Brockport, New York: A Narrative of That Place (and the Place of this Narrative)

Jonathan Mark Smith
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Brockport, New York: A narrative of that place (and the place of this narrative)

Smith, Jonathan Mark, Ph.D.
Syracuse University, 1991

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BROCKPORT, NEW YORK
A NARRATIVE OF THAT PLACE
(AND THE PLACE OF THIS NARRATIVE)

by

JONATHAN MARK SMITH
M.A., Syracuse University, 1987

Abstract of Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography in the Graduate School of Syracuse University

May, 1991

Approved

Professor D.W. Meinig

Date, 4-5-91
This historical geography of Brockport, New York covers the period between the initial settlement of the region in 1806 and the onset of industrial decline in 1882. As a study in landscape and community change it links shifting trade networks, ecological foundations, social institutions and life-worlds in a historical narrative. Alterations in social structure, spatial division and definition, and landscape form and meaning are emphasized. The community is shown to have moved from a state of moral community and economic individualism to a state of moral individualism and economic community. Some specific topics discussed are frontier migrations, pioneering, development, mercantilism, the Erie Canal, credit and financial panics, social reform movements, industrialization, class awareness, post-Civil War cultural changes and village beautification.

In addition to providing an empirical account of one particular place, the utility of place as an organizing concept is tested, as is the suitability of narrative as a mode of representation. This is intermittently presented as an imbedded ironic commentary, and it is offered as one possible form for postmodern cultural and historical geography. Unlike the historical narrative, which describes the creation of places in the landscape, this secondary discourse describes rhetorical, interpretive and epistemological devices that permit re-creation of places in narrative.

Place is unsatisfactory as an organizing principle for historical geographical inquiry if the goal is explanation of some more general phenomenon. It is, however, excellent for development of individual
understanding of a particular place and period. Although the study of a place can be highly rewarding for the neo-Kantian geographer, others may find the concept more useful in studies of the variation of a phenomenon from place to place. The appeal of either approach will be a function of personal preference for *erklären* or *verstehen*. The ironic, postmodern critique imbedded in the text provides a convenient space for what would otherwise be neglected commentary on the multiple absences and the fabricated presences of the narrative. It is, however, dissimulative, guarding the authority of the text by preempting strategic critical positions and by making the reader an accomplice in their own deception.
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Preface

It has been said that historians "imagine the past and remember the future." The same might equally well be said for historical geographers, although the reflexive tricks with which they apprehend time and interpret change are more specifically directed at landscapes, places and geographies, both imagined and remembered. Such exercises are, of course, aided (and to some extent hampered) by the existence of documents, and so to call this particular study an imagined past is not the same as to call this a fantasy; but, as I will stress, this is only one of the possible constructions that can be placed on the material.

This is only one of the possible constructions because this dissertation was created in a specific historical geographical context, and each part embodies the opportunities and constraints of the specific time and place of its composition. Since these contexts are now in the past they can only be imagined, although this imagining is, as in other cases, simplified by documentation. When I read my proposal (now a historical document) I can not help but to remember what was, at the time that it was written, the future. This reflexivity causes discrepancies to appear between that document and the one that is before you now. At first glance these discrepancies seem cause for some chagrin, but after further reflection it becomes clear that a perfect congruence of prospectus and retrospect would warrant a deeper embarrassment. It would suggest that I

Preface

had spent my time adding detail and color to an outline that I knew from the beginning.

Deviation from expressed intention is, I trust, an indication of personal growth and development, but it does not occur in isolation. One must be exposed to distracting ideas, and one must test the patience and confidence of those who had faith in a speedy completion of the original project. My greatest intellectual debt is to Donald Meinig and James Duncan, both conscientious readers, frank critics and faithful supporters. As this project neared completion John Western steered me clear of several egregious blunders. In the early stages of composition, the graduate students of the Syracuse geography department formed an agreeable and provocative community: Richard Schein, Susan Roberts and Nuala Johnson deserve particular credit for enduring and, by their subsequent comments, improving a multitude of half-baked ideas. I must also thank my colleagues at Texas A&M University for their fortitude and confidence. Rick Giardino and Mel Friedman displayed saint-like patience; Peter Hugill and Clarissa Kimber were exceedingly generous with their encouragement; Steven Banks and Vashei Tchakerian furnished a steady and welcome supply of commiseration. At various crucial points I have also been heartened by Elizabeth Young, Joel Matheny, Tom Glass and Alrike Marichnigg. My parents, Delmont and Jeannette Smith, deserve all of the customary credit, and a good deal more. They suffered endless rambling about Brockport with good cheer, and they never questioned the delays in compressing these into a coherent...
Preface

text. They also never attempted to dissuade me from the study of the village in which they reside, an act of some courage. It is, therefore, to them that this text is dedicated.
Working through analogy, we might say that justification exists for detailed factual descriptions of "profoundly unique" cities, but the same cannot be said for villages whose uniqueness is only superficial. This sort of distinction, between subjects which merit an idiographic description and those which may be appropriately employed only as the raw material of nomothetic theory formation, has tended to polarize geography. However, as Agnew has suggested, there are reasons to reject "the simple polarity between sameness and difference or the generic and the specific" as these terms do not necessarily correlate with the dualism of theoretical and factual knowledge. In fact, as Agnew has argued elsewhere, "the impact of global and national processes has always been to create regional distinctiveness rather than to displace it."

This text is about the creation of a specific region, western New York, and certain constituent sub-regions that are salient to the creation of Brockport. Regions and places are created, fused, sundered and dissolved by historical processes which work differently on different peoples and environments. These processes are in at least one sense universal, and as such they are open to theoretical formulation, but in their actualization these processes are variable, context-dependent and as such their adequate treatment demands a good deal of empirical

description. Since these geographical phenomena are subject to constant change the configurations of the past are constantly altered, obscured and obliterated. This means that in a text such as this the author is obliged to recreate regions and places. In this case the processes are literary. Once again, these may conform to theoretical universals, but their enactment is always modified by contingencies of the place and moment of composition. In this work I will pursue both themes, examining the historical circumstances of Brockport's creation and the literary circumstances of its re-creation in this text.

I have divided the situation of this narrative into two parts: a subtext and a context. The subtext of this narrative I take to be the basic assumptions and questions that informed the composition of this document. Its discussion is meant to justify my strategy. The context of this narrative I take to be that literature with which the relationship is formal, i.e. other studies of small and intermediate-sized towns. Its discussion is meant to justify my subject. The strategy of this narrative was conceived to answer three general questions. First, by what specific social processes was this place brought into being, and how are we to understand changes in this place, particularly as these relate to the landscape? Second, can places be properly understood through narrative, and if so what are some of the problems and solutions? Third, is place a clear and coherent concept? The context of this study is examined in the form of a literature review. This is presented in four parts. The first part assesses the tradition of community studies in the United States by American sociologists and anthropologists. The second part discusses
some literary approaches to the small town and the village. The third part examines an assortment of local histories written by social historians and one by a cultural anthropologist. The fourth part describes the tradition of locality studies in geography.

**Subtext**

**Place Creation and Change**

The first subtext of this study is the historical geographical study of communities and the landscapes that they build and to which they attribute meanings. These two areas were identified by Butlin as of central importance to what he called the "new social historical geography."[1] Recent studies in the iconography of landscape have taken representations of landscape as their subjects. Frequently turning to the painted world, they have sought to reveal the manner in which the depicted landscapes have been made to bear moral and political meanings.[2] The iconography of the American small town, in representations and actuality, has been surveyed by John Jakle.[3]

In the case of represented landscapes, the landscape itself is given. By focusing on images of small towns, Jakle also enjoys the benefits of a given landscape. In this study the landscape has been given begrudgingly, and in a piecemeal fashion. It is as if a painting was

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exploded, engendering most of the fragments and scattering the remainder over a large area. The reconstruction of these fragments is certainly more difficult, if not more worthy, than the deconstruction of a given image. Reconstruction and description, as Jordan points out, precede any attempt at final analysis of a cultural landscape, but the assembly of these images is informed by various working hypotheses.

These hypotheses describe the presumed processes of change. While the landscape images are synchronic, and bear evidence of having suffered change, the processes are diachronic, and progressively work change. This shifts our attention from the Clarkian view of "events in change" to what Alan Baker has called "events of change." Ultimately, one moves beyond a description of the processes of change, to an explanation of these processes. Robert has proposed four generic forms of change in rural settlements, and he has linked these to three explanatory models: core-periphery models, diffusion models, and hierarchic models.

Although such models are useful, they tend to misrepresent the inhabitants of places as victims, or as simple consumers of forms and attitudes developed elsewhere. As David Ley has pointed out, reliance on such models blinds us to the fact that landscapes are the "active

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constructions of social groups. The effort to overcome the characterization of local groups as passive consumers has been aided by the import of Giddens' structuration theory, first introduced to geography by Gregory in 1981. This promises to retain much of the respect for human agency that was gained by the "humanistic geography" of the 1970's, but to avoid the excessive claims for human freedom that are made by voluntarism. In Gregory's words, it promises to recover the common individual "without collapsing actions into intentions."

In essence, structuration argues that, in the course of social life, individuals are obliged to observe written and unwritten rules. Adherence to these rules of communication and conduct is necessary if the individual is to remain intelligible to his fellows, acceptable to those with power over him, and legitimate in the eyes of society generally. These rules are made available by "structures" of signification, domination, and legitimation, but, in an important break with structuralism, structuration argues that these structures have no existence beyond the instances in which they are invoked. This opens up the possibility of changes in, or perpetuation of, social structures, since each instance allows possibilities for the revision or the reproduction of the original rules. Thus, individuals are the producers rather than the

products of their social worlds; by their social behavior they assist in the perpetuation or transformation of social rules. However, most individuals regard these social rules as natural laws, and they are therefore unaware of the degree to which these rules govern their behavior and of the degree to which their behavior governs these rules.

This is made somewhat more accessible by Billinge as he relates structures to institutions. These may be formal, rule governed social organizations such as churches, or informal, but no less rule governed, practices such as meals. What Billinge observes, using the example of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, is that individuals exploited this institution for the purpose of personal social advancement, but that in the process they unwittingly assisted in the social reproduction of this institution.

For obvious reasons, this contextualist approach holds considerable appeal for the social historical geographer, although its adoption as a battle standard by a rising generation of scholars makes critical evaluation, difficult. It promises to situate events, present them as happening in place, and yet at the same time retain the explanatory.


2) See, Mary Beth Pudup, "Arguments Within Regional Geography," Progress in Human Geography 12(1988): 369-390. Despite such strenuous denunciations of traditional regional geographers for its assumptions of pervasive naturalism, naive empiricism, and methodological individualism, this literature has so far only managed to posit, but not to prove, an alternative set of assumptions. These are, needless to say, the pervasive artifact that undergirds everyday experience, the cultural conditioning of perception, and the inhibitions and constraints of social structures.
power of global theories. An example of the argument, typical in both conceptualization and manner of expression, is provided by Jonas when he defines a place as the "localized contingent conditions which might account for the spatially variable effects of the exercise of a causal mechanism." In other words, things vary according to circumstances.

Unfortunately, endorsement of structuration has proven easier than implementation. This may be due to the fact that complexity, which seems to recommend contextualism in the abstract, is in practice difficult to document and almost impossible to convey if one retains the standards of science. There is also a problem of scale, since an entity such as a place can be treated both as a structure within which individual agents operate, and as an agent operating within larger national or international structures. Together, these problems seem to prohibit systematic use of structuration theory, either at a uniform scale or at multiple scales, although it can be extremely useful in the analysis of specific social actions.

In the course of my investigation of Brockport, I identified three interrelated areas of change. These occurred in the social production of society, the social production of spatial organization, and the social production of landscape forms.

The Social Production of Society

In the period and place under consideration, social rules were changing. Employing its nineteenth century definition, liberalism provided the dominant ideological strain. After the revivals had introduced antinomianism into the Calvinist churches, the only organized group to endorse a conservative solution to social problems was the Grange. The precise reasons for the dominant ideology of optimistic liberalism are probably complex, but it seems reasonable to adopt Potter's hypothesis, and attribute it to economic abundance. As I have tried to illustrate in my interpretation of the fatal escapade of Sam Patch, this ideology could be shaken when worsening economic conditions caused individuals to doubt that progress was sustainable. Similar doubts, intensified by guilt, stimulated the founding members of the Grange to advocate a return to frontier frugality.

The prosperity that provided the material basis for this liberal ideology was derived from commercial agriculture, and the export of agricultural commodities. Thus, this ideology can be seen as a product of the world economic system. At the same time, the extensive nature of this system generated a life-world which encouraged individuals to perceive themselves as the authors of their own prosperity. Prosperity seemed to ratify change, risk and experimentation, while the incomprehensibility of the economic system, and the barely perceptible environmental

destruction on which it was founded, combined to distance, in both space and time, the actual source of that prosperity.

The most significant change in social organization seems to be in large part attributable to this situation. This change was the transition from economic individualism and moral interdependence to moral independence and economic interdependence. I have adopted this argument from Robert Bellah, and I will return to it in my discussion of the community studies literature below. I have discussed the economic transformation in terms of the incidence of fires in commercial structures. This is because I suspect that competitive credit relationships manifested themselves in periodic outbreaks of arson, and thus left a mark of effacement on the landscape. It is also because I suspect that the elimination of credit, the building of larger stores, and the subsequent purchase of a steam powered pump, represent the emergence of a coordinated business community. This community was galvanized by competition with Rochester, and with the instrument of village government, which it dominated, it was able to create a new, and far more stable, village landscape. The move from moral interdependence to moral independence affected the landscape insofar as it provided an ideological justification for the increasing disparity in the quality of residences and cemetery monuments, but it is much more clearly illustrated in the changing nature of social organizations such as the churches.

The Social Production of Space

The clearest process in the social production of space is the overwhelming increase in spatial segmentation. This emergence from what Berman called the "moving chaos" of the street is evident, even in a small village, nearly a century before Berman's "modernist urbanism." As Sack points out, such spaces "manifest intense and minute territorial control." This control was exercised, in part, by the village government, which grew more powerful in the second half of the nineteenth century, but the tendency is also evident in spaces that did not fall under public jurisdiction. One obvious example is the village streets, which were gradually reduced to the single function of movement. Prior to this they had been simply public property. They were used as a public pasture, impoverished persons sometimes built houses in them and they were occasionally clogged by political demonstrations. The same tendency is evident in the schools. First, the religious societies, the town government and the school separated into separate buildings. Second, the school itself separated into the academy and the common school, thus spatially dividing pupils who later would be socially differentiated. Third, the building itself was segregated into offices, classrooms themselves segregated by cohort groups and special facilities like a chapel and a gymnasium. This same tendency is clear in domestic space. First, with the construction of public schools and religious meeting houses, the primary

Institutions of social reproduction were removed from domestic space. Second, the place of production was excluded from the house, either by removing the office from the house, or by removing the residence from over the store. Somewhat later, when villagers discontinued their practice of keeping livestock, and their interest shifted to ornamental gardening, production was removed from the yard. The third phase of this domestic exclusion had only begun at the time this study ends, but it is clear that the rituals associated with the major passages in life were beginning to be excluded from domestic space. Births, weddings, illness, deaths and funerals were, or were about to be, conducted in special spaces. Just as obvious is the increased segregation within the house, with the proliferation of rooms exclusively devoted to eating, sleeping, washing, entertaining, and relaxing with one's family.

In the course of this transition, we move from a system where the society of users defined the space to one where the space defined the society of users. This is first evident in the town. If the New England town was, as Sack has written, "a parish with civil authority grafted on," the New York town was a civil unit with the religious authority cut away.¹ This is obvious in the fact that membership in the community was achieved through proprietorship, and after 1822 simply by residency. This tendency is also evident in the religious societies. For example, in early Sweden the meeting house was just the house in which the religious society happened to be meeting. Once the meeting was adjourned, it went back to being an ordinary house, or barn. By the late nineteenth century

¹) Sack, p. 140.
the situation was practically reversed. The religious society was just the group that happened to be gathered in the meeting house. The street was a pasture, when it was being used as a pasture. At some other time it might be a ball field, or a place to pile some lumber. The meaning of the street was determined by the uses to which that street was being put. Later, it was the definition of the street as a thoroughfare that identified a use as in or out of line.

The Social Production of Landscapes

The landscape that was settled on western New York in the first three decades of the nineteenth century resembled that of New England. There are similarities in the place names, the vernacular architecture and some of the town planning. However, the migrants did not replicate their native landscape, and by mid-century a village in western New York appeared to combine features of New England and the American Midwest. As the newspaper editor wrote in 1871, "this village, as concerns its public improvements, may properly be ranked about half way between the unchangeable customs prevalent half a century ago, and the vim and enterprise that characterize the new villages in the far West."²

The significance of this quote lies not so much in what it describes as it does in the fact that the editor looks to the built landscape as an


indicator of progress. This mode of regard is obviously a continuation of attitudes developed during the pioneering experience, where landscape transformation was almost invariably welcomed as a sign of improvement and stasis was almost invariably deplored as an indicator of retardation or relative decline. This accords with the liberal ideology that characterized the period, and it also contains an echo of the second aspect of social change that I have mentioned. In the official interpretation of the newspaper's proselytism, the landscape became a mirror of collective economic well-being even as it was subjected to vandalism and misuse by those who were no longer morally committed to this economic community.

Landscape is, obviously, closely related to changes in the specificity of spatial segmentation. As individual structures and spaces became more closely identified with specific social practices and organizations, they began to operate as signifiers in an emerging text of social organization. An example of this identity is found in the transfer of the term 'church' to the physical structure. Another similar transfer took place when the term 'home' was applied to the physical house. In aggregate it seems that 'community' came to refer, at least in part, to its physical structure. In each case the transfer was made from an increasingly disorderly and undisciplined social group to an increasingly orderly and iconographically specific ensemble of architecture.
Geographers have frequently chided one another for the pallor of their descriptions. When Lewis called for "accurate, vivid descriptions of the surface of the earth," he was not lamenting a lapse in standards of exactitude. More recently, Entrikin has endeavored to recast this durable debate. Unlike earlier presentations, which endorsed literary excellence because of its powers of evocative communication, Entrikin favors the description of places because he sees in their composition the basis of subjective "idiographic concept formation."

The same two salients are evident in history, where the use of prose for evocative communication is classified as narrative, and inquiries into the role of writing in imposing order on reality are referred to as narrativity. As in geography, this has encouraged what may turn out to be an unfortunate alliance between humanists and post-structuralists. Among historians, the primary authors in the last group are White, Ricoeur and Ankersmit, each of whom has in a slightly different way suggested that historians create the past. "Events," as Roth has put it.


“are not natural entities; they exist only under a description.” Entikin is making precisely the same claim for places.

A similar debate exists in anthropology. By shifting the literature under consideration to ethnography, and the idiographic concepts being formed to concepts of culture, this debate is able to raise slightly different questions about the textual construction of authority. Unlike the historian, the ethnographer is presumed to have dwelt with her subjects, and thus recreations of the experience of fieldwork are crucial to the validation and credibility of the culture the writer has produced.

I am inclined to agree with Entikin’s description of places as imaginative constructions, but not to concede that they are as a consequence fictitious. Engaging the same question as it pertains to the imaginative construction of past events, McCullagh has suggested that a description is effectively true if it is a “fair representation.” He defines this quite simply. A fair description excludes no prominent features; it omits no feature that might suggest a conclusion other than that proposed by the author, and it presents the narrative at a uniform level of generality and detail. Observing these guidelines, the author may claim to have presented “a true account of the subject as a whole.” What remains problematic, of course, is the author’s claim that the subject is a whole.

The Conditions of Narrativity

The essential insight here would seem to be that I have produced a past for this village rather than reproduced the past of this village. This insight points us toward an examination of the institutions that permit us to have the past that we do, and a reflection on the manner in which these social facts mold that past. Once again, we encounter a problem that seems best conceptualized in the terms of structuration. As an author of history I was enabled by a variety of structures as I sought to achieve certain goals. Among these the most important being the creation of an intelligible and credible document and the fulfillment of an unavoidable professional requirement; but my efforts were at the same time constrained and guided by the rules, conventions and traditions of those structures. It is probably impossible to fully list the structures that have allowed me to produce this version of the past—and which have at the same time placed their stamp on the past that I have produced—or to fully appreciate the subtleties of their impact, but it may be useful to present a cursory review of what I mean by institutions. The institutions that permitted the production of this past, and prohibited the production of a different past. I would divide into three categories: the institutional situation of the resources, the production process, and the product.

The Institutional Situation of Historic Resources

The institutional situation of the resources that have permitted me to say some things, and prohibited me from saying others, can be further
divided into the institutions that produced these resources and the institutions that preserved these resources. In the first class we would have to place the educational institutions of the nineteenth century, which produced the literate population that wrote and read letters, diaries and newspapers, that drew, reproduced, purchased and consulted maps. Each of these printed artifacts is itself an institution that was produced for specific reasons. Letters permitted the maintenance of social groups whose members were geographically dispersed. Diaries permitted individuals to record their behavior and psychological states, and to construct a sense of their evolving self from this autobiography. Newspapers permitted national political parties to address their constituents, and they permitted merchants to advertise their wares. Maps simplified the sale and purchase of land, and they permitted strangers to traverse unfamiliar territory. Obviously these institutions are governed by rules of format, content and composition. If this were not so, it would be impossible to distinguish a letter from pages torn from a diary, and the classifications would not exist. These rules obviously change. For example, the institution of the personal letter seems to evolve from a description of objects when the correspondent first arrives in a new place to a description of people or subjective states after the reader has visited the place or has been adequately familiarized with its appearance. This is clearly an internal dynamic, but there are also

1) On the popularization of the sense that individual autobiographies were important see, Lowenthal, 1985, pp. 197-200.
historical changes in these institutions. This is most apparent in the newspaper, whose subjects grew increasingly local and lurid as the nineteenth century advanced. These representations are then clearly partial. In them certain things are present while others are absent. For the present writer they are, obviously, enabling and constraining. The writer can not see any past if they are not employed, but their employment in many ways determines the past that the writer will see.

A second institution that produced a resource is representative government. This of course necessitated the decennial census, a highly regulated and rule-bound document which was readily combined with the information technology, positivistic methodologies, and populist politics of the 1960's to spawn the institution of social history. This social institution has produced a literary institution, with its own methodological rules and obligatory components, among them the tabulation of social and geographical mobility, residential patterns and family structure. These are, simply, the sort of thing that you find out when those who are charged with producing a past are, equipped with a certain technology (computers), methodology (quantification), ideology (populism, feminism or Marxism), and historical product (the decennial census). I say this not to discredit the findings of social historians, but rather to illustrate how a product of the past has been combined with various products of the present, and how this has in turn made possible the production of one particular past. The individuals who took the

census were called enumerators, and they produced numbers, and the
same can be said of those who use the census today. Unsurprisingly, a
document produced as an instrument of representative government is
itself representative, but only of certain aspects of the past. The past this
has produced in history is the result of the actions of aggregated
individuals, but this is in large part due to the fact that classifiable
individuals are the past that the census permits us to see.

The differential preservation of historic products that allow me to
produce a past is accomplished by more institutions, themselves historic
products. This is, in part, a matter of the size, stability and durability of
the social organization that produced the product. This gives a distinct
advantage to government documents like the census and the minutes of
the religious societies. It also prefers the personal papers of elite families
whose social distinction was derived from their sense of historical
continuity and whose relative immobility permitted the accumulation and
retention of extensive files. As Daniel Boorstin has pointed out, it also
shows a distinct preference for unused and anomalous things. Chairs
that people liked to sit in eventually collapsed, while their weird and
uncomfortable counterparts make it into the museums unscaed by use.
The books that people read and re-read fell apart, while the tedious tomes
of politics and theology remained pristine upon the shelf awaiting future
transformation into resonant emblems of the era in question. More
significantly, there are the vain, and often deranged, individuals who are
so wildly anomalous that they leave their thoughts to posterity.

The first evidence of historical consciousness in Brockport appeared in 1856 when a handful of old residents gathered to share recollections that were then printed in the newspaper. Such articles became more common as the century advanced, but other than the deeds, the census, the newspaper, and a few maps, very little documentation was preserved. The local historical societies that were formed in the twentieth century are preserving somewhat more, but an examination of their files indicates that these records may be found partial by future historians who may have lost our present fascination with the events and experiences of everyday life.

Institutional Situation of the Production Process

Here our attention is shifted to the present day institutions that have made it possible for me to produce this version of the past. Without these institutions I could not have produced this past, but these institutions have also placed their stamp on the past that I have produced. These can be divided into two parts. First there are all of the institutions that produced me as a potential scholar. Second, there is the institution of the graduate school. Both of these are simultaneously enabling and constraining.

I am the author of this text, but who is the author of me? More specifically, what were the institutions that I was obliged to enter before I could produce this version of the past, and how has my experience with these institutions been inscribed into the past that I have produced? Obviously this version of the past is a product of my ability to read and
write, take notes, keep files, compile indices and so forth. The flaws in
this version of the past are a product of my inability to do these things.
My abilities and inabilities are the product of state-run educational
institutions, and they reflect the variable success those institutions had in
their efforts to overcome my natural resistance to instruction. With this
in mind it is possible to see how this document could be read as an
equivocal testament to the Brockport Central School System, which is
where the most extended effort was made to teach me these things. This
institution had little success in its efforts to teach me to spell, manipulate
numbers or organize my thoughts on an outline. Thus, another subtext to
this version of the past is the educational philosophy that emphasized
phonetic reading, new math and creativity. Beyond these technical
abilities and inabilities this version of the past is informed by social skills
I have learned and failed to learn, and by the personal disciplines I am
able and unable to exercise. If you frighten the archivist, or the archivist
frightens you, drawers begin to close and the past you produce is altered.
You must also be inquisitive, and profoundly indifferent to instant
gratification.

Another institution that has made the production of this past
possible is the American graduate school, specifically the geography
department of Syracuse University, and much of what distinguishes it
from amateur histories of the village is attributable to that institutional
setting. Through that institution I gained access to excellent funding,
advice, equipment and professional training. This was without question
an enabling and constraining structure (which I affected and which
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affected me. If I had tried to produce this version of the past outside of this institution, which seems unlikely, it would have been a hobby, pursued in spare moments and in ignorance of most of its formative concepts. These financial, technological and intellectual resources were supplemented by emotional resources provided by a sympathetic community. If I had written this as an amateur, my peer group would have tempted me to neglect, or enjoined me to abandon, a project that placed such a toll on my time. Having written this in a professional context, my peer group approved of this expenditure, and it would certainly have rallied to prod me onward if my spirits had flagged.

Institutional Situation of the Product

A history can be produced for any number of reasons. It can be produced to provide a personal refuge, to establish a genealogical claim, to illustrate an ideological point, or to justify a political maneuver. A history can be produced in a variety of forms, non-literary and literary. It can be produced as a painting, as a film, as a novel, as a poem, as a narrative, as an analysis, or even as an equation. Having been produced in the institution of a graduate program, this version of the past is a byproduct of professional training, and it takes the form of a dissertation, another rule-bound structure.

There are codified standards of the morphology of the dissertation which oblige the past to exhibit qualities of distillability (the abstract); identifiability (titles and headings); divisibility (chapters and subsections); mutuality (citations); and intelligibility (declarative and
interpretive passages). There are also curiosities such as the acknowledgements, which are permitted a degree of ambiguity unacceptable in citations; the biography, where simple chronology is presumed to suffice; and the dedication, the one place where it is permissible to be utterly cryptic and inescrutable. A full analysis of the morphology of the dissertation is beyond my present need and ability. However, it is necessary to observe that this is the structure of a contemporary cultural artifact, which embodies various contemporary beliefs about the malleability of knowledge, but which does not represent the structure of the past. In the three curiosities, allusion is made to the various institutions and structures I have mentioned in the preceding pages. Placing these side by side, a gradual loss of clarity is apparent, and through this the product (the dissertation) succeeds in distancing itself from all but the most authority-granting of the institutions that have permitted its production. The acknowledgements list the institutions and individuals that have made the product possible, but, in an obligatory sentence, releases these institutions and individuals from culpability. The biography suggests the institutional settings in which the author received his language and the bulk of his assumptions and values, but in a concentrated form that is certainly disproportionate when compared to the expansive survey of more recent, but quite possibly superficial, influences. Finally, the ambiguity of the dedication announces the privacy of the support (emotional? intellectual? financial? clerical?) for which it is a register of gratitude.
This cursory analysis is meant to suggest a few of the rules pertaining to the morphology of the dissertation, and to illustrate how something as simple as textual morphology might be related to epistemological and social structures. Insofar as it conforms to this model, a dissertation provides an instance of this structure, and it reproduces this structure, although reproduction is not its author’s intention.

Representation

By shifting our attention from explicit hypothesis about the central subject of this text to implicit hypothesis of appropriate representation, I believe that we can see how ambitious, if not necessarily correct, theorizing can occur in a document that is, on its surface, descriptive and factual. To invert this argument, a document that is, on its surface, highly theoretical, can proceed without testing or breaking a single rule of theoretical argument generally. While the first case attempts to produce knowledge in a new form, the second case reproduces knowledge in a known and sanctioned form. Thus, I believe it is quite possible to theorize without engaging in theoretical discourse, and it is equally possible to engage in theoretical discourse without theorizing.

In order to express some disbelief about the implicit hypotheses of scholarly work, it may be necessary to adopt a position of what Paul Feyerabend had called "epistemological anarchism" or "epistemological Dadaism." The reasons are essentially those proposed by Feyerabend:

that both science and scientists are stultified by rules, universal standards and rigid traditions. Although I do lay claim to freedom in my choice of words, figures, images and stories, I have not written a text that is remotely outlandish or experimental. This is not a retreat from epistemological anarchism since the epistemological anarchist is no more committed to unconventionality (e.g. the exacting rigors of avant-garde writing) than he is to conventionality. Familiar devices convey my meanings quite adequately, and given the opportunity to effectively communicate it seems stupid to erect what Feyerabend has called a "wall of incomprehension...based on pretense and the wish to intimidate."  

It is difficult, and somewhat embarrassing, to defend one's method of presentation, particularly since this presents stylistic decisions as if they were made wholly in the world of free choice and conscious election. Even if we disregard the extent to which writing conforms to unexamined standards of personal prejudice and taste, it is impossible to identify for the remainder a general or uniform theory of composition. Writing is a series of impetuous decisions that tend to waver between unfortunate ebulliences and careless tediums. But I believe that geographers should be left free to commit these errors and enormities, just as the reader should be free to toss the bolus on the fire, if only because he might succeed in saying something rather well, and even if he doesn't he will at least have the satisfaction of authoring a text that seems personalized. Rather than to belabor this point, however, I will simply comment on

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These characteritics of the narrative that follows which are not customary associated with scholarly geography.

The first of these is my tendency to lapse into the active voice. When it is both possible and desirable to dramatize an event, I find the temptation difficult to resist. Aside from this personal preferenee, I believe that adoption of the active voice, or dramatic presentation, can serve to rescue the reader from the inattentiveness that accompanies a medium. A more salient recommendation of the active voice is found in the fact that it does not present individuals as marionettes that lurch through life at the behest of unseen forces. Although this may at first seem to posit a theory of radical volition, and to disregard the historical structures and ecological contingencies that prohibit, constrain and encourage certain activities, I believe that if it fact presents these things as the experienced context within which these subjects lived, as what Collingwood called the "inside" of an event.

The second characteristic of my style that may require explanation is my occasional use of irony, humor and ambiguity. Irony is, essentially, a means of expressing limited disbelief in what my subjects say, or with what I say; it is a means of registering the variable validity of both of these commentaries. My commentary is ironic when my subject's

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description of their behavior, or my own description of that behavior, strikes me as somehow foolish, fraudulent, futile or fatuous. Each of these enduring human foibles can serve as the point of departure for moralizing, but I doubt my qualifications as a moralist, and I have tried to restrain my impulse to judge and condemn. Irony seems to me the best means of treating these things as comedy.

Although it is often difficult to discern in most written history, the past contains a great deal that is comic, as does the present, and I believe that an ability to laugh without derision or outrage at this, comic element is crucial if we intend to recover the past for reasons other than demonstration of our own relative superiority or debasement. Without meaning to diminish in the slightest the seriousness with which I have undertaken this very work, or my fidelity to the record, I am obliged to recognize in its laborious composition examples of this same comic element. If my subjects are examples of what Johan Huizinga called *Homo Ludens*, then I am also an example of *Homo Ludens*. In order to recognize the unserious, playful side of human nature - the frivolity which, when controlled, makes humans bearable company - it is useful, and perhaps more accurate, to be somewhat playful in our narratives. Scholarship might very well be appended to the brief list of cultural products from which, Christopher Lasch suggests, the play element has been excised.

The history of culture, as Huizinga showed in his classic study of play, *Homo Ludens*, appears from one perspective to consist of the gradual eradication of the play element from all cultural forms, from religion, from the law, from warfare above all from productive labor. The rationalization of these activities leaves little
Obviously, there are hazards implicit in this technique. Irony can degenerate to smugness or equivocation, humor can become an overriding objective and ambiguity can become an excuse for incoherence. Nevertheless, I find these hazards less intimidating than relentless seriousness or self-certainty. My subjects are not heroes or villains, they are just people, sometimes enigmatic, sometimes craven, and sometimes foolish, and they deserve to be treated as such.

The third aspect of my narrative style that may require explanation is its somewhat disjointed nature. What became increasingly clear as I studied Brockport was that the patchy comments that I was assembling fell rather easily into stories, but that these stories were not so easily arranged into a larger story. In other words, the story of Brockport, if such could be written, would be dissimilar, at least in its narrative pattern, to the story of something like political Antimasonry. In fact the place offered no single story that comprehended the others. This was the technical problem of chorography, and it suggested to me the error, committed at the level of ontology, when we present a place as having a unitary existence. Brockport was the meeting place of biographies, histories of institutions, the sequences of events that added up to popular movements, or even events, like the panic of 1837, which were of distant origin and intercontinental significance. There was no unified story, but

rather many stories - the any and all points of view of J.K. Wright's geosphy; many stories which, due to the material of which they were constructed, were often incomplete and broken. Sometimes these connected, at other times they proceeding with a significant degree of autonomy and independence.

Each of these three techniques embodies assumptions regarding human nature, places and history, and each should be taken as one hypothesis of this text. The test of these hypotheses is, of course, the effect of this text on the reader. The extent to which they succeed in transforming the record into an image which stimulates further thought on these villagers, on the meaning of places in the grip of historical processes, and on the open ended problem of writing historical geographies of localities is, I believe, the final register of their merit and validity.

Presence and Absence

If we accept McCullagh's argument that true means fair, then I believe this historical geography is true. But it is also fictive. I have suggested some of the circumstances by which it was formed and molded, but it is also fiction in a more obvious sense since its subject, the past, is by its very definition absent. George Steiner has recently argued that the interpretation of the arts should be practiced as a performance of meaning "which makes sense sensible," rather than, if I may interpolate,
an analysis of meaning by which the sensible is made to make sense. To carry this as close as possible to the subject at hand, it is possible that the village, which is the product of many imaginations, receives its only useful critique in the construction of another village, even if it is only a village of the imagination. Thus this presentation may be thought of as one possible performance of the meanings that are latent in the records of Brockport, one means that I have theorized and enacted to make my sense of the place sensible to the reader. In Hayden White's words, it "exploit[s] a certain perspective on the world that does not pretend to exhaust description or analysis of all the data in the entire phenomenal field, but rather offers itself as one way among many of disclosing certain aspects of the field." In other words, to return to Entrikin's point, the narrative is an effort to enact in the reader's mind my concept of the place.

Place as a Concept

This, then, is a study of the emergence of one particular place, both as a geographical phenomenon and as a product of subjective "idiographic concept formation," but it is also a practical inquiry into "place" as a concept. Although the first task provides the bulk of the text, it is the second task that first stimulated the project. Simply put, this is the question of whether it is useful to think and write in terms of places.

and whether the geographical "facts" that we call places provide us with a clear and powerful concept with which we may make some sense of the social and historical life of humans. In chapters two through eleven I have attempted to explore the possibilities and limits of writing about concrete, local events. In chapter twelve I turn back on the narrative I have written and critically assess its merits and deficiencies. Although some of these deficiencies are certainly attributable to the limitations of my own ability, and others are attributable to a paucity of records, I believe that it is possible on the basis of this narrative to assess how well, or how poorly, the concept of place has served me. It is possible to decide whether place is a concept that yields clarity or obfuscation, order or disorder, or whether it perhaps upsets these dualism. In short, it will be possible to ask whether place is a useful concept, and if so or if not, why is this so.

**Context**

The chapters that follow, describe Brockport and its environs, but they also describe a series of academic codes and conventions. These codes and conventions are embodied in certain exemplary works of geography and affiliated disciplines, and they have structured my methods and interpretations by supplying me with questions, concepts and terms. Before I attempt a review of this literature, and before I attempt to situate this study in it, I must, however, divide it into two classes, supplementary secondary literature, and secondary literature that relates to the thesis of this work.
Anyone who undertakes the task of writing about a place will encounter one serious and immediate problem. A great many things are happening, and the concept of place provides little guidance in the selection of the relevant strands. Beyond this problem, the person who undertakes the task of writing about a place will quickly discover that the project runs across the grain of most scholarly literature. The author must dip into literatures as diverse as those on banking, church government, agricultural history and canal construction, to name but a few. This is what I have called the supplementary secondary literature, and discussion of these sources is limited to the text.

I have divided the literature review that follows into four sections. The first section reviews a selection of community studies written by American sociologists and anthropologists. The second section surveys some literary approaches to the small town and the village. The third section examines an assortment of local histories written from the perspective of social history and cultural anthropology. The fourth section outlines the efforts of geographers in the genre of locality studies.

