Mast agents for the London contractors took up residence in New England. Some of their names became linked with the future of the region: Samuel Waddo, mast agent at Boston; Mark Hunking Wentworth, mast agent at Portsmouth; Thomas Westbrook, to be succeeded by George Tate, mast agent at Falmouth (now Portland); and Edward Parry, at Georgetown (now Bath). Nothing prevented these mast agents from setting up as lumber merchants on their own accounts. Most of them became rich and powerful men in their respective colonies. The mast agents were, in a sense, New England managers of commercial enterprises based in London. They were not King's officers, but licensees of licensees permitted to harvest the Crown timber.

The King's man in New England was the Surveyor of Laths and Timber in Maine. He was given four deputies. Appointments to this post began in 1685. At first the surveys extended ten miles inland from any navigable waterway. Then as the trees disappeared and the need for them continued, the Surveyor and his deputies sought to range the whole of the pine belt from Nova Scotia westward to the St. Lawrence. . . .

The King's Surveyor was hardly popular with the New England colonists. The office was badly paid to begin with, and the area to be covered by this officer and his four deputies was tremendous. It was work enough just to find and mark the trees which tended to disappear when the excisors of the Broad Arrow had passed through. Swamp law governed the future of informers. The colonial courts increasingly sided with the violators as conditions slide toward the Revolution. . . .

Outbreak of the [American] Revolution ended the Broad Arrow Policy in New England. In April, 1775, news of Bunker Hill and Lexington stopped all shipments of masts to the King. Waiting mast cargoes were seized by the colonists at Portsmouth, Falmouth and Georgetown. The load of mast baulks seized by the colonists from the mast ship Minerva was reported to be rotting in Portland harbor fifty years later.

Mast logging as a marine trade did not end in New England with eclipse of the Broad Arrow Policy. Pine masts continued to be cut and shipped by Yankee traders to whomever would buy them at the highest price. France was a good customer for New England masts during the Revolution. England continued to import them, although on a commercial basis, after the war had ended. But the King had other trees in North America. Until about 1825, great pines marked with the broad arrow continued to move out of the valleys of the Saint John and the Miramichi to the King's depot at Halifax.

Puritan Perspectives on the New England Environment

MARK STOLL

No other English colony—for that matter, no other place in the world—was quite like New England. It flourished and grew on some of the poorest soil in the Empire, dissenters ran the established church, and a ministry with little official power dominated lay life. Yet, in that little-regarded corner of the British Empire the inhabitants nursed a fervent and zealous Calvinism. When in the nineteenth century their descendants rushed forth across the American continent, they brought with them a mentality molded and fired in a Puritan land. The power of that mentality soon propelled them disproportionately not only into the boardrooms of industry but also into the ranks of reform societies and of nature stewardship and preservation groups. Particularly after the Civil War, New Englanders dominated national economic, intellectual, and cultural life. By then, what the Calvinist and Puritan traditions had to say about nature mattered a great deal.

Europeans first contemplated the wild shores of America much like a painter gazes at a blank canvas. To them, America had no past, no history—it was a continent in future tense. With the colors available to them, how should they paint what they saw? Some filled their canvases with the wilderness of Sinai, where dangers and demons threatened Christian settlers. Others depicted a Canaan flowing with milk and honey, beckoning Europeans away from Egyptian slavery. Was America an Eden where fallen men struggled for redemption? Or were the colonists to follow God's plan and restore the howling wilderness to paradise? Upon this bare canvas poured the visions and dreams (and nightmares) of the European soul.

In the seventeenth century, the English often referred to their new settlements in America and elsewhere not as "colonies" but "plantations." They crossed the seas and "planted" new communities. The Puritans "planted" the Gospel in a heathen wilderness. The English also planted the beliefs, viewpoints, and intellectual traditions that would shape the landscape of the American mind. The first two centuries of English presence on the American continent was a seedtime of ideas and attitudes from European stock. Although European ideas adapted to their new environment, colonial American contributors to the arts and sciences depended upon the Old World for model, style, and conception. Self-conscious of their location on the fringes of Western civilization, educated Americans longed to participate in European learned life.

