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Selected Artists' Biographies--Maine Bird's Eye Views

Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr.

George E. Norris, 1855 – 1926

George E. Norris was born in Wareham, Massachusetts, in 1855. His name first appears on views in conjunction with other view artists, including Albert F. Poole and Henry Wellege. By the late 1880s, he had settled in Brockton, Massachusetts, and began to travel in New England, drawing and publishing views of Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont communities. His bird's eye view business ended in the late 1890s when he became a hotel manager in Brockton. He was operating the Hotel Grayson there when he died in 1926.

During the ten years between 1888 and 1898, George Norris drew and published more than thirty views of Maine towns and cities. A decade before, Joseph J. Stoner had employed artists whose drawings served as the basis for lithographs with a linear appearance. By the late 1880s a new photogravure process enabled George Norris to directly reproduce his own drawings, resulting in prints of a more pictorial quality. Norris used the Burleigh Lithography Company of Troy, New York, to produce the majority of his views.

With the exception of Waterville, Fairfield, and Houlton, Norris drew Maine communities not visited by Stoner's artists. His work covered all parts of the state, including such smaller industrial towns as Hartland, Island Falls, Monson, and Vinalhaven. Dating from 1898, his last Maine bird's eye was made to promote a coastal real estate development on Littlejohn's and Cousin's Islands in Casco Bay.

Albert F. Poole, 1853 – 1934

Born in North Bridgewater, Massachusetts, in 1853, Albert F. Poole, known as Bert Poole, began his career as a bird's eye view artist in the late 1870s. In September of 1879 he visited the Maine coast to sketch Bucksport and Bar Harbor. His Bar Harbor bird's eye view was published the following year by Joseph J. Stoner.

Between 1880 and the early-1900s, Bert Poole produced nearly fifty bird's eye views of Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont communities. He was in Maine in 1885 to draw the First Brigade of the Maine Volunteer Militia in Augusta's Capitol Park, the Togus Veterans' Home, and the town of Boothbay Harbor. He returned in 1886 to sketch the Portland suburban town of Deering and the Oxford County town of Norway. These lithographs were followed by views of the summer destinations of York Harbor in 1888 and Monhegan Island in 1896.

By the 1890s, Bert Poole was one of several Boston artists who spent their summers painting on Monhegan. In 1911 he updated his bird's eye view of the island and issued it as a color postcard. Three years later, his studio was the site of an art exhibition celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of Captain John Smith's visit to the island in 1614. Poole was joined by seventeen fellow artists showing works in this exhibit, including island resident S. P. Rolt Triscott and the noted New York painter George Bellows.

In 1916 Bert Poole sold his home and studio on Monhegan Island. He spent the balance of his life in the Boston area as a commercial and newspaper artist as well as a landscape and marine painter.

Albert Ruger, 1828 – 1899

Born in Prussia in 1829, Albert Ruger immigrated to America before 1850. He settled in the Akron, Ohio, area, where he worked as a stone mason for fifteen years. In 1864, at the age of thirty-six, he joined Company E. of the 196th Ohio Infantry. While serving in the Union army, he made drawings of military encampments in Ohio and Virginia. At Camp Chase near Columbus in the spring of 1865, Ruger drew a bird's eye view of Lincoln's funeral procession at the Ohio State Capitol, which was later made into a lithograph.

In 1866 Albert Ruger moved to Battle Creek, Michigan, and began making views of communities in the area. For the next twenty-five years, he produced more than two hundred and fifty town and city lithographs in twenty-four states and three Canadian provinces.

In 1876 Ruger returned to Akron. The next year he made his first visit to Maine, which resulted in bird's eye views of Berwick, South Berwick, Brunswick and Topsham, and South Bath. He returned to the state in 1878 to produce thirteen more views, including the Kennebec River towns of Richmond, Gardiner and Pittston, Hallowell, Augusta, and Waterville. His final Maine view, Saccarappa and Cumberland Mills (Westbrook), appeared in 1879. All eighteen of his Maine lithographs were published by Joseph J. Stoner of Madison, Wisconsin. Albert Ruger ended his career in 1891 with views of four cities in North Carolina and a fifth in South Carolina. He died in Akron, Ohio, in 1899.