



# Jeremy Belknap's 'History of New Hampshire' in context : settler colonialism and the historiography of New England

Agnès Delahaye

## ► To cite this version:

Agnès Delahaye. Jeremy Belknap's 'History of New Hampshire' in context : settler colonialism and the historiography of New England. *Journal of Early American History*, 2018, 8 (1), pp.60-91. 10.1163/18770703-00801002 . hal-04776314

**HAL Id: hal-04776314**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04776314v1>**

Submitted on 11 Nov 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Jeremy Belknap's *History of New Hampshire* in Context: Settler Colonialism and the Historiography of New England

*Agnès Delahaye*

Université de Lyon 2

*Agnes.Delahaye@univ-lyon2.fr*

## Abstract

This essay is a contextual analysis of the *History of New Hampshire* (1784–1792) by Jeremy Belknap, founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society. I situate Belknap's historical and institutional achievements within the framework of settler colonialism studies to argue that Belknap used his profound knowledge of previous New England historiography to write a settler history of American colonization—a narrative of expansionist settlement over indigenous land sustained by cultural, political, racial and social norms at the root of its enduring success. Belknap's settler history effectively negated both British and indigenous sovereignty and shifted the historical focus prevalent in his time away from the empire and onto the specific, and in his mind, unique, story of the violent formation of white, self-governing and autonomous expansionist settler societies that he believed were the real locus of American identity.

## Keywords

New England – history – Belknap – colonization – settler colonialism – historiography – United States

Jeremy Belknap dedicated his life to giving Americans a history they could call their own. His contributions to the construction of a suitable past for America

---

\* The author would like to thank the Association Française d'Etudes Américaines and the American Antiquarian Society for the opportunity to research this article during a fellowship at AAS in the spring of 2016.

are as rich as they are varied. During the twenty years of his ministry in Dover, on the New Hampshire frontier, he wrote political sermons in support of the Revolution and the independent governments of New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and composed the first volume of his *History of New Hampshire*, the nation's first historical publication, published in Philadelphia in 1784.<sup>1</sup> Back in his native Boston just as the Constitution of 1787 was being debated in the church he had been called to, he completed his *History* with two additional volumes, published in Boston in 1791 and 1792 respectively. Belknap infused this oeuvre with a "modern spirit" that made it "a milestone of American historiography," praised by Alexis de Tocqueville as a work of intellectual potency unrivalled in the rest of the former British colonies.<sup>2</sup> In the last decade of his existence, Belknap published a satire about the revolution, essays and historical pieces encouraging northern readers to give their full commitment to the new federalist system, and he composed an *American Biography*.<sup>3</sup> He also worked to create and promote the Massachusetts Historical Society, undeniably one of the most significant institutions in the development of historical practice in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of all these textual and institutional achievements, very few studies of his life or work have been conducted outside the Puritan tradition to which his earliest biographers confined him in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> It is infused with the belief that, as a minister, Belknap practiced history driven by a providential outlook and the exceptionalist conviction that New England was

- 1 Jeremy Belknap, *A History of New Hampshire*, 3 vols. (Boston and Philadelphia, 1784, 1791, 1792) (hereinafter "*HoNH*"); Eileen Ka-May Cheng, *The Plain and Noble Garb of Truth. Nationalism and Impartiality in American Historical Writing, 1784–1860* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 15.
- 2 John Spencer Bassett, *The Middle Group of American Historians* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 24; Sidney Kaplan, "The History of New Hampshire: Jeremy Belknap as literary craftsman," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. (hereinafter, "*WMQ*"), 21, no. 1 (January 1964): 18–39 at 18; "The reader will find more general ideas and more strength of thought in Belknap than in any other American historian so far," Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1 (1835; New York: Knopf, 1960), 530n.
- 3 Jeremy Belknap, *The Foresters: An American Tale* (Boston, 1792); idem, *American Biography: Or, an Historical Account of Those Persons Who Have Been Distinguished in America, as Adventurers, Divines, Statesmen, Warriors, Philosophers, Authors, and Other Remarkable Characters*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1794, 1798).
- 4 Claudio Saunt, "Go West: Mapping Early American Historiography," *WMQ* 65, no. 4 (October 2008): 745–778 at 776–777.
- 5 J.B. Marcou, *Life of Jeremy Belknap, D.D.: The Historian of New Hampshire* (New York, 1847) (hereinafter "*Marcou, Life*"); George B. Spalding, *The Dover Pulpit During the Revolutionary War* (Dover, N.H., 1876).

founded for religious reasons. His federalist fervor and his passion for historical pursuits continue to be jointly extolled as a form of “cultural nationalism,” an exercise in righteousness and civic charity on the part of a “universalist” Jeremiah, who lived in slightly more secular times than his predecessors, the prestigious Mathers, from whom he was descended, but who perpetuated their commitment to typology, providential history, and the public role of the clergy to write as the moral compass of New England society.<sup>6</sup>

This filiopietistic tradition has been challenged by Lester Cohen, who has shown how Belknap mobilized New England provincial history for its expressive cultural potency, and not as “an explanatory concept at all.”<sup>7</sup> Eileen Cheng has further established Belknap’s solid scientific credentials in a community of mostly New England historians of the Revolutionary generation, who played “an important role in the development of history as an autonomous discipline defined by a commitment to the ideal of impartial truth.” Far from being confined to New England providentialism and localism, Belknap embraced a wide array of intellectual influences to convey his vision of the future United States. His republicanism evolved alongside “a liberal ideal of the social order, that privileged the individual and private realm,” and this combination gave birth to a form of exceptionalism empowered over time into manifest destiny, a concept that “embodied this growing sense of national superiority.”<sup>8</sup> As an object of study, Belknap’s history has thus been torn between the very end of one historical development—the providential history of the New England Puritans—and the beginnings of another—nineteenth-century exceptionalism. His uncomfortable position in the periodicity of American historiography may explain why his publications, contrary to those of many of his contemporaries, have been neither fully commented upon nor reprinted since 1831, and

6 George B. Kirsch, “Jeremy Belknap: Man of Letters in the Young Republic,” *New England Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (March 1981): 33–53 at 33; Russell M. Lawson, *The American Plutarch: Jeremy Belknap and the Historian’s Dialogue with the Past* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998) and idem, *Ebenezer Hazard, Jeremy Belknap and the American Revolution* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 3.

7 Lester H. Cohen, *The Revolutionary Histories: Contemporary Narratives of the American Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 21; see also Peter Messer, *Stories of Independence: Identity, Ideology, and History in Eighteenth-Century America* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), in which Belknap’s history is analyzed through the prism of the Scottish Enlightenment, and L.L. Tucker, *Clio’s Consort: Jeremy Belknap and the Founding of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: Mass. Hist. Soc., 1990), 39, where Belknap’s history is defined as “almost purely secular.”

8 Cheng, *Noble Garb*, 2, 18.

why, more often than not, today's historians of the Revolution and the Early Republic only mention him in passing or in their index pages.<sup>9</sup>

Belknap in fact presented an interpretation of the American past that was simply *unusable* by later historians looking for suitable narratives of the formation of American national identity. The nineteenth-century Whigs who followed in his footsteps at the Massachusetts Historical Society made institutional and political liberty the determining feature of American character and the revolution the apex of an ideological interpretation of historical development that was unconcerned by the actual political and social processes of colonization and expansion.<sup>10</sup> The neo-Whig paradigm that, Colin Gordon has argued, has long dominated the historiography of the revolution and the early national period has also preferred usable, consensual pasts founded on the "fundamental denial of significant divisions (either social or ideological) among Revolutionary Americans," and has "produced a received, republican interpretation that obscures social and economic conflict beneath a heavy glaze of ideology."<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, Belknap embraced conflict and made it the backbone of his interpretation of American development—conflict with all imperial authorities at all times from the founding of the first New England settlement and throughout the history of the region until the end of the War of Independence in 1783, conflict with indigenous peoples through expansion, and conflict within New England society between those most apt to pursue the expansionist project, and those resisting it. He constructed his history in slow chronological order from the founding of Plymouth to the time of writing, with chapters articulated around successive, often failing, governments, and seemingly endless territorial disputes and arguments about boundaries and

9 There were new editions of Mercy Otis Warren's *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* and David Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution* published in 1988 and 1990, respectively. Belknap is virtually absent from such major works of American intellectual and cultural history as Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); Jill Lepore, *The Story of America: Essays on Origins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012); and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of American National Identity* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

10 Jean Matthews, "Whig History: The New England Whigs and a Usable Past," *New England Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (June 1978): 193–208; Stephanie Kermes, *Creating an American Identity: New England, 1789–1825* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

11 Colin Gordon, "Crafting a Usable Past: Consensus, Ideology, and the Historians of the American Revolution," *WMQ* 46, no. 4 (October 1989): 671–695 at 674.

ownership rights. More importantly, in Belknap's history, people, not ideas, move the story forward, through their efforts at expanding their settlements and fighting their enemies. His narrative is therefore neither directly linear nor teleological, but often repetitive and circular, and owes very little to the European liberal tradition.

