — on authenticity, leisure, and middle age — to E. B. White's.

“Hodgman captures the charm and eccentricities of Down East Maine. Squarely in the tradition of Maine humor, despite his protestations.”

The In-Betweens | by Mira Ptacin. Participant observation among psychic mediums and more in the country's longest-running camp devoted to spiritualism. “Ptacin blends memoir and reportage in exploring this unique place,” Russo and Christie say, “as well as the hold that mysticism still has on the modern psyche.”

Maine | by J. Courtney Sullivan. Family tensions boil over when three generations of Kellehers arrive for a summer stay at their beachfront cottage in what Russo and Christie call “a sharp, funny alternative to the breezier ‘beach reads’ popularly set on the Maine coast.”

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More Beautiful

BARBARA COONEY'S SIMPLE AND PROFOUND MESSAGE STILL RESONATES.

By Virginia M. Wright
Photograph by Benjamin Williamson



What we remember are the lupines, but if *Miss Rumphius* were just a sweet origin story about the blue, pink, and purple blooms blanketing Maine roadsides in spring, we probably wouldn't be thinking about it at all, 38 years after it was written.

Barbara Cooney didn't care for sugary tales. "It does not hurt [children] to read about good and evil, love and hate, life and death," the author and illustrator said in her 1959 Caldecott Award acceptance speech. "Nor do I think they should read only about things that they understand. ... A man's reach should exceed his grasp. So should a child's. I will never talk down to — or draw down to — children."

And so, in the story narrated by her great-niece, Alice Rumphius is an unconventional heroine. She travels alone to faraway places. She never marries or has children. She grows old, and for a time, she's bedridden in her house by the sea. Neighbors label her "That Crazy Old Lady" when, to fulfill her childhood promise to "do something to make the world more beautiful," she scatters lupine seeds as she walks over fields and headlands near her home.

Cooney doesn't explain Miss Rumphius's solitary life, nor does she pass judgment on how people see her. Her

"It does not hurt [children] to read about good and evil, love and hate, life and death," Cooney said. "Nor do I think they should read only about things that they understand."



softly colored folk-art illustrations reveal what isn't explicitly written: We know the townspeople come to love Miss Rumphius's eccentric pastime because we see them gathering lupine bouquets. We know Miss Rumphius's home is on the Maine coast because the rugged landscape and cottage architecture could be nowhere else.

Cooney called *Miss Rumphius* (1982) and *Island Boy* (1988) her "hymns to Maine." Of the more than 100 books she wrote and illustrated, she said those two, along with *Hattie and the Wild Waves* (1990), "are as near as I ever will come to an autobiography."

Her love for Maine was lifelong, though she didn't move here until she was 64. The daughter of a stockbroker and a painter, she grew up on Long Island and summered in Maine as a young girl. She married twice and raised her four children in Massachusetts. When she was in her 40s, she embarked on travels that opened her eyes to sense of place. She settled in Damariscotta in 1983, the year *Miss Rumphius* won a National Book Award.

Maine returned her embrace. In 1996, then-Governor Angus King declared Cooney a "living treasure of the state of Maine" and designated December 12 Barbara Cooney Day. "I consider *Miss Rumphius* one of the best five children's books ever written," King, a father of five, said.

Only at the end of *Miss Rumphius*, when she promises her great aunt that she too will do something to make the world more beautiful, do we learn the young narrator's name: Alice. In her spare style, without a shred of didacticism, Cooney gives us a story of living with intention, of seasons, and of the circle of life.

Virginia M. Wright is a *Down East* senior editor.

5



Maine Favorites for the Kids

BOOKSELLER ELLEN RICHMOND, OF WATERVERILLE'S **CHILDREN'S BOOK CELLAR**, ON THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S BOOKS SHE CHERISHES.

Charlotte's Web | by E. B. White. "A classic in any sense of the word," Richmond says. "It's a book about love, friendship, generosity, and the belief that life goes on — perfect for this particular time in history, yes?" Published in 1952 and still a bestseller.

Blueberries for Sal | by Robert McCloskey. "Kurplink, kurplank, kurplunk. Need I say more?" Richmond calls the 1949 Caldecott Honoree, which McCloskey both wrote and illustrated, "a simple story of community and contentment."

Lost on a Mountain in Maine | by Donn Fendler. Right up to his death, at age 90, in 2016, Fendler visited schools to share his story of being lost on Katahdin. "It's an amazing, true survival story that captures the imagination of children and adults alike," Richmond says. "If a customer tells me, 'I've never read it,' I know they didn't grow up in Maine, since nearly every fourth- or fifth-grade class reads it as part of the curriculum."

