

THE
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VALLEY
REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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From the Editors

Virtually every public sporting event begins with a tribute to the War of 1812. “The Star Spangled Banner,” whose words were inspired by the “red glare” of the rockets fired upon Fort McHenry by the British in 1814, is the only leftover from the conflict that remains in the public consciousness. That is a shame. Insight into this war is essential for understanding a pivotal moment in our history, when America endured the growing pains of a free, newly united nation and literally fought for acceptance on the world stage. Rediscovering the war also means reconnecting with a fascinating cast of heroes—from Dolley Madison and Tecumseh to “Old Tippecanoe” William Henry Harrison.

In this bicentennial year of the War of 1812’s commencement, we present two articles that we hope will entice readers to revisit the conflict. One offers an excellent background on the causes of the war and provides a wealth of resources to pursue additional study. The other focuses on two pivotal naval battles that occurred relatively close to the Hudson Valley—on Lake Erie and Lake Champlain.

Interestingly, another article in this issue recounts an important but oft-ignored naval battle during the American Revolution that laid the groundwork for the Continental Army’s victory at Saratoga. (It also took place on Lake Champlain.) Two authors spotlight works by nineteenth-century painters of widely divergent renown—an iconic depiction of John Brown by the unjustly forgotten Louis Ransom and two portraits by Ammi Phillips, regarded as one of his generation’s preeminent folk artists. Finally, we offer a look at how New England migrants helped their Dutch predecessors turn Albany into an all-American city.

Contributors

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Author of *The Sea Was Always There* (Fireship Press, 2012), **Rear Admiral (Ret.) Joseph F. Callo** also wrote the award-winning *John Paul Jones: America's First Sea Warrior* (Naval Institute Press, 2006), was U.S. author/editor for *Who's Who in Naval History* (Routledge, 2004), and has written three books about Admiral Lord Nelson. Prior to writing full time, he was an award-winning television producer and writer. A *Naval History* "Author of the Year," Admiral Callo is a graduate of Yale University's former Naval Reserve Officers Training Program and served in the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Amphibious Force. For ten years, he was an adjunct associate professor at St. John's University in New York City, where he taught courses on writing for mass media.

Elizabeth M. Covart completed her doctorate at the University of California, Davis, in 2011. Her dissertation, *Collision on the Hudson: Identity, Migration, and the Improvement of Albany, New York, 1750-1830*, examines identity creation and adaptation in early America. In addition to revising her dissertation for book publication, Liz also serves as a contributing editor for the *Journal of the Early Americas*.

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The Hudson River Valley Review will consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson River Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer analysis.

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THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

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On the Cover: *View of State Street from St. Peter’s downhill to Dutch Church*, James Eights (1798-1882). c.1850, Watercolor on paper, ht. 11" x 12 ¾," Albany Institute of History & Art, 1954.59.70



Detail from *View of State Street from St. Peter's downhill to Dutch Church*,
James Eights (1798-1882). c.1850, Watercolor on paper, ht. 11" x 12 3/4,"
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“Dam’d Paving” Yankees and Dutch New Yorkers

The Post-Revolution New England Migration and the Creation of American Identity in the Upper Hudson River Valley, 1783-1820

Elizabeth M. Covart

In 1789, a story appeared in Charles R. Webster’s *Albany Gazette*. It recounted how on a dark, rainy night a man and his servant jumped around State Street in an attempt to stay dry. New to the city, the man did not have a native’s instinct for walking in the rain. Unpaved, filled with holes, and lined with six-foot-long gutters that emptied out into their center, Albany’s streets presented an acrobatic challenge. Despite his best attempts, the waterspouts doused the man’s head and back.¹

For more than 100 years, the waterspouts had served Albany’s citizens as an architectural reminder of their Dutch past. Visitors often noted them as a curious sight. New residents learned to walk close to city buildings on rainy days. Contemporaries related that the waterspouts hung quietly until the *Gazette*’s 1789 narrative placed them at the center of a culture war between the residents of Albany and their new neighbors from New England.²

The author of the *Gazette* story, Elkanah Watson, believed that the waterspouts should be cut off, as they represented a local sign of inhospitality that touted the sentiment “Keep out of our streets we can do without you.”³ Watson contended that the spouts created unsafe travel conditions for both pedestrians and wagons. The Albanians countered that while wagons may become stuck in the mud, pedestrians could walk safely if they stayed close to the buildings.⁴ The waterspouts represented a vestige of the Albanians’ Dutch heritage; cutting them off would sever a precious tie to their cultural hearth.⁵ Newly arrived New England migrants viewed the waterspouts as a symbol of a backwards people. New Englanders like Watson suggested the installation of gutters that piped rainwater down the sides of buildings and into street drains.⁶ The controversy over the city’s waterspouts represents just one of the post-Revolution

conflicts between Albanians and the New England migrants who relocated to Albany during the early republic.

The waterspout dispute exemplifies the cultural transition that consumed the Hudson River Valley and much of the United States after 1783. The War for Independence precipitated major cultural and physical changes throughout America. The colonists had entered the war as Britons and exited as citizens of the United States. Newly independent, the former colonists had to adapt their British self-understandings to accommodate their new political allegiance to the United States. As government representatives worked on state and national levels to define new, American political identities, communities worked to adapt, create, and implement new cultural connections that would link them with their fellow Americans and the political institutions of their new nation.

Older settlements in the Hudson River Valley faced a major challenge as they brought their communities and culture in line with their membership in the United States: the post-Revolution New England migration. Between 1790 and 1820, as many as 700,000 New Englanders relocated to New York.⁷ These migrants hailed from a homogenous population of English descendants who did not understand the multiethnic, cultural traditions of New Yorkers living in the Hudson Valley. New England migrants complicated the efforts of valley residents to rebuild and redefine their communities between 1783 and 1820.

New Englanders believed that their self-understandings best represented what an American should be. Hence, the Yankees migrated and transplanted their culture throughout frontier lands in New York. They also tried to transform longstanding Hudson River Valley settlements like Albany into new towns complete with New England customs, architecture, history, and politics. Despite the claims of success made by Watson and other New Englanders, the Yankees did not transform Albany or the existing towns of the Hudson River Valley into New England settlements. Valley residents resisted the Yankees' attempts to dictate cultural change. Instead, through their actions and interactions they engaged their migrant neighbors in a dialogue about what being an "American" entailed.

Much of this interchange occurred as residents of the Hudson Valley implemented internal improvements that repaired the damages wrought by the War for Independence, expanded the valley's economy with improved transportation, and better linked the residents of the region with their American peers. All of these schemes displayed the New Yorkers' investment in and commitment to the new nation. As the New Yorkers and New England migrants worked toward consensus and improvement, they sometimes clashed over valley residents' old customs. The processes by which valley residents adapted their communities to reflect their membership in the United States, and the extent to which they resisted the New Englanders' attempts to dictate cultural change, can be seen in the experiences of the residents of Albany.

The 1783 Treaty of Paris ended the American War for Independence and removed

two major impediments to settling the frontier lands of New York: the Boundary Line of 1768 and the Haudenosaunee. The Boundary Line of 1768 had helped the British Empire maintain peaceful relations with Native Americans by limiting colonial settlement west of Fort Stanwix, in present-day Rome. The Treaty of Paris ended British rule, and thus, enforcement of the boundary. The treaty also reduced the influence of the Haudenosaunee. With the exception of the Oneida and a few neutral villages, the Haudenosaunee had sided with the British during the war. They had engaged in hard, extremely brutal frontier warfare in New York and Pennsylvania. This violence created bitter feelings that dissuaded the Patriots from dealing equitably with the Haudenosaunee. The Americans coveted Haudenosaunee lands; after the war, they prescribed the harsh terms of its surrender.⁸

New Englanders hungered for these new, available lands. They had founded their towns in Massachusetts and its surrounding colonies on the premise of land ownership. Original town proprietors distributed land to each male citizen because land ownership ensured industrious, self-reliant citizens who could provide for the town church. Farmers divided these tracts among their sons. Initially, they had enough for every son, but each division gradually decreased a family's holdings. Within three or four generations, farmers had only enough land to bestow to their eldest son. Younger sons had to learn a trade or move to new lands. This process repeated until fears of Native American attacks and the Boundary Line of 1768 discouraged their western movement. In 1783, Eastern colonists unleashed their pent-up land hunger and pushed west.

Geographic position placed Albany and its people at the center of New York's post-Revolution expansion. Albany stood as the last major city before the frontier; as a result, it became a popular stopover for migrants. There settlers purchased last-minute supplies and checked for available lands. Albany also provided relatively easy access to frontier lands by way of a few wagon roads and the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. From 1790 to 1810, an estimated 9,000 Yankees traveled through Albany; reportedly, 500 Yankee-filled sleighs passed through the city every day in February 1795.⁹

New England migrants also made their homes in Albany because of the city's great commercial potential. Frontier farmers needed an outlet for their produce, and Albany merchants had a long history of participation in New York's grain trade. Moreover, the riparian position of the city allowed farmers to avoid rough and costly road transportation. Albany became a prosperous hub as western farmers sent their produce via the Mohawk River and northern farmers by the Hudson River. Albany also flourished because farmers needed reliable merchants for manufactured and imported goods. Between 1783 and 1830, Albany developed into the crossroads of New York State and its population increased from 3,506 to 24,216.¹⁰

In the 1780s, Albany still resembled its colonial self. In 1785, Englishman Alexander Coventry commented that the city's inhabitants constituted mostly "all Low Dutch or Scotch" people, with the former being "the most numerous," holding most of the property, and having the "chief authority." In 1786, Scotland's Walter Minto wrote

that Albany reminded him of a town in Holland because the ends of its houses faced the street. The city had three main thoroughfares—*Handlaerstræet*, *Pearlstræet*, and *Jonkheerstræet*—which Coventry noted were wide, paved, and featured gutters or strands in the middle of them.¹¹

In 1789, Elkanah Watson relocated from his native Plymouth, Massachusetts, to profit from Albany's natural advantages and migration boom. Watson had strong opinions about Albany. He believed that the city had unlimited potential as an economic hub as long as it could be improved and renovated to accommodate more people, roads, wharves, and factories. Watson also thought that if the Albanians abandoned their foreign and antiquated Dutch architecture, language, and culture, their city would seem more American. He believed an American Albany would succeed in the new republic.

With an eye toward posterity, Watson avidly recorded his opinions, experiences, and observations in a journal. He also maintained a commonplace book, which he filled with newspaper clippings of all the stories and editorials he either wrote or agreed with. Together these sources vividly document the development of Albany into the crossroads and second economic hub of New York State. However, Watson's entries tend toward exaggeration and contain errors authored in the hope that history would remember him.

In his journal, Watson relates that he removed to Albany because God had sent him there to singlehandedly bring the city and its people into the nineteenth century: "My singular destiny directs me to pitch my tent there [Albany]. What a sacrifice to yield blind fold to a mandate beyond my power to control!"¹² Watson accepted his divine mandate because his worldly travels gave him the knowhow to improve Albany and its people.

Between 1775 and 1784, Watson had traveled through twelve states and several European countries as an apprentice and factor for John and Nicholas Brown of Providence, Rhode Island. Watson took extensive notes on the people he met and places he visited. He also documented farming methods, manufacturing techniques, manners, buildings, roads, and canals. In comparison with his countrymen, Watson had significant experience in the cosmopolitan world beyond North America, and this worldliness convinced him that he could expertly improve the "backwards" Albanians and their failing infrastructure.¹³

To improve Albany, Watson believed that he must also refine and educate its people, particularly those of "Dutch extraction." Watson recorded that Albany had just four New England families when he arrived. He described the rest of its population as eight Scotch and Irish families, a few "Israelites," and "the rest were all dutch." Watson disliked the Dutch descendants of Albany because "generally speaking [they were] enshrowded in the darkness, as to any literary acquirements, the interior of their inhospitable dwellings or there intellectual powers." Watson blamed the Albanians' uneducated ways on "their intercourse with the Indians prior to the revolutionary war." Furthermore, Watson judged that the Albanians' historic interactions with the



Elkanah Watson (1758-1842), Ezra Ames. c.1810, Oil on canvas,
ht. 58 5/8" x w. 47 5/8," Albany Institute of History & Art,
gift of the Albany Gallery of Fine Arts, 1900.5.1

Haudenosaunee had corrupted their sociability and politeness, as “their manners were tainted with savage habits; I speak of the mass with several proved exceptions.”¹⁴

Watson emphasized Albanian ignorance and hostility toward New Englanders. He blamed this anti-Yankee prejudice on Albanians’ experiences with “the scum of New England [who] in th[o]se benighted days [the colonial period] used to float off ‘among the dutch’; and boast on their return how much they had cheated them. The necessary consequence was that the dutch hated the Yankees as so many rattle Snakes—this hatred was reciprocal.”¹⁵

Watson claimed success for four major Albany improvements: gutters, paved streets, the State Bank of Albany, and canals. Between 1791 and 1829, he used his journal to detail his central role in each project and substantiated his assertions with the archived evidence in his commonplace book. Watson presents compelling stories and evidence, but they present only a partial story. His version omits the role that Albanians played in improving their city. Watson gives New England migrants full credit for the physical improvements and cultural transformation of Albany. Yet the historical record indicates that Albanians actively participated in, and in many cases initiated, the changes. It also shows that the cultural and physical alterations in Albany occurred because of the interactions between the Albanians and migrant New Englanders.¹⁶

Watson wrote his waterspout story for the *Albany Gazette* to spur his fellow migrants into action. In a 1792 journal entry, Watson related his success. He wrote that the day after his story appeared, the Common Council passed an ordinance to cut down all the waterspouts: “Every saw, & every hand that cou’d wield a saw were put in requisition & they [the waterspouts] were attack’d & came down at the same moment in every part of the City, & by the closing [hour] not a spout was to be seen.” Jubilantly, Watson continued, “My modesty will not permit me to say how much I was delighted to see the effect.”¹⁷ Watson’s friend, Gorham Worth claimed, “nothing could exceed the consternation of the aforesaid burghers, upon the announcement of this order [the Common Council’s ordinance]. Had it been a decree abolishing their [Dutch] mother tongue, it could hardly have excited greater astonishment or greater indignation.”¹⁸

Worth noted that the Albanians had their revenge. They elected Watson a constable for the First Ward, a job that entailed chasing and corralling the citizens’ wandering pigs. After this retaliatory election, Worth relates that the Albanians went “back to sleep again,” only to reawaken after “new swarms” of New England migrants had moved in and conducted a “complete and thorough revolution” of their city. Worth declared that by 1806, “The Yankees were in possession of the city! and the fate of the Dutch was sealed.”¹⁹

New Englanders used the waterspout affair as proof of the quick growth of their influence in Albany. They claimed that New England migrants overpowered the Albanians with their numbers and credited Yankee genius and hard work for the cultural change and extensive internal improvements within the city.²⁰ New Englanders and later historians used the waterspouts as evidence because of the colorful records

left by Watson and Worth.

