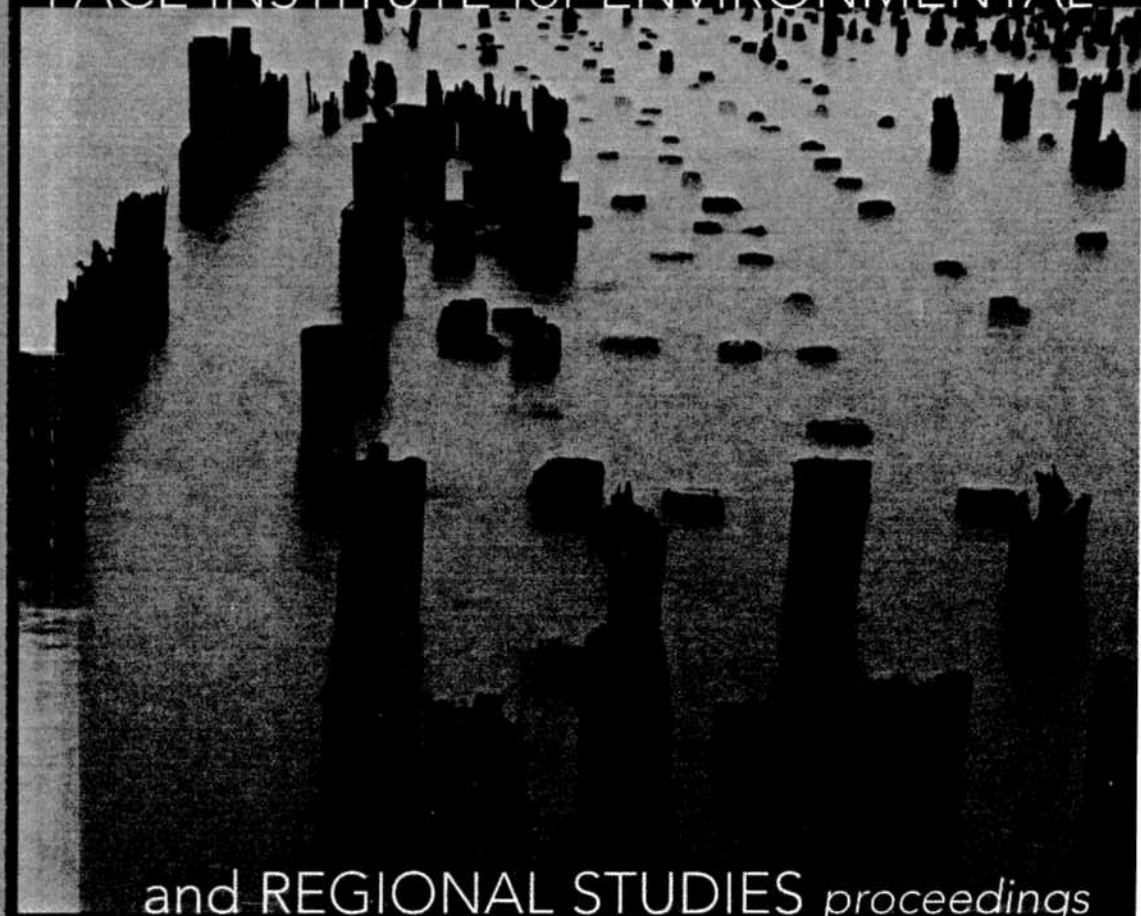


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PACE



Pace Institute  
for Environmental  
and Regional Studies

**PIERS**

*Senses of Place:*  
Urban Narratives as Public Secrets

Edited by Robert L. Chapman

Cover photo by Joseph Khakshouri

# PIERS

Pace Institute for Environmental and Regional Studies

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## "Unguarded Gates" of the Atlantic: Aestheticized Decay and the Transformation of Regional Identity

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O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well  
To leave the gates unguarded? On thy breast  
Fold Sorrow's children,  
soothe the hurts of fate,  
Lift the down-trodden, but with hand of steel  
Stay those who to thy sacred portals come  
To waste the gifts of freedom. Have a care  
Lest from thy brow the clustered stars be torn  
And trampled in the dust. For so of old  
The thronging Goth and Vandal trampled Rome,  
And where the temples of the Cæsars stood  
The lean wolf unmolested made her lair.

"Unguarded Gates," Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1895)

I was unwise enough for a moment to dread taking up my residence in this dilapidated mansion; a creeping horror, such as one feels at hearing footsteps behind one in a dark, strange place, made me foolishly uneasy, and I stood looking off across the level country through the golden light of closing day, beyond the marshes and beyond the sand dunes to the sea. What had happened to this uncanny father and daughter, that they were contented to let the chances of life slip by untouched, while their ancestral dwelling gradually made itself ready to tumble about their ears?... The fields and hills of the old picture were still unchanged, but what ebb and flow of purpose, of comfort, of social condition, had enriched and impoverished the household!

"The Landscape Chamber," Sarah Orne Jewett (1888)

### Abstract

This paper compares early conservation efforts in two Atlantic river basins in order to interrogate the flexibility of cultural constructions of place. Both regions experienced and later profited from their precipitous cycles of econom-

ic boom and bust, as international nodes of violently extractive maritime commerce were transformed into inward-looking sites of romantic provincialism at the turn of the 19th century. In accordance with theorists who foreground the importance of scale and narrative in considering spatial resource relationships, these histories demonstrate the complex ways in which notions of centrality and degradation are contested and sustained. While limited to two cases, these findings challenge urban and environmental theorists of the emerging sociology of place to reconsider their own assumptions regarding the politics of aesthetics and location.

