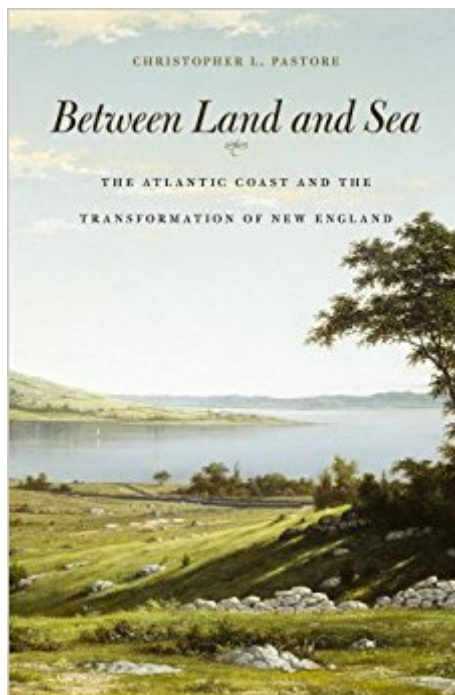


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# Between Land And Sea: The Atlantic Coast And The Transformation Of New England



## Synopsis

One of the largest estuaries on the North Atlantic coast, Narragansett Bay served as a gateway for colonial expansion in the seventeenth century and the birthplace of American industrialization in the late eighteenth. Christopher Pastore presents an environmental history of this watery corner of the Atlantic world, beginning with the first European settlement in 1636 and ending with the dissolution of the Blackstone Canal Company in 1849. *Between Land and Sea* traces how the Bay's complex ecology shaped the contours of European habitation, trade, and resource use, and how littoral settlers in turn reconfigured the physical and cultural boundaries between humans and nature. Narragansett Bay emerges in Pastore's account as much more than a geological formation. Rather, he reimagines the nexus of land and sea as a brackish borderland shaped by the tension between what English settlers saw as improvable land and the perpetual forces of the North Atlantic Ocean. By draining swamps, damming rivers, and digging canals, settlers transformed a marshy coastal margin into a clearly defined edge. The resultant "coastline" proved less resilient, less able to absorb the blows of human initiative and natural variation than the soggy fractal of water and earth it replaced. Today, as sea levels rise and superstorms batter coasts with increasing ferocity, *Between Land and Sea* calls on the environmentally-minded to make a space in their notions of progress for impermanence and uncertainty in the natural world.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 312 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press (October 13, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674281411

ISBN-13: 978-0674281417

Product Dimensions: 1 x 6.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #693,481 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #100 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Ecosystems > Coastal #1237 in Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geology #13020 in Books > History > Americas > United States > State & Local

## Customer Reviews

With a writer's flair and a scholar's insight, Pastore has transformed the muck of the tidal zone into a splendid meditation on the historical transformation of the New England coast. This is a