Far from generalizing about human progress or the nature of the imperial relationship that tied the colonies to the history and culture of the metropole, Belknap, who lived in arguably the most Anglicized region of the United States, anchored his interpretation of American development firmly within the *experience* of colonization as an unprecedented historical process. Practicing history was to Belknap "like turning a piece of wilderness into a field":<sup>12</sup> out of a mass of public and private documents, artifacts and stories, the historian built explanatory narratives that appropriated the past and made it productive for the future. His documented focus on land appropriation and expansion and his gradual recognition of the legitimacy of white violence for the dispossession of indigenous land as constitutive of American identity make the *History of New Hampshire* the story of the formation of a settler colony, and its author one of the clearest early national expressions of what is now defined as settler colonialism.<sup>13</sup> "The need to think about the History of the United States in the context of a global history of settler colonialism seems obvious," Matthew Crow has written recently, yet "the defining characteristic of settler colonialism in North America" is the "disavowal of settler history" through "a series of elisions of settler colonialism from constructed images of the past."<sup>14</sup> Belknap's *History* has been unused because it constructs a past built on aspects of colonial development that jar with the ideological aim and focus of subsequent historians.

Settler colonialism is principally situated in the social sciences. Its methodological preference for comparative approaches and its ambition to uncover the multiple power perspectives at the heart of colonization have made it

12 Cited in Tucker, *Clio's Consort*, 46.

13 Settler colonialism is not a new concept, but it has recently acquired significant theoretical strength. The most elaborate theorization of the concept is Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). A general description of settler colonies can be found in Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, "Introduction: Beyond Dichotomies—Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class in Settler Societies," in eds. Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class* (London: Sage, 1995), 1–38.

14 Matthew Crow, "Atlantic North America from Contact to the Late Nineteenth Century," in eds. Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2016), 427–485 at 427, 429.

more obviously applicable to early national expansion and the western conquest, periods of American expansionism from which indigenous agency is most easily recovered and settler intent most explicit.<sup>15</sup> But the political and cultural analyses the concept generates, and the specific, normative terms, traits and behaviors that it describes, are also relevant to American colonial history.<sup>16</sup> Settler colonialism describes and analyzes not only “the permanent arrival of settling peoples but rather the ability of those settlers to ‘carry their sovereignty with them’ and, as a society, exert that sovereignty over Indigenous peoples or settlers of other origins.” It thus essentially describes a series of processes—“territorial homogenization and the normalization of settler power and control”—through which Native title, if not Native presence entirely, is gradually extinguished, and replaced by a fully-functional racialized and gendered system, which has yet to be decolonized.<sup>17</sup> This is the story told in the *History of New Hampshire*, built on the evolving, empowered understanding of history developed by Jeremy Belknap throughout his entire career. It participates in what Aileen Moreton-Robinson has described as the series of processes through which settler colonialism “disciplines” its agents “to invest in the nation as a white possession that imbues them with a sense of belonging and ownership.”<sup>18</sup>

Belknap's desire to endorse, defend, and even glorify, violent colonization might be the most powerful factor in the paradox between his reputation and his marginality. As Veracini has argued, “historical oblivion is one structural feature of the settler colonial mind,”<sup>19</sup> and many of Belknap's contemporaries

- 15 See, e.g., Bethel Saler, *The Settlers' Empire: Colonialism and State Formation in America's Old Northwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) and Walter Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- 16 Jürgen Osterhammel first hinted at the specifics of New England as a settler colony in his *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7, 11–12. The difficulties involved in mobilizing colonialism in the American context are discussed in Michael Warner, “What's Colonial about America?” in ed. Robert Blair St George, *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 49–70, and in the debate between Jack Greene, “Colonial History and National History: Reflections on a Continuing Problem,” and David Armitage, “From Colonial History to Post-Colonial History: A Turn Too Far,” in *WMQ* 64, no. 2 (April 2007): 235–250 and 251–254.
- 17 John G. Reid and Thomas Peace, “Colonies of settlement and settler colonialism in Northeastern North America, 1450–1850,” in Cavanagh and Veracini, *Settler Colonialism Handbook*, 356–426 at 360, 362.
- 18 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis, Mn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 52.
- 19 Lorenzo Veracini, “Historylessness: Australia as a Settler Colonial Collective,” in ed. Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonial Studies: An Anthology* (Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 161–174 at 161.

built exceptionalist narratives that sustained the more enlightened, liberal face of American freedom.<sup>20</sup> Belknap on the other hand embraced its darker side and made it constitutive of American character, in order to justify and defend the settlers' exclusive title to their land. This essay will demonstrate how Belknap weaved together his settler outlook, built on his knowledge of previous promotional literature, and his republican interpretation of the political formation of the United States, to write what we may call *settler history*, a narrative of expansionist settlement sustained by cultural, political, racial and social norms at the root of its enduring success. Settler history weakens the explanatory power of the Puritan paradigm and cuts across the traditional historiographical divide between colonial and national history, and between reality and rhetoric.<sup>21</sup> It reveals the centrality and continuity of appropriation and expansion in the formation of settler societies and the historical narratives produced, preserved and diffused in New England throughout its history.

This essay opens on a discussion of the many avenues New England historical practice offered Belknap to fulfil his scientific and political ambition and his lifelong need to preserve and publicize colonial sources. A close, chronological reading of the *History of New Hampshire* follows that demonstrates how he built political and armed conflict into his narrative of the New England colonial experience to negate the validity of the British title over America and assert the settlers' sovereignty over appropriated indigenous land. Empowered by his deep knowledge of New England historiography, and by the series of formidable events he had witnessed in his lifetime, which convinced him of the stability and the potential might of the political formation he defended, Belknap could end his career on a confident return to promotional projections of the expansionist future of the United States. He envisaged no end to the New England type of settler colony.

Born in Boston in 1744, Jeremy Belknap developed his passion for history from within the New England intellectual tradition that placed great emphasis on education and on the importance of history in perpetuating the region's political culture. The conventional demands of the New England middle-class family expected that the first generation of sons to graduate from Harvard College, as Belknap did in 1762, should pursue their training as ministers to a local

20 The metaphor is borrowed from Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 5–7.

21 For a recent discussion of the fundamental divisions in American historiography of the Revolution, see Patrick Griffin, "Introduction," in eds. P. Griffin, R.G. Ingram, P.S. Onuf and B. Schoen, *Between Sovereignty and Anarchy: The Politics of Violence in the American Revolutionary Era* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 1–20.



congregation. The young Belknap had confessed his "natural" interest in historical research and expressed doubts about his pastoral calling, but he gave in to parental authority and he was ordained in 1766.<sup>22</sup> He accepted the call of the church at Dover in New Hampshire, an old settlement but still a frontier one, whose population was ten times smaller than his native Boston. He would spend the next twenty years spanning the revolution and the War of Independence commenting on these momentous events from the relative comfort of his library.

There, whenever he could, he pursued history as a means to engage with the world beyond his parish. His biographers have depicted him as dedicated minister, yet, reading through the considerable quantity of documents contained in his *Papers*, which are only partially published, one cannot help but sense that his ministerial career was not quite the calling he longed for. His relationship with his flock was never satisfactory and he often complained about his precarious living and his frustration with the burden his pastoral and fatherly responsibilities represented.<sup>23</sup> He ended his Dover ministry on a long-drawn and acrimonious financial dispute with his congregation, solved through the procedural joint decision to allow Belknap to find other employment.<sup>24</sup> Back in Boston in 1786 in one of the main churches in the city, he enjoyed a more satisfactory social and professional position, that of a leading Boston intellectual.<sup>25</sup>

Belknap's later reputation was based as much on his historical work as on his ministry.<sup>26</sup> His only successful religious publication was a psalm book,<sup>27</sup> but he did enjoy election sermons, which, as a historian, he considered to be "the

22 Marcou, *Life*, 15–16, 13–14, 42–44, 47; Belknap, *HoNH*, 1: i.

23 "I am actually obliged to plant my own bread-corn this year, and expect to handle the hoe as a common laborer, [and] my neighbors have their flocks and herds so multiplied that I cannot even get pasturing for my cows." "These things are a continual source of vexation both of body and mind; they take off my attention from my proper business, and unfit me for the duties of my station," cited in Marcou, *Life*, 120–121.

24 Belknap Papers, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (hereinafter, "CMHS"), 6<sup>th</sup> series, 4: 342–353.

25 For the strength of Belknap's intellectual ambition and nationalism, see Kirsch, "Jeremy Belknap"; David Lawrimore, "Conflict Management: Jeremy Belknap's Committed Literature," *Early American Literature* 50, no. 2 (2015): 359–384; Charles William Cole, "Jeremy Belknap: Pioneer Nationalist," *New England Quarterly*, 10, no. 4 (December 1937): 743–751.

26 John Thornton Kirkland, *A Sermon Delivered at the Internment of Jeremy Belknap* (Boston, 1798), 11–12.

27 Jeremy Belknap, *Sacred Poetry: Psalms and Hymns, adapted to Christian Devotion in Public and Private* (Boston, 1795). Only Psalm 177, "Marriage," is unattributed and consequently presumably his. The others are taken from British, Scottish and American psalmists, sometimes verbatim, sometimes altered to reflect specific circumstances, most notably

echo of the public voice, or the political pulse by which the popular opinion may be felt.”<sup>28</sup> His own political sermons present a remarkably homogeneous ideological content, in line with the civic charity practiced by other more prestigious orators such as Ezra Styles, but with less exhortation and declension and a firm belief in toleration, inclusivity and progress.<sup>29</sup> Belknap preached in favor of independence in the name of the collective economic and political experience of New Englanders. In 1774, for instance, he called on New Hampshire to “strengthen the bonds” with Massachusetts so that, “happy in our mutual affection, in the increased cultivation of our lands, in our frugality and economy, we shall surely bid defiance to all enemies of our peace, and leave this land of liberty a sacred legacy to our posterity.”<sup>30</sup> New England liberty was rooted in the ownership of land and the collective efforts of settlers to work it throughout history. Each generation had a duty to remember and prolong both, for future safety and prosperity. The role of history was to defend and transmit this “sacred legacy.”

Indeed, Belknap was particularly concerned with the preservation of original sources. He collected, catalogued and analyzed documents and mineral and plant samples to feed his interest in the human and natural history of his region, and he used his relations to seek out printed and manuscript sources, led by the conviction that his “business” would not be done until they had all been “uncovered.”<sup>31</sup> The antiquarian passion of his mentor Thomas Prince had undoubtedly inspired his reverence for the writings of the region’s previous historians, and Belknap further admitted in his preface that he had been traumatized by the destruction of precious Boston literary and historical assets through fire and war.<sup>32</sup> Driven by an acute sense of ownership, he believed archives were the region’s heritage, the depositories of its memory and identity, and the material foundation of the colony’s political culture.

---

Psalm 59, “For Deliverance from the Savages,” and Psalm 75, “Power of government from God alone (Applied to the American Revolution).”

28 *HoNH*, 1: 72.

29 See, e.g., Jeremy Belknap, *A sermon, delivered on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1798, the day of the national fast* (Boston, 1798), 28–29. Other political sermons include *A Sermon on Military Duty, November 10, 1772* (Salem, 1773); “On Account of the Difficulties of the king,” *Fast Day Sermon*, 14 July 1774; “On Commiserating,” 6 November 1774 and *An election sermon, preached before the General Court, of New Hampshire, at Portsmouth, June 2, 1785* (Portsmouth, 1785).

30 “Address to the People of New Hampshire,” June 1774, *HoNH*, 3: 332–334 (Appendix 30).

31 “for while any source is unexplored, or unattempted—I shall not think my business done,” cited in Tucker, *Clio’s Consort*, 49.

32 *HoNH*, 1: iv.

This conviction was partly fed by his knowledge of promotional sources, in which the colonizers' "literall advantage" was one of the bases of white superiority over indigenous ways.<sup>33</sup> Writing about the past was intrinsically linked with the desire to appropriate and to own all the early sources of colonization, in which the settlers' sovereignty was documented and therefore evidenced and legitimized. Belknap did not make providence the driver of New England history and he condemned the rhetorical excesses of the providential tradition, for instance in the Antinomian crisis or the aftermath of King Philip's War, as the cultural defects of less enlightened times.<sup>34</sup> Instead, driven by "local attachment" to the region in which he lived, equipped with "vernacular knowledge" in the form of sources and archive he relentlessly collected whenever he was free to do so, and with the powerful "sense of place" he experienced from exploring the land and its historical landmarks, Belknap wrote a grounded history of New Hampshire to anchor the beginnings of his settler history in firm scientific foundations.<sup>35</sup>

Belknap undoubtedly had a very strong sense of sectional pride, but his scientific ambition reached far beyond the confines of New England history. He developed his own method of referencing even contemporary sources for *further* historical work, which he discussed regularly with his network of friends across northern intellectual circles.<sup>36</sup> As he wrote to his editor Mathew Carey in May 1787, "it might be an easy matter with writers of a certain sort to dish up a fricassee of newspaper intelligence & dignify it with the pompous title of The

33 The "literall advantage" of the English is used by Belknap to account for the loss of indigenous land titles, and he constantly points out the care the settlers took to gather and preserve as many records as possible to legitimize expansion. *HoNH*, 1: 247, 253, 2: 37, 209. For a discussion of the notion see Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 26–27.

34 *HoNH*, 1: 76, 133. There are only four mentions of providence in the first volume, all in reference to the first Puritan settlements (1: 60, 96, 102, 103). In the second volume two special providences sustain the settlers' collective fight against the French and later the English, and another two express their belief in the legitimacy of "the voice of reason and Providence," to lead them to "trust in providence and defend themselves," (2: 180, 238, 308, 342). In the third volume, Providence is nature (2: 118) and the future (2: 250).

35 Karen Halttunen, "Grounded Histories: Land and Landscape in Early America," *WMQ* 68, no. 4 (October 2011): 513–532 at 532.

36 "you will only have to keep by you an alphabetical index of names, with references to the books or papers where the characters or actions of the persons are registered, which may be digested and transcribed at some future period, when your other plans are completed. This is chiefly the method I have pursued; only where I meet with hints scattered in books and papers which may not easily be collected again," Belknap to Hazard, 1779, Belknap Papers, *CMHS*, 5th series, 2: 5.

History of the United States. But a person who values his reputation as a writer would choose to have the best materials, & even then would hesitate about many things which an inconsiderate scribbler would venture to throw out at random.”<sup>37</sup> The republic of letters that he and his friend Ebenezer Hazard aimed for was a scientific endeavor in which history contributed significantly to the “public good” of the whole nation.<sup>38</sup> Belknap’s conception of history stemmed from the New England tradition, but it cannot be confined to the region’s religious or local culture.

The key to unlocking the interpretative power of Belknap’s oeuvre is not his religious outlook, but his extensive and profound knowledge of promotional sources, which enabled him to define the contours of a history of America that rendered imperial ties negligible in the long course of New World colonization.<sup>39</sup> He followed the intellectual tradition that interpreted the discovery of America as a scientific event born out of the humanist revival of the Renaissance, of which the Reformation was but one dimension.<sup>40</sup> He preferred instead to focus on scientific progress in navigation, printing, and literature that brought about “the beginning of this great American empire.” America thus obeyed its own periodicity, from discovery onwards, which was entirely datable and identifiable, a clear advantage over the history of “other countries,” whose “first eras” were “either disguised by fiction and romance, or involved in impenetrable obscurity.” Be it on the Spanish, French, or the English sides, scientifically driven discoveries had engendered the production of considerable amounts of sources that enabled historical writing as a verifiable, legitimate practice.<sup>41</sup>

37 Belknap Papers, *CMHS*, 6th series, 4: 337.

38 Belknap Papers, *CMHS*, 5th series, 2: 2 (“public good”). Hazard is best known for his *Historical Collections* (Philadelphia, 1792). See Fred Shelley, “Ebenezer Hazard: America’s First Historical Editor,” *WMQ* 12, no. 1 (January 1955): 44–73.

39 Research on travel and discovery literature is extensive, but promotional literature is often dismissed as sheer advertising. For an introductory discussion on the subject, see David Armitage, “Literature and Empire,” in ed. Nicholas Canny, *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. 1, The Origins of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 97–123; for a more complete exploration, see Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America: An Intellectual History of English Colonisation, 1585–1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Promotional literature has yet to be theorized from a settlers’ perspective, and in particular in its relation to historical writing.

40 David Armitage, “Protestantism and Empire: Hakluyt, Purchas and Property,” in ed. David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61–99.

41 *HoNH*, 1: 9.

Belknap also substituted science for nationhood as the common denominator setting colonizers apart from the rest of their fellow nationals. Early narratives of discovery had stimulated the “enterprising spirit” of the first adventurers, like John Smith, Captain Mason and Ferdinando Gorges, who explored, mapped and described the coast of New England, and in doing so, “excited the emulation in others, who had the advantage of improving their plans and avoiding their mistakes.”<sup>42</sup> Colonization thus began as the slow accumulation of relevant knowledge about the landscape and its peoples by a set of “private adventurers,” who, with very little royal backing or support, “at a vast expense, with infinite hazard and persevering zeal, established settlements for themselves, and thereby enlarged the dominions of their sovereigns.”<sup>43</sup> Appropriation was not the collective work of nations, but the fruit of the heroic and daring deeds of a few remarkable individuals, distinguished from the rest of their countrymen by their ambition and their determination to pursue opportunities abroad.

Colonization was also action. Owning the land from across the ocean was not a proper title. What made appropriation real were the actual acts of removal and settlement, dated by Belknap to the first Puritan settlements of Plymouth and Massachusetts as the end point of the process of discovery. Like explorers and merchants before them, the Puritans had been driven out of Europe by the limitations of Old World politics and gone to America “to be out of reach of prelatric tyranny and at full liberty to pursue their own enquiries and worship God according to their own conscience.”<sup>44</sup> They had come seeking *opportunity* for improvement and the fulfilment of their religious and intellectual desires.<sup>45</sup> Belknap downplayed religious freedom in favor of an intellectual project and resisted locating the birth of American freedom *culturally* in the English love of liberty, as others such as Ramsay did in their histories.<sup>46</sup> Instead, borrowing heavily from Bradford’s narrative, he elaborated on the *drama* of the Pilgrims’ experience:

The fortitude and perseverance which they exhibited therein will always render their memory dear to their posterity. To prepare for their

<sup>42</sup> *HoNH*, 1: 29.

