“THE BOND OF UNION”: YANKEE PROTESTANTISM, NATIONAL AMBITION, AND THE ERIE CANAL, 1817–1851

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

"BOND OF UNION": YANKEE PROTESTANTISM,
NATIONAL AMBITION, AND THE
ERIE CANAL, 1817–1851

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Date_____

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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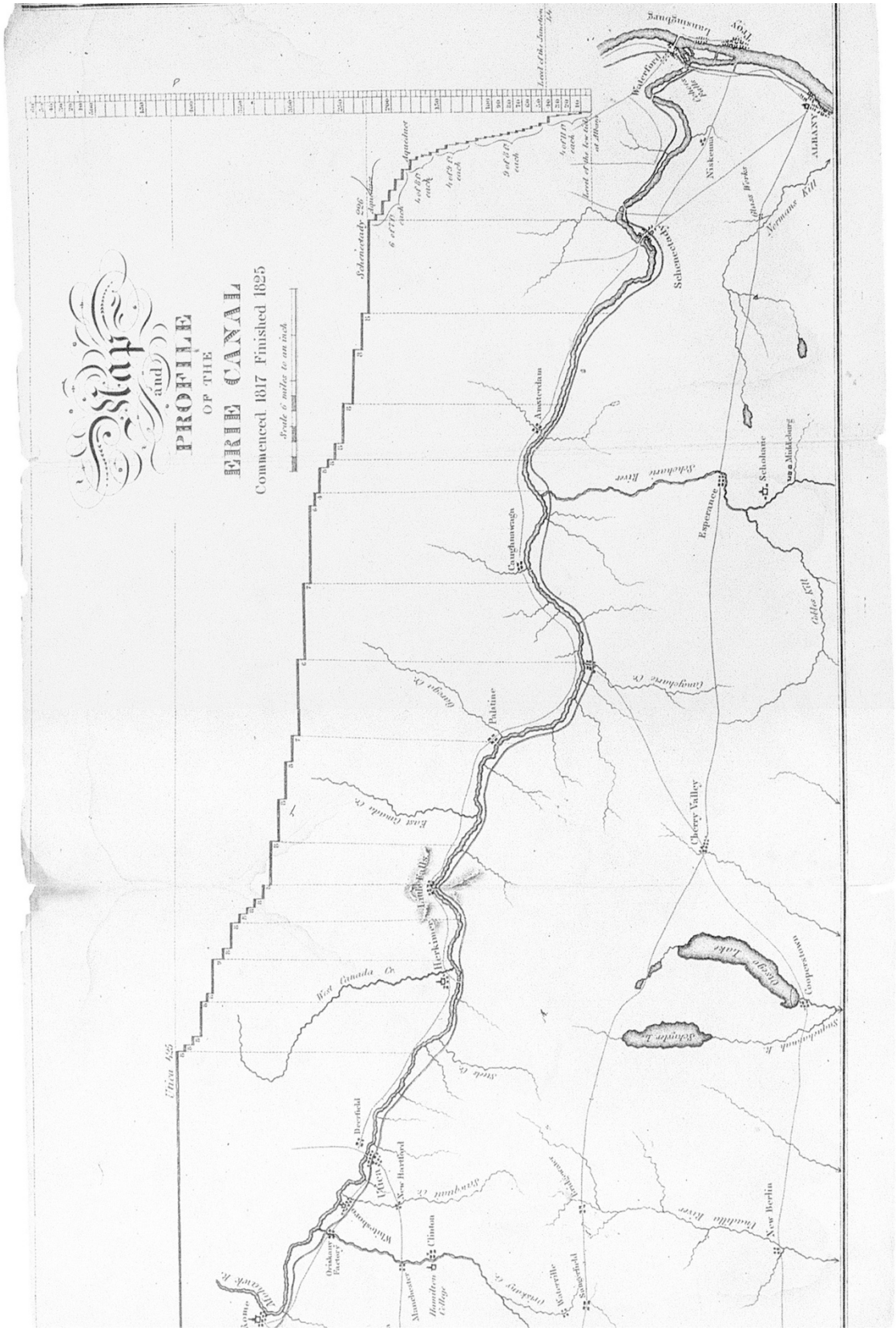
MAP OF THE CANAL

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Owasco Lake
Canandaigua Lake
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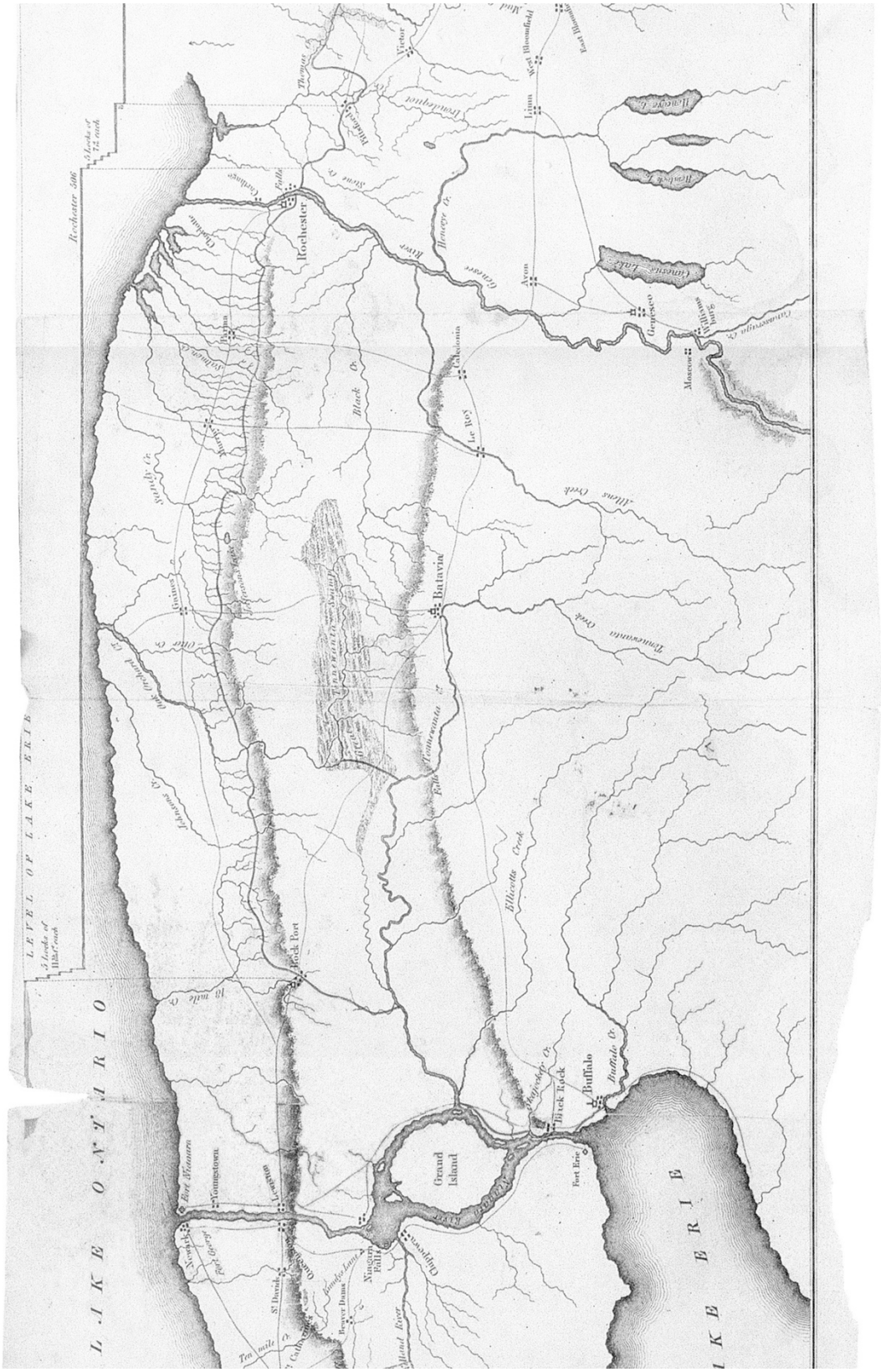

Laws of the State of New York, *In Relation to the Erie and Champlain Canal* (Albany, E. and E. Hosford, 1825).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASS	American Anti-Slavery Society
ABCFM	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions
ABS	American Bible Society
ABthlS	American Bethel Society
ASFS	American Seamen's Friend Society
ASPT	American Society for the Promotion of Temperance
CTS	Canal Temperance Society
MCBS	Monroe County Bible Society
MCMS	Monroe County Mission Society
MCTS	Monroe County Tract Society
NYSPT	New York Society for the Promotion of Temperance

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PREFACE

This project came about when I began noticing that many of America's Protestant sects, reform movements, and more originated in a small band across western New York. I grew up Latter-Day Saint—so the origin of Mormonism had always been of particular interest and wanted to understand the social conditions which created this band. Providentially, I stumbled upon a research question: did the Erie Canal have anything to do with all this fervor?

No one can produce a work like this without considerable investment from a strong community of people around him. Wise Solomon wrote, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (Eccl 4:9–10 KJV).[1] I have had many lift me up, and they share in the reward of this labor.

Teachers from the beginning have left indelible marks on my life. The faculty of Southern Seminary granted my wife and I one of the greatest, joy-filled, and edifying experiences of our lives. Greg Wills was the first person who told me that I was able do the work of a PhD. Shawn Wright was the man who told me I belonged when I was sure I was not smart enough to do the coursework. Ken Magnuson was a calm, steady guide in some of my dark nights of the soul. Jonathan Arnold allowed me to guest lecture in a course where a student posed a question that beget the project. Bryan Baise saw that I got into the classroom as a young instructor. Bryan and Jonathan picked me up off the ground more than few times. These men and more made Southern a special place.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the King James Version.

My *doktorvater*, John D. Wilsey, went above and beyond as a supervisor. Not only did he allow me into his home, family, and life, but he allowed me to see the highs and lows of his own professional career. There was no posturing; he was—and is—a friend. He lived a real life in light of the gospel, and he modeled for me the possibilities of a Christian academic. If there is good in this project, it is because he told me to "get after it, man!"

Researching for and writing a dissertation in the middle of a pandemic required the help of many people. Autumn Haag, assistant director of University of Rochester's special collections, was a tremendous blessing to me, showing generous hospitality and support at a time when New York's library systems had restrictive guidelines on nonresident researchers. The staff at Syracuse University was also helpful. The nonprofit collaborative libraries of Hathi Trust and Google Books granted digital access to special collections I could have never reviewed in New York libraries from 2020 to 2021. The archive trip I was able to take in July 2021 was graciously funded by a research grant from the board at Mission Driven Ministries. Thank you.

Four churches have left indelible marks on me as a human being, and I would be remiss to ignore their contributions. Whitesburg gave me my first reps in ministry with Steven Dunne, Zach Johnson, Matt Sloma, and David Dye. The mentoring I enjoyed with Steven Dunne has marked my life in ways he nor I will not know fully this side of eternity. The altos in Martin Gureasko's choir were matriarchs at a vulnerable time in my life. At Grace Heritage, Paul's preaching and that church's fellowship are *the* stack of twelve stones in my wife and I's walk of faith. Cedar Creek bore with my inadequacies, and they had a gospel-generosity in giving me time to complete internships, academic travel, and more. I really am grateful for that. Finally, Rivertree's elders were gracious with their time and vision: not being jealous for their own time allowed this project to finish.

More than anyone else at Southern, Sam Emadi shaped my love of God,

neighbor, and Christ's church. I am grateful to God for a friend like Sam. Other friendships helped carry the normal burdens of life: Andrew Calvert, Nate and Heather Steele, Hunter and Meagan Jernigan, Conner and Emily McMakin, J.R. and Jen Ayers, the Briggs, the Borlands, the Wellers, the Johnson, the Eckleys, the Hartsfields, and fellow pastors, my team, and many, many more.

I want to thank my family too. Jimmie and Susan Taylor, your unwavering and limitless support made this project feasible. This is a token to your generosity.

Dad, you took on a hard, often thankless responsibility that no one asked you to do, and it changed my life forever. You, probably more than anyone else, laid the ground to make this project possible through patient discipline and kind encouragement. We know P.S. Holland would have labeled a copy. Mom, having children myself, I do not know how you carried the burden you did for as long as you did. I hope this small token makes all those hours of double-shifts, endless twelves, and those now long-gone but lonely days worth it. I am so proud of who you are and to be your son.

Ellis and Rose, you give me so much joy, and both of you are answers to many long nights of prayers. I hope you never felt or realized that your Daddy was working on a PhD. If you ever did feel or know I was, this is worthless straw compared to you.

Finally, Morgan, my bride, you have always encouraged me and made way for me to pursue and develop the call that we both share: to give Christ's own people our very best. Every day with you is a new, undeserved mercy. Of course, there is much more to say, but there are more quiet and secret places to steal away to do so. I am grateful for you, and I love you.

Zach

December 2022

Huntsville, Alabama

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Modern Americans are mistaken if they believe that the westward expansion of the early republic was inevitable. Americans were anxious about foreign meddling in the land west of the Appalachians in the early nineteenth century. They were also worried that economic interests would divide the young nation. In September 1784, George Washington surveyed his lands west of the mountains to see how he might open them to commerce.[1] He was dismayed to see how little economic connections the settlers on the frontier had to the East Coast, and he was concerned that settlers stood on a "pivet" and that "the touch of a feather would turn them away" to the Spanish.[2] This concern occupied correspondence with officials and friends such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Harrison in late 1784.[3] Jefferson shared Washington's concern.[4] Even after the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson wondered whether the trans-Appalachian west would remain part of the fledgling union or divide into Mississippi and Atlantic confederations.[5] The union would need a tie to bond it together across the Appalachian divide.[6]

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[1] George Washington, *The Diary of George Washington*, September 3, 1784, *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 4: 1784–June 1786, ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/resource/mgw.wd04.

[2] George Washington, *Diary*, October 4, 1784.

[3] E.g., George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, October 10, 1784, *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-02-02-0082.

[4] There are many letters between Washington and Jefferson in 1784 about the need for a canal to break through the Appalachian Mountains. The correspondence culminates with a request to Benjamin Harrison, governor of Virginia, to survey a location for a canal to the Great Lakes. See *Washington Papers*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/about/Washington.

[5] Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, January 29, 1804, *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-42-02-0322.

[6] George Washington, *Diary*, October 4, 1784.

New Yorkers completed the Erie Canal on October 26, 1825. DeWitt Clinton, sixth governor of New York and the man responsible for its construction, believed the canal was "a bond of union between the Atlantic and the western states" and could "prevent the dismemberment of the American empire" Washington and others had feared.[7] By puncturing the mountain barrier, New Yorkers held they had guaranteed an economic connection between the frontier and the East coast. They believed their canal would link the interests of the frontier settlers to their own national interests. To do so, New Yorkers shaped the earth to will an artificial river across western New York from Buffalo to Albany. However, just as they shaped the earth, this water shaped them.[8] Rivers facilitate trade, and a canal extends the convenience of water transit beyond the bounds of a river. Canals can be thought of as artificial rivers.[9]

Martin Doyle suggested that rivers "shaped basic facts of America."[10] Many states take their shape from rivers, and settlers founded cities along rapids or intersections to steer trade through portages. Citizens debated the extent to which the government should or should not regulate interstate commerce along rivers.[11] Farmers, merchants, and workers all had an economic interest in steering trade through their closest river. Doyle

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[7] DeWitt Clinton, "Reply to the Canal Commission," April 26, 1824, in David Hosack, *Memoir of De Witt Clinton* (New York: Seymour, 1829), 418. https://archive.org/details/memoirofdewittcl00hosa.

[8] For example, Ari Kelman detailed the relationship between the Mississippi and the city of New Orleans. Of course, the location was settled because of its place on the river, and subsequent contests between European colonial powers and, eventually, Americans centered around control of the river. The struggle between citizens and the river's flooding shaped New Orleans politics—who is responsible for the levee? See Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[9] New Yorkers used this phrase to characterize the the Erie Canal. Carol Sheriff also used it as the title of her canal history. See Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817–1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 52.

[10] Martin Doyle, *The Source: How Rivers Made America and America Remade Its Rivers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2018), 9.

[11] For example, the Marshall Court held that New York state could not grant monopoly charters on its own waters if it hindered the trade of neighboring states. *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824) held that through the Commerce Clause Congress has exclusive powers to regulate waterborne commerce in the United States.

compared the environmental history of rivers to a palimpsest. He described Americans' relationships with their rivers as a layered series of "decisions on top of decisions, events on top of events, ideas on top of ideas."[12] A complete history must account for the unique context of each layer while not dismissing the relationship between them. Similarly, the Erie Canal was the base layer over which New Yorkers made a series of decisions that changed their economic, social, and moral landscape.

Thesis

New Yorkers modified American Protestantism as they responded to the economic and social transformation provoked by the Erie Canal. New Yorkers acknowledged the geographic challenges posed by the Appalachian Mountain range, but they saw themselves as benefactors of God's providential blessing. Under the banner of "providence," New Yorkers formed a voluntary network of investors, foremen, and workers to construct the canal. Their success precipitated the tremendous development of the western New York frontier. They responded to this transformation by resourcing and renegotiating the meaning of American Protestant categories such as revival, national covenant, and agency. They organized themselves into voluntary societies and decided to address the challenges posed by this transformation.

The canal is the fulcrum of this effort on account of New Yorkers. The canal created the economic and social conditions which motivated these frontier merchants to participate in a national dialogue about the relationship between virtue and the American republic. They saw religion as indispensable in shaping American discourse on moral improvement, political organization, and antislavery. Those social conditions contributed to the Burned-Over District, and the canal is a contingent factor explaining why the so-called Burned-Over District was in rural western New York and not along the rural Ohio

[12] Doyle, *The Source*, 14.

or Yazoo River Valleys or in urban cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, or Pittsburgh.[13] How New Yorkers organized to address the economic and social transformation in their local communities influenced their future organization, which addressed national issues such as temperance and antislavery. Through their experience constructing the canal, New Yorkers learned the value of voluntary associations to realize national ambitions.

Protestants in western New York organized moral improvement agencies on the canal, and these were the prototypes of evangelical missions in America's industrial cities' inner cities. They worked to reform laws to prevent work on the Sabbath. The Bible cause, temperance, and abolition began in East coast cities such as Boston and Philadelphia. However, by the mid-nineteenth century, leaders of these movements established themselves in cities along the canal corridor. Arthur and Lewis Tappan moved from Boston to New York to capitalize on the city's trade networks. Gerrit Smith's family made their fortune selling tracts of western New York land for canal and railroad construction. Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony all coordinated early efforts from Rochester. They each benefited from existing reform networks while making their own contributions through abolition efforts.[14]

New Yorkers were confident that God had set the American republic apart with a national covenant as a moral example to the watching world.[15] Their political and religious organizing ensured that the frontier would be politically republican and

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[13] The Burned-Over District is the name for the area between the Finger Lakes and Lake Erie in western New York. Charles Finney coined the term, having observed the land seemed to be a "burnt district," given the disillusion many in the area had towards the endless religious excitement in the early nineteenth century.

[14] Cf., Naomi Rosenthal, Meryl Fingrutd, Michele Ethier, Roberta Karant and David McDonald, "Social Movements and Network Analysis: A Case Study of Nineteenth-Century Women's Reform in New York State," *American Journal of Sociology* 90, no. 5 (March 1985): 1023–26. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2780088; and Victoria Sandwick Schmitt, "Rochester's Fredrick Douglass, Part One," *Rochester History* 67, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 12–17.

[15] Cf., John Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015); Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 13–108.

evangelically domesticated.[16] The Erie Canal provoked the need for missionaries, revivalists, and evangelical activists, and it also provided the economic market which allowed ordinary New Yorkers to fund those efforts. It facilitated a network of interdependent people who organized missions, published tracts, and distributed bibles to contend for their particular vision of a virtuous republic.

Background

The families that settled in Western New York after the Treaty of Ghent (1814) was signed carried a few critical assumptions about their place in the nature and destiny of the United States.[17] Those assumptions created what Anthony D. Smith called "national identity," and they are what made the nation possible.[18] Individuals' sense of national identity has less to do with geo-political borders and more with what they assume about themselves. Groups share and reproduce patterns of values, memory, tradition, and myth, and as they do so they generate a distinct, self-defined human community.[19] Over time these patterns become assumptions. E. J. Hobsbawm summarized nationalism as the self-identification of an "us" against some other "them," and he argued that the most powerful motivation is the idea of continuity with a "lasting political entity."[20]

Without deep historical ties to the land, settlers to the western frontier had to manufacture an identity from their shared assumptions about themselves. They shared a

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[16] Cf., Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 164–315.

[17] The Treaty of Ghent ended the War of 1812. The agreement returned territories of Michigan and Maine to the United States and Ontario to the British.

[18] Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 19. See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 46–79.

[19] Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, 19.

[20] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 73.

New England heritage and a conviction that their presence in the land was contingent upon their piety. These settlers were also a part of a novel state with competing visions for the nation's destiny. From the beginning, New Yorkers engaged in a national contest to define a genuinely American identity as the authentic heirs of the American Revolution.[21] John L. Brooke demonstrated that they engaged in this contest through circulars, meetings, and, critically, voluntary associations.[22] New Yorkers' value of the potential windfall from the Erie Canal tipped the balance in favor of interventionist government. More they embraced a state operated corporation to accomplish the canal's construction. To some, like Martin Van Buren, this seemed like a departure from the Revolution's principles, but with "the reconfiguration of the commercial geography, a new self-reflection was emerging that would give the people of New York a fresh public sensibility of time and place."[23] That is, pro-canal New Yorkers contended for what they believed to be a legitimate meaning of the Revolution. However, that reconfiguration had critical antecedents.

Before the Erie Canal, New Yorkers—with other Americans—shared a common myth of origin, election, and destiny. This common myth is, of course, what gave the Constitution and young republic legitimacy in the citizens' minds. Nations, however, are phenomenological. After the Treaty of Ghent was signed, Americans had different interpretations of how authenticity to the national ideal looked. David Waldstreicher demonstrated that Americans created an authentic identity through various civic displays and broadsides, but they did so while denying the legitimacy of others doing the same for themselves.[24] James Madison designed this contest. He believed that

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[21] Cf., David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 9.

[22] John L. Brooke, *Columbia Rising: Civil Life on the Upper Hudson from the Revolution to the Age of Jackson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), 115–6.

[23] Brooke, *Columbia Rising*, 431–7. The quote is found on page 434.

[24] David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism,*

pitting fractious forces against one another was the only guarantee of preserving the individual's liberty while preserving national unity.[25] Consistent with that vision, New Yorkers borrowed heavily from their Puritan forefathers to map a local destiny, even as they contested for an authentic American identity at the national level.

Nationalism and National Identity

Elie Kedourie wrote that "nation" is a "doctrine, which is to say a complex of inter-related ideas about man, society and politics."[26] That is, nationalism—even in a secular society—is a framework of presuppositions through which people identify themselves. Hobsbawm clarified that nationalism is not primarily about language, as language is usually fixed in print and imposed upon a population through social pressure.[27] Additionally, he noted that religious symbols are "too wide or too narrow to serve as symbols of a proto-nation" because they are irrelevant to the purposes of the state.[28] Nationalists compensate for this irrelevance by transforming the meaning of the symbols to accomplish a state purpose. They do so by creating sacred myths of origin, election, and sense of destiny.[29]

Americans used religious language to evoke sacred passions for their national purposes. For example, having called George Washington "beloved," Ezra Stiles described the young United States' national hero in evocative language: "But thou, O Washington, forgottest thyself, when thou lovedst thy bleeding country. . . . Thy fame is

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1776–1820 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 13.

[25] Cf. James Madison, "Federalist 10," in *The Federalist Papers*, Avalon Project of Lillian Goldman Law Library of Yale University, accessed May 6, 2021, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed10.asp.

[26] Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 136.

[27] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 59–63.

[28] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 72.

[29] Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, 39–47.

of sweeter perfume than Arabian spices in the gardens of Persia."[30] The language intentionally alluded to the Canticles to import traditional Puritan tropes and map them onto a new national identity. Puritans often reflected on the Canticles to meditate on the individual's personal experience of election and the millennium. However, the experience of election and millennium do not directly serve the purposes of a state. So, Stiles recapitulated the symbols to justify a new nationalism before the Connecticut General Assembly. The young pilgrims had been sent into the wilderness by God, as "Joseph into Egypt," to establish—through commerce—republics and religious liberty.[31] He explicitly aimed to legitimize republican thought as a new model for the world.[32] Stiles's comments were what Smith called the "cultural resources of national identity."[33]

Common law, language, nor even religion was not enough to sustain the new nation.[34] As Kedourie suggested, there must be a doctrine that supports a national ideal. Therefore, a "cult of authenticity" aligned with that doctrine was paramount to the young nation's success.[35] Smith wrote, "Authenticity functions as the nationalist equivalent of the idea of holiness in so many religions."[36] Before New Hampshire voted to ratify the Constitution in 1788, Samuel Langdon preached to the New Hampshire General

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[30] Ezra Stiles, "The United States Elevated to Glory and Honour," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 89.

[31] See Stiles, "The United States Elevated to Glory and Honour," 82–92.

[32] Cf., Conrad Cherry, ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 63. Cherry also cited Edmund Morgan who argued Stiles "was talking over [Connecticut's] head to the world that lay three thousand miles over the water. America, he was saying, had not merely conquered George III; America had conquered monarchy."

[33] Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, 47.

[34] Cf., Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, 36–40; and, Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 84–91.

[35] Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37.

[36] Smith, *Chosen Peoples,* 37–8.

Assembly and evoked language reminiscent of Deuteronomy 30: "I lift up my voice and cry aloud to the people. . . the way has been plainly set before you; if you pursue it, your prosperity is sure; but if not, distress and ruin will overtake you."[37] The exhortation was authenticity. He preached, "Do not carelessly neglect [elections] or give your votes with indifference. . . act with serious deliberation and judgment."[38] Thus, in Langdon, authenticity is cast in religious terms and covenant contexts.

Scholars have called this cult of authentic nationalism "civil religion." In the absence of totalitarianism, republics must legitimize the ethical commitments it demands from citizens. So, republics naturally "push towards the symbolization of an ultimate order of existence in which republican values and virtues make sense."[39] In the American context, the early republic borrowed symbols from a dense heritage of Christian theology.[40] Both Stiles and Langdon are examples of that borrowing. Because of the canal's construction, New Yorkers employed these same speech patterns to claim New York's ascendency as a paragon of republican virtue. For example, DeWitt Clinton spoke of himself as an "instrument in the hands of Providence" because he had faithfully exercised his gubernatorial powers to construct the canal.[41] John D. Wilsey explained that these borrowed symbols serve as the "paradigm that brings meaning to the American nation and unifies it around a moral vision."[42]

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[37] Samuel Langdon, "The Republic of the Israelites an Example to the American States," sermon preached to the General Court at the Annual Election, June 5, 1788, *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 100.

[38] Langdon, "The Republic of the Israelites an Example to the American States," 100.

[39] Robert N. Bellah, "Religion and Legitimation in the American Republic," *Society* 35, no. 2 (1998): 197. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02838142.

[40] Philip Gorski argued that the Revolutionary period was not as much a moment of Enlightened achievement as it was a deeper from of Puritan federal theology with classical and Renaissance flourish. See Philip Gorski, "Hebraic Republicanism: The American Revolution," in *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religon from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 60–82.

[41] David Hosack, *Memoir of De Witt Clinton* (New York: J. Seymour, 1829), 186–90.

[42] John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an*

National Ambition

That practice rendered a unique theologico-political ambition among New Yorkers. By the middle of the nineteenth century, New Yorkers had organized a variety of voluntary societies to advance their particular vision of what they considered an authentic American identity. How New Yorker Federalists became voluntarists is part of the story of the Erie Canal. By the antebellum years, voluntarism was the dominant strand of thought among New Yorkers in the antebellum years.[43]

The theologico-political ambition of New Yorkers represented a transition from a confident Federalism toward a competitive voluntarism. Before American independence, there was a significant overlap between religious leaders' moral authority and representatives' political activity. Mark Noll called that overlap a "Puritan canopy," which was an integrated worldview that linked the individual to society through the church.[44] The moral virtue of the individual under the direction of the church contributed to the flourishing of the community.

New Yorkers did not abandon their religious convictions though the Constitution disestablished religion. They did, however, opt to compete in the public square for those convictions, seeking to advance those moral agendas at the national level. Many New Yorkers who advanced those moral agendas employed their organizing skills while advocating for the Erie Canal.[45] For example, Stephen Van Rensselaer, who served on the Erie Canal Commission from 1816 to 1839, had also been an ardent supporter and leader within the American Bible Society, the American Society for the

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Idea (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2015), 33.

[43] See also Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 167–200.

[44] Cf., Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31–50.

[45] For example, Dewitt Clinton was governor of New York and championed the Erie Canal's construction. He was a ratifying manager for the American Bible Society, and he was elected one of its vice presidents. Additionally, he provided grants to the society throughout his service. See *Annual Report of the American Bible Society* (1817), 7–29.

Promotion of Temperance, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.[46] The networks of advocacy they created were leveraged by those who followed them to advance their own moral agenda.

Yankee Protestantism

The reader might find it odd to discuss New York in the context of Yankeeism because the prototypical Yankee is a Connecticut Puritan farmer not an evangelical reformer.[47] The first American settlers into the Mohawk River valley were New England emigrants. Why New Yorkers were Yankees is critical to the study of their theologico-political ambitions. The first colonists to establish themselves in New York, known then as New Netherlands, were of diverse ethnic origins, mainly Dutch, German, and French Huguenot merchants.[48] These settlers were often at odds with the New Englanders. The micocontests to control commerce along the Atlantic coast mirrored the more significant contest between England and the Netherlands to control Atlantic trade. James of York, an English duke and younger brother of Charles II, was appointed to secure that English dominance. His agents managed to convince Charles II and Parliament of the threat Dutch settlements posed to the North American foothold in New England. Charles II agreed. He granted York a charter that included New Netherlands. This act gave York the territory which would become New York. He invaded in August 1664, and by September, the Dutch West India Company had abandoned the colony. New Amsterdam became New York City, and New Netherlands became New York Colony.[49]

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[46] See appendix 1.

[47] See Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1795* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

[48] Cf., James W. Darlington, "Peopling the Post-Revolutionary New York Frontier," *New York History* 74, no. 4 (Oct 1993): 342, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23181918.

[49] Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 70–4.

Even before James of York's actions, however, New Englanders had out-settled the Dutch in Long Island by almost three to one.[50] By 1720, the Dutch were minorities in their former colony.[51] By the middle of the nineteenth century, four of every five settlers immigrating to New York were born in New England.[52] So infused by New England was New York that Timothy Dwight commented that New York should be "regarded as a colony of New England."[53] Each of these New Englanders brought their distinct religious and cultural character to New York as they immigrated to cultivate the more fertile and loamy soil of the Hudson and Mohawk river valleys.

That religious and cultural character had two significant features. First, these immigrants were Yankees. "Yankee" itself was a contested term. The term reflects the mutual contempt the Dutch and English settlers of the region had for one another. Though impossible to know, the Dutch likely diminutivated their *Jan* as *Janke*—"little Johnny"—to describe the English "John" settling near them.[54] Aside from etymology, Richard Bushman suggested that the New Englanders became Yankees sometime before the American Revolution as self-interested capitalism displaced the commonwealth industry and evangelical experiences dislocated the Calvinistic syllogism.[55] He suggested this created a tension within the Yankee "best described as polarity" with a liberty suspect of libertinism, avarice softened by concern for welfare, and a desire for the

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[50] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 71.

[51] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 135.

[52] Darlington, "Peopling the Post-Revolutionary New York Frontier," 352.

[53] Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, vol 3 (London: Baynes and Son, et. al., 1823), 252.

[54] "Etymology of Yankee, n. and adj.," Oxford English Dictionary Online, March 2021, Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/231174. Cf., J. N. A. Thierry, 1838, George Ticknor, *Life, Letters, and Journals of Ticknor,* vol. 2. (Boston: Osgood, 1877), 124, Google Books.

[55] Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1795* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 280–88.

transcendent in an empirical frame.[56] This transformation meant that the reforming impulse of Puritanism endured while republican virtue supplanted the "Puritan canopy." When these Yankee immigrants settled in New York, they carried their reforming impulse with them.

Second, these immigrants were committed to visible evidence as a mark of genuine conversion. That commitment to visible evidence created an environment where individuals championed activism as a work of grace. Decades before the Erie Canal, Jonathan Edwards adapted Puritan theology to respond to the intellectual challenges of the Enlightenment in two significant ways. First, he modified John Locke's concept of the will and human knowledge to defend the religious revivals which swept the eastern seaboard in the mid-eighteenth century, and he had to do so in considerable ways. Edwards adopted a "voluntarist accent" which implied a natural ability to repent and believe but a moral inability to do so.[57] He described religious conversion as a process where the will participates in the Spirit's work.[58] Edwards hedged this experiential religion in several works such as *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), *A Treatise concerning Religious Affection* (1746), and others. In these works, he prescribed various tests to authenticate religious experience.[59]

As a result, Edward's second modification of Puritan theology directly led to the concept of a church as a voluntary society. Many scholars observed that Edwards's

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[56] Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, 288.

[57] Robert W. Caldwell III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 73.

[58] Cf., Paul Ramsey, "Edwards and John Locke," 51–8; McClymond, "Spiritual Perception in Jonathan Edwards," 209–16; E. Brooks Holifield, "Edwards as theologian," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145–9. This, of course, takes place in the larger context of debates between the Old Lights and New Lights arguing about the role of preparation in salvation. See John E. Smith, ed., Editor's Introduction to Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections*, vol. 2, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1959; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 2–24.

[59] See Holifield, "Edwards as Theologian," 150–54.

modification of Puritan ecclesiology was the point where Puritan society transformed. Mark Noll called it the "collapse of the Puritan canopy," and he argued, "it was what [Edwards] held about the nature of the church and the relationship of the church to society that created a substantially new context for the writing of theology."[60] Holifield noted that Edwards's departure from Puritan orthodoxy on the church helped to "fracture Reformed theology in America."[61] The canopy which held together the individual, church, and state fractured with Edwards. Subsequent generations of Edwards's heirs would need to leverage participation in voluntary societies to advance moral reform. Advancing a moral ideal in the political sphere required the participation of individuals who might not have attended the same church. Thus, Protestants modified their various church's theologies into a mere Christianity.

While Protestants never achieved a new synthesis between individual, church, and state, the social conditions of the antebellum period influenced Yankee Protestantism. As American Protestant denominations split over the issue of slavery in the middle of the nineteenth century, voluntary associations became quasi-national denominations that could respond more dynamically to donors' ambitions. However, even those donors began to divide over the extent to which a voluntary association should weigh in on political matters, especially abolition.[62] Auxiliary groups fundraised and campaigned on behalf of these national, voluntary associations. New Yorkers established auxiliary groups throughout the canal corridor. Every dollar these auxiliary groups gave to the national organization was a vote for a particular moral vision for America. One more dollar meant another temperance tract for canallers. One more dollar meant another Bible distributed. Each dollar paid for the vision of America New Yorkers wanted to see.

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[60] Noll, *America's God*, 44.

[61] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 126.

[62] James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860–1869* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1978), 16–7.

Significance of the Question

Scholars have given attention to the impact of newspapers, radio, television, and the internet on theology.[63] These works appreciate technological achievements' impact on reshaping the religious milieu. Dismissing the canal as a narrow moment in the grand sweep of American history would be a presentist mistake. Americans' peak use of the Erie Canal occurred during a hinge moment in the American experiment—at a point in history when the effect of the nation's expansion into the frontier was tenuous. Americans wondered if the Trans-Appalachian West would remain in the union. After the Spanish had closed New Orleans to American commerce, Americans on the east coast wondered if settlers would align with Spain to secure a market for their goods. At the same time, Americans sought to put away partisan debates between Federalists and Democrats and negotiate a meaningful national identity. All of this is also true for the religious character of the young republic. Even though Federalists were in retreat by the 1830s, their protégés and the Democrats had competing theologico-political ambitions for the nation.[64] This dissertation considers the Erie Canal a significant communicative achievement in the early republic. It knit social networks throughout western New York and created associations through which American Protestants could advance their own theological and nationalistic ambitions.[65] Moreover, this dissertation takes seriously the experiences of western New Yorkers who negotiated various activist solutions to the

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[63] Cf., Paul K. McClure, "Modding My Religion: Exploring the Effects of Digital Technology on Religion and Spirituality," (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2018); Sonia Hazard, "The Touch of the Word: Evangelical Cultures of Print in Antebellum America," (PhD diss., Duke University, 2017); Michael E. Pohlman, "Broadcasting the Faith: Protestant Religious Radio and Theology in America, 1920–1950," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011); Amy Winet Lefkowitz-Mattern, "Packaging Religion: Exploring the Boundaries of Religion and Spirituality in Contemporary Popular Media," (PhD diss., California State University, 2000).

[64] Cf., Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety*, 201–6.

[65] I anticipate the charge that this might be anachronistic. I reply humans have built social networks through all sorts of mediums—and, for most of history, analog mediums. A masterful example of this Stanford's "Mapping the Republic of Letters," a project tracing Enlightenment thinkers' communication networks. The maps are then used to explain the various paths of intellectual development during the Enlightenment. See Daniel Chang et al., "Visualizing the Republic of Letters," Stanford University 2009, accessed July 20, 2020, http://stanford.edu/group/toolingup/rplviz/papers/ Vis_RofL_2009.

social conditions unleashed by the market revolution along the canal. This study fills a lacuna in scholarship by focusing on the relationship between the Erie Canal, the national ambition of New Yorkers, and the changes within American Protestantism.

A Brief Introduction to Canals

America's first canals were short sluices cut to allow passage around rapids or remove obstacles from a river.[66] The Erie Canal was America's first effort to build a grand canal which rivaled those in the Netherlands, France, and England. The Erie Canal's success inspired rival canals throughout the nation, and New York engineers dispersed throughout the nation to contribute to other impressive American canals, such as the Ohio and Erie Canal which linked Lake Erie with the Ohio River.[67]

Canals are necessary to facilitate waterborne transit where a river does not. They require two things. First, there must be a steady supply of water which can be relied upon to fill the locks of the canal, and the sedimentary substrate must not allow the canal to drain faster than the water can be replace. To overcome elevation, a canal requires an additional feature: locks. Locks allow a boat to "step" up or down elevation. If a captain needed to descend a given elevation, he would enter the locks at the higher elevation. The gates would be closed behind him. The water would be drained from his lock until it reached equilibrium with the lower elevation level. After that equilibrium was reached, the upper gate would remain closed while the lower gate was opened. This allowed the boat captain to exit the canal at the lower level. To ascend an elevation, the process was reversed.

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[66] Cf., Ronald E. Shaw, *Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States, 1790–1860* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 3–18.

[67] Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 30.

The original Erie Canal featured over 80 locks, but subsequent expansion into the middle of the nineteenth century reduced this number to 72. The Erie Canal rose around 500 feet from the Hudson River to Lake Erie through its 83 locks. The eastern section was an improvement of the Mohawk River, that removed obstacles which would snare barges traveling up and down stream. The middle section and western sections were excavated through rock and soil, reinforced with a novel mix of concrete. The original boats on the Erie Canal were not powered by engine or sail. Instead, they were towed along a towpath by conductors leading teams of horses and mules along a cleared lane called a towpath. These teams would pull the boats, both freight and passenger boats, upstream (Figure 1).

Figure 1. "The Lock, with packet boat" by W. Robert. Printed in Jacob Abbot, *Marco Paul's Voyages and Travels, Erie Canal* (New York: Harper, 1852).

Passengers could travel on the canal in packet boats (Figure 2). These boats were not necessarily luxurious, but they were more comfortable than stages which utilized unimproved roads. Cabins generally accommodated forty to fifty passengers

along with a captain and attendant. The boats were lined with cushioned benches which folded out to become bunks for sleeping. During the day, a long table which stretched down the center of a boat was used for meals and sundry entertainment, but at night, a curtain would be drawn to separate the men from the women. Beds were also brought suspended from the ceiling.[68] These packet boats ran on regular schedule, transporting mail and passengers from Albany to Buffalo.

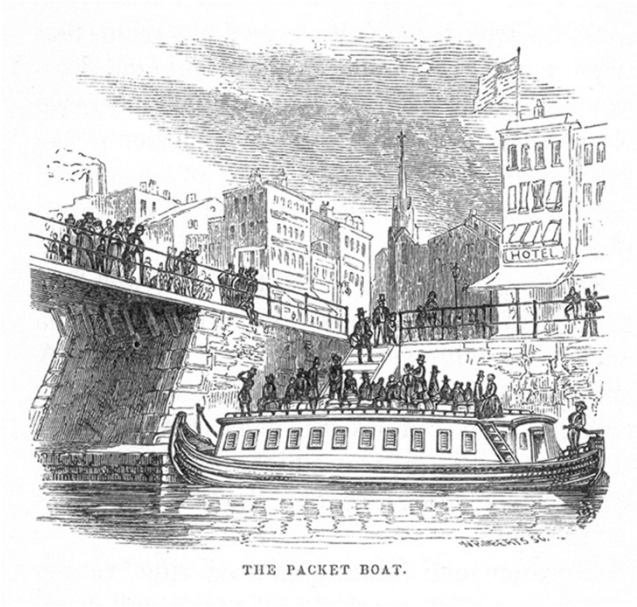

Figure 2. "The Packet Boat" by W. Robert. Printed in Jacob Abbot, *Marco Paul's Voyages and Travels, Erie Canal* (New York: Harper, 1852).

At their peak usage, Ronald E. Shaw noted that American canals stretched 4,254 miles throughout the country.[69] Yet just four years after the Erie Canal was finished in 1829, Robert Stephenson had begun proving the potential for locomotive power in

[68] Cf., Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal, 1792–1854* (1966; Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 207.

[69] Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 228.

Britain. Shaw argued that the initial relationship between canals and railroads was "symbiotic."[70] The state of New York did not allow railroads to compete directly with its canal until 1851. However, by 1831, a small railroad company began carrying passengers from Albany to Schenectady, and by the 1850s, railroads supplanted canals in east-west trade.[71] Shaw noted that this triumph must be qualified. Waterborne transport was cheaper than rail, and the peak tonnage for the Erie Canal would be 1872.[72]

Summary of Chapters

The next chapter will explain the canal's context, history, and construction. Richard Dennis observed that geography had been maligned in historiography by other more social approaches, such as Marxist or humanist histories.[73] However, a geographic-sensitive history "highlights the historical specificity of particular places."[74] Americans faced two severe geographical challenges in the early republic: Spanish and French control of the Mississippi River through New Orleans and the barrier the Appalachian Mountains posed to trans-Appalachian trade. Chapter Two situates the canal engineers' ambitions within the context of those challenges and the competition between anti-Federalists and Federalists on internal improvement.

The third chapter demonstrates how the Erie Canal defined New Yorkers' sense of nationalism. Americans had already used providential language to describe the natural waterways of North America. With reverent language, George Washington reflected upon the Hudson and Mohawk River Valleys: "Providence has dealt her favors to us with so

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[70] Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 233.

[71] Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 233.

[72] Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 235.

[73] Richard Dennis, "History, Geography, and Historical Geography," *Social Science History* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 267, doi: 10.2307/1171417.

[74] Alan R. H. Baker, *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide*, Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 220.

profuse a hand."[75] John Jay remarked, "Providence has in a particular manner. . . watered [America] with innumerable streams for the delight and accommodation of its inhabitants."[76] New Yorkers did master the landscape, and in so doing, they believed they had honored a providential plan for the American republic. They believed a failure to build the canal would have been "a total insensibility to the blessings of Providence, and an inexcusable neglect of the interests of society."[77] In their minds, Americans saw the Erie Canal as a demonstration of the virtues of a free republic, allowing America to "create a new era in history."[78] Indeed, completing the canal was a national and religious achievement. In completing the canal, New Yorkers believed they had secured a union of the states and honored God's providence. Chapter Three will trace how the Erie Canal confirmed Americans' belief in their exceptionalism.

The fourth chapter describes how revivalists and reformists responded to the social conditions wrought by the Erie Canal. The canal attracted impoverished workers from around the country who were vulnerable to exploitation and vice. Revivalists, such as Charles Finney, and missionaries, such as M. Eaton,[79] represent a concerted effort on the part of evangelicals to mitigate the moral corruption along the canal. Evangelicals formed societies to cease work on Sundays, promote temperance and chastity among

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[75] George Washington to Chastellux, October 12, 1783, *Chastellux Letters*, accessed August 17, 2020, https://www.mountvernon.org/library/research-library/special-collections-and-archives/chastellux-letters/george-washington-to-chastellux-12-october-1783/.

[76] John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*: No 2, Federalist Papers: Primary Documents in American History, Library of Congress, accessed August 17, 2020, https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-1-10.

[77] Dewitt Clinton, Thomas Eddy, and Cadwallader D. Colden, "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York, in Favour of a Canal Navigation between the Great Western Lakes and the Tide-waters of the Hudson," 1815, in *of De Witt Clinton*. Here, "memorial" was used in an arcane form, which referred to official state papers "in the form of a petition or remonstrance." Cf., "Memorial, adj. and n.," OED Online, June 2020, Oxford University Press, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116351? rskey=IF8lRX&result =1&isAdvanced=false.

[78] Clinton, Eddy, Colden, "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York," 420.

[79] His first name has been lost to history. His journal does not contain his first name. M. Eaton, *Five Years on the Erie Canal: An Account of the Most Striking Scenes and Incidents* (Utica, NY: Bennet, Backus & Hawley, 1845), 31, Google Books.

canal workers, and distribute Bibles and anti-swearing tracts among workers and passengers. The American Bethel Society and the American Bible Society will receive specific attention as they unified their evangelical work along the canal with nation-building.[80] Chapter 4 will explain the canal region's microcosm in which evangelicals nurtured the skills and cultivated the networks required for a national organization.

The project's final chapter will investigate how evangelicals harnessed the Erie Canal corridor's economic engine to support their visions of social reform. Darren Grem and Kevin M. Kruse have independently argued how the post-war economic climate in the 1950s funded the establishment of neo-evangelical institutions.[81] In reality, evangelicals and businessmen partnered to create evangelical reform institutions in the nineteenth century. This chapter will examine the intersection of Market Street and Church Street in towns along the canal zone. Because even though nineteenth-century evangelicals sought the respect of Episcopalians and Calvinists on the coast, they depended upon the support of merchants and farmers along the Erie Canal to fund their Anti-Masonic and abolition efforts.[82] Abolitionists used their business networks to fund manumission in the South and provide cover for enslaved people escaping along the Underground Railroad.[83] Evangelical New York businessmen were prominent members of societies dedicated to distributing tracts, funding Sunday schools, and more. By

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[80] Cf, Sam Haselby, "'A Complete Chain of Communication:' Religious Literature and Protestant Nation Building," in *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 234–81.

[81] Darren E. Grem, *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation under God: How Corporate American Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

[82] See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery* (1969; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 45–49.

[83] Gerrit Smith is a classic example. He bought slaves sold by Southerners to emancipate them, and he used his trade network throughout the Mohawk River Valley to move, cover, or hire fugitive slaves traveling north through Rochester, Syracuse, or Oswego. Cf., Milton C. Sernett, *North Star Country: Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 173–76.

supporting abolition or Sunday schools, evangelical businessmen participated in a national dialogue about virtue in the American republic. This dissertation's fifth chapter will establish the economic links between the evangelical reform movements and the canal merchants who funded them.

The epilogue summarizes the layers of effect the Erie Canal had on American Protestantism. New Yorkers saw religion as indispensable in shaping American discourse on moral improvement, political organization, and antislavery. The Erie Canal did not only provoke the economic conditions which wrought a social change in the region; it facilitated the union between New Yorkers' religious and national ambitions.

CHAPTER 2

"IT WILL FORM AN INDISSOLUBLE BOND OF UNION": THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CANAL

On February 4, 1808, a representative in the New York State Assembly rose with a proposal to form a committee. Joshua Forman (1777–1848) wanted that committee to investigate an ideal route for a canal to connect the Hudson River to Lake Erie. He hoped to capture a portion of the surplus treasury funds that president Thomas Jefferson suggested Congress allocate for internal improvements.[1] Reflecting on the proposal, Forman believed the expense would be negligible for three reasons. First, a navigable canal would raise property values in New York state's largely unsettled western frontier. Second, the Great Lake territories could only export goods through the St. Lawrence River. However, a canal through New York's western frontier could link the region to an essential American port, New York City. Third, New York City would be enriched by a canal bringing goods down the Hudson River from the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes (or something like that).[2] Market forces proved Forman correct; the Erie Canal consistently outperformed the St. Lawrence River improvements in tonnage through the middle of the nineteenth century.[3] Forman appreciated the opportunities that geography afforded New York.

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[1] Joshua Forman, "In Assembly, February 4, 1808," in David Hosack, appendix to *Memoir of DeWitt Clinton* (New York: J. Seymour, 1829), 344.

[2] Joshua Forman to David Hosack, October 23, 1828, in David Hosack, appendix to *Memoir of DeWitt Clinton* (New York: J. Seymour, 1829), 345–6.

[3] Thomas F. McIlwraith, "Utilization of the Erie and Great Lakes Canals Before 1850," *The Journal of Economic History* 36, no. 4 (Dec. 1976): 860. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2119243. The Canadians would have their revenge. The St. Lawrence Seaway, which opened in 1959, rendered the entire New York State Barge Canal (i.e., the Erie Canal and auxiliary canals) obsolete for raw, bulk good transport.

This chapter will cover the background and construction of the Erie Canal itself. After discussing the geographical challenges presented to the early republic, the chapter will show the importance of inland water navigation in conversations about commerce. That discussion contextualizes the willingness of private citizens to invest millions of dollars in an infrastructure project with no precedent. The details of the Erie Canal's construction are a fascinating study in early republic engineering. While others have covered that in particular, the chapter will highlight some challenges New Yorkers overcame to construct the canal.

What Is in a Canal?

Before moving on to the background of the canal itself, we must answer a critical question. Is it appropriate to call anything a "geographic challenge"? David Hackett Fischer defined a historian as "someone (anyone) who asks an open-ended question about past events and answers it with selected facts arranged in the form of an explanatory paradigm."[4] The remainder of Fischer's book explained all the wrong ways to ask questions, select facts, and arrange an explanatory paradigm. Suggesting that the early republic encountered a "geographic challenge" might frame an incorrect question or draw an improper conclusion.[5] To ensure the logic of historical thought is not violated, some, but not all, Americans in the early republic era would have had to identify some feature of geography as a challenge. As will be shown below, the early republican government believed the Appalachian Mountain divide was a problem it had to solve in order to survive as a nation.

Historians have treated the subject of geography in various ways, but focusing on a canal is to (1) narrow the scope of historical inquiry while being sufficiently open-

[4] David Hackett Fischer, introduction to *Historians' Fallacies: Towards a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 1970), xv.

