

Reflections in Bullough's Pond

By Diana Muir

University Press of New England

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Prepared by Sandra Leifeld
Newton Free Library, Newton, MA

Massachusetts
Award Winner
2001



SUMMARY:

Those of us who are interested in the history of New England, be it ecological or historical, will be grateful that Diana Muir decided to buy the house across from Bullough's Pond. Her daily view of the pond and reflections on area history have inspired a powerful and important book about the Industrial Revolution in New England: the why's, how's, and "now what" for our six states.

With engaging and accomplished storytelling, Muir takes the reader from the end of the Ice Age and Neolithic Revolution to the lives of Native peoples in what is now New England. She discusses the emergence of a Native agrarian society; the arrival of the European colonists; and the burgeoning new industries of farming (with its large-scale land clearing), cod fishing, and shipping. All the while, she explains, the population is growing – and the natural resources are disappearing.

Chapter by chapter Muir brings to life the ingenuity and inventiveness of the New England colonists as they strove to overcome each new obstacle. And the obstacles were many: war, disappearing natural resources, even the steam engine brought challenges to the early New Englanders. Today, she writes, we continue to be shaped by the values and traits of our earlier ancestors – but at what risk to land and air?

Reflections in Bullough's Pond is a readable and engaging book with fresh insights into our issues and concerns today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does Muir present her information (chronological, thematic, etc)? Is this effective? Why or why not?
2. Does Muir do a good job of engaging the general as well as local reader? Discuss her use of background material.

3. Does Muir's presentation of scientific and historical information make the book interesting? If so, how?
4. Discuss the tone of the book. Does it shift? If so, when and why?
5. Does the book give you a new perspective on New England's role in the Industrial Revolution?
6. Do you feel this book is relevant to today's society?
7. How does this book relate to other books you may have read on the subject?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Reprinted from: <http://www.dianamuir.com>

Diana Muir is an award-winning author whose most celebrated works explore the landscape and history of New England. Her most recent, 'Reflections in Bullough's Pond,' received the Massachusetts Book Award as the best non-fiction book of 2000.

A reader of books in massive quantities and a lover of library research, Muir delights in painting the past for modern readers. Her lucid and lyrical accounts, backed by careful documentation, have earned her readers and fans both among the general public and in academic circles.

Though her books are written for a general audience, her work in the social history of Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July is considered foundational in the study of human celebration. And 'Reflections' has been adopted by several college courses as a standard text on the interplay between man and nature.

Muir also has written a pair of children's books on the Maine woods and the ice trade, which have delighted a generation of New England schoolchildren. Yankee Magazine named her first, 'Giants in the Land,' one of the 40 greatest children's books of all time.

Born a Connecticut Yankee, Muir now lives with her husband on the banks of an old mill pond in the western suburbs of Boston. She has three children, all of whom have flown the nest. This has given her more time to write, but she says it makes her sad.

Other Books by the Author: (Diana Karter Appelbaum)

Adult: The Glorious Fourth: An American Holiday, An American History; Thanksgiving: An American Holiday, An American History.

Children: Cocoa Ice; Giants in the Land

ACTIVITIES:

Places of Interest to Visit:

Asa Waters Estate. Millbury, MA. 508-865-4563. <http://asawaters.org/home.html>

Explorer Cruise. Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. 401-724-2200.
<http://www.tourblackstone.com>

Museum of Work & Culture. Woonsocket, RI. 401-769-9675.
<http://www.woonsocket.org/workandculture.htm>

River Bend Farm Visitor's Center at Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park.
Uxbridge, MA. 508-278-7604. <http://www.mass.gov/dem/parks/blst.htm>

Slater Mill. Pawtucket, RI. 401-725-8638. <http://www.slatermill.org>

Walkabout Tours. Heritage Corridor. 401-762-0250.
<http://www.nps.gov/blac/what/recreation.htm>

Waters Farm. Sutton, MA. 508-865-4886. <http://www.watersfarm.com/>

Willard House & Clock Museum. Grafton, MA. 508-839-3500.
<http://www.willardhouse.org>

Millville Lock. Millville, MA. 508-278-7604.
<http://www.blackstonedaily.com/millvillelock.htm>

HELPFUL LINKS:

Diana Muir website: <http://www.dianamuir.com>

Online interviews with Diana Muir

http://www.rebeccasreads.com/interviews/authors/dia_muir_interview01.html

http://www.theconnection.org/shows/2000/08/20000821_b_main.asp

Further Titles of Interest:

Archer, Richard. *Fissures in the Rock: New England in the Seventeenth Century*.
Hanover, NH, 2001.

Bezis-Selfa, John. *Forging America: Ironworkers, Adventurers, and the Industrious*

- Revolution*. Ithaca, NY, 2004.
- Burrows, Fredrika A. *Cannonballs & Cranberries*. Taunton, MA, 1976.
- Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York, 1983.
- Dublin, Thomas. *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution*. Ithaca, NY, 1994.
- Green, Constance McL. *Eli Whitney and the Birth of American Technology*. New York, 1956.
- Rivard, Paul E. *A New Order of Things: How the Textile Industry Transformed New England*. Hanover, NH, 2002.
- Steinberg, Theodore. *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Water of New England*. New York, 1991.
- Thorson, Robert M. *Stone By Stone: The Magnificent History in New England's Stone Walls*. New York, 2002.



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