In 1849, Albany publisher Charles Van Benthuyzen promulgated Watson's version of events when he published the first edition of Worth's *Random Recollections of Albany from 1800 to 1806*. Worth wrote the book to recount his experiences in the city. Recognizing that Albany promised opportunity to young men like himself, he left behind his New England parents (who resided in Hudson, Columbia County) and moved to the city in 1800, at the age of seventeen. Worth enjoyed his time in Albany, and he vividly recalled the city and its most interesting residents. In *Random Recollections*, he discussed Albany primarily during the years he lived there. To describe the city prior to his residency, Worth relied on details from his "old friend" Elkanah Watson.²¹

In 1859, Watson's version of events received further attention from Joel Munsell in his *Annals of Albany*. A New England migrant, Munsell sought to preserve the city's history through print. In the ninth volume of his *Annals*, Munsell reprinted most of Worth's *Random Recollections* and selections from Watson's published journals, *Men and Times of the Revolution, or Memoirs of Elkanah Watson* (1857).²² Munsell lent veracity to the memoirs by bookending them with copies of records left by the Common Council. The thorough and authoritative recounting of Albany's history in the *Annals* added staying power to Watson's version of events.

However, Watson exaggerated his and his fellow New Englanders' contributions to the physical and cultural transformation of the city. In 1789, Watson claimed that Albany had just four New England and eight Scotch and Irish families. The 1788 Albany County Tax List reveals the city had at least thirteen New England heads of household.²³ Between 1783 and 1820, newcomers rapidly increased Albany's population, yet contrary to Worth's suggestion, the Yankees did not "possess" the city by 1806, nor did they "possess" New York. Native New Yorkers comprised the largest source of migrants to New York's frontier.²⁴ Moreover, native Albanians held a solid majority on the Common Council until 1811, when they elected eight Albanians and eight newcomers to the board. However, Albanians continued to control the key offices of mayor and recorder until 1816. Most physical improvements to Albany had to go through the Common Council. Private property owners could change the architectural style of their buildings, but they could not make infrastructural improvements without corporation approval. The newcomers did not dominate the Common Council until 1815, by which time the Albanians already had transformed their city.

Elkanah Watson and his fellow newcomers did not force the Common Council to cut off the waterspouts. The Common Council began improving the city's infrastructure in 1782. Albanians undertook campaigns to repair their docks, wells, and bridges and to improve their streets. Removing the waterspouts went hand-in-hand with this commitment. In January 1785, the Common Council requested that inhabitants "remove all the gutters of their respective houses which lead the water into the street." The waterspouts interfered with street drainage and hindered pedestrian and cart traffic. It appears few Albanians honored this entreaty, because on June 10, 1788,

the corporation passed a formal ordinance mandating the removal of the waterspouts. The city passed this law a year before Watson relocated to Albany and four years before the date of his 1792 journal entry.²⁵

Watson's version of events does contain elements of truth. First, he did write a story for the *Albany Gazette* about the annoyances waterspouts posed for pedestrians.²⁶ Second, Albanians did resist initial attempts by the Common Council to remove the spouts in 1785, which prompted the new law in 1788, with provisions to ensure the citizenry's compliance. The Common Council imposed fines to prevent opposition—a two-shilling-per-day sanction on Albanians who refused to remove their spouts and a twenty-shilling penalty on any person who “shall molest or obstruct any person or persons directed to take down saw or cut off such Gutter.” These stipulations lend credibility to Watson and Worth's claims of Albanian outcry and resistance to waterspout removal.

Whatever objections the Albanians had over the removal of the spouts did not translate into the annual corporation election. Albanians elected two aldermen and assistant aldermen from each ward to represent them on the Common Council.²⁷ On average, Albanians elected five new members to the council per year between 1785 and 1796. During the September 1788 election, Albanians voted for just four new members, suggesting they were pleased overall with their representation. It also appears that Worth exaggerated the Albanians' anger with Watson: Election returns show that the First Ward did not elect him to serve as constable.²⁸

The corporation renewed the waterspout ordinance on June 19, 1789, the year Watson moved to Albany. Watson's belief that the Common Council passed its ordinance the day after his story appeared refers to this renewal. As a newcomer, Watson may not have known about the original 1788 ordinance. More likely, he knew about it, but portrayed the 1789 renewal as the original so his role in the spouts' removal became central.

The ordinance renewal does not mean that the Albanians ignored the 1788 law. The Common Council annually renewed many ordinances to keep them on record and enforced; the corporation renewed the waterspout ordinance again in November 1795. Watson seemingly exaggerated when he said that “every saw & every hand were put in requisition” to cut off the spouts in 1789. If Watson saw people “sawing off” their spouts the day after the ordinance renewal, then he witnessed the continuation of a process begun in 1788. Implementation of the municipal mandate took time and money. The corporation required homeowners to pay for the removal of their waterspouts and for the installation of new gutters.²⁹ The program of fines only deterred delays from those who could afford to replace their spouts. It would seem that homeowners who could not afford to replace their spouts likely persuaded their constable or aldermen to look the other way until they raised enough money to make the improvement.

Elkanah Watson also took excessive credit for paving Albany's streets. In 1789, he declared the city's streets to be “perfect quagmires.” In 1790, Watson began his campaign for their proper pavement by writing essays for Albany newspapers. Watson

used the pen names “Polly Tenderfoot,” “An Inhabitant of State Street,” and “A Friend to Paving” in his attempts to convince the Albanians to pave their streets. He suggested that Albanians residing on properly paved streets deride neighbors who lived on unpaved streets. As “Polly Tenderfoot,” he proposed that the ladies of Albany boycott all businesses located in areas without proper sidewalks. Watson recorded that the Albanians subsequently paved their streets, with many thanking him for his efforts by “cursing” him as the “dam’d paving Yankee.”³⁰

In 1749, Peter Kalm had noted that Albany had broad streets, that “some of them are paved,” and that a few were “lined with trees.” In July 1753, the Common Council referenced paved streets and ordered that one of the thoroughfares be raised to facilitate water drainage. Since May 1756, the Common Council had passed regular ordinances to keep Albany’s streets clean and in good repair; in May 1767, it passed the first law for “paving and cleaning the streets, lanes, and alleys within the City of Albany and for preventing Nuisances within the same.” The Common Council annually renewed this ordinance.³¹

Watson did not singlehandedly lead the push to pave Albany’s streets; instead, he called attention to their improper paving. Watson preferred the large paving stones used by the Europeans to the small stones favored by Albanians because of their relatively low cost.

On July 3, 1790, the Common Council passed another paving ordinance. It required property owners to pay the costs associated with paving the length of the street that fronted their property, and its width from the center of the street to the front of their lot. The Albanians kept this cost down by using small stone. Watson chastised them for paving too cheaply. He argued that small stone would not last as long as flagstones. He also suggested the use of a mix of coarse gravel and small sand that in time would set and yield a surface as hard as flagstone.³²

Between 1790 and 1795, the Common Council ordered that all streets in Albany be properly leveled, curbed, and repaved with flagstones. Whether or not Watson influenced the Albanians’ decision to abandon their cheap, small stone paving cannot be determined. However, given the property owners’ financial responsibility for paving, Albanians repaved their streets with the higher quality flagstones because they both wanted and needed to accommodate the city’s fast-expanding population and commerce.

The rapid expansion of Albany necessitated that old roads be widened, extended, and paved, and that new roads be laid to accommodate the increase in population and commercial traffic. The Common Council appointed superintendents to oversee this work: Many bore the surnames of long-time Albany families. For example, on July 16, 1790, the Common Council appointed Albany mainstay Isaac D. Fonda—from a family that had lived in Albany since the 1650s—to superintend the “pitching, levelling and paving” of Market Street and Maiden Lane. In 1791, the corporation appointed James Bloodgood, who migrated to Albany from Flushing in the 1760s. Bloodgood established his membership within the community with his thirty-year residence, active involve-

ment in the Dutch Reformed Church, and intermarriage with the Van Valkenburgh family. The Albanians also welcomed the assistance of newcomers with their internal improvements. One of these, Robert Kinnear, was appointed by the Common Council in 1795 to superintend the paving of State Street.³³

Elkanah Watson overstated his involvement in implementing internal improvement schemes. However, Watson's interest in expanding Albany and its economy, and profiting from the New England migration, accurately reflects the desires of many migrants. In his work, *New England in Albany*, Jonathan Tenney offers a roll of ninety-two migrants who settled in Albany between 1780 and 1800.³⁴ Of those listed, thirty-three (forty-six percent) promoted the economic expansion of Albany as merchants, twenty (twenty-seven percent) practiced a trade, and another twenty (twenty-seven percent) relocated to Albany to service the growing population of the city and the migrants who passed through it.³⁵ Most migrants worked to expand and improve Albany for both the betterment of their livelihoods and the city. However, unlike Watson, they did not boast of or record their contributions for posterity.

In 1782, Charles R. Webster finished his apprenticeship at the *Connecticut Courant* in Hartford, Connecticut, and relocated to Albany. He partnered with Solomon Balentine and cofounded the *New York Gazetteer and Northern Intelligencer*, the first newspaper printed in Albany after the War for Independence.³⁶ In 1784, Webster struck out on his own and began printing *The Albany Gazette* and *Webster's Calendar and Albany Almanack*.³⁷

Like Watson, Webster settled in Albany to serve the city and profit from its expanding population and economy. For forty years, he attended to the commercial needs of Albany merchants and migrant New Englanders by advertising in his paper the wares of local businesses and available city and frontier lands. He assisted local consumers by selling books, pamphlets, paper, ink, and his Albany-focused almanac. Webster also vested himself in the community by helping to found and support schools like the Albany Mechanic's Academy and benevolent societies like the Albany Mechanic's Society.³⁸

Both the Albanians and New England migrants saw internal improvements, such as the removal of waterspouts and the installation of gutters, as necessary to bring their community out of its colonial past and into its American present and future. With this belief in mind, between 1784 and 1797 the Albanians renovated and replaced many of their seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Dutch- and British-style buildings with Federalist structures. They used American architecture to proclaim their American identity. The Albanians' alterations to the architecture of Albany transformed the settlement from a colonial outpost into an American city.

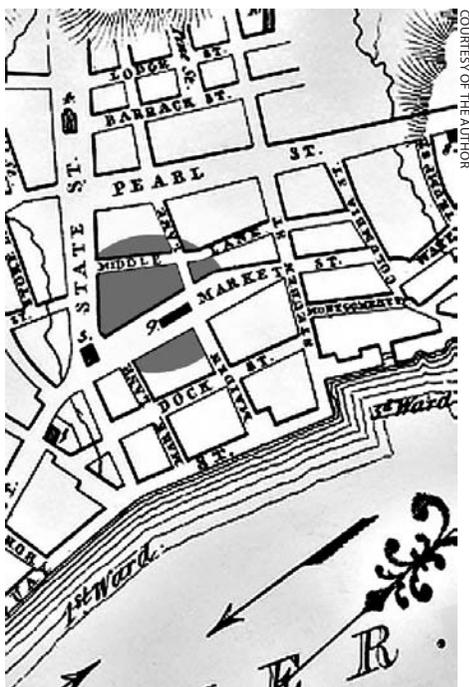
Between 1784 and 1788, Albanians dismantled the physical vestiges of Great Britain's imperial regime and used the materials to build and improve this new American city. The corporation dismantled Fort Frederick and used its stones to repair and build new drains, bridges, and docks. They demolished the dock owned by the British Army and used its materials to repair the middle pier and to build a new quay behind City Hall.

In 1783, they repurposed the north wing of the army hospital as a school and sold off the rest of its building materials for private use. In 1786, the Common Council collected and saved for reuse all nails from the old army barracks after a fire had destroyed it. They then sold the lands where the hospital and barracks had stood to fund internal improvement schemes.³⁹

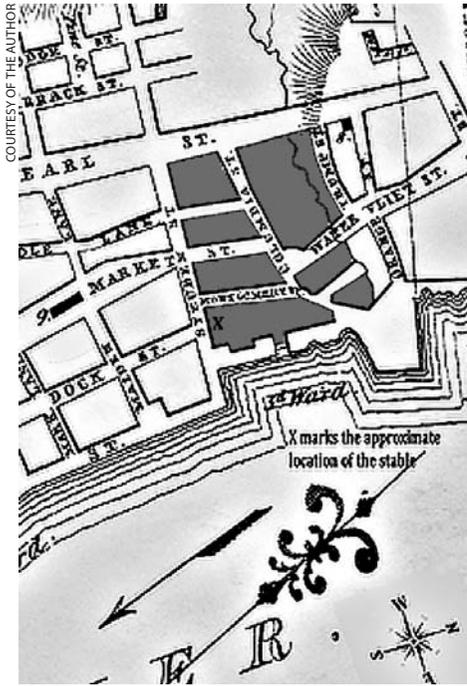
Fire played a larger role than the New England migrants in bringing about changes and improvements to Albany's cityscape. The Albanians did not renovate or replace functional structures. Therefore, Albany still resembled a seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century colonial city during the 1790s. Narrow, wooden buildings with street-facing, gable-ended roofs predominated the city skyline. Albany's colonial architecture and the spoken Dutch of its citizens contributed greatly

to the outsiders' perception of Albany as a Dutch city. Between 1793 and 1797, fires razed older Albany neighborhoods. Albanians embraced this destruction as an opportunity to build new, American-styled structures that both proclaimed their American-ness and helped to rid the city of its colonial past.

Albany witnessed six catastrophic fires in November 1793. On November 17, three slaves set fire to Leonard Gansevoort's State Street stable. Two white men with a grudge against Gansevoort had paid the slaves to start the blaze,⁴⁰ which began around ten o'clock at night. A light, northward breeze quickly carried the flames from the stable to other buildings along State Street, Market Street, Maiden Lane, and Middle Lane. The fire raged into the early hours of November 18 and consumed twenty-six houses and many businesses, including the printing office of the *Albany Gazette* and the tobacco shop and home of James Caldwell. Contemporaries estimated that losses totaled about £100,000 or \$250,000 (roughly \$5,390,756 in 2009 dollars).⁴¹ Between November 22 and 25, five more fires ravaged the city. The first blaze originated in the Maiden Lane stable of General Peter Gansevoort (Leonard's brother); the Albanians extinguished it with "great exertions" before it could spread. None of the subsequent fires caused as much damage as the November 17 conflagration, but together they destroyed most of the buildings between the junctions of State and Market streets and Maiden and Middle



Detail of the 1790 DeWitt Clinton Map of Albany with a gray circle denoting the area of the 1793 fires.



Detail of the 1790 DeWitt Clinton Map of Albany with blocks in gray denoting the area of the 1797 fires.

lanes. Albanians welcomed the opportunity to replace their forefathers' old, wooden buildings with brick structures in the current Federal style.⁴²

In 1797, another, more devastating fire allowed the Albanians to extend their architectural overhaul. Around 10:30 p.m. on August 4, cries of "FIRE!" echoed throughout the city. The blaze originated in a vacant stable on the southeast corner of Steuben and Dock streets. A brisk wind quickly carried burning embers to buildings on nearby Steuben, Von Tromp, Hudson, and Pearl streets. Within four hours, the fire had consumed all ninety-six houses and 100 stables and storehouses located within those seven blocks. The conflagration drove 150 families from their homes and caused £100,000 or \$250,000 in damage (approximately \$4,192,810.20 in 2009 dollars). Some suspected arson, as witnesses reportedly saw two unknown men

quickly row across the Hudson River as the fire got underway. Others believed the flames had been an accident; the southeast corner of Dock and Steuben streets was a popular gathering place for people to smoke and exchange local news and gossip. One newspaper noted that "it is easy to conceive how a pipe carelessly emptied or a segar thrown into an improper situation might have produced this awful catastrophe." The Albanians rebuilt and replaced the old, wooden structures with stone and brick Federal-style buildings.⁴³

Reverend Timothy Dwight of Connecticut noted with pleasure the physical transformation Albany had undergone between his two visits to the city, in 1792 and 1811. Remarking that Albany had been a "dull and disagreeable" "Dutch" city in 1792, he marveled at the architectural revolution that had taken place in the intervening years. He commented that "since I visited this city in 1792, it has, fortunately I think, been ravaged by two fires...and the town has already been improved not a little in its appearance." Dwight recorded that Albany's transformation had improved the property values and beauty of the city and made Albanians appear more American; they had "built many handsome houses in the modern English style, and in their furniture, manners, and mode of living have adopted English customs." Dwight also attributed the Albanians' increased American-ness to their adoption of English as their primary language.⁴⁴

Albanians adopted English as their official, governmental language in 1683, but they continued to use Dutch in their homes, religious services, and in the majority of their local business transactions.⁴⁵ By the mid-eighteenth century, Albanians used English to conduct most of their business, but continued to speak Dutch in their homes and church services. The public use of Dutch declined as the British population increased after the French and Indian War. The Albanians' private use of Dutch decreased after the United States achieved independence.