book for beach-combers and sailors, and for everyone drawn to the shore. (W. Jeffrey Bolster, Bancroft Prize) "winning author of *The Mortal Sea: Fishing the Atlantic in the Age of Sail*) Coasts are a co-construction of man and nature. Pastore recognizes this in his brilliant reconstruction of how the shores of southern New England acquired their shape and meaning during the colonial period. This is environmental history at its very best, vividly conveyed by someone who knows the sea as well as the land. (John Gillis, author of *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History*) In this highly descriptive, carefully written volume, Pastore takes a close look at the interaction between nature, humans, and the built environment with a focus on New England's Narragansett Bay. He traces changes in climate, resources, and European settlers' attitudes in the context of a fascinating geographic-conceptual zone that traverses the "unknowable" sea to "uncertain" estuaries to an "unknown" inland. It was useful to read an analysis of Enlightenment scientific thought on climate and its relationship to religious attitudes of the time. Most fascinating is the juxtaposition here of the liminal space between land and sea and the liminal conceptual space between science and popular culture. (S. Hammer Choice 2015-03-01) Pastore ventures onto the marshes and the mudflats between them, exploring New England's largest estuary in a fascinating, detailed, and often lyrical study of Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay. He writes clearly and perceptively about the ways in which inhabitants shaped, and were more shaped by, these tidal waters. (Peter H. Wood Journal of Interdisciplinary History 2015-10-01) Written with panache and startling flashes of insight, [Between Land and Sea] succeeds in illustrating the hidden perils of ordering a coastal landscape. It is also successful in drawing together the methodologies of historical geography and environmental history, and in piloting both disciplines into uncharted waters. Pastore's book treats terra firma and terra aqua as a single ecosystem, which adds immeasurably to the understanding of both. As a thought-piece as well as a study in history and geography, this book has great merit. • (Richard W. Judd Journal of Historical Geography 2015-10-01) Pastore's work [is] thoughtful, elegantly written, and clearly presented. In his hands, Narragansett Bay becomes not just an extension of the sea but also a set of ideas, attitudes, uncertainties, and ambiguities that accommodate a range of human understandings. One of the book's greatest strengths [is] its ability to sit comfortably, engagingly, and provocatively between the imaginary and the material. Anyone interested in coasts and margins will enjoy his examination of this small but provocative place. (Matthew McKenzie Journal of American History 2015-09-01) An exceptional history that weaves broad and compelling theories with [Pastore's] impressive, place-specific research. [Between Land and Sea] is easy to read and should be useful to professional historians interested in a wide variety of fields including environmental, colonial, maritime, and Atlantic world

history, as well as to graduate and undergraduate students looking to expand their understanding of either the region or new methodological approaches to geographic-based historical investigation. (Brian Payne American Historical Review 2015-10-01) Written with grace and with admirable attention to both cultural and physical transformations, *Between Land and Sea* is an eminently readable (and teachable) book. It deserves a prominent place on any shelf of early American environmental histories. (Andrew Lipman Environmental History 2015-10-01) In this imaginative and remarkably well-written study of the coastal history of Narragansett Bay, Christopher Pastore offers a cautionary tale three centuries in the making. At the heart of Pastore's project is the contention that in seeking to master the coastal Narragansett Bay space between continental North America and the Atlantic Ocean, for ostensibly rational reasons inspired by the Enlightenment and spurred by the Industrial Revolution, Rhode Islanders foisted a potential ecological and environmental catastrophe on themselves that persists to this day. Pastore adeptly integrates archaeological, biological, economic, environmental and religio-political evidence to craft a genuinely interdisciplinary argument. (Craig Gallagher Itinerario 2015-04-01) *Between Land and Sea* offers a glimpse at man's ability and desire to exploit and change natural space. It offers a rich environmental history, clearly and concisely peering into Rhode Island's past through the lens of its most defining physical feature. It is an essential contribution to the environmental and maritime histories of Rhode Island and Southern New England. (Morgan Breene Sea History 2015-03-01) [An] excellent book, a creative study that sparkles with insights. With this book, Pastore will cause historians of early America to realize that they ought never to take for granted the places where their stories unfold. (Ted Steinberg Reviews in American History 2015-12-01) Pastore's *Between Land and Sea* is a fascinating read and thought provoking on various levels. It addresses the intersection of environmental history with the maritime history of an important American historical location. It is scholarly in nature, yet quite readable, and at times, entertaining. This work deserves a place on the shelf of anyone interested in ecological history, particularly that of the Narragansett Bay region, and its influence on the maritime and political history of Rhode Island. (Louis Arthur Norton Northern Mariner 2015-12-01) Human, animal (and oyster), and land interactions? The non-material construction of landscape? Encounters between Europeans and a new world? Humanly-induced environmental change? In this wide-ranging and finely-written book, infused with an autobiographical affection for the land and seascapes that he describes, Pastore touches all these topics and more. (Graham Fairclough Landscapes 2015-12-01)

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of New York.

After reading this fine book, it's abundantly clear that Christopher Pastore has a strong affinity for his topic: Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay. The impermanence, and promise, of this place between the land and the sea comes through in page after page. Pastore's research is copious, but his prose doesn't suffer for it. I learned a great deal about a place that I had previously known very little about. This book held my interest and furthermore provided me with a new-found appreciation for the importance of estuaries in the larger historical context.

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