William Pencak, “Nathaniel Ames, Sr. (-1764), and the Political Culture of Provincial New England” Historical Journal of Massachusetts Volume 22, No. 2 (Summer 1994).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

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Nathaniel Ames, Sr.,
and the Political Culture
of Provincial New England

William Pencak

In 1764, the creator of the longest-running series of almanacks published in colonial British America, Nathaniel Ames, died at the age of fifty-six. Since 1726, New Englanders had patronized "An Astronomical Diary, or Almanack," as his compilation of phases of the moon, times of sunrise and sunset, and poetry proclaiming the greatness of God and the beauty of nature, was simply entitled. They enjoyed if they did not take too seriously the Dedham tavern-keeper's predictions of wars, famines, and prosperity, which colonial almanack writers spewed forth frequently, though inaccurately.

All almanacks had that material, along with lists of court dates, chronologies, and a variety of miscellaneous information. For Nathaniel Ames to retain his clientele for nearly four decades, and to send his son and successor, Nathaniel, Jr., to Harvard College (class of 1761) required something more, as almanacks were going in and out of existence all the time in the colonial seaports. Selling up to 60,000 copies a year, or more than one for every two households in Massachusetts by the 1760s, suffering the competition of pirated editions published in New London and New Haven, Connecticut, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Ames made a success of the almanack business, equalled only by Benjamin Franklin and "Poor Richard" of Philadelphia.1

What made some almanacks more appealing than others was the interleaved material — essays, proverbs, poems, recipes, jokes, pictures, remedies, etc. Although he began rather gingerly — Ames was only eighteen when his first almanack appeared — by the 1740s it was apparent why he had a best-seller on his hands. As the century progressed, his witty and thought-provoking essays on the Massachusetts political, military, and social scene both reflected and probably helped to shape popular attitudes on the major questions of the day. Examining Ames's attitudes permit some cautious generalizations concerning popular opinions on such great controversies as the Land and Silver Banks of 1740-1741, the Great Awakening, and military policies during King George's and the French and Indian Wars. We must assume that Ames pleased his audience, for unlike government publications and clerical pamphlets, he enjoyed no subsidy.

Until 1738, it would truly be stretching things to find controversial or political matter in Ames's almanacks. That year, however, he lambasted various Boston elite types:

Lawyers, Priests, and Doctors ne'er had been
If Man had stood against th'Assaults of Sin.
But, oh. he fell! and so accurs'd we be
The World is now oblig'd to use all Three!

The poem for 1738 contrasted "vain" Philosophy with "true" Religion, by noting that the wisest philosophers disagreed on the most fundamental problems: "Then all you vain Philosophers farewell," Ames concluded. These attacks coalesced in Ames's critique of the "Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons," who had first made their appearance in Boston in 1733. An elite organization which preached universal enlightenment rather than the orthodox Christianity shared by Ames and most of his readers, the Masons were obnoxious both because of their secrecy and exclusivity. They overlapped in this latter category with the Boston elite reformers, headed by future Governor Thomas Hutchinson, who had begun in the late 1730s to supplant the more populist anti-crown faction headed by Elisha

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Editions began in 1755 in New Haven, 1757 in Portsmouth, and 1758 in New London. The basic texts of the almanacks may be found in Samuel Briggs, The Essays, Humor, and Poems of Nathaniel Ames, Father and Son, of Dedham, Massachusetts, from their Almanacks, 1720-1778 (Cleveland, 1891). In this paper, almanacks will be referred to by the year they were printed for; like calendars today, they were printed late in the previous year.
Cooke, who died in 1737. "Masonry and Death are both the same," proclaimed Ames, suggesting the fissure between a cosmopolitan, Anglicized elite, and the more traditional Bostonians in the town meeting. Ames took a stand for piety in 1741, with a poem addressed "To the Scoffers at Mr. Whitefield's Preaching." The great evangelist had visited Boston in 1740, mobilizing, as elsewhere, people who were dissatisfied with an increasingly comfortable religious establishment. Ames compared the anti-Whitefield group with "hard'n'd old Caligula prepare[d]; To mock the mighty THUNDER of the Air." He taunted them to follow the Roman Emperor by putting up their wind machines, mock the voice of God represented by Whitefield, and ensure their damnation.