In the late 1800s, Northeastern vacationers in the Great Bay/Piscataqua region of New Hampshire prompted a colonial revival largely responsible for the origins of the modern historic preservation movement. At the same time in the ACE Basin of coastal South Carolina, elite Northeasterners were discovering the antebellum mansions and “abandoned” rice plantations of the South, and restored these properties as luxurious hunting and fishing retreats. These turn-of-the-century efforts by outsider elites to conserve romanticized “rural ruins” set the stage for ongoing public appreciation of the aesthetic characteristics of these river basins, and in the 1970s and 1980s, residents of the two regions fought threatening resort and industrial development to establish flagship focus areas for conservation. Wildlife refuges and estuarine sanctuaries now attract nature and heritage tourists not so different from those urban vacationers of an earlier era, drawn to rippling marsh grass and shady live oaks as well as birding, hunting, and house tours. But why did the changes occurring in these landscapes induce so much anxiety in the writers of the late 1800s cited above?

These places and their natural characteristics were not always viewed as rural or even aesthetically pleasing, and the utility and meaning of particular “resources” like waterfowl has varied drastically over time. In this paper, I examine early political, economic, and visual relationships to the landscape in these two rural areas in greater depth, in order to determine how locals and outsiders construct compelling cultures of place and restrict access to natural and cultural capital. The Great Bay and the ACE Basin are ideal sites to investigate intersections of place and resource protection, as regions deeply involved in global capital movements and resource extraction as early as the 18th century. Both areas have endured cycles of investment and disinvestment, and have been the sites of prototypical conservation efforts at the turn of the 20th century. By looking at turning points in these cycles more closely, we can place conservation efforts in context as regimes of land use planning and place-making that build on and react to those of earlier eras, while at the same time knitting

together regions whose interests have not always been construed as complementary. In addition, the variety of regional connections and cultures of place evinced in the same sites forces a reconsideration of orthodoxies of urban theory and globalization regarding rural marginalization or isolation.

In the context of theories of global culture, commerce and power, studying these sites demonstrates how specific local, rural land uses come to be seen as internationally valuable and worthy of protection. This is particularly important given the ways in which globalization processes and international alliances are typically envisioned within academic literature as biased towards urban sites and experience. In fact, movements by elites to mobilize conservation across boundaries have been developing since the early 20th century and have been located in the ACE Basin and the Great Bay in particular. Exploring this history of conservation as a practice of cosmopolitan attachment to rural areas reveals the manner in which narratives of globalization and place-making (Tsing, 2000) are not necessarily relegated to urban nodes or brief touristic encounters in the dependent far hinterlands (Oakes, 1999; Anagnost, 2000), but to more enduring associations with places and the ability to remain literally invested in multiple places in order to reap rewards on capital. Studying the investments of non-locals (and the resulting creation of unique regional identities) challenges more abstract conceptions of the role of “outsiders” in “the dynamic endurance of regionalism” (Griswold and Wright, 2004).

### Investigating Rural Connectedness and Visibility

Much of the literature on contemporary issues in the spatial politics or geography of globalization limits its analysis to the consideration of cities as dense and dynamic nodes of transnational economic and political power. Specifically because they are sites where the physical architecture of transnational capital flow and urban social movements come into contact, cities have become places of readable and accessible global evidence of sweeping social change amidst persistent inequalities, particularly given the stark economic disparities of globally connected haves and locally bound have-nots (Featherstone, 1990; Garcia Canclini, 1995; Holston, 1999). Arguing for a place-bound or re-materialized analysis of globalization, James Holston and Arjun Appadurai accuse analyses of globalization as leaving out cities, “neutralizing the importance of place, indeed of rendering it irrelevant” (Holston, 1999: 2). Where theorists of global culture have taken the rural into account, these analyses have often tended to focus on anthropological explorations of marginalized, rural, non-Western “others” and the implications of globalization processes for the identity and practices of these groups (Howes, 1996; Garcia Canclini, 1995). While these

sophisticated studies of the contradictions and ironies of urban and non-Western rural experience have made important contributions to the literature on globalization and place, they reinforce the notion that globalization is a fundamentally urban process. The disdainfully referenced “rural paradigm” and “politics of... [cities’] hinterlands” (3) can be discarded by Holston and Appadurai as relics or phenomena of no obvious importance to globalization. William Cronon notes that this artificial separation of city and hinterland has been a longstanding trope in American history:

We carefully partition our national landscape into urban places, rural places, and wilderness. Although we often cross the symbolic boundaries between them—seeking escape or excitement, recreation or renewal—we rarely reflect on how tightly bound together they really are... city and country have a common history, so their stories are best told together (1991: xvi).

Cities, of course, are fascinating sites for investigations of space and place, uncertainty, hybridity, and multiplicity. But taking these concepts seriously requires acknowledging and investigating the connectedness of rural and urban communities and the interplay of rural and urban representations and narratives. More radically, such an examination forces the questioning of these categories themselves. What made landscapes of mills in New Hampshire and phosphate operations in South Carolina seem like retreats from industrial life?

Through closer attention to analyses of place, other globalization theorists and environmental historians have realized the difficulties of distinguishing between local and global or rural and urban spheres of activity. Anna Tsing states (2000: 120): “We know the dichotomy between the global blob and local detail isn’t helping us. We long to find cultural specificity and contingency within the blob, but we can’t figure out how to find it without, once again, picking out locality.” In an essay on scaling and power, Sandra Braman suggests that the answer to the difficulty of modeling global processes might be resolved by the concept of “interpenetrated globalization”:

The concept of interpenetration draws attention to the fact that the global never exists except in the local—and today there is no local that is not infected by the global. Although the term interdependence refers to mutual interactions among different actors and processes (Rosenau, 1984, used the term cascading interdependence to refer to the multiplying mutual dependencies of nation-states), interpenetration refers to ways in which different actors and processes have become a part of each other (1996: 22).

Aside from the somewhat unwieldy terminology, concepts such as interpenetrated globalization and cascading interdependence usefully point the way towards more sophisticated understandings of scale and intensity when discussing globalization. As Braman points out, deciding what is global and what is local is an inherently ridiculous process. However, we can identify the intensification of interactions among different actors and processes, just as we can analyze the qualitative elements of interdependence and the discourses on scale, whether global or local, that these produce.