The Circus Ship | by Chris Van Dusen. Though inspired by the true story of a steamship carrying circus animals that sank in Penobscot Bay, *The Circus Ship* is silly, not sad. "Fun and easy to read aloud," Richmond says, "and the two-page spread of hidden animals is a treat."

A Handful of Stars | by Cynthia Lord. Richmond is a fan of Lord's middle-grade novels, in which "youngsters learn life lessons like empathy, courage, trust, and kindness in stories that are enjoyable, realistic, but not preachy." She especially likes *A Handful of Stars* because it's set in Washington County, where her father grew up. The book's "sensitive portrayal of migrant workers is particularly timely."

52 Main St., Waterville. 207-872-4543. **Support Maine booksellers!** During the COVID-19 shut-down, Richmond is dispensing recommendations and taking orders (with free shipping) by phone, by email (kidsbookscellar@myfairpoint.net), and at [facebook.com/childrensbookcellar](https://www.facebook.com/childrensbookcellar).

Our Maine Was on the Page

AFTER YEARS OF READING AND DAYDREAMING, WE TOOK (MORE OR LESS) TO THE WOODS.

By Jennifer Van Allen

“They spent 14 years building a stone wall!” my husband declared one night, dog-earring a page in *The Good Life*. Helen and Scott Nearing’s memoir and homesteading manual. By the time they finished it, he said, pioneering back-to-the-lander Scott Nearing was 87 years old.

“Eighty-seven!” my husband marveled. “Can you imagine?”

We were living near Philadelphia at the time, longing to escape killer commutes and draining routines that left us little time for the people we loved, the projects we cherished, and the outdoor adventures we ached for. Reading Maine books like *The Good Life* offered us hope that it was possible to simplify and proof there were people out there who treasured the woods and water as much as we did. We admired the Nearings’ pay-as-you-go credo. We loved the idea of growing our own food, building our own furniture, and committing just four hours to “bread labor,” the rest saved for civic, intellectual, and leisure pursuits.

We devoured every book we could find about Maine and highlighted the places we read about in our bedside *Gazetteer*. We were enchanted with Isle au Haut, the tight-knit island where “there was no Kmart or any other mart” that fishing-boat captain Linda Greenlaw described in her memoir *The Lobster Chronicles*. We wanted

to be surrounded by people who felt, as artist and yurt guru Bill Coperthwaite put it in *A Handmade Life*, “intoxicated with the joy of making things.”

We pored over *We Took to the Woods*, Louise Dickinson Rich’s classic account of her family’s life in the Rangeley backcountry. Candidly, she described her own ham-handed moments of homesteading and her indignation about society’s expectations, in 1942, of how a woman should look, dress, and behave. She wrote elegantly about the very things we wanted: the chance to attain happiness through achievement and to conduct our own search for personal peace, a little security, and a little love.

“It isn’t much to want,” Dickinson Rich wrote, “but I never came anywhere near to getting most of those things until we took to the woods.”

Our annual Maine vacations validated our hunch that the Pine Tree State was our promised land. Arriving each August, we felt the “sensation of having received a gift from a true love,” as E. B. White described the feeling of crossing the Piscataqua in *One Man’s Meat*, his remarkable collection of essays about daily life on a Maine saltwater farm. We went to Bucks Harbor in South Brooksville to see Condon’s Garage and get ice cream, just like the family in Robert McCloskey’s *One Morning in Maine*. When we visited the

Nearings’ homestead on Cape Rosier, we were gobsmacked to find the gardens and stone walls looking just as pristine as they’d appeared in the 60-year-old photos in the *Good Life* books.

Each year, we returned to Philadelphia more smitten with Maine than ever, more determined to create our own good life there one day.

Then, in 2014, we packed up our books and moved to Maine. We’re not homesteaders, like the Nearings. We don’t live on a dirt road off the grid, but on the main street of our small town. Our vegetable garden is a middling effort, and I’m too paranoid about botulism to get into canning. We do far more than four hours of “bread labor” each day, and like most people

we know, we struggle to unplug.

But we have made a very good life here. My husband achieved his dream of building a boat. It’s a dory that looks an awful lot like Sal and Jane’s in *One Morning in Maine*. Our schedules revolve around the tides, and we spend part of each day tromping through wooded preserves where the chickadees outnumber people.

Our lives wouldn’t meet the Nearings’ strict standards for self-sufficiency, but we have found our own brand of peace, one we never came anywhere near to getting until we took to the woods.

Jennifer Van Allen is *Down East*’s branded content editor.



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ADAPTATIONLAND

HOW DO THE BIG-SCREEN ADAPTATIONS OF THESE TOP-NOTCH MAINE BOOKS MEASURE UP?

