

VERMONT HISTORY

THE VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY • VOL. 69, SUPPLEMENT • WINTER 2001

SYMPOSIUM SUPPLEMENT

Generation of Change: Vermont, 1820–1850

Reform

Religion

Work

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VERMONT HISTORY

*The
Proceedings of the
Vermont Historical Society*

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WINTER 2001

VOL. 69, SYMPOSIUM SUPPLEMENT

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VERMONT HISTORY

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(ISSN 0042-4161)

Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *Historical Abstracts* and *America: History and Life*.

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Vermont History: The Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society, published two times a year by the Vermont Historical Society, whose offices, library, and museum are located in the Pavilion Building, Montpelier, Vermont. Second-class postage paid at Montpelier, Vermont.

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Introduction

On September 18, 1999 the Vermont Historical Society hosted the first in a series of biennial symposia. This symposia program is a critical part of the Society's goal to assume "a statewide leadership role in promoting an understanding of Vermont history by improving and expanding public access to its collections and by expanding its interpretive and educational efforts." It is also an important piece of the Society's commitment to strengthening and encouraging new scholarship by cultivating and drawing upon the expertise of the research and academic community in the state and beyond its borders to create public programs, long-distance learning opportunities, internships, and fellowships.

Presented in conjunction with the Society's exhibit, "Generation of Change: Vermont 1820-1850," the day-long symposium brought together nearly one hundred individuals to discuss issues affecting the lives of Vermonters during the period that has been called by some historians, "Vermont's Golden Age." Among the major topics of the period were slavery, temperance, religious diversity, shifting governmental policies toward education and imprisonment, political partisanship, altered work patterns, and economic innovation. This volume contains the papers that served as the basis for presentations on three facets of Antebellum Vermont history—"Reform," "Religion," and "Work." The publication of proceedings, as a special issue of *Vermont History*, is part of the educational outreach component of this biennial program.

We wish to thank heartily all those who participated and made this a successful event for the Society. In particular, we thank Paul Searls of the University of Vermont for his work as moderator, especially during the "Needs & Opportunities" session, which was designed to discuss the current state of research in Antebellum Vermont history and to delineate new areas for scholarly investigation. We thank Michael Sherman and Alan Berolzheimer for their expertise in editing and preparing this issue of *Vermont History* for publication. The Society also wishes to thank the A. D. Henderson Foundation, Inc., and Denis, Ricker and Brown Insurance Agency, Inc., for underwriting a major portion of the costs associated with the "Generation of Change" symposium.

In fall 2001, the Society will convene its second biennial symposium—"The Future of Vermont History in the Twenty-first Century:

Needs and Opportunities.” This symposium will review the current state of research in the field and discuss new or under-researched areas of Vermont history. We hope that you will join us in 2001 and participate in shaping the direction of future biennial symposium topics.

Gainor B. Davis
Director



Can Faith Change the World? Religion and Society in Vermont's Age of Reform

By the mid-1830s, Vermonters were the most churchgoing people in the Protestant world. Eighty percent attended church regularly. If any people had the spiritual power to transform the world, they did.

By RANDOLPH ROTH

Vermont's great age of reform is known today for its moral crusades, especially the campaigns to end slavery, protect Indian rights, increase observance of the Sabbath, improve education, end war, rehabilitate criminals, and prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol. Those crusades were founded on faith. Most Vermont reformers, like most moral reformers today, were willing to use the power of the government to force their moral vision upon the recalcitrant. But they realized that government action alone could not change the world. Only a spiritual revival, born of human effort and God's grace, could transform the hearts and minds of Vermonters and usher in a genuine era of reform.

Such a revival did appear in Vermont after the War of 1812. Vermonters young and old joined churches by the thousands and dedicated themselves to ushering in Christ's thousand-year reign of peace on earth. By the mid-1830s, Vermonters were the most churchgoing people in the Protestant world. Eighty percent attended church regularly. If any people had the spiritual power to transform the world, they did.

As Abby Hemenway's *Gazetteer* reminds us, life in Vermont towns centered on churches. Most were evangelical. They included the Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Free Will Baptists, and Methodists. Evangelical churches had rigorous standards for full church membership. Prospective members had to testify before the congrega-

.....

tion that they had been “born again”—that they had experienced an indwelling of the Holy Spirit and that God’s grace had given them the power to do good and be good. Evangelical church members were subject to the “watch and care” of their churches. They would be disciplined or excommunicated if they fell back into sin. Only a minority of the adults and teenagers who attended evangelical churches met the test for full membership, but such members comprised a large portion of the townspeople who remained in town and prospered from decade to decade. Many influential Vermonters were devout.

Many churches were not Evangelical: the Episcopalians, Unitarians, Free Congregationalists, Christians, and Universalists. Their test for membership was simple and very American: If you paid to support the church, you were a member. Although these churches required a lower level of spiritual commitment for full membership, their members were as committed to Christian ideals as were Vermonters who attended evangelical churches. Nonevangelical churches, like evangelical churches, enjoyed extraordinarily wide and enthusiastic support during the Age of Reform.

Vermonters also created and populated the great new religious movements of the time. William Miller, the founder of the Seventh Day Adventist church, was born across the state line in nearby Granville, New York, but he lived in Poultney for a time and considered Vermont his home. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, founders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, were also from Vermont. John Humphrey Noyes, the leader of the “perfectionists,” was from Putney. Noyes believed that the Bible had been misread: The second coming of Christ had occurred in 70 A.D., when Christ appeared before his disciples, so the millennium had already begun. God had given humans the power to be perfect—they simply did not realize it, and so had kept sinning. Noyes urged his followers to act on this knowledge. In 1838 they founded a perfectionist community, based initially in Putney. The perfectionists were chased out of town a few years later, but they regrouped in Oneida, New York, where their religious commune survived for forty years. They made their living by manufacturing brooms, bear traps, and what is known today as Oneida silverware. They did not believe in private property or in monogamous marriage. They practiced communal ownership of property and “complex” marriage, an institution in which every adult was married to every other adult in the sect, spiritually and sexually. The Noyesian perfectionists believed that possessiveness in property and persons, a legacy of sin, would disappear once humans embraced the uplifting power of God’s grace.

Vermont was thus a peculiarly spiritual place. Vermont’s reformers

viewed their efforts to change the world as an extension of their efforts as Christians to renew their society spiritually, to live by Christian ideals.

But could faith change the world? Vermont's reformers were certain it could, especially during the first decades of the reform era. Reform was on the rise. Peace reigned internationally. Democratic regimes were on the rise throughout Latin America. The British empire abolished slavery. Alcohol consumption was down, school attendance up, and the so-called "Civilized Tribes" of the American Southwest—the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole—were embracing Christianity. Crime rates fell, and it appeared that the nation's new penitentiaries—including the Vermont State Prison in Windsor—were rehabilitating felons successfully through a regimen of hard work and daily prayer. The millennium appeared at hand.

If so, were reform movements necessary? Some reformers elsewhere in the nation believed that reform movements were misguided. To them, faith alone had the power to change the world. Charles Grandison Finney, the great Presbyterian revivalist from New York, hated slavery but opposed abolition. He believed that true interracial harmony would come to the South only through evangelism. If they saw the light, slave-owners would free their slaves voluntarily and former slaves would embrace their former masters in a spirit of forgiveness. Any other solution to the slavery problem would lead to violence and enduring hatred. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a transcendentalist, also opposed reform movements, even though he embraced their aims. Forcing people to change was futile, he believed; only God could change them. For Emerson, the overriding necessity was to get in touch with the "oversoul." Emerson believed that God was in everything. Those who saw and heard God would follow God's will and make it manifest in the world by leading righteous lives. The devout could change the world, but only by changing themselves.

Few Vermont reformers embraced the views of Finney or Emerson. Faith alone might reform most Vermonters eventually, but that could take a long time, and evil caused suffering in the here and now. Furthermore, not everyone was a Vermonter. The chance of ever redeeming urban taverners, Southern slaveowners, or Western Indian killers was slim. A few Vermont reformers withdrew, as did the Mormons and the perfectionists, to form more perfect societies, but most embraced practical measures—social pressure and government coercion—to force change upon the unwashed and the unwilling. Vermont's practical reformers recognized, however, that the source of their strength was spiritual. Faith was still the most certain and effective way to change individual and social behavior.

So did faith change the world, at least in Vermont? The answer to that question, alas, is the answer to nearly every historical question: yes, no, and maybe.

The great revival, as Jeff Potash observes, started modestly, town by town, neighborhood by neighborhood. A new preacher would arrive who was effective and who reached people. Churchgoers would feel a sudden sense of conviction: "I don't have grace. I'm selfish. I'm wicked. I'm going to hell. I need God's help to be a better person. My children need God's help. My spouse needs God's help. So do my neighbors." Weighed down by their sinfulness, churchgoers fell on their knees and asked forgiveness. They might come forward to the front pew in their churches, called the "anxious bench," and struggle publicly against the devil within. The preacher would step down from the pulpit, lay his hands on them, and ask the Lord, "Please, get that sinfulness out. Give them the power to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior."

Spiritual awakening swept whole towns. Dozens, even hundreds of townspeople could have "born again" experiences within the space of a few months. Suddenly the community would be energized. Church membership increased. Churches sent missions into other neighborhoods and held special prayer meetings and Bible readings. They printed temperance pamphlets for free distribution in the South, the West, or the cities of the Atlantic coast, where the awakening wasn't strong.

The awakening took off in 1816, "the year with no summer," when crops failed across the Northern Hemisphere. People turned to God in that year of want. Thereafter, the awakening got stronger and more self-conscious year by year. By the 1830s, the faithful did not simply wait for God to bestow awakenings on the unchurched; they instigated them. Congregations hired famous itinerant revivalists from out of town who were known to have a gift for saving souls. One of the most famous was Jedidiah Burchard, who came to Vermont in 1835 and was paid to conduct revivals in many towns.

Before an itinerant arrived, townspeople held "preparation meetings," special prayer meetings that lasted for two or three weeks to get everybody ready for the appearance of the great revivalist. When the revivalist finally arrived, people came from miles around to be born again. Such revivals were tremendously successful. They persisted into the 1840s and helped create Vermont's unprecedented levels of church membership.

As diaries and letters of the period reveal, Vermonters felt that God was among them, doing something special in Vermont. God meant Vermonters to have a special mission and purpose in the world. That was why the Holy Spirit had been at work in Vermont. New church members were eager to bear witness to their faith. That was the Christian's

duty: to make the world a more godly place, to preach the message of salvation.

The great revival encouraged interdenominational cooperation. Before the awakening, Methodist preachers were still beaten on occasion by Congregationalist thugs, and Universalists were denounced as atheists. But by the 1830s and 1840s, members of those egalitarian denominations worked side by side with members of other denominations—including the more urbane Episcopalians and Unitarians—to sponsor revivals, missions, and prayer meetings. All but the Methodists supported interdenominational Sunday schools. Every denomination embraced the idea that interdenominational cooperation and friendly competition would make every Protestant church stronger. Each would get more members and enjoy more spiritual fervor. What united Christians was more important than what divided denominations.

One important legacy of the great revival was that interdenominational cooperation among Protestants laid the foundation, spiritually and financially, for broad reform movements. Churchgoers, rich and poor, gave generously to their churches and to the philanthropic and reform organizations they sponsored. And as the late William Gilmore discovered, Vermonters purchased an unprecedented number of religious, educational, and reform tracts, and through mission and reform organizations bought thousands more for free distribution outside Vermont.

Another important legacy of the great revival was the greater influence of women in town life and politics. Women gained power through the churches. Three of every five church members were female. Most churches still had rules that only men could vote to select a minister or decide church policy. But women won full voting rights in some churches and several women became successful itinerant revivalists. More commonly, churchgoing women organized their own reform movements and circulated their own reform petitions among women. Female militancy was crucial to the success of reform movements in Vermont.

At the same time, the great revival empowered women through the schools. Women had played a more important role in education since the Revolution. But the revival placed such profound importance on the state of a person's soul—and displayed so clearly the greater piety of women—that the idea emerged that devout women made the best teachers. Of course, finance played a part in feminizing the teaching force. Vermonters were frugal, and female teachers were paid only a third of what male teachers were paid. Vermonters could not resist a chance to serve God and spare the wallet. By the end of the great revival, two-thirds of all common school teachers were women.

Because of the great revival, a new order appeared in town life and

politics. That order drew its strength from the subtle forms of coercion and discrimination that New England has always been known for. As church members became more numerous and militant, church membership became more important as a mark of good character. Church members gradually took control of local businesses and town governments, and pressured nonmembers more and more insistently to join churches and temperance societies or leave town. Church members were more likely to receive business loans from their neighbors. They were more likely to raise the capital necessary to form partnerships. They were more likely to stick together with their own family members and to lend money to one another.

That connectedness made church members more successful and more powerful. Church members were more likely than nonmembers to stay in town from decade to decade and were more likely to be upwardly mobile. So even though full church members comprised a minority of the adult population at any one time, they comprised a majority among those who remained in town over time, and an overwhelming majority among the rich and powerful. And as the power of church members increased, nonmembers were increasingly isolated. They were less likely to get loans or find business partners, and more likely to live on the margins of local society. They found it more difficult to get ahead. Many nonmembers moved to the cities, to upstate New York, or to the Old Northwest. Their departure further enhanced the power of church members in Vermont.

As church membership became critical to success in business and politics, the churches changed. In the early 1800s, when churches had relatively few full members and little social influence, Christians imagined themselves to be in much the same situation as the early Christians in the Book of Acts. They saw themselves as members of a small band of disciples who bore witness to their faith in a hostile or indifferent world. To them, Christianity was not about power. It was about showing love and concern for their fellow human beings, especially their fellow church members, and about acknowledging and accepting human frailty. Most church discipline cases involved interpersonal sins: gossip, slander, or fraudulent dealings in economic relations. And churches hesitated to excommunicate people, even when members had committed egregious sins. They worked with sinners, sometimes for years, before expelling them, hoping that the sinners would see the error of their ways, ask forgiveness, and return to good standing.

As churches became more powerful, the gospel of love declined. Church membership became a sign of respectability. Did a person drink? Smoke? Observe the Sabbath? Christians embraced a rote morality that focused on the external trappings of the Christian life. Concern about slander

and gossip diminished. Church discipline focused not on interpersonal sins, but on violations of the code of respectable conduct. As church members pressured others to embrace the new standard of respectability, they became vicious gossips. They would speak, for instance, about a neighbor who came into town so drunk that he fell off his wagon. In 1800, if a member had said such a thing about another church member, even if that member had in fact been drunk, the gossip would have been disciplined, because the first duty of a church member was to go to the man who had fallen, pick him up, bring him before the church council, and help him with his alcohol problem. Now, as the church records of the 1830s and 1840s reveal, if church members caught a man drunk, they expelled him from the church, and thought the less of him and the more of themselves for it. The sinner was back in the outside world. Christians lived in the inner world.

There is a wonderful story about this change in attitude, probably apocryphal, but true to the spirit of the times, from South Newbury. Mr. Lyon was the town drunk. He experienced religion, joined the church, and became the toast of the town. But Mr. Lyon soon went back to drinking and the church excommunicated him. A note was found tacked up outside the store which said, "Whereas Mr. Lyon has not kept his promise to reform, we the Church Committee return him to the outside world from whence he came. By the Church Committee." The next day another notice appeared. "Whereas Mr. Lyon is so much worse than when he joined the church, we of the outside world refuse to accept him back. By the Outside Committee."¹ The story gets at the heart of the change that was occurring. As people felt more pressure to be good and show signs of reform, more of these jokes cropped up, and animosity increased toward the churches. In the town of Strafford, where nonmembers were still numerous, they appointed the town skeptic to enforce the Sabbath laws. The skeptic, Abel Rich, was nonchalant when a revivalist confronted him in 1835 before a crowd of neighbors and asked if he had got religion. "None to boast of, I tell ye," Rich said. He added that he bore no grudge against the preacher, but declared that if the preacher "should be mobbed and I was the only witness, I would forget it before morning-g-g, that I would-d-d."²

Such deflating humor became more important to nonmembers as they felt greater pressure to conform. Nonmembers organized their own gatherings around simple secular events. For example, if the mail was to arrive by stage on Sunday morning, men who were nonmembers would congregate at the post office, which was usually across the green from the church. They would get rip-roaring drunk and yell at the church members as they went in and out of church. A culture war had broken out.

Another result of the increasing polarization of church members and nonmembers was an increase in expressions of misogyny among men who were not church members. Such misogyny appeared frequently in Democratic Party newspapers, as churchgoing women turned against the policies of the Jackson administration on slavery, Indian rights, alcohol, and Sabbath observance. Democrats who wanted to defend their right to behave as they pleased complained that women were not being kept in their proper place. The women's rights movement had given birth to an anti-women's rights movement.

Yet another result of the increased pressure to join churches was that people who joined during revivals were three times more likely to end up excommunicated than people who joined in spiritually calm times. That pattern held for both males, who were always most likely to be excommunicated, and females. Many converts backslid within months of joining.

Church members were aware of these problems. Revivals got people into churches, but long-time members had no choice but to kick the recent converts out if they returned to drinking, Sabbath breaking, or skipping church. Long-time members wondered aloud: Were they Christianizing the world or bringing worldly people into the church who were not yet ready to appreciate Christ's message? Were the churches neglecting spiritual concerns in their campaign for more members, more donations, more power to shape the world?

It was at this time, also, that racism began to creep into the speech of white church members. As white Vermonters turned against one another over moral and spiritual issues, white Christians seemed to be trying to shore up their own self-esteem at the expense of blacks, who were depicted in written exchanges between whites as archetypes of unrespectability. William Townsend, a young man from Reading who had joined a church after years of wayward behavior, tried to convince his fifteen-year-old brother, Dennis, to take a different path than he had and join a church right away. William chided Dennis for his love of fiddling, warning that it would lead to idleness and dissipation. "It is true a fiddle makes a very pretty little squeaking noys and is a good instrument for Negroes. . . . If you wish to be a real fine White Nigger[,] practice fiddling and when you get learnt you can go and play for Dancing parties." William told Dennis that he would never become rich or great if he fiddled "like them black ones."³ In other words, you had to act "white" if you wished to be successful.

Such racist remarks were common. Church leaders declared in their official pronouncements that "Sambo" was welcome at their revival meetings, and then wondered why blacks, who seemed so interested in the Bible and in religious hymns, would not attend.

Finally, the great revival sometimes had extraordinarily incongruous consequences. Indeed, in several instances the great revival led, through bizarre chains of events, to rape or murder.

Rebecca Peake of Corinth had been young and poor when she married a much older man, a widower who already had children by his first wife. The marriage landed her on a prosperous farm. There was gossip about her, suggesting that she was a fortune hunter. She was not popular with her neighbors.⁴

The marriage was a success, despite the predictions of Peake's detractors, until her husband's grown sons by his first marriage failed economically. Her husband rewrote his will and left all the property that he and Rebecca owned to his children by his first marriage. He cut out his children with Rebecca, saying that they would do well once his older children were back on their feet. Rebecca was furious, but she had no recourse. She could not go to her neighbors, because they believed the will served her right. She could not go to court because she had no legal rights there. If she were to divorce her husband, she would win nothing but the right to any property she had brought to the marriage; she had brought none.

Rebecca went to Randolph in 1835 to a revival meeting, at which the great itinerant preacher, Jedidiah Burchard, appeared. She prayed intensely for days. She felt the sudden indwelling of the spirit, and God spoke to her: Her husband and his children by his first marriage deserved to die. She was to be God's instrument in their deaths. After the next revival meeting, she walked to the apothecary and bought arsenic, which she claimed was to kill rats. She went home and mixed the arsenic into the hash she served that night. The older son died, but the younger son and her husband survived. Spiritual fervor could lead to many things.

The Peakes' marriage was not the only one affected by the great revival. Zenas and Joseph Burnham were brothers from Pomfret, where both farmed. Their wives had been born again in the revival of 1816-17. The women became respectable and socially ambitious, and like many women who joined churches during the great revival, decided to limit the size of their families, so that they could invest more resources, materially and spiritually, in the children they had.

The Burnhams had no more children after their wives joined the church. How did they avoid having children? Because Zenas and Joseph complained that their wives were "no fun anymore" after they joined the church, and because the only sure way Vermonters knew to control family size was to avoid sex, it is clear that both women had decided to limit or eliminate sex with their husbands.

Joseph and Zenas were frustrated men. They were not church mem-

bers and so could not find solace in their faith. They were hard-working men who had provided well for their wives and children. But they felt they had been wronged by their wives. Zenas and Joseph therefore made an arrangement with their niece, Julia Burnham, who rented a farm from them with her husband, Samuel Burnham, one of their cousins. Samuel was "slow" and his family was poor. Joseph and Zenas brought their niece presents of ribbon or cloth, and she in return had sex with them if they happened by while Samuel was not at home. Their *ménage à trois* turned into a foursome when Julia and Samuel's young servant girl, Sarah Avery, also agreed to exchange sex for presents. Sarah was a town pauper from Reading, eighteen years old and very poor. She had no prospects. Once the Burnham brothers began to flatter her and lavish gifts on her, she joined their sexual circle.

Julia Burnham and Sarah Avery decided one day that they would get Joseph and Zenas a present for all they had done for them. They had no money to buy a present, so they thought of the next best thing: They would bring Sarah's fourteen-year-old half sister, Susan Vose, up from Reading, where she was a town pauper, under the pretense of working on Julia and Samuel's farm. But the real purpose was to present her as a sexual gift to the Burnham brothers.

Susan Vose did not realize the danger she was in. She was delighted to have a chance to live with her sister once again. But after ten days on the Burnham's farm, having withstood repeated attempts by Joseph Burnham to seduce her with kind words and offers of presents, she panicked. She tried to run away, but Julia Burnham and Sarah Avery caught her and dragged her into the bedroom. They took off her clothes and held her down while Joseph raped her. They left the room and locked her in the bedroom that night with Joseph, who raped her again. She finally escaped and told the neighbors what had happened.

Joseph and Julia were thoroughly punished for their crime. The guards and the prisoners at Windsor prison knew what the Burnhams had done and persecuted them for it. Joseph died three months after entering the prison, in part because the warden and the prison doctor denied him treatment, believing he was feigning illness to avoid work. Julia, it appears, was raped by one or more prison guards.

Vermont church members did not see the irony of the incident: that the revival itself had set the horrible chain of events in motion and had driven some formerly respectable (although not churchgoing) people to do things that they might not otherwise have done.

The revival also played a role in causing the tenfold increase in wife murder that hit northern New England in the 1830s and 1840s. The impact of the revival on most marriages was positive. The average marriage

became less violent because of the companionate vision of marriage that the revival and the temperance movement promoted. Men, and to a greater extent women, were less likely to strike or abuse one another verbally. But the revival and the temperance movement stigmatized men who were not successful and who continued to drink, smoke, and swear, and placed them in an increasingly difficult situation. Their chances of success had diminished because informal networks of mutual support favored church members, and their chances of marital contentment diminished as their wives began to insist that they change their behavior. Such marriages became explosive. Paradoxically, the great revival led simultaneously to a decrease in nonlethal violence and an increase in lethal violence in marriage.

Of course, no one blamed the revival for the murder of Rebecca Peake's stepson, the rape of Susan Vose, or the murder of so many wives. But resentment of the revival increased and by the mid-1830s nonmembers grew militant, arguing that church members discriminated against them and were bent on destroying their way of life. And elite church members, especially among the Unitarians, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists, grew disillusioned with the revival as it brought fewer and fewer "respectable" Vermonters into their churches and forced long-time members to spend more and more of their time expelling new recruits. Elite church members seldom said publicly that the revival had gone too far, but they said so privately. They ordered the ministers of their churches to pull back, which they did. The great revival continued into the early 1840s with the support of Adventists and other enthusiasts in the hill towns; but the revival was elsewhere in decline. The revival did not die because spiritual enthusiasm burnt itself out naturally. It died because respectable church members came to believe that spiritual progress would be more certain if it came with less emotional intensity and was less populist in its appeal.

These stories point to the great irony of the revival, which is one of the great lessons of the Bible: Even the devout cannot know God's will. Evil can come out of good. Good can come out of evil. Many Christians forgot that for a time amid the enthusiasm of the revival.

In the end, faith changed Vermont and the nation as a whole for the better. Marriages were less violent, alcohol ruined fewer lives, and a campaign for racial justice began. But the legacy of the great revival, like all human legacies, was mixed.

NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, the essay is based on evidence and analysis available in three works by the author: *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut*

River Valley of Vermont, 1791–1850 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); “The Other Masonic Outrage: The Death and Transfiguration of Joseph Burnham,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 14 (1994):35–69; and “Spousal Murder in Northern New England, 1776–1865,” in Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds., *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 65–93. See also David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1790–1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939); P. Jeffrey Potash, “Welfare of the Regions Beyond,” *Vermont History*, 46 (1978):109–128; Potash, *Vermont’s Burned-Over District: Patterns of Community Development and Religious Activity, 1761–1850* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991); and William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1830* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

¹ *Vermont History News*, 35 (1984), 118.

² William B. Parker, *Life and Public Services of Justin Smith Morrill* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 14.

³ William Townsend, Jr. to Aurelia Townsend, 1 September 1833; and to Mr. and Mrs. William Townsend, Sr., 18 September 1833 and 1 February 1834, Townsend Family Papers, Vermont Historical Society.

⁴ “Trial of Mrs. Rebecca Peake, indicted for the murder of Ephraim Peake, tried at Orange County Court, Dec. term, 1835. Embracing the evidence, arguments of counsel, charge, and sentence” (Montpelier: E. P. Walton, 1836).



Rowland T. Robinson, Rokeby, and the Underground Railroad in Vermont

Rowland Thomas Robinson and Rachel Gilpin Robinson were early converts to Garrisonian abolitionism. Devout Quakers, they believed that slavery was a sin to be opposed by every acceptable means, including aid to fugitive slaves.

By JANE WILLIAMSON

In 1896, Wilbur H. Siebert wrote to the descendants of Rowland Thomas and Rachel Gilpin Robinson at Rokeby, their home in Ferrisburgh, Vermont. Siebert, an associate professor of history at Ohio State University, sent the survey he used to gather data from aged abolitionists and, more often, from their children, for his book on the underground railroad, published in 1898.¹ Siebert's request was answered by Rowland Evans Robinson, Rowland and Rachel's youngest child, then sixty-three years old. His lengthy reply was clear, thoughtful, and to the point.² He had been a child during the 1830s and 1840s, but recalled "seeing four fugitives at a time in my father's house and quite often one or two harboring there." His memory of the four was still vivid, because one "carried the first pistols I ever saw and other [illegible] the first bowie knife." He says nothing of attempted captures or that fugitives were concealed at Rokeby.

In 1935 Siebert contacted the Robinsons again for another book, this time focused on the underground railroad in Vermont.³ Now a generation later, this request was answered by the abolitionist's grandson and namesake.⁴ The two letters have barely a point in common. The second is brief and clearly taken, not from history, but from Rowland E. Robinson's underground railroad stories. R. E. Robinson is known primarily for his books of Vermont folktales, but late in his career he wrote several underground railroad stories in which the compassionate and clever Yankees outsmart the evil slave catchers. His son's description of

grandfather foiling the slave catcher and the county sheriff, as well as his use of such phrases as “we uns” and “kotched,” are taken straight from the pages of *Out of Bondage*.⁵ Given his family background, it is not surprising that these Robinson stories were taken at face value. Siebert cited them as fact in his Vermont book, stating that R. E. Robinson “had actually heard most of the anecdotes he wrote and published, although he made use of fictitious names for his characters.”⁶ Much as he may have wanted to believe this, Siebert cited no evidence of it, and there is none in the collection at Rokeby. More tellingly, Robinson related none of these stories in his 1896 letter to Siebert.

The late nineteenth century saw a flowering of abolitionist reminiscences and tales of the underground railroad capped, in 1898, by Siebert’s book, which remained the standard work for decades.⁷ Siebert’s book and his standing as a professor of history elevated the legend and lore of the underground railroad to the status of serious history. This romantic image went unchallenged until 1961, when Larry Gara took the mythology apart piece by piece and exposed the kernels of truth from which it grew. Gara argued convincingly that unlike the well-oiled, efficient, and clandestine railroad of lore, actual aid to fugitives was provided casually if not haphazardly and often delivered quite openly, especially in New England. He contended that North and South joined in aggrandizing the extent and effectiveness of the underground railroad, because it served each of their propaganda needs equally, particularly as the sectional crisis grew after 1850.⁸

But in permanently altering underground railroad historiography, Gara’s book also seems to have brought it to a premature end. Instead of the outpouring of revisionist studies one might have expected, only a few have appeared, and those relatively recently.⁹ They have looked at individual fugitives or locales, and despite the narrow focus have revealed much about this perplexing chapter of American history. I believe the future of underground railroad historiography lies in this case study approach, and I offer a Vermont case study here.

Rowland Thomas and Rachel Gilpin Robinson were early converts to Garrisonian abolitionism. Devout Quakers, they believed that slavery was a sin to be opposed by every acceptable means, including aid to fugitive slaves. Their voluminous correspondence contains a rare cache of letters providing specific and detailed information on several fugitives; it forms the basis of our interpretation at Rokeby Museum and will be my focus here.¹⁰

A particularly rich letter from Oliver Johnson, a Vermonter and most regular and frequent correspondent, who wrote from his various postings as an antislavery agent, was sent in January 1837 from Jenner



Rowland Thomas Robinson (1796–1879) and Rachel Gilpin Robinson (1799–1862). Carte-de-visite studio photos from the mid-1840s to 1850s. The photo of Rowland is from the Brassart, Johnson & Williams studio, New York City; the photo of Rachel was taken by “Frank F. Currier, Artist,” location unknown. Courtesy of Rokeby Museum.

Township, Pennsylvania.¹¹ Located just thirty miles from “the [Mason-Dixon] line,” the area had “at all times no small number of runaway slaves, but they are generally caught unless they proceed farther north.” Johnson wrote to interest Robinson in hiring one of those runaways, Simon, who had been sold to a “soul-driver” and for whose capture a reward had been posted. “When he came here (some time in December) . . . he was destitute of decent clothing, and unable to proceed . . . William C. Griffith, the son of a friend, who has often rendered assistance to runaways, kindly offered to keep him until spring. . . . it is not considered safe for him to remain here after winter has gone by as search will no doubt be made for him.”

Many of these details confirm the conclusions of historians. In their exhaustive book on runaway slaves, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger state that the most common reason for absconding was

the fear or fact of being sold, and that slaves often timed their escapes carefully.¹² Holidays, when slaves commonly received a few days' rest, gave runaways a modest head start, as absences would go undetected for a day or two. Simon escaped in December—possibly at Christmas time. It is also clear that slaves were commonly recaptured from border regions, frequently without the aid or even the knowledge of local officials. But it seems that Simon also profited from the season of his escape, with the search delayed until spring.

Johnson's letter gave Simon an excellent job reference. "He is 28 years old, and appeared to me to be an honest, likely man. . . . I was so well pleased with his appearance . . . that I could not help thinking he would be a good man for you to hire. Mr. Griffith says that he is very trustworthy, of a kind disposition, and knows how to do almost all kinds of farm work. He is used to teaming, and is very good to manage horses. He says that he could beat any man in the neighborhood where he lived at mowing, cradling, or pitching."

Letters from New York Quakers Charles Marriott¹³ and Joseph Beale¹⁴ in 1842 and 1844 contain similar passages. Beale said of fugitive Jeremiah Snowden that "Brother John Nickolson thinks Jeremiah can be very useful to a farmer needing such a man." And Marriott assured Robinson that John Williams was "a good chopper and farmer," and that his wife Martha was "useful and well conducted in the house."

The farm operation at Rokeby was at its height during these years—the so-called "golden age" of Vermont sheep farming—and the Robinsons had quite small families, so the need for hired hands was probably constant. Johnson, Beale, and Marriott were well aware of that need, and no doubt thought of Rokeby as a likely place for fugitives needing work. R. E. Robinson also mentioned work in his 1896 letter to Siebert. He identified the Charlotte, Vermont, farm of his uncle and aunt Nathan and Abigail Hoag as a nearby "station" and said that fugitives "sometimes stayed there for months working on the farm."¹⁵ It is clear from these letters that fugitives were driven by the need for work as much as—or more than—by fear for their safety.

But safety was an issue in these letters, and all three correspondents made it abundantly clear that Vermont was a safe haven for fugitives. Johnson said that Simon had "intended going to Canada in the spring, but says he would prefer to stay in the U.S., if he could be safe. I have no doubt he will be perfectly safe with you." John and Martha Williams had been with Marriott's sister since the fall, as work could easily be found for them, but, Marriott said, "the recent decision of the Supreme Court as to the unconstitutionality of jury trial laws for them has decided us to send them further north either to you or to Canada."

He concluded, "If they could be taken in by thee, we should think them safer."

The case Marriott referred to was *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*. Pennsylvania, like Vermont and many other northern states, had passed a personal liberty law to circumvent the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. These state laws required masters or slave catchers to seek warrants before apprehending fugitives, and some guaranteed runaways a jury trial before a certificate of removal could be granted. The *Prigg* decision found Pennsylvania's law, and all others by extension, unconstitutional because it conflicted with a master's right under the federal act.¹⁶ Of course, *Prigg* would have had the same effect on Vermont law as on New York's, so Marriott's desire to move the Williamses probably indicated his belief that recapture would not be attempted in Vermont.

Beale also raised the safety issue in regard to Jeremiah Snowden, but counterposed it directly with work. He said that it would be "safer for him to be in Massachusetts or Vermont *if* [emphasis added] work is to be had for him," and that "we were unwilling to risk his remaining, *although* [emphasis added] we had abundance of work for him at this busy season."

However safe from rendition fugitives in Vermont may, in fact, have been, their own sense of security was certainly another matter. In an 1844 letter,¹⁷ Rachel Robinson described two fugitives who "were afraid to remain any where within our glorious republic lest the chain of servitude should again bind soul and limb. . . . they tarried with [us] only one night & were very anxious to journey on to Victoria's domain." These two were part of a group that had "fled from bondage in a whale-boat, and were pursued by an American vessel of war! Noble work!" Being pursued by a naval warship apparently instilled a fear that even the security of the Robinson home in the "most abolitionist state in the union" could not quell.

The underground rail of legend ran on a track headed straight to Canada. But Johnson and Marriott both questioned the wisdom of sending fugitives across the border. Johnson expressed his fear that in Canada Simon "may fall into bad company; but if he is under your guardianship, he may become a useful man." Marriott was concerned about work, saying that in Canada, "they [fugitives] are too numerous to obtain profitable employment."

The story of the young fugitive Charles Nelson also sheds light on the runaway's need for employment, the safety of Vermont, and Canada as a destination. Chauncy L. Knapp, Vermont's secretary of state and an active abolitionist, wrote to Mason Anthony of Saratoga, New York, in 1838, "to inform you that the lad who is indebted to you and your

father's great kindness for a safe arrival at my friend R. T. Robinson's, is now sitting in my office in the State House."¹⁸ He went on, "By my friend Robinson's earnest request I have assumed the office of guardian to Charles . . . if he should make such proficiency as I have reason to hope, it is my purpose to place him in a good family, ere long, as an apprentice to the art of printing."