Ames continued his populist bashing of the aristocratic pretensions of an elite, which responded to Whitefield and the Great Awakening by joining the Anglican Church or purchasing pews in the fancier Congregational ones. His poetry for 1741 attacked "Nobility of Blood" as but "a glitt'ring and fallacious good." Noting that Jesus was born in a manger, Ames urged his high-falutin readers to imitate their virtuous ancestors, instead of idolizing them, or "what are you else but of a bastard kind?"

Like many in Massachusetts, however, Ames became disillusioned with the Great Awakening and with Whitefield himself, as itinerant preachers arose in his wake. Their ignorance and contempt for existing churches led Ames to note in April of 1743 that "Many illiterate Pedlars in Divinity take up their Hoes, & go to Planting." This jibe upset one Meletiah Martin of Connecticut, a "New Light" according to Ames, who asked the almanack-maker to prove his learning by answering who did Nebuchadnezzar's idol represent, and what was the abomination made desolate in Matthew 24:15. In a response he did not publish,


Ames retorted that the idol was Whitefield himself, and the abomination Whitefield plus six other New Light preachers, a pack of Vegerant Illiterate Idle fellows, who as they have been lifted up by the Common people, as the Eagles were upon the Standards in the Roman Camps, are like to lay waste our land & bring us to as utter Distraction as did the Romans the Jews.  

Ames refrained from offending his numerous New Light readers with such remarks, preferring in 1744 to gently chide them with a few lines from the London Spectator on "Misstaken Devotion": "There is not a more melancholy object, than a Man who has his Head turn'd with a Religious Enthusiasm."

Ames's populism and affection for the people of New England thus extended to an orderly people who kept themselves in line and respected tradition, merit, and property. "All Men are by Nature equal, But differ greatly in the Sequel" is the famous jingle he wrote for 1762. Ames thus took a stand for the good old-fashioned New England way, which rejected both Anglicizing elitists and "Vegerant Illiterate Idle" New Lights.

As did religion, secular affairs became controversial in New England in the 1740s. Anxious to remedy Massachusetts' chronic inflation and shortage of hard currency, banks founded on land and silver came into existence, prompting Ames to write in his 1741 issue that "Earth and Gold Strive for Mastery." However, he followed this neutral statement with the prophecy of "a visible conjunction of Finery & Fraud in some Places," which subtly expressed a preference for the more broadly-based Land Bank over the Silver Bank funded by a small group of merchants.

Like many Massachusetts inhabitants, Ames was outraged in 1741 when Parliament ordered both banks to be dissolved. His reaction was a remarkable satirical dialogue between Ralph, a "Freshman at College," and "his Brother Will, an ignorant Rustick" who spoke in a pidgin German-English dialect in which all Ps became Bs ("Barlemand" for "Parliament," for instance). Ralph


teaches Will that King and Parliament can "Do all things they've a mind to," causing Will to comment that they were lucky not to be transformed into asses. Ralph agrees and draws the appropriate ironical conclusion:

The Reasons that they act upon
No matter whether right or wrong,
For if the Parliament had said,
That in each Banker's proper head,
A Pair of mighty Horns should grow,
'Tis Law, Ergo, it must be so.

Ames's almanack here does nothing less than question the legitimacy of parliamentary sovereignty. He thereby suggests both the "protection covenant" described by historian Richard Bushman, who argues that the inhabitants of eighteenth-century Massachusetts conceived of the King, and by extension British political institutions, primarily as guarantors of their liberties, and the notion of "Empire" suggested by Richard Koebner in his book of that title. The New Englanders saw themselves as a parallel society to England, with the colonial legislatures the equivalent of Parliament, rather than subordinate to it. They also believed themselves destined for an imperial greatness of their own. By arguing cynically that the colonists must submit to all laws, no matter how injurious or idiotic, Ames is basically saying they ought not to submit at all. The college student and the country bumpkin both share this sentiment, indicating that Massachusetts probably was, or at the very least should have been, united on this issue, regardless of class or urban or rural affiliation.

Ames's first poetic expression of the belief that New England was a great land with a special mission appeared in 1740. He stated that William Blackstone, the first settler on the Shawmut Peninsula in the 1620s — the site of Boston — appeared to him in

a dream. "Trees were as Men, Now Men as Trees appear!" the ghost remarked in awe:

    Coaches rattle through a Street
    Of Houses built magnificent and fine!