FANTASTIC



Stand By Me (1986) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994): Stone-cold classics, based on novellas from Stephen King’s *Different Seasons*. But *Shawshank* turns a white, Irish protagonist into Morgan Freeman, and *Stand By Me* moves the story from Maine to (are you kidding?) Oregon.



Empire Falls (2005) and *Olive Kitteridge* (2014): HBO made this pair of Pulitzer winners slicker and slimmed the large slates of characters, but both are novelistic in their patient unfurling and perfectly cast. Hard to read Elizabeth Strout’s prickly heroine afterwards and not visualize Frances McDormand.

Leave Her to Heaven (1945): Great old film noir, based on Ben Ames Williams’s bestseller, with Gene Tierney as the femme fatale — cold as ice as she lets her husband’s brother drown at their Maine lake cabin.



The Beans of Egypt, Maine (1994): In this indie, the dialog and backwoods grit of the ne’er-do-well Bean family are largely true to Carolyn Chute’s bestseller, a regional grotesque tackling rural poverty and pride, misogyny and misanthropy.



FABRICATED

Cider House Rules (1999): Cuts whole characters and plot arcs and makes Michael Caine’s character way nicer, but the Oscar-winning adaptation of John Irving’s 1985 coming-of-age novel is a good movie, you princes of Maine.



High Tide at Noon (1957): Elisabeth Ogilvie’s debut novel is a rich family saga about a Maine island clan. The film’s a schlocky melodrama that swaps out Maine for (are you kidding?) Nova Scotia.



Andre (1994): Andre the Seal, hero of Harry Goodridge and Lew Dietz’s well-told 1975 nonfiction animal-buddy tale *A Seal Called Andre*, did nothing to deserve this hackneyed kids’ flick, complete with a seal-assassination subplot and a sea lion playing a harbor seal.



We Were an Island (2019): An independent short film, stagy but poignant, based on Peter Blanchard III’s lovely book of the same name, recounting the romantic hermitage of Art and Nan Kellam, the sole occupants of an island off MDI for 36 years.



A Summer Place (1959): Basically hews to the plot of Sloan Wilson’s 1958 novel about class and forbidden love at a Maine resort, but trades deeply developed characters for pretty faces (Sandra Deel), innuendo, and that catchy theme.



FORGETTABLE

5 Superb Maine Poetry Collections

MAINE’S MOST IMPORTANT WRITERS OF VERSE, AS SELECTED BY GARY LAWLESS, POET AND CO-OWNER OF BRUNSWICK’S GULF OF MAINE BOOKS.

Edna St. Vincent Millay. Lawless’s favorite Millay poem is 1934’s “Conscientious Objector,” because it reflects her often-overlooked social activism. “It’s very political, and it never goes out of fashion,” he says. Millay’s Maine-iest volume is her first, *Renascence and Other Poems*, with its famous titular poem inspired by the Camden Hills.

Edwin Arlington Robinson. Robinson’s “stark and unhappy” boyhood in Gardiner inspired his Tilbury

Town cycle of poems. “He won three Pulitzers, yet he was also a manic-depressive loner,” Lawless says. “They are some pretty depressing poems.” The best known, “Richard Cory,” about a man who seemingly has it all, was first published in 1897’s *The Children of the Night*.

Ruth Moore. Moore’s 1958 *Cold as a Dog and the Wind Northeast* comprises six colorful, funny ballads about coastal Maine. “How many Mainers, especially Down East, have recited ‘The

Ballad of the Night Charlie Tended Weir’ at school events?” Lawless asks. “Moore’s most remembered as a novelist, but her ballads are close to people’s hearts.”

Kate Beston Barnes. Lawless has an affinity for Maine’s first poet laureate because he and Beth Leonard, his wife and business partner, live on her family’s Nobleboro farm. The narrative poems in *Where the Deer Were* elegantly capture the rhythms of that countryside.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Some readers may find him corny, but give the Portland native his due, Lawless says, for “being a major player in American literature” not just with poetry but with his translations. Charles Calhoun’s *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life* offers insight into America’s first celebrity poet and the city that shaped him.

Gulf of Maine Books, 134 Maine St., Brunswick. 207-729-5083. gulfofmainebooks.blogspot.com

FAITHFUL

Stay Gold

Twenty-five years after the prolific John Gould extolled its pleasures, the Golden Road of Maine's north woods still makes for a rugged road trip.

Photographed by Lone Spruce Creative



No book on this list inspires fanboys quite like Thoreau's *The Maine Woods*, and many are the writers and journalists who've landed the plumb assignment of retracing the traveling transcendentalist's route across northern Maine. CBS's *Sunday Morning* sent a crew in 2014, the *New York Times* dispatched a writer and photographer in 2008, and so on, probably going back to the late 19th century, when Thoreau's Maine travel journals were published.