[5] Cf., Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, 3–38, 216–42.

ended and (2) locate that inquiry among a particular people in a particular place.[6] That is, focusing on a canal renders a geographically-sensitive history. Frederick Jackson Turner was a typological representative of this sort of geographically sensitive history. In his 1891 "frontier thesis," he advocated for geography as a more formative influence than an idea, which was novel at the time.[7] The relationship between history and geography has been complicated, and the discussion is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, Alan R. H. Baker argued, "history is about much more than dating, and geography is about much more than locating, phenomena."[8] So, for this study, we might modify Fischer's definition of historical inquiry as asking "open-ended question about past events *in a particular location* and [answering it] with selected facts arranged in the form of an explanatory paradigm." Focusing on New Yorker's relationship with the Erie Canal—a geographical feature—grounds the study in something more than an arbitrary timeline.

Geography has received more attention from historians following a "spatial turn" in critical scholarship, and this attention has renegotiated the relationship between geography and history.[9] Johannes Riquet defined this "spatial turn" as a collection of

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[6] Cf., Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, 38–9.

[7] For more on Turner and colleagues' impact on historical inquiry, See Peter Novick, "A Most Genteel Insurgency," in *That Nobel Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (1988; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 86–108.

[8] Alan R. H. Baker, *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 31.

[9] In 1989, Edward Soja argued that geography had been subjugated by history by both Marxist and liberal social scientists. He noted that 'life-stories' have geography too (13). His work developed the argument of Michel Foucault. Soja argued that Foucault's structuralism was a new way of considering history. Soja believed that Foucault rightly discerned the "fatal intersection of time with space" (19). He argued that geography had been subjugated by both Marxists and liberals because both were engaged in an ideological battle for the meaning and destiny of history (31–40). See Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, 8th printing (1989; London: Verso, 2003).

Soja's work influenced a generation of historians, geographers, and social scientists. For a summary and reception history, see Claudio Minca, "Postmodern Geographies (1989): Edward Soja," in *Key Texts in Human Geography*, ed. Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitichin, and Gill Valentine (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 135–144.

theories that consider geography as an intersectional place within history. In theory, the exercise of power bound modern "space" in borders. Theorists described postmodern "space" as "dynamic, relational, and intersectional." For them, space was a social construct.[10] In his history of the Mississippi River and New Orleans, Ari Kelman highlighted the complexity of this debate for historians. He observed that "space" was complex because it did not account for "*terra firma*."[11] He insisted that space was not exclusively "a product of discourse, as representation or abstraction" because historical actors inhabit a material world.[12]

Consider the assertion that the Erie Canal influenced American Protestantism in light of this postmodern spatial turn. The Erie Canal occupied space—that is, area and volume—in the New York wilderness, but as Martin Doyle noted, people came together to construct, operate, and take advantage of the canal.[13] While postmodern geography "space" can explain the relationships of those people, as Kelman observed, geography as "space" cannot sufficiently account for how the land "acted" upon people by forcing certain decisions.[14] Charles W. J. Withers explained that "place" in history is "the location of phenomena, a particular positioning in regard to that other larger epistemological referent, space," and it adds value to inquiry beyond flourishes such as "production" or "reception" when it shows continuity and discontinuity with other

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[10] See Johannes Riquet, "Framing the Debate: Spatial Modernities, Travelling Narratives," in *Spatial Modernities: Geography, Narrative, and Imaginaries*, ed. Johannes Riquet and Elizabeth Kollmann (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–24.

[11] Ari Kelman, prologue to *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of Califronia Press, 2006), 10.

[12] Kelman, prologue to *A River and Its City*, 10.

[13] Cf., Martin Doyle, *The Source: How Rivers Made America and America Remade Its Rivers* (W.W. Norton, 2018), 14.

[14] Kelman, prologue to *A River and Its City*, 11. Consider, for example, for how human travel was limited by the available technology. Prior to the discovery of explosives, human being's ability to cross mountain ranges was limited to whatever passes were most accessible.

places.[15] While stopping short of arguing for proper causation, "place" can allow historians to "speak to the constitutive making of place as a consequence not just of emotional attachments in and to a setting, but because of the importance of the lived experiences and embodied practices there, and not somewhere else."[16] Therefore, focusing on the canal delimits the scope of the study by highlighting the role of "place" in western New York's religious history.

The use of "place" as a category is not representative of the postmodern "spatial turn," even as it recognizes that people make "place."[17] For example, before New Yorkers can even be called "New Yorkers," there must have been a New York. That they named the land "New York" made it a place. Edward Casey observed, "Despite the seductions of [postmodernists'] endless space (and the allure of serial time), place is beginning to escape from its entombment in the cultural and philosophical underworld of the modern West."[18] Casey concluded that the structuralist thought had made "space" infinite and, therefore, meaningless to "time." Such an assertion was absurd because people experience the openness of space "in the undelimited localities of our concrete bodily movements, that is to say, in our most engaged experiences of being-in-place."[19] So, examining the Erie Canal as a geographic place keeps the study grounded in being-in-place rather than some phenomenological theory. Again, this is what Baker meant when he wrote that a conversation between history and geography "highlights the specificity of particular places."[20] He argued that "place" should be seen as historically and

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[15] Charles W. J. Withers, "Place and the 'Spatial Turn' in Geography and in History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70, no. 4 (Oct 2009): 657–8. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20621915.

[16] Withers, "Place and the 'Spatial Turn' in Geography and in History," 658.

[17] *Pace*, Tim Creswell, *Place: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 45–9.

[18] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 339.

[19] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 341–2.

[20] Baker, *Geography and History*, 220.

geographically distinct. One can "enhance understanding of particular places rather than contribute to some grand historico-geographical theory by comparing one place to another."[21]

The discussion on "place" might seem irrelevant to rehearse, but consider how Whitney Cross set up the context of his social and intellectual history of western New York. Cross described and coined the term "Burned-Over District" to describe revivalism's impact in New York. After spending two chapters tracing what he sees as a "turning point in the history of New York" that coincided with the "completion of the Erie Canal"—including mapping immigration patterns and economic development directly related to the advent of the canal, he shied from any attempt to suggest causation.[22]

Suggesting causation in historical work is a *faux pas*, because the suggestion can reduce complexity.[23] But, this is a bit strange when one considers the narrative aspect of history. Exactly which antecedents ought to be selected in writing the historical narrative? Fischer suggested that antecedents—in Cross's case, the completion of a canal—can never be said to be a cause—what Cross called a "turning point."[24] However, this would only be true if one were engaged in a metaphysical, grand theory history. In fact, Fischer's work critiqued only metaphysicists' theories of causation, not causal relationships between events.[25] Casey's and Baker's work demonstrated the relationship between geography and history. Individually, they provided a framework that can

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[21] Baker, *Geography and History*, 220.

[22] See Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (1950; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 55–109.

[23] Cf., Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, 172–86.

[24] Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies*, 184.

[25] See footnotes throughout Fisher, *Historians' Fallacies*, 183–6.

account for frontier New York as a "particular place" where New Yorkers had "engaged experiences of being-in-place." A century-and-a-half earlier, Alexis de Tocqueville highlighted the relationship between human action and place-making in the mind of nineteenth-century Europeans. He wrote that the indigenous North Americans occupied but did not possess the land nor "appropriate" the earth because they did not cultivate it.[26] New Yorkers' understood themselves to be creating a place through their actions.

The Erie Canal was not *merely* a canal. New Yorkers came together to actually dig the ditch, frame for concrete pouring, and mechanize the locks. In so doing, they made a particular place out of a location. The construction of the canal and subsequent marketization changed the people who participated in the effort. However, before there was ever a canal in New York, those same people were merchants who had made a location a place. They established trade nodes throughout the region's inland waterways and noted inefficiencies in transport. They wanted to steer commerce from the Ohio Valley into New York harbor, saw the Appalachian chain as a problem, and in so doing, made it a type of "place" to them.[39] That is, as people made the region around the Erie

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[26] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 26.

[39] This logic is well-established in human geography, and it is behind some—if not all—the work by indigenous folk to reclaim aboriginal names of locations, such as the renaming of Mount McKinley to the aboriginal Denali. On the connection between "place naming" and political identity, see Steven M. Radil, "The Multi-Scalar Geographies of Place Naming: The Case of Cyprus," *The Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* 4, no 1 (Winter/Spring 2017): 72–85. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26664144. Cyprus is a hallmark testcase of the intersection of conflict, ethnic strife, and place. Radil's study highlights how place naming territorializes locations, particularly in view of conflict.

Finding no articles on the matter, I wonder: Americans kept the names of so many regional features such as rivers, lakes, etc. in native form but named their cities with anglicized names, e.g., Tennessee River with its settlement of Twickenham, renamed Huntsville after 1812. Theirs were settlements within territory belonging to the so-called "Great Civilized Tribes." Was this retention of indigenous names of features recognition on the part of these settlers of that fact? And, at what point did the maps "set" the names of these features to the extent where naming them would not make sense? For example, why did the Americans rename Denali after McKinley but not name the Tennessee after Boone, Jackson, or Polk? Australians have investigated this subject among their aboriginal peoples, but I couldn't find a comparable study for North America. See Melanie Wilkinson, R. Marka, and Nancy M. Williams, "This Place Already Has a Name, in *Aboriginal Placenames: Naming and Re-Naming the Australian Landscape* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2009), 403–34.

Canal their home, their home also made them. So, when Forman rose to propose the canal, he started the work of transforming one place—undeveloped frontier—into another—western New York.

The Appalachian Mountain Range as a Problem

Americans needed to solve the problems of the North American continent's geography. In the Treaty of Paris (1783), the British ceded the Ohio River Valley to the Americans. The Appalachian Mountains, however, restricted east-to-west migration into the Ohio territory, and those same mountains made exports across from western territories to cities in the east impractical. Along the entire range, there are only three traversable gaps from Maine to Georgia which allowed the transportation of goods in bulk and the migration of settlers. The Mohawk and Hudson valleys formed a corridor to Lake Champlain in the north. In the south, the Wilderness Road (c. 1775) and later Cumberland Road (c. 1806) crossed the Appalachians (Figure 3).[42]

These early American roads were hardly more than rutted trails that became impassable by inclement weather. Bulk transport via wagon was too costly. Daniel Walker Howe wrote that the early frontier "was not so much a specific line on a map as any area where it was hard to get produce to market."[43] Commerce generally happened along waterways, and American leaders recognized the Ohio River Valley territories as the future of the young nation's economic expansion. For example, Thomas Jefferson remarked that the Mississippi River system would be "one of the principal channels of future commerce" west of the Appalachians.[44] Kentucky and Tennessee farmers found it

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[42] On the Wilderness Road and settlement, see Jon Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense: The Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 112.

[43] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 40–1.

[44] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Penden (1954; Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 7.

cheaper for citizens of counties to use the Mississippi watershed for commercial transport than haul their goods through mountain passes.

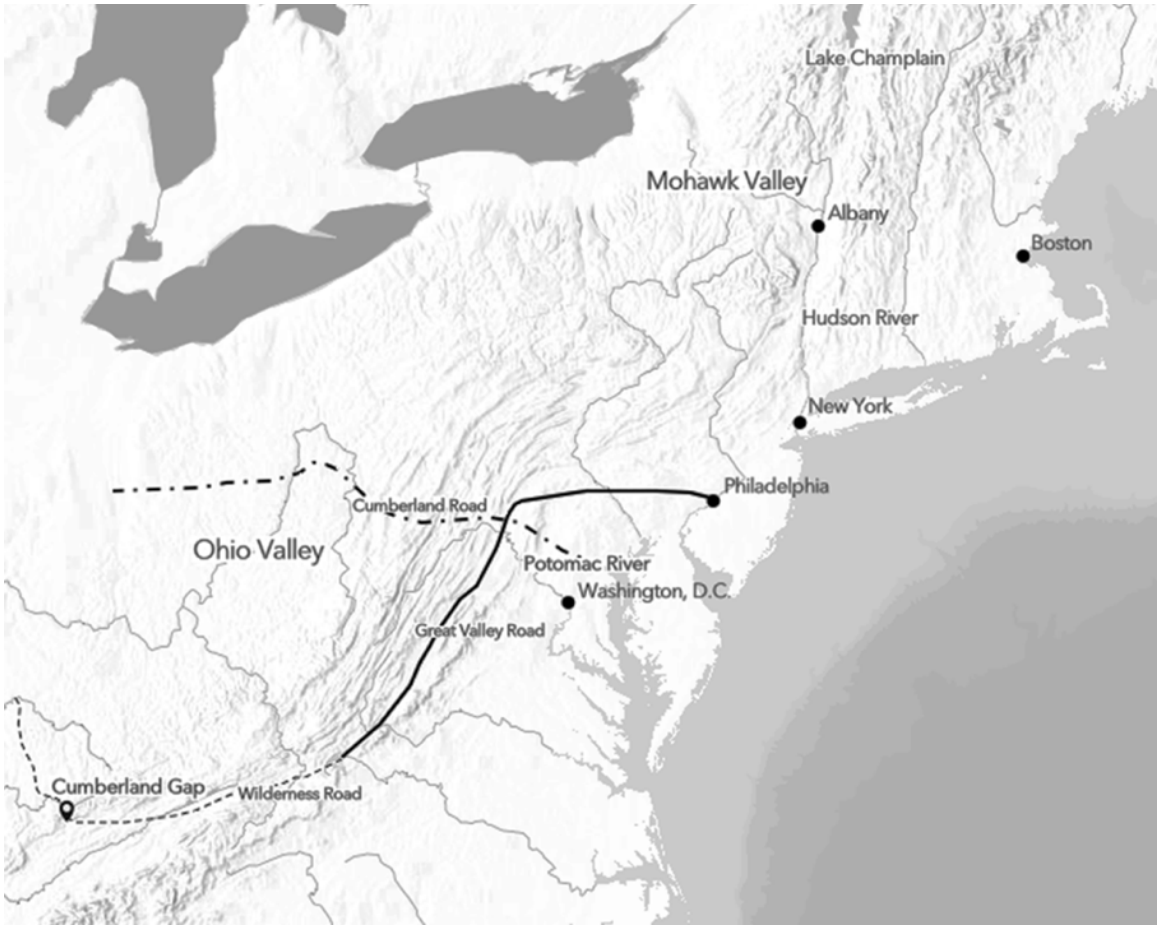

Figure 3. Early American transportation routes. Data from National Geographic Society, Esri, and Garmin. Created using ArcGIS; Esri. © 2022 Zachariah Carter.

Waterborne transit was safer, faster, and more efficient. George Washington lamented that farmers in Louisville—then situated in the Kentucky County of Virginia—moved grain to market through Spanish New Orleans (Figure 4).[45] If the future of

[45] George Washington, *The Diary of George Washington*, October 4, 1784, *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 4: 1784–June 1786, ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig. George

economic progress lay beyond the Appalachian Mountains, Washington, Jefferson, and others could not let American goods pass through Spanish and British-controlled ports and markets.[46]

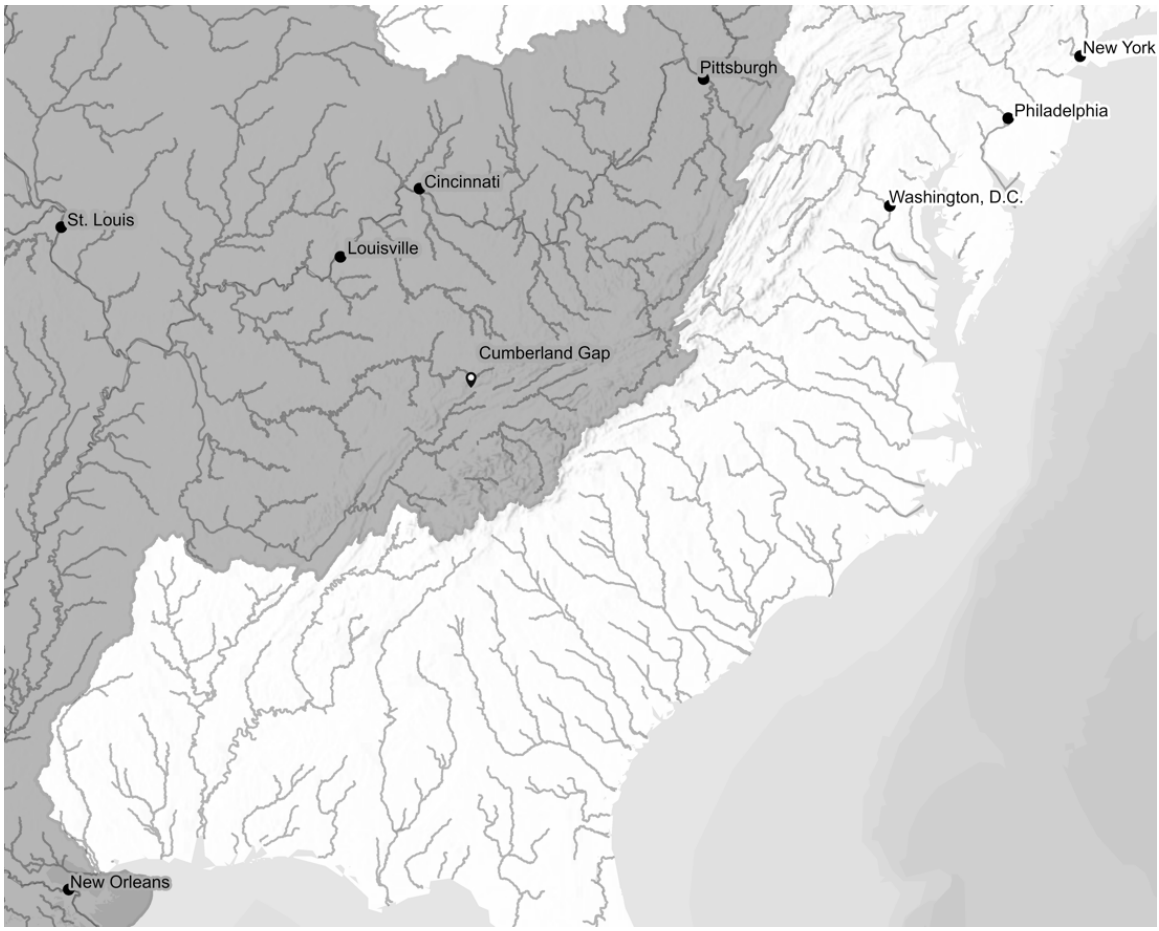

Figure 4. The Mississippi River Basin. The black lines correspond to significant rivers, and the dark gray is the watershed for the Mississippi. Data from National Geographic Society, NOAA, Esri, and USGS. Created using ArcGIS; Esri. © 2021 Zachariah Carter.

Washington Papers at the Library of Congress.

[46] Cf., Doyle, *The Source*, 18.

The British and Spanish, however, were not keen to cooperate with the upstart nation's ambitions. With the loss of the Thirteen Colonies, Britain consolidated its position in Canada and used its control of Great Lakes waterways to limit access to American commercial activity. Additionally, Britain worked with indigenous nations to resist American demands for land in the recently ceded territories to maintain their control of the lucrative fur trade.[47] Spain controlled the trans-Mississippi Louisiana territory and used it as a buffer between their colony of New Spain and the United States. To them, every American settling in the trans-Appalachian west represented erosion in control. Although Spain ceded Louisiana to France in 1800, they maintained control of New Orleans, and in that year, the Spanish closed New Orleans to American shipping.[48] New York Governor John Jay labored to secure diplomatic favors from the Spanish in return for exclusive navigational rights on the Mississippi, but Congress was uninterested.[49] Still, western settlers needed access to water navigation.

The young nation's leaders did not think cutting a canal through the Appalachians was primarily about transport efficiency. Instead, it was a matter of national unity. This concern for unity made building a canal to puncture the Appalachians a nation-building project. In the 1780s, Washington engaged projects to improve transportation along the Potomac River with the eventual goal of linking it to the Ohio Valley. Initially, these projects were restricted to slips to replace portages at places like Great Falls.[51] However, Washington seriously considered the possibility of linking the

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[47] Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 112.

[48] Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 113.

[49] Cf., Ari Kelmna, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 33–4.ac

[51] Geroge Washington, "September 22, 1784," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/01-04-02-0001-0001. [Original source: *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 4, 1 September 1784–30 June 1786, ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 1–54.]

Potomac's Northern Branch to the Youghiogheny River near modern-day Oakland, Maryland by a 10-mile overland portage.[52] He believed an eventual canal here would "cement the interest" of western settlers to merchants on the Atlantic coast (Figure 5).[53]

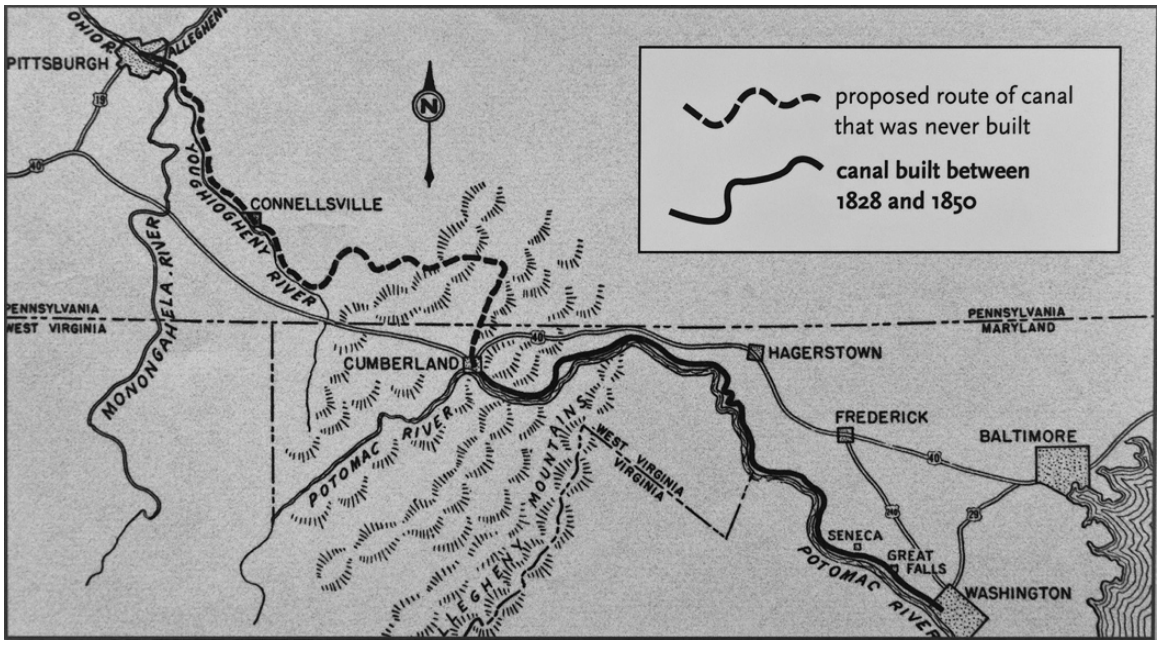

Figure 5. Proposed Map of Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, including portions never built. United States Dept. of Interior, National Park Service - United States Dept. of Interior. National Park Service information sign in Great Falls Tavern, Great Falls, MD, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Public Domain.

He impressed the gravity of the situation on South Carolina Senator Jacob Read. Trade with the British and Spanish divided the economic interests of the east and

[52] Geroge Washington, "September 26, 1784," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/01-04-02-0001-0001. [Original source: *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 4, 1 September 1784–30 June 1786, ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 1–54.]

The Youghiogheny River empties into the Monongahela River. The Monongahela River meets the Allegheny River at Pittsburgh as the headwaters to the Ohio River. Connecting the Potomac to the Youghiogheny would have provided Pennsylvania and Ohio frontier settlers with access to the East coast.

[53] "From George Washington to Jacob Read, 3 November 1784," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed July 19, 2021. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-02-02-0105. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, vol. 2, *18 July 1784–18 May 1785*, ed. W. W. Abbot (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 118–123.]

west. The results, Washington wrote, would be "fatal." He continued, "if the Inhabitants thereof should form commercial connexions, which lead, we know, to intercourse of other kinds, they would in a few years be as unconnected with us, indeed more so, than we are with South America."[54]

For his part, Jefferson supposed there were only three viable options for such a connection: the Hudson, Potomac, and the Mississippi itself.[55] After reflecting on the challenge of navigating the Gulf of Mexico and portages required to get goods to the Hudson, Jefferson concluded nature itself had granted the Potomac the spoils of the American continent.[56] He believed canals along the Potomac would "spread the feild [sic] of our commerce Westwardly & Southwardly beyond any thing ever yet done by man."[57] Of course, Virginians never succeeded in the construction of a canal. Crossing the Pennsylvania Alleghanies for Ohio River access was simply cost prohibitive. That canal would have required nearly 250 locks to reach the necessary elevation of 1,900 feet.[58] By comparison, the highest elevation on the path of the future Erie Canal was less than 600 feet.[59] North American geography presented a challenge to the budding nation, and there was only one place where a canal was financially feasible. In a prior era, glaciers had excavated an east-west channel through the Appalachian Mountains in one place: the Mohawk River Valley (Figure 6).

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[54] George Washington to Jacob Read, November 3, 1784.

[55] "From Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 15 March 1784," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-07-02-0029. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 7, *2 March 1784–25 February 1785*, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, pp. 25–27.]

[56] Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, March 15, 1784.

[57] "To James Madison from Thomas Jefferson, 8 December 1784," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0095. [Original source: *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 8, *10 March 1784–28 March 1786*, ed. Robert A. Rutland and William M. E. Rachal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 177–180.]

[58] Doyle, *The Source*, 30.

[59] Doyle, *The Source*, 30.

Figure 6. The Hudson and Mohawk River Valleys in topographical relief. Data from National Geographic Society. Created using ArcGIS; Esri. © 2022 Zachariah Carter.

New Yorkers solved the internal improvement question with Yankee grit. In so doing, they learned the value of a bipartite approach to social challenges—voluntary associations and lobbying legislative assemblies. They did so by situating the question within a larger national conversation about what it meant to be an American republic. Also, they voluntarily assembled to build the Western Canal—now known as the Erie Canal.

Internal Improvements and American Identity

Settlers in the western New York frontier and residents in eastern New York recognized the importance of improving the conditions of the newly acquired territories.

The story of the Erie Canal began with internal improvements, not merely because the canal was an internal improvement. Americans' discussions regarding internal improvements were one mechanism by which they forged their distinct national identity. Their efforts were seeking to make a place out of the Ohio Territory.

The Union of the Articles of Confederation found itself with swaths of land which had doubled the size of the original thirteen colonies, extending the territory of the United States to the Mississippi River.[60] Incorporating that territory into a nation presented two challenges. First, Americans had to hedge against the imperial designs of France, Britain, and Spain, all of whom were unwilling to surrender North America to the fledgling nation.[61] Second, the indigenous populations in the Ohio River Valley and Great Lakes Basin had not resigned to the American settler question. When the Treaty of Paris (1783) was signed, the Americans possessed the western territories on paper but not always in fact. R. Douglas Hurt noted that American possession of the region was tenuous when the British surrendered.[62] The British actively encouraged Native

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[60] Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 111–2.

[61] Norman A. Graebner argued that though the territories west of the Appalachian were devoid of European settlers they were central to the Treaty of Paris (1783). Britain, France, and Spain—more than resolve the American independence question—had to negotiate nature of territorial possessions in the New World. Britain ceded the thirteen colonies to avoid driving its colonies closer into the hands of the French. While French Louisiana had been ceded to the Spanish as compensation for the Seven Years War, France was unwilling to see the New World as totally lost. As will be discussed below, Napoleon Bonaparte intended to revive the French possession until the Haitian rebellion and Continental wars forced him to sell Louisiana to the Americans. In the War for Independence, Americans—read "French" influence through the Americans—never managed to convince the Spanish to join the war against Britain. A war with Britain that was not also a reconquista of Gibraltar was not worth Spanish blood. As discussed above, Spain was also concerned to control traffic on the Mississippi to discourage British settlement in territories it saw as a buffer against Anglo-American expansion into gold-rich Mexico. Spain agreed to enter when Americans agreed to not seek Florida.

Of course, the details of the Treaty of Paris (1783) are not the focus of this present study except for at this critical point: The Americans would receive only what the British gained after the Seven Years War. This left Canada for the British, Louisiana for the Spanish/French, and Florida in Spanish control. The American's possession of the boundary lines set by the Treaty of Paris (1763) was on paper—but not in settled possession.

See Norman A. Graebner, "The Illinois Country and the Treaty of Paris 1783," *Illinois Historical Journal* 78, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 2–16. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40191818.

[62] R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720–1830* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1998), 94.

Americans to resist American settlement from their Great Lakes forts they refused to vacate.[63] Without improvements to the western interior, the Americans would never take possession of what they owned in a treaty.

Expansion as Survival

Americans had secured the Ohio territory in a treaty, and now they were in the ironic situation of having to subjugate a corner of the world where they had just a decade prior insisted on a divine right to self-determination. Leaders like Washington and Jefferson assumed that American settlers would settle and cultivate all the land east of the Mississippi River. The Erie Canal helped facilitate this by opening the frontier to commerce. The canal was a nationalistic project for New Yorkers, and they freely utilized religious symbols to justify and sustain their efforts. The end to which they employed those symbols reflected their sense of self—what Elie Kedourie called the "doctrines" of identity.[64] How exactly Americans would settle (and subjugate) the Old Northwest is synonymous with the debate surrounding internal improvements. If Americans could not develop the interior, they would be unable to settle the area properly. Settle they did. The Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 created pathways for land ownership but did not guarantee market access through American ports. As mentioned above, the principal port of commerce for all products from the trans-Appalachian west was New Orleans by geographical consequence (See Figure 7).

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[63] Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 112. See also Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 101.

[64] Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 136.

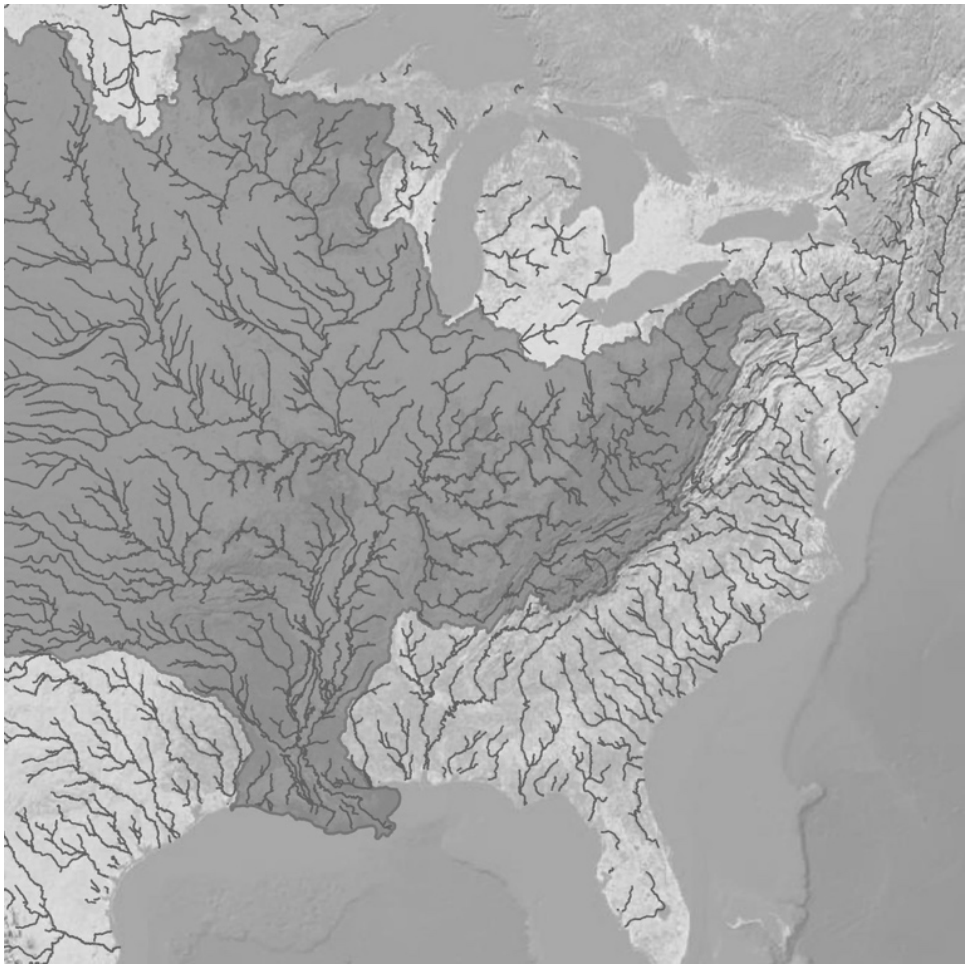

Figure 7. The Mississippi watershed. Data from National Geographic Society, NOAA, Esri. Created using ArcGIS; Esri. © 2022 Zachariah Carter.

Unless merchants hauled their goods through the passes of the Appalachian Mountains, the first settlers' goods would flow through Spanish hands before they made their way to British or American markets. Control of this commercial channel—the waterways of the Mississippi—was essential for the early American republic's survival. As Paul Gilje noted, "Conquest and expansion remained secondary to interest in commerce. . . . Indeed, the first serious steps towards American expansion were accidental and incidental consequences of diplomatic activities aimed at protecting

American commerce."[77] Economic opportunity drove the American settlers to cultivate the frontier. Commercial interests spurred East Coast merchants to lobby for ways to steer that trade to their port, including merchants in New York City.

The dominant motivation for British expansion in the New World centered around the increase of commerce. While there are many similarities between the major colonial powers, there are some critical differences. First to the New World, Spanish colonialization focused mainly on the material extraction of gold and silver.[78] Fortuitously, the Spanish stumbled upon highly developed civilizations that had developed mining operations. The Spanish exploited these operations for "cheap" bullion, which led to an absolute neglect by the Spanish in developing their colonies into significant producers of manufactured goods which would compete in the Atlantic economy.[79] By contrast, Norman ideals of feudal agriculture would dominate French and British colonial enterprises.[80] First, however, the British were merely imitating the Spanish. Walter Raleigh's charter granted great latitude in exchange for any gold or silver found in the English colonies.[81] When they found no gold, they embraced agriculture and mercantile networks as the true wealth of their colonies. Anthony Pagden showed this happened to such an extent that "plantation" and "colony" became synonymous terms in

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[77] Paul A. Gilje, "Commerce and Conquest in Early American Foreign Relations, 1750–1850," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 736–7. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/90014990.

[78] Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 66.

[79] Cf., Pagden, *Lord of All the World,* 68–73.

[80] Cf., Pagden, *Lord of All the World,* 67. The French engaged in commercial agriculture with their sugar colonies in the Caribbean, like Martinique, Guadeloupe, and St. Domingue. The French did not engage in agriculture in their North American territories, but they did develop the fur trade. The British absorbed the fur trade after 1763.

[81] See Charter to Sir Walter Raleigh, 1584, 26 Eliz. I. The Avalon Project, Yale University, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/16th_century/raleigh.asp.

British legal verbiage.[82] Whatever the British lacked in Peruvian gold or silver ore, they more than recouped through Atlantic mercantilism.

The early American republic was a part of this trans-Atlantic economy, and its expansion into the west reached back to that British emphasis on commerce—among other ideas. Gilje argued that American policy used trade to encourage Native Americans to embrace agriculture. Native homesteads over nomadic hunting left more room for American homesteads.[83] Further talks to expand slavery into Texas and the Southwest, acquire California from the Mexicans, and press the British in the Pacific Northwest focused around flooding American products into the Atlantic market—and anticipated Pacific market.[84]

Improvement as Policy

That America's territory more than doubled in two decades was nothing more than a *felix accidens*. The boundary set by the Treaty of Paris (1783), Pinckney's Treaty (1795), and the Louisiana Purchase (1803) confirmed for Americans what appeared to be a providential—and inevitable—expansion across the entire North American continent. However, as mentioned above, none of this territory was helpful to the Americans if it did not tie together in a meaningful way. They expected to do this through internal improvements.

As Americans settled the Old Northwest, commerce along the Ohio River and Mississippi River shaped the settlement of trans-Appalachian Americans.[85] For example,

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[82] Pagden, *Lord of All the World,* 79. Indeed, when Roger Williams founded the colony at what would become Rhode Island, he called it "Providence Plantation."

[83] Gilje, "Commerce and Conquest in Early American Foreign Relations, 1750–1850," 761.

[84] Gilje, "Commerce and Conquest in Early American Foreign Relations, 1750–1850," 767.

[85] At this point, the importance of the Appalachian Mountains in this early republic period should be manifest. François Furstenberg made the point in "The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (June 2008): 647–77. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30223047.

in a decade, the cultivated acreage of Ohio Territory alone increased by 1,182 percent, from only 225,675 acres in 1810 to 2,892,456 in 1820.[86] Developing a plan to capitalize on this economic growth dominated Congressional debate in the early decades of the nineteenth century.[87] These debates fell along the concurrent conflicts on the nature of the relationship between the federal government and those of the states. The lines of this conflict were not neat. For example, during the Constitutional ratification period in 1787–88, Thomas Jefferson was notoriously suspicious of an expansionist executive branch, instead trusting the states themselves to organize improvements. Yet, by 1806, Jefferson actually advocated federal spending on internal improvements, including canals:

> public education, roads, rivers, canals, and such other objects of public improvement . . . [so that] channels of communication will be opened between the States; the lines of separation will disappear, their interests will be identified, and their union cemented by new and indissoluble ties.[88]

However, just two years later, Jefferson stymied enthusiasm for improvement plans put forward, which he thought expanded federal power.[89] No one debated that internal improvements were necessary for the commercial viability of agriculture in the trans-Appalachian region. Instead, Democratic-Republicans and Federalists—and their heirs—debated various solutions to implement a federal plan for improvement, but compromise never materialized in a meaningful way.[90] New Yorkers' engagement in this debate

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[86] Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 248.

[87] For a history of these plans, see John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 39–69.

[88] *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford, quoted in Joseph H. Harrison, Jr, "'Sic Et Non:' Thomas Jefferson and Internal Improvement," *Journal of the Early Republic* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 341. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3123720.

[89] Harrison, "'Sic Et Non:' Thomas Jefferson and Internal Improvements," 346.

[90] Cf., Pamela L. Baker, "The Washington National Road Bill and the Struggle to Adopt a Federal System of Internal Improvement," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 440–3. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3124811.

In fact, it would not be until the Federal Highway Act of 1956 which created the interstate system that a fe. deral program for internal improvements would be signed into law.

forged a political class with distinct market interests in developing New York's harbors and waterways. Figures such as Christopher Colles, Philip Schuyler, Joshua Forman, DeWitt Clinton, and others entered the debate of internal improvement as policy.

Want for "Easy Carriage": The Need for a Canal in New York

Of course, the advent of the Erie Canal did not occur within a historical vacuum. John Rutherford noted that improving New York's inland waterways was a "favorite subject of conversation" even when New York remained a British colony.[91] What the British came to call New York is bounded by water on nearly every side. Lake Champlain is at the state's northeast corner and drains into the St. Lawrence River, later forming its border with Vermont. The Long Island Sound and Delaware River shape its southernmost boundary. Two Great Lakes, Lakes Erie and Ontario which the Niagara River connects, hem New York on the west. The St. Lawrence River divides New York from Ontario and Quebec provinces to the north and northeast. As for the state's interior, ancient glaciers carved vast depressions and valleys in the geography of the North American continent, leaving behind deep freshwater lakes and headwaters for rivers within the interior. The Finger Lakes, the Mohawk River, and the Hudson River were the most significant waters for warfare and trade (Figure 8).

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[91] John Rutherford, *Facts and Observations in Relation to the Origin and Completion of the Erie Canal* (New York: N.B. Holmes, 1825), 3.

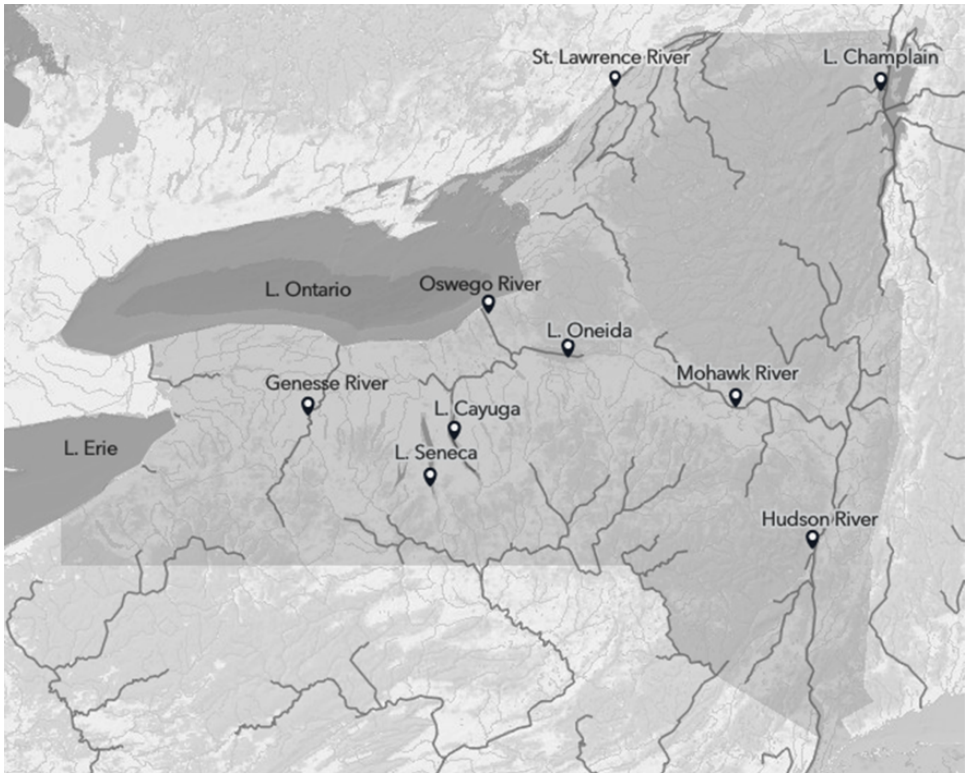

Figure 8. New York State borders, lakes, and major rivers. Data from National Geographic Society, NOAA, and USGS. Created using ArcGIS; Esri. © 2022 Zachariah Carter.

The indigenous peoples of New York had developed a complex network of portages and trails to complement the rivers and streams. In 1724, Cadwallader Colden (1688–1776) noted how the canoe allowed the Iroquois and other nations to deftly navigate the streams and rivers without restricting movement through forests.[92] Using a canoe, two men could float and quickly unload goods across portages. The Iroquois dominated commerce by controlling a few portages. They used these portages to guide trade through the St. Lawrence or the Hudson River.[93] One can see how the Iroquois, for example, could make use of the Oswego River to connect Lake Ontario to Albany via

[92] Cadwallader Colden, "A Memorial Concerning the Fur-Trade of the Province of New York," in *Papers Relating to An Act of the Assembly of the Province of New York*, appended to *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada* (London: T. Osborne, 1748), 27.

[93] Colden, "A Memorial Concerning the Fur-Trade," 27–9.

Lake Oneida and the Mohawk River (Figure 6). These first nations shuttled goods, mainly fur, from the interior to competitive markets, seeking the highest bidder in British territories.

In 1724, Colden wrote that the French were at a disadvantage given the poor weather in Hudson Bay, which limited them to a narrow window for passage to European markets.[94] He argued that the British ought to develop ties to the Iroquois Confederacy to steer commerce down the Hudson River away from the French in Quebec. Moreover, he anticipated the route which the Erie Canal would take. Colden argued that New Yorkers should steer Iroquois trade through American markets. He hypothesized that New York merchants could cut the French off entirely by avoiding Lake Ontario: "There is a River which comes from the Country of the *Sennekas*, and falls into the *Onondaga River*, by which we have an easy Carriage into that Country, without going near the *Cataracui Lake [vis*., Lake Ontario]. The Head of this River goes near to *Lake Erie*."[95] Ronald E. Shaw noted that with trade on the Great Lakes as the prize for New Yorkers the French had the St. Lawrence, but the English controlled an "ace in the hole" with a "potential advantage of an inland water route to Lake Erie."[96] Colden anticipated the route of the Erie nearly a century before its construction. If the British wanted to steer Iroquoian trade through Albany to New York City, they would have to take advantage of the inland waterways of western New York. More importantly, they would steer commerce away from the French.

Though people had improved waterways or dug canals and their popularity was growing in Europe, the French had completed a significant canal project in the 1680s, inspiring British (and future American) engineers to imagine more ambitious

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[94] Colden, "A Memorial Concerning the Fur-Trade," 30.

[95] Colden, "A Memorial Concerning the Fur-Trade," 34.

[96] Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Canal West: A History of The Erie Canal, 1792–1854* (1966; Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 11

projects. Their royal canal at Languedoc in southern France—renamed *Canal du Midi* after the French Revolution—linked the Atlantic with the Mediterranean through a series of channels, dredges, and the Orb Aqueduct. French engineers improved the inland waters of *la Métropole*, connecting the River Garonne near Bordeaux to the *Étang de Thau* (Figure 9). The French believed the canal confirmed their sentiments of superiority.[97]

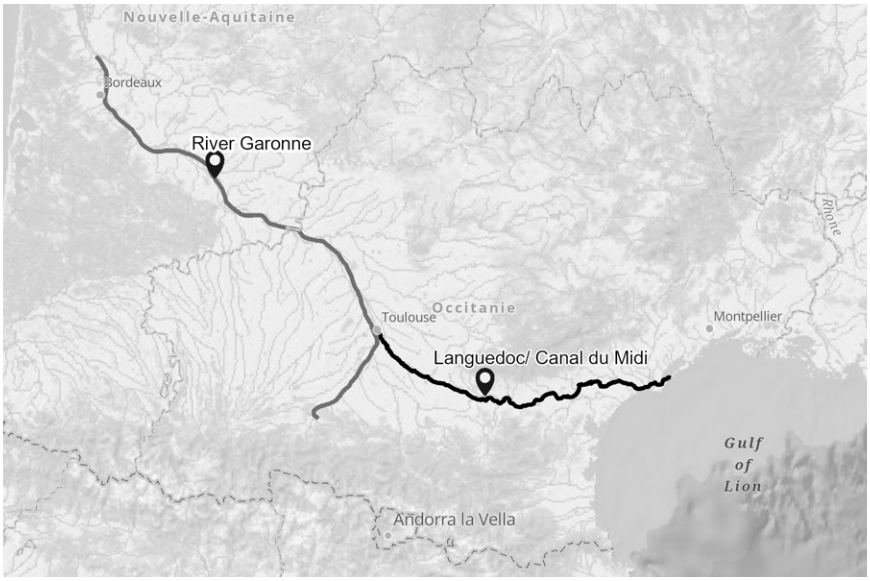

Figure 9. The *Canal royal en Languedoc*, renamed *Canal du Midi* in 1789 after the French Revolution. Data from Esri, GEBCO, and DeLorme. Canal data from user "46eronique.marill." No additional user data is available. Created using ArcGIS; Esri. © 2022 Zachariah Carter.

British governors in New York seeking to improve commerce from the Great Lakes through the Hudson looked to the Languedoc canal as a model. In 1768, Governor Henry Moore of New York (1713–1769) announced his hope that "the obstruction of

[97] More will be said on the intersection between canal construction and national identity in the next chapter, but Pierre-Paul Riquet, the Canal du Midi's chief entrepreneur, became a folk hero in the period of French nationalism following the Revolution. See Chandra Mukerji, "The New Rome: Infrastructure and National Identity on the Canal du Midi," *Osiris* 24, no. 1 (2009):15–32, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/605967.

navigation in the Mohawk river between Schenectady and Fort Stanwix. . . could easily be removed by sluices by the plan of those in the great canal of Languedoc."[98] The Languedoc canal also inspired Washington and Jefferson's improvements along the Potomac River.[99]

From this moment on, British authorities seriously considered various solutions to opening communication from the port of New York City to the Great Lakes. For example, Governor William Tryon of New York (1729–1788) ordered a report in 1774 on the navigation possibilities along New York's inland waterways. An unnamed commissioner reported: "The Hudson is the only navigable river in the Province. . . [its] branches are interrupted by falls and rifts; to surmount these obstructions, an expense would be required too heavy for the Province at present to support."[100] The financial cost of improving the navigation of the New York colony was too great for His Majesty's government.

Nevertheless, His Majesty's former subjects, the rebel Americans, understood the importance of controlling New York's inland waterways. Control of the headwaters and tributaries of the Hudson was pivotal to developing New York harbor as a commercial hub. Even as British redcoats occupied New York, New Yorkers were anticipating a day when they would link the Atlantic to their own inland seas—the Great Lakes. While stationed in Albany during the American War for Independence, Philip

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[98] Henry Moore, "Address to Colonial Assembly," December 16, 1768, quoted in Henry Wayland Hill, *A Historical Review of Waterways and Canal Construction in New York State* (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1908), 39.

[99] In a letter from Washington to Jefferson, Washington thanked Jefferson for his description and reporting on the Languedoc canal. Washington hoped America would "be able to embark in projects of such pecuniary extent," and the two believed that it served as a model for Potomac improvement. See "From George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, 31 August 1788," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-06-02-0440. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, vol. 6, 1 January 1788–23 September 1788, ed. W. W. Abbot (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 491–495.

[100] Report to Governor Tryon, June 11, 1774, quoted in Henry Wayland Hill, *A Historical Review of Waterways and Canal Construction in New York State* (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1908), 40.

Schuyler (1733–1803) discussed the construction cost of "uninterrupted water carriage between New York and Quebec" with Charles Carroll.[101] Schuyler would eventually be appointed to one of the first commissions to find a suitable route west of the Hudson. Still, before that, the Americans would have to win their independence.[102]

At the war's end, George Washington moved his headquarters to New Windsor to wait for the Treaty of Paris (1783) to be finalized. As the British had not yet evacuated troops from New York City, Washington stayed close but took a tour of upstate New York's waterways north of the Hudson. He reported to his French colleague Maj. Gen. François-Jean de Chastellux, liaison officer of the Comte de Rochambeau to Washington, said that developing the "vast inland navigation of these United States" was critical—a stewardship of divine providence.[103] Washington recognized the significance of these waterways as a means of securing the United States' future as a "new empire."[104] While Washington's focus would be on developing the Potomac River, New Yorkers like Schuyler recognized how vital the development of their waterways was to their future as a new state.

The first genuine proposals for something resembling a canal came from Christopher Colles (1739–1816) in 1785. Colles had been the chief engineer on the canals which improved the navigation on River Shannon, Limerick before he immigrated to New York.[105] Colles suggested forming a company dedicated to clearing obstructions on Mohawk River with a short canal connecting it via Wood Creek to Lake Oneida.

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[101] Benson J. Lossing, *The Life and Times of Philip Schuyler*, vol. 2 (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1873), 40. Digitized by Cornell University.

[102] Cf., Gerard Koeppel, *Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo, 2009), 20–3.

[103] George Washington to Chastellux, 12 October 1783, in *Chastellux Letters*, accessed August 30, 2019, https://www.mountvernon.org/library/research-library/special-collections-and-archives/chastellux-letters/george-washington-to-chastellux-12-october-1783/.