He concluded with praise that

    Great Britain’s Glory buds and blossoms here.
    Ye Gods in Rome what have ye more to do?
    Elysium in New England waits for you.

By ranking his own society above that of Rome and terming it the fruition of Britain’s, Ames is implying that America had fulfilled the promise of its European progenitors, and in fact surpassed them. As historians Max Savelle and Richard Merritt have shown, such sentiments were not unique to Ames, although he, along with fellow almanack-maker Benjamin Franklin, was one of their most fervent proponents.7

Ames’s belief in Massachusetts’ special importance also appears in the poem which concludes his work for 1742. After a lengthy disquisition on astrology and the interpretation of heavenly portents, he finished with "pleasing news remarkable": "the advancement to the sacred chair of government" by William Shirley. Ames claimed to have discovered favorable signs in the sky "portending good," and he compared Shirley to a sun who radiated light to

    New England’s Stars, His System’s graced.
    Then by the Power of His beaming Rays,
    Blest be New England’s succeeding days.

By regarding the alignment of the stars and planets as directed by the Almighty to foretell the happy future of New England, Ames applied to the province and its ruler the celestial signs appropriated by kings. Massachusetts, as it had been during the early Puritan days, was worthy of such company.

Similar opinions on American destiny occur in a chronology of "remarkable events" that Ames published for 1745. After beginning with the creation of the world, and taking us through The Bible, the Trojan War, and the conversion of Constantine, then noticing how "first the use of PRINTING bless'd the world," Ames concentrates almost exclusively on New England events. The planting of Plymouth and Massachusetts, the founding of Harvard College ("where great Apollo's learned Sons reside"), King Philip's War, the great Boston fire of 1711, John Lovell's battle with the Maine Indians in 1725, the recent outbreak of war with Spain, and the great earthquake of 1727 conclude the list. With the exception of European wars which involved the colonists, only incidents from New England's own recent history were deemed by Ames to be worthy of inclusion.

The capture of Louisbourg on June 17, 1745, gave Ames a chance to join his fellow countrymen in extolling their collective virtue. In imitation of the Biblical episode where Joshua made the sun stand still, Ames arranged for "the Prince of Light . . . in his burning Car" to

Rein in his Steeds and rest upon high noon  
To view our Victory at Cape-Breton.

As historian Nathan Hatch has noted, King George's War (1744-1748) restored to New England its militant sense of destiny; by conquering the French-Canadian Roman Catholics, God's "New Israel" was on the march again.⁸

By late 1746, when Ames published the 1747 almanack, joy over Louisbourg had given way to frustration with a faltering war effort. Americans sent to garrison the post died by the hundreds, as promised British regulars did not arrive. Nor had British naval assistance materialized for expeditions against Canada funded by the Massachusetts legislature.

Hail VICTORY! thy Aid we still implore,  
Thy Britain conquers; send her thunder o'er;  
We only for her moving Castles wait;  
But they, alas! have been detain'd by Fate.

⁸. Hatch, "The Origins of Civil Millennialism."
Addressing "Jove" and "the fates," but in reality Britain, Ames pleaded:

Give one propitious Sign
And, lo, Ten Thousand bold Americans will join,
With cheerful Hearts to Extirpate a Race
Of superstitious Papists false and base.

Curiously, these were exempted from the eloquent pleas for religious toleration and peace Ames had printed only the year before. An excerpt from Milton criticized men for living in "Hatred, Enmity, and Strife," while worshipping a "God proclaiming Peace." An anonymous poem described the "Persecutor's Hell":

No Spirit howls among the Shades below,
More damn'd, more fierce, nor more a Fiend than he.

Ames, like all Massachusetts, was disappointed that when peace came in 1748 the province received no rewards for its exertions, including the retention of Louisbourg. However, he hid his true feelings, and wrote one of his most moving poems to celebrate the end of hostilities:

No Hero's Ghosts, with Garments roll'd in Blood,
Majestick stalk; the golden Age's renew'd:
No hollow Drums in Flanders beat; the Breath
of brazen Trumpets ring no Peels of Death.
The milder Stars their peacefull Beams afford,
And sounding Hammer beats the wounding sword
To Plow-Shears now; Mars must to Ceres yield
And exhill'd PEACE returns, and takes the Field.