An undated clipping of a short article written by Knapp and published in the *Gazette and Standard* and an 1860 letter from Robinson flesh out the full story. Charles was traveling as manservant to his master who was honeymooning in upstate New York. Leery of bringing Charles too near Canada, Campbell, the master, left him in the care of a hotel keeper in Schenectady while he and his bride visited Niagara Falls. Local abolitionists offered to help Charles make his escape, and he was transported that night all the way to Rokeby. After a diligent but fruitless search, Campbell returned home to Vicksburg, Mississippi. Charles apparently lived up to Knapp's hopes, for the article concluded, "Charles continued to reside in Vermont, much beloved by all who knew him. He is now doing a flourishing business, in his line, not far from the forty-fifth degree of north latitude—a practical refutation of the pro-slavery fallacy that 'the colored man can't take care of himself.'"¹⁹

Oliver Johnson's January 1837 letter and a second one sent in April²⁰ provide detailed information on how fugitives traveled and support our general understanding of how they moved from house to house. Johnson said of Simon's trip that "it will be a great way for him to walk, but not worse than going to Canada." He continued, "I gave him such directions as will enable him to reach Philadelphia, where he will put himself under the direction of our friends, who will give him all needful information concerning the route to New York, at which last place he will be befriended by the 'Committee of Vigilance,' or by members of the Ex. Committee. I trust he will meet with no serious difficulty on the way." In a third letter sent in October, he asked whether "the black man [had] arrived yet from Pennsylvania?"²¹

The vigilance committees, organized and operated primarily by free blacks, were established specifically to aid fugitive slaves. The New York Committee was the first, established in 1835; the Philadelphia Committee was not organized until a few months after Johnson wrote this letter. Although both groups were relatively short-lived, they worked together very closely for a time. Records of the Philadelphia Committee for 1839 indicate that from June to December, about a third of the fugitives sent on were forwarded to the New York Committee. With officers, dues, meetings, and sometimes paid agents, these committees were the closest thing to the kind of organization imagined in the legend. They

all had rather shaky existences, however, and were most effective only briefly after passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. Centered in urban areas—Boston, New York, and Philadelphia—they functioned as nodes in a broad web of activity.²²

Among the most interesting letters in the Robinson correspondence are those between Robinson and Ephram Elliott, a slave owner in Perquimans County, North Carolina. Exchanged in the spring of 1837, they concern the former slave Jesse. Robinson wrote Elliott on Jesse's behalf to negotiate the cost of a freedom paper, "the most anxious wish of his [Jesse's] heart." In his reply,²³ Elliott admitted that Jesse's "situation at this time places it in his power to give me what he thinks proper," but went on to state that he did "not feel disposed to make any title for him for less than Three Hundred Dollars which is not more than one third what I could have had for him before he absconded If I had been disposed to sell him." Robinson wrote to present a counteroffer.²⁴ "Since leaving thy service he has by his industry and economy laid up 150\$ & he is willing to give the whole of this sum for his freedom . . . If Jesse was in possession of a larger sum he would freely offer it all for his freedom." Robinson also made clear his own unwillingness to contribute, saying "much as I and his other friends here may desire his liberty I am bound to inform thee without the least wish to offend that we cannot consciously contribute any thing towards the purchase of a slave even for his liberation; because we believe it would be recognizing a principle which God forbids." Robinson urged Elliott to accept Jesse's offer, noting that "considering his present circumstances & location," it "must be ackgd [acknowledged] liberal." Elliott conceded that Jesse "at this time is entirely out of my reach," but held firm on his price nevertheless.²⁵ Holding on to a hope that Jesse would return voluntarily, he said, "I don't know how Jesse could with clear conscience wish me to take any less. . . . If he feels disposed to come back I will meet him at any place that he will mention. And no sum of money or no Temptation shall Separate us."

The Robinson letters provide a wealth of detail that helps us to separate historical fact from fiction. Pursuit is key to the legend of the underground railroad. All the conventions of the popular understanding—the need to operate clandestinely, to communicate in code, to travel at night, and to create hiding places—arise from the assumption of hot pursuit by a determined, ruthless, and often armed slave catcher. While many fugitives were in precisely such danger in the first days and miles of their escapes, it diminished steadily as they put more and more distance between themselves and the slave South. Larry Gara noted that fugitives had already completed the truly perilous parts of their jour-

neys *before* making contact with northern white abolitionists.²⁶ By the time they reached Vermont, safety was not an issue, as Oliver Johnson, Joseph Beale, and Charles Marriott all made abundantly clear. Even the slave owner Ephram Elliott conceded that Jesse was “entirely out” of his reach. More important, the correspondence with Elliott was *initiated* by Robinson, who, by writing, revealed Jesse’s precise whereabouts—something he certainly would not have done if he thought it would put Jesse at risk.

Were fugitive slaves pursued by slave catchers across the borders of Vermont during the antebellum period? That we are still asking this question in 2001 is testimony to the incredible tenacity and power of the mythological railroad, for I have been unable to find any evidence of slave catchers in the state. Ephram Elliott is only one slave owner, but he clearly considered attempting to recapture a fugitive in Vermont to be out of the question. After searching Vermont’s antislavery and other newspapers for documentation of those incidents passed on in the oral tradition, Ray Zirblis stated flatly in his 1996 report, “There are no substantiated incidents of organized slave catching in the state.”²⁷ And Joseph Poland, Siebert’s chief informant on Vermont, said in his 1897 reply to Siebert’s questionnaire, “I know of no attempt to recover a fugitive slave from Vermont, save in the celebrated case where Judge Harrington denied the request . . . and a more recent one, in the town of Hartford, which collapsed through the force of public opinion.”²⁸

In his 1968 book *The Slavecatchers*, Stanley Campbell noted that it was simply not realistic or economically feasible for slave owners to pursue their property into the far northern states.²⁹ According to Marion McDougall, it was not just the trip north nor securing permission to seize the fugitive, difficult as both might be, but the trip back south that made the proposition so unlikely. “The risk and trouble of transporting slaves across free states were so great,” she said, that it was rarely even tried.³⁰ Agreeing with both Campbell and McDougall, Gary Collison went so far as to say that in New England, “slave hunters had to be as cautious and secretive as fugitives.”³¹ As for the expense, Franklin and Schweninger make clear that the cost of the slave catcher could easily exceed the value of the fugitive if the search extended too far or too long.³²

That said, there is one documented case of a slave recaptured on Vermont soil, although it is not a tale in the classic mode of pursuit by a slave catcher. The Hartford incident cited by Joseph Poland was reported in the August 23, 1844, issue of the *Green Mountain Freeman*.³³ Colonel S. T. Bailey of Georgia was visiting relatives in Hartford, Vermont, accompanied by a female slave who was left behind when he

went to Canada. Like Charles Nelson, she took advantage of the opportunity to escape, but instead of moving across state lines, she found shelter in a house "a few miles distant." On his return, Bailey located his missing slave with the help of Samuel Nutt, a Windsor County justice of the peace, and together they "proceeded to bind their fellow being hand and foot, in open day, in the presence of several females, threw her into a wagon, and the slaveholder drove off with his victim—neither of them have been seen since." A December issue of the *Green Mountain Freeman*³⁴ reported that, in fact, Bailey was arrested and tried for kidnapping, but was released for lack of evidence that the woman had been forcibly taken. Thus, contrary to both Vermont's antislavery reputation and Joseph Poland's memory fifty years later, local authorities failed to protect the fugitive slave.

In aggrandizing the danger, the legend also socialized it, insisting that northerners who aided fugitives took great risks, and that in breaking the federal law, they exposed themselves to arrest and fine or imprisonment. Attractive as this brave, white abolitionist image may be to some, the tone and content of the Robinson letters certainly belie it. Although there were a few northern martyrs, the vast majority operated openly and with impunity. Levi Coffin and Thomas Garrett, two great Quaker abolitionists, operated unmolested for years in the much more hostile border regions of Cincinnati, Ohio, and Wilmington, Delaware.³⁵ This aspect of underground railroad mythology is most troublesome, because it takes the spotlight off the true heroes—the fugitives—and shines it instead on their white assistants. It turns runaway slaves from active agents into the passive recipients of white benevolence.

The Robinson letters also shed light on the paths the fugitives took. Influenced by the railroad analogy, the underground railroad has been seen as a series of established stations along which a runaway traveled, in what Zirblis has called the "connect-the-dots approach."³⁶ And though there clearly were known friends and helpers along the way, each fugitive probably took a slightly, if not wholly, different route influenced more by his own needs and the family, religious, and friendship ties of his helpers than by prescription. Charles Marriott and Joseph Beale, for example, were both Quakers, and connected to Robinson by strong religious ties. The three were among a vanguard of radical abolitionists constantly agitating the New York Yearly Meeting to action; they supported the boycott of slave-made goods and were cofounders of the New York Association of Friends for the Relief of Those Held in Slavery and the Improvement of the Free People of Color. Johnson was a fellow Vermonter and member of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society. Far from sending the fugitives in their care along a predetermined route,

they all thought of Rokeby as a possible destination because of the match of work experience and need and their complete trust in Robinson. In his 1896 letter to Siebert, R. E. Robinson noted among those to whom fugitives were passed, Joseph Rogers, who was also a Quaker, a neighbor, and a close friend; and Nathan Hoag and Stephen F. Stevens, who were both Quakers and Robinson relatives. Thus it seems more accurate to envision the underground railroad as a web or network of safe homes based on family, religious, and friendship ties rather than as a linear road of anonymous stations.

Underground railroad activity seems to have dropped off at Rokeby after 1850. In 1896, R. E. Robinson could not "remember seeing a [illegible] fugitive here after 1850, though now and then an imposter called on us."³⁷ The index to the Robinson letter collection also shows that abolition dropped off sharply as the subject of correspondence after 1850. A number of events in the mid-1840s probably contributed to this decline. A lifelong Garrisonian, Rowland T. Robinson never abandoned the goal of immediate emancipation or his commitment to moral suasion, which meant that he was left out of the majority when activists began to employ political means after 1840. At the 1839 annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, for example, he was the lone member of the Vermont delegation to vote against both the majority and the use of the ballot to further the cause.³⁸ He and a small group of what one historian described as "pseudo-anarchists" resorted to disrupting meetings of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society as their views became more marginal. Finally, in 1843, the majority resigned in disgust. The Liberty Party began organizing political clubs that same year and eventually usurped the place formerly held by the abolition societies,³⁹ leaving Robinson without a venue for action. He also lost his base in the Society of Friends. Charles Marriott and several others were disowned in 1842 for their abolitionist activities, which were seen as "calculated to excite discord and disunity among friends."⁴⁰ Robinson survived this incident only to resign his membership a few years later.

Financial troubles at home also preoccupied Robinson, leaving less time and energy for the cause. The price of wool had peaked in 1840, and by 1850 he was in debt and looking for other sources of income. He made a substantial investment in his orchard in 1849, for example. And, like many abolitionists, Robinson turned to spiritualism in the years after 1850, conducting seances in his home, making contact with both his deceased father and son.

Despite these changes, Robinson never abandoned his religious beliefs nor his commitment to full civil rights for African Americans. Immediately after the war, he wrote to the Quartermaster General in Wash-

ington, D.C., offering shelter and jobs for freedmen.⁴¹ A decade later, he used his position as executor of the estate of Joseph Rogers, a fellow Quaker and abolitionist, to contribute to freedmen's education, and he sought William Lloyd Garrison's advice on which of the several black colleges was most worthy. Garrison replied in July 1878,⁴² suggesting Howard, Wilberforce, Hampton, Fiske, and Berea as possibilities. He made a special plea for Berea, which, he said, had "triumphantly solved the problem whether whites and blacks can be amicably and advantageously educated together."

Robinson died the following year.

The story of the underground railroad as we have interpreted it at Rokeby is not always popular. For many people, the romance of the railroad is inextricably tied to the drama and intrigue of danger and secrecy. But taking a close look at the documentary evidence puts the Robinsons' contributions in a new light. Rather than mere shelter for a night, Rowland and Rachel Robinson welcomed former slaves fully and freely into their home, gave them employment on the farm, and provided the space and time needed to start life anew. Fugitive slaves escaped with little more than their own courage and determination; at some point they had to leave their old lives behind them and begin new lives as free men and women. This was the opportunity offered by the Robinsons and Rokeby.

Indeed, reflecting on "days of auld lang syne," William Lloyd Garrison said of Robinson in that 1878 letter, "I always placed you high on my list of friends and co-laborers the most esteemed and the truest; and it affords me the greatest satisfaction to know that you have been preserved to hear the ringing of the jubilee bell, and to witness all those marvelous changes which have taken place in our land within less than a score of years."⁴³

NOTES

¹ Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1898).

² Rowland E. Robinson to Wilbur H. Siebert, 19 August 1896. Siebert Papers, US 5278.36.25* (Volume 41) Houghton Library, Harvard University.

³ Wilbur H. Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (1937; reprint, New York: Negro University Press, 1969).

⁴ Rowland T. Robinson to Wilbur H. Siebert, 28 October 1935. Siebert Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

⁵ Rowland E. Robinson, *Out of Bondage and Other Stories* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1936). These melodramatic stories are distinctly unlike Robinson's several books of Vermont folktales and may well have been written because he realized there was a market for them. It is even possible that Siebert's request for information gave him the idea. Siebert contacted the Robinsons in 1896, and "Out of Bondage" appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897.

⁶ Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery Record*, 75.

⁷ See, for example: Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times; Or, Sketches of the Anti-Slavery Movement in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1881); Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869); Parker Pillsbury, *Acts of*

the *Anti-Slavery Apostles* (Concord, New Hampshire, 1883); Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1880); Robert C. Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1883); William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (1872; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968).

⁸ Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1961).

⁹ See Kathryn Grover, *The Fugitive's Gibraltar: Escaping Slaves and Abolitionism in New Bedford, Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Stanley Harold, "Freeing the Weems Family: A New Look at the Underground Railroad," *Civil War History* 42 (December 1996): 289–306; David S. Cecelski, "The Shores of Freedom: The Maritime Underground Railroad in North Carolina, 1800–1861," *North Carolina Historical Review* 71 (April 1994): 174–206; Byron D. Fruehling and Robert H. Smith, "Subterranean Hideaways of the Underground Railroad in Ohio: An Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Critique of Local Traditions," *Ohio History* 102 (1993): 98–117.

¹⁰ The Robinson Family Correspondence is housed at the Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History in Middlebury, Vermont. Letters are quoted verbatim here, retaining oddities of spelling and usage.

¹¹ Oliver Johnson to Rowland T. Robinson, 27 January 1837, Jenner Township, Somerset County, Pennsylvania, Robinson Family Correspondence.

¹² John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231.

¹³ Charles Marriott to Rowland T. Robinson, 3 March and 17 March 1842, New York, Robinson Family Correspondence.

¹⁴ Joseph H. Beale to Rowland T. Robinson, 12 July 1844, New York, Robinson Family Correspondence.

¹⁵ Robinson to Siebert, 19 August 1896, Siebert Papers, Harvard.

¹⁶ William M. Wiecek, "Slavery and Abolition Before the United States Supreme Court, 1820–1860," *Journal of American History* 65 (1978): 34–59.

¹⁷ Rachel Robinson to Ann King, 9 January 1844, Ferrisburgh, Vermont, Robinson Family Correspondence. Rachel also described the fugitives' state of mind, saying, "poor men! they left wives behind, and deeply did they appear to feel the separation: they felt it so keenly that one of them said he would not have come away, had he not supposed he could easily effect the escape of his wife also when he was once away. Both seemed very serious, as though grief sat heavy on their hearts."

¹⁸ "Anti-Slavery Action in 1838: A Letter from Vermont's Secretary of State," *Vermont History* 41 (Winter 1973): 7–8.

¹⁹ "Charles Nelson; The Story of a Fugitive from Slavery," *Gazette and Standard*, undated clipping, Archives, Rokeby Museum. Rowland T. Robinson to Ann King, 5 August 1860, Ferrisburgh, Vermont, Robinson Family Correspondence. Robinson's estimate of Charles apparently differed from Knapp's, because he says in the letter, "but he turned out poorly."

²⁰ Oliver Johnson to Rowland T. Robinson, 3 April 1837, South Weymouth, Massachusetts, Robinson Family Correspondence.

²¹ Oliver Johnson to Rowland T. Robinson, 16 October 1837, Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Robinson Family Correspondence.

²² Gary Collison, "The Boston Vigilance Committee: A Reconsideration," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 12 (June 1984): 104–116; Irving H. Bartlett, "Abolitionists, Fugitives, and Imposters in Boston, 1846–1847," *New England Quarterly* 55 (March 1982): 97–110; Joseph A. Borome, "The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (July 1968): 20–351.

²³ Ephram Elliott to Rowland T. Robinson, 19 April 1837, Perquimans County, North Carolina, Robinson Family Correspondence.

²⁴ Robinson kept a copy of his reply to Elliott; it is written in his hand on the back of Elliott's April letter.

²⁵ Ephram Elliott to Rowland T. Robinson, 7 June 1837, Perquimans County, North Carolina, Robinson Family Correspondence.

²⁶ Gara, *Liberty Line*, 61.

²⁷ Raymond P. Zirblis, *Friends of Freedom: The Vermont Underground Railroad Survey* (Montpelier: Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, 1996), 35.

²⁸ Joseph Poland to Wilbur H. Siebert, 7 April 1897, Siebert Papers, US 5278.36.25* (Volume 41) Houghton Library, Harvard University. The story of Judge Theophilus Harrington's insistence that nothing short of "a bill of sale from God Almighty" would suffice as proof of ownership is one of the best-known stories in the oral tradition and has been so since at least the 1840s. (See Charles M. Storey to Caroline Weston, n.d., Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library.) Both the quotation

and the case may be apocryphal, as the decision was not recorded. In any case, it took place in the first decade of the nineteenth century (when slavery was still legal in New York State) and thus is outside of the period under discussion here.

²⁹ Stanley Campbell, *The Slavecatchers: The Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 185.

³⁰ Marion Gleason McDougall, *Fugitive Slaves, 1619–1865* (1891; reprint, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1967), 36.

³¹ Collison, "The Boston Vigilance Committee," 107.

³² Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 160, 286–289.

³³ "Hold the Miscreant Up, That Freeman May Look at Him!" *Green Mountain Freeman*, 23 August 1844.

³⁴ "The Georgia Slaveholder and His Catchpole," *Green Mountain Freeman*, 20 December 1844.

³⁵ Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*; James A. McGowan, *Station Master on the Underground Railroad: The Life and Letters of Thomas Garrett* (Maylan, Pennsylvania: Whimsie Press, 1977).

³⁶ Zirblis, *Friends of Freedom*, 18.

³⁷ Robinson to Siebert, 19 August 1896, Siebert Papers, Harvard.

³⁸ David Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791–1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 173.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 180–181.

⁴⁰ Hugh Barbour, Christopher Densmore, Elizabeth H. Moger, Nancy C. Sorel, Alson D. Van Wagner, and Arthur J. Worrall, eds., *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meeting* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 186. See also Isaac T. Hopper to Rowland T. Robinson, 29 January 1842, New York, Robinson Family Correspondence.

⁴¹ S. Barker to Rowland T. Robinson, 31 October 1866, Washington, D.C., Robinson Family Correspondence.

⁴² William Lloyd Garrison to Rowland T. Robinson, 11 July 1878, Boston, Robinson Family Correspondence.

⁴³ *Ibid.*



Being Good: An Abolitionist Family Attempts to Live Up to Its Own Standards

Rachel Robinson's boycott of slave-made goods was entirely consistent with her character, with attitudes that she shared with her husband, Rowland T. Robinson, and with the values and ideals that they tried to pass on to their children.

By RONALD SALOMON

On November 30, 1835, William Lloyd Garrison, a leader of the wing of the abolitionist movement that called for immediate emancipation, wrote to George W. Benson, a fellow abolitionist. In the middle of this informal and chatty letter Garrison mentioned

an excellently written epistle, both as to its composition and its penmanship, from Rachel Robinson,¹ wife of Rowland T. Robinson of Ferrisburgh, Vt. . . . It is written in a delicate, tender, yet decisive spirit, and evinces a high degree of consciousness. Not a particle of the productions of slave labor, whether it be rice, sugar, coffee, cotton, molasses, tobacco or flour, is used in her family, and thus her practice corresponds admirably with her doctrine. But I cannot say that I have as yet arrived at clear satisfaction upon this point, so as to be able to meet the difficulties that cluster in our path.²

Who were these people, whose principled lifestyle impressed even William Lloyd Garrison?

Rachel Robinson's (1799–1862) boycott of slave-made goods was entirely consistent with her character, with attitudes that she shared with her husband, Rowland T. Robinson (1796–1879), and with the values and ideals they tried to pass onto their children. The boycott was only one part of the way that the Robinsons conducted their lives, consistently choosing actions they saw as morally right over those that were merely expedient. This attitude often set them apart from the

mainstream of the larger community and it had a profound and unexpected impact on the family.

The meaning of Rachel and Rowland's actions can best be understood in the context of Hicksite Quakerism and the abolition movement. Ultimately, it is necessary to look at the next generation to see the effects of "being good," because the Robinsons' choice to strive for perfection in their own lives was problematic for their children.

THE ROBINSON FAMILY

The Robinson family came to Newport, Rhode Island from the northwest of England near the village of Burgh-Over-Sands in Cumberland, in the mid-seventeenth century. They were devout Quakers, successful merchants, and some were known to be slave-owners. Whether they were involved in the slave trade, like some of their Quaker associates in Newport, is not definitely known.

In 1791 Thomas (1761–1851) and Jemima (1761–1846) Robinson, Rowland's parents, moved to Vergennes, Vermont. Thomas's brother, William, bought six hundred acres of farmland in Ferrisburgh, including land to be used for the establishment of sawmills and gristmills. In 1793 Thomas and Jemima moved to a house on the property, and in 1808 William deeded the property to Thomas.³

Thomas and Jemima were abolitionists and were active in the Ferrisburgh Quaker Meeting. This meeting was established prior to 1793 and was visited in that year by the controversial Quaker minister from Long Island, Elias Hicks.⁴ A glimpse of their character can be seen in a letter to Thomas from James Temple, who had lived with the Robinsons and may have been a fugitive slave. He eventually moved to Montreal. Writing in 1851, Temple's expression of gratitude and praise was effusive. He mentioned that he was using Jemima's eyeglasses that the widowed Thomas had given to him, and expressed his conviction that when Thomas's time comes he will surely join Jemima in Heaven.⁵

Thomas and Jemima had one son, Rowland Thomas, named for the ancestor who had emigrated from England. It was the custom of many Quakers to have their children educated away from worldly influences, and by the late eighteenth century they had established coeducational day and boarding schools. The boarding schools were particularly important to rural Quakers whose children might otherwise be isolated from other Quaker children. The Robinsons sent young Rowland to the Nine Partners School, founded in 1796 with the encouragement of Elias Hicks and associated with the Quaker Meeting at Nine Partners in Dutchess County, New York.⁶ There he met Ann King (1786–1867), a teacher, and Rachel Gilpin, a fellow student from New York. Rowland

and Rachel were both very close to Ann King and shortly after their marriage in 1820 were joined by her on the Robinson farm. She lived there off and on until her death in 1867.

In 1810 Thomas Robinson bought his first Merino sheep. These, together with his apple and pear orchards and mills, made him relatively wealthy and he built a large addition to his house in 1814 or 1815. By 1822, when Rowland and Rachel's first child was born, this rather grand house was home to three generations of a devout Quaker family, as well as a beloved and respected friend and teacher.

THE INFLUENCE OF ELIAS HICKS

The Robinsons and Ann King were followers of Elias Hicks, which may explain some of their attitudes towards slavery as well as their general way of living. Hicks, a Quaker farmer from Jericho, Long Island, was associated with the Quaker tradition that emphasized the influence of an "inner light" or "light within" over that of scripture.⁷ By the late eighteenth century there was an informal division in the Society of Friends. One faction eschewed hired clergy and generally held meetings in silence, punctuated by inspired and impromptu testimony. They claimed to be following the original practice of George Fox, the founder of Quakerism. They believed that truth was more likely to be revealed through the "inner light" than through the Bible. The other, evangelical, faction modeled their practice on the more mainstream puritan Congregationalist churches, and placed biblical authority above the "inner light."⁸

Hicks held a particularly intense opposition to slavery. In his 1810 pamphlet *Observations on the Slavery of Africans and their Descendants*, he argued that slavery was "man-stealing" and therefore a sin, that profit from slavery was equal to theft, and that to own a slave was to possess "prize goods." He derived his opposition to profit from slavery and the use of slave-produced products from the earlier eighteenth-century ideas of the Quaker ministers, John Woolman and Benjamin Lay.⁹ In 1793 the Jericho Preparative Meeting entered into its minutes,

Tender scruples hath arisen in the minds of friends with respect to Trafficing [sic] in or making use of the Labour of persons held in Slavery from a feeling of commiseration of their afflicted state.

This minute was endorsed by the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings. Ferrisburgh Meeting was part of the same New York Yearly Meeting as Jericho.¹⁰

The religious practices of the Robinsons and Ann King grew out of the tradition of according primacy to the "inner light" that, after a formal split in the late 1820s, came to be called "Hicksite" as opposed to the more structured "Orthodox" meetings. Discord in many Quaker

meetings became more rancorous by the 1840s, when the Hicksite New York Yearly Meeting disowned some of Rowland and Rachel's abolitionist associates. At that time the Robinsons left the Society of Friends.

ABOLITIONISM AND THE BOYCOTT OF SLAVE-MADE GOODS

The history of the abolitionist movement in New England and New York reveals a similar, although slightly later, evolution of the tactical orientation to eliminating the evil of slavery. Vermont's entry into the United States as a free state in 1791 presumably reflected popular sentiment. With the exception of its cotton mills, Vermont's commercial ties to the slave economy were not extensive and the state had much less to lose by the abolition of slavery than would Rhode Island or New York. From the early nineteenth century, it was perfectly acceptable to speak out on the evils of slavery. For example, Professor George Benedict of the University of Vermont, in an oration delivered on July 4, 1826, called slavery "an evil of . . . terrific magnitude." But, reflecting a common sentiment among Vermonters, Benedict also said the emancipation must be embraced by all and not imposed from the outside.¹¹

William Lloyd Garrison began his career with these gradualist sentiments but soon converted to "immediatism," the idea that slavery should be abolished at once with no compensation to the slaveholder. Slavery, he argued, was not merely wrong, bad economic policy, or political error; it was a sin. This position was debated in the churches. The Quakers said that slavery was a sin,¹² as did many New England Baptist congregations, some of whom went so far as to "disfellowship," i.e., excommunicate, all who disagreed.¹³ The Congregationalists, on the other hand, said that slavery was "an enormous evil."¹⁴ The implications of the difference between "evil" and "sin" are great. If slavery is a sin, it becomes the duty of all who consider themselves to be good Christians to eradicate it. Furthermore, the toleration of slavery itself is a sin. This attitude fundamentally shaped the Robinsons' ideas about slavery and influenced their behavior, providing the rationale that compelled them to sever all connections with slaveholding.

The idea of a boycott of slave-made goods, or "prize goods," carried abolitionist arguments one step further. In his *Extemporaneous Discourses* Hicks wrote, "What is the difference whether I hold a slave or purchase the produce of his labour from those who do." In his *Observations* he wrote

Is it possible that there should be . . . a man with heart so hard as to assent to purchase, and to make use of the fruit of the labour of his fellow citizens . . . Would not every sympathetic heart, at the sight of a piece of sugar, or other produce . . . be filled with anguish. . . . Would

he not consider the individual who would dare to be so hardy as to traffic in and use the produce of such labour . . . the open and avowed enemy of both God and man.¹⁵

Rachel, Rowland and Ann, having been associated with the school supported by Hicks, were exposed continually to his ideas and influence. Although all Christian religions focus on adherence to God's law, Quakerism, with its continual emphasis on free will and individual enlightenment, required constant vigilance to avoid anything corrupting. Thus, Quakers lived with constant behavioral reminders of their aspirations toward perfection, such as dress, speech, and resistance to oath-taking. Hicks emphasized individual responsibility in his teachings.

The ideas of slavery as a sin and the use of slave produced products as supportive of sin held currency in the strongly religious, but non-denominational, atmosphere of the various anti-slavery societies in New England. The Vermont Anti-Slavery Society was founded in Middlebury in 1834, with Rowland, who had been a founder of the Ferrisburgh Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, one of its directors. At its second annual meeting it passed a resolution stating that slavery was a sin, and in its third annual report (1836) it stated that "American slavery in principle under all circumstances is a flagrant sin." During that second annual meeting Rowland also proposed a further resolution, which passed, stating

that by consuming the produce of the labour of slaves we are directly sustaining the iniquitous system of slavery; and that therefore as abolitionists, we are called upon to abstain from using such articles as are believed to come to us from a polluted channel.¹⁶

In the previous summer Rowland had written a long letter to *The Liberator* proposing this boycott. Opponents of slavery, he asserted, cannot in good conscience castigate the slaveholder and, at the same time, use the products of slave labor. He acknowledged that there was much disagreement on the subject, including a total lack of interest among some anti-slavery people. Throughout this letter he referred to the duties of Christians, God's laws, and the sinfulness of slavery. He also used phrases from his own Quaker tradition, such as keeping "our eyes open to the light" and the "internal operations of light on our own minds" as a way to bring about agreement on the subject.¹⁷

In the same issue of *The Liberator*, Joseph H. Beale, a Quaker farmer from Westchester County, New York, who also had business interests in lower Manhattan, placed an advertisement for his new store. This was addressed to "his anti-slavery friends" and offered a variety of dry goods, sugar, coffee, and tea, as well as "umbrellas of different sizes covered with free-labor muslin" and paper "made of linen rags."¹⁸

Joseph Beale was a member of the New York Yearly Meeting and a

friend of the Robinsons, of Rachel's family, the Gilpins, and of Ann King. In addition to his farm and store, Beale ran a store for free people of color. He also seems to have served as a private banker for some members of the Quaker community.¹⁹

Beale's store ran into trouble from the start. As early as 1834, before he began advertising in *The Liberator*, he wrote to Rowland.

We have endeavored to do our duty in promoting this good cause of justice and humanity—but we have met with so many difficulties and so little encouragement from our fellow citizens in our own society from whose high profession we expected a little better feeling on this benevolent concern, that we think it most probable that we shall be compelled to relinquish it—as we feel that we cannot give the requisite attention to this business without neglecting more or less the proper education of our dear children.²⁰

Beale remained in business in his shop at 376 Pearl St.²¹ In addition to the lack of support, he was also plagued by lack of supply. He mentioned this in several letters to Rowland. In September 1834 he wrote that his calico was deficient in width and his muslin deficient in quality. In August 1837 he referred to some commodity [not legible] that he would try to get from Belfast or Liverpool or, failing that, Dublin.²² The supply problem was widespread. James Mott, husband of Quaker minister and abolitionist speaker, Lucretia Mott, ran a free-labor store in Philadelphia, but because he was unable to get a supply of cotton, he sold only wool.²³

Despite supply problems some demand for free-labor goods did exist. When people wrote on the subject, both privately and for publication, they expressed sentiments similar to Rowland's. In 1835 Ann King received a letter from her friend Elizabeth, from Scarsdale, New York, saying that she avoided "eatables that come through that channel," but with clothing she found it "impracticable to keep quite clean"; she noted that her sentiments were rooted in "a resolution to take up the cross." However, she referred to herself as "a solitary 'speckled bird' in the family where I board," and implied that even most Quakers did not boycott.²⁴

Attempts to popularize the boycott continued. From the mid-1830s on, women's anti-slavery societies held "Ladies' Anti-Slavery Fairs" in an attempt to promote their cause. These sales of handwork and baked goods were used to raise funds, generate publicity, and provide activities for women, who often were excluded from other anti-slavery activities, particularly public speaking and administration. Baked goods made without slave-produced sugar were often the showpieces. On January 2, 1837, *The Liberator* reported that at the Ladies' Fair of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, "The cake table was loaded with varieties of cake, made with sugar not manufactured by slaves

and near it was placed the motto, FREE LABOR.”²⁵ When Angelina Grimké, a well-known abolitionist speaker, married Theodore Weld, another leading abolitionist, much was made of the wedding cake, which used only free-labor sugar and was baked by a former slave of the Grimké family.²⁶

The desire to avoid the use of slave-produced goods remained ambivalent through the following decades. Many people supported the idea; many more did not. There is little evidence that the practice of the boycott had any broad base. In 1838 a free-labor store opened in Philadelphia at 5th and Arch Streets, but advertisements for it in *The Liberator* appeared for only a few months. This store was across the street from the Free Quaker Meeting House, the gathering place for a breakaway group of Quakers who had fought in the American Revolution, and one block from the Arch Street Friends Meeting, where the more traditional group assembled.²⁷

In 1837 the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women addressed free people of color, suggesting that they “abstain from the use of slave labor products, as far as is practicable.” The convention provided New Testament justification for this position, which echoed the Quaker “prize goods” argument. They went on to say that “our abstinence has strengthened us for the work we are engaged in, and that there is a sweet feeling of conscious integrity that gladdens our heart.” They added, however, that abstinence was not always possible.²⁸

In 1841 Hannah Green, a young Quaker woman from Cayuga County, near Syracuse, New York, wrote to Rowland, Rachel, and Ann about her attempts to boycott. She felt that boycotting would send a strong message to slave holders and found it puzzling that so many people where she lives were indifferent. Although this indifference would compromise the boycott’s effectiveness, she asserted that it was still important for those who believed to follow through. She added that even though it was difficult to get free-labor goods, like-minded people must “do with less and circumscribe our wants—believing it is better to wash our hands in [insufficiency?] that we may be favored to encompass His alter [sic] with acceptance.”²⁹ As late as 1855, Maria Weston Chapman, in a tract entitled *How Can I Abolish Slavery, or Counsels to the Newly Converted*, advocated the avoidance of sugar.³⁰ Throughout the 1840s and 1850s *The Liberator* continued to report and encourage ladies’ fairs.³¹

Two themes run through these letters, tracts, reports, and pamphlets. The creation of a supply of free-labor goods was not going well, therefore, abstention, when possible, was the best course of action; and second, boycotters believed that attempts to boycott were indicative of a high level of morality and Christian virtue.

MORALITY AND CHRISTIAN VIRTUE
IN THE LIVES OF THE ROBINSONS AND THEIR ASSOCIATES

Morality and Christian virtue are so often emphasized in abolitionist writing that they appear to be the governing principles in the lives of these people. In the Robinson Letters collection, the letters of Rachel Robinson, Ann King, Joseph Beale, and Oliver Johnson, an abolitionist originally from Peacham, Vermont, give the reader the impression of an all-consuming goodness and lovingkindness.³² This is, in part, a Quaker mode of expression, but when one looks at the way these people conducted their lives one can see the style of expression as an outgrowth of their attitudes and practices.

Rachel Robinson was very active in the Ferrisburgh Women's Monthly Meeting. Several times during the late 1820s and early 1830s she held the very powerful position of clerk of the meeting. She was often assigned to be a visitor to meeting members whose conduct raised questions or who were seeking clearance to marry. The frequency of these appointments indicates both her willingness to work for the welfare of the meeting and the trust placed in her by members of the meeting. Her reports in the meeting's minutes frequently emphasized attitude as well as behavior.³³

Rachel was also very well regarded beyond her community. For example, Henry C. Wright, a deeply pacifistic Quaker from Boston, who was also an anti-slavery speaker and writer, wrote to Ann King in 1842 regarding a book he was preparing. It was to be called *A Kiss for a Blow, or a New Way to Prevent All Fighting Among Children*. He planned to send a copy to Rachel because "There are but 4 or 5 persons in all the circle of my acquaintance whose criticism on such a book I would value much & Rachel Robinson is one."³⁴

Rowland was similarly active and held in high esteem. In 1833 he founded the Ferrisburgh Anti-Slavery Society and devoted a large proportion of his time to the abolitionist cause. Being relatively wealthy he was able to hire farm managers and many workers, so he did not have to devote a large amount of personal time to his farm, although he maintained an active interest in the latest developments in scientific farming. He also carried his moral principles into his farming operations. In 1831 he was sued for refusing to grind grain for a local farmer who, he suspected, was going to sell it to a distiller. In 1838 he placed an advertisement in *The Vergennes Vermonter*, a paper with strong anti-slavery sentiments, for the shop of John Roberts in Vergennes, who had a stock of anti-slavery books for sale.³⁵ Rowland was willing to invest his own money to further the cause.

Rowland and Rachel would be considered "left wing" by today's

standards, but the term is somewhat misleading. Their beliefs and practices were motivated, not only by a sense of justice, but also by a need to do God's will. Their ideas about God's will required a high degree of activism. Rowland's principal associates in Vermont were Orson S. Murray and Oliver Johnson. Since little of Rowland's correspondence is available we must rely on Murray's and Johnson's to reveal Rowland's character.

