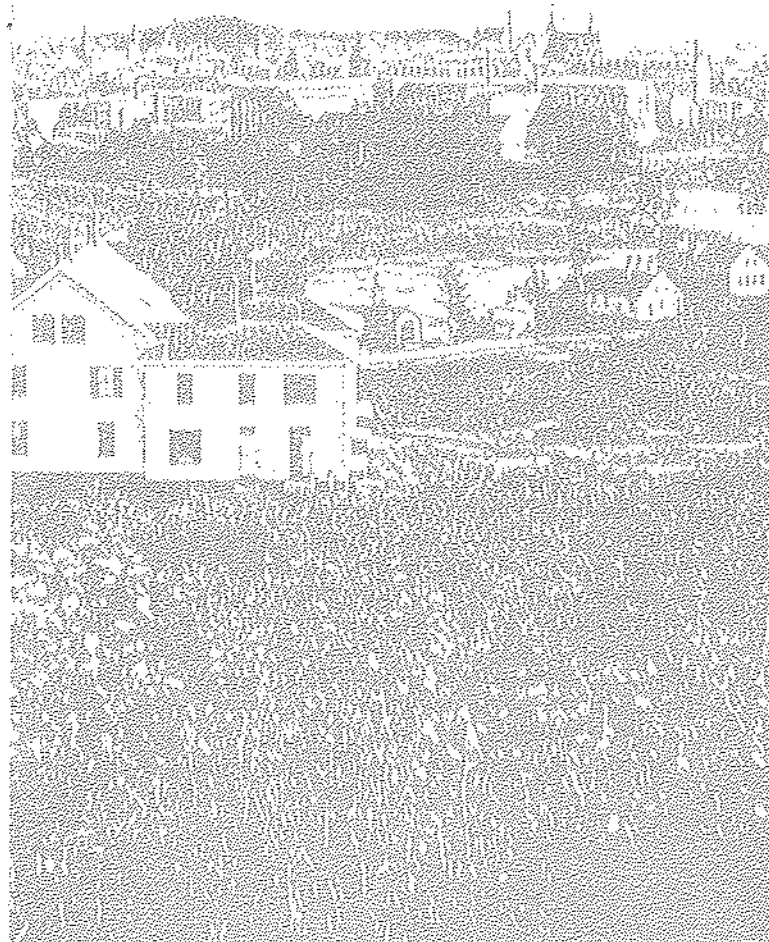
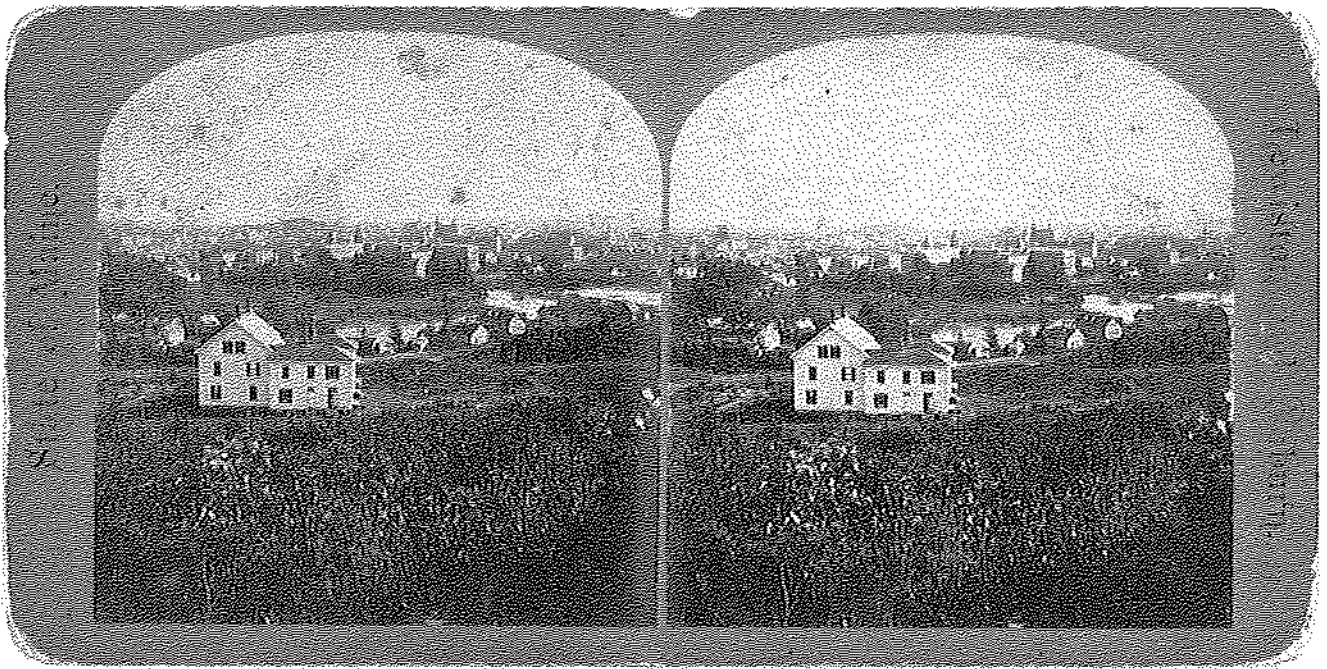