Occasionally, a real heavy-hitter turns up on the Thoreau trail. John McPhee's 1975 book, *The Survival of the Bark Canoe*, chronicles a Maine river trip with an atavistic boat maker and his pals, a picaresque journey scattered with insights about "the first tourist in the Maine woods" and his Penobscot guides, along with methods of river travel past and present. J. Parker Huber's *The Wildest Country*, first published in 1981 and since updated, is a soulful guidebook dissecting both Thoreau's journeys and Maine's changing north woods. Every Mainer should have a copy of John Neff's exhaustive and highly readable *Katahdin: An Historic Journey*, which devotes a chapter to Thoreau's pilgrimage to the Greatest Mountain, although the poet of Concord pops up throughout.

And then there is John Gould, who bills his 1995 memoir *Maine's Golden Road* as "a second opinion about a couple of million acres of the Great North Maine Wilderness, 150 years after the Philosopher of Walden Pond carried an umbrella to the top of his beloved Mount Katahdin." Gould was as prolific a writer as Maine has ever turned out. He wrote or

cowrote some 30 books and has the distinction of being the country's longest-running columnist, penning a weekly piece in the *Christian Science Monitor* from 1942 until his death in 2003. For 30 of those years, he spent a few weeks each summer fishing, paddling, and hiking in Thoreau country, accessing ponds, trails, and camps via the titular Golden Road.

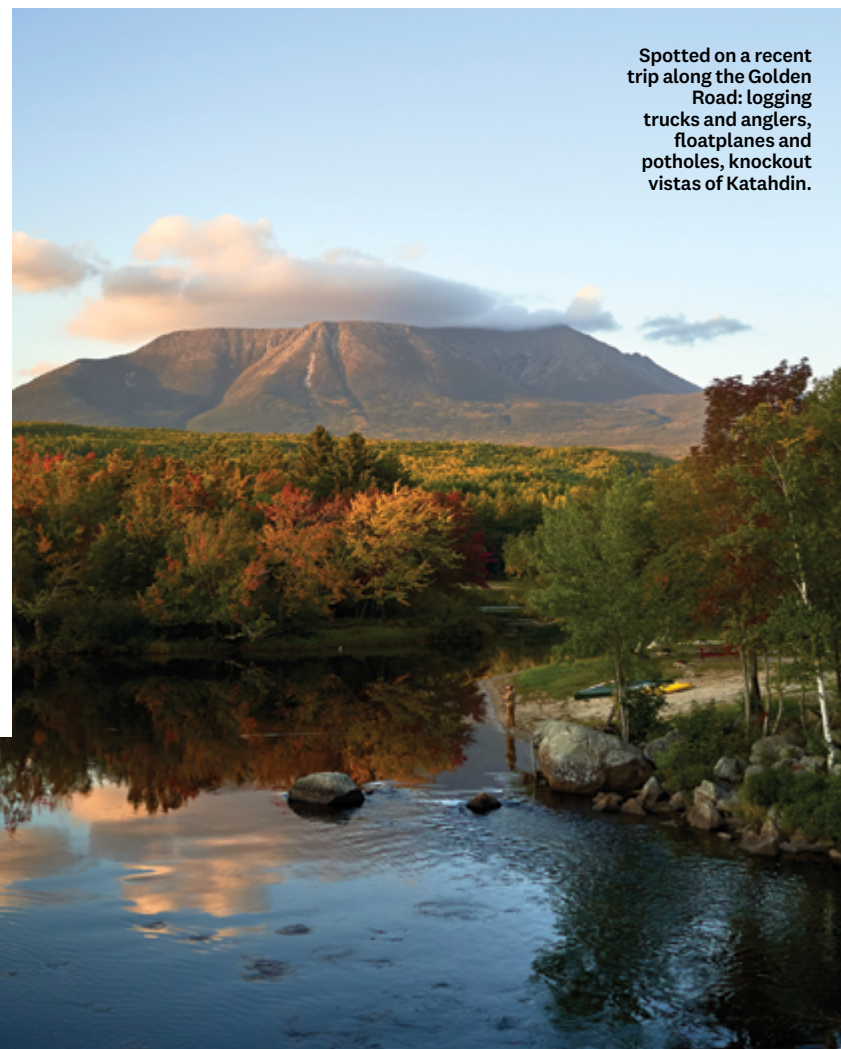
Completed in 1975, the Golden Road is a mostly unpaved, 96-mile ribbon built to connect the Great Northern Paper Company's Millinocket mills to its vast timber holdings to the north and west. It was also a boon to sportsmen like Gould, who, with a permit from Great Northern, could suddenly reach with comparative ease deep woods and salmon-rich waters. With its linked essays, reflections on Thoreau, and affectionate portraits of old-guard wardens and woodsmen, *Maine's Golden Road* is a record of a transitional time: the twilight of the old lumber camps, the mechanization of logging, and the opening of Maine's deepest forests to weekenders.

Gould remembers having a single key from Great Northern — once Maine's largest landowner, now defunct — that unlocked just about any gate he came across. Today, with the forest-products industry flailing and fractured, some half-dozen landowners manage sections of the Golden Road. Logging traffic is diminished, with Subarus full of anglers and vans towing white-water rafts as common as trucks loaded with timbers. Even so, a modern-day Thoreau admirer can drive the rutted roadway for miles without encountering any of these. The Golden Road still grants access to, in Gould's words, "as fine a wilderness pleasure as a man can have." — B.K.

The Golden Road is a mostly unpaved, 96-mile ribbon built to connect the Great Northern Paper Company's Millinocket mills to its vast timber holdings to the north and west.



Spotted on a recent trip along the Golden Road: logging trucks and anglers, floatplanes and potholes, knockout vistas of Katahdin.



5



Highly Digestible Books for Maine Cooks

FORMER FOOD-MAG EDITOR MAGGIE WHITE, ON THE VOLUMES OF KITCHEN INSPIRATION THAT SHE AND HER HUSBAND, CRAIG, STOCK AT CAMDEN'S OWL & TURTLE BOOKSHOP CAFE.

The Lost Kitchen | by Erin French. White has noticed that anyone so lucky as to snag a res at French's Lost Kitchen restaurant, in an old gristmill in rural Freedom, rates the experience on a scale from "exceptional" to "magical." The cookbook captures that same magic — warm personality, humble storytelling, and recipes rooted in the land.

Cooking Down East | by Marjorie Standish. "Maybe no one needs porcupine meatballs on their table anymore," White says, "but it's fun to read the recipe." And Standish's chowders, fiddleheads, and other Maine classics are as relevant as when the cookbook dropped in 1969.

The Way Life Should Be | by Christina Baker Kline. An early-thirtysomething New Yorker ditches city life to find romance on the Maine coast. "It would shock no one to learn we receive a lot of requests for 'vacation reads,'" White says. The protagonist of this charmer of a novel loves to cook, so Kline strews great recipes throughout.

Full Moon Suppers at Salt Water Farm | by Annemarie Ahearn. Down East contributor Ahearn runs a Lincolnville cooking school. "This book embodies a lot of what makes our part of the world special," White says. "It's rustic and refined. It's unimpeachable, but you still have to work for it. And it celebrates our incredibly varied seasons."

Adventures in Comfort Food | by Kerry Altiero, Katherine Gaudet. Altiero's 27-year-old Rockland standby, Cafe Miranda, is a riot of chatter, kitsch, and fusion-y flavors. "You won't miss the energy of the cafe," White says, "because the book bursts with personality too. Plus, with long winters, Mainers require a lot of comfort food."

33 Bay View St. 207-230-7335. owlandturtle.com. **Support Maine booksellers!** During the COVID-19 shutdown, Owl & Turtle is taking orders by phone and continuing its book-of-the-month club, with a monthly surprise title on your doorstep in the genre of your choice (the shop carries much more than food books).

Rachel Carson Slept Here

SEVEN LANDMARKS FOR YOUR NEXT LITERARY PILGRIMAGE.

► **Harriet Beecher Stowe House, BRUNSWICK.** Between 1850 and 1852, Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* while raising six kids in this Colonial-style house near Bowdoin College, where her husband taught. It's also where she laid plans for *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, a romantic portrait of fishing-village folklife that took her a decade to write, helped birth the "local color" movement in American lit, and caused a post-Civil War tourism boom in Harpswell. Call to arrange tours of the house, now a Bowdoin office building with a small interpretive area. 207-725-3433. bowdoin.edu/events/stowe-house

► **Sarah Orne Jewett House Museum, SOUTH BERWICK.** Jewett was born in this 1774 Georgian mansion, which provided inspiration for the grand Maine summer home shared by the two heroines — and possibly lovers — in her 1877 first novel, *Deephaven*. "The house is very old," one of them says, "and my ancestors followed the sea and brought home the greater part of its furnishings." The furnishings in the preserved home, which Jewett left as a child and returned to as an adult, are in the Arts and Crafts style and surrounded by 19th-century antiques. 207-384-2454. historicnewengland.org

► **Rachel Carson's Coast, BOOTHBAY.** From her Southport Island cottage, on a rocky ledge overlooking the Sheepscot River, Carson laid the groundwork for *The Edge of the Sea*, her melodious, meticulous 1955 study of tidal ecology, as well as for the landmark *Silent Spring*. Nearby spots that inspired her include the Hendricks Head and Indian-town Island Preserves, managed by Boothbay Region Land Trust (bbrlt.org), and the Nature Con-

servancy's 78-acre Rachel Carson Salt Pond Preserve (maps.tnc.org/MainePreserves). Her cottage is privately owned, but the non-profit Rachel Carson Homestead (rachelcarsonhomestead.org) hosts an annual raffle for a week-long stay there.