Parsing these interdependencies in the case of the conservation of particular resources will obviously lead to other resources in a potentially never-ending web of extractive and restorative relationships; Cronon’s outstanding examination of the relationship between the development of Chicago and the exploitation of resources in its hinterlands in *Nature’s Metropolis* (1991) comes in at 530 pages—and Cronon threatens that it could have been much longer (xvii). However, by focusing on those interdependencies and discourses of scale that the actors themselves highlight and employ in conservation projects, researching regional and global resource relationships should be far more doable. Anna Tsing’s “Inside the Economy of Appearances” demonstrates a more manageable case study approach that focuses on the ways that “scale must be brought into being” in the case of investment fraud in an Indonesian gold mine. Like Cronon, Tsing focuses on the exploitation of natural resources, and the frontier narratives (in both cases promulgated by boosters) that facilitated quick profits for some and environmental disaster in the regions exploited. Tsing asserts:

The globalist claims of finance are also a kind of conjuring of a dramatic performance. In these times of heightened attention to the space and scale of human undertakings, economic projects cannot limit themselves to conjuring at different scales—they must conjure the scales themselves. In this sense, a project that makes us imagine globality in order to see how it might succeed is one kind of “scale-making project”; similarly, projects that make us imagine locality, or the space of regions or nations, in order to see their success are also scale-making projects. The scales they conjure come into being in part through the contingent articulations into which they are pushed or stumble. In a world of multiple divergent claims about scales, including multiple divergent globalisms, those global worlds that most affect us are those that manage tentatively productive linkages with other scale-making projects (2000: 119).

Through the analysis to follow, environmental efforts are considered, at least partially, as economic projects, and as such this extended definition of scale-

making serves well for the consideration of efforts to conserve natural resources and hallowed places. However, this study diverges from Tsing in a crucial way: rather than examine the conjuring of spectacular success, I examine the conjuring of disaster and decay. Instead of luring investors with the future promise of economic riches, conservationists in this case are concerned with forecasting potential destruction and unpleasant consequences if they fail in motivating action. The “spread of desolation” (131) over the Kalimantan landscape that prompted Tsing to write her article also has to be evaluated and explained in order to gain currency; busts are no more “real” than booms. While it is difficult to identify production potential over the long term (127), it is similarly difficult to identify whether a change in the duck population year to year is the result of spiraling population decline or simply a dip in a normal pattern of periodic fluctuation. While Tsing asks how the frontier story can “imagine the Kalimantan landscape so wrongly” (133), this paper asks how various groups struggle over the proper way to define “too much” development in a landscape. The story begins with a boom in ducks.

### Interpreting and Responding to Degradation in the Rural Southeast

In a letter dated September 28, 1864, from overseer W. Sweet to Adele Petigru Allston, a widowed South Carolina rice plantation owner, Sweet declares that he has “never seen the like of the Duck for the season in my life... it appiers that thay will Eat up all of the Rice” (Easterby, 1945: 304). Sweet had plenty to deal with besides the rice—he reports having to help recapture Yankee prisoners who had escaped from the jail in Florence and stolen his boat, and finally receiving his exemption from the General to continue administering the harvest. He is “Getting on Prety well... considering how much Bad weather we have had... a gwodeal of fever among the negroes lately.” Interestingly, it seems that the war exacerbated his problem with the ducks since hunting, the predominant means of control, was not feasible due to ammunition shortages: “I can not Keep them out of the field Doe all that I can... and Knothing to shwot them with.” The fifth of October, Sweet suggests, “I could have some Ducks Kild and send them to you By Paul But I have no shot or Powder nor caps” (306). One of five overseers’ letters from the overseers’ reports for Allston’s plantations in 1864 that mentions the severity of damage to the rice crop from ducks, Sweet’s apology reveals that aside from the ongoing difficulties in rice cultivation prompted by the war, poor weather and soil exhaustion, changes in duck migratory patterns and explosions in population engendered by extensive monoculture helped to doom rice culture on the Carolina coast by the end of the 19th century. Ducks had been attracted to the feast of nutritious starch since

the beginning of rice cultivation in the 1700s: as early as 1823, an overseer named Daniel Avant reports to Robert Allston, Adele’s husband and a future governor of South Carolina, that “the summer Ducks is vary thick” (247). Even without the ducks, rice plantations in South Carolina that had thrived between 1750 and 1850 were faltering due to the introduction of much more tractable cotton cultivation, hurricanes, and by the 1880s, the loss of a skilled slave work force and growing rice markets in the Southwest plains that could support industrial harvesting machinery (Linder 1995). While the result of many factors and gradual processes, the change in fortunes was fast. In 1859, only five years before the poor harvest of 1864, rice production in South Carolina reached its peak: “179.4 million pounds of clean rice... 95.9 percent of the entire nation’s production” (Linder, 1995: iv).

But the spikes in duck population that were a proximal cause of agricultural decline later served to engender the “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm, 1983) of duck hunting for sport and pleasure that would transform the plantation houses and rice impoundments remaining from the antebellum period. The boom years of rice culture had left a legacy of environmental devastation that would make life difficult for the sharecroppers and small farmers remaining in the area, but they had also left the infrastructure remaining from capital and labor investments in improving the land, most notably the complicated systems of irrigation effected through back-breaking years of ditching, still visible in aerial photos of the area today (ERBP, 1996: 23, Linder, 1995: xii). In *Black Majority*, Peter Wood asserts that “no development had greater impact upon the course of South Carolina history than the successful introduction of rice” (1974: 35), and it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the rice economy for the direction of South Carolina’s subsequent development, much akin to the role of other grains in Cronon’s history of Chicago.