[104] George Washington to Chastellux, 12 October 1783.

[105] Shaw, *Erie Canal West*, 12; Koeppel, *Bond of Union*, 24–5.

Investors would raise capital through land grants from the legislature.[106] He calculated the canal would turn a profit if it only saw 120 tons pass through the channel. These numbers were modest. Before the War for Independence, over 600 bateaux passed from Wood Creek to the Mohawk River each year—well over 1200 tons.[107] Of course, commerce—as it had always been—was at the center of Colles's proposal. Following the War for Independence, the British endeavored to divert trade from the Ohio Valley through the St. Lawrence into Quebec. Colles warned that building the canal was "expedient" because "trade is like water, when it passes in any particular channel, it is not easily diverted or drawn away into another."[108] In other words, old habits die hard. If western merchants got accustomed to piloting along one channel, New Yorkers might not convince them to take another route that led merchants through New York City harbor. As the Americans expanded into Ohio and Kentucky in the 1780s, they increasingly realized the importance of steering trade through American ports. As mentioned above, western expansion was "secondary to interest in commerce."[109] As much as Colles's proposal is about a canal, it is primarily about westward expansion to control commerce coming out of Ohio through the Great Lakes. Gerard Koeppel explained that while Colles' proposal made it into the state committee legislators never put it to a vote.[110] New Yorkers would wait a decade before they organized an effort to survey potential canal routes.

By the 1790s, the state legislature was amenable to proposals like Colles's.

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[106] Christopher Colles, *Proposal for the Speedy Settlement of the Waste and Unappropriated Lands on the Western Frontiers of the State of New-York, and for the Improvement of the Inland Navigation Between Albany and Oswego*, pamphlet (New York: Samuel Loudon, 1785), 3–4. Digitized by University of Michigan. Hathi Trust. Cf., Koeppel, *Bond of Union*, 25; Shaw, *Erie Canal West*, 13.

[107] Colles, *Proposal for the Speedy Settlement and for Improvement of Inland Navigation*, 7.

[108] Colles, *Proposal for the Speedy Settlement and for Improvement of Inland Navigation*, 13.

[109] Gilje, "Commerce and Conquest in Early American Foreign Relations, 1750–1850," 736–7.

[110] Koeppel, *Bond of Union*, 27.

Schuyler chartered the Western Inland Navigation Company in 1792. Schuyler's company was the first chartered by the New York Assembly with hopes of building a canal. While others had proposed such companies, Schuyler's name and experience with inland waterways convinced the legislature to charter the company. Schuyler himself was a hero of the War of Independence, having planned the logistical support for the Saratoga campaign in 1777.[111] The British planned to divide the New England colonies from the Mid-Atlantic colonies by controlling the Hudson River. Thus, for the Continental Army, Saratoga was potentially a severe liability. However, Schuyler knew the region well. His family estate dated back to Dutch control of the Hudson River, and his home was in Saratoga County, set just off the Hudson.[112] So the Continental Congress appointed him as the logistician for the Army's Northern Department.[113] Here, Schuyler developed his already extensive knowledge of New York's inland waterways. Stationed in Albany, he coordinated troop movements for the Northern Department, moved foodstuffs, and protected Albany's position on the Hudson.[114] This period of service presented him with an opportunity to imagine a course for peacetime water navigation in New York state.

The Western Inland Company itself never achieved its ultimate end—that is, the uninterrupted carriage of goods between Albany and Lake Ontario. Shaw explained that this had more to do with a shortage of qualified engineers and laborers than anything

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[111] Of course, Philip Schuyler would be replaced as commanding officer with the more popular Horatio Gates for the actual execution of the battle. Schuyler was a Dutch aristocrat commanding Yankee New Englanders. Alas, this is beyond the scope of the subject matter. For more on this, See Robert Middlekauf, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763–1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[112] Cf., David R. Starbuck, "The Schuyler House," *The Saratoga Campaign: Uncovering an Embattled Landscape*, ed. William A. Griswold and Donald W. Linebaugh (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2016), 179–81.

[113] Colin Williams, "New York's Committees in the American Revolution," in *Key to the Northern Country: The Hudson River Valley in the American Revolution*, ed. James M. Johnson, Christopher Pryslopski, and Andrew Villani (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 58.

[114] Stefan Bielinski, "Albany County," in *The Other New York: The American Revolution Beyond New York City, 1763–1787*, ed. Jospeh S. Tiedemann and Euegene R. Fingerhut (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 154–73.

else.[115] It had, however, managed to open navigation through the Mohawk River by dropping the cost from $100 to $32 per ton.[116] Additionally, the company surveyed the possible routes a canal could take, solved frontier engineering problems, and performed material surveys to discover the most effective methods of canal construction.[117] More importantly, however, many of its early shareholders became involved in New York canal management in the subsequent decades. This involvement allowed future canal advocates to turn the Western Inland Company's failure into the Erie Canal's success, and individuals like Gouverneur Morris (1752–1816) and DeWitt Clinton (1769–1828)—both Company shareholders—were convinced of a grand canal's potential.

"We Turn Our Best Hopes to a Patriotic Government": Convincing New York to Build the Erie Canal

Of course, the failure of the Western Inland Company to connect the Hudson with the Great Lakes did not mean that merchants simply elected to ignore moving their merchandise. Like the rest of Americans, New York merchants had to use notoriously awful road networks. When Thomas Cooper toured Western New York in 1809, he was shocked to learn the market for Buffalo's produce was New Orleans. Merchants found it easier to ship their grain ninety miles via a road near Erie, Pennsylvania, carry it by wagon nine miles to Chautauqua Lake, float their goods down the Alleghany to Pittsburgh, and ship the bulk through the Ohio to the Mississippi—a journey over 1,500 miles as the crow flies—than take the nearly 350-mile overland trip to Albany. Inevitably, Cooper supposed "the market will be Montreal, for there are not more than nine miles of portage from Lake Erie to Montreal. . . navigation is not only very much short, but much easier."[119] In 1815, a merchant who wanted to ship merchandise just

[115] Shaw, *Erie Canal West*, 18–19.

[116] Shaw, *Erie Canal West*, 18; Koeppel, *Bond of Union*, 32.

[117] Cf., Koeppel, *Bond of Union*, 33–4.

[119] Thomas Cooper, *A Ride to Niagara in 1809* (1810; Rochester, NY: George Humphrey,

thirty miles to a nearby port city would spend more than a competitor sending the same ton of goods across the Atlantic.[120] Such a cost was enough to bankrupt American merchants. In fact, that shipping cost bankrupted one Jesse Hawley, who penned a series of essays from debtors' prison urging the construction of a canal from Buffalo to Albany.

Jesse Hawley (1773–1842) was a merchant who transported flour from Geneva on the northern tip of Lake Seneca to New York markets.[121] Business for Hawley turned south when the cost of transporting grain through Western Inland Navigation Company's canal and overland portages left him bankrupt.[122] From debtors' prison in Ontario County in 1807, Hawley wrote a series of fourteen essays urging New Yorkers to support the canal's construction. A chief problem of canaling in New York with the Western Inland Company had been stable water levels. Without a stable water reservoir, dry months would make navigation impossible through artificial channels and improved riverways as water levels fell.[123] So, Hawley's proposal seized on an inspiration he had in 1805, frustrated by fluctuating prices along the Western Inland Company's canal. If workers could cut a channel from Lake Erie at Buffalo, a New York canal could theoretically have a stabilizing water reservoir.[124]

Throughout those fourteen essays, Hawley laid out a comprehensive plan for improvements that would become the Erie Canal. He identified Lake Erie as the point of origin for the canal. From there, engineers would dig to the Genesee River just outside of what would become Rochester. The canal could continue north of the Finger Lakes until

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1915), 17. Digital copy provided by the University of Niagara Library.

[120] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 40

[121] Jesse Hawley to David Hosack, July 24, 1828, Hawley's Essays, "Digging Clinton's Ditch," American Studies at the University of Virginia, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/volpe/canal/hawley_intro.html.

[122] Jesse Hawley to David Hosack, July 24, 1828; Cf., Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 24.

[123] Cf., Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 24.

[124] Jesse Hawley to David Hosack, July 24, 1828.

it linked with the Mohawk River. Sluices and channels would ensure that the Mohawk River's water level would stay stable throughout the year all the way to Utica.[125] He estimated the rise would only be two feet per mile on the canal. This gentle rise, he believed, was evidence that "the Author of nature. . . had in prospect [this] large and valuable canal."[126] Paying for the canal, Hawley admitted, would be a tall order. However, allowing foreign investment would be detrimental when the young nation had leveraged so much debt to fund its revolution. British financing would lead to the American government becoming "completely manacled" by foreign banks.[127] Instead, Hawley exhorted readers that "we therefore can alone, with confidence, turn our attention and our best hopes to a patriotic government, with a productive revenue, as the source of capital competent to the completion of our numerous internal improvements."[128] He believed that where the Western Inland Company had failed the federal government could not.

Hawley forged the link between the Erie Canal, nationalism, and Protestant theology with his essays. He made the canal a place where New Yorkers' commercial prominence was part and parcel of the nation's destiny, and he saw the canal within a vision of American power. Shaw argued that Hawley's essays were "by and large a prophecy of nationalism and democracy."[129] New York politicians used Hawley's

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[125] Jesse Hawley as "Hercules," "Introductory Essay," *Genesee Messenger*, 1807, Hawley's Essays, "Digging Clinton's Ditch," American Studies at the University of Virginia, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/ volpe/canal/hawley_intro.html.

[126] Jesse Hawley as "Hercules," "No. II," *Genesee Messenger*, 1807, Hawley's Essays, "Digging Clinton's Ditch," American Studies at the University of Virginia, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/ volpe/canal/hawley_intro.html.

[127] Jesse Hawley as "Hercules," "No. VII," *Genesee Messenger*, 1807, Hawley's Essays, "Digging Clinton's Ditch," American Studies at the University of Virginia, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/ volpe/canal/hawley_intro.html.

[128] Jesse Hawley as "Hercules," "No. VIII," *Genesee Messenger*, 1807, Hawley's Essays, "Digging Clinton's Ditch," American Studies at the University of Virginia, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/ volpe/canal/hawley_intro.html.

[129] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 28.

essays—with all of their hope and ambitions for government support—to agitate for federal funding for construction. When that failed, the state began on the project. Hawley's rhetoric was actualized when New Yorkers completed the canal.

On February 4, 1808, Joshua Forman, a representative from Onondaga County, rose to propose a canal—very similar to that of Hawley's essays. Later, of course, Forman insisted that the idea of a canal from Lake Erie to the Hudson was "original with *me,*" even though newspapers suggested he had taken the concept from Hawley.[130] Forman moved that the Assembly organize a committee to survey the most direct route for a canal to connect the Great Lakes with the Hudson.[131] Forman suggested the assembly should avail themselves of funding Thomas Jefferson had asked Congress to allocate for internal improvement in 1806.[132]

Forman and others had good reason to assume that funding would come. As noted above, then president Thomas Jefferson supported allocating resources to improve the internal navigation of the United States' turnpikes, rivers, and mailroads. Additionally, in March 1807, the Senate instructed Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin to report on possible infrastructure projects Congress might fund.[133] Gallatin and his deputy engineer, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, indexed every proposed improvement project throughout the country. They insisted that only the federal government could complete each necessary work. In their mind, two principal problems stood in the way of the United States' future prosperity. First, market inefficiencies squandered productivity by frustrating efforts to deliver goods to market. The opportunity cost of delay was higher

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[130] Joshua Forman to David Hosack, October 12, 1828, quoted in David Hosack, appendix to *Memoir of DeWitt Clinton* (New York: J. Seymour, 1829), 350. Emphasis original.

[131] Joshua Forman, "In Assembly, February 4, 1808," in David Hosack, appendix to *Memoir of DeWitt Clinton* (New York: J. Seymour, 1829), 344.

[132] Joshua Forman, "In Assembly, February 4, 1808." Cf., Larson, *Internal Improvements*, 55–9.

[133] Joshua Forman, "In Assembly, February 4, 1808."

than any massive spending which might be needed. Second, individual or small corporate investments in improvements could not turn profits because of the country's sheer size. The economies of scale simply could not work to any given project's advantage. So, Congress would have to fund an entire infrastructure project to remove all of these inefficiencies—mainly through canals.[134]

Yet, Congress's progress in accomplishing Gallatin's plan can only be described as fits and starts. Some made genuine efforts to capitalize on Gallatin's plan, but a hostile House committee succeeded in rejecting the Senate's suggested program for improvements. From the publication of Gallatin's plan in 1808 through the next decade, Congress engaged in some of the most contested debates about the federal government's role.[135] New York congressman Peter B. Porter joined with Kentucky senator John Pope to bend Gallatin's plan into actionable items for congressional sponsorship. The Porter-Pope Bill would have required the federal government to purchase a third of the shares of companies slated to build the improvements by modifying Gallatin's plan for total funding of projects. Partisanship on the part of Congress kept the bill locked in committee. The War of 1812 eventually killed the Porter-Pope bill.[136]

Before it died, however, New York Lieutenant Governor DeWitt Clinton and New York statesman Gouverneur Morris traveled to the District of Columbia in December 1811. They did so to advocate for the improvements identified in the Gallatin Plan, which included a western canal in New York. Earlier that year, in March 1811, Clinton, Morris, and others on a canal exploratory committee delivered a report to the Senate on the prospect of a canal. Within the committee, they rejected the notion that a

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[134] US Department of the Treasury, *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury on the Subject of Public Roads and Canals*, April 12, 1808 (Washington: R.C. Weightman, 1808).

[135] Baker, "The Washington National Road Bill and the Struggle to Adopt a Federal System of Internal Improvement," 440.

[136] Cf., Larson, *Internal Improvement*, 61–3.

private corporation should again be tasked with creating a New York canal; after all, the failure of the Western Inland Company chastened them. They argued that "too great a national interest is at stake. . . . Among many other objections there is one insuperable: That [privatization] would defeat the contemplated cheapness of transportation."[137] They believed Congress should fully fund the project as other states along the Great Lakes would benefit from the canal.[138] Both President Madison and Congress rebuffed Clinton and Morris's requests. Clinton and Morris had found Madison "enthusiastic as to the advantages of interior navigation, by means of canals" but "embarrassed by scruples derived from his interpretation of the constitution."[139] In other words, Madison was unwilling to expand the federal government beyond its enumerated responsibilities, that is, until it became advantageous to do so. In 1811, Madison and other Virginians saw New York's rise as a threat to Virginian supremacy. Evan Cornog explained that New Yorkers suspected jealously was at the heart of Madison's refusal of the New York commissioners for two reasons. First, Congress had already funded the construction of national turnpikes. Second, states feared a canal would "work to the detriment of other states."[140]

For precisely this reason, the commission, including Clinton and Morris, insisted the work had to be federal. It might channel commerce through the Hudson rather than the Potomac, but the only states which would suffer would be Pennsylvania or Virginia. Merchants in the Old Northwest would have cheap carriage of goods to market. The New York Assembly did not believe it was their responsibility alone to fund a canal

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[137] New York Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the State of New York: At Their Thirty-Fourth Session, Begun and Held at the City of Albany, the Twenty-Ninth Day of January, 1811* (Albany: S. Southwick, Printer to the State, 1811), 75. Google Books. Cf., Evan Cornog, *The Birth of Empire: DeWitt Clinton and the American Experience, 1769–1828* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 112.

[138] New York Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the State of New York*, 75.

[139] Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 112.

[140] Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 112–3.

that would prosper merchants in Ohio, Indiana Territory, and beyond. If the states were not bound in federal union, it would be fair to "ask compensation" or take "a transit duty." However, as New York was a part of a federal union of states, it asked for "distributive justice" to offset the cost of any canal built.[141]

Rebuffed by Madison and Congress, the canal commissioners did not waste any time. On March 14, 1812, they submitted a report to the New York Senate, laying out a comprehensive defense of their proposed route. Critics had argued that commerce would more easily flow via portage on the Niagara River through Lake Ontario out through the St. Lawrence. Michigan territorial delegates argued for this Niagara shortcut when invited to buy shares in New York's capital venture. The Michigan territorial government "resolved unanimously. . . the canal contemplated by the commissioners of the internal navigation in the state of New-York, from Black Rock to Rome, would not be so desirable as a canal round the cataract of Niagara."[142] The Niagara cataract was the Western Inland Company's original canal route—through Lake Ontario to Oswego port into Oneida Lake into the Mohawk River system (See Figure 6).[143] The canal commissioners' objected that their proposal to terminate the canal at Lake Erie had more to do with commerce than engineering difficulties. They relayed expert opinion that the probability of steering trade south through Oswego when it had already entered Lake Ontario seemed "impractical." However, capturing the market share of Great Lakes commerce at a Buffalo port—before anyone had to portage around the falls at Niagara—

[141] New York Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the State of New York*, 75.

[142] State of New York, *Laws of the State of New York, in Relation to the Erie and Champlain Canals, Together with the Annual Reports of the Canal Commissioners, and Other Documents, Requisite for a Complete and Official History of those Words with Correct Maps Delineating the Routes of the Erie and Champlain Canals, and Designating the Lands Through Which They Pass* (Albany, NY: State Government Press, 1825), 74.

[143] Cf., Koeppel, *Bond of Union*, 57–64.

ensured "no rivalry" with Montreal.[144] They estimated that such a canal would cost around $6 million.[145]

New York would have to wait. Congress spent treasury surplus on warfighting in June 1812. The War of 1812 highlighted the vulnerabilities of the American frontier to British incursion, and it revealed the inefficiencies in the American military. The opening campaign of 1812—a three-pronged invasion of Canada—was an utter failure, and after Napoleon's rout in 1814, the United Kingdom could devote land resources to the defense of Canada. Of particular interest for this study was the naval war in the Great Lakes. Gordon Wood argued that British control of the Great Lakes contributed to American defeats on land. Only by wresting control of the lakes from the British could Americans retake lost territory.[146] In fact, battles on Lake Erie and Ontario decided the success or failure of respective campaigns in Ohio and Canada.[147] The reason for this was apparent. Without internal improvements in the wilderness, whoever controlled the water could move land forces more efficiently.[148] Shaw illustrated the cost of this inefficiency acutely. Geography forced the military to spend $2000 to relocate a $400 cannon from the District of Columbia to Buffalo.[149] He wrote, "The war itself had turned on the control of the very waterways which the New York canal system would unite."[150] Until then, Great Lakes commerce would continue to flow through the St. Lawrence, past American merchants into the hands of the British.

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[144] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 75.

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[146] Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 684–5.

[147] Hicky, *The War of 1812*, 41–4.

[148] Cf., Donald R. Hicky, *The War of 1812: A Short History* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2012), 41.

[149] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 56.

[150] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 56.

When Madison needed a postwar boost, he called upon Congress to begin "establishing throughout our country the roads and canals which can best be executed under the national authority."[151] Perhaps the painful lessons of the War of 1812 stood as a lesson for him. Transportation on the American frontier had to be improved should war with the British occur again. Howe noted that Madison's strictly limited constitutionalism did not stand in the way of his suggestion. Madison held that limitations could be rectified "through an amendment to the constitution itself."[152] However, when Henry Clay and John Calhoun advanced a version of the Porter-Pope bill rebranded as the Bonus Bill, Madison vetoed the bill as unconstitutional in 1817.[153] It was now clear. If any had the perception that the national government might be persuaded to support improvements, the veto of the Bonus Bill dashed all hope. Pamela L. Baker noted that Congress would reject all proposed efforts until it took up the direct funding of a comprehensive plan for internal improvement with the passage of the Federal Highway Act in 1956.[154]

During the war, some in the New York senate grew weary of the practicality of digging a canal three hundred miles through the state's western frontier. In 1814, the state assembly passed an act repealing certain powers of the canal commission. Canal supporters perceived this as a retreat, and the act galvanized the efforts of individuals on the canal commission but none more so than those of DeWitt Clinton.

DeWitt Clinton was a career politician in the state of New York. Before his appointment to the canal commission in 1810, he had been a United States Senator

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[151] James Madison quoted in Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 81.

[152] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 81.

[153] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 88; Larson, *Internal Improvement*, 69.

[154] Baker, Pamela L."The Washington National Road Bill and the Struggle to Adopt a Federal System of Internal Improvement," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 464. https://doi.org/10.2307/3124811.

(1802–1803) and mayor of New York City (1803–1815). His uncle, George Clinton, had been governor of New York from 1777–1795. During his time as mayor, Clinton had come to appreciate the benefit vital government initiatives could render. He demonstrated executive leadership in efforts to expand the public school system in the city, organize the city's public health department, and bolster the commercial center and harbor during the war.[155] But his failure in the political arena led to his rise in another. Clinton ran for the presidency but failed.[156] That failure yielded a transformation that made the canal possible.

The decline of the Federalist party—represented finally in Clinton's loss to Madison in 1812—meant that he could advance a Federalist agenda without upsetting Jeffersonian politicians. Additionally, a synthesis had occurred between states that embraced a free-market approach to business and those with a mercantile bent in political leadership.[157] Charles Sellers explained that a market revolution had unified the interest of commerce across various sectors to the political realm.[158] So, some could accept a government-led initiative to effect a commercial change as an act that did not violate the free choices of individuals precisely because it benefited the market.[159]

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[155] Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 22–61.

[156] Cf., Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 84–95.

[157] Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 115.

[158] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 40.

[159] Richard E. Ellis provided a helpful summary of how this process occurred here: Richard E. Ellis, "The Market Revolution and the Transformation of American Politics, 1801–1837," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800–1880*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 1996), 149–76.

In short, his thesis was improvements in transportation and increased global demand for American agricultural products (such as Southern cotton and Midwestern grain) replaced localized sentiments with national spirit. Advancing the prosperity of the farmer, merchant, and industrialist required (but also reflexively produced) Republican federal expansion on one hand and an independent national market subject to nonlocal forces. But this increased political apathy on the part of individuals, strengthen American slavery's interest in the political sphere, and led to a boom-and-bust cycle within the American economy.

Now, to modern readers, this point may be confusing,[160] but the market revolution represented a decided shift in national politics. Before this, entire parties dedicated themselves to thwarting any federal investments that might impact citizens' individual liberties. Foisting a canal upon taxpayers would have been seen by Jeffersonian Democrats as a gross overreach of federal power. However, DeWitt Clinton recognized that shared interests and reciprocal benefits bound together the fortunes of agriculture, manufacturers, and commercial merchants.[161] By tapping into those sentiments, Clinton believed he could make a compelling case for the canal. He was right.

Clinton was not alone. Thomas Eddy (1758–1827) recruited Clinton for this latest effort to convince New Yorkers to build a canal. Eddy and Jonas Platt (1769–1834) had sought to gather prominent investors and influential leaders together in Manhattan. They hoped to mobilize them to convince the legislature to build the canal. Eddy brought Clinton and other prominent citizens to the project, including Cadwallader Colden, mentioned earlier. Historians of the canal look to Clinton's "memorial" speech as a watershed event.[162] Printers published a thousand copies of his memorial for distribution, and canal meetings were summoned from New York to Buffalo.[163] Broad support could secure the canal's position as a New York project more than the speculation of New York

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[160] By this I mean Americans may generally assume that the federal government may spend billions of dollars on a variety of federal infrastructure projects, a corporate bank—the Federal Reserve—can raise or lower interest rates at will, and congressional action can issue mandates rather than incentives for entire industries—such as healthcare or transportation. This, however, represents a serious break in the assumptions of nineteenth century Americans.

[161] DeWitt Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York, in favor of a Canal Navigation between the Great Western Lakes and the tide-waters of the Hudson" (1815), in David Hosack, appendix to *Memoir of DeWitt Clinton* (New York: J. Seymour, 1829), 406.

[162] "Memorial" is here used in an arcane form, which referred to official state papers "in the form of a petition or remonstrance." See "memorial, adj. and n.". OED Online, June 2020, Oxford University Press.

On the importance of the memorial, see Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 57; Koeppel, *Bond of Union*, 120; Larson, *Internal Improvements*, 75.

[163] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 57–60.

City merchants. Koeppel counted the signatories of the memorial in the tens of thousands, and these signatures functioned as a sort of public referendum on the legislature's slowness in funding the project.[164]

The memorial itself was a work of rhetorical appeal, as Clinton wrote it with the stated purpose of convincing the New York Assembly to build the Erie Canal. He argued that the government's "first duty" was internal improvement to facilitate commerce. In Clinton's view, canals offered the best balance between cost, efficiency, and safety.[165] More importantly, canals offered a chance to create an internal market between the states because they cut the distance from Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh to the ocean through New York by considerable factors. Clinton believed that the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers had clear advantages as "all other communications are impeded by mountains" such that "the only formidable rivals" of New York were New Orleans and Montreal.[166] Clinton found a route through Lake Ontario unacceptable as it would pass commerce through British hands. On the other hand, an "Erie Canal" kept western trade in the United States.[167]

More critical for Clinton, however, was the effect a canal could have on the nation. By increasing the transportation capabilities for merchants, Midwestern grain farmers had the same commercial interests as Mid-Atlantic millers. Clinton suggested that whatever anxieties any American might have about the "dismemberment of the Union by collision between the north and south" could not compare to a break with the West.[168] He insisted that economic interests would separate the nation along the

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[164] Koeppel, *Bond of Union*, 120.

[165] Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York," 406–7.

[166] Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York," 409.

[167] Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York," 413

[168] Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York," 420.

Appalachians unless the Atlantic states and western states were "cemented by a common, an ever-acting, and powerful interest."[169] He felt a western canal through New York would form "an imperishable cement of connexion [sic], and an indissoluble bond of union.[170] Cornog observed that Clinton had adopted a decidedly market-oriented understanding of personal relationships, and in this, he anticipated much of what would characterize the economic realities of the antebellum period.[172] The market interests of the coming decades shaped the course of American history in the coming decades. In addition to securing the nation, the canal would confirm the United States' ascendance to the world stage. While the Old World sought to unite its great seas with oceans, Clinton held that "it remains for a free state to create a new era in history and erect a work more stupendous, more magnificent, and more beneficial than has hitherto been achieved by the human race."[173]

Their efforts were successful. When Governor Daniel Tompkins opened the New York Assembly in February 1816, he could not ignore the pressure to advance the canal even though he was personally unenthusiastic about funding the endeavor. Tompkins insisted the legislature must ask itself if the canal was worth the financial burden it would impose on constituents.[174] Citizens clearly thought the financial commitment was acceptable. At least twenty-six petitions from cities, towns, and villages throughout the state were entered into the New York Senate's record from February 21, 1816 to April 3, 1816.[175] Over 100,000 New Yorkers signed petitions in support of canal

[169] Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York," 420.

[170] Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York," 420.

[172] Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 115.

[173] Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York," 420.

[174] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 116.

[175] "At least" because the Senate clerk did not indicate the exact number of petitions which came from each of the cities entered into the record. For example, "sundry memorials" were submitted from inhabitants in unincorporated Onondaga County. See State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 116–22.

construction.[176] Even as additional petitions were received in Albany, the legislature heard the people. Still, anti-canal politicians sought to delay the overall process through amendments or requiring additional surveys.[177] On April 17, 1816, both James Cochran and, future U. S. president, Martin Van Buren sought to dismiss the proposal for funding in the New York Senate. Each effort was rebuffed.[178] Later that day, on April 17, 1816, opposition failed and the canal bill—"An act to provide for the improvement of the internal navigation of this state"—passed.[179] The commission got to work in May, and they elected DeWitt Clinton as the commission's president.[180] That following February 1817, the commission reported back to the assembly that the canal would cost $13,800 to build per mile.[181] In April 1817, the New York Assembly passed a series of taxes, issued bonds, and borrowed capital to fund the construction of what would become the Erie Canal.[182] Only a decade earlier, a merchant in debtors' prison sketched a route which eventually seized the imagination of New Yorkers. It was the promise of returns in the western lands, the needs for secure transportation, and a commercial rivalry with Canada which turned the personal ambitions of a few politicians into a transformative

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[176] Larson, *Internal Improvements*, 75.

[177] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 122–75.

[178] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 176–8.

[179] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 184.

[180] Cf., Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 63.

[181] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 184.

This is roughly $325,000 in today's purchasing power of the same dollar. The data is imprecise as the Bureau of Labor Statistics's Consumer Price Index (CPI) has official data only back as far as 1913. The figure averages two figures with one from the earliest CPI figure in 1913 and another with an assumed inflation rate of 1.41 percent since 1817 based on estimated CPI from the BLS's database. See U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "CPI Inflation Calculator," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed December 13, 2021, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm; and Alioth Finance, "Official Inflation Data," accessed December 13, 2021, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1800?amount=13800.

[182] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 334–58.

infrastructure project.[183]

"Digging Through Mire; Digging Through Gravel": Building the Erie Canal

After the election of 1816, Governor Tompkins was installed as James Monroe's vice president on March 4, 1817. DeWitt Clinton was the only candidate in the specially called gubernatorial election, and he took office on July 1, 1817. Three days later, he participated in a groundbreaking ceremony on the Fourth of July in Rome, NY. As will be noted in the next chapter, the decision to break ground on the Fourth was not incidental but emphasized a particular national ambition attached to the canal itself.[184] After all, the construction contracts were dated June 27, 1817, but the "Fourth of July" looked better in print.[185] In the words of Shaw, "The Erie Canal was dug with an eye to drama."[186]

Independent of the budding nationalism attached to the moment, the drama of the Fourth provided necessary publicity. To balance the interest of merchants in New York City afraid of heavy taxes for "Clinton's ditch," the Assembly levied special taxes for the purchase of lots along the newly improved canal route. Additionally, the canal commissioners opened subscription books—effectively municipal bond purchases—which would fund the costs beyond what the state agreed to pay. These subscriptions would be wildly successful, and, as Larson pointed out, they were mainly so among "middling investors—and even working people" not "monied gentry."[187] Building the canal was a demonstration of the enterprise of the ordinary man, not Manhattan

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[183] Cf., Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 80.

[184] Cf., Carol Sherrif, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817–1862* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996), 23.

[185] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 371.

[186] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 83.

[187] Larson, *Internal Improvements*, 77.

merchants. The subscription approach had to do in part with the state's failed prior canal-building enterprise, the Western Inland Company. Eventually, however, these bonds became a haven for New York, American, and even British investors—especially after the Panic of 1819.[188]

The drama of the canal is what encouraged investors to pour money into subscriptions. So, the commissioners aimed to show early progress, which they knew would excite investors. So, they started on a section of the canal that was the easiest. However, this was pragmatic. The engineers were learning on the job.

The commissioners had divided the construction into three major phases. The first and most westerly section stretched from Lake Erie to the Seneca River—just north of Cayuga Lake. The middle section stretched from that point on the Seneca to Rome. The eastern section connected Rome to Albany on the Hudson.[189] The commissioners gave a section to a specific chief engineer—James Geddes, Benjamin Wright, and Charles C. Broadhead.[190] None of these engineers, however, had canalling experience. The commissioners had spent years convincing a preeminent British civil engineer, William Weston, to oversee the American engineers. He refused. So, Benjamin Wright with James Geddes offered to use the canal as an engineering school.[191] At this point, the only engineering school in the nation was the United States Military Academy at West Point.[192] If this was not spectacular enough, Geddes admitted that he had only used a

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[188] Larson, *Internal Improvements*, 77.

[189] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 198–9; Noble E. Whitford, *History of the Canal System of the State of New York* (Albany, NY: Brandow, 1906), 76. Whitford was a state engineer who had produced this history under the order of the New York Legislator as a supplement to the 1905 annual report. His work is one which almost every historian of the Erie Canal has depended.

[190] Whitford, *History of the Canal System*, 76; Cf., Larson, *Internal Improvements*, 77.

[191] Whitford, *History of the Canal System*, 76. Cf., John A. Krout, "New York's Early Engineers," *New York History* 26, no. 3 (July 1945): 271, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23149682.

[192] See J. Ledlie Klosky and Wynn E. Klosky, "Men of Action: French Influence and the Founding of American Civil and Military Engineering," *Construction History* 28, no. 3 (2013): 78–84. http://www.jstor.org/ stable/43856053.

level once before becoming involved in the surveying process in 1808![193] Whitford noted that in the early nineteenth century, judges had the task of surveying to adjudicate matters of property and deed.[194] So, while Wright, Geddes, and others were not formally trained as civil engineers like Weston, they were the best a fledgling nation could offer.

The subscription model of funding and the judge-as-engineer composition of the project emphasized how democratic the undertaking really was. Of course, Clinton's words were technically just rhetorical ("it remains for a free state to create a new era in history and erect [this] work").[195] Yet, the canal was built by a free people—funded by working-class farmers, not aristocratic investors, initiated by the petitions of tens of thousands of ordinary citizens not a federal program, and engineered by homegrown amateurs not educated specialists. More will be said about all of this in subsequent chapters. Still, the canal represented New York grit which eventually affected an idea of what it meant to be a nineteenth-century American.[196]

Thus, the details of the actual construction itself are not ancillary. New Yorkers themselves initially dug their own canal as contract laborers. On January 31, 1818, the commissions reported to the legislature that they had modified their contract processes. Initially, they planned that the state should purchase all the necessary tools and supplies for construction. After all, this was best practice according to European standards. The commission bucked standard practice when they reasoned that a market approach would drive costs down, delivering better returns for the subscribers and incentivizing further investment. So, they granted contracts for small tracts on the canal route. The contractor would supply tools and workers, and the state would payout. The commission believed

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[193] Krout, "New York's Early Engineers," 271.

[194] Whitford, *History of the Canal System*, 788.

[195] See above, 33.

[196] Cf., Ronald E. Shaw, *Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States, 1790–1860* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 42–44.

this would also incentivize contractors to stay on the project.[197] The state paid contractors according to the cubic yard per material extracted. It paid out for soil and earth at the lowest rate and compensated contractors at various rates according to the hardness of any sedimentary rock.[198]

An unintended effect of the market approach was the innovations contractors invented to increase efficiency and profit. Europeans relied upon spades to cut through roots. However, within six months, Americans realized that attaching blades to their ox or horse-driven plows could excavate far more profitably. This innovation meant a contractor could gross around $6,300 annually for excavating earth. Of course, a plow would not cut through rock. However, local ingenuity did not stop with soil. One Jeremiah Brainard invented a wheelbarrow dramatically lighter than the standard of the day. This wheelbarrow meant more rock could be moved and unloaded, preserving the stamina of the laborer.[199]

The laborers themselves—at least early on—were comprised of locals. Local labor was a badge of honor for the nativist sentiments of the commissioners. The commission stated to the New York Senate that the overwhelming majority of contractors were American farmers, mechanics, and merchants who lived along the canal itself.[200] Further, they reported that three out of every four laborers on the canal project were born in America. Of course, those very same farmers, mechanics, and merchants stood to gain or lose in the outcome of the canal.[201] Many had bought those tax-incentive plots of land that helped fund the early stages of the canal.

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[197] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 368.

[198] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 91.

[199] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 93. Revenue calculated at the standard dimensions of the canal: one mile by forty feet wide by four feet deep at 3¢ per cubic foot. Rate supplied in Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 93.

[200] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 403.

[201] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 403.

Shaw argued that "tradition has it that the Irish immigrants built the Erie Canal," but he insisted scholars ought to revisit this tradition.[202] As noted above, nativist commissioners asserted otherwise, and he argued that the archived construction reports—which number half a million—demonstrate "most canal workers to have been recruited locally."[203] Still more recently, critical scholarship has argued that New York exploited immigrant laborers in construction. Carol Sheriff claimed the canal was built on the back of disenfranchised labor or vulnerable immigrants.[204] Ryan Dearinger followed Sheriff. He insisted, "American citizens used canals. . . to rehash notions of civilization, to reconstruct boundaries of citizenship and manhood, and to distance the work of unskilled immigrants while praising the industrial progress they helped create."[205] Given the construction contractor system, commissioners could not regulate labor across the canal. So, exploitation was, of course, possible. However, more comprehensive data, including wage data, suggests otherwise. Shaw showed that Albany newspapers advertised wages for canal laborers around 25¢ a day—on the low end.[206] The narrative of exploited labor is difficult to follow when one considers that daily wages for laborers in Albany averaged 16¢ in 1818.

Further, when one considers that contractors were advertising in Albany for labor needed in Rome, the supply of labor along the route must have been restricted, which would have driven the cost of compensation higher. Sheriff and Dearinger each argued that canal labor was similar to Southern labor exploitation.[208] Dearinger insisted

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[202] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 90. This tradition exists in songs and ballads such as those published in Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal*. Some of those songs are quoted below.

[203] Shaw, *Erie Water West,* 91.

[204] Sherriff, *The Artificial River*, 36–40.

[205] Ryan Dearinger, *The Filth of Progress: Immigrants, Americans, and the Building of Canals and Railroads in the West* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 9.

[206] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 91.

[208] Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 40; Dearinger, *The Filth of Progress*, 3.

that even though New York was granting suffrage during the time of canal construction earlier conceptions of "menial labor. . . contribute to [a worker's] social dislocation. Wielding pickaxes and shovels to clear swamps, dig ditches, move rocks, and build roadways was the work of the desperate 'laboring poor,' not of free and independent American men."[209] There is, however, no indication that New York canallers would have seen themselves working in demeaning labor. Sheriff's and Dearinger's arguments that the canal was built with exploited labor was strained. That the work was "menial" or laborious did not make it exploitative. As Shaw noted, wages for labor along the canal were nearly double those in cities like Albany.[210]

There is no doubt, however, that the work was difficult. Workers immortalized the grind of drudging Clinton's ditch in song:

> We are digging the Ditch through the mire;
> Through the mud and the slime and the mire, by heck!
> And the mud is our principal hire;
> Up our pants, in our shirts, down our neck, by heck!
> We are digging the Ditch through the gravel,
> So the people and freight can travel.
>
> We are digging through the gravel,
> Through the gravel across the state, by heck!
> We are cutting the Ditch through the gravel
> So the people and freight can travel,
> Can travel across York State, by heck!
>
> We are digging the Ditch through the mire,
> Through the mire, the muck, and the mud, by heck!
> And the mud is our principal hire,
> In our pants, up our sleeves, down our neck, by heck!
> The mud is our principle [sic] hire.[211]

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[209] Ryan Dearinger, *The Filth of Progress*, 3.

[210] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 91; State of New York, "Report No. 92," (March 16, 1846).

[211] Quoted in Lionel D. Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1977), 79.

Each native farmer, mechanic, and laborer on the canal recognized that improving the wilderness of western New York helped secure their own individual economic stability. Yet another melody, "Paddy on the Canal"—one common among Irish immigrants—illustrated this point clearly:

> When I came to this wonderful [empire?]
> It filled me with the greatest surprise,
> To see such a great undertaking;
> On the like I never opened my eyes
> To see full a thousand brave fellows,
> At work among mountains so tall,
> To dig through the vallies [sic] so level,
> Through rocks, for to cut a canal.
>
> I entered with them for a season,
> My monthly pay to draw,
> And being in very good humor,
> I often sung Erin go Bragh.
> Our provision it was very plenty,
> To complain we'd no reason at all,
> I had money in every pocket,
> While working upon the canal.
>
> I learned for to be very handy;
> To use both the shovel and spade;
> I learnt the whole art of canalling:
> I think it an excellent trade. . .
>
> When at night, we all rest from our labor,
> Be sure, but our rent is all paid,
> We laid down our pick, and our shovel,
> Likewise, our axe, and our spade,
> We all set a joking together;
> There was nothing our minds to enthrall,
> If happiness be in this wide world,
> I am sure it is on the canal.[212]

[212] Quoted in Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal*, 81.

Sheriff argued that immigrants' expectations did not always correspond to expectations, but she admitted that very few laborers left written records.[213] Those records that survive suggest that immigrants found the Erie Canal to be a gateway to equality. Despite incentives the British Passenger Acts gave to Canadian transit, Irish immigrants chose the United States "where farmland was easier to secure and where construction of public works such as the Erie Canal offered relatively steady well-paid employment."[214] In fact, two of three Irish who made their way to Canada eventually made their way to the United States.[215] This is not to suggest that the Erie Canal itself drew these immigrants seeking economic opportunity. Emigration out of Ireland was due to deteriorating conditions in the homeland.[216] For the immigrants who did comprise the labor force, the canal offered a stable job with a living wage—something post-Napoleonic Ireland could not provide under the British crown.[217] These immigrants filled critical gaps as the canal stretched further west into unsettled territory where labor could not be found locally. One such immigrant celebrating the fruit of his labors boasted, "I have a fine farm of land now, which I own outright. No one can demand rent from me."[218]

New Yorkers themselves solved two significant engineering challenges using homegrown solutions. They boasted that these were not European solutions.[219] The first and most significant challenge to solve was the material structure of the canal itself. In

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[213] Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 41.

[214] Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 194.

[215] Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 194.

[216] Cf., Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 202–6.

[217] See Sheriff's survey of quotations relaying the Irish perspective: Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 41–4.

[218] Pádraig Cúndún quoted in Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 41.

[219] See Chapter Three.

between Rochester and Syracuse, the land is swampy. While an engineer can easily make soil and rock hold a water channel, the canal's western section required cement to reinforce its walls. Sent to study canal engineering in England, Canvass White (1790–1834) understood a hydraulic cement was best suited to the task. New York had to import the only known limestone suitable for hydraulic cement from Wales at "incredible expense."[220] White experimented with the varieties of limestone found in North America until he found an alternative substitute.[221] His discovery cut one of the most expensive material costs of the canal. But more importantly, he provided the material solution to one of the canal's greatest engineering challenges.[222] Another engineering solution demonstrated the democratic nature of the canal building process. Unnamed citizens who lived "west of Utica" had figured out how to remove the green stumps of felled trees. Using compound pullies tied to oxen yokes, a team of seven men with a pair of oxen or horses could remove thirty to forty stumps daily. [223] By experimenting, the contractors on the canal made it their own school of engineering. In this school, they learned how to use a level and chart a route. They learned how to set cement and forge locks. Their simple machinery cut an artificial river across western New York. In just five years, they cut over two hundred miles of the canal.[224] To New Yorkers, these tales became lore by attaching

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[220] David I Spanagel, "Clinton's Ditch," in *DeWitt Clinton & Amos Eaton: Geology & Power in Early New York* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 91. See also Clinton's comments in State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 438.

[221] Spanagel, "Clinton's Ditch," 91.

[222] For White's education, Whitford, *History of the Canal System*, 792. All else, cf., Shaw, *Erie Water West,* 96; Spanagel, "Clinton's Ditch," 91.

[223] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 403.403. Some popular historians list Nathan Roberts as the inventor of the stump puller, but no original documents indicate this to be so. Indeed, the Erie Canal Museum's exhibit on the subject states the inventor is unknown.

[224] Much more could be said about the details of construction, including the engineering details encountered at every mile. These reports can be read at length in State of New York, *Laws of the State*, which has already been referenced throughout. It is the historical record by state order. Shaw's chapter "Forty Feet Wide and Four Feet Deep" in *Erie Water West* explains the engineering feats in greater detail. Suffice to say, the history of the engineering alone is remarkable. It is baffling that these people used shovels and pickaxes to dig a forty-foot wide, four-foot deep channel over three hundred miles through rock, swamp, and dirt in only eight years.

this triumph of engineering to ordinary folk. They canonized this lore in enthusiastic civil ceremonies, which are the subject of analysis in the next chapter.

New Yorkers dug the canal to address a geographic challenge posed to commerce. The process of politicking, funding, engineering, and constructing the canal shaped the participant's self-identity. By making western New York a place viable for Great Lakes commerce, New York state identity emerged alongside a burgeoning American identity. Westward expansion and communicative ties between the Atlantic and frontier states were at stake. But these emerging identities were not put to practical application in Boston, Washington, or Charleston. Instead, it took place in "the mud and the slime and the mire, by heck!"

CHAPTER 3

"A HUMBLE INSTRUMENT IN THE HANDS OF PROVIDENCE": NEW YORKERS, THEIR CANAL, AND A BUDDING EMPIRE

On March 19, 1825, twelve New York City merchants presented recently re-elected Governor DeWitt Clinton with a gift: two commissioned silver presentation vases.[1] Outside of his house in Albany, they—with around a hundred citizens—honored him for completing the Erie Canal despite the prejudices against the project.[2] Representing the group, Isaac S. Hone rose to praise Clinton's "sagacity," which foresaw the benefit a means of navigation between the Hudson and Lake Erie would provide. Clinton received the warm praise with gratitude: "If I have been hitherto a humble instrument in the hands of Providence, of dispensing some benefits to my fellow citizens, I have every inducement from their kindness for devoting my best and my future exertions in the same career."[3] In this comment, he revealed a commitment to providentialism and republican nationalism, which motivated his energies to complete the canal and confirmed his sense of American exceptionalism.

New Yorkers interpreted the completion of the Erie Canal as confirmation that they were participating in the divine government of God. Because New Yorkers believed God had carved the Mohawk Valley, they connected their mastery over the land with their ascendance through antecedent theological categories such as "providence." As they reasoned an obligation to "providence" in appeals to the canal, they expected obedience

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[1] The "Presentation Vases" are on public display at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Avenue in Gallery 731. See Figures 8–10 below for photos.

[2] Technically, the Erie Canal was not officially opened until October 1825.

[3] David Hosack, *Memoir of De Witt Clinton* (New York: J. Seymour, 1829), 186–90.

would guarantee their ascendance. This reciprocal obligation-blessing was rooted in the Protestant orthodoxy that settlers imported into New York. Still, New Yorkers would emphasize and reinforce this vision through a nationalistic ambition for reform. The construction of the Erie Canal settled the question of who they were in the world and the type of nation America would be—one where citizens could dominate the natural order in service of commerce; one where men participate in the divine government of God.

Throughout the process of building the canal, New Yorkers began to attach nationalistic significance to the project. They believed the canal demonstrated their republican virtue and faithfulness to God's plan for the state. Nations are dependent upon these myths of origin and destiny, and New Yorkers looked to the canal as evidence of their role in American ascendance. Protestant theology was in the background of this nationalistic project. The doctrine of "providence" was an antecedent to DeWitt's and others' reflections upon the canal, but they modified the doctrine that served their nationalistic purposes. New Yorkers regularly appealed to this providence-myth as a primary reason and end for the canal. However, these were not mere rhetorical devices. By the canal's completion, the nationalistic significance had matured into a fully-orbed belief that God planned New York's ascendency. They reinforced the providence-myth through celebrations and ceremonies surrounding the canal's creation. More, they saw themselves as faithful to the task of providence and expected to receive "blessings" in return for commerce.[4] New Yorkers' experience of providence and covenant, redefined, was the foundation of their national ambition, a religious-political ambition for a vision of American destiny. Furthermore, all of this was confirmed for them by completing the Erie Canal.

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[4] Cf., *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825.

Can a *Canal* Really Be So Significant?

One can be forgiven for doubting that a four-foot-deep channel of water through some hills and marshes contributed anything to the making of American identity. The previous chapter closed by emphasizing how democratic the construction of the Erie Canal was. Farmers and merchants dug the canal themselves. They engineered solutions to pull trees and excavate the earth. They made their judges surveyors and bought bonds to finance the construction. The canal was the locus of their energies. To them, it represented something of themselves.

Chandra Mukerji studied the Canal du Midi's impact on French national identity.[6] In 1681, the French completed the *Canal royal en Languedoc*, renamed *Canal du Midi,* in 1789 following the French revolution. The *Canal du Midi* connected the River Garonne to the Mediterranean Sea at the *Étang de Thau* (See Figure 7), and the project took over two hundred years. In 1856, the French named the entire system *Canal des Deux Mers*, or The Canal of the Two Seas. It facilitated uninterrupted water transit from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, with lateral canals allowing water freight to use the River Rhône.[7]

The Languedoc canal captivated Jefferson's imagination. In 1786, he urged fellow Virginian John Banister Jr. to see the canal—"an object worth examination"—during Banister's visit to France.[8] He planned to do so himself, telling James Madison that he hoped to examine the canal and acquire "knowledge of that species of navigation which may be useful hereafter."[9] During his time as a minister to the Court of Versailles,

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[6] Chandra Mukerji, "The New Rome: Infrastructure and National Identity on the Canal du Midi," *Osiris* 24, 1, Science and National Identity (2009): 15–32, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/605967.

[7] Cf., UNESCO World Heritage, "*Canal du Midi*," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed August 22, 2022. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/770/.

[8] "From Thomas Jefferson to John Banister, Jr., 15 June 1786," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-09-02-0537. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 9, 1 November 1785–22 June 1786, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 642.]

[9] "To James Madison from Thomas Jefferson, 30 January 1787," *Founders Online*, National

Jefferson toured all two hundred miles canal. He took a forty-mile trip to observe facilities where French engineers collected water to regulate the canal's water level.[10] The canal clearly occupied Jefferson's mind, and he imagined a similar canal in Virginia. On May 2, 1788, he sent notes on the canal's mechanics to George Washington, hoping that Washington would "find in them something perhaps which may be turned to account some time or other in the prosecution of the Patowmac canal."[11] He knew Washington had designs for a Potomac canal.[12]

For their part, the French were proud of their canal. Chandra Mukerji argued that French nationalism of the nineteenth century had as its foundation, first, social ferment but, second, a social imaginary that saw France as the New Rome. She argued that Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) hoped to ground his absolutism in a narrative that the French were Gallic Romans. Louis XIV planned on justifying engineering projects to evoke the spirit of ancient Rome. The *Canal du Midi* was the crown of his engineering agenda.[13] Mukerji argued that infrastructure projects transform national identity because they signal a government influence. One can think of a civic feature as an artifact of its creators' influence and power. For Louis XIV, he expected the canal to be a soft reminder that he was the absolute monarch. However, Mukerji observed that the canal had an ironic effect. Infrastructure projects like canals do not require artistic craftsmanship to the

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Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-09-02-0126. [Original source: *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 9, 9 April 1786–24 May 1787 and supplement 1781–1784, ed. Robert A. Rutland and William M. E. Rachal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 247–252.]

[10] From Thomas Jefferson to William Short, 21 May 1787, *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-11-02-0352. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 11, 1 January–6 August 1787, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 371–373.]

[11] "To George Washington from Thomas Jefferson, 2 May 1788," Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-06-02-0218. [Original source: The Papers of George Washington, Confederation Series, vol. 6, 1 January 1788–23 September 1788, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997, pp. 251–257.]

[12] "To George Washington from Thomas Jefferson, 2 May 1788."

[13] Mukerji, "The New Rome," 16.

same degree Louis XIV's Palace at Versailles. Laborers slog with shovels, rakes, stone, and mortar to dig and build canals. The *Canal du Midi* was a monument of the Frenchmen who dug it—not the monarch who commissioned it.[14] That said, the French would not revolt against their monarch for nearly a century after completing the canal.

Nevertheless, Mukerji concluded that French "national identity linked places and persons in political terms and had roots in the infrastructural engineering of the seventeenth century, such as the Canal du Midi."[16] The canal allowed the French to imagine themselves as Gaulish Romans. More, French peasants could see themselves as independent Frenchmen apart from the person of their king because the canal was an artifact of *their* effort.[17] Mukerji did not suggest the canal provoked French revolutionary sentiment. However, she did insist that before the French could think of themselves as a nation, they had to think of an identity divorced from the monarch. Mukerji suggested that the canal provided that identity and captured the popular imagination. In fact, following the French Revolution, Pierre-Paul Riquet, the *Canal du Midi*'s chief entrepreneur, became a folk hero in the period of French nationalism following the Revolution.[18] The canal became a symbol before and after the French Revolution upon which the French could cast and receive a national identity.