1) This is unsatisfactory in two respects. First, the author must labor with the embarrassing knowledge that he is not fully versed in the literature that relates to the subjects on which he is, for a page or so, presuming to write. Second, although the account the author is attempting to describe may seem to deviate from the accepted interpretation, it is hard to challenge this interpretation on the basis of a sample of one.
The Tradition of Community Studies

The term community is generally taken to denote "a spatially delimited set of interacting face-to-face groups." The fact that these groups share a particular territory, or place, builds a sense of identity and mutual responsibility; the fact that they often fail to share the same set of values, or ideology, leads to conflict and sometimes to repression. Thus we have the principal benefit and the principal liability of life in human communities. The central aim of a community study is explication of these centripetal and these centrifugal forces.

The distinction between communities of propinquity and communities of values suggests the basic difficulty which the geographer will encounter when using this term. Even cursory examination of a place reveals that localities are not necessarily communities and that communities are not necessarily local. With this in mind it seems advisable to use the term locality rather than the term community. Although this modification of our terminology may serve to avoid some confusion, and to escape the criticism that in speaking of communities of propinquity we are erroneously suggesting a unanimity of opinion, I leave the older term with some regret. My misgiving stems from the belief that members of one community of value, experience, and in many cases come to appreciate the values of other communities primarily at the local scale.

The idea that propinquity does constitute a form of community, and that propinquity carries incumbencies of responsibility, can lead to efforts to dominate a subordinate community, and to regulate

the behavior of its members; but it can just as readily lead to efforts to redress the causes of that community's subordination. For example, the Brockport temperance campaigns can be interpreted as an effort, largely ineffectual, to impose the values of the evangelical Protestant bourgeoisie on members of the Irish Catholic working class. But it can also be seen as evidence of the sense of responsibility that the members of the evangelical Protestant bourgeoisie felt when the body of a fellow villager (whatever their values) was found floating in the canal. This sense of local responsibility is also evident in the villager's charity. As the newspaper editor advised in 1859, "liberally sustain the home poor, and as a general rule - give the go-by to stragglers and to strangers." 1

Much of the literature I am about to review has at its heart a persistent ambivalence toward this fundamental moral dilemma. A recent book by Robert Bellah, et. al., documents the historic transition of the United States from a world of economic independence and moral community to a world of economic interdependence and moral autonomy. Although it is possible to quibble over the actual historicity of either situation in its pure form, the argument of these authors is persuasive. In brief, what they describe is a progressive decrease in the American's willingness to have his or her values or responsibilities defined by his or her situation. This assumption of individual prerogative is evident within communities of value, as we shall see in the decreased authority of the churches in mid-nineteenth century Brockport, but a more pronounced effect is found in communities of propinquity, as we shall see in the

increases in the clarity of the boundaries that divide the social classes, in
the village.

Primary among academic studies of American communities are the
two volumes on Middletown, or Muncie, Indiana, issued by Robert and
Helen Lynd in 1929 and 1937. The Lynds' study did not undertake
verification or a thesis. Rather, employing the techniques of the cultural
anthropologist, they sought to describe and tabulate the "variations upon
a few major lines of [human] activity" as these occurred in the small
American city. The techniques of the cultural anthropologist that the
Lynds employed were, in essence, strategies to ensure dispassionate
objectivity in their description and analysis of ordinary group life in this
(relatively) typical community. A second aspect of the Lynds' agenda was
documentation of cultural, technological, and economic changes, which
they perceived as unprecedented in their impact, quantity and frequency.

In order to gauge the magnitude of these changes the Lynds chose
the "objectively observed behavior of 1890... as the base-line against
which to project the culture of today [1929]." Although establishment of
such an arbitrary base-line may be a necessary expedient, it nevertheless
implies that, prior to the selected date, the local culture, technology and
economy were relatively immutable. In making this assumption I believe
that there was a significant lapse in the Lynds' otherwise scrupulous
fidelity to the principles of dispassionate observation. Virtually every

1) Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in Modern
American Culture. (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1929);
Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts. (New York:
Harcourt Brace Iovenovich, 1937).
commissilor on life in the modern period is united in this affirmation of
harrowing changes that have reached a particularly frenzied pitch in the
commentator's own time. Thus, I am, a priori, incredulous when I read of
“this narrow strip of thirty five years [which] comprehends for hundreds
of American communities the industrial revolution that has descended on
villages and towns, metamorphosing them into a thing of Rotary Clubs,
central trade councils and Chamber of Commerce contest for 'bigger and
better' cities.” And this, a priori doubt is, I believe, amply justified by the
material presented in my study of Brockton.

Warner and Lunt also used a self-conscious anthropological
approach to the analysis of an American community as it responded to the
bureaucratization of mass society.¹ In their enormous Yankee City series,
the first volume of which was issued in 1941, the authors were concerned
with the means of “maintaining group unity under the overwhelming
burden of the number and complexity of social relations and the physical
bulk of population” in contemporary society.²

Both of these studies served to establish an important precedent for
studies of American communities with their assumption that they were
documenting the emergence of a new industrialized, bureaucratized "mass
society." Writing under the pseudonym James West, the anthropologist
Carl Withers made a similar assumption in Plainville, U.S.A.³ Based on
observations in the 1940's, Withers's book is organized around conflicts

¹) W. Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt, The Social Life of a Modern
²) Warner and Lunt, p. 16.
³) James West, (Carl Withers), Plainville, U.S.A., (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1945).
arising from the "too rapid impact with the outside world of a 'traditional' social, religious, and technological system." A similar project was undertaken by Vidich and Bensman in their study of Springdale (possibly Candor), New York. Once again the author's subject is a community's response to "mass society" as they "attempt to explore the foundations of social life in a community which lacks the power to control the institutions that regulate and determine its existence." Although much of this exhaustive study seeks to demonstrate the gradual loss of local initiative and self-determination, and the strategies employed by residents to find advantages in their position, they do concede the reciprocal relation between villages such as Springdale and "mass society." Anticipating an idea to which geographers have been recently attracted, Vidich and Bensman observe that while "mass society" certainly shapes villages such as Springdale, "Springdale, taken as one of thousands of similar communities, exerts itself upon and shapes mass society." 3

The proposition that mass society was progressively destroying not only traditional communities, but also the possibility of novel communities, was theorized by Robert Nisbet in 1958. In The Quest for Community, Nisbet argued that this quest was the "dominant social tendency of the twentieth century." He suggested that the sense of loss was attributable to the functional irrelevance of primary associative areas like kinship, the church and the locality to the larger political and

1) West, p. 220.
3) Vidich and Bensman, p. 107.
economic order, and that this decline in their institutional relevance had diminished member's allegiance to these groups and occasioned a corresponding loss in their symbolic and psychological functions and benefits. Nisbet lay responsibility for this decline on the State, a social organization that was in its original guise simply military, but which had, since the end of the medieval period, progressively usurped the function of these intermediate groups and, to some degree, the allegiance of these group's members.1

Edward Shorter has made the opposite argument. In The Making of the Modern Family, he claims that traditional village communities were not destroyed with the family, but by the family.2 With the rise of middle class domesticity, Shorter argues, the nuclear family became a private realm of sentiment and affection. As the family came to supply the largest portion of the individual's emotional requirements, the individual lost their ties to their age and sex peer groups. At the same time, domesticity pulled women out of community life (at least productive life), it withdrew family members from participation in village rituals, and it removed reproduction from community supervision. Domesticity would end up, he wrote, "kindling a cozy fire in the household - and conflagrating the community about it."3

In 1968 Maurice Stein set out to organize community studies and, using the work of Parks, the Lynds and Warner, to propose some general

3) Shorter, p. 206.
theoretical postulates for future community studies. While admitting
that every community is, at least in regard to some of its aspects, unique;
and that every community study will, as a consequence, permit only
limited generalizations, Stein proposed that all studies of American
communities will be unified by "the trend toward increased
interdependence and decreased local autonomy."²

This theory of the breakdown of traditional communities,
particularly in the period after 1920, has been systematically criticized
by Thomas Bender.³ The nub of Bender's complaint is that these and other
studies reify the meaning of community as a local village, which is
simply the form that this social organization happened to assume in the
nineteenth century when social scientists like Ferdinand Tönnies and Sir
Henry Maine first addressed the question of community change.

Although Bender's argument is extremely persuasive, it prompts two
cautions. First, in defining community as an experience and
place as a "container" that may or may not provide a setting for this
experience, Bender fails to specify what community is an experience of.
It is, obviously, tautological to define community as the experience of
community. The point reiterated by Nisbet is that people do not come
together simply for the joy of being together, they come together to do
something, and the sense of community derives from the satisfaction of

1) Maurice Stein, The Eclipse of Community: An Interpretation of
1960).
2) Stein, p. 107.
3) Thomas Bender, Community and Social Change in America. (Baltimore:
cooperating in the achievement of this shared goal. The second remark, which serves to endorse the merits of territorial communities, is that every member of society is potentially a member of a community of propinquity while large numbers (as we can see in the cases of homeless schizophrenics) are made social, but not community, problems when the latter are organized exclusively along lines of affection.

The present work is not a community study, but its assumptions are guided by this literature, and it makes what I believe to be some contributions to our understanding of these issues. These relate in particular to Shorter's theory of the effect of domesticity, and to Nisbet's observation that the strength of a community is directly proportionate to its instrumental value in the eyes of its members.

Shorter's thesis seems to be verified by events that followed the Civil War. As we shall see in chapter 10, village rituals like the Independence Day celebration fell into decline, the power of the religious communities was restricted, and Christmas was adopted as an instrument of family bonding. As we shall see in chapter 11, middle class men seem to have retired to their houses, and left Main Street to an increasingly unruly crowd of working class men, who remained bonded to their peer group. In the same chapter we shall see evidence of the privatization of mourning.

The fact that a sense of community can result from a collective purpose is evident throughout the work that follows. This takes the form of various campaigns. The earliest communities in the town of Sweden were bonded by their campaign against nature (chapter 3 and 4). The
The earliest communities in the village of Brockport were small knots of moral reformers who, like their pioneer predecessors, sought to impose their own vision in the world in which they found themselves (chapter 7). At the beginning of the Civil War, we will see that the sense of community reached an unprecedented pitch, and we will see how this operated to encourage the young men of the community to enlist (chapter 10). With the disillusionment that followed this collective effort, and the rise of domesticity, collective effort shifted from moral to economic concerns. "Public spirit," as expressed in the tidy lawns and ornamental architecture of the village beautification movement, became an exercise in optimism (chapter 11). Since this was expressed in appurtenances of modernism, like gas lamps, shade trees and streets free of roaming pigs, community was for the first time inscribed in the landscape. In other words, the ideal of community took on a physical form. It is this last example of collective effort that has given us the persistent image of the local community that Bender criticized.

Together these observations seem to confirm Bellah's argument. There is no critical point, no watershed dividing one view of community from another; but there is a perceptible progression from a sense of community derived from participation in projects of social reform and moral regulation to a sense of community derived from projects whose goals were largely economic. In other words, expressions of individualism, and the prerogatives of the family, moved from the economic to the moral spheres of life, while recognition of social interdependence passed from the moral to the economic sphere.
continuation of these trajectories is readily apparent in today's newspapers, where pro-choice editorials advocating abortion rights stand beside editorials endorsing formulation of a national industrial policy.

The Small Town as an American Ideal

The small town has exercised an immense fascination for the American imagination. For many individuals, its institutions and its landscapes continue to define a moral order. For example, as Meinig has written, "the New England village is widely assumed to symbolize for many people the best we have known of an intimate, family-centered, Godfearing, morally conscious, industrious, thrifty, democratic community." The midwestern Main Street village, which Brockport more closely resembles, is in the minds of many individuals "the seat of a business culture of property-minded, law-abiding, citizens devoted to "free enterprise" and "social morality," a community of sober, sensible, practical people." Indeed, a literature exists to advise town governments on the means to preserve this desirable image.

Narrative histories of the village, like that of Page Smith, have recorded the decline of the village, and its accompanying moral order.

with dismay. Lingeman's sprawling history of the 'American small town' follows roughly the same track, and concludes with a discussion of the national urge to return to small town life, which first became evident in the 1970's. Many of the individuals harboring this desire presumably shared the sentiments of Donald Connelly, who published his notes on one year's cycle of life in a New Hampshire town. Connelly described his town as an enclave of "genuinely civilized life on a human scale" in a time "when so much of American life seems to be out of joint." A similar opinion was expressed by James and Carolyn Robertson in the Small Town Book: Show me the way to go home, a perfect mirror of the political pessimism of the 1970's. "Small communities," the Robertson's wrote, "are probably the safest places to learn how to rebuild the ideas and institutions that are falling around us."

This myth of small town life is supported by a long literary tradition. The most complete account of this is to be found in the two volumes by Herron. New England villages have been treated by Westbrook. (Although Brockport was home to Mary Jane Holmes, one of

the most popular novelists of the nineteenth century, it has not found a place in her novels.) With the striking exception of the movement that Hilfer called "the revolt from the village," this literature has extolled the benefits of small town life.\(^1\)

In addition to novels and plays, the small town has been treated in various non-academic forms of nonfiction. Santmyer's *Ohio Town* and Miller's *Town and Country* strike me as among the more perceptive of these.\(^2\) The tendency of literate individuals to migrate to the nation's cities from native places that are, as often as not, small towns, has given us the distinct genre of accounts of the author's return to old haunts. Along with its obligatory nod to Thomas Wolfe's affirmation of the impossibility of such a return, the homecoming book is usually colored by mild revulsion and nostalgia. A recent book in this vein is Bryson's *The Lost Continent*. The author, an expatriated Iowan, returned to the United States in search of "an amalgam of all those towns I had encountered in fiction."\(^3\) Needless to say, despite his diligence, he discovered none that placed closer than runner-up. Perhaps one of the 'better recent examples' of this is Ron Powers' *White Town Drowsing*. In this Powers describes his return to Hannibal, Missouri, and registers the usual surprise at the discovery that buildings are somewhat less imposing than remembered, and the usual dismay over the proliferation of tawdry clap trap. He


provides a fascinating report of the hubris of modern, public-relations-firm-managed boosterism, as exemplified in the Mark Twain sesquicentennial, but this is not exactly central to the book's purpose. At the heart of the book is Power's search for his father in the village which served as the context to, and as a metaphor for, his father's life.  

Although little of this literature is scholarly, I make mention of it for three reasons. First, nostalgia for small town life and its supposed virtues immeasurably complicates the task of writing about a small town, since it plants in the writer the fear that if he is not actively debunking the myth he is rhapsodizing. Second, no literate person can hope to escape the influence of this fictional geography. Fredrick's Tyre and Octavius; Westcott's Homeville; Marietta Holly's Jonesville; Frances Wither's Wiggetown; Crane's Whilomville: these and other fictional towns of upstate New York are fixtures of my imagination, and they have no doubt worked subtle changes on my readings and interpretations. Third, Brockport is my home town, and there are, quite possibly, unexamined psychological motives working through my text.  

The Study of Places in American History  

Unlike the community studies, I have not altered the name of the village in my study. It is there, at 43° 12' north 77° 52' west, on any map of sufficiently large scale that you may choose to consult. This is one benefit of historical work. All of the persons mentioned here, and all of  

children, are presumably dead, and I am spared the need for sensitivity to the feelings of individuals.

Histories of specific places in the United States are numerous, probably countless, and they range from multi-volume works authored by acclaimed historians and issued by international presses to mimeographed leaflets authored by untrained amateurs and issued by local historical societies. As we move toward the latter type the variability in quality is, of course, more marked, but the best are highly accurate and detailed. Regardless of their length, the sophistication of their binding, the notoriety of their author, or the recognizability of their imprimatur, these works may be divided into two classes. The first are the local chronicles, which arrange events as they happened and tend to include a lot of names. When carefully constructed these are very helpful and not to be sneered at, but they are not at issue here. The second sort of work is the local history proper, which originates in a chronicle but end up as something quite different. This is because the author reduces the importance of chronology as an ordering principal, sorts events into stories on the basis of themes and theories, throws out some ties to events in the wider world and sticks in a fair amount of educated speculation.

Detailed histories of specific localities are a long standing staple of American historiography. An acknowledged classic among these is Merle Curti's Turnerian interpretation of Trempealeau County, Wisconsin. The popularity of such studies increased in the 1960's, when quantitative

sources and methodologies were employed in the project of writing a
collective biography of the faceless masses. Social and geographical
mobility, the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth, the changing
complexion of local political participation and legal definitions all figured
prominently in these studies, testament to the powers and limitations of
their methods. Many of these studies described New England towns,
presumably because of their superior records.1

Although New York has not been as thoroughly scrutinized as New
England, some noteworthy studies of localities have been produced.
Studies by Kross and Wright document colonial towns on Long Island, and
argue that their experience was similar but not identical to that of their
New England counterparts, the principal distinction being the New
Yorker's larger tolerance of deviance and dissent.2

Book length studies of frontier communities in the period just after
the American Revolution have long been limited to Howe's 1939 study of
Homer, New York.3 White's study of Beekmantown, published in 1979, is
unencumbered with the demographic statistics usual in the new social
history, yet he succeeds in placing the locality in the larger context of
state politics, and in demonstrating that on the rich forest frontier the

1) John Murria, "New England Town Studies," History and Theory 11

2) Jessica Kross, The Evolution of an American Town, Newington, New York,
1642-1775, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); Langdon G.
Wright, "In Search of Peace and Harmony: New York Communities in the Seventeenth Century," New York History 81

3) Herbert Barber Howe, Jedediah Barber: 1787-1876, (New York: Columbia
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social status and economic resources of settlers actually tended to decline as settlement progressed.

In the period of industrialization, probably the best known work is Stuart Blumin's study of Kingston, New York. At the heart of Blumin's discussion of Kingston is a desire to make generalizations regarding the effect of the urbanization process on the local meaning of community. What he discovers is that the sense of place increased as the residents of urbanizing Kingston became members of new, voluntary organizations.

Another important study of the experience of urbanization in this period is Paul Johnson's study of Rochester, New York during the revivals of the early 1830's. Like Blumin, Johnson wishes to generalize from his sample of one, and treat the Rochester revivals as a microcosm of Jacksonian Reform. Adopting Durkheim's notion of moral rules as "social facts," Johnson attempts to ground the revival movement in economic self interest. This is to say that he interprets the perfectionism of Charles Grandison Finney, which repudiated the traditional Protestant notion of human depravity and predestination, and substituted an ethos of personal moral responsibility, as a strategy to compel the internalization of discipline by workers in the emerging industrial society. The difficulty we will encounter with Johnson's work is that the same things were happening in Brockport, a village that had almost no industry.

Mary Ryan is explicit in her claim for the general significance of her findings for Oneida County, New York, which she compares to "one of Hegel's World Historical Individuals." Her project is to plot the rise of "domesticity," and thus her interest is centered at the junction of family history and women's history. She locates this change at mid-century, although this may be influenced by her heavy reliance on the censuses of 1855 and 1865. Although Ryan retained the quantitative devices of the new social history, the task of demonstrating how the middle class moulded its particular identity around the home and the family obliged her to interpret various non-numerical sources. The interpretive freedom which Ryan permits herself seems to presage a movement, of which Ryan appears to be member, which bills itself as the new cultural history.

Even further removed from the locality studies that are informed by the techniques of social history is Hareven and Langenbach's study of the milling town of Manchester, New Hampshire. This book consists of oral histories collected from surviving workers at the enormous Amoskeag textile mill, photographs, and brief linking essays. In one sense this book returns to the issues of community studies, since the authors discovered that the common experience of mill workers, both at work and at leisure, served to create a strong sense of community. And yet this is largely intimated, since the book presents no thesis and draws

If the statistical social histories sought to write the collective biographies of the faceless masses, Amoskeag represents an attempt to write the collected biographies of a somewhat smaller, but no less ordinary group. The advantages and disadvantages of its method are clear. We are given a semblance of the heterogeneity of humans and their reasons for acting as they do, but as a consequence of this heterogeneity it seems that we are barred from generalization or the formulation of theories.

The difficulty of mixing idiographic richness, hospitality to anomalies, and respect for the decisiveness of individuals with an incisive theoretical argument is at least partially overcome in Anthony Wallace's study of the cotton milling district that surrounded Rockdale, a town in Pennsylvania's Delaware county. This study attracts immediate attention because his subject was chosen for reasons of personal curiosity rather than scientific representativeness, and also because he sought to apply anthropological techniques to archival material. This detailed, digressive and somewhat disorganized study attempts to incorporate the theoretical position of what Wallace calls 'paradigmatic processes' of cultural change. As the name implies, these cultural processes are interpreted using a framework quite similar to that employed by Thomas Kuhn in his anti-gradualist theory of scientific progress.

Locality Studies in Geography

Although many geographers claim to have been charged with the study of places, they have generally taken this to mean the study of regions rather than localities. The historical geographical literature on localities in the United States that does exist is distinguished from the literature discussed above by a somewhat greater emphasis on town plans, the built landscape and the meanings attributed to it, and the function of the town or city in a larger urban system. None of these aspects are the exclusive province of geographers, however, and it remains unclear whether there is a distinctively geographical approach to the study of localities.

The plans of towns and cities may be classified with rural registers of land division and urban planning in the general study of settlement patterns, which Jordan described as "the study of the form of the cultural landscape." Of these three subcategories, cities and rural districts seem to have received the most thorough consideration. Geographical studies of the morphology of small to intermediate sized towns are, by comparison, limited in number. The early work of Schofield and the two studies by Trewartha stood unseconced for nearly half a century. More recently, Wood has returned to the study of the morphology of the New England village, and in a series of articles he has suggested the need for

significant revision in the conventional understanding of the actual appearance of the majority of New England villages, and in the processes which created the models for our stereotypical image. Much of this literature is addressed in the course of the discussion that follows.

The typical morphology of Pennsylvania towns has also been studied. Noting our "exceedingly scrappy" knowledge of small American towns and cities generally, Zelinsky has provided the notes from his explorations of towns in Pennsylvania. Using a variety of morphological characteristics impressionistically catalogued over a series of transects, he has attempted to define the Pennsylvanian town, and to delimit the formal region in which it is found. This study in many ways resembles the studies of material culture conducted by Fred Kniffen: its originality lies in its effort to map a specific collection of cultural artifacts, or compage, rather than a single cultural form.

Set between these two regions, New York has received little attention. Aside from rather brief articles by Bannister and McKelvey, the morphology of the villages of New York remains unexamined, much less explained or classified. A study such as this one, where the subject is a single village, does not permit us to ask the obvious questions of classification, regionalization, transfer and innovation, but it does shed

some light on our understanding of village planning. Perhaps the most significant point is the relative timidity of Hell Brockway's ambitions as these were expressed in the original plan, and the ad hoc additions by which that plan was augmented. This contrasts rather strikingly with the extensive and easily enlarged grids of western towns. It is also significant that typical elements of New England town planning were discarded or modified. For example, the churches are moved from a central to a peripheral location, and the functions formerly accommodated on the green are divided between Main Street and the grounds of the Collegiate Institute.

The literature that pertains to the built landscape and its meaning is expansive, and I can only gesture in the direction of most of it by referring to the partial review by Lewis. This area is, needless to say, closely affiliated to the study of settlement patterns, and it is principally distinguished from this by its concern for architectural artifacts. With this said, it becomes clear that the study of material culture is also a cognate field. The interpretation of built form is a standard feature of western cultural history. Among the first Americans credited with this form of interpretation is Henry Adams, although the more significant wellspring is certainly the large corpus of Lewis Mumford. Beginning in 1952, J.B. Jackson argued that American cultural history was legibly registered in the appearance of the landscape, and thirty years later he

continued to press the point that the study of "landscape itself" can provide us with "a disciplined way of looking at the physical world." Peirce Lewis has presented similar arguments.

Dell Upton has written of the need to regard "material culture as primary rather than supporting or reflective evidence for larger inquiries," and to ask how buildings, high style and vernacular, "embody and convey the competing values of groups in their material surroundings." The fundamental insight of this interpretive approach, as Philip Wagner has argued, is that cultural landscapes participate in the processes which they record and facilitate, that they bear meanings, intentional and unintentional, which serve to provide a context lending social definition to the characters and actions that they contain. Norton, consciously following Wagner's lead, attempts to look at locations as places to which people have given a meaning, within which they interact as members of a group, and from which they derive their sense of group identity. Perhaps the best empirical demonstration of this last point in the context of New York state are those provided by Duncan and Duncan

and by Hugill. This work combines insights from symbolic interactionism with theories of elites and hierarchic diffusion to explain distinctive anglophile landscapes, and to explore the use of this iconography in strategies of group identification and exclusion.

This concern for meaning has raised thorny epistemological issues since meaning is, perhaps by its very nature, uncertain and contestable. A method based on linguistics and physiological psychology, which purports to offer a degree of objectivity, has been proposed by Sitwell and Bilash. Although their impressive and highly technical apparatus may provide a basis for the scientific verification of meaning (which less scrupulously positivistic thinkers have seldom questioned), it is poorly suited to the discovery or interpretation of meaningful objects and actions in the landscape. I have ignored the physiology and psychology of perception and cognition. The meaning of the landscape, or of the events that take place in it, is nothing more than the response of the persons who look at it. My interest is in what persons think they see, or what I think they think they see, not in whether, if, or how they see anything at all. In particular, I have been anxious to discover how a person derives


an understanding of the nature of the world—its orders, hierarchies, values and liabilities—and an understanding of their place in that world from local experience. I am inspired in this endeavor by the work of the social historian Robert Darnton and the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Darnton, for example, describes the procession générale of Montpellier as "a statement unfurled in the streets, through which the city represented itself to itself" and "a social order represented itself to itself."1 Clifford Geertz found in the Balinese cock fight "a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves," a "sentimental education."2 Among geographers, perhaps the most ambitious undertaking along these lines is Duncan's study of pre-colonial Kandy, Sri Lanka.3

The last characteristic of the geographic study of localities that I mentioned was their attention to the function of these settlements in a larger system. People do not come together just to be together, they come together, either impelled by personal desire or compelled by another's desire, to do something. In the case of Brockport, as in the case of all but a handful of American examples, these reasons were economic. Again, much of this literature is reviewed in the chapters that follow.

The geographical study of localities must admit of some anomalies. Lewis' study of Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, for example, provides a rich description of the rise and a lament for the decline of one specific locality. In J.B. Jackson's description of the quintessential western town, Optimo City, we are given a description of a place which ranges from the chandeliers in the diner to the layout of the streets. One of the more notorious geographical studies of a locality is Bunge's *Fitzgerald*, published in 1971. The book studies one square mile of land, now situated in the city of Detroit, from aboriginal settlement to the social revolts of the late 1960's. The historical section, which was added as an afterthought, is modeled on Whittlesey's sequent occupance, and it adds little to our understanding. It is in any case simply a prelude to "THE LESSON" of the book, a didactic homily on the evils of racism and the tyranny of the machine. The most recent contribution to the literature on the small town by a geographer is Jakle's study of small town iconography. Although in some respects enlightening, the sweep of the generalizations tends to obscure the fact that towns vary according to region, period and function, and that the iconography also varies.

Summary and Conclusion

The preceding chapter contains three elements. After briefly introducing the study, it discusses some basic historical processes that were at work during the creation of Brockport. It then describes some significant institutional structures that were at work during the recreation of that place. Finally, it reviews a range of studies of similar subjects. Thus, I have attempted to define two basic themes and to suggest that I am qualified to develop and illustrate these themes in a responsible manner. This last task now moves from assertion to demonstration as the themes become the central subject. I have attempted to solve the morphological problem of two parallel but in many respects disparate themes by using two formats. The longer discussion of place creation is presented as standard text, while the interspersed discussion of text creation is presented in italics and in boxes. This is an example.

The village of Brockport is a place with a past. It is also a place with a history, but these possessions are not identical. Its history exists in the present, shaped and selected by the differing durability of records, by the relative ephemerality of social activities, and by the shifting priorities and prejudices of the living and the dead. In contrast to this gnarled, eroded and encrusted product, the past of the village is, at least in the ideal, a comprehensive and coherent series of actions and consequences, causes and effects.

In passing moments of despair or infatuation, the historical geographer may feel something akin to lust for this comprehensive knowledge. Fantasies of time travel, day-dreams of voyeuristic eavesdropping and delusions of immediate contact...
with subjects long dead are common symptoms of this hankering after historical omniscience. They also betray epistemological envy of empirical science. The past was, they suppose, a sensible experience, and the trick of knowing the past is the trick of bridging the gulf between stimulants that have vanished into air or dissipated into dust and simulable, which is to say living, receptors. Unlike empirical science, which has its own instruments for extending the range of human sensibility into the immense, the infinitesimal, and the ordinarily insensible, our investigations of the past are transacted through human instruments, surrogate witnesses. Like a blind man listening to a description of a scene, the historical geographer's head may fill with pictures, but these are pictures composed of his own conceptual images, and they are helplessly dependent on a witness who may be far from trustworthy.

That this comprehensive history occurred at all is little more than a hypothesis, an assumption created from the application of everyday temporal experience to various signs of the past. These signs are things—books, buildings, deeds and newspapers—whose state of decay or anachronism of style suggest a distant provenance. We have been so thoroughly and relentlessly inculcated with the orthodoxy of history, so profoundly impressed with its ladder-like centuries and periods, and so beguiled by the eloquence and erudition of its expository authorities, that we often fail to recognize it as one more naturalized assumption. If we are circumspect and wary of ideological biases in history, we are trusting of history itself, and seldom if ever do we ask ourselves whether history is itself an ideological position. If ideology is a totalizing system which
pregnates to explain a world, and if history orders the remnants of the past into such an explanation, then I believe that we must concede that it is.

Hans Kellner has suggested that the tropology of Hayden White, itself an appropriation of Renaissance rhetoric, may be ordered into a "narrativity of mind" in which representational systems are driven forward by the "tropological urge to explain themselves." He suggests, in other words, a progressive scheme whereby the institutionalized study of the past, or history, has created new meanings out of old. The four tropes are metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, and I believe that we may discern their progression in geographical description. In laying out these "master tropes" and their "role in the description and discovery of the truth," Burke proposed as their literal substitutes the terms perspective, reduction, representation, and dialectic. As Hayden White described it, "The archetypal plot of discursive formations appears to require that the narrative 'I' of the discourse move from an original metaphorical characterization of a domain of experience, through metonymic deconstructions of its elements, to synecdochic representations of the relations between its superficial attributes and its presumed essence, to, finally, a representation of whatever contrasts or oppositions can legitimately be discerned in the totalities identified in the third phase of discursive representation.

Metaphor is the first stage in the application of a language to the world, and it is based on a sense of similitude. This figuration is abundantly present in the work of Romantic

geographers like Humboldt and Ritter. Humboldt, for example, wrote of "the great enchainment of cause and effect" when he argued that "no material and no effect may be studied in isolation." In *The Erde und Ritter* attempted, in his own words, to illustrate the "connections of the unified whole [the globe] with man and his creator." By the end of the nineteenth century geographers had begun to write metonymically. White describes metonymy in various ways, two of which command attention. First, he defines it as "the act of having "dispersed the elements of a given domain across a time series or a spatial field;" second, he defines it as "the effort to comprehend that field in terms of the laws that bind one phenomenon to another as a cause to an effect." The first aspect, of metonymy, which is essentially the division of the similitude of metaphor, is evident in the overriding concern for regionalization in European and American geography from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The second aspect, the search for laws, which White describes as mechanistic, is apparent in the various strains of environmental determinism that ran through much of the geography of that period. Thus, the discipline created (or appropriated) signifiers like "New England Extended," "The Pennsylvania Culture Region," and "The Upland South," each essentially metonymic in form. The rhetorical move was resisted in nineteenth-century Germany, where Bucher and Frobel castigated the region as an unscientific "deformation of the truth" to which the undisciplined mind was "wont to ascribe mystical attributes," but by the twentieth century Hartshorne

3) Hayden White, 1978, pp. 6, 73.
I was content to accept that any study of reality "must use concepts that represent actual deformations of the truth... approximate and arbitrary deformations of reality." Regions are not, he concluded, true or false, but only "purposeful and non-purposeful." I might say, it is obvious that New York was settled by New Englanders, simply by looking at the houses, churches, barns, place names and so forth. But this is hardly true. I looked at all these things when I was a boy, and the connection was not obvious to me. It did not become obvious until I was exposed to the interpretation. Then it was made obvious.

The effort to derive meaning from these categories prompted a turn to synecdoche, or a signification which "unifies the concept of the whole by attributing to it some essence found in the part." This took the form of interpretations of landscape symbolism such as those found in works such as Meinig's "Symbolic Landscapes," or Lewis' "Small Town in Pennsylvania." Duncan has made extensive use of the concept of synecdoche, and has identified numerous instances of the trope in the "text" of the landscape of pre-colonial Kandy, but he has not made the final turn of the tropological tetrad and begun to "ferret out" the synecdoches in the "landscape" of his text.

The final turn suggested by tropology is irony, a "stage of consciousness," in White's words, "in which the problematical nature of language itself has become recognized." Irony, he continues, "points to the potential foolishness of all linguistic representations of reality." Following White, Kellner has described irony as "the final awareness within the series of tropes that all of its processes have been relativising turns."

The anthropologist James Clifford has referred to irony as "belief skepticism," and his colleague Michael M.J. Fischer has defined it as "a self-conscious mode of writing, which reflects and models the recognition that all conceptualizations are limited, that what is socially maintained as truth is often poetically motivated." 1 Fischer's "poetical motivation" is, of course, the tropological urge of representational systems to make sense of themselves.

In laying this out, I do not mean to falsify any particular stage in this pyramid of concept formation, or to suggest that these concepts have evolved purely on the basis of an internal logic that has reconstituted the world to suit its own predictions (and predilections). To make the nominalistic claim that geographers write the world into existence is simply to reverse the inadequate positivistic notion that the world writes itself into geography, while the geographer serves as its faithful amanuensis. It seems clear that there has been some sort of reciprocity between reading the landscape (either immediately, or vicariously through historic texts), and writing geographies. These acts are mutually informing. Although this characterization is insufficiently precise, I am inclined to let it stand, at least for the moment: Theories of representation exist, but they are Procrustean when applied to a literature with a history of specific problems and solutions, and its own codes of representation. The text that follows is, in a sense, stuck between the tropes of synecdoche and irony, between an investigation of the meaning of a landscape and an investigation of its own role in the production of that meaning. Unable to budge the matter one way or the other, I have decided to make a virtue of this impasse, and to leave the text stuck, and as a consequence split

1: Situating the Narrative: Subtext and Context

...into the written interpretation of the landscape and my self-conscious reading of this writing. Thus, in what follows there are parallel discussions, the first a discussion of place making in the past landscape, the second a marginal gloss on place making in the present text.

Chapter 2
Overture to the European Settlement of
Western New York

To begin, there is the inescapable problem of an opening. It is necessary to find a plausible juncture, a point in time where previous events appear to have tapered to a close, and where the historical actor, having disposed of previous concerns, is posed in a relatively unencumbered state to undertake a new episode. It is necessary to identify what Kellner calls an “initiating event” from which the interesting “state of affairs” appears to flow. As the study of places, geography offers a solution to this problem. It simply assumes that the story begins when a people appears on the scene. In the primordial approach advocated by Sauer, the significant discontinuity occurred between uninhabited and inhabited landscapes, and thus he proposed that “the datum line from which change is measured is the natural condition of the landscape.” Sauer does, however, suggest beginnings other than the primordial. These might be called the ethnic, or the cultural, and they occur when imperial expansion and native dislocation bring a new, “functionally coherent way of life” to an area. This second discontinuity, seemingly based on the metaphor of geological overthrust, is made all the more striking in the case at hand since the European invaders were literate, and the testimony is abruptly shifted from archaeological artifacts to historical texts.

Western New York was invaded after the American Revolution when the Iroquois confederacy, abandoned by its British allies, collapsed.

Between 1779, when General Sullivan’s campaign of despoliation rocked the formerly solid structure of Iroquois society, and 1797, when the Treaty of Big Tree abrogated the last native claims to sovereignty, an extensive and relatively fertile tract was opened to agricultural colonization.

This opening establishes a beginning, defines a space and specifies an inaugural activity. Although the word “invasion” is inserted to recall the first book of Andrew Clark, and to suggest that I am withholding approval of this event, the metaphor of a military maneuver might serve insidiously to elevate the piecemeal migration to the level of epic. The period, the place and the process may easily be divided into smaller increments of time, space and social activity, and they may just as easily be compounded with larger temporal, spatial and social continuums, but modification of any of these boundaries would weaken the specificity and the coherence of the event that provides my opening note.

The colonists were preponderantly New Englanders, part of the great volkswanderung in which more than 800,000 persons left their eastern homeland between 1790 and 1820 and spread themselves across the Great Lakes basin. The movement had begun some decades earlier.


with migration into Maine and Vermont, but the persistence of high fertility rates and the prevalence of niggardly soils combined to assure the rapid exhaustion of available land in these districts. After 1790 the surplus of this burgeoning population exiled to western New York, their numbers augmented by individuals seeking to free themselves of the inflation, high taxes and stiff rents of their native states. In the complaint of Ann Grant, a patrician Yorker, this invasion was personified in "Obadiah or Zephaniah, from Hampshire or Connecticut, who came in without knocking; sat down without ceremony; then talked of buying land, and finally, began a discourse on politics." With its comment on the outlandish Puritan onomastics, its specification of their origins, its amusement at their indecorous egalitarianism, and its note on the factors that drew these people to New York and drove them from New England, this quote encapsulates the cultural, political and economic significance of this migration.

The impact of the migration on the society and landscape of western New York was immediately perceived. In 1810, the Yale divine Timothy Dwight was pleased to note that three fifths of the population of the state of New York were New Englanders. Ever alert for signs of social and religious degeneracy among his scattering compatriots, Dwight wrote with satisfaction that those he observed "retain extensively, and many of them absolutely their original character." And the change of cultural

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...
Colonization began largely to flow from Europe, New York City and Philadelphia. This infusion of capital served to make western New York a colony in another sense, since New Englanders did not participate in much of the large scale planning of the region and they were obliged to export much of the profit of their labor as mortgage payments. Europe, the Hudson Valley and Pennsylvania also contributed colonists, and these served in some measure to dilute and modify the character of the region.

Having made these admissions, the fact remains that it was largely New Englanders who accomplished what Zelinsky called the "first effective settlement" of the region, and this was "of crucial significance for the later social and cultural geography of the area." 