Wood carefully traces the relationship between South Carolina’s successful development of rice as a staple crop and the tremendous increase in the Atlantic slave trade from Western Africa, since Angolans and Gambians were highly skilled in rice cultivation and resistant to the rampant malaria that accompanied the creation of impoundments for inland and swamp rice culture. At first, the “large-scale transitions to a slave labor force and to a rice-growing economy during the second generation... had little relation”:

Every colony was in search of a staple, and South Carolina’s commitment to rice developed only gradually... Likewise every colony was in search of labor, and if each obtained from the nearest source workers who were accustomed to the prevailing climate, it was natural that the northern colonies

would draw servants from Europe while the southern colonies were taking slaves from the West Indies and Africa. (55)

However, “by the 17th and 18th centuries, West Africans were selling rice to slave traders [in Africa] to provision their ships... through most of the slaving era a central part of this broad stretch was designated as the Grain Coast, and a portion of this in turn was sometimes labeled more explicitly as the Rice Coast” (59). Given the difficulty planters were having experimenting with rice, slaves began to be advertised in terms of the skills they brought: one advertisement trumpeted “a choice cargo of windward and gold coast negroes, who have been accustomed to the planting of rice” (60). In order to keep watch over their growing labor force (eventually to become a majority), planters built houses close to the fields, and were not nearly as resistant to the mosquitoes as their laborers, particularly once the system of periodic controlled flooding based on a combination of African, British, and Dutch techniques was established (Linder, 1995: ix, xvii). In 1774, an English visitor described how “The Old Planters us’d this Method in order to view from their Rooms, their Negroes at Work in the Rice Fields—But this Method... now is banish’d—They find the bad Effects—and are all removing their Houses back into the High and dry Lands, remote from the Swamps” (Wood, 1974: 74).

The flooded impoundments also smelled terrible. In 1854, a planter noted that the “effluvia” on journeys through the swamp was “so noxious and intolerable” that white passengers were forced to cover their noses with handkerchiefs (Linder, 1995: xiv). Easy transportation on the three main rivers in the ACE Basin (the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto) prevented the growth of towns or local trade centers in the immediate area (ERBP, 1996: 23), since rice could be transported to Charleston for processing in centralized mills and sale by multi-purpose factors “who would receive the rice, arrange for marketing, and issue the planter credit” (Linder, 1995: xvii). Compared to the upland agricultural areas and new towns of the Basin serviced by the South Carolina Railroad (financed by Charleston merchants wanting a steady supply of cotton) from 1833 (ERBP, 1996: 23), the coastal lowlands remained relatively depopulated and extensively rural. By 1866, the area was described as “a howling wilderness” (Linder, 1995: xxii), and the poisonous snakes and alligators in a vacant landscape of malarial miasmas and wretched smells made it seem all the more threatening.

For these reasons, plantation owners like Adele Allston maintained more elaborate mansions in Charleston or in drier areas upland and vacationed in Newport or Virginia Springs (Easterby, 1945: 9) for at least half the year before the war; after the war, most of the plantation properties had been abandoned

by their owners or destroyed by Sherman. The large properties were unsuccessfully redistributed under the Freedmen’s Bureau and eventually reclaimed (although not reinhabited) by rice planters, most of whom sold their now “worthless” estates to timber or phosphate companies and rich northeasterners attracted to the rice fields for their potential as bargain hunting preserves with a steady supply of cheap black labor (Linder, 1995: xxii). Having been passed down for generations within a few wealthy planter families due to the relationship between high investments of start-up capital and high returns under slave labor, rice plantations in South Carolina were turned over to national corporations and industrialists from the Northeast who would retain the land as inexpensive investments requiring little maintenance for the next hundred years. Untended by landowners interested in hunting or timber harvesting, the farm fields reverted to woodlands, concealing much of the history of 200 years of colonial settlement (ERBP, 1996: 23). (See Figs. 1-3: The Lowcountry Landscape: A Howling Wilderness? [Two plantation houses, cypress swamp])