► **Booth Tarkington's Boat-house, KENNEBUNKPORT.** Indiana-reared novelist, playwright, and two-time Pulitzer-winner Tarkington was an ebullient summer presence around Kennebunkport in the early 20th century, and the town influenced his 1932 novel *Mary's Neck*, a satire about a fish-out-of-water Midwesterner navigating social pitfalls among oddballs, snobs, and folksy commoners in a Maine summer colony. During near-daily coffee klatsches at his handsome boathouse, called The Floats, Tarkington mentored Kenneth Roberts, helping edit works like Roberts's landmark historical novel *Arundel*, about Benedict Arnold's march through Maine to Quebec. The Floats is privately owned but can be admired in passing on Ocean Avenue, just south of Nonantum Resort.

► **Celia Thaxter's Garden, APPLEDORE ISLAND.** "Flowers have been like dear friends to me," Thaxter wrote in 1894, in *An Island Garden*, "comforters, inspirers, powers to uplift and to cheer." Her plot on Appledore Island, 7 miles off Kittery, inspired one of the most beloved gardening books, a mix of practical advice and poetic reflection. The Shoals Marine Laboratory offers summer tours of a seaside garden on the site of Thaxter's original, designed based on her descriptions. \$100/person, departing by boat from New Castle, New Hampshire. 603-862-5346. shoalsmarinelaboratory.org

► **Dorothy Boone Kidney's Cabin, ALLAGASH WILDERNESS WATERWAY.** Between 1957 and 1985, Kidney and her husband spent summers tending to a remote dam on the Allagash, assisting fishermen and canoeists traveling the famed 93-mile waterway. She penned three memoirs about their experience, including *Away From It All* in 1969, in which she wrote, "There is a therapy to be found in the woods. There is a simple, happy way of life living as our early ancestors did among the streams and lakes." Kidney's one-room cabin still stands on the north end of Chamberlain Lake, and writers and artists can apply with the Allagash Wilderness Waterway for an annual two-week residency. 207-695-3721. maine.gov/allagash

► **Elisabeth Ogilvie's Island, CUSHING.** The prolific Ogilvie wrote more than 40 novels, most tracing the dramas of hardscrabble islanders, but her 1954 memoir *My World Is an Island* has aged best. It's a slow-simmering, often funny account of settling into life on idyllic Gay's Island, in Muscongus Bay, where she would live and write for some 50 years. Down East Adventures hosts retreats in a cottage on Gay's Island, where guests wander the rocky shoreline that inspired the novelist, between puffin-watching tours and meals prepared by James Beard Award-winning chefs. 207-594-9544. adventures.downeast.com — J.V.A.



GAIL WILSON (HITTY)

Living Doll

RACHEL FIELD'S 1929 STORY ABOUT HITTY PREBLE GOES ON AND ON.

Phil Whitney's family ties to Great Cranberry Island stretch to the 1700s, yet he'd never heard of Hitty Preble until he retired there and helped open the Great Cranberry Island Historical Society museum in 2008. Then came the steady trickle of visitors asking about Hitty, a small wooden peg doll made famous in 1929 by author Rachel Field.

Field, who found the doll in a New York antiques shop, cast Hitty as the narrator of her Newbery Medal-winning children's novel, *Hitty: Her First Hundred Years*. Hitty's tale begins in the 19th century on Great Cranberry and circumnavigates the globe as she passes from owner to owner. For the museum, the historical society researched Field's connections to the island — it was her favorite vacation destination — and assembled a Hitty exhibit. "I was surprised at how many people from all over the country are interested in Hitty," Whitney says. "We even had a special Hitty day on what turned out to be the worst weather day of the year, and still, 50 to 75 die-hard fans came."

Devotees are mostly older

women who collect all sorts of dolls, but Hitty comes with a distinct culture, says Julie DeGroat, a New York maker of fabric Hittys and founder of the online club Hitty Girls. Collectors share photos of Hitty in Hitty-size rooms with Hitty-size furniture. They take Hitty on trips — she's a world traveler, remember — and pose her in front of landmarks like the Eiffel Tower.

Rachel Field's Hitty, who resides at the public library in Field's hometown of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, is one of a kind, probably carved from scrap by a sailor in the 19th century. Few rules dictate her contemporary doppelgangers' DNA, says New Hampshire doll maker Gail Wilson, who has made thousands of Hittys in clay, papier-mâché, and wood. However, Hitty should look antique and have dark hair (blondes and redheads are friends). Most important, is Hitty's size, about 6 ½ inches tall. "The magic of Hitty isn't that she's made of wood, it's that she's small," Wilson believes. "That's essential to her story — it's how she fits in all these places and travels the world." — V.M.W.



