

As Maine As it Gets

Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill



As Maine As It Gets by Jay S. Hoar.

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This book is a collection of pieces, most of them about life in the inland of southern Maine decades past as recollected and researched by Professor Jay S. Hoar. His love for Maine and its people permeate the book and he makes that past world come alive. One section looks at the lives of Maine's last Civil War veterans, the focus here goes more towards the pattern of their lives after the war than their role in it. Another tells of the sad fate of the Union veteran's headquarters in Portland, a remarkable building full of history and historical documents and artefacts, all of which should have been preserved. What life was

like for rural dwellers in the Great Depression, the home front in World War Two and the subsequent decade are both well described. A third section, 'From the Groves of Academe' covers several fields including rare books he has found, the unusual development of spoken English in Maine and the lives of some Maine celebrities, particularly the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935). Although he won the Pulitzer Prize four times for his poetry during the 1920s and his poetry remains taught in courses, Robinson has not achieved the great fame of his contemporary and fellow New Englander Robert Frost. Jay Hoar goes a fair way to correcting that error. Made curious about this poet by what Hoar wrote, I found some of Robinson's poems and found myself well pleased. It is that type of book, offering a pot-pouri of interesting and original topics that sparks curiosity in the many different fields Hoar writes of.



Jay S. Hoar

The longest section of the book may well be the most important. The world has probably thousands of biographies and memoirs of Hollywood's celebrities. Anthologies of famous films and even reprinted screenplays and books devoted to single films abound. Analyses of what the film world appears to be about, its

hidden meanings psychology and finances are ubiquitous. As for the endless exposés of Hollywood celebrities, could somebody pile them up into a mountain range and drop a live match?

In contrast, what we do not have enough of are accounts that deal with Hollywood films and business practices outside Hollywood in its golden age. This is a massive omission as between the end of the Edwardian era and the takeover of television in the 1950s the picture show was a major social centre in small town American life and for that matter in towns over much of the world. Even South Georgia Island, south of the Falklands and just above the Antarctic Circle had its own picture show until 1966. What was the precise role of the theatre in town life? What was it like to go the movies in those decades in small town America? What was it like to work in a picture show? How were they run and how did they relate to the big distributors? The first section of *As Maine As It Gets* answers those questions, at least for the region described. Jay Hoar's father ran at first a Maine picture show, then a chain of them in this era, from the 1920s to 1955. Jay worked in his father's picture shows from the 1930s onwards. He observed in fine detail how they were built and run, audience behaviour and how the staff worked and lived and vividly recounts the experience, making that past world come alive.

This makes not only for an interesting account, but a valuable one, but then so much in this book is like that.

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This 1912 picture show in Belfast Maine is one of the few remaining functional small town picture shows in the state. While not owned by the Hoar family, it bears a great similarity to their theatres.