By the 1780s, many Dutch-descended Albanians had only a functional literacy in Dutch. They could speak and read the language but could not write it. In 1784, merchants Jacob Cuyler and Leonard Gansevoort wrote to Jan Bronkhorst, a Dutch trading partner in Croisie, France. The merchants informed Bronkhorst "if it was more agreeable to you to write us in the Dutch Language than the English we request you will do it as we can perfectly understand it." However, Cuyler and Gansevoort told Bronkhorst that they would continue to communicate in English because they could not "write it [Dutch] as well as the English."⁴⁶ The Albanians' Dutch literacy further deteriorated in the early nineteenth century. In 1819, Gerard Van Schaick sent his cousin, Peter Gansevoort, an entry from their family bible in the original Dutch, commenting "as you are a Dutchman I shall trouble you with the translating it." Van Schaick's comment reflects either a desire to relish the opportunity to use the old, familial language with his cousin or, more likely, a jocular remark that neither he nor his cousin knew enough Dutch to translate the entry into English.⁴⁷

After 1780, Albanians started to eliminate Dutch from their private and religious lives. As new citizens of the United States, they wanted to make sure they fit in as Americans, so they integrated English into all facets of their daily lives. The youth of Albany led this transition after their military service and sacrifice during the War for Independence bonded them with other Americans. Eilardus Westerlo, *dominie* (minister) of Albany's Dutch Reformed Church, embraced the change as inevitable. To accommodate the growing preference for English, in 1780 he started offering two Sunday services, a morning service in English and an afternoon one in Dutch. Westerlo worked hard to keep the city's youth and young families in his church. To better his fluency, the Netherlands-born Westerlo increased his use of English at home. In 1782, he started keeping his journal in English so that his "own Children will be best able to understand my Notes." Westerlo understood that as Albanians spoke more English, few in his children's generation would teach Dutch to their children, and the minister wanted his grandchildren to be able to read his journal.⁴⁸

Many older Albanians protested the conversion to English. They did not want to use English in their homes or listen to English sermons in the Dutch Church. Westerlo's ability to preach in English and Dutch placated these congregants. However, within a few years Westerlo found he could not physically meet the challenges of his preaching load; the extra sermons strained his voice and made him prone to throat infections. In 1784, he informed his Consistory that he needed to cut back. Since most of the

congregation preferred English, the Consistory agreed that he should preach in that language.⁴⁹

Westerlo's transition distressed his older congregants. Their frequent pleas for a Dutch service tore at Westerlo's heart. He began to fear that if he continued to preach in English, his older members would not receive the full grace of God. Westerlo informed the Consistory that he would return to the Dutch service as it "edified" those "who [were] drawing right to their End" and seemed "best for [his] people."⁵⁰ However, Westerlo's decision to preach in Dutch worried the Consistory. The English services had increased weekly attendance and membership among the newcomers and youth in Albany. Without the English liturgy, the Consistory feared that the younger generation would leave the church in favor of the Presbyterian and Anglican churches, which offered sermons in English. The Consistory informed Westerlo that those who "ask[ed] me not to preach more in English; ha[d] been too rash & prejudicial to the real Interest of my Congregation, Especially the rising Generation. Which are of danger of being drawn off from our Church by every pretender and Seactarian." In October 1784, the Consistory again persuaded Westerlo to preach in both languages with their promise of a £175 per year salary and £200 in back pay.⁵¹

Westerlo preached two Sunday services until March 1787, when the Consistory hired John Bassett to preach the English service and to oversee the new Dutch Church Academy.⁵² The church continued to offer bilingual services until December 1790, when Westerlo succumbed to "nervous fever" at the age of fifty-two.⁵³ The Consistory failed to find a Dutch-speaking minister to replace Westerlo; older ministers refused to leave their pulpits and none of the new, American-trained ministers spoke Dutch. The inability of the church to offer regular Dutch services after Westerlo's death marked the end of the prevalence of the Dutch language in Albany. Albanians no longer needed to understand Dutch to receive the word of God. Thereafter, few Albanians passed Dutch on to their children.⁵⁴

The transition to English in Albany illustrates a larger trend among the Dutch- and German-speaking communities of the Hudson Valley. After the Revolution, many of these localities adopted English as their primary language. They switched because ethnic churches had sustained non-English language use, but their ability to do so became hindered as communities found it harder to find European ministers for their pulpits. This proved to be the case in Rhinebeck. Dominie Stephen Van Voorhees preached and kept the Dutch Reformed Church records at Rhinebeck Flatts in English during his tenure (1776-1785). Educated in America, Van Voorhees stood as the first Dutch Reformed minister to be ordained by the American Synod, in 1772. After Van Voorhees departed the church in 1785, Dominie Petrus DeWitt offered both English and Dutch sermons until he left the pulpit in 1799. Under the direction of Dominie John Broadhead Romeyn, the Rhinebeck Flatts congregation completed its transition to English.⁵⁵

In 1805, Albanians decided to do away with the last major element of their colonial

past. Since 1656, the old, stone Dutch Church had stood in the middle of State and Market Streets.⁵⁶ Nearly all visitors to Albany had remarked on the church's distinctive, blockhouse-like shape and its location in the center of the city's two busiest streets. By 1797, the Dutch Reformed congregation had outgrown this small, historic church. Between 1790 and 1810, the post-Revolution migration into New York had expanded Albany by more than thirty-two percent, from 3,506 in 1790 to 10,762 in 1810. The City of Albany and the Dutch Reformed Church fed and capitalized on this growth by dividing and selling their lands within and without the city.⁵⁷ Flush with cash from these sales, the Consistory commissioned architect Philip Hooker, himself a New England migrant, to build them a new church. Hooker designed an elegant, modern building. Two towers topped with acorn-shaped cupolas adorned its imposing exterior, while elegantly and richly carved wood and stonework ornamented the interior. The Consistory dedicated the new church on January 27, 1799.⁵⁸

The Consistory kept the old church to assist with its sizable congregation. In 1805, the Consistory discussed building a second, new church with a bigger nave. The corporation welcomed and encouraged this idea. By 1805, Albanians viewed the Old Dutch Church as a major nuisance. The city had worked hard to pave, widen, extend, and build new streets to accommodate its large population growth; this hallmark of their colonial past literally stood in the way of Albanians' progress toward their American future. Yet the Common Council could do nothing to improve and ease the flow of traffic at its largest intersection, State and Market streets, where the Dutch Reformed Church owned the property. When the Consistory began to think about building a new church to replace its 1656 church, the corporation supported these plans by offering to purchase the land underneath the old church.⁵⁹

In August 1805, the Common Council sent a committee to meet with the Consistory to discuss removing the old church. The Consistory agreed to build a second church, dismantle the old church, and to sell the city the land underneath it. The Common Council consented to purchase the land for \$5,000, payable within ten years with all "lawful interest" to be paid annually. The Common Council also allowed the Consistory salvage rights to all of the building materials from the old church and to dig up, recover, and remove all of the bodily remains of those interred beneath it.

In March 1806, workers commenced demolition of the old stone church. The work proceeded slowly as laborers carefully removed the hourglass pulpit and interior furnishings. The Consistory wanted to recover as much stone as possible for their new church, so the workers prepped the church with care before they tore it down. The end of the church came the day the laborers made their final preparations. On that day a worker climbed atop the church roof and removed the Dutch weathercock that had stood perched above it—and above Albany—since 1656. Gorham Worth correctly asserted that the end of the "Dutch era" in Albany came in 1806. However, the end did not come because the "Yankees were in possession of the city!" It came the day the worker removed the old weathercock. On that day Albanians decided to embrace their

American future by removing the last hallmark of their colonial past.⁶⁰

The New England migration into New York influenced great changes in the Hudson River Valley during the early republic. Although as many as 700,000 New Englanders migrated, the experiences of Albany show that the New England migrants did not overwhelm and force Hudson River Valley residents to adopt their New England-branded American identity as their own. Valley residents resisted the Yankees' attempts to dictate cultural change. Instead, through their actions and interactions they engaged the migrants in a dialogue about what being an "American" entailed. Much of this dialogue took place as Hudson River Valley residents implemented internal improvement programs. Both the New England migrants and the older inhabitants of the Hudson River Valley believed that investment in better roads, Federal-style architecture, and proper gutters outwardly showed the American-ness of the region and its inhabitants' commitment to the new republic.

The New England migration stands as an important aspect of the history of the Hudson Valley, New York State, and the United States. The migrants may not have dictated change in long-established New York communities, but they served as a catalyst for the new social order that emerged in the 1830s. Throughout many communities, migrants and New Yorkers negotiated over what they wanted the social and cultural life of their community, state, and nation to be. Together they formed and participated in organizations that gave rise to the religious revivalism of the Second Great Awakening and movements for women's rights, free labor, and temperance, and against slavery and Freemasonry. The causes championed by native and migrant New Yorkers spilled into other states as their children and grandchildren continued to move west. By the Civil War, the New Yorkers' discussions and movements had become negotiations and campaigns for the nation.

Endnotes

1. New York State Library/Manuscripts and Special Collections, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 3, Journal D, 446; NYSL/MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 4, Commonplace Book, 24; Stefan Bielinski, "Charles R. Webster," *The Colonial Albany Social History Project*, April 29, 2007, <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/w/crwebster6841.html>.
2. Elkanah Watson and Gorham Worth related in their journals and memoirs that the waterspouts caused cultural conflict.
3. NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884" (GB12579), Box 3, Journal D, 446; Hugh Meredith Flick, "Elkanah Watson: Gentlemen Promoter 1758-1842" (Columbia University, Political Science, 1958), 103.
4. David M. Ellis, "Yankee-Dutch Confrontation in the Albany Area," *New England Quarterly* 40 (1971): 262-271.
5. Ellis, "Yankee-Dutch Confrontation in the Albany Area," 266; Gorham A. Worth, *Random Recollections of Albany: From 1800 to 1808*, 3rd ed. (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1866), 10-11. Worth explains that Albany derived its long gutters from provincial Holland towns: "In Holland the spouts were projected over the canals; but by the adoption of this practice in Albany the water was poured upon the head of the unwary passenger." Ellis states that the gutter tradition came specifically from Amsterdam. Unlike Amsterdam, Albany had steep streets and lacked canals. Down the center of Albany's unpaved streets ran a single gutter used to collect the spouts' water. The water overflowed the gutters, speedily streamed down the streets, and made the roads treacherous for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic.
6. NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884" (GB12579), Box 3, Journal E, 48.
7. Darlington posits that as many as 800,000 migrants came from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island alone. Davenport presents a more conservative estimation of 700,000. The post-Revolution New England migration followed the process of "chain migration." When a family or group of neighbors decided to move west they sent several young men to New York to find and purchase land. These scouts stopped in Albany and other western settlements to check for available tracts. From Albany, they proceeded to reconnoiter the land. The men reported their findings either in person or in letters, which often encouraged more men to travel to New York for land. Together, the scouts spent most of a spring, summer, and fall clearing their land to accommodate a starter homestead and small farm. With the basics in place, the migrant returned home, packed up his family, and made a winter trek back to his new home. Most migrants moved their household during the winter sleighing season because spring muds waylaid heavy wagons. James W. Darlington, "Peopling the Post-Revolutionary New York Frontier," *New York History* 74, no. 4 (1993): 379-381; David Paul Davenport, "The Yankee Settlement of New York, 1783-1820," *The Genealogical Journal* 17, no. 1988-1989 (1989): 65; David Maldwyn Ellis, "The Yankee Invasion of New York, 1783-1830," *New York History* 32, no. 1 (1951): 3-17; David Maldwyn Ellis, *Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region, 1790-1850* (New York: Octagon Books, 1967); Dixon Ryan Fox, *Yankees and Yorkers* (New York: University Press, 1940); Susan E. Gray, *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (Chapel Hill ; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Ruth L. Higgins, *Expansion in New York: With Especial Reference to the Eighteenth Century*, Perspectives in American History 30 (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1976); Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Yankee Exodus: An Account of the Migration from New England* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950); Lois Kimball Mathews, *The Expansion of New England: The Spread of New England Settlement and Institutions to the Mississippi River 1620-1865* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1909); Daniel Vickers, "Working the Fields in a Developing Economy: Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1675," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 49-69; Daniel Vickers, "Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1990): 3-29; Joseph Sutherland Wood, *The New England Village* (Baltimore,

Md. ; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

8. The Americans also took land from their Oneida allies. Joseph T Glatthaar, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
9. David Maldwyn Ellis, "Rise of the Empire State, 1790-1820," *New York History* 61, no. 1 (1975): 14; David G. Hackett, *The Rude Hand of Innovation: Religion and Social Order in Albany, New York 1652-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69. Although New England contributed large numbers of pioneers to New York's frontier lands, the largest group of settlers came from New York. To make good on its offer of land bounties to its Revolutionary War soldiers, New York set aside 1.5 million acres of land in present-day Seneca, Cayuga, Oswego, Onondaga, Cortland, and Tompkins counties. New York divided its Military Tract into twenty-eight townships measuring six square miles each. The Military Tract encouraged New Yorkers to pick up and move west within the bounds of their own state. Darlington, "Peopling the Post-Revolutionary New York Frontier"; Thomas L. Purvis, "The National Origins of New Yorkers in 1790," *New York History* 67, no. April (1986): 133-153.
10. Joel Munsell, *The Annals of Albany*, vol. 5 (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 78 State Street, 1854), 100-101. City of Albany population figures: 1790: 3,506. 1800: 5,349. 1810: 10,762. 1820: 12,541. 1830: 24,216. The population increase results from three factors: 1. Colonie's addition as Albany's Fifth Ward in 1810, which increased Albany's population by 1,406 people. 2. The Yankee migration. 3. By 1830, the Yankee migration into New York began to wane, but immigration from Ireland took its place, see William E. Rowley, "Albany: A Tale of Two Cities, 1820-1880" (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University History of American Civilization, 1967); William E. Rowley, "The Irish Aristocracy of Albany, 1798-1878," *New York History* 52, no. 3 (1971): 275-304.
11. State, Market, and Pearl streets constituted Albany's main avenues. Dr. Alexander Coventry, *Memoirs of an Emigrant: The Journal of Alexander Coventry, M.D., 1783-1831*, vol. 1 (Albany: New York State Library, 1785), 73; William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Walter Minto, "Notebook 2," (Minto-Skelton Papers), Box 2, Folder 24, December 26, 1786; Albany County Hall of Records, "Albany Common Council Minutes," vol. 17, September 16, 1805.
12. NYSL/MS, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884" (GB12579), Box 3, Journal E, 49.
13. Flick, "Elkanah Watson: Gentlemen Promoter 1758-1842"; Elkanah Watson, *A Tour in Holland, in MDCCCLXXXIV* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Isaiah Thomas sold at his bookstore in Worcester and by him and company in Boston, 1790); Elkanah Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution, or, Memoirs of Elkanah Watson Including Journals of Travels in Europe and America, from 1777 to 1842, with His Correspondence with Public Men and Reminiscences and Incidents of the Revolution*, ed. Winslow C. Watson (New York: Dana and Company, 1856).
14. NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 3, Journal E, 48.
15. Watson or one of his ancestors evidently sensed some irony in this statement. In a different pen someone inserted above "the dutch hated the Yankees": "(judging the whole people of New Eng'd by their worthless Samples as we Judge the Irish)." NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 3, Journal E, 48; Flick, "Elkanah Watson: Gentlemen Promoter 1758-1842," 107-108.
16. Watson also took credit for many other improvements such as street lamps, turnpikes, libraries, and the dredging of the sandbar from the Hudson River. Watson summarized his involvement in many of these improvements in his "Summary Review" on pages 449-456 of Journal D. NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 2, Journal D, 433-456; NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 3, Journal E, 32-40, 50-53, 63-93.
17. NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884" (GB12579), Box 3, Journal D, 445-447; NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 4, Commonplace Book, 24.
18. Worth, *Random Recollections of Albany*, 2nd ed., 10-11.
19. Worth, *Random Recollections of Albany*, 2nd ed., 10-11.
20. The New Englanders extended their claim that Yankee migrants served as the sole agents of cultural