Orson S. Murray was a Calvinistic Baptist minister from Orwell, and later, Brandon, Vermont. He was a paid agent of the New England Anti-Slavery Society and Publisher of the *Vermont Telegraph*, a Baptist newspaper published in Brandon. During his proprietorship he changed the *Telegraph* from a religious paper to one emphasizing anti-slavery, temperance, and pacifism. Murray was apparently a fiery speaker whose intemperate language offended nearly everybody, with the exception of his fellow radicals. He was often physically attacked, or "mobbed," after his lectures.³⁶

Oliver Johnson, a printer from Peacham, and later Middlebury, Vermont, was also an anti-slavery agent. His views were much the same as Murray's, but his style was more diplomatic and restrained. He was able to discuss issues with people who had tolerated the "mobbings" of Murray. In 1840, when the Robinson's second son, George (1825–1894), decided to become a printer, Rowland wrote to Johnson for help in finding an apprenticeship. Only the letters from Johnson survive but it appears that Rowland's main concern was to get George a place that would satisfy his parents' moral standards. Affairs at *The Liberator*, which Johnson was temporarily running, were chaotic, but eventually Johnson found a possibly suitable place in New York with a printer whom he described as "a Presbyterian, but not a bigot."³⁷ Eventually George apprenticed with Orson Murray in Brandon, though he never became a printer.

During this period a rift was growing in the anti-slavery movement that showed some similarity to the Hicksite-Orthodox separation in the Society of Friends. In 1838 part of the movement entertained the idea of an anti-slavery political party which, if successful at the polls, would enact anti-slavery legislation and thus achieve their ends. This group was frequently allied with the faction that did not feel that women should have leadership roles in anti-slavery societies. The Garrisonians, on the other hand, supported women's rights and the election of a woman, Abby Kelley, to the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society.³⁸ The 1840 meeting of the society was crucial. Oliver Johnson wrote to Rowland on April 20, discussing the impending split and his personal distress over it and asked him to attend the meeting.³⁹

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The Robinsons, Ann King, and their circle, including Murray, Beale, Charles Marriott, and Wright, remained loyal to Garrisonian principles. Among these was the acceptance of people of color as equals. Most White abolitionists would be described today as racist; the Garrisonians believed that there was not only no biblical justification for slavery, but that the Bible was quite clear that all people were equal as created by God.⁴⁰ Rufus Griswold, editor of *The Vergennes Vermonter*, expressed very precisely the principles upon which the Robinsons ran their household.

Teach your children by example and precept never to wound a person's feelings because he holds a humble station in life—or because he is poorly clad—or because the God of nature has bestowed on him a darker skin than theirs.⁴¹

This principle was applied in the Robinson home, although it did not always sit well with the younger generation. From the mid-1830s through at least the 1840s and perhaps later the Robinson farm was a stop on the Underground Railroad.⁴² Fugitive slaves were sheltered and employed for wages on the farm for periods ranging from a few weeks to several months. It is presumed that some of them occasionally lived in the house. One man of color, Mingo Niles, who had been a servant or slave of the Robinson family in Newport, seems to have been on very good terms with the younger generation. Anne Robinson (1827–1917) wrote to George, who was working near Saratoga, that Mingo told him “to be a good boy,” and in a letter from Rowland, Rachel and cousin Huldah there is a reference to “thy friend Mingo.”⁴³

PASSING ON VALUES TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Rachel and Rowland present a puzzling picture of themselves as parents. They combined very high principles and behavioral standards with great leniency. Despite their own dedication to progressive social ideas, they were only partly successful in passing these ideas on to their own children. In their attitudes toward people of color the Robinson children appear to have been more influenced by contemporary racial attitudes than by their parents. Although Rachel and Ann King, through their positions in the women's meeting, strongly encouraged Quaker traditions of plain speech and dress in the community,⁴⁴ and these traditions were followed faithfully in their home, the younger generation never fully accepted them. By the time they reached their teens, the sons were not using Quaker Plain speech, characterized by the avoidance of the second person plural “you” when addressing one person, when writing to each other or to their friends.

Rachel practiced frugality and avoided anything that could be interpreted as wastefulness. For example, in an 1831 letter, written when she

was quite ill, she referred to the remaking of worn out clothing.⁴⁵ In addition to piety, plainness, and frugality, education was of primary importance to the Robinsons. Since the Nine Partners school had become Orthodox after the Hicksite-Orthodox separation, the Robinsons used a combination of local schools, private tutors, including Ann King, and a school that Rowland ran on their property from 1839 to 1845. Several letters refer to attempts to recruit teachers for both this school and private tutoring.⁴⁶

Despite all the attention, examination of the lives of the Robinson children makes one wonder whether the efforts of their parents and of Ann King, whose letters to them are filled with advice and admonition,⁴⁷ had the desired effect. While the correspondence of the Robinson children, including Thomas, who died at age 32 and left only one letter, reveals, through the filter of the typical prejudices of the period, attitudes of compassion and kindness, it also suggests that the major separation between the two generations was often on racial issues.⁴⁸ In his single surviving letter Tom, writing to George, referred to a dance of the "colored friends" and described, in Black dialect, one man's regret about not being able to attend.⁴⁹ Over many years the correspondence between George, the second child, and Rowland Evans, the youngest, frequently referred to interracial tensions in the Robinson home. During their adolescence and young adulthood one or the other was often living away from the farm. Eventually they ran the farm together although Rowland Evans spent much of his time in New York City and Brooklyn.

In the latter part of the 1850s, when George was running the farm and Rowland Evans was in Brooklyn trying to establish himself as an illustrator and cartoonist, a series of letters expressed the brothers' dislike of people of color, particularly those living in the house and especially one woman named Mary Ann. She seems to have been a favorite of Rachel and had a lot of influence over her, which led to the only recorded confrontation between Rachel and one of her children. George complained to his brother about Mary Ann and Rowland Evans replied

It is very unpleasant to have the house overrun with "coloured" but no doubt mother thinks she is doing the best she can . . . We young ones have never been thoughtful enough of Father's and Mother's feelings in our comments on their various plans . . . not many poor devils have such good old folks as we have.⁵⁰

George replied that it was easy to express such sentiments from Brooklyn but home was becoming quite unpleasant, and he displayed some defiance and defensiveness.

The most, I think all, I ever said to mother was once when she was talking to me about drinking "arduous" spirits, when I told her we all

.....

had our tastes,—some a strong appetite for coloreds, & others a slight taste for rum, & we must bear with each other, and leave each one to his own judgment and conscience.⁵¹

Much of the tone of the letters between George and Rowland Evans is lighter and they reveal the ways in which the young men deviated from their parents' path. There is a great deal of talk about the Ferrisburgh Town Band and the Vergennes City Band; George played fiddle and flute and Rowland Evans played brass. There is mention of going fishing together and getting drunk, several additional references to George's drinking (more as a problem of supply than behavior), and a great deal of gossip.⁵²

Anne Robinson, the third child and only daughter of Rowland and Rachel was more like her parents. She wrote in Quaker Plain, even to her brothers, and was far less critical of her parents, although her pen could be sharp. Writing to George in 1843 she reported an incident illustrating the split in the anti-slavery movement.

Father went to Williston last third day to an anti-slavery meeting . . . They had terrible doings at their meeting—They nominated father for president, the priest-ridden part objected because he is a no-government man, a no-sabbath man, an anti-minister man &c. &c.⁵³

Rowland was elected over the objections of the evangelical faction. Anne's tone in this letter was of great admiration, even to the point of bragging.

Perhaps the children's ambivalent attitudes had to do with upheavals in the lives of their parents that were caused primarily by the tenacity of their principles. When the Hicksite-Orthodox separation occurred, Rowland and Rachel continued what they considered to be the practice of their Quaker ancestors. At the time of the separation many Quakers, although not all, were fairly tolerant of each other's ways of worship. When the more conservative abolitionists, who were often of the evangelical persuasion, broke with William Lloyd Garrison, forming what was often called the New Organization, the Robinsons remained with the Garrisonian Old Organization. They did not, however, express their differences with other factions in the same vituperative tone often used by Garrison and Orson Murray.

By the 1840s the controlling faction of the Hicksite New York Yearly meeting was becoming less sympathetic to the abolitionist cause, particularly to the radical wing to which the Robinsons and their New York friends were allied. Several of these friends were disowned because of their public anti-slavery activity and the meeting sent a delegation to visit the Robinsons to see if they were deviating from the meeting's precepts. Anne Robinson described this visit, almost satirically, in a letter

to Ann King. The visit ended satisfactorily in that there was no action taken against the Robinsons.⁵⁴

However, shortly thereafter, Rowland and Rachel left the Society of Friends. This was a blow to Quakers in New England, as the Robinsons were well known and respected. D. I. Orvis wrote to Ann King that people were astonished that they had actually left. He stated that people knew that the Robinsons were dissatisfied but assumed that they were "coming back to the good old path again." Margaret Thyall, a fellow teacher of Ann King, wrote saying, "If such friends leave us, what is to become of the society?"⁵⁵

FAILURE AND SUCCESS

Rowland T. Robinson and Rachel G. Robinson spent their entire lives trying to be as good as possible according to their understanding of human perfection. They were fortunate to have a network of friends—the Beales, Oliver Johnson, Orson Murray, Charles Marriott, Henry C. Wright, and especially Ann King—who loved, supported, and helped them. They were deeply committed to the cause of anti-slavery. The abolition movement had begun with a burst of enthusiasm in the 1830s, but by the 1840s disagreement about methods and goals splintered and enervated the movement. It was not until the Compromise of 1850 with its revived Fugitive Slave Act, that the movement became refocused.⁵⁶ During this period the Society of Friends, which at an earlier time had seemed so committed to the abolition of slavery, began to appear to the Robinsons and their friends to be as timid as the more traditional churches.

Rowland had many outlets for his fervor. Except during periods of ill health, he was active in several anti-slavery societies; he traveled frequently; he used his own money to disseminate anti-slavery information; and he sheltered fugitive slaves. The fugitive slave burden fell on the whole household, but Rowland was the one who made the arrangements for their reception and emancipation.⁵⁷ In addition he ran his farm, orchard, and mills, if not always on a day-to-day basis, nevertheless taking the responsibility for planning and overall management.

Rachel was active in the local Quaker meeting. This gave her a local influence but she was unable to affect the national debate in the issue of slavery. Women had an established place in Quaker meetings but in the anti-slavery movement they were usually auxiliaries; the crux of women's civic abolitionist activities were ladies' fairs and ladies' anti-slavery societies. Abby Kelley's attempt to speak in public was cause for dispute and her election to office in the American Anti-Slavery Society was fundamentally divisive. Ladies' fairs took place in heavily populated areas where a sufficient number of customers could arrive on

foot.⁵⁸ However, this was not an option in a sparsely populated western Vermont county, no matter how great the local anti-slavery sentiment.

Boycotting slave-labor goods was a way that a woman could take a positive step for the cause. By refusing to have these goods in her house and by communicating this to William Lloyd Garrison, Rachel made a public commitment to destroying the slave system by hurting its trade, and a private commitment to live according to the principles she believed in, whatever the sacrifice. Rachel and other women who boycotted knew that they were doing the right thing. None of the letters of these women admits to any doubt in their own minds, although they admit that others doubted.

The boycott was consistent with the pattern of Rachel's life. She visited other Quakers to help them to stay on the right path. She and Rowland took great pains with their children's education. They sheltered fugitive slaves. She treated all people, no matter how repulsive they were to her sons, as equals. Indeed, she showed great tolerance for her sons' rebellions. When she corrected them, at least in writing, she did it with no display of anger.

The boycott was not extensive and it did not end slavery. It did ensure that its participants remained totally apart from the slave system. Similarly, treating people of color as equals did not end racism, even in her own family, but it gave Rachel the knowledge that she was following the injunctions of her faith. Rachel can be said to have been empowered by her behavior. Through her devotion to behaving with goodness she came to be very much in control of her own life.

Did the Robinsons fail or did they succeed? They did not end slavery. Although notable regionally, they were marginal figures on the national scene and had little influence over the larger course of events. Helping fugitives, boycotting "prize goods," and educating children had little significant effect on contemporary issues. In this sense they failed to achieve their most cherished goals. But they had strong ideals and principles, which they made concrete through the conduct of their lives. They rarely compromised. From this point of view they would have to be judged successful, as people who lived up to their own high standards for "being good."

NOTES

¹ Rachel Robinson's letters, in contrast to those of many of her relatives, are extremely easy to read. The penmanship is the first thing one notices.

² Walter M. Merrill, ed., *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Volume 1* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 566.

³ Much of the information presented here on the history of Rokeby and the Robinson Family has been gathered in conversation, over several years, with Rokeby Museum's past director, Karen

Peterson, present director, Jane Williamson, and trustee, Dean Leary. As research on the farm and family is ongoing, some information is both speculative and changeable, but most is verifiable.

⁴ Bliss Forbush, *Elias Hicks: Quaker Liberal*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 92.

⁵ James Temple to Thomas Robinson, 11 May 1851, Robinson Letters, Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, Vermont. (The Robinson Letters are currently housed in the Sheldon Museum although they are the property of Rokeby Museum, Ferrisburgh, Vermont, and are used by permission.)

⁶ Forbush, 93.

⁷ Many sites associated with Hicks and his ministry are preserved in the Jericho-Westbury area of Long Island.

⁸ Margaret Hope Bacon, *The Quiet Rebels* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1985), 83–87.

⁹ Forbush, *Elias Hicks*, 145, 89. In the Quaker religion “minister” does not refer to hired clergy, but rather to people recognized by the elders of the meeting as being worthy to preach.

¹⁰ 17 October 1793, quoted in *ibid.*, 89–90.

¹¹ George M. Benedict, *An Oration Delivered at Burlington, Vt. On the Fourth of July, 1826* (Burlington: E. & T. Mills, 1826), 17, 24.

¹² *The Liberator*, 3 December 1836, 4:3.

¹³ Erwin S. Clark, *History of the Town of Addison, Vt., 1609–1976* (Middlebury: The Addison Press, 1976), 40–41.

¹⁴ Rev. John E. Nutting, *Becoming The United Church of Christ, 1795–1995* (Burlington: Vermont Conference for the United Church of Christ, 1995), 17.

¹⁵ Elias Hicks, *Extemporaneous Discourses* (1825) and *Observations on the Slavery of Africans and their Descendants* (1810), quoted in Forbush, 148.

¹⁶ *The Liberator*, 5 March 1836, 1:1–3; 4 March 1837, 3:3; 5 March 1836, 1:3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 July 1835, 2:4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:5.

¹⁹ See Joseph Beale (JB) to Rowland T. Robinson (RTR), 10 February 1837, 24 August 1837, 17 June 1840, and 14 November 1840 in Robinson Letters.

²⁰ JB to RTR, 11 September 1834, Robinson Letters.

²¹ Today the site of 376 Pearl St. is occupied by the Gov. Alfred E. Smith Houses, one of New York’s earliest large-scale housing projects. So the site is still functioning as an attempt at social betterment.

²² JB to RTR, *ibid.*, and 24 August 1837, Robinson Letters.

²³ Bacon, *Quiet Rebels*, 105.

²⁴ Elizabeth [surname unknown] to Ann King [AK], 23 December 1835, Robinson Letters.

²⁵ *The Liberator*, 21 January 1837, 4:3.

²⁶ Janet Stevenson, “A Family Divided,” *American Heritage*, 18 April 1967, 88.

²⁷ *The Liberator*, 1 June 1838, 4:6; “William Penn Tours Guidebook” (Philadelphia, Quaker Information Center, 1996). Pacifism was central to Quaker practice.

²⁸ *An Address to Free Colored Americans Issued by the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, May 9–12, 1837* (New York: William S. Dorr, 1837), 17, 18.

²⁹ Hannah Green to RTR, Rachel G. Robinson (RGR), and AK, 6 March 1841, Robinson Letters.

³⁰ Maria Weston Chapman, *How Can I Abolish Slavery, or Counsels to the Newly Converted—Anti Slavery Tract #14* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1855), unpaginated.

³¹ *The Liberator*, 7 January 1842, 13 January, 20 January, 27 January 1843, for example. *The Liberator* also published a list of Massachusetts railroads and their attitudes toward people of color, with the implied suggestion of which ones to avoid.

³² I do not mention RTR because he was not a good correspondent. Friends and relations continually complained of this. A postscript in his hand attached to someone else’s letter was often the best that could be hoped for. In addition, his penmanship was terrible.

³³ Ferrisburgh Society of Friends, Women’s Monthly Meeting: Minutes, Bailey-Howe Library, Department of Special Collections, Manuscript Collection, University of Vermont.

³⁴ Henry C. Wright to AK, 25 July 1842, Robinson Letters.

³⁵ RGR to RTR, 1 September 1831, Robinson Letters; *The Vergennes Vermonter*, 30 April 1838, 3:5.

³⁶ David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont: 1791–1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 131.

³⁷ Oliver Johnson (OJ) to RTR, 27 March 1835, 20 September 1840, and [date obscure] 1840, Robinson Letters.

³⁸ James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 94–95.

³⁹ OJ to RTR, 20 April 1840, Robinson Letters.

⁴⁰ This sentiment can be found in almost any issue of *The Liberator* or *The Vermont Telegraph*.

⁴¹ *The Vergennes Vermonter*, 31 October 1838, 1:6.

⁴² For an unraveling of the mythology of the Underground Railroad see Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1961, 1996); for Vermont see Raymond Zerblis,

Friends of Freedom: The Vermont Underground Railroad Survey Report (Montpelier: Vermont Department of State Buildings and Vermont Division of Historic Preservation, 1996).

⁴³ Anne King Robinson (AKR) to GR, 22 January 1843; RTR, RGR, Huldah Hoag to GR, 19 February 1843, Robinson Letters.

⁴⁴ Ferrisburgh Women's Monthly Meeting, Minutes, Bailey-Howe Library, Department of Special Collections, Manuscript Collection, University of Vermont.

⁴⁵ RGR to RTR, 16 August 1831, Robinson Letters.

⁴⁶ RGR to RTR, 8 July 1831; J. S. Bingham to RTR, 19 July 1838; RTR to RGR, 2 September 1831; AKR to AK, 6 September 1844, Robinson Letters.

⁴⁷ AK to GR, 3 August 1840, 18 December 1842, April 1843; AK to Rowland Evans Robinson (RER), 20 October 1850, 25 December 1850, 10 February 1851, 20 April 1851, 15 June 1851; all in Robinson Letters.

⁴⁸ For a revealing and sensitive look at Vermonter's racial attitudes in the midcentury see the reactions of Ophelia Sinclair to Topsy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This puts the Robinson boys' language in perspective.

⁴⁹ Thomas Robinson II to GR, 21 March 1847, Robinson Letters.

⁵⁰ GR to RER, 21 February 1859; RER to GR 9 March 1859, Robinson Letters.

⁵¹ GR to RER, 27 March 1859, Robinson Letters.

⁵² I recommend reading boxes three and four of the Robinson Letters together to get the sequence of the correspondence between George and Rowland Evans correct.

⁵³ AKR to GR, 22 January 1843, Robinson Letters.

⁵⁴ AKR to AK, 6 September 1844, Robinson Letters.

⁵⁵ D. I. Orvis to AK, 29 March 1846; Margaret Thyall to AK, 1 January 1846, Robinson Letters.

⁵⁶ Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 93ff.

⁵⁷ See letters from Joseph Beale, Ephram Elliott, and Oliver Johnson to RTR, Robinson Letters.

⁵⁸ *The Liberator*, 2 January 1837, 7 January 1842, for example.



Racism in Antebellum Vermont

Neither Vermont's constitutional prohibition of adult slavery nor Judge Theophilus Harrington's famous application of that provision ever really precluded the Green Mountain State from those expressions of racism that existed all over New England and beyond.

By JOHN M. LOVEJOY

Two historical events appear to have established Vermont's response to questions about slavery and the existence of racism in the state. The first occurred in Windsor in July 1777, when the Vermont Constitution was adopted. It was the first state constitution to declare adult slavery unlawful within its borders. The second event took place in Middlebury at the Addison County Court House in June 1804, when the Honorable Theophilus Harrington, junior member of the three-judge Supreme Court panel, speaking for the court, declared that slave ownership in Vermont could only be proved by the production in evidence of a bill of sale for the slave signed by Almighty God, Himself. The court's practical application of the law prohibiting slavery set forever the height of the "bar" over which challengers would have to jump. From that day forward no jumpers applied.

The original thirteen colonies had a substantial accumulation of laws on their books, as well as spoken and unspoken codes, relating to negroes, mulattos, and Indians and, in several instances, to slavery itself.¹ Vermont patterned a substantial portion of its constitution after that of Pennsylvania.² However, because Vermont lawmakers were relatively unburdened by an existing legal history and its accompanying tapestry of laws, codes, and precedent-setting opinions, the drafting of the Vermont Constitution was a simpler process than in most of the other states. Lacking a general, experiential historic base, and possessing a negli-

gible black population, Vermont's "outlawing" of adult slavery came easily and, viewed in context, may have been regarded by lawmakers as an inevitable, relatively simple move. In a similar vein, it is significant to the history of Vermont to recognize that as the first new state voted to join the Republic, it had no hand in drafting the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the federal Constitution, or the Bill of Rights. Only after admittance as a state did Vermont begin to have input into the legislative aspects of nation building.

It is important to recognize that neither the constitutional prohibition of adult slavery nor Judge Harrington's famous application of that provision ever really precluded the Green Mountain State from those expressions of racism that existed all over New England and beyond. This paper examines some of the realities of racism, and looks at several blatant examples of racial prejudice that occurred in antebellum Vermont. J. Kevin Graffagnino's admonition in his 1977 article "Vermont Attitudes Toward Slavery: The Need For A Closer Look," turns out to be remarkably prescient.³

NOTES ON NATURAL SCIENCES AND THE WORD "NIGGER"

Antebellum natural science studies in Vermont resembled similar studies in other states of the new nation. Anthropology was in its infancy. The prevailing nineteenth-century concept of man tended to perpetuate variations on the single theme of permanent racial inferiority: "science became an instrument which 'verified' the presumptive inferiority of the Negro."⁴

The ideas of three men contributed most to Americans' antebellum justification for Negro inferiority: Carl von Linnaeus (Swedish, 1707–1778), Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (German, 1752–1840), and the Reverend Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith (American, 1751–1819). Their theories, dressed in a broad array of factual finery, were either directly or indirectly part of the natural science curriculum at Middlebury College, the University of Vermont, Norwich University, and Dartmouth College. The intellectual basis of racism in Vermont was thus equivalent to the climate in the rest of America. As William Lee Miller explained in his recent book *Arguing About Slavery*, to fathom the degree of nationwide racism in the antebellum period one should "extrapolate backward from today's worst white attitudes, and multiply by a large number."⁵

One clear indication of the conviction among whites of the inferiority of blacks is the widespread use of the word "nigger." By the early nineteenth century, and probably earlier, most uses of this word by whites were considered derisive, particularly when expressed "with dismissive, abusive, or contemptuous force."⁶ William Faux, in *Memorable*

Days in America, observed while in Boston in February of 1819 that "contempt of poor blacks, or niggers, as they are called, seems the national sin of America."⁷ In perhaps the definitive work on the use of the word "nigger" in the antebellum period, published in Boston in 1837, Hosea Eaton wrote: "Negro or nigger, is an approbrious [*sic*] term, employed to impose contempt upon them as an inferior race, and also to express their deformity of person. Nigger lips, nigger shins, and nigger heels, are phrases universally common among the juvenile class of society, and full well understood by them."⁸

Lydia Maria Child, a leading light and literary genius in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, wrote in 1836 that "if a person of refinement from Hayti, Brazil, or other countries, which we deem less enlightened than our own, should visit us, the very boys of this republic would dog his footsteps with the vulgar outcry of 'Nigger! Nigger!' I have known this to be done, from no other provocation than the sight of a colored man with the dress and deportment of a gentleman."⁹ Beyond the words, reflecting white society's general opinion of the free colored population in the major cities of the North, including Boston, one could find "cuts and placards descriptive of the negroe's deformity . . . everywhere displayed to the observation of the young. . . . Many of the popular book stores, in commercial towns and cities, have their show-windows lined with them. The barrooms of the most popular public houses in the country, sometimes have their ceiling literally covered with them."¹⁰ Indeed, such racial stereotyping was widespread in the antebellum North.

Vermonters were not exempt from this kind of stereotyping and invective. Correspondence among educated and prominent citizens frequently exhibited racist attitudes and the epithet "nigger." For example, on April 2, 1837, Charles B. Fletcher (1818–1852), son of Vermont Congressman Isaac Fletcher, wrote from Charleston, South Carolina to Henry Stevens, Sr., the founder of the Vermont Historical Society, and reported that the "niggers" in the South were not nearly as bad off as Vermonters had been led to believe.¹¹ Another example is the use of the phrases "nigger" and "nigger business" in letters between Democrat newspaper publishers Robinson and Southmayd, co-owners of the Castleton *Vermont Statesman*, and Charles G. Eastman, owner of Woodstock *Spirit of the Age*, in a political context to disparage the Whig Party.¹²

Even more revealing, and somewhat shocking, are four letters from George Gilpin Robinson to his brother Rowland Evans written between 1854 and 1859. These two men, sons of devout Quakers and prominent Vermont abolitionists Rowland T. and Rachel Robinson, apparently failed to absorb the enlightened attitudes about race promoted by their

parents, for their correspondence contains many racial slurs. (For further background on the Robinson family, see the articles in this issue by Jane Williamson and Ronald Salomon.)¹³ The first letter was written on April 3, 1854 from Astoria, New York, where George was living with his sister Ann for a short time, to Rowland, then at home in Ferrisburgh. He sent word to his brother about a black servant named Sarah who "went Saturday on a nigger cruise to Brooklyn with Niobe's cook." This is an allusion to the Saturday afternoon ferry, crowded with African Americans off from work and going to Brooklyn to shop.¹⁴ The next letter was written by George, now back in Ferrisburgh, on December 26, 1858 to Rowland, now living in Brooklyn, New York, referring to black servants employed by the Robinsons. "Eliza is gone & Sarah has stepped into her place—also Julia is gone—Clara is tending the baby, so you see the Black Star is decidedly in the ascendant, whereby the damned niggers are more than ever impressed with the idea that we can't keep house without them,—which, I presume, tends to make A [Aaron ?] the more confident, as it looks as if the quarrel was only between him and the Greyhound company, the rest of the family being as firm in the colored persuasion as ever."¹⁵

In a letter to Rowland from Ferrisburgh on January 9, 1859, George trotted out the race-based "smell" problem so long associated with white criticism of blacks. "The rest of us are in usual health, except that Sarah went home sick the other day,—so we are out of a maid. I suppose the next move will be to get Mary Ann or Frances, unless by chance they find one somewhere that can out stink even them."¹⁶ The final letter of this set was written February 21, 1859, filling in Rowland on the latest family toils and intrigues. "... we have *little* Frances here again. I think odor improves finally, for I can pass within four feet of her without holding my breath. When she comes close to me at breakfast, to deliver the buckwheat cakes it is decidedly refreshing. If Mother's nigger arrangements are as satisfactory to her as they are hideous to me, they must afford her a great deal of comfort."¹⁷ An examination of the huge generation gap within this family of abolitionists is beyond the scope of this paper; but it does demonstrate something of the extent to which the derogatory and derisive term "nigger" had become common currency in antebellum Vermont.

NOTES ON COLONIZATION

Among the first responses to the growing awareness of a race problem in America was a movement to eliminate it by removing blacks from North America. The American Colonization Society was founded in 1816. Its early roster included James Madison, Andrew Jackson,

Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and Stephen Douglas, as well as many religious leaders and college presidents. Between 1816 and 1820 a number of state legislatures, including Vermont's, went on record officially supporting the American Colonization Society. Auxiliary societies sprouted up in states north and south.¹⁸ In both regions, the principle of colonization was generally upheld as the most viable practical solution to the problem of slavery, or, as the two newspaper editors quoted above stated, "the nigger business."¹⁹

The first state-level Colonization Society was created in Vermont. It was established in 1818 at the State House in Montpelier, where a group of private citizens held a meeting for that express purpose. The prominence of the Vermont society's membership paralleled that of the national society. Its roster of members contained a heavy mix of notable politicians, including former Governors C. P. Van Ness, Ezra Butler, and Jonas Galusha; former U.S. Senators Elijah Paine, Horatio Seymour, and Samuel Prentiss; Congressman Herman Allen (in 1833, both Benjamin Swift and William Slade were listed as delegates to the Society); judges Abner Forbes and Titus Hutchinson; and financiers Thomas Emerson, Israel Dana, and William Palmer. The membership also included a number of ministers from a variety of churches who, from the 1820s to the mid-1850s, constituted roughly half of the Colonization Society's board of officers. Additionally, "a great majority of the colonization groups were organized in local churches, such as the Baptist Society of East Bethel, the Congregational Society of Montpelier, and the Methodist Society at Pittsford."²⁰

The Vermont Colonization Society grew throughout the 1820s but was slowed in the early 1830s by the activities of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society. The Anti-Slavery people, led by William Lloyd Garrison of Boston, who got his early start in Vermont (1828–1829) as editor of the *Bennington Journal of the Times*, were more strident, fanatical as many said, than the colonizationists, and called for the *immediate* emancipation of all slaves.²¹

The colonizationists saw certain "evils" that were the direct result of African slavery in the United States. Reverend J. K. Converse, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Burlington, delivered a discourse to the Vermont Colonization Society on October 17, 1832, in Montpelier, in which he said that "slavery is now acknowledged by our ablest politicians to be a heavy curse on the whole country . . . ruinous to whites; it retards improvement; roots out an industrious population . . . destroys all incentives to enterprise . . . and is followed by many decidedly immoral influences." The root of the problem was the "evils, the degradation, the cruelties, dangers and blighting political influences

arising from the introduction of a colored population into the United States." Converse's remedy for all these evils was the colonization movement, which would, first, rescue the free colored population and send them where they could be free and happy; second, "free this country from the unnumbered evils of colored population, and thus avert the danger of dreadful collision between two *castes* which must inevitably be objects of mutual jealousy to each other"; and third, send all free blacks back to Africa, to "spread civilization and christianity through the 100,000,000 who now people the continent."²² So firmly did the colonizationists believe that the two castes could not mix that it was a truism of theirs that, "let prejudice be dispelled and let our laws become as favorable as they could wish, opening to the colored man all the avenues of honor and hope, the disadvantages will still be felt." Basically, whites want white legislators, congressmen, preachers, judges, teachers, physicians, etc., and not black ones.²³ These ideas, shared by colonizationists in Vermont and elsewhere in the nation, were pervasive, strongly held, and, many believed, grounded in religion, science, and the economics of the day.

The Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, organized in 1834 as a chapter of the American Anti-Slavery Society, vehemently criticized the Vermont Colonization Society. The argument between the two organizations was the "immediatism" of the abolitionists versus the "gradualism" of the colonizationists. Oliver Johnson of Middlebury, a board member of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, spoke at the Society's first annual meeting on February 18, 1835, and outlined the organization's fourteen basic criticisms of the Colonization Society; two are most relevant here. The first was that the colonizationists were against immediate emancipation; the second was that they denied "the power of the gospel to annihilate prejudice, and blasphemously attribute those feelings of hostility to the people of color, which are the sin and disgrace of the country." The colonizationists, of course, denied all these charges.²⁴ Though both organizations unequivocally disapproved of slavery, the Colonization Society did not see immediatism as a workable solution. As to the abolitionists' charge that the colonizationists were prejudiced toward blacks, the gradualists replied that prejudice existed already, without any help from them, and found as a simple matter of the human condition that whites were "violently prejudiced against the colored, and unwilling to associate with them on terms of equality."²⁵ The colonizationists believed themselves to be realists: Whites and blacks were different, could not mix in society, and blacks should live among their own, in Africa, in order to solve America's slavery problem and at the same time provide a balanced, harmonious life for themselves. Coloni-

zationists in Vermont and throughout the Union were devoted to these racist ideas.

NOTES ON ELECTIONS IN VERMONT

The national political scene presented Vermonters with a conundrum. As opposed to slavery as most Vermonters purported to be, the national candidates entered in the presidential elections offered them little choice on the issue. Five of the first seven presidents were slaveholders (Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson), and the executive and judicial branches at the highest levels of government were similarly permeated with slaveholders, up into the 1840s.²⁶ These realities at the national level posed a dilemma for the voters of Vermont, and the fact is that many Vermonters, not necessarily a majority but large numbers, voted for those presidential candidates who were slaveholders (see Table 1). By their actions, these voters were gradualists on the slave issue, clearly picking candidates who wished to preserve the Union rather than risk its dissolution.

Historians of antebellum Vermont have paid attention to the anti-slavery vehemence of William Slade, one of Vermont's representatives in Congress from 1832 to 1842. But it must be noted that Slade's pas-

TABLE 1 Vermont voters in presidential elections, 1828–1848

<i>Year</i>	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>No. of votes</i>
1828	Andrew Jackson*	Democratic-Republican	8,350
	John Quincy Adams	National-Republican	24,363
1832	Andrew Jackson*	Democrat	7,865
	William Wirt	Anti-Masonic	13,112
	Henry Clay	National-Republican	11,161
1836	Martin Van Buren*	Democrat	14,040
	William Henry Harrison	Whig	20,994
1840	William Henry Harrison*	Whig	32,440
	Martin Van Buren	Democrat	18,006
1844	James Knox Polk*	Democrat	18,041
	Henry Clay	Whig	26,770
	James G. Birney	Liberty	3,954
1848	Zachary Taylor*	Whig	23,117
	Martin Van Buren	Free Soil	13,837
	Lewis Cass	Democrat	10,943

* Indicates national winner

Source: *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1994), 429–432.

sion on the slavery question increased over time, and early in his congressional tenure he was a gradualist, like most Vermonters.²⁷ Originally a Colonization Society member, he shifted to the antislavery side, and finally called publicly for the immediate emancipation of all slaves. However, before Rep. Slade's complete conversion in December 1835, he delivered a speech from the well of the House notifying the membership that "the abolition of slavery which I would advocate is a gradual abolition. I believe the immediate and unqualified abolition of slavery to be inconsistent with a just regard, both of the best interests of the community, and the highest welfare of the slave. The philanthropy which aims at such an abolition, whatever I may think of its purity, I cannot commend for its intelligence or discretion . . . I would not, at once, entirely emancipate him from the control of his master." Slade's middle-of-the-road position at that time also included criticism of the Anti-Slavery Society's use of the U.S. mails to flood the major cities of the South with incendiary publications and thus "to excite the passions of the slave, and tempt him to force the bondage which is not for him to break, but for others to unloose . . . I deplore [the abolitionists'] often misdirected zeal, and deprecate the reaction it is calculated to produce."²⁸ Captured in time, representing his constituency, or at least what he believed to be the sentiment in Addison County, Rep. Slade took a middle ground.

"MOBOCRACY"

Congressman Slade's transition from gradual colonizationist to immediate abolitionist coincided with a rising tide of racism in the country, which seems to have reached a peak in 1835; on September 5th of that year the *Niles' Weekly Register* reported that "*Society seems everywhere unhinged*, and the demon of 'blood and slaughter' has been let loose upon us! We have the *slave* question in many different forms." The editor observed that for the preceding week there were more than 500 reports in various newspapers from all the states detailing disturbances of one kind or another connected to the issue of slavery.²⁹ Some referred to this state of affairs as "mobocracy." New England had its share of disturbances and Vermont was no exception. A discussion of mobbing runs the risk of overemphasizing the number of people participating. Most "mobs" were small. The mob incident in Boston on October 25, 1835, involving Garrison was loud and nasty, but comparatively speaking, not very large.³⁰ Relatively few individuals in any given state or any given town were interested in physically agitating the subject of slavery. Still, Vermonters' participation in antiabolition mobs indicates the active presence in the state of a virulent form of racism.

