**The Griot**

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**African American Collection of Maine**

Glickman Family Library, Sixth Floor
314 Forest Avenue
Portland, ME 04104
(207) 780-4275

**Reading Room Hours:**
Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

**Collection Contacts**
Maureen Elgersman Lee, faculty scholar
(207) 780-4011

Susie Bock, head of special collections, director of the Sampson Center, University archivist
(207) 780-4269

David Andreassen, library assistant
(207) 780-5492

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**From the Editor’s Desk**

How time has flown! It is already the fall of 2004, making the 2004-2005 academic year the Griot’s eighth year in print. Not to be left out of the current make-over trend, the Griot is getting some freshening up. The feature known as a “A Place in Time” will continue to highlight materials from the African American Collection of Maine. In addition, each issue will review a book from the Collection and will keep readers abreast of some of the most recent publications in African American history and culture. This issue of the Griot begins unraveling the mystery of the Maxfield family and reviews a new novel.

Maureen Elgersman Lee is an associate professor of history and faculty scholar for the African American Collection of Maine, University of Southern Maine Library.

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**Book Review**


Calvin College English Professor Gary Schmidt begins his latest novel by introducing the reader to Bostonian Turner Buckminster, who “had lived in Phippsburg, Maine, for almost six whole hours,” and “didn’t know how much longer he could stand it” (p. 1). The only son of Phippsburg’s newest clergyman, Turner is more interested in lighting out for the Territories than becoming part of the new community. Under the watchful eye of widow Mrs. Cobb and routinely pummeled by the deacon’s son, Willis Hard, Turner finds nothing appealing about Maine. Until he meets Lizzie Bright. Thirteen-year-old Lizzie Bright Griffin grew up on Malaga Island, as had many generations of her family before her. She routinely rows her grandfather’s dory between the island and the mainland; she goes clamming almost daily; she talks to and touches whales. According to her grandfather, also a minister, Lizzie is “the closest thing to glory he’ll ever see on God’s green earth” (p. 59).

Schmidt uses Turner’s visit to Malaga to offer a dignified, reverent description of the island and its people:

“Together [Lizzie and Turner] climbed up to the center of the island, where the trees were thick and high. She showed him the graves, and they stood quietly together and were careful where they set their feet. Then back up the shore and to the south end of the island, where shingled one- and two-room houses clamped themselves to the rocks like oysters, glad to be there and rooted, and highly engaging. It is a sobering look into the moral dilemma of Malaga Island in 1911 and 1912, providing the reader to Bostonian Turner Buckminster’s last look at the communities of the Territory, his reverence for the people of these islands, and his awe of the natural world” (p. 217). Although Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy is a youth novel, both the subject and the writing style make it suitable for adult readers. Gary Schmidt’s work is literarily picturesque, historically rooted, and highly engaging. It is a sobering look into the moral dilemma of Malaga Island in 1911 and 1912, providing the reader to Bostonian Turner Buckminster’s last look at the communities of the Territory, his reverence for the people of these islands, and his awe of the natural world. It is a youth novel, both the subject and the writing style make it suitable for adult readers. Gary Schmidt’s work is literarily picturesque, historically rooted, and highly engaging. It is a sobering look into the moral dilemma of Malaga Island in 1911 and 1912, providing the reader to Bostonian Turner Buckminster’s last look at the communities of the Territory, his reverence for the people of these islands, and his awe of the natural world.

McAllister studies William Brown's short-lived African Company (also the African Grove Theatre), located in New York City from 1821 to 1823.


McHenry constructs a history of African American literacy from the 1830s through the 1920s by focusing on the associational lives of Black readers. The author diverts attention from the fact of Black literacy to its use in constructing Black social and political identity.


An account of Michael Healy and Eliza Clark's ten biracial children whose "ambiguous" skin color and features allowed them to pass for white. One of the Healy children, James Augustine, became the United States' first African American Catholic Bishop; his brother, Patrick, served as president of Georgetown University. A welcomed complement to Albert S. Foley's Bishop Healy: Beloved Outcaste (1954).


A collection of Painter's previously published essays on the American South from the antebellum period through the turn of the twentieth century. The collection reveals why Painter remains an important American historian.


Waldrep explores the history of lynching from its beginnings in revolution-era America through the 1998 murder of James Byrd, Jr., in Jasper, Texas. Waldrep explores the form, use, and discourse of lynching across the United States.


Wallenstein's text examines three hundred years of U.S. law and social history concerning interracial marriage.

He places particular emphasis on the one hundred years leading up to the Loving v. Virginia (1967) Supreme Court decision that allowed interracial marriage in all states, including the then sixteen states that prohibited it.

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A Place in Time: The Maxfield Family

One of the most recent donations to the African American Collection of Maine is an arrangement of photographs (reproductions) of the Maxfield family. They were donated by Muriel Deering Christopher of Biddeford; she had purchased the item at an Amundell flea market from a man who had bought it at auction in Biddeford. The arrangement features a total of fourteen extended family members: Mrs. Ella Woods, Mrs. E.A. Maxfield, and M.C. Maxfield and his children—Walter, Harriett, Lena, and Geneva. Also pictured are M.C. Maxfield's siblings: Mary, Elizabeth, Stafford, Herbert, Gateswood, Bolden, and Miles. The evidence may be lean, but research is helping to unravel the Maxfields' story.

The Unites States census locates at least some members of the Maxfield family in Hanover County, Virginia, just north of Richmond. Stafford Maxfield was born in Virginia in 1840, and was a farmer in 1880. His wife, Amanda, kept house and took care of their seven children: Mary, Lucy, Martha, William, Harriet, Miles, and Gertie. Another Maxfield family was headed by Hubert (also Hubert) and Louisa Maxfield. During the 1870s, they had five children of their own: Lucy, Mary, Harriet, Clara, and Hubert. By 1880, Louisa Maxwell was widowed and parented her five children—aged one through ten years—on her own.

This is where the trail ends right now. It is difficult to find the Maxfields in Virginia census records after 1880, and the family may have emigrated from the south during this era. Maine records locate various Maxfields in Maine—some with the same first names. However, they are identified as Black, not as White. It is possible that some of the Maxfields that appear in Maine censuses had light complexions and were, therefore, misidentified by census takers. The 1880 manuscript census for Virginia identifies Louisa Maxfield and her children as "mulatto," an archaic term indicating that they were bi-racial or that they simply had fair complexions.

According to the 1880 census, there was an African American with the Maxfield surname living in Maine. Machias-born Joseph Maxfield lived in Deering, Cumberland County. A brickyard laborer, Joseph Maxfield boarded with a local family. No documentation has been located, thus far, to link Joseph Maxfield with the Virginia Maxfields.

Clearly, more work will have to be done to solve the Maxfield family mystery; any future updates will be posted in the Griot.