The strength of Mukerji's argument was in how she connected imagination to nation. Nations are doctrines comprised of myths. She showed how Louis XIV hoped to resource the tradition of Rome through engineering projects. He had expected these projects would fortify his rule by rooting it in the tradition of Gaul. In the end, the French saw the canal as a folk symbol for the revolutionary republic. For their part, Americans

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[14] Mukerji, "The New Rome," 16.

[16] Mukerji, "The New Rome," 32.

[17] Cf., Mukerji, "The New Rome," 32.

[18] Mukerji, "The New Rome," 31–32.

themselves engaged in their own nation-building project during the early republican period. What the Americans believed or did not believe about themselves was to be settled in the years after the Revolution. Like the French, a canal contributed to New Yorkers' vision of greatness.

"How is a nation built?" is an important question. However, "What is a nation?" is prior. Anthony D. Smith suggested that an ideal-type definition of "nation" is,

> A named and self-defined human community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, symbols, values, and traditions, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and common laws.[19]

Smith wrote that "nation" is a "descriptive term for a form of historical human community. . . characterized by a cultural and/or political identity."[20] The roots of this identity were a variety of myths, including myths of origin and election. However, this does not have to be an origin myth of ethnic homogeneity. For example, wars themselves can forge a concept of "Other." Consider the American Revolution. British subjects became American when they voluntarily took up arms against their crown sovereign. However, that sense of self and a concept of Other is meaningless without a place where those dynamics develop. So, people forge nations as their attachment to a specific place they consider as "Home," where non-home is "outside." This has the effect, Smith argued, of historicizing the location: the landscape where heroic achievements occurred attaches significance to the place in the psyche of a community. When individuals rehearse these achievements in some ceremony, they form a collective memory that shapes, informs, and reinforces the community's shared cultural and political identity.[21] So, if these features answer "What is a nation?," the answer "How is a nation built?"

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[19] Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 19.

[20] Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, 22.

[21] See Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, 28–49.

becomes clear.

To have a nation, a human community must have a catalytic event that allows for the formation of an "Us." As these are not rooted in biological fact but historical fiction, these catalytic events are generally in conflict.[22] Consider the American Revolution again. The War for Independence created a historical discontinuity between people—the British and Americans—with common ancestry. In the early republican period, figures such as George Washington and Henry Knox and places such as the Delaware River and Valley Forge were (and still are) memorialized in elaborate civil celebrations. All of this contributes to a shared cultural and political memory that "makes" someone an American. However, those features are not settled by some committee. For the United States, David Waldstreicher wrote that these ritualized memories "engendered both nationalism and political action. . . conflict produced 'the nation' as contestants tried to claim true American nationality and the legacy of the Revolution."[23] So, there was an internal conflict during the early republican era about which symbols ought to be memorialized and rehearsed.

New Yorkers hashed out the meaning of their destiny and place in the young republic in their state assembly. As they determined how they would capitalize upon their geographical advantage, DeWitt Clinton and others forced New Yorkers to consider

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[22] On the role of fiction in nation-building, see Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). Hill argued that literature is prior to statecraft—that is fiction is prior to nation. This is because human beings, not impersonal forces of capitalism or demography, are responsible for conflict. Surveying the Western literary canon, he showed how Western states and Westernizing states have sought to locate themselves within the canon. While he intended for his work to be a clarion call for the training of humanities in statecraft—learning the lessons of war in a story costs infinitely less than learning them in time—the link between fiction, state, and war is clear.

Two other popular level works are relevant here as well to highlight how "nation" is a shared narrative. See Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (San Francisco: Harper, 2015), 77–246; Johannes Krause and Thomas Trappe, *A Short History of Humanity: A New History of Old Europe*, trans. Caroline Waight (New York: Random House, 2021). Both of these works touch on the idea of "nation" as fiction with a nod to biological sciences and recent discovery in archaeogenetics, respectively.

[23] David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 8–9.

whether they were people worthy of that geographical advantage. In ways comparable to the French with the *Canal du Midi*, the Erie Canal was a symbol upon which New Yorkers cast and received their identity. When they completed the canal, they heaped up religious and cultural symbols to demonstrate their faithfulness to "providence." They also mixed Roman symbols into their ceremonies to reinforce their claims that they were true republicans.

So, again, one can be forgiven for wondering how a four-foot-deep channel of water through some hills and marsh contributed anything to the making of American identity. The idea of a nation relies upon a series of commitments always up for renegotiation. Specific commitments in the American experience have dramatic staying power: the signing Declaration of Independence and the ratification of the Constitution—to name two. Some ideas predate the American nation, which its British settlers imported themselves—ideas such as providence or covenant. In the contest "to claim true American nationality and the legacy of the Revolution," the Erie Canal was an important symbol for New Yorkers, which linked providence with the sense of destiny instilled by other national symbols. Historians have observed similar phenomena, relating later American engineering achievements to American culture.[24]

The Meaning of Providence

For those in favor of internal improvements, stewarding "providence" corresponded to commercial gain. The concept of stewarding providence was a broad pattern that extended beyond political conversations related to the Erie Canal. When he defended what would become known as "the American System," Henry Clay explained

[24] There are, of course, many examples from the twentieth century which may come to mind but none so important than the engineering achievements of the space program. Perhaps more connected to the theme of this paper—internal improvements—is the work begun with the Federal Highway Act of 1956. On the subject, Tom Lewis argued, "Interstates have become a physical expression of the part of the American character that desires to resolve our destiny in this seemingly limitless land." See Tom Lewis, preface to *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life*, upd. ed. (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

that the "present affliction" facing the American economy was a failure to harness "the bounty of Providence."[25] Daniel Webster argued similarly that "Providence" had given Americans the "means for gratifying one another's wants" in commerce.[26] Stewarding "providence" for Clay and Webster meant producing a means that guaranteed Americans could sell their produce at market.

Appeals to "providence" featured heavily in the initial stages of canal development. For example, in 1807, Jesse Hawley insisted that when the "Author of nature" had set Lake Erie at an incline, he "had in prospect a large and valuable canal, connecting the Atlantic and the continental seas."[57] In 1816 while writing as "Atticus," DeWitt Clinton claimed that "Nature" had destined New York City to be the greatest commercial city in the world.[58] In an effort to motivate support for the canal, he cataloged the weaknesses of global and domestic ports. Then, he insisted that "Nature" had given to New Yorkers "the exclusive power of being the exporters, at a small expense, of the marketable produce of all the inhabitants who now live, or ever will live upon the waters of all the upper lakes."[59] Hawley and Clinton were leaning on two centuries of reflection upon the active government of God, and they marshaled that language to suit political ambitions.[60] In the case of this study, canal advocates were

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[25] To review, the Americans had not developed an internal market between the states, and the various embargos leveraged by European powers on American exports hurt agriculture. Henry Clay, "Speech in the House of Representatives, March 30–31, 1824," in *State Papers and Speeches on the Tariff* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1892), 255.

[26] Daniel Webster, "Speech in the House of Representatives, April 1–2, 1824," in *State Papers and Speeches on the Tariff* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1892), 349.

[57] Jesse Hawley as "Hercules," "No. II," *Genesee Messenger*, 1807, Hawley's Essays, "Digging Clinton's Ditch," American Studies at the University of Virginia, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/ volpe/canal/hawley_intro.html.

[58] DeWitt Clinton, *Remarks on the Proposed Canal from Lake Erie to the Hudson River*, by Atticus [pseudonym]. MSS Collection, RB. Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester, 7.

[59] Clinton, *Remarks*, 9.

[60] Cf., Harry S. Stout, "Rhetoric and Reality in the Early Republic: The Case of the Federalist Clergy," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, 2nd ed., ed. Mark A.

comfortable appealing to "providence" to argue that New York must construct the canal, and the intellectual roots of this appeal extend to the founding of Britain's North American colonies. However, New Englanders, their intellectual heirs, and New Yorkers such as DeWitt Clinton and Jesse Hawley participated in a corporate redefinition of providence's meaning from 1630–1828.[61] As New Yorkers participated in that redefinition, their understanding of "providence" conditioned their expectations and experience of building the canal. Additionally, "providence" animated their sense of mission following the canal's completion.

The idea of providence was at the heart of the Puritan understanding of God.[62] Puritans confessed, "God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things. . . by his most wise and holy providence."[63] God's government of the world is called "providence."[64] Additionally, they believed that though God's providence extended to all things, special attention was granted to care for God's church and cause all things to work for the good of God's church.[65] It was this confession of faith that early settlers to British North America brought to their colony.

Noll and Luke E. Harlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 65–78.

[61] In 1629, Charles I chartered the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the shareholders agreed the colony would be locally governed in terms established by the Cambridge Agreement. This kept the colony from being pressured by a Londoner board susceptible to Anglican influence. John Winthrop and company left for the New World in 1630. In 1828, Nathaniel William Taylor delivered his chapel address at Yale wherein he laid out what became known as "New Haven theology," a definitive redefinition of Puritan orthodoxy. See Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers*, 5–111.

[62] This is not to suggest that Lutheran, Roman, or Orthodox Christians do not affirm the providence of God. Instead, the Reformed grounded matters related to Mosaic law, justification, preservation of the saints, and perhaps most famously predestination in the providence of God. Of course, they viewed themselves to be in continuity and returning to the catholic tradition, but providence became a dominant theme in Reformed dogmatics. E.g., Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, vol. 4 in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 212–44.

[63] Westminster Confession of Faith, 5.1.

[64] Cf., Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607–1876* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

[65] Westminster Confession of Faith, 5.7.

These settlers believed the government of God—his providence—was expressed in a cooperative relationship between the church and state. That doctrine implied that God had a direct interest in the affairs of human beings, both in the ordinary operation of providence and the extraordinary care God providentially attended to his church.[66] They believed that God organized his church into organizations of "voluntary agreement, consent, or covenant."[67] New Englanders defined a covenant as a contract with reciprocal obligations and benefits.[68] They believed that God did not only make this covenant with individuals but that all of society was organized around it. E. Brooks Holifield explained that Puritans understood the concept of "covenant" broadly to apply to "not only the intricacies of salvation but also the institutional arrangements of colonial society."[69] This idea of covenant held a New Englander in a three-part covenant: (1) their mutual church members over whom they exercised "church-power,"[70] (2) the magistrates who promoted religious flourishing, and (3) the God who providentially organized the churches of New England.[71]

This emphasis on covenants under providence is not splitting hairs: seventeenth-century New England thinkers wove together the strands of individual, God's Church (or churches), and the state in the concept of a national covenant.[72] Eighteenth-century theologians unraveled that theological fabric to retain the Puritan

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[66] Cf., Westminster Confession of Faith, 5.7.

[67] The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline, 1648, 4.4.

[68] Cf., E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 39–40.

[69] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 41.

[70] The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline, 1648, 4.3.

[71] Congregational Churches in Massachusetts, preface to *The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline, 1648*.

[72] More will be said on national covenant in subsequent chapters. E.g., Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1953), 20–6; Phiip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 37–82.

convictions in their colony while addressing their encounters with social and intellectual pressures. However, these theologians never discarded the unwoven threads. Instead, theologians recontextualized the concept of covenant and providence to suit revivalistic fervor and revolutionary spirit, and the rewoven thread would be the cord of republican political theory. On this point, Noll argued that without offering anything to take its place, theologians who followed Edwards moved all reflective energy on integrating the individual, God's Church, and the state into the political sphere.[73] This "opened thought to a subtle, yet powerful, move away from theology to politics, and intellectual leadership to a shift from the clergy to the men of the state."[74] Similarly, Bruce Kuklick noted that the Calvinistic view of man suited republican interest and congregational matters employed political metaphors, and the heirs of Edwards's tradition "matured with revolutionary political impulses." Though existing in two domains, the "conventions of discourse" overlapped.[75]

Hawley's and Clinton's words represented what Noll described as a "subtle but powerful" shift from theology to politics, even though the word "providence" retained its meaning. Nicholas Guyatt demonstrated that "providentialism was not only a component of American identity but also a strategy for achieving concrete political goals."[76] He organized providence language into three categories: (1) judicial providentialism, (2) historical providentialism, and (3) apocalyptic providentialism. Judicial providentialism described that God's government would bless or punish based upon the virtue or vice of the nation. Historical providentialism labeled the belief that God's government "imagined a special role for certain nations in improving the world" and tailored historical

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[73] Noll, *America's God*, 50.

[74] Noll, *America's God*, 50.

[75] Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 59–65.

[76] Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United* States, 4.

conditions to suit that role. Apocalyptic providentialism designated the immanent government of God in fulfilling the prophetic visions of John the Revelator through a particular nation.[77] Each of these providentialism was foundational to the thinking of nineteenth-century Americans. More importantly, however, these providentialisms formed the basis for an overarching myth of America as providentially blessed.

The construction and celebration of the Erie Canal occurred during a hinge moment in American history, and the moment reflected and reinforced the providentialistic attitudes of New Yorkers. The press to settle westward and develop the interior for commercial transportation had been about consolidating trade across the Appalachian Mountains, but the period was also one which defined the nation. John D. Wilsey described this period as a division between competing visions of American exceptionalism, but each vision understood itself to accomplish a particularly ordained mission.[78] Wilsey described one of the visions, "closed exceptionalism," as "strongly religious" and "certain of God's providence concerning the future [and inevitable triumph] of the United States." He described the other vision, "open exceptionalism," as humbly confident America had been ordained as a "moral example" to the world.[79] Wilsey's paradigm summarized the process that Waldstreicher called "the awakening of American nationalism."[80] During the period itself, no one vision of exceptionalism had been settled.

Americans often connected the idea of internal improvement with providence and mission. John Lauritz Larson demonstrated that antebellum discussions about where to build roads or canals had less to do with transportation. But instead, Americans

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[77] Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United* States, 6.

[78] John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 37–62.

[79] Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion*, 62.

[80] Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 294.

perceived internal improvements as a means to mitigate the "geographical isolation" which threatened to sever the Union's economic interest.[81] Moreover, the canal was also a symbol onto which New Yorkers mapped and reflexively confirmed their sense of self. By completing the canal, New Yorkers believed they had successfully stewarded providence. They believed that God had granted New York a geographical advantage.[82] However, the practice of reading a providential advantage upon New York's geography began decades prior.

Following the War for Independence, Washington and Chastellux exchanged several letters related to the future of the new American nation. The two had worked closely together on the Yorktown campaign, and Chastellux stayed behind to help the French army demobilize and to tour the United States.[83] In one of the 1783 letters about the future, Washington recounted his travels through the waterways of New York. The expeditions were quite extensive. He "made a tour through the Lakes George & Champlain. . . the Mohawk river to Fort Schuyler, crossed over to the Wood Creek. . . viewed the Lake Otsego, & the Portage between that lake & the Mohawk river at Canajohario."[84] Struck by this trip, he believed that inland navigation was an essential asset for commerce and continued: "Providence which has dealt her favors to us with so

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[81] John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 3.

[82] Cf., Jesse Hawley as "Hercules," "No. II," *Genesee Messenger*, 1807.

[83] The Washington Library at Mount Vernon called Chastellux a forgotten figure on two counts. First, he was lost in the shadow of the Marquis de Lafayette and General Rochambeau. Second, Chastellux's estate failed to publish his diaries and letters. The Library has begun to publish and sponsor research on him, arguing that his friendship with Washington was actually more significant in early American history than that with Lafayette. This is probably because Chastellux was fluent in English and served as translator. See Joseph F. Stoltz III, "François-Jean de Chastellux," in *Digital Encyclopedia of the Washington Library*, ed. Jim Ambuske, https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/francois-jean-de-chastellux/.

[84] George Washington to Chastellux, October 12, 1783, *Chastellux Letters*, accessed August 17, 2020, https://www.mountvernon.org/library/research-library/special-collections-and-archives/chastellux-letters/george-washington-to-chastellux-12-october-1783/.

profuse a hand. Would to God we may have the wisdom to make good use of them."[85] His comment reflected what Guyatt called "judicial providentialism." In Washington's words was an implication that a failure to use the inland waterways for commerce would be vice. Such a failure would leave the region vulnerable to the commercial exploitation of the British. Washington believed that nature was a gift from heaven that Americans ought to steward, but he applied this conviction in the service of the new republic's internal improvement. This pattern was repeated in future appeals to build the canal.

New Yorkers looked to their geography as evidence that God had blessed them, and they were intent on faithfully stewarding that providence in the exercise of commerce. Each of these figures employed providence in one of the three categories described by Guyatt, and each use described how New Yorkers understood the Erie Canal as a part of what Waldstricher called the "contest" for American identity.[87] In one sense, each appeal implied a question to the New Yorker: if God set the conditions up in this way, of course He wanted a canal built here, and if we do not build it, who will replace us to build it?

Two years after Washington wrote to Chastellux, Christopher Coles made the first genuine appeal to build the canal by linking providence with geography. Having identified the cost of construction and projected revenue, he concluded that "providence" favored his proposed canal route through the Appalachian Mountains. He believed this because the Mohawk Valley and Mohawk River connected to Lake Oneida through a small river called Wood Creek. He supposed the connection was perfectly designed "to permit us to pass thro' this channel into this extensive inland country."[93]

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[85] George Washington to Chastellux, October 12, 1783.

[87] Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 8–9.

[93] Christopher Colles, *Proposal for the Speedy Settlement of the Waste and Unappropriated Lands on the Western Frontiers of the State of New-York, and for the Improvement of the Inland Navigation Between Albany and Oswego*, pamphlet (New York: Samuel Loudon, 1785), 11.

Like Washington, Coles manifested a providentialism in his writing, but unlike Washington, he displayed a "historical providentialism." Coles saw providence as the benevolent government of a personal God who designed the geography of New York, intending to make it great. He believed that intent was a commercial enterprise and the settlement of the western frontier, given what preceded this conclusion in his pamphlet. Rather than imply that a failure would be vice, Coles explicitly warned that a failure to capitalize on providence would hand British commercial control of the Great Lakes.[96]

In 1808, Jesse Hawley wrote about providence and commerce even more explicitly. His "No. II" essay began recounting the groans of merchants who celebrated the soil of western New York but despised the "fatigue and toil of so much land transport." Hawley lamented: "Why was not the parent of nature so thoughtful. . . kind, as to give this country a river?" Of course, Hawley wrote that the Creator had been thoughtful and kind but left "the finishing stroke to be applied!" He continued:

> Nor do I conceive the idea to be vain, or even incorrect, in saying, that it appears as if the Author of nature, in forming Lake Erie with its large head of waters into a reservoir, and his having formed this Limestone ridge into an inclined plane, had in prospect a large and valuable canal, connecting the Atlantic and the continental seas, to be completed at some period in the history of man, by his ingenuity and industry![97]

Hawley wove together commerce, providence, and geography in this essay. As shown above, Hawley's essays influenced the New York Assembly to survey routes for a possible canal. His view is an example of explicit historical providentialism, complete with an imagined role for a given nation to fulfill in improving the world. Hawley genuinely believed that God intended for someone to build a canal through the Mohawk River Valley, and he believed that because he interpreted New York's geography as a gift

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[96] Colles, *Proposal for the Speedy Settlement*, 13.

[97] Jesse Hawley as "Hercules," "No. II," *Genesee Messenger*, 1807, Hawley's Essays, "Digging Clinton's Ditch," American Studies at the University of Virginia, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/ volpe/canal/hawley_intro.html.

from God. In his view, God wanted a canal there in New York so that the state would become even more commercially dynamic and ascend to its place, having demonstrated its "ingenuity and industry."

This pattern indeed continued in the legislative briefings filed by the canal commission as they pressed their project forward in the Assembly. Their March 1812 report called for the canal to be constructed, even though Congress had shut down proposals. How New Yorkers would fund the canal was a matter for future discussion. For now, the commission emphasized, "whether this subject be considered with a view to commerce and finance, or on the more extensive scale of policy, there would be a want of wisdom, and almost of piety, not to employ for public advantage those means which Divine Providence has placed so completely in our power."[98] Failing to build the canal because of a lack of funding would be a foolish and impious stewardship of God's government in creating New York's inland waterways. On March 8, 1814, they repeated the refrain: providence had prepared a way for a canal to be constructed in New York state.[99] A year into the project, the project was slowed by flooding. So, in January 1818, the commission reported: "with minds accustomed to view in every occurrence a particular dispensation of a benign and superintending Providence, the two last seasons cannot but be regarded with peculiar interest."[100]

This statement demonstrated two things. First, the commission itself interpreted weather in these categories, and second, they expected the Assembly to filter their disappointment in contractors' delays through the theological category of God's

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[98] State of New York, *Laws of the State of New York, in Relation to the Erie and Champlain Canals, Together with the Annual Reports of the Canal Commissioners, and Other Documents, Requisite for a Complete and Official History of those Words with Correct Maps Delineating the Routes of the Erie and Champlain Canals, and Designating the Lands Through Which They Pass* (Albany, NY: State Government Press, 1825), 72. Google Books.

[99] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 103.

[100] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 375.

providence. So, they found the good in the delays, and by showing them in a providentialist framework, they expected the Assembly would accede. What is missing, however, from previous generations' use of the same framework was a call to repentance. A few generations prior, meteorological phenomena which interfered with industry was seen as God's displeasure.[101] Here, however, the canal commission appealed to providence to defuse legislative ire.

DeWitt Clinton himself regularly used the theme of providence in his language about the canal. Throughout his "Atticus" pamphlets, Clinton developed what Guyatt called "historical providentialism." In his first essay, Clinton suggested that by building a canal, New York would take its place among the Chinese empire, the Netherlands, the Russian empire, and Britain as a commercial power.[102] Clinton made the point explicitly in his second essay: "If the projected canal should be executed, New-York must and will become one of the most splendid commercial cities on the face of the earth. . . unrivaled by any city on the face of the earth."[103] He argued that New York possessed four key features: a stable government, a temperate climate, an ice-free, deep-water harbor, and a river connecting that harbor to the interior. Canton (modern-day Guangzhou) and St. Petersburg had extensive inland rivers, but he wrote that both had severe disadvantages. Canton suffered "constant hostility with commerce" from the government, and St. Petersburg's deep-water harbor froze six months out of the year. American cities suffered their own plights. Boston and Philadelphia had deep-water ports but did not have reliable river transportation to the interior. Clinton argued that New Orleans's climate was "sickly" and that the Mississippi's silty nature resisted improvement. Finally, not wanting

[101] E.g., Michael Wigglesworth, "God's Controversy with New England," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, rev. ed., ed. Conrad Cherry (Chapel Hill: Universtiy of North Carolina Press, 1998), 42–53.

[102] Clinton, *Remarks*, 1–6.

[103] Clinton, *Remarks*, 7.

to miss an opportunity to insult Virginia, he suggested that "Virginia does not pretend that she will ever give birth to a great commercial city."[104] Of course, Washington and Jefferson attempted to develop such a city in Virginia through a canal—a fact Clinton was keen to omit. He considered their efforts "absolutely impractical."[105] Clinton argued that New Yorkers ought to consider providence's design to civilize the interior through the canal's construction. He wrote, "Is it with you a subject of no consideration, whether the millions of people, who are settled or may settle upon the waters of the great lakes, shall be a virtuous or a vicious generation, whether they be civilized or savage."[106] In setting the canal in this context, Clinton believed New York had a providential destiny.

Clinton used the same motifs in his memorial. Like many early New Yorkers, his providentialism had deep roots in New England theology.[107] In the memorial, Clinton forced the canal issue in the context of judicial providence, and he expected his audience would follow that logic. He argued that delays in beginning construction demonstrated a "weak mind" and "culpable inattention" to God's design for the state of New York. He continued to suggest that the delay was insensitive to the "blessings of Providence" and would squander those blessings. Clinton believed the canal would bless the public good and endure eternally.[108]

As noted earlier, tens of thousands of New Yorkers affixed their signatures to this memorial. Here, in this quote, was a clear historical providentialism with elements of judicial providentialism. The next chapter addresses how New Yorkers' revivalism

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[104] Clinton, *Remarks*, 8.

[105] Clinton, *Remarks*, 10.

[106] Clinton, *Remarks*, 9.

[107] His ancestors landed at Cape Cod and remained there until 1731 when the Clintons migrated to New York. See Evan Cornog, *The Birth of Empire: DeWitt Clinton and the American Experience, 1769–1828* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12.

[108] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 138.

placed providence, mission, and covenant together after the completion of the Erie Canal. Still, for now, the early nineteenth century was a hinge moment where thinking of the American nation as chosen for an eternal mission will take on additional meaning. During a consequential speech in January 1819, Clinton addressed the Assembly as governor, and he connected the material prosperity of New York to God's providential design for the Erie Canal. He had requested the legislature to consider a bill that would expedite the contract process, allowing the canal to finish early and below budget. His grounding for this challenge, however, was not a policy argument. While acknowledging that the transit duties would fill the state's coffer, he was most concerned that New York's market would expand: "productive classes of society should have good markets out of the state. . . a wise government ought to encourage communications with those places, where the farmer and manufacturer can sell at the highest, and buy at the lowest price."[109] Clinton emphasized, however, that not even commerce ought to be their most critical consideration but instead "the very essence of our liberty and prosperity."[110] He contended that men everywhere believed they must submit to ineffective government because people thought they could not govern themselves. America was an exception provided they maintained their republican character. Indeed, the American experiment was novel in 1819, and American Federalists and European monarchies watched the France revolution in horror.[111] Clinton saw the root of American genius in the states' union: "a dissolution of the union may, therefore, be considered the natural death of our free government."[112] Finishing the canal would "establish the perpetuity of free government" and guarantee New York's ascendance as a state:

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[109] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 395.

[110] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 395.

[111] Cf., Tim Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory: The Five Revolutions That Made Modern Europe, 1648–1815* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 337–51; 611–74.

[112] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 396.

> The most exalted reputation is that which arises from the dispensation of happiness to our fellow creatures, and that conduct is most acceptable to God which is most beneficial to man. Character is as important to states as to individual, and the glory of a republic founded on the promotion of the general good, is the common property of all its citizens.[113]

Clinton said those words about a four-foot-deep channel of water through some hills and marsh. The Senate's answer confirmed this interpretation of New York's destiny on January 18. They considered it "the subject of internal improvement, as before noticed, is so intimately connected with the prosperity of agriculture."[114]

Each of these examples demonstrated that New Yorkers thought about the canal in terms beyond simple transportation. For them, the canal represented their faithfulness to God's governing design of their state. It had been God who carved the gap in the Appalachian Mountains at the Mohawk River. A failure to use that would be to reject the "bounty of Providence"—a rebellion of God's government. The canal also represented the state's sense of ascendance. New Yorkers were keen on advancing that ascendancy narrative. Important, however, is the link that evolved in conversations about the canal itself and New York's ascendancy. Because God had granted the Mohawk River Valley and the canal itself represented the state's sense of ascendance, New Yorkers began to reason God himself had determined their state was the key to God's blessing on the nation. Indeed, Clinton proclaimed that the canal would bring the states into closer union and that distinctions of "Eastern and Western, of Southern and Northern interests" would be overcome. If they completed the canal, New York, in his mind, had an opportunity "to be instrumental in producing so much good, by increasing the stock of human happiness," and he believed this was a worthy ambition of the free people of New York.[115]

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[113] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 396.

[114] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 397.

[115] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 396.

The Providence-Myth in Celebration

For just a moment, reconsider the Canal du Midi. Louis XIV called back to the Gallic heritage of the French to motivate the massive construction effort. As Mukerji showed, the French looked to the Canal du Midi as a source in their national identity canon. Similarly, New York politicians appealed to familiar theological categories, and New Yorkers saw the completion of the Erie Canal as evidence of God renewing his purpose for the young republic. At every meaningful stage, each ceremony marked the achievement. This planning was, first, strategic. As mentioned previously, citizens funded the canal through a bond market. Advertising the success of each stage would bring additional sponsors. New Yorkers, second, also celebrated themselves.

Like Louis XIV, DeWitt Clinton was fascinated by the Romans and believed resourcing their images would lend legitimacy to the young republic. Evan Cornog showed that Clinton was obsessed with classical imagery, analogies, and parallels. He believed America to be a new Rome.[116] In this regard, Clinton was like many other Americans during the early republic era. Clinton and others cherished the idea of Rome and the Roman Republic because it provided important intellectual categories necessary for nation-building.[117] Cornog suggested that this obsession betrayed a "hope of imperial glory" in Clinton's reflection on the canal.[118] Clinton carefully staged the celebrations of the canal to evoke classical imagery. In the first celebration, he directed classical imagery on a packet boat.

When workers finished the middle portion of the canal on October 23, 1819, newspaper editors were elated. Clinton and other canal commissioners boarded a packet

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[116] Cf., Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 120–4.

[117] Cf., Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009). Shalev focuses on the decades preceding the canal era, but his work is an important survey of the idea of America as a New Rome.

[118] Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 123.

boat for Rome, just a few miles down the canal. The New York City's *Evening Post* cast the scene in republican exaltation by focusing on the figure of Clinton though there are dozens of others on the boat. The writer described Clinton in the middle of a party. Streamers and banners were set above him while bands played. Consistent with Clinton's classical obsession, the reporter alluded to the Xerxes but noted significant contrasts between Clinton and Xerxes.[121] Supposing the reporter expected the allusion to be understood by readers, the reporter could have only been alluding to one "expedition of Xerxes." That very allusion emphatically linked providence and nationhood at the Erie Canal.

The unnamed writer was alluding to Herodotus's *History of the Persian Wars*, a book familiar to most literate Americans at the time. Clinton certainly was familiar with Herodotus.[123] The reporter expected his readers to remember that Xerxes dug a canal to avenge the Greek victory over Persia at Marathon. The allusion revealed how the writer believed an audience would understand that illusion.

Herodotus presented Xerxes as a warrior king initially shy regarding the task his nation demanded: avenging Marathon. Xerxes had an interest in conquering Egypt. He, however, took up the mantle to war against the Greeks to satisfy his countrymen. His war would be one to unify a variety of petty city-states into one unified empire. The first naval expedition, however, failed, being destroyed by a storm. So, Xerxes conscripted armies to dig a canal to gain access to spare his expeditionary force the trip around Mount Athos. Herodotus supposed Xerxes dug the canal simply because he could.[124] Throughout

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[121] "Extract of a letter," *The Evening Post* (New York City), October 30, 1819. Newspapers.

[123] Clinton cited Herodotus in his address to the New York Historical Society on the potential origins of the Iroquois peoples. He rejected the common thesis of his day that American natives were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, and, instead, he held they were Asian in descent. See Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 121.

[124] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 7.1–37.

the entire narrative, Xerxes relied upon the wisdom of the Magi and remained responsive to fate—an actor under "heaven's commission."[125]

The reporter believed the strength of comparison outweighed any risk of confusion. On the face, Xerxes and Clinton both shouldered the duty to which their nation called them. Both believed themselves to be operating under a divine government. Faithfulness to that duty required the construction of a canal. Backstage to this vision of unification was the canal. The writer situated a contemplative Clinton under a banner of peace that aimed to unify a confederation of states.

Another reporter at *The Long Island Star* wrote that seeing the canal boat move had a "moral grandeur" because it naturally caused one to contemplate the country's future greatness. The reporter continued by emphasizing that New York had done it alone, an "unassisted effort" that "was highly gratifying to the pride of an America."[126] New Yorkers across the state invested in the canal's success and what it represented. Editors far removed from the actual construction or any large population centers focused on canal stories, presumably because their readership was. One newspaper tracked even the most minor developments—reporting, for example, the transportation of salt along an eight-mile stretch outside of Rome—because of what those developments represented to their readers.[127] When contractors completed the canal's middle section, the *Poughkeepsie Journal* reprinted articles for a week celebrating the "herculean undertaking," which editors universally acknowledged as significant.[128]

Clinton himself saw the significance of the moment. He highlighted it in his gubernatorial address to the Assembly in January 1820. He asserted that direct hostility to

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[125] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* 7.18.

[126] *The Long-Island Star*, November 3, 1819. Newspapers.

[127] "Western Canal," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, October 13, 1819. Newspapers.

[128] "The Grand Canal," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, November 3, 1819. Newspapers.

internal improvements was now deluded, and legislative efforts to obstruct completion were now futile. Already, voices called for an abbreviated route, which would free up funds to develop the area around the completed sections. He reminded the Assembly that the "honor and prosperity" of the state were at stake. The financial incentives were present: freight prices for grain dropped by half along the middle portion of the canal. That efficiency would be felt not only by the merchant but by the farmers themselves, allowing for more investment in the market. No one, Clinton said, could genuinely measure the advantages this canal would bring until "years of experience have passed away."[129] Clinton's insistence that honor was at stake emphasized how he and the legislators saw the Erie Canal. To them, the canal was not a mere improvement. It was a sign of their state's glory. His rhetoric worked. That spring, the legislature solidified the Erie Canal's position in the state through bills that levied taxes, established tort laws protecting the canal, and regulated transit.[130]

New Yorkers celebrated every stage of the canal's completion. On October 8, 1823, the eastern portion of the canal was completed. The completed middle and eastern sections meant that transit from Oneida Lake to New York City harbor was now possible without portage. Ronald Shaw explained that engineers felt the eastern passage—especially from Schenectady to Albany—featured the most challenging features as the steep descent through the Mohawk gorge.[131] New Yorkers themselves were also impressed at the workers' breakneck pace. The chairman of the canal commissioners,

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[129] State of New York, *Laws of the State*, 437–40.

[130] New York Assembly, "An Act for the maintenance and protection of the Erie and Champlain Canals, and the works connected therewith," April 13, 1820, in *Laws of the State of New York, in Relation to the Erie and Champlain Canals, Together with the Annual Reports of the Canal Commissioners, and Other Documents, Requisite for a Complete and Official History of those Words with Correct Maps Delineating the Routes of the Erie and Champlain Canals, and Designating the Lands Through Which They Pass* (Albany, NY: State Government Press, 1825), 518–28. Google Books.

[131] Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal* (1966; Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 134.

William Bayard, claimed that the successful completion rate would affect the "social and moral character of the people and on the political power and importance of this nation."[132] This act of canaling would show them that all they had said about themselves was true. New York, and with it, the nation was ascending. Bayard's speech highlighted another critical theme. God himself would use the commerce created by the canal to secure the states in a firmer union: "The Great Western Canal. . . will unite a large portion of our people in strong ties of a community of commercial interest; and under God, as we trust, secure & consolidate the union of our States."[133] Bayard's language reflected the lexicon of belief he shared with other Americans. George Marsden argued that despite their ethnic and denomination diversity, Americans shared a common religious outlook: "Religion. . . was largely a matter of accepting God's providence."[135] That is, Americans simply resigned their future to God's will. The canal might secure and consolidate the states into a union, but that would only happen according to God's government—or "under God."

New Yorkers celebrated their achievement during the last months of construction, and those celebrations showed how the providence-myth shaped their self-perception. If they had reasoned that God ordained the canal according to geography and that God alone could sustain the efforts, then New Yorkers themselves had been agents of divine action. Their sense of pride from being such was evident as the canal construction ended. In 1824—just months before the canal was completed—the Marquis de Lafayette visited America. This tour was to commemorate the American independence he himself helped secure. New Yorkers saw the canal as a perfect symbol of national importance through which they could honor Lafayette. Leaving Fort Niagara, he traveled to Lockport

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[132] *The Evening Post*, October 10, 1823. Newspapers.

[133] *The Evening Post*, October 10, 1823.

[135] George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture: A Brief History*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 79.

where he would take the canal to Albany. There he enjoyed a small explosives demonstration and parade, but what filled him with "astonishment and admiration" was the "encroachments of civilization on savage nature" represented chiefly in the "miraculous, that gigantic work, that grand canal, which, in tightening the bonds of the American Union, spreads comfort and abundance in the wilds through which it passes."[136] Auguste Levasseur, Lafayette's secretary on the trip, remarked that New York's republican spirit, represented in the canal, could be an example for Europe.[137] This thought was more impressive considering the French had both a republic and grand canal of their own and suggested the method and democratic nature of funding and construction were superior to even that within France. This, of course, has been canal advocates' point: the uniquely American method of improvement would be a model for the world.[138]

DeWitt Clinton's rhetoric became even more potent. In his 1825 second inaugural address to the New York state legislature, he linked the state's internal improvement network with its economic ascendency. However, Clinton did not only believe the canal ought to lead to commercial success. He expected it would serve as an example to the young republic of moral fortitude.[139] He first announced plans to expand the canal, even before it was completed. He argued that this was necessary to capitalize on the canals' consolidated markets and to direct all lake traffic through New York. This consolidation and directing was critical, he reminded them, as the shoreline of the lakes was longer than the distance of the saltwater shoreline of the coast. The New York state population was booming, and New York City itself built 3,000 houses in 1824. Clinton

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[136] Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825, Or Journal of a Voyage to the United* States, trans. John D. Godman (Philadelphia: Cary and Lea, 1829), 191–2.

[137] Levasseur, *Lafayette in America*, 200. Cf., Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 182.

[138] Cf., Chapter Two. Also, DeWitt Clinton, et al., "Memorial of the Citizens of New-York, in favor of a Canal Navigation between the Great Western Lakes and the tide-waters of the Hudson" (1815), in David Hosack, appendix to *Memoir of DeWitt Clinton* (New York: J. Seymour, 1829), 420.

[139] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, January 15, 1825. Newspapers.

believed the city would become the third largest in the world and first in commerce in a decade.[140] For Clinton, New York's ascendancy was "derived" from "the great Fountain of Benevolence," but its citizens' "propitious spirit" was "generally diffused through the other states in favor of Internal Improvements." Clinton believed that New York was the key to the success of American commerce. Citizens, however, needed to decide if they would seize the bounty of providence: "It remains for us ourselves to determine whether we are worthy of the career which the author of all good has opened to us."[141]

From the beginning, he had carefully considered how the symbols included and excluded from a celebration would influence the public perception of the canal. For example, he chose Rome, NY for the ground-breaking ceremony of the canal. Cornog wrote, "The namesake of an ancient empire provided the site for the inauguration of a new one."[142] Clinton carefully directed the canal opening to ensure New York demonstrated it had properly stewarded providence and guaranteed its ascendancy as a virtuous republic.

In 1823, a group of Pearl Street merchants commissioned Thomas Fletcher to smith the silver vases. Fletcher adapted a classical form with contemporary elements to create an iconographical vision of American achievement. Fletcher's firm and the merchants agreed that the vases needed to allude to a recently uncovered vase from Hadrian's Villa at Trivoli.[146] Beth Carver Wees explained, "The firm advanced a decorative program that associated explicit reference to American industry and geography with classical imagery in order to evoke parallels between America and ancient

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[140] New York never surpassed London, but at the completion of the Erie Canal, London papers called New York City "the London of the New World." See Edwin G. Burrows & Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 450.

[141] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, January 15, 1825. Newspapers.

[142] Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 117.

[146] See Beth Carver Wees, "Ancient Rome via the Erie Canal: The De Witt Clinton Vases," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 42 (2007): 140–2. MetPublications: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Rome."[147] Like Louis XIV, these New Yorkers understood the value of retrieving and renegotiating symbols to advance their national ambitions. Indeed, the vases featured the Roman pantheon in relief alongside the engineering feats of the canal itself (Figure 10). Mercury and Ceres watched over a canal lock (Figure 11). On another panel, Hercules and Minerva witnessed American ingenuity at the Rochester aqueduct. In prominent relief, Fletcher made the canal lock system prominently (Figure 12).

Figure 10. Thomas Fletcher and Sidney Gardiner, *Presentation Vase*, 1825, Silver, 23,7/16" x 20,1/8" x 15 1/8," 410 oz. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Louis V. Bell and Rogers Fund, et al.

[147] Wees, "Ancient Rome via the Erie Canal," 142.

Figure 11. Mercury left of a canal lock. Fletcher and Gardiner, *Vase*.

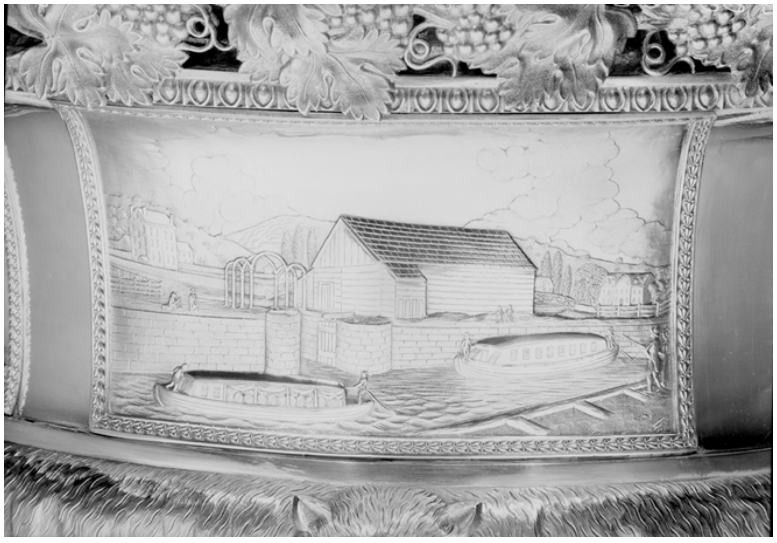

Figure 12. A canal lock with packet boats. Fletcher and Gardiner, *Vase*.

The American eagle finial perches above this Roman gallery, and that eagle rests upon the state of New York, holding within its talons the arms of the state. With that eagle, Fletcher emphasized America as the authentic heir of republican nationhood. More importantly, he demonstrated American ascendancy by setting the canal alongside the

Roman gods and goddesses, what one editor called "illustrations of the progress of the arts and sciences."[148] Another wrote that the vases were "exquisite specimens of the genius of our countrymen."[149] Clinton concurred. In a private meeting after the unveiling, Clinton relayed to Fletcher that some critics considered them superior to any commemorative vases in Europe.[150] Of course, Americans would believe so. The vases celebrated them and their achievements. The vases gave New Yorkers an opportunity to commend their greatness and reflect on their greatness. Reflect they did. Newspapers advertised that the pair of vases were displayed at the "Knickerbacker Hall" after the presentation for public viewing and adulation.[151]

When on March 1825 merchants from Pearl Street and a few hundred citizens presented him with the vases, Clinton was grateful. They praised his efforts. He believed he had only been an "instrument" of divine providence who obeyed God's geographic design by championing the canal.[152] After all, he had labored so vigorously in the state assembly through his memorial and again as governor to see the project finished: the canal would prove to be Clinton's crowning legacy.[153] This moment among so many had been crafted with "an eye to drama."[154] Clinton, however, was also aware of what the moment communicated about the state.

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[148] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, March 26, 1825.

[149] *Poughkeepsie Journal*, March 23, 1825.

[150] Thomas Fletcher to Melinda Fletcher, May 7, 1825, quoted in Wees, "Ancient Rome via the Erie Canal," 145.

[151] *Black Rock Gazette*, April 5, 1825. This is not to be confused with the Knickerbocker Hotel opened in 1906. I could not find definitive information on the Knickerbacker Hall—other than it was a common surname during this period. It could have been an exhibition hall within the City Hotel where the vases were presented, taking its name from a benefactor or patron named Knickerbacker.

[152] Hosack, *Memoir of De Witt Clinton*, 186–90.

[153] Cf., Cornog, *The Birth of Empire*, 155.

[154] Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Canal West: A History of The Erie Canal, 1792–1854* (1966; Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 83.

Cosmopolitan Americans, such as those Pearl Street merchants of New York, represented a class of Americans self-conscious about their inferiority to Europe—mainly regarding civility and antiquity.[155] Europeans possessed both, and New Yorkers intended to demonstrate the grandeur of their republican nation. Cornog noted that Clinton designed every detail of the Erie Canal commemoration to highlight the sophistication of American society. Clinton's agenda in his public actions "was aimed at a European audience as much as at his fellow New Yorkers. The American sense of cultural inferiority was, after all, gleefully encouraged by the Europeans. . . Clinton felt this kind of transatlantic condescension keenly."[156] So, when the time came for pageantry to mark the opening of the canal, he and others were intent on legitimizing the American nation as much as celebrating the work itself.

On October 26, 1825, the Erie Canal was officially opened. The official commemorations centered around what was called "the wedding of the waters." The details, however, made the meaning of the commemoration. The planners intended to reinforce their national ambitions by linking "providence" with Roman republican symbolism; that is, New Yorkers aimed to show that God intended for them to be the leaders of this new republic: they intended to emphasize this fact in three main ways. First, they had the ceremony offering benediction for the canal itself. Second, they draped the ceremony in Roman republican meaning. Finally, they emphasized the canal as an exclusively New York achievement.

At nine o'clock, Buffalo's band struck the first note. The Frontier Guard flanked. Grand Marshal John G. Camp, a hero of the War of 1812, New York Governor DeWitt Clinton and lieutenant governor James Tallmadge Jr. led a parade of merchants,

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[155] Cornog, "How De Witt Clinton Invented Our Past," 55. Cf., Richard Bushman, introduction to *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, and Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

[156] Cornog, "How De Witt Clinton Invented Our Past," 55.

mechanical and civic organizations, and more from the courthouse to the canal basin. Captain Wetmore, a canal pilot, had prepared the *Seneca Chief* for the tour.[161]

First, Jesse Hawley addressed the company. He congratulated them "on the epoch of uniting the waters of the great Inland Mediteraneans [*sic*] of North America with those of the commercial Atlantic." *New Yorkers*—he emphasized—did this: a fifty-year-old state with a population the size of Hanover. He argued this canal demonstrated the manifest certainty that America would secure the "vast Empire of Wilderness, extending to the West, far beyond the setting sun" bequeathed by the "Fathers by their glorious Revolution"—two decades before John L. O'Sullivan suggested the inevitability of westward expansion.[162] For Hawley, the Erie Canal opened the West to be won.

A 32-pounder artillery salute bid farewell to the *Seneca Chief*.[163] All along the canal were cannons to serve as an audio proto-telegraph. The sound marked the start of a barrage throughout the state along the canal. Cannons fired in succession from Buffalo to Albany and from Albany through New York City to the Atlantic Ocean at Sandy Hook Bay. The message would resound: water navigation had been opened from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic. New York City would return the barrage to Buffalo as a "National Salute."[164] The entire volley lasted three hours and twenty minutes.[165] The barrage alerted cities along the canal that statewide celebrations were to commence. From New York City, two aldermen would head west at the sound of the cannon in New York City harbor to communicate congratulations and welcome merchants "along the whole line, and from

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[161] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825, Newspaper.

[162] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825.

[163] William L. Stone, *Narrative of the Festivities Observed in Honor of the Completion of the Grand Erie Canal United the Waters of the Great Western Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean* (New York: Corporation of New York, 1825), 295.

[164] *The Long-Island Star*, October 27, 1825, Newspapers.

[165] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 185.

every part of our state" who would now trade in her markets.[166] Salt milled in Syracuse and grain farmed outside of Buffalo no longer needed to be transported through the port of New Orleans. That 32-pounder carronade broadcast that New Yorkers had breached fortress Appalachia.

Those not joining Clinton and others on the packet boat retired to the city courthouse for a celebration that blended religious tones and a nationalistic spirit. Gilbert Crawford, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, offered a benediction to open the event. Sheldon Smith, a Buffalo architect, spoke on the occasion. New York citizens succeeded where the Greeks and Romans failed: "with all their wisdom and learning, [they] were unable to make a canal a short distance across the isthmus of Corinth; although they several times attempted it under Julius Cesar."[167] This oratorical focus on antiquity by Smith was to legitimize the American republic. Smith asserted, "Should the arrogance of Europeans hereafter prompt them to enquire what America has done for the world, let them look upon the canals of New-York, and be silent."[168] Smith emphasized the providential plan of a "beneficent Creator," which granted New Yorkers "all those fertile regions that extend west to the Pacific Ocean, and south to the banks of the Missouri."[169] He concluded,

> Ages on ages shall roll away, and the grand Canal shall remain an imperishable monument of human wisdom, enterprize and glory. Interwoven with the works of Providence, it shall endure with time; drawing closer and closer the bonds of union, and the ties of social compact; aiding and rewarding the hand of industry; and dispensing blessing over a free, grateful, and happy People.[170]

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[166] *The Long-Island Star*, October 27, 1825.

[167] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825.

[168] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825.

[169] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825.

[170] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825.

A local judge offered toasts to the canal, state, De Witt Clinton, and the memory of George Washington, among others. The party sang an ode to commemorate the occasion, set to the tune of the early republic anthem "Hail, Columbia!" Again, New Yorkers freely mixed two significant antecedents for this occasion. The word "ode" itself evoked Græco-Roman poetry, and the refrain to "strike the lyre" suggested a 1796 KJV *Psalms* influence.

"Celebration Ode"
Strike the Lyre! With a joyous note,
Let the sound through azure float:
The task is o'er—the work complete
And Erie's waves with oceans meet—
Bearing afar their rich bequest,
While smiling commerce greets the west.
See where the peaceful waters glid
Through woodlands wild, as if in pride,
To mark that learning makes her home,
Where Solitude had set her throne.
Strike the Lyre! 'tis envy's knell—
Pallid fear with her cell
Shrinks aghast—while truth and frame
On Glory's scroll 'grave CLINTON's name
Strike the Lyre! A brighter day
Ne'er on Columbia shed its ray;
Though proud the hour when Freedom's son,
The great, the glorious, Washington,
Our beacon light, o'er peril's wave,
With soul of fire led on the brave
To deeds that make the young heart bound
With valor's fervor at the sound.
This day the cheering thought inspires—
The children ne'er will shame their sires:
Strike the Lyre! The sainted shade
Of Him, who crush'd the foeman's blade
Exulting smiles, while history's page
Records this glory of the age.
Strike the Lyre! 'tis freedom's song,
While th' red flash, the line along,
Tells to the world, with echoing roar,
Matter and space are triumph'd o'er!
Gigantic genius led the van,
While sturdy toil fulfill'd the plan.

What boundless gratitude is due
To those whose purpose, evertrue,
Pursued their course with daring pride,
Till Erie's waves carress'd the tide.
Stike the Lyre! Should discord's brand
In vain be hurl'd by impious hand,
NEW-YORK can proudly boast alone
She wove the band.[171]

Money was to be made commemorating the canal. Entrepreneurs chartered tours to these celebrations. For example, an advertisement offered tickets aboard the *Matilda* for a ride to Albany, Troy, and other cities' celebrations. They would join the grand procession to New York City on the return journey.[172] Of course, not everyone was included in the celebration. The women of Buffalo protested their exclusion from the celebration. Pseudonymous "Freelove Submission" insisted that the organizers ignored their interest in the canal.[173] The decision to exclude Buffalo's women—while lamentable, to be sure—showed the organizers had a purpose beyond mere celebration. The organizers curated symbols and participants to cultivate a particular message about the meaning of the Erie Canal and the destiny of New York state.

