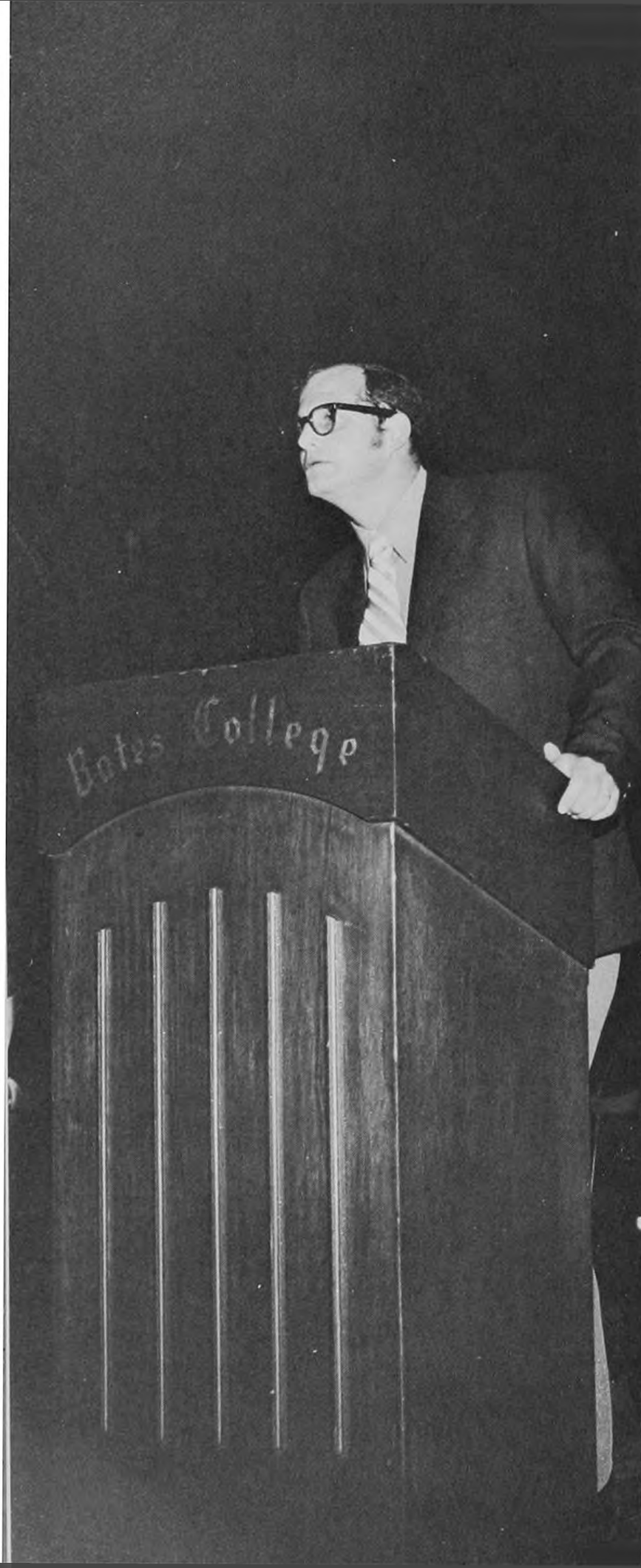




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*BEYOND THE FRONTIER:
AN ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH TO
THE EARLY HISTORY OF NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND*

When I was invited by the Standing Committee of our Society to speak to this meeting on some aspect of the Maine "frontier," my reaction was at least ambivalent.

My hesitation in accepting the assignment stemmed from at least two causes. One was my antipathy to the doctrinaire. In the recently-published book that I presume prompted the invitation, I had tried, very conscientiously and indeed somewhat against the tides of fashion, to arrive at an interpretation on the basis of accumulated evidence, approached in the first instance with an attitude of wide-eyed innocence. Now someone was trying to put a flag in my hand and dress me in the uniform of a party. One waggish committeeman even suggested a title: "Frederick Jackson Turner in the Maine Woods." The second cause for my hesitation, I must admit, was the antiquity of the thesis to which I was expected to relate my own work.

But as I thought more about the assignment, I knew that it would be a mistake not to use the opportunity that this engagement provides to articulate some vague ideas of mine about what I expect will be some serious work to come. Although I am certainly no Turnerian--I doubt that any historian in the last thirty years has admitted to a view of American history identical to that presented by Turner in 1893--I have in my own studies become addicted rather strongly to the notion that human experience is affected profoundly, perhaps decisively, by the place in which it happens. To the extent, then, that Turner introduced in a serious way, for twentieth-century scholars, the concept of what might loosely be called "environmentalism" to American historiography, I find him not old hat at all, but as contemporary, say, as Earth Week. But contemporaneity is not the point. I reject emphatically the

the fallacy that the validity of a proposition bears any relationship at all, direct or inverse, to its newness.