Here I have populated my region, not with many persons but with a people. Using metonymy, or the practice of referring to the contents by the name of the container, I have created an allegorical being, the culture region. This begins as a descriptive


2: Overture of the European Settlement of Western New York

category, what geographers have been trained to call a formal region, but in presenting Dwight's note on the alacrity of the non-New Englander's acculturation and by backing this up with Zelinsky's "doctrines," I have imparted causal power to this category. I have suggested that it not only describes, but that it also explains. Thus, a concept has become an actor, a promotion that lies at the heart of allegory.¹

Having created my beginning and having brought my allegorical actor into being, I feel some predictable anxieties. We suppose that time is continuous; to use a common and telling metaphor, we suppose that it flows like a river rather than bursts forth like a geyser. My solution is that common to historical narrators: I foreshadow the event with what Kellner calls "pre­echos."² These are a sort of rhetorical flashing with which I attempt to patch over the break of my beginning in an effort to suggest that there was in fact no break. I do this with two more allegories, the first of which describes the defeat of the Iroquois with the figure of a love triangle, and the second of which describes pre-invasion Anglo Saxons as outlaws. In so doing I am able to affirm the continuity of time by admitting that something came before my beginning, but in presenting that which came before in figures that are tragically unstable and doomed, I have at the same time naturalized my beginning and legitimated my break in time.

From Place to Space: the Initial Expropriation

In western New York there were two distinct phases of imperialism, distinctive both in their brands of encroachment and in their views of the place and its people. For the British it was the home of

imperial subjects, the Iroquois, who were, despite their periodic recalcitrance, members of an international society. For the Americans it was just wasted space. This is not to deny that the British assessed western New York in terms of the wealth that it could produce. It was for them a source region, and later a conduit, for furs which they wished to see assembled at Albany. But for the British the value of the place, whether as an economic hinterland or a military buffer state, could not be divorced from the aboriginal population. The American innovation was to conceive of, and ultimately to accomplish, productivity without these people; it was to envision, and ultimately to achieve, wealth directly from the land itself.

Iroquois insubordination long rankled colonial authorities. The necessity of "chastising [sic] the most obnoxious and ungrateful Nation the Senecas"¹ was an obsession with Cadwallader Colden, the colonial governor. Colden, who was the first student of the Iroquois, struggled to protect them from the chicaneries of private purchasers, and in 1751 penned what may have been the first tract calling "for treatment of the Indian as a man and as a brother," but his altruism was decidedly paternalistic.² While Colden endorsed a cultivated economic dependence, regulated "under the cover or protection of the fortified posts," this was mixed with a thirst for punishment. In his correspondence he repeatedly complained of the pride and pretension of the Six Nations, and

particularly of the haughty insolence of the Seneca. "No safe and lasting peace can be obtained with the Savages," he wrote, "til these Senekas [sic] at last be chastened and made an example of to other nations." Even when the Senecas acceded to assist the English in their war against the Delawares on the frontier of Pennsylvania in the spring of 1763, Colden was unsatisfied, wishing that "the Chenessiess [Seneca] had received a thorough chastisement."

"It is arcane, however, and memory of the connection did not, presumably, color Colden's usage. When I note the ancient relation I am attempting to elucidate Colden's term, so cast it in a new light, rather than to explicate its true historical meaning. This etymologising is an effort at what Tyler has called "evoking what can not be known discursively." It is meant to evoke a sense of metaphorical similitude between the Seneca and a willful mistress. This metaphor of the region as a woman, and of regional relations as figurative gender relations, remains potent to this day. The thorough naturalization and abiding versatility of the concept permits its retention through periods of radical historiographic revisionism. We now accept the proposal that this was not a virgin land. In describing the impact of Old World pathogens on Native New York Historical Society, Collections, vol 9, (New York: New York Historical Society, 1876), p. 272-4, 261, 356.


Americans, for example, Crosby estimates that the smallpox epidemic of 1640 reduced the Iroquois population by fifty percent.\(^1\) Thus the art historian Vincent Scully writes of the earlier historians of the New World "rewriting history to call it a virgin when it was in fact a widowed land." \(^2\) Geopolitical rivalry is often construed as a contest for a woman, hence the galaxy of metaphors from courting to spurning, to jealousy.

As Jennings illustrates, the Seneca's periodic inductability was due to the absence in their minds of any sense of hierarchy or mastery. "Instead of the chain being a part of the British Empire," he writes that the Seneca believed that "the colonies were a part of the chain." \(^3\) When British support was withdrawn after the American Revolution, these pretensions collapsed.

The transformation of the frontier, from a place "where peoples of different continental origins did business with one another," \(^4\) to a wilderness of wasted land came as a result of changes in the configuration of political power. \(^5\) When the English eliminated their


\(^4\) Jennings, p. 59.

\(^5\) Arthur M Schlesinger Jr. writes, "it is always inequality of power that is the primary condition and ultimate source of imperialism," and "the historic springs of American expansion were twofold: the disparity of power between the red and the white Americans and the determination of white Americans to protect national power against European rivals, first in North America and later in the seas beyond." The Cycles of American History, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), pp. 155, 142.
French rivals in 1763, they temporarily foiled the Iroquois' survival strategy of desultory allegiance. Thus, they obtained a monopoly over the Iroquois' trade and they became sole arbiters of their economic and technological dependence. In the period that followed, it may be useful to think of pre-revolutionary New York as containing two colonial peoples, each controlled for the British authorities by the other. The colonists and the imperfectly colonized Iroquois were both imperial subjects, but the hostility that they might have concerted and directed across the Atlantic was instead used to check one another. When this hostility became open aggression, the Iroquois were defeated with astonishing ease. This was because, without British aid, they did not or could not concentrate power.

"The League," as Wallace writes, "was not an organization for more efficient warfare." Their neolithic technology did not harness natural forces or rationalize geography for the purpose of military power. Their society, which remained consensual rather than coercive, did not focus political power onto an exalted center. Their economy, which discouraged accumulation, did not concentrate economic power in capital. As Lewis Henry Morgan observed in 1901, the absence of desire for personal gain was their "fatal deficiency." The Euro-Americans were, on the other hand, schooled and skilled in the intensification of power—natural, political and economic—and with this in hand their society was decidedly lethal to those that opposed it.

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This was made evident in 1779, when continental troops under the command of Major General John Sullivan attacked the Iroquois and devastated the agricultural economy of the Six Nations. Their strategy was simple vandalism. The soldiers spent most of their time and energy mutilating orchards, burning fields and villages, and destroying provisions. Their campaign was, in other words, an exercise in environmental destruction and "place annihilation."2

The Clinton-Sullivan campaign was only one episode in a prolonged effort on the part of various European peoples to exercise control over western New York, and to transform it from a place into a space. The high color of marauding and the climactic gore of the Senecas disemboweling the Continental Army scouts on the fringe of Little Beard's Town have, however, given it an undeserved prominence in the record. The slower process of "place clearing" began, albeit unintentionally, with the epidemics of the 1640's, and it was not completed until the signing of the Treaty of Big Tree in 1797. In Sack's definition, place clearing involves the substitution of a large, abstract space for a preexistent


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geography) demands that the preexistent geography be obliterated and effaced both materially and conceptually.2

Foresters on the Skirts of Society

As every pioneer knew, any delay between clearing and planting was an invitation to weeds, aggressive, hearty and opportunistic plants that were, in the eyes of the one who did the clearing, quite worthless. Humans with these same qualities of rapid dissemination, rugged endurance and exploitative cunning were, similarly, the first to inhabit the new space that had been opened. To the authorities who credited themselves with having done the clearing they were as unwelcome and worthless as weeds. Governor Clinton, for example, threatened that anyone who presumed to purchase land directly from the Iroquois would be "driven off and their buildings... destroyed, by calling out the military forces of the State."3

It is impossible to estimate the size, deployment or activities of this backwoods frontier. It existed precisely because it largely preceded anything so orderly, rational and bureaucratic as a census, property maps or deeds. The evidence is, therefore, anecdotal. Since the anecdotes were recorded by the scouts of the regulated society that would follow it is invariably uncomplimentary. In 1796, Isaac Weld described the

1) Sack, pp. 33, 127-38.
3) O. Turner, 1851, pp. 106-117.
population of western New York as "men of a morose and savage disposition... the very outcasts of society."1 Ebenezer 'Indian' Allan, the murderous bigamist Tory who resided on the Genesee without allegiance to England, America or Iroquios, was only the most notorious of the outcasts on this marchland of the European world.2 In 1804, Timothy Dwight described the inhabitants of the farthest fringe of settlement as "foresters," footloose, shiftless and vicious. As "these countries advanced toward order and stability," Dwight was confident that "the more restless, idle, roving inhabitants" would depart "for places where they can indulge their own idle and licentious dispositions."3 In 1805, at Beamus' Tavern on the road between Harford and Batavia, the Quaker, Robert Sutcliff, was astonished to encounter what he had "often heard of but seldom if ever seen, a professed atheist who openly advocated his opinions."4 He dismissed the dissident's motive as "a desire to gain celebrity, even through absurdity" but he did not ask himself if this very solecism might have provoked the ostracism that drove this man from within a community capable of regulating its member's opinions out onto the skirts of society.

This image of the skirts of society is important if we are to grasp the frontier as 'a geographical' rather than a 'historical' concept. As

2) James E. Seaver, De-He-Wa-Mis, or the Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison ... (Batavia: Wm. Seaver and Son, 1841), pp. 142-152.
3) Dwight, vol 1, p. 164; vol 3, p. 373; vol 4, p. 18.
Bernard Bailyn has pointed out, our view of the frontier is almost invariably anachronistic. We view it backward over a time line, and see it as the beginning of a period of progressive improvements in the material conditions of life. Viewed geographically, however, the frontier is at the end of a cultural realm and it stands at the bottom of a long decline in the material conditions of life. Thus it is that Bailyn writes of the frontier as "a periphery, a ragged outer margin of a central world, a regressive, backward-looking diminishment of metropolitan accomplishment" where civilization broke down into the primitive. It was populated by individuals who shared the sentiments, if not the personal rectitude, of Cooper's Natty Bumppo, a legendary forester who found it convenient to stay one step ahead of "the troubles and deviltries of the law."  

Having inserted these "pre-echos," I have unended the rupture of my beginning, or rather the beginning of the beginning, since the prologue that precedes the appearance of the village of Brockport will take many more pages. As a historian, Kellner is sensitive to the problem of ruptures in time, but he has not considered the geographer's anxiety with the creation of ruptures in space. Like time, we assume that space is continuous and that it is at no point empty. We are aware that many boundaries are vague, and that they accord with legal and political boundaries no more closely than the Victorian period accords with the actual

2) James Fenimore Cooper, Pioneers, p. 369.
Thus, before reducing the scope of my inquiry to its ultimate locale it becomes necessary to mend the rupture that its conceptual excision has caused in space. This is accomplished by sketching in a geographical context. As is usual when laying out such a context the narration is given from a metaphorical height, a "belvedere" perspective. The technique is said to have originated with Victor Hugo's "A Bird's Eye View of Paris," a chapter in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), and like much in the Romantic tradition the synoptic view makes height and distance a metaphor of synthesis. The metaphors of analysis have all to do with depth and closeness.

As Darby pointed out, there are narrative problems for the geographer who would narrate a panorama. All aspects of the geographical scene are simultaneously present, while the narrative is necessarily presented as a sequence. This shift from a two-dimensional subject to a one-dimensional representation is not necessarily more violent, however, than the shift from volume to surface that is effected by photography. And our knowledge of the patterns traced by a viewer's gaze as it roams across the surface of a painting casts doubt on the hypothesis of simultaneity. No, the real cause of the geographer's pause before undertaking the narration of a panorama is the inescapability of imputing the scene with a plot, as to use Harvey's words, "it amounts to the building of a theoretical apparatus." The line of the narrative becomes after all a journey with a beginning, a middle and an end.

1) Dickinson writes, "there is common agreement...that nature seldom presents a sharp boundary between two regions, and that frequently there is a belt of rather indefinite character or an area of more definite nature, but intermediate in type." Robert E. Dickinson, *Regional Concept: The Anglo American Leaders* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 149.
A Delimitation of Western New York

Standing in North Burke on the Quebec border and sighting south, it is over three hundred miles to Raritan Bay at the southern tip of Staten Island. A longitudinal transit of greater length can be run in no state east of Michigan. In itself the statistic is trivial, but it gains significance when it is placed beside another. Standing at the mouth of Irondequoit Bay near Rochester and sighting south it is barely eighty five miles to the Pennsylvania line. Western New York is a long, attenuated protrusion from the body of the state, an appendix, a panhandle better deserving the denomination than that of Texas. It is longer than the Texas panhandle, only half as wide, and, unlike the abstract geometries of the west, it was situated between proven political rivals. When New York State gained sovereignty over this land at the Hartford Convention of 1786 its tongue-like outline was more than an idiomorphic curiosity: it was an exposed political promontory. To the north lay the colony of a hostile empire, to the south a state with half again the population of New York. The confederation which bound New York to this southern neighbor was an untested and quite possibly ephemeral experiment in political and territorial amicability, and this uncertainty was not wholly removed by the ratification of the Constitution in 1790. Pennsylvania announced its faith in the durability of American accord when it purchased the Erie Triangle, a guaranteed corridor to the Great Lakes, in 1788.
Western New York's peninsular quality is reinforced by bold physical demarcations. To the north and west it is framed by great lakes, inland seas gouged by the glaciers from the soft sandstone and shale of the ancient St. Lawrence River Valley. To the south it is bounded by the sparsely populated Allegheny Plateau. This last boundary is easily overlooked, particularly today when airplanes and improved roads have exaggerated the propinquity of places like Rochester and Pittsburgh, and yet it was on this very flight that the physical isolation of western New York was most forcefully impressed upon me. Barely forty miles out of Rochester the area given over to forests is perceptibly enlarged. To the north the woodlots are little square islands in a sea of farmland, whereas here they are linked by long sinuous arms that course along the ridge lines. Twenty miles farther south the forest begins its encroachment on the valleys. By the Pennsylvania line it is the fields that are little square islands in an endless sea of woods. When the hills of northern Pennsylvania were peopled, it was by a population engaged in primary economies such as lumber (1830's and 1840's), coal, iron (1840's) and oil (1870's and 1880's). Many of the laborers in the last boom were Swedish. Although it does not precisely conform to the state line, this difference in economy and ethnicity only serves to accentuate the southern boundary.

An eastern boundary is not immediately discernible. East of Cayuga Lake the hills steepen, and the longitudinal orientation of the intervening valleys seems arranged to divert westward movement to the

Fig. 2.1 This outline is taken from Samuel Lewis' map, *The State of New York from the best Authorities* (1795). The elongation of the appended territory is exaggerated on this map. This inaccuracy was, presumably, reflected in the minds of the state authorities, and it must have heightened their concern for the long-term security of their new possession.
north or south, but as a barrier these hills were less formidable than the Pennsylvania mountains, and, what may be more to the point, they were not so easily avoided. Thus, unlike the Pennsylvania mountains, they are today covered with vestiges of a population that was once numerous and, in instances, prosperous.

Defining regions is a metonymical operation of consciousness. As Burke puts it, "the basic 'strategy' in metonymy is... to convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible." As a concept, western New York has been employed to convey several incorporeal states. In the early nineteenth century western New York was variously perceived as a land of opportunity and as a population with distinct economic and political interests. The need to modify the property requirements that encumbered male suffrage was, for example, particularly salient to the large population of heavily indebted farmers in the west. This population was also given a high degree of political unity by their shared interest in improved transportation. Today, the economic and political interests of the region have been largely absorbed into different geographical configurations such as "upstate" New York or the "rust belt." Western New York does survive as a perceptual region, with certain vistas, for the most part rural, taken as emblematic. It also displays a degree of functional coherence, with networks of identity, patronage and marketing that stem from its athletic teams, educational facilities, media organisations and marketing centers. The historical circumstances that gave it its original coherence have, however, entirely vanished. My difficulty in establishing an eastern boundary is due to the absence of a convenient political, ethnic or physical divide. This has made the

1) "Burke, p. 506."
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What that I finally suggest more uncertain, more arbitrary, and more clearly pliant to anachronistic impressions. As meronymy, my concept of the region is, thus, a promiscuous container. It readily houses the yield of several epistemologies. If, of the four boundaries, the eastern appears initially as the least satisfactory, it appears ultimately as the most satisfactory representation of regional delimitation. Its shifting uncertainty is a metonymy of the shifting uncertainty of its conceptual counterpart.

Not one of these boundaries was impregnable. The hills and mountains were pervious, permitting access to western New York through five major gates and proving in no place absolutely insurmountable. When the odium of insecurity was lifted from the lakes they quickened with vessels of commerce, and thriving ports were founded on their shores. Before turning to the discussion of these routes and the towns that arose at their junctions it is, however, necessary to furnish this frame with the body, with the varied topography that so firmly guided its later development.

An Anatomy of Western New York

Within these boundaries it is possible to discern three divisions: the high uplands, the low uplands and the lake plain. Dissimilarities of topography, climate and soil are sufficient to propose the existence of boundaries, if not their precise delineations, and these dissimilarities are amplified by variability in the use of these lands by the Iroquois and by differences in their situations relative to other movements and peoples. These latitudinal divisions cut across the longitudinal bands formed by
the great land purchases, but over the long run I believe that the differences between these provinces did more to shape the human geography of western New York than did the differences between the New Military Tract, the Phelps and Gorham Purchase (later the Pultney Purchase), the Morris Reserve and the Holland Land Purchase.

The high uplands of western New York

The Appalachian uplands generally descend from the southern border to the lake shore. The highest elevations are found near the southwest corner of the state, where the Cattaraugus and Alleghany Hills exceed two thousand feet. The severity of the local relief in the latter of these is in part due to the absence of glacial sculpting, but it is enhanced by the down-cutting of the large streams. The constant ample flow of these streams is ensured by the steady and copious orographic precipitation that is wrung from the winds that have passed over Lake Erie. These same winds littered the eastern shore of Lake Erie with dead fish and water weeds, and their redolent putrefaction suggested to the Indians the name of Cattaraugus, or "stinking beach," a name which now designates the largest of these streams. The hills are drenched with twelve more inches of rain than the adjacent lands in western New York, and their discharge is enlarged by the lower evaporation rates occasioned by cooler temperatures and cloudier summers.  

In some years the growing season on these hills is two months shorter than that on the lake plain to the north. While this permitted the white pine forests that provided the region's first resource, it hampered agriculture and discouraged settlement. When settlers spread south from the vicinity of Batavia, for example, they found that the upper valleys of Oatka and Tonawanda Creeks were subject to early frosts. This problem was certainly exacerbated by cold air drainage from the surrounding hills, and it provided an effective limit to fruit and wheat cultivation. Agriculture was also handicapped by poor, acidic soils since this area lay too far south of the northern limestone escarpments to have benefitted from the glacial redistribution of lime. As a consequence, Spafford wrote in 1813, "the soil seems better adapted for grass than grain," and many farmers took to breeding Merino sheep. If the questionable statistic cited by Spafford is allowed, Allegany County's per capita production of woolen cloth was the highest in the western counties.

The uplands that lie to the north and to the east of these hills are lower. The inferior summits and smoother contours of this region are the result of powerful glacial abrasion, a deviation made all the more effective by the great weight of the ice that was channeled between the adjacent heights into an antecedent depression. As the ice sheet was pressed up the flanks of these low hills it gathered in the longitudinal stream valleys.

3) Spafford, p. 65.
Fig. 2.2 The physiography of western New York may be divided into three bands, the lake plain, the low uplands, and the high uplands (marked H). The low uplands enjoyed a longer growing season than the high uplands and better drainage than the lake plain. In addition, the low uplands benefitted from lime that was spread south from the escarpments that run along their northern border. This map is adapted from Vincent Throop, "Physiographic Diagram of New York," 1935.
and gouged these into deep troughs. The lateral feeders were not so incisively altered. When the ice receded approximately ten thousand years ago the streams were unable to escape through their former southern outlets as these were blocked by glacial debris. Thus, when the exaggerated valleys had filled with the runoff of their tributaries, which now split over waterfalls from hanging valleys, they overflowed at their northern ends through streams that eventually united in the Seneca River. There are eleven of these Finger Lakes, the largest of them, Seneca Lake, forty miles long.

The low uplands

Each of these lakes has its head braced between the precipitous slopes of high hills. In all but a few cases their feet are in a country of a wholly different character. Here the slopes climb much more gently from the shore. They do not rear up, but rather roll away in undulations that dot and dimple the larger waves of a more fundamental topography. The undulations are glacial drift, boulder clay, unsorted fragments of Canadian granite, the excavated tip of Lake Ontario, and shards of limestone plucked from the obstinate brows of the Niagara and Onondaga escarpments. The larger swells are the edge of the Alleghany Plateau, chamfered and subdued by the glaciers to their final, flush meeting with the low lake plain.

This gentle relief and porous soil combined to facilitate good drainage in the region between the escarpments and the higher hills, and the limestone enriched soil was more productive than that of the
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lands to the north and south. The superiority of this land near the feet of the Finger Lakes was recognized by the Iroquois, and it was the site of the principal nuclei of the Seneca and the Cayuga tribes. The Iroquois practiced extensive burning in this vicinity and they opened large prairies across the band of the low uplands. This opening added to the distinctive appearance of the region, and it enhanced the region's already considerable agricultural advantages.

The land between Geneva and the Genesee River, was to a considerable extent open grassland when Sullivan's army made its raid in 1779, and trees were in many places confined to small groves of a few acres. In 1799 the town of Bloomfield west of Canandaigua contained only a handful of settlers, but they were surrounded by prairies "of two and three hundred acres, free from all timber and even bushes." Passing through the same town six years later, Timothy Biglow noted that this antecedent clearing had eliminated the need for the violent disfiguration of cutting, grubbing and burning, and the country had as a consequence quickly assumed "the appearance of an older settlement." By 1810 Bloomfield was the most populous town in Ontario County.

From its headwaters in Pennsylvania, the Genesee River cuts north through the center of western New York. Just before it emerges from the high uplands, and just prior to its termination in Lake Ontario, glacial

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1) Cook, p. 48; McNall, p. 17.
4) Spafford, p. 135.
disruption of its channel forced the river to carve out spectacular ravines, but between these stretches it occupies a broad alluvial valley. The alluvium attracted the Seneca, who built several villages in the valley, and the valley was extensively burned over. Advancing on Little Beards Town, the mounted officers of the Sullivan expedition could see nothing but the tips of the shouldered guns as their soldiers advanced through the tall grass. These open Genesee flats were said to cover eighty square miles, "ten thousand acres not even encumbered with a bush." Passing through the valley, Francis Wright wrote, "we often paused to admire the giant trees, scattered tastefully here and there by the hand of nature." Prairies were also found west of the river. The open landscape won the approval of one traveler, to whom it "resembled more than anything we had seen an English park." Another large prairie extended west from the present site of Batavia. Originally styled Big Plains, this is today remembered by the town of Oakfield at the headwaters of Oak Orchard Creek.

The low uplands of western New York enjoyed the region's richest natural endowments. Although Timothy Dwight grumbled that, "an extensive sameness spread over it," he admitted that it was a land to delight the eye of the traveler and the farmer as it presented few...

2) Printed in the Lyons Republican, 11/16/1821.
4) O'Callaghan (ed.), vol 4, p. 1165; Bigelow, p. 50; Sutcliff, pp. 9-10.
impediments to the passage of the former or the plow of the latter. "The phrase beautiful country, as used here," he wrote "means appropriately and almost only lands suited to the purpose of husbandry." To a very large degree this practical beauty was due to a cultural landscape appropriated from a people whose organic economy was not vastly dissimilar to that of the euro-Americans. When New Englanders and Pennsylvanians began to farm the Genesee Country they clustered in this same band of land, and their principal armature, the Genesee and Niagara Road, linked villages that stood in or near prairies that the Iroquois had created.

The Lake Plain

A plain runs along the base of Lake Ontario below the Niagara Escarpment, and a similar feature curves around the eastern end of Lake Erie. In its eastern section this plain is dimpled with drumlins, but it is for the most part very nearly level. Most of this plain is exposed lake bottom, which emerged as the lake receded and the land rebounded from the burden of the glacier's weight. North of the escarpment the soils are naturally less fertile than those farther south, their relative infertility

1 Dwight, vol 4, pp. 19-20.
due to their failure to receive the benefit of the pulverized limestone that the glaciers spread southward from this ridge.  

In the summer the lake plain receives more sun than the southern uplands, and its growing season may be one or even two months longer than that in the highest hills, but due to its low elevation the region is surprisingly dry, with only thirty-two inches of precipitation annually. This is no more than is received by eastern Kansas or Central Texas, and the region is spared closer resemblance to these places only by its mantle of winter clouds. Unlike the Cattaraugus Hills, where up to half of the more abundant rain is channeled away through the streams, the lake plain loses only a quarter of its rain through surface drainage. This accounts for the desultory performance of the streams, many of which disappeared in the summers prior to their flow being supplemented from the Barge Canal. One traveler on the Ridge Road in late August, 1822, reported that there was in Sandy Creek "no water as its appellation signifies." As we shall see, the paucity of these streams hampered early milling and presented the Erie Canal engineers with a hydrometric problem.

This is surprising, in part because it rains so often here. As one nineteenth-century Rochester climatologist put it, the frequency of small-

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1) De Laubenfels, p. 106.
2) McNall, p. 4.

2) O'Callaghan (ed.), vol. 4, p. 1172.

3) Joseph Pickering, 1825, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 33.

ruts and hoof prints in which stagnant water could accumulate. In the uplands of the Genesee Country attention to drainage had reduced the incidence of these diseases between 1801 and 1816, and optimists reported that in the first of these years only one in two hundred died of bilious fever, a malady they attributed to “clearing away the woods from the moist and swampy ground.” Always a bit brighter than the rest, Timothy Dwight explained that the “miasmata” was exacerbated by the frontier staples of overwork, ramshackle dwellings, wretched food, and purifying millponds.

The poorly drained lake plain provided the mosquitoes with an ideal habitat, however, and here eradication was retarded until at least 1828. Well into the thirties mosquitoes impressed visitors with their size, numbers and voracity. Along the canal, they swarmed so thickly that on even the most sultry evenings it was necessary to build “huge fires of pine” before the doors of dwellings “so that the thick smoke might penetrate the dwelling, and scour the infernal mosquitoes [sic] out of it.” The population that was scattered between Black and Sandy Creeks was


3) Tyrone Power, 1836, in Mau, p. 343. These efforts to exclude the pest were handicapped by the practice of unchinking the logs of cabins in summer to admit a breath of air. Frances Wright, 1819, in Mau, p. 228.
stricken with malaria in 1819, and with yellow fever in 1821. The second
scourge was, in the memory of one resident, "the greatest amount of
sickness that I knew in any locality in the Genesee Country." When two
aspiring millers dammed Sandy Creek at the Ridge, flooding twenty acres
of timbered land, a quarter of their neighbors promptly died, presumably
of malaria. At one point, three quarters of the population along the
Braddock Bay road were afflicted with bilious interments, and throughout
the period of settlement, one Clarkson resident recalled, "it was a common
thing to bring whole families out of the woods on ox sleds." The
pestilence abated when the development of the Rochester mills caused
many local mill ponds to be drained, but perhaps what really made the
lake plain habitable was the introduction of quinine after 1823. Despite
this, malaria remained endemic to the population, recurring until at least
1859.

In addition to the natural peculiarities of its site, the lake plain is
made distinguishable by the singularity of its geopolitical situation. The
belt of land that borders the lake's southern shore was an ancient
frontier. It stood between the upland villages and prairies of the Iroquois
and the hunting ground of the Hurons and Algonquins to the north of the
lake. Although the Iroquois controlled the territory and established some

1) Frances Wright, 1819, and Joseph Sibley in Mau, p. 232, 173.
2) O. Turner, 1851, pp. 535-538, 561.
3) Hedrick, p. 195. A notice of a general outbreak of malaria is found in
the B.R. 3:38, 6/30/59. The Brockport lawyer, Daniel Holmes, who died
in 1919, was incapacitated by the symptoms of malaria for a few days
each week. A bench was placed in front of the Baptist Church in the
city so he might rest on his daily walk to the office. B.R.
11/20/1952.
villages in it, their presence was weak and their imprint was faint. 1

Etienne Brûlé landed on the lake shore somewhere between the Niagara and Genesee Rivers in the autumn of 1615, and recorded our first written description. It is brief but unequivocal. The lake plain was, he said, an unkempt tangle of "wood and brush, marshy bogs, frightful and unfrequented places and wastes." 2 And this was after passing through Canada! After the holocaust of the 1630's and 40's, when smallpox and the Beaver Wars reduced the native population by as much as fifty percent, the Iroquois attempted to push their frontier to the north shore of lake, but their colonies were withdrawn by 1680. 3 After this the lake plain seems to have reverted to its former status as a hostile frontier. It was on the southern boundary of the lake plain that the Jesuits established their short-lived mission at Onondaga (1656 to 1658) and, after the collapse of this shaky amicability, it was on this same boundary that Denonville (1687) and Frontenac (1696) made their attacks. 4

1) In what would become western Monroe County, artifacts of Indian occupation are scarce. Three paths crossed the Genesee at the ridge, two diverge southwest across the present town of Sweden. Five camps were situated on the streams; but, to our knowledge, there were no towns, no fields and no openings. Harrison C. Follett, "Map of Monroe County, New York. Exhibiting Known Aboriginal Camp Sites and Trails." Presented to the Rochester Historical Society, 1981. A negative photostat is in the collection of the Rundel Library Local History Room, BV1.


Insecurity reappeared on the lake plain after the American War of Independence. The contestability of the zone was demonstrated by the British retention of the forts at Niagara and Oswego, and even after the posts were transferred to the Americans in 1796 many assessed the situation as imprudently exposed. In 1801 Charles Williamson reported that the region west of the Genesee below Hartford (now Avon) had "escaped the general improvements" as "the idea of exposure to Indian depredations on a frontier is always sufficient to prevent the man of industry and property from settling."\(^1\) This circumspection was vindicated during the war of 1812 when the small coastal settlements were subjected to sacking and naval bombardment.\(^2\)

The peripheral situation of the Lake Ontario plain is remembered in the name of the river, the Genesee, which now designates the entire stream from headwaters to mouth. It was the practice of the Iroquois to name sections of the river in accord with their character, and thus Genesee, which means beautiful or shining valley, was the Seneca name only for the central section. The lower river was Casconchaton, or river with the falls upon it, and it was as such that it was introduced to the French who came from the north.\(^3\) Had development been initiated from

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1) O'Callaghan (ed.), vol. 4, p. 1141.
the northern part, it is probable that this name would today designate the whole stream.

Circulation Systems in Western New York

As was mentioned above, the physical boundaries of western New York are perforated by five major gates. The first of these is the old glacial spillway leading to the Mohawk River Valley. The second is the valley of the Susquehanna River. The third is the valley of the Allegheny River. The fourth is the western extension of the lake plain that runs through Pennsylvania's Erie Strip into northern Ohio. The fifth is the eastern extension of the lake plain, which wraps around the Tug Hill Plateau and the Adirondack uplands to join Vermont through the valley of the St. Lawrence River. With the pacification of the lakes these last portals were enlarged to include the waters of the lakes themselves. Each of these portals provided access to, and from, a different region, and each produced a pivotal city with appended routes and places. The early circulation system of western New York was the result of efforts to link these routes and places into a unified transportation network.

The earliest, and ultimately the most important, of these routes was the Genesee Road, which stretched west from the Mohawk River gap at Utica. This first terminated at Canandaigua, but once the Treaty of Big Tree had extinguished Iroquois claims to the land west of the Genesee River it was extended to Ohio through the western portal of the lake plain. The second route stretched north from Williamsport, Pennsylvania.
climbing to the divide between Lycoming Creek and the Tioga River and continuing to Painted Post on the Chemung River. In 1804 the New York and Erie Road was built from Painted Post through Hornell, Wellsville and Belvidere to Olean (formerly Hamilton and Joshua's Town) on the banks of the Allegheny River. This was the third portal, with relatively easy downstream transportation to Pittsburgh and the Ohio Valley.

In 1792 the road west of Utica was "little better than an Indian path," but agitation by western developers and settlers persuaded the state to survey and improve the road in 1797. Specifically, the crews were charged with making the road passable for wagons and sleighs. They broadened the road, filled or corduroyed its mires, threw up bridges, and arranged a ferry at the mouth of Cayuga Lake to bring wagons around the Montezuma marshes with comparative safety and ease.

These improvements, and the maintenance later provided by the Seneca Turnpike Company, which gained control of the thoroughfare in 1800, expedited the conveyance of persons and goods. Although countless migrants to western New York and Ohio passed over this road, it was the relative efficiency with which their products could be conveyed in the opposite direction that explains why the artery soon promised to become "one continued settlement from Fort Schuyler to the Genesee River." Standing beside the Cayuga Bridge in the fall of 1805, Sutcliff wrote that in a single day 1,500 sleighs had passed, each of them loaded with produce, and all bound for eastern markets.

2) Sutcliff, p. 6.
Fig. 2.3 Early circulation systems in western New York. This outline is taken from Samuel Lewis' map, *The State of New York from the best Authorities* (1795).
West of the Genesee River the road evolved in a similar fashion. As with the eastern section, a trail of the Iroquois had been adopted by cattle drovers driving their stock to the British garrison at Niagara. In 1795 a mounted rider found it "tolerably good, upon the whole, but in some places very miry."¹ A short section of this road crossed land ceded by the Iroquois in 1792, and the state once again sponsored a survey and improvements as far as the the Scots settlement at Caledonia in 1798.² The energy of the state, and the precise limits of its jurisdiction were clearly inscribed on the landscape. As a traveler in 1798 described it, from the Genesee River to Ganson's, a tavern erected on the boundary with the territory that remained in the hands of the Seneca, the road was "thirty two feet wide" and "cut in a straight line;" but from Ganson's to the west he wrote, "for twenty one miles I went through the woods often so dense that the foliage completely overshadowed the earth and I could sometimes scarcely distinguish the way. In many places the road is detestable, so full of mud that you sink to the horse's girth."³

All of this land west of the river was purchased by Robert Morris in 1797, and most of it was immediately resold to the Holland Land Company. Their agent, Joseph Ellicott, began to plat Batavia in 1801. This was meant to serve as the gateway to the Holland Land Purchase, and it stood at the point where the old trail forked, its northern tangent angling up to Fort Niagara, and its southern tangent, the Buffalo Road.

¹) Duke De La Rouchefoucault, Liencourt, 1795, in Mau., p. 87.
heading west to the lake shore where it turned south, as the Erie Road, for Ohio. Ellicott fully recognized that "sustained growth could be assured only by integrating the frontier economy with the trading routes and commercial markets of the outside world," and he devoted considerable energy to the planning and construction of market roads, but his desires were only slowly realized.

The second principal entry point to western New York was the Susquehanna River Valley. The Chemung River and its tributaries flow east near the southern boundary of western New York. After joining the Susquehanna at Sayre, Pennsylvania, these waters veer eastward in a large bow which returns to its original longitude near Northumberland, the point of its union with the Susquehanna's western branch. The distance added by this deviation was inconsiderable for those who began to float goods downstream to Baltimore after 1800, but it added enormously to the hardship of those who labored in the opposite direction. Anticipating this, the agent for Sir William Pultney, Charles Williamson, directed the construction of a road from Williamsport through Painted Post to the new town of Williamsburg, at the junction of Canaseraga Creek and the Genesee River, in 1792.

The migrations that followed this road introduced new peoples to western New York and to some degree diluted the New Englanders, who

1) Wyckoff, p. 81.
2) Wyckoff, pp. 50-51. On the road's actual condition, see Dwight, vol. 4, p. 35; Biglow, p. 43.
had settled along the Genesee Road, between Geneva and Canandaigua only four years earlier. Germans were settled around Williamsburg, but Williamson's mismanagement and the New Englander's hostility combined to drive most of them to Upper Canada. Scots also came over the southern road, and these were settled far to the north in Caledonia (formerly Big Springs) directly on the road from New England. Finally, after Williamson penned his promotional tract in 1799, southern gentlemen came north over the southern road. Their arrival "filled Agent Williamson with pleasure," as it augured well for his design of settling the Genesee Country with large, tenanted estates, but for "the New England backbone of population." Cowan writes, their behavior was a source of "amazement and sometimes disapproval." In addition to luxuriant furnishings, ready capital and bold plans, these Southerners brought black slaves and servants.

It is the confluence of these peoples with the stream New Englanders that prompted Zelinsky to describe western New York as "the first major intra-American blending and fusion of regional cultures" and as a "subsidiary cultural hearth" fuscnd with religious and social ideas. Meinig has reiterated this theme, stressing the importance of migration from Pennsylvania which served to dilute and modify the New England imprint, and to initiate "an important national, Americanizing process." As Frederick Jackson Turner put it, "a change had come over

1) Cowan, p. 229.
the wanderers to those new regions, and a modified society and 
psychology had been developed in the 'New York Yankee,' which made 
him a distinct variety—less Puritan, more adaptable, and more tolerant of 
other types than the Yankee who remained in the land of his birth."\(^1\)

On its surface the foregoing section is a description, but it 
contains a fair amount of explanation. In places this is explicit, in 
others implicit, since a description of the environment is always 
implicitly explanatory. (This is not to say that the explanations are 
strictly speaking environmental, since I have in numerous places 
introduced human factors.) In the course of introducing his own 
more magisterial geographical overview, Braudei writes, 
"Geography in this context is no longer an end in itself, but a 
means to an end. It helps us to see things in the perspective of the 
very long term. It helps us to discover the almost imperceptible 
movement of history."\(^2\)

In order to accomplish this explanation, and to intimate 
these long-term movements, it was necessary to commit a great deal 
of anachronism. First-hand accounts (penned for heterogeneous 
reasons) are included for their verisimilitude and because, with a 
relaxation of chronological discipline, they permit me to get ahead 
of the story and show the significance of these geographical 
patterns by foreshadowing future developments. More strikingly 
anachronistic are the fragments of twentieth-century science and 
scholarship, and the overall structure, which is based on

1) Frederick Jackson Turner, The United States, 1830-1850: The Nation and 
its Sections. (New York: Henry Holt, 1935; reprint ed., Gloucester, Ma.: 
2) Fernand Braudei, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in 
hindsight.\footnote{Lowenthal, 1985, pp. 217-219.} Glaciation, for example, is a fact that would not be produced until 1840, and the full benefit of the soils in the northern part of the region was not realized until (and then it was strongly exaggerated by) the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825.