<sup>43</sup> *HoNH*, 1: 10.

<sup>44</sup> *HoNH*, 1: 60–61.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion on the empowering experience of removal and settlement, see Jack P. Greene, “Introduction: Empire and Liberty,” in ed. Greene, *Exclusionary Empire. English Liberty Overseas, 1600–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–24.

<sup>46</sup> Ramsay, *History of the Revolution*, 9, 27.

enterprise, they had to sell their estates, some of which were large and valuable, and turn them into materials for a new plantation, with the nature of which they had no acquaintance, and of which they could derive no knowledge from the experience of others. After traversing a wide ocean, they found themselves in a country full of woods, to subdue which required immense labor and patience; at a vast distance from any civilized people; in the neighborhood of none but ignorant and barbarous savages; and in a climate, where a winter much more severe than they had been accustomed to, reigns for a third part of the year. Their stock of provisions falling short, they had the dreadful apprehension of perishing by famine, one half of their number dying before the first year was completed; the ocean on one side separated them from their friends, and the wilderness on the other, presented nothing but scenes of horror, which it was impossible for them to conceive of before they endured them.

In this excerpt, removal is an unprecedented, historical rite of passage that deprived the settlers of everything that had defined them in England—their property, their friends and family, and their sense of safety and confidence—and opened a space between Europe to the east and the wilderness to the west, which they then shaped and expanded through their own labor and exertion. What empowered them to survive was not just their faith, although their belief in providence provided some grounding. They were kept strong by an act of will, their “steady and pious resolution” to commit to their decision to remove: “never repenting the business on which they had come into this wilderness,” they overcame isolation, starvation and fear, to become the first settlement to survive the first winter.<sup>47</sup>

The Pilgrims mattered historically not because they planted the seed of religious freedom in America, but because they were the first to remain and endure the inescapable labor and suffering that led to the creation of a secure expanding settlement. This set them clearly apart from the explorers, traders, and fishermen, who had so far composed the white population on the coast of New England, and who stayed only momentarily and interacted too closely with their indigenous neighbors. Belknap thus read and paraphrased Bradford’s journal as the first settler narrative. As Veracini has demonstrated, the settler narrative is distinct in form and intent from the colonial narrative founded on a return to the homeland, and it “mobilizes peoples in the teleological expectation of irreversible transformation.” It has a beginning—in this

47 *HoNH*, 1: 59–60 at 60. This is very reminiscent of William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647* (New York, The Modern Library, 1981), 92–93.

case the Puritan settlements—but it has no end. It consists instead in the story of the settlers “battling with the land” and “their community building,” which was told not only in Bradford’s and Winslow’s promotional works, but also in John Winthrop’s *Journal*, and was formulated time and again by the long tradition of New England’s historiography.<sup>48</sup> Belknap perceived this continuity and effectively built it into his own version of the settler narrative spanning the entire history of the region.

It mattered to Belknap not to make freedom of religion the driving force of his narrative, for he was writing a political history of settlement. He was aware of how inconsistent religious freedom would seem in the light of the “theocratic prejudices” and the “strangest language” of the Massachusetts founders. On the contrary, he dwelled on the latter’s penchant for social control and condemned them firmly for excluding all religious others and executing Quakers. Yet, he asked his readers to see continuity in the political and cultural development of the New England settlements. He blamed all the bigotry on the ministerial cast, on John Cotton in particular, leaving political leaders such as John Winthrop unscathed and praising them instead for their great cultural and institutional achievements, such as Massachusetts’ love of education, and Harvard College, “a distinguished figure in the republic of letters,” where many “eminent men” have been “formed for the service of the church and state.” After conveniently pointing out that New Hampshire was untouched by the most abusive of Massachusetts’ practices, the “religious test” of church membership for the attribution of political rights, Belknap resumed his narrative of expansion, the real focus and the core of his story, which continued *in spite of* the founders’ zeal and the religious conflicts of the early years.<sup>49</sup>

Born and trained within the New England historical tradition, Belknap was not confined to either its providential outlook or to a form of localism limiting his interpretation to the religious exception of the New England founding. He wrote a history of New Hampshire because “the life of a cabbage” he lived for twenty years in Dover provided him with many opportunities to collect, copy and confront a wide range of historical documents from and about the region, which contained the settler experience he mobilized as the paradigmatic core of his *History*.<sup>50</sup> It was not just local attachment and sectionalist pride that

48 Veracini, “Telling the end of the Settler Colonial Story,” in ed. Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington, *Studies in Settler Colonialism, Politics, Identity and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 204–218 at 207.

49 *HoNH*, 1: 51, 54, 74, 63–64, 74. For Belknap’s full discussion on toleration and progress, see *HoNH*, 1: 58–84.

50 Belknap Papers, *CMHS*, 5th series, 2: 6.

drove him, but the ambition to produce scientific history for the whole nation, out of promotional literature since the beginnings of colonization. The accumulation of knowledge about America had led to the opportunity for the permanent occupation of the New England shore, and settler history had begun as an act of heroism on the part of men and women who had come to stay and appropriate not only the land they settled, but also the story of that appropriation. Belknap embraced this tradition and carried it forward to the present of publication in the remaining eight hundred pages of his *History of New Hampshire*.

Belknap's knowledge of New England colonial history heightened his sense of historicity—his conviction that settlement had been an unprecedented moment in western history and that settlers had created new societies to suit their needs. Yet, for states to exist, complete sovereignty had to be asserted, and that was complicated in two respects: for all the rhetoric about America as *terra nullius*, it was undeniable that the settlers had recognized some form of indigenous sovereignty in the past, an aspect of Belknap's settler history that will be discussed in the next section of this essay. Most pressing at the time of independence, when Belknap was writing the first volume of his *History*, was the issue of British sovereignty over the colonies. Belknap shifted colonial sovereignty away from the British nation and onto settler society, he reduced the colonists' political existence to a minimal settler contract rooted in, and limited to, the land it served to appropriate, and he built conflict into his narrative as the engine of expansion.

The true originality of Belknap's *History* indeed lies in his repudiation of the legitimacy of the imperial relationship. His chronology differed significantly from Ramsay's and Warren's historical works and from other, later, local histories of individual colonies.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, both Warren and Ramsay dated the beginning of imperial conflict with the accession of George III to the throne and the subsequent beginnings of crown "encroachments on the civil liberty" of the colonists. Before that time, they argued, the colonies had been left alone to develop and fructify peacefully under "the ancient harmony" that had reigned between the metropole and its American dominions. Later histories and geographies of the United States would similarly sum up the colonial period as a series of local developments with distinct cultural traits—generally the "happy state of mediocrity" of the northerners and the "more aristocratic principles" of southern slave owners—but which shared common political ground

51 See for instance Hugh Williamson's *History of North Carolina* (Philadelphia, 1812) or Benjamin Trumbull's *Complete History of Connecticut* (New Haven, Conn., 1818). Closer to Belknap's outlook and style is Hugh M'Call's *History of Georgia* (Atlanta, Ga., 1811).



in their English love of liberty cultivated and enriched by their confrontation to the American landscape. This common attachment to their own rights and privileges in turn drove them to rise together against “the sad story of colonial oppression” begun in the 1760s, when royal financial pressure hampered their progress. These histories of independence therefore acknowledged allegiance to Britain, located conflict chronologically and spatially in the gradual break down of the imperial relationship, and gave the political and material formative role of colonization little explanatory power. For instance, the focus of Ramsay’s argument was trade and the degeneration of exchange. He deemed “the descriptions of constitutions [...] both tedious and unprofitable” and only mentioned land briefly, in Crevecoeurian depictions of the cultural impact of land ownership on the American psyche.<sup>52</sup>

Belknap’s *History* does the opposite. It is a political history of land appropriation that asserted the settlers’ sovereignty and denied the empire legitimacy. Going back to the founding, Belknap was forced to acknowledge the existence of royal or corporate charters, the theoretical basis of English sovereignty in America, as the founders had done before him, albeit “for convenience, only,” especially in Massachusetts.<sup>53</sup> But he replaced the legalistic argument the documents carried—the borders, the royal seal, the names of the owners, the chartered government—with an experiential one, to diminish their relevance. First he pointed to their unreliability, for they revealed more about European courtly politics than actual verifiable territorial claims; then he demonstrated time and again how the distance between the time and place of issuance and the reality of appropriation rendered the legalistic argument at best conflicted, and preferably void altogether.<sup>54</sup> He also read the Massachusetts charters in particular as *corporate* charters granting the settlers the basic right to govern themselves, that is, to manage their own affairs.<sup>55</sup> This enabled him to demonstrate that the colonial polity he described was legitimate and designed to

52 Warren, *History of the Rise*, 72, 75; Ramsay, *History of the Revolution*, 1: 13, 17, 21, 44.

53 *HoNH*, 1: 95–97 at 95. About the significance of chartered companies, see Elizabeth Mancke, “Chartered Enterprises and the Evolution of the British Atlantic World,” in eds. Mancke and Shammas, *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 237–262.