Of the varieties of attitudes toward nature planted with the first generations of Puritans, three stand out for their lasting influence. The educated elite blended Calvinism with more secular literary and philosophical trends to produce that sense of nature's purity and man's wiliness. Most Puritans fixated more narrowly on the Bible, whose concepts and phrases they combined with the Calvinist ethic of work and activity to generate compelling rationales for the transformation of the wilderness into which they had ventured. Finally, many Puritans struggled to overcome their remoteness to keep abreast of European developments, particularly in natural science, to which they made their own contributions in the service of man and God. These three perspectives on nature clearly manifested themselves in the works of Anne Bradstreet, Edward Johnson, and Cotton Mather. . . .

In 1662 Michael Wigglesworth published "God's Controversy with New-England," in which he described America as "A waste and howling wilderness, / Where none inhabited / But hellish fiends, and brutish men / That Devils worshipped." That image of a howling wasteland full of demons and devil-worshippers forms the common portrayal of the attitude of early New England Puritans toward the natural world. Themes of hostility toward and exploitation of nature, grounded in Biblical types and imagery, did dominate such accounts as William Bradford's Plymouth Plantation, Edward Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour, in New England, and Cotton Mather's histories of New England. New Englanders' high literacy rates and intense Protestantism combined with their concentration on the Bible as the source of religious truth meant that the Bible above all else gave

thirty years old. Johnson's heart did not rise when he arrived in America, nor did he ever have to "submit" to the way of the New England churches. Johnson was a dedicated and enthusiastic captain in the Lord's army ready to begin His great work. Johnson went back to England to retrieve his wife and seven children and returned in 1636 to dedicate his energies to the colony. One of the founders of Woburn, he became captain of the militia, town clerk, and deputy to the General Court. . . .


To Johnson, the location of the Puritan colony in the wilderness was rich in Scriptural meaning. Particularly in Book I, the words "wilderness," "waste[,]" or "desert" appear on practically every page, with various import in different contexts. Wilderness to Johnson first of all provided a refuge for Christ's church from the Antichrist, a gathering and mustering place for his army of saints. Martial metaphor pervaded Wonder-working Providence. To be a proper refuge and gathering place, the wilderness must be conquered for Puritan use. The Puritans from the beginning took as part of their purpose to fulfill the command of Genesis to multiply, and replenish and subdue the wilderness, and took pains provisioning their ships, "filling them with the seeds of man and beast to sow this yet untilled Wilderness withal. . . ."

Johnson's Puritans saw Biblical wilderness recreated in American wilderness. Puritans used a system called "typology" to recognize in current events an exact re-play of Old Testament episodes. The Hebrews' exodus from Egypt, forty years in the wilderness, and arrival in Canaan, the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey, prefurred the Puritan's progress. Every Biblical parallel they found strengthened their self-conception as the elect of God, his chosen people, and invested "the great straites this Wildnesse people were in" with divine significance. Both Israelite and Puritan fled persecution from unjust rulers, underwent testing and trial in the wilderness, and by the Providence of God arrived in the Promised Land. In the wilderness, both Hebrews and Puritans received the tutelage and correction of God, who would "awaken, rouze up, and quicken them with the rod of his power" if they strayed.

While wilderness formed a sacred setting, nature itself was God's medium for goodness or discipline. Every natural feature or event to Johnson was God's provision
for his chosen or providential aid for planting Christ's churches in the wilderness. The beaver trade providentially prepared the country for their presence by attracting early colonists. God dealt with the problem of numerous hostile natives by sending a plague among them which "not only made room for his people to plant; but also tamed the hard and cruel hearts of these barbarous Indians. . . ." God changed the weather for his people, sending an unusual abundance of rain, which astonished the "Heathen." . . .