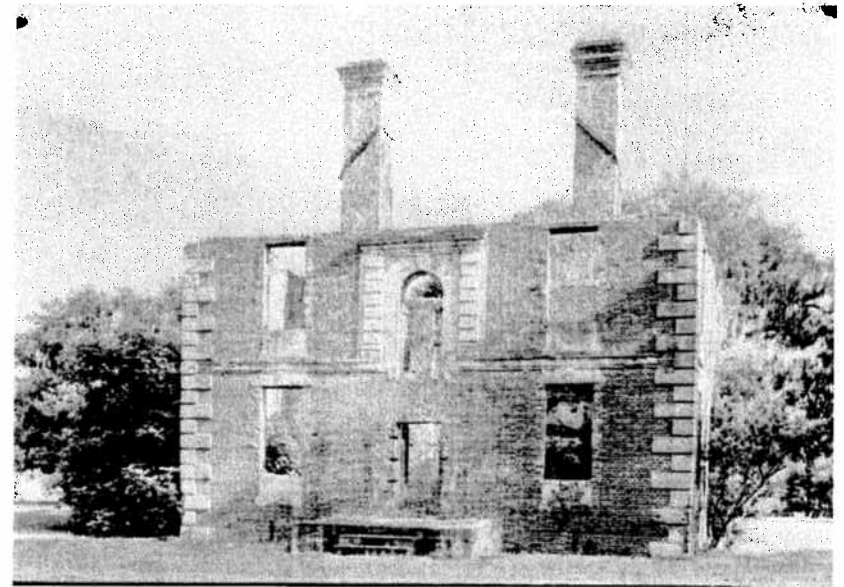


Figure 1. HABS, American Memory Project

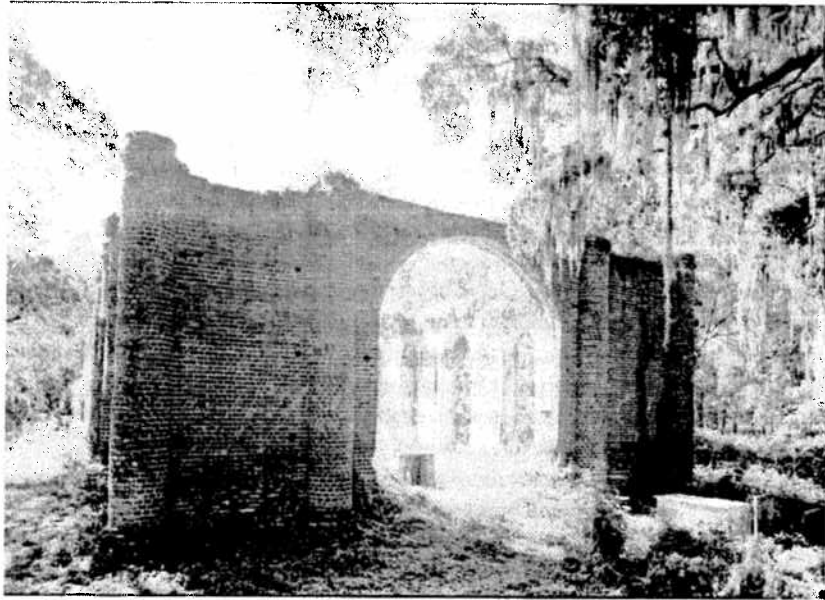


Figure 2. HABS, American Memory Project



Figure 3. Photo courtesy of author

### **Interpreting and Responding to Degradation in the Rural Northeast**

A similar reclamation process was occurring simultaneously in the Piscataqua River Basin north of Boston, also at the hands of northeastern elites seeking out recreation and investment opportunities. The Great Bay area on the coast of New Hampshire had likewise played a significant part in colonial industry and international trade, as the forests in this fertile glacial river valley provided opportunities for harvesting first-growth pine ideal for masts—a valuable commodity since England had exhausted its supply of tall trees and Norwegian substitutes were vastly inferior (Ramsden 2001: 13). This time, again parallel to

Cronon<sup>2</sup>, the timber economy had been king beginning as early as the 1650s. The rivers in the area powered sawmills, and shipbuilders from England moved across the ocean to take advantage of the available lumber and ready market for fishing boats and slave ships at “half the cost” of English ships (Saltonstall 1941: 29): “As early as the 1630s and 1640s, the settlers, many of whom were skilled English shipwrights, were building smacks for the fishing trade and ketches and sloops of 30 and 40 tons or more for the West Indies trade” (13). Between 1791 and 1801, exports were as high as “880 million feet of pine boards, 80 million feet of oak planking and 280 million barrel staves” (13). In addition to the crucial deep water harbor of Portsmouth, inland towns on the deep bay acted as ports, creating a thriving region far more “urbanized” for the time than the ACE Basin. Lucinda Brockway describes typical patterns of settlement:

To accommodate commercial and residential needs, large tracts of common land and privately held land were subdivided into narrow lots averaging forty to eighty feet. These lots included small kitchen gardens... Land closest to the Piscataqua River and its accompanying inlets was particularly attractive because of its waterfront shipping access and was often developed for combined residential and commercial structures (Brockway, in Giffen and Murphy 1992: 81).

William Saltonstall, in a maritime history of the region, describes the busy scene of commerce and the jewel-like setting of the harbor towns:

Down the tributaries came straight masts for His Majesty's naval vessels, molasses brigs for the West India trade, privateers for the more thorough prosecution of the American Revolution, and, from Eliot, sleek clippers for the tea races from Shanghai to London; and along their banks rolling fields and blue hills swept back to the mountains from tidewater towns where ‘the smell of the sea mingled with the scent of apple blossoms and clover, and sweet hay drying in the sunshine’ (Saltonstall 1941: 7).

While undoubtedly a romanticized view, this happy picture of global commerce amid pastoral vistas (in 1717, “as pleasant a place & plentiful as any in ye World” 26) could not be more different than that of lowcountry plantation life; while British observers made passing reference to the beauty of the rice fields in the sun, the stench of the plantations and their notorious diseases and slave

<sup>1</sup> Although strictly, this economy actually precipitated the resource exhaustion that allowed the harvesting of white pine in the much less accessible north woods to be successful in the 1850s. See Cronon, 151.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that apologists for slavery have certainly tried. Karen Oakes, in Giffen and Murphy, describes similar romanticism in the racist attitudes in the Piscataqua Region as regards Native American contact with colonists. (1992: 165)

exploitation make a cozy scene nearly impossible to conjure.<sup>2</sup> Efforts to recruit European settlers to the ACE were never very successful, and whites who did immigrate, finding “the place so extraordinarie sicklie” (Wood 1974: 65) often either turned around and got back on the boat or “remove[d] themselves to other English colonies” (68).

Despite Saltonstall's rosy picture, the prosperity of the region quickly declined due to the increasing rates of timber extraction. In order to harvest a large mast tree without breaking it as it fell, workmen “‘cut down a number of smaller trees which grow in that direction’... ‘a straight path is cut and cleared for it through the woods’” (Saltonstall 1941: 57). The “infinite thick woods” (55) inevitably dwindled. Saltonstall recounts that “by 1700, they already had to go back into the woods, away from the river bank, in order to find trees” (57). English officials, wary of these practices because of the decimation of their own native resources, placed unpopular restrictions on lumbering that were regularly disobeyed and provoked violent political battles with colonists that led to greater attempts at oversight. The “difficult task of conservation” was given to John Bridges, the Surveyor General of His Majesty's Woods, who attempted to attack “those who devastated the magnificent New Hampshire woodlands”:

Especially did he complain of Richard Partridge, popular lieutenant governor of the colony. Partridge, a well-known mill-wright and shipbuilder, illegally shipped large cargoes of masts to Spain, Portugal, and Algiers. Bellomont, in securing his removal, wrote: ‘Mr. Partridge is a mil-wright by trade wch. is a sort of carpenter, and to set a carpenter to preserve woods, is like setting a wolf to keep sheep.’... It is to the full as great prejudice to England to imbezle the Timber-growing in N.H., as it would be to imbezle that which grows in the New Forest in England (64).