What this suggests, then, is that knowledge of past places is both more and less than a mimesis of the place as it was. The numerous omissions and emendations combine, as Lowenthal writes, to create an image that is "more coherent than the past was when it happened."\footnote{Lowenthal, 1985, pp. 234} This creates a dilemma, since to know and explain what "really happened" is to know and explain both more and less than what "really happened." This mimesis, then, is not of western New York at the opening of the nineteenth century, but of the knowledge that temporarily surrounds that subject at the end of the twentieth century. Seen in this light the past place would seem to be an allegorical figure through which I have, pursuing a course of metonymy, embodied that knowledge.
Chapter 3
Pioneering the Triangular Tract

Pioneering was by its very nature brief and barely documented. Its single, urgent object was to attain a sustainable hold on the land, and this required a rapid succession of built landscapes and economies. The efficiencies of construction that made a lean-to sheathed in elm bark advantageous in the first season became disadvantageous in the second. Maintenance as the frail structure fell to ruin in the second. Hunting, which was easier than husbandry while the population remained sparse, became a time consuming undertaking of uncertain rewards once fields had begun to reduce and partition the wild habitat. These changes were effected by steady, exhausting labor, and thus the leisure, and perhaps the skills, that would have been necessary to document the pioneer's activities were largely absent. As a consequence our narrative accounts are largely the work of two types of outsider, the traveler writing for a foreign audience and the old man writing his memoirs and recollections for a future audience. These answer, but only in part - and then with notable distortions - our questions as to how a sustainable hold was gained on this land.

The reader may question how I gained my hold on a valid impression of this gaining of a hold on the land. The footnotes provide an answer, but only in part - and then with notable distortions. Huie has categorized footnotes with other "paratextual conventions" of historical writing such as...

quotations and antique illustrations. In her opinion this archival material is inserted to fulfill a "documentary function," to naturalize a text that is otherwise fictive.1 Her argument should be inverted, since the clearest distortion effected by the footnote is its naturalization of the fiction of the document. This naturalization is immediately evident in the placement of citations, which are set beneath or behind the written page just as "reality" is supposed to exist beneath or behind appearance.2 This is exposed as fiction when we realize that the transformation of meaning into writing is simply a condition of becoming a document while the cause of any particular piece of writing becoming a document is to be found in its being regarded as such by some later reading.

Writing fulfills the condition of becoming a document because it extends the range of communication through materialization. In every instance the object of writing something down is to defer, postpone and forestall the moment of its ultimate comprehension. It follows that reading is deferred comprehension. This deferral permits conveyance of the written material over distance. Thus, because it may be postponed, the moment of comprehension may also be removed. Comprehension can occur both after and away from the historical and geographical point of expression. Thus, as Stock puts it, "the speaker, in authoring a text in a written form, gives birth to an autonomous vehicle of exchange."3 The traveler's accounts and memoirs that I have mentioned are examples of such autonomous vehicles. In short, meanings are written down so they can be "taken" (or apprehended) outside of the historical and geographical context in which they were created. Unlike

immediate verbal communication, every written document is "taken" (or apprehended) out of context.

Although writing opens up the possibility of mobility for verbal meaning, the spatial and temporal range of this vehicle is nevertheless constrained by boundaries. Outstanding among these are linguistic boundaries, both historical and geographical, and boundaries of censorship, which are obviously geographical, and which have a historical aspect in bowdlerization and suppression. No less important are boundaries of indifference and neglect. Again, these have a historic and geographic aspect. Texts of local interest have a limited range of dissemination; texts of timely interest have a limited range of duration.

This suggests that whereas a speech act is a point in time-space, written material is bounded in time-space by something like a shell. Writing gives meaning the possibility of historical duration and geographical dimension. The size of this shell can vary widely, from the stupendous shell of something like The Book of Genesis to the infinitesimal (and now terminated) shell of the post-it note on the wall before me. While the text is an "autonomous vehicle," as with automobiles this autonomy does not extend to a determination of the size of the shell within which it can operate. Barring those texts that are inscribed in stone or platinum, the textual Land Rovers that move onward in time or outward in space (witness Voyager II) with a minimum of assistance, the size of the time-space shell of a text is determined by external factors.

One important aspect of the time-space shell of a text is the increasing cost over time of keeping the shell open. As we move away from the transmission source, more and more social energy must be channeled into the receivers. For example, the texts of dead languages are recovered through the investment of social labor that is embodied in the preservationist, the archivist, the translator and the scholar, the last of whom provides an interpretive preface and annotations that grow increasingly
laborious and complex over time. The situation is analogous to driving away from a radio station and periodically amplifying the energy allocated to the receiver in order to maintain a level of intelligibility which is, in any case, deteriorating.

I have gained a hold on a valid impression of my subject through readings - deferred, dislocated and somewhat laborious comprehensions of meanings in the process of physical and semantic decay. I did not read documents, I read certain pieces of mouldering paper as documents. The mouldering sheets were a necessary condition of these readings, but the cause of these readings was the composition of this dissertation. Thus, since the writing of this dissertation caused the form of reading that makes old manuscripts into documents, it is possible to conclude that this dissertation is the source of its footnotes rather than vice versa.

These deficiencies of the record may be in part overcome by examining changes in the landscape. It is an axiom of landscape interpretation that the appearance of an ordinary landscape contains clues to cultural values and indicators of cultural change. The division, allocation and valuation of space likewise registers and reinforces the social order and hierarchy. Similar and related divisions, allocations and valuations are observable in temporal rhythms, with diurnal, hebdomadal, menstrual and annual cycles containing in their shifting patterns clues to changes in the culture that observes them. In order to identify and assess these diagnostic features it is necessary to observe our subject in greater detail. To accomplish this we will limit our attention to

1) Lewis, 1979, p. 15.
the Triangular Tract, a rather ordinary parcel left by the fragmentation of the Morris Reserve. This fragmentation, and the further fragmentation into individual farms, were direct, if in some ways different, results of the redefinition of this land as a commodity. The most simple and profound cultural fact of this landscape being, after all, its definition as infinitely divisible private property that could be transferred and converted into other forms of value.¹

Having completed the synopsis of the second chapter it is necessary to wheel down from the high vantage and begin to close on the ultimate subject. The figurative descent of this homing is registered in the increased precision and specificity of the language; in the abandonment of overt allegories and broad generalizations; in the strategic use of tedium, which intimates exhaustiveness by being simply exhausting. As the rhetoric of the text is tightened, its scope is constricted, and thus both form and content reinforce the sense of moving closer to the subject. This magnification suggests a growing degree of intimacy even if the details that it reveals are simply minute rather than, strictly speaking, intimate. Thus, homing in on the subject has the sophistical advantage of blurring the difference between close scrutiny and deep understanding. However, it raises at least one problem. The visual metaphor of a zooming camera lens requires a stationary subject, in this case a piece of land. The advantages

of zooming-in are to some degree offset by the cost of being forced to write a sort of sequent occupancy study.

In seventeenth century New England, the individual’s access to the resource of land was determined by the town, which also served as the guarantor of that land’s productivity through road construction, fencing regulations, the provision of supplemental pasture land, the recruitment and subsidy of millers, tanners and blacksmiths, and the elimination of pests. The individual was granted these rights in exchange for his assumption of moral and financial responsibilities to the ecclesiastic and civil authorities of the town. This method of resource allocation rested on the assumption that it was only when organized into towns that persons were entitled to take up land. Although never clear of doubt, this presumption was finally exploded by the land grants of Charles II, which demonstrated that the towns' claims to priority in the acquisition of New England lands was a defeasible privilege. Augmenting this external assault, the cohesive town was corroded from within, once convenient markets had arisen in the Caribbean plantations and the Canadian garrisons and individual ambition had been quickened by the lure of commercial agriculture.¹

A century later in western New York, land was purchased from proprietors rather than granted by towns; and capital or credit, rather than the assumption of social responsibilities, was the price of admission to the material world. This did not, of course, remove the issue of

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responsibility; it only quantified the matter by converting it into a cash exchange. It also simplified the concept of property in the basis proposition of the simple ownership.\(^1\) The experience with which land could be transferred using this simplified system of land distribution made it an indispensable tool in the vigorous and aggressive expansion of the European agriculturalists into the interior of the continent.

In taking up a contract on a parcel of land, the settler entered his family in a complex web of environmental, geographic and economic relations. The essential economic relationship was indebtedness, a condition that Adam Hodgson found shrewdly universal in the Kenaston Country of 1830.\(^2\) When he traveled down the Hodge Road in 1831, John Hirtle was astonished to learn that in six or eight farims in a season were insolvent though the aspect of their lands rendered the thing at first view almost incredible.\(^3\) He attributed their embarrassment to their own improvidence, idleness and extravagance, indications founded on their overestimation of the speed and facility with which they could reap exaggerated profits.\(^4\)

The conversion of all property into a commodity is important, but we should also consider the effects of the commodity; the conversion of all debts into money. This made access to money imperative, and it expresses the vigor with which proprietors and their tenants endeavored to establish viable links in the commercial economy of the coast. Also,

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2) Adam Hodgson, 1830, in Handy an McKelvey, p. 20.
responsibility; it only quantified the matter by converting it into a cash exchange. It also simplified the concept of property to the bare proposition of free simple ownership. The expedience with which land could be transferred using this simplified system of land distribution made it an indispensable tool in the vigorous and aggressive expansion of the European agriculturalists into the interior of the continent.

In taking out a contract on a parcel of land, the settler situated his family in a complex web of environmental, geographic, and economic relations. The essential economic relationship was indebtedness, a condition that Adam Hodgson found close to universal in the Genesee Country of 1820. When he traveled down the Ridge Road in 1821, John Howison was astonished to learn that "seven or eight farmers in a dozen were insolvent though the aspect of their lands rendered the thing at first view almost incredible." He attributed their embarrassment to "their own imprudence, idleness and extravagance," indiscretions founded on their overestimation of the speed and facility with which they would reap exaggerated profits.

The conversion of all property into a commodity is important, but we should also consider the effects of its corollary, the conversion of all debts into money. This made access to money imperative, and it explains the vigor with which proprietors and their clients endeavored to establish viable links to the commercial economy of the coast. Also.

2) Adam Hodgson, 1820, in Handy an McKelvey, p. 29.
unlike lifelong social obligations, cash debts could be squared, and the settler might, like Longfellow's blacksmith, look the whole world in the face because he owed not any man. Thus, the allocation of resources as commodities locked individuals into a series of financial obligations that compelled them to incorporate their production into the export economy, while it at the same time freed them from social obligations to their neighbors. These were individuals, like those described by Lemon, who "planned for themselves much more than they did for their community." 

Across western New York, settlers were actuated by similar motives and expectations. Their most urgent and immediate ambition was simply to survive, an achievement that was hardly guaranteed. Most settlers arrived with deep misgivings about their new situation. Before Simeon Pierson left Connecticut to take up land in the Triangular Tract, his relatives did their best to dissuade the young man. Although they "did not doubt that it was a great wheat country," he later wrote, they argued "that it would not always be so," and whatever the virtues of the site, they pointed out that from its remote situation one would find "no market nearer than Montreal." In each of these dolorous predictions, Pierson conceded, "they spoke truly." This anxiety was assumed and borne with the notice of the farther prospect of reproducing the life that had been voluntarily abandoned. Perhaps some were impelled by the vision of surpassing this achievement, but surely all were visited by the fear of falling far short of it.

2) Ebelyn Hull McPherson, "Gleanings from Old Diaries and Letters," Manuscript, Erie Historical Society Miscellaneous Collection
Every aspect of this complex of minimum desires, superfluous wishes and morbid anxieties was realized in superlative examples. Modest achievement was the rule; spectacular success and failure were, if not to the same degree, exceptional. This differentiation and sorting was effected by the unequal allotment of resources, by both nature and society; a partiality that diverted people and places to their several destinies as it drew various results from uniform intentions. Private and geographic circumstances conspired in this unequal providence. Industry and diligence were certainly rewarded, although perhaps more copiously in the accolades of the community than in cash profits, but a sizeable fund of initial capital seems to have been the most crucial personal asset. The most advantageous sites and situations were priced in accordance with their estimated potential and, whatever sagacity the settler may have exhibited in his divination of fertility from the clues provided by native vegetation, his chance of procuring a good farm was a function of the credibility and collateral that stood behind his promise to pay for it. The geographical aspects of a given parcel certainly included the environmental factors of soil, precipitation and drainage; but the built landscape of roads, mills and markets was at least as decisive in determining who among the countless candidates would succeed, and then to what degree, while it winnowed away the nameless failures.

In the Triangular Tract a relatively distinct pioneering phase can be identified between the first survey in 1801 and the arrival of the Erie Canal in 1823. For some inhabitants, deprivation and primitive living conditions persisted after the later date, but it nevertheless marks a
definite watershed. I have so far suggested that this was a dynamic period of divergent fortunes for both persons and places. What follows is an attempt to describe how one particular place came into being, how it was organized, improved and populated. Finally, it is an attempt to describe how its several inhabitants, all actuated by similar motives and constrained by similar natural and economic condition, diverged along different paths. In short, it is an attempt to describe the emergence of variety.

**Fragments of Financial Ruin: The Morris Reserve.**

Meinig has written that, "geographically, the most important feature of the New York experience in land disposal was the significant variations from place to place in the methods and results."¹ In western New York this variation occurred because development was undertaken privately and few individuals or syndicates could afford to freeze their capital in land for any length of time. The American proprietors in particular required what we would now call a rapid roll over on their investments. Unfortunately for the undercapitalized Americans the opening of much of Ohio in 1795 glutted the American land market, while the heightened naval conflict between Britain and revolutionary France after 1797 froze American finance.² This explains the ease with which European capitalists moved in to buy the lion's share of western New

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¹ Meinig, 1966, p.143.
York, and the irony of Americans paying Europeans for land they had won by war barely a decade earlier. Then as now, capital is no patriot.

These events have been described in numerous sources and do not require extensive recapitulation. Our only concern is the parcel of land that came to be called the Morris Reserve. This was the only significant portion of western New York not to fall into European hands, a fact that was registered in its further fragmentation into several smaller tracts, the Triangle among them.

When Robert Morris purchased the preemption rights to the land west of the Genesee from the State of Massachusetts it was in a series of five deeds. Of these Morris retained three, while he assigned the remaining two to his son, Thomas, with instructions to sell them in Europe. Disposal was a matter of some urgency since Morris was a speculator who bought land on credit which he could satisfy only if he liquidated most of the purchase before the first payment came due. Wiebe has described Morris' scheme "an essentially spaceless, placeless quest for wealth" in which he "played with huge chunks of territory" much as he

1) In 1786 the delegates to the Hartford Convention bisected western New York with the Preemption Line, drawn north to south just west of Seneca Lake. New York retained sovereignty over the land that lay to the west of this line, but the legally transferable prerogative of its purchase from the Iroquois was granted to Massachusetts. Profits from the sale of this prerogative were slated for settlement of that state's war debt. In April of 1788 Massachusetts sold its preemption rights to a syndicate of New England capitalists for about one million dollars in heavily depreciated Massachusetts currency; with the assurance of Federal assumption of state debts in June of that year this currency rose to its face value and the syndicate, with over half of its account outstanding, failed. This syndicate, known by the names of its principals, Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham, was succeeded by Robert Morris, the Philadelphia financier whose unfortunate affairs are documented in the text.
might have "shifted tokens on a game board." Although this had worked in his speculation east of the Genesee, which he had quickly and profitably transferred to the British syndicate of Sir William Pultney, Morris found his designs for the territory west of the river blocked by an intractable fact of the place. The Iroquois were still there, in full possession of their soil rights, and disinclined to move or sell. He could clear the space in thought, but not, we might say, in deed. Morris' problems with liquidity were evident by 1791, when he mortgaged the easternmost parcel to his former client, Sir William Pultney, for $100,000. In the following spring he presumed to sell two tracts from the mortgaged parcel, the One Hundred Thousand Acre Tract and the Triangle. This action of course outraged the mortgage holder, who sought and received an injunction that prohibited any further sale of the encumbered land until 1795.

With this source of revenue temporarily closed, Morris averted financial collapse with the propitious sale of the two western tracts to a consortium of Dutch banking houses. This became the Holland Land Company, title being officially transferred to the New York banking house of LeRoy, Bayard and McEvans, as the laws of New York State forbade the possession of land by aliens. With the profit of this sale Morris was prepared to meet his initial obligation to Massachusetts, and was thus relieved of the immediate need to sell the parcels entrusted to his son. Indeed, as his scheme was to sell only so much land as was necessary to meet pressing obligations, while retaining the remainder

Fig. 3.1 The Morris Reserve is shown in white. The Mill Seat Tract is double hatched. The enclave near the center of the Morris Reserve is the Gardeau Indian Reservation. The various tracts into which the Morris reserve was broken are outlined.
with the expectation of realizing additional profits from its inflating value, such a sale was as undesirable as it was unnecessary. Morris dispatched a letter instructing his son to withdraw the two remaining parcels from the block. Unfortunately, the communication was tardy, and before the letter reached his hands Thomas succeeded in disposing of the property, selling it to the same Dutch consortium. This left his father in possession of only the Morris Reserve, which he could neither mortgage nor sell. Stretching from Lake Ontario to the Pennsylvania border, and lying between the Dutch holdings to the west and eastern markets, the Morris Reserve was well positioned to rise with the tide of land prices, but the dramatic collapse of the financier's personal credit denied Morris the profit inherent in this advantage.  

Resistant Developers: Lally, Havard, McPike and their Triangle

In the treaty of Buffalo Creek, which Oliver Phelps negotiated in 1788, the Iroquois had with one small exception retained their land west of the Genesee River. The relinquished parcel was surrendered in exchange for the promise of mills to be erected for their benefit, and it was therefor known as the "Mill Seat" tract. In the Treaty it was described as a parallelogram, with its base running east-west just north of the Seneca Village of Canawango, its head at the Ontario shore, its eastern boundary at the Genesee River and its western limit parallel to this line.

I: Pioneering the Triangular Tract

twelve miles to the west. It was surveyed by Hugh Maxwell in 1789. Maxwell, author of the erroneous Massachusetts preemption line, once again failed to distinguish himself as a surveyor. Running the western boundary longitudinally rather than the twenty two degrees east of north that would have accorded with the angle of the river, he succeeded in grabbing several thousand acres and the valuable mill site at Buttermilk Falls, a bonus that suggests that this, like his earlier mistake, was not entirely innocent. Augustus Porter corrected this line in 1792, and this correction left the gore of 87,000 acres that became known as the Triangular Tract.

One year later the New York bankers Herman LeRoy and William Bayard contracted for the Triangle, estimated at the time to contain 80,000 acres, for three shillings an acre or about $30,000. The partnership was enlarged in 1801, when Charles Mc'Evers and Matthew Clarkson purchased undivided quarters. All of these men were cronies of the major operators in western New York. LeRoy had served as Counsel General of Holland, Bayard, an “able capitalist of Anglo-American leanings,” was a friend of Charles Williamson, and their banking house was the American representative of the Holland Land Company. It was

this banking house that held the Holland Land Purchase for its Dutch owners until the state prohibition against alien landholders was rescinded in 1798. The date of the contract makes it appear likely that they received the land in consideration of their services to Robert Morris, or that they purchased it outright so he might be spared some financial embarrassment.

The notion that the banking house did not seek out the property, but had it thrust upon them by a land-rich but cash-poor Morris, is bolstered by the fact that the parcel was not particularly promising as a speculative venture. It lay against a hostile international border, it was thickly wooded and it was exceedingly swampy. Much of its soil was heavy clay, decomposed Medina shale patched with moraines that stood like islands in the stagnant water. The lakeshore was thickly shaded with hemlock; in the acid water of the relic bogs short ash and elm and red maple clustered tightly; on the low moraines beech and maple, both sugar and silver, stood more widely spaced in an open woods, their thick crowns precluding undergrowth. The sun was seldom hot, the skies were frequently grey, and the rain, if never copious, seemed close to


perpetual.\textsuperscript{1} It was a damp and dusky place of shadows and stagnant pools that well deserved its earliest cognomen, the Black North.\textsuperscript{2}

Despite these discouraging prospects the reluctant proprietors undertook sale of their property in 1801, enlisting Joseph Ellicott, Resident Agent of their clients, The Holland Land Company, to appoint a surveyor. In 1801 Ellicott delegated responsibility for the tract to his surveyor and confidant, Richard Stoddard. Recognizing the detrimental effect that a band of unimproved wilderness would have on the value of the land that lay to the west, Ellicott took some interest in the development of the tract and he advised Stoddard closely. The resulting imprint of land division and roads was a frugal version of practices already implemented by Ellicott in his own domain, the Holland Land Purchase.

The plan was designed to be flexible and simple, "to suit every description of fair purchaser," and to insure that "no Pretexts for Litigation in relation thereto should arise."\textsuperscript{3} At Ellicott’s suggestion, only 18,000 acres in the "Angular Point" at the far south was divided into farm lots of one hundred and twenty acres and offered for sale to "settlers on

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\textsuperscript{1} Onin Parker, 1896, pp. 221-230.  
\textsuperscript{2} The designation "black north" is probably related to the designation "black swamp" which Emmanuel Howes (1819) used to describe the Tonawanda Swamp. Handy and Mc Kelvey, p. 27. On the other hand, it might describe the hemlock/northern hardwood association that was common on the Ontario littoral. Shanks and Goodwin, pp. 299-343.  
\textsuperscript{3} Frank H. Severance (ed.), "Joseph Ellicott’s Letter Books," Buffalo Historical Society Publications. 26 (1937), pp. 94-96, 104-112. The counterpart of the rectangular survey is the printed contract, which, like the survey system, was fairly uniform throughout Genesee country. Both the grid and the printed contract are necessary when sales are small, frequent and numerous. McNall, p. 34.
credit." This represented about twenty percent of the total acreage, and included the land in townships one and two, or that part of the Triangle that would eventually stay within Genesee County. Within this Angular Point, a five hundred acre block, "to be laid out equally on each side of the State Road to include the Mill Seat at Buttermilk Falls" was reserved for sale to a single purchaser at five dollars an acre. The proceeds from this plot, which became the village of LeRoy, paid for the survey of the remainder. Disinclined to sink any money in the tract, the proprietors attached some importance to this economy.

It was, somewhat fondly hoped that the land of the northern townships (3, 4 and 5) could be sold to speculating "Purchasers" rather than to "settlers on credit." Townships, sections (1440 acres), half sections (720 acres), or at the very least quarter sections (360 acres), were to be the units of sale. These units were surveyed, blazed, and conspicuously numbered, and their outlines were recorded on a general map, so that sales could be made by the proprietor's agent, Gouverneur Ogden, in Canandaigua. At the same time, in conformity with Ellicott's tested system, Stoddard was instructed to classify "the several descriptions of the Land." The most striking characteristic of this tract is that it all was eventually placed in long lots of 120 acres, a technique that Ellicott had used to combine parcels of large acreage with the minimum length of road necessary to give access to each parcel.1

1) Wyckoff, 1988, pp. 30-41. Stoddard's survey notes have not come to light. It is possible that they are in the LeRoy Papers of the New York Historical Association in New York City.
I. Dispossessing the Triangular Tract

Stoddard and his brother-in-law, Dudley Sakonstell, acquired the five hundred acre "Mill Seat" in 1801. Since this was valued at slightly more than double the surveyor's fee, it is likely that Stoddard's share came in payment for his service as surveyor. Although Ogden was to have served as resident agent, Stoddard almost immediately assumed the role. The land office was relocated from Canandaigua, probably first to Ganson's Tavern, and later to a structure built by Stoddard beside his deputory milling operation on Allen's (later Oaka) Creek.

The proprietors were eager to dispose of this property with a minimum of development, and their only further contribution was a road bisecting the tract from north to south. In this, as in most else, they followed the advice of Ellicott, who felt that all the necessities "to insure the speedy sale and settlement of a tract of country there is not one of more importance that that of opening roads." In August of 1801 Stoddard dispatched a crew of six men to open a road four rods wide from LeRoy on the State Road in the south to the shore of Lake Ontario twenty-five miles to the north. "If the practice followed those of Ellicott, the actual cut was probably one rod wide. (But breadth, incidentally, of a yacht, of exact) with all trees under one foot in diameter cut close to the ground." Railing the men at his tavern in LeRoy before their departure, he is said to have

1) J. Turner, 1850, p. 518.
2) J. Turner, 1850, pp. 374, 387, 488. For additional biographical information on Ganson and on Stoddard's land office, see J. B. Beers, Gleanings and Biographical Record of Genesee County, (Syracuse, J. W. Vose, 1890), pp. 450-452, 458-459. As late as 1803 Ellicott reported that the mill was not fully employed, even though its nearest competitor lay twenty miles to the west. Bingham (ed.), p. 207.
4) Bingham (ed.), p. 271.
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2) O. Turner, 1850, pp. 374, 387, 488. For additional biographical information on Ganson and on Stoddard's land office, see F.W. Beers, Gazetteer and Biographical Record of Genesee County, (Syracuse: J.W. Vose, 1890), pp. 450-452, 458-459. As late as 1803 Ellicott reported that the mill was not fully employed, even though its nearest competitor lay twenty miles to the west. Bingham (ed.), p.207.
4) Bingham (ed.), p. 271.
Fig. 3.2 This is taken from the map filed with the Genesee County Clerk in 1804. The rectangular lots of approximately one hundred and twenty acres are arranged with their short faces to the roads. Although this amount of land was necessary to provide a family with a sufficient wood supply, most of these lots were further subdivided.
given the simple instructions to "bear east and find a ford through Black Creek, cut out the underbrush and logs, and make a road that a wagon could go down and blaze trees, so if a man wants to locate land he can find his way back."

Apparently the crew was furnished with no further details. After four days of energetic and intemperate chopping, they emerged from the forest at Sandy Creek Harbor on the Ontario shore. The whitecaps were "as pretty a sight at a human could wish to see," one of them later told an interlocutor, if only because they were driven before a wind that also dispelled the clouds of insatiable mosquitoes. Behind the crew lay a crooked and provisional swath, staggering north, like its engineers, who had circumvented the most formidable quagmires and trees, and regained their bearings with sightings taken, one later recalled, "through the bottom of a bottle." 1

Hard liquor and hard drinking were, by all accounts, pervasive on the American frontier, and only prigs will omit reference to the rather unsteady steps of the westward advance.

When included, accounts of dipsomania generally assume one of two forms: censure or burlesque. Apparently this triad of censorship, censure and burlesque is fundamental to our

1) Murrian Peters, "History of the Laying Out of the Lake Road from LeRoy to the Lake," 1850's manuscript in the miscellaneous collection of the LeRoy Historical Society. This account purports to be a transcription of the recollections of Mr. Demnings, one of the members of the original party. The raconteur and his scribe are both more interested in humor than history, and the tale is something of an exercise in drollery.
Fig. 3.3. The Lake Road was laid out through the middle of the Triangular Tract. It was a branch of the Niagara Road, which it joined at the south, and it was meant to provide access to a shipping point on the shores of Lake Ontario.
treatment of certain, deeply troubling subjects, most notably sexuality.

The last leg of the triad, burlesque, makes a momentary appearance in the foregoing account of the survey of the Lake Road. This is a conventional approach to the narration of intoxication, intimately related to more didactic treatments and suggested by the historical document. Burlesque can be classified as a subset of Comedy, which White called "the mythos of Synecdoche," and its relation to the didactic treatments is made clear in White's definition. He describes comedy as "the apprehension of a world in which all struggle, strife, and conflict are dissolved in the realization of a perfect harmony, in the attainment of a condition in which all crime, vice and folly are revealed as the means to the establishment of the social order which is finally achieved at the end of the play." Individuals often apprehend their personal biographies as a comedy of errors and awkwardness which time has revealed as necessary and benevolent steps toward their final, self-satisfied maturity.

White defines comedy as a mode of interpretation that resolves apparent disorder and enlists its various manifestations in a unified progression. I have used the word burlesque because it introduces the ironic modes of understatement and understatement. Burlesque is, basically, an aggrandizement and solemnification of an insconsiderable or trifling subject, or a trivialization and travesty of a subject commonly regarded as serious and grave. In either case, the incongruity of the treatment and the subject provides a humorous release of personal or social tension. In scholarship, burlesque is seldom intended. It is frequently recognized, however, as pedantry, or an insistence on rigorous standards in inappropriate settings. In the case of this text, as the scale of the subject was reduced, I began to feel anxious about the fitness of the treatment. I began

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to suspect myself guilty of antiquarianism. To show that I was conscious of the possibility that the entire work might be read as a burlesque, as perhaps aggrandizing trivial events or trivializing grand ideas, it seemed periodically advisable to exaggerate the incongruity between treatment and subject and to parody thereby the unconfirmed but suspected unsuitability of the mode of analysis and description.

Surveyed and made the responsibility of the Town of Northampton in 1803, this became the Lake Road, and it structured all later development in the tract. Predictably, Stoddard replicated the practice of Ellicott and used the road to divide lots where it did not follow lot lines.1 This practice, and that of abutting long lots to the road on their short ends, maximized the number of parcels into whose price the benefit of the road might be computed. Although it was undertaken so purchasers could get into the Triangle and see what they were buying and then get out and sign the contract for it, or in other words "to facilitate the speedy sales of land," the road had one further economic function. It facilitated and encouraged the cultivation, movement and sale of commercial crops so that the man who signed the contract might pay it off with similar alacrity.2

1) Albert Hazen Wright, pp. 363-4; Wyckoff, p. 141.
2) Because the ultimate purchaser was frequently close to destitute it behoved the proprietor to facilitate at least marginal economic success. Although the extravagance and cost of Williamson's "hotbed technique" eventually exasperated his employers and discouraged anything similarly ambitious being attempted elsewhere, his innovations served as a model. Beyond the concrete examples of financial support, infrastructure, progressive agriculture and education, he redefined the land company so that it's policies began to resemble the paternalism of the patron or patent holder. He demonstrated that successful settlement from the point of view of his capitalist masters required successful settlement from the point of
Situated at the southern end of the Lake Road was Stoddard's mill, to which Stoddard understandably wished to direct local produce, and beyond this, along the State Road, lay the Canandaigua and Geneva markets. At the northern terminus provision had been made, at least on the maps, for an embarkation point called Port Bayard, from which goods might be shipped to Montreal. The name probably dates from the time when the northern part of the Triangle and the One Hundred Thousand Acre Tract were organized as the town of Bayard, and it registers the hope, never fully realized, that this would be the entrepôt of the region. When Thomas opened his mill above Sandy Creek harbor in 1820, Port Bayard contained view of his humble clients. Ellicott policies were, more modest, pragmatic and, ultimately, more successful.

The agent’s interest were also dependent on the settler’s success, as he received his commission, typically 2.5% of the established price and 50% of any excess, only as payment was made. Preferably, payment would be made in cash, and this lead the agent to encourage, and in some cases to facilitate production, particularly of wheat, for the market economy. On a modest scale potash kettles might be provided, as this both encouraged clearing, which would raise the land’s value if the settler failed, and produced a marketable product, which reduced the likelihood of this disaster.

Because land was abundant, evictions were uncommon, goods were grudgingly accepted in payment, and settlers were often allowed to work off their debt constructing roads at inflated wages, but "french leave," or abandonment of a farm on which payment could not be made, was a common response to an unbearable economic burden. In addition to the payment of interest, agents encouraged prompt occupation and improvement, sometimes imposing cash penalties for dereliction. Clearing and buildings provided a forfeit in the event of "french leave;" and cultivated lots raised the value of adjoining lots.

McNall, pp. 20-1, 28-30, 34-9; Cowan p. 299.

1) The name, Port Bayard, appears on a map prepared for the proprietors in 1821. LeRoy Historical Society Miscellaneous Collection. Since James McEvers had died in 1817, and Murray Four Corners had been renamed Clarkson in 1820, all the living proprietors had the gratification of being memorialized in the landscape of their possession. Port Bayard is briefly mentioned in Hastings, pp. 22-3; and in O. Turner, 1851, p. 361.
Fig. 3.4 By 1821 the road pattern had grown more complex. The Ridge Road furnished a connection to the east, where a good harbor existed at Rochester. Port Bayard had been purchased, but the remainder of the lake shore had failed to attract purchasers.
a few abandoned shacks. In 1833 E. B. Holmes wrote to his brother that the settlement was "new round Thomas' and so to the lake" but that "from Brockport to Thomas' the country is well improved - good farms." With this development, shipments from the port became feasible. It was further recommended by the fact that shipment from this point evaded the odious Merchants and Miller's Coalition which had been organized, to the fury of the farmers, in the canal towns.1

Peopling the Triangle

The visible impact of Stoddard's labors was slight, but they had profoundly altered the nature of the Triangle by converting it into a commodity that could be liquidated to "every description of fair purchasers." To do this he had, first of all, blanketed the tract with geometrical designs and numerical signs. He had taken an undivided expanse, measured and apportioned it, and placed an index number on each of the newly created parcels. From their carefully measured and recorded dimensions he had calculated the precise area of each; and with reference to his own evaluation he had quantified their quality in the figure of a price. Using geometry, numbers and arithmetic he had transformed nature into land, a transformation that necessarily

1) E. B. Holmes to Joseph Holmes, July 14, 1833, Holmes Papers. On the Merchants and Miller's Coalition see BFP&MD, 2:52, 9/26/32; 3:3, 10/17/32; 3:22, 2/21/33. For confirmation of its existence, see the entry of August 28, 1839 in the Journal of the Miller, Lyman A Spalding. Spalding Family George Arens Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, MS. 33.
preceeded conversion of the Triangle back into the pecuniary form of the banker's original thirty thousand dollar investment. What remained was the considerable challenge of finding clients willing to convert their dollars, either actual or anticipated, into a piece of the Triangle.

The speculators to whom it was hoped the northern townships would appeal failed to appear. With their initial plan frustrated, the proprietors were forced to shift their hopes to settlers—a revision of strategy which raised numerous problems, but which, once begun, precluded a return to the former plan. The wild tangles of speculative holdings discouraged prospective settlers and thus depressed the value of adjacent land. They also hampered the economic performance of those who did settle. When farms were interspersed with unoccupied parcels, roads were longer to travel and more costly to maintain. The uncleared brush served as a shelter to predators that fed on livestock and a haven for the birds, squirrels and deer that devoured seeds and crops.

Even settlers on credit were shy. One recalled arriving at Ganson's Settlement in 1806 only to be advised "not to buy land down in the north woods" as it would "always be sickly there and the region will never be settled." Despite these detractors, Stoddard managed to lure weary migrants from the State Road with low prices, liberal credit, and the rather compelling observation that those who chose to settle here would not be obliged to travel another mile. It was this last argument that persuaded a group from Killingworth, Connecticut to abandon their trek to the distant Western Reserve and begin settlement north of LeRoy in

1) O. Turner, 1850, pp. 552-3.
1803. Scots spreading out from Caledonia settled at Port Hill by 1805. Stoddard also ran advertisements in the Geneva newspapers from 1806 to 1810, by which time the population of the land to the north, organized as the Town of Murray, had reached 1166. Stoddard liked to refer to this population as "his children down in the North Woods," and toward them he appears to have acted as a lenient, if not altogether helpful, father.

The first inhabitants were poor, attracted to the Triangle by land offered "on the most reasonable terms." Offered for two to two dollars and fifty cents an acre in 1802, this land was thirty per cent cheaper than similar property east of the river, where improvements—clearing, fences, a house, a barn—raised the price to anywhere from six to twenty dollars an acre. And some exceptionally cheap land was available, with several farms selling for less than two dollars an acre. Furthermore, the newspaper advertisements announced that "there will be but a small pan of the purchase money required in hand, and a long credit given for the residue." In practice the first requirement was frequently remitted, and

2) The first advertisement appears in the (Geneva) Expositor, 10/19/06; the last advertisement appears in the Geneva Gazette, 5/2/10.
3) McPherson.
4) Advertisement placed by Richard Stoddard in the (Geneva) Expositor, Nov. 10, 1806. This advertisement, which announced "upwards of 80,000 acres of land" ran until the time of Stoddard's death in 1810, when the available land was listed at 50,000 acres. Subsequent agents did not advertise in this newspaper.
5) O'Callaghan (ed.), vol 4, p. 1182; McNall, p. 39. By 1830, an improved farm near Pittsford was billed at $35 an acre, and the word was $25 would be refused. The minimum capital for successful settlement was $2000. Adam Ferguson, 1831, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 51.
Upwards of 80,000 Acres of

LAND,

SITUATE in the county of Genesee, state of New-York, lying 12 miles west of Genesee river, & 11 miles east of the Courthouse in the village of Batavia. The main road leading from the city of Albany to New-Connecticut, Presque-Isle, Fort-Niagara, and the province of Upper-Canada, passes through a part of this tract, from which another road leads to Lake Ontario, near the mouth of Sandy Creek, (which place is an excellent harbor for boats,) whence produce may be sent by water to any part of Europe. This tract of country has been surveyed into convenient Farms for settlers, and is offered for Sale on the most reasonable terms of any land in the western country. There will be but a small part of the purchase money required in hand, and a long credit given for the residue. From the fertility of the soil, and advantages of the water, there is no part of this country can excel, and but little equal it. There is already a Saw & Grist-mill erected on the tract. For the price, and terms, enquire of the subscriber, J. Stoddard, or the agent, who is only authorized to sell the Proprietary.