What fascinated me about today's speaking engagement was the opportunity to try to bring into focus, considerably ahead of the original schedule, the inchoate thoughts that had for some time been haunting me about the nature and structure of the chronological sequel to my study of northern New England that I have committed myself to producing one of these days.

In polished form, such a statement would constitute a sort of prospectus for a study--ultimately one or two volumes--of the region of northern New England during what I conceive, at least tentatively, as its golden age. Or at least it would look toward an important part of such a study. The period, as I now see it, starts with the double beginning of 1763: huge and unprecedented geographic expansion to the northward and northeastward occasioned by the permanent end of the inhibitions presented by hostile French and Indians upon English expansion, and the onset, for similar reasons, of the crisis in colonial relations that culminated in American Independence. I haven't yet placed the end of the period, but it would certainly be related in some way to the beginnings of the shift in our national life to industrialization, and it would be related to demographic changes--that is, to the end or the slowing down of population increase in the region as related to the growth in population in the nation as a whole, and the beginning of migration out of the region to the west. It would also be related to the decline in the importance of the ports of Maine and New Hampshire as centers of import and export and of shipbuilding, and of the relative importance of agricultural production of the sort practiced on the diversified, self-sufficient farms of the northern New England countryside. Very tentatively, I would expect to carry the study up to about 1830 or, at the latest, 1840.

The problem that concerns me primarily is to come to terms with the idea of locality--the sense of place. What constitutes a man's attachment to a place? How does he form his ideas of it? How does this sense, which is seldom articulated, contribute, as I suggest it does, to a system of values, and even to a man's understanding of his own identity? What meaning do we attach, even on the shallowest, almost literal level, to the immensely evocative last line of "The Dry Salvages," the third of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*--"The life of significant soil"? And was Edmund Muskie using any more than an empty phrase, possibly one with potential

political mileage, when he spoke so movingly on election eve, 1970, and referred to the Maine coast, the locus of his nationally televised speech, as conveying a "sense of place"?

In an era of galloping homogenization of American experience, urged along by mass communications, great mobility, national corporations, national professions, and a national aesthetic represented as well as anything by a MacDonald's hamburger stand, regional distinctiveness seems to be as much threatened as the importance of distinction among the various religious traditions in the face of the over-arching religion which Will Herberg called the American Way of Life.[1] C. Vann Woodward worried over something like this in an essay on the Southern identity more than a decade ago. [2]

But even with the fading of Richard Hofstadter's "tradition-directed" individual and his replacement by one more characteristically oriented toward career, [3] and in the face of the various standardizations that we all deplore, or claim we do, the United States has yet to become one vast Southern California. A Texan is still a Texan, a Manhattanite is still unmistakable, and a Yankee is still a Yankee. With respect to New England, George W. Pierson has written that despite the complete loss of all objective measurements--demographic, economic, racial, or religious--by which one could claim to recognize a distinct region, nevertheless "as a region of the heart and mind, New England is still very much alive." [4]

If that much is true today, I think we can agree that much more than that must have been true before the onset of the various homogenizing tendencies we thought about a moment ago. On the other hand, we must not leap to the assumption that regionalism or localism (I haven't yet thought through the difference) was necessarily the controlling element in an American's identity at every time before that.

What I am searching for, then, begging the initial question of whether the area comprising Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont constitutes a "region" sufficiently uniform and distinct to justify studying as an entity (I believe I have already answered that question in the affirmative elsewhere), is a way of getting at the origins and nature of regionalism as applied to this particular place. If such an exercise is to be at all satisfactory, it must cut through the surface of experience and try to grapple, however imperfectly, with the depths of feeling; for the sense of place as I conceive it is much more, perhaps infinitely more, than an economic or a sociological relationship.

My problem, as I see it, is partly scientific, because

there is indeed a great deal that will have to be "known" in the ordinary sense. At least equally important, however, it is partly artistic, because some of the truth about this problem of which I am already dimly aware and which I hope will become more clear as the study progresses (in fact, I shall proceed with it only because I am able to accept on faith the probability of that clarification) depends for its communication upon something more than deadpan reporting. Perhaps some of the broad sweeps which I hope will one day blend on the canvas will be at least suggested to you as we proceed here; perhaps some of you will help me refine them.

