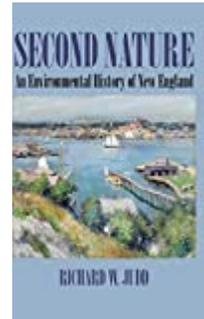




Richard William Judd. *Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014. 344 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-62534-066-5; \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-62534-101-3.



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Of Tilled Fields and Thirsty Cities: New England Environmental History, On Balance

Beneath the Quabbin Reservoir, in what was once the Swift River valley of central Massachusetts, lie four submerged towns. Old roads lead, eerily, to the edge of the water. Local legend persists that when the reservoir's water level falls, a pointy church steeple can be seen rising from below. (It's a myth: All of the buildings in the immersed towns were torn down, before the flooding. Only cellar holes remain.) The towns were sacrificed because, in the early twentieth century, Boston was thirsty. Despite years of seeking additional water sources, and dams built on both the Sudbury and Nashua Rivers to create reservoirs, the city needed water. So, in 1938, Massachusetts simply dissolved the four towns to prepare for the Quabbin's creation. Town residents fought the move all the way to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, but lost. Homes were bulldozed. 7500 bodies were exhumed and relocated to new cemeteries. Then the flooding began. Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott, Massachusetts, in the meantime, became known as the "drowned towns."^[1]

They are almost as submerged, although not quite, in

Richard W. Judd's sweeping new synthesis of New England environmental history, *Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England*. The book covers the entirety of the human era in New England, from the first human arrivals to the "rewilding" movements of recent years. Judd's objective in *Second Nature* is to find a path between the "environmental determinism" so characteristic of early works of environmental history (in which human actors are pushed, almost involuntarily, in particular directions by nature) and the more recent declension narrative (in which historians cast "culture as antagonistic to and dominant over nature") (p. ix). Representative of this latter camp, he contends, are such influential works as William Cronon's *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (1983) and Carolyn Merchant's *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (1989). He's right: Cronon and Merchant, among others, are glum about the effects of men and industry on environment. Judd amends previous studies by covering a much longer chronology, but he also aims to be more balanced.