

10-31-2014

Leon Leonwood Bean Correspondence

Leon Leonwood Bean 1872-1967

Leon L. Bean 1872-1967

Hilda McLeod Jacob
Maine State Library

Maine State Library

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Recommended Citation

Bean, Leon Leonwood 1872-1967; Bean, Leon L. 1872-1967; Jacob, Hilda McLeod; and Maine State Library, "Leon Leonwood Bean Correspondence" (2014). *Maine Writers Correspondence*. 121.
http://digitalmaine.com/maine_writers_correspondence/121

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BEAN, Leon Leonwood
b. Greenwood, October 13, 1872
d. February 5, 1967

February 23, 1961

Mr. L. L. Bean
Freeport
Maine

Dear Mr. Bean:

Is it true that you have a new book out, called MY STORY? We have been asked about it, and we would of course like to buy the book. Who is the publisher, and what is the price?

We would also hope that a copy might find its way into the Maine Author Collection. This is, as you probably know, a permanent exhibit of books written by Maine people. The books are for the most part inscribed presentation copies, and we treasure them not only for the worth and variety of the books themselves, but also for the distinction of the inscriptions which range from pen-and-ink sketches to tributes to Maine, from verse to autobiographical anecdotes.

In order that our information on Maine writers may be complete, we collect also biographical and critical material.

Will you, at your convenience, let us know about the book?

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection

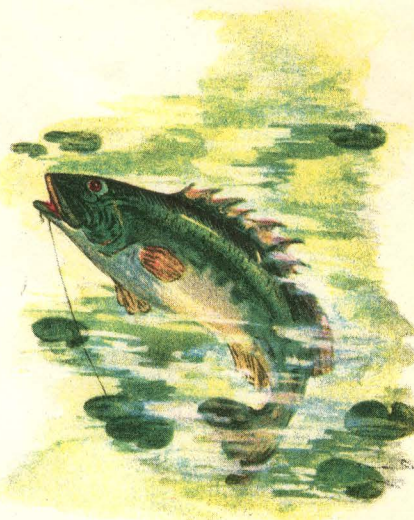


L.L.Bean
INCORPORATED

Manufacturer
Leather and Canvas
Specialties

FREEPORT, MAINE

March 2, 1961



Maine State Library
Augusta
Maine

Attention of Hilda Mc Leod Jacob,
In charge of Maine Author Collection

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

Thank you very much for your letter of February 23rd, which arrived during Mr. L. L. Bean's absence in Florida on his annual winter vacation.

We forwarded your letter to Mr. Bean in Florida, and have just heard from him. He is more than pleased to send to the Maine State Library, no charge of course, a copy of his latest book, "My Story." This is going forward to you under separate cover, and with it we are sending one of the prospectus which describes the book.

We trust it will reach you promptly and be a worthy addition to your Maine Author Collection, which sounds very interesting indeed.

Sincerely,

ESW
Order #ME850.

L. L. BEAN, INC.

March 14, 1961

Mr. L. L. Bean
Freeport
Maine

Dear Mr. Bean:

Thank you very much for autographing and
presenting to the Maine Author Collection a copy
of your delightful and most interesting book.

It is a collection of humor and wisdom
that is a pleasure to have in the Maine section,
and we appreciate your interest and generosity.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection

Hard Sell And Soft Soap Put 'L.L.' Through School

By HARRY SHULMAN
District Correspondent

FREEMPORT — Leon L. Bean, the man who ran a hunting boot into a multi-million dollar business, is dead. But they'll be telling stories of his achievements for the next century.

"L. L." was not the ordinary, garden variety individual. His business was operated on the theory that everything sold by L. L. Bean, Inc., had to measure up to top quality. Over the years he turned away thousands of salesmen who came to his shop peddling something that would yield him high profits, but didn't meet his standards.

L. L. undoubtedly made high profits on his business, but they resulted from repeat orders. He had customers who had been buying his merchandise for half a century.

The story of how he founded his business is well known, but there are other stories about L. L. which have not been as widely circulated.

ORPHANED at 12 with little possibility he would be able to obtain much schooling, young Leon did a bit of serious thinking and decided he would have a better chance of making his way in the world if he could read and write.

That's how he happened to go into his first business venture.

"I paid for a year's schooling at Kents Hill by selling a new brand of soap just out on the market," he told an interviewer some years ago.

"At the time most of the housewives around Kents Hill were using one of the popular brands of the day, but I was able to talk several of them into trying half-a-box on a trial basis."

Most youths would have been satisfied with that, but not L. L. Having gotten his first taste of success he reached for higher stakes. He went to stores where the women traded, told the grocers the new soap was selling well and advised them to stock up to meet the demand.

The grocers took him at his word and placed orders with him.

EVEN THAT failed to satisfy the super-salesman. Armed with the orders he took a trip to Portland and made a bee line for the largest wholesale house in the state. It just happened to be the firm that serviced all grocery stores around Kents Hill.

"I showed them the store orders and said I figured, seeing as how the stores were buying the soap, they ought to buy a carload of the stuff to re-stock



Author and Book

the stores. They did and I came out pretty well on the deal," Bean recalled.

That carload of soap helped finance his year's stay at Kents Hill. Later he was able to squeeze in a semester at Hebron Academy. That was his formal education.

But L. L. Bean actually never stopped learning. From the day he embarked on his new career, the manufacture of a wax waterproof hunting boot, and until the day he began to ease gradually out of active management of his firm he continued to acquire knowledge.

THE STORY goes that Bean, after returning for a hunting

trip, suffering from sore, wet feet caused by wearing water-soaked shoes, came up with the idea of attaching shoe rubbers to the conventional hunting boots of that period. He had a cobbler sew the rubbers onto leather tops.

"After I designed the boot I went to the U. S. Rubber Co. to see if they would make the kind of rubber bottom I wanted," Bean explained. "When they told me the price I had to go back to Freeport and borrow \$400 to pay the bill."

That was the start and it was the only money he's ever borrowed, according to Bean himself. "Our business has been built on earnings only," he once explained.

He loved to talk about his first catalog, a four-page product which he published in 1912. "It had four pages but I didn't have anything to put on the last page." So he left it blank.

THE CATALOG advertised the only item L. L. Bean was producing at the time, the hunting boot. One page was covered with testimonials.

That was a far cry from today's L. L. Bean catalog which is sent to upwards of 400,000 throughout the world.

But L. L. never changed in one respect, although his catalog did. He insisted on testing everything that carried his label, holding back on spinning rods and spinning reels until he was satisfied the "bugs" had been removed and he could recommend them.

He was a fine woodsman, hunter and fisherman, knew what sportsmen wanted and needed and did his best to supply them.

People who worked for him were loyal. He was that type of man. Even when his employees increased to well above the 100 mark he insisted on knowing each one and called them by their first names.

AS HIS BUSINESS prospered and grew so did the Freeport post office. It probably did more business than any post office in the country situated in a town of Freeport's size.

His firm received letters addressed only to Bean, Maine. One, from Europe, was addressed only: "Bean's, the famous store in the State of Maine, USA."

But one of Bean's favorite letters was written by a customer in the far North:

"Dear sir: Send for shoes; four weeks pass, no shoes. Write letter; six weeks pass, no shoes. Write another letter; next day shoes come. Shoes OK, me OK. Hope you OK."