November 2015

Edmund Ware Smith Correspondence

Edmund Ware Smith 1900-1967

Bill Caldwell

Maine State Library

St. Josephs College

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SMITH, EDMUND WARE

b. 1900?
Thoughts & Afterthoughts
By The Editor

I am the owner of volume number 581 in a series of 750 copies of a book printed in the early forties by The Derrydale Press. It is entitled The One-Eyed Poacher of Privilege and it is a volume of a dozen precious stories from the gifted pen of Edmund Ware Smith. In the years since this book was given to me by a college classmate, it has been read and reread, I have since met the author and I have read many another of his engaging stories. But I had long since despaired of ever again meeting in print Jeff Coongate, that rollicking culprit, that brash and unapologetic day or night poacher, that master actor and uninhibited liar.

A new day dawned on November 14th because, on that day, Ed Smith broke a silence of almost 15 years and gave to the select coterie of his admirers, a sequel to his first volume of stories about the lovable and incorrigible Coongate. It is called The One-Eyed Poacher and the Maine Woods, it is published by Frederick Fell (269 pgs $3.95) and it contains eight more One-Eyed Poacher yarns plus a dividend in the form of collected tales, some from his beloved Mattagammoh Lake region where he has made his home for the past ten years.

It is possible that the salty stories Ed Smith relates about Jeff Coongate may have some foundation on fact. If he stretches those facts a bit here and there to make a readable yarn, the reader is the gainer and should not stoop to look such a gift moose in the mouth. The hero of these tales may be an outrageously impossible creation of a fertile mind yet his brazen exploits will bring rich and wistful response from his meeker brethren who might have been able to dream up such ingenious non-legal episodes but would never have had the character and the dubious integrity to carry them out.

The title of this sequel may be somewhat baffling because the original book was laid in Washington County, Maine, as is this one, but there will be nothing about the tilts of Thomas Jefferson Coongate and his running mate, Zack Bourne, with young Tom Corn the shrewd and dedicated (to the apprehension of Coongate) game warden that will be other than pure delight. The devoted nimrod with just a touch of devil-may-care in his make-up will get a vicarious thrill from the exploits of the legendary Coongate. More especially will the poacher instinct that lives in most of us, be gratified by living through such awesome tales of insolent and impudent criminal transgressions as those set down in "Jeff Coongate and the Stolen Crony" or "The Specific Gravity of Jeff Coongate" or "Hum Over the Dam" or "The One-Eyed Poacher's Revenge."

Since it was published, this book has had claim to fame other than the ultimate pinnacle it will reach among so many who will treasure it; it is preceded by what may have been among the last works of Bernard DeVoto. It is a tribute to Ed Smith that DeVoto could be induced to pen such a masterful and entirely sympathetic and credulous foreword to a truly delightful volume; it is significantly fitting that the introduction is of a part with the text; the two are entwined; they take to each other as naturally as Coongate's canoe takes to Mopang Lake in quest of illegal moose meat.

To this section of Maine this volume may have an added appeal because of the series of more personal essays with which Ed Smith brings his latest work to a close. But, whether or not you recognize the terrain described, whether or not you agree with his idea of the best fishing waters, the perfect fly, the best rod, the tightest log cabin or the finest game fish, you cannot, if you love the great outdoors at all, miss sheer enjoyment in this work by a man who is doing what he loves most to do and loves to do most what he is doing.
Pulitzer prize winning Bernard DeVoto comes to light as a man of two minds with respect to Maine. In a recent issue of Harper's magazine he penned a scurrilous attack on the coastal section of this state, using some epithets hardly designed to reflect great glory on U. S. Route One as it traverses northward into Maine from Massachusetts. Next Monday he will come to light in the course of a foreword to Edmund Ware Smith's new book, "The One Eyed Poacher and the Maine Woods" as one who sees great merit in a writer whose home is in the Maine woods, at Mattagamon Lake. In this second role he is as guilty of understatement as he is seemingly given to gross exaggeration in the first guise.