5 Irresistible Maine Mysteries

THE BEST SUSPENSE, CRIME, AND DETECTIVE READS WITH MAINE AT THEIR HEART, ACCORDING TO PAULA KEENEY AND ANN WHETSTONE OF KENNEBUNK'S MAINELY MURDERS BOOKSTORE.

For regulars at the all-mysteries bookshop that Keeneey and Whetstone run out of their carriage house, the series is the thing: continuing adventures of charismatic sleuths stretched out across sometimes dozens of books. Each pick below is the most recent title in a whole series that comes recommended.

Random Acts | by Gerry Boyle. Boyle's Jack McMorro character is a freelance journalist with a philosophical bent, and his series leans way into suspense. Keeneey and Whetstone praise the character development and sharp dialog, along with the glimpses of "the darker side of Maine, one summer tourists never see."

Almost Midnight | by Paul Doiron. "The stark beauty of the wilds of Maine is always at the forefront of Doiron's books," Keeneey and Whet-

stone say. The former *Down East* editor in chief is 10 titles into his series about game warden Mike Bowditch (an 11th drops in June). This one revolves around an attack on a hybrid wolf, a totem of Maine wildness.

Within Plain Sight | by Bruce Robert Coffin. Coffin's a former cop, and his books are procedurals set in Portland — his most recent has a potential serial killer on the loose. The Mainely Murders owners recommend his Detective Byron series for its gritty realism. "He knows his stuff," they say, "from the way cops act and talk to every nook and cranny of the city's landscape."

The Woman in the Woods | by John Connolly. "Connolly is the master in combining genres: mystery, horror, the supernatural," Keeneey and Whetstone say. The most recent of

his bestselling Charlie Parker thrillers has an anonymous corpse in the Maine woods, a ghost on the phone, an evil book — the works. Plus, his PI hangs out at Portland's (real life) Great Lost Bear bar.

Sealed Off | by Barbara Ross. Maine is perfect for "cozy mysteries," amateur sleuth stories light on blood, sex, and violence, big on setting. No one renders quaint coastal villages like Ross, Keeneey and Whetstone say. This one's #8 in Ross's Maine Clambake Mysteries, with an affable lobster purveyor investigating a body in a sealed room.

1 Bourn St., Kennebunk. 207-985-8706. mainelymurders.com. **Support Maine booksellers!** Mainely Murders is taking orders for books and gift cards by phone and email during the COVID-19 shutdown.

MARGARET WISE BROWN OR NAH?

The prolific children's author, who summured on Vinalhaven, had a thing for pen names. Which of these belonged to her?

- 1 GOLDEN MACDONALD
- 2 A LADY OF MAINE
- 3 MEMORY AMBROSE
- 4 HENRY BESTON
- 5 TIMOTHY HAY
- 6 K.C. MCKINNON
- 7 JUNIPER SAGE

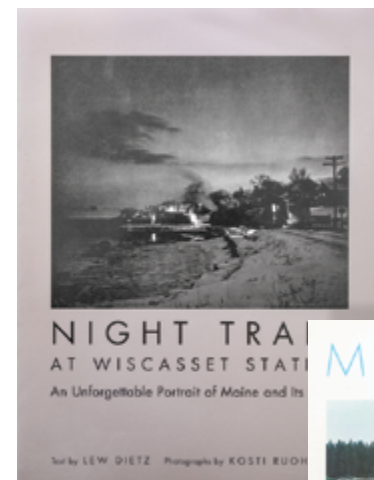
Cover the answers on the right if you would like to guess.

1. This nom de plume graced early editions of Brown's 1946 children's classic *The Little Island*, about a spruce-studded isle, its seasons and wildlife, and a curious kitten from the mainland.
2. Sally Wood, often credited as Maine's first novelist, used this pseudonym to publish her gothic romance novellas *Tales of the Night* in 1827.
3. Brown submitted the first draft of her beloved *Goodnight Moon* using this moniker, though it was eventually published under her real name.
4. Henry Sheahan is better known by the pen name on his books, including *Northern Farm*, his lyrical memoir of farm life in Nobleboro.
5. Brown again, named after ruffage, for a horse book.
6. Cathie Pelletier — whose darkly funny 1986 debut novel, *The Funeral Makers*, tops the Aroostook County canon — published a pair of romances as McKinnon in the '90s.
7. The name Brown used when she collaborated with kids' author Edith Thatcher Hurd. Brown used her own name for her Maine-est collab, with illustrator Dahlia Ipcar, on the timeless picture book *The Little Fisherman*.