- change to the entire state of New York.
21. Three editions of *Random Recollections* appeared between 1849 and 1866. Charles Van Benthuyzen published the first and second editions, which appeared under Worth's pseudonym, Ignatius Jones. The second edition appears just as the first except that Worth added "recollections" on "Old Mr. Banyar," "Old Mr. Lydius," "The Visit," "French Politeness," and "The Marquis's Pupils." Worth's *Recollections of Hudson* also appeared in the second edition. Joel Munsell published a third edition of the work under Worth's real name in 1866. This edition is identical to the second with the exception that Munsell went through and added pictures and extensive footnotes to support Worth's points. Munsell also produced a two-volume illustrated edition. This edition features documents, prints, and other miscellany gathered by Munsell to further illustrate Albany and the people discussed by Worth. The illustrated edition can be found in the Manuscripts and Special Collections of the New York State Library. NYSL, MSC, Gorham A. Worth, *Random Recollections of Albany, 1800 to 1808*, (974.743 fW93a3 V.1).
 22. Munsell also published the same sections of Watson's *Memoir* in his *Collections of Albany* in 1865. NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579); Gorham A. Worth, *Random Recollections of Albany, 1800 to 1808*, 1st ed., (Albany: Charles Van Benthuyzen, 1849), Joel Munsell, *The Annals of Albany*, vol. 9 (Albany, NY: Munsell & Rowland, Printers, 1859), 208–222; Joel Munsell, *Collections of Albany From Its Discovery to the Present Time*, vol. 1 (Albany: J. Munsell, 78 State Street, 1865), 374–382.
 23. Comparison of the 1788 Albany County Tax List with the records of the Colonial Albany Project and Jonathan Tenney's *New England in Albany* reveal at least thirteen New England households in 1788. Tenney claims that ninety-four New England families came to Albany between 1780 and 1800. The New Englanders on the 1788 Tax List are: Solomon Allen, John Blake, Elisha Crane, Thomas Diamond, James Elliot, Enoch Leonard, Robert Lewis, John Shepher, Thomas Spencer, John Stafford, Benjamin Wallace, Bethuel Washburn, and Charles R. Webster. Stefan Bielinski, "The People of Colonial Albany," *The Colonial Albany Social History Project*, n.d., <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/index.html>; Jonathan Tenney, *New England in Albany* (Boston: Crocker & Co., 1883), 26–29.
 24. Albany's population increased every census. Census totals: 1790: 3,506; 1800: 5,349; 1810: 10,762; 1820: 12,541; 1825: 15,974; 1830: 24,216. It should be noted that many of the Native New Yorkers had New England parentage, the progeny of the Yankee migrants who settled along the Hudson River and in frontier locations after the French and Indian War. "Brief History of Albany From Child & Shiffer's Dictionary 1831," in Munsell, *The Annals of Albany*, 5:100–101; Darlington, "Peopling the Post-Revolutionary New York Frontier"; Purvis, "The National Origins of New Yorkers in 1790"; Thomas J. Humphrey, *Land and Liberty: Hudson Valley Riots in the Age of Revolution* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004); Sung Bok Kim and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg, Va.), *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664-1775* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1978).
 25. ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes, 1781-1791," vol. 10, January 17, 1785; ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes, 1784-1790," vol. 11, June 10, 1788; ACHR, "An ordinance for regulating the fixing of gutters, June 19, 1789," in ACHR, City Clerk, "Common Council Laws," (S.A.R.A. Box 1).
 26. Few issues of the *Albany Gazette* remain for 1788, 1789, or 1792. NYSL, "New York State Newspaper Project," Albany County Newspapers, <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/nysnp/101.htm#Albany>.
 27. The Dongan Charter organized Albany into three wards. In 1800, the city added a Fourth Ward and in 1815 a Fifth Ward. Ward representation remained the same with two aldermen and assistant aldermen.
 28. ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," vols. 11, 11a, 12, 13.
 29. John Van Zandt issued two receipts to Spencer Stafford for gutter parts in August 1799. The receipts reflect that a gutter pipe cost eight shillings in 1799. It appears that Stafford's gutter needed five bands, twenty-eight joints, one head, one elbow, and one lodestone to build and attach a gutter in place. Depending on the receipt, the gutter cost Stafford a total of £3.3.0 or £3.5.0. Albany Institute of History and Art, Library, "Gerret Van Zandt, Jr., Papers," "Receipt to Spencer Stafford," (CJ541), Box 1, Folder 5, August 7, 1799; AIHA, Library, Gerret Van Zandt, Jr., Papers, "Receipt to Spencer Stafford," (CJ541), Box 1, Folder 5, August 13, 1799.
 30. NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 3, Journal D, 444-445; NYSL, MSC, "Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884," (GB12579), Box 4, Commonplace Book, 5, 23.
 31. "Common Council Minutes," July 31, 1753, in Joel Munsell, "The City Records," in *Collections of the*

- History of Albany From its Discovery to the Present Time*, vol. 1 (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 78 State Street, 1865), 84; “Common Council Minutes,” May 22, 1756, in Munsell, “The City Records,” in *Collections of the History of Albany From its Discovery to the Present Time*, 1:101; “Common Council Minutes,” May 13, 1767, in Munsell, “The City Records,” in *Collections of the History of Albany From its Discovery to the Present Time*, 1:176; “Common Council Minutes,” June 17, 1768, Munsell, “The City Records,” in *Collections of the History of Albany From its Discovery to the Present Time*, 1:188; Peter Kalm, *Peter Kalm’s Travels in North America*, trans. Adolph B. Benson, vol. 1 (Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), 342.
32. ACHR, “Common Council Laws and Ordinances, 1765-1840,” “A Law for paving that Part of Market Street,” SARA Box 1, August 11, 1790; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 13, January 8, 1791; NYSL/MS, “Elkanah Watson Papers, 1773-1884,” (GB12579), Box 4, Commonplace Book, 23; “Albany, Monday, Sept 29, 1794,” *Albany Register, Published as The Albany Register* (Albany, September 29, 1794).
 33. Stefan Bielinski, “Fonda,” *Colonial Albany Social History Project*, September 10, 2009, <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/ffonda.html>; Stefan Bielinski, “James Bloodgood,” *The Colonial Albany Social History Project*, May 29, 2006, <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/bj/abgd7354.html>; Stefan Bielinski, “Abraham Bloodgood,” *The Colonial Albany Social History Project*, May 29, 2006, <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/bj/abgd7351.html>; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” Vol. 14, August 20, 1795.
 34. Tenney inaccurately claims that all of the ninety-two men on his list hailed from New England. Of the ninety-two, thirty-nine originated from New England, fourteen from New York (including five born in Albany), two from New Jersey, one from Maryland, while the origins of thirty-six of the men could not be determined. Although Tenney erroneously claims New England origins for the men on his list, he lists the occupations of seventy-four of the men with great accuracy. Tenney, *New England in Albany*, 26–29.
 35. The following represents the breakdown of occupations for the seventy-four listed by Tenney: thirty-three merchants (forty-six percent), eleven printers/bookbinders (fifteen percent), four stagecoach operators (five percent), four tavern keepers (five percent), three architects (four percent), three hatters (four percent), three lawyers (four percent), two shippers (three percent), two silversmiths (three percent), two iron manufacturers (three percent), one teacher (one percent), one baker (one percent), one clergyman (one percent), one physician (one percent), one druggist (one percent), one painter (one percent), and one city marshal (one percent).
 36. In 1771, Scots Alexander and James Robertson started Albany’s first newspaper, *The Albany Gazette*. By 1776, the *Gazette* had failed because of the Robertsons’ Loyalist politics. Charles R. Webster resurrected *The Albany Gazette* in 1784.
 37. Stefan Bielinski, “Albany Gazette,” *Colonial Albany Social History Project*, August 2002, <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/ag.html>; Bielinski, “Charles R. Webster”; George R. Howell and Jonathan Tenney, *Bi-centennial History of Albany: History of the County of Albany, N.Y., from 1609 to 1886*, vol. 1 (Albany: W.W. Munsell & Co., Publishers, 1886), 371; Munsell, *The Annals of Albany*, 5:230–240; Joel Munsell, *The Annals of Albany*, vol. 10 (Albany, NY: Munsell & Rowland, Printers, 1860), 227; Tenney, *New England in Albany*, 30.
 38. Webster and others helped to found the Albany Mechanic’s Society in an effort to support “Mechanics and Tradesmen of the city of Albany and its vicinity. . .for the laudable purposes of protecting and supporting such of their brethren as by sickness or accident may stand in need of assistance, and of relieving the widows and orphans of those who may die in indigent circumstances, and also of providing the means of instruction for their children.” Legislature of the State of New York, “Charter of the Incorporation of the Albany Mechanic’s Society” (Charles R. & George Webster, at their Bookstore, 1803), 1; George R. Howell and Jonathan Tenney, *Bi-Centennial History of Albany: History of the County of Albany, N.Y., from 1609 to 1886*, vol. 2 (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., Publishers, 1886), 372, 722.
 39. ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, September 23, 1783; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, May 18, 1784; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, March 19, 1785; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, April 16, 1785; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, May 2, 1785; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, July 25, 1785; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, August 15, 1785; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, June 19, 1786; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, August 16, 1788; ACHR, “Albany Common Council Minutes,” vol. 11, June 20, 1789.

40. The slaves' mischief had dire consequences. Bet and Dean pled guilty and Pomp received due process. The court sentenced all three to death by hanging. The Albanians welcomed the severe punishment given the extent of the damage, the grave danger the fire posed to the city, and the rebellious actions of the slaves. On November 25, 1793, the corporation meted out further punishment when it passed "A law forbidding slaves from walking in the streets and lanes of Albany after nine o'clock in the evening." The actions of Bet, Dean, and Pomp also prompted the corporation to increase the night watch and pass stricter ordinances concerning fire prevention. "No Headline," *Albany Register*, published as *The Albany Register* (Albany, NY, January 13, 1794); "Albany, Monday, March 17, 1794," *Albany Register*, published as *The Albany Register* (Albany, NY, March 17, 1794); Gerlach, "Black Arson in Albany, New York," 307-310; ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," Vol. 13, November 25, 1793; ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," Vol. 13, December 4, 1793; ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," Vol. 13, December 12, 1793. During the December 17 meeting, the Common Council offered a reward of \$200 for information concerning any persons involved in the various fires from November 17-25, excluding Pomp, Bet, and Dean, who they had in custody; NYSL, MSC, "The Examination of Bet a Negro Slave of Philip S. V. Rensselaer taken the 28th Day of November 1793," (SA1797), November 28, 1793.
41. 2009 dollar figures based on the current Consumer Price Index and on the formulas provided by John McCusker in John J. McCusker, "How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 101, no. 2 (1991): 297-373.
42. Several of the newspaper articles list the names of the persons who lost property in the November 17/18 blaze. "FIRE at ALBANY.," *Columbian Gazetteer* (New York, New York, November 25, 1793); "Albany, November 20.," *Federal Gazette*, Published as *The Federal Gazette*, and *Philadelphia Evening Post* (Philadelphia, November 27, 1793); "Litchfield, November 27. Fire at Albany," *Litchfield Monitor*, Published as *The Monitor* (Litchfield, Connecticut, November 27, 1793); "Norwich, November 26.," *United States Chronicle*, Published as *The United States Chronicle: Political, Commercial, and Historical* (Providence, Rhode Island, November 27, 1793); "Springfield, Nov. 26.," *Independent Chronicle*, Published as *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser* (Boston, November 28, 1793); Robert S. Alexander, *Albany's First Church And It's Role in the Growth of the City* (Delmar, NY: Newsgraphics Printers, 1988), 153; Tricia Barbagallo, "James Caldwell, Immigrant Entrepreneur," *The Hudson Valley Regional Review: A Journal of Regional Studies* 17, no. 2 (2000): 62; Gerlach, "Black Arson in Albany, New York," 303-307.
43. "Another Conflagration!," *Albany Chronicle*, Published as *The Albany Chronicle* (Albany, NY, August 7, 1797); "Fire at Albany.," *Diary*, Published as *The Diary or Loudon's Register* (New York, NY, August 8, 1797); "Fire.," *Gazette of the United States*, Published as *The Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, August 9, 1797).
44. Like many New Englanders and Americans, Dwight described good American tastes and characteristics as being "English" in style. Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, ed. Barbara Miller Solomon and Patricia M. King, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1969), 345-348; Joseph Manca, "Erasing the Dutch: The Critical Reception of Hudson Valley Dutch Architecture, 1670-1840," in *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America 1609-2009*, ed. Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt, and Annette Stott (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Press, 2008), 59-84.
45. In 1683, the Duke of York issued the "Duke's Laws," for the governance of New York. The laws required the former New Netherlanders to replace their Roman-Dutch Law with English Common Law and to keep all of their government and court records in English.
46. AIHA, Library, "Cuyler, Gansevoort & Co. to Jan Bronkhorst," St. Croix Collection, (MG2), January 22, 1784.
47. New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, Gansevoort-Lansing Collection, "Gerard Van Schaick to Peter Gansevoort," (MssCol 1109), Box 31, Folder June 1819. The Dutch entry Van Schaick sent Gansevoort reads as follows: "1752, Augustus 16 "is gebore meiyne Dochter Catrena Oss Een son dagh Outhent te aught urren en de Morgen Compiece Seybrant Van Schaick Jun.r en peet Mareija Ten Broeck, en gedoopt bey Dominie F. Fielenhuysen." In English the entry roughly reads: "1752, August 16 "is born my daughter Catrena Oss on Sunday at eight o'clock in the morning, Godfather Seybrant Van Schaick Jun.r and Godmother Marelia Ten Broeck,