# *Yankees & Strangers*

THE NEW ENGLAND TOWN  
FROM 1636 TO 1992





Courtesy of Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

**T**he words "New England" conjure up an image of neat houses clustered picturesquely around a village green, or a town dominated by a white, steepled church and set against rolling hills. In this traditional view, New England is pastoral, small-scale, and well-ordered. Its inhabitants, in keeping with its name, are of Anglo-Saxon stock. Taciturn, frugal, and hardworking, the typical Yankee is thought to have a staunch character molded by tilling a hard and rocky soil or battling an uncertain sea. But for all their self-reliance, these fabled New Englanders have an exceptional sense of social responsibility, typified by the New England town meeting. In short, New England represents personal fortitude in individuals and harmonious order in the community. Through these reputed virtues, the New England town has become a worldwide symbol of American democracy.

This traditional view of New England includes much that is factual—aspects of it can be seen by anyone who lives or travels in the region today. But what this picture leaves out is perhaps even more revealing than what it includes. For example, it suggests a homogeneous community rather than the highly diverse population cre-

ated by successive waves of immigration into the region. The pastoral image belies the extensive industrialization of the Northeast, with the accompanying periods of growth and decline and social disruption that these have brought. Our views of New England are dominated by the colonial period and its styles, but the popular "colonial" town image was largely created during the nineteenth century Colonial Revival movement.

If the picture of New England is more complicated, and consequently richer, than the usual images, why has so much of the story been left out? "Yankees and Strangers" will address this question by examining the New England town—its beginnings, its changes, and its power to symbolize a way of life. Through the slide presentation, readings, and discussions with a history scholar, participants will explore these topics: How and when did the popular image of the New England town develop? What role did immigration and urbanization play in the idealization of the New England town? Did idealization serve to exclude some citizens and privilege others, and if so, does it continue to do so? How does our sense of town history affect our response to changes happening now? Are the traditional town virtues a vital reality today, or only a nostalgic image?

## IMAGES OF THE NEW ENGLAND TOWN

"Symbolic Landscapes: Some Idealizations of American Communities," by D. W. Meinig

"Town Commons of New England, 1640-1840,"  
by John D. Cushing

"Another City Upon a Hill: Litchfield, Connecticut, and the Colonial Revival," by William Butler

**T**he series begins with a visual overview—a slide presentation covering the evolution of early village centers, nineteenth century urbanization and restoration, tourism and modern real estate development. Discussion will be based on the slide presentation and three short readings from the series anthology.

Throughout the nineteenth century, New Englanders had a dominant role in writing American history and literature and creating American education. As a result, D. W. Meinig argues, "an idealized image of the New England village became so powerfully impressed upon such a broad readership as to become a national symbol, a model setting for the American community." Meinig's thought-provoking article examines the process by which a landscape becomes symbolic, what such a symbol can tell us about the society which creates it, and how the symbol can in turn influence social reality.