Aboard the *Seneca Chief*, organizers carefully attended to the symbols. The boat itself had carried Lafayette during his tour along the Erie Canal.[174] William Stone recorded the journey. In the cabin itself was a painting of DeWitt Clinton in a Roman toga, having just opened a canal lock.[175] Eran Shalev argued Americans resourced the symbol of the toga to legitimize their republicanism. The toga was a symbol of a free Roman citizen, and there was a tradition in the early republic to use the toga as a mark of republican legitimacy. Shalev wrote, "Patriots could enact and make sense of

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[171] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825.

[172] *The Evening Post* (New York City), October 29, 1825. Newspapers.

[173] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 22, 1825. Newspapers.

[174] See *Black Rock Gazette*, June 27, 1825, Newspapers.

[175] Stone, *Narrative of the Festivities*, 296.

representations that suggested a union of Roman and American annals."[176] Clinton's right was a likeness of Hercules "resting from the severe labor just completed."[177] Summoned by the extended hand of Clinton, a humbled Neptune was painted to be confounded by the mastery of his domain. Beside the painting were barrels of waters from the Erie to be poured into the Atlantic—a "wedding of waters."[178] At each port along the canal, city representatives staged celebrations similar to those in Buffalo. In Rochester, a performance between a boat stationed to guard the city hailed the convoy:

> *Who goes there?*
> Your brothers from the West, on the waters of the great Lakes.
> *By what means have they been diverted so far from their natural course?*
> By the channel of the Grand Erie Canal
> *By whose authority, and by whom, was a work of such magnitude accomplished?*
> By the authority and by the enterprise of the patriotic People of the State of New York.[179]

From there, each city along the canal expressed its sentiment in meaningful ways. At Macedon, an arch bridged the canal, and attached to it were two signs; one side read "Clinton and the Canal" and the other "Internal Improvements." The citizens of Montezuma treated the convey with fireworks. This pattern repeated itself until the ceremony in New York City itself.

In New York City harbor, Clinton celebrated with the party the achievements of New York's citizens accomplishing navigation between "our Mediterranean Seas and the Atlantic Ocean." He then evoked benediction: "May the God of the Heavens and the Earth smile most prosperously on this work, and render it subservient to the best interests

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[176] Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores*, 166.

[177] Stone, *Narrative of the Festivities*, 296.

[178] Stone, *Narrative of the Festivities*, 296.

[179] Stone, *Narrative of the Festivities*, 300.

of the human race."[180] Clinton poured the water from Lake Erie into the Atlantic Ocean—thus "wedding the waters."[181]

At the opening of the Erie Canal in Buffalo, Hawley connected the future expansion of America to the providence of God through the Erie Canal. Hawley argued that the canal granted a "vast Empire of Wilderness, extending to the West, far beyond the setting sun" by the "Fathers by their glorious Revolution."[186] In 1825, westward expansion was still in progress as the United States consolidated its territories. Mexico controlled extensive territory in the West; what would become British Columbia was contested between the United States and the United Kingdom. Hawley and all present at these ceremonies pointed to the canal as a tie that would bind the west with New York's capital markets and guarantee westward expansion.

Set in its geographical context and the need to expand trade, Hawley's comments, the celebration, the Clinton vases, and more revealed that New Yorkers saw the canal as a nation-building project. The early republic's anxieties—preventing the Union's severing along the Appalachian Mountain range—yielded to a more powerful, nationalistic ambition. Hawley contended that the canal granted the West to New Yorkers. This comment was not precisely the "closed exceptionalism" of Wilsey's taxonomy, but his common was not "open" either. Instead, Hawley's comment reflected a nationalism Anders Stephanson called a "diffuse disposition toward the world."[187] Stephanson observed that the period after the Missouri Compromise was marked by "social, economic, and spatial *openness*," which saw the United States as a nation that could "roll

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[180] Stone, *Narrative of the Festivities*, 321.

[181] Cf., Gerard Koeppel, *Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2009), 378–80.

[186] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, October 29, 1825.

[187] Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 28

across the expanse pretty much at will."[188] Hawley certainly saw the expansion of the nation as inevitable, and he reasoned it was because the West had been opened to commerce through the Erie Canal.

DeWitt Clinton and others understood that the canal was more than a mere canal. The project gave Clinton and colleagues a canvas upon which they could project their national ambitions. By emphasizing the Puritan category of "providence," they legitimized the effort in the minds of ordinary New Yorkers. However, they also reinforced their own interpretation of their place in history when the project succeeded. This reinforcement was apparent in their celebrations. By reaching back into antiquity and recontextualizing symbols, New Yorkers demonstrated that they were the true heir of the Roman republic. More significantly, though they had accomplished the herculean task alone, they understood their success to have been guaranteed by providence.

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[188] Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, 28–29.

CHAPTER 4

"ENLIGHTENED ENTERPRISE IN LAND ENDOWED": REFORM EFFORTS AMONG THE ERIE CANAL

Basil Hall published a travel journal describing his 1828 journey along the Erie Canal. His observation of Rochester captured the dramatic population boom facilitated by the canal's economic opportunities: "Out of more than 8,000 souls in this gigantic young village, there was not to be found in 1827 a single grown-up person born there."[1] Hall continued, "The population is composed principally of emigrants from New England. . . Much of all this prosperity may be traced to the cheapness of conveyance on the Erie Canal."[2] Immigrants transformed Rochester from a sleepy hamlet into an economic engine for the state. They repeated this transformation in several other towns along the canal, such as Albany, Utica, and Buffalo.

The Erie Canal facilitated the transformation of western New York from frontier wilderness to a marketized economy by opening homesteads to regional and international markets. Grain grown outside of Rochester could be sold in Europe. As the economy grew, New Yorkers experienced a transformation of social conditions, which did not always correspond to their Protestant ideals of personal holiness, family unity, and republican virtue. This gap between their ideal and New York Protestants' desire to be a model of republican virtue motivated some of the earliest activists, such as Josiah Bissell and Joseph Penney.

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[1] Basil Hall, "Travels in North America (1828)," in *The Erie Canal Reader, 1790–1950* ed. Roger W. Hecht (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 45.

[2] Hall, "Travels in North America (1828)," 45.

To respond to this gap, revivalists and reformers adopted an activist Protestantism to address the social conditions wrought by the Erie Canal. Immigrants into western New York sought economic gain, and in turn, they dramatically transformed social conditions. Concurrent with the city's growth, residents suffered the difficulties of rapid urbanization. As the city grew, residents of Rochester and neighboring villages struggled to order the chaotic growth of their booming cities.[3] These residents benefitted from the canal's boon to the local economy, but the arrival of the canal also led to creative destruction as the region entered the market economy.

"Creative destruction" was a term coined by Joseph Schumpeter to describe how new units, mechanisms, or means of production replace outdated ones. In his immediate context, Schumpeter presented an Austrian view of economics, which advances a vision of economic transformation through innovation.[4] Schumpeter's concept can be applied to describe the Erie Canal's effect on the western frontier. The canal destroyed a subsistent, frontier economy and brought about marketization.

As the canal transformed the constituent character of the region's economic life from subsistent farming to market production, the traditional locations of moral formation—the home and church—shifted. To follow market demands, the laboring class no longer predominately worked out of their homes. Instead, individuals like Abiathar Millard Harris would leave their homes and search the region for work.[5] To address this shift, New Yorkers funded efforts along the canal to address what they saw as threats to family and republican virtue. They built lasting evangelical institutions, distributed pamphlets and Bibles, and evangelized canallers to advance their moral outlook.

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[3] See Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier: Sorting the New Nineteenth-Century City* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 31–40.

[4] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1943; Oxford: Routledge, 2010), 71–3.

[5] More on Abiathair Millard Harris below. MSS Collection, CX32: (Harris, Abiathar Millard) Aisle 411W A2, Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester.

"Each Place of Importance": Population Boom in Western New York

The rate at which people settled in New York's frontier is staggering. In 1850, Orsamus Turner reflected upon the impact of the canal in New York. Turner suggested that no one could have imagined the extent of growth the canal caused. He marveled that cities such as New York, Buffalo, and Rochester had doubled in size. He was amazed that the canal seemed to have created a "new Empire. . . around the borders of our western lakes." [6] What Turner expressed in words, the census recorded in fact. Settlers transformed New York state from 1790–1850. New York City had always been the largest city in the young republic.[8] The state itself, however, was initially rural. In 1790, Massachusettsans boasted seven towns and villages with more than 2,500 people. New Yorkers only had three. Throughout the next seven decades, New York would never eclipse Massachusetts in total "urban areas." This, however, was due to a classification technicality. Before 1940, the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of an "urban area" was: "cities or other incorporated places of 2,500 or more population."[9] Rather than spreading into decentralized villages and townships like Massachusettsans, New Yorkers overwhelmingly concentrated in cities along the Erie Canal economic corridor after 1820.

For example, in 1850, Massachusetts had nineteen "urban areas" to New York's fourteen. However, the population distribution told the story. Of the Americans who lived in an urban area in 1850, 3-in-10 lived in New York state. Only 1.3-in-10 lived in Massachusetts. This was an increase from 1840. In 1840, New York only had ten

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[6] Orasmus Turner, *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York* (Buffalo: Jewett, Thomas & Co., 1850), 637. Google Books.

[8] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in The United States: 1790 to 1990, Campbell Gibson, POP-WP027, June 1998, Table 1, https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/1998/demo/POP-twps0027.html.

[9] Special rules applied to include in counting any villages in New England that may not be incorporated or areas where state legislature nomenclature may designate a population center as something other than "city." U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places In The United States: 1790 to 1990.

"urban areas" to Massachusetts's twenty-four. Yet, twice as many urban Americans lived in New York's cities than in Massachusetts's cities. This figure highlighted the concentration of New Yorkers in cities along the Erie Canal economic corridor. The rapid growth of these cities themselves is worth noting. From 1790 until 1850, New York state experienced explosive growth, and the cities along the canal experienced the bulk of this growth. During the 1820s, New York City grew by only 64 percent, while Utica grew by 180 percent. Buffalo grew by 313 percent and Rochester grew by 471 percent (see table 1).

Table 1. Population growth of select New York State cities from 1790 to 1850

City	*1790*	*1800*	*1810*	*1820*	*1830*	*1840*	*1850*
New York	33,131	60,489	93,424	123,706	202,589	312,710	515,547
Albany	3,498	5,289	10,792	12,630	24,209	33,721	50,763
Utica	—	—	*	2,972	8,323	12,782	17,565
Rome	—	—	*	3,569	4,360	5,680	7,918
Syracuse[a]	—	—	—	—	—	—	22,271
Palmyra	—	994	2,187	3,724	3,427	3,549	3,893
Rochester	—	—	—	1,610	9,207	20,191	36,403
Buffalo	—	—	—	2,095	8,668	18,213	42,261

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in The United States: 1790 to 1990 Campbell Gibson, POP-WP027, June 1998, Table 1, https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/1998/demo/POP-twps0027.html; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1790 Census, 1791, 36–41, https://www.census.gov/ library/publications/1793/dec/number-of-persons.html; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1800 Census, 1801, 27–33, https://www.census.gov/library/ publications/1801/dec/return.html; Family Search, "United States Census, 1810," Database with images. FamilySearch. http://familysearch.org, accessed March 4, 2022. Citing NARA microfilm publication M252. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1820 Census, 1821, 49–66, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1821/dec/1820a.html; Family Search, "United States Census, 1830." Database with images. http://familysearch.org, accessed March 14, 2022. Citing NARA microfilm publication M19. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1840 Census, 1841, 16–23,

https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1841/ dec/1840c.html; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850 Census, 1853, 87–132, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1853/dec/1850a.html.

[*]The U.S. Marshals who counted for the 1810 census did not include township names for Oneida County. This likely indicates that the villages of Utica and Rome were colloquially named and settled but not chartered.

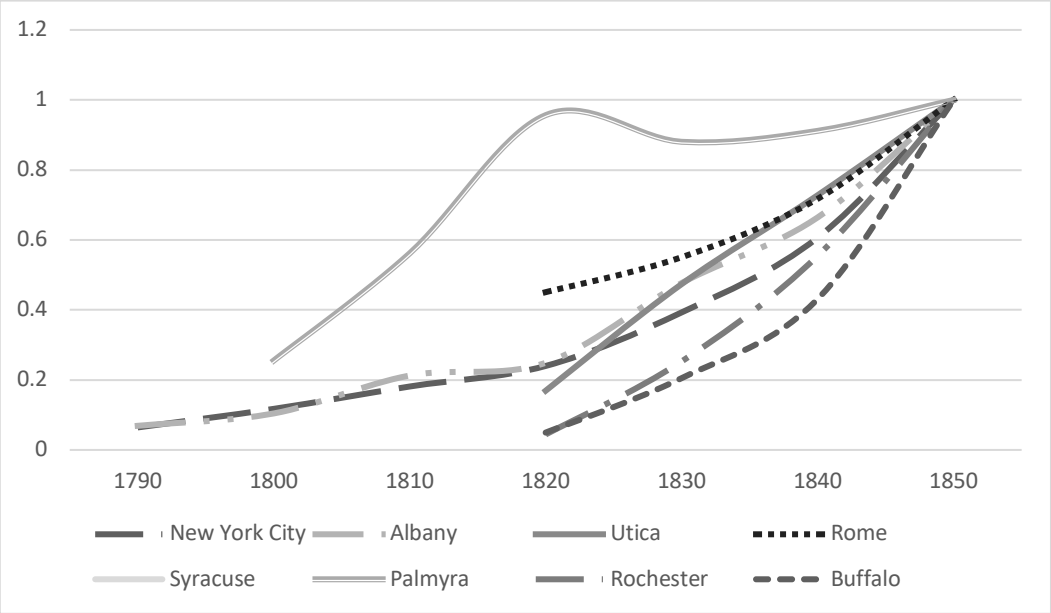
[a]Officials did not include Syracuse in censuses until the 1850s because the citizens could not agree on a name to submit to the postal service. The area around Syracuse was densely populated due to its industrial salt mining presence.

As Whitney Cross observed, explosive growth unfolded from east to west. He wrote that the canal affected each city "separately in a series of impacts sticking successively across the state over a period of fifteen years. Thus Utica's boom was over before Buffalo's began."[10] Indeed, each city's exponential growth corresponded to the completion of the canal segment closest to that city. When the population data is normalized, it is possible to see the settlement trends of New Yorkers (Figure 13). Palmyra, with its agricultural economy, grew steadily during the early republican era at a rate faster than New York City, but the region reached saturation after individuals settled the best agricultural land.[11] After workers completed the canal in 1825, Albany, Utica, Rochester, and Buffalo grew far faster than New York City. From 1820 to 1830, Rochester grew seven times faster than New York City. Rochester and Buffalo sustained those growth rates throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

[10] Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (1950; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 59.

[11] Cf, Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 62.

Figure 13. Normalized population growth rates of select New York State cities from 1790 to 1850.



Source: Census data is found in Table 1.
Note: Special thanks to Andy Sharples for helping to normalize the population data and Logan Carter for checking my arithmetic and providing an alternative model for graphing.

There is considerable evidence that each city planned for this exponential growth. Indeed, New Yorkers supported the canal on the promise of economic development. In 1811, New York City and the tracts of land which would become Rochester both chose grids to scale the economic potential of their cities. That these decisions occurred in the same year demonstrated the projections speculators had regarding the economic performance of the canal. Diane Shaw explained, "Rochester. . . was to be a commercial city, built for profit and attractive to business interest."[12] Shaw continued, "These new cities were intended not as agricultural villages with closed or localized economies but, rather, as outward-looking commercial towns pursuing

[12] Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 30.

opportunities along the mercantile chain."[13] Contemporaries noticed this phenomenon. On August 25, 1826, Alexander Steward Scott judged it noteworthy that each village along the Erie Canal he visited had arranged its streets in grand style, anticipating that "each place will sooner or later become of importance."[14] So, New Yorkers expected the canal would result in net economic growth, and they enjoyed the dividends of their infrastructural investment.

That transformation from agrarian economics to market economics followed more significant trends within the United States. Charles Sellers noted that "virtually all business in colonial America" were small enterprises due to British legal tradition, which saw corporations as a threat to crown sovereignty; after the independence, however, Americans sought the economic advantages of corporate organization.[15] The canal allowed western New Yorkers to capitalize on those dividends. Paul E. Johnson explained this phenomenon in Rochester. By 1830, the economy had shifted away from masterworks toward owner-and-wage-earner operations. Following this shift, these operations exported finished goods beyond their local communities to Albany and beyond.[16] Marketization also affected a shift in the type of work in which New Yorkers engaged. By 1840, half of Palmyra's labor force was still employed in some agricultural enterprise, while only five percent of Rochester's labor force worked in the same field (See Table 2).[17] Rochester's experience characterized an entrance by the frontier into the

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[13] Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 31.

[14] Paul G. Schneider Jr., ed., *Everything Worthy of Observation: The 1826 New York State Travel Journal of Alexander Stewart Scott* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2019), 57.

[15] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 44.

[16] Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York 1815–1837* (1978; New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 37–40.

[17] Census data from 1790–1840 was notoriously erroneous. This was related to the methodology of these censuses. Because these were originally intended to determine the representatives required for legislative purposes, the U.S. Marshalls were designated to count the census under the authority of the Secretary of State. They did not, however, receive any specific direction on its undertaking other than a standard form. This has led many to believe that figures are unintentionally undercounted or

market economy.

Congress first sought detailed economic information in 1840. However, no one gave the marshals tasked with enumerating the census any specific details on classifying a resident's employment. That is, the decision to classify employment as agricultural or commercial was mainly at the discretion of an individual marshal. These marshals, however, left clues about how they totaled such employment in their calculations of the productive value of the states. They counted cereal and cash crop cultivation and animal husbandry as agricultural, but they tallied these goods' storage, packing, and transportation as commercial.[18] Rochester was a significant collection and forwarding location for wheat products, and this was why Rochester was considered a commercial city though its industry largely centered on the milling of wheat.

New Yorkers were correct that internal improvements would positively impact their frontier. Cities such as Albany, Rochester, and Buffalo grew at rates faster than New York City, and as these cities grew, the New York frontier entered the market economy. This growth, however, had consequences on western New York society. Their New

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overcounted during this early period.

The official history of early censuses indicated that the sixth census (1840) was the first census marking an effort to collect more than demographic information on the United States. Many people complained directly to Congress about the gross errors still present within the sixth census. Relevant to this subject, petitioners argued that some marshals seemed to only count the employment of the heads of families; others only the work of unmarried men; and still others the full count of males. While the figures in Table 2 are the best available, they remain incomplete. In fact, this must be the case. The labor force participation rate, which is labor force over civilian population as a percentage, is off by almost twenty percentage points in most cities listed in Table 2. If the numbers contained within the 1840 census are accurate, then Albany's labor force participation rate is only 6.4 percent of the city's population. This is statistically improbable, even considering the rise in unemployment following the Panic of 1837.

While it is unrelated to the subject, I would be remiss to neglect mentioning the marshal's racist classification of any "colored population." Marshals grossly erred by recording statistically impossible figures, counting too much of the non-white populations as insane or dumb. Proponents of slavery exploited these figures to their advantage, insisting that slavery protected non-whites from self-destruction or destitution. The outcry over the 1840 census was so great that Congress corrected the issue with funding, direction, and eventually revising the entire enumerating process. See Carroll D. Wright, *The History and Growth of the United State Senate*, Prepared for the Senate Committee on the Census (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 32–40. United States Census Bureau .

[18] Department of State, Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1841), Census Publications, "1840 Census," accessed March 23, 2022, https://www.census.gov/ library/publications/1841/dec/1840c.html. See stub headings on pages 120–9 for this information.

England heritage and national ambitions informed how New Yorkers managed those consequences.

Table 2. Select New York State Cities' 1840 labor force in sectors

City	*Agri.*	*Comm.*	*Manufact.*	*Seafaring*	*Canaling*	*Pro.*
New York	2,770	11,377	43,405	2,787	720	2,908
Albany	144	35	1,621	8	106	237
Utica	39	236	271	—	5	166
Rome	949	91	462	12	86	45
Palmyra	462	71	303	—	34	39
Rochester	236	530	2,916	25	229	151
Buffalo	60	771	1,851	8	347	211

Source: Family Search, "United States Census, 1840." Database with images. http://familysearch.org, accessed March 17, 2022. Citing NARA microfilm publication M19. National Archives and Records Administration.

Note: There are minor discrepancies between the database images sourced here from microfilm and the recapitulation published by the U.S. Department of State in 1841. Where discrepancies occur, priority was given to the microfilm image because the microfilms are the only digitized copies of the original census documents themselves. Compare with Department of State, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1841), 18-23, Census Publications, "1840 Census," accessed March 23, 2022, https://www.census.gov/ library/publications/1841/dec/1840c.html.

The Market Revolution Along the Erie Canal

Sellers described the effect of a town or region entering the market economy. Traditional authority structures are upended when an economy transforms from agrarian to market. Sellers wrote that a market revolution dissolves "deeply rooted patterns of

behavior and belief for competitive effort."[19] New Englanders who moved into the New York hinterlands had to contend with dual challenges, one moral and one practical. First, they had to recontextualize their expectation of moral formation to fit within this new market dynamic. Second, they had to disseminate that recontextualized framework throughout their new homeland. They did the first by concentrating on the public conduct of the wage-workers and manufacturers. They did the second by founding and funding reform agencies to carry this mission beyond the confines of any given local parish into the heart of industrializing cities.

Philip Garbutt of Wheatland, Monroe County experienced this transformation during his time as a miller. Garbutt had inherited the mill from his father-in-law in 1811, and the mill had a reputation for producing a high quality of flour demanded in Canadian markets.[20] In fact, that American millers were selling grain through Canadian rather than American markets motivated New York City merchants to advocate for the Erie Canal in the first place. American goods which passed into Canadian markets drained the potential returns of American merchants.

Garbutt received flour orders from customers, purchased wheat from local farmers accordingly, milled, and warehoused the flour until delivery. This warehousing and distribution operation had changed from Garbutt's father-in-law's operation, which milled local grain for local families. Abner Bogg of Montreal was one of Garbutt's customers. Bogg purchased 400 barrels of flour from Garbutt, and he coordinated their storage at Denison's Store in Hanford Landing. From Hanford Landing, merchandise would travel through the Genesee River into Lake Ontario. The price of flour must have dropped over the winter of 1820–1821 because Bogg requested 100 extra barrels of flour

[19] Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 5.

[20] Cf., George E. Slocum, *Wheatland, Monroe County, New York: A Brief Sketch of Its History*, (Scottsville, NY: Isaac Van Hooser, 1908), 24.

"if all of the above flour is not yet delivered. . . without mill Brand or any kind of mark" without any adjustment to the price.[21] Bogg suppressed the upside price point of Garbutt's flour, instructing him, "I am of the opinion you have a Good Contract with me."[22]

Flour, like all major commodities, was subject to market pricing. As the distribution network grew, price fluctuations became more common. Merchants developed complex warehousing operations to mitigate these forces to capitalize on a bullish market price. This operational practice was particularly the case in Rochester. Shaw explained, "[Rochester's] milling landscape was compassed of not only mills but also warehousing and freight facilities that extended the mills' reach. . . transport was part of the commercialized landscape that moved locally produced or refined goods to a wider market."[23] By leveraging these warehouses, millers such as Garbutt could sell to markets beyond Rochester at the very best possible price.

As a result of internal improvements, Garbutt's business changed. He retained his Montreal contacts but entered into business with Eli Hart, a flour merchant in New York City. His entrance into the New York markets allowed Garbutt to take advantage of larger, more profitable markets. He ceased to be a regional supplier to the Lake Ontario region. Garbutt was one node in a developing network that supplied American grain to Europe. He relied on merchants down the canal to capitalize on wheat prices. For example, in 1823, Eli Hart counseled Garbutt that he should not send any flour. He wrote, "We think the [illegible] of flour will be over in about two weeks, after which we hope that the price may be something higher: We are not without hopes of obtaining in the

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[21] Abner Bogg to Phillip Garbutt, March 5, 1821, box 1, MSS Collection, AG21: Garbutt Family Aisle 5E B8, Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester.

[22] Abner Bogg to Phillip Garbutt, March 5, 1821.

[23] Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 31

months of July and August 7.25 to 7.50 a barrel."[24] Hart sold American flour to European markets and used his vast warehouses to restrict the supply of flour in the market artificially; eventually, this market manipulation would provoke New York City's Flour Riot during the Panic of 1837.[25] Garbutt could mill flour, store it until demand reached an appropriate level, and ship it hundreds—even thousands—of miles away to the highest bidder. His correspondents gave him reports of political news from Boston, influxes of cheaper Southern wheat, demand for flour in Liverpool. The Erie Canal allowed Garbutt to enter the transatlantic market. Across New York, farmers and artisans began producing goods for consumers outside their local communities. Each could store their wares until either a local or distant market paid a better price.

Market Effect on the Community

Merchants were not the only ones who adjusted to marketization. As the region experienced marketization, family units had to adjust to a new economic order. For example, Paul Johnson explained that the transition from household-based, bespoke production of goods—such as shoes or barrels—to commercial production out of shops diluted the family's control over young men. During the 1820s, young men who would have worked in their family's business just two decades earlier sought employment in the marketplace—away from the moral instruction of the household. Paternalistic control, however, was not lost but transferred from a young man's father to his foreman through boarding arrangements. Until they were married, respectable young men and women lived in boarding houses when they worked in a city outside of their own. Newspapers during the period advertised vacancies, and young adults would apply to board. For

[24] Eli Hart to Phillip Garbutt, June 2, 1823, box 1, MSS Collection, AG21: Garbutt Family Aisle 5E B8, Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester.

[25] See Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 609–11.

example, one H. White advertised a convenient house on Canal Street in Palmyra, New York: "Genteel boarders welcome."[27] Boarding allowed young adults to search for employment beyond their own city. One New York City boarding house off Broadway was "near all places of recreation, and not too far for business," and it offered optional meals with lodging. This particular boarding house also offered an office "very suitable for a lawyer, dentist, doctor, or lottery office."[28]

Boarding was also a means of extending a Protestant virtue beyond the household. In a newspaper advertisement, D. B. Crane boasted that his preparatory school offered boarding where young ladies would be under a "particular guardianship" and young men would receive "ample accommodations."[29] The practice was so common that the Rochester City Directory recorded hosts and respective boarders. If the boarders regularly changed, a directory would be irrelevant by the time it was published. This suggested that boarding houses were generally stable, helpful to labor-seeking young adults seeking stability while they searched for work. However, because the practice was about morality more than financial efficiency, young adults with respectable occupations also boarded in homes. For example, Reuben Leonard, a tavern owner off Exchange Street, hosted a goldsmith, grocer, laborer, merchant, circuit judge, and clerk.[30]

Merchants who employed apprentices or skilled laborers often boarded them. Johnson wrote, "Employment was conditional on co-residence. Even workmen whose fathers and brothers headed households in Rochester lived with employers."[31] Like a

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[27] *The Reflector* (Palmyra), May 12, 1830.

[28] *The Evening Post* (New York City), June 9, 1820.

[29] *Wayne Sentinel*, May 9, 1828.

[30] Elisha Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester, Containing the Names, Residences and Occupations of All Male Inhabitants Over Fifteen Years of Age, in Said Village on the First of January, 1827 to Which Is Added a Sketch of the History of the Village, From 1812 to 1827* (Rochester, 1827), 38.

[31] Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 43.

boarding house, this arrangement had less to do with economic value but arose out of moral impetus. Through boarding, civic officials could preserve public morality by making hosts responsible for their boarders. City ordinances forbade unswept sidewalks, hucksters on streets, nine-pin alleys, billiard tables, and more around boarding houses.[33] These city ordinances transferred the duty of moral formation from the family unit to a surrogate figure, a boarding house manager, without sacrificing any moral accountability of western New York. Whether a young adult boarded to seek employment outside of the household, honor a moral norm, or boarded with their employer, New Yorkers had a cultural expectation that young adults needed some paternalistic covering.

Traditional mores of moral virtue frayed followed marketization, despite families' best efforts. In 1830, editors of *The Gem*, a Rochester literary magazine, stoked fear into the hearts of New York's citizens: one circular reported a boy who had gone to work in the city had been corrupted by a "sorcerous" of "Beelzebub" and cast off his parents' authority—even though he had been "trained" in "the paths of innocence and virtue."[34] The "sorcerous" was Francis "Franny" Wright, a free-love utopianist. The editor's allusion to Proverbs 22:6—"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"—cut right to the heart of New England culture and its expectation that a child raised as a Christian would remain morally virtuous. As M. Michelle Jarrett Morris noted they had this expectation because, "the family and larger commonwealth. . . were to be firmly integrated, with the family acting as the first line of defense against sin, crime, and disorder."[36] In a letter to the editor, pseudonymous "Philo" inquired whether merchants considered themselves "as having charge" over the souls of their apprentices and clerks and questioned whether any pious family would

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[33] Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester,* 101–103.

[34] *The Gem* (Rochester) 2, no. 5, June 26, 1830.

[36] M. Michelle Jarrett Morris, *Under Household Government: Sex and Family in Puritan Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 245.

knowingly allow their child to become the charge of someone who would exclude them or neglect them regarding family worship.[37]

New Yorkers were concerned that market forces untied the social fabric carefully woven through pious religion.[38] Therefore, editors at *The Gem* counseled young men who had found an apprenticeship to "obtain a friend to select for you the best books on morality, religion, and the liberal arts. . . [and] select for your model the purest and greatest characters; and always endeavour [sic] to imitate their virtues, and to emulate their greatness." Most importantly, however, these editors challenged apprentices to "serve God," "attend his worship," "and set an example of piety, charity, and sobriety to all around you."[40] They believed this to be a bulwark against social decay caused by the marketization of New York markets.

"We Cannot Change Our Course": New York Protestants Mobilize

Many other historians have connected the market revolution with revivalism, though there has been disagreement on whether revivalism was a rural or urban phenomenon. In the mid-twentieth century, William Warren Sweet and Alice Felt Tyler each suggested revivalism was a primarily rural phenomenon, explained it as an effect of crowd excitement in an otherwise monotonous, agrarian existence.[43] Concurrent with the decline of metatheory and the rise of social history in historiography in the 1970s, each Whitney Cross, William G. McLoughlin, and Paul Johnson each advanced his own

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[37] *The Gem* (Rochester) 2, no. 22, March 5, 1831. For extended quotation also found in Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 47.

[38] Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 44.

[40] *The Gem* (Rochester) 2, no. 24, April 9, 1831.

[43] See William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth, and Decline* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1944); Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944; and though a bit later in focus, Ted Ownby advances a similar explanation of revivalism in the American South but emphasizing the perceived feminizing influence of evangelicalism: Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in Rural South, 1865–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

explanations which accounted for the social conditions of an urban situation, suggesting that evangelical revivalism provided meaningful solutions to urban plight.[44] In important ways, this particular study weighs the urban perspective as more convincing but does not dismiss the rural phenomena either. Recently, Richard Lee Rogers observed that revivalism did "reach its highest level in the western region of the state, but a unique pattern of revivalism also surfaces in the rural northern part."[45] He hypothesized that "manufacturing towns likely to harbor revivalism were most likely located where the surrounding area was agricultural."[46] From 1800–1830, revivalism occurred in areas of population concentration, manufacturing capabilities of an urban area, and agricultural activity at the county level with one exception: rural northern New York had characteristics of revivalism that cannot be attributed to urbanization.[47] The market economy created by the Erie Canal bridged urban and rural area, and the canal itself has explanatory power for continuities between both urban and rural revivalisms. The supply-chain logistics the Erie Canal created tied merchants like Phillip Garbutt to wheat farms outside of urban centers. For example, Christopher Clark observed that national markets required the coordination of production, distribution, and consumption of goods; so, even rural family units were "drawn into the various facets of this market."[48] Economics aside, New Yorkers did not see themselves as participating in two New Yorks—one rural, another urban. New Yorkers talked about themselves as if they saw themselves as a part

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[44] See Cross, *The Burned-Over District*; Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*; and Stuart Blumin, *The Urban Threshold: Growth and Change in a Nineteenth-Century American Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976).

[45] Richard Lee Rogers, "The Urban Threshold and the Second Great Awakening: Revivalism in New York State, 1825–1835," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 4: 695.

[46] Rogers, "The Urban Threshold and the Second Great Awakening," 669.

[47] Rogers, "The Urban Threshold and the Second Great Awakening," 705.

[48] Christopher Clark, "Consequences in the North," *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800–1880*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 25.

of a more extensive system facilitated by the canals—what happened in the urban areas affected the rural ones.[49]

Revivalism and Reform

A "revival" as a concept itself has no standard definition. For example, historians of Christian theology have described revivalism as a movement of "spiritual intensity," typically within the context of conversion that leads to activism.[50] This referred to the biblical concept of covenant renewal, a common trope in New England religious thought. Robert W. Caldwell accounted for the varieties of revival theologies by identifying key questions related to a given revivalist's soteriology. Revivalists had different perspectives on the nature and cause of salvation, the relationship between divine action and human agency, and the authentic marks of true conversion.[51] How a given theological tradition expressed these perspectives constituted its revival theology.[52]

Historians have also adopted a variety of sociological definitions of revivalism. William G. McLoughlin, for example, suggested that revivals function as a means of cultural renewal, which culminates in an effort to realize a cultural ideal.[53] Timothy L. Smith emphasized the organizational qualities of revivals. He suggested the revivals revealed the "inner structure" of American Protestantism often obscured by denominational "strata;" thus, revivals were best thought of as social movements often

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[49] See the gubernatorial address to the Senate and House of New York, *Rochester Daily Advertiser*, January 6, 1827.

[50] Cf., William G. Travis, "Revivalism, Protestant," *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid, Robert Dean Linder, Bruce L. Shelley, Harry S. Stout (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990).

[51] Robert W. Caldwell III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 4.

[52] Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists*, 6.

[53] William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1–23. McLoughlin's conclusions are unorthodox but universally appreciated. See J. Edwin Orr, "Review of *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*," *Fides et History* 13, no. 5 (April 1984): 92–5.

borne out of the charismatic leadership of particular revivalists.[54] Sociologist John L. Hammond suggested that revivalism was a Protestant political ethos based on aggregate voting patterns corresponding to other revival areas despite the patterns of an immediate context.[55] For Hammond, revivals may have been religious in symbolism, but they were a political organization within a voluntarily associating society. One other suggestion needs to be mentioned. Donald G. Mathews suggested that revivalism was a reorganization of religion to address a particular social question—a "re-vitalizing of religion" as the prerequisite of a revival is the "institutional and ideational framework that has provided a meaningful context for the revival in the first place."[56] In other words, individuals need to have enough familiarity with the standard to which they fall short before they voluntarily change to meet it.

The dating of revivals and continuity-discontinuity between prior revivals also complicates any definition. McLoughlin's taxonomy assumed total continuity between all awakenings in American culture; in his view, revivals were cultural recontextualizations.[57] Iain H. Murray drew a distinction between the spiritual awakenings of the so-called First Great Awakening and Second Great Awakening. He suggested that churchmen during the First Great Awakening believed the revival to be a noncontingent, divine work. During the Second Great Awakening, however, he argued that revivalists applied Baconian reason to cultivate conditions they felt most conducive to revival. In Murray's view, revivalists saw the Second Great Awakening as, in a word, contingent upon human agency. He, therefore, saw discontinuity between the First and

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[54] Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism & Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (1957; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 1–62.

[55] John L. Hammond, *The Politics of Benevolence: Revival Religion and American Voting Behavior* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1979), 1–19.

[56] Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780–1830: An Hypothesis," *American Quarterly* 21, no 1(Spring, 1969): 25.

[57] Cf., McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 19.

Second Great Awakenings.[58] By comparison, Thomas Kidd insisted that there was no real break between the First and Second Awakenings. The First Great Awakening had begun when Puritan church leaders lamented the lack of spiritual zeal among New Englanders. They "began calling out for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. . . and some began experimenting with new measures to raise the possibility of corporate renewal."[59] Religious disestablishment granted opportunities for individuals to innovate new measures while calling for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He suggested that "from the perspective of the eighteenth century, the Second Great Awakening looks like a story of continuity as much as change."[60] These issues further complicate efforts to define revivalism definitively.

Four features of revivalism cover even the broadest awakening timelines. First, revivalism occurred within the category of national covenant renewal. That is, revivalism required some standard to which people fell short. In the American context, the standard was evangelical zeal and piety. Second, revivalism required an individual to voluntary participate in national covenant renewal. Third, revivalism was made possible in times of social reorganization. Finally, revivalism renegotiated the social order: traditional structures of authority, orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and resulted in transformed culture.[61] The dichotomy between urban and rural was false. Revivalism was a reorganizational phenomenon where voluntary individuals renegotiated traditional norms of religious authority and action in the wake of some disestablishing event.[63]

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[58] Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 89–274.

[59] Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.

[60] Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 321.

[61] For a classic study of this particular feature, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[63] Cf., Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780–1830: An Hypothesis," 25.

A disestablishing event could be a national tragedy, the arrival of a new communication medium, or any other creatively destructive phenomenon. McLoughlin argued that the rise of individualism precipitated the First Great Awakening.[64] One, then, could say that the rise of individualism was a disestablishing event in the intellectual life of America that made evangelicalism conceivable in a way it had not yet been.

In Western New York, there were two of these disestablishing events. First, as Nathan Hatch has shown, Americans applied the egalitarian logic of the American Revolution and the election of 1800 to American Protestantism.[65] Protestantism during this period was not separate from prevalent egalitarian ideas of the era, and a lack of organizing institutions—such as seminaries—in the frontier accelerated the decentralization and democratization of American Christianity. Second, the canal's arrival in New York replaced subsistence-frontier economic life with market-driven production. The population centers along the canal grew faster than churches could organize those people's moral instruction. Those two events set the stage for the 1830 Rochester revivals.

Marketization and Reform in Rochester

If revivalism has organizational features, we should not be surprised to see vibrantly organized forms of Protestantism in western New York and along the canal's tributaries. Early on, reformers' efforts centered on bible distribution and moral instruction through tracts. Eventually, reformers sought to change the canal's operation by enforcing Sabbatarianism and moderate drinking. If revivalism has organizational features, we expect to see appeals to a standard New Yorkers did not attain, and we would see them organize themselves in such a way that would rectify the failure to meet

[64] McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 53.

[65] Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 3–15.

that standard. Along the canal, clergy and missionaries insisted that canallers suffered moral atrophy because merchants allowed work to occur on Sundays and drink without moderation.

In the decade prior to Finney's arrival, Rochester enjoyed a market revolution with the arrival of the Erie Canal, but this arrival brought social fragmentation. Paul Johnson explained that young adults "dissolved old social ties and worked out their careers far from home, and each was forced to create an identity and a system of ethics pretty much out of whole cloth."[66] Western New York was full of young people like this. Again, Basil Hall said of 1828 Rochester, "Out of more than 8,000 souls in this gigantic young village, there was not to be found in 1827 a single grown-up person born there."[67] Mobility marked this early republican period from 1800–1830,[68] and the Erie Canal provided ample opportunities for young adults to find employment in the economic world it created in previously agricultural areas.

Abiathar Millard Harris (1802–1844) was one of these young adults whose life changed because of the arrival of the Erie Canal. Abiathar was the second child of Daniel Harris (1771–1853) and Amanda Miller (1778–1862).[69] Both Daniel and Amanda were born in New England—Connecticut and Massachusetts, respectively. They were a part of the migration of New Englanders into the New York frontier. Amanda Miller had deep New England roots. She was seven generations removed from Nathaniel Ely, the settler who established Hartford, Connecticut with Rev. Thomas Hooker. Like many other New Englanders, she and each of her siblings migrated from Massachusetts to settle in the

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[66] Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 32.

[67] Hall, "Travels in North America (1828)," 45. Johnson wrote the same. See Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 33.

[68] Tocqueville actually suggested that early republican mobility contributed to the vibrancy of American democracy.

[69] Heman Ely, *Records of the Descendants of Nathaniel Ely* (Cincinnati: Short and Foreman, 1885), 314.

western frontier.[70] The Harrises farmed land in Otsego County until they were dispossessed on account of a relative successfully exercising a claim in probate against them. So, in 1816, Daniel Harris moved his family to Monroe County. He had won a contract to excavate a portion of the canal there just outside of what would become Rochester. Daniel and Amanda Harris established their life in Rochester by excavating the canal, suffering bankruptcy, but ending life "in comfortable circumstances."[71]

On March 20, 1821, Daniel and Amanda's second child, Abiathar Millard Harris, left his home in Rochester for Palmyra as a young apprentice seeking employment from a print master.[72] Harris's journal provides clues to both the expectation of morally formative employment and the conditions of job-searching in the 1820s. Additionally, his experience contextualizes the focus of reformers on merchants and business owners during this period. Harris's experience suggested that merchants did not provide the moral instruction to their apprentices expected by society.[73] Christopher Clark noted that Harris's ability to move to seek employment was necessary in an era where "employment was often seasonal and intermittent, and workers like Harries need to move "not in order to make fortunes but as strategies for survival." [74]

In Palmyra, Harris found work with a printer there named T.C. Strong for a few weeks but received an invitation to run a print shop in Moscow, New York. Moscow was a small hamlet off the Genesee River, which connected it to the canal at Rochester. [77]

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[70] Ely, *Records*, 62.

[71] Ely, *Records*, 148.However,

[72] MSS Collection, CX32: (Harris, Abiathar Millard) Aisle 411W A2, Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester.

[73] Cf., *The Gem* (Rochester) 2, no. 22, March 5, 1831. Also see comments by Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 47.

[74] Clark, "Consequences in the North," 38.

[77] The village of Moscow, New York burned to the ground June 17, 1900. Leicester, a nearby village, absorbed the population. See "Moscow, N.Y., Burned," *New York Times*, June 18, 1900.

However, on May 8, 1821, he arrived to find "a damned dirty office . . . [with] dirt deep enough upon the floor to plant potatoes." He took up work but found no supervisor to assist or mentor him. Ripley, the paper's printer and publisher, was a "lazy drunken rascal, seldom ever worked, but at tavern." Harris, however, was most upset that Ripley had no money for his salary. He spent June looking for work along the canal corridor from Rochester to Buffalo to no avail. On one occasion in July, Harris's search took him to the Canadian side of the Niagara. He failed to find an apprenticeship there but said he was "damned glad of it." Harris demanded order in his work environment but found this stop in his search detestable. He was disappointed that he found the office of "Andrew Heron, an old knave" a place where "what little work was done was half done, the men being sailors when there was no work, and when there was they sat down to it with a bottle of grog by their side—and the office was like a hog pen."[78] After months of searching, Harris found a print office in Rouses Point, New York, a village on Lake Champlain for the next few years. Eventually in 1827, Harris returned to Rochester for reasons not entirely clear. Harris appeared to have taken a cruise of the canal itself, which was not uncommon. His journal abruptly ends midsentence.[79] Harris's journal sheds light on a region in transition, and the details of his experience highlight a region upended by economic transition. Areas experiencing marketization were frequently subject to booms and busts; unemployment was a constant threat, and workers had to migrate to find work.[80] Harris is one of the hundreds of workers along the canal who suffered under the starts and stops of the transforming economy.

Rochester was at the center of this transformation, although not all travelers saw this growth as such. Michael Hutchinson Jenks (1795–1867), a U.S. Representative

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[78] MSS Collection, CX32: (Harris, Abiathar Millard).

[79] MSS Collection, CX32: (Harris, Abiathar Millard).

[80] Cf., Clark, "Consequences in the North," 38.

from Pennsylvania, chronicled his tour through the state of New York in a journal. There in, he described the city as a town with "no great beauty . . . a dirty place. All the streets are filled with mud and rubbish."[81] Jenks remarked that the town appeared to build housing without regard for beauty, the city was haphazardly organized, and "water seems to do everything here." He believed that while Rochester could never be beautiful, "no place in the Union can exceed it in point of variety and manufactures."[82] If the town itself was "dirty," the canal was worse.

The Genesee River bisected Rochester. The river's headwards flow from the Alleghany Plateau north towards Lake Ontario. In 1811, Rochester's founder, Nathanial Rochester, had planned to locate the city's mills in a district just south of Buffalo Street and east of Mill Street, where engineers could divert water to power mills (See Figure 14). Diane Shaw, an architectural historian, explained that Rochester sought to impose "sorting power" over his chartered city. Shaw defined "sorting" as an intentional organization of spaces, buildings, and people reflecting a notion of good form, and she argued that nineteenth-century Americans organized their cities in ways to "enhance a self-fulfilling image of economic vitality and bourgeois gentility."[83] That is, citizens organize their cities in such a way that reflects their values and priorities. "Sorting," however, was more than a zoning activity. People today generally do not mind living near respectable, quiet, or nonpolluting enterprises. Similarly, citizens in Rochester did not mind living near the canal itself. However, they did not want to live near the milling and

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[81] Michael Hutchinson Jenks, *A Traveler's View of New York State in 1829*, MSS Collection, CX153: (Jenks, Michael Hutchinson) Aisle 41W A5, Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester.

[82] Jenks, *A Traveler's View of New York State in 1829*.

[83] Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 1.

warehousing districts—nor the canallers who loaded or unloaded packet boats. So, residents hoped to relegate those activities into distinct districts.

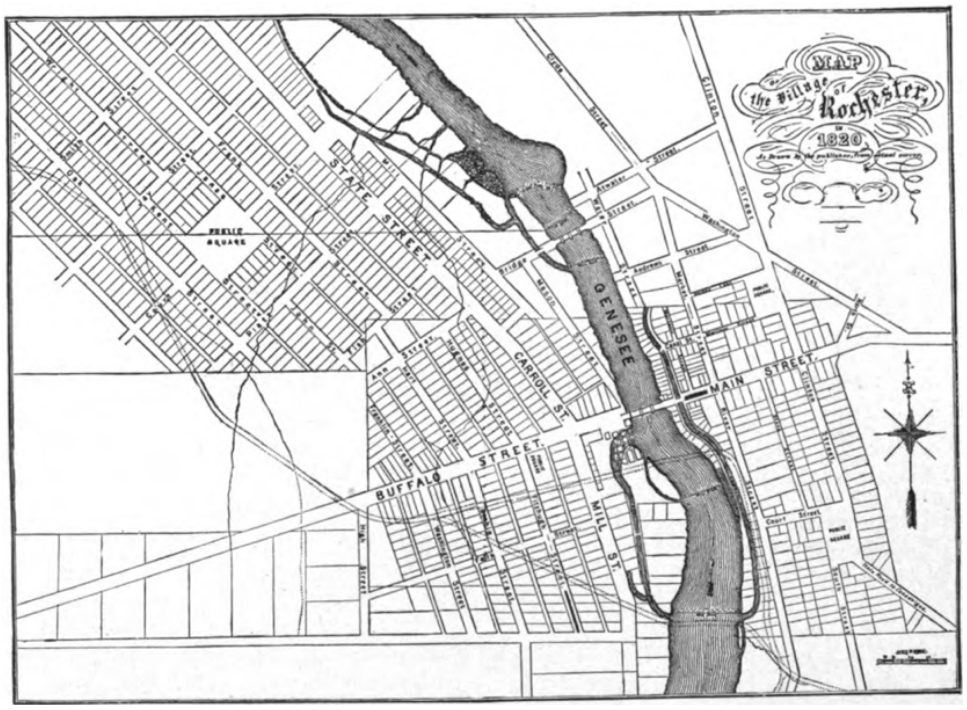

Figure 14. "Map, The Village of Rochester, 1820," in William F. Peck, *History of Rochester and Monroe County, New York* (New York: Pioneer Publishing, 1908), 50.

Rochester the city was to be orderly with precise districts, which would reflect a new order reminiscent of Manhattan in a western frontier. However, the state assembly's route for the Erie Canal cut right through those orderly districts.[84] This led to a reconfiguration of Rochester. Jenks's journal below shows Rochester from that perspective (See Figure 15). His map was inverted—oriented the south-north instead of a traditional north-south orientation.

[84] Cf., Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 31–40.

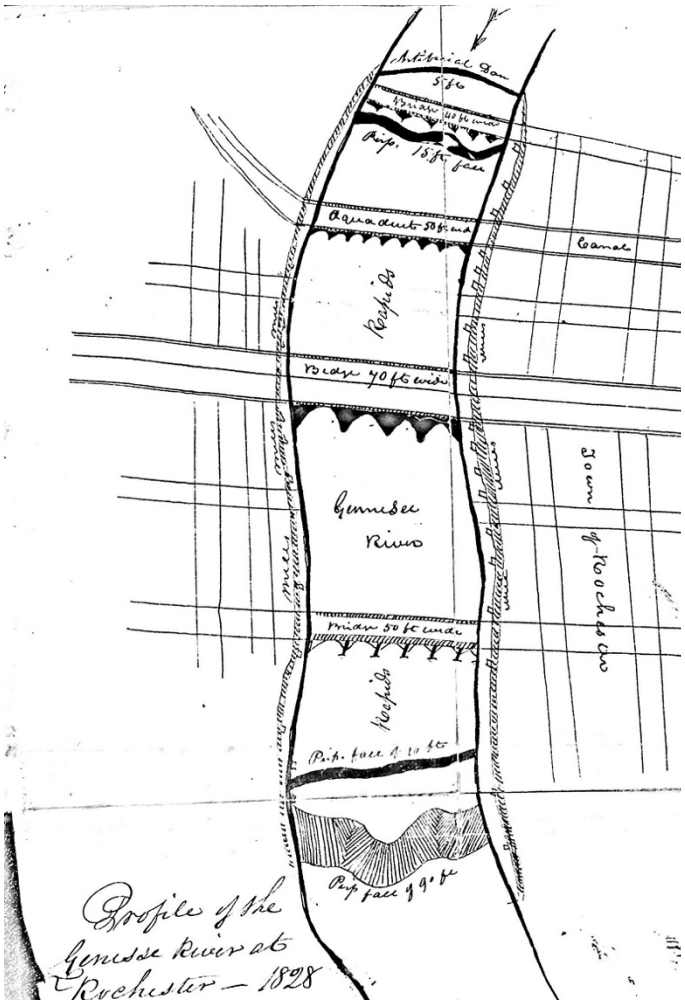

Figure 15. "Profile of the Genesee River at Rochester—1828." Michael Hutchinson Jenks, A Traveler's View of New York State in 1829, MSS Collection, CX153: (Jenks, Michael Hutchinson) Aisle 41W A5, Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester.