54 “If we smile at the arrogance of a Roman Pontiff in assuming to divide the whole new world between the Spaniards and Portuguese, with what consistency can we admit the right of a king of England, to parcel out America to his subjects, when he had neither purchased nor conquered it, nor could pretend any other title, than that some of his subjects were the first Europeans who discovered it, which it was in possession of its native lords?” *HoNH*, 1: 18.

55 *HoNH*, 1: 184.

serve the immediate and exclusive interests of the settlers exerting it. Whenever possible, the latter used land titles and colonial acts of their own, written in their own preciously preserved records, to counteract “royal charters and instructions, acts of Parliament and precedents of all kinds,” which were “at best but a rotten foundation” for their civil societies.<sup>56</sup>

Belknap effectively argued that the settlers’ concerns were neither immediately, nor necessarily compatible with the empire. He prolonged his initial statement that knowledge had been the propulsive force behind colonization with a demonstration that only the settlers knew how to practice colonial management. Veracini has theorized the nature of settler interaction as a set of triangular relations between the settlers on the one hand, and, on the other, exogenous and indigenous others, against whom settler legitimacy is exercised and asserted. Exogenous others typically include metropolitan interlopers, migrants and temporary residents, who are exactly the enemies of Belknap’s narrative, as they were Bradford’s and Winthrop’s.<sup>57</sup> The first two volumes of the *History of New Hampshire* follow a circular structure pitting the Massachusetts and New Hampshire towns against a whole series of British emissaries and envoys, who failed to understand the realities of colonial existence and were unsuited to the work of expansion and the protection of the settlement.

Exogenous others are foils to the specific characteristics and concerns of settler societies. Conflict began from the onset of settlement, when Ferdinando Gorges, who held title over the entire region through the Council for New England, tried to assert his authority over the portions of territory he had bought for himself in northern New England. Then the story continued with the repeated impositions of “chimerical projects” of “lordships” and “leases subject to quit-rents” by the Masons and the Allens, generations of absentee widows and debt-burdened heirs of Gorges’ associates, who intrigued at court and sent their representatives over to New Hampshire to extract revenue from what they believed were their possessions. But “either from the jarring interests” of these claimants, “or their indistinct knowledge of the country, or their inattention to business,” their titles remained weak and “inaccurately described, and interfered so much with each other as to occasion difficulties and controversies” that lasted until independence removed their claims for good.<sup>58</sup>

What set the settlers apart from exogenous others was their attachment to the land and the legitimacy they acquired through their very act of

<sup>56</sup> *HoNH*, 1: 86, 146, 2: 290–291.

<sup>57</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 16–52. Indigenous “others” are discussed later.

<sup>58</sup> *HoNH*, 1: 12, 32; 2: 209.

appropriation.<sup>59</sup> Freehold ownership, the settlers' "undisturbed possession of the soil," runs across the history of New England as the basis of the colonists' political rights and the renewed material expression of their commitment to the colonial project.<sup>60</sup> It began with the founding Puritans, who had rooted themselves in America by being the first to provide the permanent means of their survival in an empty land, an argument that dominated the promotional texts of the 1630s.<sup>61</sup> By toiling and planting the land together through a power structure that protected private ownership as well as their collective needs, the settlers had concluded what Carole Pateman has defined as a "settler contract," a racial and social contract establishing settler sovereignty over what was perceived as a state of nature.<sup>62</sup> Their collective joint acts of farming and self-government sealed settler existence as a civil society in the wilderness. By relegating trade to a secondary action, and making agriculture the primary settler activity, "the surest foundation for all other improvements" and "the original source of wealth and independence in such a country as this," Belknap rooted American existence not in the space between the peripheries and their center, but within the colonies themselves, in the land that formed the basis of the settlers' "native rights."<sup>63</sup>

The *History of New Hampshire* is therefore entirely constructed on the centrality of community and town formation in settler political life, the endlessly repeated association of small communities of individuals who delimit untamed land for themselves and elect representatives to manage their immediate collective concerns—surveying, land distribution and the recording of deeds, the settlement of boundary disputes, local taxation, infrastructure, and defense. From common economic interests, they developed common agricultural practices, which jarred with English expectations and precluded the purchase of "waste lands" by outsiders. Conversely, the "equal division of property among independent freemen" entailed social and political solidarity

59 For a comparative study of European appropriation methods, see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

60 *HoNH*, 1: 97.

61 See Christopher Leverett, *A Voyage into New England* (London, 1624) or John White, *The Planters Plea* (London, 1630). Patricia Seed discusses the various theories legitimizing European conquest in *American Pentimento: the Invention of Indians and the Pursuit of Riches* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

62 Carole Pateman, "The Settler Contract," in eds. Pateman and Charles W. Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 35–78.

63 *HoNH*, 1: 25, 30; 2: 264.

and commonality of purpose—the preservation and defense of their land and societies—binding communities together spatially, culturally and emotionally in a common future. Indeed the settlers' collective goal was appropriation itself, "the passion for occupying new lands" increasing with the clearing of each new township and "calling" the people "into action" and "hardy enterprise."<sup>64</sup>

In the early years, most members of the Massachusetts and New Hampshire councils tended to be natives of the colony, whose personal advantage consequently matched that of the rest of settler society. Yet, royal imposition grew stronger from the Restoration onwards, with the revocation of the charter in 1683 effectively ending the founding period, and the formation of the Dominion of New England complicating New Hampshire's previously harmonious relationship with Massachusetts. From then on, the political story Belknap tells time and again up to the Revolution is that of the confrontation between a series of named careerist royal envoys, who considered colonial governance as a source of personal political or financial advancement, and the mass of New England settlers, whose anonymity signifies their commonality of interests and the consensus that ensued. They are "the people," ruled over locally by the "most sensible part" among them—righteous, self-retrained politicians eager to compromise in order to keep the peace and preserve the settlers' titles and the safety of their borders—but enticed to succumb to the "sanguine," "vindictive, and imperious" authority of the arch-villains of the story close to the Board of Trade. Edmund Andros and Edward Randolph, "the angel of death," are particularly criticized, whose "many instances of tyranny and oppression"—taxation without representation, unlawful seizure of property, the gagging of the press—anticipate the royal impositions of the 1760s and the run-up to independence.<sup>65</sup>

Inept imperial polity stimulated the people to resist encroachment whenever possible. Belknap's overall aim was to demonstrate the contiguous tradition of "republican government," to which the settlers had clung in spite of the imposition of aristocratic figures in Portsmouth or Boston, from the inception of the first covenants to the War of Independence.<sup>66</sup> Belknap's narrative anchored republicanism in the colonizing experience by defining governance as serving the settlers' immediate, exclusive and collective interests, which precluded lordship and vassalage and were incompatible with British political

64 *HoNH*, 1: 141, 183; 2: 242, 244.

65 *HoNH*, 1: 91, 231; 2: 246. Cranfield is "vindictive and imperious" (1: 178), but Randolph and Andros the forces behind the worst impositions, 1: 185, 188.

66 *HoNH*, 1: 86.

hierarchies.<sup>67</sup> Hardship had necessitated “mutual confidence between rulers and people” and separated the true settlers, those who stayed, from their enemies, who ran away when faced with difficulties, or worse, who betrayed the allegiance they had first sworn to the settlements.<sup>68</sup> Settlers had developed their own sense of political legitimacy and authority, mainly “habits of decency, family government, and the good examples of influential persons,” and all interactions with imperial authorities were perceived as cases of “self-defense.” Self-government and land appropriation went hand-in-hand as the exclusive domains of those who actually colonized.<sup>69</sup>

Belknap inscribed his understanding of republicanism entirely within the confines of the settlers' experience. By the time independence was declared, their political culture had been fully formed and they only “adopted and repeated” “the writings of Sydney and Locke” and “the arguments which had formerly been used in England, against the usurpations of the House of Stuarts” to argue their case in a language the British could understand.<sup>70</sup> First, removal and the hardship of the founding had created specific knowledge and expertise and generated in the settlers a sense of a community of interests that superseded rank, social conventions, and previous metropolitan ties. Then, over the course of expansion, mimicked by the structure of Belknap's narrative, the transformation of the landscape repeatedly trumped all other forms of ownership claims, such as English sovereignty, inheritance, and bills of sale exchanged in the metropole. The settlers' property was premised on ownership *made real* by the labor of its permanent residents.<sup>71</sup> Improvement and

67 “Lordship and vassalage were held in abhorrence. The yeomanry were the proprietors of the soil and the natural defenders of their own rights and property, and they knew no superior but the king,” *HoNH*, 1: 90.

68 *HoNH*, 1: 86. Dover governor Burdet, for instance, who wrote letters to Archbishop Laud, persecutor of the Puritans, returned to England in 1640 disgraced for “his villainy,” which the settlers “considered as the more atrocious, because he had been admitted a freeman of their corporation, and had taken the oath of fidelity,” 1: 35; Benning Wentworth had “an appearance of haughtiness, contracted by his residence in Spain,” while John Wentworth, his nephew, “though bred a merchant,” began planting in New Hampshire and was “influential on other landholders, who also applied themselves in earnest to cultivate the wilderness,” 2: 262, 266.

