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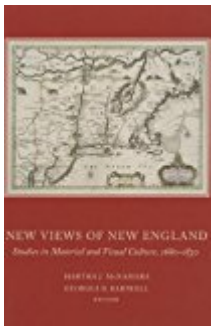

Georgia Brady Barnhill, Martha J. McNamara, eds.. *New Views of New England: Studies in Material and Visual Culture, 1680-1830.* Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2012. xxxv + 277 pp. $39.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-9852543-0-8.

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Commissioned by Marieke Hendriksen (Utrecht University, Netherlands)

This anthology, born out of a 2007 conference co-sponsored by the American Antiquarian Society and the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, offers an important contribution to the history of Early America. In her introduction, Martha McNamara points to the formative work provided by the *New England Begins* exhibition held at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1982. Inaugurating the study of material culture in colonial New England, this exhibition examined a wide range of artifacts but tended to isolate the region from its broader political, cultural, and economic networks. As an attempt to revise that literature, the current book promises to expand our understandings of this early period by pointing to the potential of objects and images to illuminate the study of vision and constellations of identity formation and empire. The book does not disappoint. In ten cohesive essays, the reader receives a rich discussion of the imperial trade in consumer goods, constructions of whiteness, shifting political and social relationships, regionalism versus cosmopolitanism, the tension between religious belief and consumerism, and displays of wealth and status.

Part 1 of the volume situates the experience of early New Englanders within the transnational British Empire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Essays by Emerson Baker, Patricia Johnston, and Kevin Murphy elucidate the ways that colonists understood their place in the broader British Empire: not as residents of some remote waystation, but as key participants in a vast, rich trade network. In Maine, an emergent elite class displayed their wealth and gentility with the prominent homes they built and the cosmopolitan goods they purchased. Examining this evidence, Baker asserts that the evolution of polite society was well underway in Maine by the 1660s.[1] One of the most intriguing essays in this section comes from Kevin Muller, who uses eighteenth-century cityscapes to understand how Bostonians understood their position in the British Empire. Looking at the sightlines and perspectives employed, and how those views changed over time, Muller argues that in the first half of the eighteenth centu-

ry, New Englanders came to see themselves as "both subjects and creators of the British Empire" (p. 52). In this way, Muller contributes to a growing literature that uses material culture to reveal how Early Americans displayed their cosmopolitanism and wealth.[2] Yet Muller goes one step further to suggest that the circulation of these cityscapes helped to cultivate a sense of local and transatlantic identity that was rooted in, and expressed through, visual culture. Colonial merchants especially found, in this visual culture, an expression of their local commercial success, their regional social status, and their crucial place in the imperial trade network . Importantly, the production and sale of such cityscapes declined sharply after the American Revolution, suggesting a corresponding shift in the worldview of New England's merchant class.

Part 2 examines the effects of transatlantic political, cultural, intellectual, and economic networks on the circulation of objects between family members and local communities in New England. Of particular interest is Catherine Kelly's discussion of an emergent aesthetic of whiteness in nineteenth-century miniature portraits. In her view, transatlantic discourses on sentiment and sensibility, visual aesthetics, and natural science helped to construct an ideology of race based on specific traits—both for whites and blacks. Importantly, Kelly notes that portrait painters attempted to convey their sitters' character by choosing a particular set of visual signifiers. Transparency, both of character and appearance, thus came to figure highly in miniature portraits painted of white genteel women. As Kelly shows, the natural sheen of ivory made it a preferred medium for portraits because it could help visualize the "luminous, transparent, delicate" nature of the sitter's character (p.141). Other essays in this section look at the persistent "embarrassment of riches" experienced by emergent elites circa 1800, the strategies Loyalists used to maintain their possessions while in exile, and displays of wealth and gentility in eighteenth-century funeral celebrations.

Part 3 includes an essay by Martin Brückner on the commercialization of map production in eighteenth-century New England, with particular attention to the ways that pictorial cartouches reconfigured certain maps as visual commodities intended for consumption and circulation in the marketplace. Rather than mere reference objects for navigation, several of Brückner's examples offer commentary on regional affiliations and "looming political conflict" on the frontier (p. 243). Wendy Bellion's essay offers some broad concluding thoughts for the book, including some musings on the interconnectedness of images, objects, and texts. In her words, "visual culture implicates objects, and material culture involves vision" (p. 251). While the fields of material and visual culture studies share methodologies, the study of images and objects also requires interdisciplinary knowledge of history, literature, and other fields to understand how the materiality of things implicates or changes social practices and relationships. Her essay stresses the need for scholars to include images and objects in their study of texts, especially for the colonial period.

McNamara and Barnhill have thus published a fine book with multiple avenues for future research. The book might be improved with the inclusion of a bibliographic essay—or at the least, a list for further reading—that outlines some of the major historiographic trends in the study of material and visual culture in this period. This would improve the reference capacity of this volume for students, adding to the book's generous footnotes. Aside from this minor criticism, ***New Views of New England*** is sure to speak to both experts and enthusiasts, both teachers and students. The fascinating content of these essays is only surpassed by the important methodological contributions made by the authors in the book, who offer inspiring models for researching and interpreting images and objects. Highly useful and instructive,

the book is sure to be of use to scholars of material culture, Early America, and visual studies alike.

Notes

[1]. Baker's argument thus reperiodizes the process examined by Richard Bushman, who dates the origins of America's "refinement" to about 1690. See ***The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*** (New York: Vintage, 1993).

[2]. See, for example, Konstantin Dierks, "Letter Writing, Stationery Supplies, and Consumer Modernity in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World," *Early American Literature* 41, no. 3 (2006): 473–94.