Only in 1756 did Ames stily express the thought that Massachusetts had been betrayed by England: "This Province may be said to give Peace to Europe; since for Cape Breton the French yielded all their Conquests in Flanders." He once again extolled his province's importance for the entire world.

Despite his patriotism, Ames no more identified the essence of his country or the welfare of its inhabitants with the government, or General Court, of Massachusetts than twentieth-century Americans equate the general good with Congress. "Many
convened. For May of 1750 he foretold "Many projects to little or no Purpose but tending to Discord." A short poem appeared for May of 1753:

Politicians, Projectors, Directors,
Dictators and Detractors,
How many there be?
But how fruitless are most,
You may easily see.

"The Public Good Men oft pretend/ While private Interest is their End," he warned for May of 1762. Interestingly, Ames did not voice such criticisms during the war years, when the General Court behaved with spirit and voted large sums and forces. In peacetime, however, when the legislators frequently changed their minds or did not show up even for votes on vital currency matters, public unhappiness with their conduct was understandable.

To solve Massachusetts' problems, Ames proposed individual moral reform, a solution also favored by Benjamin Franklin's "Poor Richard" for Pennsylvania. As Ames noted for September of 1751: "Many increase their Troubles by indulging their selfish Principles and vicious Habits." Beginning in 1752, he began to issue appeals for people to lead healthier and more virtuous lives. Essays stressing this theme appeared again in 1754, 1755, 1757, 1759, 1762, and 1764. Drinking spirits was the major sin: "The Antediluvians had not learn'd the Art of Intemperance, therefore they attained the Age of 900 Years." Alas, "Mechanicks and low-liv'd Labourers drink RUM like Fountain Water," and thus failed to live out even the three-score years and ten allotted the degenerate present age. Yet Ames managed a compliment for his lower-class constituents here by remarking that they "can infinitely better endure" the bottle "than the idle, unactive, and sedentary part of Mankind." Still, "DEATH" in capital letters lurked "in the bottom of the Cup of everyone."

Ames extended his proscriptions to solid food in 1754, taking special aim at "Men who have their Palates solicited with Variety of delightful Tastes," such as "high relished Sauces . . . which contain in Embryo the first Seeds of those rebellious Distempers which spring in a terrible manner, and cut down Millions before they have liv'd out half their Days." "More die by Gluttony, than perish by the Sword," and "Much Meat, Much Malady" were two of his predictions for that year.
Much of Ames's dietary advice is remarkably modern and sensible. For instance, in 1759 he speculated that fewer soldiers would die of "camp fever" (typhus) if they stopped eating so much beef and pork, which without grains, fruits, and vegetables "produce acrimony in the Blood, and daily dispose it to a state of Putrefaction." The "Alkaline Salts" from too much red meat led to "a stinking Breath, rotten, corroded Gums, high colour'd foetid Urine; black, blue, and brown Spots; Eruptions on the Skin; Fevers; foul Tongue, bilious and bloody Dysenteries, and other atrocious Distempers." Perhaps such horrific visions are needed today to keep us on our low-salt and cholesterol-free diets!

One of Ames's more gracious bits of medical advice was his "Page for the Ladies" in 1762. Unlike Franklin, whose almanacks were replete with proverbs and advice on women and marriage, the fairer sex is almost totally absent from Ames's pages. But in 1762 he praised women's use of tea as the center of their social gatherings as superior to men's use of punch, for tea drinkers "are more easily preserved from the Custom and Habit of drinking Spirituous Liquors, which murders Soul, Body, Estate, and Reputation." Tea was also "a Friend to the Muses, it brightens the Intellect and clears the Understanding." Ames also urged mothers to nurse their own children, and not to put them in swaddling clothes. Wet-nursing and unnecessary confinement led to frequent death of children on the one hand, and malformation of the body on the other.

Ames concluded his essays on health with the "Gentleman's Page" for 1764. He urged moderation in the use of tobacco, snuff, and punch. Ames credited tobacco with "many medicinal virtues," but he still spent most of his essay denouncing a substance possessed of "venemous qualities" that weakened the blood, destroyed the appetite, and increased the desire for strong liquor. Snuff, to be used in moderation, signified a gentleman, but "excessive Use of it produces Apoplexies and Disorders arising from the Obstructions of the Animal Spirits." And overindulgence in punch,

To the lost Wretch, who ceaseless craves the Bowl
Th'inebriating Draught such Pleasure gives,
That Reason and Religion both in vain,
Their pure and Heavenly Prohibitions urge.