69 *HoNH*, 2: 244, 303.

70 *HoNH*, 2: 258.

71 Here again Belknap shows how well he mastered the work of his New England predecessors. About John Winthrop's understanding of labor as a means of appropriating the land, see Andro Linklater, *Owning the Earth: The Transforming History of Land Ownership* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 26–29.

enterprise were the basic forces behind the colonizing impulse, shaping the institutions best suited to the settlers' specific political needs: freehold ownership equitably distributed, government by consent, and education, accessible to "succeeding generations" of settlers, sons and migrants, who would come and "seek an asylum on these western shores," for "the best part of the America Terra Firma is yet not only uncultivated but unappropriated."<sup>72</sup> The colonists' property, their land, and the society that transformed it, were as much the Americans' past as their future, their past taming of the wilderness the very reason for their legitimate conquest of even further land.

By the end of the 1780s, Belknap was ready to openly confront Loyalist interpretations of American sovereignty. Foreigners' accounts were "inadequate" and had "gained more credit than they deserve," and he was confident that, "notwithstanding the dreams of European philosophers, or the interested views of European politicians," the good land of America "could be best described by those who have for a long time resided in it."<sup>73</sup> Belknap in particular wanted to correct the many uninformed "misrepresentations" he had found in George Chalmers' *Political Annals*, in which colonial "innovations," dating back to the first Salem church covenant in 1629, were denounced for being contrary to the "subordinate" status of the colonies, whose freedom, Chalmers argued, was only to "people and cultivate," not to form religious and political institutions of their own choosing.<sup>74</sup> Especially offensive was Chalmers' depiction of the settlers as "effeminate," "factious," and "cowardly," and of New Hampshire as "a different, though *inconsiderable* settlement; irregular and factious in its economy, affording no precedents that may be of exemplary use to other colonies." This debunking, Belknap asserted, could "by no means be admitted."<sup>75</sup> Volume I had demonstrated the legitimacy of the settlers' appropriation of American land and of the political system that sustained their sovereignty; volume II

72 "Observations upon the Question, Has the Discovery of America been useful or hurtful to mankind?" *Boston Magazine*, May 1784, 1: 280–285 at 284.

73 *HoNH*, 2: 172.

74 George Chalmers, *Political Annals of the Present United Colonies, from their settlement to the Peace of 1763* (London, 1780), 139, 144, 153.

75 *HoNH*, 2: xi. Belknap was also worried about Chalmers' future claims. A letter from John Adams to Belknap dated 24 July 1789 reads as follows: "I have this morning received your letter of the 18<sup>th</sup>. George Chalmers I have seen in London. He is a Scot, who adventured to Maryland and practiced law, [...] a very bitter Tory; but a laborious writer. There is no second volume of his Annals, and as he has had the art of obtaining some employment under the present ministry, I suppose it probable that he will neither find profit nor pleasure to tempt him to labor longer at Annals," Belknap Papers, *CMHS*, 6th series, 4: 437.

would prove the colonials' manly worth through a century of warfare and the resulting disappearance of both British and indigenous sovereignties.

In the first volume of the *History*, Belknap's approach to the issue of indigenous sovereignty had been ambivalent. He glossed over indigenous agency and the settlers' obligation to compromise and compensate for the precariousness of the early years, by asserting that settlement had begun on solid "moral" ground with the Puritan purchase of indigenous land. Settlement had thus begun with "no remarkable quarrel with the savages, except the short war with the Pequods," which filled indigenous nations with such "dread and terror of the English" that they kept "quiet for nearly forty years."<sup>76</sup> However, this apparently confident assertion was followed by a very convoluted discussion of the Puritan accounts of the Pequot war, which shows the moral and historical difficulties early settlement posed to Belknap as he sought to assert the contiguous nature of settler sovereignty.<sup>77</sup> To acknowledge land purchase was indeed to recognize indigenous land titles, which negated the *terra nullius* argument at the foundation of the settler contract. Belknap's attempt to make sense of these contradictions is probably the weakest part of his entire *History*.

Early colonists may be excused for their derogatory depictions of their indigenous neighbors, he began critically, and "it ill becomes us to cherish an inveterate hatred of the unhappy natives." Yet, he continued in the next paragraph, "it must be acknowledged that human depravity appeared in these unhappy creatures in a most shocking view," a damning judgement checked in the next sentence by placing indigenous violence in the wider context of human history. As "bad as they were," it would "be difficult to find them guilty of any crime which cannot be paralleled among civilized nations," Belknap admitted. Besides, Indian resistance was legitimate, with regards to the "encroachments made on their lands, and fraud committed in trade," which "afforded sufficient ground for a quarrel" and generated constant suspicion.<sup>78</sup> Yet ultimately Belknap resorted to the classical promotional argument that Providence had already "put an end to the controversy" by emptying the land before

76 *HoNH*, 1: 8, 17–19, 62–64 102. Multiple power perspectives on the Indian wars of the seventeenth century are Alfred Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), and Julie A. Fisher and David J. Silverman, *Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantics and Narragansetts: Diplomacy, War, and the Balance of Power in Seventeenth-Century New England and Indian Country* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

77 In his youth he had wanted teach in an Indian school to relieve the "great load of guilt" that lay "heavy on this land in neglecting the means" of converting the natives, Marcou, *Life*, 22.

78 *HoNH*, 1: 103, 104, 106.

the arrival of the settlers.<sup>79</sup> His confused argumentation had failed to solve his moral quandary and he was forced to deny the very existence of the people who played such a significant part in his story.

Indian polity was easier to deal with in the context of British impositions, for violence could then be blamed on outside interference. In the next section of his text, he argued that peaceful relations with the natives had effectively ended with the Restoration. Belknap meant to suggest that, had they retained their initial autonomy, the settlers could have dealt with indigenous presence more efficiently. He blamed the onset of the most fatal war in American history in part on the “irregular lives of many of the eastern settlers, their distance from the seat of government, and the want of subordination among them.”<sup>80</sup> He implied that the solution to indigenous conflict was more settler power and consolidated government in the borderlands. Peace in America came from more expansion, not less, and the autonomy of the settlers’ governments to handle these issues themselves.

To further minimize the magnitude of indigenous resistance and the impact of white expansion on the geopolitical balance of the region, Belknap also denied Metacom’s political power and the very existence of an Indian confederacy. Instead, he followed Hubbard and asserted that the “real reason” for the war as the “anger of Squando, an enthusiast,” whose infant had been drowned by two English sailors. “Having heard that the Indian children could swim as naturally as the young of the brutal kind,” these two men, “in a thoughtless and unguarded humour overset the canoe” in which the baby was travelling with his mother. Both were saved from the water but the baby “died soon after,” which drove his father to employ “his great art and influence to excite the Indians” against the settlers. The major Indian conflict of the seventeenth century had thus been the result of a single individual’s desperation, superstition, and intrigue, themselves triggered by the random and “humorous” act of two alien transients.<sup>81</sup> The violence and racism of this depiction aside, it is important to point out that Belknap initially strove to blame colonial violence on the same exogenous others who disrupted peaceful expansion and self-government at

79 *HoNH*, 1: 103.

80 *HoNH*, 2: 109. For detailed and contextual accounts of the war, see Lepore, *Name of War* and Jenny Hale Pulsipher, *Subjects Unto the Same King: Indians, English, and the Contest for Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

81 *HoNH*, 2: 108–109 at 109. The story is also in William Hubbard, *The History of the Indian War in New England*, ed. Samuel Drake ([1677] New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), 2: 135.



the Restoration. Resisting British encroachment and crushing indigenous resistance were two sides of the same expansionist coin.

After King Philip's War was dealt with, however, Belknap no longer showed qualms or restraint regarding the fate of indigenous populations in New England. He was happy to acknowledge the consensus, within New Hampshire society, about the legitimacy of white violence and the constant state of warfare in the borderlands. He continued to deprive indigenous tribes of their agency, making them the pawns of the French Jesuits in the north, who fanned the flames of a "religious phrenzy" of deadly consequences. But he embraced the undeniable fact that colonial space was intrinsically contested, as Europeans fought for colonial dominion and indigenous tribes sought alliances to defend their territories against further white expansion, "Indian war" being "a necessary appendage of a war with France."<sup>82</sup> The European wars of the eighteenth century had a tremendously disruptive impact on American land, yet violence against Native Americans was also a necessary part of expansion driving the narrative forward. The natural increase of the settler population and the beginning of non-Anglo immigration proved the attractiveness and the health of colonial society, while exerting pressure on the land, which in turn increased frontier violence.<sup>83</sup> The New Hampshire men were thus "used to handle their arms from the age of childhood, and most of them, by long practice, had become excellent marksmen, and good hunters." Unsettled land was dangerous and living in the borderlands, which New Hampshire mostly was, implied "attacking Indians in the woods," a most fitted testing ground for future military exploit during the revolutionary struggle made all the more inevitable for the settlers' habit of defending themselves in the wilderness.<sup>84</sup>

The settlers' inclination for armed conflict had nothing to do with the structured, institutional violence of traditional armies. A case in point was the siege of Louisburg that had looked "like a Cambridge commencement" but won the

82 *HoNH*, 1: 204 ("religious phrenzy"), 2: 147 ("a necessary appendage of a war with France"). Belknap reserves the use of the term "conquest" for conflicts with France, not with indigenous neighbors, as if to diminish their sovereignty even further. For an analysis of the complementary processes of war and expansion in the Northeast, see Reid and Peace, "Colonies of Settlement," 356–426.

