

KENNETH A. LOCKRIDGE. — *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West*. New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1974.

Kenneth Lockridge writes provocative books. He has the rare talent to examine a small body of evidence, a small Massachusetts town in his first book and signatures upon wills in this present book, and from its perspective launch a major inquiry into Colonial American Society. In both books, Lockridge's query resulted in challenging hypotheses but while the results from the study of Dedham have found wide acceptance the present results will meet with much stiffer resistance.

The basic problem with the study of literacy, as Lockridge freely acknowledges, is one of methodology. This book is loaded with assumptions: signatures on wills reflect the literacy of the signer, the negative age bias and positive class bias of probate records cancel each other out as influences on literacy measurement, literate men regardless of class were not significantly more inclined to leave probate records than illiterate men, etc. Lockridge does not arrive at these assumptions naively or simplistically but rather with the mental nimbleness and informed judgement that always characterize his work. However, readers will have an uneasy feeling that all of these assumptions cannot possibly be accurate for all of the colonial period and Lockridge's intellectual edifice is so tightly constructed that one cracked corner-stone could reduce it to rubble. Nevertheless, one can hardly fault a scholar for being daring and imaginative and treading where lesser men fear to as long as the treading is done carefully and intelligently; yet the uneasy feeling will remain and reviews, articles, and graduate seminar papers will carp at the methodology for years to come.

Lockridge disarmingly introduces his conclusions to the unwary reader as "traditional." New England male literacy rates, relatively low throughout the seventeenth-century at 60 per cent, climbed to 70 per cent in 1710, 85 per cent in 1760, and 90 per cent or what Lockridge calls virtual male universal literacy in 1790. The rapid rise of literacy in the eighteenth-century clearly correlates with the presence of public schools. These conclusions indeed sound traditional to most historians whose views on colonial education have been formed by Bernard Bailyn and Lawrence Cremin. However, here the tradition ends and the innovations start. In a vehement attack on Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society*, Lockridge maintains that (1) attitudes of a widening and more cosmopolitan world perspective that we associate with modern man did not accompany the increase in literacy and (2) the public school system did not arise out of any threat perceived by New Englanders that the wilderness conditions of the new world were destroying their culture. Lockridge argues that instead of ushering in modern attitudes literacy was rooted in an attempt to invigorate the past and was designed to expose New Englanders to The Word and maintain their traditional religiosity and piety. Puritans created the public school system not as a response to the wilderness in the Turnerian manner suggested by Bailyn but because they had the freedom to put into practice ideals they had long held in England where circumstances prevented implementation. The "intense protestantism" engendered by Puritanism replaces both the wilderness and the demands of a modern era as the causes for the creation of the public school system and the massive increase in literacy. In Pennsylvania and Virginia where presumably the wilderness and the same needs of man were both present but an intense protestantism was not, the literacy rates of the eighteenth-century lagged significantly behind New England.

Lockridge's challenge is clear and in the case of the creation of the public schools well substantiated. New England never experienced Bailyn's "frenzy of fear" that frontier hardships would bury culture and Bailyn's qualitative evidence for it of a few wills that expressed this frenzy looks scanty when compared to the thousands of wills that Lockridge examined. Bailyn's other qualitative evidence consisted of statements of New Englander's expressing concern for education and Lockridge supplies just as many similar statements uttered by Puritans on the English side of the Atlantic. The ground shifts, however, to a shaky

position for Lockridge when he attacks Bailyn's second proposition that public schools and literacy led to a modernization of attitudes. Lockridge tests the modernization of attitudes by the dubious method of seeing if public charity, or what he calls "rehabilitative giving", increased along with literacy. He presumes that if charity to institutions increased then men would be showing modern attitudes. Since Lockridge finds that "rehabilitative giving" did not increase, colonial men were not becoming modernized. Few will accept the logic of this test but more importantly other variables did not remain constant. From Lockridge's own previous work and from the work of many other recent historians, we know that eighteenth-century New England was becoming an over-crowded society, short on land and long on bankruptcies where fathers were having an increasingly difficult time providing for their adult children. Under these economic conditions it would be miraculous for the overall rate of giving to charities to rise.

By de-emphasizing modernization Lockridge wants to remind us that seventeenth-century New Englanders lived closer to the "credulous word-of-mouth world of the peasant" and that schools and literacy did not fundamentally change the region into a forward looking society. While supplying a larger perspective on New England as an insular traditional peasant society, Lockridge ignores the fact that the very force of Puritanism that he believes to be so important to an understanding of the educational impulse tended to involve the villager in a wider world. After all, the typical villager heard a learned minister speak at least twice a week and was involved in elections and government that went beyond the village confines. He may not have been a learned man himself or a major officeholder but the tribalism of Puritanism involved him in a community that spanned all of New England and extended to England. Local ties were probably a New Englander's most important ones but he could not have been as insular as Lockridge suggests.

Probably the best service this book provides for the historical profession, besides interesting reading and fuel for journal pages and graduate seminars, is that it puts the Puritan back in Puritan New England and reminds us that, in his goals at least, the Puritan looked backward not forward. In particular the emphasis on the continued religiosity of the eighteenth-century is welcome because too many historians distracted by the contentiousness of eighteenth-century man and blinded by the secular Revolution later in the century fail to realize that New England was still fundamentally a religious society shaped by Puritan precepts.

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MARY W. HELMS. — *Middle America: a Cultural History of Heartland and Frontiers.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J., : Prentice-Hall, 1975.

The "cultural history" referred to in the title of this work has to be understood in its anthropological sense. That is to say, it has to do at once with ethnohistory and socioeconomic history. Those elements of political history which intrude serve merely to explain some of the priorities to which the development of Middle America has responded.

Any work of this type is necessarily reminiscent of Eric Wolf's *Sons of the Shaking Earth*. While it cannot be said that this author has matched Wolf's felicity of style (indeed this is in that respect a most textbookish textbook), she has nevertheless produced a most worthy successor to a valuable teaching aid.

Since 1959, when Wolf's work was first published, our knowledge of Middle America has deepened considerably. Nowhere is this more obvious as in that section of the book devoted to the pre-Columbian period. Benefitting, as she does, from recent scholarship Helms