I propose to work at the outset with three complementary themes, two of which are borrowed from disciplines other than history--one from a relatively new field called "perceptual geography," and one from literary history and criticism. The third theme could hardly be more classically historical, because it deals with precisely that which differentiates our discipline from all others, namely, the uniquenesses of various segments of time. This third theme, incidentally, happens to be the one which I feel rests on the shakiest conceptual foundation of the three and is therefore the one most likely to be abandoned. But I shall proceed with it for a time on the basis of intuition, and give you the chance at least to sample the kind of crazy notions that sometimes churn through a historian's mind while he is trying to formulate a thesis.

The point of departure for all three is, yes, Turner.

Much has been written and speculated about the frontier, especially in American history. Turner suggested, among other things, that the frontier experience diminished the sense of place in the psyche and motivations of those who underwent it because it did away with permanent attachments. Despite the antiquity of the Turner hypothesis, it seems to me that it continues to grip us in ways of which we are barely conscious. We are so habituated to thinking in terms of the moving frontier that when we are dealing with any period of American history during which settlement was expanding--prior, that is, to 1890--it is difficult to look beyond the adventure of the first settlement, and discover the significance of what happened next. It would be quite possible for me to continue my study of northern New England by simply telling the story as the settlement of a succession of frontiers until we reached Lake Champlain on the west and Aroostook County on the east, combined with the development of a succession of commercial "frontiers" in the established ports and perhaps some industrial and cultural "frontiers" thrown in for good

measure--in short, as an account of various kinds of "progress." Perhaps few readers would notice that anything was missing.

But what concerns me more than that, and what is needed if we are going to come to terms at all with the sense of place, is the relationship between man and his environment after the "frontier" stage is over. It might be argued, especially if one subscribes to the Turnerian concept of moving frontiers, that the frontier experience has little to do with the uniqueness of place but has to do rather with the elemental concerns of human survival that are common to all men who test themselves against nature on the fringe of civilization, wherever the particular frontier in question happens to be. Only when the frontier experience has ended, and when the area which was once wild has passed over into its permanent, or at least its next stage, do we begin to discern cultural patterns that distinguish it from other places. On the level of what one might call the surface of life, I tried to look into this for the interior townships of Maine and New Hampshire that were settled between about 1720 and 1750, and the results of my investigation of this transition from frontier to what I called the "country town" are already in print.

But to understand the sense of place, we must probe beneath the surface, and for this I am proposing the three parallel routes suggested earlier. The first route is that of a particular kind of geographer. Yi-Fu Tuan, in an article entitled "Attitudes Toward Environment: Themes and Approaches," comments provocatively as follows:

"Though curious as to frontier attitudes, geographers have, on the whole, neglected indigenous cosmographies.... Geographers are more at home in the economics of livelihood than in the theology of belief. They are interested in evaluations of nature at the frontier, for these must be material and pragmatic if the immigrants are to survive. In long-settled areas, on the other hand, material needs grow less urgent. Nature is no longer consciously appraised for its practical uses. Cosmographic notions reveal their structures less clearly in crop and field patterns than in myths and taboos, in architectural design, and in layout of gardens." [5]

I suspect that a study of northern New England "cosmographies" would be painfully less than fruitful, inasmuch as I can think of nothing in particular which would distinguish the general view of the universe held in our little corner of the earth from that in the rest of New England, the rest of America, or for that matter, the rest of the western world. But we can narrow our quest to one which seeks an attitude

toward nature, and specifically, to use another of the suggestions of Yi-Fu Tuan, toward landscapes that have acquired special symbolic significance.

Was there, in the case of northern New England, a distinction in attitudes toward the local environment between the frontier and the settled stage? And if so, is it possible to detect the consistent notes of difference and perhaps to discern at what stage of settlement on the various "frontiers" the shift took place? Do these consistent notes in the post-frontier stage, if they exist, provide important clues in our quest for the sense of place?

There is no lack of evidence that attitudes toward the environment during the stages of discovery and initial settlement were predominantly exploitive. The evidence is both circumstantial and documentary. The very purpose of the first permanent coastal settlements early in the seventeenth century, to which their locations, surviving narrative and business records, statements of intent, and mode of operation all attest, was, as one of the settlers tried to explain to an uncomprehending visiting preacher from Massachusetts, to catch fish. In the early eighteenth century, when the near interior and far eastern coastal areas were frontiers, no longer of England but rather of that roughly defined civilization whose cultural capital was Boston, one is struck by two preeminent concerns with respect to the unsettled parts of those areas. One is the extraordinary nervousness over who was going to beat whom in the race to cut down every available pine tree. The other is the lack of consistent purpose and of planning and foresight that accompanied the mad scramble by several thousand New Englanders on the lists of grantees of new townships in unsettled territory between 1713 and 1744. [6] This period of expansion between the Peace of Utrecht and the beginning of King George's War was, among other things, a period of speculation, including speculation in the land of northern New England, and it was also a period during which many a Massachusetts farmer and fisherman dreamed, without the slightest idea of either the expense or the labor and physical hardship involved, of tilling his own broad upcountry acres. Such dreams, incidentally, were only seldom realized. More often, if a man acquired a share in a township, he sold it to a fellow proprietor with more means and know-how, or to a land jobber. [7]