The town of Bradford hosted an itinerant abolitionist lecturer in late September, 1835. As word of the impending lecture spread many townsfolk objected. Word was passed to the lecturer not to proceed, as his program “was against the wishes of the people of the village to have the subject agitated.” But their entreaties fell on deaf ears and “with that blind and bigoted obstinacy, which characterizes this class of modern reformers, he refused to listen to good counsel and proceeded to lecture to what few he could collect to hear.” Determined that this mouthpiece of abolitionism, this advocate of disunion, should understand, and in this case truly feel the real convictions of Bradford residents, a group of people placed a fire pump at the doorstep of the hall and fired it at the lecturer inside. Initially undeterred he continued, even with his somewhat sodden countenance on display, but when the old pump was replenished and a second round of water applied to the fiery speaker and his small audience, he withdrew. In the words of one newswriter, he realized that “Vermonters understood, as well the art of putting out the torches of incendiaries who would light up our country with flames of revolution, as the brand of him who would set their dwellings in conflagration.”³¹

Much has been written about a similar, though far more dramatic, incident that took place in Montpelier on October 23 and 24, 1835. The focus of this mob activity was two speeches by the Connecticut-based Unitarian minister Samuel J. May, a close associate of Garrison.³² Writing some forty-two years after the incident, the *Green Mountain Freeman* observed how difficult most people would find it to comprehend “the extent and force of the hostility to the *abolitionists*” in 1835. I would observe that today, it is still difficult in this new millennium to make sense out of the pervasiveness of that hostility. That a great majority of the leading citizens of Montpelier either stood by passively or participated in disruptive activities as Rev. May’s right to free speech, guaranteed under both the federal and the state constitutions, was snuffed out, stands as an exemplar of the depth of feeling in the fall of 1835.³³

Most of Montpelier’s citizens, in fact, did not take kindly to slavery. However, they did not believe that this out-of-stater should be allowed a platform to discuss his “Absurd Doctrine of Anti-Slavery.” They had no desire to be arraigned and condemned by him as he spoke in a nonconciliatory, aggressive manner, spinning out his incendiary and fanatical doctrines. Their view was to ignore the First Amendment if necessary and move Mr. May out of town. Rocks were thrown at the windows of Representative’s Hall in the old Capitol Building where the first meeting was held, and at the Old Brick Congregational Church where the second meeting took place the next day. Eggs were lobbed, and intemperate shouting from the audience electrified the air and caused disruptions. There were

taunts of violence, and an annoying amount of foot thumping. Ultimately Reverend May relented and left for his scheduled appearances in Burlington, Middlebury, and Rutland, where he lectured to relatively small crowds. He did run into problems at each stop, though none to compare with the magnitude and vehemence of the disruptions in Montpelier.³⁴

If nothing else, Rev. May's late fall swing through Vermont energized the Anti-Slavery Society and brought to the surface an undercurrent of deep-seated racial tensions which Vermonters were not used to dealing with, principally because of the absence of black people in the general population. The logic of the Anti-Slavery Society's stand, which many Vermonters found fanatical and far too unrealistic and demanding, was "We do not talk of *gradual* abolition, because as Christians, we find no authority for the *gradual relinquishment of sin*. We say to slave-holders repent now—today—immediately . . . break off your vice at once." This view drove the lecturers to make blistering attacks on the local churches' religious integrity and even to attack the United States Constitution as a flawed document because it allowed slavery to continue.³⁵ The didactic, often rude stridency of the antislavery lectures offended many Vermonters, especially in the 1830s when abolitionist momentum was just beginning to build.

One of the very few cases in Vermont in which the mobocrats were actually arrested and charged in court for their boisterous activities took place in Newbury on November 19, 1835. The Rev. George Storrs, an agent for the New Hampshire Anti-Slavery Society, was delivering an abolitionist lecture at the Methodist Chapel. A number of men and boys gathered in and outside the chapel making speeches, talking loudly about maintaining the Constitution and the Union. Allegedly fueled by "the power of GROG," they attempted to stop the fanatical speaker and, in effect, to abridge Storrs's freedom of speech. They did their best to disrupt the event, hollering, ringing the bell, breaking a panel on the front door, and throwing brickbats. But Storrs prevailed, raising his voice loudly when the occasion called for it.³⁶

Soon after the citizens left the chapel, two local justices of the peace arraigned three of the rioters and bound them over to the county court's December session. A trial eventually took place in June 1836, with Vermont Supreme Court Justice Jacob Collamer presiding on circuit in Chelsea. The jury found the defendants guilty of disrupting the Newbury lecture and interfering with the free speech rights of Rev. Storrs, essentially agreeing with Judge Collamer's charge that no matter what is being said at a meeting, "no man is to be allowed to break it up." The judge penalized the defendants rather harshly, in part for taking up the court's time, by levying fines totalling \$25.00 and cost of prosecution at \$143.76.³⁷

The riotous behavior of this mob was certainly approved by a portion of Newbury's citizenry, who shared the belief that the changes sought by the Anti-Slavery Society were simply too radical for Vermonters to bear. There was a real fear that antislavery policies would lead to the disunion of the Republic. Moreover, the idea of eventual amalgamation between a white and a "lesser" race was unsettling to mid-1830s Vermonters, as well as to others in the New England states. This was the face of antebellum racism.

The Newbury incident bears out the prejudicial sentiments so keenly demonstrated over and over again throughout New England, including the Green Mountain State. Whether antiabolition sentiment was predominant throughout Vermont from the 1830s to the 1850s is hard to tell with assurance. However, it is clear that demonstrations protesting what the general public believed was the annoying agitation of the slave question by overzealous speakers within and outside of the state did occur from time to time.

LEMUEL HAYNES AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS

The stories of the treatment received in Vermont by two prominent free American blacks provide a final, telling illustration of the realities of racism in the state during the antebellum period. The cases of Lemuel Haynes and Frederick Douglass are separated in time by twenty-five years and represent the actions of two different generations of Vermonters. But the experiences of these two men suggest the extent to which racial prejudice—and actions that can only be considered racist—remained the bedrock of many Vermonters' attitudes toward black Americans throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

The subtleties of Reverend Lemuel Haynes's removal from the West Rutland Congregational Church speak to the rising tide of racism in Vermont in the early 1800s and beyond. It was said that the young men of the neighboring parish used to taunt the Haynes' own young parishioners because they had a "colored preacher." Their retort was that Rev. Haynes's soul was "all white! Snow white!"³⁸ As time went by over his thirty-year ministry in West Rutland, the parishioners became increasingly conscious that their pastor was indeed a mulatto, in other words he was clearly not white and, as a preacher, an anomaly in Vermont and in New England. Haynes's years of stirring sermons, sick visits, marriages, somewhat outspoken Federalist views, and noteworthy pastoral devotion began to wear thin with a newer generation who began to believe skin color was an impediment to real excellence in the pulpit, and so Haynes graciously withdrew from the congregation he had served for so long rather than allowing himself to be asked to step aside.

The jury is still out on whether changing times, politics, creed or

race, or a grand mixture of all these factors brought an end to Haynes's thirty-year pastorate, but Haynes certainly thought that race had something to do with it.³⁹ By the second decade of the nineteenth century a full generation separated free northern blacks from slavery and whites from their earlier perceptions of slavery. New England offered free colored people a basic life, with few "white" social freedoms, at best a degraded life; but many whites were satisfied to tolerate this debasement because they did not honestly believe the races should mix. Haynes had always been a man of outspoken conviction, even entering into the national political disputes of the day. Such outspokenness and willingness to wade into the turbulent political scene undoubtedly made him seem a rather uppity black to the younger generation. That is, the reverend was acting as only whites were supposed to act. After his dismissal in 1818, Haynes related to an acquaintance, with a wry sense of humor, that "the congregation had just then discovered that he was a colored man."⁴⁰ Some years later he is alleged to have observed that his congregation thought "they would appear more respectable with a white pastor than a black one."⁴¹ It is reasonable to conclude that the move by Haynes' congregation to dismiss him had racial overtones, at the least.

The last incident exemplifying the play of racism in antebellum Vermont involves an early sojourn of Frederick Douglass to Vermont. In the summer of 1843 Douglass was travelling in Vermont by stagecoach. The stage stopped one night along the way and took on five new passengers, and because it was dark none of the new fares had any idea of the color of the passenger, Mr. Douglass, already on board. As the conversation went on during the ride Douglass "was treated with all manner of respect. . . . Scarcely however had the light gilded the green mountains of Vermont than he saw one of the chaps in the coach take a sly peep at him, and whisper to another 'Egad after all 'tis a nigger'. . . . He had black looks for the remainder of the way, and disrespect."⁴² This may well have happened in July 1843 as Douglass headed for Middlebury to participate in his first One Hundred Conventions being sponsored by the New England Anti-Slavery Society. The stagecoach episode was nothing new to Douglass; several times he had been forced from public rail transportation in Massachusetts. Once, when he inquired of the conductor urging him to vacate why he must leave the nearly empty first-class car for the "negro car," he was told pointblank, "because you are black." The conductor then summoned eight to ten assistants to remove Douglass and one cried out "Snake out the d—d nigger!" Douglass held onto the seat so tightly as he was physically removed that both he and the seat, which was ripped out from the floor boards, were thrown off the train and onto the station platform.⁴³

The Middlebury Convention was preceded by handbills spread about town and advertisements in the local newspapers, one of which described Frederick Douglass as "the eloquent fugitive from slavery whose thrilling narration of his own history and suffering while in bondage and powerful appeals for his oppressed brethren have accomplished so much in other states."⁴⁴ Douglass' recollection of the Middlebury College students' handbills, on the other hand, was that they were a good deal less genteel. Their posters, placed about town, made "violent aspersions" on the character of each of the speakers and made the "gross-est misrepresentations of our principles, measures, and objects." Douglass "was described as an escaped convict from the state prison."

When only six or eight people showed up on the morning of July 13, 1843, for the first lecture, Douglass strode out of the Town-Room, headed "to the corners of the streets [to] give notice of the Convention, and endeavor to bring people in."⁴⁵ In the evening a larger audience attended, but still very few local professed abolitionists, and fewer still from the surrounding country. In fact, a limited number of Middlebury's most respected people were in attendance; the audience included a number of idle boys looking for a show.

On the last evening there was a bit of a row as many of those who came wanted to hear Mr. Douglass's narrative of how he learned to read and write. A grand curiosity on this point seemed to be frustrated when Rev. George Bradburn droned on and on past 9:30 P.M. railing against the church and the clergy. The young, back row benchers threw buckshot and gravel at the podium, at least three eggs flew in the same direction, sending a message to Bradburn to sit down, but also indicating that some in the audience came prepared for a possible disruption. The news report said "the disturbance was made by minors" and speculated hopefully that "the day of mobs has, we trust, gone by in Vermont, and especially in Middlebury."⁴⁶

The stridency of the convention speakers' attacks was clearly not appreciated. Bradburn, an abolitionist from Attleboro, Massachusetts, called the clergy a "race of corrupt hypocrites" and claimed that by common law "the clergy as a body were guilty of Murder and Robbery." A Universalist clergyman named Mr. Knapen questioned the validity of these statements from the floor, but unrelenting, Bradburn asserted that the "northern Universalists . . . were the most brazen faced hypocrites of the whole gang."⁴⁷ He then denounced the Constitution and the Congress and made a "desperate lunge at the Supreme Court," expostulating that "they were all a dishonest gang led on by the blind Spirit of Slavery." The news reports expressed dissatisfaction with the lecturers, dubbing them "infuriated disorganizers" who were bent upon destroying the political parties, reviling the clergy, leveling the "pillars

of the Constitution," and dissolving the Union, unless they were immediately granted their way. Though the Vermont newspapers did not directly attack Frederick Douglass, his speeches "rankled antebellum northern whites because he was both an abolitionist and a black," and he was at times in various venues called a "saucy negro," "an impertinent black vagabond," or just "nigger Douglass."⁴⁸ In general, the speakers' approach to their subject was adjudged far too harsh, unjustly critical of the churches, the clergy, and the whole nation, for Middlebury hearts and minds. In order to accomplish what the antislavery advocates intended, "to melt the chains from the hands of the bondsmen, and let the oppressed go free," these abolitionists were advised to "exhibit more candor in their remarks" and to have more warmth and love in their presentations and less "of the thunder and lightning of denunciation."⁴⁹ Middlebury's appeal to the lecturers was that they should recognize that the progress of antislavery sentiment in Vermont was advancing and would continue, not overnight but by "a long and persevering appeal to popular sentiment."⁵⁰

The overall review of the Anti-Slavery Convention in Middlebury was fairly blunt. Newspaper reports confirmed that, after three sessions on two successive days, few people attended, and very few of those from the local area who held abolition in some regard.⁵¹ The *Middlebury People's Press* called it a "Convention of Foreign New Light Abolitionists." Though there were moments during the two days when "powerful eloquence" illuminated a "laudable kind of discussion," the editor said, the speakers all too often

relapsed into the most violent denunciations, and bitter invectives against politicians, priests, and all civil, ecclesiastical and benevolent institutions of the country, which should be prostrated unless they would give free course to the mighty carriage of abolitionism which was rolling through the land, and if found antagonist would crush them to a powder.⁵²

Even Douglass' own assessment was none too rosy, and it stands as an affirmation of the depth of underlying racism that permeated antebellum Vermont. The great black abolitionist observed that "few people attended our meeting, and apparently little was accomplished by it." Moreover, "upon the whole . . . the several towns visited showed that Vermont was surprisingly under the influence of the slave power. Her proud boast that within her borders no slave had ever been delivered up to his master, did not hinder her hatred to anti-slavery."⁵³

NOTES

¹ A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process, the Colonial Period* (New York, 1978), 3-16, 61-99, 100-150, 313-389; Lorenzo Johnston Greene,

The Negro in Colonial New England (New York, 1974), 124–143, and laws not indexed, scattered through the entire book; Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (Boston, 1981), use index by state and subject; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free State, 1790–1860* (Chicago, 1961), 97.

² Paul Gillies, "Not Quite a State of Nature: Derivations of Early Vermont Law," *Vermont Law Review* 3(1) (1998): 99–131; Gary T. Aichele, "Making the Vermont Constitution 1777–1824," in Michael Sherman, ed., *A More Perfect Union: Vermont Becomes a State, 1777–1816* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 1991), 2–24; Walter Hill Crockett, *Vermont: The Green Mountain State*, 5 vols. (New York: Century History, 1921–1923), 2: 167–239; Michael Bellesiles, "The Establishment of Legal Structures on the Frontier: The Case of Revolutionary Vermont," *Journal of American History* 73 (1987): 895–915; Peter S. Onuf, "State-Making in Revolutionary America: Independent Vermont as a Case Study," *Journal of American History* 67 (1987): 797–815; John Shaeffer, "A Comparison of the First Constitution of Vermont and Pennsylvania," *Vermont History* 43 (1975): 33–43; Francis Thompson, "Vermont from Chaos to Statehood: New Hampshire Grants and Connecticut Equivalent Lands," *Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association* 6 (1921): 231–271.

³ J. Kevin Graffagnino, "Vermont's Attitudes Toward Slavery: The Need For A Closer Look," *Vermont History* 45 (1977): 31–34.

⁴ John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859–1900* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1995), xiv; Larry R. Morrison, "'Nearer to the Brute Creation': The Scientific Defense of American Slavery before 1830," *Southern Studies* 19 (1980), 228–242; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 158n., 222–223, 230, 507–508; William R. Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3–4.

⁵ William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York, 1996), 11–12.

⁶ J. E. Lighter, ed., *Random House Dictionary of American Slang* (New York, 1997), 658; Geneva Smitherman, *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (Boston, 1994), 167–169; *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Nigger."

⁷ William Faux, *Memorable Days in America: being a journal of a tour to the United States, principally undertaken to ascertain by positive evidence, the condition and probable prospects of British emigrants* (London, 1823), 9.

⁸ As quoted in Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 245.

⁹ Lydia M. Child, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (Amherst, Mass., 1996), 195.

¹⁰ As quoted in Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 245.

¹¹ See Graffagnino, "Vermont Attitudes," 33–34; Crockett, *Vermont*, 3: 277; *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress, 1774–1989* (Washington, D.C., 1989), 1006.

¹² Robinson and Southmayd to Charles G. Eastman, 8 June 1842, in Charles G. Eastman Correspondence, 1826–1846, Vermont Historical Society (I am indebted to Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], for this source); Crockett, *Vermont*, 325.

¹³ See David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791–1850* (New York, 1987), 147, 170, 173, 174, 180; Charles E. Tuttle, Jr., "Vermont and the Antislavery Movement" (Honors Thesis, Harvard University, 1937), 77–79; Wilbur H. Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (Columbus, Ohio, 1937), 24, 25, 35, 73, 74.

¹⁴ George G. Robinson to Rowland E. Robinson, 3 September 1854, Robinson Family Papers, Rokeby Collection, Sheldon Museum. George signed his letters "Gillp," as he was affectionately known in the family, taken from his middle name, Gilpin, which was his mother's maiden name. Rokeby Collection.

¹⁵ George G. Robinson to Rowland E. Robinson, 26 December 1858, *ibid.*

¹⁶ George G. Robinson to Rowland E. Robinson, 9 January 1859, *ibid.*; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black*, 256–257, 259, 260n, 492, 501, 518.

¹⁷ George G. Robinson to Rowland E. Robinson, 21 February 1859, Robinson Family Papers. An earlier letter from family friend Charles H. Symes to Roland demonstrates how comfortable Symes felt "niggering up" Rowland: "I am learning the fiddle but I don't want you to let the boys know it and I want you to send me the notes to some of the nigger songs that be such as you think will do for next summer if you can get them handy." (Charles H. Symes to Friend Robinson [Rowland E.], 16 March 1849, *ibid.*). On the opprobrium set upon whites playing the "nigger" instrument, see Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 199–200. On an aspect of the human dynamics that provoked this sort of prejudice in the thoughts of Frederick Douglass, see Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free State, 1790–1860* (Chicago, 1961), 103. On the prevalence of prejudice in antebellum Vermont

and statistical methods of measuring it, see Elise A. Guyette, "The Working Lives of African Vermonters in Census and Literature, 1790-1870," *Vermont History* 61 (1993): 69-84.

¹⁸ Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 24; Lawrence J. Friedman, "Purifying the White Man's Country: The American Colonization Society Reconsidered, 1816-1840," *Societas* 6 (1976): 5; *Journal of the General Assembly of the State of Vermont* (1819): 76, 138-139, in its preamble states "that all men are born equally free and independent," and then highly recommends colonization in Vermont and to their senators and representatives in Washington "to alleviate human woe, and eventually to secure this country from great and impending evils"; see also *The Journal of the Senate of the State of Vermont, October Session* (1851): 158.

¹⁹ As quoted in Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 244; for the full text see Charles George Eastman, *Letters, 1826-1846*, Vermont Historical Society.

²⁰ Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery*, 13-15; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 145, 156-157; Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 103, 106; "Eighth Report of the Vermont Colonization Society," October 18, 1833; Tuttle, "Vermont and the Antislavery Movement," 29-42 (quote on p. 30).

²¹ Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York, 1998), 59, 70, 72-73, 99, 103, 118, 128, 142, 194, 219-220; Russel B. Nye, *Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy, 1830-1860* (East Lansing, Mich., 1963), 3-4; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 142, 143, 147, 149, 151, 166.

²² J. K. Converse, *A Discourse on the Moral, Legal and Domestic Condition of Our Colored Population, Preached Before the Vermont Colonization Society, At Montpelier, October 17, 1832* (Burlington, Vt., 1832), 19, 23; Friedman, "Purifying the White Man's Country," 7-11.

²³ J. K. Converse, "The History of Slavery, And Means of Elevating the African Race: A Discourse Delivered Before The Vermont Colonization Society, at Montpelier, October 15, 1840 (Burlington, Vt., 1840), 22. For another example of colonizationist sentiment, see the Fourth of July, 1826, oration in Burlington by newly appointed University of Vermont Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy George W. Benedict, later the owner and editor of the *Burlington Free Press* (1853-1866): "An Oration, Delivered at Burlington, Vermont, on the Fourth of July 1826: Being The Fiftieth Anniversary of American Independence" (Burlington, Vt., 1926), 17, 22, 23.

²⁴ Oliver Johnson, *Address, Delivered in the Congregational Church, in Middlebury, By Request of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, Wednesday Evening, February 18, 1835* (Montpelier, 1835), 21-23; *First Annual Report of The Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, Presented at Middlebury, February 18, 1835* (Montpelier, 1835), 13-17; Mayer, *All on Fire*, 134-138, 236; William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on American Colonization* (Boston, 1832); and in answer to Garrison, see Cyril Pearl, "Remarks on African Colonization and the Abolition of Slavery, In Two Parts" (Windsor, Vt., 1833).

²⁵ *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Vermont Colonization Society*, October 15, 1846 (Burlington, Vt., 1846), 16.

²⁶ Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 13.

²⁷ On Slade's career see Crockett, *Vermont*, 3: 246-247; *Biographical Directory of U.S. Congress*, 1820; Henry Perry Smith, *History of Addison County Vermont* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1886), 151-153; Samuel Swift, *History of the Town of Middlebury in the County of Addison, Vermont* (Middlebury, Vt., 1859), 126, 274-278; Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams. Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848* (Philadelphia, 1875), 7: 275-276, 8: 150-151, 9: 39-40, 453-455, 10: 60, 63, 198, 472-473; *Niles Register*, 6 June 1829, 241-244.

²⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 23 December 1835, 83-89; Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, see references to "Slade."

²⁹ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 5 September 1835.

³⁰ David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York, 1998), 3-32; Lorman Ratner, *Powder Keg: Northern Opposition to the Antislavery Movement, 1831-1840* (New York, 1964), 3-87; Theodore Lyman, ed., *Papers Relating to the Garrison Mob* (Cambridge, Mass., 1870).

³¹ *The New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, 12 October 1835, 12, as taken from *The Newport (N.H.) Spectator*, no date, though the incident probably occurred on a weekday in late September, 1835.

³² Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (New York, 1968), 153-155; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 149-150; Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 182-83, 362n.63.

³³ *Green Mountain Freeman* (Montpelier), 11 July 1877; Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 11-12.

³⁴ *The Liberator*, 31 October 1835, as reported in the abolitionist *State Journal* (Montpelier), 27 October 1835. Samuel May said he was mobbed five times in Vermont that fall. He appeared in Montpelier on Thursday and Friday, October 22 and 23; went on to Burlington and spoke there on Monday, October 26; to Middlebury to speak on Tuesday, October 27, and on to Rutland to lecture on Wednesday, October 28. In Burlington May was accosted by a man in the gallery who did not wish any speeches on abolition, but a prominent local lawyer and Congressman Herman Allen had him removed and discouraged others from participating. In Middlebury a "youngster threw a hand-

ful of duckshot at May as he spoke and was ejected by the sheriff, and several robust youngsters threw stones at the building, but Rev. May went on"; see *The Liberator*, 31 October 1835. In Rutland a newspaper notice encouraged the citizens opposed to the abolition lecture to stay away from the Baptist Meeting House, rather than go and be disruptive. As a result, few attended. There were some "trifling" disturbances reported but Rev. May thought it best to cut short his lecture. A rock through the window, shuffling of feet by some attendees, some yelling from without, the ring of sleigh bells, as well as the discharging of firearms some distance away likely encouraged his decision; see *The Rutland Herald*, 27 October and 3 November 1835.

³⁵ *The Liberator*, 31 October 1835.

³⁶ *The Herald of Freedom*, 28 November 1835; Richard H. Sewall, *John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 32, 133, describes a particularly disruptive antislavery lecture series delivered by Rev. Storrs in Dover, New Hampshire, August 1835, and the tactics used by the opposition to dislodge him from the podium.

³⁷ Orange County Court Records, Volume 13, 208–210; *The Herald of Freedom*, 9 July 1836; Crockett, *Vermont*, 5: 101–104. Another incident in Newbury took place in 1842 at the Methodist Episcopal School where there were about 260 students. Faculty and students made a concerted effort to keep out one black girl, as "it was held by a large portion of the public to be a sin and a crime to teach a colored person to read and write, a view endorsed generally by the clergy and the religious press, who ranged themselves on the popular side." Frederick P. Wells, *History of Newbury, Vermont* (St. Johnsbury, Vt.: The Caledonian Company, 1902), 213–214.

³⁸ Richard D. Brown, "Not Only Extreme Poverty, but the Worst Kind of Orphanage: Lemuel Haynes and the Boundaries of Racial Tolerance on the Yankee Frontier, 1770–1820," *The New England Quarterly* 61(1988): 511 at note 10. See also Paul Douglass, *Black Apostle to Yankeeeland: Equalitarian Catchcoolt Who Overlived His Caste* (Brandon, Vt., 1972), 28–29; and Timothy Mather Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes, A.M.* (New York, 1839), 81, which was published but a few years after Haynes's death and probably carries the greatest authenticity.

³⁹ Cooley, *Sketches*, 73–172; Helen MacLam, "Black Puritan on the Northern Frontier: The Vermont Ministry of Lemuel Haynes," in Richard Newman, ed., *Black Preacher to White America: The Collected Writings of Lemuel Haynes, 1774–1833* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990), xix–xxxviii; Rev. David Sherman, *Sketches of New England Divines* (New York, 1860), 267–284; Albion B. Wilson, *History of Granville, Massachusetts* (Hartford, Conn., 1954), 191–194; Henry G. Fairbanks, "Slavery and the Vermont Clergy," *Vermont History* 27 (1959): 305–312; John Saillant, "'Doctrinal Controversy Between The Hopkintonian and The Universalist': Religion, Race, and Ideology in Postrevolutionary Vermont," *Vermont History* 61 (1993): 197–215; Saillant, "Lemuel Haynes's Black Republicanism And The American Republican Tradition, 1775–1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (1994): 293–324; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 243–244; Ruth Bogin, "'The Battle of Lexington': A Patriotic Ballad by Lemuel Haynes," *William and Mary Quarterly* 42 (1985): 499–506; Bogin, "'Liberty Further Extended: A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by Lemuel Haynes,'" *William and Mary Quarterly* 40 (1983), 85–105.

⁴⁰ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 243–244; see this text at 34 and notes 120–123 on a misplaced use of the word 'nigger'; Saillant, "Haynes's Black Republicanism."

⁴¹ The source of the most poignant anecdote on Rev. Haynes's dismissal comes from the Fitch Manuscript History of Washington County, New York. This was prepared by Dr. Asa Fitch from 1847 to 1878, a collection of articles, bits of transcribed oral history, and pieces of genealogy, mostly of Washington County (which runs along the border of Vermont touching both Rutland and Bennington counties). Dr. Fitch died before the manuscript was published. For the last twenty years it has been available in microfilm (the Vermont Historical Society has a copy). Recently Kenneth A. Perry has done a masterful job of compiling the entire manuscript into a gazeteer, with an extensive index. Dr. Fitch heard the Haynes story from Captain Donald McDonald, of either Salem or Hebron, N.Y., at dinner in about 1848, which would be roughly fifteen years after Haynes died, and as much as thirty years since the actual dismissal. In Capt. McDonald's telling of the story to Fitch he says, "they found out that he was a nigger, and turned him away" [emphasis in original Fitch manuscript]. The quote is McDonald's, not Haynes's, as is often implied when it is quoted. It is questionable whether Rev. Haynes, talking about himself to anyone, would have referred to himself as a "nigger." Kenneth A. Perry, *The Fitch Gazeteer, An Annotated Index to the Manuscript History of Washington County, New York* (Bowie, Maryland, 1999), 1: 220–221; Vermont Historical Society, Film 197, at frame 245. Chrisfield Johnson, *The History of Washington County, New York* (Philadelphia, 1878), 201–202, relating the same incident, uses "a black man"; Ebenezer Baldwin, *Observations on the Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Qualities of Our Colored Population: With Remarks on the Subject of Emancipation and Colonization* (New Haven, Conn., 1834), 46, relates the same incident and uses "a colored man."

⁴² Blessingame, *Douglass Papers*, 1: 45.

⁴³ Ibid., 1: 10 at n. 2.; Mayer, *All on Fire*, 306–307.

⁴⁴ *Vergennes Vermonter*, early June 1843.

⁴⁵ *Vermont Observer* (Middlebury), 18 July 1843.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 25 July 1843; Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies* (New York, 1994), 672.

⁴⁷ *Middlebury People's Press*, 19 July 1843.

⁴⁸ Blessingame, *Douglass Papers*, 1: xxxvii.

⁴⁹ *Vermont Observer*, 25 July 1843.

⁵⁰ *Middlebury People's Press*, 19 July 1843.

⁵¹ Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 671–672; *Vermont Observer*, 18 July 1843; *Middlebury People's Press*, 19 July 1843.

⁵² Ibid.; it is noteworthy that on the last evening a local “colored lady,” Mrs. Betsy Lafas, spoke out and complained during Rev. Bradburn’s talk that her son Samuel was abused while passing out handbills. No response was reported from either Bradburn or the audience.

⁵³ Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 632.



Surrogate Ministers: Women, Revivalism, and Maternal Associations in Vermont

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By MARILYN S. BLACKWELL

After the fourth annual meeting of the Brattleboro Maternal Association in the summer of 1838, secretary Marcia Knowlton assessed the society's progress. "Whether any soul has been converted to God through our instrumentality," she remarked, "is a question which we have no desire to decide, but we have some reason to hope that during the interesting season of revival recently enjoyed in this place, a number of the children belonging to our association have been brought into the fold of Christ." If this were the case, "even in one solitary instance," she declared, "we would say 'Not unto us, not unto us, but to *thy name*.'" Closing her remarks with prayer, Knowlton pledged members to be more faithful in the discharge of their duties as mothers and in their efforts at early conversion of their children.¹

Where did Knowlton's sense of maternal mission originate? Clearly, her motivations—and those of the association's other fifty members—were related to the evangelical impulse underlying many female benevolent organizations of the early nineteenth century. Nancy Cott, Keith Melder, Ann Boylan, and other historians have detailed the extent of these activities. Mary Ryan, who has analyzed changes in family life

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during the early nineteenth century, has shown the important role women's associations played in fostering youthful conversions during the revivals that swept the "burned over district" of New York.² But Vermont historiography has given little attention to the connection between women and revivalism. Both Randolph Roth and P. Jeffrey Potash found that significant numbers of adolescents, particularly children of church members, professed their faith during the revivals of the 1830s, and they acknowledge that married women outnumbered men as church members before the great revivals erupted. But neither historian has focused on women's participation in the revival process or detected an institutional basis for women's activism.³ Marcia Knowlton's zeal sparks unanswered questions: How did women's associations contribute to revivalism in antebellum Vermont, and in turn, how did the revivals influence the development of women's evangelical activities?

Few records of women's voluntary societies have survived to enable us to construct a clear pattern of female activity in the antebellum period, which may account for the absence of women's involvement in Vermont histories. Of the evangelical churches—Congregational, Baptist, and Methodist—records exist of only a handful of Congregational women's associations. Only rarely did local church historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mention early women's societies. More helpful are the lists of associations in the annual reports of the state evangelical societies, such as the Vermont Bible Society and the Vermont Domestic Missionary Society. Used in conjunction with comparative records from New Hampshire and Massachusetts, these reports reveal the development of women's religious association during the period.

Maternal societies, such as the one Marcia Knowlton joined in Brattleboro, did not emerge spontaneously; they evolved from earlier women's religious organizing and at the same time represented a turning point in that process. Female benevolent activity in Vermont, lasting over two decades before the 1830s, helped prepare for the revivals as women supported parallel male organizations. At the peak of the revival cycle, Congregational women began organizing maternal associations; in the process, they shifted their focus from indirect support of the evangelical movement to an exclusively female effort—one that effectively domesticated the work of revivalist ministers, moving it from the church to the home. This article briefly traces the development of women's religious organizing in the state, details the participation of women in Brattleboro's religious institutions as a case study of the revival period, and assesses the role of maternal societies in the evangelical movement.

WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS ORGANIZING

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, benevolent women began their activities by donating money or goods to gospel teaching in frontier areas. As members of local "cent" societies, women gave a penny per week, which these groups forwarded yearly to state or national religious organizations, such as the Vermont Bible Society, the Vermont Missionary Society (later the Vermont Domestic Missionary Society), the American Board of Foreign Missions, the American Education Society, and the Vermont Tract Society. These men's groups supported ministers' education, missionaries, and the printing and distribution of Bibles. Sometimes labeled the "evangelical united front," these efforts usually involved an elite group of women at the local level connected to the established church.⁴ Women in Jericho, for example, believed "that Christians are under solemn obligation to do all in their power for the furtherance of the gospel." This sense of collective responsibility as Christians spurred them to create one of the earliest missionary societies in Vermont in 1806, and to contribute annually to all of the larger evangelical associations over the next two decades.⁵ In Benson, members of the female cent society believed they were part of a vast organizing effort to promote "the cause of Christ in the world" by "contributing their property together with their prayers, for the spread of the gospel in the dark regions of the earth."⁶ During this period, Congregational women organized at least sixty-nine female benevolent societies in fifty-seven towns in Vermont. Annual contributions were relatively small, from just a few dollars in the early years to as much as \$45 from societies in the larger communities, but the combined contributions of these associations represented significant support for the spread of the gospel.⁷

At first these efforts appear to have had little direct impact on women's local communities because the bulk of their contributions supported missionary work elsewhere. But during the 1820s, some women's groups began redirecting their efforts locally, which helped to establish both their moral leadership and their status in their own communities. In what has been interpreted largely as a class effort, wives of community leaders defined new standards of female behavior; by encouraging a strict Christian morality, they wielded considerable social influence as they carved out a female role beyond the household.⁸ Mary Goss, a member of Montpelier's Female Foreign Mission Society, noted her local concerns in 1821: "Vice and immorality greatly prevail," she explained, but "Praying circles have recently been instituted and a system of visiting from house to house established."⁹ The Female Bible Society of Royalton, which generously donated to the Vermont Bible Society

every year, began supplying Bibles to local families through committees in each school district. In Montpelier, the Tract Society solicited the help of local women for a similar scheme in 1830.¹⁰

This effort to "save Souls" was often synonymous with charity for the poor and enhanced women's self-sacrificing image in the community. Indeed, evangelicals sometimes used the word "poor" interchangeably with unredeemed. The Benson Young Ladies' Bible Society sought out the poor who were "destitute of the word of life" in order to supply them with Bibles. In 1825 the Craftsbury Female Benevolent Society voted to prepare a box of garments for Indian missions and to devote the rest of their time to helping the "needy in our own town." Three years later, just as religious revivalism erupted in Caledonia County, they voted to use the society's work for "support of the gospel at home."¹¹ Alms and conversion efforts went hand in hand.

Young women also participated in spreading the gospel as they cooperated with men in organizing and teaching Sunday schools. Typically ministers and community religious leaders mobilized adolescents in Bible classes to prepare them for teaching younger children in Sunday school. In 1815 thirty-six-year-old Hannah Wells, daughter of Reverend William Wells of Brattleboro, gathered a class of young women for Bible study while her father organized a prayer meeting for young men. When Wells's class of young women became too large for her to handle, she enlisted help from the newly formed "ladies praying circle," which supplied additional teachers; meanwhile, a Sunday school for boys opened at the village schoolhouse. These classes, usually held in the summer months, were not formally organized as part of the village church until 1822.¹² Sunday school leaders often sought to gather all the children in town as a means to spread the gospel and to encourage good behavior and church attendance on Sunday. Religious leaders in Greensboro organized Sunday schools in the town's school districts, and in Hardwick and Craftsbury as well, in 1817. Children in Montpelier could attend one of three Sabbath schools founded in 1816.¹³ By the time the Vermont Sunday School Union, a nondenominational organization led by Congregationalists, coalesced in 1825, membership included 48 schools with 2,053 scholars and 313 teachers in the state. Two years later, the number of scholars had quadrupled to 8,061; by 1832 Vermont leaders could boast 427 Sunday schools in a population of 280,000, or one school for every 655 residents.¹⁴

Beyond the immediate goals of teaching piety and instilling "orderly conduct," these classes were designed to eventually effect conversions leading to church membership. Leaders from Bridport reported, "It is a means of enlarging our congregations, and is an animating exhibition to

parents and all who feel for the interest of the young.”¹⁵ The Sunday school effort in Greensboro resulted in fifty-five new members in the Congregational church and twenty at the Baptist church.¹⁶ As the young adults who taught Sunday school spread the gospel, they reinforced their own piety, and it is likely that many became full church members. These evangelicals included both young men and women, but as historian Ann Boylan suggests, the role held particular resonance for young women, who had few other avenues for “useful and significant” work. For some, Bible classes and Sunday school teaching led to missionary activities; for others it spurred participation in local benevolent organizations. In this way young women were drawn outside the home while remaining within the confines of women’s nurturing tradition just as young children were becoming the focus of the evangelical movement.¹⁷

Christian education for youth through the development of Sunday schools stemmed in part from an emerging view of children as innocent and moldable and the movement to educate citizens for the new Republic. During the first half of the nineteenth century, child rearing through affection and persuasion gradually replaced Calvinist discipline in many middle-class families, yet parents also expected to establish firm control over their children through moral training at an early age.¹⁸ Publications in Brattleboro of a *Miniature Bible* for children in 1816 and a small prayer book for Sunday schools in 1826 reflected this new child-centered approach. Small enough for a child’s pocket, the tiny volumes summarized Biblical lessons in simple form; both stressed “habits of piety in early life” and “dutiful and humble” behavior toward parents, teachers, and relations.¹⁹ In a similar vein, the Sunday School Union promoted a reward system to encourage Bible memorization. Children who learned Scripture lessons received small books and special library privileges. As one superintendent reported, this “operates as a powerful stimulus upon the scholars to learn the lessons perfectly, and to behave with propriety.”²⁰ Evangelical parents—and particularly mothers who assumed greater responsibility for educating young citizens in the new Republic—envisioned early religious training as the means to maintain parental authority and instill regular habits in children.

