

Udo J. Hebel, ed. (2016)

New England Forefathers' Day Orations, 1770-1865

The volume presents the first comprehensive documentation of New England Forefathers' Day orations. Between the American Revolution and the Civil War, Forefathers' Day orations were the cornerstone of anniversary performances dedicated to the commemoration of the arrival of the Mayflower and the Pilgrim Fathers in Plymouth in 1620 and the ensuing foundation of the first Puritan colony in New England. The Forefathers' Day celebrations of December 22, and the oratory of these festivities in particular, contributed significantly to the construction of a national U.S.-American myth of origin and the invention of a national U.S.-America historical and political tradition. First established in Plymouth in the late 1760s and flowering in Massachusetts and other New England states well into the nineteenth century, Forefathers' Day followed the expansion of the United States to the South, Midwest, and West until the Civil War. In the antebellum times, Forefathers' Day was frequently seen to equal the Fourth of July in cultural and political significance. The annotated edition of thirty-one Forefathers' Day orations from 1770 through 1865 collects representative examples from different historical periods and from different regions of the United States. The selection of anniversary addresses is accompanied by introductions to the respective celebrations, orators, and contexts and by reprints of historical paintings and popular prints of New England history. The volume documents the use of early colonial New England history for the purpose of national identity constructions in a crucial period of U.S.-American cultural history.