When an expedition of the Lincolnshire Company sailed from Boston to the Sheepscot River in 1720 to look over a tract of land which they proposed to subdivide and sell off much in the manner of a modern real estate developer, one of

their number, Thomas Fayerweather, kept a journal. It is full of revealing comments. Two examples:

"...went up to Chegewannusock alias Murconkus Falls being about 18 Miles up the river from Mr. Pierce's house, which falls we found very agreeable for...Mills, the passage which to em being exceedingly pleasant and the Soile very promissing plentifully Stor'd with Spruce, yellow Oak, pine, Birch, &c abounding with agreeable Coves for the situation of plantations; the river abounding with wild fowles; deep waters also for large Vessels almost all the way up."

"...landed at ramin point being the Eastermost point of land upon the river of which we took possession...the shore of which we found well Stor'd with Spruce--&c and the soile very promising well watered and a levell Champion Country and abounding with safe Harbours or Coves for Vessells being deep water,...situated for Navall trade the land very promising for cultivation...." [8]

One could go on with a host of similar examples, but I doubt that you really have to be convinced that the attitudes toward the natural environment that marked this or any other frontier stage were marked predominantly by an assessment of what immediate use man could make of the resources--and the uses one had in mind were always practical, and usually economic.

It is necessary to add that in New England, until well into the eighteenth century, the landscape that it was envisioned would ultimately emerge from the raw state, whatever its natural idiosyncracies, was one which would be characterized in the settled areas by the relatively compact village. This was decreed by both legislation and habit, though I am well aware of the departures from both that had long since occurred in practice, even in the older parts of Massachusetts. Every town plan conceived by the proprietors of the frontier townships and approved by the legislatures of Massachusetts and New Hampshire had much to say about the size of houses, the nature of fences, the extent of cultivation, and the compactness and defensibility of the settlement. None allowed for the peculiarities of the landscape, except to provide that each proprietor would ultimately get for his own use equal shares of the various kinds of land--home lots, field, pasture, forest, marsh land, and so on. In short, the special nature of a locality was largely irrelevant to plans for the use of land that were conceived in the frontier stage. I would even suggest, at some risk because I don't know exactly how to prove it, that the fear of the wilderness and the association of wildness with evil and of civilization with good that so marks

the seventeenth-century consciousness in New England (in both the Puritan and non-Puritan parts) lingered in the mentality of eighteenth-century proprietors and pioneers--the French and Indian menace alone was reason enough to justify it--possibly just below the surface of the conscious.

So much for the frontier.

What concerns me at this stage is to try to determine the point during the eighteenth century at which it is possible to discern a shift in attitudes, or better, perhaps, to be able to describe the nature of the shift, which led to such developments and ideas as:

1. A concern for soil conservation sufficiently strong and enlightened to permit the New Hampshire legislature in 1755 to end the century-old practice of allowing cattle to graze in the salt marshes of Hampton because "The shrubs and Beach Grass are destroyed, in Consequence whereof, in Storms and High winds the Sand is driven from off the said Beach upon the meadows and the meadows thereby much Injured and dammified." [9]

2. The admiring comments of the Reverend Paul Coffin of Buxton after examining, in 1768, the five-year-old settlements at Fryeburg and Brownfield, in the upper valley of the Saco. Here there was not the slightest suggestion of the compact village of New England tradition, attempts at which on the older northern frontiers had already been almost universally abandoned. "Nature," wrote Coffin (note that he said "nature," not "man"), "has formed here the desirable rural retreat which poets describe as the most amiable situation in life." His sojourn in the area does sound idyllic, in a civilized but bucolic way. One of his hosts was a "sober, religious man; of good judgment in religion, loving rational and intelligible christianity" who lived in a handsome house which contained a "high clean" wainscotted reception room with five windows, and who had "an amiable and accomplished wife and a pretty daughter of about five years." Another of his hosts owned a grist and saw mill, which Mr. Coffin inspected, being treated at the same time to the sight of "a fine flock of Wood Ducks." Still another gentleman owned a grove of sugar maples, which the people round about jokingly called his "West India Plantation." At one point in his journal, Mr. Coffin refers to a section of Fryburg as "this Eden," and he describes the present and future state of one farm as follows: "He planted near the center of 200 acres of interval, all his own. The River forms a semicircle before his door, which faces Southerly. A fence is begun and to be finished which will run East and