Poacher Loses Bout With Law

"The One-Eyed Poacher and the Maine Woods"
By Edmund Ware Smith
Here is another volume of the humorous adventures of the inimitable Jeff Coongate, friend of the underprivileged and the bane of Tom Coon, the State game warden.

As usual the sanctimonious attitude of this notorious violator of the game laws prevails over the suspicions of Warden Coon, but Jeff still loses to the extent of a three months vacation in the county jail.

The story of how this intrepid woodman nearly becomes the victim of Miss Letty Turnbuckle is one of the best in the book although the tale of Zack Bourne's appointment as a game warden, a plan concocted by "the authorities to trap old Jeff, is worthy of a high rating.

The author also writes interestingly of his conversion from a city resident to a dweller in the deep woods of Maine, and of his experiences there. He is a good Mainiac by adoption. There is an introduction by Bernard DeVoto. (Frederick Pell, Inc.)

A. H. Merrill
November 16, 1955

Mr. Edmund Ware Smith
Matagamon Lake
Shin Pond, Maine

Dear Mr. Smith:

Your new book, THE ONE-EYED POACHER AND THE MAINE WOODS, is on our order list, and we look forward with eagerness to its arrival. Advance reports indicate a book of wide appeal and popularity, which will be a happy answer to the recurring question of, "Are there any new good books on Maine?"

We write now about the Maine Author Collection. You may already know of this permanent exhibit of books by Maine people, or about Maine. The volumes are inscribed presentation copies, the inscriptions as varied as the books, ranging from pen-and-ink sketches to autobiographical anecdotes; from bits of verse to tributes to the state. It is a distinctive feature of an outstanding exhibit, and we are always proud to be able to add a new book and a new name to our list of writers.

Of course we hope that you will want to inscribe a copy of THE ONE-EYED POACHER AND THE MAINE WOODS for the collection. The book will be noted in the quarterly Bulletin of the Maine Library Association, and we anticipate confidently a long and active life for it. You have our congratulations and best wishes for its success.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection

hmj
Mrs. F. W. Jacob  
Maine State Library  
Augusta, Maine  

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

Any letter with a Maine postmark is welcome here, even if the envelope contains nothing but a bill. Yours contains much, much more, and I shall be pleased and proud to try to write something appropriate on the flyleaf of The One-Eyed Poacher and the Maine Woods.

My wife and I became residents of Maine about eleven years ago, after being visitors and part-time residents for almost forty years. Our log cabin on Mattagamon Lake, which we built about eleven years ago, was our first home anywhere. And last spring we bought a second home, for winter living, near Damariscotta. We expect to return to Damariscotta soon after the first of the year. It's just a step over to Augusta, and I will drive over and inscribe the book. Or, if you prefer, address the book to me here, and I'll return it to you inscribed.

Thanks very kindly for your letter.

Sincerely,

Edmund Ware Smith  
Managing Editor  
FORD TIMES
January 13, 1956

Mr. Edmund Ware Smith
Damariscotta
Maine

Dear Mr. Smith:

Are you back in Maine yet? If you are, please know that we shall be delighted to have a call from you; but if you find it inconvenient, let us know, and we'll send the copy of THE ONE-EYED POACHER over to you for an inscription.

It is just as spirited and nostalgic and humorous and tantalizing as we knew it would be. It is being purchased for our traveling libraries and bookmobiles, and we are delighted to have such a rousing good book about the state.

Good luck to it, and may its author soon find his way to the country of which he writes so captivatingly.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
January 16, '56

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

Yes, I'm back in Maine—here in Damariscotta—and very glad of it, weather or no! I expect to drive over to Augusta within a week or so, and will drop in to inscribe the "One-Eyed Poacher." The book is having wonderful reviews, and for a collection oddment is having a very remarkable sale. I'm pleased and flattered.

Many thanks for your interest.

Sincerely,

Edmund Ware Smith
Mr. Edmund Ware Smith  
Damariscotta  
Maine

Dear Mr. Smith:

Perhaps you are in Michigan, or Damariscotta, or even delightfully farther north in Maine; but wherever you are, you can surely hear the delighted response that greeted your new book, TREASURY OF THE MAINE WOODS.

