

Book Review: *White Pine*. Andrew Vietze. Globe Pequot. 2018

White Pine is a new book by author Andrew Vietze. It is only 218 pages and an easy and fast read. It is a well-researched history of the vitally important role that the eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) played in the history of the United States, particularly our colonial and revolutionary periods. If you are a history buff, or have lived in the northeast or lake states, you should enjoy this book.

The book begins with a chapter about the importance of white pine to the northeastern Indian tribes such as the Iroquois, Algonquin and Chippewa. They used it for medicine, shelter and even sustenance in hard times, and it is an important figure in their folklore. The early European colonizers of the northeast quickly realized the value of the white pine for sawtimber, and most wood buildings were constructed of pine. However, it was the value of white pine in ship building that was particularly transformative in American history. The large white pines were sometimes 4-5 feet in diameter, 150-200 feet tall, straight-boled and clear for 100ft. This made it ideal for masts in ship building. In the early 1700s, the British Crown, recognizing the value of white pine, claimed ownership of all white pines of mast quality under the "White Pine Acts" and marked those with the "Kings broad arrow" bark blaze. The colonists were greatly resistant to these edicts, leading to protest, resistance and even insurrection. The British bombardment and razing of the ship building and lumber town of Falmouth, Mass, (todays Portland, Maine) was an important event fomenting the American revolution. Some American militia carried the "Tree of Liberty" flag, the signature tree being a white pine. During and after the war, the New England ship building ports were essential to the success of the nascent United States of America, both commercially and militarily.

The book then skips over to the "Aroostook War" of 1839 in northern Maine, which was actually a confrontation between the USA and British that nearly led to an actual war. The confrontation was over the boundary between Maine and the British Colony of New Brunswick. While the specific point of disagreement was the international boundary, the resource that generated the dispute were the forests of white pine.

The author then detours into more modern history by telling the story of several lumber families in Maine, the "Pine Tree State". In one case they are milling second growth white pine and the other, milling sunken pines recovered from lakes which once served as log ponds. Remarkably, nearly 500 million board feet of white pine lumber is still produced annually in northeastern and lake state sawmills, making it the regions' #1 sawtimber.

The final chapters start with the great lake states fires of the late 1800s and how in part, these led to the forest conservation movement. The author tells of early conservation advocates such as Christopher Columbus Andrews and Gifford Pinchot, and the birth of scientific forestry in the USA. He finishes with a chapter on the arrival of white pine blister rust from Europe. While the rust substantially impacts eastern white pine, the species remains very important, both ecologically and commercially.

For forestry and history enthusiasts who don't have a whole lot of time for reading for pleasure, this might be a good book for you. I certainly recommend it.