83 Belknap praises the beginnings of Scots-Irish immigration in the late 1710s, "an industrious, frugal, and consequently thriving people," *HoNH*, 2: 32.

84 *HoNH*, 2: 52, 66. Precedents for the revolutionary struggles include the attack on royal governor Dunbar by rioters dressed as Indians (*HoNH*, 2: 92), the defensive union of the New England colonies (2: 220–221), or the people of New York's resistance to encroachment (2: 244).

Seven Years War for the British. Belknap acknowledged that discipline had been very poor, but could colonials, “destitute of professional skill and experience,” really be expected to behave like a regular military force, the kind of which Britain was so proud? Their talent lay elsewhere—in their daring, their “ardent patriotism,” in their tenacity and in the labor they performed “beyond the power of oxen,” and, finally, in their “love” for their General. Indeed, in the colonies, “fidelity, resolution and popularity must supply the place of military talent.” What the men lacked in professionalism, they made up for with conviction and enthusiasm. Initially just “a plan for the reduction of a regularly constructed fortress, drawn by a lawyer, to be executed by a merchant, at the head of a body of husbandmen and mechanics,” their victory was the expression of the “enterprising spirit of New England,” a feat of courage, labor, and communal commitment, that demonstrated the sheer power of the settlers’ “enthusiastic ardor.”<sup>85</sup>

Violence not only formed the settlers to armed resistance, it also created cohesiveness and racial solidarity among them, and shaped their understanding of justice and politics. Indian scalps and Indian slavery are mentioned repeatedly as important pacifying sources of income and a way for local authorities to show their support for those most exposed on the frontier.<sup>86</sup> Having “imbibed from their infancy a strong antipathy to the savage natives; which was strengthened by repeated horrors of blood and desolation, and not obliterated by the intercourse which they had with them in time of peace,” New Hampshire settlers collectively supported a justice system based on racial solidarity enforced by the populace above and beyond existing, often inapplicable, laws. It “being impossible to impanel a jury some of whom had not suffered by the Indians, either in their persons or families,” Belknap wrote in his second volume, “when any person was arrested, for killing an Indian in time of peace, he was either forcibly rescued from the hands of justice, or if brought to trial, invariably acquitted.”<sup>87</sup> Settler societies were thus shaped by constant conflict with indigenous peoples and delineated by racial and cultural boundaries clearly defined in Belknap’s narrative, in which people of mixed heritage were

85 *HoNH*, 158, 160, 166–167, 169, 170, 173.

86 *HoNH*, 1: 265, 11: 52. Belknap, on the other hand, had nothing but contempt for southern chattel slavery, which had nothing to do with American sovereignty and which he believed had damaged the colonists’ “struggles for liberty” by giving them “so flagrant an appearance of inconsistency,” *HoNH*, 1: 66. For a thorough study of Indian slavery in New England, see Margaret Newell, *Brethren by Nature. New England Indians, Colonists, and the Origins of American Slavery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

87 *HoNH*, 1: 67.

monsters and captives who failed to come back early enough could "contribute to a succession of enemies in future wars against their own country."<sup>88</sup>

Volume 2 of Belknap's *History* tells story after story of capture, combat, torture, and escape, as so many *exciting* vignettes of daily heroic colonial life.<sup>89</sup> This shared experience defined the character of New Hampshire settlers, signified gradual mastery over the landscape, and served as training ground for future national glory, embodied by the illustrious career of John Stark, whose "early captivity, from which he was redeemed, qualified him to be an expert partisan, in the succeeding war; from which station, he afterward rose to the rank of Brigadier General in the armies of the United States."<sup>90</sup> The colonial experience had gradually given birth to a unique American type, who stood at the exact opposite of the "effeminate" men Chalmers had depicted in his *Annals*. The *History* is masculinity writ large, equating violence with legitimate action and racial hatred with necessary self-preservation, "the first law of nature."<sup>91</sup> Empowered by their violent existence in the "continual apprehension and alarm" of the borderlands, the "hardy race of men" peopling America were "rangers" who used disguise and deceit to attack the British with the rallying cry "Let us get them into the woods." They defeated the invaders and the indigenous peoples who stood in their way, and regained the autonomy they had enjoyed before the Restoration. By 1783, local tribes were vanquished and the imperial relationship was no more: "the country was then absolutely [their] own."<sup>92</sup>

88 *HoNH*, 2: 48, 226. Mobilizing postcolonial concepts such as hybridity or anxiety in this analysis of settler history is tempting, but it requires another essay entirely, which would address the risk of focusing the argument solely on white marginality, as opposed to white domination, which is what concerns Belknap the most. For studies of American postcolonial anxieties, see Edward Watts, *Writing and Postcolonialism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998) and Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

89 Belknap's rhetoric is more empowered than the "anti-Indian sublime" Peter Silver has identified in the middle Atlantic in the mid-eighteenth century. There is horror, but not victimization in his version of borderland conflict. Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: Norton, 2008), xx.

90 *HoNH*, 2: 217.

91 *HoNH*, 2: 284. Belknap could confess his admiration for the fact that indigenous warriors resisted using rape in warfare, yet he immediately qualified his assertion by calling upon "philosophers" to enquire "whether this negative virtue is to be ascribed to a natural frigidity of constitution," 1, 230. Similarly, he acknowledged female combatants but in theatrical and often farcical descriptions, 1: 180, 220, 270; 2: 227.

92 *HoNH*, 2: 234, 272, 310, 322. This "hardy race of men" is extolled in one of Belknap's letters to George Washington dated July 19<sup>th</sup> 1784, transcribed in Marcou, *Life*, 137.

In the ten years that preceded his death in 1798, Belknap effectively brought his settler theory of American history to its logical end: the projection of the colonial past into the expansionist future of the United States. Now an established man of letters of Boston, he published the last volume of the *History of New Hampshire* and the first volume of his *American Biography*, and he founded the Massachusetts Historical Society. All three achievements were part of a single project—to give intellectual elites in the northern section of the United States the lead in the production of settler narratives based on solid scientific and institutional ground through the constitution, preservation and ownership of a sacred corpus of archive.

First published in 1792, the third and last volume of the *History* is virtually void of any trace of the violent conflicts that dominated the first two. It opens with the description of the existing, fixed lines securely delimiting the state, whose laws guarantee property and the fair distribution of land.<sup>93</sup> Indigenous presence within the boundaries of the new state has effectively disappeared, leaving behind only “monuments and relics” scattered among widespread white settlements. The formidable enemies of the past are relegated to antiquity, and their descendants reduced to poverty and dependence.<sup>94</sup> Writing in the *Columbian Sentinel* in response to Henry Knox’s attack against American Indian policy, Belknap asserted his conviction that “husbandmen and hunters, civilized and uncivilized people cannot generally live within the same limits, or if there be any attempt to incorporate them into the same society, the former will always rise superior, and the latter will sink into a state of dependence.”<sup>95</sup> Indigenous peoples “roving” the woods had fallen prey to French manipulation, their own “natural” propensity for war and their love of drink, and their stubborn refusal to save themselves by adopting white ways—farming, patriarchy and the nuclear family.<sup>96</sup> Conquest within the internal borders of New Hampshire was over and the victory of civilization over savagery legitimized whatever oppressive Indian policy would be necessary in the expansionist future of the American west.

93 *HoNH*, 3: 9–14, 209–211.

94 “Monuments and Relics of the Indians” is the title of Chapter seven, *HoNH*, 3: 63–72.

95 *Columbian Sentinel*, vol. XXII, Issue 40 (24 January 1795), 1.

96 *HoNH*, 2: 247; Belknap, *Report on the Oneida, Stockbridge, and Brotherton Indians, Submitted to the Board of Commissioners of the Society Established in Scotland for promoting Christian knowledge*, 1796 (Boston: Mass. Hist. Soc., 1798), 17, 37. For a wider discussion on revolutionary understanding of indigenous sovereignty, see Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 19–45 and 240–271. Belknap never used the “Norman Yoke” theory dear to his contemporaries, as discussed in Robert A. Williams Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 233–286.

Consequently, the final volume of the *History of New Hampshire* consists of a peaceful physical, social and political description of the state, its landscape, its settler population, and its thriving economy, shortly after the first census of 1790. Belknap combined science and promotion to praise all aspects of the New Hampshire environment. Mobilizing geography, geology, aesthetics, climatology, surveying, botany, zoology and medicine, he aimed to appropriate knowledge about the American natural world in order to counter European prejudice and validate American science.<sup>97</sup> Having gathered information through a circular distributed across the state, Belknap inserted statistical table after table about the births, deaths, diseases and longevity of the settlers, as well as the quantities and prices of their agricultural production, and their trade in cattle, produce and commodities.<sup>98</sup> He meant to demonstrate that New Hampshire was indeed in the latest stage of history, which combined mastery over the land and its resources with the ability to compete with other more integrated regions of international trade, including Asia.<sup>99</sup> Belknap had brought his narrative to its logical, promotional end by praising the present and future wealth and abundance of the state as a continuation of the processes behind its founding.

