

INTRODUCTION: A DREAM COUNTRY

I have learned this, at least, from my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854



THAT TITLE WON'T WORK, James Truslow Adams was told. No one will pay three dollars for a book about a dream.

Adams, author of a series of popular books on American history—think of him as the David McCullough or Ken Burns of the 1930s—was seeking to broaden his literary horizons. A man with elite bloodlines dating back to the seventeenth century, when one of his ancestors came to Virginia as an indentured servant and ended up in the landowning class, Adams, born in 1878, had nevertheless grown up under relatively modest circumstances. (His father was an unsuccessful Wall Street broker.) After graduating from Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute in 1898 and earning a master's degree in philosophy at Yale in 1900, he went to work on Wall Street himself, making enough money to devote himself to writing. His local histories of Long Island brought him some renown and attracted the attention of presidential adviser Col. Edward M. House, who hired him to assemble data for the Paris Peace Conference following World War I, which he attended as a cartographer in the American delegation. After the war, Adams wrote his “New England trilogy”—which included the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Founding of New England* (1921)—and gained scholarly recognition for *Provincial Society, 1690–1763* (1927), a volume in the highly regarded