Johnson included economic activity as a sign that New Englanders were making a garden of the wilderness and noted that, far from the fears of the first settlers that New England would suffer from lack of a staple commodity, "every thing in the country proved a staple-commodity, wheat, rye, oats, peas, barley, beef, pork, fish, butter, cheese, timber, mast, tar, sope, plank-board frames of houses, clabbord, and pipestaves, iron and lead is like to be also." Colonists who formerly had to import all necessities from England now "have not only fed their Elder Sisters, Virginia, Barbadoes, and many of the Summer Islands that were prefer'd before her for fruitfulness, but also the Grandmother of us all, even the first isle of Great Britain" as well as Portugal and Spain. Johnson marveled "that this Wilderness should turn a mart for Merchants in so short a space." . . .

In broader perspective, Johnson's work exemplified the ability of Western Christians of all creeds to justify their global colonization efforts. Clearing land, introducing foreign plants and animals, expanding agriculture, developing trade, and conquering, converting, expelling, or exterminating aborigines—in sum, the wholesale transformation of entire ecosystems—all received blessing as God's work. Yet everywhere as well, the voice of Christian conscience—here in a whisper, there in a shout—limited or shaped European activities. Johnson, for instance, never weakened his demands for continued self-sacrifice and dedication to a higher cause, for stewardship of the earth, and for conversion of the Indians when possible. Christian ideology about nature arrived in the wilderness of the New World as a promise wrapped in a threat. . . .

As an intensely devout, prominent Puritan minister, both son and grandson of prominent Puritan ministers, Cotton Mather assumed the heavy responsibility of carrying the New England Puritan tradition into the eighteenth century. He lived in an era of great change in science, theology, politics, and society—the age of Boyle, Newton, Ray and Derham, and Locke, of the Cambridge Platonists, Deists, and German Pietists, and of the Glorious Revolution. Mather saw decline of ministerial authority and the rise of an increasingly prosperous, materialistic, and religiously liberal colonial upper class. Still, he carried on the old traditions well, and accommodated them to current intellectual trends. Puritans of Mather's day were eagerly accommodating nature in the Bible to the nature of science and philosophy. Extremely proud of both his doctorate in divinity from Calvinist Glasgow University and his election as a fellow of the Royal Society, Mather could write passages of millenialist fervor next to digests of the latest in natural philosophy (science) or natural theology.

Calvinist and Puritan religious intensity derived from the insistent principle that no aspect of life or experience lay outside the realm of religion. In this respect, Mather's universe was identical with Johnson's. However, in language and conception it evolved steadily in new directions. In his early career, Mather's concept of the Puritans' place in the wilderness echoed the metaphors and world view of Johnson's generation. But by the turn of the century the old terms and concepts were fading from Mather's books, never repudiated but supplanted by the new outlook of an age of rationalism and science. . . .

However much it resembled the world of Edward Johnson or Anne Bradstreet, Mather's universe was different. True, the invisible world still infused the visible: he believed there were devils in the woods and saw angels in his study. Nevertheless, he could be skeptical and insist on proof of supernatural workings. During the Salem witch trials of 1692, he and his father recommended rejection of testimony against witches based solely on "spectral evidence," that is, testimony about spirits who appeared only to the victim. (Unfortunately, their recommendation went unheeded.) Like educated men in England, Mather suspected natural causes were at work in events previously understood to be of supernatural origin. . . .

Cotton Mather and most of his learned peers at home and in Britain welcomed the increasing intrusion of the natural into the realm of the supernatural with ever more confident assertions that science and revelation agreed. Yet, this represented a retreat from the pervasively, relentlessly spiritualized universe of New England's founders. The spell of the supernatural had been broken and the seductively rational and orderly Enlightenment was beginning to entrance the Western mind. Perhaps natural causes and not witchcraft caused cows to die or beer not to ferment. Perhaps microscopic "animalcules" and not God's judgment caused disease. . . . Reason and natural law seemed to fill so much of the universe that it was all churchmen could do to stuff providence into the interstices. While for a century and a half most Protestants like Mather continued to insist upon the harmony of the books of nature and revelation, the increasing number of discordant notes prompted an ever growing number in the eighteenth century to rely upon the book of nature alone.

Further Reading

———, The Ordeal of Thomas Hutchinson (1974)
Richard L. Bushman, From Puritan to Yankee (1967)
Peter N. Carroll, Puritans and the Wilderness (1969)
Stephen Inness, Labor in a New Land (1983)