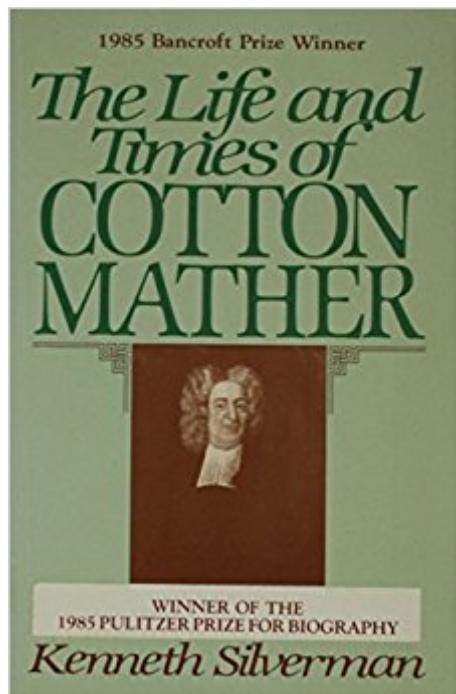


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# The Life And Times Of Cotton Mather



## **Synopsis**

Reintroducing Kenneth Silverman's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of the most celebrated of all New England Puritans, at once a sophisticated work which succeeds admirably in presenting a complete portrait of a complex man and a groundbreaking study that accurately portrays Mather and his contemporaries as the first true American rather than European expatriates. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This had rave reviews as a biography, so I bought it. As soon as I opened it up, I realized I did not have a huge interest in Cotton Mather. I suspect it is fine for someone who cares about the era or the religiosity. I discovered I did not, and stopped reading after 50 pages. What writing I saw was good, but not compelling enough to make me spend two weeks on a topic I don't care much about. This happens a lot with biographies, which are often way too detailed for my taste.

Like the product, like the service, it is great as usual. Use these services you will be pleased.

AAAAA +++++

Very readable, Mather was nuts, got to remember they thought devils floating around in the air all over the place, not quite the rationalists we might think.

When I find a book like this, I am so grateful. Kenneth Silverman illuminates the life of a difficult, important, complex man as well as his period in our history, both of which are generally shrouded in the darkness of the witch trials, like a guilty memory in our unconscious.

I can't imagine too many Christians wading through a 400+ page biography about a man that most of them have never heard about, but they should. If nothing else, they would gain tremendous insight about life in early America, especially the Boston society. Along the way they would learn much about one of the most interesting and prominent characters of the colonial times. Mather came from incredible stock; the uniting of the most honored families in early New England, the Cottons and the Mathers - both grandfathers being famous Puritan preachers in early colonial history. Cotton, obviously named after both grandfathers may seem like a strange name until you know that his own father, also a well-known minister was named Increase (Cotton named one of his sons Increase, and later had a grandson by the same name; how did such a name fall out of favor?). Cotton lived from 1663 to 1728 and few have crammed so much into a lifetime. He preached hour-and-a-half long sermons (and on at least one occasion his pastoral prayer lasted two hours) at Boston's largest church, North Church. He studied medicine and science, fulfilled the full complement of the pastorate, often dabbled in politics, wrote almost 400 books and numerous articles and pamphlets. All of this while battling various illnesses, a stuttering problem, burying 13 of his 15 children and marrying three times. With all of this production nevertheless Mather is best known for his role in the Salem witch trials and executions, a role that has been somewhat exaggerated. The bigger picture of his life would reveal that in addition to his ecclesiastical achievements he also wrote the definitive history of colonial living in America, was the first to use inoculations (smallpox) and may have actually been the first to discover the germ theory of disease. Still, Cotton Mather was an odd man for a Puritan pastor. He communed with angels, received "Particular Faiths" (words of knowledge), often doubted his own salvation and flirted for a time with Arianism. In addition, he battled for many years with debt, and more seriously with his last wife, who left him for a time. What a life! The Life and Times of Cotton Mather is an interesting read. I am glad I took the time.

"In his curiousness, epic reach, and quirkily ingenious individualism he was...the first unmistakably American figure in the nation's history". With his Puritan background, weird name, and early involvement in the Salem witch-trials, Mather has - in Silverman's observation - become a "national gargoyle" in the US: a type of bigotry, superstition, and wrathful religion. Silverman's biography

gives us all Mather's many faults and human failings (some of which repel, some of which amuse), but there is so much more here: no grim black-hatted witch-finder, Mather was in fact an early scientist and a witty man of the world who shocked ministerial colleagues with his view that luxuriant wigs were an "innocent fashion" rather than to be condemned. He was also in many ways humane, preaching Christian ecumenism (within limits), opposing religious persecution, and promoting smallpox inoculation in the face of sceptics.

Be prepared to put away your cartoon caricature of Cotton Mather and discover a complex man. very committed to faith in a unique period of American history. The book is balanced, factual and well written and provides substantive understanding of the complexities of early American church and society. While it is easy to criticize the past, we learn nothing from it unless we delve deeply into the people and society in which it took place. Silverman does a very good job of that and reveals a surprisingly multi-dimensional Cotton Mather who, though he participated in matters unimaginably horrible to us, was actually in some ways a surprisingly enlightened force during his time.

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