

21H.421 Introduction to Environmental History (Spring 2004)

Assignment 2: Bibliographic Essay

Due: In class, Tuesday March 16

Length: Approximately 5 pages, plus annotated bibliography and notes

Overview

In this assignment you are going to write a bibliographic essay about one part of an important event in the environmental history of the local region, the creation of the Quabbin Reservoir. In class you will be assigned one of the following topics to concentrate upon:

- Climate and Weather
- Geological Setting
- Health and Disease
- Boston's Pre-Quabbin Water
- Engineering
- Drowned Farms
- Dislocated Residents and Residences
- Images of the Old Days
- Changes in the Land and Landscape
- Recreation and Conservation
- The Country and the City
- Wildlife
- The Quabbin Reservoir: Pro and Con
- Maps and Geographical Setting
- News
- Public Good vs. Private Property

In a bibliographic essay the goal is to give yourself a sense of how previous writers have approached the topic you will research and write about, and to give your reader some idea of the outlines of this particular scholarly literature. To get an idea of what your final product will look like, start by reading the bibliographic essay in the back of William Cronon's Changes in the Land. Since your essay will need to be shorter than his, focus on the section entitled "The New England Indians," on pp. 238-244.

Background: Engineering the Quabbin Reservoir

"Quabbin Reservoir was Boston's fourth westward reach for a pure upland source of water that could be delivered by gravity and not require filtration. Construction of the Quabbin required impoundment of the Swift River and the taking of the towns of Dana, Enfield, Greenwich, and Prescott. In 1926, construction began on the Wachusett-Colebrook Tunnel, which is now the eastern section of the Quabbin Tunnel. Surplus flow in the Ware River was diverted to the Wachusett Reservoir during eight high-water

months of the year and increased the safe yield by 40 mgd. During the 1930s, the Wachusett-Colebrook tunnel was extended to the Swift River. It is a two-way tunnel: water flows west from the Ware River to the Quabbin during the high-water months and then east from the Quabbin to Wachusett at other times of the year. Construction on the Quabbin Reservoir began in 1936. Filling commenced on August 14, 1939 and was completed in 1946 when water first flowed over the spillway. The Quabbin Reservoir was filled with water from the Swift River and flood skimming from the Ware River during eight months of the year. At the time, the 412 billion gallon reservoir was the largest man-made reservoir in the world which was devoted solely to water supply.”¹

Finding the Sources

There are many ways to find sources for historical projects. In this assignment you are going to start in one of the MIT libraries and visit others as necessary. We have put a set of books related to the history of the Quabbin Reservoir on reserve at the Humanities Library (Building 14S). You will likely need to consult books, articles, maps and other sources from other MIT libraries that you find using Barton. As you get deeper into researching your topic, you might also find useful materials at local town libraries (see the online catalog that covers most of the area’s public libraries: <http://www.mln.lib.ma.us/>).

As you work through the assignment, you are going to be organizing your search by systematically trying different methods of searching.

- 0. Reference librarians.** Asking a librarian about resources for your specific topic is almost always the best way to get started. Make notes about what he or she tells you.
- 1. Encyclopedias and Dictionaries.** These come in two varieties: general, like Encyclopaedia Britannica, and specialized, like the Encyclopedia of Climate and Weather or the Encyclopedia of Ephemera. Since this is a topic of mostly local interest, you might look to an encyclopedia for articles of general related interest. Make notes on what you find. If there are important people you should know about, check the entries in the Dictionary of American Biography. To find reference books on a particular topic, librarians often turn to First Stop: The Universal Index to Subject Encyclopedias or the Guide to Reference Books. All of these resources are in the MIT Library system.
- 2. Subject Headings and the Library Catalog.** The next step is to find out how sources that you might be interested in have been catalogued. In most of the branches of the MIT library, you will find the Library of Congress Subject Headings. This work will help you figure out what subjects to search under when you consult Barton. Make a list of relevant headings and keywords.

¹ “Quabbin Reservoir and Ware River Construction: 1926 –1946”
<http://www.mwra.state.ma.us/04water/graphic/largeQ.gif> [Accessed February 26, 2004].