Beginning with his 1755 essay, Ames began to integrate his two favorite themes of moral reform and praise for his native
land. America and New England in particular were predominantly agricultural, and thus blessed with "pure balsamic air." "Breathe not the Air of Cities, where breathless Winds imbibe Effluvia from the Sick and Dying, from the Dead, from Docks and Dunghills; where Thousands of Lungs with Exhalations foul, sate the Air with Strange Corruption, and make that vital Element a Nauseous Mass," he warned. "Sweet ambrosial breezes [which] fan the undulating Skie" could be found only a few miles from Boston, in his hometown of Dedham. Agrarian America had become Arcadian America, an unspoiled paradise. Ames was probably right for the eighteenth century, when Bostonians fled the city to avoid smallpox, and when urban infant mortality was much higher than in the countryside.

Arcadia's heroism matched her beauty. Ames extolled the virtues of exercise and "the husbandman," whose "Nerves grow firm and strong." But, for the "Son of Luxury . . . his flacid Nerves are unstrung, his Nature sinks, his Meals oppress, his Sleep is frantic with pale Spectres, coin'd in his delirious Brains." "'Twas toil that taught the Romans how to conquer," Ames argued, just as "New England's hardiest Sons . . . with the Spirit of the Romans, conquered Louisbourg." Ames was conveying to his readers a keen appreciation of their own merits. The "New Whig" ideology, that agricultural peoples, with the hardihood to preserve their virtues and freedom from the corruptions of wealth and refinement, possessed a special destiny, passed through the Ames almanacks to New England's villages.

That destiny, however, was temporarily called into question during the early days of the French and Indian War, which were disastrous for British arms. In his 1756 issue, Ames's poetry is nothing less than an epic history of the war, thus far. Ames laments Braddock's defeat outside Pittsburgh, and Governor Shirley's loss at Oswego:

You've heard the Pagan's fearful warlike Yell;
Their Clarion sound as from Jaws of Hell . . . .
Noble Heroes, most ignobly slain;
Their valiant Souls through many a gaping Wound
Left their rich Carcasses to strew the Ground.

However, the defeat of Baron Dieskau's invasion of New York in 1755, in which "proud Gallic Pow’rs / Prostrate themselves before the leaden Show’rs," raised his spirits. He called upon the "Mirmydons" of Massachusetts to be equal to their "great Leaders
true," and attributed the victory of the combined British and American force to the moral superiority of the latter, rather than the professional skill of the former. Ames took special pride in a citizen army

from Vice refin'd
Not of the Filth, but Flower of human kind!
Mother's their Sons, Wives lend their Husbands there.

He concluded a survey of the characteristics of the British colonies with the assertion that "the Breed and Disposition of the New-England People, are the most stout and warlike, and deserve the Preference in Military Affairs." Even before the French and Indian War was won, even before the British had done more than repulse an invasion, virtuous New Englanders were redeeming the ineptitude of the British regulars. Nor should it be forgotten that Massachusetts received nearly half the British reimbursement for its exertions in the war, and that about one-third of all military age men from Massachusetts served in the ranks.9

Ames's 1757 issue once again brought forth lamentations as Loudoun and Abercrombie failed in their expeditions. "Minorga's gone! Oswego too is lost. . . . These sad events have silenced my Muse." Aside from accusing his "Brethren" of having "lost the Roman Spirit" which held out the melancholy prospect that they might "be like Sheep drove into Canada," Ames devoted most of the year's wisdom to denunciations of tippling, sloth, and luxury.

Then, in 1758, Ames seems to have experienced a genuine vision. Although the military situation had not improved much for the English by late 1757, when Ames published his almanack, he still included his remarkable "Thoughts upon the past, present, and future State of North America." In the past, the French had tried to monopolize "the inestimable Country to the West," which "with infinite Justice, the English resented." The present was a time of struggle for mastery, but the English would

only win if the colonies ceased quarreling "like the petty
Kingdoms of Africa." If only they could unite!

