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*Katherine Grandjean*

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KATHERINE GRANDJEAN

## American Passage



The Communications Frontier  
in Early New England

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New England was built on letters. Its colonists left behind thousands of them, brittle and browned and crumpled with curls of purple script. How they were delivered, though, remains mysterious. We know surprisingly little about the way news and people traveled in early America. No postal service or newspapers existed until 1704 would readers be able to glean news from a public print. But there was, in early New England, an unseen world of travelers, rumors, movement, and letters. Unearthing that early American communications frontier, *American Passage* retells the story of English colonization as less orderly and more precarious than the quiet villages of popular imagination. The English quest to control the northeast entailed a great struggle to control the flow of information. Even when it was meant solely for English eyes, news did not pass solely through English hands. Algonquian messengers carried letters along footpaths, and Dutch ships took them across waterways. Who could travel where, who controlled the routes winding through the woods, who dictated what news might be sent in Katherine Grandjean's hands, these questions reveal a new dimension of contest and conquest in the northeast. Gaining control of New England was not solely a matter of consuming territory, of transforming woods into farms. It also meant mastering the lines of communication.

In six chapters covering a century, Grandjean explains the transformation of England's holdings from a handful of isolated settlements to a connected array of towns by tracing the movement of letters and oral messages over land and water. By doing so, she demonstrates convincingly that information exchange was a crucial element for English expansion. *American Passage* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of 17th-century New England. (Richard D. Brown, co-author of *Taming Lust: Crimes against Nature in the Early Republic*) An impressive achievement. Grandjean offers new insights into the history of early New England, when the English presence was little more than a few scattered, disconnected, and vulnerable outposts at a great distance from England itself. Carefully researched, elegantly crafted, and clearly written, *American Passage* captures the primitiveness, contingency, porousness, and fluidity of English settlement in an environment where their communications were heavily reliant on Native Americans. (Konstantin Dierks, author of *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America*)  
About the Author Katherine Grandjean is Assistant Professor of History at Wellesley College.