The library has been ordering copies enthusiastically, and recommending the book widely, and we know it will enjoy a long life and enviable reputation.

Can the Maine Author Collection hope to have an inscribed copy to keep Jeff Coongate company?

Success to it!

Sincerely yours

hmj  
In Charge of  
Maine Author Collection
Edmund Ware Smith
Damariscotta, Maine

January 16, '53

Dear Mrs. Jacobs:

Your letter about "Treasury of the Maine Woods" is a heartening thing. I learned not long ago that the volume was chosen by the U. S. Armed Forces for the January Kit Book-- and I fear some Maine boys in far places will be made very homesick by it.

I'm just back from Michigan, where I, too, was homesick. I'll drop in at the library some day soon with an inscribed copy of the book to -- as you say-- keep Jeff Coongate company.

Thanks again for your letter.

Sincerely,

Edmund Ware Smith
October 6, 1959

Mr. Edmund Ware Smith
Damariscotta
Maine

Dear Mr. Smith:

Should this be addressed instead to Roaring Brook Campground? The newspaper picture of your group incited envy among some of us: to be in such an idyllic spot, in such distinguished company!—not only the distinguished William O. Douglas, but also the distinguished Maurice Day!

As your advance scout, Mr. Day told us of the new book, and now that it is on our order list, we can hardly wait. It does seem such a long time between books. This one is coming at a propitious time for Christmas gifts, and that's a good thing.

We hope the Maine Author Collection may continue to bask in your generosity, and that FOR MAINE ONLY may be added to the other books.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
June 27, 1960

Mr. Edmund Ware Smith
Damariscotta
Maine

Dear Mr. Smith:

FOR MAINE ONLY never came to the Maine Author Collection. This we regret intensely, but we dare to hope that perhaps you have been so busy the matter has not yet had your attention.

You were most generous with your earlier books, and we trust that in good time this one may also be places in the exhibit. Don't interrupt what should be a relaxed and happy vacation -- just remember us when it is again the season for remembering books.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
July 5, 1960

Mr. Edmund Ware Smith
Damariscotta
Maine

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you very much for sending FOR MAINE ONLY. We are adding it to the Maine Author Collection with joy and gratitude.

Surely this must be one of your most popular books. People are still discovering it, and we trust that the author's pride and purse are being gladdened thereby.

Our good wishes for a delightful summer.

Sincerely yours

hmj
In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
Jake's Rangers Acquire Bus As Official 'Flagship'

DAMARISCOTTA — Colonel Jake Day, leader of Jake's Rangers, has taken delivery of the group's official campaign vehicle, a brand new bus. The Rangers' flagship arrived here in an unusual two car convoy. The other car was test-run prior to delivery to President Kennedy.

But the Rangers' bus stole the limelight. Glamorized by the group's colorful insignia and received by the seven red-shirted Rangers, the bus attracted much attention. Children swarmed through its spacious interior and were given rides up and down Main Street, with Dr. Sam Belknap at the wheel.

The event was a high point in the bright career of Jake's Rangers—a group of Damariscotta business and professional men whose spare time is dedicated to the Maine outdoors with special attention to the wilderness in and near Baxter State Park.

NATIONALLY KNOWN

The resident members include Colonel Jake (Maurice) Day, nationally known artist; Edmund Ware Smith, author and Ford Times editor; Dr. McClure Day, Jake's son and local veterinary surgeon; Dr. Belknap, Damariscotta physician; Bentley Glidden, postmaster, and the Rangers' "Spherical Man"; Edward Pierce, grocer, the "Linear Man"; and John Glidden Jr., insurance man.

There is one active non-resident, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. "Justice Bill" has accompanied the Rangers on several mountain trips. Honorary Rangers are Lester (Sawdust) Hall of Nobleboro, and former Governor Percival P. Baxter.

All the Rangers hold sergeant ratings except Colonel Jake. One—Ed Smith — once held the rank of major but was broken to sergeant when it was learned he didn't move to Maine until 1908, when he was seven years old.