Despite Bridges's advocacy of preservation and the value of demanding strict controls on stands of royal forest in New Hampshire as was already the policy in England, his arguments were oriented toward preserving the crucial wood claimed by the crown as a reliable supply of masts. These were marked by the Navy and bid on according to “general naval estimates,” and colonial administrators obviously were interested in resisting opening the market to other entities such as the East India Company willing to outbid the Navy Board and pay high prices to well-established colonist brokers and contracting operations in the ports (63). The Surveyor General attempted to encourage tar and hemp production as alternative exports, but the valuable masts essential to maritime commerce continued to be extracted under “swamp law.” England would eventually suffer severe setbacks during the Revolutionary War when their supply was cut off (69).

The former colonists enjoyed a brief heyday in the decade following the Revolutionary War. The immediate results of this temporary windfall would have far-reaching impacts on the region in the future. Dona Brown describes these boom years: “the area took on an imposing and prosperous appearance: ship captains and wealthy merchants built large and elegant houses overlooking their wharves and warehouses in the towns and along the rivers” (Brown, in Giffen and Murphy 1992: 3). The view of the rivers might not have been so elegant. Ramsden describes the riparian scene: “by the 1790s there was so much activity on the Piscataqua that New Hampshire passed a law prohibiting the throwing of ‘ballast, rubbish, gravel, earth, stone, dirt, ashes and filth into said river’” (2001: 14). The activity could not be sustained for long: “almost as soon as the houses were built, the sources of the fortunes that had financed them were beginning to dry up. Like most boom economies, this one was fragile” (Brown, in Giffen and Murphy 1992: 3). Compared to the minutely calibrated rhythmic art of tidal rice cultivation, where a bad storm or flood at the perigee<sup>3</sup> could doom a year’s crop and wash out years of work, the coursing rush of wood downriver resembled an irresistible steam engine sustaining port commerce of many types (in financial services, construction, cod fleets, merchant trade, etc.), hardly fragile or unstable in the same manner as other staple economies.

But by 1796, Timothy Dwight visited and reported that the “‘commerce of Dover consists chiefly in lumber [which] is daily diminishing, and in a short time will probably fail” (3), and lumber resources declined steadily and predictably. Additional political sources of trouble destroyed any hope of salvaging a market in other commodities, since the Embargo Act of 1807 and the War of 1812 destroyed the Great Bay’s ships and fractured the network of trade patterns in which the region had played such a crucial role (3). Domestic trade making use of the natural advantages of location and resources was impossible:

As early as 1750... James Birket, a sea captain from Antigua, observed that the salmon had forsaken the Piscataqua because of ‘the sawdust from the mills.’ (Man-made dams, which cut the salmon off from their spawning grounds, didn’t help either)... By the 19th century, the only trace of the ample forest was layers of sawdust deposits throughout the waters of the Great Bay region. Even the mudflats of blue clay were largely exhausted by the more than 40 brickyards in the Piscataqua basin, many of whose bricks adorned the finest houses on Boston’s Beacon Hill (Ramsden 2001: 14).

Inland economies less dependent on lumbering and maritime trade, and now benefiting from the transition to rail commerce were able to turn to small man-

ufacturing, mostly of textiles fabricated from southern cotton, but the ports that were the heart of the earlier economic growth struggled. “Long the region’s busy front yard,” Ramsden avers, “the Great Bay estuary... had become instead the soiled back yard as Piscataqua towns turned inward and away from the water, using it as a dumping ground for sewage and industrial waste” (2001: 14). The dramatic visual effects of this transformation were widely noted. Fourteen years after Timothy Dwight’s tour through the still busy region, he asserted that the deforestation and desolation made the town of York “‘naked and bleak,’ with an air of ‘stillness and solitude,’ even of ‘antiquity’” (3). These public impressions of an area long forsaken were exacerbated by the steady population decline that accompanied the economic plummet: Brown notes that “some of the best-known nineteenth century accounts of the region describe a place where the hand of time had completely stopped moving, as if ‘all the clocks..., and all the people with them, had stopped years ago” (3). The residue of human development in decaying riverfronts empty of boats was all too obvious, but the people were missing (or, like the sharecroppers in the ACE, occupied in much less visible domestic economies). The ruins seemed haunted by the economic commerce of the past. In 1868, a Thomas Bailey Aldrich, the author of the xenophobic “Unguarded Gates” that gives this paper its title, describes Portsmouth in a more romantic mood:

The crazy old warehouses are empty; and barnacles and eel-grass cling to the piles of the crumbling wharves, where the sunshine lies lovingly, bringing out the faint spicy odor that haunts the place—the ghost of the old dead West India trade! (4)

It took second-growth reforestation and a new cosmopolitan appreciation for remoteness and the rugged vistas of the sublime to promote a second boom in the area, making elaborate use of the earlier boom to create an altered relationship to the past, where the evocative images of decay were supplanted by an invigoration of the physical artifacts of past development into carefully “restored” replicas—encapsulated museums of the height of past glories that were simultaneously engines of future commerce. (See Figs. 4-6: The Piscataqua Landscape: Naked and Bleak? [2 historic buildings, warehouse dock, 2 and 3 subsequently moved])

<sup>3</sup> When the full moon coincides with the point at which the moon is closest to Earth, resulting in unusually high tides. (Linder, 1995: iii)