The Erie Canal bisected the river across an aqueduct on the south side of Rochester (top of Jenks's map). The two maps, when set in relief, illustrated how chaotic the growth of Rochester was. What Jenks described as "mills" was likely components of the entire flour industry—warehouses, processors, and mills. These had spilled out of their respective planned district at Buffalo and Mill Street and onto the east and west banks of the Genesee. This disorder of industry hardly fit Nathaniel Rochester's grand

vision of sorted districts. Shaw wrote that these districts were "works in progress . . . the emergence of the articulated districts, not their refinement."[85]

That lack of refinement left the canal towpath "a free-to-all highway for a vagrant world."[86] Without these sorted districts, undesirable elements spilled out into the city. The towpath was a clear path from Albany to Buffalo, which ran along both sides of the canal. The canal made a natural thoroughfare for migrants seeking work. When not at work, however, workers along the canal—canallers—made sport in the cities along the canal. Brawling, cockfighting, drinking, and cards were all common pastimes along the canal. The canal banks were so rowdy that boat captains believed that a worker's ability to fight was as important as his ability to operate a packet boat.[87] These vices were not so much unique to the canal as they concentrated at the canal. Carol Sheriff wrote that the canal had a reputation for being a "magnet for delinquents."[88] She wrote of two examples. The first example was that the New York state prison published data that one in four inmates had "followed the canals." The second example was a collection of stories of residents who submitted claims to the Canal Board for reparations on account of canallers' destruction of property.[89] Like Abiathar Millard Harris had to leave his home to seek work, hundreds of migrant workers worked seasonal jobs during the canal's navigation season. These workers brought their own moral patterns with them.

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[85] Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 63.

[86] Samuel Hopkins Adams, *Grandfather Stories* (1955; Syracuse University Press, 1989), 300. Adams, the Progressive-era journalist, collected family anecdotes about life on the canal. The degree to which these anecdotes which date back to 1820 are historical or reconstructions is a question. Some inclusions are clearly fiction. That said, the portion quoted above Adams included from the diary of an unnamed relative.

[87] Lionel D. Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal* (1962; Syracuse University Press, 1977), 70. *Low Bridge!* is an edited collection of primary recollections, documents, and folklore related to the Erie Canal.

[88] Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817–1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 143.

[89] Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 143–4.

Not only was the canal a place of violence but canalling also often went in hand with labor exploitation. Lionel D. Wyld observed a discrepancy between folk songs published in books and journals with those sung along the canal's banks. Popular folk songs glorified and romanticized a life for canallers that never was. They presented an ideal about the canal:

> When I was young and about sixteen, none was more light and gay;
> I gamboled nimbly on the green or sported in the hay;
> The bloom of youth was on my cheeks, my heart was full of joy.
> How happy were those days to me, a merry boatman's boy![90]

These songs disguised a life of stigma the canallers experienced. Wyld published some of the actual songs hecklers would sing and shout at those who worked along the canals:

> Hoggee on the towpath,
> Five cents a day.
> Picking up horseballs
> To eat along the way![91]

Or,

> Canawler—Canawler
> You son of a bitch
> You'll die on the towpath
> You'll be buried in the ditch
> Canawler—Canawler
> You work on Sunday
> You'll never get rich.[92]

Canal life was difficult, and workers were often subjected to terribly unjust working conditions by their employers. An unnamed boat captain's wife recorded her interaction with a child working on the canal. Malnourished and bruised, the unnamed boy asked her for a job. She noted his poverty: "in lieu of a jacket, he wears an old potato bag of bombast with holes cut for arms and head."[93] The bruise on his eye was from his

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[90] Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal*, 82.

[91] Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal*, 83.

[92] Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal*, 83.

[93] Adams, *Grandfather Stories*, 296.

former boat captain, Ely Tugg of the *Three Brothers*. The boy had tried to stab Tugg because he paid him with depreciated bills. The boy then insisted he would try again. When the woman warned him that he would be put in jail, the boy replied: "That's what I hope . . . soon as the snow flies. No canawl jobs in winter. How will I eat if I can't get into jail?" She then reported that scores of children take jobs but "are fobbed off by evil captains with depreciated currency or perhaps no wage at all."[94] Sheriff argued that canal captains exploited the canallers. She wrote, "captains assumed no paternal responsibilities for their young workers . . . in fact, [they] treated their employees more like animals than sons."[95] Workers, like Harris or the young canal boy, migrated to wherever a job was. Canal boat captains knew that another worker would replace one fleeing poor conditions.

Residents along the canal were concerned about both the crime of canallers and the exploitative practices of captains. They expected to see vice and exploitation in Manhattan. They, however, did not expect to see it along this great symbol of republican virtue and national identity.[96] Social reformers organized to address these issues by changing the social practices of canallers by advancing moderation in drinking, distributing tracts, and increasing Bible literacy. Reformers also adopted political advocacy to advance their aims. Reformers such as Josiah Bissell worked in the state legislature to close the canal on Sundays to provide religious instruction to the canallers. Evangelism and social action went hand in hand for these reformers. In the wake of marketization which had dislocated the family as a paternalistic, organizing structure, reformers turned to the other paternalistic structure at their disposal: government.[97] They

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[94] Adams, *Grandfather Stories*, 297.

[95] Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 147.

[96] Cf., Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 149.

[97] Though Tocqueville described this period as an era of voluntary association, western New Yorkers saw a reciprocal relationship between a strong government action that brought about religious virtue. After all, they had advanced the position that government ought to engage in internal improvements with federal funding contra Madison and Jefferson.

formed voluntary associations to advocate new laws regarding transit on Sundays and the consumption of alcohol. Before the efforts of the reformers themselves can be discussed, a few clarifying details on the meaning of reform along the canal must be offered.

Recent histories of reform along the canal have taken classist approaches to explain reformers' activities.[98] These approaches tended to flow downstream from the scholarly discussion around "refinement."[99] According to the narrative, reformers imposed Protestant morals upon an unruly class in order for them to "be counted on to defer at the polls."[100] If the middle classes could not refine canallers' behavior, "moralized merchants" would shun them from the "spatially privileged" positions of the middle-class white male through imposing churches. This would push undesirable elements out of sorted, defined districts.[101] Certainly, reformers had ambitions to refine the manners of society. However, suggesting that reformers did so to ensure ballot compliance or genteel broadways diminishes the theological motivations for their missions.

Jonathan Den Hartog expressed this point acutely. Den Hartog suggested that the Federalist party transformed American politics and religious life beyond its immediate impact. Though the party was traditionally associated with central banks, commercialization, and stable centralized government, it had serious religious commitments which it used to shape the new nation. Piety should serve patriotism. They believe that self-government in a republic was most successful when the church and state cooperated to form moral, dutiful citizens. Ultimately, however, Federalists' efforts undermined the Federalist party, but the impulse to use government to bring about moral citizens lived on in the evangelicals' political action on Sabbatarianism, temperance, and abolition. See Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

[98] E.g., Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, and Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*.

[99] Richard Bushman popularized the concept. He argued that gentility was a mass cultural phenomenon in America which accomplished two things. First, it provided organizing ideals around which diverse peoples could establish a respectable society. Second, it prevented a stratification of classes in America; even if uplift was difficult, one was not locked out of high society due to a lack of peerage. See Richard Lyman Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 2003).

[100] Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 149.

[101] Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 94–108.

Reformers aimed first for conversion and hoped for refinement, and canallers generally respected them as individuals who cared for them.[102] If revivalism has four features—(1) a category of national covenant renewal; (2) individual as a voluntary participant in that renewal; (3) made possible by a time of social reorganization; (4) and renegotiates the social order—then the market revolution along the canal corridor was a sufficiently dislocative event to permit social reorganization.

Need for Covenant Renewal in Rochester

The reformers' first effort addressed temperance. Alcohol was a central feature of life along the canal. Clergy urged action. At its May 1827 meeting, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church received a report and recommended actions from the newly organized American Society for the Promotion of Temperance (ASPT).[103] Just a year prior, reformers organized the ASPT in Boston for the stated purpose of moderating the consumption of alcohol in the United States.[104] This organization would eventually be renamed the American Temperance Union. Beyond clergy, New Yorkers were keen on temperance progress in their areas as well. In Genesee County, for example, citizens devised a plan to suppress intemperance in their county. Reformers at the ASPT claimed that three out of four criminal prosecutions in 1820 New York City were directly related to "intemperance," and newspapers circulated these statistics throughout New York. Alcoholism on the canal was equally present, and canallers were prosecuted and imprisoned for alcohol-related crimes.[105] In 1829, twelve grocers sold alcohol on the east

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[102] Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal*, 73–4. Cf., Sheriff, *The Artificial River,* 148.

[103] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, June 7, 1827. Newspapers.

[104] American Temperance Union, *Permanent Temperance Documents*, vol. 2 (New York: 1851), 42.

[105] Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 143.

side of the Genesee River alone.[106] At their peak, liquor stores numbered fifteen hundred along the canal—nearly one for every quarter mile.[107] New Yorkers and the rest of America were beginning to awaken to the ills of intemperance. One editor called intemperance evil: "We see the victims of it in the prostration of character, poverty, vice, disease, and death. The evil is tremendous, and calls aloud for the attention of every friend of virtue, christianity, and patriotism, in the land."[108] The canal was supposed to represent New York's ascendance as the pinnacle state within this "New Rome," but strong drink threatened the moral character of the United States.

Along the canal, however, the matter was acute. The proliferation of alcohol among canallers and boatmen made the profession dangerous, and the very structure of the canal contributed to excessive drinking. Traffic jams were common near the locks—the worst jams could delay traffic for days. On one occasion, 131 westbound boats were delayed for two-and-a-half days while log barges made their way east.[109] All canallers and passengers could do was secure their packet boat and choose from the "groggeries" placed to numb the frustration of delays. Hotels and taverns served hot meals with a strong drink to those in transit; grocers and liquor stores kept the canallers flush. The dangerous working conditions mixed with alcohol made the canallers' jobs perilous. Sheriff found that occasionally towropes would pull inattentive drivers into the canal, and missteps caused falls. She wrote, "In an era where many people never learned how to swim, a tumble into the seven-foot-deep enlarged Canal could prove fatal."[110] Drunken piloting would kill boat captains in collisions or accidents. For example, Captain Mike

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[106] Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck, "A Brief History of Brewing in Rochester," *Rochester History* 54, no 2 (Spring 1992): 6, https://www.libraryweb.org/~rochhist/v54_1992/v54i2.pdf.

[107] See Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 147.

[108] *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, April 2, 1827. Newspapers.

[109] See Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal*, 73.

[110] Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 147.

Heart died after he fell between his boat and another, suffering crushing and drowning. He left behind a wife and six children.[111] Reformers estimated that a boatman's life expectancy on the job "did not on average exceed twelve years after they embark[ed] in the waterman's employment."[112] While the ASPT saw alcoholism as a national disgrace, ordinary New Yorkers knew firsthand that canallers needed moral instruction.

The practice of forming a society to deal with drunkenness did not represent a classist assault against the lower class.[113] Residents of New York formed societies prior to the arrival of the canal. Constructing the canal itself required the local action of dozens of citizens.[114] Those instincts carried over into social reform long before the canal was ever-present in cities like Rochester. Organizations such as the Monroe County Bible Society, Tract Society, and a Sunday School union formed almost a decade prior to the temperance chapters and relief societies for boatmen.[115] In fact, before people even settled the area which would become Rochester, farmers in Monroe County had organized fifteen churches.[116] One newspaper boasted that the combined capacity of Rochester's churches by 1832 was 7,610.[117] The first Sunday school was organized in 1818; there were twenty by 1836.[118] Elizabeth Backus headed up Rochester's first social relief society, the Female Missionary Society, in 1818, which distributed aid to "destitute

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[111] Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal*, 63.

[112] *Sailor Magazine*, November 1835, quoted in Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 147. Brackets original.

[113] *Pace*, Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 94.

[114] Cf., Chapter 1.

[115] See Orlo J. Price, "One Hundred Years of Protestantism in Rochester," *Rochester Historical Society Publishing*, vol 12 (1933): 241–393. Though the work is nearly a century old, Price's work remains a critical document in Rochester early history.

[116] Price, One Hundred Years of Protestantism in Rochester," 245–6.

[117] *Republican* (Rochester), January 31, 1832, quoted in Joseph W. Barnes, "Obediah Dogberry: Rochester Freethinker," *Rochester History* 36, no 3 (July 1974): 4.

[118] Henry O'Reilly, *Settlement in the West: Sketches of Rochester with Incidental Notices of Western New York* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1838), 291.

congregations" in the county.[119] By 1821, settlers in Monroe County were funding missionary efforts in the Niagara wilderness area in addition to participating in a local chapter of the American Home Missionary Society.[120] When migrants concentrated vice along the canal, New Yorkers organized to address the issue just as they had for bible literacy and frontier evangelism. They were not engaging in a novel class war against poor canallers. Instead, they were supplementing their already existing efforts to make America a virtuous republic.

So, while the motivations for organization were not classist, there was overlap between class. These reformers had theological commitments informing their efforts: they believed God had given the American republic a special "errand." Their faithfulness would incur God's blessing, and their failure would incur God's wrath. Recent histories have taken these commitments more seriously. These theological antecedents showed the relationship between revivals, reforms, and "refinement."

As shown in chapter three, the concept of "providence" loomed large in New York vernacular and influenced how New Yorkers saw their place in the world. Related to this, western New Yorkers saw themselves as expanding over the face of the earth under this providence. In his 1838 history of Rochester, Henry O'Reilly (1806–1886) quoted Edward Everett (1794–1865), then governor of Massachusetts, who gave a speech on western immigration. In a clear allusion to Old Testament themes, Edward Everett (1794–1865) celebrated that a son of New England would leave "the land of his fathers" to form a settlement on a river's bank and name it after his hometown, deriving strength to face his labor by remembering "the spring that gushed from the rock by his father's door." Western New Yorkers themselves were these sons of New England, which is why

[119] O'Reilly, *Settlement in the West*, 298–9.

[120] O'Reilly, *Settlement in the West*, 299.

O'Reilly included Everett's comments in their history about themselves.[121] New Yorkers were indeed sons of New England. James W. Darlington showed that from 1790 to 1820 Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island lost 800,000 people to emigration, and most of these individuals migrated to or through New York. By 1850, census records showed that four out of every five settlers immigrating to New York were born in New England.[122] Many Americans often considered the Old Testament narrative an interpretive framework; they saw themselves re-dramatizing the events of Ancient Israel. Many imagined themselves coming out from under an oppressive monarch into a promised land. Those who held this view about this land believed that they would have to establish a republic after driving out the land's inhabitants of the "Promised Land."[123] Just as Israel's presence in the land was contingent upon covenant fidelity, these same sons of New England believed that God would drive them out of their land if they failed to live up to their mission.[124] Here is the national covenant renewal category, the first revival feature.

Western New Yorkers understood themselves to have been successful at this mission of settling a "promised land." The marker for this success would shock modern sensibilities unless those sensibilities appreciate how total the Old Testament controlled New Yorkers' sense of self. Henry O'Reilly was postmaster of Rochester and an advocate for canal enlargement when he wrote his *Settlement in the West*. In *Settlement,*

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[121] O'Reilly, *Settlement in the West*, 273. Interestingly, O'Reilly himself was not a New Englander, but an Irish immigrant. He immigrated to the United States in 1816. However, he boasted in the "intellectual and moral qualities" the New England heritage imparted to Rochester (273).

[122] James W. Darlington, "Peopling the Post-Revolutionary New York Frontier," *New York History* 74, no. 4 (Oct 1993): 352, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23181918.

[123] Cf., Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[124] E.g., Samuel Langdon, "The Republic of the Israelites an Example to the American States," sermon preached to the General Court at the Annual Election, June 5, 1788, *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, rev. ed., ed. Conrad Cherry (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 93–105.

O'Reilly contrasted the location of native settlements along the Genesee Falls in 1812 with the location of Protestant churches in 1838. One must wonder if the allusions to Numbers 33 in O'Reilly's writings here were intentional or if he was so formed by the passage that his allusions were simply a consequence of culture. In Numbers 33:51–53, the Lord God gives Moses a clear commission: drive the inhabitants out of the land, destroy their high places, take possession of it, and settle in it. He wrote, "The wigwams of several Indian families also *graced* the south and east sides of the elevation whereon may now been seen the Free Bethel Church" along with the residents of prominent residents such as Nathaniel Rochester and Joseph Strong.[125] He celebrated that "Christian temples" are now erected on the site of the pagan rites of the native Seneca. No longer could "pagan rites" occur on the land. The land itself:

> has been transformed for the purposes of civilized man, and is now surrounded or covered by some of the fairest mansions and the noblest temples of Western New-York. Such are the results of ENLIGHTENED ENTERPRISE combined with LIBERAL INSTITUTIONS in A LAND BOUNTEOUSLY ENDOWED BY HEAVEN.[126]

O'Reilly emphasized three features critical to national identity: "enlightened enterprise" and "liberal institutions," which are mission, with "land . . .endowed," which is election. He believed God himself had placed New Yorkers in their land, and he linked the market revolution in western New York brought about by internal improvement—which in the 1830s likely referred to the Erie Canal—to American republicanism and divine charter. He saw Rochester as an outpost of a chosen people engaged in a divine mission to inherit their destiny. Shaw was correct that architecture "could obliterate what social pressure could not."[127] However, where Shaw argued that the middle class constructed churches on the canal bank to force morality upon the poor, the project of

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[125] O'Reilly, *Settlement in the West*, 275. Italics original.

[126] O'Reilly, *Settlement in the West*, 277. Small caps original.

[127] Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 95.

building a moral edifice came later. Before they built churches or organized societies, New England's sons were on a religious mission to transform their Canaan into a new Israel.

Sheriff and Shaw rightly showed that Rochester citizens were concerned that the behavior of canallers and boatmen was unrefined, but, again, the issue was not about class.[128] These were not the efforts of "bourgeois males and females."[129] Instead, Rochester citizens were concerned that pagan, uncivilized living was returning to the recently subdued landscape of the immoral lives of the canal workers. So, the reformers' efforts reached for the hearts of canallers before they worried about changing canallers' actions. These efforts were shown in their labors to evangelize them directly through missionaries or indirectly through bible distribution.

Reforming New York's Canal

As mentioned above, the first reform efforts in western New York centered around distributing Bibles, religious education, and religious tracts. The American Bible Society had formed in 1816, and in 1821 Monroe County residents gathered at the Eagle Tavern to plan a local chapter. The Monroe County Bible Society innovated in ways that shaped the larger organization, led by Levi Ward, a local banker. They were the first to conduct surveys of biblical literacy in their area, employing agents in nearby towns. The Monroe County Bible Society coordinated efforts throughout western New York. Their canvas surveys indicated a lack of Bibles among local families "because of either poverty or Catholicism;" they labored to supply every family in the county "destitute of Holy Scripture."[130] In 1825, Josiah Bissell Jr., one of those agents, launched the campaign to

[128] *Contra* Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 94–5.

[129] Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 94.

[130] Monroe County Bible Society, "Secretary's Record of the Proceedings of the Monroe County Bible Society, 1821–1883," MSS journal in Rochester Public Library (inaccessible), quoted in Barnes, "Obediah Dogberry," 5.

sell or give a Bible to every household in western New York.[131] This example could have inspired Alexander Proudfit, a Washington County, New York minister, to write a letter four years later to the American Bible Society suggesting they place a Bible in the home of every American family.[132]

The American Bible Society insisted that a Bible in every home would bring "light" to "perishing thousands," prosperity to our highly favored nation," and "perpetuity to our civic institutions."[134] For Bissell, a Bible in every household meant the Lord would not remove his hand of blessing from Monroe County, New York state, or the United States of America. Reformers like Proudfit and Bissell wanted a Bible in every home because antebellum Americans connected the presence of the Bible with a revival of religion.[135] Rev. O. C. Comstock said as much in an address to Ithaca's Bible Society: "To establish, perpetuate, and promote Bible Societies" is a duty in God's economy and faithful execution of "the great commission."[136] By supporting bible societies, Ithaca's residents advanced of the gospel in Tompkins County. Critically, the emphasis in this reform effort was not primarily on refinement. Comstock wanted the Tompkins County Bible Society to see that their efforts secured those who "believe the Bible. . . the salvation of their souls and the eternal honor of divine grace."[137] New Yorkers demanded the same zeal from their clergy. The Cayuga County Bible Society called upon ministers to announce "the Bible cause" to their congregations: the Bible needed to be printed for

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[131] Blake McKelvey, "Civic Medals Awarded Posthumously," *Rochester History* 22, no. 2 (April 1960): 7.

[132] *Rochester Telegraph,* March 29, 1825. Cf., John Fea, *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 40.

[134] Fea, *The Bible Cause*, 40. Fea quoted the American Bible Society's *Annual Report* (1829).

[135] Cf., Fea, *The Bible Cause*, 52–3.

[136] *Rochester Daily Telegraph*, June 26, 1827.

[137] *Rochester Daily Telegraph*, June 26, 1827.

people who did not have one.[138] New Yorkers were successful in their endeavors. From 1800 to 1840, the number of publisher-printers in the state grew three-fold.[139]

This practice of organizing into voluntary associations, such as these societies, has been noted by historians of American history.[140] Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the first to comment on this phenomenon of American life, and he considered these associations a foundation of democratic expression: "In democratic countries the science of association is the mother science; the progress of all the others depends on the progress of that one."[141] Johann N. Neem questioned the assumption that associations are a natural product of the post-Revolutionary milieu. Instead, he suggested that early republic elites wanted to suppress the potential for voluntary associations to fracture the people into special interest groups, and figures such as Thomas Jefferson believed that such organizations would become too powerful and have an outsized influence on the nation.[142] Neem argued that evangelical religious societies, such as these bible societies, trained individual citizens in organization. He wrote, "Forming associations and corporations had once been the preserve of urban elites. Ministers taught ordinary people how to do the same."[143]

Political associationism, then, intersected with religious associationism at a critical junction. As Jonathan J. Den Hartog has shown, early republican Americans

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[138] *Rochester Telegraph*, February 22, 1826.

[139] Paul G. Gutjahr, Appendix One "An Overview of Bible Production in the United States, 1777–1880, in *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777–1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[140] E.g., Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[141] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 492.

[142] Johann N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 5.

[143] Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners*, 82.

connected virtue with republicanism. He wrote that they reasoned that "if a republic was based on virtue and virtue on religion, the means to defend a republic would be through the religious faith and moral behavior of its citizenry."[144] This connection was why O'Reilly appealed confidently to religious themes in his city's history and why Comstock linked his local bible society's efforts to the advance of the kingdom of heaven.

Essential shifts in American Protestant theology facilitated this logic, mainly the spread and influence of New Divinity. Mark Noll called this shift the "Americanization" of Calvinism.[145] The New Divinity theologians are worth monographs on their own. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, a few comments will contextualize the link between associationism, revivals, and reform. The New Divinity school is a collection of diverse theological movements such as New Haven theology or Oberlin theology, wherein theologians labored to keep Edwardsean Calvinism philosophically respectable to ordinary people. Common folks' sense of liberty, autonomy, and self-determination unleashed and vindicated by the American Revolution cut at the themes of predestination and monergism within Protestant orthodoxy. Beyond the sense of common people, New Divinity thinkers were responding to complex philosophical developments such as Scottish Common-Sense realism which animated the thinkers behind the American Revolution. Common sense realism insisted that nothing existed beyond perception. Though it had been helpful during the First Great Awakening to defend the concept of religious experiences to Old Lights, common sense realism became a liability when ordinary Americans began rejecting orthodox categories such as predestination or monergism, which cannot be sensed in any real way. Common Americans who had just exercised agency themselves from a British monarch did not

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[144] Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 66.

[145] Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 269.

take kindly to clergy insisting that they were powerless to affect their salvation. Theologians modified these categories to show the reasonableness of Protestant orthodoxy. [146]

Further complicating their task, upstart, professional revivalists commanded the public imagination. Before the American Revolution, New England clergy could count on the government to guard their hegemony. However, following the revolution, they faced market competition from dynamic communicators who offered common folk compelling visions of self-respect and self-confidence. These populist revivalists often did so without regard for respectability or orthodoxy. Nathan Hatch wrote that this religion prospered "largely because the price was right and the streets were filled with vendors."[147] Moreover, these revivalists organized using new methods, such as camp meetings, which were independent of or ancillary to local churches; this shifted away from the concern of the First Great Awakening conversions that affected behavior to movement building around voluntary behavior modification. Common people could wrap their minds around walking the camp tent aisle, praying at the anxious bench, or signing a pledge as grounds for assurance of salvation; they would not, it seemed, hear a preacher ground assurance as a syllogism in the economy of salvation.[148]

So, theologians rehabilitated the concept of predestination while bearing in mind populist sentiment. E. Brooks Holifield noted that New Divinity's theologians shared five key commitments. First, the Bible was true, even if it defied reason. Second, God ordered human history but governed it in a way that did not violate his "free and

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[146] Cf., E. Brooks Holifield, "Calvinism Revised," *Theology in America: Christian Though from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 341–69; Mark A. Noll, "The Americanization of Calvinism," *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 269–329; Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

[147] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 15.

[148] Cf., Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers*, 110–1.

responsible" creatures. Third, sin is an inevitable choice *post lapsum*, but Adam's guilt is not imputed—that is, humans are born morally innocent but cannot help but sin. Fourth, every human has the volitional faculties to repent. Fifth, grace is irresistible but consistent with human freedom.[149] These commitments animated the reformers' efforts. Den Hartog argued that these societies "provided 'on the ground' means to practice faith and demonstrate belief."[150] The New Divinity provided a rational framework for reformers to affect religious belief by confirming their salvation.

Looking at the church landscape, the picture of just how saturated western New York was with New Divinity theology emerges. New Yorkers established the presence of the New Divinity in two ways. First, as covered above, they simply brought New England theology with them when they migrated from Connecticut and elsewhere. Second, they called and ordained pastors who had been educated at New Divinity schools such as Yale, Union, Andover, and Auburn Theological Seminary (Table 3). Auburn itself had been established as a New Divinity school to counterbalance the influence of Princeton on the frontier.[151] Justin Rowe showed how the seeds for New Divinity were planted through migration and hiring while western New York was on the "margins." After the Erie Canal brought a population swell to the area, these marginal pastorates grew to dominate Presbyterian synods. Rowe noted, "The presbyteries of Geneva, Oneida, and Cayuga grew by 147, 213, and 308 percent respectively between 1815 and 1825." During that same period, New Brunswick Presbytery (Princeton) grew by only 17 percent and Ohio Presbytery (Pittsburgh) decreased by 8 percent, and a similar trend occurred in tithing records.[152] Taking synod growth and giving into consideration, Rowe concluded:

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[149] Holifield, *Theology in America*, 343.

[150] Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety*, 204.

[151] Cf., Holifield, *Theology in America*, 372.

[152] Justin Rowe, "Fleeing to Babylon: How the Erie Canal, Diffusion, and Social Structure

> The canal not only directly transformed the structure of the 19th century Presbyterianism (by raising the influence and general standing of certain western presbyteries) but did so in a region that was particularly significant to the introduction of doctrinal innovation and the eventual schism of American Presbyterianism.[153]

Economic opportunity caused by the canal led to growth in areas where New Divinity was prominent.

When reformers organized into societies during this era, they participated in a particularly American way of accomplishing a given goal.[154] Moreover, theological developments in the region meant reformers had categories to expect reasonable people to join their efforts eagerly. New Yorkers such as O'Reilly and Comstock saw themselves in the context of a national covenant that needed renewal, and they were confident that reason would help people make the right choice. Marketization along the canal had led to opportunities for social reorganization. They hoped they could convince their neighbor to participate in this renewal. If their neighbors would, they were confident they could confirm God's blessing on their enterprise. They saw their task clearly: they had to reason with sinners.

New Yorkers knew that God's blessing would not rest upon them as long as their state's most significant engineering feat was also the cause of so much of its vice. In the antebellum era, virtually all Americans ceased work and levity on Sundays. Tocqueville noted that the "commercial and industrial life of the nation seems suspended" on Sundays.[155] He even noted that the statutes of New York prohibited hunting, fishing, gambling, visiting houses with drink, and travel except for necessity.[156] To New Yorkers,

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Forever Changed American Calvinism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 4 (December 2016): 597. https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12092

[153] Rowe, "Fleeing to Babylon," 600.

[154] Cf., Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 496.

[155] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 517.

[156] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 682.

there seemed to be one geographical exception to this practice: the Erie Canal. They believed closing the canal on Sundays would start the moral reform of the towpath.

Table 3. A sample of established clergymen and their alma maters in Monroe and Erie Counties, 1830s.

City	*Church*	*Clergyman*	*Alma Mater*
Buffalo	First Presbyterian	Sylvester Eaton	Unknown
Collins	Methodist Church	Amos Bronson and itinerates	None
La Fayette	Congregational Church	*"Plan of Union" church. New School. No record of pastor.*	
Lancaster	First Presbyterian	*Church conflict through 1830s; high turnover; "New School"*	
N/A	Itinerate evangelist	Richard DeForest	Auburn Seminary
Rochester	Bethel Free (Presbyterian)	G. S. Boardman (likely New School)	Princeton
Rochester	First Baptist	Pharcellus Church	Colgate Seminary
Rochester	First Presbyterian	Tryon Edwards	Yale
Rochester	Second (Brick)	George Beecher, fifth son of Lyman.	Yale
Rochester	St. Luke's (Episcopal)	H. J. Whitehouse	General Theological
Rochester	Third Presbyterian	William Mack (likely New School)	Princeton

W. Aurora	Congregationalist Church	*"Plan of Union" church in Buffalo Presbytery. New School.*

Source: F. DeW. Ward, *Churches of Rochester: Narrative of the Rise, Progress, and Present Condition of Each Religious Organization, August 1815–July 1871* (Rochester: Erastus Darrow, 1871); H. Perry Smith, *History of the City of Buffalo and Erie County*, vol. 1 (Syracuse: D. Mason & Co., 1884).

Note: Often, church records either have not survived or been indexed; so tenures are unlisted. As this is a study of American Protestantism, Roman Catholic parishes in fall outside of the scope of study. Roman Catholics, however, did comprise significant portions of the population in urban areas, especially in Buffalo. Additionally, due to the time-bounding of the survey, the table seems to lack hardly any churches in Buffalo. Many of the Protestant churches in Buffalo were organized from the early 1840s on. However, ending on that date is important because the Presbyterian church divided in 1837 over New Divinity. Finally, in some cases, churches and pastors were known, but no information could be found on the alma maters of the pastors. Where possible, additional information was supplied.

Honoring the Sabbath

Historians have derided these reformers as "zealous Sabbatarians" or "moralized merchants."[157] These New Yorkers inherited the cultural and moral expectations of New England. For them, civic health demanded Sabbath observance. Nor were these reformers fringe political actors. Their families represented some of the most powerful families in the early republican period. William Jay—son of former Governor of New York and Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay—argued that no religious defense of the Sabbath was necessary; its benefits were obvious. He contended that there were evident civic blessings from Sabbatarianism. First, Jay argued that governments required the use of religion to instruct the sentiments of citizens; a Christian Sabbath is even better. It is a time for the religious instruction of citizens. Jay also argued that the Sabbath was a mercy for the poor in "unremitting labor" as it "suspends their toil" and "revives their strength." [158]

Moreover, what the market separated was rejoined: "The Sabbath also frequently reunites the family circle which had been broken throughout the week." Jay

[157] E.g., Blake McKelvey, "Rochester and the Erie Canal," *Rochester History* 11, nos. 3&4 (July 1949): 10; Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 94.

[158] William Jay, circular essay in *Troy Sentinel*, December 16, 1825

saw the Sabbath as a mercy for families crushed in industrializing markets. Most damning in Jay's view: "We are ourselves familiar with a republic which prohibited the observance of the Sabbath . . . we have beheld the French people . . . gorged with blood and exhausted by crime."[159] William Jay had been educated under Timothy Dwight at Yale.[160] His essay demonstrated New School optimism: if laborers had an opportunity to receive religious instruction, they would better their lives. Most importantly, however, Sabbath keepers would not end up like the revolutionary French. Consistent with this optimism, Jay was involved in many reform efforts throughout New York state, organizing Bible societies and abolition.

Jay's Sabbatarian views were not his alone. Newspapers circulated Jay's essay throughout western New York.[161] As a polemic for Sabbath observance on the canal, the *Black Rock Gazette* published a catechism on the Sabbath, modeled after Fisher's explanation of Westminster Shorter:

> Q: For whom was the sabbath given?
>
> A: For Adam and all his posterity . . .
>
> Q: Why is the Sabbath a benefit to mankind?
>
> A: Because it contributes essentially to promote good order, morality, and religion in the world. It is a friend of the poor as well as the rich. It protects those who regard the day from those vices which are destructive to comfort and competency. No man was ever materially injured by his regard to the Sabbath: while thousands of Sabbath breakers have become vicious and vagabonds. The blessing of God is not upon the Sabbath breaker.[162]

That this polemic was set in catechism reflected the cultural heritage of New England in western New York. Settlers would have received religious and moral instruction through

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[159] William Jay, circular essay in *Troy Sentinel*, December 16, 1825

[160] See Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety*, 186.

[161] E.g., *The Geneva Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, December 21, 1825; *Cherry-Valley Gazette*, December 13, 1825; et al.

[162] *Black River Gazette*, February 17, 1830.

some catechism, and newspaper editors—like those at the *Black River Gazette*—pushed forward reform by circulating these essays, tracts, and sermons.[163]

Joseph Penney, the pastor at First Presbyterian Church, Rochester, was one of the first to campaign for closing the canal on Sundays.164 The impact of Penney's efforts is difficult to measure; there are few extant documents or newspapers to that end. So, historians often move past Penney's efforts to the state congress's rejection of Sabbatarian proposals.165 Often omitted, however, is that the efforts in Rochester inspired others throughout the state to take up the cause of Sabbath-keeping up and down the canal.

As early as 1825, New Yorkers, including Penney, from counties and towns along the canal petitioned their legislature to "prevent traveling in boats on the canals on Sunday."166 The state appointed a committee to study the petition and rejected the suggestion. The committee believed closing the canals was counterproductive to the state's interest, "oppressive" to canallers, and could have unintended consequences. Canallers who were not working would crowd "taverns, grog shops, and houses of ill

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[163] See one such sermon, "The Sabbath," *Onondaga Register*, September 10, 1823. The occurrences between 1820–30 are significant. For example, a database search of New York Historic Newspapers "sabbath AND convention" returned over four hundred unique newspaper pages throughout the state. Changing those keywords does net overlap. So, "sabbath AND society" nets only 98 unique pages, but some of these pages also appear in "sabbath AND convention." What is important here is not mainly the number of returns, but that newspapers were advancing the conversation. New York Historic Newspapers is administrated by the North New York Library Network in partnership with Empire State Library Network. See https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/about.

[164] McKelvey, "Rochester and the Erie Canal," 10.

[165] Cf., Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 84; McKelvey, "Rochester and the Erie Canal," 10.

[166] State of New York, *Laws of the State of New York, in Relation to the Erie and Champlain Canals, Together with the Annual Reports of the Canal Commissioners, and Other Documents, Requisite for a Complete and Official History of those Words with Correct Maps Delineating the Routes of the Erie and Champlain Canals, and Designating the Lands Through Which They Pass*, vol 2 (Albany, NY: State Government Press, 1825), 577.

fame."167 Moreover, the state legislature refused to enforce a canal Sabbath, holding the state could not "interfere in matters of conscience."168

When legislation efforts stalled, Rochester entrepreneurs tried to create a market for Sabbath-keeping. Josiah Bissell Jr.—mentioned above—vigorously supported the efforts of the Sabbath Convention in Rochester. Bissell organized "six-day lines" for canal and stagecoach travel.[169] In 1827, entrepreneurs opened the "The Hudson and Erie Six Day Line;" Other so-called "pioneer lines" soon followed.[170] The middle class did not universally embrace these six-day lines.

On the one hand, some religious groups—like the Seventh-Day Baptists—believed the Sabbatarians infringed upon their religious liberty by restricting Sunday travel.[172] Others insisted that closing the canal on Sundays would only multiply iniquity.[173] Further working against the entrepreneurs was that travel by canal or stagecoach was already slow. Joseph Barnes explained that this lost day proved to be a drain on profitability.[174] This drain seemed to matter not. An anonymous citizen wrote to an editor: "Let [this six-day line] 'pioneer' the way to the better observance of that Sabbath which God has sanctified . . . No, they will not be eager to pursue gain at the expense of principle: they will not raise the interested cry of the 'the copper-smith' of Ephesus."[175] For this citizen, lost profits were preferable to apostasy.[176]

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[167] State of New York, *Laws of the State of New York*, 578.

[168] State of New York, *Laws of the State of New York*, 578.

[169] Barnes, "Obediah Dogberry," 5. See also Johnson, *Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 84.

[170] Cf., Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal, 1792–1854* (1966; University of Kentucky, 1990), 227.

[172] Ronald Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 227.

[173] C.f., State of New York, *Laws of the State of New York*, 578.

[174] Barnes, "Obediah Dogberry," 5; Ronald Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 227.

[175] *Geneva Gazette and General Advertiser*, April 23, 1828

[176] This is an interesting phrase which sheds light on how our citizen read his or her Bible, and the choice of syntax highlights just how religious he or she interprets the pioneers' efforts. Nowhere in the

On January 13, 1828 in Auburn, twenty-two signatories established a "Sabbath Convention" dedicated to providing an alternative, commercially viable transportation company to promote its employees' moral development. The convention wanted pledges from individuals who would establish a line from Albany to Buffalo amounting to $25,000. The idea was that each region would provide $5,000. They connected the Sabbath-keeping with "free government," stating the latter was contingent upon the former. Finally, this convention resolved never to transit a line that might violate the Sabbath and "highly approve the efforts recently organized in Rochester to check the violation of the Sabbath on the Erie Canal."[177] New Yorkers saw their refusal to use Sunday canal lines as a mark of piety.[178] Practically speaking, these efforts kept the market alternative to "seven-day lines" commercially viable.

As with the American Bible Society, the Sabbath cause had local auxiliaries which supported the national effort. For example, Protestants in Troy organized a local "sabbath association" on July 17, 1828. Taking clues from the Auburn convention, this Rensselaer County Sabbath Association dedicated itself to raising support for the Sabbath

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New Testament is found the exact phrase "the copper-smith of Ephesus." That clues us in that our citizen shifted to allusion to build his or her case about those who refuse to use pioneer lines.

In 2 Timothy 4:14, one "Alexander the coppersmith" is identified as an opponent of Paul the Apostle. Paul also names one Alexander of Ephesus, the false teacher in 1 Timothy 1:20. Most modern commentators assume these are the same Alexanders (E.g., I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*. International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004). Perhaps a familiar commentary of this citizen, *Matthew Henry's Complete Bible Commentary*, made the point more firmly: Alexander the coppersmith was the same as the one who had initially defended Paul in a riot at Ephesus. Alexander had been a true "professor" of faith but abandoned the gospel—our citizen reasoned—for profit at the temple of Diana he had once decried.

Our citizen believed that folks who chose the profits of a seven-day line over Sabbath-keeping had apostatized themselves like "the copper-smith of Ephesus."

[177] Circular published in *Wayne Sentinel*, February 29, 1828. See note on n141.

[178] E.g., *Geneva Gazette and General Advertiser*, February 20, 1828. The *Wayne Sentinel*, *Geneva Gazette*, and others republished the proceedings of the Auburn Sabbath Convention under the direction of the final resolution: "*Resolved*, that the proceedings of this convention be signed by all members present, and that the editors of papers in this state friendly to the Sabbath, be requested to publish the same." At least these two but certainly many more, sought to signal their approval of Sabbath-keeping by republishing this document. In this way, these newspapers participated the larger organizing work of reformers.

cause. Much like a pattern that would emerge in other reform movements, the association sought pledges to "refrain from all secular employment on that day, from travelling in Steam Boats, Stages, Canal Boats or otherwise, except in cases of necessity or mercy, and aim at discharging the duties of that sacred day."[179] One clue that New Yorkers had genuinely pious concerns about Sabbath observance was the wording of the pledge's exemption. The phrase "necessity and mercy" was lifted directly out of the Westminster Confession of Faith's statement on the Sabbath. This phrase was also included in other non-Presbyterian, nonconformist confessions of faith; both the Savoy Declaration and the London Baptist Confession contain the phrase.

Sabbatarians could never sell the concept of a slower-less-profitable canal line, and their campaigns in the New York legislature returned nothing.[180] In the end, the entrepreneurs lost $30,000 on the project.[181] They did not, however, lick their wounds. Their failure would not stop their efforts to hallow the Sabbath. Josiah Bissell insisted, "we cannot change our course."[182]

As noted above, Diane Shaw and Carol Sheriff insisted that the earliest reformers were primarily concerned with the refinement of lower-class canallers, suggesting, for example, that they were classists. This interpretation comes at the expense of the reformers' stated positions. Of course, essays, tracts, and pledges include some rhetoric, and this rhetoric had a refining impact. However, New Yorkers framed the issues of temperance and Sabbath-keeping from a religious perspective. Their confession informed their sense of national identity of faith, and they wanted to confirm that sense of identity

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[179] *Troy Sentinel*, July 29, 1828.

[180] Cf., Johnson, *Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 87–8.

[181] O'Reilly, *Sketches of Rochester*, 303. This is roughly the equivalent of $1,000,000 USD in 2022.

[182] Uncited statement by Josiah Bissell quoted in O'Reilly, *Sketches of Rochester*, 303.

with meaningful political action.[183] These were ecumenical efforts that minimized the religious distinctions between denominations. This minimization would tremendously influence the development of future ecumenical activism.

Moving the City to Activism

When the Sabbatarian efforts in the legislature and marketplace failed, reformers were convinced that Rochester needed a revival of religion. They reasoned that businessmen unwilling to attend the moral instruction of their employees and apprentices were not committed Christians. Some believed a revival would cause merchants to remember their moral and religious duty: attending to the republic virtue of western New York.[184] Additionally, reformers understood that they must address the moral instruction of the canallers more directly. Rather than simply distributing tracts and Bibles through societies, New Yorkers organized urban missions to address the moral instruction of the canallers directly. Through both, reformers hoped to address two concerns: market-induced apathy towards God and squalor among canallers.

August–September 1830 were significant months for revival and reform in western New York for two reasons. First, New Yorkers chartered a society for the moral instruction of canallers. Second, Charles G. Finney came to Rochester to practice—for the first time—his "new measures. Both had a tremendous influence on American Protestantism.

On August 11, 1830, a convention of citizens and clergy from along the canal

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[183] Cf., Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety*, 188–96. Den Hartog showed how the work of the Bible societies allowed for individuals to set aside denominational loyalties for a higher cause. This was also the case in the Sabbath associations. These societies emphasized holy living and conversions. This, Den Hartog explained, could have political impact but from a decidedly "nonpolitical stance." That is, reformers could shape society without seeking political office. There are only a few short years where the issue of abolition erases this early perspective from the larger narrative of reform. Some reformers thought seeking abolition without conversion would be political disastrous, but William Jay and others increasingly embraced direct political action to counter the slave party's political gamesmanship.

[184] Cf., O'Reilly, *Settlement in the West*, 277; and, Johnson, *Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 93–4.

organized an inland chapter of the American Seaman's Friend Society (ASFS). Nearly two decades earlier, Bostonians had established such a society for evangelizing sailors, but the War of 1812 stymied their efforts. New York City residents restarted this effort in 1816, and they took collections to establish "The Marine Bible Society of New York" and plant a Mariners' Church near the East River. By 1826, they constituted the ASFS.[185] Immediately the ASFS commissioned one Rev. John Truair to connect the seaman's cause to republican virtue in a tract. Doing so, Truair asserted, however, that subscribers' chief motivation for the seaman's cause ought to be "the shortness and uncertainty of human life, and from the destruction which are almost constantly coming upon the sailor . . . Will not the Christian community make one united and speedy effort to bring the seamen out of this state of oppression and cruel bondage!"[186] By 1833, subscribers to the ASFS incorporated to provide tracts, Bibles, reading materials, shelters, and chaplains to sailors.[187]

The local connection to the national organization is another reason to insist that the reformers cared for the canallers and to reject the thesis that reformers waged a class war against them.[188] The ASFS was committed to the salvation of sailors before it was ever concerned about their moral behavior: sailors have "immortal souls, a single one of which is of more real value than all the wealth of the universe."[189] It is reasonable to assume that the reformers who organized a canal chapter of the ASFS believed the same about canallers.

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[185] Israel P. Warren and H. H. McFarland, *American Seaman's Friend Society: Notes of Fifty Years' Efforts for the Welfare of Seamen, 1828–1878* (New York: American Seaman's Friend Society, 1878), 5–9.

[186] John Truair, *Call from the Ocean: An Appeal to the Patriot and the Christian in Behalf of Seamen* 29–31. Here, again, Charles Foster's work on evangelical reform as a "united front" is germane.

[187] Warren and McFarland, *American Seaman's Friend Society*, 16–28.

[188] *Contra*, Sheriff, *The Artificial River*, 149; Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 94–108.

[189] Truair, *Call from the Ocean*, 31.

In Syracuse, on August 11, 1830, New Yorkers established a state chapter of the ASFS "for the purpose of carrying into effect, measures of religious and moral improvements" among all canallers.[190] Convention clerk Joseph Penney—a Sabbatarian—addressed those who would read of the convention holding that the "far-famed canal is fast becoming a channel of corruption to our community." The canal removed boys from their homes, taught them petty crime, and hardened their hearts to moral living. He contended,

> Every member of the community is interested in this matter; but not a step can be taken without your active cooperation. With you it rests to say, let these waters be pure; let the canal be a proud monument to the passing stranger, as well of our publick [sic] virtue as of our commercial enterprise, or let it prove to all that we recklessly sacrifice our country's good, and the very souls of these youth to our views of personal advantage.[191]

If Penney could not convince the state to address the canal's issues through Sabbatarianism, he called upon New Yorkers to show their commitment to Christian and republican virtue. He held out two choices. In language reminiscent of Revelation 22:1, Penney suggested the Erie Canal could be a "pure" place of Christian virtue. Alternatively, he suggested that New Yorkers could choose to sacrifice their children to make a profit.[192]

For reform-minded New Yorkers, profit-seeking seemed to be their biggest obstacle. The middle-class had grown tired of the reformers' incessant pleas and confrontational zeal. For example, no one caused more trouble in Rochester than Josiah Bissell. When he caught the pastor of Second Church, William James, riding a seven-day line, Bissell incited the congregation to dismiss James for Sabbath-breaking. This action caused a major breach between Penney and Bissell. Penney and others were comfortable

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[190] *Buffalo Bulletin*, September 4, 1830.

[191] *Buffalo Bulletin*, September 4, 1830.

[192] Sheriff, *The Artificial River,* 139.

appealing to moderates for funding. Bissell, however, wanted to replace moderate reformers with people willing to take up the canal crusade. By the end of the 1820s, reformers were running out of resources and support, and they had alienated many of the moderate Rochester elite.[193] In late 1829, Bissell called upon Charles Grandison Finney. Bissell believed that moderate reforms reflected a moderate faith. Frustrated, Bissell lamented to Finney: "the people & the church say it cannot be helped—and why do they say this? Because the state of religion is so low; because they know not the power of the gospel of Jesus. 'Through Christ Jesus strengthening us we can do all things,' and if so it is time we were about it."[194]

In his memoirs, Finney noted the pressure he felt to come. He had received correspondence that the churches in the area constantly fought about reform issues, and he believed he could help.[195] Prior to his invitation, he had been pastoring Union Church in New York City. Charles Hambrick-Stowe wrote that it was in New York City that Finney had found the "ideal male convert:" the Christian businessman.[196] Associating with men such as Anson Phelps and the Tappan brothers gave Finney a frame he used when planning "new measure" evangelistic crusades.[197]

In September 1830, Charles Finney arrived in Rochester. Considering Hambrick-Stowe's observation, Bissell's call likely appealed to Finney's ideal convert. The efforts of Rochester reformers were notorious throughout the state, and Bissell himself was known to be a keen businessman laboring for reform. Finney's

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[193] Cf., Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 89–93.

[194] Josiah Bissell to Charles Finney, September 15, 1829, Finney Papers, quoted in Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 94.

[195] Richard A. G. Dupuis and Garth M. Rosell, ed., *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1989), 301.

[196] Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biographies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 98.

[197] Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, 98–9.

contemporaries, however, thought Rochester would be a mistake, calling it "too uninviting a field of labor to be put at all in competition with New York of Philadelphia."[198] Finney, however, would not be deterred. Early in the morning, Finney and his wife boarded a packet boat from Utica to Rochester.[199]

When he arrived in Rochester, Finney found himself at the center of prominent middle-class conversions—his first, the wife of a prominent lawyer.[200] He remarked that the revival was mainly among "the highest classes of society . . . The lawyers, physicians, merchants and indeed all the most intelligent class of society, became more and more interested, and more and more easily influenced to give their hearts to God."[201] Part of what made Finney's work in Rochester so dynamic among the upper classes was the public spectacle of "the anxious bench."

Hambrick-Stowe explained that Finney did not believe that the upper class ought to be allowed to have private anxiety about their assurance of salvation. In Rochester, anyone ready to repent would come to the front of the revival gathering for prayer. For his ideal converts, this had two additional benefits. As more upper-class individuals converted, the social pressure grew for an individual to sit at the anxious bench. Moreover, the public spectacle ensured these ideal converts would commit publicly to civic benevolence. After all, Rochester's elite had just seen a public repentance.[202]

Finney was able to accomplish what Bissell and the Sabbatarians had failed to do. Rochester was now excited about religion. Finney noted in his memoirs that the

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[198] Dupuis and Rosell, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 301.

[199] Dupuis and Rosell, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 303.

[200] Dupuis and Rosell, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 303.

[201] Dupuis and Rosell, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 307.

[202] Cf., Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, 108–9.

revivals among the middle and upper classes affected "the change in the order, sobriety, and morality of the city." The Rochester revivals may be criticized for their theological suppositions.[203] Finney made significant modifications to Calvinistic orthodoxy, but he did so well within the umbrella of the New Divinity school. Robert W. Caldwell III wrote, "Finney essentially embraced the scaffolding of Edwardsean theology but rejected one of its central components, its affirmation of moral inability."[204] Finney's modification of New Divinity theology rested upon his assessment that moral inability and natural inability were equivalent. Thus, he advanced Nathaniel William Taylor's modifications of New Divinity.[205] Taylor had revised Edwardsean categories of ability; that is, he argued that the penitent had real potential to choose to become Christian when God's grace suspended their sin nature.[206] Finney simply pushed Taylor's position further. He held that the commands to repent and obey "necessarily implies a power or ability to obey."[207] With his modification of Edwardsean freedom, Finney believed that sinners could be persuaded to choosing God, and he also believed that conditions—his "new measures"—could be set to make that choice attractive.

These modifications contributed to Finney's success in Rochester. New Yorkers had the intellectual categories to understand Finney's conviction about the freedom of the will. After all, the sons of New England had brought New Divinity agency to New York with them. As Caldwell noted, "None of [Finney's] positions were really new. . . versions of them had been circulating widely among Congregationalists and New

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[203] Cf., Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 89–274.

[204] Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists*, 166.

[205] Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists*, 175–7.

[206] Cf., Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists*, 120.

[207] Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists*, 177.

School Presbyterians for decades."[208] So, when Finney preached that they could voluntarily accomplish their salvation with a single decision, the city embraced the message.[209]

After Finney's Rochester revivals, the city of Rochester becomes a central hub for reform movements throughout western New York. Samuel D. Porter's conversion is one direct link to the revivals.[210] A former atheist converted under Finney's preaching, Porter mobilized a new wave of reform efforts for the canallers, including temperance efforts, tract and Bible distribution, and Sabbath-keeping. These efforts picked up where Bissell and others left off: evangelicals born again in revivals had specific benevolent duties to guarantee a virtuous republic. How these evangelicals formed benevolent societies—and what that effort meant for their national ambition—is the next chapter's subject.