Actually the Rangers are a nonmilitary, nonbelligerent outfit. Their headquarters is the coffee counter in Perley Waltz's drugstore or in the post office next door.

IN MAGAZINES

Stories by Smith, illustrated by the Rangers' own color photos to describe the group's annual trips, appear regularly in Field & Stream magazine. These pieces in the national outdoor magazine have given Maine nation-wide publicity.

Colonel Jake, quite aside from his wilderness Maine watercolors which have been reproduced in Better Homes & Gardens, Ford Times and other magazines, has developed quite a series of color slide lectures. With Pierce and Glidden as technicians the lectures, featuring Ranger wilderness adventures, enjoy state-wide popularity.

Jake spotted the bus going by one day and said: "That's what the Rangers need." Last week the need was realized in the new "flagship."

It will be used to transport the Rangers and their camping outfit to remote places in northern Maine, for family picnics, and will carry Colonel Jake's complicated equipment on his lecture tours.

The "flagship" will begin its maiden voyage early next week when the Rangers head for Baxter State Park on their customary spring expedition.

Portland Sunday Telegram, May 28, 1961
Jeff Coongate Flinches. Suddenly at four o'clock in the afternoon Thursday, October 26, pain, cold and shivering as a hailstone in January, stabs his black heart.

The vagabond One-Eyed Poacher feels cut off, alone, as though a knife had slashed through his true heart. To comfort himself, he turns to his Winchester — hard. To heal his chilled heart, The One-Eyed Poacher swigs his jug of Hernando's root.

Across the rough mountain country of Mapong County other wilderness men flinch with him. Out from nowhere blows a chill grey wind to ice the cockles of their hearts;—Zake Bourne, Stumpy Coldwell, Jumbo Tethergood shiver; even young Tom Corn, the game warden, shivers. Crashing out of the ceiling at Mapong County Jail falls a chunk of plaster. The clock ticks to four.

Edmund Ware Smith, the Maine writer who fathered this wilderness tribe, is dead.

Unforgettable, never-to-be-forgotten Ed Smith died at four o'clock in the afternoon Thursday October 26 at Miles Hospital, Damariscotta.

Ed, the blue-eyed, lean, grey-haired gentleman with the pixie smile forever on his face and the engineer's cap forever on his head; with the love of Maine woods forever between his ribs and the wondrous spell of Maine wilderness in his words; Ed with the spirit of Katahdin springing from his sentences and the sound of Matagamon waters in his ears; Ed with the strength of Traveller Range in his prose and the art of working wood well in his hands; and the yen to fish trout in his fingertips and the hunger for woodsmoke and campfires and good men and good liquor and good times and good tiredness in open air always within him — Ed Smith is dead.

That is what the newspapers and the doctors say. And they are right, of course, up to a point.

And no more will Ed Smith keep his golf dates with Harry Marble at Wavenock; no longer will beautifully crafted tables and desks come from the workshop behind Ed's home, blazoned with the proud brass plate "Made by Edmund Ware Smith." No longer will there be the clack-clack at dawn of Ed's typewriter; and no longer will magazine editors and book publishers eagerly tip open the envelopes containing a new Smith manuscript, filled with the taste of wild berries and salt pork and the smell of spruce and peopleed with the Robin Hoods and Paul Bunyan of Katahdin Forest.

These are voids that today and always will be empty and aching.

But everlasting, never mined dry, is the unending rich lode of daydreams-come-true which Ed Smith's work gives to America.

Eardrums racked by the clatter of rivets, America can turn to Ed Smith and listen to the scolding of a squirrel; scoured by restless fumes, America can turn to Ed Smith and sweeten itself with clear mountain water curling round a rock; stifled in the asphalt cities, America can turn to Ed Smith and find soothing stillness in the Maine wilderness; bruised, hamboned and bagged by bosses, bills and bombast, America can rejoice with Ed Smith's cantankerous rascals of the Maine forest, big men who smell of woodsmoke, fly dope, hard work, rum, tall mountains and pine spills. And America, thanks to Ed Smith, can dig its fingers into the soil of its roots, breathe the air of its wilderness, get a lung full of freedom and go back to the grind refreshed, and believing daydreams can come true. Smith made them real.