WOMEN’S EVANGELICAL ACTIVITIES IN BRATTLEBORO

Maternal societies, whose members focused even more directly on youthful conversion, arose not only out of this push for Christian education and the tradition of female religious benevolence, but also from the climate of religious enthusiasm and the divisions it fostered in Vermont communities. The evidence from Brattleboro’s Congregational churches shows how women participated in church expansion over two

decades beginning in 1814. That year the First Congregational Church of Brattleboro split as members from the East Village organized a new church in the growing commercial center to improve attendance and control church leadership. During the controversy, both the older church in West Brattleboro and the new Centre Church in Brattleboro Village grew dramatically; women represented approximately three-quarters of new members over the next two years and became important sources of support for both ministers.²¹ In Brattleboro Village, women not only helped organize the new church but also operated a Fund Society to support the church and initiated the Female Friendly Association for Religious and Charitable Purposes in 1816. Led by prominent and wealthy Sally Holbrook, members of this group committed themselves to gaining Christian knowledge, praying for "the revival of religion," and cultivating "a spirit of sympathy for the afflicted." At first married women, many of whom were the wives of local merchants and manufacturers, dominated the leadership, but increasingly they brought their adolescent daughters into the society, where they set an example of female piety for them and established a generation-bridging female elite in the community.²² Remembered as much for their display of "white caps, calashes and ribbons, and . . . stately dress" as for their "Christianizing influences," they met every Wednesday afternoon and became, according to church historian Charles Day, a "source of spiritual power." "Marked not only by piety but by a dignity, nobility and courtliness of manner that could not be forgotten," this group of women constituted the "main spiritual prop" of the village ministry.²³

During the 1820s, as commercial activity and population in Brattleboro expanded, religious diversity increased, fracturing the Congregational establishment. Methodist, Universalist, and eventually Baptist groups formed in town, spurring Congregational leaders to bolster their efforts at Christian education. Both Congregational churches drifted increasingly toward Calvinist orthodoxy, requiring public professions of faith for membership. In the early 1830s, ministers of both churches enlisted outside evangelists to conduct protracted meetings in their parishes, spurring revivals similar to those in other towns in the Connecticut River Valley, first in 1831 and then in 1833 and 1834. During the "great accession," which began September 11, 1831, at a prayer meeting in the village schoolhouse, the Centre Congregational Church gained sixty-six new members.²⁴ But controversy over the shift toward orthodoxy and the emotionalism of the revivalists splintered the Congregational community again. In the East Village, disgruntled members left the Centre Congregational Church to form a Unitarian society in 1831, and three years later disagreements with the minister over reviv-

alism caused his dismissal. In West Brattleboro, Universalists staged a "preach-in" on November 24, 1833, to demand use of the church for their meetings.²⁵

During this period of religious fervor and denominational competition, when Congregational ministers were heightening the importance of conversion, evangelical mothers in the village sought a more active role in Christian education. While male religious leaders sought to provide poor young men with education, female leaders organized a committee to encourage parents to send their children to Sunday school. In February 1834 they formed the Brattleboro Maternal Association. Half of its fifty members also belonged to the Female Friendly Society, but unlike the earlier association, the new group encouraged any mother in the community to join, which expanded the membership beyond the Brattleboro elite to the wives of artisans and farmers.²⁶ These women responded to the divisiveness in the community and to a renewed sense of mission by asserting a universal role for mothers in fostering Christian conversion. They welcomed new female church members to that responsibility. Indeed, two-thirds of the members of the maternal society joined the Centre Congregational Church between 1831 and 1838. The appeal to a unifying motherhood became a means to heal community divisions, at least among these women, and to find what they believed was a sacred calling.

MATERNAL SOCIETIES AND CHILDHOOD CONVERSION

Brattleboro's evangelical mothers were not only inspired by local events but also by their connections to an extensive network of women pledged to childhood conversion. Like others in the Northeast, these women followed a plan for organizing maternal associations that had been outlined in *Mother's Magazine*, a monthly periodical first published in Utica, New York, in January 1833. Hired by the Utica Maternal Association, the magazine's editor, Abigail G. Whittelsey, promoted the spread of maternal associations and circulated literature on Christian child rearing.²⁷ The first maternal society on record had been organized in Portland, Maine, in 1816. Subsequently, Congregational women in Boston adopted the Portland constitution and rules of operation; by 1825 they had circulated 2,000 copies of the constitution to inspire other groups. It opened with the words: "Deeply impressed with the importance of bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The exact same wording is found in the constitution of the maternal association of Jericho Centre, Vermont, organized in 1833. The constitution of the Brattleboro Maternal Association began: "Regarding it as a christian duty to train up our children in the nurture

& admonition of the Lord.”²⁸ In some areas ministers’ wives took the lead in organizing these associations. In 1833, for example, the wives of Congregational ministers in Cheshire County, New Hampshire, across the Connecticut River from Brattleboro, formed a regional association and then promoted the organization of maternal societies in each town in the county by sending agents and subscriptions to *Mother’s Magazine* to facilitate the effort. By 1836 they could report the organization of thirty-eight maternal associations in two New Hampshire counties.²⁹

It is unclear whether a similar system operated among clergymen’s wives in Vermont, but maternal societies did emerge in the larger towns or where women had established a tradition of religious benevolence. Records or specific reference to thirteen societies exist; it is likely there were many more. Larger commercial towns, like Montpelier, Burlington, Middlebury, Woodstock, and Bradford comprise nearly half the list. Societies also appear in New Haven, Jericho, Benson, Craftsbury, Newbury, Wardsboro, and Royalton, where Congregational women had previously formed religious organizations or revivalism was intense.³⁰ Many began operation in 1835. That year the annual report of the Vermont Domestic Missionary Society noted that “pious mothers are beginning to feel that the great principles of the gospel may be made to control the mind and conscience . . . at a very early age.” Minutes of the Vermont Congregational Convention for 1836 noted that maternal societies were “extensively organized” in the state but not “duly appreciated”; the following year the organization reported that “associations are multiplied to aid” mothers in their efforts to raise “virtuous youth.”³¹ In 1838 Sophia A. Hewes of Chelsea began editing her own monthly, *The Mother’s Book and Young Lady’s Companion*. She planned to tap a ready-made distribution system through maternal societies in the Connecticut River Valley and offered free printed constitutions for every twenty copies sold. In 1841 she even promoted the organization of a state maternal society, but there is no evidence that it ever materialized.³²

Through this literature and preprinted constitutions, mothers became acquainted with a uniform system of operation and also connected with an ecumenical movement for Christian education. Members of maternal societies met monthly to pray for their children’s conversions and to read and discuss Christian child-rearing literature. Many groups accumulated extensive libraries of religious books and periodicals, which they circulated among themselves and other mothers in the community. The Brattleboro society read aloud from Caroline Fry’s *Scripture Principles of Education* (1833) and Lydia Sigourney’s *Letters to Mothers* (1838). Sigourney, who believed that mothers were the only “universal agent of civilization,” explained that Christian mothers labored for both

God and country. "Mothers, the blessing of this ministry is ours," she exhorted. "The religion of a new-born babe, is the prayer of its mother."³³ Members relied on the community of women in their local societies and the connection to this larger group of like-minded women whose writings were published in *Mother's Magazine* to bolster their religious leadership in the household and their authority over children.

In contrast to women's earlier evangelical efforts, these women focused inward on self-improvement and the development of Christian values at home, rather than elsewhere. Mothers who assumed the responsibility for shaping childhood character modeled piety through their own example. This burden weighed heavily on members of the Brattleboro Maternal Association. As Marcia Knowlton explained, children's "character & condition for time & eternity is generally determined during the short period of infancy & childhood & determined too by maternal influence & example."³⁴ Members of maternal societies committed themselves to daily prayer with their children and to preventing them from developing "pride, vanity, or worldly-mindedness." The children, who included daughters sixteen and under and sons twelve and under, came to quarterly meetings, where the minister provided an appropriate sermon. In the benevolent tradition, members also pledged to protect and instruct children whose mothers had died.³⁵ This commitment allayed women's fears for their children after their own deaths and indicated how exclusively these mothers had assumed the role of Christian educators, for they did not trust that surviving fathers would assume the task. Mourning a member's death in 1841, the secretary of the Brattleboro group recorded: "She has left three young children in this world of temptation and adverse influences—with no mother's eye to watch over them—no mother's voice to admonish and counsel—no mother's prayer to call down the blessing of our Heavenly Father upon them."³⁶

Emerging at the height of the revival cycle in Vermont, maternal societies represented a product of religious enthusiasm and division rather than its cause. In Brattleboro, 125 young men and unmarried women joined the church in the 1833–34 revivals, just as the maternal society was forming. Another revival and upsurge in church membership occurred in 1838 and it is possible, as Marcia Knowlton hoped, that mothers were partly responsible for bringing an additional forty-five young people into the two churches at that time.³⁷ But it is more likely that women's earlier evangelical activities—the support of missionaries, the training of daughters in praying circles, and the promotion of Sunday schools—were more significant in fostering Vermont revivalism. Evidence of these activities indicates that women created an active organizational culture in Vermont that facilitated the expansion of

church membership, roughly matching the pattern Mary Ryan found in western New York. But unlike Ryan's findings for Utica, where the organization of maternal societies preceded the great revivals, the development of these associations in Vermont appears to have been the result of revivalism.³⁸ They helped sustain Christian child rearing after the revival cycle had subsided and into the late 1840s. That work took place largely in the home, not at church, and could no longer be measured strictly by church membership. According to the annual report from the Maternal Association of Wardsboro in 1845, such work was "unheeded, and often unrequited" but "not *less important* than the work of men," for mothers' influence created the wealth of a nation through training of "honest and industrious youth."³⁹

Even as they focused on childhood conversion, these women's organizations functioned largely to supply mutual support for mothers, many of whom were overwhelmed with domestic burdens. It is not surprising that they had difficulty retaining members, particularly in more rural settings. During the 1840s members of the New Haven Maternal Society repeatedly bemoaned the poor attendance at meetings; fifty-two mothers and 120 children belonged to the group, but only nine or ten attended meetings. Despite their hopes for a revival in 1847, they despaired a year later. "Many who apparently were deeply anxious," the secretary explained, "have again relapsed into careless indifference."⁴⁰ The society in Brattleboro suspended meetings in 1846 and revived the organization briefly between 1861 and 1863. Not as focused on conversion, these mothers were probably more successful in bolstering their own piety and instilling the self-control and good habits required for their children to achieve middle-class status.

It is clear that the 1830s marked a turning point for this group of women and their sense of responsibility for the promotion of Christianity. The organization of maternal societies expanded the membership in benevolence, by enlisting any mother to the sacred charge, and institutionalized a shift in women's focus from distant frontiers and the support of male religious activities to their own households and a specifically female religious and family role.⁴¹ As Christians, these mothers transformed their collective responsibility into personal responsibility for their children's futures. The role promoted a commonly held ideology of Christian Republicanism and bolstered existing gender norms. At a time when interest in childhood development was on the upsurge, maternal societies clearly helped women define their importance in reproduction and carve out an exclusive role as spiritual mothers. In this way they connected the divine order to their daily lives while moving the locus of moral and religious training to the home from the church.

In the broader context of antebellum reform, however, this was a conservative movement. It domesticated the revival and missionary impulse by channeling women's activism back into the family, particularly in comparison with the activities of a smaller number of women who became involved in reform movements: temperance, moral reform, anti-slavery, and eventually women's rights. Some members of maternal societies sympathized with the cause of temperance and moral reform as these issues appeared in the pages of *Mother's Magazine*, but most were wary of challenging male behavior directly.⁴² When maternal societies reemerged after the Civil War in a more secular version to promote good mothering, they appeared even more conservative compared to other women's extensive reform efforts. Yet in the antebellum period, they helped fortify evangelical women when revivalism waned. As Sophia Hewes exclaimed in 1841, "In seasons of declension and coldness, the flame of piety is still found burning, and the spirit of prayer prevailing at the maternal meeting."⁴³

NOTES

¹ Brattleboro Maternal Association, Record Book, 18 July 1838, Centre Congregational Church, Brattleboro, Vt.

² Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), chap. 4; Keith Melder, "Ladies Bountiful: Organized Women's Benevolence in Early Nineteenth Century America," *New York History* 48 (1967), 231-254; Ann M. Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Women in Sunday Schools," *Feminist Studies* 4 (October 1978), 62-80; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chap. 2. For maternal societies see, Richard A. Meckel, "Educating a Ministry of Mothers: Evangelical Maternal Associations, 1815-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (Winter 1982): 403-423.

³ Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 195-219; P. Jeffrey Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District: Patterns of Community Development and Religious Activity, 1761-1850* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 161-183.

⁴ For women's contributions to these societies, see for example, *First Report of the Vermont Bible Society, Communicated to the Society, at their Annual Meeting at Montpelier, October 21, 1813* (Montpelier, Vt., 1813) and subsequent reports, hereafter cited as *Annual Report Vermont Bible Society; Address to the Churches and Congregations of Vermont, by the Trustees of the Vermont Missionary Society. To Which is Prefixed the Last Report of the Trustees, and the Last Report of the Treasurer. May 1814* (1814) and subsequent reports, hereafter cited as *Annual Report Vermont (Domestic) Missionary Society*. See also Benson Young Ladies' Bible Society, Record Book, 1817-1835; Female Missionary Society, Montpelier, Vermont, Records, 1812-1816, Bethany Congregational Church Records, Microfilm, Reel F; Constitution and Record Book of the Female Cent Society, Barnet, Vermont, 1828-1835; Craftsbury Female Benevolent Society, Record Book, 1825-1828, all at Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vermont (hereafter VHS). For an overview of the evangelical movement, see Daniel Walker Howe, "The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North during the Second Party System," *Journal of American History* 77 (March 1991), 1216-1239. On the "evangelical united front," see Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Press, 1960).

⁵ Articles of the Female Religious Society in Jericho, 1806, Records of the Ladies Cent Society Jericho Centre Vermont, Congregational Library, Boston, Mass. For an example of ministers' appeal to women's Christian duty, see Chester Wright, *A Sermon, Preached Before the Female Mission Society in Montpelier, 1816* (Montpelier, Vt.: E.P. Walton, 1817).

⁶ Benson Female Cent Society, Record Book, 1815, VHS.

⁷ For a comprehensive listing of benevolent societies in Vermont, see Conrad Edick Wright, *The Transformation of Charity in Post-revolutionary New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 266–269. See also *Annual Report Vermont Bible Society, 1813–1835; Annual Report Vermont (Domestic) Missionary Society, 1814–1838*.

⁸ Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 83–127; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 36–66.

⁹ Mary Goss to Sophia Brigham [?], 20 December 1821, Bethany Congregational Church Records, Microfilm, Reel A.

¹⁰ *Annual Report Vermont Bible Society, 1835*, 5; Montpelier Auxiliary Tract Society Record Book, October 1828–1830, VHS; Bethany Congregational Church Records, Microfilm, Reel F.

¹¹ Benson Young Ladies' Bible Society, Record Book, 1817; Craftsbury Female Benevolent Society, Record Book, 28 September 1825.

¹² *Third Annual Yearbook of the Centre Congregational Church, Brattleboro, Vermont* (Brattleboro, Vt., 1917), 98–99; Mary R. Cabot, *Annals of Brattleboro, 1681–1895*, vol. 1 (Brattleboro, Vt.: E.L. Hildreth, 1921), 343, 355.

¹³ *Sunday School Repository* 2 (June 1818), 74–75; Abby Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, vol. 4 (Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Watchman and State Journal Press, 1882), 394; Goss to Brigham, 20 December 1821, Bethany Congregational Church Records.

¹⁴ *First Annual Report of the Vermont Sabbath-School Union: Presented at Castleton, September 13, 1826* (Rutland, 1826); *Second Annual Report . . . Vermont Sabbath-School Union* (Montpelier, 1827); Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: the Formation of an American Institution, 1790–1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 31.

¹⁵ *Second Annual Report . . . Vermont Sabbath-School Union*, 10–11; Boylan, *Sunday School*, 135–139.

¹⁶ *Sunday School Repository* 2 (June 1818), 75.

¹⁷ Boylan, "Evangelical Womanhood in the Nineteenth Century," 62–80; quotation from p. 71. See also Sabbath School Records, First Congregational Church, Jericho Centre, 1836–1840, Vermont Congregational Conference Papers, Carton 3, Fl. 5, Special Collections, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vt.; Brookfield Sabbath School Union, Record Book, 1829–1861, VHS.

¹⁸ Boylan, *Sunday School*, 6–21. For child-rearing theory and practice, see Carl Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 66–110; Bernard W. Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968); Jacqueline S. Reinier, "Rearing the Republican Child: Attitudes and Practices in Post-Revolutionary Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (Jan. 1982), 150–163; Marilyn S. Blackwell, "The Republican Vision of Mary Palmer Tyler," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Spring 1992): 11–35.

¹⁹ Thomas G. Fessenden, comp., *Miniature Bible, or Abstract of Sacred History. For the Use of Children* (Brattleboro, Vt., 1816); quotation from preface, n.p.; *Prayers For the Use of Sunday Schools. By a Teacher* (Brattleboro, Vt., 1826).

²⁰ *First Annual Report . . . Vermont Sabbath-School Union*, 1826, 10.

²¹ For the religious controversy, see Lewis Grout, *A Second Discourse on the Early History of the Congregational Church and Society in West Brattleboro, Vt. Covering Two Pastorates—25 Years, or From 1794 to 1819* (New Haven, 1894), 10–13; *A Manual for the Use of the Centre Congregational Church of Brattleboro, Vt. 1859* (Brattleboro, Vt., 1859), 5–7; *Third Annual Yearbook*, 66–72; Brattleboro Congregational Church Record Book, 1799–1834, First Congregational Church, West Brattleboro, Vt. New female members between 1815 and 1817 represented 76% (n = 92) at First Church in West Brattleboro and 73% (n = 73) at the Centre Congregational Church in (East) Brattleboro Village. Membership records were taken from *Third Annual Yearbook*, 117–119; First Congregational Church Membership Record Book, 1818–1843, First Congregational Church, West Brattleboro, Vt.

²² Female Friendly Association for Religious and Charitable Purposes, Record Book, 1816–1861, Centre Congregational Church, Brattleboro, Vt.; Cabot, *Annals of Brattleboro*, 355–357; quotation from p. 355.

²³ [Charles Orrin Day], "The Old Church on the Common: An Address Delivered by Rev. C.O. Day on Sunday Evening, Sept. 2." Miscellaneous clipping, VHS, n.d.; see also Cabot, *Annals of Brattleboro*, 352, 467.

²⁴ Day, "Old Church on the Common." For revival activity in other towns during the period, see Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 187–219.

²⁵ Cabot, *Annals of Brattleboro*, 175–176, 349–352, 385–391, 448–450; quotation on p. 386; *Third Annual Yearbook*, 76–85; Brattleboro Congregational Church Records, 1832–1835; Mary Palmer Tyler Journal, 29 April 1835, Helen Tyler Brown Collection, VHS.

²⁶ Brattleboro Maternal Association, Record Book, 8 February 1834; Mary Palmer Tyler Journal, 22 and 27 May 1834. For the focus on young men, see *Third Annual Yearbook*, 81–82.

²⁷ Brattleboro Maternal Association, Record Book, 8 February 1834; Meckel, "Educating a Ministry of Mothers," 415.

²⁸ For the Portland wording, see Park Street Maternal Association Record Book, 1816–1871, Park Street Church Records; Old South Maternal Association Record Book, 1837–1850, Old South Church Records; Records of the Maternal Association of Jericho Centre, Vermont, 1833–1835, all at Congregational Library, Boston, Mass. For Utica, see Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 89. For the Brattleboro constitution, see Brattleboro Maternal Association Record Book.

²⁹ Meckel, "Educating a Ministry of Mothers," 406; New Hampshire Maternal Association, Cheshire County, Records, 1833–1870, New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H.

³⁰ For mention of these societies, see *Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of the First Church, Burlington, Vt., February Twenty-Third to Twenty-Sixth 1905* (Burlington, Vt., 1905), 52; *History of the Congregational Church of Middlebury, Vt., 1790–1913* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1913), 99; *Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of Bethany Congregational Church, Montpelier, Vermont, July 19 and 20, 1908* (Montpelier, Vt., 1908), 32–35; *One Hundredth Anniversary of the Organization of the Congregational Church in Craftsbury, Vermont, and Dedication of the Remodeled Church Building, Wednesday November 17th, 1897* (Craftsbury, Vt., 1897), 23. See also Constitution of Bradford Maternal Society, Adams Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Vermont; Brattleboro Maternal Association, Record Book; Maternal Association of New Haven, Vt., Record Book, 1836–1853, VHS; Maternal Association of Jericho Centre Vermont, Record Book, 1833–1835; "Extract from the Report of the Maternal Association of Wardsboro, Vt.," *Mother's Magazine* 13 (1845), 294–296; Reverend L.D. Barrows, "Address to Newbury Maternal Association," *Mother's Book and Young Lady's Companion* 3 (March 1842), 178; *Annual Report Vermont Domestic Missionary Society*, 1838, 26.

³¹ *Annual Report Vermont Domestic Missionary Society*, 1835, 21; *Extracts from the Minutes of the General Convention of Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers in Vermont, at their Session at Castleton, September, 1836* (Windsor, Vt., 1836), 10.

³² Sophia A. Hewes, ed., *The Mother's Book and Young Lady's Companion*, 1 (April 1838); (December 1841), 98.

³³ Lydia Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers* (Hartford, 1838), 12, 28, 33.

³⁴ Brattleboro Maternal Association, Record Book, 12 September 1838.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Constitution; Maternal Association of New Haven, Vt., Record Book.

³⁶ Brattleboro Maternal Association, Record Book, 5 October 1841.

³⁷ The number of new youthful members is derived from analysis of church membership lists and grand lists for revival years. Young men are those who appear on membership lists but not on the town grand list because they were under twenty-one years of age. Young women are those without "Mrs." as a title. See Brattleboro Congregational Church Records; *Third Annual Yearbook*, 125–128, 130–132; Brattleboro Grand List, 1833–1840, Office of the Town Clerk, Brattleboro, Vt.

³⁸ Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 83–127.

³⁹ "Extract . . . Maternal Association, of Wardsboro, Vt.," *Mother's Magazine* 13 (1845), 294–295.

⁴⁰ Maternal Association, New Haven, Vt., Record Book, January 1848.

⁴¹ Some societies did continue support of female missionaries or missionaries' wives to whom they sent literature and instructions for establishing maternal societies among Native American women. See *Mother's Magazine* 5 (October 1837), 236; 6 (October 1838), 230; and Deborah Dawson Bonde, "Missionary Ways in the Wilderness: Eliza Hart Spalding, Maternal Associations and the Nez Percé Indians," *American Presbyterians* 69 (Fall 1991), 271–282.

⁴² For discussion of moral reform and temperance, see Brattleboro Maternal Association Record Book, 20 January 1836, 20 July 1836, 25 September 1839; for disagreement about moral reform, see Cheshire County Maternal Association of Clergymen's Wives, Minute Book, 13 June 1838, Fl. 1, New Hampshire Maternal Association, Cheshire County, Records, 1833–1870.

⁴³ Sophia Hewes, "Maternal Associations," *The Mother's Book and Young Lady's Companion* 3 (December 1841), 98. For maternal societies after the Civil War, see Julia Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 26–29.



"To Outfit Destitute Young Men for the Ministry": Thetford's Response to the Call to Evangelism

An enthusiastic spirit of evangelism permeated many of New England's educational and local communities. Thetford Congregational Church, seeing the opportunity to affect the transformation of the world from their own small corner, participated in the evangelization effort.

By DAVID G. VANDERSTEL

The state of civilization in the newly settled regions of the American West emerged as an issue of great concern among New Englanders during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Fearing the absence of supporting institutions among a widely dispersed population, and the impact of that void on the development of American society, they explored ways of reaching and influencing individuals and families who had migrated to settle the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. One principal means of affecting the future of the West was to support itinerant ministers and missionaries who would serve as emissaries of religion and culture. The Missionary Societies of Massachusetts and Connecticut, for example, recruited the Reverends John F. Schermerhorn and Samuel J. Mills, graduates of the Andover Theological Seminary in Andover, Massachusetts, to embark in 1812 upon a year-long tour "of that part of the United States which lies west of the Allegany Mountains." Their purpose was to investigate the conditions of the emerging society and determine the church's responsibility for addressing the needs of western residents. The missionaries' report, published in Hartford in 1814 and distributed widely, concluded that the preservation of the West from evil, undemocratic forces would require energetic voluntary efforts channeled through churches, schools, and tract societies.¹

Two decades later, Lyman Beecher, the renowned clergyman and president of Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, noted in his "Plea for the West" that the "religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West." He argued that the struggle would be "a conflict of institutions for the education of her sons, for purposes of superstition or evangelical light, of depotism or liberty."² Beecher's statement reflected an attitude common among early nineteenth-century New England Protestants who viewed themselves as God's stewards, ones who were called specifically to transplant their religious, cultural, and educational institutions into the frontier regions as a ministry to the newly settled Westerners.

Given this sense of divine mission, an enthusiastic spirit of evangelism permeated many of New England's educational institutions and local communities. Professors, students, merchants, clergy, and townspeople joined in supporting organizations, such as the American Home Missionary Society (established 1826), that would gather resources to fertilize the desolate regions and cause them eventually to flourish like "the garden of the Lord." Communities and congregations, such as Thetford and its Congregational Church, seeing the opportunity to affect the transformation of the world from their own small corner, also participated in the evangelization effort. They did so by designating and outfitting their own young men for the ministry and encouraging them either to remain in service to New England congregations or to transplant religion and culture into the "destitute western regions" or even to foreign lands.

From the beginning of his fifty-seven year tenure as pastor of the First Congregational Church of Thetford in 1779, the Reverend Asa Burton demonstrated a strong interest in the education of youth. This devotion to learning had surfaced during his teen years in Norwich, Vermont, when he witnessed the founding of Dartmouth College across the Connecticut River in Hanover. He quickly fell under the influence of the school's founders, who impressed him with "a sense of the importance of a learned education; [and] of the necessity of religion." With his subsequent attendance at Dartmouth, Burton vowed to "obtain a college education, become a good man, and a minister of the gospel."³

Called to serve the Thetford church, Burton soon reported that the town was poorly fitted for schools and religion. He described the local youth as loose and uncivil, "living as their corrupt lusts dictated, free from the restraints of parental government, and the checks of an enlightened conscience."⁴ To address these concerns, Burton introduced weekly conferences with the youth during which he emphasized scripture reading and the discussion of religious issues. He visited regularly with local teachers to review instructional methods and helped to organize a

library and town lyceum. Burton even convinced a Thetford female benevolent society to send contributions to a newly established academy in Meriden, New Hampshire.⁵ Most importantly, he believed that a thorough theological education required personal mentoring. So, for thirty years, Burton housed students of divinity in his Thetford home and assisted them in preparing for the ministry.⁶

Manifesting his support for education, Burton joined with other members of his congregation and the Thetford community in founding the Thetford Academy in 1818. Attorney Simeon Short, Judges Jedidiah F. Buckingham and Joseph Reed, local merchants William Latham and Thomas Kendrick, and Burton all approved of the venture and subscribed funds for the project.⁷ The founders recruited the Reverend John Fitch, a 1790 graduate of Brown University and pastor of the Congregational Church in Danville, to be the academy's first preceptor. Over the years, Fitch had engaged in the preparation of numerous young men for college and eventually for a life in the ministry.

The Thetford Academy commenced in February 1819 with approximately fifty students in attendance. Both boys and girls were admitted, paying \$2 per quarter for English studies and \$3 per quarter for classical language studies. Believing that education should be accessible to all regardless of economic standing, Burton and the school's founders established the "Charitable funds of Thetford Academy." Overseen by the school's treasurer, Judge Buckingham, this special fund provided financial assistance to students who were unable to afford the cost of the academy's tuition. For those students choosing to continue their studies at college, support was also available.⁸ The first credit to the Thetford charity account, in the amount of \$8.25, came from Dr. Burton who, by his actions, demonstrated the importance of homegrown charity. By August 1825, the account totaled \$112.20, although \$232.00 had already been paid out for meritorious and needy students.⁹

During his years as pastor, Burton was mindful of those young men who demonstrated great promise to be ministers and personally provided that mentoring experience. In addition, concurrent with the founding of the Academy, Burton convened his congregation to discuss an important financial matter. On December 7, 1818, inspired by their pastor's commitment to education, the Thetford church voted to collect money on alternate Sundays "for the education of pious, indigent young men at the Academy in Thetford while fitting for college for the gospel ministry."¹⁰ For the next three years, the church renewed its commitment to this education fund, though no records exist to specify how much they actually collected.

In the years prior to the founding of the Academy, one boy, Edmund

Otis Hovey, son of Thetford farmer and blacksmith Roger Hovey, had come to the attention of Dr. Burton, most likely during the minister's regular meetings with the Thetford youth. Edmund was an avid reader of ancient history, biographies, travel narratives, and other works of the day. When the *American Journal of Science and Art* began in 1818, Edmund at age seventeen became an interested follower, something that would inspire his later work in geology. This commitment to learning, however, clashed with his father's priority for work on the farm. Recognizing the importance that education had played in her own family's life, Edmund's mother Martha, a member of the influential New England Otis family,¹¹ encouraged her son to pursue his studies. At the age of eighteen, Edmund, not knowing what his future profession would be, began his preparatory studies at Thetford Academy under the tutelage of Reverend Fitch. Soon encountering a shortage of funds to support his education, Edmund spent the next year teaching in nearby Norwich and the subsequent year in Thetford.¹² Judge Joseph Reed, affiliated with the Academy from its founding, also took a special interest in Edmund. Over the years, Reed, though not a "professor of religion," had helped many young men through college, some of whom had continued on into the ministry. Recognizing the young Hovey's potential, Reed extended an offer of financial assistance to the blacksmith's son.

Dr. Burton also was well acquainted with Hovey who, around 1809, had moved with his family from Hanover Center to Thetford. Amidst a religious revival that swept Thetford and the surrounding communities in 1821, the church elders, while visiting the Hovey household, found Edmund particularly receptive to the gospel message. Burton was so impressed by the young man's desire for religion and interest in education that he selected Edmund to lead theological discussions among young converts in the congregation. With his new position in the Thetford church and community, Hovey developed a closer relationship with Burton's stepson Charles White, who was six years older than Edmund. White graduated from Dartmouth later in 1821, attended Andover Seminary and graduated in 1824, and returned to Thetford to become the associate pastor at his stepfather's church. In so doing, he became a role model for Edmund and remained a close acquaintance for years to come.

Following their earlier decision to establish a charity fund, the Thetford congregation in December 1821 authorized the creation of a committee, consisting of Reverend Fitch from the academy, deacons David Kinney, Abijah Howard, and William Thayer, and Judge Buckingham to "concoct a plan for this [church] to support a beneficiary while preparing for the ministry."¹³ At a meeting of January 12, 1822, the congregation approved the committee's proposal and agreed to subscribe grain,

clothing, board, and/or money to support their candidate for one year. They also appointed Dr. Burton, Reverend Fitch, and Mr. Thayer to select the intended beneficiary. One week later, on January 19, the committee recommended, and the church approved, that "Otis Hovey" would be their beneficiary.¹⁴

From the beginning of the Thetford church's educational initiative in 1818, Burton clearly had his eye on Edmund as the intended beneficiary. Over his forty years in the clergy, Burton had prepared and mentored many young men for the ministry, and he very obviously recognized Edmund's talents and potential to become a minister of the gospel. Furthermore, Burton saw much of himself in Edmund, most notably his strong commitment to learning, the financial status of his family, and the desire of a father for his son to forego an advanced education in order to maintain the family farm. Another clear indication of Burton's intentions for Hovey was that despite the numerous young men in Thetford, no other individual received the church's pledge for financial assistance; Edmund Otis Hovey was the only one so designated.

By the fall of 1822, "at the advanced age of 21," Edmund commenced "the acquisition of a liberal education" at the Academy with an eye toward college. He explained in a letter to his sister Nancy that he had willingly accepted "the hand of Charity for support" from various members of the church who provided board and paid for his textbooks. The ladies "cent society" gathered clothing for him, and his Uncle Otis gave him a calf, which Edmund promptly sold and applied the proceeds toward his tuition. He found his situation "as pleasant as might be expected" and vowed to "improve every moment" in order to "render my life useful and answer the expectations of my Patrons."¹⁵

The winter of 1822-1823 brought a sudden end to Edmund's short-lived studies. A serious respiratory illness forced the young man to put his books aside for several months and to seek the recuperative seashore environment of Sandwich, where his mother's family resided. The Thetford church, obviously fearing the loss of its investment, briefly withdrew its support of Edmund. But by the fall of 1823, Edmund had recovered and resumed his studies at Thetford Academy, focusing heavily on the Greek language, clearly with an eye toward attending college. The church again extended its financial support, designating Dr. Kendrick, Judge Buckingham, and Thomas Merrill "to procure subscriptions, & lay them out in supporting Mr. Hovey the chh Beneficiary in fitting for College."¹⁶ Throughout the course of Edmund's three years of study at the Academy, the education society of the Thetford church paid \$13.75 toward his total bill of \$16.75; preceptor Fitch, who was preparing Edmund for college, paid the balance.¹⁷

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Upon completion of his studies at Thetford Academy, Edmund applied for admission to Dartmouth College in the fall of 1824. He was familiar with the school, having lived his early life in Hanover Center and taking pride that his father had crafted much of the iron for the early college buildings. His Freeman relatives also had been involved with the college since its move to Hanover. But the principal influences for Edmund attending Dartmouth were Dr. Asa Burton, himself a 1777 graduate, and the Reverend Charles White, a graduate in the class of 1821. After passing his oral entrance examinations, Edmund entered the freshman class of Dartmouth in January 1825 at the age of 23½.

Hovey was able to pursue his studies at Dartmouth because of the continued generosity of his benefactors at home. The Thetford congregation met annually to reconsider support for their "church beneficiary." Subscriptions raised went directly into the college's charity fund, which President Bennet Tyler had established to assist those students preparing for the ministry who had demonstrated financial need.¹⁸ During his four years of study, Edmund received at least \$108 of his \$147 tuition bill from charity subscriptions, the exact amount pledged by his benefactors back in Thetford.¹⁹ And, given the influence of Dr. Burton with the Dartmouth administration, Edmund received more assistance on an annual basis than any other student in his class. While the standard student appropriation was \$15, Edmund received \$27.²⁰

Demonstrating his penchant for religious matters, Edmund quickly affiliated with the Theological Society at Dartmouth. Established in 1808, this student society monitored the state of religion in the nation, maintained contact with the newly founded Andover Theological Seminary, and corresponded with ministers in western settlements and missionaries in foreign lands, as well as nurturing the religious life of its members.²¹ Through the society's regular exposure to missionary literature, Edmund and his fellow classmates became intrigued by work in the mission fields, an interest that would affect their course of studies and their future commitments.