The remaining readings provide a historical perspective on town centers. John Cushing's discussion of town commons in the colonial era points out that early nineteenth century town beautification campaigns created the grassy, attractive commons we think of as "colonial." Later in the century, the Colonial Revival movement continued this trend; in his article, William Butler examines this movement in his account of the reshaping of Litchfield's colonial image.

"By the 1860's," Butler writes, "Americans were becoming increasingly bewildered by the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration." These stresses gave rise to a reaction that idealized the New England town of Revolutionary War times. The Colonial Revival movement answered a need for symbols of ancestry, affirming the identity of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Participants will consider whether the nineteenth century overlay on colonial history lessens the appeal of the New England town. How can we balance the community's historic egalitarian values with the image's power to exclude and discriminate?

## THE POLICIES OF PERFECTION

*A New England Town: The First Hundred Years,*  
by Kenneth Lockridge

**I**n his introduction to *A New England Town* Kenneth Lockridge says, "the past is a mixture of contradictory events whose meaning is sometimes ambiguous." So it is with the history of the New England town, that icon of what one English observer called "the world we have lost." Dedham, Massachusetts, was founded in 1636 when a group of early immigrants petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts for a grant of land just south of Watertown. These newcomers to New England, who found that much of the best land had been taken by earlier arrivals, wanted a portion of land on which they could create a "well-ordered" community under their own governance. Lockridge traces the story of this community through its first hundred years.

Dedham was founded as a utopian community whose Puritan members signed a covenant committing them to unity through the exercise of Christian love. In many ways it seemed a model community, but tensions developed as later arrivals were seen as a threat to the town's utopian ideals and the founders' power. Lockridge's thesis is that this exclusive, loving, orderly, peaceful and stable town gave way to an increasingly individualistic, factionalized, and hierarchically arranged community, much more characteristic of American democracy as we know it now. Despite the fact that this thesis has been widely criticized, the book retains its influential status as one of the most important early works in community studies. And, because Dedham shared many institutions with other New England towns of the colonial period, its remarkable story will serve as a historical setting for the rest of the series.

In this session discussion will focus first on the nature of pre-industrial village life in New England—its ideals, its people, and its institutions. It will also explore the question of how, why and when the original town of Dedham began to change, and trace the connection between the early town's history and America's emerging sense of uniqueness. Participants will be asked to assess the appeal of a highly structured utopian community and consider the modern day manifestations of this impulse. Finally, this session will encourage discussion of two related themes that are central to the entire series: the difficulty of reconciling moral idealism with exclusiveness and the problem of a closed community's ambivalence toward newcomers and change.

**TWO**  
**NEW ENGLAND**  
**GIRLHOODS**

*A New England Girlhood*, by Lucy Larcom  
*Our Nig, or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North, Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*, by Harriet Wilson

The readings for this session are a study in contrasts and similarities. Both are autobiographical works by amateur authors, and both illustrate the sentimental style thought to be appropriate for women writers of the day. Though written for popular consumption, these intriguing books help us understand the complexities of the New England image.

*A New England Girlhood*, a memoir of growing up in two New England towns, covers the decades that saw New England move from an agricultural economy into the era of industrialism. Discussion will touch on the late nineteenth century tendency to romanticize the lost past, as Lucy Larcom does in creating her idyllic picture of rural, small town life. She continues to idealize in her account of the later part of her childhood, when she and her sisters worked in the famous Lowell cotton mills. Although the contrast to the "Old New England" of her village years is clearly drawn, she nonetheless presents Lowell as a model community based on the ideals of harmony, mutual support, and moral and intellectual improvement. Participants will investigate the reasons why Larcom minimizes hardship, ignores exploitation, and omits the strife, during just this period, over the replacement of mill girls by immigrant workers. They will also consider the implications of her belief in a special, morally superior New England character.