- and baptized by Dominie. F. Fielenhuysen.”
48. AIHA, Library, Eilardus Westerlo, “Memoirs,” Eilardus Westerlo Papers, (CZ557), May 22, 1782; Alexander, *Albany’s First Church*, 144–146; Randall H. Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 152–153; Hackett, *The Rude Hand of Innovation: Religion and Social Order in Albany, New York 1652-1836*; Alice P Kenney, “The Albany Dutch: Loyalists and Patriots,” *New York History* 42, no. 4 (October 1961): 346.
 49. The governing body of the Dutch Reformed Church consisted of the Church Domine, the Consistory, and a board of Deacons and Elders. The Deacons and Elders elected several of their fellows to sit on the Consistory with the Domine. The Consistory handled the day-to-day operations of the Church and oversaw its operating budget.
 50. AIHA, Library, Eilardus Westerlo, “Memoirs,” Eilardus Westerlo Papers, (CZ577), September 26, 1784; AIHA, Library, Eilardus Westerlo, “Memoirs,” Eilardus Westerlo Papers, (CZ577), October 4, 1784; Alexander, *Albany’s First Church*, 145–146.
 51. AIHA, Library, Eilardus Westerlo, “Memoirs,” Eilardus Westerlo Papers, (CZ577), October 21, 1784; AIHA, Library, Eilardus Westerlo, “Memoirs,” Eilardus Westerlo Papers, (CZ577), October 22, 1784. Westerlo could afford to continue his church services even when the Church fell in arrears on his pay. In 1775, he married Catherine Livingston, daughter of Philip Livingston and Christina Ten Broeck, and widow of Stephen Van Rensselaer II, Patroon of Rensselaer Manor. For more on Westerlo see: Alexander, *Albany’s First Church*; Bielinski, “Catharina Livingston Van Rensselaer Westerlo,” *Colonial Albany Social History Project*, September 10, 2001; Stefan Bielinski, “Eilardus Westerlo,” *Colonial Albany Social History Project*, March 15, 2009, <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/w/westerlo.html>.
 52. Alexander, *Albany’s First Church*, 147–148, 168–169; Stefan Bielinski, “Reverend John Basett,” *Colonial Albany Social History Project*, October 26, 2005, <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/b/jobasset.html>.
 53. Early Republic doctors frequently referred to typhoid as the “nervous fever.”
 54. Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion*; Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson : Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of Revivals* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Joyce D. Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Hackett, *The Rude Hand of Innovation: Religion and Social Order in Albany, New York 1652-1836*.
 55. Van Cleef Bachman, “The Story of the Low Dutch Language: I,” *De Halve Maen* 56, no. 3 (1982): 1–3, 21; Van Cleef Bachman, “The Story of the Low Dutch Language: II,” *De Halve Maen* 57, no. 1 (1983): 10–13; Van Cleef Bachman, “What Is Low Dutch,,” *De Halve Maen* 57, no. 3 (1983): 14–17, 23–24; Van Cleef Bachman, Alice P Kenney, and Lawrence G. Van Loon, “‘Het Poelmeisie’ An Introduction to the Hudson Valley Dutch Dialect,” *New York History* 79 (1980): 161–185; Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion*; John L. Brooke, *Columbia Rising: Civil Life on the Upper Hudson from the Revolution to the Age of Jackson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Charles Gehring, “The Survival of the Dutch Language in New York and New Jersey,” *De Halve Maen* 58, no. 3 (1984): 7–9, 24; A.G. Roeber, “‘The Origin of Whatever Is Not English Among Us’ The Dutch-speaking and the German-speaking Peoples of Colonial British America,” in *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 220–283; John Benjamin Drury, *The Reformed (Dutch) Church, Rhinebeck, N.Y.: An Historical Address* (Chatham, NY: Courier Steam Printing House, 1881), 29; Frank D. Blanchard, *History of the Reformed Dutch Church of Rhinebeck Flatts, New York* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, Printers, 1931), 47–52; Howard Holdridge Morse, *Historical Old Rhinebeck, Echoes of Two Centuries* (New York City: Pocantico Printery, 1908), 132–133.
 56. In 1715, the Consistory built the stone church around the blockhouse and then dismantled the blockhouse from the interior. This roundabout construction caused the stone church to have a square shape.
 57. Both the Dutch Reformed Church and Albany’s corporation capitalized on the land boom caused by the post-Revolution New England migration. In one sale in December 1795, the City of Albany made £5,578.3.3½ by selling lands in Schaghticoke, Fort Hunter, and Albany. The Dutch Church stood to

- make even more money than the city, as they owned more land. Unfortunately, the church's land sales records could not be located. For more on the corporation's land transactions see: "Report of Committee of Ways and Means," in ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," Vol. 15, December 7, 1795.
58. Initially, Albanians knew the new Dutch Church as the North Pearl Street Church. Today they know it as the First Reformed Church of Albany.
 59. Alexander, *Albany's First Church, 162–164*; Janny Venema, *Beverwijk: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier, 1652-1664* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 81–82.
 60. ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," Vol. 17, August 12, 1805; ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," Vol. 17, November 25, 1805; ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," Vol. 17, December 2, 1805; ACHR, "Albany Common Council Minutes," Vol. 17, December 4, 1805; NYSL, Albany Dutch Reformed Church Consistory, "Minutes of the Consistory," (MA 974.743 A. 326 207-4130), Reel 1, November 26, 1805; NYSL, Albany Dutch Reformed Church Consistory, "Minutes of the Consistory," (MA 974.743 A. 326 207-4130), Reel 1, November 28, 1805; NYSL, Albany Dutch Reformed Church Consistory, "Minutes of the Consistory," (MA 974.743 A. 326 207-4130), Reel 1, December 3, 1805; NYSL, Albany Dutch Reformed Church Consistory, "Minutes of the Consistory," (MA 974.743 A. 326 207-4130), Reel 1, December 4, 1805; Alexander, *Albany's First Church, 171–173*.



An early photograph of Louis Ransom's painting of John Brown before it disappeared

“No Mortal Eye Can Penetrate”

Louis Ransom’s Portrait of John Brown

Warren F. Broderick

Inspired by current events and the legal and moral dilemma of slavery, an obscure Utica artist named Louis Ransom determined in December 1859 to create a masterwork to commemorate John Brown, seen by the artist as a martyr to the abolitionist cause. When the controversial painting was exhibited in New York City four years later, it achieved immediate and nationwide fame. Yet despite this acclaim and his being a true Renaissance man—an artist, inventor, author, and debater—Ransom’s career and personal life still contain many mysteries that wait to be revealed.

Louis Linscolm Ransom was born into modest circumstances on January 2, 1831, in the Town of Salisbury, Herkimer County. His father was Merriman Ransom (1805-1880), a millwright who operated a series of mills along Spruce Creek, downstream from the current State Route 29. His mother was Olive Ann (Spencer) Ransom (1807-1888). The Ransom family lived in the nearby Town of Little Falls from 1837 to 1854, when they returned to Salisbury. As a teenager, Ransom showed remarkable artistic ability, which led relatives and family friends to raise enough money for the young man to travel to New York City in 1851 and train under the noted portrait and historical painter Henry Peters Gray (1819-1877).¹ Ransom’s son, Eugene, later recalled that his father was accompanied to New York City by a neighbor, a Mr. Beardsley. (This was presumably John Beardslee, a merchant neighbor of the Ransoms’ in Little Falls.) One of the artistic compositions Ransom took with him, a classical sketch of the “Suicide of Ion,” especially impressed observers and helped earn him admission into the National Academy of Design.²

Ransom returned to Herkimer County in 1852 and began his career as a portrait painter, an occupation he provided to census takers in both 1850 and 1855. On November 1852, Ransom completed a rather sophisticated large portrait of young sisters, Jennie and Lizzie Ives of Salisbury, aged six and nine respectively. (This work is now owned by the Albany Institute of History and Art.) An even more impressive group portrait of four deceased children of the Lorenzo Carryl family of Salisbury (owned by the Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, Massachusetts) has been attributed to Ransom for stylistic as well as logistical reasons. This fifty-four-inch by forty-five-inch masterpiece



“Jennie and Lizzie Ives,” Louis Liscolm Ransom, 1855. Oil on canvas, ht. 35 3/4” x w. 28 1/2”, framed ht. 43 1/2” x w. 37 1/2.” Inscribed bottom left: “Louis Ransom / Nov. 1855.” Albany Institute of History & Art, gift of Miss Eliza Ives Raymond, 1935.1.2

presents an early Victorian home interior in great detail. The Ransom, Ives, and Carryll families all resided in the “west district” of Salisbury. Ransom also executed portraits of an unidentified uncle and of Byron Houghton of Little Falls.³

Louis Ransom married Julia Hyatt of nearby Stratford on October 20, 1856. The following year, he established a studio in downtown Utica at 13 Tibbitts Block. Long since demolished, the building was located at 77-83 Genesee Street—the city’s busiest thoroughfare—between Broad and Catherine streets. Sometime between 1859 and 1860, he moved his studio to 209 Genesee Street, between Devereaux and Blandina streets, where the New York State Office Building now stands. The couple lived at both locations as well.

Utica was a burgeoning and prosperous industrial and commercial center bisected by the Erie and Chenango canals as well as by various roads and railroads. The citizens of this fast-growing city were quite interested in education and the arts. Ransom’s life in Utica is best documented in its daily newspapers, which contain references to his portrait painting as well as his involvement in various civic events and organizations. For example, he was active in the Young Men’s Lyceum and the Utica Literary Association. Ransom seemed to relish debating controversial issues. He was one of the local organizers for a “Free Fight” convention, held there in 1858, associated with controversial spiritualist and “free-love” advocate Andrew Jackson Davis.⁴ In debates, Ransom was described as “a free thinking man on any and all subjects” whose “speaking was impassioned, eloquent and earnest.”⁵ In a debate where he defended the theory of spiritual communications, the reporter gave Ransom “due credit” for the “shrewdness, the logical talent, the candor, and the admirable temper in which he discussed a subject which is of vastly more importance to him than it is to most of those who hear the discussions—for Mr. Ransom certainly believes what he preaches.”⁶ A few years later, the same reporter commented that, during a debate “on a matter of public import,” when his adversary “deserts the question, and descends to personal abuse of his opponent, he forfeits the right of a disputant—the right to a reply—for he has ... become a blackguard.”⁷ Ransom also attended a convention of “Garrisonian” abolitionists held in Utica in January 1860.

In visits to his Utica studio in 1859, the editors of the city’s two daily newspapers were impressed with his portraits of



COURTESY OF THE HERKIMER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

Photograph of Louis and Julia Hyatt Ransom c.1862.

prominent public officials and commercial leaders.⁸ Both were struck with the realism and informality of Ransom's work, in apparent contrast to the stiff formality that had characterized much American portraiture in past years. Ransom began specializing in group portraits and historical scenes as well. A painting of a young German boy in the collection of the Herkimer County Historical Society is labeled "Herman Herkimer," while the Oneida County Historical Society owns an unsigned genre painting, clearly the work of Louis Ransom, showing General Nicholas Herkimer preparing for military maneuvers, possibly the bloody Battle of Oriskany.

In the 1861 fair of the Utica Mechanics Association, Ransom exhibited a view of "Camp McQuade" and a group portrait of the Rescue Hook and Ladder Company.⁹ The following year, again at the Mechanics Association fair, he exhibited nine paintings—mostly portraits, but also an intriguing "composition study, 'Morning After the Discovery of America,' representing Columbus and his fellow adventurers on board the *Santa Maria* at sunrise."¹⁰

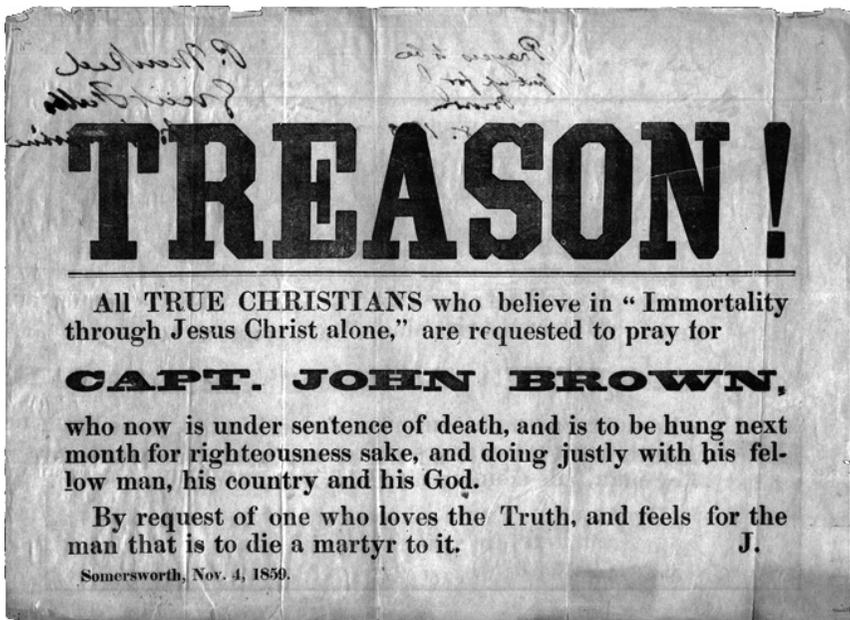
Life in Utica for Louis and Julia Ransom had its difficulties as well. Some years later, the editor of the *Utica Daily Observer* commented on their Spartan existence in their studio apartment on Genesee Street:

... the demand for his pictures was not great ... His conception outran his achievements. He was a critic, painter, poet and philosopher all in one....in three rooms he and his wife dwelt in contented poverty. The world was reformed over and over again in that sky parlor of his; ancient wrongs were righted; the oppressed were lifted up; honor, honesty and genius received their just rewards, and a new heaven bent above a new earth, all by the power of his intense magnetic eloquence. Nothing came of it, only that he inspired many a younger man with a loftier and nobler ambition than he might have otherwise possessed ... Now and then he stopped to paint a picture—just a pot-boiler and nothing more—and occasionally, in leisure moments, his fill [sic] mind sought relief in quaint and original poems ... he sat down contentedly to his dinner of boiled potatoes, apple-sauce and dry bread...¹¹

It should be remembered that the *Observer* resented his abolitionist views in general and the John Brown painting in particular.

The abolitionist movement was gaining additional supporters in Utica, a city of 22,000 residents that, like other upstate communities, was concerned about the uncertain future of slavery in the United States and rumors of the impending secession of Southern states from the Union. Utica's citizens seemed evenly divided between pro-abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates. The significance of the recent raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia (later in the new state of West Virginia), on October 16, 1859, and the subsequent execution of John Brown and some of his colleagues on December 2 filled the print media and was the subject of debate by a majority of Americans.

Utica's two daily papers differed strongly based on their political party affiliation. The *Morning Herald* was a Republican paper with a strong anti-slavery agenda while its rival, the *Daily Observer*, supported slavery as part of the national Democratic platform.



“Treason” Broadside, 1859 November 4. Virginia Governor (1856-1859:Wise). Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, 1856-1859. Accession 36710. State Government Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

Information reported in both papers, especially accounts of the raid and subsequent trials and executions, must be analyzed with these biases in mind. For example, on December 3, 1859, the *Herald* reported that because of the “barbarous deed” of John Brown’s execution, even “young, ardent” Democrats declared they would vote for a Republican president. The *Observer* countered that the only John Brown demonstration in Utica “in favor of treason and murder” was the day’s edition of the *Herald!*

Louis Ransom’s anti-slavery sentiments would be revealed to all his fellow townsmen a few months later. In an interview granted to a correspondent of the *Syracuse Daily Standard* in late September 1860, Ransom stated that the recent events at Harper’s Ferry had inspired him to create an unforgettable work honoring John Brown as an American martyr:

Like thousands in this country, he found that the old man in the prison at Charlestown, had wound himself all about his heart, and when the news of that execution came, the story of Brown meeting the slave mother on the steps of the prison and kissing her child came with it. The story caused the tears to well up in the eyes of many a free father and mother in this northern land, and the day after the execution as Ransom read it, he resolved *that* should be subject of the next picture upon his easel.¹²

Once Louis Ransom read about John Brown’s execution, he began executing a painting that would require six months to complete. An important and surely the most

controversial element of the life-size work involved the so-called “kissing of the Negro baby,” an incident that did not actually take place but that was frequently reported as fact in print media, poetry, and other contemporary literature. On December 3, the day following the execution, the *New York Daily Tribune* carried in its entirety Mary Brown’s interview with her husband, conducted during her four-hour visit the evening before his hanging. The interview took place in the home of John Avis, Brown’s jailer, which was attached to the jail:

With regard to his execution, he said that he desired no religious ceremonies, either in the jail or on the scaffold, from ministers who consent or approve of the enslavement of their fellow-creatures, that he would prefer rather to be accompanied to the scaffold by a dozen slave children and a good old slave mother with their appeal to God for blessings on his soul, than all the eloquence of the whole clergy of the Commonwealth combined.