Figure 4. HABS, American Memory Project

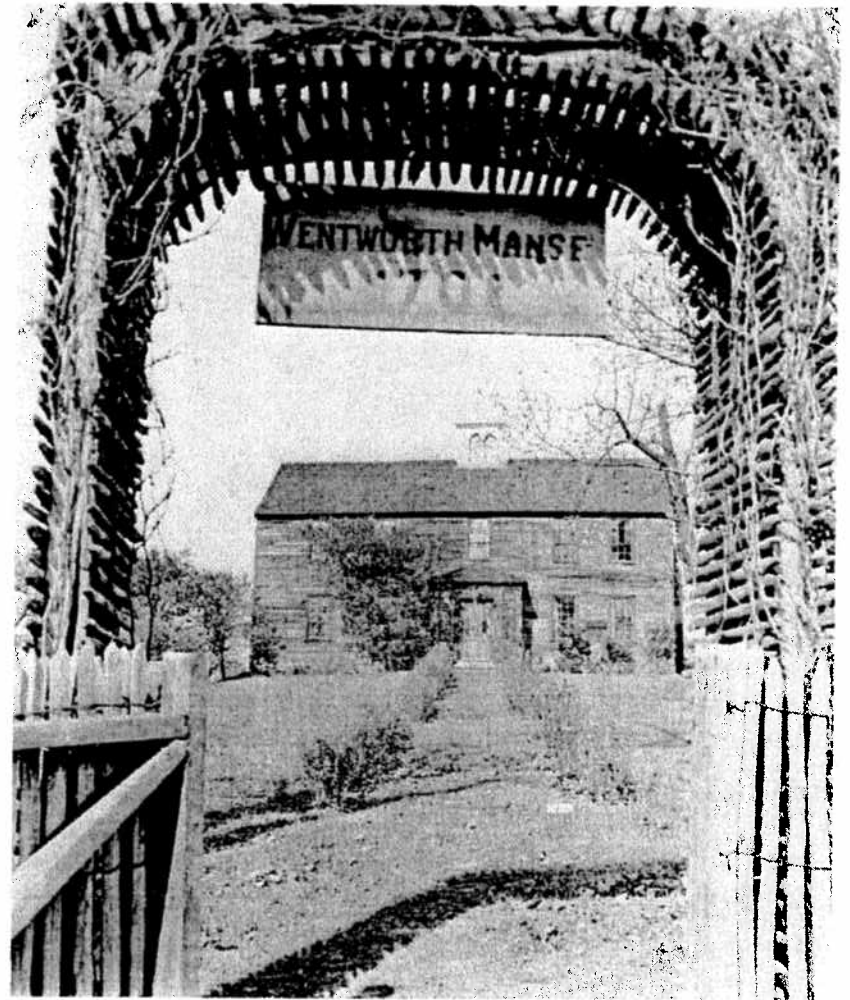


Figure 5. HABS, American Memory Project



Figure 6. HABS, American Memory Project

### Rediscovering Ruins: In the Vanguard of Preserving the Past

The resort and rural vacation industry in New England that developed in the late 19th century to service the recreational needs of urban tourists was a boon for Piscataqua towns, starting on the most isolated Isles of Shoals off the coast that had earlier supported commercial fishing villages:

The new resort businesses did not provide instant salvation for the region. Population continued to decline in many areas, and it took decades for the tourist trade to stabilize the economy of these towns. But tourist industries came to play a crucial role in the region's economy. Tourism became a second "boom" of the Piscataqua region, surpassing in many places the importance and financial impact of the factories upriver. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the region had become fully integrated into the contemporary resort economy, boasting the latest styles in cottage architecture, an efficient railroad network, and fashionable hotels with the most recent innovations in plumbing and lighting (6).

Elaborate distinctions between types of lodging arrangements with varied lengths of stay arose for vacationers of different classes, but all reaped profits

for local entrepreneurs and regional railroads: a local newspaper opined in 1899, "the railroad, the newspaper, the porter, the hackman, the trader, the merchant, the bootblack, the trolley, the livery stable, the barber—everyone gets some of [the summer guests'] money" (7).

The wealthy people who came for the longest time, however, ended up having the most permanent effect on the landscape, long after other areas became more fashionable for working- and middle-class vacationers and all the hotels and trains that had serviced these consumers disappeared. While elites from Boston and New York, like the planter aristocracy in South Carolina, had their choice of famed vacation destinations such as Newport, Northeasterners sought exclusivity and seclusion to protect their properties from the "invasion of excursionists" (7). Another attraction was the availability of historic remnants of colonialism, and Piscataqua was "in the vanguard of nostalgia" (9). The region was "especially rich in the architectural relics of its short period of prosperity: its 'colonial' houses and old buildings were sprinkled thickly over the region, standing among the mill houses, along abandoned highways, between summer cottages, and in the commercial districts" (9). Now advantaged from having been passed over by 19th century industry for the inland, ports of Piscataqua could attract "a network of wealthy and influential visitors" (11) interested in the loftier pursuit of common "cultural goals" rather than profit: "it was the ideas and values of these 'summer people' that found greatest expression in the landscape of the Piscataqua region" (10). This searching for past community entailed a reactionary turn to a presumably unsullied pre-industrial past. Ironically, the appreciation of historic culture required that the rich appreciate the effects of economic deterioration including buildings that had not been maintained: "signs of poverty and isolation could... be seen as 'quaint' reminders of bygone days" (10).

Consuming this past meant protecting it from commodification at the hands of those locals and visitors who had easy access to old houses and relics suddenly made valuable. As summer people made private restorations of their own houses or houses bought from farmers whose properties were exhausted and no longer profitable, they also "were often prominent in efforts to restore and claim historic landmarks for public use. By the early 20th century, 18th century buildings all over the region were being preserved in larger and larger numbers by efforts such as these, both as private houses and as museums." (13) As some private homeowners died, their own houses became memorial museums: "colonial architecture—the relic of the region's first boom economy—by the end of the 19th century had become the most lasting product of its second era of prosperity" (14).