*Our Nig* provides an challenging contrast to the previous work. While Lucy's world, even with its misfortunes, is that of an insider and a respected member of a community, the author of *Our Nig* tells of her life as an outcast. The almost total absence of a community or family context is striking in this story of a black servant growing up in a New England household. A few highly painful relationships define the world of the author, whose defenders are removed or rendered helpless. Though Lucy Larcom wrote proudly about the democratic equality of New England small towns, it didn't occur to her to consider those who, like Harriet Wilson, were outside the life of the community. Participants will be asked to consider how these facts reflect on New England's stance against slavery in the South.

**MILLTOWN**  
**LIFE**

*Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City*, by Tamara K. Hareven and Randolph Lungenbach

"Happy Times in Mill City," by Ann H. Sullivan

During the nineteenth century, when Litchfield, Connecticut was being redesigned to fit nostalgic images of a colonial heritage, towns of a very different image were being built to accommodate the influx of immigrant workers. *Amoskeag* provides first-person accounts of the lives of those who worked for the Amoskeag mill in Manchester, New Hampshire, from 1837 to 1936. The mill, which produced cotton and woolen fabrics, dominated the town and the lives of its workers, who included Scotch, Irish, German, Swedish, Polish, Greek and French Canadian immigrants. Program participants will be asked to consider the realities of the lives of workers caught in the rush towards industrialization, and the even harsher impact of industrial decline which followed.

Memories of milltown life, seldom found on greeting cards or calendars, nevertheless had a certain emotional appeal for many who were part of its early phases. The sense of community recalled by these workers can be compared with the communal ideal of the colonial period, as described in Lockridge's *A New England Town*. The men and women we meet in the pages of *Amoskeag* are content, too, with the changes taking place in the region: on the whole, they preferred the sociable life of the factory city to the drudgery, isolation, and poverty of their rural existence. Women, especially, appreciated the chance to earn their own money and work outside the home. "I was happy in the Amoskeag," says one. "I loved my work; it was my life."

Yet there are critics who contend that the picture presented in *Amoskeag* is far too positive. In her review of the book, entitled "Happy Times in Mill City," Ann Sullivan, a Manchester native, points out the predominance of interviews with first-generation immigrants from French Canada, who tended to be less critical of working conditions than those who arrived later. Sullivan argues that workers from later generations would have told more about exploitation, child labor, worker protests, and ethnic and class discrimination in Amoskeag's "one happy family." Sullivan's father was the first member of his family to go to college and work outside the mills. She quotes his bitter comment: "Remember, at Amoskeag they locked the gates after the workers went in mornings. That should tell you something."

## SESSION 5

### THE NEW ENGLAND TOWN TODAY

*Without a Farmhouse Near*, by Deborah Rawson  
Current news items contributed by participants

Session Five brings the series up to date with a look at what's happening in New England today. In *Without a Farmhouse Near*, journalist Deborah Rawson creates a lively picture of the changes taking place in the two small towns of Jericho and Underhill, Vermont. These communities, where Rawson grew up and her family still lives, are undergoing a transformation that will be recognized by readers from many areas of New England—dairy farms are giving way to residential and commercial developments serving the personnel of high tech corporations that have located in once rural regions.

Rawson takes the reader on visits to a spectrum of residents—Yankee farmers whose local roots go back two hundred years, newly arrived IBM employees, writers and artists, real estate developers, town Planning Board members, state officials, environmentalists, grass roots activists. At the heart of the controversy is the Vermont landscape: its value as scenery, as wildlife habitat, as farmland, and as real estate for development. In communities which until recently were nearly as homogeneous and harmonious as the New England ideal, weighing these values has created painful dilemmas for individuals and traumatic disruptions of social ties. Participants may find many of these issues striking close to home as they discuss questions of development versus conservation, old timers versus newcomers, local control versus corporate power, individual versus community rights, and change versus continuity with the past.

To focus discussion further, participants will be asked to bring clippings and articles from their town newspaper and other sources to generate discussion about current issues in their community. In particular, participants will be asked to consider whether the traditional values and images of the New England town are still an effective force. Are harmony, order, and egalitarianism the current priorities of town government? Is a special sense of responsibility in evidence at our town meetings? Are we conscientiously passing on a New England way of life to our children? To what extent does an active sense of history effect the town's response to today's changes and challenges?

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