This part of the interview was excerpted in the December 3 issue of the *Utica Morning Herald*, and this was likely where Ransom first read about Brown’s intentions. Brown had actually expressed similar intentions in a letter written from prison to Mrs. George L. Stearns of Boston, dated November 29.¹³ His jailer was known to employ an enslaved black woman as a servant who cooked for his prisoners. Avis was not her owner and is known to have treated this woman and her young child humanely.

A “special correspondent” of the *New York Daily Tribune* (since identified as Henry S. Olcott, a journalist and noted spiritualist) was the first to report that as John Brown “stepped out of the door a black woman, with her little child in her arms, stood near his way... he stopped for a moment in his course, stooped over, and, with the tenderness of one whose love is as broad as the brotherhood of man, kissed [the baby] affectionately.”¹⁴ This account was repeated in other print media and seems to have been refuted at the time by only pro-slavery advocates.

Many Americans would have read that Brown kissed the Negro baby in John G. Whittier’s popular poem, “Brown of Ossawatomi,” first published in the *New York Independent* on December 22, 1859. Lydia Maria Child repeated the story in her poem, “The Hero’s Heart,” first published in William Lloyd Garrison’s journal, *The Liberator*, a few weeks later.¹⁵ Both poems soon appeared in James Redpath’s popular work, *Echoes of Harper’s Ferry*, which appeared soon thereafter.¹⁶ Like many of his fellow Americans, Louis Ransom believed (at least initially) that the kissing story was true.

The first the world heard about Ransom’s masterpiece would be a visit to his studio by the editor of the *Utica Morning Herald* recorded on June 30, 1860. Entitled “A Meritorious Picture,” the article would be reprinted in a number of other newspapers:

Mr. Louis Ransom, of this city, has just finished a picture representing JOHN BROWN on this way to the scaffold. In the foreground is a figure of a slave mother and her child; at the extreme left, Justice, with the right arm broken, grasping a broken sword; at the right a soldier and in the background three male figures. The central object of the group is JOHN BROWN, with pinioned arms, and the escutcheon of Virginia above his head. As a portrait it is strikingly life-like. The

countenance exhibits a noble repose, while the eyes look pityingly down upon the pleading mother and her wondering child. Those who have seen the original pronounce the likeness perfect . . . it impresses us as a work of superior merit. The contrast of light and shade is happy, while the anatomical development is admirable. The faces show much character, and the artist has succeeded, in a marked degree, in blending at once strength and delicacy of touch.

We hear no more about the painting for three months until the *Herald* published a short notice that Ransom “is to give an exhibition of his picture of JOHN BROWN, going to the scaffold, one of these days in Utica. It is his intention to place the picture on exhibition in other cities, after it shall have been thrown open to the criticism of Utica amateurs for a short time.” The editor, having seen the work, remarked that it “cannot be ‘seen’ at a glance; but requires study, and improves with it.”¹⁷

A private unveiling, by appointment only, was held at Utica City Hall (located almost directly across from Ransom’s studio) on September 19 from eight a.m. to seven p.m. A notice stated that the work “has received high encomiums of praise from men well fitted to judge its artistic excellence. The resemblance of the picture to old JOHN BROWN himself, has been pronounced very striking by a gentleman who enjoyed a personal acquaintance with the hero of Harper’s Ferry.”¹⁸ One wonders if this gentleman was Gerrit Smith, the famous abolitionist from nearby Madison County (see sidebar).

A correspondent of the *Herald* (identified only as “B”) submitted a detailed description of the painting:

The work is in every way noble, and it undoubtedly receive[s] the approbation of the lovers of art, and the admiration of the community. The great tragedy which this picture in part portrays, is so recent that it is difficult to estimate the artist’s efforts with justice. The first impression upon entering the room is one of awe and astonishment. The subject is so exalted that you have already expected that a good production will be the result of a text so prolific; but that you have not conceived that a work so classical in composition and so masterly in all its arrangements could be called by the creative power of art from even the rich materials from which this is composed. You are not disappointed in the picture falling below your conception, but are gratified with the elevation of the artist’s thought, which you must feel ever after in your memory import form and life to the event he so happily illustrates. There is a solemnity serene and almost ominous in the production. You feel as though something terrible was concealed behind those lofty figures, which every instant is liable to be discovered by a change in their position. As a composition intended to illustrate a portion of our country’s history, I can imagine nothing more completely in harmony with its theme. While every figure is depicted in motion, the repose of the whole is as impressive as the grandest solitudes. There is a calm grandeur in the central figure—*pose*, expression, everything indicates that the enthusiasm of an idea, bears the doomed man far above the bayonets and scaffold now bursting on his view. Let no one imagine that this picture, more than any other production of genius, can be comprehended at a glance. Study it, if you would appreciate its merits.

John Brown occupies the center of the canvas, standing, as the artist informed us, 6 feet 4 inches in height, being 6 inches taller than life. With a truly masterly skill the banner of Virginia is made to wave behind him in such a manner as to form a halo around his head, and by the keenest sarcasm the escutcheon is

displayed with the device, and armed Liberty trampling on a slain tyrant, and the motto, 'Sic Tempus Tyrannis;' is carried by a dwarfish man who has a most brutal visage, and who is in the act of pushing a defenceless [sic] woman from the prison steps. The continental in the background needs no interpreter. That uniform was the Declaration wrought into garments for the battles of the Revolution The slave mother and child are representative of that downtrodden race for which the hero who sleeps at North Elba laid down his life. The incident occurs here of John Brown kissing the infant while the mother held it in her arms as the hero passed down the prison steps. The hussar in the foreground is the impersonation of arrogance; this fellow, by the way, will impress every beholder with is symmetrical and giant-like proportions. ...If painted full length he would stand eight feet in height. Put the splendid hussar uniform on such a man, and imagine the effect. There are other figures and details well worthy of study, and I confidently expect that the public will hail the advent of Ransom's picture with delight. The artist informed me that it was his intention to exhibit the painting in public....¹⁹

The public showing Ransom mentioned took place soon thereafter, in Syracuse, from September 24 to 28. The site chosen was Convention Hall at 229-235 East Genesee Street, a downtown landmark.²⁰ The painting was seen by thousands of people and was universally praised. Even the editor of the pro-slavery *Syracuse Central City Daily* admitted that the subject was so important that he encouraged all citizens to see it for themselves, whether or not they were "averse to the martyred hero of the Harper's Ferry insurrection." The editor admitted that Brown had "hundreds of admirers in this hot bed of Abolitionism."²¹ Indeed, Ransom had selected Syracuse as the site of the painting's first public showing because "he had confidence in the liberal sentiments of the city which had wrenched the manacles of a guiltless man and gave him liberty, under the very frown of the Government."²² Ransom was speaking of the celebrated "Jerry affair," in which a fugitive slave, William Henry, had been freed from authorities on October 1, 1851.

The *Syracuse Daily Journal* remarked that the work "is a production of which any artist might be proud... We advise all our reader to see it for themselves, which they may do for ten cents each."²³ The *Syracuse Daily Standard* was especially fullsome in its praise. A correspondent remarked that "the conception and execution are in every way equal to the subject... a picture so classical in all its elements. Let the city, glorious with the rescue of Jerry, do justice to the man who has honored John Brown in his sublime picture, by a significant patronage."²⁴ The editor noted that the picture, "like all great works of art, cannot be comprehended at a glance. It needs to be studied to fully appreciate its merits."²⁵ The paper's correspondent, who interviewed Louis Ransom, informed readers that:

Who is Ransom? Let me tell you. He is a man who has stood twenty years at the easel, working honestly to become an artist worthy of the name. Like Church, Palmer, and Rotherwell, he has never been abroad, for he is firm in the faith that American minds and American history are as rich with all the elements of art as Italian, German, or French. His studies have been prosecuted mostly in New York...²⁶

One of the painting's viewers was Edwin Vose Sumner (1797-1863), a career military officer from Syracuse, who "pronounced the picture 'very like' and expressed himself much pleased with it." Colonel Sumner "had some personal intercourse with old JOHN BROWN on the Kansas border" and "spoke in high terms of praise of the man whose likeness he looked upon."²⁷

Surprisingly little about Louis Ransom and his masterwork appear in the print media following the successful Syracuse exhibition. Ransom surely attended the meeting (organized by Susan B. Anthony) that was held in Utica on December 2, 1860, to commemorate the martyrdom of John Brown.²⁸ Relatively little activity by Ransom was documented in 1861 and 1862 despite the onset of the Civil War. No additional exhibitions of his John Brown painting have been identified during his final two years as a resident of Utica. Exhibitions in pro-abolition upstate cities such as Auburn, Rochester, or Troy would have seemed logical.

During the summer of 1862, Louis and Julia Ransom moved to the Village of Lansingburgh, along the Hudson River in Rensselaer County. He was able to share rooms upstairs over the Farmers' Bank, at 293 State Street (the present Second Avenue), with his brother-in-law, attorney Eugene Hyatt (1829-1895). Eugene had come to Lansingburgh from Stratford in 1861. The Ransoms rented an apartment at various locations in the village. Sharing space with his relative certainly saved the artist money, but Ransom also may have settled in Lansingburgh to facilitate pursuit of his inventions.

Possibly the most noteworthy events in Ransom's life relative to the John Brown painting occurred in 1863 and 1864, while he was living in Lansingburgh. The painting was loaned to P.T. Barnum to be exhibited at the latter's American Museum, located from 1841 to 1865 at the corner of Broadway and Ann Street in lower Manhattan. Barnum's advertisement, placed in the *New York Times* between May 18 and May 23, read that "at all hours every day and evening A VERY SPLENDID PAINTING BY LOUIS RANSOM, of Lansingburgh, N.Y., representing the celebrated JOHN BROWN, leaving the Charlestown (Va.) Jail on his way to execution."

An account of the showing written by George William Curtis (who referred to himself as "the Lounger") appeared in the immensely popular *Harper's Weekly* on June 13, 1863:

It is one of the incidents that history will always fondly record and art delineate. The fierce and bitter judgment of the moment upon the old man is already tempered. Despised and forsaken in his own day, the heart of another generation may treat him as he treated the little outcast child. In the picture his head is conspicuous against the yellow ground of a flag which surrounds it like a halo. The eager officer by his side pushes the mother away, and the bedizened soldier in the fore-ground scowls at her. The fussy parade which the authorities made at his execution is admirably suggested by these figures, and however sharply the work might be criticized by the connoisseur, there is a solemnity and pathos in it which is wanting in many a finer painting.²⁹

This review was reprinted in the *Lansingburgh Gazette* of the same date and in numerous other newspapers. According to Ransom's son, Eugene, the painting was exhibited for only a few days before Barnum took it down, rolled it, and returned it by train to Lansingburgh. Barnum had received many threats to sack or burn his museum if a painting glorifying the kissing of a Negro baby remained on display.³⁰ These threats came from the same persons who instigated the infamous New York City draft riots a few weeks later, beginning on July 13 in lower Manhattan. Irish and other working-class men of immigrant origin resented federal laws that allowed more affluent men who could afford to pay a \$300 commutation fee to exclude themselves from the draft. Many blacks in New York City suffered from the rioters' violence.

The notoriety of the John Brown painting and its tumultuous exhibition in New York City led the firm of Currier and Ives to create a lithograph from the painting the same year. Differences between the two are relatively insignificant, such as the manner in which the skin tones of the mother and her child were rendered. The small-format lithograph measured 11.10 inches by 8.8 inches and bore the following legend:

JOHN BROWN / Meeting the slave mother and her child on the steps of Charlestown jail on his way to execution / The Artist has represented Capt. Brown regarding with a look of compassion a Slave mother and Child who obstructed the passage on his way to the scaffold—Captain Brown stopped, stooped, and kissed the child—then met his fate / FROM THE ORIGINAL PAINTING BY LOUIS RANSOM.

While relatively few Americans would have observed the actual painting during its hasty exhibition, thousands would have owned or seen the immensely popular lithograph. An edited version (possibly without the artist's permission) was created by Currier and Ives in 1870. Entitled "JOHN BROWN—THE MARTYR," this version eliminates all the authority figures except that of the hussar. Reasons behind the issuance of this simplified version of the lithograph are not known nor easily deduced.

By now, Louis Ransom was devoting much of his time to development of a self-propelled streetcar and was looking for a permanent home for his masterwork. His first choice was Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio. Founded in 1833, Oberlin was the first American institution of



Currier and Ives lithograph,
from the author's collection

higher learning to regularly admit female and African-American students. Abolitionist Gerrit Smith had donated 21,000 acres of land for use by the college. John Brown designated his son, Owen, to oversee the management of this land for the benefit of both the developing college and free-soil settlement in Ohio.³¹

On October 16, 1863, Ransom wrote Oberlin President Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875), a Christian evangelist who had been involved with the abolitionist movement, offering the painting to the college if he could be reimbursed for \$400 in debts he had incurred in its care:

October 16, 1863
To the President of Oberlin College:

Dear Sir:

I am compelled to address you in the above manner because I have not been able to learn the name of the gentleman now occupying the position indicated and wishing to communicate with you in relation to a large historical painting which I have. I adopted the only possible, present method of reaching you.

The painting to which I refer is one representing John Brown meeting the Slave Mother and her Child on the steps of the jail at Charleston, on his way to execution. I painted this work as a small tribute to the great soul of a noble man, and I desire that it should now occupy a place befitting the character of the man and the picture, and I know of no place which more completely fills every condition of fitness more than Oberlin College. I have always valued the work at \$2000.00 and the day is not distant when its actual commercial value will reach that figure, but having been a source of expense to me, both during its progress and since I am willing to sell it for little more than would be necessary to cancel the debts now clinging to it (i.e. \$400.00.)

This picture was on exhibition last summer at Barnum's Museum where it attracted a great deal of attention and receive[d] a very flattering notice from George W. Curtis Esq. Through the Lounger in Harper's Weekly, and you will see from a paragraph from an as—letter which I enclose, that it is somewhat known in the service. The picture measures 7 x 10 feet I enclose a photograph of it, which is necessarily imperfect, like all photos of paintings.

If the picture could not be purchased directly by the College, perhaps the people of Oberlin might be induced to buy it for the institution.

Hoping to open a correspondence with you on this subject and asking your indulgence for this abrupt self introduction, believe me

Yours,
Louis Ransom
Lansingburgh, N.Y.

I have been so—as to find Mr. Curtis' article copied into our local journal and I enclose it. L.R.