Publicity of the region helped to spark a national movement of “colonial revival” in formerly depressed places discovered by elites, not coincidentally just as the influence of modernism was beginning to affect architecture for working class and middle class American communities; at its most extreme, all traces of development after colonialism were bulldozed in places like Williamsburg (Hamer, 1998: 4). David Hamer, in a study of the origins of historic preservation in the U.S., notes that the removal of architectural details by “museum directors and antique collectors” from the antebellum neighborhood of rice planter’s homes in Charleston prompted the development of zoning ordinances in the 1930s to preserve the entire housing stock in the Battery neighborhood from further modifications (5). Whereas the Great Bay’s colonial revival had been prompted by private landowners concerned with preserving a widespread network of landmarks, Charleston’s historic preservation movement was concentrated on one neighborhood in its entirety and was implemented by a combination of private efforts by realtors and public efforts by the city council to establish laws on zoning and a board of architectural review (6). This model was successful for the downtown area and later enabled a thriving tourist economy, but was difficult to apply to the outlying areas of former rice culture on the coast as a boom of new resort and recreation industries much like that in the Piscataqua exploded around Charleston to support “heritage” tourism in the 1970s.

### Historic Aesthetics of Rural Landscapes: Reconstructing the Value of Place and Interdependency

What do these stories tell us about earlier phases of globalization and international trade? Certainly, by tracing the political-economy of land use relations before 1860, we can track the implication of diverse world networks of commodity and culture flows. Rice strains from Madagascar cultivated with West African techniques and flooded by Dutch irrigation systems as well as rivers choked with timber bound for all parts of the world give us vivid snapshots of processes of “interpenetration” and “cascading interdependence.” The spread of culture and capital and the long-term effects such movements can have are all too visible in the case of the architectural heritage of the Great Bay and the ACE Basin. But for the purposes of this paper, the transformation of international nodes of commerce into inward-looking sites of regional heritage can give us a much better grasp on the complex ways in which instances of place-making and scale-conjuring are both resisted and negotiated.

These active struggles over property designations and appropriate use are demonstrated in the resistance of colonists to accept English restrictions on His

Majesty’s Forests, and in the back-door reclamation of plantations by their former property owners after Reconstruction. The fact that signs of severe economic depression can be transformed into scenes of past glory, or that places where plantation owners drank the finest Madeira can become rustic and remote hunting retreats demonstrates the flexibility of these designations. This flexibility can also be seen in terms of the minor geographic differences (contingent articulations) that make a New Hampshire coastline more connected to the West Indies than to its inland manufactories gradually become remote compared to the newly superior connections of inland towns to national networks of commerce. Coastal islands connected by bustling river traffic to Charleston, and through the city, to the rest of the world, eventually became so isolated from the city and its local railroad and road networks that bridges weren’t built to the islands inhabited by descendants of former slaves until the 1940s. Electrification came as late as the 1960s (Jones-Jackson, 1987: 7). The racist system of international trade in people that sustained the economy of the Carolina coast became a racist system of containment and marginalization of the economic prospects of the descendants of those slaves according to the requirements of a later regime, and all in the “same” place.

Evidence of the subtle and lingering, but divergent effects of capital investment and resource extraction even within a single river basin, the previous examples point towards the difficulty of categorizing central nodes and their supportive hinterlands. Elites, while mobile, make long-term investments that connect them to regions, in this case wetlands, with special characteristics—and these might be the second growth forests that are evidence of earlier eras of failed investment by another class of elites or the signs of economic decline that have prevented development. The ways in which regimes of value are produced and implemented by attempts to restrict access all point towards the manner in which rhetorics of “conservation,” “preservation,” and “restoration” must be constructed and negotiated, and make reference to an imagined past and a particularly limited set of ideas about which people, resources, and activities are appropriate. Distinguishing between what Gullahs of the Sea Islands call *bin-hyuh* and *come-hyuh* is extremely difficult in places with sedimented histories of 300 years of investment and reinvestment; however, the economic stakes of deciphering and elevating old, rustic, natural, or preserved places from those around them mean that these imagined differences and contingent articulations take on very consequential meanings, as demonstrated by the passages cited at the beginning of this paper, which variously locate threats of decay at the feet of immigrants or degenerate locals.

It would be a mistake, however, to view this construction of meaning around land use as explicable in movements or eras, however grounded in particular places of elite activity. As the records of Sweet, Bridges, and Dwight attest, people with varying degrees of power and varying degrees of attachment to specific areas are in a constant process of observing, acting in, and evaluating the landscape and the processes they find there. This aspect of a visual and visceral experience of landscape should not be forgotten when discussing the remnants of previous built environments (including architecture, resource extraction, pollution, and animal population changes) and their effects on future activities and land use orientations. Landscape intensively occupied by humans, even quite recently, can look like a “howling wilderness” or it can look disturbingly “naked” and polluted. Precocious understandings of subsequent resource extinction can occur even when such resources are still viewed as infinite and comparably bountiful, as in the case of Bridges’ plea to preserve the sheep-like New Hampshire woods from the carpenters’ lupine saws, or Jewett and Aldrich’s anxieties of modern ruins, whether destroyed from insiders or outsiders. In *Carolina Sports by Land and Water*, rice plantation owner William Elliott advocated a judicious approach to “devil-fishing, wild-cat, deer, bear, and duck hunting” in the interest of species conservation in 1846:

We may yet hope to see the time when men may, under the sanction of the law, and without offence, or imputation of the aristocracy, preserve the game from extermination—and perpetuate, in so doing, the healthful, generous, and noble diversion of hunting” (Linder, 1995: xxiii).

The story of the often horrific scale-conjuring of environmental devastation in the 20th century and the conservation and preservation movements that accompanied this collective realization should be viewed from the perspective of earlier landscape relations, not least because it is mainly a story of how the everyday knowledge and observations of hunters, farmers, and woodsmen came to be assembled, prioritized, and articulated in institutionalized ways.

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