Here we find a vast Stock of proper Materials for
the Art and Ingenuity of Man to work upon: —
Treasure of immense Worth; conceal'd from the poor
ignorant aboriginal Natives! The Curious have
observed, that the Progress of Humane Literature
(like the Sun) is from the East to the West; thus has
it travelled thro' Asia and Europe, and now is
arrived at the Eastern Shore of America. As the
Coelestial Light of the Gospel was directed here by
the Finger of GOD, it will doubtless, finally drive
the long! long! Night of Heathenish darkness from
America: — So Arts and Sciences will change the
Face of Nature in their Tour from Hence over the
Appalachian Mountains to the Western Ocean; and
as they march thro' the Vast Desert, the Residence
of Wild Beasts will be broken up, and their obscene
Howl cease for ever; — Instead of which the Stones
and Trees will dance together at the Music of
Orpheus, — the Rocks will disclose their hidden
Gems, — and the inestimable Treasures of Gold &
Silver [will] be broken up. Huge mountains of Iron
Ore are already discovered; and vast Stores are
reserved for future Generations. This Metal more
useful than Gold and Silver, will imploy Millions of
Hands, not only to form the Martial Sword, and
peaceful Share, alternately; but an Infinity of
Utensils improved in the Exercise of Art, and
Handcraft amongst Men. Nature thro' all her
Works has stamp'd Authority on this Law, namely,
"That all fit matter shall be improved to its best
Purposes." — Shall not then those vast Quarries,
that teem with mechanic Stone, — those for
Structure be piled into great Cities, — and those for
Sculpture into Statues to perpetuate the Honor of
renowned Heroes; even those who shall NOW save
their Country. — O! Ye unborn Inhabitants of
America! Should this Page escape its destin'd
Conflagration at the Year's End, and these
Alphabetical Letters remain legible, — when your
Eyes behold the Sun after he has rolled the Seasons
round for two or three centuries more, you will
know that in Anno Domini 1758 we dream'd of
your Times.

A careful reading of this famous passage reveals not only
a prophet dreaming of the future, but a patriot encouraging his
own contemporaries to be the progenitors of such a future. An
eighteenth-century almanack-maker could see the Promised Land,
and "unborn Inhabitants" would build statues to honor their
forefathers. As the diary of Nathaniel Ames, Jr., made clear, his
father's intent was to make sure that new generations adequately
appreciated their history. "Do not despise old times too much, for
remember, that 2 or 3 centurys from the time of seeing this, you
will be counted old times folks as you count us to be so now." A
great people remembered that they owed their prominence not to
themselves, but to their ancestors: "If you have more arts than we
have . . . impute it not to our inability . . . for if we had had only
those very arts that we have now, when we first came to settle in
N. America, very like we should have found out those very things
which you have the Honour to be the Inventors of." When all was
said and done, the only thing that really progressed from one
century to the next was "Vice"; material progress was a debt owed
the past. 10

The 1758 almanack is also important because the
almanack itself is elevated into an important historical document
which charts America's coming glory. An almanack was
sometimes called an "ephemis" by the colonials, as it was almost
invariably thrown out at the year's end, as are twentieth-century
calendars. Ames, however, expressed the wish that future
generations should read his work, and learn of his vision. The
heightened popularity of his almanacks over three decades, thanks
to the epic poetry celebrating contemporary achievements they
contained, gave Ames an elevated sense of their importance in
spreading to his countrymen a consciousness of America's destiny.
As historians Fred Anderson and Charles Royster have amply
demonstrated, it was also a sense of destiny which rank-and-file

soldiers in both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution carried to the battlefield.11

As the French and Indian War took an increasingly English turn, Ames's glorification of America continued. For 1759, he saw

Ten thousand Wonders open to my View,
Shine forth at once; Sieges and Storms appear,
And Wars and Conquests fill th'important Year,
Rivers of Blood I see and Hills of Slain,
An Iliad rising out of one Campaign.

If America equalled the feats of the Trojan War in 1759, she was again a newborn Rome in 1760. Ames foresaw a future in which

Stately Domes adorn the ample Square,
There sapient Senators inrobd repair.

James Wolfe's triumph on the Plains of Abraham was ordained by the Almighty, who directed his Angels to "Wing your Course to Earth . . . haste to Help of English Troops." Endowed with "Skill Divine," this "Hero, Patriot, Politician, All," was nothing less than an American Samson, destroying the "Gallic Perjury" with his final breath: "Like him of Gaza, conqu'ring in thy Fall, Gaining the greatest victory at thy Death."