J. STODDARD
Novr'ry 1806.
some mortgages were stretched over ten years. Furthermore, tiny parcels were available. Deeds delivered by 1836 reveal an average purchase of sixty acres, and farms of less than thirty acres were not uncommon.

In the Triangle, township 3 was the last to be occupied. The coveted title of first settler was claimed by Calvin Freeman, son of Moody Freeman, bearer of the same title for township 4. It was 1803, Calvin claimed, when he raised his log house on the Lake Road in section 8, and the spring of 1804 when he put his occupation beyond doubt with a three acre clearing and a crop of corn and potatoes. It was only because a debilitating attack of Genesee Fever forced him to retreat to his father's house that his farm was abandoned, he said. Unfortunately for Freeman, during his convalescence others arrived, and clouds of disputation will forever surround his claim to primacy. Squatters are said to have arrived in 1805, but the settlement really inaugurated in 1807. This commenced the first stage of settlement, which continued for just over a decade. It was a time of considerable hardship and suffering during which Freeman's experience was probably typical. Each family built a shack, cleared a few acres, and sowed corn in mounds among the stumps while the mosquitoes

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1) B.R. 20:41, 7/676. Although the seller often provided credit without any down payment, he seldom retained the mortgage. These were frequently sold to one of the "hundreds of individuals who took one or perhaps two mortgages in a lifetime." Robert W. Silsby, "Mortgage Credit in the Phelps and Gorham Purchase," *New York History*, 41 (1960): 3-54.

made merry on their necks, arms and faces. Then, through the long summer, while wildlife browsed on the scraggly field, perhaps half of the family would roll around the dark and airless confines of the cabin in a feverish delirium. Needless to say, since "fever and ague was the common lot of all," advancement was dilatory.

For most members of the first wave of settlement the gradual enhancement of the value of their property was the only sure source of profit. This took two forms. If they managed to purchase the property they could resell it at a higher price; if they could not they could default on the mortgage and sell their improvements to someone else. Isaac Weld wrote of such an inhabitant: "if he has built a comfortable house for himself, he readily quits it as soon as finished for money and goes to live in a mean hovel in the woods till he gets time to build another." Between 1814, when the Canadian border was pacified, and 1818, when the last good land in the Holland Purchase was taken, migrants averse to distant destinations in the far west began to reappraise backwaters like Sweden. For the rough and ready there was still somewhere else to go, but for those with more money than hardihood there were fewer places to choose.

1) This pattern of pioneering seems to have originated in the Delaware Valley, although it had spread to New England by the late eighteenth century. See, Terry G. Jordan and Matti Kaups, *The American Backwoods Frontier: an Ethnic and Ecological Interpretation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). With the exception of John Parks, a Pennsylvanian backwoodsman who settled his parents in Sweden, there is no means of establishing the number of actual Pennsylvanians in the Triangle. See, O. Turner, 1851, pp. 412, 419; Helen Hastings and Mary M. Smith, "Triangle Towns: An Unfinished History of the Western Monroe County Towns of the Triangular Tract," Unpublished Manuscript, 1930-40.

2) *B.R.* 20:41, 7/6/76.

3) quoted in Dwight, vol. 4, p. 160.
Fig. 3.6. The town of Northampton was formed with Genesee County in 1802. It included the present towns of Kendall, Murray, Clarendon, Hamlin, Clarkson, Sweden, Parma, Ogden, Riga, Greece, Gates and Chili. In 1808 Northampton was divided into four parts, and the six western towns became the town of Murray. Sweden, which included township 3 of the Triangular Tract and the present town of Clarendon, was separated from Murray five years later. Clarendon was divided from Sweden in 1821.
between. In combination this raised the price of land, and encouraged a population shift. Second and third generation settlers arrived with cash, for which their impecunious predecessors willingly exchanged their mortgages and limited improvements. Compensated with this small emolument, many removed to Ohio. As an early resident of the town of Sweden recalled, "the farmer who had only cleared and improved his land found himself possessed of a valuable property, though the original purchase price remained unpaid." Those who had nothing to show for their tenure, and consequently nothing to sell, decamped, or to use the contemporary phrase they took "french leave," but with the conclusion of the war in 1814 the more industrious began to sell their contracts and their improvements to "a more thrifty and enterprising population."1

In Sweden it appears that this older, wealthier population arrived between 1814 and 1820. Overall the population grew from eight hundred and nineteen to two thousand eight hundred and five, a leap of two hundred and forty-two per cent; but the most impressive gains were made by individuals who were under ten and or over forty-five years of age.2 In these groups the increase was nearly twice the average. The growth of the younger cohort indicates that young families, who comprised the bulk of the initial wave of settlement, had reached their full complement of members. The average family numbered six. Of the households, ninety per cent sheltered children under fifteen years of age, the average number being three or four with a modal figure of two. The second

1) Smith and Husted, pp. 5-6.
2) The census of Nov. 25, 1814 is recorded in the Sweden Town Book, vol I, p. 2.
Fig. 3.7 Demographic profiles of Sweden over the first thirty-five years of its existence reveal a pattern common to the frontier. Since the cohort groups of the censuses varied some interpolation was necessary to bring them into conformity. The profile for 1814 shows a young population with a slight male bias. The tremendous population growth between 1814 and 1820 (from 819 to 2,805) is particularly evident in the population of children and older persons. By 1830 the rural population had begun to decline. The dense population of the previous decade was founded on the high fertility of virgin soil, and the cutting of virgin timber for the export of potash. Reduced fertility and deforestation drove many families west or into the emerging cities and villages. By 1840 the aging of the original population is evident in the constraining base of children.
increase I take as an indication that older migrants were arriving, presumably with some savings, to buy out partially improved land.

The brothers, Dudley, William, Aaron and Able Root arrived from Hebron, Connecticut, via Saratoga County, in 1818, and took up land in the southeast corner of the town. They found trees standing in the roads. Among their neighbors, only one of whom held title to his land, they found "no framed houses and but one barn," but they were able immediately to purchase about four hundred acres for about fifteen hundred dollars. Their sons became the town's largest landowners. Robert Staples, an Anti-Mason, who would serve as Town Supervisor, Justice of the Peace and State Legislator, arrived from Branford, Connecticut, via Vermont, in 1816 and purchased a farm "previously article[d]" in the town's southwestern corner. Levi Pond, another Anti-Masonic State Legislator, and a member of the Brockport Bank Formation Committee, arrived in 1817. The brothers, James, John and Chester White came from Madison County in 1820 and paid for their large farms on the Beech Ridge in six to eight years. These residents, who were "of a more substantial class, and better off," left their mark on the landscape in a number of large houses, some of which were constructed in a vernacular Georgian style of local brick and fieldstone, a form that made a claim to social status in a fabric proclaiming that they, unlike their predecessors, intended to remain. And, indeed, many of them did.

The wealthier farmers did stay put, and when the time came later in the century to assemble recollections it was they who furnished the material. When county histories came into vogue even later in the century the heirs of these farmers paid to have the biographies of their eminent forbears inserted, often beside an illustration of that farm that they had purchased, "previously articleled," a half century earlier. This would seem in no small part to account for the sanguine and satisfied tone of these documents. They projected the experience of their contributors and subscribers onto a population whose fortunes were far more diverse.

Taken together, the biographies assembled in a county history resemble the "polyvocal" accounts that have recently received the endorsement of some anthropologists. However, they illustrate the difficulties and liabilities of collaborations which give "equal rhetorical weight to diverse renditions of tradition." Any such text must define a "representative" group, and each contributor must then select a "representative" rendition from their quiver of opinions. In the nineteenth century county histories the "representative" men are simply those who were willing and able to purchase a peculiar type of immortality, and they largely represented themselves as persons who deserved this memorialization. This works its distortions, but it is not evident that they are greater than those found in assembled tales of misery. It is not even clear that they are...
greater that the distortions implicit in a combination of "all points of view," which suggest the possibility of synthesizing lives that are idiosyncratic and singular.

These biographies are in fact assembled interpretations of lives, they are connotations ascribed to names; we might say that they are myths with which humans attempted to explicate the mysteries of personality, character and individuality. Lowenthal has suggested the relative recency of the habit of thinking of one's identity as something that is developed through an "interconnective narrative" of autobiography, and he places its origins somewhere in the eighteenth century. The autobiographies of the county histories are simply a vernacular version of Wordsworth's "Prelude." This suggests that these texts are the product of a religious crisis. Having, at least to some degree, evacuated the house of religion, identities sought a new home in history, and some found a heaven of sorts in local histories. Don't they, after all, offer a release from absolute anonymity and oblivion? Writing bears the meaningful code of personality beyond the grave. In their very expression, the accompanying portraits seem to say "I know that I am dead."

If autobiographies are connoted lives, the denoted lives are found in the manuscript census. That which was taken for the town of Sweden in 1820 indicates two thousand eight hundred and five individuals: four hundred and fifty nine male heads of families by name, the remainder by numbers. These simply state that this one, or that someone, lived -not who they were, or how they lived, or with what cause. Where the autobiographies put somebody behind the name, these individuals exist in history as nobodies, as signifiers with nothing signified. Means have been devised to elicit inferences from these lists, to connote these signifiers with "collective biographies," to give the nobodies the surrogate corporeality of "society" and the surrogate life of social

1) Lowenthal, 1985, pp. 197-200.
Such efforts to amend the inadequacies of the record lose sight of another venerable form of history, the memento mori of the utterly inpenetrable silence of the individuality behind these names. The cavernous silence of the unwritten may contain the deepest truth of history, not in what it withholds but in what it says with, its eternal reticence. Behind the voluble history of development there is a silent history of envelopment and oblivion.

A number of the original settlers sold their improvements and went west, first to Ohio, and later to Michigan and Wisconsin. Perhaps even more flit from farm to farm within a rather limited area. Although some may have accumulated some capital for their trouble it is likely that more sank into poverty. In township 3 this relatively impoverished class is registered in the large number of land contracts for parcels of small acreage. The smallest of these, for one third of an acre, carried a price of four dollars. It was sold to Hyram Brace, a relation, perhaps, of Nathaniel Brace, whose account at the Seymour store in Clarkson was settled with the notation "too poor to live."

1) Some recent scholarship seems to indicate that the population was considerably more stable than was formerly supposed, see Donald H. Parkerson, "The Structure of New York Society: Basic Themes in 19th Century Social History," New York History 55 (1984): 157-87. The frequency of partially legible entries in the manuscript census foiled my efforts to calculate the exact rate of turnover, and this experience causes me to suspect the assertions of those who claim to have overcome this handicap.

The Triangular Tract was brought into existence by the vagaries of eighteenth century finance and the chicaneries of surveying. Speculation, bankruptcy and the white man's habit of cutting himself extra-generous slices of land were all common enough to suggest the possibility of theorization. However common the circumstances, it is important to note the contingency of their outcomes. It is not an accident that parcels like the Triangle came into being in western New York, but the appearance of the Triangle itself is an accident or a coincidence. The benefactors of this accident instituted certain policies which appear to have attracted relatively poor farm families and to have settled them on farms which were often too small to support them for any length of time. It is difficult to prove, but I suspect that many of these persons became those cheap laborers that allowed the later consolidated farms to prosper. Many of them also became the laborers of Brockport, the Canal shipping point for the produce of these farms. Thus it is that contingencies create the circumstances for the realization of later contingencies and subtle regional variation yields variations that are more marked.

Individuals with similar intentions are also subject to variation. Here the contingency is the accident of inherited wealth. On July 4, 1876, F.P. Root stood at the podium of the chapel of the Normal School and tested the endurance of his audience with a diligent history of Sweden and Brockport. The aging farmer had arrived in the town of Sweden as a boy of four in 1818, and over the intervening decades he had inherited and amassed the town's most extensive holdings. Despite this personal success,
he spoke with a certain nostalgia. "No people were more cheerful and jolly," he recalled, "than the toilers in clearing away our forests;" and as if to explain this happy, if burdensome, state, he went on: "society was open to all who conducted themselves with propriety; there was no class society, no aristocracy, for all were equally respected who were equally worthy."¹ There is no reason to doubt the good cheer of these pioneers, or the pleasure of cutting farms in the virgin forest, or even the esteem that was to be earned by simple integrity. On these points witnesses are very nearly unanimous. But classes were at least latent by the time Root's rather wealthy family arrived.

This was fully developed by 1842, when sixteen year old Elisha Carpenter sought an appointment for the winter term as a district school teacher in the town of Sweden. Armed with book learning acquired at the Brockport Collegiate Institute, he set out in a buggy, his immaturity imperfectly disguised by his father's stovepipe hat. This was invariably removed by the low doorways of the cabins where he made his inquiries. He located a country school about five miles out of Brockport, and passed an interview before two trustees who were sitting in a field husking corn. The stipend was small, but it included boarding in the houses of his pupils. Displaying a villager's inclination toward comfort, he first boarded in the district's large houses, of which there were five, all of them painted white. Later, with some regret, he accepted the hospitality of the owners the brown houses. Last of all he turned to the log-cabins. In the course of this circulation he began unwittingly to prolong his stays in white

¹) B.R. 20:41  7/6716.
houses, and to abbreviate his stays in the brown and log houses, the homes, incidentally, of the majority of his pupils. His discrimination lead to a distinct unpopularity among the poorer residents, who felt slighted, and the wealthier residents, who felt imposed upon.

His prejudice is understandable. In the larger white houses, which were home to few children, he might enjoy a private room, whereas in one "brown house," which he depicted as representative, there were only two rooms. The schoolmaster's bed, shared with the son, stood in the corner opposite that where the parents slept with their daughter. Even this was relative luxury. In one log house, of a single room and a loft, his host, a farmer, dwell with seven sons ranging in age from nine to twenty, and three daughters. The schoolmaster slept with the boys in the loft under a communal blanket. Amid the grunts and snores of his pupils, Carpenter lay on his back, watching the stars through the roof's numerous apertures and calculating the minimum duration before he might reasonably return to the comfort of one of the white houses.1

His estimations were inaccurate, and the insulted cabin dwellers began to withdraw their children from his classes. By spring his school had been abandoned entirely. Taking to heart this lesson in the sensitivity of persons to imputations of social class, he engaged a second school in the following winter. This was the cobblestone school located on the Ridge Road one half mile west of Redman's Four Corners, a collection of taverns, which served the Rochester to Niagara Falls stage, and "brown houses, cottages and cabins." This hamlet, which had arisen as the voting

1) B. R. 26:28, 4/6/82.
place for the town of Murray prior to its division in 1813, had been
cchristened "Fuddleton" by Carpenter's pedagogic predecessor.
Immediately to the west of the school there were several large farms, with
houses freshly painted white, inhabited by "intelligent and cultivated
families."

"There is the same thing right over again," Carpenter remembered
having said to himself, "painted houses against brown and log houses."
The residents of Redman Four Corners were persuaded that their children
were more severely disciplined and more carelessly
tutored than those of
the more prosperous farmers to the west. To avoid the problem of the
previous winter Carpenter boarded first in each of the taverns and log
houses, cunningly reserving for the depths of winter his stay in the
"painted and cobblestone houses."

1) B.R. 26:30, 4/20/82.
Chapter 4
Community, Ecology and Economy in Early Sweden

Increasingly distinct variations within the social fabric and across the cultural landscape were, simultaneously, the marks and the means of regional development. When millers and merchants arrived, adding a new echelon to the social elite, it was a consequence of greater productivity, but it became at once a cause. The diversification of the landscape into woodlots, fields, and towns, the multiplication and specialization of buildings, and the increasingly intricate web of roads produced a changing landscape that was, likewise, both an index and an instrument of a deepening environmental transformation. The energy that drove this escalating complexity in the social order was derived from natural ecosystems, which were progressively dismantled. As one British traveler ruefully observed, in America improvement did not imply what he could consider "making things better," but only a senseless "augmentation in the number of houses and people, and above all in the amount of cleared land."

The paradox of complexity appearing as both the product and the producer of complexity may serve to suggest the dynamic of development, a dynamic fueled by energy preempted from nature; but this does not satisfy the need to identify a primary cause. English industrialization and population growth must be placed at the bottom of this. Malthus's Essay on the Principles of Population Growth had been published a year after the Treaty of Big Tree was signed, and it was less than a decade old when the

1) Basil Hall, 1827, in Handy and McKelvey, pp. 34-35.
fringe of the European agricultural hinterland first crept over the boundaries of township three. As causes go, even this is proximate rather than primary—a phenomenon with its own, only partly excavated, causal foundations—but it seems we must content ourselves with proximate causes, only deliberating over how immediate or remote these should be. To say that the forest were felled because individuals wished to clear them away is only to accept the most immediate cause. To say that British woollen mills required the ash of the incinerated trunks to scrub gum from the fleeces of sheep is simply to set things at a greater, but not at the greatest possible, distance. A comprehensive explanation would require greater historical reach. However discouraging, this notion of remote origins does direct our attention to linkages, in this case the tangible ties of geography, with distant sources of exogenous change.

We have seen how historical beginnings and geographical boundaries are very often literary creations imposed on things that we presume continuous. The problems and solutions of writing a break in time or space are also found in the writing of a break in the continuum of causality. Objections to overdetermination, philosophical libertarianism and the belief in "emergent properties" are, at least on one level, simply efforts to discard this problem.

It is, obviously, debatable whether development is a process of making things better. For several species it is a process of making matters infinitely worse. Even among humans there will be dissenters. Whether or not they were aware of the change, women lost economic
power when the development of regular markets destroyed the home
industry of cloth production. Admitting its equivocality, it remains
possible to reason through the analogy of biological organisms and define
development as a progression from lesser to greater degrees of social and
spatial complexity. Explanations of development are always more or less
proximate, but they can be understood with the triad of the specialization
in the function of persons and places, the dismantling of natural systems,
and an increase in the size, appetite or accessibility of a market. These
are the processes described in more familiar and homely terms by F.P.
Root when he wrote: "during the first decade most of the land was cleared
of timber, neat and comfortable farm buildings were erected, lands
fenced, orchards planted, roads made and societies organized."

Social and Geographical Organizations

The social and geographical organization of society was guided by
mild legislation, and by cultural habits of somewhat greater potency, but
it was governed by no total or comprehensive plan. In fact, the
population was conceived less as a society than as a collection of societies.
These were the voluntary "societies" mentioned by Root. The town was
part of a larger political geography, but it served as something more like
a compartment than a department. It was a means of grouping persons
into units through which they could collectively provide their own
collective goods, most notably roads, rather than an instrument through
which these persons could be governed from afar." The church was,

1) B.R. 20: 41, 7/6/76.
likewise, part of a larger ecclesiastical geography, but it lacked the territorial powers to place claims on the hearts or the purses of those who chose not to join. Settlements were also unregulated, and unplanned in both layout and distribution. They seem usually to have centered on an extended family of some importance, and to included the families of their hired help.

The Town of Sweden

By 1813 the population of township three sufficed to warrant formation of a political town. In company with a sizeable but thinly populated portion of the One Hundred Thousand Acre Tract (by then known as the Connecticut Tract) to the west, it was partitioned from Murray by an act of formation which passed the legislature on April 2, 1813. The first meeting was delayed, however, since at the time of the town’s formation “very little of the land had been deeded, and it was with great difficulty, and not without some shifts that freeholders enough could be found or made to fill the town offices for some time after.”¹ "It was no uncommon thing," F.P. Root later recalled, "for a man to get some small amount deeded to enable him to hold office."² Thus it was that one

¹) B.R. 1:34, 6/5/57.
²) B.R. 2:41, 7/5/76. The original state constitution restricted suffrage. Small freeholders, with holdings valued at less than twenty pounds, and renters with tenancies of at least forty shillings a year were entitled to vote for the assembly, while none but freeholders with property valued at 100 pounds above all indebtedness could vote for senators or the governor. It was the conviction of the document’s author, John Jay, that those that owned the state should rule the state, and this conviction endured as law for nearly fifty years. At the constitutional convention of 1821 the delegates were preponderantly Bucktails, and as a part of the general overhaul of state government
Fig. 4.1. The enrollment figures for the district schools give some indication of the population distribution within the Town of Sweden. Clearly, the bulk of the population was clustered in the eastern half of the town and on the Beach Ridge (Niagara Escarpment). This pattern resulted from two factors. Swamps, which are prevalent in the southwestern corner, were avoided. However, proximity to the Ridge Road, which ran just north of the town, somewhat negated the deterrent effects of swamps.

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Common School Enrollment

Town of Sweden

1918-1919
year after formation the first meeting convened at the tavern of Johnson Beadle in Sweden Center. The electors conscientiously voted to acquire two volumes of the statutes of the State, to survey and clear the boundaries of the town, and to undertake various parochial projects for their mutual convenience. The final partition of Sweden was begun in 1819, when it was unanimously carried that the town be divided on the west line of the triangle. In 1821 notice was given of an intention to petition the legislature for the creation of Orleans County, to include "that part of Sweden that lies west of the Triangle line in the County of Genesee." Later in that same year, at the schoolhouse in Clarendon, the accounts were divided, and the Town's property, an assortment of books and boxes, was sold for fourteen dollars and forty-eight cents. This reduced the town to approximately twelve square miles, a size that left few persons more than three miles distant from the town center, the radius, as Okada has described it, of a typical farmer's circle of friends and acquaintances.

Since 1664 the political geography of New York had been organized as a hierarchic system of towns and counties, a design which simultaneously preserved centralized authority and distributed the power to address local concerns. This territorial structure mixed the patrician ideals of the Hudson River Valley and the pragmatic needs of humbler citizens. It was at the request of such citizens that towns were erected.

"Whenever a sufficient number of persons have planted themselves on a given tract," Timothy Dwight wrote, "of such extent that they can act without inconvenience in the proper business of a township, such a tract is incorporated for this purpose." Writing in 1813, Spafford sought to define this entity and to identify the various aspects of this "proper business." He wrote: "Town, is strictly, and even by our laws, a civil or communal district -Township, a territorial." He continued: 2

"They are not cities, nor even villages! What are they? They are organized for town purposes, elect town officials, pay Town, County and State Taxes, and some of them even have Town-houses where the public business is transacted -Civilly, they are Towns, territorially, Townships, whatever their form or area."

"Town purposes" are hardly elucidated by this passage, but a clue to their composition and limits is lodged in the phrase "civil or communal district." Unlike their New England counterparts, which Sack describes as "a parish with civil authority grafted on," the New York town filled no ecclesiastical function. The word communal is misleading, since the town was not an organic entity and it had no power to restrict membership, exclude paupers, or to regulate the sale of land. 3 It was simply a district defining a group of accidental neighbors and a political instrument through which neighbors could seek collectively to minimize the inconveniences posed by nature and one another.

The multiple contingencies that conspired to assemble these accidental neighbors are reflected in the fortuitous pragmatism that

3) Sack, pp. 140-144.
suggested the Town's name. Like most of the place names in western New
York, there is little to suggest that "Sweden" was the product of long
thought or deep feeling. The inspiration for the name "Sweden" is
certain, and Flick is content to categorize it with other "namesakes of
the Old World which added a certain glamor to the dreary frontier
settlements." It may memorialize Sweden's rather negligible
contribution to Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig in 1813, and be therefore
affiliated with names like Parma, Warsaw and Moscow. Another
possibility is the settlers' perception of a similarity between descriptions
of the Scandinavian forests and their own bog pocked, snowy and heavily
wooded home. This hypothesis is recommended by the Baltic flavor of
neighboring towns like Bergen and Riga, or the more distant Livonia.
Whatever the inspiration, the significance of the Town's name is its lack
of significance. Like the boundaries of the town, the name presumed no
particular contents; the one was simply a container, and the other was
simply a tag, prepared to hold and signify anything that occupied this
space. As a territorial category the town resembles other social categories
defined by heredity, function or class, and like these it is potentially an

1) Harold W. Thompson, Body, Boots and Britches. (Philadelphia: J.P.
Lippincott, 1940), pp. 447-480.
2) Admiral Franklin Hanford, "On the Origin of the Names of Places in
Monroe County," Scottsville Literary Society 35. (Scottsville, N.Y.: Scottsville Literary Society, 1911). This is reproduced as "Origins of the Names of Places in Monroe County, New York," Rochester Historical Society Publications 5 (1926): 49-77. See also, Alexandre C. Flick, History of the State of New York, (New York: Ira J. Friedman, 1962). vol 10, p. 310. For a time, it seems to have been called Brookfield. Hastings and Smith, p. 30. This is probably a transfer, either from Connecticut or Massachusetts, and not a description of local topography.
object of personal identification. Unsurprisingly there is little to suggest that this patriotism (in the strict sense of local allegiance) existed.

Certain parallels exist in this text. It is populated with words that can be classified by grammatical function or etymological affiliation but which at the same time inhabit a particular place within the space of these pages. Like geographic space, this is divided into territories. In fact, the sections, chapters and sub-headings are in some respects the analogue of the state, the county and the town. The entire work might be described as a federation of sections, while paragraphs might be likened to communities and sentences might be likened to households.

This metaphor can be pushed, if only slightly, in order to ask about the "political structure" of the dissertation. To what extent are the sentences, paragraphs, sub-headings and so forth autonomous? Is the centralized meaning of a thesis pervasive, intermittent or nonexistent? To oppose types that are, perhaps, ideal, we can recognize the possibility on the one hand of a totalitarian text which prohibits "local" autonomy. On the other we can envision a simple collection, a literary "community of convenience" in which there are assembled autarkic meanings. Thomas Aquinas has probably provided the best example of the first of these; the writing of Jean Baudrillard may provide the best example of the second.1

This metaphor might be pushed to explicate the "patriotic" affinity of the sentence. Is its primary identity derived from its place between its neighbors, or from its role in the service of the whole? If the first is true we will call it a digression; if the second is true we will say that it furthers the plot. With this is

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mind it is possible to see that a conventional dissertation, or an ordinary monograph, is an exercise of authorial absolutism. Every space in the text is organized in a hierarchy that supports the thesis. Digressions, which are a concession to the needs and desires of a particular moment during composition and a particular place in the text, are esteemed with totalitarian disgust as "disorderly," "undisciplined" and "uncontrolled." Curiously, these same words are used by the lovers of centralized planning to describe democratic politics and free market economics. Whether there is reason to have faith in some literary equivalent of the invisible hand or the public will is a matter that is far from clear, but it does seem odd that the great American dissertation production industry should so happily reproduce the form of this profoundly Germanic prototype.

Although the town had no say in the matter of souls, and it made scant claims on individual sentiments, it was valued as a practical instrument for the accomplishment of profane and prosaic tasks. Foremost among these was road construction, and between 1814 and 1816 the more populous eastern section received almost all the roads that it has today. This system improved a haphazard network of trails that had been "imperfectly cut out" during the first decade, and which had remained "in many places corduroyed with logs and timbers, and everywhere hardly passable." 1 In each of the first three years two hundred and fifty dollars was raised to improve the roads of the town; in 1817, when road building was superseded by road maintenance, no funds were allocated.

1) B.R. 1:34, 6/5/57.
Fig. 4.2. The road system of 1819 has been augmented, but the larger farms of later years did not require roads as closely spaced as those found on the Beach Ridge. The roads that are named were public property, and they appeared on the maps of Monroe County (which was formed in 1821). The remainder had no names and they did not appear on maps. Their existence can only be adduced from the records of road districts that appear in the Sweden Town Book.
For maintenance the town relied exclusively on corvée labor, determined in proportion to the value of a man's property. The average assessment was for five days, while that of the town's wealthiest citizen, John Reed, was for eighteen. The impressed laborers were notorious for dawdling and slipping away early, during what became known as a "shrinking day" of work. Farmers viewed it as a respite from their routine labor, and roadwork frequently degenerated into horseplay and fraternal insobriety. As late as mid-century, the Rural New Yorker described the typical town road as an "ingenious contrivance for creating mud." The product of these perfunctory efforts was what J.B. Jackson has called a "vernacular road system," a network that was "flexible, without overall plan, usually without maintenance, and the bane of long-range travelers and of a government wanting to expedite military or commercial traffic."

The layout of individual roads was not flexible, since each almost invariably followed the blazes of the lot lines of the original survey, but the overall plan was flexible, with each road created after an individual decision based on particular circumstances. Although rectilinear in form, the road pattern was not uniform in coverage. It was (and remains) most densely concentrated in those areas where small farms clustered in the 1820's. As one historian of Connecticut put it, they were "the embodiment of the right of each property owner to get free access to his

They were not public property, but rather public rights of access, easements over land which remained in the possession of the owner of the adjacent land. This seems to explain why they were not depicted on early maps of the county, and why they were given no names, but only appear in the town records with denominations such as: corner by Seth Spooner's east to the "Old East Road." This is now Shumway Road. The Old East Road (now called Sweden Walker Road) was a public thoroughfare built on land donated by the proprietors, and it thus had a name and it appeared on the county maps.

Travelers in the Genesee country were prone to comment on the number of wheeled conveyances. One who passed through Avon in 1828 wrote that "such a thing as a human being walking anywhere on the public roads out of the villages is rarely seen." Five years later another concurred: "the truth is people never think of walking: they get out a team, as they call it, and away they go, though they have not half a mile to ride. You will rarely meet anyone walking on a road." Is seem, however, that this was the rule only on the thoroughfares frequented by travelers. On the local roads walking was much the most common means of travel.

3) James Stuart, 1828, in Mau, p. 284.
5) Hedrick, p. 184.
By 1825, when the numbers had presumably risen, only one family in four owned a team.\(^1\)

Although the roads permitted periodic trips to market a more important daily function was to give livestock access to forage. While clearings remained limited, fields were too valuable to devote to grazing. The roads themselves were clearings, scars in the forest canopy, and their margins supported herbaceous plants and grasses. Furthermore, for animals such as pigs, which subsisted on roots and mast, roads gave access to unpurchased woodlots. This led to the town's second important task, the regulation of livestock whose privilege it was to roam these roads. This is why it kept a registry of each resident's earmark and policed the commons, which is to say the roads, for strays. Because animals were prone to stray, and while straying to trample and chew, or to indiscriminately inseminate; and because fences were rickety and neglected; and because the browsing and carousing of these fugitive beasts was a provocative affront to the privacy of private property, expensive fines were charged to the hapless owners of wayward cattle. At the first meeting of the town it was voted that pigs "not be free commoners," and Reuben Stickney of Sweden Center was appointed pound keeper and commanded to "furnish a yard sufficient for a pound." Hogs were sometimes granted winter liberty, but otherwise the victim of their rooting and grubbing was awarded twentyfive cents. After 1819, when breeding apparently became a concern, male animals were the specified

\(^1\) According to the State Census of 1825 there were 383 horses in Sweden, which amounts to .16 horses per capita. The average family numbered 6.
subjects of injunctions, and the fines rose dramatically. For a boar of more than four months, the forfeit was one dollar; for a roving ram, between August 12 and November 12, the owner was charged two dollars, and later five dollars; for a stud horse of more than two years, the penalty was ten dollars. Ultimately it was decided that all fences be four and a half feet high and "laid out in a workmanlike manner of logs rails, boards or of stone wall."

The tasks with which the town was charged were not exacting, and their accomplishment was never more than partial, but the uniformity of the population’s livelihood and their consequent mutuality of interest made these tasks relevant to every resident. Frontier agriculture was simply impossible without this primary association. This functional relevance made the town a community in Nisbet’s sense of the word, a necessary mediation between the family and the larger economic and political order. It is possible to identify a simple social structure in this community, exclusively male to be sure, and headed by persons of relative wealth, but otherwise egalitarian and practical in composition. The town officers, who were numerous, had duties that extended "to all objects of communal welfare." In spite of this noble description, apathy frequently made it necessary to impose a substantial forfeit on nominees who declined the office offered by their peers. Among these officers, the most notable was the supervisor. As Kathy Kutolowski has shown in her study of Genesee County politics in this period, this post was filled in

1) Nisbet, 1958.
2) Spafford, p. 28.
3) For a list of Supervisors of the Town of Sweden, see Peck, 1895, p. 405.
conformity with the "traditional deferential patterns" of New England. She attributes this to the fact that political problems were perceived as business problems, and thus it was only natural to select individuals with a demonstrated knowledge of the alchemy of wealth. If they derived personal advantage from their political position this was accepted because their personal assets were in the locality and personal advantage was inseparable from local advantage.1

Over Sweden's first half century the post was filled by many men. Few remained in office for more than a few successive one year terms, although many were returned to the position after an absence. For the first five years the Town Supervisor was John Reed, owner of the town's largest holdings. He was replaced in 1821 by Silas Judson, a miller who was acquainted, we may guess, with everyone. Three years later James Seymour, a storekeeper, assumed the position briefly, only to leave it before completion of his term to become sheriff of Monroe County. He was succeeded by Joseph Randall, another miller. Riding on the crest of Anti-Masonry, the farmer Robert Staples was returned to office five times before the office was yielded, once again, to millers. Until the 1870's the position alternated between millers and the owners of large farms, and many names recur. The only exceptions are the owner of a slaughterhouse and two lumber merchants in the village of Brockport, who held the office at various times after 1865. What unites all of these individuals is their visibility.

As its last task, the town assumed responsibility for the poor. Although the poor fund was not large—with an emergency supplement raised at the summer's end it came to two hundred and fifty dollars in the first year—it showed a notable commitment to communal responsibility. Recipients were referred to possessively as the "town's poor." Unfortunately, the record is both sparse and spare in its comments on the town's poor, but I suspect they were widows, orphans and elderly people struggling to survive without the assistance of children. The contract to care for these individuals was sold to the lowest bidder. What this suggests is that the town saw itself as a collective whose responsibility it was to compensate in those cases where the family unit was destroyed.

Early Religious Communities as an "Island of Holiness"

Missing from the catalogue of town duties that we have described are the ecclesiastical entanglements and moral incumbencies of the towns of New England. Needless to say, this stemmed from the disestablishmentarian state constitution of 1788. The role of the church, and of the meetinghouse as a pivot of local, geographical organization, was diminished by this separation of church and state, although the prevalence of religious apathy might, in any event, have achieved the same result. In western New York, "the Sabbath... was not visibly distinguished even as a day of relaxation," and the period of settlement was later remembered for "gross acts of wickedness, especially open and

bold desecration of the Sabbath, such as traveling away on business or pleasure, or deer hunting." This religious apathy was arrested by the general religious revival which swept the area between 1815 and 1817. These years embrace the infamous year without a summer, and chiliastic anticipation quite possibly provoked the upwelling of spiritual enthusiasm that brought the First Congregational Church of Sweden into being in the Fall of 1816.

On September fifth the sixteen original members gathered before the pastor of the church in nearby Riga and a representative of the Youth's Missionary Society of Utica to undergo examination "as to their religious experience and doctrinal belief." The congregation organized under fifteen articles of faith. Accepting these truths, and "denying all ..."
ungodliness and worldly lust" the covenant promised that, God willing, they would live "soberly, righteously and godly" all the days of their lives. They publicly eschewed "the habitual use of ardent spirits," forswore visiting friends on the Sabbath, and renounced vain amusements. But recognizing individual weakness they subscribed to the discipline of Matthew 18, and prayed for the grace "to watch over each other." The precaution was not entirely otiose. One member, Thomas Balch, was charged with the use of "indecent or lascivious words and actions in sundry times and places," and, although witnesses to the actions were not forthcoming, he was, for the verbal indiscretion, denied holy communion for three months time. The same penalty was levied on Abigale Beadle for habitual drinking and visiting friends on the Sabbath.

In the winter of 1819 the clerk of the church, the miller Silas Judson, was dispatched to Ogden "to place this church under the watch of the Presbytery," and in that year it was received into the Ontario Presbytery on the "accommodation plan." One year later the congregation built "a wooden structure possessing no particular beauty, form or comeliness, without paint inside or outside, with neither steeple or belfry, and but little to distinguish it from an ordinary barn." In other words, it was a perfectly typical Puritan meeting house. Perhaps with the

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1) B.R. 20:41, 20/6/76; Smith and Husted, p. 6. The first reference to the "usual place of worship" appears in the on the entry for June 3, 1820 in the Session Book, the first explicit reference to "the meetinghouse" appears in the entry of July 26, 1824.
hope that piety would promote some sober diligence in their debtors, the proprietors donated the two acre site and granted, in addition, one hundred acres to be sold for "the support only of the gospel ministry." Ministers were not numerous in the region, and the church did not resolve to seek a permanent pastor until 1829, one year after it was "resolved that a church of our faith and order be established at Brockport."

The society clearly grew, from sixteen original communicants, of whom ten of were women, in 1816, to thirty three in 1822 and eighty seven in 1827. Attendance was perhaps double this figure, but the fact remains that the visible saints were never more than about four per cent of the adult population in the immediate area. The communicants tended to be prominent citizens, Silas Judson, for example, was clerk of the church and Town Supervisor, but they were by no means representative citizens. This may be due to a popular indifference to religion, but it is more clearly attributable to the highly exclusive nature of the society as outlined in the articles of faith. Even if we include the Methodist society, which established two rural churches (in West Sweden in 1836 and in Sweden Center in 1856) and the Baptist, who established two rural churches (in East Sweden in 1830 and in West Sweden in 1836) we do not begin to include a majority of the population. This Christian community

2) O'Callaghan, vol. 4, p. 1184.
3) B.R. 20:41, 7/676; "Sweden Baptist Church Record Book, 1830-1895." Seymour Library, Brockport, N.Y.
was, as Curtis Johnson has shown the case to be elsewhere in rural New York, a small “island of holiness” in a sea of latitudinarianism.¹

The town records of Sweden that cover the years 1814 to 1821 are in a leather-bound volume that is presently lodged in a metal file drawer in the town office building. Upon request a polite public servant will retrieve the volume, and pass it across the counter with a sympathetic smile that she apparently reserves for antiquarians. The researcher is then directed to a quiet room, out of the way of the business of licensing dogs and settling parking tickets. What is first apparent upon opening the volume is the anachronism of its style: the solecisms of orthography, the crude penmanship, the listing lines, the irregularity or absence of headings. Some fundamental differences (other than sex) distinguish the clerk of 1815 from his brisk and orderly successor. The same apparent disorder, the same vexing illegibility, the same scrappy appearance, characterizes the contemporary church records.