West by his door, from bend of River to bend of River, and from his house another fence is to run South, till it strikes the River. The land on the left hand of this fence will be tilled, at the right it will be fed, and on this he will build a large corn house, mounted so that his sheep may run under it. His situation is extremely convenient. His pasture fields and woodland will all be handy." [10]

3. Jeremy Belknap's famous panegyric to an idealized New Hampshire community with which he concluded his three-volume *History of New Hampshire* in 1792: "Were I to form a picture of a happy society, it would be a town consisting of a due mixture of hills, valleys and streams of water: The land well fenced and cultivated; the roads and bridges in good repair; a decent inn for the refreshment of travellers, and for public entertainments: The inhabitants mostly husbandmen; their wives and daughters domestic manufacturers; a suitable proportion of handicraft workmen, and two or three traders; a physician and lawyer, each of whom should have a farm for his support. A clergyman of any denomination, which should be agreeable to the majority, a man of good understanding, of a candid disposition and exemplary morals; not a metaphysical, nor a polemic, but a serious and practical preacher. A school master who should understand his business and teach his pupils to govern themselves. A social library, annually increasing and under good regulation. A club of sensible men, seeking mutual improvement. A decent musical society. No intriguing politician, horse jockey, gambler or sot; but all such characters treated with contempt. Such a situation may be considered as the most favourable to social happiness of any which this world can afford." [11]

4. A large assortment of intriguing comments upon the relationship between man and nature with which James Sullivan, a Harvard classmate of Belknap's, salted his *History of the District of Maine* in 1795. Some of these comments, such as those in which he rationalizes the duty of man to subdue that nature which is a gift to him from God, [12] are, I am afraid, destructive of at least part of the thesis that I shall try to urge--namely, that one can see at least a partial shift from an exploitive view of nature to one which emphasizes man's partnership with nature--but others of them support my tentative view, which is another and more important part of the thesis, that the post-frontier attitude toward environment is much more concerned with the particularities of locality than the frontier attitude, which varies very little or none at all from frontier to frontier. There is not time here to sample Sullivan much, but perhaps the best example I can

provide is the great lengths to which he goes in arguing for the advantages to health and civilization of the coldness of the Maine climate. [13] Sullivan is, if anything, even more moralistic than Belknap, his mind a fascinating concoction of natural history, the Protestant ethic, eighteenth-century rationalism, raw speculation, and regional pride.

5. The following comments on the relationship between a particular natural environment and civilization and character by Zadock Thompson in his *History of Vermont* (1842), obviously influenced by his own Romantic age: "Hence, as might be expected, their characters partook much of the boldness and roughness of the mountain and forest scenery, in the midst of which they resided. Being compelled, on account of their exposed situation, to face dangers of various kinds, and being accustomed to remove obstacles and surmount difficulties by their own abilities, and imbibed the loftiest notions of liberty and independence." [14]

These examples of post-frontier attitudes are diverse, and in fact have been chosen deliberately (and in some haste) for their variety. They suggest several aspects of the shift in what we might call environmental perception, and a number of possibly profitable lines of investigation into this phenomenon. These might include:

1. The appearance of a concern for conservation, as in the New Hampshire legislation concerning the Hampton salt marshes of 1755. Conservation of fish and game became a concern much earlier than this, but appears to me to be a less profitable line of inquiry, because of its obvious and direct connection with the food supply, than concern over soil and timber resources (excluding the very early attempts to preserve the King's mast pines), and especially the preservation or improvement of natural landscapes.

2. Evidence of the appearance of an appreciation of characteristic regional landscapes. The Reverend Mr. Coffin's pastoralism is striking in what amounts almost to a pioneering context, as is his cheerful, indeed enthusiastic acceptance of a community whose physical nature is in fact determined by its natural setting, or rather by a partnership in which man is the junior partner, rather than by Puritan schemes of settlement. The expressions of Belknap--not only the one quoted, but others in his *History* as well--point to an idealization of the one characteristic type of community of the interior region, precisely the "country town" whose emergence I have already tried to describe elsewhere. Sources will also have to be found which deal with the other principal landscapes of the region, namely the seacoast (both populated and barren),

the forest, and the mountains.

