

Introduction

I hope every woman who can write will not be silent.
Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1850, Brunswick, Maine

Maine has been home to great women authors—erudite, wise, and passionate—whose writing has changed the world. Maine women, armed with pen and paper, have influenced the outcome of the Civil War, mobilized women’s political and domestic rights, and powered the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. They have upset the status quo again and again. Many of them—not only the well known—have made this world a better place. As director of Maine Women Write, an organization that promotes the works of Maine women writers, I could not think of a more perfect time than right now to collectively celebrate our half of Maine’s literary history.

What makes a *Maine* woman writer? To answer that question, I looked to the Maine Women Writers Collection (MWWC) at the University of New England and found these criteria for inclusion in its extensive collections: *At some point in her life, the author lived and wrote in Maine, and Maine influenced her writing.* Most of the women writers gathered here have lived in Maine for many years—some their entire lives—and have produced in Maine the works quoted in this book. Others who are quoted, passed through. Harriet Beecher Stowe was born and died in Connecticut, but she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Brunswick, Maine, where she lived for two years. The story line, which came to her during a service held at the First Parish Church down the street from her home, was sharpened by discussions with local, abolitionist friends. Louise Bogan was born in Maine and lived here off and on as a young child before she moved away, but her Maine childhood, tumultuous as it was, seeded her poetry and feminism of later years. Anne Morrow Lindbergh spent long summers in Maine with her husband and family; her references to sea and land, no matter the book, are deeply informed by her love of Penobscot Bay and her observations of island life. Edna St. Vincent Millay left her home in Camden at the age of twenty-one to attend Vassar College. She did not return to live year-round, yet Millay considered Maine her home, visiting her mother in Camden frequently as well as spending summers on Ragged Island in Casco Bay. Rachel Carson was born in Pennsylvania and worked in Washington, D.C., but it was when she first came to Maine on a visit as an adult that she truly felt at home; here was a place where she could write peacefully, while observing the intricacies of the natural world. A common theme emerges, not only among these notable authors, but among all others found here: for over two hundred years Maine has inspired women to write.

Collecting quotes from full-length works might have brought with it some irreconcilable challenges— orphaned stanzas, homeless lines—if it had not been for the exquisite writing Maine women have penned; each quote stands tall on its own. My assistant, Meygan Lackey, and I felt privileged to spend two years reading their prose and poetry. But that is not the whole quote-collecting story. There was another privilege in store. Early on in the project, Maine writer and photographer, Kerry Michaels, suggested that a synergy might evolve from pairing the quotes with photographs of Maine—its gardens, lakes, mountains, fields, and ocean. Taken by the idea, she started photographing and we set to pairing the two media. The result was alchemy. The interplay of words and photos enlivened each and, above all, accentuated just how much Maine women writers have energized the essence of place, strengthened women’s lives, and illuminated the human condition.

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