What I find interesting in both cases is the manner in which I set out in my notes to tidy up the record, the alacrity with which I set about rectifying deficiencies like the absent index, page numbers and annually recurrent sections with clear headings. Had I paused I might have formed a good question. Rather than asking what the record contained, I might have asked why the record was made? Evidently it was not made to provide a convenient reference source. Admittedly, the absent amenities permit expedient extraction of information, they allow a reader to quickly penetrate an unfamiliar text much as street signs and road maps allow a driver to penetrate an unfamiliar

city, and the authors of this record may not have resented the time they spent hunting down an entry or they may have known its idiosyncratic design well enough to dispense with standardized guide posts, but this does not seem to have been the case. In fact, one wonders whether the record was used at all. With the exception of the log of carmarks by which stray beasts could be identified, and the damage they caused charged to their owner's account, it seems doubtful that people would forget the things that they wrote down. It also seems noteworthy that the lists of landowners and their annual assessment of road work carried no indication of their fulfillment or neglect of these duties.

The town and the churches were enduring corporate entities. Of the two, the town was more deeply inscribed in the landscape, but the churches also had structures and, more enduringly, burying grounds, that registered their existence. As institutions expected to span several generations they also wrote, and today preserve, records, literary relics. This has quite possibly exaggerated the importance of these institutions and given them an unwarranted prominence in the retrospective vista. Beyond this possible problem of overestimation there is, however, a deeper problem of reading and rewriting historical documents. Anachronisms abound! But they are not anachronisms of writing so much as they are anachronisms of my reading. To use Lowenthal's term, they exist in the modern "interpretive apparatus," the tangled nest of public and private institutions, physical settings, and literary technologies that have radically altered the context and quite possibly done violence to the content of a simple, crudely compiled, leather-bound volume. 1

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Centers and Settlements

Between the individual families and the town there existed a more intimate level of association in the rows of houses that clustered along the roads. Sweden Centers was, first of all, a voting place and equal access to this privilege determined its location. It can be seen as the functional and symbolic expression of democratic political organization in a rural society. The second form of clustering was the "settlement," a term imported from New England, and virtually synonymous with neighborhood. Various settlements came to be recognized in the town of Sweden. Among these the Root and Bethlehem settlements in the town's southeastern corner and the Moon settlement on the East Lake (now Sweden Walker) Road, are recorded. Some decades later, in the village of Brockport, neighborhoods, particularly ethnic neighborhoods, were referred to as settlements. Since the names of two of the rural settlements denote extended families, and since such clusters of fathers and sons were relatively common, it is possible that additional settlements were recognized. The population of these settlements was almost certainly augmented by the families of hired laborers. They are the representation in the landscape of a patriarchal family structure. Similar to settlements were corners, or important crossroads, such as Wilkie's Corners, Barlow's Corners or Reed's Corners.

1) For example, a fire was reported in "the new settlement a short distance south of the railroad," in 1861. This neighborhood was largely Irish. The housing provided for workers, also for the most part Irish, north of the canal near the harvester works, was called the "Carpenter Settlement." The name commemorated its developer. See, B.R. 5:31, 5/9/61; 11:52; 9/6/87.
Fig. 4.3. A reconstruction of the first farms based on the original deeds indicates that the original survey was immediately altered. Only a few of these farms occupied an entire 120-acre lot, and several comprised less than 40 acres. By 1821 contracts had been taken out on all of the land in Sweden, but even fifteen years later only about half of the land had been paid for (the unshaded area). This may indicate the low profitability of many farms. Far from yielding a significant marketable surplus, some of the smaller farms were inadequate to provide sustainable subsistence in basic necessities like firewood and grazing land. What this pattern suggests is that the owners of many of these smaller farms must have derived their cash income from seasonal labor on the large farms. The large blocks in the top center of the map embrace the strategic intersection of the Erie Canal (1821) and the Lake Road, and they represent the speculative holdings of the developers of Brockport.
All of these settlements were linear, a village form that prevailed in early western New York. Describing the Genesee Country in 1804, Robert Munro noted the settler’s “prevailing” practice of building adjoining the public roads, and cultivating lands nearest them.”¹ As Timothy Dwight described it, “the settlements are either villages, hamlets, or long continued lines of farmhouses distant from each other an eighth, a fourth, a half and sometimes three fourths of a mile. The villages are few; the hamlets are more numerous; but the extent is chiefly occupied by these lines of farm houses.”² The village of LeRoy was described in 1833 as extending two miles with “but a single street and that the public old highway.”³

This linear village was common to New England and, at a further remove, East Anglia.⁴ Joseph Wood has documented the prevalence of this linear form in New England, thereby significantly retouching our picture of the New England norm.⁵ The conventional understanding is that New England farmers lived in villages and worked in the surrounding fields, the motives for their clustering being a utopian social scheme and a recalcitrant native population. As this impulsion and this

¹) O’Callaghan, vol. 4, pp. 1172. 1176.
²) Dwight, vol. 4, p. 20.
compulsion to dwell together dwindled near the end of the eighteenth century, and as both were replaced by the profit motive of commercial agriculture, farmers are said to have abandoned their village houses to take up residence on their land. This is the scenario that Wood challenges when he argues that, from the early seventeenth century, scattered farmsteads and linear villages, or street villages such as those of northern Germany, constituted the common landscape of rural New England. Nucleation recurred in the Federal period when a market oriented economy brought an "increased demand for central goods." Sweden Center was what Wood calls an auxiliary central place. Its services, the tavern (1811), the post office (1819), the meeting house (1820) and the district school, were those found in the typical eighteenth century New England town center. Other services were dispersed, as no


3) The postmaster was Calvin Gibbs (1819-1821). Sweden Center remained an office until 1859, when it became a branch of the Brockport office. It was discontinued in 1875. John L. Kay and Chester Smith, *New York Postal History: The Post Offices and First Post Masters From 1773-1980* (State College Pa.: American Philatelic Society, 1982), p. 177. The mail was routed through Bergen, see O. Turner. 1851, p. 556.
residents could engage in a full time non-agricultural activity. As was reported elsewhere in the Genesee Country, even professional men had "their principal supply from their farms, and use their calling principally as a recreation." The Raleighs, for example, who lived just south of what would become Brockport, were hatters as well as farmers. Their shop was located on the farm. Likewise, the town's first physician, John B. Elliott, owned a forty-acre farm on the Beech Ridge. It is possible that this served as a means to overcome his patients' lack of cash, as physicians were said to purchase wild land in order that their patients could work off their debts by clearing it. Other home industries, such as weaving, were widely pursued, particularly by women. Many of these products found a showcase at the crossroad's store in Clarkson. Goods were frequently bartered, as were services, in a transaction called "changing work."

Although visitors to western New York noted that "every man is a farmer and a proprietor" and "few therefore can be procured for hire," comparison of a list of Sweden landholders and the census of 1820 indicates that the majority did not possess land. If they were regularly employed by one land owner, they presumably dwell on or adjacent to his land. If they were day laborers they would, presumably, choose to dwell near the town center where farmers would go to seek recruits.

For information regarding the school house, see the deed for the adjoining tract of Mark Femre, Triangular Tract-Deed Book, vol. 2, p. 112.

1) John Melish, 1811, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 6.
3) Hedrick, p. 205.
4) Mau, p. 229.
Dismantling Nature

The settlers of Sweden were members of an organic society. The fibers in their cloth, the fertility in their soil and the fuel in their fireplace was extracted from the world of biological organisms. The original source was the solar radiation that struck the earth from year to year. Not for another thirty years would these people begin to tap the ancient sunlight that was fossilized in the bowels of the earth.

The resource base of this society was therefore, at least potentially, renewable, a word that may provoke admiration, or even envy, in the breast of a modern human. Such a response would be founded on a marked overestimation of the benignity of organic societies such as this one. Agriculture can only occur when some preexisting ecosystem is at least partially dismantled and its energy flows are rechanneled to the desired species and mechanical devices. This action has consequences that are immediate and manifest; but, due to the complexity of the natural system and its arcane feedbacks, this action also has consequences that are microscopic, global, delayed or otherwise hidden from view. A second aspect of this society that should check any nostalgic admiration is the fact that, as practiced, its livelihood was not sustainable.

Clearing the Forests

Cutting down trees accomplished three things. First, by burning the wood and allowing its ash to mix with the soil, the settlers took possession of the solar energy of previous centuries. This, and the
absence of weeds and vermin in the first couple of years, gave them the spectacular but short-lived returns of twenty five bushels of wheat per acre that were reported as average in the first years. It was fortunate that this bonus existed, since a family of five required from twenty to thirty bushels of wheat for its own subsistence.

For individuals who could hire laborers to help with clearing, subsistence was never in doubt. In event of emergency, the same funds could be used to purchase food. But this prerogative was uncommon, and in most cases the family provided all of the energy that was available to dismantle the forest and assemble the farm. Sanguine promoters like Charles Williamson assured settlers of profits in the first year, but he assumed that hired labor would clear the land and sow the wheat. For the majority who could not command this labor, progress was slow and profits were delayed. We are told that two husky professionals showing off could fell a tree four feet in circumference in just over three minutes, but, adjusting to more sustained exertion, the sedulous farmer could be proud to clear ten acres in a year. In those frequent cases where the settler or his wife was incapacitated with fever, this might be reduced to a miserable four. Russell has suggested that even this modest figure is a high "pioneer rate," which would fall to a bare acre and a half once farming was underway, weeds and vermin had begun to flourish, and the

1) O'Callaghan, vol. 4, p. 1174
2) Individuals were said to require four to six bushels of wheat a year, although the figure could be lowered to three bushels if alternative grains were also consumed. _The Country Gentleman_, 7 (1856), p. 365.
3) O'Callaghan, vol. 4, p. 1148.
4) Handy and McKeilvey, p. 38; Mau, p. 174, 149; Hedrick, p. 110.
settlers' energies were diverted to other tasks. And this was not immediately available cropland. Trees felled in June, which was the typical month for clearing, were not flammable until August, when each acre demanded an additional day to skid the unconsumed remains of the larger trunks and boughs.

In 1819, a visitor to Riga described the area as "a swampy wilderness" where the residents were "shivering with ague and wasted with long continued fevers." As late as 1822, a resident of the neighboring town of Ogden recalled, "a large portion of the present Monroe County, west of the Genesee River, was a dense forest, consisting of heavy timber, with here and there an opening." Between the Ridge and Buffalo Roads, Lyell Road extended a mere four miles west of Rochester, and "from there to Ogden Center, most of the way, the pedestrian was guided by blazes through the trackless woods." In 1835, standing on the escarpment over Lewiston and looking north toward the Lake, a traveler saw "a perfect sea of wood, an immense level forest, which extended for forty or fifty miles in length and twenty or thirty in breadth."

Nearly two decades after the first settlers had arrived in the northern townships of the Triangle the imprint of their labor remained faint. In the most densely settled section on the Beech Ridge felling and burning continued. In 1829, a traveler on the Ridge Road commented that the untamed landscape was much as that along the Niagara Road must have been three decades earlier. Ten years later, and thirty years after settlement, Fredrica Sophia Broke traveled the same road and "passed several fires where the trees were burning as they stood or their trunks and branches piled up and blazing." Patrick Shirreff described the same landscape as "more recently settled than any [he had] yet seen, the fields being thickly covered with black stumps overtopping the wheat crop: and the felling and burning of trees...going on in all directions."

The chronology of these quotes suggests that clearing was a stretched over several decades, and that the pace of deforestation may have increased once the Erie Canal brought money into more common circulation, thus permitting the employment of laborers. Somewhat less than half of Sweden was deforested in 1825. Over the next decade the figure rose to sixty seven per cent. Under the constraints of low wheat prices that followed the panic of 1837 the farms actually lost some ground to the forests, which had reclaimed thirty-seven acres by 1845. As wheat prices rose back toward two dollars a bushel in the 1850's the forest

2) Fredrica Sophia Broke "Memorandum During Tour in the United States," (1834), Rush Rees Library manuscripts.
3) Patrick Shirreff, A Tour of North America... As Adapted for Agricultural Emigration, Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1835: p. 87
was further reduced, to a minimum of about twenty per cent of the land in Sweden. Each expansion renewed the burst of fertility that came from cutting and burning the native vegetation, although pests like the Hessian Fly were immediately propagated from the neighboring fields. The declining productivity that prompted the alarms of the 1850's was a combination of the ineradicable pests, weeds and vermin that accompanied agriculture and the inability of farmers to keep production up with further expansions onto virgin land.

The second reason for cutting the trees was, as Jones puts it, to remove the climax vegetation and replace it with "a syncretic ecosystem arrested long before the climax stage of forest and accordingly under severe ecological strain." Jones phrases it in this manner to draw attention to the fact that, unlike the homeostatic climax, the fields were an unstable ecotone in which material forces struggled to restore an energy balance. In fact, it was the constant need to arrest these forces that explains the declining rate of clearing. Each acre that was cleared required an annual investment of additional labor to keep it clear of the forests that would swiftly recolonize it, and of the pests that were constantly competing with the settlers for the products of their fields.

One settler in the region remembered that "as the wolves grew scarce, the deer became plenty." This was almost certainly true, but it fails to ask how the wolves became plenty, a multiplication that was almost certainly due to increased numbers of deer foraging in the fields and

2) O. Turner, 1850, p. 315.
clearings created by the settlers. E.L. Jones has summarized the situation:

The early European pioneers in American woodlands provided more and more "edge" - the ecotone so important for biological variety - and concluded that the edible mammals and birds along the margins of the forest, among the second-growth saplings and in the Indian clearings had been the original forest dwellers. "Actually these animals were a crop," the Milnes have written, "raised inadvertently."

The wolves, whose howl one settler in the Triangle remembered as "the most dismal and frightful, mournful" of sounds, was one of the inadvertent "livestock" of the farm. The same was true of bears, which would "prowl about the cabin in the night scavenging the bones of squirrels and pigeons" discarded by the slovenly inhabitants. Following the fields into the wilderness as undesired, but nevertheless integral, members of the agricultural colonization were crows, grey squirrels, quails and opossum.

Measures were taken to control some of these inadvertent consequences of agriculture. At its first meeting, it was resolved that "the Town of Sweden pay ten dollars for every Wolf scalp that is ketch'd [sic.] and killed by an inhabitant of the town." In the same year, settlers in Sweden and neighboring towns organized a general wolf hunt. Beginning at the town line, a circle of men and boys slowly and raucously constricted their line, thereby driving the carnivores to a point near the

1) Jones, p. 514
3) Joseph Sibley and George Hosmer, in Mau, pp. 91, 176.
town center where they were slaughtered. The extirpation must have succeeded, as fifteen years later wolves were sufficiently exotic to be displayed beside camels and panthers in a touring circus. Although this spared the settler's livestock, it removed the check on the number of deer and opened their crops to redoubled depredations. A similar unforeseen feedback can be surmised from the extirpation of rattlesnakes. The audible relish with which these were eaten by foraging hogs was counted as a blessing, and this was undiluted by reflections on the effect their removal would have on the population of ravenous rodents. The disruption of the forest cover also opened a vast habitat to weeds, aggressive plants that were under normal conditions limited to the scars that were left by landslides and forest fires. By 1819 the Town of Sweden found it necessary to fine those slovenly farmers that let Canada Thistle go to seed on their land.

The third reason for clearing the land was to secure wood. Obviously, it was used as a building material, and, due to its apparent plentifullness it was prodigally wasted. Sophia Broke commented that in the Genesee country "the very barbers' poles, of which there are numbers in each town, have enough timber in one of them to satisfy all the barbers in any moderate town in the United Kingdom." Wooden buildings, fences and implements were seldom painted, and they therefore rotted and demanded frequent replacement. Vast amounts of

1) B.R. 15:36, 6/1/71.
2) John Maude, 1800, in Mau, p. 110; Francis Hall, 1816, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 19.
3) Broke, 1834.
wood were also consumed as fuel. Depending on the hardness of the wood
burned, one correspondent to The Country Gentleman claimed that
individual farmsteads had consumed fifty to one hundred acres of
woodland for fuel in the first half century.¹

Perhaps the greatest excise placed on the woodlands came as a
result of the potash trade. Potash, wheat, pork and oak built staves for
barrels in which to ship these commodities, were the principal
commercial products of the region, and of these potash was undoubtedly
the most important. Looking back, one settler questioned "how they could
have got along without it."² The temporary fertility of the accumulated
forest mold rendered superfluous its use as a fertilizer, and among pioneer
farmers "all of them who could raise a five pail kettle, or club with their
neighbors and get a cauldron, commenced the manufacture of the new
article of commerce."³ One Clarkson merchant remembered that "many
times when a new settler was under the necessity of raising some money,
or stood in need of store trade, he would go into the forest, chop down
maple and elm trees, roll them together and burn them, for the ashes
alone, without reference to clearing."⁴ The relation of this new article of
commerce to the British woolen industry serves to illustrate the
connection between activities seemingly disparate, in both character and
location, as the felling and burning of trees on the shore of Lake Ontario

²) O. Turner, 1851, p. 563.
⁴) O. Turner, 1851, p. 563.
and the building of mills in the Pennines of England. To employ the terms of world systems theory, it exemplifies the manner in which the economic development of the periphery is directed and driven by the economic development of the core.

By 1865 Sweden was twenty per cent forested. If the farmers had invested time in woodlot management they could have just subsisted on the renewable energy resource that remained. But the village population, the several steam engines of its factories and, most insatiably, the railroad, were placing new demands on the forest. Sweden had passed the point of sustainable energy self-sufficiency some years earlier, and had begun to import coal. This exploitation of the lithosphere had a counterpart in the use of inorganic gypsum as a fertilizer in place of organic ashes. Lumber was imported from Canada and Michigan.

These novel solutions to the local scarcity of forest products obviated careful management, and there is little to suggest that careful husbandry replaced gross exploitation in the dwindling woodlots. There were, however, signs of a decline in the value of open land which contrast markedly with practices when open land was scarce. This is evident in the town’s population of horses, which doubled per capita between 1825 and 1865. For the earliest settlers oxen were the preferred draught animal. Unlike horses, bull calves were a byproduct of another part of the farm ecology, dairying. In addition, the oxen’s strength was undiminished by a diet of hay and pasture, while a horse required oats.

This was appreciated when both labor and plowland were limited. A yoke was far less expensive than a harness. One last economy offered by the ox was the coincidence that, upon its demise, its owner was not restrained by dietary scruples or inhibitions.¹

**Schools**

This may seem an odd place for a discussion of schools, but the fact is they belong at the boundary of this society's organization of labor and the energy system of its regional environment. Children were laborers, and even the smallest could be put to work scaring away crows. Through the first part of the nineteenth century, as F.P. Root put it, "parents owned and educated their own children."² Defiance of the parent's claim on their child's labor was undertaken by the State in the 1870's, after the majority had lost any reason to defend this traditional liberty. In this northern climate there was relatively little to do through the long winter months, and like any pool of idle labor children were, presumably, disposed to behave in an obnoxious and inconveniencing manner. Candice Beach taught in a district school just north of Sweden in 1815. In her diary she wrote that her class was comprised of "27 as big Rogues as ever lived," strong lads accustomed to work. The reason for their idleness is suggested in a subsequent line. "It is so uncomfortable

²) B.R. 20:41, 7/6/76
for myself and Scholars;" Beach wrote, "the greater part of them have no
shoes nor stockings, and it is too cold for them."¹ To insure a modicum of
comfort for teachers and pupils in the eleven district schools in Sweden,
parents were assessed a week's board for the teacher and one cord of
wood.²

John Stilgoe has written that such district schools "objectified the
American commitment to education for democracy but their locations
objectified democratic difficulties."³ Whatever its applicability
elsewhere, the second assertion, based on the claim that schoolhouses
were often inconveniently situated on the district's most worthless parcel,
is not born out in Sweden. Here every schoolhouse was optimally located
at the crossroads of greatest centrality. We must approach the first
assertion with similar circumspection. The most plausible explanation of
the Northern schoolhouse, and the North's historic support of education,
is the fact that winters were long and cold, houses were small and
crowded, and there was nothing much to do until spring.

Mills

Through the first few years of settlement, while population and
productivity remained low, mills were scarce. From 1804 to 1810 the
inhabitants of the northern townships took what wheat they had to
Stoddard's mill on Oatka Creek. Since the journey, out and back, was a two-

¹) Candice Beach Diary, Miscellaneous Collection, box 3. LeRoy Historical
Society.
²) Peck, 1895, p. 407.
³) John Stilgoe, Common Landscape of North America, 1850-1845, (New
day haul for farmers from remote quarters like Sweden and its northern neighbor, Clarkson, the mill had been, since 1801, adjoined by three taverns offering overnight accommodations. Unfortunately, the northern townships contained no superior mill sites like that at LeRoy, which might entice private capitalists in advance of a supporting population and serve as a stimulus for settlement. This deficiency, Dwight noted, prevailed from Manlius to Buffalo Creek. A southerly dip of the underlying strata diverts the runoff from the southern uplands into a series of lateral depressions by which it is channeled into the Genesee River, and, as a result the streams in the north are small and intermittent. In addition, precipitation along the lake is surprisingly slight. By late August the largest local stream, Sandy Creek, was often dry.

Without any advantageous sites the area was compelled to wait through six years of slowly increasing population before anyone would venture to invest the thousand or so dollars required for a small saw and grist mill. Elsewhere proprietors subsidized mills, but there is no indication that this was done in the Triangle. Deeds indicate that the millers that eventually located in Sweden paid a premium rate for their mill sites. By 1810, milling was done at Churchville on Black Creek.

1) Calvin Freeman, in Smith and Husted, p. 7. O. Turner, 1851, pp. 543, 548.
2) Dwight, vol. 4, p. 84.
3) XYZ [Johnston Verplanck], p. 64.
4) O'Callaghan, vol. 4, p. 1151. Note, this investment is about four times that of a farm.
6) The land for the sawmill raised by Roswell Burrows in 1815 was purchased for $6.58 an acre, about 40% more than the average price of farmland. Triangle Tract Deed Book, vol. 1, p. 227.
which flows year round, and at Clarendon, where Sandy Creek drops with
seasonal vigor over the Niagara escarpment. Grist and saw mills were
constructed along the Ridge in the vicinity of Clarkson after 1811, and
between 1813 and 1815 both a gristmill and a sawmill appeared at Hog's
Mouth, east of Sweden Center, where Salmon Creek breaks through the
Beech Ridge.

The proliferation of local mills came with the second, wave of
settlers and the inflated wheat prices of 1812-18. It was terminated by
what was rather sentimentally called the "hydraulic privilege" of the
Genesee Falls, in Rochester. In 1812, Hamlet Scranton wrote from the site
of the future city that his environs were "in a state of nature at present,
but the prospect is very promising for business in case the difficulties are
settled between the British and American nations." The bridge over the
Genesee was nearing completion, farms were selling for anywhere from
five to fifteen dollars an acre, and, most critically, forested village lots of a
quarter acre were selling for fifty dollars. By 1830 eleven "flouring mills"4
(a local term, typically expressing the active process rather than

1) Hastings and Smith, p. 33.
2) A.L. Bugbee, "Map of Monroe County," 1822, Rundel Library Map
Collection, Bill 1. The course of Salmon Creek is inaccurately
depicted, however we can see three flouring mills, owned by Judson,
Davis and Randall, and four saw mills. None of these men are listed as
a full time miller on the Census of 1820. Although he is not identified
on the Bugbee map, Keen Burrows owns a plot on Salmon Creek
where N.T. Hall will operate the only remaining mill in 1852. On the
N.T. Hall Mill, see the Map by P.J. Brown, "Monroe County," Addison,
N.Y.: A.G. Gillett, 1852. On the mills near Clarkson on the Ridge Road,
see Peck, pp. 254-259.
3) Jane Marsh Parker, Rochester: A Story Historical. (Rochester:
4) James Boardman, 1829, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 40.
the static product) turned fifty-three runs of stones with a capacity to grind twelve thousand bushels of wheat daily.\textsuperscript{1} By 1833, Rochester's sawmills turned out nine million board feet of lumber.\textsuperscript{2} By this time the Erie Canal had, of course, augmented this hydraulic privilege, as it eliminated the scattered local mill's advantage of propinquity and brought a larger area into Rochester's ambit.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Traveling over western New York in 1796, Isaac Weld found much to abhor. In particular, he deplored the evident fact that settlers were "totally dead to the beauties of nature" and seemed to admire nothing but the promise of personal enrichment.\textsuperscript{3} Some years later a similar dismay overcame visitors to the falls at Rochester, where the diversion of water into the millraces had so diminished the river's volume that gusts of wind flapped the "thin gauze veil," and sometimes blew the piddling sheet up into the air.\textsuperscript{4} "No point can be found," Trollope wrote of the falls in 1832, "where its voice and its movement are not mixed and confounded with those of the admirable machinery of this flourishing city."\textsuperscript{5} Some years earlier John Howison had expressed similar sentiments. He wrote: "the rattling of mills, and the smoke of iron foundries... neither harmonize

\textsuperscript{1) John Fowler, 1830, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 46.  
2) Stephen Davis, 1833, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 60.  
3) Isaac Weld, 1796, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 7.  
5) Trollope, p. 333.}
It is doubtful whether all geographers could be brought voluntarily to subscribe to a single definition of their field, no matter how generous or non-binding its terms. The source of this fractious nature is unknown. Perhaps there is a selection for temperaments that find the regulation of a community ungenial and who have, therefore, at some point drifted into the initiatory habit of idling and fantasizing over maps. Perhaps, as the positivists would argue, it is a murky term, as yet unidentified, in our discourse. Whatever its source, this partisan spirit can be pacified by the shibboleth of human relations with the environment, perhaps the closest thing we have to a universally accepted card of membership in the discipline.

The politics of this study are hardly clear, since it is as apt to appeal to misanthropists as it is to humanitarians. But the appeal of the rhetoric is more readily discerned. Human relations with the environment are almost invariably written out (as they are here) in terms of what Burke called a “dialectic of tragedy.” Human action elicits an environmental reaction. Humans then passively suffer the consequences of this reaction and transcend their former state with an acquisition of new knowledge, or what Burke calls “tragic vision.” Ralph Brown, for example, described the Mormon failure to grow oranges in San Bernardino in terms of such a dialectic, which he called “the practical test of putting people on the land.”

1) Howison, p. 286.
vision" was attained once speculative beliefs were exchanged for hard-won, "actual knowledge" of the land. It seems that the great power of stories with an ecological plot resides in their didactic function. They are instructive, and they also illustrate the nature of instruction, or the acquisition of knowledge. Curiously, this is represents nature as a character which speaks to humans in a dialogue. Writing this dialogue down creates a new object and begins a new dialogue. Once again the result should be heightened knowledge. It should also result, as Burke argued, in a catharsis or a purging of guilt through verbal symbolism.2

Reaching for the Outside

Those who arrived after 1812 may have been, as their descendents later claimed, more assiduous than their predecessors, but the development of the the northern townships of the Triangle was the fruit not so much of their superior industry as it was of a new mercantile geography. After the cessation of hostilities a swelling volume of Genesee Country produce was directed toward the Rochester mill site and the Genesee harbor for preliminary processing and shipment to Montreal down the St. Lawrence River, a channel which Dwight described as "the cheapest, safest and most unembarrassed passage for the produce of all the countries that surround the great American Lakes."3 This had been

1) Brown, 1948, p. 11.
3) Dwight, vol. 4, p. 86.
legal since the ratification of Jay's Treaty in 1795, and it had been vigorously promoted by Charles Williamson, the proprietor's agent for the huge Pultney Purchase to the east, as an exercise in Anglo-American rapprochement. Jefferson's embargo (1807-9), which caused a glut in eastern markets, stimulated this trade, but it was not until the end of the war in 1814 that it flourished.

Under the provision in Jay's Treaty, duty free export of American staples to Canada began in 1795, and it continued until the Canada Trade Act of 1822. Bulky commodities like wheat, lumber and potash were shipped over Lake Ontario and down the St Lawrence River to the Canadian entrepot. At the same time New York City merchants were using the partially improved Mohawk River to convey manufactured goods to western New York and upper Canada. Like the trade in produce, this trade in goods was also a result of Jay's Treaty, which secured for American manufactured goods and European goods imported by American mercantilists a duty at the Canadian border that was no higher than that which was levied at Canada's seaport ports. This, with the export of raw materials caused a trade imbalance as the Americans, desirous of no Canadian products, would take only cash in payment.

William Hencher, a fugitive partisan of Shay's Rebellion, established a post at the mouth of the Genesee River in 1792, and built a boat which he used to trade with Canada. In 1796, when the British surrendered the forts at Oswego and Niagara, "there was a great change..."

navigation on the lake was brisk," and "surveyors and emigrants on their way to New Connecticut [Ohio] often put into the mouth of the river." With the Canadian markets opened by the treaty, flour at the lake ports brought twice the price that it did at Geneva, and the trade in cattle was similarly profitable. Since the establishment of the first asher at Tryon Town on Irondequoit Bay in 1799, pearl ash had become an important export, with one hundred and eight barrels being shipped to Montreal at a shilling a bushel. The English woolen industry, which used the ash to clean flocks of the gummy secretions known as the yoke, was insatiable in its demand for this article.

This embarkation point rose to dominance since larger vessels could not negotiate the sand bar at the mouth of Irondequoit Bay, and by 1810, when it was called Latta's and boasted twelve shanties, it was the principal coastal settlement between Oswego and Lewiston. As such it merited the bombardment that was launched from the ships of the British commander, Admiral Yeo, in 1814. Retreating from this exposed position after the war, the docks clustered at Carthage Landing and Hanford's Landing on the east and west banks of the river at the head of navigation. Ships were pulled to the landings by men hauling towlines along the

1) O. Turner, 1851, pp. 410-13; 1850 p. 320.
4) Van Wagener, pp. 164-65.
shore. By mid-summer 1810, "1,000 barrels each of flour, pork and potash, and 100,000 staves had already been shipped to Montreal" from the Genesee Port. Navigation on the lake increased dramatically after 1816. In 1817 the first steamboat, the "Ontario," touched at Rochester. By 1818 there were sixty vessels on the lake; by 1821 there were one hundred and fifty. Throughout these years, until it was stemmed by the Canadian Trade Act of 1822, and staggered by completion of the canal, about 400,000 dollars worth of goods were annually exported through the facility.

Inland, an extensive system of collection points and transportation links developed, and these were increasingly oriented toward the Genesee harbor. At the landing, goods such as salt were hoisted up the banks of the Genesee River gorge on an inclined plane, counterbalanced by descending exports. At the crest of the hill a portage, improved at an early date with a horse-drawn tram, ran to the head of the rapids above Rochester. Here it connected with durham boats that could travel up the Genesee to warehouses at Scottsville, Avon, York, Genesee, Moscow (now Leicester) and Mount Morris. At Gardner on the Genesee, and at Dansville

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on Canaseraga Creek, portages to Portageville on the upper Genesee and Arkport on Canisteo Creek gave access to the remote interior.¹

At the same time overland transport, which had formerly channeled produce south onto the Niagara Road, was reoriented toward the lower Genesee. To the west the Ridge Road, which intersected the river at Hanford’s Landing, served as the major artery. This had been discovered in 1798 by the aspiring trader Eli Granger, who was foraging the woods for oak with which to construct his sloop, the Jeremiah. In the course of his search he stumbled upon the Ridge, a fossil beach that ran like a great artificial causeway through the swamps westward to Lewiston on the Niagara River. In the following year this was cleared from King’s Landing (later Hanford’s Landing) on the Genesee to the road that ran north from Canawagus (Avon) to Braddock Bay through the heart of West Pultney.² Under the guidance of Charles Williamson it was pushed to a point twelve miles west of the river, probably to the Lake Road, by at least 1804, which is when James Sayers purchased the four corners.³

In 1805 Joseph Ellicott explored the western section, and endorsed its immediate improvement, but his plans were only slowly realized, and for some years the Ridge Road crossed the Lake Road only to dwindled to a faint and inconvenient path. By 1807 it was opened as the North State Road.⁴

4: Community, Ecology and Economy in Early Sweden

[Map of the area with various locations marked, such as Avon, Caledonia, LeRoy, Rochester, and others.]
Fig. 4.4. The Niagara Road provided the primary axis for the overland transportation system that developed west of the Genesee River. Three principal tributaries were extended north, their placement determined by the holdings of the land companies and harbor facilities on Lake Ontario. As the Ridge Road was pushed west from the Genesee River between 1799 and 1804, marketing centers arose at the crossroads. Produce that had been directed south to the Canandaigua market was increasingly directed north to the Port of the Genesee and the Montreal Market. Unlike Caledonia, LeRoy and Batavia, which existed on sizeable streams and therefore possessed significant milling facilities, Parma, Murray (later Clarkson) and Gaines were situated on intermittent streams whose headwaters had been captured by Black Creek. Their role was simply to forward grain to the Rochester mills, a reduced function which explains their failure to rival the size of their southern counterparts.
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Road to the western boundary of the Triangle, and Ellicott's crews were active to the west, but the section running over the intervening One Hundred Thousand Acre Tract (Connecticut Tract) remained primitive.¹

The work appears to have progressed slowly, as the army of Jacob Brown, which was bound from Sacketts Harbor to the Battle of Lundy's Lane in 1814, turned back west of Clarkson, repulsed by mud, unbridged streams and tangled undergrowth.²

Until 1815 the absence of bridges hampered travel on the Ridge, but as the minor streams were spanned it came into competition with the State Road to the south.³ Its use as a route for western migration was promoted in 1812 when the Genesee was bridged at Rochesterville, and advanced in 1819 when Canandaigua merchants, in an attempt to outflank that village, threw their stupendous bridge over the Genesee gorge at Carthage.⁴

Spanning the gorge on a prodigious wooden arch, with a chord of three hundred feet, this bridge stood for nearly two years before the center began to buckle under the weight of the leaning and overmassed timbers of the sides. Despite a shoring of logs, and tons of stones set on the center as a counterweight, it snapped upwards in 1820, and with it collapsed the dream of fixing Carthage as the nexus of western transport. Of course the merchants at Murray Four Corners (Clarkson) were anxious to see the

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¹ Bingham (ed.), pp. 273-4 and 313. The Ridge to the western boundary of the Triangle was a road district by 1806. A.H. Wright, pp. 384-5.
² Peck, 1895, p. 404.
³ O. Turner, 1850, p. 362.
Ridge became a major thoroughfare, and so in the same year that the Carthage Bridge was constructed, Witter Steward, Gustavius Clark, James Seymour and Able Baldwin petitioned the State legislature to authorize the supervisors of Genesee County to raise one thousand dollars to bridge Sandy Creek on the Ridge Road west of their hamlet.

By 1818 two stages provided daily service between Canandaigua and Lewiston, the Old Line, which carried the mail, and the Sabbatarian Pioneer Line. Ten years later one traveler pronounced the road "perhaps the best in America;" a few years subsequent another, who had been elsewhere badly rattled, wrote that he should "die in the belief that it is the very best in the United States." He took up a book and ventured to read, so smooth was the roadbed and so steady the ride. Only the grouching John Fowler found reason to complain. With his head swaddled in kerchiefs against the billowing dust he sulked along bored by "the most uninteresting eighty miles of ground I have ever passed over."*4

Although Fowler found scant distraction in the scene, there were by 1818 various sights that might rouse a less etiolated curiosity. Several little villages were strung along this road at the points where it intersected the major north-south routes, like the Lake Road, which had been laid out from the south fifteen years earlier. By the 1820's "all, or

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1) Albany Argus, 7, 2/26/1819.
4) John Fowler, 1830, in Mau, p. 315.
nearly all of them appeared to be flourishing.\(^1\) Of these, Clarkson was the principal "caravanserai" between Rochester and Gaines, and one traveler described it as "a cheerful-looking village with a neat church."\(^2\) Although it boasted an impressive brick tavern by 1817, its function as a way station for western travelers was minor. Almost everyone spent the night in Rochester, and Clarkson, which lay only an hour or so beyond that place, was at best a breakfast stop.

In addition to being, like Sweden Center, an auxiliary central place with a meeting house and tavern, its principal function was to collect country produce and ship this over the Ridge to the Rochester Mills and Hanford's Landing. It was, in other words, a merchant's outpost. Unlike Sweden Center it was a point of articulation with the regional economy; it maintained regional linkages and attracted a different sort of individual. Initially, mills might serve as the site for exchange, but as milling began to concentrate at the most advantageous sites, and the distance from farm to mill site increased, stores operated by independent entrepreneurs, but linked to these mills, began to appear. On the other hand, asheries, which had no significant power demands, but which reduced the bulk of the commodity to be transported, did not concentrate in a single place but remained scattered. Thus the combination mill and store that Williamson had envisioned did not come to be the rule, although most stores ran their own asheries.

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\(^2\) Charles Daubney M.D., 1837, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 67
Henry McCall and Joshua Field were the first to accept ash at their stores in Clarkson, the former opening his doors in 1810. Here the raw ash was converted to potash or pearl ash, loaded into four hundred pound barrels and forwarded to the Genesee port, where, as early as 1800, it fetched thirty-six cents a bushel. James Seymour moved to Clarkson in 1817. A Connecticut native, he had acquired some experience and capital working in the store of his uncle, Henry Seymour, in Pompey, New York. Arriving in Clarkson he immediately tented a wing of the new brick tavern, built in the previous year by Heil Brockway, and began running a store. 

A short time later he moved across the Lake Road to the store and ashery of Joshua Field, which he subsequently purchased. Here he remained for about five years until, in anticipation of the canal, he relocated in Brockport, a mile to the south. The traffic in ashes was considerable, and two branch asheries seem to have processed ashes for Seymour's store, Cussick's "down north," and Amos Stuckney's in Sweden Center.