Belknap described the attractive prospects of the landscape while equating the transformative power of expansion with the most powerful values of republicanism of the first two volumes: the rejection of privilege and the leveling of society through generalized access to the land. Independence had freed the “democratic principle” inherent in this “happy land” and was working its magic on the poorer sort in the backcountry.<sup>100</sup> The star protagonists of this final volume are thus essentially the surveyors drawing the lines of the expanding settlements, the horse- or oxen-drawn carts clearing new roads and improving communication across this increasingly domesticated landscape, and, finally, the young or newly arrived settlers of the borderlands. Frontier living, with “such hard fare, and the labor which accompanies it,” continued to be the shaper of American character through which “many young men”

97 Belknap the “naturalist” aimed to rival with his European counterparts, such as Buffon, Raynal, and Goldsmith, to whom he referred explicitly in his text, the same way he had competed earlier with British and loyalist historians, such as Hume, Hutchinson or Neal, *HoNH*, 3: 115, 123.

98 Jeremy Belknap, “A circular” (Boston: 1 March 1790).

99 *HoNH*, 3: 67–71, 87, 92, 111–112, 174, 250.

100 *HoNH*, 2: 191, 200. For all his enthusiasm for the leveling power of the frontier, however, the limits of Belknap's democratic vision of American improvement are clear. He condemned frontier vigilantism in the 1790s as he had criticized the destruction of loyalist property in the 1780s, *HoNH*, 2: 302, 366.

gradually “acquired property sufficient to render themselves independent freeholders” and to “feel all the pride and importance which arise from a consciousness of having well earned their estates.”<sup>101</sup> An “important branch of the American union,” New Hampshire numbered “firmness of nerve, patience in fatigue, intrepidity in danger and alertness in action” among its “native and essential characteristics.”<sup>102</sup> Colonial existence on the frontier was a transformative process for both land and men, whose identity, language, and sense of self-worth were intertwined with the landscape and its demands on the willful individual.<sup>103</sup> Being American meant adjoining political freedom to colonial development.

In his late projects, Belknap continued to depict colonization as an acquisitive *and* an intellectual pursuit, the materialization of modern, individual scientific and commercial ambition through the “proper management” of resources.<sup>104</sup> He embodied this conception of settler history in a long line of colonial movers forming the basis of his *American Biography*, published in part in the *Columbian Magazine* of Philadelphia in 1788, under the pseudonym “the American Plutarch.”<sup>105</sup> He borrowed heavily from the earlier promoters of colonization, such as Hakluyt, Purchas and Smith, to promote the lives of exceptional rulers throughout the history of colonization, which he intended to include leaders from other regions and from all periods of American history, starting with his own personal hero, George Washington.<sup>106</sup> His public speeches continued to praise the unique qualities of this colonial type, going back in time as the history of the new nation unfolded, until Columbus himself became in his view the epitome of the American character, “an enterprising adventurer,” “one of the few who had begun to think for themselves,” and whose discovery of America had initiated a new phase in world history.<sup>107</sup>

101 *HoNH*, 3: 195–196.

102 *HoNH*, 3: 194.

103 “If some of the words which our fathers brought from Britain, and which were in vogue a century ago, be there lost or forgotten,” he wrote in the preface, “it is no reason that they should be disused here, especially when they convey a definite sense,” *HoNH*, 3: v–vi. He then details the American usages of the words *freshet*, *interval* and, crucially, *immigrant*.

104 Belknap, *American Biography*, 1: 34.

105 “Life of John Winthrop,” *Columbian Magazine*, vol. 2, 1788, Issue 1, 3–5, Issue 2, 55–57, Issue 3, 121–123; “Life of Gorges,” vol. 2, June 1788, Issue 6, 298–301; “Life of John Smith,” Winter 1788, Issue 8, 418–421, Issue 10, 549–554, Issue 11, 637–641, Issue 12, 699–703 & 722–727.

106 Belknap’s proudest moment was when George Washington thanked him personally for his *History*, Marcou, *Life*, 137–138 and Belknap Papers, *CMHS*, 5th series, 2: 87.

107 Belknap, *American Biography*, 1: 19–20.

Belknap made Columbus the subject of his 1792 speech at the Massachusetts Historical Society, the last great historical project of his life.<sup>108</sup> The MHS was to be the place where past knowledge could be housed for future scientists to peruse and consult as they continued to tell the story of American expansion. The young generations had “been accustomed to hear their parents relate the dangers and hardships, the scenes of blood and desolation, through which they and their ancestors [had] passed, and they [had] an ambition to emulate their hardy virtues.”<sup>109</sup> This politically essential heritage tradition had been carried forward by each generation of historians, from Winthrop to Hubbard to Prince, and now, to the MHS itself, as a seeker and guardian of the region's precious sources.<sup>110</sup> Its “professed design” was “to collect, preserve, and communicate, materials for a complete history of this country, and accounts of all valuable efforts of human ingenuity and industry, from the beginning of its settlement.”<sup>111</sup> Belknap envisaged not a single institution but a string of similar ones across the nation, to collect, copy and distribute material for free throughout the network. To the obvious material needed for the political history of each colony, the MHS added an extra layer of meaning through the terms *ingenuity* and *industry*, which pointed directly to colonial development through labor and expansion, the fundamentals of colonization, and now the enduring purpose of the expanding United States.

Still preoccupied by the ownership and protection of historical archive, Belknap engaged in the competitiveness that reigned among the intellectual circles he solicited.<sup>112</sup> His plan for a seal for the MHS showed “a flying eagle, ranging wolf and a shark, all seeking their prey.”<sup>113</sup> The meaning of this image is

108 Jeremy Belknap, *A Discourse intended to commemorate the Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus* (Boston, 1792).

109 *HoNH*, 3: 196.

110 Jeremy Belknap, “Introductory Address from the Historical Society to the Public,” *CMHS*, 1st ser., 1: 1–3.

111 Cited in Tucker, *Clio's Consort*, 99.

112 About the competition for membership and the acquisition of sources between New England historical societies, see Philip F. Gura, *The American Antiquarian Society, 1812–2012: A Bicentennial History* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 2012), 22–23, 49, 173–174. For studies of competition and cooperation within intellectual circles, see Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and Robb K. Haberman, “Provincial Nationalism: Civic Rivalry in Post-revolutionary American Magazines,” *Early American Literature* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 162–193.

113 Louis Tucker, *The Massachusetts Historical Society: A Bicentennial History, 1791–1991* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1995), 59.

unclear—was it the mountains, the forest and the sea, the three landscapes of colonial development beyond the differences in the geography and economy of the regions? Nevertheless the predation implied in the image cannot be understated. The Society would strive relentlessly to gather and preserve the documentary basis of American sovereignty and identity. It grew in part through its relation with Harvard college into “one of Boston’s most important and exclusive Yankee institutions,” whose members, from Tocqueville, Bancroft and Turner to Perry Miller and Bernard Bailyn, have looked back into America’s past to find the ideological origins of the United States.<sup>114</sup>

“From our example of a government founded on the principle of representation, excluding all family pretensions and titles of nobility, other nations are beginning to look into their natural and original rights as *men*; and to assert and maintain them against the claims of despotism,” Belknap wrote in his *Columbus Discourse* of 1792.<sup>115</sup> Read within the framework of nationalist historical writing, these words echo those of other patriot historians of the early national period. Yet Belknap’s *History of New Hampshire* was not the idealistic depiction of the breaking down of a previously peaceful imperial connection, but a narrative of colonial empowerment through the experience of violent conquest. Settler appropriation and the negation of imperial claims, as well as violence and the extinction of indigenous titles, were the joint, formative processes behind the existence of a settler society whose history was entirely inscribed in the transformation of the landscape. Belknap believed in the union of the states, for they all shared an appetite for land and habits of self-governance and racial violence that were also the drivers of westward expansion. His settler history described American power and American conquest as the two faces of the same process of empowerment that promised a bright, leveling future for the nation.

A century before Frederick Jackson Turner, Belknap indeed anchored American identity in the formation and defense of the institutions most apt to preserve and reproduce the processes at the heart of settler expansion. Exceptionalism may thus owe its enduring power more to its inscription in the *longue durée* of settler domination than in the ideals of the American Republic. More importantly, the fact that Belknap found his material and his stylistic inspiration in the historiography of his region raises the exciting prospect of a

114 Tucker, *Massachusetts Historical Society*, 8. Louis Tucker was President of the Society from 1977 to 2005. He concluded his commemorative history as follows: “As long as there is a United States of America, there will be a need for the Massachusetts Historical Society.” Tucker, *MHS*, 467. A list of its members is appended to the volume.

115 Belknap, *A Discourse*, 42.



new, contextualized approach of early New England sources, in which issues of power, expansion, and the assertion of settler autonomy may no longer be subservient to those of religious culture. Settler colonialism may prove to be a fruitful ground from which to study the role of New England history in the formation of America's special brand of liberalism.