Photo Finish

MORE THAN JUST COFFEE TABLE DECORATIONS, THESE CLASSIC MAINE PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTIONS HAVE ALL THE STORYTELLING HEFT OF A GREAT NOVEL.

By Benjamin Williamson



Night Train at Wiscasset Station | by Kosti Ruohomaa, text by Lew Dietz

Ruohomaa, who lived in Rockland, was founding father of Maine's visual narrative during the golden age of photography. A regular contributor to *Life* in the '40s and '50s (as well as this magazine), he didn't focus exclusively on Maine, but it's where he shot his best-known and most memorable work. The focus of *Night Train* is the self-reliant Maine Yankee, resistant to the forces of change, here at what Dietz (a founding *Down East* editor) called "America's outpost." Nostalgic even when they were shot in the 1940s, Ruohomaa's black-and-white photos showcase a vanishing world of horse-drawn plows, river-driven logs, and one-room schoolhouses. Still, the images are stark and unsentimental. You can see many of them this summer in Searsport, at Penobscot Marine Museum's exhibit *Kosti Ruohomaa: The Maine Assignments*, with a tentative opening date of June 30.



Maine | by Eliot Porter

The phrase "intimate landscapes," which Porter used as the title of an earlier book, aptly describes this portfolio focused on the photographer's lifelong summertime home. Porter, a pioneer in the use of color in landscape photography, found delight in close, cleverly composed shots of rocks, shells, and plant life. There are some surprisingly sweeping images in here (a colorful sunrise from his family's place on Great Spruce Head Island, for example), but the most striking are of lichens on fallen logs, carefully studied rock formations, and the like. It's also fun to see Porter's careful eye trained on lobster buoys, weathered siding, and other parts of the man-made environment.

Sightings: A Maine Coast Odyssey | by Peter Ralston
"Go deep," Ralston was told by his friend and mentor Andrew Wyeth, and that's just what he does in this love letter to Maine's fishing communities, first published in 1997. A cofounder of Maine's Island Institute, Ralston knows how to find unexpected beauty in harsh landscapes and seascapes, but it's his images of the people who dwell there — often at work, often in boats — that best reveal the patience and deep understanding of communities that went into this remarkable body of work. The cover image of sheep in a dory is one of Ralston's, and Maine's, most recognizable.



Maine: The Seasons | by Terrell S. Lester

This collection is nothing if not varied: macro shots of lobsterboats in the harbor feel equally at home next to photos of solitary oaks in the snow. Lester's fondness for his home base of Deer Isle is particularly evident, and the book benefits from essays on the seasons by powerhouse authors Elizabeth Strout, Ann Beattie, Richard Russo, and Richard Ford.

5

Books That Didn't Fit Anywhere Else

A CROSS-GENRE POTPOURRI OF TITLES WE COULDN'T FIND ANOTHER PLACE FOR — BUT THAT DESERVE A PLACE ON YOUR BOOKSHELF!

We Were the Kennedys | by Monica Wood. A vivid, compassionate account of midcentury life in a paper-mill town, Wood's 2012 memoir begins with the untimely death of her father and chronicles her family's struggles in Mexico, Maine, against the backdrop of a national tragedy.

Edinburgh | by Alexander Chee. Maine is treated wistfully in Chee's powerful, provocative first novel, a place of both comfort and pain for his protagonist, Fee, who was sexually abused growing up there. Fee leaves, grows from a detached boy to a pained-but-functioning man, then returns, only to be upended by an encounter with the son of his abuser. The book brims with taut, poetic, memorable lines, as when Fee, watching a lighthouse beam stretch over the sea, considers "that even light bends. That even light is made to carry weight."

Confluence: Merrymeeting Bay | by Franklin Burroughs. One of the world's great estuaries is surprisingly little-chronicled, writes former *Down East* columnist Burroughs. Ostensibly a natural history of a river delta, *Confluence* is really a series of linked essays about rootedness and interconnectivity, as attentive to the bay's human denizens as to its fish, fowl, and flora.

Take Heart: Poems from Maine | edited by Wesley McNair. A sprawling, two-volume anthology of work by Maine poets — from old-school bards like Edna St. Vincent Millay and Robert P. Tristram Coffin, right up through recent laureates like Betsy Sholl and Stuart Kestenbaum — often about or inspired by the state's landscapes and people.

Islands in Time | by Philip Conkling. An environmental history text that reads like the best nature writing, from a cofounder of Maine's Island Institute. Conkling's 1981 text is in its 3rd edition, reflecting some of the challenges facing Maine's island communities, still characterized by "the tension between rootedness and impermanence, between bounty and failure, between un-giving rock and shifting sand."