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[208] Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists*, 176.

[209] Finney explained his own theology of sin and the nature of the will in his memoirs. See Dupuis and Rosell, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 321–3. Allen Guelzo rightly noted that theologians often misclassify Finney as an Arminian for his use of the "anxious bench," but this position assumes Old Princeton theology as the only variety of Calvinism present in nineteenth century in America. Instead, Finney is one in a line of many New Divinity evangelists. See Allen C. Guelzo, "The Making of a Revivalist," *Christian History* 20 (1998), https:// christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/finney-making-of-a-revivalist.

[210] Cf., Dupuis and Rosell, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 319.

CHAPTER 5

"THE SCENE WILL BE CHANGED": FUNDING THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE REPUBLIC

Charles Finney's revivals in Rochester made the city a central hub for reform movements.[1] During the 1830s and 1840s, the temperance and Sabbath movements continued with new vigor. Other reformers, such as abolitionists, also developed networks throughout western New York, soliciting ordinary New Yorkers' support through auxiliary groups and subscriptions. Ordinary New Yorkers who profited off the economic success of their businesses along the Erie Canal contributed portions of their proceeds to support reform efforts across the state and national levels through local agencies.

These merchants, such as Josiah Bissell, were a particularly energetic class of evangelicals. They were involved in reform society leadership and maintained relationships with other reformers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Charles Finney was pastoring in New York prior to his Rochester revivals. In New York City, Finney saw how businessmen who converted to Christianity became energetic in benevolent societies. He also appreciated how they channeled that energy towards greater purposes. Charles Hambrick-Stowe called these individuals Finney's "ideal male convert:" the Christian businessman.[2] Anson Phelps and Arthur and Lewis Tappan were two such men.[3] The men established a city mission in New York which dedicated itself to

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[1] Funding which made this chapter possible was generously provided as a research grant by the board at MDM.

[2] Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biographies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 98.

[3] As he arranged his memoirs, Finney emphasized his role in the conversion of Anson Phelps and Lewis Tappan in his chapter on ministry in New York City. See Richard A. G. Dupuis and Garth M.

minimizing the effects of poverty felt among the city's poor. The mission and its subsequent churches were radically egalitarian.[4] In their churches, these evangelicals abolished pew rentals and class distinction in seating, and the laity was encouraged to participate in leading Bible studies and Sunday schools. The churches became centers for benevolent distribution of Bibles and tracts, and the meetings gave the city's poor opportunities to mix among more liberally-minded, middle-class urbanites.[5]

One of these ideal converts was Samuel D. Porter. Porter converted under the preaching of Finney and became involved in Rochester's reform efforts. In his memoirs, Finney described pre-converted Porter as an "infidel" who had good morals but denied the "divine authority of the Bible." Finney, however, convinced Porter that he should "obey the light" he already had before he would give Porter any gospel preaching. The following day, Porter told Finney that he had "made up his mind" to live as a Christian. Porter was an ideal convert who "aided" Finney "with his whole influence, and his purse."[6] Indeed, Porter served as president of the Monroe County Bible Society, worked among canallers, established orphanages, and opened schools and a hospital.[7] He was also instrumental in the anti-slavery movement: his sister's barn was a stop on the "underground railroad."[8] Porter, a resident of Corn Hill, Rochester, was at the center of

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Rosell, ed., *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1989), 281–97.

[4] "Egalitarian" here should not be mistaken for the contemporary, evangelical theological position opposite "complementarianism." Instead, the lexeme ought to be understood from a political theory perspective.

[5] Cf., Dupuis and Rosell, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 296n70.

[6] Dupuis and Rosell, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 320.

[7] William F. Peck, *Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason, 1884), 411; 419; 422.

[8] An archivist's note contradicts an earlier journal article from 1939 which said it was Porter's own barn which was the stop. He or she noted that Porter's own house was under surveillance. See Biographical/ Historical Note, Porter family papers, A.P84, Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester. Cf., Dexter Perkins, "Rochester One Hundred Years Ago," *Rochester History* 1, no. 3 (July 1939): 18.

almost every reform movement in the city. By the 1850s, he, his wife, and many other reform-minded people could be found retreating on Sunday afternoons to the Anthony farmstead outside Corn Hill.[9]

As the reformers and recently converted merchants advanced their agendas, their discussion and reference to the canal faded. They focused on the individuals affected by the world the canal created, not the canal itself. However, this did not make the Erie Canal irrelevant to the ordinary New Yorker. Historians would be mistaken if they confused a lack of conversation regarding the canal as an indication of irrelevance. The Erie Canal was more of an internal improvement than a transportation development. This distinction meant that the canal was a fundamental component of the political economy. Ronald Shaw wrote that the canal became "part of the social and economic foundation of the new nation."[10] This foundation made the canal a generator of political conversation, "shaped by the force of emergent nationalism, or as an element in the preservation and advancement of republicanism."[11] Whitney Cross grated that the relationship between the region's "enthusiasms to specific sociological conditions could easily be overdrawn. . . still, [reformers] lived in an environment whose influence they could scarcely escape."[12] Shaw wrote that individual people and places "developed into an integrated, interconnected network, the full dimensions of which can be best grasped if seen as a whole" because of the canal.[13] New Yorkers were bound by their environment, thrust into conversations about republican virtue provoked by the canal. Their

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[9] Blake McKelvey, "Susan B. Anthony," *Rochester History* 7, no. 5 (April 1945): 5.

[10] Ronald E. Shaw, *Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States, 1790–1860* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 198.

[11] Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 198.

[12] Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 74.

[13] Shaw, *Canals for a Nation*, 160.

participation in the economy cast them into a dense network, concerned about reforming the behavior of their fellow citizens to make them ready for republican government.

As noted above, environmental historian and river scientist Martin Doyle wrote that studying waterways is "akin to reading a palimpsest."[14] A palimpsest is a manuscript where subsequent layers of writing or illustration obscure an original layer. A palimpsest bears the traces of its original form even though layers obscure the original form itself. Waterways forced Americans to make "decisions on top of decisions, events on top of events, ideas on top of ideas."[15] Each of these decisions, events, and ideas is directly related to the cause prior to it. Each decision, event, or idea introduced an additional degree of separation from the canal itself. Despite being obscured by these layers, the original form of the canal remained influential. The canal was the fulcrum for this region in New York as it opened the transatlantic frontier to commerce. The canal facilitated the transportation of goods and people and attracted throngs of workers to load, steer, and forward goods on packet boats. The canal created the economic and social conditions which motivated these frontier merchants to participate in a national dialogue about the relationship between virtue and the American republic.

Reformers do not suggest the canal directly caused their actions, but they would not see it that way. They saw themselves acting on account of the world that the canal created. The reformers' perspective is comparable to how modern Americans do not attribute the location of their houses, schools, workplaces, or houses of worship to a highway system. However, before highways, urban cores were dense. Workers lived within a short distance of their workplace, and their house was near their children's school and their family's house of worship. Highways diffused the populations into

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[14] Martin Doyle, *The Source: How Rivers Made America and America Remade Its Rivers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2018), 14.

[15] Doyle, *The Source*, 14.

suburban sprawl.[16] An American family may perceive their decision to buy a house in the suburbs was caused by a better school system. However, that family's decision ultimately was what Doyle called "a decision on top of a decision." Had a highway never been built, that family would have never been able to decide to relocate to a suburb. Therefore, one can argue that the highway was the penultimate cause of that family's decision. Similarly, Doyle demonstrated how waterways functioned as penultimate causes in American history.[17]

However, the canal did not disappear in the minds or imaginations of western New Yorkers. The opposite was true. The canal was an ever-present force in New Yorkers' lives. First, as soon as they recognized the commercial success of the canal, New Yorkers immediately lobbied to expand the canal, and they passed an enlargement plan through the state assembly in 1838.[18] Second, every day, New Yorkers saw advertisements for goods received, shipping schedules, and warehousing information in their papers (See Figures 16–19). So, reformers did not have to reference the canal in their appeals. The canal was an assumed and an ever-present fact of life.

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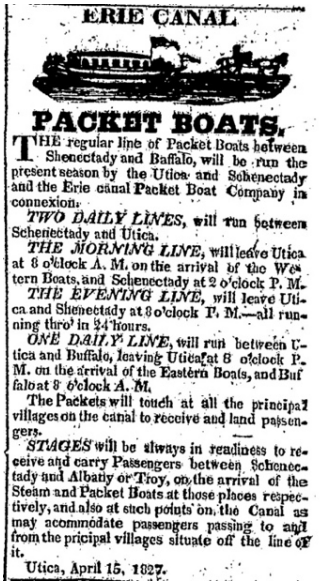
[16] Cf., Nathaniel Baum-Snow, "Did Highways Cause Suburbanization?" *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122, no. 2 (May 2007): 775–805. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25098858.

[17] Cf., Doyle, *The Source*, 9–16.

[18] The details of the enlargement are interesting but beyond the scope of this dissertation. Ronald E. Shaw wrote an excellent chapter on the subject in his Erie Canal history. See Ronald E. Shaw, "The 'Forty Million Debt,' 1835–1841, in *Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal, 1792–1854* (1966; Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 303–29.



ERIE CANAL

PACKET BOATS.

THE regular line of Packet Boats between Shenectady and Buffalo, will be run the present season by the Utica and Schenectady and the Erie canal Packet Boat Company in connexion.

TWO DAILY LINES, will run between Schenectady and Utica.

THE MORNING LINE, will leave Utica at 8 o'clock A. M. on the arrival of the Western Boats, and Schenectady at 2 o'clock P. M.

THE EVENING LINE, will leave Utica and Shenectady at 8 o'clock P. M.—all running thro' in 24 hours.

ONE DAILY LINE, will run between Utica and Buffalo, leaving Utica at 8 o'clock P. M. on the arrival of the Eastern Boats, and Buffalo at 8 o'clock A. M.

The Packets will touch at all the principal villages on the canal to receive and land passengers.

STAGES will be always in readiness to receive and carry Passengers between Schenectady and Albany or Troy, on the arrival of the Steam and Packet Boats at those places respectively, and also at such points on the Canal as may accommodate passengers passing to and from the pricipal villages situate off the line of it.

Utica, April 15, 1827.

Figure 16. Schedule of Erie Canal passenger travel with details on connections via stagecoach. *Rochester Daily Telegraph*, August 27, 1827

STORAGE,
Forwarding and Commission Business.

CANAL TRANSPORTATION.

UNION LINE.

FOR FREIGHT AND PASSENGERS.

THE subscriber, as agent for the above extensive Line of

Canal Boats,

is prepared to receive PROPERTY and forward the same to Albany or New-York. He will also contract to receive MERCHANDISE in Albany or New-York, and forward the same to any part of the western country, or the Canadas.

☞ Office at the stone Warehouse, near the Episcopal Church.

RUFUS MEECH.

Rochester, March, 1827.

Figure 17. Advertisement for freight transit along the canal. Elisha Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester* (Rochester, 1827), appended.

Storage, Forwarding and
Commission business.
CANAL TRANSPORTATION

Union Line.

THE subscriber as agent for this extensive Line of Canal Boats, is prepared to receive property and forward the same to Albany or New-York. He will also contract to receive merchandize in New-York or Albany, and forward the same to any part of the Western country or the Canadas. Office at the *Stone Ware-House* near the Episcopal Church.

RUFUS MEECH.

Rochester, 6th March, 1827.

STORAGE & FORWARDING

AT ROCHESTER.

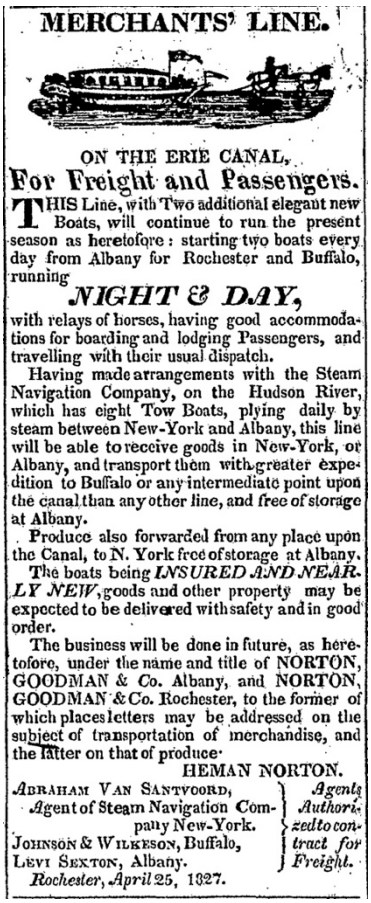
THE subscriber, one of the partners of the house of JOY, BRACE & Co. who are the proprietors of an extensive line of boats upon the Erie Canal called the "PILOT LINE," keeps his office at the head of Child's Basin Rochester, and is prepared with commodious Warehouse, for the reception of any quantity of country PRODUCE, and will store and forward the same to its place of destination on as reasonable terms, and with as much facility as any other house.

The same concern have also an establishment at Brockport under the firm of BROWN & HUNTER, and all property delivered there shall receive the same attention.

ROBERT HUNTER & Co.

January 1, 1827.

Figure 18. Sample forwarding advertisements in the *Rochester Daily Telegraph*, August 27, 1827.



MERCHANTS' LINE.

ON THE ERIE CANAL,

For Freight and Passengers.

THIS Line, with Two additional elegant new Boats, will continue to run the present season as heretofore: starting two boats every day from Albany for Rochester and Buffalo, running

NIGHT & DAY,

with relays of horses, having good accommodations for boarding and lodging Passengers, and travelling with their usual dispatch.

Having made arrangements with the Steam Navigation Company, on the Hudson River, which has eight Tow Boats, plying daily by steam between New-York and Albany, this line will be able to receive goods in New-York, or Albany, and transport them with greater expedition to Buffalo or any intermediate point upon the canal than any other line, and free of storage at Albany.

Produce also forwarded from any place upon the Canal, to N. York free of storage at Albany.

The boats being *INSURED AND NEARLY NEW*, goods and other property may be expected to be delivered with safety and in good order.

The business will be done in future, as heretofore, under the name and title of NORTON, GOODMAN & Co. Albany, and NORTON, GOODMAN & Co. Rochester, to the former of which places letters may be addressed on the subject of transportation of merchandise, and the latter on that of produce.

HEMAN NORTON.

ABRAHAM VAN SANTVOORD, Agent of Steam Navigation Company New-York. } *Agents Authorized to contract for Freight.*
JOHNSON & WILKESON, Buffalo,
LEVI SEXTON, Albany.

Rochester, April 25, 1827.

Figure 19. Passenger line advertisement in the *Rochester Daily Telegraph*, August 27, 1827.

During this period, New York merchants combined business and evangelical religion to realize their ambition to have a virtuous republic—one with moderation in drinking, bible literacy, and the abolition of slavery in the nation.[19] New York evangelicals understood the usefulness of morality for republican government and believed that republican governments could reinforce religion's cultural standing. Jonathan J. Den Hartog explained that evangelicals saw patriotism and piety as integrated commitments. For example, John Jay, who supported early reform societies such as the American Bible Society, believed that religion trained people for the morality and duty of republican government. Jay believed that government could "reciprocate by endorsing religion's usefulness and encouraging its practice."[20] Jay's convictions contextualized the efforts of Sabbatarians on the canal who labored to have the state legislature shut down canal traffic on Sunday.

New York evangelicals used their dollars to lobby for their particular vision of moral reform. Darren E. Grem and Kevin M. Kruse each suggested a link between merchants and evangelical activism. They suggested a contemporary link beginning in the early twentieth century Grem wrote that most of the historiography "does not account for the fact that conservative evangelicalism was formed in boardrooms and private business, not just in churches or committees, or during political campaigns."[22] Kruse argued that while most Americans had always thought of the nation as Christian, businessmen coopted religious language to advance their political agenda. Grem and Kruse neglected that evangelicals have mobilized businessmen for religious and political purposes since the early nineteenth century. In fact, businessmen had been an "ideal

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[19] New York state eliminated slavery in 1827.

[20] Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* (University of Virginia Press, 2015), 43.

[22] Darren E. Grem, *The Blessings of Business: How Corporations Shaped Conservative Christianity* (Oxford, 2016), 3.

candidate" in Finney's evangelical crusades.

In a way, the link between business and evangelical effort was a necessary consequence of the disestablishment of religion. At the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, Federalists were increasingly concerned with how democrats pressed established religion from the public square. Den Hartog showed how evangelicals became increasingly concerned about the marginalization of religion. For example, in 1797, Timothy Dwight made an explicit connection between a free republic and a vibrant Christianity.[26] Even before the canal was completed, individuals like Dwight called for reforming society's morals. In so doing, evangelicals like him shifted from engagement in Federalist politics to mobilizing evangelicals into societies. Den Hartog explained: "Local organizations connected into national bodies to create energy for accomplishing a greater purpose."[27] The earliest organizations formed by these voluntarists were the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society. Over the next two decades, evangelicals in western New York would follow this voluntarist strategy and form their own societies to affect moral reform along the canal.

The "Mother Science" of Democratic Countries: The Role of the Voluntary Association in the American Republic

However, many of these voluntarist societies did not start as federal societies. Each of these organizations started as a collection of local auxiliaries which sought to advance a national vision in a local context. As evangelicals consolidated these local auxiliaries into national organizations, they exercised political will through voluntary organizations. Local merchants' modest donations supported these organizations. In 1825, Sampson V. S. Wilder, an evangelical Federalist, consolidated a collection of local

[26] Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety*, 53.

[27] Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety*, 67.

tract societies to form a national union. He did so by pulling the New England and New York societies into a unified national organization.[41] Critical here was the transition in the location of tract printing. While every individual auxiliary had originally printed their own individual tract or purchased one through a regional depository, they surrendered that prerogative to a new national printshop in New York City, established with seed money from Arthur Tappan.[43] Wilder and the committee managed the distribution of tracts through various associated branches and auxiliaries. These branches and auxiliaries collected funds at their local level, used them to purchase tracts from the central printing organization and then distributed them at the local level.[44]

This consolidation allowed individual evangelicals to advance their visions of morality on a national scale in the budding democratic republic. Clergy and merchant classes led these organizations. For example, ATS officers at the founding were comprised of nearly equal parts clergy to merchants (see table 4). This leadership structure demonstrated cooperation between a merchant and religious class to advance a particular vision of American identity. Additionally, rank-and-file members secured an annual subscription to the national society for two dollars, the rough equivalent of a brick mason's day-and-half wage.[45] This subscription entitled the member to one tract and one vote should they attend the annual meeting. The first year saw 227 such members—

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[41] Perhaps confusing, the New England society located in Boston was originally called the American Tract Society (1814). But, in 1825, this society merged with the New York Religious Tract Society by the efforts of Sampson Wilder. All printing efforts were moved to New York, and the American Tract Society (1825) was constituted in New York City. All mention of the American Tract Society here forward refers to the American Tract Society (1825).

[43] American Tract Society, *Records from the Life of S.V.S. Wilder* (American Tract Society, 1865), 231.

[44] American Tract Society, *First Annual Report of the American Tract Society* (American Tract Society, 1826), 14–17.

[45] American Tract Society, "Constitution of the American Tract Society," in *First Annual Report of the American Tract Society* (American Tract Society, 1826), 5. For wage data, see Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *Comparative Wages, Prices, and Cost of Living* (MA State Printing Office, 1889), 55.

ordinary people contributing their widow's mite to the national project of moral improvement. This figure does not include the subscribing members of the 108 auxiliaries and branches of the national organization. Other national moral improvement societies operated in nearly identical ways, including the American Bible Society, the American Bethel Society, the American Temperance Society, and more.[46]

Table 4. American Tract Society Officer composition, 1826

	Clergyman	Politician-Merchant*
President	0	1
Vice-Presidents	12	6
Directors	23	13
Publishing Committee	5	0
Distributing Committee	0	5
Finance Committee	0	6

Source: American Tract Society, "Officers," in *First Annual Report of the American Tract Society* (American Tract Society, 1826), 7.

Note: Categorizing non-clergymen as something other than politician-merchant is complicated as many individuals operate in both spheres of leadership. For example, Richard Varick was a former mayor of New York City but also developed real estate. Stephen Van Rensselaer represented New York in the House but incorporated a bank.

Alexis de Tocqueville described this act of organizing the "mother science" of democratic countries.[47] With the absence of an aristocracy, individuals who sought to influence had to band together to accomplish the progress they wanted to see. Tocqueville saw these associations as part of the foundation of American identity.[48]

[46] See *Constitution of the American Bible Society* (American Bible Society, 1816), 2; *Fifth Annual Report of the American Bethel Society* (American Bethel Society, 1841), 12–16;

[47] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 492.

[48] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 492.

Spreading these moral associations' ideals required the cooperation of individuals in these federalized associations.[49] That act was a contest for a particular vision of American identity, and every two-dollar, rank-and-file subscriber represented a vote in that contest for American identity.[50]

While Protestants never achieved a new synthesis between individual, church, and state, the social conditions of the antebellum period influenced Protestantism in the north. Voluntary associations became quasi-national denominations that could respond more dynamically to donors' ambitions. Auxiliary groups fundraised and campaigned on behalf of these national, voluntary associations. New Yorkers established auxiliary groups throughout the canal corridor. Every dollar these auxiliary groups gave to the national organization was a vote for a particular moral vision for America. One more dollar meant another temperance tract for canallers. One more dollar meant another Bible distributed. Each dollar paid for the vision of America New Yorkers wanted to see.

Each contribution was an effort to realize an expressly Christian nation. Sam Haselby noted that there was no clear historical model for establishing a vast republic with seemingly endless opportunities for expansion.[52] During this period, the concept of Protestantism, activism, and nation synthesize into an early Yankee Protestantism. John Wolffe insisted that by the early nineteenth century a distinct Yankee evangelicalism was emerging and that a clear distinction must be made between the organizational practices

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[49] See "Address of Rev. Justin Edwards," *Addresses, Delivered at the Anniversary of the American Tract Society* (American Tract Society, 1826), 29.

[50] Cf., David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 8–9.

[52] Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 214. Maskell described how Samuel J. Mills of the American Bible Society experienced the frontier, securely American after the Treaty of Ghent (1814). Mills was a New Englander who was not directly connected to the Erie Canal, but New Yorkers who shared his New England sentiments also shared his concern to christianize the frontier. He believed bible distribution would be most effective in doing so. Maskell does not suggest that Mills organized a national bible society. Instead, Maskell saw Mills as a representative figure of the evangelical sentiments of the time—similar indeed to many of the New Yorkers discussed in this study. See Maskell, "American Icarus," 56–66.

of Northern evangelicals with Southern evangelicals. While Northern evangelicals energetically organized into societies to reform societies, Southern evangelicals were suspicious of such national organizations. He argued they were suspicious on three counts. First, Southern evangelicals were less enthused about the ecumenical cooperation of their Northern counterparts. Second, Southerners were suspicious that national agents were anti-slavery agitators. Finally, some Southerners trended towards a hyper-Calvinism which believed these mission agencies were irreverent because they overemphasized human agency. Wolffe wrote, "Although Southern evangelicals espoused some causes. . . their active identification with national movements was limited. Their impact, too, was constrained by the continuing influence of social mores founded in codes of honor rather than piety."[53] Den Hartog expressed similar ideas. Southern evangelicals shied away from national organization because of the issue of slavery and culturally supported disestablishment. Southern evangelicals occasionally participated in national organizations, such as having local bible society chapters, but they avoided most efforts to organize nationally to protect the institution of slavery.[54]

When set in relief to Southern evangelicals, the organizing activity of the Northern evangelicals stood out as vigorous and clearly nationalistic. Northern evangelicals had goals for the moral improvement of the nation. As early as the 1810s, Northern evangelicals had ideas for how to use religion to advance republican virtue: if agents could place Bibles in the home of every American, they would become educated and moral citizens. That was the logic of American Bible Society (ABS) founder Elias Boudinot. For Boudinot, the American Revolution began the final chapter in human

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[53] John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers, and Finney*, in *A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements, and Ideas in the English-Speaking World*, ed. David W. Bebbington and Mark A. Noll (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 189.

[54] Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety*, 163.

history, the one right before Jesus Christ would establish his millennial reign.[55] His efforts, more than anyone's, led to the consolidation of various Bible societies in the ABS. Historians have evaluated these evangelicals' efforts in various ways, classifying them as imperialistic or racist.[56] Others have seen these evangelical efforts as the root cause of stable democracies worldwide.[57] The ABS was indeed a nationalistic project as much as an evangelistic effort.[58] Northern evangelicals did not distinguish between the two. Protestants believed that God would illuminate the heart and mind of a reader to see the reasonableness of Christianity.[59] They were also happy to enjoy the fringe benefits of a converted citizen. The early republic was a project where the national symbols were up for public negotiation. For former Federalists who wished to see a Christian republic, christianizing Americans was the only way to properly reinforce the "sacred myths" of origin, election, and destiny. Moreover, New Haven theologians provided a consistent framework through which evangelicals could christianize Americans. By disseminating reasonable faith through Bible and tracts, throngs of Americans would be converted—and become morally outstanding citizens.

"Preventing the Destruction of the Mighty Republic:" 1820–1830

These societies used subscription models to fund their endeavors. Haselby insisted that the emphasis on fundraising among "bourgeois" members of these early societies represented the rise of modern capitalism: "Unlike the original apostles, who

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[55] Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 216–8.

[56] E.g., Haroon Kharem, "The American Colonization Society," *A Curriculum of REPRESSION: A Pedagogy of Racial History in the United States,* Counterpoints 208 (2006): 87–92. https://www.jstor.org/ stable/42980005.

[57] E.g., Robert D. Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *The American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 244–274. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41495078.

[58] Cf., Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 227.

[59] Cf., Fea, *The Bible Cause in America*, 11.

gave their labor and their lives, patrons of the missions movement only had to give their money."[60] This, he argued, made the ABS "nationalistic." That is, the bourgeoisie could avoid direct labor by funding agents to labor in their place. Caleb Maskell described this phenomenon through a different lens. He correctly argued that a confident millenarianism was at the center of the organization of these benevolent societies, especially the American Bible Society.[61] Maskell suggested that millenarianism allowed Northern elites to organize national societies even though early republic Americans were "allergic to anything that smacked of the once-naturalized old-world hierarchies of imperial aristocracy."[62] Because New York Protestants held to a confident millenarianism, they could be convinced by elite evangelicals that the work of these societies was critical "in order for the nation to enter into its destiny."[63] Maskell did not define what it meant to be an elite evangelical. Presumably, he meant that individuals were elite by virtue of leadership within a national organization. Both Haselby and Maskell correctly highlighted the nationalistic emphasis of these organizations. However, these emphases on bourgeois or elite elements of these societies missed the folks who funded the mission of the ABS.[64] National benevolence societies such as the ABS were overwhelmingly funded by ordinary people who acted in agency to advance the progress of these national organizations. In fact, the national organizations were more dependent upon the local auxiliary chapters than aristocratic endowments.

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[60] Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 227.

[61] Caleb Joseph David Maskell, "American Icarus: Imagining Millenial Benevolence, 1814–1851," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2019), 27–30.

[62] Maskell, "American Icarus," 4.

[63] Maskell, "American Icarus," 54.

[64] This is not to suggest there isn't tremendous value in Haselby's work. The ABS was nationalistic. However, searching Haselby's chapter concerning the ABS, I could not find any reference to the annual reports of the ABS. That is a major lacuna given Boudinot was a national organizer—his rhetoric convinced skeptical societies to federate. The bible societies existed years before Boudinot had Samuel Mills and John Schermerhorn tour the Southern states.

For example, when the Monroe County Bible Society was established, subscribers could purchase a lifetime membership for $10 or an annual subscription for $1. These funds were used to purchase Bibles and New Testaments for distribution, and any excess funds would be contributed to the ABS.[65] This was the pattern for all auxiliaries of the ABS. Also, the Monroe County Bible Society inspired the ABS's mission to see a Bible in every American home. In Monroe County, the local chapter and its subscribers desired to gift a Bible to all who wanted one. In 1825, they distributed 2,7000 Bibles and New Testaments.[66]

New Yorkers would purchase Bibles from agents of a local auxiliary, fulfilled through the ABS General Supply, and the funds would return to allow more printings.[67] Individuals funded these societies not only through subscriptions but endowments. Congregations collected offerings to establish their minister as "members for life." For example, "a few ladies of his congregation" established Nathan S. S. Beman, a pastor at the Presbyterian Church in Troy, NY as one of these "members for life."[68] These were real sacrifices: to do so required a gift of $30—the equivalent to six months' gross wages for a day laborer in 1826 Albany.[69]

Instead of being a bourgeois movement, the ABS was funded through dozens of local auxiliaries supported by dozens of regular Americans and direct contributions by the same. More, the mission of the ABS was carried out through auxiliary groups which funded their local efforts before forwarding contributions to the national organization.

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[65] Cf., Elisha Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester* (Rochester, NY: 1827), 106.

[66] Agent of the Monroe County Bible Society, May 2, 1825, "Domestic Correspondence," *Ninth Report of the American Bible Society* (New York: 1825), 58.

[67] Agent , May 2, 1825, "Domestic Correspondence," 57–8.

[68] "Minister Members For Life, by the Contribution of Thirty Dollars and Upwards," *Tenth Report of the American Bible Society* (New York: 1826), 104.

[69] State of New York, "In Senate, No. 92, March 16, 1846," *Documents of the Senate of the State of New York, Sixty-Ninth Session, 1846* (Albany, NY: 1846), 26.

The ABS was profoundly democratic, but that does not make it any less nationalistic. Instead of being concerned with cultural refinement, folks like Beman's "few ladies" genuinely wanted to see a Christian nation so that God would continue to bless America. Average Americans funded the ABS—not the New York, Philadelphia, or Boston bourgeoisie (See Table 5). Indeed, individuals like John Quincy Adams and John Calhoun donated to the efforts of the ABS—$100 and $30, respectively.[70] However, auxiliary groups and independent societies accounted for the overwhelming number of receipts of the ABS. So, if Boudinot's message connected with anyone, his message connected with ordinary Americans.

Table 5. Annual Receipts of the American Bible Society, 1826

Source	Amount
Donations from Auxiliary Societies	$10,640.68
Donations from Bible Societies, not Auxiliary	$94.71
Remittances for Bibles, from Auxiliary Bible Societies	$24,605.93
Remittances for Bibles, from Bible Societies, not Auxiliary	$1,677.14
Donations from Benevolent Societies	$32.00
Legacies	$2,510.00
Ministers Directors for Life	$120.00
Laymen Directors for Life	$590.00
Ministers Members for Life	$1,168.06
Laymen Members for Life	$1,220.00

[70] American Bible Society, *Tenth Report of the American Bible Society* (New York: Society Press, 1826), 114.

Charitable Societies Members for Life	—
Annual Contributions	$506.00
Donations from Individuals	$2,321.32
Congregational Collections	$474.45
Proceeds of Bibles, etc. entrusted to individuals for sale . . .	$344.87
Sales to Individuals entitled to purchase	$3,152.55
Rent from Printer and Binder of parts of house	$700.00
Dividends on Stock, and Interest on temporary Loan	$661.50
Interest on Money Loaded to Trustees of Building	$642.30
Donations to the Sinking Fund, for paying Debt on Society House	$573.85
Source: American Bible Society, *Tenth Report of the American Bible Society* (New York: Society Press, 1826), 18–9.	

For New Yorkers along the canal, the matter was acute. As mentioned earlier, the conditions of canallers seemed to New Yorkers a test of providential forbearance. Evangelicals were reminded of the poor state of religion in New York by the disrespecting of the Sabbath and the intemperance of the canallers. In the middle of his Sabbatarian struggle, Josiah Bissell wrote to his friend Gerrit Smith and requested that he leverage his contacts in Utica for the Bible effort.[71] Bissell hoped Bible distribution along the canal would eliminate workers' immoral behavior. Smith, an evangelical Presbyterian, was a real estate developer in New York state before becoming a philanthropist and activist in his own right.[72] He received multiple updates from Bissell

[71] Josiah Bissel to Gerrit Smith, March 4, 1828, box 1, folder Bishop–Bissell 1828–1874, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library Manuscript Collections.

[72] "Biography of Gerrit Smith," box 1, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library Manuscript Collections.

on his work.[73] Bissell's own efforts to reform society, particularly the question of mail delivery on Sunday via the canal, were dependent upon contributions to fund efforts throughout the mid-1820s. Believing this to be a national problem, Bissell had even sought funding from outside of Rochester itself, and he found allies in Lewis Tappan and Lyman Beecher. These contributors—including Smith and the Tappan brothers—were the "ideal converts" Finney calibrated his revivals to reach.

The issue of temperance was equally important along the canal. In 1826, Christians in Boston chartered the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance (ASPT).[74] That the charter members had national ambitions is evidenced in how they organized. While the ABS resulted from Elias Boudinot's efforts to federate localized bible societies, the ASPT started as a national project with the expectation that local groups would eventually be organized.[75] Many of the same sentiments for Bible distribution marked the ASPT. The society's preamble believed liquor promoted vice, which hindered "all the common means which God has appointed for the moral and religious improvement of men."[76] The language "common means" referred to Protestant confessional documents such as the Westminster Confession. Within Westminster, the language of "ordinary means" refers to the actions in which an individual can participate to have "infallible assurance."[77] In short, drunk citizens could not avail themselves of the common means necessary for moral lives. Of course, society members believed

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[73] Josiah Bissel to Gerrit Smith, March 4, 1828; Josiah Bissel to Gerrit Smith, August 12, 1828.

[74] American Temperance Society, *First Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The American Society for the Promotion of Temperance* (Andover, MA, 1828), 3.

[75] E.g., local groups such as the New York State Society for the Promotion of Temperance organized after the national group. The NYSSPT chartered in 1380—two years after the founding of the ASPT.

[76] American Temperance Society, *First Annual Report*, 4.

[77] Westminster Confession of Faith, 18.3. The Savoy Declaration contained similar language.

intemperance to threaten the "destruction" of "this growing and mighty Republic."[78] Some reformers were aligned with multiple societies and established them in western New York. New Yorkers such as Stephen Van Rensselaer, James G. Richards, Anson G. Phelps, Thomas B. Cooke, and Josiah Bissell supported the national organization's early efforts while remaining involved in earlier bible and tract efforts (See Appendix 1).

Alcohol was particularly prevalent in western New York because it was an export product. From 1823 to 1826, New Yorkers' canal exports of whiskey increased from 52,903 gallons to 135,000 gallons—an increase of 155 percent.[80] This coincided with the opening of the canal. Alcohol was easy to produce because of the prevalence of clean water, wheat, and corn, all three readily available in the areas around the canal. Most of this produce was concentrated in Rochester, and there were two breweries and two distilleries in the city.[81] Just as the production of alcohol concentrated in Rochester, so did the reform efforts. Highlighting again how each of these movements was interconnected and related to national ambition, Josiah Bissell was at the center of the temperance movement in Rochester. Like his passion for the Monroe Bible Society and Sabbatarianism, Bissell resolutely advanced temperance along the canal. In a letter to Gerrit Smith discussing a land purchase, Bissell expressed his intentions to use only temperate lines for transit and business.[82] He had a pattern of organizing alternative methods of transport and shipping, which aligned with his religious conviction, having tried to organize a six-day line to avoid transit on Sunday. He would then patronize a

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[78] American Temperance Society, *First Annual Report*, 4.

[80] Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester*, 115.

[81] Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester*, 115.

[82] Josiah Bissel to Gerrit Smith, April 28, 1830, box 1, folder Bishop–Bissell 1828–1874, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library Manuscript Collections. No archival notes nor newspaper database searches returned any such hits on a "Temperance Line of Stage," but the context of the letter has transit in view: "Temperance Line of State from Vernon to [Pompir? illegible]. Both of these villages are within the vicinity of Syracuse and near to Smith.

canal line established to support the temperance cause. Intemperate in his zeal for reform, Bissell informed Smith that he had gone "beyond Temperance to the Cold Water Society—no Tea, Coffee, or any other Slops—only pure Water to drink & Coarse fare to Eat & my hearth perfectly good & Spirits improving"[83] As early as 1830, some New Yorkers began to press temperance to prohibition on the canal; they called on temperate drinkers to become "cold-water men."[84] By the 1840s, reformers urged children to join the "Cold-Water Army" by taking the "Cold-Water Pledge," stating they would never take a drink of alcohol. After taking the pledge, children earned a "cold-water certificate" from the American Tract Society.[85]

Through the 1820s, reformers honed the skills required for managing national societies. These societies developed the subscription as the primary funding mechanism. However, they were not funded by a few large subscriptions from the bourgeoisie. Instead, ordinary Americans contributed their "widows' mite" to the cause of tract and Bible distribution. With each dollar given, these ordinary Americans were funding their national ambitions.

"The Division of Labor": 1830–1840

New Yorkers addressed the issue of intemperance by establishing an auxiliary of the ASPT in 1830. Identical to the other societies, the New York State Temperance Society (NYSTS) had local districts responsible for carrying out the mission of and soliciting funds for the society. These local organizations had agents who were to 1) network among social elites, 2) obtain the cooperation of newspaper editors, 3) convince distillers to abandon their work, 4) collect data and testimony about the harms caused by

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[83] Josiah Bissel to Gerrit Smith, April 28, 1830.

[84] Doctor Springwater of North America, *The Cold-Water Man; or a Pocket Companion for the Temperate* (Albany, NY: 1832), 69.

[85] Thomas P. Hunt, "The Drunkard's Friend," *Cold Water Army* (Boston: Whipple & Damrell, 1841), 7.

drunkenness, and 5) preach temperance.[86] While most of the active efforts focused on eroding the demand for alcohol, New Yorkers also addressed the unique challenges the transient life of the boatmen caused. For example, in 1830, the eight hundred members of Utica's temperance chapter opened a "temperance tavern" to provide an alternative location for travelers and workers to secure lodging and meals.[87] Taverns were an essential target for temperance advocates. In an age where hotels were rare on the frontier, taverns were some of the only places travelers could find shelter, but they were also central to the sale and consumption of alcohol.[88] Utica's "temperance tavern" offered what Bissell's six-day line offered: a market alternative to what was seen as morally egregious. In the same report, the New York City chapter described the results of an experiment. Officials kitted a ship bound to Canton (modern Guangzhou) with coffee instead of alcohol. The ship's captain reported that temperance made the men productive, peaceful, and pleasant. The chapter reported they hoped to find more anecdotes to support the chartering of a "Marine Temperance Society."[89]

This energy was also directed at the temperance reform of the Erie Canal itself. Various canal merchants chartered a "Canal Temperance Society" (CTS) on March 19, 1831.[90] They distributed a circular to every canal boat captain, which linked temperance on the canal with New York's glory and Christianity's advance. The circular, however, also implied a paternalistic duty these employers had for the moral instruction of their employees. As discussed above, this sentiment was a key holdover from the Puritan

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[86] New York State Temperance Society, *First Annual Report of the New York State Society for the Promotion of Temperance* (Albany, NY: 1830), 11.

[87] New York State Temperance Society, *Second Annual Report of the New York State Society for the Promotion of Temperance* (Albany, NY: 1831), 17.

[88] Cf., Ruth Rosenberg-Napersteck, "A Brief History of Brewing in Rochester," *Rochester History* 54, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 3–6.

[89] New York State Temperance Society, *Second Annual Report*, 69.

[90] New York State Temperance Society, *Second Annual Report*, 94.

concept of a covenantal society—wherein the family is the unit of moral development. The society presupposed that because canallers were away from "the precious and preserving influences of home, and the Sabbath" they were "uncommonly exposed to demoralization."[91] Therefore, the task of moral development and protection of these canallers fell to the captains of canal boats. The society sought their support through temperance tract distribution and the teetotaler pledge.[92]

Two years later, Thaddeus Joy, CTS president, would suggest that the canal "which was formerly such a prolific source of intemperance and confusion, is now becoming the pattern of temperance, peace and good order."[93] Future, concerted efforts among New Yorkers suggested otherwise.[94] Rhetorical appeals for temperance often included references to the dangers alcohol posed along the canal. For example, the Niagara County chapter of the NYTS reported a dead body had been found—drowned in the canal—"drunkenness was the sole cause of death."[95] Others boasted that not one drop of alcohol passed through their county in packet boats.[96]

Set in context, reformers' efforts were not bourgeois efforts, as Haselby suggested, and their efforts were not—as Diane Shaw suggested—a classist project.[97] Instead, reformers applied the logic of New Divinity and early earlier societies, such as the ABS and ATS, to the places where they saw immoral behavior. They had theological

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[91] New York State Temperance Society, *Second Annual Report*,, 94–5.

[92] New York State Temperance Society, *Second Annual Report*, 95.

[93] New York State Temperance Society, *Fourth Annual Report of the New York State Society for the Promotion of Temperance* (Albany, NY: 1833), 21.

[94] The extant 1830s city directories do not list the production of whiskey. What can be known is that the number of public houses in Rochester increased from nine to eleven from 1834 to 1838. While one cannot know how much alcohol was served, it in unlikely that an increase in taverns led to a decrease in alcohol consumption.

[95] New York State Temperance Society, *Fourth Annual Report*, 65.

[96] New York State Temperance Society, *Fourth Annual Report*, 72.

[97] Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 227; Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier*, 94–5.

convictions about the individual, covenant, and nation that taught them a sense of responsibility for their neighbor and the productive industry of the city. In 1830 New Yorkers established an inland chapter of the ASFS in 1830 Syracuse. They did so because they believed the canal was a "channel of corruption to our country, and a disgrace to our country."[98] The canal isolated young men from "the good influences of home. . . almost entirely from the moralizing institutions of society."[99] These reformers saw the canallers as victims of the market's effect, and reformers tried to alleviate these effects on the canal workers.

Reformers' greatest effort for canallers was the American Bethel Society. The rise of Protestant missionary efforts for sailors corresponded with the growth of transatlantic commerce and European colonization, the Dutch East India Company, and the British East India Company, while Protestants established and funded corollary chaplaincy corps. In America, Cotton Mather was the first to organize efforts among American seamen. These efforts developed into mature missionary efforts in the nineteenth century, such as the ASFS.[100] Most of the American efforts, however, were concentrated in port cities, domestic and foreign.[101]

By 1836, reformers in Buffalo organized the American Bethel Society (ABthlS) to concentrate efforts of the ASFS on continental, inner waterways.[102] Within two years, the ABthlS had chaplains in Troy, Utica, Rochester, Buffalo, Cleveland, and

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[98] *The Evening Post* (New York City), August 30, 1830. The *Evening Post* commented that an unnamed writer at the Albany *Daily Advertiser* insisted the claims were "highly overcharged, if not utterly untrue." Yet, the rhetoric connected with delegates who felt the claims were true enough that they organized a chapter of the ASFS.

[99] *The Evening Post* (New York City), August 30, 1830.

[100] Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1986), 7–14.

[101] Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions*, 461.

[102] Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions* 479–80.

Pittsburg, and they expected to need more. New York State had 3,500 canal boats registered with 30,000 people employed in its operation. Reformers lamented:

> "'The watermen are an abandoned class of men,' has become a proverb. But why are they abandoned? As a general thing, they have no Sabbaths . . . driven along upon our canals and highways on the Lord's day, exposed to intemperance and all its kindred evils—and should we not expect them to become abandoned?"[103]

Second to the reformers were prison statistics: one-in-four inmates at the Auburn State Prison had been recent canal employees.[104] They proposed a simple solution: "Only give watermen the Sabbath and the means of grace . . . and the scene will be changed."[105]

Evangelical supporters of the ABthlS held a pious concern in their reform appeals. Moreover, they had the interests of the canallers as their aim, seeing them as victims of marketization's socially disruptive effects. The canal work had denied boatmen the grace of God that each reformer enjoyed. The reformers reflected: "When we review our individual history, we are reminded that under God it has been through the means of grace which we have enjoyed, that we are now permitted to anticipate the kingdom of heaven."[107] The ABthlS expected this line of reasoning to garner donations, demonstrating their concern for the canallers as victims.

Support for the ABthlS came from a variety of sources. Like most reform organizations during this period, the chief funding source came from local chapters—"Bethel Friend Societies"—which collected subscriptions to support the society. Additionally, women organized "Bethel Fairs" from Buffalo to Brooklyn to raise money through an auction.[108] As an auxiliary of ASFS dedicated to the inland waterways and

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[103] "The Western Waters," *The Sailor's Magazine* 11, no. 1 (Sept. 1838), 34.

[104] "The Western Waters," 34.

[105] "The Western Waters," 34.

[107] "The Western Waters," 34.

[108] Cf., *Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Buffalo), February 10, 1838; *The Long-Island Star* (Brooklyn) December 24, 1840.

canals of the United States, the ABthlS established "Bethel churches," distributed ATS tracts and Bibles. At the same time, the ABS and ATS relied upon agents to sell or distribute Bibles and tracts, respectively. The ABthlS funded missionaries to move "boat to boat," visiting the boatmen.[109] These boatmen appreciated the ABthlS missionary efforts and believed the missionaries genuinely cared for them—that is, they did not feel patronized. The ABthlS missionaries reported they received "as kind and as tender treatment from the boatmen, as pastors usually receive from their parishioners."[110]

Deacon M. Eaton was one of two ABthlS missionaries on the Erie Canal.[111] Scholars have yet to identify his first name. Eager to get donations, agents of the ABthlS published his journal to solicit the compassion of philanthropists.[112] To the educated supporters of the ABthlS, the agents also challenged presumptions on the qualifications required for pulpit ministry. They explained that Eaton was uneducated and unrefined, but he was effective. The agents argued, "the missionary labors of Mr. Eaton illustrate a point on which the church and its leaders, (if we may in part except the Methodist branch,) are not yet fully enlightened. We allude to *the division of labor*."[113] The society was advocating for removing professional requirements for those seeking to enter ministry: "There are millions of minds which the ministry of the gospel will with never reach . . . if we are justified in keeping up the standard of intellectual qualifications for the ministry."[114] The society hoped to see unemployed men be funded to evangelize

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[109] American Seamen's Friend Society, *Fifth Annual Report of the American Bethel Society* (Buffalo, NY: 1841). Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester, 9.

[110] Cf., ASFS, *Fifth Annual Report*, 9; Lionel D. Wyld, *Low Bridge! Folklore and the Erie Canal* (1962; Syracuse University Press, 1977), 73–4.

[111] Deacon M. Eaton, *Five Years on the Erie Canal: An Account of Some of the most Striking Scenes and Incidents* (Utica, NY: Bennet, Bakus, and Hawley, 1845), 11.

[112] Cf., Eaton, *Five Years on the Erie Canal*, 14.

[113] Eaton, *Five Years on the Erie Canal*, 14.

[114] Eaton, *Five Years on the Erie Canal*, 14.

among their colleagues. They wrote, "No good man will read [this little book] without saying, if I can find another Deacon Eaton, and a responsible committee to direct his labors, I will contribute my share of his support."[115] The merchant class would not leave their shops to go on mission, but they could fund missionaries who would.

The ABthlS's insistence that clergy requirements needed to be relaxed was critical, demonstrating how solicitation linked business and reform. The allusion to "division of labor" was no accident. In the late eighteenth century, early economists such as Adam Smith described the division of labor as a consequence of and contributor to industrialization. Manufactories produced more goods when individuals specialized in a particular task within an economic system, and as a market grows, specialization deepens.[117] The function of the allusion in the agent's appeal through Eaton's journal was plain: philanthropists did not need to leave the marketplace to improve religion. That is, Church Street needed Market Street, and the former's mission depended on the latter's profit. Businessmen simply needed to empower missionaries to fulfill gospel mission through funding. Of course, Adam Smith anticipated this specialization would happen in religion: "Like every other employment too, it is subdivided into a great number of different branches . . . and this subdivision of employment in philosophy, as well as in every other business, improves dexterity, and saves time."[118] The agents' allusion to "division of labor" marked an irony of the period. Evangelicals believed marketization had alienated canallers from the common grace of Sabbath attendance and moral formation, but evangelicals embraced marketization's division of labor as an efficient allocation of resources. Merchants who could afford to delegate their shipping to canallers to forward their goods from Rochester to Albany could also delegate

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[115] Eaton, *Five Years on the Erie Canal*, 16.

[117] Cf., Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. and an. Edwin Cannan (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 3–23.

[118] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 11.

evangelical mission through funding.

During this reform period, one sort of professionalization devolved while another developed. The rapid expansion into the western frontier led to a rise in an unprofessional class of clergy, especially among the Baptists and Methodists. Congregationalist and Presbyterian synods also felt pressure to send less refined clergy into pulpits. Even the ABthlS agents appealed for lower standard requirements for clergy. Every demand for lower standards was motivated by a need to increase the supply of candidates for ministry. As the frontier was settled, the markets developed and led to specialization. This specialization had a unique effect. While the ABS and ATS had relied upon legions of volunteer agents, later organizations such as the ASFS and the ABthlS paid to establish professional chaplains at ports and professional missionaries along canals like other missionary organizations.