3. Further evidence of the appearance of an attitude of partnership with nature, as distinguished from one of exploitation, especially when the natural forms or assets involved are conceived as belonging especially or uniquely to the region (even if they do not in fact). For example, Belknap concludes a little sermon on temperance in his *History* by suggesting that the natural advantages of New Hampshire lend themselves to an abandonment of spiritous liquors because there are plenty of apples for cider, hops and barley may be raised readily for beer, there have been experiments with an interesting new beverage made of spruce twigs boiled in maple sap, and, finally and most convincingly, "after all, there are no persons more robust and healthy, than those, whose only or principal drink is the simple element, with which nature has universally and bountifully supplied this happy land." [15]

4. An examination of land values for signs of a possible shift in premiums from one kind of landscape (one which is profitable in an exploitive sense) to another.

5. Expressions of intense approval of a characteristic regional post-frontier occupation, such as the persistent remarks about the virtues of farming by Belknap, Sullivan, and Thompson. Dr. Samuel Tenny wrote a piece on Exeter, New Hampshire, in the Massachusetts Historical Society *Collections* in 1795, in which he noted that the transition from lumbering to agriculture, which occurred relatively late in that particular town--in the 1760's--had brought about a spectacular "alteration...in the face of this tract of country." Lumbering was one of the worst of all occupations because "it serves to keep those engaged in it in a perpetual state of poverty; while, at the same time, it commonly ruins their morals, and induces a premature old age." Before the "alteration," the taverns were full every night, and the people "seldom all retired sober." But farming keeps a man home at night; therefore, the public morals and safety are improved. [16]

6. The use of early landscape paintings and possibly even contemporary reactions to the "place"--as in Frost, Robinson, and the whole crew of female Maine novelists from Celia Thaxter to Sarah Orne Jewett to Mary Ellen Chase. This is perhaps the farthest-fetched route to what we're trying to get at, but the intent would be, in the absence of much imaginative and poetic literature from the period, to see whether one could identify the various elements of environmental perception in this artistic material, or at least that

part of it which is self-consciously regional, and then find the same or similar elements in other kinds of evidence from the period in question.

This is enough, perhaps, to suggest the variety of possibilities for exploring the route of perceptual geography in a quest for the sense of place. Another route, I suggested, might be the route of literary history and criticism.

It is a curious and, from the point-of-view of one undertaking a study such as this, exciting fact that the first school of American humor, at least according to scholars who ought to know, was "Down East" humor. The Down East character, dripping with local color and sardonic understatement, and even provided competently with dialect, burst full-blown into being in 1830 with the first appearance in the *Portland Daily Courier* of Major Jack Downing, the creation of a talented Maine newspaperman named Seba Smith. The collected "letters" came out in book form in 1833 under the title, *The Life and Writings of Major Jack Downing*, the appearance of which was followed in 1835 by Augustus B. Longstreet's better-known *Georgia Scenes*, which initiated the school of western frontier humor. [17] This in turn was the most important nursery of the American vernacular tradition in literature which ultimately produced Mark Twain. It is true, of course, that the Down East character has never received the attention lavished upon the cowboy, the prospector, or the alligator-horse. I'll not bother to speculate as to the reasons, although they would not, I am sure, be difficult to find. Interestingly, the various western characters of local color tradition are for the most part associated with the frontier--with, that is, a state of society that is on the fringes of or beyond civilization. This is not the case with the Down Easter. One can still find the equivalent of Jack Downing on almost any saltwater farm, lobster boat, or country hamlet in Maine. He is, in short, a post-frontier phenomenon whose association is not with a process or a phase of society, but with a place.

Recalling what we said earlier about the transition in environmental perception at some point from the frontier stage, in which the sole emphasis is upon survival and exploitation, to the stage of completed settlement, in which the emphasis is at least partly upon the appreciation of local landscapes, listen now to a literary commentator of the 1930's, Constance Rourke: "The comic comes into being just when society and the individual, freed from the worry of self preservation, begin to regard themselves as works of art." [18]

It is not necessary for the transition in environmental

perception to have occurred at the precise moment of the acquisition of sufficient self-confidence to appreciate one's own eccentricities to postulate what seems to me to be an extremely suggestive pairing.