Still unsure about his future profession, though in need of additional pocket money, Edmund used his college vacations to teach in local schools. The winter of 1827–1828 found him again in Hanover Center, the village of his youth. There, for three and one-half months, he taught more than sixty "very interesting scholars" and instituted a weekly Bible class to provide "religious instruction which they ought to receive." Through his increasingly frequent work in schools, Edmund began to appreciate the immense responsibilities that educators possessed in shaping the minds and lives of their students. "The more I have to do with the instruction of children," Hovey noted in a letter to his parents,

“the greater appears the importance of their having *good* instruction.” Influenced by those who had watched over his own education and guided him through his own course of study, Edmund resolved likewise to “do my scholars all the good I can.”²²

Upon graduating from Dartmouth in August 1828, Edmund began at long last to confront his own future and the expectations of his benefactors. Steered from an early age toward the ministry, shaped by Dr. Burton and his stepson/assistant minister Rev. White, and influenced by the work of Dartmouth’s Theological Society, Edmund eventually acknowledged the call of the ministry, recognizing the “wide field opening at the West for the exertions of the Philanthropist and Christian.”²³ On November 12, 1828, Edmund closed his school in Hanover Center, visited his family and friends in Thetford, and on November 17 departed for Andover Theological Seminary to pursue his theological studies.²⁴

Andover Seminary was the nation’s leading theological school that defended the orthodox Calvinist tradition. Founded in 1808 by Massachusetts Calvinists who viewed the growing Unitarian influences at Harvard and Yale as a threat to the proper training of ministers, the seminary became a stronghold of Trinitarian orthodoxy for the Congregational churches of New England. It trained men for the ministry and, in so doing, emphasized the “importance of the church in the secular world.”²⁵ As a result, Andover students were filled with a sense of divine and civic mission. They became involved in revivals and protracted meetings in their communities, active in education as teachers and professors, and instrumental in the operations of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and the American Home Missionary Society to advance God’s kingdom.

Edmund’s arrival at Andover proved to be a life-altering experience, and ultimately a fulfillment of the desires of his long-time benefactors. During his three years of schooling, Hovey became more convinced of the need to work as a minister in “the vineyards” where, he noted, the laborers were few. He continuously recognized that he was “under great obligations to many excellent friends and patrons in Thetford” who had supported and nurtured him from his days at Thetford Academy. He also felt that he had “entered upon hallowed ground” at Andover and, finding that “responsibility is every day increasing,” was assured that God had guided him “to this consecrated Seminary” in order to pursue a life in the ministry. With the sacred ministry clearly in view, he began his studies in order to “be prepared for usefulness in life.”²⁶

During Edmund’s years at Andover, many of his classmates developed a strong interest in foreign missions. Edmund, however, demonstrated an interest in the “desolate regions of the West,” especially after

hearing from two classmates who labored as agents of the Sunday School Union in Indiana.²⁷ Interest became commitment when the Reverend Absalom Peters, Corresponding Secretary of the American Home Missionary Society, visited the Andover students in the summer of 1831 to present the needs of the “western man.” After hearing Peters’s plea, Edmund decided, with the advice of his seminary professors, “*to devote my life to the labors of a Missionary in the Valley of the Mississippi*.”²⁸ Peters initially proposed that Edmund accept an assignment at the military post at the Falls of St. Mary’s, some one hundred miles north of Mackinaw in the Michigan Territory, but Edmund, demonstrating a degree of uncertainty about the appointment, concluded that Fort Wayne in the young state of Indiana would prove to be “the more promising.”²⁹

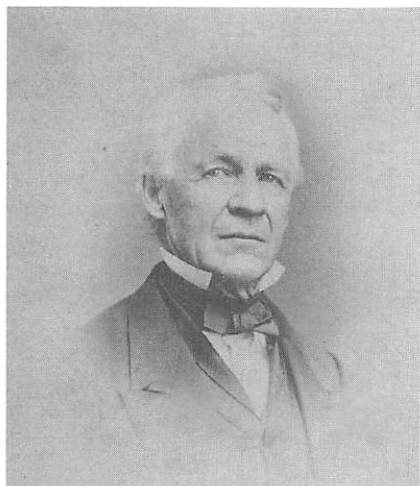
Following Edmund’s marriage to Mary Carter of Peacham in October 1831, the couple proceeded to the missionary grounds of Indiana under the auspices of the American Home Missionary Society. There, Edmund assumed the pastorate of a small congregation on the banks of Coal Creek in Fountain County, located in western Indiana. He observed that some residents were Presbyterians (or at least receptive to the Presbyterian message), but that there was also a “*Diversity of Sectarian bigotry—as it appears in Methodism, Campbellism New Lightism Dunkardism &c &c.*” Despite these initial obstacles, Hovey did “not regret that I am not snugly lodged in a fine N.E. village—The foundations must be laid.”³⁰ Within a short time of their arrival, the Hoveys moved to “awaken” their congregation by establishing a Sabbath school in their small community. By July 1832, they had recruited thirty-two regular scholars and developed a library of some forty volumes. Despite this progress, Mary reported in a letter to her sister in Cazenovia, New York, that “western towns are notoriously wicked places.”³¹ To her mother back in Peacham, Mary wrote, “the Lord has some thing for us to do here; . . . I hope we have both made up our minds to *labor & suffer & die* in the service of Christ.”³²

During the fall of 1832, Edmund joined an initiative that would realize the ambitious goals for which he had prepared at Andover. Several Presbyterian missionaries and clergy, including the Reverend James Thomson, a graduate of Miami University and pastor of the Crawfordsville Presbyterian Church, and the Reverend John M. Ellis, a graduate of Andover and founder of Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois, met to discuss the creation of a manual labor school in Crawfordsville, Indiana. Citing the “lamentably low state of common schools” in the West, the need for “supplying a suitable number of competent teachers and exciting a taste for education,” and “training young men in sufficient numbers for the ministry,” these men joined to establish a “high Classi-

cal & English school" with a system of manual labor, "rising into a College as the wants of the country demand."³³ In early 1833, the trustees, including Hovey, voted to erect a building for their school. They also appointed, at Edmund's recommendation, Caleb Mills, a fellow graduate of Dartmouth and Andover and a strong proponent of education, to be the principal of the preparatory department and teacher's seminary.³⁴ The following winter the trustees applied to the state of Indiana for a charter for "The Wabash Teachers' Seminary and Manual Labor College."

As his second year of labor in Indiana drew to a close, Edmund found himself involved increasingly in the operations of the new school. He notified the Home Missionary Society in New York City that he intended to leave his mission post and to join the new western school as its financial agent. In the spring of 1834, Edmund left his congregations to devote his time fully to Wabash College. Over the ensuing months, Hovey embarked upon an "agency" or fundraising tour for the college, which led him throughout New England for some eighteen months.³⁵ This task soon included recruiting "some man suitable for President, enlisted who shall help me to get funds."³⁶

Over the course of the next forty-three years, Edmund Hovey served Wabash College in many capacities. In addition to acting as the college's chief financial agent, he was professor of natural and moral science, rhetoric and oratory, chemistry, and Latin. He was secretary of the faculty, and overseer of the construction of the college's first buildings.



*Edmund Otis Hovey
(1801–1877). Photograph
ca. 1850. Courtesy of
Robert T. Ramsay, Jr.
Archival Center, Lilly
Library, Wabash College,
Crawfordsville, Indiana.*

Most significantly, he recruited the first three presidents of the college, including the former associate pastor at the Thetford church (and now his brother-in-law) Charles White, all of whom provided the strong leadership that brought credibility to this new institution of higher learning in the West.

Rather than return to the comforts of a quiet parish life in the hills of New England as his friends and family had often encouraged him to do,³⁷ Edmund maintained his commitment to Wabash until his death in 1877. Through the mentoring of his Presbyterian and Congregationalist colleagues, the support of the American Home Missionary Society, and his education at Dartmouth, Andover, and the Thetford Academy, Edmund realized that Wabash College was his calling in the West—his “work in the vineyards of the Lord”—and that he could best meet the needs of the emerging western society by cultivating the minds of young men in the classroom. Clearly, the support and nurturing that Hovey received from the Thetford Congregational Church proved to be an important factor in shaping his later life. However, little did Edmund’s benefactors in the Thetford church realize that their years of support would extend beyond the hills of New England and have such far-reaching consequences on evangelism and the promotion of higher education in the rapidly developing American West.

NOTES

¹ Colin B. Goodykoontz, *Home Missions on the American Frontier* (The Caxton Printers, 1939; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 139ff.

² Lyman Beecher, “Plea for the West” (Cincinnati, 1835), as quoted in Edwin Scott Gaustad, ed., *Religious Issues in American History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 149ff.

³ Charles Latham, ed., *The Life of Asa Burton Written by Himself* (Thetford: The First Congregational Church, 1973), 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵ General John Eaton, *Thetford Academy, Thetford, Vermont. Seventy-Fifth Anniversary and Reunion, Thursday, June 28, 1894* (Concord, N.H.: The Republican Press Association, 1895), 21.

⁶ Latham, *Life of Asa Burton*, 29.

⁷ *Thetford Academy 75th Anniversary*, 22–23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26; Thetford Academy, *Here is Thetford* (Thetford, Vt., 1937), 4–5.

⁹ *Thetford Academy 75th Anniversary*, 26–27.

¹⁰ Records of the Church of Christ, Thetford, Vermont, 1773–1832, Thetford Historical Society, Thetford Library.

¹¹ Martha Freeman Hovey was a descendant of the Otis family, influential colonial and Revolutionary leaders. Her grandfather was a member of the Massachusetts colonial council at his death.

¹² Horace C. Hovey, “Prof. Hovey’s Ancestry and Early Days,” *The Wabash*, Vol. 23, No. 3, January 1899, 145–156.

¹³ Records of the Church of Christ, Thetford Historical Society, Thetford Library.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Edmund O. Hovey (EOH) to Nancy Deane, 30 November 1822, Robert T. Ramsay Jr. Archival Center, Lilly Library, Wabash College.

¹⁶ Records of the Church of Christ, Thetford, 30 April 1824, Thetford Historical Society, Thetford Library.

¹⁷ Thetford Academy Treasurer Book, Thetford Historical Society, Thetford Library.

¹⁸ Subscriptions for Charity Fund, 1824, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.

- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Treasurer's Account Book, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.
- ²¹ Records of the Theological Society, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.
- ²² EOH to parents, 6 January 1828, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Robert T. Ramsay, Jr., Archival Center, Lilly Library, Wabash College; EOH to Israel Dewey, 23 March 1828, personal collection of Philip Zea.
- ²³ EOH to Israel Dewey, 30 November 1828, personal collection of Philip Zea.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ David Day Williams, *The Andover Liberals: A Study in American Theology* (Caxton Printers, 1941; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1970), 11.
- ²⁶ EOH, 30 November 1828, personal collection of Philip Zea; EOH to Charles White, 7 December 1828, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.
- ²⁷ EOH to parents, 24 July 1829, Robert T. Ramsay, Jr. Archival Center, Lilly Library, Wabash College.
- ²⁸ EOH to Mary Carter, 16 July 1831, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.
- ²⁹ EOH to Mary Carter, 29 July 1831, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.
- ³⁰ EOH to Committee on Domestic Missions, 16 March 1832, Special Collections, Franklin-Trask Library, Andover-Newton Seminary; EOH to American Home Missionary Society, 29 March 1832, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Robert T. Ramsay, Jr., Archival Center, Lilly Library, Wabash College.
- ³¹ Mary Carter Hovey to Martha White, 16 January 1832, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.
- ³² Mary Carter Hovey to Martha Carter, 11 February 1832, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.
- ³³ James Thomson to Williamson Dunn, 22 November 1832, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Robert T. Ramsay, Jr., Archival Center, Lilly Library, Wabash College.
- ³⁴ Edmund O. Hovey, "History of Wabash College," *The Wabash Magazine* 1 (1857): 194-195.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 199.
- ³⁶ EOH to Fred Hovey, 24 November 1834, Edmund Otis Hovey Collection, Robert T. Ramsay, Jr., Archival Center, Wabash College.
- ³⁷ Hovey, "History of Wabash College," 200.



“A Convention of ‘Moral Lunatics’ ”: The Rutland, Vermont, Free Convention of 1858

*Representatives of nearly every
American Antebellum reform movement
known to humankind crowded into
Rutland in late June 1858 to thump the
drums for their particular causes,
creating a cacophony of assertions and
cross-purposes.*

By THOMAS L. ALTHERR

As Randy Roth has shown in *The Democratic Dilemma*, antebellum Vermont was awash in a tide of religious revivals and sectarian surges. Even though that level of enthusiasm waned by the 1850s, Vermont was still susceptible to short sporadic upheavals.¹ In the summer of 1858, Rutland played host to one of the most unusual gatherings of moral reformers ever to assemble on the American continent. Perhaps New Hampshire abolitionist Parker Pillsbury described it best. Writing to William Lloyd Garrison on June 30, 1858, he remarked, “I am just returned from attending one of the largest and most important Reformatory Conventions ever held in this or any other country. . . . The most prominent topics considered were Spiritualism, the Cause of Woman, including Marriage and Maternity, Scripture and Church Authority, and Slavery. Then the subjects of Free Trade, of Education, Labor and Land Reform, Temperance, Physiology and Phrenology were introduced, and more or less considered.” Pillsbury praised New Lebanon Shaker Frederick Evans for “a calm and clear exposition of the doctrines held by his denomination”; Albany minister Amory Dwight Mayo for “a most eloquent and able address on the Bible”; a variety of feminists for speeches on behalf of Woman; and New York radical Ernestine Rose for “all her strength and noble earnestness.”

“How could we fail, then,” he posed rhetorically, “of an occasion to be felt and remembered forever.” One speaker, Henry Clarke Wright, seemed to embody the eclectic quality of the mix by himself: “H. C. Wright, of no State or country in particular; was also there, endeavoring to weave his broad robes of Righteousness out of Anti-Slavery, Non-Resistance, Temperance, the true laws of Marriage, Maternity, Education and the construction of the family.” “Permit me to say, in a word,” Pillsbury concluded, “that no Convention ever held in America could have had more Millennial hope and promise in it than this.” Repeat it in each state and even the slave states would come shouting for reform, he conjectured.²

In the quest for moral perfection that drew the energies of many reformers in the decades before the Civil War, those Americans sought the proper strategy and cause to bring on the projected millennium. Few single-issue radicals emerged, but many stressed one social evil or economic malady as the major obstacle to paradise regained. For many that was chattel slavery, for others excessive alcoholism or marital domination or male oppression of females or sexual expenditure, and yet for others dietary and nervous system problems seemed the root causes of national debility. To erase these severe smudges on the American moral self-image, reformers championed a flood of movements: abolition, anti-slavery, women’s rights, the Cult of Domesticity, temperance, religious revivalism Second Great Awakening-style, Free Love, passionlessness, spermatic economy, pacifism, celibacy, pantagamy, polygyny, transcendentalism and pantheism, associationism and Fourierist socialism, homeopathic, Thomsonian, and eclectic medicine, hydropathy, vegetarianism, phrenology, mesmerism and galvanism, law reform, public education, conversion of indigenous people, and spiritualism. Some reformers sampled widely from this menu; others followed one or two through to the bitter end.³

Movement tactics to win followers varied from personal conversion to moral suasion to outright propaganda. Acutely aware of the power of the mass-distributed printed word, radicals distributed tons of pamphlets, newspapers, and broadsides to the public, occasionally flooding the mails with petitions. In an age when lectures were a chief form of entertainment, the reformers hustled out on the lyceum circuit town to town. At times masters of the clandestine maneuver, at others, the purveyors of ultimate candidness, these enthusiasts kept their eyes on their main goals. Although most of them advocated and practiced Christian nonviolence, many up until the Civil War, some leaders thought that violence had value in convincing formerly marginal converts. Confrontational politics was a style few of them avoided. A few knocks from a mob served to strengthen a speaker’s resolve. Paradoxically enthralling

to the individual and predicating collective effort alike, reform movements both succeeded and foundered on these emotional drives.

The convention was an arrangement common to the age. Formalized gatherings of delegates and speakers in large, predetermined locales and arenas, often with thoroughly mapped-out agendas, conventions were ubiquitous by the 1840s. Whether a convention was the best mode of communication and persuasion drew some debate, but increasingly this organizational principle won the day. Reform-minded radicals had no monopoly on the convention process. Businessmen, politicians, ministers, military men, and promoters of conservative socioeconomic institutions such as slavery all convened regularly. Reformers, then, when setting up their own conventions were breaking no new territory, but perhaps were adapting the tactics of the mainstream for their own ends.

Before 1858, American reformers assembled in numerous conventions to promote their specific causes. For example, for most of the years of the 1840s and 1850s women's rights workers held national conventions, as did the abolition, temperance, and other reform movements. Advocates at these conventions might have argued about appropriate strategies and at times some urged shifts to other causes, but mostly these gatherings focused on a single purpose. Thus, when the melange of movers and shakers descended upon Rutland in June, 1858, their arrival marked a break in tradition. Such a mixed assemblage held out the possibility of either extraordinary communication and cooperation or a dispiriting Babel.

Why Vermont? Why Rutland? Vermonters had claimed an independent streak all the way back to Ethan and Ira Allen and the Green Mountain Boys and had had plenty of what historian David Ludlum termed "social ferment" in the first half of the century. Abolitionism had attracted quite a few sympathizers in the 1830s. Future Mormon leaders Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had been born in the state, and Millerite founder William Miller and Oneida Community mastermind John Humphrey Noyes got their start in Vermont as well. Rutland itself had hosted a temperance convention in 1844, and for over thirty years a black minister, Lemuel Haynes, had presided over a congregation there. Vermont boasted some resort spas, and Thomsonian botanist doctors ranged the region.⁴ On the other hand, residents had attacked radicals, mobbing abolitionist Samuel May in Rutland in 1835. Due to business and agricultural shifts, many Vermonters had moved west. By the late 1850s, most Vermonters possessed a more conservative frame of mind. Farmers and businessmen emphasized boosterism and economic prosperity which they hoped the recent railway lines would bring. Reversing the trend of rural abandonment, Rutland's population had jumped from

3,000 to 7,633 inhabitants by September, 1857.⁵ Even if the state was relatively hospitable for radical gatherings, the choice of Rutland still seemed curious, in that New York, Boston, or some other metropolitan area would have promised the reformers bigger crowds and more immediate media exposure. If they were looking to escape the hot cities, a common summertime practice before the arrival of air conditioning, they found no relief in Rutland; all contemporary reports suggest it was blazing those three days.

The origin of the idea for the convention is somewhat fuzzy, but apparently Spiritualist groups in the Boston area or in Vermont, or both, envisioned a wide-ranging gathering. In late May a call went out for "Friends of Human Progress" to assemble in late June in Rutland. Over 150 Vermonters, most from the western stretch of the state, signed the petition. Rutland businessman John Landon and merchant Newman Weeks appear to have been the chief contacts in the town, but others such as Burlington educator John R. Forrest and Glens Falls, New York, minister Jason F. Walker also took an active role. It is apparent, however, that the Spiritualist contingent engineered the effort. Many newspaper accounts after the event remarked about the predominance of that religious movement at the convention. The Rutland organizers secured much local cooperation in staging the event. *The Spiritual Age* for June 12th gave the details:

Ample accommodations will be made to feed and lodge all who may be desirous of attending the Convention. Arrangements have been made with the different railroads to carry for half fare. Special trains will be run on the Rutland and Burlington, Rutland and Washington, and Western Vermont roads. Our friends from Boston and vicinity who wish to be at the Convention on the morning of the first day, will buy their tickets through Rutland, and take the P.M. train Thursday, June 24th. On the Cheshire Railroad they will be furnished with return checks from Rutland to Fitchburg. Those who leave Boston on the first train Friday morning, will arrive in Rutland at 2:30 P.M. Rooms and board have been secured at hotels, boarding houses, and in private families, from 50 cents to \$1.25 per day. Those wishing to engage rooms beforehand will please make application by letter to John Landon and Newman Weeks, General Committee.⁶

The committee erected a large tent, "one hundred feet in diameter," "on the vacant lot [on the] east side of Grove street." The group expected five thousand in attendance.⁷

Although organizers were disappointed that Garrison and Wendell Phillips bowed out of the event, even though they had signed the call, the convention attracted an array of well-known speakers, veterans of reform sorties as far away as Missouri. William Goodell, a moderate

abolitionist who had worked with the Liberty Party in the 1840s, came representing the American Antislavery Society. Stephen Symonds Foster and Parker Pillsbury came with a more aggressive abolitionist bent. The "Poughkeepsie Seer," Andrew Jackson Davis, and his equally talented wife, Mary, headed the Spiritualist attractions, but editors Joel Tiffany and Samuel Brittan and famed local Vermont medium Achsah Sprague helped round out the cast. Feminists Frances Dana Gage, Julia Branch, Eliza Farnham, and Ernestine Rose added female moral passion. Frederick Evans of New Lebanon, New York, pitched in for the Shaker perspective, and Elder Miles Grant kept the Millerite hopes alive. And the ubiquitous Henry Clarke Wright knitted all the causes together.

Although limited space precludes any extended discussion here of the Vermont participants, many were farmers and merchants, and most apparently were Spiritualists. Several, such as Gibson Smith of Shaftsbury, Samuel Davis of Bethel, Dennis Chapin of Huntington, and abolitionist H. P. Cutting of Castleton were Universalist ministers. Joshua Young, a Congregationalist minister from Burlington, became famous the next year for delivering the eulogy at the funeral of John Brown of Harper's Ferry. A number of alternative medicine practitioners, such as Jacob Holt of Bridgewater, William Hopkins of Vergennes, Ezra Edson of Manchester, and Selah Gridley of Castleton joined up, as did dentist Seth Blake of Bellows Falls. Some participants, such as Augustus and Cyrus Armstrong of Dorset, were probably longtime abolitionists. Rowland T. Robinson of Ferrisburgh had gained notoriety for Underground Railroad activities. Emily Cogswell of Middlebury, just one of many women involved, and Hosea Doton of Pomfret, represented the teaching profession. Large contingents of signers were from the Burlington and Bennington regions. These included several affluent merchants and farmers, according to census records. Far from reflecting a ragtag bunch of radicals, this cross-section of Vermonters consisted of many solid-citizen types, several of whom had held civic offices.

Rutland itself and the surrounding county accounted for a large number of petition signers. In addition to organizers John Landon and Newman Weeks, these included John W. Cramton (misspelled Crampton on the petition), a tinware manufacturer, who went on to hold many high-level positions in business and government and who the *Burlington Free Press* labeled in 1889, the "most 'official' person in the state."⁸ Other signers from the Rutland area included men and women from all walks of life: merchants, laborers, schoolteachers, and small business owners. Many were involved in Spiritualism and some in allopathic medicine.

Newman Weeks, a life and fire insurance and real estate agent, justice of the peace, notary, ticket agent for Grand Trunk Railroad, and mer-

chant dealing in furniture and upholstery goods, may have been the Rutlander most involved in the Spiritualism movement. In a few letters to Plymouth medium Achsah Sprague, Weeks left record of his enthusiasm. On April 15, 1858, he told her of Burlington bookkeeper William H. Root's recent "waking up" to Spiritualism.⁹ A few weeks after the reform convention, Weeks gushed to Sprague about his Women's Rights politics: "So you see I am practically a 'Woman's Rights Man,' and not only that but a 'Human Rights Man.' I hope the time is not far distant when Women will stand up in their woman hood on a perfect equality with men, & no longer submit to be deemed *inferior*, or the mere *appendages* to the 'Lords of Creation.'"¹⁰ By the end of October, however, he was lamenting to her about the stagnancy of Spiritualism locally: "There is nothing going on now in Vermont remarkably interesting in the line of spiritual growth."¹¹ And a month later, reflecting on a reform conference in Utica, New York, Weeks declared it "not quite equal to the Rutland Convention."¹² As late as 1867 Weeks was still active in Spiritualism, as he called a national convention to order in Cleveland that September.

Opening the convention on June 25th, Jason Walker exhorted the assembled speakers and crowd to treat the occasion as a "free platform" and to observe toleration toward different viewpoints: "They who would be reformers of their fellows should always be charitable." Albert Landon of Rutland then offered a set of resolutions that the Business Committee had drafted. Sweeping far and wide, the pronouncements declared the individual's authority "absolute and final," condemned slavery, espoused Spiritualism, opposed war and capital punishment, celebrated marriage based on "exclusive conjugal love," defended a woman's right to choose if and when to bear children, praised free trade and land reform, challenged churchly rights to enforce the Sabbath and biblical justification, and finished with six vague statements on the moral improbability of mankind, the last of which wondered whether or not "time and devotion spent on religious service" was of any benefit.¹³ Rather than summaries of the reformers' positions, these tenets served as the starting points for the debates. Over the next three days, despite Walker's hopes for total congeniality, the divergent opinions surged back and forth across the rostrum.

Henry Clarke Wright rose first to take on the very last resolution. An itinerant minister of sorts, Wright agreed that physical structures like churches should not confine worship, but pleaded for Christian sentiments to prevail. This touched off brief remarks by others on the costs of churches and the possibilities of salvation. After repast and refreshment, Wright picked up the mantle again and delivered a long address

on the first resolution, thumping hard for the individual's rights and responsibilities: "*I must be responsible, individually and alone, for my opinions and practices.*"¹⁴ Samuel B. Brittan, the Spiritualist editor, then held forth on the "natural evidences of immortality," triggering responses from Millerite Elder Grant and Spiritualists in the audience. Another well-known Spiritualist editor, Joel Tiffany, followed with a rather abstruse and seemingly pointless disquisition on organization in nature and religion. Such was enough to exhaust the afternoon session. In the evening Amory Dwight Mayo, an Albany minister, attempted to call the radicals more or less back into the conventional Christian fold with an appeal to the sanctity of the Bible. William Goodell and Stephen Symonds Foster rose to rebut Mayo, but the convention president overrode them, and the day closed with presentations by the two Vermont trance mediums, Helen Temple of Bennington and Achsah Sprague of Plymouth.¹⁵

On the second day of the conference, matters began rather innocuously with a talk by Dr. H. S. Brown of Clarendon, Vermont on the need for a just government to regulate the affairs of individuals, a refutation of Henry Clarke Wright's position. Then things swung into high gear when New York feminist Julia Branch delivered an impassioned oration on the conditions of married women and offered a resolution that stunned the crowd: "That the slavery and degradation of woman proceed from the institution of marriage; that by the marriage contract, she loses control of her name, her person, her property, her labor, her affections, her children, and her freedom."¹⁶ As Luisa Cetti, one of only a handful of scholars to examine the Free Convention, argued in an unpublished paper, this resolution catapulted the convention in a women's rights direction, perhaps further than most feminists desired at the time, adding in a "Free Love" dimension that many of those assembled detested. Newspapers, particularly *The New York Times*, which devoted the entire front page of its June 29th edition to the convention and Branch's speech, characterized the meeting as a Free Love extravaganza. This was an inaccurate, if not downright unfair assessment, but as other current anti-Free Love stories, such as one about an alleged seduction among the Berlin Heights, Ohio Free Lovers showed, hostility toward that set of ideas was rampant.¹⁷ Stephen Symonds Foster attempted to soften the declaration by advocating marriage "*based upon the perfect principle of perfect and entire equality;*" a notion he probably thought described his own marriage with Abby Kelley Foster. But others such as Joel Tiffany jumped up to attack the Free Love ideas right away. Ernestine Rose set about to smooth things over by asserting that Branch did not mean "to let loose the untamed passions either of men or women," and made her own observations on the deprivations women suffered in

too many marriages. Shaker Frederick Evans leaped forth to encourage the conventioners not just to control but crucify their lusts. This topic of marriage drew responses from the next three speakers. Eliza Farnham, in the midst of a general analysis of women's rights, injected her points that women had endured abuses within marriage too long and that rebellion was in their hearts. Having abandoned a loveless marriage of his own, Henry Clarke Wright echoed the claims about prison-like marriages. And Ohio feminist Frances Dana Gage redirected the discussion to the matter of marital property rights and championed continuing reforms in that area. Thus the morning session drew to a close.¹⁸

That afternoon the abolitionists got their turn. Parker Pillsbury pitched in strongly to embellish his claim that "slavery is the sin and crime of our country." Calling for an interpretation of the Constitution to eradicate slavery, William Goodell joined his fervor to Pillsbury's.¹⁹ Stephen Symonds Foster raised the ante further, charging as a thoroughgoing "Come-Outer" and disunionist that "any law, constitution, court, or government, any church, priesthood, creed, or Bible, any Christ, or any God, that, by silence or otherwise, authorizes man to enslave man, merits the scorn and contempt of mankind."²⁰ By the time Henry Clarke Wright got his turn to speak, he must have been close to frothing in agreement, as he took the podium. "Down, then, with all Constitutions and Unions—," he thundered, "down with all churches, religions, and Bibles—down with all Christs and all Gods, that cannot exist without enslaving or killing men! Let man be sacred! Perish all Bibles, Christs and Gods, that would desecrate him!" Subsequent speakers widened the meaning of the word "slavery" and fulminated on the slavery of mental bigotry or the tyranny of the body over the mind, ending the session with a reaffirmation of the individual's rights.²¹

After the dinner break, the evening session returned to the theme of women's rights. George Sennott of Boston averred that women should take a vital place in reform movements, because, emphasizing the assumed ideal of passionlessness, he reckoned their moral superiority suited them well for the tasks: "For though man's crimes do spring from unprincipled passion, it is a fact as well known as any fact can be, that on the part of woman, there is no *passion* whatsoever. . . . Women are not sensual, they abhor sensuality, and when they become independent, it will be one of the first things swept away, whether in marriage or out." Mary Davis closed out the segment with a speech underscoring Sennott's remarks as well as those by other feminists earlier in the convention.²²

By Sunday, many Spiritualists were expressing dissatisfaction with the twists and turns of the discussions. Apparently, according to Pillsbury, some wished to disband and hold a concurrent Spiritualist-oriented con-

ference. But Andrew Jackson Davis interceded and kept them with the main body, which by that time was approaching about 3,000 spectators.²³ After morning debate on the merits of free trade and a proposition to remove Christian teachings from public schools by Rutlander John Landon, Davis and the Spiritualists took over. Rehearsing his favorite points about harmonial forces in the universe, Davis argued for Spiritualism as a "door to my acceptance of the various reforms for which this Convention has assembled," as "a broad and glorious triumphal archway leading in all directions into freedom, and a universal enjoyment of a heaven in the world."²⁴ Frederick Evans then spoke on the Shaker doctrines of physical and spiritual simplicity and celibacy to wrap up the session: "A celibate life, community of goods, separation from earthly governments, abolition of oaths, of war, of slavery, of poverty, and a sinless, innocent life."²⁵

Evans may have been a hard act to follow, for the concluding evening session account reads like a denouement. A Mr. Markham held forth briefly on "natural rights," and then Miles Grant launched into an attack on Spiritualism, declaring that "communications purporting to come from departed human spirits proceed from demons, and lead directly to skepticism, sensualism, and a rejection of the doctrines of the Bible." Grant promptly found himself locking horns with Joel Tiffany until both exhausted their points of view. Thomas Curtis and Stephen Symonds Foster offered up the obligatory commendations to the organizers, to the Harmonists from Troy, New York, who had provided intermission singings, and to the people of Rutland, most of whom must have been as drained by the conference as were the participants.²⁶

The Rutland convention captured many of the swirling radical religious currents of the day. Although the Second Great Awakening was thirty years in the past, the gathering bore some resemblance to the camp revivals in the frontier groves. Each reformer sought to evangelize for his or her cause. Fervor was the order of the day. Rutland must have felt a little scorched from its three days of being "burnt-over." Although it's impossible to know the religious composition of the audience, clearly traditional religions and sects had scant representation on the podium. Liberal Christianity seemed retrograde compared to the challenges of "Come-Outerism," Millennialism, and Spiritualism. The conference even got one cleric into hot water with his congregation. Reverend Joshua Young of Burlington apparently did not attend the gathering, but his signing of the petition drew little applause from his flock, who later that year removed the pastor from his position.²⁷

Several newspaper accounts declared that the Spiritualists predominated. Probably the stories referred to the number of Spiritualists in attendance, but the growing movement did make its mark on the conference.

Although historians debate the structure of the Spiritualist movement—Ann Braude emphasizing the role of women in a more loosely-knit coalition of anti-authoritarian reform and Bret Carroll detecting a greater pattern of organization—the movement had definitely gained steam since its spirit-rapping days of the 1840s.²⁸ The Rutland conference gave the Spiritualists a featured role. Mary and Andrew Jackson Davis delivered long disquisitions on the expected celestial harmonium. Spiritualist editors Brittan and Tiffany chimed in with their own advocacies of their perspective. Trance mediums Helen Temple and Achsah Sprague took the stage to display their talents.²⁹

But the Spiritualists did not completely dominate the field. Anti-ecclesiastical speeches and queries permeated the conference. For example, the organizing committee submitted the following resolution concerning the Bible: “*Resolved*, That nothing is true or right, and nothing is false or wrong, because it is sanctioned or condemned by the Bible; therefore, the Bible is powerless to prove any doctrine to be true, or any practice to be right, and it should never be quoted for that purpose.”³⁰ Henry Clarke Wright, erstwhile Presbyterian minister, challenged the audience about religious hypocrisy, in which they attended services and sang hymns, but failed to incorporate genuine Christianity into their lives. Wright railed: “You do not take him home to your houses, your stores, or your shops. You keep your God closed up in your churches through the week, and then open the doors and let him out again. One hundred million dollars are invested in houses for God in the United States, and fifty-two days of each year are set apart for God-worship, and thousands of priests are employed to conduct that worship.”³¹ Ernestine Rose, who was somewhat of an atheist, avowed, “I am opposed to all the creeds, systems, legislations, all the writings, printings, or acts of men with regard to any other being, except men and women here. If there is another life, I say the same. Let us do our duty to humanity here, and when we reach another state of existence, we will attend to the duties of that state.”³²

Occasionally speakers attempted to reconcile the radical and traditional outlooks. Joel Tiffany spoke on behalf of “organization in a religious sense”: “Suppose I find ten, twenty, thirty, or fifty men and women who think and feel as I do, who have the same aspirations, and who feel that they can gather together with me, and thus, by our mutual breathings forth, stimulate each other to higher, holier and purer desires, and for that purpose we come together, and thus unitedly, with all our hearts and aspirations, breathe forth our desires to that great infinite source of all good—have you any objection to it?”³³ Horace Seaver, of Boston, declaimed that although he was a non-believer himself, he did not be-

grudge anyone who found some happiness in religion. "Religion," he said, "has made of this world, almost literally, a hell, and if there be any liberalism that can make a heaven for any portion of humanity, or all of us, I have no objection."³⁴ And Tiffany, apparently frustrated by the diversity of opinions at the convention, tried to salvage some respect for religion, even if not the sectarian brand, as moral suasion: "I mean by 'Religion,' that truth which I believe is necessary to enlighten the world; and I wish not only to know that truth, but to practice it in my life. When I wish to present to the world the idea of purity, I wish to present that idea through my own daily life, by becoming the embodiment of it."³⁵

Predictably, much of the debate centered on the role of the Bible in religion. Amory Dwight Mayo declared, "The most important question to the religious development of our country is now *The Authority of the Bible*. Every doctrine of theology, every phase of ecclesiastical policy; every problem of private and public morality, is involved in its solution. It is a hopeless endeavor to reconcile the present confusion of religious affairs until we have arrived at some intelligent answer to these queries—*What is the Bible?; what is its Authority in Religion; what is the true method of its use?*"³⁶ Now and then a speaker called for a more fundamentalist reading of the Bible. After a sharp attack on Spiritualism, Miles Grant defended the Bible: "How do you know good from evil? Try it by the Bible. I take the Bible as the *only* rule of faith and practice; there fore I believe these spiritual manifestations are from demons." Grant, however, became embroiled in a dispute with Joel Tiffany over biblical semantics. Pillsbury rushed in to chide them for "discharging small shots of text at each other."³⁷

Far and away the greatest amount of antiecclesiastical thunder came from the Come-Outers, a movement that had grown increasingly vociferous. As George Sennott, a Boston lawyer, remarked about the strength of this group, "twenty years ago, a 'come-outer' was a name to hoot at—a singularity; now they hold conventions."³⁸ Pillsbury submitted a resolution that distilled the arguments of Come-Outerism: "*Resolved*, That the two great pillars of the slave system of this country are the State and the Church—the former as represented by the two great political parties, the Republican and Democratic; and the latter by the Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopal Churches, and the American Bible and Tract Societies—not one of which has ever repudiated the principle that man may breed, buy, sell and hold his fellow man in absolutely brutal slavery."³⁹ After his own similar resolution, Foster went on to upbraid the Spiritualists: "in this nineteenth century, a nation, that every seventh day goes on its knees before God, thanking him that we live in a land of Gospel light and civil and religious liberty,

denies, on pains of stripes and imprisonment, its own Sacred Scriptures to one-seventh part of its population—and we are to talk about a belief in immortality, are we? We are to discuss the question whether spirits in the other world can communicate with us, are we? . . . You pretend to be Spiritualists, and believe in a future life; and yet, you are so attached to this, that you dare not repudiate this pro-slavery, man-thieving government, because it may cost a drop of blood, a scratch on the face! You believe in Spiritualism? Why, I have more Spiritualism in my little finger than you have in your whole bodies.” He especially singled out the Methodists who he thought carried out the work of slave-hunters north of the Mason-Dixon Line.⁴⁰ S. C. Chandler took the anti-institutionalist line even further. In addition to the four or so million slaves, Chandler asserted there were another sixteen million church members who were chained to “this ecclesiastical God, that tells you what ideas you shall possess of him, what you shall find in the Bible and what you shall not find there, and what you shall think in relation to ourselves and your present and future destiny.” He implored the audience “to set aside that ecclesiastical authority, to break the shackles that bind your minds down, and forbid you to tread in the paths of mental freedom.”⁴¹ For many of the Rutland radicals, religion was the ultimate prison, the Devil’s handmaiden.