This store and ashery was the focus to two economies. The first of these was local. Individuals who found themselves with a few extra eggs or a superfluous dogkneb or an unnecessary pitchfork would exchange these items for credit at Seymour's store. Likewise, home industries like hat making and weaving, which were numerous, used this place as a

1) John Mauze, 1800, in Handy and McKelvey, p.10.
3) This, and much of what follows on the Seymour store and ashery, is drawn from Mary E. Smith, "The Seymour Store and Ashery and 'Murray Four Corners' Town of Clarkson, Monroe County, New York," Manuscript, Onondaga Public Library. LN48C621s.
showcase for their wares. At the same time the store was a collection point for commercial products which it directed to a larger market. Because of this connection it was one of the few sources of cash, which farmers needed to pay their mortgages and taxes. This was disbursed for market produce, for work at the ashery, or for hauling goods to the river, although it appears that produce and work were more frequently exchanged for goods and credit. Farmers could exchange a day's work at the ashery for a dollar's credit at the store and they could haul produce to the landing for three dollar's credit. The reliance on barter succeeded in preventing the dislocation of the points of sale and purchase, and this was much to Seymour's advantage, but Seymour was himself similarly constrained by the absence of cash. He sold wheat to the four local distilleries for whiskey of equivalent worth, he sold rags to a Rochester paper mill for an equivalent worth of paper products.1

Because it was the locus of two economies, Clarkson might be described as a point of semi-articulation. As Bayle has shown in her study of St. Mary's County, Maryland, this early stage of incorporation into the market economy is quite beneficial. However, as articulation advances and a spatial division of labor intensifies the locality is deskillcd. As long as the economy remains vigorous this loss is well worth the rewards of enhanced productivity, but in times of economic slump the locality is unable to fall back on local production.2 When Hedrick wrote that in his

1) This barter economy would persist into the 1850's in the less accessible corners of the region, see Okada, 1985.
opinion rural New York society reached its zenith in the 1840's he was
describing what I have called semi-articulation. At that time the farm was
certainly dependent on a market to consume its produce, but it was not yet
dependent on the market to produce the means of production. The farm
produced its own material and energy - the tools, the fertilizer, the seed,
the food and the fuel that was necessary to produce the surplus that was
taken to market.

A perceptible quickening of pace is evident in this section.
The apparent acceleration of the tempo of change is warranted
by events, but its transfer to the language of the text was
unwitting. It is attributable to the sudden increase in the
number of facts and to some fairly precise dates, which permitted
an ordering of these facts into a sequence. The increase in the
number of facts resulted from the temporary expansion of the
geographical horizon of the study. Enlarging the boundaries of
the inquiry was necessary in order to explain the integration of
Sweden into the regional economy, but it had a literary
consequence. The unprecedented quantity and quality of
available material made it possible to write a narrative of causes
and consequences. This is distinguished from preceding
narratives by its apparent transparency, by the suggestion that
the facts are speaking for themselves. Interpretation of their
significance is accomplished with a minimum of theory, a form
of verbal economy by which the text is streamlined and
accelerated.

In the period covered by the pages that follow the volume
of written material generated by the locality expanded greatly.
This shift from a relative scarcity to a relative abundance of
documents fundamentally alters the problem of interpretation.
Rather than using virtually everything and making the most
that is possible out of it, the problem has become one of selection, culling and elimination. This process becomes more conspicuous and overwhelming as we advance toward the final chapters. The most salient feature of the selection process is its preference for events that appear connected to previous events by some sort of plot. The text that is constructed from the selected features is however somewhat devious. To the reader the facts suggest the plot whereas for the researcher and writer it was the plot that suggested the facts. This is why we can never accept the proposition that the facts are speaking for themselves.
Chapter 5

The Erie Canal and the Village of Brockport: Questions of Authorship

On October 23, 1819, the Chief Engineer, a boat sixty-four feet in length and eight in breadth, laden with nearly a hundred of Utica's most worthy citizens, left that village for Rome. A single horse drew the craft without conspicuous exertion. The band that was wedged between the passengers struck up a medley of patriotic airs, and the village church bells responded. At the prow, on a stiff, hand painted flag, the American eagle rose over the image of a long low bow. Beneath its keel were the words "inland navigation;" over the eagle's head were the words "Erie Canal." The first passage on that waterway had begun. The film of water, two and one half feet deep, stretched eighteen placid miles to Rome; but to the west the dirt was flying, and ninety-six additional miles would be navigable within a month.1

Thus began an epoch of singular importance to the human geography of eastern North America. The full extent of the Erie Canal's impact can be debated, but our purpose is far more modest.2 Our view is restricted to one impact, the siting of the village of Brockport in the Town of Sweden. Although the subject is limited the inquiry permits us to probe the deeper question of the role of individuals in the creation of ordinary landscapes. Speaking generally it is possible to say that the canal caused the village, but it is clear that this is shorthand for a more complex

1) This account is adapted from that which appeared in the American Journal (Ithaca), 11/10/1819.
process. Villages are built by humans and human actions are not exactly caused. Motivated is a better term. The canal provided a motive for building the village, but only certain individuals could perceive or respond to this motivation. Motives yield no results without individuals who are prepared to be motivated.

James C. Malin made this point in defense of local history when he wrote of four elements that are invariably joined in the history of human activity: the individual, the family, the time, and the place. Each of these is "unique in an absolute sense," he writes, and together they constitute "the individual in local space," an agent and a scale that Malin called "the fountainhead" and "the solid foundation" of the historian's craft. Marwyn S. Samuels called the study of individuals working within such a context a "biography" of landscape, with attributions, in this case multiple, of authorship. What we find is something quite different from the will of a single individual, or the simple structures of economic, environmental or geopolitical necessity. What we find, in fact, is individuals motivated by the circumstances of a specific historical moment, local space, consanguineous context and personal psyche, all of which in varying degrees stem from the works, imaginative and material, of other authors.

5: The Erie Canal and the Village of Brockport: Questions of Authorship

Hypsometry and Politics

To begin, we must recover some semblance of the context of canal construction. A partial list of these modifying circumstances reveals the necessary environmental preconditions of topography, hydrography and, to a smaller extent, climate; the propitious political agendas of individual political careerists, regional constituencies and geopolitical entities; the mercantile goals of coastal exporters and inland producers; and the inventory of plans and projects, actualized and otherwise, that preceded construction. Each of these contributed to the construction of a rationale for the canal, a undertaking of equal importance, and perhaps greater difficulty, than that of excavation or the construction of aqueducts and locks.

The Mohawk Corridor stands as one of the most venerable examples employed by those who would discover geographic determinants behind the course of historic events. Alben Perry Brigham called it the "The Eastern Gateway of the United States," and hung a good deal of American history on what was, in his final analysis, a geologic freak.¹ Ellen Churchill Semple also looked to topography for an explanation of the canal.² Even James Vance is compelled to acknowledge as significant the fact that, at four hundred and twenty feet above sea level, the Rome

2) "Here was everything needful for a cross-country waterway of three hundred and sixty-three miles; a deep river leading northward from one of the finest ports in the land, a tributary stream from the west flowing down from a broad low mountain gap, lake feeders on the summit, and a terminus on a line of inland seas." Ellen Churchill Semple and Clarence Fielden Jones, American History and its Geographic Conditions, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), p. 270.
summit is one quarter that of the Great Valley route in Virginia, and he attributes its success over the Pennsylvania Mainline to the obvious superiority of the route. But, he adds,

The historical geography of canal transportation is not all hypsometry. In the United States it is compounded of equal parts of urban and state mercantilism, and political geography.¹

If the environment were indeed determining, one might expect that it would veto so northerly a waterway, where traffic was halted for twenty-one weeks of every year.²

The American canal system elaborated and refined what Vance called the "mercantile model of settlement" or "a geographical pattern that would be logical for the creation of mercantile links between the newly developing North American colonies and the homelands in Europe."³ In other words, each canal represented an effort on the part of the exporters of one coastal city to capture the inland trade and to enjoy the profits to be derived from buying cheap and selling dear.⁴ Prior to the American Revolution staple goods were drawn to the coastal ports, or entrepôts, from agricultural hinterlands that were accessible to navigable rivers. As Vance points out, most of these colonial entrepôts had been

injudiciously planted at the mouths of small rivers, and they rather quickly exploited the export potential of the restricted hinterlands of those limited watersheds. This "timidly conceived expression of national mercantilism" is most strikingly demonstrated by the position of Boston on the Charles River, or Charleston on the Ashley-Cooper River. geographical ignorance created a second problem, since the colonial charters had disposed of the new world territory in abstract slices that ran westward from the coast, in disregard of the major watercourses, which are longitudinal. Thus the headwaters of the Merrimack, the Blackstone, the Connecticut, the Delaware and the Susquehanna Rivers lay in a different state than did their mouths. As the mercantilists of the coastal cities turned their attention inland, their ambitions were seldom aided by natural assets.

New York City had none of the immediate problems of its rivals. It lay at the mouth of a major river, the Hudson with its Mohawk tributary, and this drained a territory entirely within the state of which it was the economic capital. Its merchants were not, therefore, immediately hampered by political or physical obstacles. They were, however, faced with a larger incongruity between political and physical geography which threatened to frustrate the mercantile design of channeling western produce through American coastal entrepots. The natural emporiums for the staples produced in western New York and the old northwest were Montreal and New Orleans. As we have seen, from the time of earliest settlement, a sizeable part of the commerce of western New York found its market in the Canadian port. The Cumberland Road, which
reached Wheeling in 1818, and the Pittsburgh Pike, which touched the Ohio in 1820, attempted to stem the hemorrhage of trade, but it was the Erie Canal, completed in 1825, which finally stanchcd this loss.

American canal builders were inspired by the French canal of Languedoc, undertaken at the behest of Louis XIV, and by the dense network of privately constructed British canals; but as models of development both examples were deficient. The technical problems of greater distances, more formidable obstacles and more severe weather were compounded by inadequate financial instruments and inadequate engineering expertise. In most cases the territory the canals were to cross was scarcely settled, prohibiting a quick return on the investment. With the scarcity of capital this demanded that the projects be public undertakings, and canals thus became one of the earliest examples of government sponsored development, and the Erie Canal became one of the first and most successful examples "of centralized long-range planning in a democracy." 1

First recommended for artificial improvements in Cadwalader Colden's Memorial of 1724, the Mohawk Valley was, from the time of the Dutch, valued as a route to divert goods that would otherwise pass down the St. Lawrence to Montreal. Conflict delayed further consideration until 1768, but this petition, and a second, lodged in 1784, were quashed by a frugal legislature. Ignoring a petition by the New York City Chamber of Commerce, the lawmakers deemed it inexpedient to undertake

improvement of the river at government expense. A third petition, organized by Governor George Clinton in 1791, persuaded the legislature to fund a survey, and this, in combination with the private survey of Elkanah Watson, resulted in the incorporation of the Western and Northern Inland Lock Navigation Companies in 1792. The first corporation was charged with making improvements on the Mohawk River, Wood Creek, the Oneida River and the Seneca River to allow navigation as far inland as Seneca Lake. The second was charged with opening navigation north to Lake Champlain.

With investors remaining shy, and costs doubling, the state was obliged to assist the company with gifts, investments and loans. By 1796, artificial waterways were completed at Little Falls, German Flats and Rome, and the cost of transport from Seneca Falls to Schenectady was reduced to one third that of overland transport. Despite this apparent advantage, in 1803, with $400,000 spent on construction, traffic remained slight; and in 1808 the failing company resigned its rights west of Lake Oneida. The project was undercapitalized, its works were makeshift, shoddy and unreliable and its tolls were high, but it did provide one lasting service. Its failure "helped to pry some men loose from their accustomed preference for the simplest and cheapest possible modification of nature." 1

A more radical and enduring modification of nature was evidently required, but the immediate costs were enormous and the eventual returns uncertain. The financial capacity of private capital, which had

1) Rubin, p. 25.
5: The Erie Canal and the Village of Brockport: Questions of Authorship 212
not been equal to the modest requirements of the Western Inland Lock and Navigation Company, was all the more inadequate when it came to so bold an adventure. Following its old habit of frugality the state legislature remained non-committal until its members were stirred to action by vague promises of Federal assistance. Anticipating Federal disbursements, intimated by Jefferson in 1805, and explicitly propounded in the Gallatin Report of 1808, Joshua Foreman, assemblyman from Onondaga County, introduced the Erie Canal legislation that was passed in 1808. This authorized James Geddes to survey both an interior and an Ontario route in 1809. In 1810 a second bill was passed. Initiated by Senator Joseph Platt, it was supported by the majority leader, De Witt Clinton, who led a second survey in the summer of that year. Jefferson's timorous circumspection, the looming war with Britain and an implacable sectional rivalry combined to scuttle the national project of internal improvement, but in New York state the canal project had gained its own momentum. The State began to consider funding the project itself, and in 1812 it was determined that loans totaling five-million dollars were obtainable in Europe.

As the prospect of federal funding receded the canal project temporarily languished, a grand but extravagant fancy. Had it not been adopted as a political symbol by De Witt Clinton, a new form of charismatic politician, it is likely that delays and reservations would have hindered the plan until it was superannuated by the railroad.1 Although history identifies the canal with Clinton, he was not an early proponent of the

1) Rubin, p. 52.
scheme, and he did not become one until 1810, when, as majority leader of the State Senate, he supported the bipartisan resolution that established the canal commission. By 1815, harboring gubernatorial aspirations, Clinton adopted the canal as a campaign issue.

De Witt Clinton had embarked on a political career at twenty-one when he was employed as a private secretary by his uncle, George Clinton, the long-serving anti-federalist governor of the state. When the old gentleman withdrew from public life four years later, his image somewhat sullied, it was his young nephew, in company with Aaron Burr, who took up the Republican banner. Exploiting his position on the Council of Appointment, Clinton maneuvered to secure dominance in the party through political patronage. Burr was eliminated as a rival when he shot Hamilton in the tragic duel that ended his political career. Clinton's fortunes vacillated through divers alliances and feuds, which put him at various times in and out of the offices of State Senator, U.S. Senator, Mayor of New York City and Lieutenant Governor. In 1813 his party, which was increasingly dominated by Martin Van Buren's Bucktails, refused to nominate Clinton as Lieutenant Governor, and in 1815 an alliance of ardent Republicans removed him as Mayor of New York City. Driven to the skirts of political oblivion, Clinton sprang back into the limelight brandishing one issue, the canal project. "The New York Memorial," which he penned in 1815, revived the scheme which had lain dormant since 1812; what was perhaps more to the point, it revived Clinton's beleaguered career. He was immediately appointed to head the Canal Commission, and in 1817, the year in which construction was
authorized, he was carried into the office of Governor on a tide of Canal enthusiasm. Recognizing the futility of opposition, Martin Van Buren brought his Bucktails behind the project.

The Erie Versus the Ontario Route.

The economic, environmental and political contexts of New York's Grand Canal project assured the initiation of ambitious improvements along the route ineffectively developed by the Western Inland Lock Navigation Company. Beyond the Seneca River, however, the context was different. Here the immediate economic returns were uncertain. Also, the perpendicular alignment of the rivers and the relatively level topography made it difficult to replenish the canal water that was lost to percolation and evaporation. Finally, political opposition emerged in those regions that foresaw western competition and falling farm prices as the only tangible outcome of an Eric route. Like Peter Plowshare, a pamphleteer from Jefferson County, the inhabitants of these regions asked "why I should be taxed to effect a plan, which, if effected, places the farmer at the head of Lake Michigan in a better situation than myself."  

Flushed with visionary optimism, Gouverneur Morris had suggested an Eric route to Simon De Witt in 1801, but until the western terminus was assured in 1821 there was no guaranty that the Grand Canal would be

1) Baer, p. 6.  
2) Peter Plowshare, "Considerations Against Continuing the Great Canal West of the Seneca," to the legislature, July 20, 1819, quoted in Elizur Wright, Myron Holley and what he did for Liberty and True Religion (Boston: The Author, 1882), p. 89.
Fig. 5.1. Some early proposals called for the canal to descend to Lake Ontario at Oswego. Goods would be transferred to sloops for conveyance to a second canal which would climb to Lake Erie from a point near Lewiston. Although this plan would have reduced construction costs, it was rejected. The international boundary was perceived as a hazard, as were lake storms, but the greatest detraction was the probable loss of trade to Canada.
in fact an Erie Canal. In his report of 1809 Geddes recommended the Erie Route, primarily on military grounds. Other arguments for the inland route were that it avoided down lockage to Lake Ontario and eliminated break of bulk points at Oswego and Lewiston. The Hercules Papers, published in a Canandaigua newspaper by the bankrupt flour merchant Jesse Hawley in 1808, endorsed the inland route and stirred the western population to insist on this alternative. The Erie route received its first official sanction in the Canal Commission report of 1811, although the suggestion that the waters be channeled over a continuous inclined plane invited ridicule. When De Witt Clinton presented his New York Memorial in 1815 it was once again with the recommendation that the canal be carried to the upper lake. Eager to court the western constituency, Clinton appended to its list of merits the development of the State's western section.

Opposition to the Erie connection continued until 1821; but the initiation of digging west of the Seneca River, and later west of the Genesee, had served by that time to disorganize detractors. The reasons for an inland route were multiple. After the fiasco of 1812 the persistence of the hostile international boundary seemed assured; navigation on the lake, impossible for canal craft, was also subject to natural hazards; and the descent to the lake along the Oswego River did entail redundant lockage at Lewiston, assuming that the Mountain Ridge could be breached at that place. More significantly the inland route promised to divert traffic that might otherwise descend to Montreal. This mercantile entrepot rivalry was clearly primary among the decisive factors. In the
report to the legislature of 1808 the call was for "a canal between the tide waters of the Hudson River and Lake Erie, through which the wealth and trade of that large portion of the Union, bordering on the upper lakes, would forever flow into our great commercial emporium."1 The Erie route was "obstinately insisted upon" not only because it was "free from the uncertainties of winds and waves," and "safe in the event of a war with Great Britain," but because it was also, if not primarily, bad policy in the United States, to open a communication for sloops between Erie and Ontario, as the produce of all the upper lakes would on their passage to the ocean, and when there, the lockage to the tide in the St Lawrence being only 206 feet, while it is 574 feet to the tide in the Hudson, there would be danger of the whole lake trade being diverted to a port in the territory of another nation.2

In 1817 the Joint Committee of Canals warned that, "stimulated by the energetic impulse of private emolument," the citizens of the western counties were making new roads and improving [sic] the old, erecting storehouses and wharves [sic.], building vessels of every description calculated to facilitate transport, and at various places extending into the country, by artificial construction and the improvement of natural streams, navigable communication with the northern waters. It has heretofore added to the wealth of the state, while it has enriched themselves. And unless it is directed into new channels, it will hereafter lavish the productions

Under attack by the Plowshare Movement and other sectional detractors who sought to terminate construction west of the Seneca River in 1819, the Canal Commission reiterated the mercantilist argument.

The sooner the canal is extended from the Seneca River to Lake Erie, the sooner will be those commercial connections, [sic.] which have been or are about to be formed, between our western citizens and Montreal, be destroyed, or prevented... and the sooner will the full tide of western commerce set toward the commercial metropolis of this state.2

The Northern Route

The canal was opened from the Hudson to the Genesee in the fall of 1821, the year that Monroe County was formed, but it was delayed at this point until 1823,2 awaiting completion of the famous stone aqueduct. West of the Genesee it was acknowledged that "much of the route of the canal will pass through woods, or land newly cleared." The cost of the necessary grubbing and clearing, along with the unusual amount of rock near the surface between Rochester and Lockport, was predicted to raise the cost of construction to a thousand dollars a mile.3

Hoping to direct the canal through the most populous section of the Holland Land Purchase, Joseph Ellicott wrote to Simeon De Witt in 1808 and extolled a southerly route which would pass between the Onondaga and

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Fig. 5.2. Three routes were surveyed west of the Genesee River. The first of these ran along the top of the Niagara Escarpment. Although this would have avoided the need to ascend the escarpment in one great set of locks it would have required numerous embankments and cuts. The second route ran to the south through a more populous region. Unfortunately it climbed to a low summit and would have required a constant supply of water at the summit in order to fill the locks. Although feeders were planned to draw water from Black Creek and Tonawanda Creek the supply was ultimately judged inadequate. The route that was chosen ran at the foot of the Niagara Escarpment. This minimized embankments and cuts and its summit was Lake Erie, an inexhaustible source of water.
The Niagara escarpments. He described the "district between these two terraces" as level and free of rock ledges; indeed, he continued, "it may be considered a valley."1 Were it so situated, the canal would veer south after crossing the Genesee River at Rochester. Turning west near the mouth of Black Creek, it would follow the shallow valley of that lethargic stream to the swamp in which it rose. From here the canal would drop, a mere thirty feet Ellicott reported to Surveyor Geddes in 1809, down Tonawanda Creek to join Lake Erie near Buffalo.2 Writing to his wife from Batavia in 1816, the canal commissioner Myron Holley reported that he and his fellow commissioners would that morning "start into the woods" with the "hope to demonstrate the practicability of making a canal" over "the ridge of land that divides the Tonawanda Swamp from Black Creek." The previous evening he had been given tea by Andrew Ellicott, who presumably used the occasion to boost the southern route.3 This reconnaissance did not, apparently, rule out the southern route, although the commissioners left the scene troubled by doubts of the adequacy of local streams. Seeking to calm their fears, Joseph Ellicott gauged their flows, and wrote that fall to Samuel Young with the assurance that Tonawanda Creek alone would suffice to daily lift 148 boats through the necessary lockage.4 Later, in his report to the Canal Commission, Ellicott

2) Laws, vol. 1, p. 28.
3) Myron to Sally Holley, June 16, 1816, Myron Holley Papers, New York State Library Archive.
4) Joseph Ellicott to Samuel Young, October 24, 1816, in Severance (ed.), 1910, pp. 74-77.
The flow of ten additional streams, which, he wrote, in dry seasons sufficed to fill 673 locks daily. Ellicott's labors were unavailing. When Geddes had made his survey in 1809, he had been charged to investigate not only the Resident Agent's route, but also "to ascertain the place where the important passage might be made from the Tonawanda Creek through the ridge which bounds it on the north, whence the country is on a continual descent to the Genesee River." Like the southern route, this route lacked sufficient feeders, but because its entire course lay below the level of Lake Erie it could be supplied from that perpetual source. For this reason, the link between Lockport and the Genesee was constructed in accord with the earliest plans, as an inclined plain with a grade of one to two inches to the mile rather than as a slack water system. The final decision in favor of this northern route was made in 1821. Admitting that "the most southerly of these passages had the advantage, of a location more through the center of our western settlement - of being several miles shorter and of requiring less expenditure," the Commissioners found it nevertheless necessary to reject the proposal because the fear of inadequate feeders was "but too well grounded." It was therefore to the northern route, they wrote, that "during the last year our attention has been specially directed."

Brockport Comes into Being

Deciding on the northern route, for reasons that were evidently hydrological, the canal commissioners had elected to push the project through a region that was relatively backward. Thus, it was in this western stretch that the immediate impact of the canal was most striking. By reducing the cost of transportation from Buffalo to Albany by nearly ninety per cent, from one hundred to twelve dollars a ton, it served as an instrument of striking environmental modification. This was noted by a historian of Orleans County when he wrote:

The lumber of the country found a ready market and floated away. Wheat was worth four times as much as the price for which it had previously been selling. Prosperity came in on every hand: the mud dried up, the mosquitoes and the ague, and the fever, and the bears left the country. ¹

A traveler on the Ridge Road gave a similar description, and the same imputation of the cause.

A very few years have completely changed the appearance of this section of the State, and in a few years hence, those who pass through it will scarcely know it. The numerous thriving villages along the road, show the progress of internal improvements, and the well cultivated farms prove the beneficial effects of the Canal Policy. ²

These "numerous thriving villages" represent the second aspect of landscape change effected by the canal. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who despised the Erie's stygian appearance, nevertheless admired canal water

²) Monroe Republican, Sep. 13, 1825.
as "the most fertilizing of all fluids," and he envisioned the day when "the wondrous stream may flow between two continuous lines of buildings, through one thronged street from Buffalo to Albany." \(^1\) Indeed, such was very nearly the case. \(^2\) As a passenger of 1835 described it, "the banks of the canal appear like a continual village [sic.], but occasionally you come to a place more thickly settled and distinguished by a name." \(^3\)

Brockport is one such village, situated at the point where the Erie Canal, following the northern route to its terminus on Lake Erie, crossed the Lake Road. Each of the decisions adumbrated in this chapter, and some of those described in earlier chapters, are, therefore, essential to the creation and the location of this village. And the matter does not end here. More ambitions, appraisals, schemes, chicaneries and actions were necessary before this village could, as we all too glibly say, "spring up" at this crossroads. But before I attempt to suggest these complexities, let me present, in skeleton form, the record.

In August of 1821, four months after the Canal Commission had announced in favor of the northern route, the syndicate of James Seymour, Able Baldwin and Myron Holley purchased 247.5 acres from John and Clarinda Leach of Cazenovia for $1742.50, or $7.04 per acre. The couple had purchased lots fourteen and fifteen in township three (277.44 acres) from the proprietors in 1820 for $416.60. \(^4\) His original acreage was

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4) Triangular Tract Deed Book vol. 1, p. 95.
Fig. 5.3. Villages arose in those places where the Canal crossed the major north-south roads. These were situated just south of the string of villages that had grown up with the Ridge Road a decade earlier and their appearance permanently curtailed the growth of the older villages. Unlike the route of the railroad, which had the flexibility to link preexisting towns, the route of the canal was governed by topographical considerations, and it thus gave rise to new villages.
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diminished by the sale of thirty acres to Rufus Hammond, a farmer whose
garden was bisected by the canal. Even without this, Leach realized a four
hundred per cent return on his investment. There is also a suggestion
that P. Noyes had lots surveyed, and a map drawn, for the land farther to
the east.1

The second, and ultimately more significant, actor in the creation
of the village was Heil Brockway, who had begun his acquisition of land
in 1817.2 He purchased half of lot seven in what would become the
southwest corner of the village, and dwelt there with his large family,
farming and working as a contractor. In the fall of 1821, six months after
the canal commissioners had announced in favor of the northern route,
his purchased lot sixteen in the northeast corner, and in the spring of the
following year he closed the deal on lots eight, nine, and ten. This last
parcel, conveyed in April of 1822, comprised 438.66 acres, and he
purchased it for $2,399.39, or $5.46 an acre.3

The syndicate of Seymour, Baldwin and Holley selected the parcel
east of the Lake Road because it had been cleared, an improvement which
also explains the higher price of their purchase.4 Nevertheless, they
were deprived of the opportunity to profit from their superior acquisition
by legal troubles, and by 1827 its various members, or their receivers,
were obliged to sell their land to Brockway.

1) This map is referred to in a notice on the survey for Washington Street,
2) Charles T. Bush, Heil Brockway: Founder of Brockport, (Brockport, N.Y.:
3) Triangular Tract Deed Book vol. 1, p. 13.
4) B.R. 17:47, 9/11/73.
Fig. 5.4. This map of the intersection of the Lake Road and the Canal is taken from the Geddes atlas of 1817. It illustrates how the canal engineers contrived to follow the five hundred foot level with a minimum of cutting and filling. Development of the lots to the east of the Lake Road was delayed by Myron Holley's legal difficulties. To the west Brockway's site was hemmed in by a swamp, which remained wooded into the 1820's. This was eventually filled by leveling the small moraines.
Myron Holley’s Peculation

In the far northwest corner of Connecticut, on the slopes of Mount Riga, four sons were born to Luther and Sarah Holley. Luther, a woodchopper who labored to stoke the iron furnaces of Salisbury, was a stern and aspiring man. Ambitious for himself and for his sons, he exchanged his axe for a merchant’s ledger and, in 1793, enrolled his second and third sons, Myron and Horace, in Williams College. Although Luther was said to “despise no church,” he equally “belonged to none.”

At the command of Sarah, who had been born to a stern Baptist preacher, he observed the Sabbath, but once settled in the pew he was wont to lapse into deep repose.

With difficulty Myron sought to blend his parents’ virtues of worldly ambition and spiritual grace. By inclination timorous, he identified himself as one of those individuals who are forever “reflecting on the gloomy side of things and creating for themselves imaginary miseries.” Against this malaise he knew only “one effective remedy,” that of “keeping the mind constantly and assiduously employed.”

After a brief period of adolescent restlessness and rebellion it seems that he fully embraced this stringent discipline. In 1801 he was apprenticed to Judge Chauncy of New Haven, under whose guidance he read law until 1804, when he moved to Albany, and shortly thereafter to Canandaigua.

1) Elizur Wright, p. 17.
2) Myron to Luther Holley, Jan. 3, 1799, Holley Papers.
3) Myron to Luther Holley, Jan. 12, 1799, Holley Papers.
4) Myron to Luther Holley, Feb. 15, 1801 and Oct. 27, 1804, Holley Papers.

Wright claims that his apprenticeship was served under Judge Kent of Cooperstown, N.Y. Wright, pp. 24-25.
He married Sally House within the year. The union was impetuous for a young, untested lawyer, and for the next five years or so the couple struggled, boarding “in a small room, almost filled up with a bed, cradle, chairs and tables and surrounded by a noisy family.” They subsisted on an annual salary of four-hundred dollars and the produce of their garden.\(^1\) Holly’s legal career was short, terminated voluntarily, he later claimed, when he scrupled to defend a guilty murderer. Operating a book store, acting as land agent for his father’s numerous small speculations in western New York and, after 1807, holding clerical positions in the county government, Myron scraped ahead in an economy “a good deal injured by the embargo.” It was along this last avenue of politics that Holley’s arrested career finally advanced. By 1810 he was county clerk and in five years, with an annual salary of fifteen hundred dollars, and a house valued at five thousand dollars, he anticipated the none too distant day when he would be free of debt.\(^2\)

With his New England inheritance Holley had acquired a deep regard for federalism. He was, as a later critic put it, a “high toned Federalist” who sought, in his own words, “to redeem the state authorities from the powers of democracy.”\(^3\) But as a citizen of the west he found himself increasingly estranged from the anglophile party of the seacoast states. “Indignant at the British squad now on our coast,” he organized a company of militia in 1805; and in 1807 he reported that “many of the

\(^1\) Myron to Sarah Holley, May 21, 1808, Holley Papers.
\(^2\) Myron to Luther Holley, Feb. 10, 1814, Holley Papers.
\(^3\) This criticism appeared when Holley ran for County Clerk in Wayne County, Western Argus, 10/31/1833.
young men of the western district are willing to engage in an expedition against Canada, nay they desire it." Thirty years later, still coveting Upper Canada, he cheered from the banks as his son, Robert, participated in an assault on Navy Island in the Niagara River.  

In 1816, at the age of thirty-seven, he was sent to the Assembly as a Federalist, but by 1820 his support lay predominantly with the Bucktails.  

In the same year that he was sent to the legislature he was appointed as treasurer to the canal commission.  

The salary for this position was two thousand dollars, a sum, he later argued, incommensurate with the responsibilities and hazards of his position, but one to which he was at the time rather bashfully resigned. As he told the assembly, "a majority of that (canal) board are so situated as to render preferring such a claim to them for decision, indelicate." He was a poor man among patricians.  

In his work on the canal commission Holley found the perfect task to keep his mind constantly and assiduously employed. He blamed the canal business for a "distraction of mind" that delayed his correspondence and, as his zealotry kindled, drove his exasperated wife back to Connecticut. He was forced to confess that his "companionable qualities [had] fallen a little into decay." He justified his obsession by claiming

2) Myron to Orville Holley, Oct. 30, 1820, Holley Papers.  
3) Report to the Legislature, Feb. 17, 1817, Holley Papers.  
4) Myron to Luther Holley, Dec. 12, 1817; June 20, 1821, Holley Papers.
that it was rooted in "fears of foul management," although as it turns out his management was among the foulest.

Holley's intrigue was centered in northern Ontario County, where he wished to form a new county with Lyons, a village in which, as he wrote to his father, "I am very much interested," as its seat. This scheme explains his determination to extended the canal beyond the Seneca River; and it was this scheme that brought him to blows with Peter Plowshare. Holley was also criticized for his use of canal contracts as an instrument of personal political patronage, but his ambition to form and lead a new party to replace "the old, respectable and ever venerable federalism" prompted him to distribute these contracts without regard for party affiliation. The final charge, which crippled Holley's speculative enterprise, ended his political career, and propelled him into the role of social reformer, was that he embezzled state funds to finance speculative village creation.

In 1821 Holley wrote to his brother Milton, encouraging him to come west and reap the windfall of village creation.

Every prospect of the future connected with the present condition of the country, through which the canal passes west of Utica, gives the most undoubted assurance of rapid and extensive increase [sic]. And

1) Myron to Luther Holley, June, 1820, Holley Papers.
2) Myron to Orville Holley, Jan. 23, 1822. On June 16, 1823 Holley wrote to his father that his plan for a county centered on Lyons might elicit attacks and even his removal from the Canal Commission.
3) Hall's attack appeared in the Rochester Gazette, 9/10/1820. Holley's rejoinder appeared in the Ontario Repository, 10/17/1820 and the Northern Whig, 11/21, 1820. Holley comments on the attack, and on his third party ambitions are registered in a letter to his brother, Orville, Oct. 30, 1820, Holley Papers.
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wherever population, business and capital are sure to be brought and made stationary there is the proper field for enterprise and skill to exert themselves in."

Myron exerted his enterprise and skill in three places where population, business and capital were sure to be brought and made stationary. The first was Lyons, where he and his partners owned about three hundred acres of land. The second was a small parcel near Rochester. The third was one third of 247 acres in the village of Brockport.

Holley's embarrassment does not demand much explanation. In 1817 he negotiated a bank loan for the State. This was for $400,000, and it was given at low interest on the condition that the funds be distributed to contractors in small bills, rather than through the more common practice of State vouchers. Presumably the issuing banks did this with the expectation that some portion of the large number of far-flung bills would never be redeemed for specie. Through stupidity or cupidity, Holley issued the small contractors vouchers rather than cash, and then submitted their receipt to the state for reimbursement. He made his money in other words, "by giving his notes as Treasurer of the Canal Commission, and taking receipts, as for cash advanced, and having these receipts passed to his credit on the Comptroller's books." By April of 1824, when he resigned as a commissioner, Holley had lost or pocketed something between eighteen and thirty thousand dollars.

1) Myron to Luther Holley, November 11, 1821, Holley Papers.
2) Attorney General's Report, April 9, 1825, printed in Laws. vol. 2, pp. 560-570. For a very benevolent treatment of the affair, see Wright, p. 91.
3) Western Argus, 10/31/1833.
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Both Holley and the state Comptroller, were aware of a shortfall by 1821, and in an attempt to keep the embarrassment from the assembly Holley later reported,

I have sold my house and lot in Canandaigua, where I lived, and with the avails of that, and with Canal money, I have bought property on the canal line, since it was located, which has increased, and is increasing rapidly in value; so that, in my judgement, with good management, it will be sufficient to meet my deficit... and with perfect conviction, that, in many places along the canal line, real estate would rise rapidly in value, I made the purchases alluded to; and have contributed a portion of the expenditure necessary to place them in a situation for profitable sale. These purchases have been made, in all cases, after the canal line was established, and where no dispute about its location, or the manner of its construction, was involved.

Since the low interest of the original bank loan had saved the state eighty thousand dollars, some Assembly members were inclined to overlook the discrepancy, but others, who resented the premium that he had granted himself, moved to strip him of his property. Ultimately Holley was forced to surrender all his property except his personal residence in Lyons.² Politically Holley was ruined, and it was probably this ruin rather than any fine sense of probity that propelled him into his subsequent career as an Anti-Mason and a social reformer.

1) Reported in Assembly, Feb. 25, 1824. The full transcript appears in the Lyons Advertiser, 4/16/1824.

2) Lyons Advertiser, 4/13/1825. A bill for the relief of Myron Holley passed the senate, but failed to pass the legislature, although both houses passed a resolution allowing him to use his house in Lyons for one year. Lyons Advertiser, 3:1, 4/25/1827.
5: The Erie Canal and the Village of Brockport: Questions of Authorship

Heil Brockway’s Journey

At the age of twenty-five, in or around 1802, Heil Brockway departed Lyme, Connecticut and joined his Uncle, Beman, in Catskill.¹ His uncle had arrived thirteen years earlier, and had worked as a grocer, a tavern keeper and a contractor on the Susquehanna Turnpike.² Heil’s sojourn in Catskill was brief, although perhaps long enough to impress the young man with the profits to be made in a market town. In 1803 he was buying land in Ontario County, and by 1805 he had taken a farm beside his father, Gamaliel Brockway, on the Seneca Turnpike west of Geneva.³ Gamaliel had dwelt in the town of Seneca since 1800, although it is unclear whether he was among the twenty New Englanders who purchased the township from Oliver Phelps in 1789.⁴

Gamaliel died in 1809, leaving his property to his four children; his wife, Azubah, lingered for four years.⁵ Selling out to his brother, George, who purchased Gamaliel’s farm, Heil moved a few miles north to the town of Phelps, and commenced investment in the mill seat on Flint Creek that became the hamlet of Orleans.⁶ Here he worked as a blacksmith and

¹) Bush, pp. 5-6.
²) This is surmised from the fact that in that year he was granted a license to sell spirituous liquors, but not an innkeepers license. J.B. Beers, History of Greene County, New York, (New York: J.B. Beers, 1884), pp.121, 41; J.V.V. Vedder, Historic Catskill, (Catskill: n.p., 1922), p. 69.
³) Brockway’s first land purchase is recorded in Ontario County Deeds, Liber 9, p. 360. These farms lay to either side of present day Post Road, just south of Rt. 20. The Sand Hill Cemetery, where numerous Brockways are interred, is on land that once belonged to Gamaliel. See the Minute Book of the Town of Seneca, 1805, p. 172.
⁵) Geneva Gazette, Aug. 23, 1809; April 14, 1813.
speculated extensively in farms and commercial property. It was this
second interest that came to dominate his attention after 1815, when he
began to sell small parcels in Orleans, sometimes for more that five
hundred dollars an acre.¹

These speculations in Ontario County gave Brockway the means to
undertake the more ambitious project of the village that would ultimately
bear his name. He had gained first hand knowledge of the profitability of
such an undertaking of village foundation in Orleans. It was also in
Orleans that he learned to combine speculation with development, as he
was also a builder who frequently constructed houses and stores for those
who purchased his property. Beyond this, and the material found in
Bush's admirable biographical pamphlet, very little can be discovered
about the man.