If we accept the idea of a regional self-image as a "work of art," regarded, perhaps, with an attitude of semi-detached amusement, we are left with the task of determining of just what that image consists. Part of it is, of course, the adoption and refinement of the image of the society from without. We can hardly expect the Maine and New Hampshire coastal villagers, many of whom owned sloops with which they traded regularly with Boston, to have responded with graceful humor to the following satirical article contributed in 1723 to James Franklin's *New-England Courant*. It dealt with the declining currency of the title "captain" because of its indiscriminate use by commanders of coasting sloops and rural militia companies. Because there were more entries into Boston from the Piscataqua than from any other single port in this period, the writer obviously had the skippers of Portsmouth and Kittery as much in mind as anybody:

"What a Shame it is, that a Captain should debase his Honourable Shoulders, and defile his Hands, by sweating early and late under the Burden of huge Logs of common Fuel, fit only to be handled by Persons of baser *Bones*, who have no Honour to lose by such mean Performances? That a Captain should stand in the Hold of a Vessel, up to the Knees in Grain, without Shoes on his Feet or Beaver on his Head, measuring out his Cargo to a Company of Bakers, Carters and Porters? And that he should be so illiterate as to write, *Wit*, instead of *Wheat*, and instead of, *Five Bushels of Barley*, to set down, *Fine Bushel Barely*; as if he design'd to prove himself a Cheat by his own Books? That a Captain should eat Pease with a Wooden Spoon, cut Pork on a Shingle, and pick Bones with his Teeth,...like a Dog under a Table? ...I have often walk'd on the Dock with Shame in my Face, and Tears in my Eyes, at this intolerable Abuse of a Title, which was once significant of the greatest Merit.

"If we enquire into the Reason of the intollerable Growth of Captains, it can hardly be accounted for but by considering, that our Coasters and Country Captains give the Title to each other....Captain *Dishwell*, with a Shoulder of Mutton in his Hand, meets Captain *Strainhard*, rolling a Barrel of Beef along the Wharff, and they make no Conscience of giving Title to one another: One cries, *Your Servant, Captain*; and the other answers, *How do you do Captain, I am glad to see your self well, Captain*. It is indeed a common saying,

Once a Captain and always a Captain; but it does not therefore follow, that because one is a Captain, we must all be Captains." [19]

That was in 1723, and the author a supercilious Bostonian.

A hundred years later, Down Easterners, much in the manner of the rebel troops who adopted the satirical "Yankee Doodle" as their marching song, were chuckling over the comic situations in which one of their own number had involved Jack Downing, the symbol of all of them, and the language in which he expressed himself. In one of Downing's letters, supposedly written from Augusta, where he had been sent by a tiny handful of constituents to serve in the legislature, he refers in all seriousness to some trouble in his little militia company back in Madawaska, of which he is the captain (not yet having attained the exalted rank of major): "And besides I dont know as I ought to go off jest now, for I had a letter yesterday from one of my subalterns down to Madawaska, that there's some trouble with my company there: some of the Sarjents been breaking orders, &c, and I dont know but I shall have to go down and Court Martial 'em." And it's signed "Capt. Jack Downing." [20]

Some northern New Englanders regarded the "work of art" that was themselves and their society with a bit more seriousness than Seba Smith. Belknap, Sullivan, and Thompson all spoke of the beneficial effects of the hardships of the environment on something that was uniformly called "character." No less than Jefferson, they related farming to virtue.

All of this suggests the possibilities that lie in examining the image that the society of the region held of itself. Surely there are untapped sources of local color humor, crude attempts at depicting the Down East character, and literature of a somewhat more serious nature--though I continue to think that the humorous and the good-natured, because it cannot help but reflect self-confidence, holds the surest key to what it was that northern New Englanders liked and even laughed at about themselves.

The regional self-image, I should think, might also be reflected in arts and crafts, particularly the useful ones--tools, furniture, boats, and buildings--and in regional foods. When a Maine man eats clam chowder or a boiled lobster, or when a New Hampshire man pours real maple syrup on his pancakes (or better, corn meal mush), he is, consciously or unconsciously, feeding himself upon his place. He is making a regional statement. If this is not true, how does one explain the incessant production of regional, including "Yankee" cookbooks and the appeal of local color restaurants?

Here are still more keys to the sense of place.

Finally, I suggest the route of history. I mean straight, plain, common-sense American history contemplated specifically from the standpoint of the differences in the essential economy, culture, and politics from one period to the next. I am not suggesting that it will be necessary to go to all the trouble of writing a narrative history of the United States all over again--or at least that I want to do it--but rather that just as there are ideas whose time either has or has not come, I suspect that there also are places whose time has come and gone. I am postulating, without yet having had the time to think about it in great depth, that the period from either just before or just after the Revolution to about the 1830's or 1840's, when the movement out of the region began, was the "right" time in American history for the flourishing of whatever was peculiar about the economy, the culture, and the politics of northern New England. If this can be shown in any sense to be true, then an important part of the sense of place during the period of my coming interest was a consciousness of its "nowness." Likewise, I should think, if one were to find a sense of place retained in the region, it would be one that was associated in some way with the lost time that was then now.