After receiving a negative response, Ransom wrote President Finney again the following January. He offered to donate the painting to Oberlin if proper exhibition space could be provided. The “Mr. Smith” who urged Oberlin to acquire the work was surely Gerrit Smith. Oberlin apparently did not accept his counteroffer, and the painting remained in Lansingburgh for the time being.³²

January 9, 1864
Reverend Charles G. Finney

Dear Sir:

Your letter is here and I have delayed writing through the fear that this correspondence was annoying to you. Yet one proposition which I made must have been overlooked, for which reason I feel compelled to bother you again.

If Mr. Smith's suggestion were acted upon, the picture would be purchased for the Institute and placed in its rooms without its costing the Institution or its neighbors a single cent. All we would ask is room for the work, which would be paid for by gentlemen of this vicinity. The antislavery character of Oberlin is a sufficient explanation of my desire to place the John Brown picture permanently within its halls, for could any other institution be named to me of as good repute as that matter, I would as gladly see my picture in its possession.

Would you be pleased with the arrangement which I have intimated? Asking your indulgence for my frequent intrusions, Believe me

Very Truly Yours.
Louis Ransom
Lansingburgh, N.Y

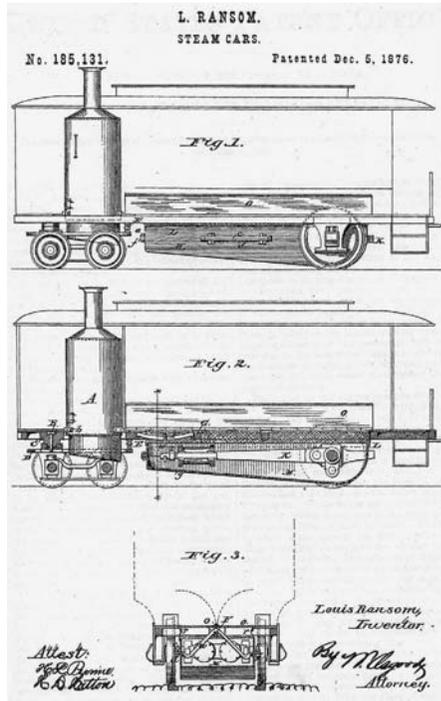
Lansingburgh offered Ransom far more opportunities to pursue his second career as an inventor and mechanical engineer. He announced the opening of his studio in Lansingburgh in an advertisement placed in the *Lansingburgh Gazette* in September 1862: "Persons wishing portraits have only to sit for a photograph from which the picture is painted life-size, instead of the old method of sittings." Ransom also advertised portraits of deceased persons and "photographs also colored in oil in the most approved style." A brief editorial in the *Gazette* lauded Ransom as "an artist of rare abilities."³³ A brief six-month absence noted in the *Gazette* of March 9, 1863, cannot be explained, but shortly following his return, Ransom issued a broadside advertising the resumption of his portrait painting business.

The extent of Ransom's artistic output in Lansingburgh is difficult to judge. The only documented work is a portrait of a deceased oil-cloth manufacturer, Jonathan Whipple, described by a newspaper editor as exceptionally realistic in depicting Whipple's "fine ruddy complexion which is so rare in this climate . . . transferring to the canvas the aroma of [his] finest expression"³⁴ The Ransom's first son, Eugene, was born in Lansingburgh on December 9, 1864. A portrait of Eugene as a young boy (now owned by the Herkimer County Historical Society) may have been executed in Lansingburgh. These works exhibit the informality and realism noted in descriptions of portraits (long lost) that appeared in Utica and Lansingburgh newspapers.

Louis Ransom's inventive creativity manifested itself in his years in Lansingburgh. As a boy back in Salisbury, he may have developed an interest in mechanical matters from his father, Merriman, an experienced millwright. As urban areas in the Eastern United States grew rapidly through the 1860s, many operational and safety issues involving horse-drawn streetcars became a major concern, and an interest developed in self-propelled vehicles. Ransom was later described as a "one idea man" so absorbed

with the creation of the self-propelled streetcar that he toiled for fifteen years in this endeavor, surely to the detriment of his career as an artist.³⁵

Louis Ransom announced his plan for a “hydraulic” or “pneumatic” streetcar in 1864. Utilizing compressed air, it was “able to propel a car twenty miles with a single charge of air. A force of 15,000 pounds is exerted upon the cranks, and this operates at about 5,000 pounds upon the track.”³⁶ He was issued a patent the following year for an “Improvement in Reservoirs for Compressed Air” and one for the car itself two years later.³⁷ Assisted by John LaMountain, a Lansingburgh resident and noted aeronaut, Ransom formed the Lansingburgh Pneumatic Car Company to begin testing the apparatus, which could be adapted to most existing streetcars. The operation was financed through the sale of stock in the company.³⁸ Various air pumps were tested

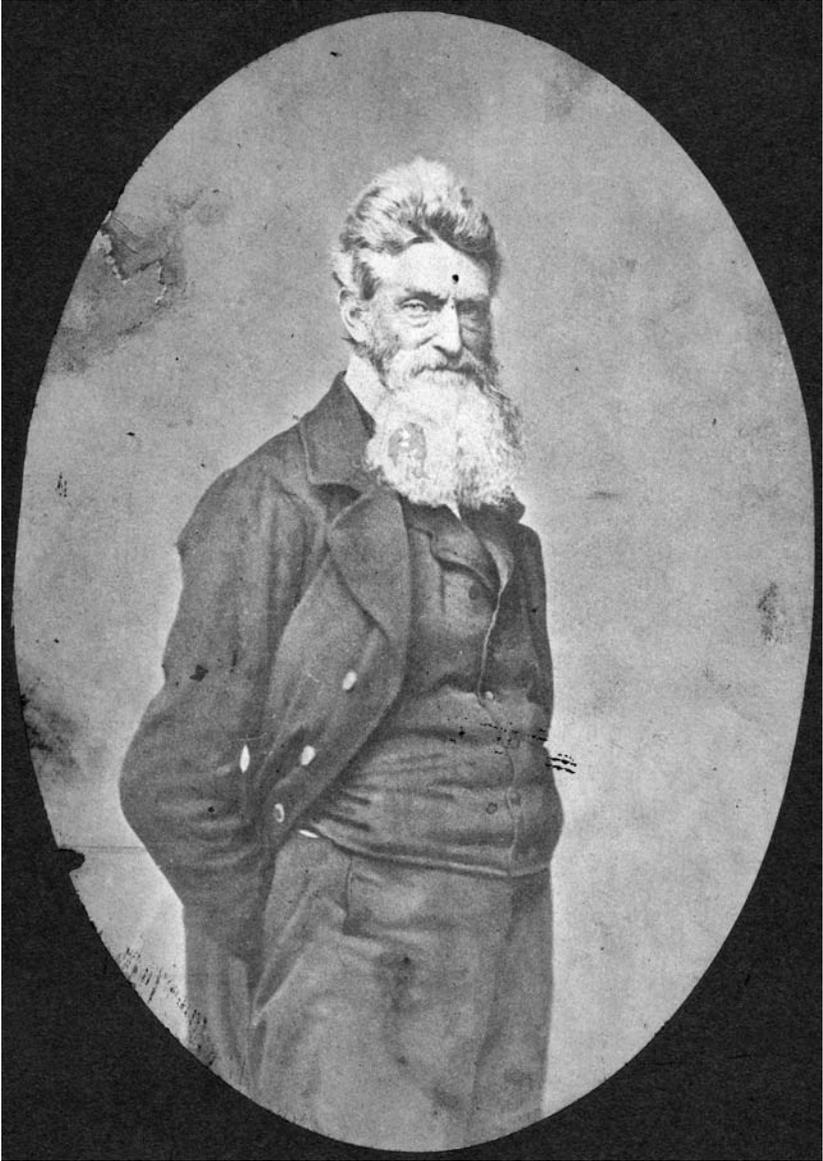


Ransom’s design for a steam-powered street car

and a prototype streetcar was built. It “proved a failure” due to the expense involved in manufacturing an apparatus capable of producing sufficient compressed air. Ransom “wasted ten years” of his life developing the pneumatic streetcar, which worked in principle but was never financially viable.³⁹

The editor of the *Utica Daily Observer* continued that while “this would have been the end of the story in the lives of most men ... [Ransom] wasted no regrets ... but gathered from the wreck of the condemned car all the valuable features which it possessed and proceed[ed] to apply them to a new car, the motive power of which was steam.” His new invention was first announced in the press in 1873, when a prototype boiler and engine were being constructed at Starbuck’s machine works in Green Island, across the Hudson River from Troy. The vehicle was functional but proved too noisy to be permitted in urban areas, so he apparently perfected his invention and in 1877 designed a new model, which was manufactured by the Gilbert and Bush Company, also located in Green Island.⁴⁰ The design, based on that of a small steam locomotive, featured an upright boiler in the rear and the steam engine and water tank under the platform.⁴¹ By now a resident of Stratford, Ransom was issued a series of four patents relative to this project, in 1876 and 1877.⁴² The detailed patent drawings show this

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The Bearded Patriarch, John Brown photographed by Martin Lawrence, circa 1859, December 12. A copy of this photograph with the inscription "Your friend, John Brown" was donated to the Herkimer County Historical Society by the descendants of Louis Ransom.

“YOUR FRIEND, JOHN BROWN”

NEW YORK STATE LIBRARY



Engraving from
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly,
November 19, 1859

John Brown is depicted in Ransom's painting as the “bearded patriarch,” and comprises the best known of the various images of him that have survived. This image appears in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* of November 19, 1859, in a feature article about his trial and impending execution. This engraving properly credits the photographer, “Martin M. Lawrence, 381 Broadway, N.Y.” and states that it was “taken one year ago.” Research conducted by photo historian Jean Libby has determined that Brown sat for the portrait in May 1858. Martin Lawrence (1808-1859) was a well-known daguerreotypist in New York from 1842 until his death in 1859.⁷¹

While it would seem logical to assume that Ransom worked from the *Harper's Weekly* engraving, my recent discovery at the Herkimer County Historical Society has revealed a source more closely associated with “old Brown” than

that published magazine image. Among a large group of photos from the Ransom family, donated by a grand-daughter of the artist, is a salted paper print photograph (7 3/8 inches by 5 3/8 inches on a trimmed cardboard mount) of John Brown bearing the inscription “Your Friend, John Brown” on a small piece of paper pasted on the cardboard front. These small signatures were prepared by Brown for his family to apply to mounted portraits as needed for gifts to friends and supporters. The cardboard mount bears the blind stamp of the photographer, Martin Lawrence. Two other photographers produced high-quality copies of the Lawrence image to sell under their own names, a common and legal practice at that time.⁷² Only two other signed studio-stamped original prints of this specific Martin Lawrence portrait exist; one is held by the Library of Congress and the other by the Kansas Historical

Society. Four others exist that have been removed from their original cardboards and remounted.⁷³

Louis Ransom probably obtained this photograph in December 1859. How he obtained it is not documented, but is certainly the subject of some fascinating speculation. He is not known to have had personal contact with any member of the Brown family. A likely go-between was well-known abolitionist and philanthropist Gerrit Smith, who lived at Peterboro in Madison County, not many miles distant from Utica. Furthermore, Smith was a patient at the New York State Lunatic Asylum in Utica for a few weeks beginning on November 7, 1859; he admitted himself for treatment of a stress-induced disorder. Unfortunately, Gerrit Smith's case file at the New York State Archives is currently not accessible for research because of an overly conservative legal opinion from the New York State Office of Mental Health "protecting" the confidentiality of a doctor-patient relationship of 150 years ago.⁷⁴

If Ransom had visited Smith during his stay at the nearby asylum, he may have asked Smith for an accurate image of John Brown. John Brown or a Brown family member may have delivered it to Smith during a visit to Peterboro in 1858 or 1859. The date of delivery to Gerrit Smith, if indeed there was such a delivery, might be easier to determine if the date and definitive meaning of the cryptic inscription on the reverse could be determined (see below). The possibility also exists that Ransom obtained it from another unidentified person with abolitionist sympathies in Utica or Syracuse. And finally, there was a distribution of John Brown's images at his funeral in North Elba on December 8. If Ransom was not in attendance himself, someone present may have asked for a photograph to deliver to the artist. This will all remain interesting speculation unless additional documentation is discovered.

The photograph contains four lines of neat but faint pencil script on the verso. Thanks to the efforts of Jean Libby and others (including noted handwriting analyst Marcel Matley), these have been attributed to John Brown's daughter, Ruth, the wife of Henry Thompson.⁷⁵

John Brown was born on May 9, 1800, in Torrington, Connecticut. He married Dianthe Lusk on June 21, 1820, in Hudson, Ohio. She died in childbirth on August 8, 1832. Ruth, their fifth of six children, was born on February 18, 1829, in Richmond, Pennsylvania. John Brown remarried Mary Anne Day, daughter of blacksmith Charles Day, in Meadville, Pennsylvania, in 1833. Mary Brown emigrated to California with her son, Salmon, and three young daughters in 1864. She died in 1884 and is interred in Saratoga, California.

Ruth (Brown) Thompson died on January 14, 1904, in Pasadena, California. She married Henry Thompson on September 26, 1850 (presumably in North Elba). He

was born in 1822 and died on February 8, 1911, in Los Angeles County, California. During the Civil War, the Brown-Thompson family lived in Put-in-Bay, Ohio, near her brother John Brown, Jr. The Thompsons removed to California in the late 1870s. In the 1855 census for North Elba, Henry and Ruth Thompson are listed with their young son, John. Henry was one of many children born to Roswell and Jane Thompson of North Elba; two of Henry's brothers, Dauphin and William, were killed in the raid at Harper's Ferry.

The Kansas Historical Society holds an important letter from the Thompsons written to John Brown from North Elba on April 21, 1858. It expresses their serious reservations of Henry potentially joining his father-in-law in the preparation for the raid. First Henry wrote and then his wife:

I had better give up going away from home. I don't know but it is best although it is hard to give it up my whole heart is in the work. If I should leave and never get back my wife and little ones would be dependent on their friends for a living as our place is in no situation to afford any income. If I thought the success of the enterprise depended on my going, I should go at once. Nothing but three little helpless children keeps me at home."

"I have nothing of interest to write only to say that I hope you will not blame me for Henry's not going with you, I should like to have him go with you if I could feel that he would live to come back. It seems really [sic] hard to consent to let him go and leave me with my little ones. I have not said much to him about it either way. He has decided the question himself. I do feel that God has been with you thus far, and will still, be with you in your great and benevolent work.⁷⁶

The cryptic inscription in Ruth's hand on the verso of the "bearded patriarch" photograph acquired by Louis Ransom would have been written after this letter had been mailed. How and if Ruth's writing relates to her father's dangerous "enterprise" is a matter of interesting conjecture:

*I would not speak of love even tho
my father and my mother may. I would
pass my love about with such strength
no mortal eye could penetrate.*

Jean Libby has speculated, and likely so, that these lines somehow refer to young members of the Brown and Thompson families, their personal relationships, and their differing degrees of involvement in the preparations for the Harper's Ferry raid. One must "read between the lines" to attempt to understand the various nuances in Ruth Thompson's inscription.

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remarkable vehicle, which attracted much interest in Syracuse and Philadelphia, as well as the Capital District. The prototype vehicle was tested over 12,000 miles and appeared to run successfully. It was described in great detail in the *Troy Daily Press* of February 2, 1877.