Brockway's contribution to the village plan of Brockport is limited
to his earliest purchases, which lay to the west of the Lake Road and to the
east of the Lake Road north of Water Street. The remainder of the streets
east of Main Street, on the land of the failed syndicate, were laid out by the
Town of Sweden, for the most part after 1828.² Thus the the village
initially lay to the west of the Lake Road within a block bounded by Utica
Street, Holley Street, the Lake Road and the Canal. There are three
unusual aspects to the design within this rectangle. The building lots are
smaller than those of a later date, pedestrian alleys provide access to the

¹) Ontario County Deeds, Liber 30, p. 196.
²) What is now State Street was laid out in 1822. Market and South Streets
were laid out in 1828, and Union Street was laid out in 1830. See the
Fig. 5.5. This is based in the original map drawn for Heil Brockway by Zenas Case, surveyor for the Town of Sweden, in the late 1820's. Very few if any of the lots south of Holley Street were purchased at this time, and Jones Street was never built.
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Canal docks, and at least some of the houses were built directly on the street. This compactness seems odd when we consider that the population in 1826 was only three hundred, and that beyond what is now Utica Street the land was virgin forest. What it probably represents is Brockway's sanguine expectations for growth and his efforts to make the most of the developable land, of which he held the monopoly.

Acknowledgement of Brockway's authorship of the village is, obviously, registered in its name, Brockport, an abbreviation of Brockway's Port. This was adopted, with deference to Brockway's expressed wish, on November 15, 1822 at "a numerous and respectable meeting of the inhabitants of the towns of Sweden and Clarkson." Like the man it honored, this appellation may have lacked universal approval, as other denominations do appear in the record; but the contention obviously faded with the forgotten animosity. The suffix of port, on the other hand, was without detractors. No resident could regret advertisement of the village as an entry way, or portal, through which goods were transported since, were it not for the transactions surrounding import, export and, until the locks at Lockport were completed, overland portage, there would have been no residents. It was

2) Brockport, reported in 1823, may very well represent a misapprehension of the flat o of upstate pronunciation, but it concurs with the Seneca name of Gwe-te-a-ne-te-car-do-oh, which means, roughly translated, Red Village. Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, 1825, in Truesdale, p. 67. As late as 1840 a traveler wrote in his journal that the "very pretty village" near Clarkson was known by some as Brookfield and by others as Sweden. A.M. Maxwell, 1840, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 73.
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the business of haulage, barter and shipment noted in the second syllable, rather than the author memorialized in the first syllable, which gave the village what we might call its distinctive deportment and demeanor. When Trollope described Port Byron as "a whiskey store and a warehouse" she described the essential character of the canal village perhaps better than she knew.

Myron Holley's biography is the most thorough to appear in this dissertation, an allocation of space that can be judged disproportionate to the significance of the man. Without Holley's presence it is doubtful that the course of events would have been greatly altered. The same might be said for Brockway. A village very similar to Brockport would in all likelihood exist on the site presently occupied by Brockport if Brockway had contented himself with the development of Orleans. This presents a problem for the role of biography in historical geography. Ordinary landscapes are produced by ordinary persons pursuing what appear to be ordinary, unimaginative goals. Mercantile economics and transportation technology explain a village like Brockport quite adequately, and it is therefore easy to see individuals such as Holley and Brockway as simple agents of these forces. However, the fact remains that it was these, not other, individuals who carried out the task. These individuals had come by rather complex means to possess the skills, information, motivations and financial resources that were necessary in order to make a grab at this opportunity. Thus the role of biography in historical geographic explanation would seem to be less a matter of explaining the singular effects of individuals in the process of geographical change than it is a matter of explaining the

1) Trollope, p. 333.
The process of geographical change.

Like ordinary landscapes, ordinary biographies are difficult to reconstruct. The traces that individuals leave on the historical record are often faint, and, as we can see in the cases of these two men, legacies differ. Brockway has left the more common sort of record, a bare collection of behavioral facts. We can follow his movements, reconstruct his business transactions and research the composition of his household, but when it comes to his motivations we can do little more than attribute to him a simple and somewhat crude profit motive. Psychologically, socially and professionally, Holley was a different sort of person, and this difference is communicated in the form as well as in the content of the record. He exists for us as a personality far more singular than Brockway and far more complex in the sources of his frustrated ambition. Recognition of this difference serves to reinforce a sense that historical explanation is governed by the subject's historical, social and personal attitudes about the proper place of writing. It is very difficult, for example, to write plausible psychological explanations of the behavior of individuals who did not find their own psychological states noteworthy.

Authoring Landscapes and Local Legends

As a student in the Brockport Central School, I was instructed in local history. I recall two items of local lore. The first is that Clarkson merchants influenced the course of the canal; the second is that a disagreement between the founders, Heil Brockway and James Seymour, resulted in the disjunction of streets abutting their property line, which ran down the center of Lake Road. Informal conversations with local
residents suggest that these two items are perhaps the elemental core of the folk knowledge of local history. People who know nothing else are apt to recite these items; people who do not know these items are unlikely to know anything at all. As the foregoing account suggests, both stories are spurious.

The story of the feud between Brockway and Seymour has been discredited in the more recent village histories, where the misalignment of the streets has been attributed to mundane considerations of drainage. The explanation is probably correct, but, as the laying out of the village was an undocumented task, absolute verification is impossible. A second theory, propounded by an otherwise excellent history teacher, was that the jogs in the streets represented an effort to discourage speeding. But in 1820 speeders were not, of course, a menace. This anachronism alerts us to the need for caution. The point to be noted is that this legend is rooted in a perceived oddity or anomaly of the landscape, and that it is explained by something correspondingly odd and anomalous in a personality. Quirky streets are put down to quirky people.

The connection that is being drawn, it seems to me, is between the idiosyncrasies of place and personality. One can make better stories of malice than one can of mud because malice is human, individual and passionate; and these are motives that the folk lore of place making emphasizes. These are motives that ordinary people understand. To understand the story of the feud, one must be intimate with the motive of spite; to believe the story of the feud, one must be persuaded of the force of spite; to recount the story of the feud on nothing more than hearsay
one must want to say something, not about streets, but about a mythology of motives in which spite is a large and legitimate factor.

In the second item of local lore we once again find persons, this time with motives of personal gain, treated as agents of history. The claim that the merchants of Clarkson sought to bring the canal through their village and succeeded in drawing the canal north to cross the Lake Road at a point just south of that village is again based on nothing more than a small irregularity in the course of the canal. In other words, the landscape once again provides the crack where the seed of legend can take root and flourish. The story is made credible by the fact that the uncle and business partner of James Seymour, Henry Seymour, was a member of the canal commission, as was Myron Holley. The evidence is entirely circumstantial, and the story is not, in any case true. From Rochester to Lockport the canal follows the five hundred foot level, and no man could call it from that course. This is made clear in a letter received at the Clarkson tavern by David Thomas, the section engineer. The Chief Engineer, Benjamin Wright, wrote "always... conform to the natural obstacles so as to have persons of judgement see after the Canal is formed why curves and sinuositites were made." The significance of the erroneous legend is patent. It makes it seem that the village was willed

1) Henry Seymour and Horace Meech were partners in the Erie Canal Transportation Company, as were James Seymour and Rufus Meech. It was a boat of the company of Meech and Seymour that brought the first freight to Brockport when the canal was opened in 1824, and this freight was destined for James Seymour's Store.

2) Benjamin Wright to David Thomas, 6/20/1820, David Thomas Papers, New York State Library.
This last section is an example of what Clive calls an
"autobiographical intrusion."¹ There are various uses for the
personal pronoun in each of its cases: "I think...", "it strikes
me...", "in my opinion..." each serve as an indispensable qualifier
for those who are not convinced of the infallibility of their
understanding or the universality of their mode of reasoning.
The autobiographical intrusion ventures somewhat further into
the questionable territory of self-reference as it attempts to
provide some context for the questions that have been posed.
This implies a relativism that has in some cases led to institutional
prohibitions against self-reference, although restrictions are
sometimes eased for senior scholars and special license is
ordinarily granted in the preface and footnotes. In other words
the acceptability of self-reference depends on its location in the
text and, curiously enough, on biographical considerations.
Reference to my own childhood in this place and at this time is
therefore unconventional, and it requires explanation. Its
purpose is to indicate the beginning of my curiosity about
Brockport and to show how this was stimulated by the
unsatisfying solutions proposed by other curious persons. My
curiosity, that of my seniors, their solution and my dissatisfaction
with their solution are all social and biographical facts. The same
is true of this text. The purpose of the autobiographical intrusion
is not, therefore, to point out the relativism of my answers; its
purpose is to denaturalize and historicize my questions.

¹) John Clive, Not By Fact Alone: Essays on the Writing and Reading of
Chapter 6

The Hazards of New Fortunes

New Village- A new village called Brockport is now erecting at the place where the Grand Canal intersects the main road leading from Clarkson to LeRoy.¹

On October 17, 1823, slightly less than a year after this announcement appeared in the Rochester Telegraph, navigation west of the Genesee was inaugurated by the packet boat William C. Bouck. The depth of water was irregular, and in places insufficient, but with redoubled exertions the mules succeeded in bringing the boat to Brockport.² Among the passengers attempting to dine as the keel bumped and scraped over the submerged boulders and bars were the canal commissioner, Myron Holley, and the engineer, Judge Bates. With spirits undamped by the celebrities' tardy arrival, the citizens of Brockport caroused on the canal bank in the glare of a great bonfire. When the packet was finally drawn into the light three guns were fired and nine cheers were raised.

Disembarked, the notables were at once swept up in a procession that fell in behind Captain Wilkie of the militia and marched up Main Street to Alvord's hotel where a feast awaited. When the cloth had been removed the villagers began a round of boisterous toasts. To the Erie Canal: "While, from the seaboard it moves through the country, the country is moved to the sea." To the militia: "They will defend the soil they cultivate." To the big ditch: "After having overcome the big Root, it has

¹) Rochester Telegraph, 11/19/22. This notice also appeared in The Palladian (Geneva), 11/27/22.
²) Rochester Telegraph, 10/21/23.
conquered 10,000 little ones with perfect ease." (The big Root was, presumably, Erastus Root, the radical Republican opponent of De Witt Clinton.) To the presidential election: "Before the state of New York is prepared to elect, let the people elect the electors." To the state of New York: "The vanguard of internal navigation. Other states forward march." To the United States: "Cutting canals while Europe is cutting off heads." To Brockport: "The present head of canal navigation: may she maintain her rights and do justice to the country." To the Canal Fund: "When they fail we have credit." To the Canal Commissioners: "Tried and found faithful." To the Canal Engineers: "Fraught with gentle discernment and perseverance." To the ladies of New York: "May they imitate their mothers in the production of sons friendly to internal improvement."

Seven days later, an Albany correspondent wrote excitingly of seeing "a boat from beyond the Genesee River." The season for navigation was close to over but, beginning in late April of 1824, one packet departed Rochester for Brockport daily. And on May 7th the first boat from Albany, a freighter of Dows, Meech and Company, arrived in Brockport with a full cargo assigned to Meech, Seymour and Company. The canal terminated at Brockport because the Sandy Creek embankment, which was at seventy-six feet the highest on the canal, remained uncompleted. In March of 1824 the "Eric Canal Transportation Company" advertised four daily lines of "good covered boats" which traveled fifty

1) Rochester Republican, 10/24/23.
miles a day behind relays of horses from Albany to Brockport, and they assured customers that "every facility for transporting property from Brockport to Buffalo will be afforded." The section linking Brockport to Lockport was opened on September 8, 1824, supplied with water from Oak Orchard and Tonawanda Creeks, and, a porous bottom notwithstanding, navigation to Lockport was possible at that time. Brockport remained the preferred terminus, however, because the road from Lockport to the west was impassable.2

Brockport served as the point to which grain, principally wheat, was gathered for shipment by canal to the Rochester mills. In the brief season of navigation that came in the fall of 1823, Godd and Roby, one of six firms in the village, shipped six hundred barrels of wheat.3 By 1835, 451,000 bushels, thirty-seven days work for the Rochester mills, were collected here.4 Admiring "the city-like bustle apparent in her [Brockport's] streets," the Rochester Daily Democrat "could not doubt the striking fact communicated to us by one of her merchants, that his retail trade, during much of the past spring and summer, has averaged three hundred dollars a day!" The editor continued,

"The traffic of the place is principally produce. If a farmer within the circumference of fifty miles, has a load of wheat to sell, he knows where he can always get the highest price and the best bargains, for the

1) Geneva Palladian, 3/31/24. Rufus Meech and James Seymour are listed as owners (2 of 20) in Brockport. Oliver Phelps is the head. Henry Seymour and a Horace Meech are on the list.
3) Hastings, p. 41
4) John W. Barber, Historical Collections of the State of New York... (New York: The Author, 1851), p. 115.
The frank and accommodating manner of her merchants has made Brockport a favorite with the agriculturalists of Monroe, Genesee and Orleans. Hence, immense quantities of wheat, corn etc. are daily sold there, for which the proceeds of his rich crops so liberally enable him to partake.¹

The agriculturalist partook, though perhaps not so liberally as he may have wished, of goods, which it was Brockport’s role to provide. Deliverance from the penury of the preceding decades was sudden and startling. A newspaper editor in the village of Lyons wrote that

"among the agreeable and convenient results of the opening of the Erie Canal, is the trade in shell fish, fruits and small wares etc., which though they do not form a very great item in the account current of of internal trade, yet do in fact mightily contribute to the comfort and simple luxury of life...Clams, oysters and lobsters are finding their way, on the canal, to the remotest interior."²

Indeed, in 1824 one editor commented that the high price of wheat would enable farmers "to pay for merchandise, besides treating themselves to some oysters and clams."³ This outlandish food, which incidentally alleviated the iodine deficiency that had caused myxedema, proved surprisingly popular. The outlandish ideas that came over the canal received a mixed reception. By 1830 the tailors that occupied the second story apartments over the Main Street stores were busily stitching "the latest fashions from New York."⁴ If this was taken as a sign of progress, there were equivocal indicators. For example, villagers opened their newspapers in 1833 to discovered an advertisement addressed to "to the unfortunate sufferers of gonorrheah [sic] and syphilis." With striking

¹) Rochester Daily Democrat, 9/16/36.
²) Lyons Advertiser, 12/5/29.
³) Lyons Advertiser, 1/2/24.
⁴) B.F.P., 1:1, 10/6/30; 1:2, 10/13/30; 1:9, 12/1/30; 1:35, 6/1/31.
nonchalance, the local druggist, John B. Elliot, explained that the
antidotes of gonorrhea medicine and "anti-syphilitic lozenges," were
worry free and thoroughly tested by some unmentioned segment of Paris
society.1

Although the village purveyed the fashions and vogue of New
York and Paris, its real concern lay in the surrounding farms. As the
first banker of the village, Joseph Roby, confided to his father-in-law
during the blighted summer of 1839: "One can not be in a community like
this where everything depends on the success of one crop without feeling
a good deal of anxiety."2 This remained, after all, a market town in which
the best indicator of prosperity, next to a long list of wedding
announcements, was "the large number of farmers' teams daily crowding
the streets."3

The Raw Village

Despite this lively trade and this approving notice, the village did
not present a pleasant face. In 1825 its environs were described as "not
much settled being too wet and flat,"4 and in 1829 it was still engulfed by
"forests yet standing in their native maturity and vigor." One approached
it on the canal through shadows of "the towering pines, the lofty wide
spreading elms, the gigantic maples, whitewoods and sycamores of the

2) Joseph Roby, (Brockport) to Samuel Sidney Breese, July 31, 1839, Breese,
Stevens, Roby Papers, (hereafter B.S.R.P.), Rush Rees Library,
University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.
3) B.R. 3:13, 1/7/59.
4) Joseph Pickering, 1825, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 33.
Fig. 6.1. This receipt for toll was given by the Collector’s office in Brockport in 1829. The Adriana was carrying merchandise, hops, oysters and passengers to Brockport, Lackport and Buffalo. (Collection of the author.)
Fig. 6.2. This receipt for toll was given by the Collector's office in Brockport in 1831. The Conesus was carrying merchandise, apples and vinegar to Brockport, Knowlesville, Medina and Lockport. (Collection of the author.)
west." Emerging from the forest into the clearing of the village this same traveler noted: "Brockport, a goodly-sized and flourishing village twenty miles west of Rochester. This village is well built and appears to be the center of some considerable trade." Somewhat later he remarked of Albion:

It much resembles its sister village of Brockport, save it is not quite so large.... the country is rich and beautiful. But here, as in most if not all of the villages which have sprung into existence with the canal, everything looks raw and naked. In most of them not a shade tree is to be seen.... according to the present practice, people only think of shade trees after they are gone.

As Francis Wright had written, "in general, the settler cuts to right and left with unsparing fury, anxious only to clear the giant weeds which obstruct the light and choke his respiration." And "although all will agree it is in very bad taste... as the human eye is prone to rest with pleasure on what is uncommon, an American usually considers an open plain as nature's most beautiful feature."1

To one canalling humorist, this raw appearance suggested Brockport as a likely place to recount that "two buxom country lasses got on board." Inquiring as to their destination, he was informed that they intended to work out for a few weeks. Curious as to their suitability as New York City chambermaids, he asks for a résumé of their skills. "O a heap of things," he claims to have been told by one of the homespun hoydens. "


2) Lyons Republican, 11/16/21.
can milk cows, feed pigs, harvest flax, shell corn, spin, churn butter, bake bread, make cheese and such things." It makes little difference whether the author actually met a woman with these qualifications embarking on a career of domestic service. What is telling is that such a woman pursuing this plan with these talents was considered likely to board a packet in Brockport. The story is plausible because the agent and the scene were, to use Kenneth Burke's term, synecdochic. This is to say that the qualities made explicit in the character of the "young lass" were implicit in the appearance of the budding village. To make sense of this bit of humor it is necessary to refer to stereotypes, or ideological categories that are not unlike those used by the author and his audience to anticipate the nature of real scenes and individuals.1

Small mitigations of this raw, naked and rustic appearance were, however, increasingly apparent as the 1820's drew to a close. In 1829 the villagers furnished the village with sidewalks. In addition, a Rochester paper noted, the village was a good deal healthier, "the diseases usually prevalent at this season having scarcely made their appearance here."2

The pious may have been disposed to attribute this sudden salubrity to the recent recruitment of religious societies. The Congregationalists and the Methodist had formed in 1827, and the Baptists, whose numbers were swiftly augmented, organized in the following year.3 Although they were the last to organize, the Baptist were the first to build a meeting

1) Rochester Telegraph, 6/28/25.
2) Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph, 9/1/29.
3) Histories of these denominations are given in B.R. 20:42, 7/13/76; 20:45, 8/3/76; 20:47, 8/17/76.
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house. It was a small brick building, forty-five by sixty feet, and topped with an oval framed belfry, which stood some distance back from Main Street, north of the point where it was intersected by Holley Street, on a site formerly occupied by a school house. Although it and the village burying ground, which lay hard by, stood on a sizeable mound of glacial debris, and thus escaped the damp to which other subterranean excavations were subject, the church's basement, which housed the lecture room, was above ground level. This elevation compounded the hill, itself described as steep. The climb up the wooden stairs to the audience room door was arduous and perilous, and the chance of slipping and falling were ever present dangers. Another ascent, equally strenuous and treacherous, was, however, uppermost in the minds of those who gathered for the dedication sermon. Under the supervision of the three protestant ministers, the service was "appropriate and solemn."2

A contemporaneous development, indicative, like the churches, of the profits of the grain trade, were merchant's houses. An anonymous writer of 1815, traveling westward from Utica, observed that nine tenths of the settlers were New Englanders, "religious, sober, frugal and industrious" in character, but curiously fond of "shew in buildings, equipage and dress." James Fenimore Cooper noted their penchant for ostentatious dwelling houses, and attributed it to the insecurity of status in the New Englander's "radically democratic society."3 In the village, as in the countryside, housing was a powerful testament of inequality. A boy in

1) B.R. 25:33, 5/12/81.
2) Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph, 9/20/29.
Brockport in the 1830's remembered encountering his schoolmate, Dwight, on a village street. To the puzzled amusement of his friend, Dwight seemed delirious with delight. He was waving his arms, beaming and repeatedly babbling "Oh good times, good times." Inquiry disclosed the source of his ecstasy. His father, with whom he dwelt "in a humble cottage: had been appointed caretaker to the house of Colonel Wilkie. He and his son were to occupy the Colonel's mansion, which stood to the north of the village, and "it was the thought of living in that large white house, with lawn and shade trees, and a large garden with a grape arbor and all kinds of fruit trees 'and everything' that caused Dwight's joyful exclamation, good times, good times." 1

Like their counterparts in New England, the moguls of the inland trade preferred Adamesque-Federal architecture. The style was of English derivation, homage, perhaps, to the merchant's ultimate clientele. More significantly, however, as Alan Gowans has pointed out, adoption of the Adamesque-Federal style announced "pretensions to becoming the new republic's permanent aristocracy." 2 In the village, at least six "battlement house" were built of unpainted brick or stone between 1825 and 1830. Three stood on State Street, one stood on Market Street, and it is possible that the two Brockway houses on Main Street were executed in this style. 3 Regrettably, all have been demolished or remodeled beyond

1) B.R. 25:37, 6/9/81.
3) Hastings, pp. 53-58a; supplement, p. 1.
The battlement house had pitched roofs with eaves that ran parallel with the street. Their distinctive mark was the top of their side walls, which rose to the ridgepole in a large step rather than along a straight incline. The wall that supported the center level was flanked by tall, straight chimneys, and it was sometimes pierced by an elliptical window. The term battlement house is a reference to this crenelated profile. This parapet was typically pierced by an elliptical window, a distinctly Adamesque shape which has given us, among other things, the Oval Office of the President of the United States. This shape was partially reproduced in the front door transom, or "fanlights", which together with the narrow windows, or "sidelights," served to admit light into the entry hall and to contribute an appearance of lightness to the doorway itself.

The interior woodwork, often carved, was, with the exception of the doorways, painted white in conformity with the wallpaper, which, as William Seymour remembered it, had a pattern of satiny stripes on a no gloss ground.

Unlike the vernacular Georgian houses popular among the farmers, the battlement house was square, with the door set to one side, and in this respect their form was distinctly urban. At the same time they were set to one side of their lot, with just enough room for a driveway to the carriage house on the narrow side. This asymmetry, Hastings claims, accommodated a new desire for a side yard devoted to box bordered flower garden, spread below a side porch.¹ The urban house type and the ornamental yards set these residences apart from their counterparts in

¹) Hastings, pp. 51-55.
Fig. 6.3. The last "battlement house" left standing in a relatively unaltered state stood on State Street beside the Presbyterian Church. This drawing is based on a postcard from the first part of this century. The porch is almost certainly an addition, but the basic form of the house remains intact. The elliptical attic window is a characteristic signature of Federalist architecture.
the country and the large cities. The cultivation of ornamental gardens
was common among the wealthier citizens by the 1830's, when we find the
village banker, Joseph Roby, working in his garden, "setting out trees and
shrubs - transplanting, mending fence & in short a little of everything:
roses, honeysuckle, daffodils, hyacinths, mums, cherry blossoms." 1 The
working yard, with its barn, chicken house, fruit trees, current bushes,
vegetable garden, "lattice enclosed drying yard," garbage heap and privy,
was moved to the rear. Here they were inconspicuous, and linked to the
cellar kitchen which, with brick floor, accommodated the rougher,
heavier tasks of food preparation.

These and other signs bore testimony to the rapid transformation of
village society. Religion, whose fortunes and misfortunes will be
examined more closely in the following chapter, was a clear beneficiary
of the discretionary income generated by the canal trade. This trade also
introduced a sizeable merchant class with distinctive political preferences
and landscape tastes. At the same time, however, the canal gave rise to a
much larger class of rootless watermen who were insensitive to the
traditional instruments of community censure and discipline. These
watermen posed a challenge for the churches, both as a field of
missionary endeavor and as bearers of corrupting examples. Although
they were employed by merchants, they also posed a recalcitrant problem
for this class, since they moved beyond the limits of supervision and were
free to annoy the merchants of other villages with relative impunity.

1) Joseph Roby (Brockport) to Samuel Sidney Breese, May 1, 1836, B.S.R.P.
The Evil Canal

In *Moby Dick*, Ishmael described the Erie Canal as "one continual stream of Venetianally corrupt and awful lawless life." Although his intention was hyperbolic he was not far from the truth. Some travelers were pleased to discover boatmen who were "civil and even respectable," but most were dismayed and disgusted by this surly, sensual crew. Working with "vicious associates" on the water and wallowing in "libidinous associations" on the shore, the waterman's life was a moralist's nightmare. Insulated from the regulating influence of public opinion, these men were feared as potential desperadoes. One had only to cast an anxious glance into one of "those dens of pollution that have been aptly described as the very nostrils of Hell" in which they congregated, or to consider the "vagabonds and sharper" that made the canal villages their "general rendezvous," to glimpse an appalling future.

Dispatched as a "missionary among the waterman" by the American Bethel Society, Deacon M. Eaton found that the prevailing creed among the boatmen was Universalism, or the belief in impartial salvation. A more dire infidelity was evident in those like the erudite steersman who had read "Tom Paine, Hume, Voltaire and Bolingbroke, and by degrees had strayed from the path of virtue and become a very wicked man."

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1) Joseph Pickering, 1825, in Handy and McKelvey, p. 33.
3) Deacon M. Eaton, *Five Years on the Erie Canal* (Utica: Bennett, Backus and Hawley, 1845), pp. 100, 136, 152.
Of particular concern were the boys who drove the horses. In Brockport, to become a packet driver "was the highest ambition of the average boy and young man," and each spring it was the source of considerable juvenile delight when the horses were accustomed to their harnesses by dragging logs through the village streets. Eaton wrote that half of the drivers were orphans. Like Edward Noyes Westcott's David Harum, many others were runaways who had fled a truculent father and an overpopulated farmstead, where "nuthin' c'd afford to be eat that c'd be sold, an' ev'rythin' that couldn't be sold had to be eat." Harum, who "lit out with what duds [he] c'd git together, and as much grub's [he] could pack in [a] tin pail" remembered the "old ditch" as "better to me than the place I was borned in." Nevertheless contemporary witnesses could imagine no domestic situation more vile than the horse stations. Dotted at intervals of ten or fifteen miles along the canal, here drivers and horses were changed, and boys were initiated into the secrets of sin. One Brockport resident remembered the horse stations as "the most debasing dens of iniquity to be found in the county," his evidence most likely being Bill Bailey's, which lay just less than a mile west of the village. Routinely beaten and defrauded by their masters, the boys degenerated into "saucy" wise-aces and liars with a premature taste for liquor, tobacco, theft and gambling. Although Eaton attested that behavior had much improved since the beginning, when "there was not a place in America where there

3) Thomas L. McKenney, in Mau p. 261.
was more wickedness of every kind than on the canal," the boys remained "a very degraded class." If they returned home it was "seldom with the same innocence" but with what was "most always [a] degenerated, if not a ruined character."

It was, presumably, apprehension of this very sort of character which impelled Samuel Breese, a land owner from Vernon, New York, to caution his son, Sidney Breese, who was serving as an apprentice in the dry goods store of his brother-in-law's brother, Thomas Roby. "The place you are in is, I am informed, much larger than Vernon," the elder Breese began, "it will, therefore, I presume, contain some bad, unprincipled young men, with such I warn you to have no communication." He asseverated in his next letter: "Beware wicked unprincipled companions." Sidney's mother, who claimed to desire nothing so much as his maturation into a respected merchant, advised him to shun his peers, seek the esteem of his employers, and devote his free time to church meetings and the study of scripture. It was by such injunctions and proscriptions that the social lines dividing future merchants from future watermen were drawn and maintained.

Drunkenness, pugilism, gambling, whoremongering and a generally insolent attitude comprise the basic list of the boatmen's indiscretions. Disapproval of these iniquities caused villagers to hold the watermen and their emulators at a social, and to some extent spatial.

1) Eaton, pp. 32.45&31.
2) George H. Lee, in Smith and Husted, p 18.
3) Samuel Sidney Breese to Sidney G. Breese, April 3, 1836; April 27, 1836. B.S.R.P.
4) Helen Breese to Sidney G. Breese, April 3, 1836; April 23, 1836. B.S.R.P.
distance. Nevertheless, organized efforts were made to effect their reform. The Brockport Recorder and Clarkson Advertiser wrote, the "Citizens... were audibly [sic] engaged in dividing [sic] measures to promote the comfort and moralize the Boatmen employed on the canal." Identifying what they felt was the root of the waterman's misbehavior in 1830, the Young Men's Temperance Society resolved that five hundred tracts be purchased "for gratuitous distribution in this village and vicinity, and to persons employed on the canal." As late as 1861, a Bethel Missionary, Deacon Stack, was laboring on the village wharves to place Bibles in the hands of "sinful boatmen," and street preaching was conducted each Sunday on Main Street near the canal.

Ordinarily, it was possible to confine the boatmen to the vicinity of the docks. Exceptions occurred when the men were immobilized by a break in the canal, or by a sunken boat, "which put the boatmen into trouble, to drown which they added worse to bad." As the number of idle boatmen in the village mounted, fights and incidents of vandalism grew more frequent. The unsavory population was also augmented by a trickle of migratory prostitutes.

This novel transportation system opened to the boatmen new avenues of debauchery, but this was not the limit of its influence. It also confronted the merchants with new pressures and temptations. As we

1) Smith and Husted, p. 30.
2) B.F.F., 1:1, 10/6/30.
shall see in the following section, their powers of resistance were not appreciably greater.

The canal presented a moral threat to the established society because it offered dissatisfied individuals a life and a livelihood unregulated by the institutions of community and family. The free thinkers whose uncomplimentary descriptions are encountered serve as symbols of this escape, as do the sad but sympathetic descriptions of runaways. The folly of escape from traditional instruments of authority is illustrated in the descriptions of the new masters, cruel and unprincipled fiends or degrading dissipations. The anxiety of eroding authority is evident in the Breese letters. These written enjoinments and exhortations reinforced the surrogate authority of the extended family and shamed whatever urge Sidney may have felt to depart this institution for the hazardous companionship of his peers. It will be seen that the same authority was exercised to stifle Sidney's urge to shed the dull discipline of an apprenticeship for the alluring freedom promised by a life as a speculator in western land.

As a mental image constructed of diverse impressions the canal was equivocal. This is not to say that consideration of the image necessarily yielded feelings of ambivalence. The benefits were so very desirable while the ills were presumed in some measure remediable. The equivocality of the image was masked, and the ambivalent reading remained inaccessible, so long as families and communities believed that escape from local economic controls need not necessarily entail an escape from local social controls. Possessing hindsight and lacking this confidence, my image of the canal is equivocal. My desire is to provoke in the reader a sense of ambivalence, a mingled sense of loss and gain, but to hide this desire behind a simple chronicle of
quotations and innocuous linking sentences. Much of my strategy through the remainder of this, and through most of the following, chapter encourages this ambivalent reading by criticizing the confidence which these people felt in their ability to restrict and channel social change. Like the images of the past, this historical image is potentially equivocal, and it is potentially subject to ambivalent readings. My role is to permit alternative readings by presenting the whole historical image, but to at the same time discourage readings other than my own.

Credit and Arson

Brockport assumed the form, shortly ubiquitous throughout the agricultural, commodity exporting interior, of a "main street village." It functioned as a meeting place between a trade network that was, in its countless ramifications, global, and an interior of parochial experience and prejudice. In both function and form the main street village must be categorized under the general heading of market towns; but because it was an instrument for "the economic development of wastelands" which stood at the head of a long series of exchanges that directed crops to a distant market, a somewhat more specific heading would be the bastide town. It had not been initiated by political or ecclesiastical fiat and therefore, aside from the street names that honored political figures and

1) Stilgoe, pp. 256-262.
2) James Vance, This Scene of Man: The Role and Structure of the City in the Geography of Western Civilization, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 28, 256.
military heroes, conventional authority was not inscribed in the landscape.¹

Main Street, which was the functional and symbolic core of the town, began at its point of attachment to the canal. Brockway expected Clinton Street, which runs parallel to the canal on land that he owned, to serve as the center of trade.² The waterway was a poor spectacle, its only impressive dimension being its length, but it was the site of considerable animation. In addition to goods the canal was a conduit for people and information. People were served by the hotels, which were first grouped to the north of the bridge, and saloons, which evaded the regulations of the excise board with the euphemistic title of canal groceries. On the west side of Main Street the Canal Pavilion, was rendered "emphatically the 'stranger's home'" by the most judicious interior decoration.³ This was later renamed "The Jumping Off Place." To passengers stultified by the uneventful routine of packet boat travel, this title served as an invitation to spring for the towpath and imbibe one of the expeditious stimulants offered at the hotel bar.⁴ Adjoining the hotel to the north was a house "convenient for a large family," but devoted to the sale of liquor.⁵ Facing this from the east side of Main Street was an identical pair, The Eastern

¹) Even this faint imprint was, in part, effaced when the street named for Admiral Lawrence was rechristened Market Street.
²) This is noted in the obituary of Isaac Barnes, see B.R. 16:3 10/12/71.
⁴) Hastings, p. 41. This was owned and operated by A.W. Cary and Augustus Brainard.
Hotel and Plumb's Grocery, above which the penurious cobbler Frisbee awaited the business of "those who wish to supply their own leather."

Heil Brockway launched the Red Bird line of packets in 1828. Distinguished by their crimson window blinds, a few of these long white boats shuttled from Rochester to Buffalo. More important for the village was the daily service to Rochester by smaller boats like the Sir Henry, the Siamese Twins, the Red Bird and the Jenny Lind. Even a boy growing up in Rochester remembered,

It was very pretty to see the packet Red Bird with its glistening white sides and its crimson window-blinds, go by every afternoon taking home to Brockport and other villages passengers who had been visiting or transacting business in Rochester. It was drawn by three horses tandem, always going at a round trot... at her prow the packet carried a sharp iron, curved like a sickle, and if any careless driver had not stopped his horses and dropped his towline, it would have been cut in two.

The line boats, which passed through the village at mid-day, provided a spectacle with their brass bands and sun-dazed passengers, but it was in the evening, when the Sir Henry returned from Rochester, that men and boys gathered on the bridge and in the downtown groceries in anticipation of current news and market reports. This attraction was considerably enhanced after Brockway's partner and son-in-law, Elias B.

1) In April of 1832, Heil Brockway launched two new packets, Rochester and Buffalo, which, as their names advertised, were to ply the canal from Rochester to Buffalo. The two boats shuttled back and forth on alternate days, one leaving Rochester at 8:00 A.M., and arriving in Buffalo at 7:00 the following morning, the other departed Buffalo at 9:00 A.M. and arrived at Rochester at 6:00 the following morning. B.F.P., 2:28, 4/11/32. Rochester was commanded by Captain Hull, while Buffalo was commanded by E.P. Brockway. B.F.P., 2:30, 4/25/32.

Holmes ran afoul of the older man and formed the Opposition Line, the Siamese twin, as the name of his boat put it, of the Red Bird Line. What ensued was not only a war of prices, which pushed fares for the Buffalo trip below fifty cents, but a war of the watermen as well. Every evening Holmes' Siamese Twins and Brockway's Sir Henry raced home from Rochester. Preceded by the blast of Captain Tyler's horn the boats would round the final bend, their horses lashed to a full gallop, their wakes aboil, and their crews, if all was well, enraged by the other's unprincipled navigation. If, as the assembled villagers hoped, insult had been given and taken, or even only taken, each crewman grabbed a blunt weapon, lunged from his boat and began to cudgel his competitor in an amusing eruption of bloody turmoil. During this "very squally time" Brockway himself was seen to swing a brickbat in one of these donnybrooks. Whether he did it to defend his property, or just for the gusto, we can not, of course, be sure; but, as every boy knew, Brockway was "a man to be feared."

1) Daniel Preston and Elisha Carpenter, in Smith and Husned, pp. 14&19. Brockway's reputation as a hard man is difficult to confirm. Its legacy is a lingering myth that explains the misalignment of the village cross streets as the consequence of a disagreement between Brockway and Seymour. If a disagreeable disposition is in any way congenital, then the curious and tragic incident that terminated the life of Hell's brother George would seem to substantiate this reputation. George, a resident of Ontario County, was butchering hogs with Stephen Beadon when Beadon suddenly flew at him in an explosive rage and plunged the butchering knife into Brockway's abdomen. Brockway died. When the conspicuously remorseful Beadon was brought to trial numerous eyewitnesses testified that Brockway had repeatedly insulted the defendant, and had actually delivered an unprovoked blow. In their opinion Brockway's contumely had exceeded forbearance, and the jury agreed. Beadon's charge was reduced to manslaughter, and his sentence was a mere seven years' imprisonment. (Geneva) Palladian, 1/10/27.
Below street level to either side on the berm (south) bank were arranged the basins, docks and warehouses of the village merchants, "the most important place in town" where "the heft of business was done." ²

Large warehouses were necessary because the merchants, who took crops in trade for manufactured goods, were periodically inundated with "country produce" that was "brought in much faster than it could be shipped by the small boats then in use."² It is because of the linkage of stores, which had to be on Main Street, and warehouses, which had to have facilities for direct loading onto boats, and basins, which could only be cut in the bank opposite the towpath (north), that Brockport grew southward, away from rather than toward its parent and closest neighbor, Clarkson.

Starting beside the "large and commodious building" of the forwarding merchant Horace Brace, who was prepared "at all times to receive property to sell, or to forward to all parts of the United States or Canada," Merchants Street ran west to its terminus at Brockway's brick and boat yard.³ This gave access to a series of warehouses, wagon shops, liveries and the like, which stretched for a quarter mile toward the boat yard. When it traveled by canal, the circus performed here in a lot beside Barnes' wagon shop. Until the boat yard fell victim to arson in 1850, two to five boats in various stages of construction were constantly "in the

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1) Priam B. Hill and James P. Comers in Smith and Husted, p. 2.