For weeks after the Rutland Convention newspapers as far away as Kansas and New Orleans printed reports and editorials about the debates. Only a few treated the event neutrally or with approval. Spiritualist newspapers, such as *Banner of Light* and Brittan’s *The Spiritual Age* printed lengthy transcripts of the debates. Similarly, *The Liberator* and *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* carried reports and letters to the editor, the former into early September.⁴² All the other newspaper accounts savaged the conference. Some took the strategy of disassociating the meeting from its location, wondering how such a thing could have ever befallen Rutland. For example, the Bradford, Vermont, *Aurora of the Valley* opined: “Why these heterodox people should select such a peaceful, retired and virtuous locality as Rutland, as the scene in which to ventilate their horrid doctrines we are at a loss to tell.” “The town of Rutland is now being smitten as with a plague,” pronounced the St. Johnsbury, Vermont, *Caledonian*. Similarly, the *Burlington Free Press* consoled, “We do not wonder that the decent people of Rutland were annoyed at the presence of the Convention, for we do not remember to have read of a greater exhibition of mingled nonsense, indecency, insanity, and blasphemy, than appears to have been made by it.”⁴³ Several other newspapers employed attacks on the speakers’ personal characteristics, real or imagined. The Jackson *Mississippian Daily Gazette* referred to a convention “composed of masculine females and feminine males.”

“Female Plug Uglies” was the headline in a Fayetteville, Tennessee, *Observer* piece. A few stories, such as one in the Albany, New York, *Evening Journal*, took pleasure in derogatorily describing the physical characteristics of Eliza Farnham, Frances Dana Gage, and Julia Branch.⁴⁴

Most of the newspaper accounts, however, expressed dismay over the ideas of the conference. “Such miserable stuff as this must create intense disgust in the minds of all reasonable people,” blasted the Portland, Maine, *Advertiser*, “and this will work its own cure. We have no fear of seeing such revolting doctrines made popular so long as they are presented in their hideous deformity.” The Davenport *Daily Iowa State Democrat* chimed in: “What a happy meeting of all that is mean, all that is disgusting, all that is impudent, all that is sacrilegious.” “If the permanent lady residents of Rutland had taken their broomsticks and chased some of these hot-heads out of New England, they would have effected a greater ‘reform’ than all the conventions in the Union could accomplish,” spouted the Youngstown/Canfield, Ohio, *Republican Sentinel*. The prize for cleverness probably goes to the Wheeling, Virginia, *Daily Intelligencer* for its ridicule of the topics: “While their hand is in, why not introduce some resolutions defining the precise position of the Convention on the old hen question, the diagnosis of stump-tail milk, the pathology of pork, and the peregrinatory processes of green cheese.”⁴⁵

What overall impact did the Rutland Free Convention make on the United States of 1858 other than stirring up editors? Few of the participants later referred to their participation. Many nationally known radicals, such as Wendell Phillips, Garrison, Theodore Parker, and Theodore Dwight Weld, the Grimké sisters, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, the Fox sisters, Horace Greeley, and the Tappan brothers had not joined in the conference nor did they leave any reaction to it. Aside from the debate in the abolitionist and Spiritualist newspapers, the convention left little mark. It didn’t sway the major political parties overtly, and it did not accelerate or halt the tide toward civil war. The state of Vermont did enact a staunchly abolitionist measure, “An Act to Secure Freedom to All Persons within this State” in November, 1858, but even that law’s connection to the Rutland Convention is unclear.⁴⁵ Was the convention just some sound and fury in backwater Vermont?

The Rutland gathering may not have generated earthshaking changes in Americans of that day, but it still serves as a barometer of the prejudices and passions that simmered then, as a crazy-quilt paradigm of the reach of reforms afoot, and as an example of the internecine bickering among the reformer wing. Moreover, even though editors lambasted the Rutland conclave, the convention movement hardly died out. For years afterward, reformers continued to assemble in convention as if it were

the most natural of activities. Similarly, although the speakers may not have referred to the Rutland affair afterwards, it still was part of the relentless process of being a radical in those tumultuous decades, yet one more baptism under fire for unpopular causes. It is tempting, but probably overstating the case, to see the meeting, its speakers, and its ideas as prophetic, pointing the way to a future when Americans would normalize several of the reformers' platforms. Or, perhaps historian Louis Filler was closer to the truth with his observation: "It was as though these restless perfectionists were convening for all but the last time—at least as a coherent body—before civil war made largely irrelevant their configuration of causes."⁴⁶ But the scenario arises immediately of Henry Clarke Wright leaping to his feet, along with the other "fanatics in grand conclave," to debate that point yet one more time.⁴⁷

NOTES

¹ Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). A version of this paper appeared in the *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1999): 34–48. My thanks to the Rutland Historical Society for permission to use material from that article here.

² Parker Pillsbury to William Lloyd Garrison, reprinted in *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*, 10 July 1858, 1.

³ Historical summations of the antebellum reform movements are numerous, but two useful, brief monographs are Ronald A. Walters, *American Reformers 1815–1860* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978) and Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1995).

⁴ David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791–1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939). See also Wilbur H. Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (Columbus, Ohio: Spahr and Glenn, 1937); John L. Myers, "The Major Effect of Antislavery Agencies in Vermont, 1832–1836," *Vermont History* 36 (September 1968): 214–229; Randolph A. Roth, "The First Radical Abolitionists: The Reverend James Milligan and the Reformed Presbyterians of Vermont," *New England Quarterly* 55 (December 1982): 540–563; Louise B. Roomet, "Vermont as a Resort Area in the Nineteenth Century," *Vermont History* 44 (1976): 1–13; and Harold A. Meeks, *Time and Change in Vermont: A Human Geography* (Chester, Conn.: The Globe Pequot Press, 1986).

⁵ Austin J. Coolidge and J.B. Mansfield, *A History and Description of New England, General and Local*, 2 vols. (Boston: Austin J. Coolidge, 1859), Vol. 1: *Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont*, 894.

⁶ *The Spiritual Age*, 12 June 1858.

⁷ "The Free Convention," *Rutland Herald*, 25 June 1858, 2.

⁸ *Burlington Free Press*, 21 January 1889, 5.

⁹ Newman Weeks to Achsah Sprague, 15 April 1858, Achsah Sprague Collection, Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vermont, Document Box #181, Folder 5.

¹⁰ Weeks to Sprague, 17 August 1858, *ibid.*, Folder 6.

¹¹ Weeks to Sprague, 31 October 1858, *ibid.*, Folder 7.

¹² Weeks to Sprague, 26 November 1858, *ibid.*, Folder 7.

¹³ J. M. Yerrinton, ed., *Proceedings of the Free Convention Held at Rutland, Vermont June 25th, 26th, and 27th* (Boston: J. M. Yerrinton, 1858), 8–10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11–23; quotation is on p. 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24–50, 177–184.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50–55; quotation is on p. 55.

¹⁷ Luisa Cetti, "The Radicals and the Wrongs of Marriage," unpublished paper presented at the Third Biennial Symposium of the Milan Group in Early United States History, "Making, Unmaking and Remaking America: Popular Ideology before the Civil War," Milan, Italy, June 1986.

¹⁸ Yerrinton, ed., *Proceedings*, 56–63, 67–81; quotation is from p. 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82–93; quotation is on p. 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 95–99; quotation is on p. 95.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 100–109; quotation is on p. 101.

²² Ibid., 109–124; quotation is on p. 118.

²³ Pillsbury to Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*, 10 July 1858, 1.

²⁴ Yerrinton, ed., *Proceedings*, 143–148; quotations are from pp. 147–148.

²⁵ Ibid., 151–159; quotation is on p. 159.

²⁶ Ibid., 160–173; quotation is on p. 161.

²⁷ I am indebted to Elizabeth Dow, former curator of the Wilbur Collection at Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont, for calling this development to my attention.

²⁸ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), especially her recounting of the Rutland Convention Spiritualists, 69–73; and Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

²⁹ Yerrinton, ed., *Proceedings*, 119–124, 143–151, 24–29, 36–42, 177–184.

³⁰ Ibid., 10.

³¹ Ibid., 11–12.

³² Ibid., 13.

³³ Ibid., 42.

³⁴ Ibid., 108.

³⁵ Ibid., 127.

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁷ Ibid., 164–169; quotations are from pp. 164 and 169.

³⁸ Ibid., 111.

³⁹ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 96–99; quotations are from pp. 96 and 99.

⁴¹ Ibid., 104–105.

⁴² *The Liberator* featured material pertinent to the convention in its June 4th, June 11th, July 2nd, July 9th, July 30th, August 6th, August 13th, August 27th, and September 3rd issues. *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* paid somewhat less attention to it, including pieces in only its July 31st and August 21st numbers.

⁴³ "Free Convention at Rutland," Bradford *Aurora of the Valley*, 3 July 1858, 2; "A 'Reform' Convention," St. Johnsbury *Caledonian*, 3 July 3 1858, 2; and Burlington *Free Press*, 30 June 1858, 2.

⁴⁴ "Northern Wickedness and Fanaticism," Jackson *Mississippian Daily Gazette*, 14 July 1858, 3; "Female Plug Uglies," Fayetteville, Tennessee *Observer*, 8 July 1858, 2; and Albany *Evening Journal*, 2 July 1858, 2.

⁴⁵ "A Convention of 'Moral Lunatics,'" Portland, Maine, *Advertiser*, 6 July 1858, 1; "'Isms' in Convention," Davenport *Daily Iowa State Democrat*, 29 June 1858, 2; Youngstown/Canfield, Ohio, *Republican Sentinel*, 15 July 1858, 2; and Wheeling, Virginia, *Daily Intelligencer*, 29 June 29 1858, 1. But probably the most vilifying prose appeared in the Nashville, Tennessee, *Union*, whose editorial the Concord, New Hampshire, *Democratic Standard* reprinted in its July 24th issue, page one; the essay warrants some lengthy excerpting here:

All the moral and political diseases which have afflicted society for many years past, recently broke out in a violent eruption at the "Reformers' Free Convention" at Rutland, Vermont. That unfortunate city seems to have been selected as a moral pest house on this occasion, where all the plagues that infest the world have congregated together, that they may engender some new and more loathsome leprosy. By a sort of affinity which exists in the social as well as the physical world, all forms of error and vice have been attracted to revel and riot in these saturnalia of sin. Licentiousness scarcely concealing its hideous deformities under the robe of a false and disgusting philanthropy; Superstition, appealing to the worst passions and propensities of our nature and linked with the most degrading vices; Infidelity, trampling upon the sacred shrines of religion; Abolitionism, insolently defying the obligations of human and divine law and substituting its own infamous doctrines for those eternal truths which the wisdom of our fathers have left us for our own guidance—these are the elements which mingled in that foul assemblage of pestilence and pollution. . . . These dangerous and destructive heresies have never flourished at the South. They cannot live upon our soil. They wither for want of sustenance in the purer, moral atmosphere that surrounds them here. They vanish, like morning mists, in the clearer light of our social and political philosophy. We have no fens of moral disease and pestilence, to nourish their rank and poisonous growth, no fetid pools of pollution in whose still and stagnant depths the germs of these social evils may be engendered.

⁴⁶ Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830–1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 263–264.

⁴⁷ The phrase in quotation marks was the headline of the Springfield, Massachusetts, *Republican* article about the convention, 28 June 1858, 2.



“By Work in Shop”: Boot and Shoe Production in Calais, Vermont, 1829–1850

Abdiel Kent's boot and shoe shop was organized during a period of transformation, as the earlier system of domestic manufacture and apprentice training slowly gave way to an emerging industrialism based on factory production and wage labor.

By JILL MUDGETT

I had the good fortune to be selected as the historical society's Kent Fellow during the summer of 1997. My task, designed to reflect what I found in the collection, was to research the history of Calais in general and Kents' Corner in particular from 1820–1850. Anything relating to the larger economic, social, religious, and political issues commonly associated with Vermont's history during the first half of the nineteenth century was fair game. Waiting for me in the archives was a wealth of information on Abdiel Kent, the Kent brother responsible for the construction of the Greek Revival brick structure now known as the Kent Museum. The museum's founder, Louise Andrews Kent, did much to secure a prominent position for Abdiel Kent within the public historical memory in Calais. So I knew going into the project that Abdiel had been somewhat of a nineteenth-century entrepreneur, that he was involved in a mixture of industry, real estate, and farming both in Calais and in neighboring towns. What leaped out at me from the collection was the significance for Kent's personal economy of a boot and shoe shop located in the complex of buildings at Kents' Corner. Kent established the shop in 1829 after a few years spent in southern New England, which included employment with relatives in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, who operated, among other things, a cotton



*Abdiel Kent (1805–1887).
Portrait by Thomas
Waterman Wood.*

factory and a facility engaged (surprisingly enough) in the production of boots and shoes.

Kent's stay in southern New England exposed him to industrial models that differed from those available to him in Calais. From its very inception, the scale and organization of shoe production in Kent's shop differed markedly from the small-scale domestic manufacture by rural farmer/shoemakers common throughout the countryside during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Unlike those part-time shoemakers, who generally supplied local families with boots and shoes on a custom basis, Kent operated his shop year-round, filling local orders and, at times, delivering hundreds of pairs of boots and shoes to merchants ten miles away in Montpelier, by that time both the shire town and state capital, and the nearest commercial center.

Shoe production on that scale depended on the work of outside laborers. Kent's shop was organized during a period of transformation, as the earlier system of domestic manufacture and apprentice training slowly gave way to an emerging industrialism based on factory production and wage labor. Spanning the transition between those shifting systems, Kent's shop, like so many others established during that period, was characterized by what historians have called a mixture of persistence

and change.¹ The employment patterns recorded in Kent's account books document that melding of the old with the new. The steady stream of laborers flowing in and out of the shop over the twenty years between its organization and midcentury clearly reflects a shop aligning itself with new models of production while simultaneously clinging to older patterns of industrial organization. While Kent employed both men and women, apprentices and wage laborers, locals and newcomers, boarders and outworkers, the majority of his laborers were young, unmarried men from Calais or nearby communities, many of whom boarded with Kent while working in the shop for wages. Those arrangements, while lacking the more intimate, paternalistic quality of the traditional one-on-one apprenticeship, cannot be characterized as relationships centered solely on business. Instead, Kent's young journeymen entered a rural industrial world where agricultural demands were answered and where social, civic, and educational interests often took precedence over industrial ones—a manufacturing environment where, in short, cash-poor and landless young men found benefits they measured in more than monetary terms.

In the discussion of the persistence and change that characterized rural industry in general and shoemaking in particular during the first half of the nineteenth century, historians largely have overlooked the ways in which the combination of established and evolving manufacturing practices shaped the work experiences of individual laborers. Indeed, most historical scholarship only skims the surface of that transitional period in an effort to chart the path from domestic craftsmanship to factory production. When the transitional phase is discussed, it is usually to explore the economic participation of women as sewers (or binders in shoemaking) working out of their homes under the putting-out system, and when the analysis centers in the rural shop itself, it is largely to detail the technical changes that occurred as production methods became fragmented, as groups of unskilled laborers, each responsible for one step in the production process, replaced trained craftsmen, each employed to produce the entire shoe.² Although such scholarship does much to explain both the organization of Kent's shop and the marketing of his finished product, it ignores the day-to-day realities within those rural shops, creating a gulf in our understanding by failing to explore the ways in which newer industrial commitments worked in conjunction with older agricultural and civic ones.

Historians generally categorize the shops scattered across the rural countryside during this period as a mixture of older small shops employing a shoemaker and perhaps a journeyman or two, and "twelve-footers"; with dimensions of roughly 12-by-12 or 10-by-10 feet, twelve-footers were production centers large enough to accommodate

an owner or primary shoemaker and several journeymen.³ However, while most rural shops operated roughly within that scale, many Massachusetts shoe factories from the same period were characterized by large-scale production employing scores to over a hundred laborers. Kent's shop falls within the definition of the twelve-footer. Whereas the family shoe shop at Kents' Mills in Rehoboth probably operated within the emerging factory system of southern New England, the version Kent established in Calais reflected an understanding of capitalist production reduced to fit the less industrialized economy of central Vermont.

Unlike other owners of rural twelve-footers, Kent employed outside shoemakers from the start; he was not expanding an already-established trade in which he had been a primary producer, and there is no indication that he worked steadily or consistently in the shop once it was organized. While he was active in the daily operation of the shop (the account books and day books are recorded in his hand), within a few years after its establishment he was employing a man as a sort of overseer, responsible, it seems, for training and managing the laborers. In her 1882 gazetteer of Vermont towns, historian Abby Maria Hemenway stated that Kent's shoe shop had "at times employ[ed] a dozen or more men," a number verified in surviving documents.⁴ The earliest surviving record for the shop, a small pocket-sized memorandum book, recorded the starting dates for eleven men who began work in the shop between 1831 and 1832, while an account book used between 1839 and 1852 recorded the names of at least fifty-five men employed during that period.⁵

In his discussion of the shoe industry during the same period, economist Ross Thomson outlines a system of production in which individual worker control of or responsibility for the finished product was being supplanted by a more fragmented shop organization. After the leather had been cut into uppers in the shop, they were sewn together through a process known as "binding," a step often assigned to women who served as outworkers, completing the stitching in their homes. Once stitched, those uppers could be delivered to the shop where men would form them to the wooden last and then join them to the sole, a process known as "bottoming." By 1830, the rural shoe shop had become a manufacturing center in which, as Thomson puts it, "workers were trained not to make the whole shoe, or even to bottom it, but to trim, last, peg, or heel."⁶ The records for Kent's shop reveal that in this rural industry, labor was divided according to a less rigid example of the model outlined by Thomson. In contrast to apprentice labor, most of Kent's journeymen were paid according to an estimate for an entire month of work. Those wages varied and suggest that payment was based on skill and position within the shop. While Kent's brother worked for eighteen dol-

lars a month in what Hemenway called a position of "foreman," thirty-year-old Chellis Scribner worked for a monthly wage of ten dollars.⁷ Kent did not record the labor of his journeymen in terms of pegging, lasting, or heeling, but it is safe to assume that many of his newer laborers were engaged in such tasks.

As historians have pointed out, while journeymen in shops like Kent's could have been trained by a craftsman who had learned the trade according to an older system of production and then passed on certain steps to laborers divided into gangs, more often than not training was received from another worker who possessed no craft ethos himself. The combination of a lost craftsman ethic with the division of labor into separate steps made it difficult for journeymen to reapply the skills acquired in shops; without an understanding of the whole system, laborers found that their skills were not portable. As another scholar describes it, an earlier focus on careers for offspring shifted to the creation of wage laborers for capitalists in a way that eliminated a laborer's chance for upward mobility. As factories grew larger, small-scale producers could not compete, and young wage laborers were left little or no opportunity to establish shops of their own. In that analysis, the changing market economy of the early nineteenth century created a growing workforce of landless laborers in both urban and rural areas, an industrial transformation that cemented a wider and more pronounced economic disparity and helped to demarcate the boundaries of economic class.

To explain the transitional phase of manufacture and the reasons why young men from rural areas would choose what is viewed today as constrictive or even exploitative labor, historians cite a scarcity of available agricultural land that grew more severe as the century progressed. According to that theory, the lack of agricultural opportunity created among young men what has been called a "pool of potential workers which the shoe industry could and did tap."⁸ While wealthier families could finance education or professional training for their young sons, most men turned to the "common occupation" of manufacturing as "another channel for energies constricted by the scarcity of land."⁹

While agricultural scarcity was a reality for many wage laborers employed in shops throughout New England during that period, journeymen in Calais appear to have had access to farm land well into the latter half of the century. Town deed books are filled with the sale of agricultural lots, and Hemenway's gazetteer contains brief biographies of numerous local sons who purchased and established farms during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. Kent's own family provides an excellent example of the continuation of farming in the town. Although Abdiel chose a career with agriculture as only a second-

ary focus, all five of his brothers eventually farmed in Calais, most of them establishing farms in the mid-1830s and 1840s, and none of them on land owned by their father.

While some of the men employed by Kent turn up in documents ten and twenty years later as day laborers, most of the members of Kent's workforce who can be traced arrived at the shop as unmarried men in their late twenties and early thirties, worked for a few years at the most, and eventually went on to farm their own lands. Rather than being a response to a lack of agricultural land, then, work in Kent's shop can be interpreted as an example of young men biding their time while they waited for other, more permanent, opportunities to open to them. While some of his shoemakers went on to lives as wage laborers, most were simply waiting for land in the way nearly all manufacturers in New England had done fifty years earlier, a biding of time still possible for them as laborers working in the less-thickly-settled areas of northern New England. The Calais shoe shop operated within a larger world of economic and industrial transition, and its geographic location meant that its young laborers could utilize the new method of production to meet a more traditional or persisting objective.

Perhaps the clearest example of the ways that Kent's shop served as a place of temporary employment for young men before undertaking an agricultural career is seen in the strong ties of so many individual laborers to agricultural obligations. Chellis Scribner worked for Kent off and on during the mid-1840s, and, during that time, Kent recorded the wages Scribner lost for drawing wood and once for being "home haying." Similarly, Hiram Robinson worked both in the shop and on Kent's farm between 1839 and 1840, during which time he lost over seventy days for everything from sheep shearing to cutting hay and plowing gardens. Although Kent credited Robinson on a steady basis for work in the shop during that period, both employer and employee seemed to accept that Robinson's membership in the Calais community necessitated frequent lapses in his shoemaking. Kent's accounts are filled with similar entries for nearly all his laborers, both those who were local and those who were not. While Robinson had been born in Calais, Scribner came from a neighboring town; although entries for both men employed similar language, many other entries for nonlocal journeymen contained only brief entries of "at home" to record days spent away from the shop. Although Calais native Hersey Slayton lost days "to haying" and repairing a barn, nonlocal worker Jason Trask spent several days "to home" during the same period.¹⁰ There is no reason to doubt that Trask's time at home was spent in the fields and barn. Shoemakers could labor with Kent for a week or two, take a six-month leave from

the shop, and return to work again for as long as they wished. Such work patterns continued to midcentury and suggest that Kent's shop was part of a rural manufacturing system answering to a schedule different from that imposed by increasingly regimented conceptions of industrial time.

Still, the significance of agricultural concerns to the daily lives of shop laborers should not be overemphasized. While Kent's laborers did leave the shop to answer the calls of haying and plowing, their employment patterns did not fall exclusively within the framework of the agricultural calendar. Unlike so many shoemakers of the late eighteenth century, men who engaged in craft production during the slow season on the farm, Kent's journeymen were part of a much larger and modern capitalist manufacturing system operating year-round. But unlike the more strictly regimented patterns of production employed in large-scale Massachusetts factories during the same period, laborers in rural shops were able to more thoroughly balance agricultural and industrial demands.

Moreover, it should be remembered that agricultural chores likely were performed on the farms of neighbors or family members, and did not require a strictly seasonal commitment on the part of young, unmarried men. Of eleven men documented as working in the shop during the first half of the 1830s, six began work in the spring or summer, while an additional four began in the fall between early September and mid-November, the height of the harvesting and slaughtering seasons.¹¹ Only the record for Jonas Kelton, who began work on the last day of November, falls into the seasonal pattern cited in historical scholarship. Similarly, while the records for the men employed during the 1840s include more examples of winter work, they continue to chart a predominance of work cycles following no clear agricultural pattern.¹² Although Kent's shoemakers spent days fulfilling agricultural commitments, such obligations in no way ordered or defined their time.

The relative flexibility with which Kent operated his shop also afforded his shoemakers the freedom to pursue interests outside of both farming and industry. Again, the entries in Kent's account books offer revealing illustrations. In addition to time off in 1839 for haying and plowing, Hiram Robinson "lost one day to hunting" and half a day in February spent "fishing for pickerl," while Jason Trask lost half a day on a "squirrel hunt." Similarly, twenty-one-year-old A. P. Slayton lost time that year for "fishing + hunting" one day and another time for "fishing with Langdon," another young journeyman boarding along with Slayton in Kent's brick house. It is difficult to imagine that those trips were strictly utilitarian, that Kent's young laborers did not often make a day of hunting or fishing together at one of the many ponds scattered throughout Calais. Similarly, the time journeymen spent away from the shop on trips to

neighboring towns was taken by choice. Kent's records contain scores of references to days laborers spent in other towns, trips that frequently involved charges deducted from wages. Trask's account was debited \$1.50 in July, 1839, "to cash to Craftsbury," while Langdon was charged \$2.00 for spending money for Montpelier. Often those charges reflected transportation fees, such as the time James Deale took Kent's "team to Waitsfield." As with the hunting and fishing trips, many of those day trips involved more than one shoemaker. At times Kent's records for those days suggest his sense of humor, such as the reference to the half day on April 28, 1842, that both Oren Deming and Richard Silloway took what Kent called an "exploring voyage."¹³

But days spent hunting in the woods or traveling to Montpelier were not the only occasions for which journeymen were excused from the shop. Just as Kent seemed to understand that agricultural obligations necessarily called his laborers into the surrounding fields and farms, so, too, did he allow his shoemakers time off to attend educational, civic, and social functions. Kent's accounts contain an abundance of references to both time and spending money given for town meetings, muster trainings, and militia meetings. Calvin Remick was charged twenty-five cents "to cash to Town Meeting" in March 1840, while Simeon Martin lost a total of ten and a half days between May and November 1841 for everything from fishing to an election and a muster training. Such events could be both civic and educational, and gave both Calais residents and outsiders employed in the shop an opportunity to interact with other members of the community.

Other educational or recreational events functioned similarly. In addition to hunting, fishing, and traveling in 1839, Trask took at least one half day to attend a concert at the meeting house, while Nelson Harris twice attended an "exhibition or speaking school" in 1846. However educational or exciting such events may have been for young men from rural hill towns, it is difficult to imagine that they held a significance equal to the opportunity to attend New Year's balls and parties. Joel Langdon spent December 31, 1840, away from the shop "to distribute ball cards," while Horace Hawes lost one and a half days in January 1844 "to Ball," perhaps traveling northeast to his hometown of St. Johnsbury for the event. It is easy to imagine some of the social benefits of attending mixed community gatherings. Richard Silloway surely was not the only laborer in attendance at a party on January 1, 1842; we cannot help but wonder whether Kent's twenty-two-year-old neighbor, Roxa Tucker, a young woman who had both boarded with and worked for Kent the previous year, was in attendance along with Silloway. In any event, the two were married the following fall.¹⁴

Those examples suggest that, contrary to popular scholarly opinion, work as a wage laborer in a rural shop did not necessarily signify a loss of artisanal authority in exchange for a life controlled by inadequate wages. Rather, Kent's shoe shop provides a case study with which to problematize that interpretation. In addition to the benefits of days spent fulfilling personal obligations and interests, wages or equivalent amounts of credit largely spent on goods obtained in Kent's small store gave journeymen access to otherwise unobtainable commodities. Although payment in goods equivalent to the wages due laborers (often referred to as the truck system) was a common practice during this phase of industrialization, scholarship touches on it only briefly. When truck payment is discussed, it is largely to illustrate how it created a class of laborers under capitalism, and with the assumption that credit was used to purchase overpriced food staples and other necessities from company stores.¹⁵ Surviving account records for Kent's journeymen, men paid largely through that truck credit, reveal very different uses for shop wages. Rather than purchasing staple goods in Kent's store, many laborers used their credit not only on spending money for day trips, but on an assortment of material goods Kent was able to provide for them. Clothing, cigars, tobacco, and liquor dominated those purchases and, combined with the fee many laborers owed Kent for board in his house, often surpassed the credit they had earned. Joel Langdon earned \$113.08 between March and August 1839, mostly for work done in the shop, but by August he owed Kent \$30.00 for twenty week's board. In addition, Langdon began to accumulate charges in the store during his first week of employment; by August he had purchased on credit everything from liquor and cigars to sugar, buttons, and a straw hat. When Kent totaled the debit side of the account, Langdon owed him \$83.08 for merchandise plus the boarding fee. He had saved nothing during his six months of employment. Similarly, Benjamin Richardson earned \$10.22 for a little over a month of work in 1845; during that time, however, he purchased pants, mittens, cigars, and shaving utensils from Kent's store, running up a debit of \$10.47. In the end, Richardson settled the account by paying Kent twenty-five cents cash. The choices those young men made with their money do not suggest an awareness of their place within what is commonly cited as a growing class of permanently landless and powerless wage laborers. In addition to shaping their own employment periods, journeymen gauged the benefits of labor in the shoe shop on a scale that included access to social and civic events, as well as a ready supply of nonutilitarian, perhaps even extravagant or luxurious, material goods.

Undoubtedly, of course, some of Kent's shoemakers struggled to sur-

vive on their wages. A handful of the men employed by Kent between 1839 and 1852 can be traced a decade or two later to wage labor. Some continued in Kent's shop, where the census enumerator found them after midcentury still employed as shoemakers. Although those men were the heads of their own households, the enumerator's failure to record property valuations (coupled with the lack of surviving grand lists for Calais) makes it impossible to chart what level of economic success they might have achieved. Still, by 1880 the shop was all but motionless; without land or skills and thorough training, those shoemakers perhaps were forced to leave Calais in order to survive. Former shoemaker Nelson Harris failed to find success after he left the shop: By 1850 Harris was thirty-three years old and living in the neighboring town of Worcester where he struggled as a day laborer with personal property estimated at \$150.00.¹⁶ Even if not all of Kent's laborers eventually acquired farmland, even if, for some of them, employment in the shop signaled an initiation into what would become a lifelong dependence on the emerging world of industrial wage labor, their experiences in the Calais manufactory cannot be viewed strictly as a case of capitalist exploitation. Even Nelson Harris found in the shoe shop an environment where he could earn a monthly wage, learn (at least part of) a trade, and exercise the freedom to take days off to attend exhibitions and speaking schools. Kent's account books document over and over again a cluster of laborer interests that could be simultaneously agricultural, civic, familial, educational, or social—but never solely industrial.

Kent's Calais shoe shop was established during a period of economic and industrial transformation. Tethered between an older system of craftsmanship and apprentice training and an emerging one of large-scale factory production, Kent's twelve-footer prospered by juggling a mixture of persisting and evolving techniques. Indeed, it embodied that state of economic flux, of industrial metamorphosis. The shop employed apprentices but mostly adhered to the newer system of wage labor, a system in which truck credit soon would be replaced by cash. It employed a few women as binders, but largely relied on the more traditional labor of male shoemakers. Located in a hill town in central Vermont, the shop was both near enough to a commercial center to prosper from its shoe market, and distant enough from Massachusetts factories to succeed without a strictly regimented work cycle. As a result, Kent's shoemakers were granted significant control over their own work schedules.

But the Calais shoe shop was established on the cusp of cultural change; straddling a dying world of domestic manufacture and an emerging one of factory mechanization, the shop eventually would slow. Its success had depended on economic fluidity, on a period of

transition; it would not survive the century. In comparison both to the system it replaced and the one to which it soon gave way, its span was brief. Its walls, however, concealed a whirl of worker activity—the details of which we have only begun to uncover.

NOTES

¹ For the theory of persistence and transformation in rural industry during the nineteenth century, see Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

² The most commonly cited study of the shoe industry is Blanche Evans Hazard, *The Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts Before 1875* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921). See also John R. Commons, "American Shoemakers: 1648–1895: A Sketch of Industrial Evolution," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 24 (November 1909): 39–84; Ross Thomson, *The Path to Mechanized Shoe Production in the United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989). For the social conditions of rural laborers in general, see Clark, *Roots of Rural Capitalism*; Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

³ Hazard, *Organization*, 43; Thomson, *Path to Mechanized Production*, 23. For a description of earlier small shops, see Clark, *Roots of Rural Capitalism*, 99. Smaller shops evolved during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as seasonal exchange by individual farmers gave way to "craft production proper, skilled work conducted full time in shops that might also employ journeymen and apprentices."

⁴ Abby Maria Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer* IV (Montpelier: Vermont Watchman and State Journal Press, 1882), 158.

⁵ Abdiel Kent, Account Book, 1839–1852, Vermont Historical Society manuscript collection, X MSC 20. This account book is missing some pages, which probably contained accounts for additional shoemakers.

⁶ Thomson, *Path to Mechanized Production*, 23–25.

⁷ Hemenway, *Gazetteer* IV, 158; Abdiel Kent, Account Book, 1839–1852.

⁸ Thomson, *Path to Mechanized Shoe Production*, 31.

⁹ Clark, *Roots of Rural Capitalism*, 94.

¹⁰ Abdiel Kent, Account Book, 1839–1852.

¹¹ Abdiel Kent, Memorandum Book, 1829–1836, Vermont Historical Society, AC B K413.

¹² Abdiel Kent, Account Book, 1839–1852.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Vermont Vital Records, 1760–1870 (Middlesex: Office of Records and Research, microfilm).

¹⁵ Thomson, *Path to Mechanized Shoe Production*; Clark, *Roots of Rural Capitalism*; Prude, *Coming of Industrial Order*. According to Hazard, many shoe shop owners also had stores on their premises; *Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry*, 51. However, it is important to remember that Kent's store functioned primarily as a trading place for other Calais residents. Kent supplied his store with goods both from Montpelier merchants and traded in by Calais farmers; I have not attempted to analyze whether or not he significantly raised the prices he then passed on to his shoemakers.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, *Seventh Census, 1850*, Vermont (Montpelier: Vermont State Library, microfilm); Vermont Vital Records, 1760–1870; Hemenway, *Gazetteer* IV, 128–177.



Sleepers Awake! The Industrial Revolution Comes to Antebellum St. Johnsbury

Several challenges confronted the E. & T. Fairbanks Company as it industrialized antebellum St. Johnsbury. Key among them were access to raw materials, transportation, labor, capital, and markets. The fact that the Fairbanks Company prospered and grew is testimony to its success at meeting these challenges.