As I said earlier, I regard this last bit of speculation as the most uncertain of the three routes to the sense of place that I have tried to outline here. However, the artifacts, the folk art, the architecture, the regional characters, the vocations of farming, fishing, and trading and the state of technology that I think is usually associated with these vocations in the literature, the art, and perhaps even the folk memory of the region all suggest strongly that the period after the frontier stage but before the face of the nation was changed by industry is the time that especially belongs, in a sense, to the seacoast and countryside of northern New England. Therefore, it would be premature to abandon the idea before it is tested further.

And so, tentatively, we have three roads to the sense of place--that of perceptual geography, that of literary analysis, and that plain, old-fashioned history approached with a quest for the uniqueness of a time. What I hope is that all three, undoubtedly with some modification, will converge in a way that will provide a part of a cultural synthesis, and a key to understanding the inner life of a time and a place.

I should like to add a postscript. You may recall that I tried to distinguish between that consciousness which, as I conceive it, belongs to a situation of growth or conquest, to

which I think we may apply the shorthand term "frontier consciousness," and what I think we might call the "post-frontier consciousness." I have tried to develop some aspects of this "post-frontier" consciousness in an attempt to find some ways to understand the sense of place.

I think, too, that a study of this nature contains a bonus. I am not referring here to the purpose of such a study, for its purpose would be to understand more of the truth about an aspect of human experience. And I am not talking about its justification, for to my mind, the discovery of new dimensions of truth is its own justification. But as a bonus, it strikes me that some inquiry into the "post-frontier" consciousness is especially worthwhile in the period of national confusion and various kinds of crises in which we find ourselves today.

Up to now, it seems to me, the nation as a whole has been able to handle gracefully only those situations characterized by growth, whether of territory, wealth, population, or technology. As a result of assumptions and conditions imbedded deep in the fabric of our history, we are psychically equipped as a people to deal only with whatever it is that one understands by "progress," usually a "progress" that is susceptible to quantitative measurement and not infrequently a measurement that is accompanied by dollar signs. This dynamic condition, if we make our definitions sufficiently flexible, is the essence of the frontier experience.

It seems to me that we need to develop psychic tools with which to survive happily and creatively in a climate that is not dominated by the quest for further bigness. I suggest, then, that a study of the "post-frontier" consciousness might, as a by-product, even when applied only to a limited region, contribute usefully to the psychic health of a nation that may have at last decided, or at least ought to so decide, that except in the areas of maturity, wisdom, compassion, serenity, humor, and self-control, the time has come to stop growing.

-----NOTES-----

1. In *Protestant--Catholic--Jew*, rev. ed. (New York, 1960).
2. "The Search for Southern Identity," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XXXIX (Summer, 1958), 321-338, reprinted in Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., ed., *The South and the Sectional Image* (New York, 1967), pp. 174-186.

3. See *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1955), Chapt. I.
4. Quoted by Woodward in "The Search for Southern Identity," Grantham, ed., *The South and the Sectional Image*, p. 174.
5. David Lowenthal, ed., *Environmental Perception and Behavior* (Chicago, 1967), p. 7.
6. For some indication of this movement, see my *The Eastern Frontier: The Settlement of Northern New England, 1610-1763* (New York, 1970), Chapt. XI.
7. See my discussion of this point in general in *Eastern Frontier*, pp. 183-4, and, as applied to a particular Maine township. pp. 209-17.
8. Diary of Thomas Fayerweather (typescript in Maine Historical Society by Miss Esther B. Carpenter after ms. in Bangor Public Library), pp. 5-6.
9. *Laws of New Hampshire*, III (ed. Henry H. Metcalf, Bristol, N.H., 1915), 128-9.
10. Maine Historical Society *Collections*, IV, 278-86.
11. *The History of New-Hampshire* (Dover, N.H., 1812), III, 251.
12. *The History of the District of Maine* (Boston, 1795), pp. 128-32.
13. *The History of the District of Maine*, pp. 8-9, 60-1, 103.
14. *History of Vermont* (Burlington, 1842), p. 212.
15. Belknap, N.H., III, 199-200.
16. Massachusetts Historical Society *Collections*, IV, 90-1.
17. For this sequence, see Robert Lowell Russell, "The Background of the New England Local Color Movement" (unpub. diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1968), pp. 11-12.
18. *American Humor, A Study of the National Character* (New York, 1931), pp. 15-17, quoted by Russell in "Background of the New England Local Color Movement," p. 12.
19. *New-England Courant*, Dec. 2, 1723.
20. Seba Smith, *The Life and Writings of Major Jack Downing* (Boston, 1834), p. 168.

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