Networks and Reform

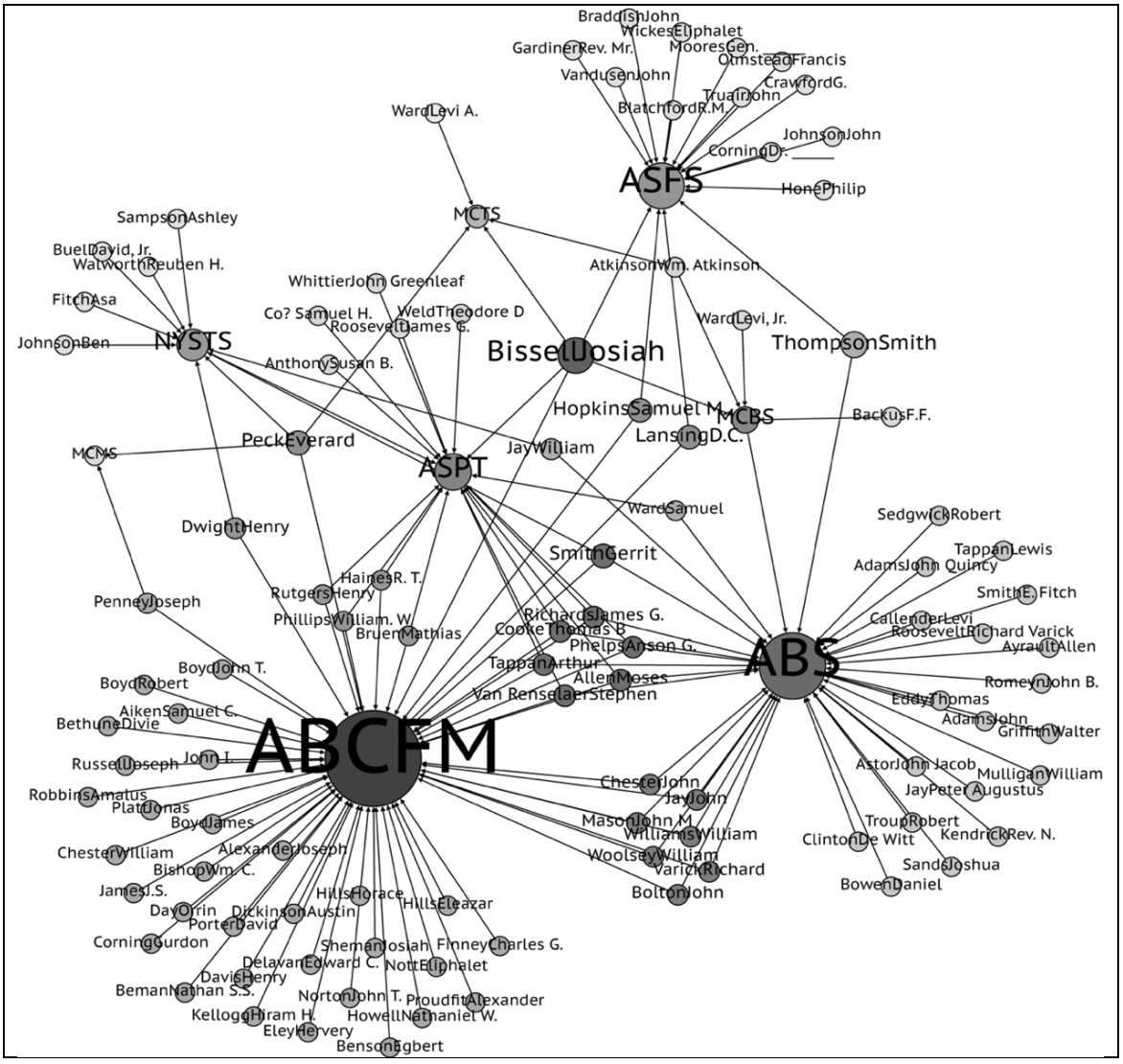
Some New Yorkers thought about these projects as a unified push. This network perspective advances the "united front" thesis of Charles Foster. Foster argued that these reform organizations represented an extradenominational push by evangelicals to christanize the nation.[121] Because of their federalized structure, reform organizations' local chapters addressed local concerns as a part of a national conversation on moral virtue. For example, missionaries of the ABthlS distributed Bibles among boatmen as a part of a national drive to Christianize the nation by distributing ABS Bibles.[122] This

[121] Specifically, Foster suggested that reform efforts were an attempt to reinforce Victorianism within America. In his preface, Foster defined "American Victorianism" as a "conservative counterpoint to native radicalism." He described his work as a case study in how British evangelical ideals were transmitted and adapted for an American context. In this respect, his work is analogous Richard Bushman's refinement thesis. Yet, Foster neglected the religious convictions of those advancing a "United Front." Eve Foster's contemporaries observed an oddity of his work: revivalism is not a feature of the study until late in the work. For example, Robert T. Handy noted that Foster suggested that revivals actually *followed* the temperance movement. See Robert T. Handy, review of *An Errand of Mercy*, *Church History* 29, no. 3 (Sept. 1960): 373–374. Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790–1837* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 121–130.

[122] Cf., American Seamen's Friend Society, *Fifth Annual Report*, 9.

unified push was also reflected in the mutual associations between direct subscribers of these organizations. Often, individuals directly supported multiple national reform organizations. For example, Josiah Bissell contributed to and helped to lead five different organizations (figure 20).

Figure 20. New York Leading Reformers' Network, 1820–1830[123]



[123] Graph made using Gephi. Matrix data and sources found in appendix 1. Delimiting methodology described within appendix 1. Nodes are sized according to degree centrality, and they are shaded according to closeness centrality. Edges are directed but unshaded.

So, even as Bissell was directly involved in solving the local problems along the canal through contributions to the ABthlS, he had ties at a national level. Bissell's relationships with these organizations also beget relationships with people; historians graph these relationships as networks. So, the "Evangelical United Front" was not a centralized, evangelical machine but a dense network of aligned individuals. Foster wrote, "the people in these organizations would naturally focus on what was common to all."[124] These individuals, such as Bissell, were happy to set aside sectarian distinctives and network themselves in societies with members of other denominations to accomplish reform.[125]

Historians have begun to appreciate networks over class as an interpretative methodology.[126] Beyond technical analysis, anecdotal wisdom in research has insisted that historians must never ignore a subject's friends.[127] There was nothing inevitable about Gerrit Smith's decision to support Josiah Bissell's Sabbatarian efforts. Smith and Bissell lived in different cities. However, they were colleagues—both real estate developers who had Presbyterian, evangelical convictions. For example, on October 25, 1827, Bissell wrote Smith, letting him know he had contributed $100 to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). To Smith, he also protested an ABCFM solicitation which he thought drew "only upon the rich for [a] special offertory to call upon [the rich] to 'pay as the Lord hath prospered them."[128] In their friendship,

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[124] Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 124.

[125] Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, 129.

[126] Florian Kerscbaumer, Linda von Keyserlingk-Rehbein, Martin Stark, and Marten Düring, ed., introduction to *The Power of Networks: Prospects of Historical Network Research* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[127] Michael A.G. Haykin has often be an anecdotal source of this counsel. John D. Wilsey has also highlighted this when considering the historically complex life of John Foster Dulles within his family structure and associates.

[128] Josiah Bissel to Gerrit Smith, October 25, 1827, box 1, folder Bishop–Bissell 1828–1874, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library Manuscript Collections.

conversations about reform and commerce mixed. Right after this protest, Bissell alerted Smith of some plans to contract work in New York City. When it came to Sabbatarian efforts, Bissell relied upon his friend.

In quantitative terms, network research describes how such relationships impact decision-making. Network analysis describes how individuals supporting various societies may have influenced one another to adopt new causes or modify their own causes. For example, Gerrit Smith actively supported the ABCFM, ASPT, and ABS, and Josiah Bissell leaned upon Smith for support in his Sabbatarian effort, hoping to recruit him for the work. Networks became ways for reformers to advance their own interests among other reform-minded people. One such reformer was Fredrick Douglass. He selected Rochester because he believed where he would find ample support for his anti-slavery efforts in the rapidly growing city. Additionally, of course, the city was a stop on the Underground Railroad, being so close to Canada.

Moreover, Douglass had friends in the city who were active reformers, such as the Post families.[130] In 1823, Isaac Post and his family moved from Massachusetts to Scipio, New York, to farm. Scipio was connected to the Erie Canal network through Oswego Lake.[131] The degree to which the canal directly impacted the Post's decision to move to Scipio is impossible to know. Motivations cannot be measured. However, what can be known is this. Unlike some New Englanders who continued migrating into the Ohio Valley, the Post family settled in New York and enjoyed whatever advantages came from the Erie Canal's marketization of the region. In 1836, the Posts moved to Rochester to open a drug store, where they became involved in the social causes of the day.[132]

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[130] Schmitt, "Rochester's Fredrick Douglass, Part One," 12–7.

[131] Collection Overview, Isaac and Amy Post Family Papers, 1817–1918, D.93: Rare Books, Special Collections, and Preservation, River Campus Libraries, University of Rochester.

[132] Collection Overview, Isaac and Amy Post Family Papers.

Sociologists have described social movements as organizational networks.[134] More, they have empirically demonstrated that networks cannot "be underestimated as a determining factor in the dynamics of movements."[135] Network analysis has the distinct advantage of taking an actor-centric approach to complex cultural reorientation—often called "movements." Simply, movements are not impersonal forces; individual actors contribute to changing society in a particular way. Naomi Rosenthal led a study to describe the social networks of reform movements in western New York, but their studies concentrated on reform as protofeminism. As such, their study excluded movements prior to 1840. Her team's findings, however, are germane. They argued that biographies alone could not account for the complexity of western New York reform movements, and they showed that archives often have lacuna that skews the perception of authority.[136] Network analysis reveals how people interacted, even without records or correspondence. Networks, however, can be calculated by extant membership records, and these are manifold in university libraries, especially those of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and the University of Michigan. Many of these records have been digitized and are available on databases such as Hadith Trust or Google Books. These membership records are critical to identifying dual (or more) affiliation—in other words, shared membership or shared leadership. As Rosenthal argued: "Dual affiliation creates mechanisms for cross-fertilization and communication and may reflect congruence of purpose. If a leader in one organization is also a leader in another, that is significant to both organizations."[137]

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[134] Naomi Rosenthal, Meryl Fingrutd, Michele Ethier, Roberta Karant and David McDonald, "Social Movements and Network Analysis: A Case Study of Nineteenth-Century Women's Reform in New York State," *American Journal of Sociology* 90, no. 5 (March 1985): 1023. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2780088.

[135] Christophe Verbruggen, Hans Blomme, And Thomas D'haeninck, "Mobility and Movements in Intellectual History," in *The Power of Networks: Prospects of Historical Network Research*, ed. Florian Kerscbaumer, Linda von Keyserlingk-Rehbein, Martin Stark, and Marten Düring (New York: Routledge, 2020),

[136] Rosenthal, et al., "Social Movements and Network Analysis," 1026.

[137] Rosenthal, et al., "Social Movements and Network Analysis," 1026.

Christophe Verbruggen and others have reinforced this perspective in subsequent scholarship.[138] For example, suppose an individual like Josiah Bissell was involved in a network of reform societies. In that case, other reformers connected to Bissell had a "congruence of purpose" even if no extant records explicitly stated such. Scholars such as Ronald E. Shaw, Paul E. Johnson, and Whitney Cross described the relationship between the canal's social conditions and Christianizing efforts among reformers. Network analysis reinforces this narrative by showing how the various reform efforts were a part of a unified front, wherein New Yorkers were addressing local issues while also participating at a "federal" level.

The relationships between the ABS, ABCFM, ASFS, and ASPT are dense, with many leaders dually—or in some cases— triply affiliated. A few, however, were four-factor affiliated. If publications were the only extant sources, historians could deduce Christianizing ambitions. This deduction is entirely appropriate.[139] The ties, however, show that leaders linked each society's mission in their minds. These networks reinforce the idea that individuals advocated these ambitions within institutions and that cross-pollination occurred among other societies. While leaders in the MCBS and MCTS, Josiah Bissell contributed to the ABCFM, ASFS, or ASPT as a member though he was not a leader. He explicitly approved of their mission, and he did so because it accorded with his nationalistic ambitions expressed in the MCBS and MCTS.

The "New York Leading Reformers' Network, 1820s" graph is a directed

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[138] Verbruggen, *et al.* described the developments since Rosenthal *et al*. See Verbruggen, et al., "Mobility and Movements in Intellectual History," 123–9.

A recent example of this scholarship is Nicole Myers Turner's work *Soul Liberty*. There are limited archives and extant documents of the antebellum and postemancipation experience of African Americans. Historians who seek to tell the story of how African Americans flourished in communities have limited sources from which to draw. Network analysis helped Turner fill in the gaps to tell the story of African Americans in Virginia after emancipation. See Nicole Myers Turner, *Soul Liberty: The Evolution of Black Religious Politics in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

[139] See for example, Fea, *The Bible Cause*, 28–33.

edgelist of all leaders in the following societies, clockwise from the top: the American Seamen's Friend Society (ASFS); the Monroe County Bible Society (MCBS); the American Bible Society (ABS); the American Board of Commissioners on Foreign Missions (ABCFM); the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance (ASPT); the Monroe County Missionary Society (MCMS); the New York State Temperance Society (NYSTS); and Monroe County Tract Society (MCTS). Each of these societies was chosen for its relation or mission to the Erie Canal. Leaders or contributors from outside of New York state were excluded. Therefore, individuals such as Lyman Beecher are omitted. Individuals, such as DeWitt Clinton who led the ABS, who passed during the decade, were not excluded because their initial support served as a catalyst for establishing a society. However, no predictive models can suggest how Clinton or others would have supported other societies had they not passed.

The edgelist is derived from a subscription matrix (Appendix 1). In converting the matrix to a directed edgelist, each person was classified as the *source,* while the society was classified as the *target*. The direction of support was always unilateral; of course, no society could subscribe to an individual. The network which emerged is one with six distinct node clusters that orbit around a given reform society. Each node represents a New York individual who was either a leader or lifetime subscriber of a particular society, and equal weight was assigned to each source regardless of the relationship to the target.

Individuals who existed in the space between these clusters represented "congruence of purpose."[140] These individuals supported causes that advanced their own Christianizing efforts, and they are described as "central" not necessarily because of their prominence or prestige but their activity in a given network.[141] They graphed as nodes of

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[140] Cf., Rosenthal, et al., "Social Movements and Network Analysis," 1026. T

[141] See Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 169–98; See also Stephen P. Borgatti,

medium size and medium shade. William Jay, located near the centerpoint of Figure 20, is central because of his activity, not necessarily his prominence. However, he is not as central as Gerrit Smith. The most central individuals, those most active in reform societies, are graphed in medium size and a darker shade. Individuals such as Josiah Bissell, Samuel M. Hopkins, Gerrit Smith, Arthur Tappan, and John Jay supported societies that addressed their respective concerns.

Centrality was an important indicator of who would most likely embrace new reform movements. Before Gerrit Smith became an abolitionist, he was a central actor in foreign missions, Bible distribution, and temperance. He became active in abolition because he had already been central in other domains.[142] Reformers became more active in the following decades as efforts to reach canallers directly and end slavery took on additional importance. As the efforts multiplied, new actors took on greater degrees of centrality (See Figure 21). Each of these new actors was participating in bringing about a particular vision of American identity.

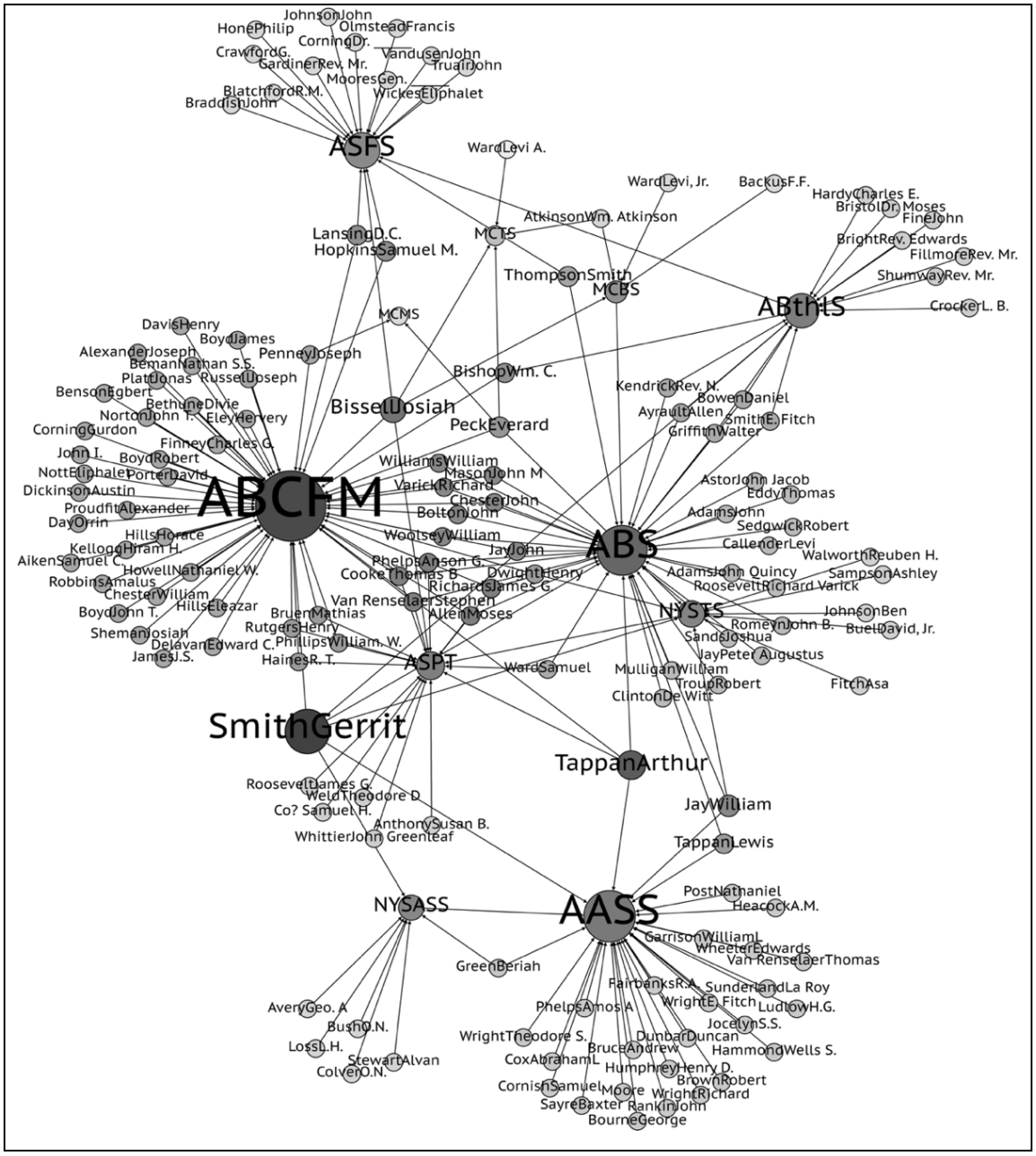
Martin G. Everett, Jeffery C. Johnson, *Analyzing Social Networks* (London: Sage, 2018), 190–4.

[142] This is related to a principle of diffusion where there are ideal types which are open to innovativeness. Gerrit Smith and others here would be considered "innovators" because they have the following characteristics:

- Interest in new ideas which leads them from existing local peer relationships into cosmopolitan social relationships.
- Friendships among other innovators, even if geographically separated from these friends.
- Possession of resource to absorb the failed venture.
- Possession of transferable experience from relevant domains

Everett M. Rogers described these qualities and how they manifest in networks. See Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 282–3.

Figure 21. New York Leading Reformers' Network, 1830–1840[143]



[143] Graph made using Gephi. Matrix data and sources found in appendix 1. Delimiting methodology described within appendix 1. Nodes are sized according to degree centrality, and they are shaded according to closeness centrality. Edges are directed but unshaded.

A cursory glance at the graph shows a few things. First, because of their leadership in the anti-slavery movements, Gerrit Smith and Arthur Tappan became more central. Additionally, the number of dual affiliations grew from the 1820s to the 1830s. Dual affiliation meant that subscribers and leaders increasingly saw their affiliations as a part of a larger project to shape the republic according to their vision. More importantly, the links between reform societies and business become more apparent. Many of the most central actors in reform were prominent in the marketplace. Each of these reformers advocated for a particular Christian and national desire, and their centeredness demonstrated that they interpreted these individual societies as advancing a congruent project.

Not reflected in these graphs is the "authority" of a given actor. Delimiting data is an essential step in any investigation. The authority of a given figure does not add or subtract to the investigation of a given actor's centeredness in a network nor does it contribute to a congruence of purpose. Congruence of purpose—centeredness—was more critical to establishing these societies as a unified project to realize a particular Christianized nation.

However, each actor has authority and could contribute to a society's notoriety through each actor's social network. Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust defined a prestigious actor as "one who is the object of extensive ties, thus focusing solely on the actor as a recipient."[144] Simply put, someone who is prestigious in a social network needs other actors less than those same actors need him or her. Figures such as William Jay, Stephen Van Rensselaer, and Arthur Tappan, each with lower centeredness than someone like Josiah Bissell had a higher authority than Bissell due to their social networks. Again, this was not graphed because it would not demonstrate congruence of purpose.

[144] Wasserman and Faust, *Social Network Analysis*, 174.

For example, Gerrit Smith was president of the New York Anti-Slavery Society (NYAASS) and a member of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). There he developed a relationship with its editor and author of *American Slavery As It Is*, Theodore Weld. This relationship is representative of the overlapping circles of the reform network. Activists, such as Weld, networked themselves in national organizations, but they depended on the deeper networks of individuals like Gerrit Smith to do their work. For example, Weld sent Smith a circular letter—identical to the ones sent to other networked members—seeking information on the actual conditions of slavery in the American South. Weld wanted to know: "Were slaves allowed to hear preaching to make them Christian or just good slaves?" or "Do those slavers who believe in infant baptism have the children of their slaves baptized?" Weld wanted to know if women who desired to dress modestly were provided with the clothing necessary to exercise their piety.[145]

However, in a letter he sent just weeks before the circular's distribution, Weld confessed that he struggled to procure addresses. He turned to Smith for assistance: "I have scarcely any names—not more than half a dozen from all the free states. . . call on the abolitionists present [at your anti-slavery state convention] to hand in to you the names of all responsible persons."[146] Weld hoped to bind the results of the circular, distribute them widely, and stir the entire national organization to "wrath and malice and most Christ-like conflict" for the cause of the American enslaved person.[147] While some evangelicals were committed to rhetorical appeals for gradual abolition, by 1839, Smith and Weld had grown impatient and were ready for direct political confrontation.[148] The

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[145] Theodore Weld to American Anti-Slavery Society subscribers (Gerrit Smith), October 23, 1839, box 37, folder Weld, Theodore Dwight, 1831–71, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library Manuscript Collections.

[146] Theodore Weld to Gerrit Smith, September 16, 1839, box 37, folder Weld, Theodore Dwight, 1831–71, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library Manuscript Collections.

[147] Weld to Smith, September 16, 1839, Gerrit Smith Papers.

[148] Cf., Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Antislavery Schisms," in *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical*

actual key to Weld's success at the national level laid not with his work as an editor but, instead, the network of a real estate developer who also happened to be the president of New York state's Anti-Slavery Society chapter.

Dissemination—getting the word out—is the challenge of every reformer, and reformers like Weld leveraged merchants like Smith to disseminate their ideas. Tocqueville noted that reformers might be silenced in both autocratic and democratic societies. In an autocratic society, the reformer is censored if he or she is not in the ruling class. In a democratic society, the reformer is functionally silenced by the cacophony of all equal voices in a given sphere.[149] Only by using some other mechanism—material or immaterial—to introduce inequality into the conversation can a reformer's ideal rise above the conversation. Here, this led to market-driven dialogue for that moral vision to take shape in the public square. Success in implementing that moral vision is achieved only by convincing others of that vision. These benevolent societies were the avenue for evangelical merchants to organize themselves collectively.[150] This pattern is even actual among antifederalist, populist religious folk. Nathan Hatch noted that by the mid-nineteenth century populist religious movements were moving from a place of "alienation to influence."[151]

This was necessary because all moral positions became political in the newly disestablished republic. Evangelical efforts to keep freemasons out of political office in decades prior illustrate this point acutely. Thurlow Weed used his position as editor *Anti-Masonic Enquirer* to advance his political positions in Monroe County, New York. Joined

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War Against Slavery (Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 193.

[149] Cf., Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 490.

[150] Daniel Walker Howe, "The Market Revolution and the Shaping of Identity in Whig-Jacksonian America," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800–1880*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Steven Conway (University of Virginia Press, 1996), 270–1.

[151] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1989), 193.

by Hervey Ely, Samuel Works, and others, Weed explained that the anti-mason party existed for "the destruction of Free Masonry" through "the ballot boxes."[152] Kathleen Kutolowski demonstrated that evangelical energy predicted anti-mason sympathies, but she also argued that this was particularly prevalent among the middle-class merchant class.[153] She wrote, "Businessmen and professionals . . . organized and orchestrated the Antimasonic party."[154] As an editor, Weed marshaled religious language to persuade citizens of Rochester to vote. His paper often tracked the ratio of mason and anti-mason candidates in the New York legislature.[155] Printing descriptions of masons as originating during "the reign of Popery" but "contemner of all religion," Weed wanted to secure Antimasonry in the state.[156] Even if Weed was a political operative attempting to secure John Quincy Adam's election, the message resonated with New Yorkers who established it as a political party.[157]

For the causes of abolition, temperance, antimasonry, and more, evangelical business leaders organized associations to consolidate their political power to affect their moral vision in the political sphere. These leaders had ideas about the nature of American identity, and they leveraged their influence to shape the moral discourse of the country. With disestablishment, moral opinion was pushed into the public square. So, as David Walker Howe argued, evangelical merchants linked the democratic process with moral persuasion.[158]

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[152] "Anti-Masonry Convention," *Anti-Masonic Enquirer*, editorial, December 15, 1829.

[153] Kathleen Smith Kutolowski, "Antimasonry Reexamined: Social Bases of the Grass-Roots Party," *Journal of American History* 71, no. 2 (Sept. 1984): 279. https://doi.org/10.2307/1901756.

[154] Kutolowski, "Antimasonry Reexamined," 281.

[155] "Anti-Masonic Party," *Anti-Masonic Enquirer*, editorial, January 5, 1829.

[156] "To Free-Masons and the Public—No. 3," *Anti-Masonic Enquirer*, editorial, April 29, 1829.

[157] Cf., Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 268–70.

[158] Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 270.

Reform, Marketization, and National Ambition: 1840–1850

The link between reform, marketization, and national ambition was established before the issue of abolition became prominent. However, evangelical action to end slavery strengthened those ties, and that action ended up culminating in a civil war that remade the American nation. Recently, historians have given attention to the religious character of the American Civil War.[159] Kevin P. Phillips has highlighted how interpretations of American destiny, Protestant orthodoxy, and the issue of slavery were resolved during the Civil War.[160] Again, most figures commonly associated with these Northern interpretations had high degrees of centrality in prior decades' reform efforts: William Jay, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, and Gerrit Smith.

Each of these individuals' prestige grew as New York's state economy ascended. The canal remade the New York economy, and that economic rise led to a rise in the prestige of social actors. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace proposed that many of Wall Street's innovations came about to finance the Erie Canal: the savings bank to issue bonds; the investment bank to speculate on future internal improvements; and the security exchanges which arose as individuals sold and bought canal bonds.[161] The canal functioned as a subsidized stimulus for the state economy: "it was the state-run Erie Canal that secured New York City's position as the nation's entrepôt, galvanizing its commerce, its banking, its stock market, and its manufacturing sectors: in 1825, the year the Erie commended operation, five hundred new mercantile operations opened their

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[159] E.g., Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); James P. Byrd, *A Holy Baptism of Fire and Blood: The Bible and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[160] Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics, and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

[161] Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 444–5.

doors in the city."[162] Other historians argued this to be overstated; for example, Edward E. Baptist suggested New York City's economic ascendancy had nothing to do with the canal, Yankee ingenuity, or grit and everything to do with the "cotton trade" into the 1850s.[163] Erie Canal historian Ronald E. Shaw had a measured perspective:

> The influence of [the canal's] commerce on the rise of the port of New York is as important to the history of the Erie Canal as it is difficult to assess . . . In the literature of the Erie Canal, however, we find a more pervasive influence on New York City and anticipated; and as the city grew, a greater influence attributed to the effects of the Erie Canal.[164]

New Yorkers themselves believed that their economic ascendancy was realized through the canal. Of course, they had built the canal with the expectation that it would secure western trade through the Hudson over and against the St. Lawrence. Naturally, they would see the growth of their city caused by the canal.

The canal was a commercial marvel. In 1847, for example, the tolls collected for freight and passenger travel along the canal were $3,333,347.[165] At peak transit in 1853, freight boats traveled 12,327,650 cumulative miles. Three years later, the total value of property moved within the state on the canal system peaked at $218,327,062.[166] Of course, railroads eventually caused a decline in freight traffic along New York state canals; still, at the first shot of the American Civil war, the Erie Canal carried more volume than the New York Central Railroad, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad,

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[162] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 450.

[163] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 87, 315–30.

[164] Ronald E. Shaw, *Erie Water West: A History of the Erie Canal, 1792–1854* (1966; Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 282.

[165] Noble E. Whitford, *History of the Canal System of the State of New York* (Albany, NY: State Legislative Printer, 1906), 1064. Tolls peaked again during the Civil War but dropped following Appomattox, bottoming out in 1881 at $571,596. In 1883, the state dissolved the toll system.

[166] J.H. French, *Gazetteer of the State of New York* (Syracuse, NY: R. Pearsall Smith, 1860), 56.

Pennsylvania Railroad.[167] By the point of decline, however, the canal had solidified the primacy of New York state's economy. That economy buoyed a generation of central actors who ensured their visions of a Christian republic would be realized. The efforts, however, were not political only. As active as he was in politics, Gerrit Smith also worked fervently to secure the benevolent support of poor, emancipated blacks. For example, he gave vast tracts of land to thousands to ensure their financial security and stability.[168] To pay for these endeavors, Smith—like many other reformers—maintained their enterprises while lending time to societies.[169] By the late 1840s, the "centered actors" within the reform leadership network became active in abolition and protofeminism, and they leveraged their prestige to ensure the causes had sufficient support.

The AASS became politically active with the Liberty Party, and the prior decade's "centered actors" were at the heart of the party's efforts to end slavery. Abolitionism was fissuring on the very myth of the American nation: in 1839, William Garrison and a minority of figures called for the North to cede from the Union. Garrison believed that politicking violated abolition principles and that the founders fundamentally compromised the meaning of liberty by allowing slavery.[170] Salman Portland Chase had escalated tensions by insisting the Liberty Party under no circumstances could cooperate with the Whig nor Democrat parties; both, he argued, were morally repulsive. Henry Clay was a duelist, and James Polk wanted to expand slavery by annexing Texas. Chase put

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[167] Shaw, *Erie Water West*, 291–2.

[168] "Biography of Gerrit Smith," box 1, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library Manuscript Collections.

[169] For example, which leading temperance efforts in the 1830s, Smith was also developing land and selling stocks for railroads. See John Jacob Astor to Gerrit Smith, October 13, 1830 box 1, folder Astor, John Jacob 1829–1873, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University Library Manuscript Collections.

[170] Cf., Kate Masur, *Until Justice Be Done: America's First Civil Rights Movement, From the Revolution to Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2021), 168. John Bicknell, *America 1844: Religious Fervor, Westward Expansion, and the Presidential Election That Transformed the Nation* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2015), 74.

forward a third-party candidate for nomination.[171] The Liberty Party abandoning the Whig party guaranteed Polk's election in 1844. Eager to unite the abolition vote in 1848, the executive committee of the AASS urged Liberty voters to "unite with those who have recently detached themselves from the two political parties with which they have hitherto acted." The committee was concerned that more fervent abolitionists would disengage entirely or moderate abolitionists would compromise. Instead, Arthur Tappan, Lewis Tappan, William Jay, and others urged all abolitionists to:

> "Preach, print, and pray;" organize in school districts, in towns and villages . . . invoke the aid of the pulpit, the press, the lyceum; above all, invoke the God of the oppressed—the God of our fathers—that he will indeed make this a Model Republic, where all men may enjoy equal rights . . . [do not] go backwards in the great anti-slavery reform, but, according to the ability given you, do all in your power to uphold the doctrines and measures, to the maintenance and diffusion of which you have pledged yourself before God and man.[172]

Tappan and others evoke tropes that stretch back to the original reform appeals decades earlier. The "God of the oppressed" was not the God of the enslaved person; instead, this was the God who had delivered the Puritans to Massachusetts's shore from the oppressive compromises of the Church of England, and this was the God who delivered the American colonists from the tyrannical oppression of the British crown. For these reformers, abolition was an extension of the sacred mission Providence gave to the sons of New England: the trope of a "model republic" echoes the Puritan concept of their "errand in the wilderness." However, a significant New Divinity modification influenced the committee as well. The notion that abolition had "measures" echoes the revivalist's practice of "new measures" the decade prior: by preaching, printing, and praying—that is, "moral suasion"—the abolitionists were sure that reasonable citizens would join their

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[171] Salman Portland Chase, "Address of the Liberty Party of Pennsylvania to the People of the State," *Anti-Slavery Address of 1844 and 1845*, ed. Salmon Portland Chase and Charles Dexter Cleveland (Philadelphia: Bancroft & Co, 1867), 11–68.

[172] American Anti-Slavery Society, *Address to the Friends of Liberty* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society Tract, 1848), 11–2.

cause.[173] To the extent that reformers advocated for more active political organization, prior reformers established the reasoning behind this contemporary advocacy.

[173] American Anti-Slavery Society, *Address to the Friends of Liberty*, 10.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE

New Yorkers anticipated the canal's economic success and hoped it would bring about influence. What they could not have measured was the transformation of their society and the organization needed to order that transformation. Through the canal, New Yorkers solved a geographical problem for the United States: how to unite a growing nation divided by a mountain. The canal realized the dream of Americans to puncture the Appalachian range.

New Yorkers also mapped their national ambitions through the canal. The settlers who had settled initially in western New York carried with them deeply formed traditions about the new republic's destiny and mission. These traditions contributed to an American nationalism that New Yorkers baptized in Protestant imagery. Without order on the frontier, these traditions became important tropes to interpret the settlement and displacement of native populations: as Israel had done in the conquest, "the sons of New England" were taming a promised land by displacing the "Canaanites"—that is, the indigenous population.

However, that purity did not last. The canal, which ought to have been evidence of the superiority of the American republic and, especially, New York state, accelerated a market revolution that destroyed the mediating institutions which ordered frontier chaos: Sabbath worship and family ties. New Yorkers believed that their place in the land was jeopardized. Early republic Americans had connected the new nation's destiny to its citizens' virtuous lives. Unless the chaos was ordered and religion reestablished, New Yorkers were concerned about the prospects of their state.

All of this sentiment accorded with the Protestant orthodoxy of the day. These "sons of New England" were catechized in evangelical religion, emphasizing visible evidence as a sign of grace. That is, if people did not live like Christians, they were not Christians—even if they had been baptized as children. This was one of Jonathan Edwards's chief contributions to American theology. Additionally, however, Edwards had privatized religious faith by placing salvation outside of preparatory, mediatorial means. While Edwards maintained the Puritan *ordo salutis*, he did set the trajectory for the New Divinity tradition. For Edwards, salvation was a spontaneous act of the Holy Spirit evidenced by pious living, but it was also a volitional act. Thus, the New Divinity tradition—especially the New Haven theologians—insisted that individuals could be exhorted to choose salvation voluntarily. They believed Christianity was reasonable enough that anyone could be convinced to adopt it. The early reformers presupposed this reasonableness, and their efforts to address perceived sin along the canal with tracts and Bibles are evidenced by this. For them, pious living was a choice, and they were confident that sinful canallers could be convinced to live pious lives. More, these reformers advocated this piety for national purposes. After all, providence had placed New York at the center of American destiny: God's plan was the state's commercial success. Failure to live up to that plan would destroy the nation.

Initial efforts to reform life along the canal were failures, and individuals like Josiah Bissell believed there was not enough excitement about religion to affect pious living. So, Bissell invited Charles G. Finney to Rochester to bring revival. Finney's revivals in Rochester catalyzed a new generation of evangelical reformers who linked their movement's fortunes to the fortune of evangelical merchants. These evangelical reformers depended upon the donations and pledges of New York merchants and farmers to fund their reform efforts. In so doing, they participated in a national dialogue about the religious character of America. This market-driven dialogue—-he with the most dollars wins!-—enabled a democratic and egalitarian contest for the reform of a nation. This led

to a link between Market Street and Church Street. Such a link resulted from a free society that permitted anyone to advance any idealist vision of reform. Those networks, however, reinforced and accelerated additional reform efforts. A few dozen reformers became central in these networks, and their efforts increased the prestige of reform societies so that by the mid-nineteenth century, fledgling societies had national and international chapters.

Paul Johnson, Sam Hasleby, Diane Shaw, and others have suggested that these reform networks were tools for social control. Such a materialistic analysis of this region betrays the individual agency of each of these societies. People organized local reform chapters because they had religious convictions upon which they acted. They were members of these societies not because they believed that the nation needed to be regulated but because they believed in these individual societies' missions. Membership in these societies was donation-based, and ordinary New Yorkers contributed their widow's mite to the causes dear to them. More, any appearance of a "united front" is not the product of a bourgeois effort on the part of some elites to accomplish the moral reform of a nation. Instead, it is the real "congruence of purpose" each of these individual donors expressed when they gave to multiple societies, therein creating a genuine benevolence front.

There is irony in this story. In many ways, the hopes and aspirations of individuals such as Jesse Hawley and De Witt Clinton were indeed realized. The Erie Canal was a tremendous commercial success, but it also solidified New York state's influence in the United States. The trade it facilitated opened up routes in the west, guaranteeing Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland had access to Atlantic markets.[1]The New

[1] Cf., Peter Bernstien noted that in 1820 less than 100 people lived on what would become Cleveland. Just five years after its completion, 1000 people called Cleveland home. By 1850, Cleveland had 17,000 residents. While Chicago only had 100 residents in 1830, over 30,000 residents would call Chicago home. Peter L. Bernstein, *Wedding of the Waters: The Erie Canal and the Making of a Great Nation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 353.

Yorkers also saw their canal as a source of national union. The economies of the Old Northwest were tied directly to Albany-New York City and not New Orleans because of the Erie Canal. The economic axis of the Union shifted from north-south to east-west. New York had punctured the Appalachians.

However, the reform societies which achieved national prominence along with central actors within those societies eventually provoked national disunity over the issue of slavery. By linking nation destiny and evangelical reform with slavery, reformers set the tinder, which would engulf the nation in civil war.[2] Nothing is inevitable in history, but the road to the civil war was paved within a contest over the meaning of the American nation. New Yorkers staked their claim to that vision after the Treaty of Ghent, and they were intent on not seeing the Southern states choose profit over piety. Eventually, the difference was irreconcilable. Mission purity was too critical to the reformers, and they successfully called the Southern bluff, forcing South Carolina to cede in 1860. The tropes that animated reform efforts in the 1820s interpreted the civil war experience.[3] Early setbacks were interpreted as expiation for the failure to eradicate slavery, and the blood of Union soldiers would sanctify the nation for its next chapter in its divine mission.[4] While

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[2] Cf., James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860–1869* (New Haven: Yale Universtiy Press, 1978); and Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[3] This point has been observed by many scholars. E.g., William A. Clebsch, "Christian Interpretations of the Civil War," *Church History* 30:2 (June 1961): 217–8, accessed Feb. 2, 2019, https://jstor.org/stable/3161973; Mitchell G. Klingenburg, "'Without the shedding of blood there can be no remission:' The War Theology of Horace Bushnell and the Meaning of America, 1861 to 1866," *Connecticut History Review* 51:2 (Fall 2012): 165–6, accessed Feb. 2, 2019, https://jstor.org/stable/44370135; Christopher C. Moore, "'Blood, Blood, Rivers of Blood': Horace Bushnell and the Atonement of America," *Fides et Historia* 50:1 (Winter 2018): 3.

[4] For example, following a Union defeat at Bull Run, Horace Bushnell preached: "God is pressing us on to the apprehending of that for which we apprehended. . . . and that will not be done till we have made long, weary, terrible sacrifices for it. Without shedding of blood there is no such grace prepared. . . . There must be tears in the houses as well as blood in the fields." His conviction crystalized after the war. The death of Union soldiers was memorialized as having "great remissions and redemptions," sanctifying the American nation. He preached, "By the blood of their sacrifice these dead have consecrated our free institutions." See Horace Bushnell, "Reverses Needed" (1861), in *The Spirit in Man: Sermons and Selections*, ed. Mary Bushnell Cheney (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 179–80. Google Books; Horace Bushnell, "Our Obligations to the Dead" (1865), in *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, ed. Mary Bushnell Cheney (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), 486. Google Books.

the Erie Canal can hardly be said to contribute to the Civil War, it reinforced the industrialization of the North and strengthened the ties to the Old Northwest.

Future scholars have two areas for potential investigation. First, there is evidence that sectarian leaders used their networks to capitalize on the millenarianism of New Englanders to create eccentric and utopian societies. New Englanders emigrating to western New York to work along the canal did not leave their millenarian convictions in Massachusetts. Sectarians like William Miller, Joseph Smith, and John Humphrey Noyes offered theological interpretations of the social transformation of western New York. Moreover, these sectarians formed networks of correspondence with other populist religious leaders. Their journals reveal modifications in their ministry to capture and retain spiritually-minded people in their respective movements. Parley Pratt was an example of one of these networked individuals. He became an early apologist for the Latter-Day Saint movement, but only after he began his pilgrimage as a part of the Shaker community and associated with Campbellite Sidney Rigdon. Together he and Rigdon stumbled into Mormonism, and they both advanced as masons, influencing the Latter-Day Saints along the way. Ultimately, Joseph Smith's charisma is what would solidify Pratt's and Rigdon's ties to the movement.[5] These movements offered alternatives to the nation-building efforts of Yankee Protestants by assembling as apocalyptic separatists, utopian communes, or reorganized societies. A scholar would serve the academy by delimiting the extent to which the canal influenced eccentric and utopian societies' networks and how the movements were interdependent—in theological content, shared followers, and competitive idiocrasies—and how these movements critiqued and modified Yankee Protestants' national ambition.

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[5] Cf., Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (New York: Parley Pratt, 1874). Google Books.

The second area of investigation would build upon the network graphs of reform organizations to describe how the diffusion of ideas occurred between figures of authority. The methodology of such a study would be straightforward: examine the extent and direction of communication between a sample of leaders to establish weight and prestige within the network. The academy knows figures such as Artur Tappan and William Lloyd Garrison well. The academy would be served by identifying marginal figures who have historically not received attention due to them based on their prestige among contemporaries. Related to this, within Rochester itself, many of these reformers live in proximity. Describing the relationship between Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Fredrick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, Isaac and Amy Post, and more could reveal an American analogy to the British Clapham Sect. Each of these figures resided within the Corn Hill neighborhood of Rochester and was known to spend Sunday afternoons at Anthony's house. The interpersonal relationships formed within the reform network itself are a fascinating subject of study. For example, Elizabeth Cady was the cousin of Gerrit Smith. Smith introduced Elizabeth to her husband, a fellow abolitionist. Their efforts—along with those of the Posts—convinced Fredrick Douglass to locate his efforts in Rochester. Susan B. Anthony relocated to Rochester after walking away from teaching, and she networked with the Stantons, Posts, and Douglass. A scholar would serve the academy by demonstrating how each of these friends leveraged their friends' networks to advance their reform agenda.

APPENDIX 1

SOCIETY SUBSCRIBERS FROM NEW YORK STATE

Last Name	First Name	Location	MCBS	MCTS	MCMS	ABS	ASPT	ABCFM	NYSPT	ASFS	AASS	ABthlS
Adams	John	New York				X						
Adams	John Quincy	New York				X						
Aiken	Samuel C.	Utica						X				
Alexander	Joseph	Albany						X				
Allen	John	Rochester										
Allen	Moses	New York				X	X	X				
Astor	John Jacob	New York				X						
Anthony	Susan B.	Rochester					X					
Atkinson	Wm. Atkinson	Rochester	X	X								
Avery	Geo. A	Rochester										
Ayrault	Allen	Geneseo										X*
Backus	F.F.	Rochester	X*									
Beman	Nathan S.S.	Troy				X		X*				
Benson	Egbert	New York						X*				
Bethune	Divie	New York						X*				
Bissell	Josiah	Rochester	X*	X*			X[1]	X		X		
Bishop	Wm. C.	Rochester						X				X*
Blatchford	R.M.	New York								X*		
Bolton	John	New York				X*		X*				
Bourne	George	New York									X	
Bowen	Daniel	Buffalo										X*
Boyd	John T.	Albany						X				

[1] I believe the 1827 ASPT document incorrectly printed "Josiah Russell" as the sole supporter in Rochester. According to the directory, there was not a “Josiah Russell” who lived in Rochester 1827. From the secondary literature, we know that Josiah Bissell was active in temperance efforts. Perhaps a clerk misread Bissell's "Bi" as an "Ru." Bissell did not have great penmanship. The note from the society itself also said that because the book was signed late at night so "it will not excite surprise" that the signatures would be illegible. For absence of “Josiah Russell,” see Elisha Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester* (Rochester, 1827). Rochester Public Library Digital Collections. For ASPT comment, see American Temperance Society, *First Annual Report* (Andover, MA: 1827), 35.

Last Name	First Name	Location	MCBS	MCTS	MCMS	ABS	ASPT	ABCFM	NYSPT	ASFS	AASS	ABthlS
Boyd	James	Albany						X				
Boyd	Robert	Albany						X				
Braddish	John	Utica								X		
Bright	Rev. Edwards	Utica										X*
Bristol	Dr. Moses	Buffalo										X*
Brown	Robert	New York									X	
Bruce	Andrew	New York									X	
Bruen	Mathias	New York					X	X				
Buel	David, Jr.	Troy							X			
Bush	O.N. Bush	Rochester										
Callender	Levi	Greenville				X						
Chester	John	Albany				X		X				
Chester	William	Hudson						X				
Chester	John I.	Warwick						X				
Clinton	De Witt	Albany				X*						
Colver	Nathaniel	Greenwich										
Cooke	Thomas B	Catskill				X	X	X				
Cox	Abraham L.	New York									X	
Cox	Samuel H.	New York					X					
Corning	Gurdon	Troy						X		X		
Cornish	Samuel	New York									X	
Crawford	G.	Buffalo								X		
Crocker	L. B.	Oswego										X*
Davis	Henry	Clinton						X*				
Day	Orrin	Catskill						X				
Delavan	Edward C.	—						X				
Dickinson	Austin	New York						X				
Dunbar	Duncan	New York									X	
Dwight	Henry	Geneva						X	X			
Eddy	Thomas	New York				X						
Eley	Hervery	Rochester						X				
Fairbanks	R.A.	New York									X	
Fillmore	Rev. Mr.	Buffalo										X*
Finney	Charles G.	Whitesboro						X				
Fine	John	Ogdensburgh										X*
Fitch	Asa	Salem							X			

Last Name	First Name	Location	MCBS	MCTS	MCMS	ABS	ASPT	ABCFM	NYSPT	ASFS	AASS	ABthlS
Gardiner	Rev. Mr.	Sag-Harbour								X		
Garrison	William L.	New York									X*	
Green	Beriah	Whitesboro										
Griffith	G.P.	Troy										
Griffith	Walter	Rochester										X*
Haines	R. T.	New York					X	X				
Hammond	Wells S.	Albany									X	
Hardy	Charles E.	Ithica										X*
Ha'stead	J.B.	Castile										
Heacock	A.M.	Buffalo									X	
Hills	Eleazar	Auburn						X				
Hills	Horace	Auburn						X				
Hone	Philip	New York								X*		
Hopkins	Samuel M.	Albany						X		X		
Howell	Nathaniel W.	Canandaigua						X*				
Humphrey	Henry D.	Hudson									X	
James	J.S.	New York						X				
Jay	John	New York				X*		X*				
Jay	Peter Augustus	New York				X						
Jay	William	Bedford				X			X		X	
Jocelyn	S.S.	New York									X	
Johnson	John	Newburgh								X		
Johnson	Ben	Ithica							X			
Joy	Thaddeus	Albany										
Kellogg	Hiram H.	Salina						X				
Kendrick	Rev. N.	Hamilton										X*
Lansing	D.C.	Auburn/Utica						X		X		
Lincklean	Henry	Cazenoveia										
Leavitt	Joshua	Brooklyn									X	
Loss	L.H.	New York										
Ludlow	H.G.	New York									X	
Marshall	J.T.	Oswego										
Mason	John M	New York				X		X				
Meech	Horace	Albany										
Moore	Edward M.	Rochester									X	
Moores	Gen. _____	Plattsburg								X		

Last Name	First Name	Location	MCBS	MCTS	MCMS	ABS	ASPT	ABCFM	NYSPT	ASFS	AASS	ABthlS
Mulligan	William	New York				X						
Norton	John T.	Albany						X*				
Nott	Eliphalet	Schenectady						X*				
Olmstead	Francis	New York								X*		
Peck	Everard	Rochester		X*	X*			X	X			
Phelps	Anson G.	New York				X	X	X				
Phelps	Amos A	New York									X	
Phillips	William. W.	New York					X	X				
Platt	Jonas	New York						X*				
Porter	David	Catskill						X*				
Post	Nathaniel	Newport									X	
Powell	Thomas	Milton										
Proudfit	Alexander	Salem						X*				
Penney	Joseph	Rochester			X*			X				
Rankin	John	New York									X	
Richards	James G.	Auburn				X	X	X				
Robbins	Amalus	Troy						X				
Romeyn	John B.	New York				X						
Roosevelt	Richard Varick	New York				X						
Russell	Joseph	Troy						X				
Rutgers	Henry	New York					X	X*				
Sampson	Ashley	Rochester							X			
Sands	Joshua	Brooklyn				X						
Savage	James	Albany										
Sayre	Baxter	New York									X	
Sedgwick	Robert	New York				X						
Sheman	Josiah	Albany						X				
Shumway	Rev. Mr.	Palmyra										X*
Smith	E. Fitch	Buffalo										X*
Smith	Gerrit	Petersboro						X	X			X*
Stewart	Alvan	Utica										
Tappan	Lewis	New York									X	
Tappan	Arthur	New York					X	X			X	
Thompson	Smith	New York				X*				X*		
Tracy	Jedidiah	Troy										

Last Name	First Name	Location	MCBS	MCTS	MCMS	ABS	ASPT	ABCFM	NYSPT	ASFS	AASS	ABthlS
Troup	Robert	New York				X*						
Truair	John	New York								X*		
Vandusen	John	Hudson								X		
Van Rensselaer	Stephen	Albany				X	X	X*				
Van Rensselaer	Thomas	New York									X	
Varick	Richard	New York				X*		X*				
Vincent	Mathews	Rochester	X*									
Walworth	Reuben H.	Albany							X			
Ward	Levi A.	Rochester		X*								
Ward	Levi, Jr.	Rochester	X*									
Ward	Samuel	—				X	X					
Webster	G.B.	—										
Weld**	Theodore D	Pompey					X				X	
Wickes	Eliphalet	Jamacia								X		
Williams	William	Oneida Co.				X		X				
Wheeler	Edwards	New York									X	
Whittier	John Greenleaf	—					X					
Wright	E. Fitch	New York									X	
Wright	Richard	Schenectady									X	
Wright	Theodore S.	New York									X	
Woolsey	William	New York				X*		X				

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ABSTRACT

"THE BOND OF UNION": YANKEE PROTESTANTISM,
NATIONAL AMBITION, AND THE ERIE CANAL,
1817–1851

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New York Protestants modified their faith to address the social conditions wrought by the Erie Canal. The Erie Canal was a triumph of early republic engineering, and New Yorkers interpreted the process of organizing, building, and celebrating its construction with nationalistic fervor. In their minds, the accomplishment vindicated the early republic. The religious convictions of New Yorkers had an additional impact. Because New Yorkers inherited their theological categories from New England, they interpreted the experience through the lens of providence. For them, the canal confirmed both the legitimacy of the young nation and New Yorkers' unique place in history. So, when the moral degradation wrought as the western frontier rapidly urbanized, New Yorkers organized dense networks of reform societies to address the perceived moral decline. Network analysis demonstrated that these societies were not bourgeois efforts, even though they were a "united front." Instead, the ordinary New Yorkers who had contributed to bond markets to construct the canal also contributed to reform societies. This effort reflexively changed New York Protestantism by reinforcing voluntarism and generating the marketization of Yankee evangelicalism.

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