By ALLEN YALE

St. Johnsbury was like many rural communities in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. At this time Vermont was in what Brook Hindle called “the wooden age,” and what Jared van Wagenen referred to as “the golden age of homespun.” At St. Johnsbury, two tributaries join the Passumpsic River: The Moose River joins the Passumpsic from the east about one and a half miles above where Sleepers River enters from the west. Rapids and falls punctuated the course of all three rivers. In this age of water power, these potential mill sites often developed into mill villages. In St. Johnsbury, several small mill villages contained gristmills, sawmills, potasheries, fulling and carding mills, blacksmith shops, coopers’ shop, and tanneries, as commonly found in rural villages of the time. Sleepers River was the site of the growth of an industry that would make St. Johnsbury famous.¹

An event of major significance to the future industrialization of St. Johnsbury happened in 1815, when Major Joseph Fairbanks and his family arrived and acquired a mill site on Sleepers River. Fairbanks did not waste time getting established. That summer he and his sons cleared the “mill grounds and by October had the saw mill and gristmill in suc-

cessful operation, also a carriage shop over the gristmill" for his son, Thaddeus. The mills at what became known as Fairbanks Village continued to expand. Soon, a fulling mill and a clothier shop were set up near Major Fairbanks's gristmill. In 1818, his nephew, Huxham Paddock, set up an iron works nearby. In addition, Huxham and Thaddeus built a clover mill downstream from Major Fairbanks's complex to extract clover seeds from clover blossoms.²

In 1824, Huxham Paddock leased the iron works to Thaddeus. The E. & T. Fairbanks Company was born when Erastus Fairbanks joined his brother in the operation of the iron works. It produced all sorts of cast-iron hollowware along with cultivators, patented cast-iron plows, and stoves. A machine shop produced heavy screws for clothiers' screws and house jacks, as well as "all kinds of machinery turned and finished at short notice."³ At this time E. & T. Fairbanks was no different from many small iron works, with a few workers using local materials to cater to a very limited regional market. Within a few decades, however, this company would become one of Vermont's largest manufacturers, and by the Civil War, it was the world's leading manufacturer of scales.

Several challenges confronted the firm as it industrialized antebellum St. Johnsbury. Key among these were access to raw materials, transportation, labor, capital, and markets. The fact that the Fairbanks Company prospered and grew is testimony to its success at meeting these challenges.

In 1829, an agricultural fad swept Vermont that would have a lasting effect on the Fairbanks brothers. In March, the St. Johnsbury *Farmer's Herald* carried articles on the cultivation and processing of hemp. Soon Erastus and Thaddeus were involved in the new Passumpsick Company, a hemp-dressing facility. Thaddeus Fairbanks was named head of the hemp works and E. & T. Fairbanks Company was contracted to make the hemp-dressing machines. In conjunction with this project Thaddeus constructed a platform scale to weigh wagon loads of hemp. The fad wilted as quickly as it blossomed. In 1835, the other partners sold the property to E. & T. Fairbanks. Despite the failure of the hemp works, the Fairbanks involvement in the venture was a key factor in their future, for it initiated the company's manufacture of platform scales. On the eve of the introduction of the platform scale, nothing particular differentiated St. Johnsbury from many other rural villages throughout Vermont. Little could anyone have guessed that scales would cause the modest Fairbanks enterprise to experience explosive growth and that by the end of the century this place would become renowned throughout the world.⁴

In the 1830s, the buildings of E. & T. Fairbanks Company straddled Sleepers River, near the site of Major Fairbanks's dam. The company consisted of three buildings—the foundry, the gristmill-sawmill, and

the "red shop"—and employed about thirty artisans. The Fairbanks iron works was a one-story building twenty-five feet by sixty feet, smaller than a typical hay barn of the time. As befits "the wooden age," most of the components of the large platform scales were fabricated out of wood provided by the customer at the site of construction. Only the iron parts of the larger scales were manufactured in the shops in St. Johnsbury. These could be carried in a saddlebag.⁵

One challenge for any manufacturing process is access to raw materials. While E. & T. Fairbanks was at some disadvantage for acquiring certain raw materials, St. Johnsbury was fairly well located for the production of scales. Pig iron, the material of greatest bulk and weight, was available within a twenty- to fifty-mile radius. Franconia, New Hampshire, was Fairbanks's major supplier of pig iron in the early years. Between April 1838 and March 1839, the town supplied Fairbanks with over 107 tons of pig iron and 3 tons of bar iron. At about the same time, cousin Horace Paddock forwarded 18 tons of pig iron from Troy, Vermont. The Tyson Furnace of Plymouth, Vermont, was another iron supplier. Scrap iron from broken plows and stoves, procured locally, provided additional cast iron. Other bulky items—wood, charcoal, and limestone—were available even closer to the works. Most of the materials that had to be hauled long distances, such as cast steel and copper, were used in relatively small quantities.⁶

Greatly increasing demand for platform scales to weigh commodities as diverse as cotton, coal, iron, and freight shipped over the expanding network of canals and railroads dramatically increased Fairbanks's need for raw materials and widened its market. As scale design evolved from the age of wood to the age of iron, the acquisition of pig iron became the company's most critical challenge, both because of its weight and the quantity needed. By 1840, local sources were not able to provide all of the company's needs, and it had to rely on more distant sources of pig iron. By the late 1840s, Fairbanks purchased pig iron from the Adirondacks and beyond; by 1848 the company was buying twenty to thirty tons of Scottish pig iron a month. This made the company's distance from the sea a problem. Advances in transportation were necessary if the company was going to grow.⁷

Fortunately for Fairbanks, the growth of the company coincided with a revolution in transportation in America. The Champlain Canal opened in 1823, linking Lake Champlain to the Hudson River. It gave Burlington access to New York City via the Hudson and, after 1825, access to the West through the Erie Canal. Materials imported for Fairbanks at New York were shipped up the Hudson, through the Champlain Canal, and down Lake Champlain to Burlington. Unfortunately, from there

they still had to be drawn by team across the Green Mountains to St. Johnsbury. For the company's first twenty-five years, teamsters driving heavy wagons pulled by up to eight horses hauled freight to and from St. Johnsbury. These wagons rumbled along dirt roads to and from the ports of Burlington, Portland, and Boston. Depending on distance, the teamsters were on the road for several days, stopping at inns for meals and lodging for themselves and their horses.

Ever sensitive to transportation, the Fairbanks partners were not content to leave the availability of improved forms of transportation to chance. Soon after the railroad was introduced to America, the company recognized it as a way to solve its transportation problems and became involved in the Connecticut and Passumpsic Rivers Railroad. Eventually Erastus Fairbanks became president of this railroad. Meanwhile, the 1840s saw other railroads slowly moving north from Boston. The journey by team from St. Johnsbury to the nearest railhead grew shorter and shorter. In 1845, construction began on the Connecticut and Passumpsic Rivers Railroad up from White River Junction toward the Canadian border. With great celebration, the first train steamed into St. Johnsbury on November 23, 1850. Now E. & T. Fairbanks had a year-round, rapid freight connection with much of the northeastern United States. The immediate economic importance of the railroad to St. Johnsbury was dramatic. During the first full month of the railroad's operation, over 868 tons of freight was shipped into or out of St. Johnsbury.⁸

The growth of Fairbanks also depended on the availability of labor. The company began in 1824 with only a dozen or so workers. Over the next two decades, however, the company's rapid expansion required a dramatic increase in its work force. By 1850 the firm employed 225 workers, and by 1900 over eight hundred. Many of the jobs in the scale works required highly skilled workers: pattern makers, foundry workers, machinists, and sealers. To attract and maintain this skilled work force, Fairbanks was required to provide good wages and working conditions, for the attractions of cities and the West were constantly luring workers from St. Johnsbury.⁹

The ethnic composition of the labor force changed over time. Available evidence suggests that initially Fairbanks workers were all born in the New England states of Vermont, New Hampshire, or Massachusetts. By the end of the 1830s a few Canadians with English or Irish surnames joined the New Englanders who made up most of the work force. By 1858, while 78 percent were native-born Americans and 60 percent were native Vermonters, there were 25 foreign-born workers, of whom twelve were Irish and ten were Canadian. Eight of the ten Canadians had French surnames. This trend toward a diverse work force continued

until 1900 when almost 49 percent of Fairbanks workers were immigrants or the sons of immigrants.¹⁰

Access to capital was another challenge facing the Fairbanks brothers during the opening decades of the company. Capital investment was reflected first and foremost in the physical plant. The St. Johnsbury Grand List for 1855 indicates that Fairbanks had grown from 3 buildings in 1824 to 32 in 1855. The value of the company's capital assets had grown from \$4,000 in 1824 to \$100,000 in 1850, \$1 million dollars in 1870, and over \$2.6 million in 1880. In addition to the investment in the physical plant, Fairbanks needed working capital to pay for raw materials, shipping, and wages. In 1860 the company's annual payroll was approximately \$90,000. As Fairbanks was selling its scales on credit and had considerable inventory with its salesmen, it took careful management to maintain sufficient working capital to meet its financial obligations. An analysis of the Fairbanks records suggests that much of this capital growth was the result of reinvestment of profits by the partners and borrowing from employees.¹¹

In addition to challenges on the production side of the business, the firm had to pay attention to the growth of markets for scales. The increase in demand described earlier stimulated a commensurate and rapid growth in the scale industry generally. Between 1850 and 1900 the number of scale manufacturers in the United States grew from slightly more than twenty to approximately ninety. In 1876, Benson Lossing wrote "In 1870, there were forty-nine establishments in our country engaged in the manufacture of scales and balances, employing 1,000 men, and yielding an annual product of nearly \$3,000,000 . . . [T]he establishment of Messrs. Fairbanks represents more than one-half of the entire business of the scale and balance making in the United States." Despite a dramatic increase in competition, Fairbanks was able to maintain its market share and greatly expand its market territory.¹²

Initially, E. & T. Fairbanks and Company catered to a regional market restricted to what is now referred to as the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont—west of the Connecticut River Valley, north of Bradford, and east of Craftsbury—one of the most rural sections of Vermont. In the forty years that followed, the company's market exploded even more dramatically than its production. By 1833, E. & T. Fairbanks had granted sales territories throughout the northeast and the Atlantic seaboard and had licensed manufacturing and sales of its scales west of the Appalachians as far as the Mississippi River. By 1850, Fairbanks scales could be bought in San Francisco.¹³

The dramatic growth of the domestic market was surpassed by the expansion of the foreign market. As early as 1833 Fairbanks scales

were being sold in the settled portions of British North America. Two years later Fairbanks issued a license to Henry Pooley of Liverpool, England to manufacture Fairbanks scales in the British Isles; 1836 saw the company's first sales to Latin America. Fairbanks correspondence documents sales in China in 1845, Honolulu in 1846, Calcutta in 1850, and Java in 1851. An 1861 Brazilian advertisement claimed that Fairbanks's market included almost all the states of Europe, eight Latin American countries, and China. After the Meiji Restoration, Fairbanks scales were adopted for the Japanese postal system.¹⁴

The growth of E. & T. Fairbanks was reflected in the growth of St. Johnsbury as the premiere town in Caledonia County. This was formally recognized when the county seat was moved there from Danville in 1856. By then, Fairbanks scales and St. Johnsbury, Vermont, were known throughout the nation, and, in fact, throughout most of the world.

With the arrival of the Fairbanks family in 1815, Sleepers River had begun to awaken. By the Civil War, one of the company's partners, Erastus Fairbanks, was governor of Vermont, the Fairbanks scale company was the world's leading manufacturer of scales, and Sleepers River was a beehive of industrial activity.

NOTES

¹ Brooks Hindle, ed., *America's Wooden Age: Aspects of Its Early Technology* (Tarrytown, N.Y.: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1975); Jared van Wagenen, Jr., *The Golden Age of Homespun* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1953).

² Edward T. Fairbanks, *The Town of St. Johnsbury Vt.: A Review of One Hundred Twenty-Five Years to the Anniversary Pageant 1912* (St. Johnsbury, Vt.: The Cowles Press, 1914), 353, 151, 145.

³ Office of Town Clerk, St. Johnsbury, Vermont, Land Records, book 5 page 244, Lease Huxham Paddock to T. Fairbanks, dated 1 October 1824; (St. Johnsbury) *Farmers Herald* (23 September 1828), 3 (hereafter *FH*).

⁴ *FH*, 12 March 1829, 1; *FH*, 18 March 1829, 3; Fairbanks, *Town of St. Johnsbury Vt.*, 155, 412-413.

⁵ Fairbanks Weighing Division, Colt Industries, *Fairbanks Standard 150 Years 1830-1980* (St. Johnsbury, 1980), 12.

⁶ Fairbanks Papers, Vermont Historical Society, 6037, 6277; Fairbanks, *Town of St. Johnsbury Vt.*, 147.

⁷ Fairbanks Papers, 5889, 1403, 1207.

⁸ *St. Johnsbury Caledonian*, 1 December 1850 (hereafter *SJC*); *SJC*, 1 February 1851, 2.

⁹ *State of Vermont. 1850 Industrial Census*, Microcopy, Public Records Commission, 1959. The 1900 figure was derived from the number of people who self identified as Fairbanks workers in the 1900 Population Census and the 1901 directory of St. Johnsbury.

¹⁰ Allen Rice Yale, Jr. *Ingenious and Enterprising Mechanics: A Case Study of Industrialization in Rural Vermont, 1815-1900* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995), 72-75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 88-95, 99-108.

¹² House of Representatives, *Miscellaneous Documents of the House of Representatives Thirty-Eighth Congress, First Session, Manufactures of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the original returns of the Eighth Census under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C., 1865), cxcvi; House of Representatives, *The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States . . . Compiled from the original returns of the Ninth Census (June 1, 1870)* (Washington, D.C., 1872), 473; *Census Report Volume VIII Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900 Manufactures* (Washington, D.C., 1902) 14; Benson Lossing, *The American Centenary: A History of the Progress of the Republic of the United States during the First One Hundred Years of Its Existence*, (Philadelphia, 1876), 254.

¹³ *FH* 031229, 3; Yale, *Ingenious and Enterprising Mechanics*, 135-143.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 147-152.



The Struggle for Decent Transportation in Western Rutland County, 1820–1850

*Long before the toll roads limped to
their ignominious end, the people of
western Rutland County had become
aware of two developments that would
revolutionize transportation —
canals and railroads.*

By GWILYM R. ROBERTS

Like those of other frontier areas, roads were terrible in western Rutland County in the closing years of the eighteenth century. Narrow paths at first, they were widened a bit later, and marked by large rocks in the way and especially deep mud in the spring-time. Post riders made their way along these difficult passages, usually once per week, delivering newspapers and running errands for customers.

Jeremy Dwyer, one of several post riders in the area, had advertised in 1795 that he would travel north to Middlebury Falls from Castleton once each week, returning by a slightly more westerly route.¹ Two years later, while poetically reminding his customers of the world and national news he had brought them, Dwyer presented a picture of travel conditions in 1797:

Old customers and neighbors all
I pray attend unto my call;
Now hear me chant my doleful ditty
Which calls for patience, and your pity;
'Tis two years now and something more
Since I began my northern tour;
In rain or shine I weekly go
Nor mind the vain assaults of snow.
In fair or foul, in dry or wet;
In winter's cold or summer's heat,
I climb your hills, as steep or steeper
Than roof of house, then sink much deeper.
And find myself involved in mire

Up to old Jacob's hips or higher.
 These services you can't deny,
 As Jacob's bones will testify
 In spreading this important news
 I've spoilt my clothes, my boots and shoes.

In a request very common in advertisements of post riders, he urged his customers to pay the money due to him,

Or else I fear that our next meeting
 Will by authority be greeting
 Signed by his worship,——, Esquire.
 So then you'll know that I am
 J. Dwyer²

Travel conditions in that same year were further illustrated by the United States postmaster general's call for bids for transporting mail. For the eighty miles from Rutland to Lansingburg (now part of Troy, N.Y.), the successful bidder was to leave Rutland at noon on Monday and arrive in Lansingburg by 10 A.M. on Thursday—about 34 hours of travel time, or somewhat less than 2½ miles per hour.³ By 1802, matters had improved only slightly: bidders for a mail route including Rutland and Fair Haven were to cover the fifteen miles between those villages in four hours at the start of their route and in six hours on the return trip.⁴

The account books of William Ward of Poultney reflect the difficulty and cost of transportation in this period. Between 1807 and 1823 he hauled tons of goods from Poultney to the Hudson River port of Troy in his heavy wagons. From Poultney he carried hundreds of pounds of pork and such items as "1,714 pounds of cheese and whiskey" for a Poultney storekeeper and "a load of machines" from John Stanley's foundry. On the return trip he brought bushels of salt, barrels of fish, and kegs of molasses. The cost of hauling these goods somewhat less than eighty miles was one-sixth of the value of the pork and 37 percent and 23 percent, respectively, of the value of the salt and whiskey.

The turnpike craze of the first decades of the nineteenth century, in which groups of individuals improved or built sections of road in return for being allowed to charge fees from the public, offered a controversial solution to difficult travel conditions. In November of 1804, it was reported that twenty-seven petitions to establish turnpikes had been submitted to the Vermont legislature, along with five remonstrances against them. The turnpike opponents did not mince words, saying that when a turnpike proposal was beaten "there's ten that smiles to one that cries" and comparing a turnpike to a harlot, "crying out to the unwary, 'turn in hither.'"⁵

In 1805 the Vermont legislature granted charters to two turnpikes that especially affected western Rutland County. The Fair Haven Turnpike

ran from the state line in southwestern Fair Haven some 27 miles northward to the south line of Benson; the Poultney Turnpike (in which foundry owner John Stanley was a key figure) ran from the end of the Hubbardton Pike in Castleton about 12 miles to the Northern New York Turnpike, which it met at the state line between Poultney and Granville.⁶ How much the turnpikes did to improve transportation is uncertain, but a steady flow of petitions to the legislature for relief suggests that those projects failed to meet the hopes of the entrepreneurs who established them.

One particular problem was the Vermont law that allowed any person to pass through a turnpike gate without paying if that person lived within eight miles of that gate. (Persons traveling to or from church, or military duty, or a grist or saw mill, were also exempted.) In 1808, the owners of the Fair Haven Turnpike, pointing out that too many travelers claimed to live within eight miles of a gate, claimed that this provision would prevent them from finishing the turnpike in the allotted five years (by 1810), and asked for an extension. The extension apparently was not granted, and in 1814 the turnpike proprietors, stating that a court had nullified their charter because they did not finish the pike until June 2, 1811, asked the legislature to reinstate the charter and repeal the eight-mile law. The Poultney Turnpike had similar problems, and in 1810 its proprietors asked that they be given two more years to finish their pike.⁷

In 1817 the Fair Haven Turnpike group petitioned again, stating that they had used all the receipts of the company to maintain the road, and asking that residents living along the pike be allowed to work off their town taxes on that road, as they sometimes did on town roads. The proprietors also asked again for repeal of the eight-mile law. Four years later, the owners of the Poultney Turnpike reported similar difficulty, stating that they had spent about \$12,000 on the pike but that the receipts had never kept the road in shape. The only dividend, they claimed, had come from some money returned to them by an individual who had failed to build a section of the road as promised. Stating that they must have relief or give up, they asked permission to surrender the southern part of the pike, and to raise enough tolls on the remainder to give them some income beyond their expenses. The petition was rejected.⁸

In 1828, Dan Orms, clerk, reported that the Fair Haven Turnpike had paid out \$700 more than it had taken in at its two tollgates since 1818, and asked permission from the legislature to move the north gate. This petition failed. In 1829 he again detailed the difficulties faced by that pike. He stated that an 1819 law had established the north gate just north of the Orwell line due to the influence of persons opposing the turnpike, and that those persons had built a shunpike bypassing the gate by a road meeting the pike 100 rods north and 100 rods south of it.

Since the shunpike was built in 1821, he reported, the chartered pike had averaged about \$30 profit yearly from that gate after paying the gatekeeper. He requested to move the gate, and petitioned to change the eight-mile rule to a two-mile rule.⁹

Within six years of this petition, the Fair Haven and Poultney turnpikes ceased to exist when the legislature repealed their incorporations in late 1833 and late 1834, respectively. By this time, the roads were largely irrelevant. Ten years earlier, a letter writer had complained that the free road to Granville was in better condition than the turnpike upon which the traveler must pay ten cents to ride.¹⁰

At least some improvement in the public roads resulted from channeling part of the energy expended each year in giant celebrations of the Fourth of July into public work on the roads. For example, in 1823 the citizens of Wells assembled at 8 A.M. on the Fourth with provisions, teams, ploughs, scrapers, and shovels to work on town roads under the direction of a committee of arrangements, gathering eight hours later for a "sumptuous repast." Poultney residents met an hour earlier to work on two sections of roads in their town, with a dinner provided by people of the areas whose roads were being improved. Noting that a Whitehall man had both arms blown off while celebrating, the editor of the Poultney newspaper stated that work on the roads was much better than a day of "rioting and debauchery."¹¹

In the following year, more than 100 men worked on the road from Poultney to Castleton, resulting in a road that was proudly labeled "as good as any in the county." After their community dinner at four, sixteen toasts were drunk; along with "Washington's Memory" and "Lord Byron's Memory," subjects of toasts included "Patriotic Diggers," "Good Roads," "Ladies Who Got the Meal," and "Our Castleton and South Poultney Friends Who Helped."¹²

Long before the toll roads limped to their ignominious end, the people of western Rutland County had become aware of two developments that would revolutionize transportation—canals and railroads. In 1817 subscribers to the *Rutland Herald* could read of the plans of New York State to build two canals—the "western" (Erie) and the "Great Northern" (Champlain)—and of the plans for digging the latter (thirty feet wide at the top, twenty feet wide at the bottom, and three feet deep). "The idea, indeed, may seem visionary, but we believe the period is not far distant, when our present toilsome method of transporting to and exporting from market, will be rendered in a great degree unnecessary, by the more easy conveyance of boat transportation."¹³ Work on the Northern Canal commenced a few months later.

Six years later, on September 17, 1823, the *Poultney Gazette* reported

that the first ocean-going vessel, the Vermont sloop *Gleaner*, had reached Troy from Lake Champlain. Its departure from Troy for New York City was hailed by cannon, musketry, and three companies of volunteers; a similar celebration greeted it in New York City. The boat contained 1,000 bushels of wheat and 35 barrels of potash, marking a new day in the export of Vermont products. "Verily, anticipation in our country can scarcely keep up with reality," the Poultney editor wrote.¹⁴

For many years, Poultney merchants had hired teams to carry tons of goods to Troy on the Hudson in the fall after the farmers had brought their cheeses to the stores. The advertisement by S. W. Dana for thirty teams to haul goods "to the canal" on October 21, 1824, three weeks after his "cheese fair," illustrated the change in the trade routes of western Vermont.¹⁵

The tremendous success of the Erie Canal, completed on October 26, 1825, launched a "canal craze." Throughout the settled parts of the United States, a rush was on to build canals to imitate the success of New York State. Rutland County was no exception, and within four months of the completion of the Erie Canal a charter for the "Otter Creek and Castleton River Canal Company" had been granted. The group that met in Rutland to act upon this charter heard of the plans for a canal from Rutland to Whitehall, and for another canal along Otter Creek from Middlebury to Wallingford that would meet the first canal at Rutland. The meeting put into effect plans to get a charter from the New York legislature for the section of canal that would lie in that state, and to survey the Vermont portions of the canal.¹⁶

Soon Vermonters were reading of the great advantages of the proposed canal. It should be comparatively easy to build, the *National Standard* stated, with no great differences in water levels, and should not cost over \$200,000. The *Rutland Herald* editor listed the many products that would pour out of Vermont's hills and valleys, and waxed poetic about "mingling the waters of the Atlantic with our pure fountains which flow from the proud hills which surround us."¹⁷

By August 1826, a survey showed that the difference in the water levels was "somewhat greater than had been anticipated," but the Rutland editor urged everyone to support this canal, which would bring so much wealth to the people of the area. Six months later, it was reported that a committee had found a rather unfavorable reception in Albany, where the New York legislature was flooded with requests for canals. The legislature agreed to charter the Otter Creek and Castleton River Canal, but not to give financial support.¹⁸

This failure, combined with the survey showing a greater water level drop from one end of the canal to the other than had been expected,

apparently doomed the Otter Creek and Castleton River Canal; an 1835 article mentioned that the project had failed "two or three years ago" when its stock failed to sell. As a practical matter, this canal project probably was doomed from the start. A month before the first meeting of its promoters, the Rutland paper had carried an article on the success of the Stockton and Darlington Railroad in England, with predictions of widespread use of railroads in the United States. By 1830, the Rutland editor was reporting that, contrary to expectations, it had been proven that steam power could move a car eighteen miles per hour on rails, while canal boats could move at fifteen miles per hour, but only at four to six miles per hour without risk of destroying the canals.¹⁹ For northern New England, the fact that canals were frozen four months of each year was an additional handicap.

In late 1831, plans for two railroads for western Rutland County appeared, starting a rivalry that was to continue for many years. In September, a group consisting largely of Rutland men announced that they would petition the Vermont legislature for permission to build a railroad from Rutland to the New York line in the direction of Whitehall, and would petition the New York legislature for permission to continue the line to Whitehall. The Vermont legislature granted this charter in November. In December, a group consisting largely of Poultney men, including Amos Bliss, storekeeper and newspaper owner, and Henry Ruggles, foundry owner, met in Poultney to announce their plans for a rival railroad. Their line would run from Rutland through Castleton and Poultney in Vermont and Granville, Salem, and Greenwich in New York to the Hoosick River.²⁰

Action was slow with the Rutland and Whitehall promoters. Announcing a meeting at which some steps might be taken, the Rutland editor stated that the group seemed to have been asleep since receiving the charter more than a year earlier. He pointed out, in a statement similar to previous comments about the canal, that farmers could expect to see their real estate increase in value by perhaps 100 percent, and that the value of their goods sold would increase while items purchased would decrease in price. Nearly three months later, the paper announced that a survey of the railway route would be made. After two years, the editor urged action in selling the company's stock, but one week later he had to report that an emissary to Albany had discovered that their charter had expired.²¹

In July 1835, nearly four years after the chartering, an engineer's optimistic report on the proposed Rutland and Whitehall railroad was published, estimating the total cost of building the road at \$262,500. This included building 25 miles of horse path at \$200 per mile, \$5,000 for

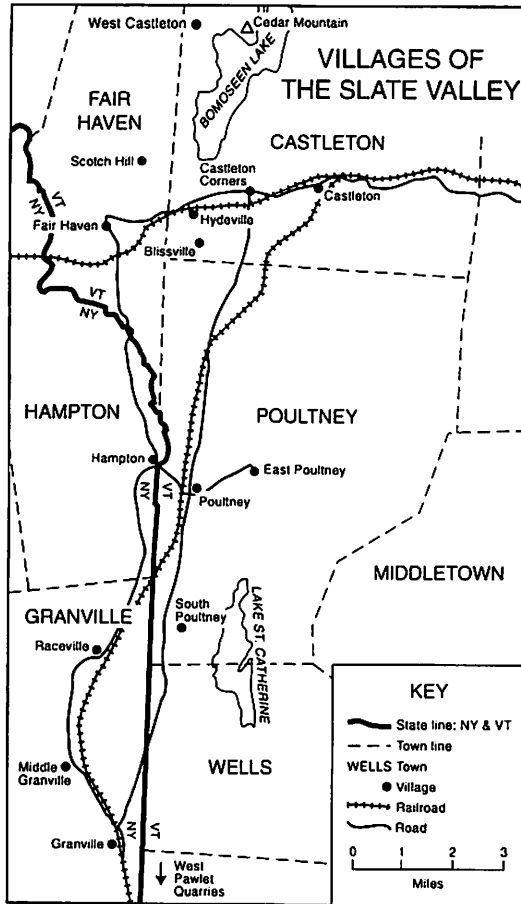
carriage houses and stables, and the cost of 25 freight horses and 16 passenger horses. He estimated annual receipts at \$56,160.75 and annual costs of \$18,944.80, including \$12,000 for wages, feed for horses, and fuel for engines, resulting in an estimated annual profit of \$36,206.25, or 14.5 percent of the cost. Now, the editor wrote, all the project needed was a helmsman who would win "imperishable fame" by taking charge of this great project and succeeding.²²

When it was announced that the Rutland and Whitehall stock (2000 shares at \$100 each) finally would go on sale in September 1835, the editor warned that it probably would not all be sold immediately because there just was not enough money in the area, but that residents should not despair, because it surely would be built eventually. A year later, he opposed as visionary a plan to use Vermont's share of the National Revenue Surplus to build railroads through Vermont, and another to tunnel through the Green Mountains, urging concentration instead upon the Rutland and Whitehall line.²³

A new proposal to sell that railroad's stock came in 1836 when the Vermont legislature established the Rutland Railroad Bank. Each subscriber was required to buy stock in the Rutland and Whitehall Railroad in order to buy an equal amount of stock in the bank, and the bank could not start doing business until \$100,000 had been spent on the railroad. The timing could hardly have been worse; in the spring of 1837 when the stock was offered for sale, the Panic of 1837 was upon the country. Reports of financial collapse were everywhere, with railroad stocks falling lower than ever known before. On May 5, 1837, the *Herald* reported that "this has been the gloomiest week that New York has ever seen," and that "internal improvements all over the country are suspended. . . . Surely this is a DARK AGE."²⁴

With railroad developments stymied by the depression, lines of stage routes continued to provide the only reliable passage to the area. Post riders were advertising their routes at least as late as 1836.²⁵

Ten years after the Panic of 1837 disrupted their plans, the two rival railroads seemed to be starting from scratch. At a meeting in Hydeville in 1847, sponsors of the Whitehall plan decided to petition the Vermont legislature for a charter allowing them to build to the New York border in the direction of Whitehall. Within two weeks, a Poultney meeting expressed approval of a railroad to the south and west of Poultney, probably meeting the Saratoga and Whitehall at Ft. Ann. In January 1848 stock for this "Rutland and Washington Railroad" went on sale, and was reported to be oversubscribed. (Under pressure from Salem-area interests, this road shifted its plans, deciding to go to Troy via Salem rather than to Ft. Ann). Later that year, stock of the Rutland and White-



"Villages of the Slate Valley." Map by Stacey Hodges, University of Maine at Farmington Instructional Media Center. Whitehall, N.Y., is six miles west by railroad from the left edge of the map; Rutland, Vt., is six miles east from the right edge of the map; and Troy, N.Y., is sixty-one miles south from the lower edge of the map.

hall was offered to the public. The bitterness between the two railroad groups was evident in a letter of February 9, 1848, in which a sympathizer with the Whitehall group charged that the Poultney-centered group had included names of convicts in the state prison and privates in service in the Mexican War in order to gain enough signatures.²⁶

The Vermont legislature originally had planned for one railroad to go

from Rutland to the New York border at either Fair Haven or Poultney. After a decision was made for Poultney, according to the *Rutland Herald*, the Fair Haven group got a charter to build from the New York state line to Rutland through Fair Haven. The act provided, however, that if the Rutland and Washington group should spend \$10,000 on their railroad in one year, the Rutland and Whitehall could go east only as far as Castleton. By 1849 the Rutland and Washington had spent much more than \$10,000 in one year, having finished the Rutland–Castleton section and completed part of the Castleton–Poultney section. This nullified the right of the Rutland and Whitehall group to build east of Castleton. In 1849, and for at least ten years thereafter, the Rutland and Whitehall had a bill in the legislature each year to let them build to Rutland—but these efforts all failed, leaving the Rutland and Whitehall with no way of getting their passengers to Rutland except by stage or by the rival line.²⁷

In October 1850, the Rutland and Washington Railroad ran its first passenger cars: a special trip to the Rutland County Agricultural Fair in Castleton. One passenger was not too pleased by the one open car (smelling of sheep) and by the two small passenger cars with unplanned hemlock benches on steel springs. A railway official responded that this was a special train, run at a return-ticket cost of fifty cents per person, with cars procured on an emergency basis; on the second day, the passenger cars had fine velvet seats. The 9-mile trip took 40 minutes in the morning, and 30 minutes on the return trip. (Unable to run a competing train, the Rutland and Whitehall ran a stage starting from Rutland at the same time; the horses soon fell behind the train.)²⁸

While one letter writer told of the excellent railroad from Rutland to Castleton, another complained about the lack of fences around the railroad lines (a situation soon to be corrected by the legislature), and about the fact that the big white signs saying “Look Out While the Bell Rings” were not much help. The Rutland and Washington now made connections with the Troy and Rutland at Eagle Bridge, but the unfinished section from Castleton to Salem added an extra six hours by stage to the time of the trip to New York. Meanwhile, the Rutland editor complained that the Rutland and Whitehall line refused to make a connection with the Rutland and Washington trains at Castleton.²⁹ Thus, the Rutland and Whitehall ran trains from Whitehall to Castleton and conveyed its passengers to Rutland by stage, while the Rutland and Washington ran trains from Rutland to Castleton and conveyed passengers by stage to Salem, without a formal connection between the two lines.

In July 1851, the Rutland editor rode the not-quite-finished route from Castleton to Poultney, on a special train run for the Castleton Seminary and Troy Conference Academy public examinations. He also

reported that a train from the Rutland and Whitehall was making connections with the Rutland and Washington at Castleton. On March 11, 1852, the first train of the Rutland and Washington ran all the way to Troy, making a connection at Eagle Bridge. In September, 13,850 customers traveled on the Rutland and Washington line to the state fair in Rutland during a three-day period.³⁰

Financial problems and bankruptcy for some of these railroads lay ahead in the 1850s. However, by 1852 western Rutland County finally had a transportation system on which its developing marble and slate industries could ship their heavy products to all parts of the country, which could cover the distance from Rutland to Castleton at about a mile-per-minute pace, and which would transport its people the 468 miles round-trip to New York City and back in one long day of travel. To people who had traveled the county's horrible roads at a snail's pace fifty years earlier, the transformation was truly amazing.

Some old-timers must have felt like the Boston writer quoted in the *Rutland Herald* several years earlier: "What a terrible hurry the world is in! But a few years ago eleven or twelve miles an hour in a steamboat was considered the *ne plus ultra* of speed in traveling; now we are scarcely satisfied with thirty in those flying machines called railroad locomotives! We begin already to talk of one hundred miles per hour! The brain grows dizzy at the very thought of it! . . . Soon we'll outstrip time herself, and get there before we leave."³¹

NOTES

¹ *Farmer's Library* (Fair Haven, Vermont), 28 December 1795.

² *Rutland Herald*, 11 September 1797.

³ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1797.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 June 1802.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1804.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 February 1806.

⁷ *Vermont State Papers* (Petitions), 8:97; 80:146; 80:129.

⁸ *Ibid.* (Petitions), 52:181; 55:189.

⁹ *Ibid.* (Petitions), 60:71; 60:251.

¹⁰ *Rutland Herald*, 12 November 1833; 27 October 1834; 26 May 1824.

¹¹ *Poultney Gazette*, 2 July and 9 July, 1823.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7 July 1824.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9 April 1817.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 November 1817; 17 September 1823.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 September, 1824.

¹⁶ *Rutland Herald*, 28 February 1826.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 March and 4 April, 1826.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1826; 27 February 1827.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 August 1835; 31 January 1826; 2 February 1830.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 September, 22 November, 20 December, 1831.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22 January and 7 May, 1833; 27 April and 4 May, 1835.

²² *Ibid.*, 7 July 1835.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11 August, 1 September, 1835; 11 October, 1836.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 December, 1836; 4 April, 18 April, 15 May, 16 May 1837.

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²⁵ Ibid., 6 May, 1846; 19 July, 1836.

²⁶ Ibid., 30 June, 7 July, 8 December 1847; 26 January and 13 December 1848; 17 January 1849; 13 December and 9 February 1848.

²⁷ Ibid., 21 November 1849.

²⁸ Ibid., 17 October 1850.

²⁹ Ibid., 21 and 28 November 1850; 16 and 30 January 1851.

³⁰ Ibid., 24 July 1851; 18 March and 4 September, 1852.

³¹ Ibid., 18 August 1834.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



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