Ed Smith, and his majestic, wonderful wife Mary, came from Detroit; from a city apartment, and built their own cabin with their own hands among the mountains and lakes of Northern Maine, 29 miles from the nearest telephone, 40 miles from the nearest doctor. Ten years they lived there, on and off, canoeing in the paddle prints of Thoreau down the East Branch of the Penobscot, stomping over Traveller, scrambling up the craggy mane of Horse Mountain, watching the sun set and the moon rise over Matagamon. Together they fished hidden pools, swam remote lakes, cooked over campfires, slept on pine branch beds, lugged rocks to build their hearth, chopped a garden out of the Maine wilderness; and found a new reality for which most human hearts can only yearn.

All of this wonder Ed Smith distilled, recreated and gave back to America through books and articles and stories. Ed Smith was blessed and luckier than most, to have lived the life he loved to the hilt. And then he multiplied his blessing by creating it again in printed words, so magical they transform a Newark slime or a Chicago penthouse into a corner of Mapong County.

Twelve years ago Ed Smith came to live near Damariscotta.

For a hundred more years Ed Smith will go on living in Damariscotta; and in Duluth; and in Dallas; and in Detroit; and in every man or woman whose hands can hold his books and whose hearts relish his words.

As long as the One-Eyed Poacher and Zake Bourne and Mapong County live, Ed Smith will go on living.

And every man who has met Jeff Coongate, The One-Eyed Poacher, knows that as long as there is salmon in the river and a deer in the forest, Jeff Coongate and his gang will never die. Nor will everlasting Ed Smith.
October 12, 1966

Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine

Dear Sir:

The report for the "Survey of College and University Libraries, 1965-66" went in without the corrections requested in a follow up letter. They are as follows:

Part I, A,a,1  "Number of vols. at end of 1964-65 year"  ....18,866

Part I, A,a,4  "Total number of vols. at end of 1965-66" ....21,150

The figures reflected 1966 salaries.

Yours truly,

[Signature]

Librarian
Ruth Sawyer

Bill Clark

Mr. Cloake Key

Eliza Craftsword

Mary Jane

John Conrad

Eliza Ogilvie

David Woodbury

Owen Pratt

Holdys Hasty Carroll

Dorothy Clark Wilson

E. W. Smith
February 14, 1967

Mr. Edmund Ware Smith
Damariscotta
Maine 04543

Dear Mr. Smith:

An unhappy omission: your UPRIVER AND DOWN is not in the Maine Author Collection. It is true that your earlier titles, now sadly out of print, are not there; but we do want to have the current books represented.

We hope that you will want to take time from planning the spring safari to inscribe a copy of the book for this purpose. No books give us more pleasure than yours of the Maine woods, whether you write of Justice Douglas or that other distinguished woodsman, Mr. Coongate.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
February 26, '67

Dear Mrs. Jacobs:

Just back from a trip to find your good letter. Please excuse my delay in replying.

I'd be pleased and proud to inscribe "Upriver and Down"—just as soon as the snow gets down below the second fence rail.

Best wishes, sincerely,

Edmund Ware Smith
Mrs. Edmund Ware Smith
Damariscotta
Maine 04543

Dear Mrs. Smith:

The loss of a friend is ever painful and to learn of the death of your husband is to experience a special kind of grief. Maine had a true and warm friend in Mr. Smith. Our sadness is in a way selfish -- we shall miss the eagerness with which we anticipated a new book; we shall miss the appreciation of a precise phrase of insight; we shall miss the vicarious pleasure of the Katahdin trips, the tall stories, the wonderful balance of sensitivity and humor that characterized his writing.

We have his last letter to us, written in February, promising to send an inscribed copy of UPRIVER AND DOWN for the Maine Author Collection "just as soon as the snow gets down below the second fence rail." For us, the snow will never get down that far, but we shall add the book to his others in the collection, with gratitude for many hours of pleasure in his writing, and a happy memory of knowing him even briefly.

Please accept our sympathy.

Sincerely yours

hmj
In Charge of
Maine Author Collection