Ames did not run out of encomia in the following years. If Wolfe was Samson, Jeffrey Amherst in 1761, who completed the conquest of Canada, was "Great Alexander, who the World had won . . . Inspired by Heav'n what cannot Britons do . . . Canada, like ancient Carthage fell." On a more earthly level, Ames provided in 1761 a recipe for home-made wine, on the premise that Americans could make anything that foreigners could make. In 1762, he was back to international politics, and he contrasted two regions ruled by the British. India possessed "an hundred Kings," and the throne of the Mogul Emperor was "his golden Seat [where] the dazzling Blaze / Of Diamonds, Rubies, Sapphires strike the eye." But India was also cursed with "Pagan Ignorance.... To Idol-Gods or living Brutes they Bow." America,

in contrast, was "kind Heaven's peculiar Care." Ames predicted that "in Time thy Towers will vie with Europe's pride, / And scepter'd Heads will gladly here reside." Like Benjamin Franklin, Ames hoped that someday the King of England would transfer his capital to the New World. Meanwhile, all India had to look forward to was sharing its wealth with Christians, who "with your blest faith enrich the Natives there."

Ames mustered chronologies and statistics to support his patriotic ardor. The 1762 "Brief Chronology of Remarkable Events" correctly located the "first Sparks of this dire War" in the New World with French incursions into the Ohio Valley, mentioned the importance of Washington's 1754 expedition, and all in all included fifty-six events, twenty-eight relating to Europe, Asia, Africa, and the West Indies, and a full half to North America. Chronologies were a common feature of almanacks, but none had begun so recently — they usually started with the creation of the world — or so stressed American as opposed to European events.

The statistical tables Ames borrowed for 1763 from Benjamin Franklin's "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," and Reverend Ezra Stiles's "curious" table on the continued geometrical increase of New England's population only added to the case for American greatness.12 For he saw in the demographic explosion of the colonies nothing less than the fulfillment of a prophecy God had made to Abraham in Genesis 13:14 and 15, where "I will make thy Seed as the Dust of the Earth, so that if a Man can Number the Dust of the Earth, then shall thy Seed also be numbered." Then followed an astonishing remark: "We hold our lands under no other Lord but He who gave the Land of Canaan to Abraham." Gone were the triumphs of British arms, or any allegiance to King and Parliament. Here is the voice of the old Puritans. Ames goes on at length about how God had miraculously preserved the colonists during early hard times, "and in our memories are many recent Instances of the Interposition of Providence," especially during the recent war. "Great things are come to pass in America, which every Year gradually unfolds and opens more and more to our Views."

One more argument for American destiny that Ames presented was her ability to produce a genuinely great man. He

was none other than almanack-maker Benjamin Franklin. In Poor Richard's Almanack, Franklin had presented himself as the hero by virtue of "Public Spirit," and America (especially Pennsylvania, in his case) as a land whose virtuous people far outshone the pretentious courts and crowns of Europe. Ames followed suit. In 1755, his poetry began with God's creation, described the wonders of the universe, and concluded with

Who'ere presum'd, till FRANKLIN led the Way,  
To climb the amazing Hight of Heaven,  
And rob the Sky of its Tremendous Thunder.

Franklin had written the last chapter in intellectual history thus far, the man who finally permitted a glimpse into the principles by which the Almighty had structured the cosmos. Eight years later, Ames praised Franklin the demographer, who wrote in his "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind" that in America the land was so plentiful that "the Farmer may have Land for nothing," in an "extent of Territory large enough for a Kingdom." In the last of the Ames, Sr., almanacks, which was completed in 1764, it was "the Bostonian the Hon. Benjamin Franklin" that Ames praised, whose observations were "justly held in the greatest honor by all the polite and enlightened Nations of Europe," although Franklin had left Boston at the age of seventeen, and never returned! Calling attention to yet another of Franklin's contributions, Ames predicted that "American Bards upon the GLASSYCHORD" — the glass harmonica that Franklin had invented — will "chant forth his honor for generations to come."

