

**FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA:**  
Protecting Nature in Postwar New Hampshire

K.A. Jarvis  
Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press. 2020. ix and 196 pp.  
ISBN: 978-1625345011

Reviewed by Jonathan Leonard  
University of Connecticut  
Department of Geography

*From the Mountains to the Sea: Protecting Nature in Postwar New Hampshire* explores the underlying *sense of place* that led residents to band together in preserving their way of life. The author introduces three distinct areas in New Hampshire with varying challenges associated with their conservation, as they each invoke a different sense of meaning and importance to the people of the *Granite State*. The author, Dr. Kimberly A. Jarvis, is a professor of history at Doane University and specializes in women's studies, and the conservation movement in the United States. Dr. Jarvis is also the author of the book, *Franconia Notch and the Women Who Saved It*, and several journal articles and conference papers.

From the book's introduction to the second chapter, the author introduces Franconia Notch, a region in the White Mountains, and follows the campaigns to save the area from excessive timber harvesting practices, and the proposed construction of an interstate highway. The battle, generally between official entities and the people who live there, lasted decades. The purpose of the proposed interstate was to connect the *north country* to the rest of southern New Hampshire, in the interest of increasing economic development in the more rural northern part of the state. In addition, an interstate would also increase tourism to the notch, as vacationers from the more urban parts of New England and New York were a major source of income for many inhabitants in the region. The author does a wonderful job extrapolating the details and local politics that took place over this decades-long debate. Dr. Jarvis emphasizes that the will of the people was not necessarily to preserve the notch *as is* and *untouched*, but rather it was the recognition that economic development is needed, yet it must be done in a way that ensures that the character of their land is maintained. At the time, a natural land feature in Franconia Notch, the Old Man of the Mountain, was regarded as the very soul of the Granite State. The Old Man was a large granite cliff edge in the shape of a face that appeared to *watch over the land*. By the late 20th century, in what can be seen as one of the greatest compromises between economic development and environmental conservation, a gentler *scenic parkway* was built through the notch, instead of the more environmentally destructive interstate highway.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore the campaigns to save Sandwich Notch, a region also in the White Mountains, in the town of Sandwich which is fifteen miles southeast of Franconia. While it is natural to assume that the reasons to save the notches of Franconia and Sandwich are similar, they are different cases with differing physical and human geographies. The campaign

efforts in Franconia Notch were focused mainly on saving the area from the construction of an interstate highway, while Sandwich Notch residents rejected the commercialization of their town. By the early 20th century, Sandwich Notch was becoming a popular destination for the establishment of summer homes by wealthy city slickers in nearby cities. This was viewed by the locals as ruining the identity of the area. New Englanders are known for being nostalgic and place great emphasis on concepts such as history and tradition. That being the case, Sandwich Notch was seen as a place in the region which represented the *old New England* way of life, and it must be preserved. Efforts to save Sandwich Notch were focused on the area along Sandwich Notch Road, one of the first roads built in the area in the 17th century. Besides the value of the road itself, there are several features that have historical importance such as old foundations, cellars, and stone walls. This section of the book, like previous chapters, explains the long process with regard to conservation and that baby steps were often necessary. For example, the first success in the process of Sandwich Notch conservation was the simple, yet drawn out, act of making Sandwich Notch Road a *scenic road* in order to protect the natural and anthropogenic features that are along it.

In Chapter 5, the book's final chapter, the author leaves the mountains of the central and northern part of the state for the coastal region. The state of New Hampshire has the shortest coastline in the United States with just over eighteen miles of seashore. If we include the Great Bay Estuary, which is adjacent to the town of Durham, that coastline more than doubles. With such a limited shoreline, it is expected that residents living there would fight fiercely to the prospect of any possible environmental hazard. Unlike the previous two regions, Durham is not a wild and sparsely populated area as it has been well populated since the 17th century due to its proximity to the coast. In 1973, a new company called Olympic Refineries developed plans to build what would have been the world's largest oil refinery in Durham, but the town's residents mobilized to prevent what they viewed as a threat to their town. Here the argument was not necessarily about preserving the untouched beauty of the seashore, but more so to preserve a way of life that residents have known for generations. For example, many in the town were aware of catastrophic oil spills in other parts of the country and feared that if this happened in their town, what would become of the fishing industry that so many have relied on for generations? Most agreed that an oil refinery was necessary for the economy; however, the common concern was simply that it shouldn't be built *here*. What I found interesting about this chapter is how the author provides some background connecting the events in small-town America to the world stage and the 1973 OPEC Oil Embargo in the Middle East. Following the passing of legislation, the residents of Durham used the concept of "Home Rule" to combat the to combat the oil executives of New York City, the publisher of the state's only daily newspaper, and even their own governor.

The merits of this book are considerable. The author uses a wide array of sources which helped to paint an honest picture of the modern histories regarding three distinct towns in New England. It is enjoyable to see old newspaper clippings and flyers created by several environmental organizations included. Although, the only examples shown in all three conflicts are from the perspective of the preservationists. For instance, if there were Sandwich Notch real estate advertisements or information flyers in support of Olympic Refineries, it would have been

an entertaining contrast to include in this book. However, those were the losing parties after all, and history is commonly written by the victor. Also, Dr. Jarvis does an excellent job in showing that, while concepts like ethics and moral duty are commonly mentioned as principal driving forces for environmental conservation, the *sense of place* made up of personal connections such as nostalgia, identity, and sentimentality are also powerful factors.

Overall, I highly recommend this book as it gives us an intimate look at the struggles of residents in rural New England in the 20th century. It isn't explicitly stated in the book but, what is also refreshing is how the author effortlessly weaves concepts from different fields such as history, political science, geography and more, in order to give an honest picture of the happenings in small-town America. In addition, it is intriguing how the author captures what might be the leading motivation that convinced the majority of the people to support the protection of the land: the New Englander's deep and undeniable *sense of place*.