- 3. Shelf Browsing and Call Number Scanning.** The system that MIT libraries use to organize their books is known as the Library of Congress Classification. Books are arranged so that those on similar subjects tend to be near one another on the shelf. What this means is that you should always look at the books on the shelf near the one that you are actually looking for, because they may be relevant for your project. You can also do this electronically. For example, suppose that you find out about a book with the call numbers beginning with QH105 and you don't find the book in Barton because the MIT libraries don't own it. However, you do find other books which might be promising, such as Thomas Conuel's Quabbin: The Accidental Wilderness, with the call number QH105.M4 C66x. Make a note of any books that you find by shelf browsing or scanning call numbers.
- 4. Indexes to Journal Articles.** Besides books, you will also be interested in finding articles in scholarly journals. These are not catalogued in Barton, but do appear in other indexes. Depending on your topic, you will want to check the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, the Social Sciences Index, the Humanities Index, Historical Abstracts, and Lexis-Nexis. There are also more specialized indexes which might be of use. Make notes on the articles that you do find.
- 5. Keyword Searching.** At this point it is time to go online. Start at the MIT libraries website and choose VERA. From there you can get to any number of electronic journals and databases. Start with the Web of Science database. This will help you to find recent journal articles. Many of them will be available electronically through VERA. Try a Google search where you type in a lot of the keywords that you have come up with so far.
- 6. Citation and Related-Record Searching.** The Web of Science database allows you to do two further kinds of search. First, if you have an important book or article, Web of Science can help you find many articles which cite that source. Second, if you have an important article, Web of Science can help you find articles that are similar to it. Take one of the articles that you have found and try both citation and related-records searches. As always, keep track of what you find.

Keeping Track of Your Work

As you search for sources, it is crucial to keep track of your work. Whenever you find out about a potential source, make a note of the following:

- Author/ Editor
- Title
- Publisher
- Date
- Page numbers
- Call number
- Physical Location or URL
- Way that you found out about the source
- Whether or not you looked at it
- Additional notes

Many people like to use 3x5 cards to keep track of this stuff, but you can also write it on a pad of paper or enter it into a database on your computer. You should also make a list of things that you checked that didn't work out. For example, if you looked in a specialized encyclopedia but didn't find any relevant articles, make a note of that. If you looked for a book and it wasn't on the shelf, make a note. Keep all of your notes, **as you will need to hand them in with your assignment.**

Making an Annotated Bibliography

After you have done your research you will have dozens of sources, not all of them relevant. Go through your sources and pick out about ten that seem particularly relevant or interesting. Go to the library and get copies of those sources (or read through them at the library). You are not going to read every word, but you are going to skim through each source. As you do, make notes. What is this source about? How might it be used to write an environmental history of the Quabbin? What are some the things the author concentrates on? What does she or he ignore?

Writing the Bibliographic Essay

Once you have made your annotated bibliography you are ready to start the final part of this assignment, writing your bibliographic essay. Pick a nice descriptive title (or think about one as you write). Organize your material so that you have an introduction, some paragraphs about the sources that you have chosen to write about, and a conclusion. Unlike assignment 1, the bibliographic essay does not necessarily need to have an argument, but it should have a coherent organizing frame. This might come naturally from the sources you've found (for example, many of them might fall clearly into distinct interpretive approaches) or you may have to impose a chronological or thematic logic that allows you to move your discussion from one source to another. Still, this is a type of essay; it is not enough to hand in your annotated bibliography. For a reader who knows nothing about wildlife management in the watershed, for example, where is the best place to find background information? Which books or articles have good information about chronology? Which sources provide good visual images?

What You Have to Hand In

To construct your bibliographic essay you went through a process of finding a lot of stuff and gradually refining it. We would like to see your rough notes for the project (be they index cards, database printouts or handwritten notes). You also have to hand in your annotated bibliography (which should be alphabetized by the authors' last names) and, of course, your five-page essay.

Feel free to consult with us at any stage of the process if you are having a hard time with the assignment or would like to talk about finding further sources.