Nathaniel Ames, Sr., died on July 11, 1764, so the almanack for that year was the last he completed. It is only fitting that the final essay he published, "An Introduction to Agriculture," should begin: "If we may judge by Analogy, and the progressive Increase of the Inhabitants of this Continent, the Kingdoms of the Earth and the Glory of the World will be transplanted to America." Ames himself had already done much to proclaim that this glory was not only forthcoming, but to a large extent it was already here. Favorably comparing his countrymen and their exploits to the achievements of Greek,

Roman, and Biblical history and heroes, presenting statistical and chronological evidence, and waxing poetic in his praise of the virtuous yeoman, Ames, like the preachers of mid-eighteenth century New England, found in war and expansion a revival of the Bay Colony's mission. America, especially Massachusetts, was once again at the center of both divine and human history; the two million or so colonists, who without British aid could not defend themselves against less than a tenth their number of French and Indians, were once again certain that God would grant them the wealth, power, and fame that John Winthrop had predicted in 1629, when he spoke of "A City Upon a Hill." Only now it was the almanack, the unofficial, humble organ of the common folk, which trumpeted the destiny once proclaimed by magistrates and clergymen.
BOOK REVIEWS


The Puritans recognized the reality of evil in their society, but saw no causal connection between crime and poverty. They extended sympathy to the victim, not to the one who chose crime over honest living, and believed that society owed offenders nothing except a fair trial and the opportunity to defend themselves. The convicted were expected to pay for what they had done to both individuals and society. Although offenders were held strictly accountable, they were not considered to be permanently excluded from society. The colonial leaders endeavored to turn wrongdoers into honest citizens. Forgiveness and rehabilitation, however, came only after offenders had been punished, not as substitutes for punishment. The punishment was not only a deterrence, but also the fulfillment of the state's obligation to the victim, who had waived the right to private vengeance because it would punish the offenders. Thus, offenders were punished, not just for the sake of punishing them, but of holding society together by preserving public justice and the social contract.

Such is the basic theme of Edgar J. McManus, convincingly demonstrated throughout his Law and Liberty in Early New England. Drawing upon secondary works and well-exploited printed sources, the author presents a balanced survey of criminal law in early New England. Especially noteworthy is his comparative approach, treating New Plymouth, New Haven, and Connecticut as variations on the Massachusetts theme, and Rhode Island as a separate, unique legal entity, strictly adhering to English common law.

The author covers a wide range of subjects, and makes a number of stimulating assertions. He discusses patterns of criminality, including sexual harassment and the sexual abuse of
children, and he reports that petty theft, illicit sex, and drinking violations were predominant crimes. The laws of England did not apply automatically to New England, but were adopted only to the extent that the assembly incorporated them into colony law. Scriptural law served as a backup system of law, to remedy defects in the statutes, and it became a force for progress and legal reform. McManus argues that the New Englanders expanded the common-law definition of self-defense, and included the defense of property, in addition to the defense of human life, as justifiable homicide. On witchcraft, the author maintains that during the pre-Salem period, there were few executions, because the conviction had to satisfy the two-witness rule requiring eyewitness testimony or the accused's confession. The Salem witchcraft trials of 1692-93 deviated from the long-established tradition, sparing from the gallows those who confessed, while sending to the gallows those who asserted their innocence to the end, and who falsely accused no-one.

Early American legal historians may find fault in some of the author's arguments. His contention that the law made explicit allowances for the social standing of offenders in proscribing penalties (sentences of whipping for low-class offenders, and fines for the upper-class), for example, is overdrawn, because sentences usually stipulated the choice, fine or whipping, at the fixed rate. Similarly, his insistence that smoking was discouraged because it not only increased the risk of fire, which would destroy property, but "was also annoying and dangerous to the health of nonsmokers," is too farfetched. The author's statement that Indian crimes were infrequent because the colonial control over them was effective does not accurately reflect the real situation. Court records (both printed and manuscript) reveal that native Americans committed more crimes proportionately than whites. Nor were Blacks treated much less discriminately than Indians, as McManus contends.

Some of the secondary works the author relies on should have been more closely scrutinized. Francis Jennings' *The Invasion of America* and Yasuhide Kawashima's *Puritan Justice and the Indian*, which makes a frontal attack on Jennings' work, are lumped together as works challenging Alden Vaughan's view, in his *New England Frontier*. A more detailed index seems desirable, also. Such items as "self-defense," "victim," and "Child abuse," which the author discussed in the text, were not included in the index.