

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIES OF THE MID-ATLANTIC: AN INTRODUCTION

Allen Dieterich-Ward and David C. Hsiung

We hope that those of you interested in the history of Pennsylvania—of “Penn’s woods”—embrace the field of environmental history. This approach to the past examines the relationships human beings have had with the natural world: how and why humans have changed the environment, and how that changed environment has, in turn, reshaped human society. The basis for those relationships can range from the animate (such as elk) to the inanimate (oil), and even to the intangible (the pastoral ideal). As a scholarly approach to the past, environmental history emerged in the 1970s as a growing awareness of global environmental issues and an explosion of popular environmentalist movements swept through society.¹ Perhaps this brief definition is old news to you, because by now environmental history has matured as a scholarly field. Its books have won some of the profession’s most prestigious awards and this year the American Historical Association has named an environmental historian, William Cronon, as its president.² You might have gained a familiarity with this field also from the past pages of *Pennsylvania History*, which has published a scattering of environmental history articles over the past

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three decades including a 1999 special issue edited by Joel Tarr focused on “The Pennsylvania Environment.”³

However, that volume is now more than a decade old and the first years of the twenty-first century have brought a wealth of new environmental scholarship as well as increasing popular attention to the thorny issues linking humans to the rest of nature. As guest editors, we set out to craft a special issue centered on two overarching goals. First, we wanted to highlight for the usual readers of *Pennsylvania History* the broad range of possibilities for enhancing their own scholarship through adopting the lens of environmental history. Moving beyond this audience, our second goal was to demonstrate for environmental scholars the importance of bringing their attention “back East” and to the Mid-Atlantic in particular. In doing so, we hope this volume will serve as a benchmark for future work and as an invitation to undertake the type of engaged scholarship necessary to link academic history with the region’s broader social, political, and, yes, physical landscapes.

We begin with a retrospective interview in which Joel Tarr, one of the grandmasters of the field, speaks informally about the scholarly developments he has seen (and certainly shaped) during the course of his career. Time has proven correct his earlier prediction that interest in the teaching of environmental history would increase in the future, for the 2011 Pennsylvania Historical Association conference featured a roundtable discussion on this topic with remarks by Stephen Cutcliffe, Charles Hardy III, and David Soll. That discussion has been adapted and included here to provide examples of ways to incorporate environmental history into the broader curriculum. Moving beyond the classroom, we are also delighted to present articles by Peter Linehan, James Longhurst, and Brenda Barrett that raise important issues concerning the relationships between historical scholarship, environmental activism, and public policy. Indeed, calls to action conclude the latter two essays with Longhurst urging scholars to “actively guide the records of [the environmental movement] into archives” and Barrett profiling “a public history project [to] memorialize a revered leader” that quickly became “a more activist group that seeks to influence public policy.”

At the heart of this volume are the ten essays that make up the “New Perspectives” section. Instead of presenting the usual case studies, we asked these scholars to review the recent literature and provide thoughtful speculations on the directions in which the field may move. While the topics of some of the essays in the 1999 special issue (natural resources, pollution, social activism, and public policy) reappear in these pages, the current volume

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broadens the perspective to include Native Americans, tourism, race, outdoor recreation, and much more. Environmental history, John R. McNeill claims, “is about as interdisciplinary as intellectual pursuits can get”; we have acknowledged this by including the perspectives of an anthropologist and an agroecologist along with those of historians having wide temporal, geographic, and thematic interests.⁴ The essay by ecologist Peggy Eppig, especially, reminds us that primary sources can be found not just in the archives, but also on the land itself. Boundaries such as stone fences and hedgerows, if understood as the product of human interactions with an ever-changing environment, can help us see political, social, and legal developments in new ways.

Yet the vibrancy of the field presented us with a dilemma: we found there were many more topics than could be accommodated in a single issue. We could not include the exciting new work centered in the Mid-Atlantic on issues ranging from the connections between war and nature, to science in the Atlantic World, to the history of animals.⁵ In what direction will future environmental histories of the Mid-Atlantic region go? Just as events of the 1960s and 1970s shaped the initial direction of the field, surely the developments of the 2010s will inform the next wave of scholarship. Perhaps the ever-changing issues surrounding horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing technologies to extract natural gas will provide historians with a new perspective on how people extracted oil and timber in previous centuries. No matter what, we are certain to see new scholarship worthy of collection in a third special issue of *Pennsylvania History*. We just hope it appears before another thirteen years pass!

NOTES

We would like to thank the contributors for their hard work, patience, and cooperation. Due to personnel changes at *Pennsylvania History*, three different journal editors have shepherded this volume to print, including Paul Douglas Newman (who enthusiastically supported the initial idea), John Hepp (who embraced the nontraditional format), and Bill Pencak (who saw it through production). We would also like to thank the staffs at *Pennsylvania History* and Penn State Press for their always-excellent work. Finally, we would like to dedicate this volume to Dr. Angela Gugliotta, whose passionate teaching and innovative research on the cultural history of air pollution in Pittsburgh was cut short by her untimely passing in 2010. (See her PhD dissertation, “Hell with the Lid Taken Off: A Cultural History of Air Pollution in Pittsburgh,” University of Notre Dame, 2004.)

1. Overviews of the field include J. Donald Hughes, *What Is Environmental History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006); Donald Worster, “Appendix: Doing Environmental History,” in his edited

- volume *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Carolyn Merchant, *The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). William Cronon provides a compelling argument for the importance of environmental history in "The Uses of Environmental History," *Environmental History Review* 17, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 1–22.
2. For example, J. R. McNeill won the 2010 Albert J. Beveridge Award from the American Historical Association (AHA) for *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). The 2009 winners of the Bancroft Prize from Columbia University included Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), and Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). William Cronon, the 2012 president of the AHA, also won the Bancroft Prize for *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).
 3. For example, see Donald Brooks Kelley, "Friends and Nature in America: Toward an Eighteenth-Century Quaker Ecology," *Pennsylvania History* 53, no. 4 (October 1986): 257–72; and Kerry S. Walters, "The 'Peaceable Disposition' of Animals: William Bartram on the Moral Sensibility of Brute Creation," *Pennsylvania History* 56, no. 3 (July 1989): 157–76; Joel A. Tarr, "The Environmental History of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 445.
 4. John R. McNeill, "Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History," *History and Theory* 42, no. 4 (December 2003): 9.
 5. See, for example, Michael Gunther, "'The Deed of Gift': Borderland Encounters, Landscape Change, and the 'Many Deeds of War' in the Hudson-Champlain Corridor, 1690–1791" (PhD diss., Lehigh University, 2010); Mark Fiege, "Gettysburg and the Organic Nature of the American Civil War," in *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of War*, ed. Richard P. Tucker and Edmund Russell (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), 93–109; James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, eds., *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Bob Frye, *Deer Wars: Science, Tradition, and the Battle over Managing Whitetails in Pennsylvania* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); and Ann Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).