



Editorial

REAL estate, a topic much in the news of late, also attracts the attention of the four authors of *NEQ*'s September 2010 issue. From a rocky island off the coast of Maine to its soaring pine forests, from the tony precincts of Beacon Hill to the refreshing landscapes of New York's Central Park and Boston's Emerald Necklace, our writers trace men's confrontations with and retreat into wilderness as well as their attempts to sculpt the land to extract from it both profit and pleasure.

The issue opens with the dramatic recovery of eleven hapless sailors from the inhospitable confines of Maine's Boon Island. In his retelling of the classic 1710 shipwreck of the *Nottingham Galley*, Stephen Erickson unravels the event's back story, a web of intrigue involving politics, mutiny, smuggling, class conflict, reputation, and the power of the written and printed word. In the process, he follows the life of the ship's captain, John Deane, a mysterious figure of uncertain loyalties, dubious principles, and distinct ambitions who spends his life trying to vindicate himself from charges of cowardice and more.

Erickson's narrative ranges over land and sea, from Boon Island to England to Russia and back. The issue's next essay centers on Boston, a city that, between 1794 and 1817, was rapidly expanding. Then, as now, real estate development was a game of chance that rewarded the clever, lucky investor but could crush those less fortunate and more timid. As Jay Wickersham introduces his narrative, "This is a story about money: how Boston architect Charles Bulfinch went bankrupt; how his leading client, Harrison Gray Otis, grew wealthy; and how the architect felt about the two men's relative failures and

The New England Quarterly, vol. LXXXIII, no. 3 (September 2010). © 2010 by The New England Quarterly. All rights reserved.

successes. It is also a story that dramatizes the difficulties of architectural practice in the early years of the United States, showing how the choice of a career and the pursuit of status, riches, and influence could make or break a man.”

As workers crowded into developing cities like Boston in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, professionals and clerks as well as shopkeepers and teachers sought a summer respite at seaside resorts and through country excursions. Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson were among those vacationers as well as among the growing number of writers who described their holiday experiences. As William W. Stowe demonstrates, however, “far from mere travelogues, Emerson’s ‘The Adirondacs’ and the essays that make up Thoreau’s *The Maine Woods* show how two of our most gifted writers used both the wilderness experience itself and the freedom and isolation that the wilderness vacation offered to confront ideas that were central to their thinking and to create texts that are appealing in their unassuming simplicity and profound in their implications.”

As Andrew Menard argues, along with Thoreau and Emerson, Frederick Law Olmsted believed that “cities commonly ‘give the human senses not room enough.’” But whereas Thoreau escaped to the forests of Maine and Emerson to the Adirondacks, Olmsted sought out a “wilderness” nearby that could impart a similar “‘tranquility and rest to the mind,’” a leisurely retreat that might “guarantee the ‘health, strength, and morality’ of city dwellers.” Only “a fully engineered landscape” located within the city’s precincts, he insisted, could offer such a democratically available, and hence broadly beneficial, sense of enlarged freedom.

As our summer sojourns come to an end this September, I invite you to experience the vicarious thrills of a perilous sea voyage, heady real estate and city planning ventures, and philosopher expeditions. I invite you to take a vacation of the mind expertly guided by Messrs. Erickson, Wickersham, Stowe, and Menard.

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS