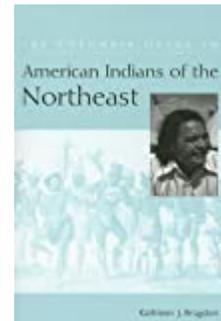


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Kathleen J. Bragdon. *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Northeast.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. xv + 292 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-11452-3; \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-231-11453-0.



Reviewed by Thomas Clarkin (Department of History, University of Texas)

Published on H-AmIndian (June, 2002)

Kathleen J. Bragdon's *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Northeast* is part of a multi-volume series devoted to regional studies of American Indian life. Bragdon, a professor of anthropology at the College of William and Mary, has authored monographs and articles on American Indians in southern New England during the colonial era. In this volume Bragdon expands the scope of her studies to the northeastern region of the United States, an area defined as extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the eastern edge of the Great Plains and reaching from the lower edge of the Canadian boreal forests south to Virginia and North Carolina.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part I, "The Northeast: An Overview," consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 defines the northeastern region, and considers issues such as population change and language. It also discusses northeastern cultures before European contact. The remaining chapters examine European exploration and colonization, the expansion of the frontier, and northeastern Indian communities from 1850 to the present.

Chapters 1 and 2 are the richest in material, reflecting both the historiography of northeastern Indians and Bragdon's own scholarly interests. In addition to providing historical detail, Bragdon discusses some of the pressing scholarly questions in this subject area, examining

issues as intertribal cultural influences, tribal formation, and demography. Chapters 3 and 4, while not as lengthy or as thorough as the previous chapters, are nonetheless welcome, in that they acknowledge the persistence of Indian communities and growing scholarly interest in topics such as Indian gaming, federal recognition of Indian communities, and sovereignty.

Part II, entitled "People, Places and Events in Northeast Native History," consists of 161 entries on diverse subjects including tribes, prominent individuals both Indian and non-Indian, and laws that affect northeastern communities. The utility of this section is limited, as most entries are rather brief and none contain bibliographic references.

Part III, "Historical Timeline for the Northeast," is an annotated timeline of events ranging from 1497, Cabot's voyage to Newfoundland, and 1994, when the Mohegans received federal recognition. As with Part II, the entries are too brief to be of much use. Most of the entries date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—there are only six entries for the nineteenth century, and eight for the twentieth. This imbalance is perhaps a reflection of the historiography of northeastern communities but also misleading in that the timeline gives the erroneous impression that American Indian communities were less vibrant or important after the colonial era. Moreover, this

section contains several errors, giving incorrect dates for the Pequot War, Pontiac's Rebellion, passage of the Indian Removal Act, and federal recognition of the Gay Head and Mashantucket communities.

Part IV is a "Resource Guide to Research and Theory." The resource guide is divided into eighteen topic areas, ranging from Indian tribes to gaming to film. Bragdon opens each topic area with a brief discussion of the historiographical issues surrounding the topic, followed by a bibliography. The research guide also offers addresses and other contact information for northeastern tribes today and a section on museums that house significant collections or displays relating to northeastern Indian groups.

The final topic area in Part IV, entitled "Electronic Resources," is in fact a listing of eighty Internet sites pertaining to northeastern Indians. With the growth of the Internet, and the tendency of most students to begin research projects on the World Wide Web, Bragdon had little choice but to include such a section. However, publishing such a list raises two interesting issues. The first, known as "link rot," is the tendency of websites to disappear without warning. Of the eighty sites that Bragdon lists, six no longer existed and two refused to load (another two had incorrect addresses, but I was able to puzzle those out). Thus, only one year after the book's publication, 10 percent of the links are no longer useful.

Bragdon cannot be faulted for the seemingly inevitable disappearance of cited links, as "link rot" is a question that publishers will soon have to confront.

A more important issue concerns the value of the websites. What constitutes a legitimate or authoritative resource on the Internet? While some of the websites that Bragdon lists belong to scholarly institutions, private individuals or businesses created others. I am wary of sending my students to electronic resources lacking scholarly credentials. Private websites often are used for polemical purposes or contain woefully inaccurate information, while commercial websites are usually aimed at generating income. For example, one of Bragdon's links opens a casino page that invites visitors to gamble. A short animated feature starring a turtle dancing in his/her boxer shorts pops up on the screen. While ethnohistorians may squeeze some information from such sites, I have my doubts, especially in regard to undergraduate research.

In sum, this book has value as a resource and research guide, but the value is limited by the format, which is the same used in other volumes in this series. The discussions of current scholarly concerns in northeastern American Indian history found in Part I and the resources listed in Part IV will have the greatest appeal to scholars. Undergraduates will find Parts II and III the most accessible, but should be forewarned of the factual errors in the timeline.

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Citation: Thomas Clarkin. Review of Bragdon, Kathleen J., *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Northeast*. H-AmIndian, H-Net Reviews. June, 2002.

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