While Ransom's steam-powered streetcar operated successfully and trials indicated it offered a promising new development in the world of public transportation, "objectionable features" remained. These consisted of "noise in running, escape of smoke and steam in the street, excessive fuel [consumption] and discomfort to passengers" from the vehicle's noise, soot, and vibration.⁴³ These issues appear to have been unresolved, whether for mechanical or financial reasons or a combination of both, and Louis Ransom's self-propelled streetcar never became commercially viable. In the 1880s, the electric streetcar would fill the need for local mass transit. The final abandonment of his streetcar project must have devastated Louis Ransom.

Ransom also received three patents relating to trunks—a cylindrical traveling trunk and two types of clasps for securing trunks.⁴⁴ Many years later in Akron, Ohio, he claimed that he had applied for a patent for an improved railroad crossing device, but no such approved application can be identified.⁴⁵

During Ransom's eleven-year stay in Lansingburgh, he seems to have found time for civic pursuits as well, not always without controversy. For example, an article he contributed to the *Lansingburgh Gazette* about difficulties between two local temperance organizations elicited a nasty, personal character attack by another correspondent, who sarcastically referred to Ransom as the "Professor of Pneumatics and Trunkology." Ransom's response was strongly worded and to the point. One wonders how much time in Ransom's life was devoted to these debates and arguments for their own sake rather than to constructive achievements in areas where he possessed so much talent.⁴⁶

Ransom served as Lansingburgh Village Clerk in 1865 and 1866.⁴⁷ When a new Town Hall was proposed for the village, Ransom prepared a set of drawings at no charge.⁴⁸ The final listing for Ransom in the Troy city directory dates from 1873; presumably, soon thereafter he moved to the hamlet of Stratford, his wife's hometown in Fulton County, where they acquired a small lot and house.

Stratford is bisected by East Canada Creek; its western portion, where Louis and Julia are interred, is located in the Town of Salisbury, Herkimer County. Their house lot had been obtained by Julia Ransom's father, John Hyatt, in 1879. While living in Stratford, Ransom continued to execute paintings and also perfected his mechanical inventions. In the 1880 census, his occupation is listed as "mechanical engineer."⁴⁹

In 1884 or 1885, the Ransoms moved to Akron, Ohio, for reasons that remain unclear. Their son, Eugene, entered and graduated from Buchtel College, which grew into Akron University. Eugene worked primarily as a mechanical engineer. Louis Ransom executed a portrait of philanthropist John R. Buchtel, the college's founder; this portrait cannot be located today and may have been destroyed in a fire that gutted the primary

college building in 1899.⁵⁰ While a resident of Akron, Ransom split his time between painting and engineering pursuits. He also continued to be involved in civic affairs, as evidenced by his numerous letters to the editor of the *Akron Beacon Journal*. In the Akron city directory for 1892 to 1893, Ransom is listed as living at 127 Brown Street; he does not appear in subsequent directories.

In 1887, Louis Ransom granted a detailed and informative review to a reporter of the *Akron Beacon Journal*. He was working on a painting of firefighters and proudly showed the reporter a completed (and presently unlocated) portrait of Ulysses S. Grant that he was attempting to sell to the Grant family, as well as a large painting depicting the panic during the destruction of Pompeii by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. Still an ambitious artist, Ransom related his plans to memorialize the March of Nero and to paint four ambitious scenes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.⁵¹

The John Brown painting presumably accompanied the Ransoms to Stratford and then certainly to Ohio. Upon settling in Akron, Ransom placed the work on loan at Buchtel College, where it was displayed "in one of the literary halls." By 1886, he had "determined to present it to Oberlin College, in furtherance of an idea that has taken shape in his mind, that the colleges of the country should become repositories of historical paintings." He believed "that the walls of the great educational institutions of the land, instead of the bareness that now marks them, should have painted upon them representations of great events in American history, and thus every college have a series of splendid monuments to the founders of the nation and those who have made the American life of today possible. Next to painting upon the walls themselves, is the handing upon them of the painted canvas, and as a beginning Mr. Ransom's masterpiece ... has been generously placed in one of the halls at Oberlin."⁵²

A press release issued by Oberlin College outlines the presentation ceremony held on February 25, 1887:

Many of the citizens and students of Oberlin gathered this afternoon in Peters Hall to witness the presentation to the college of the famous picture, 'John Brown on the Way to the gallows,' by the painter, Mr. Louis Ransom, of Akron. Remarks were made by Professors Churchill and Monroe, President Fairchild and the artist, who gave an account of the painting of the picture, explained it, and closed with a few timely remarks on art in connection with our colleges. The picture is at once historical and symbolical, representing John brown as he is about to kiss the negro child. The portrait of the hero is remarkably fine. A slave driver attempting to push the quadron mother away inadvertently unfolds the Virginian flag, which forms a halo around Brown's head. In the foreground is a true 'F.F.V.' of Virginia, who with the other two figures make up the group. The picture was painted immediately after the death of Brown, being finished in 1860 and in 1863 formed the subject of a highly commendatory article in *Harper's* by G.W. Curtis. The painting is 7 by 10 in dimensions, the figures being of heroic size. Soon after its completion it was exhibited in Barnum's museum until a mob compelled it to be removed. It is valued at not less than \$10,000 and is considered a valuable acquisition to the college.⁵³

At the same time, a small-format broadside or handbill was published by Oberlin. Surely, it was composed in part by the artist:

A RARE PICTURE

An historical painting of heroic size and Striking merits, by Mr. Louis Ransom, of Akron, formerly of Utica, N. Y., has just been presented to Oberlin College. The picture represents "John Brown of Ossawatomie" and seven other figures. In the foreground, descending the steps, is a slaveholder,— type of the slave power,—of commanding proportions, and face not devoid of culture, but Strongly marked by passion and a domineering Spirit. He is dressed for the occasion in the uniform of one of the Virginia "crack companies" of militia, which happens to be that worn by the minions of European despotism, and whose gorgeous trappings fitly symbolize the "pride which cometh before destruction."

Seated on the stone balustrade is the slave-mother and her child, already immortalized in the verse of Whittier. The artist does not spare slavery here. He answers the oft repeated Sneer at the abolitionists, 'Would you wish your daughter to marry a nigger?' by the mute appeal of this half white slave woman, with a child lighter than herself. The little fellow, born to life-long servitude, frightened by the soldier, turns up to her a bright Anglo-Saxon face.

Further back is a contemptible little 'overseer' or hired slave-driver, parading in militia uniform, who forgets his assumed soldierly bearing, and reverts to his true character, in his unseemly rush to push the 'nigger woman' out of the way. In this rapid movement he causes a yellow silk ensign which he carries to swell out so that the sunlight falling upon a portion of it forms a background and a halo for the head of John Brown.

Brown's is, of course, the central figure. Standing on the upper Step he overtops all others, calm and dignified, with the bearing of one altogether assured of the final triumph of his cause. His eyes are upon the little child.

Above his head, upon the silken banner, are the arms of Virginia, a conqueror trampling upon his prostrate foe, and the motto "Sic Semper Tyrannis." The terrible irony of that motto, on that occasion, drives home to every beholder the question, "Who is the tyrant, who the conqueror?"

The jailor, in civilian's clothes, stands beside Brown in the doorway, and a friend also accompanies him. In the background a member of some other militia company wears in the service of oppression the uniform of the old 'Continental's.'

In one corner of the picture, among neglected rubbish, is seen a mutilated and discarded statue of Justice.

The technical execution of the picture is worthy of the bold composition. It was painted at the time, and narrowly escaped the violence of a mob when first exhibited in New York City. Mr. Ransom, the artist, is now at the meridian of his powers, and has revised the painting so that it embodies both the enthusiasm of his earlier and the maturer judgment of his later years.

Historical painting has been too little cultivated in America, and the rarity of such works renders this picture a special credit to its author, and a special acquisition to the College, and to the country.⁵⁴

Since the original painting no longer exists, a study of it to ascertain the nature of Ransom's "revisions" is impossible. But Eugene Ransom believed that his father merely retouched the slave mother's dress. Eugene also believed that "the nearly Greek features of Ransom's slave mother represent a subtler conception than the wholly African head substituted, apparently intentionally, in the lithograph. Such refinements perhaps would

not have appealed to the wide public Currier & Ives usually reached." According to recollections of conversations with his father, Eugene noted that the "mother was always a light quadron and the baby a shade lighter."⁵⁵

Initially, the John Brown painting occupied a prominent position in Oberlin's Peters Hall, but it was eventually moved to an insecure position in an upstairs laboratory. In 1919, the Prudential Committee of the college's Board of Trustees agreed to loan it for two years to Paul Laurence Dunbar Senior High School in Washington, D.C.⁵⁶ The loan had been requested by A.H. Glenn, the high school's principal and an Oberlin graduate. As a photograph taken at the time shows, the painting had suffered severe paint loss and needed proper conservation and better storage conditions. Oberlin has no documentation of the painting beyond this date. It was never returned per the loan agreement and is now lost to history. Apparently, it was destroyed or discarded at Dunbar High School, where no documentation of its fate survives either. Nor are we certain that Louis Ransom was aware of the loan and his masterwork's subsequent fate. One of the most important images of the abolitionist movement was lost forever.

As for Louis Ransom, his mother died in Salisbury in 1888, and he signed a legal waiver to her estate on December 20 of that year in Jackson County, Missouri.⁵⁷ Julia Hyatt Ransom passed away in Akron on May 17, 1899; she was interred in her native Stratford. Louis and Eugene Ransom returned for the committal and visited old friends.⁵⁸ On October 16 of that year, Louis Ransom married Abbie Louise Fosdick in New York City. Abbie was born in Akron on October 23, 1860, to Epenetus and Charlotte (McAlpine) Fosdick; he was a civil engineer who oversaw major sewer construction projects. Louis and Abbie's son, Fosdan Ransom, was born on December 9, 1899, in Pocantico Hills, Westchester County. Why the couple had moved to downstate New York from Ohio is not known.⁵⁹ They are listed in the 1900 census for the Town of Mount Pleasant (in which Pocantico Hills is located). Also listed in the same household were four young men, referred to as "step-sons," aged between ten and seventeen years old. They all bore the surname Fosdick. Later that year, Eugene Ransom married Jennie A. Gale in Akron.⁶⁰

Over the following three decades, Louis Ransom and his younger wife changed their residence frequently, and it is unclear how many years they lived together as a couple. In 1910, they are recorded in a census as residing on Blue Hill Avenue in Milton, Massachusetts, south of Boston. Abbie's occupation is given as "associate editor, magazine."⁶¹ From 1912 to 1916, the Ransoms summered on Nantucket, where Abbie is documented as building a summer beach home in Siasconsett.⁶² Photographs of the beach house, newspaper clippings, published poems, and other records relating to Abbie are found in the collection of the Nantucket Historical Association.

In 1920, the Ransom family is found living on Columbia Pike in Arlington, Virginia, where Abbie's occupation is given as "Clerk, U.S. government."⁶³ Soon thereafter, Louis Ransom returned to Ohio and lived with his son, who resided at 347 School Street in Cuyahoga Falls, just north of Akron; Abbie does not appear to have accompanied him.

Louis Ransom died there on September 29, 1926. His body was returned to Stratford for interment alongside his first wife. At the time of the probate of Louis Ransom's will in 1926, a brief obituary noted that Abbie was said to be living in Victoria, Oregon.⁶⁴ This obituary also mentions the John Brown painting as well as a life-size religious painting entitled *Follow Me* and the portrait of John R. Buchtel. Executed in 1896, *Follow Me* remained in the Ransom family until recent years; they still own *The Crusaders* and a few other religious and historical paintings.⁶⁵

Louis Ransom was described in 1877 as “a short, active man, weight about 140 pounds... grey hair and beard [and] bright eyes which sparkles with intelligence.”⁶⁶ The quality of his relationship with his wives is sometimes unclear and likely could have been strained. He was clearly brilliant, multitalented, and energetic—an artist, inventor, writer, debater, and philosopher. But at the same time, he was known to be strong-willed, moody, argumentative, sometimes impractical, and a decidedly poor manager of his finances. Abbie Ransom decidedly was his intellectual match, a poet and writer, magazine editor, and self-sufficient professional woman. The final years of her life were spent in Washingtonville, Orange County, with her son, Fosdan, a machinist. She passed away there on July 6, 1937. Fosdan lived until June 2, 1974, and is survived by descendants in New Jersey and Virginia.⁶⁷

Louis Ransom's will—referred to as “one of the most remarkable documents ever admitted in Probate Court” in Summit County, Ohio—was filed a short time following his death and was published in part by the primary Akron newspaper, the *Beacon Journal*. The will was dated August 30, 1920, and in it Ransom claims Cuyahoga Falls as his residence at that time.⁶⁸ He bequeathed his manuscripts as follows to his son, Eugene:

‘Saul Abranthis,’ a lengthy poem in blank verse;
‘Jim Rubis,’ a novel;
‘The Helpless,’ a novel;
Miscellaneous writings in prose and verse in one large volume.

Ransom added that “if fortune favors me, [I] intend to publish [them] in book form.” For that reason, he also directed that typescript copies be forwarded to Abbie and his younger son, Fosdan. None of these works were ever published and their content and merit remain as mysterious as other aspects of Louis Ransom's life. The will goes on to state that Ransom was “also author and owner of a number of oil paintings, all of which are now in the village of Siasconsett, Mass., and in the possession of my wife. These paintings I will to her and my son, Fosdan, wishing them to be equal undivided owners of the said paintings.”

By the time his will was written, relations were clearly strained between Eugene and Abbie. Louis completed his will with this request:

And now I have another desire which I wish to be respected as my will. When I have passed over I will that all those hereinbefore named heirs of mine will get together and if any changes are desired in the dispositions I have made, they will amicably consider and make such readjustments as they can justly agree to

but my manuscripts the originals, I will to retain in the possession and custody of my eldest son, Eugene Ransom.

I also will that if at any time profit shall accrue from the exhibition or sale of my paintings or reproductions thereof such profits shall be equitably divided between the aforesaid Mrs. Abbie Fosdick Ransom, Eugene Ransom, and Fosdan Ransom; and if profits shall accrue from the sale of my books I wish a likewise disposition be made thereof.

The monumental John Brown painting may have been destroyed, but it survives in the previously mentioned lithographs by Currier and Ives; the 1863 lithograph has been reprinted and reproduced in countless books and magazines. Ransom's work also inspired a series of artworks on the same subject. The first was an unsigned woodcut that illustrated John G Whittier's poem "Brown of Ossawatomie" in his collected works, *National Lyrics*, published in 1866. Brown is not idealized in this version and the observer looks at him from a different vantage point.⁶⁹

John S. Noble (1835-1907), a Southern artist, completed the next painting of the scene, entitled *John Brown's Blessing*, in 1867; this work is now owned by the New-York Historical Society. This life-size painting was likewise reproduced in a contemporary lithograph. Thomas Hovenden (1840-1895), an Irish-born artist from Philadelphia, executed the somewhat similar *Last Moments of John Brown* in 1884; two virtually identical versions this work are owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. In Eitaro Ishigaki's (1893-1958) stunning mural painted in 1937 in a New York City courthouse, the baby-kissing scene is central to the work. Two twentieth-century African-American artists memorialized John Brown being led to his execution. Horace Pippin's (1888-1946) *John Brown Going to His Hanging* (1942) is more fanciful than earlier works and depicts Brown closer to the scaffold. William Johnson's (1901-1970) *John Brown's Legend* (1945) shows a ministerial Brown placing his hand on the head of the young child. More recently, a banner painting by contemporary artist Joseph Flores, commissioned by the National Abolition Hall of Fame in 2008, recreates the scene in the manner of Hovenden.

Louis Ransom was the first artist to represent John Brown as more than a mere man—a former fighter who had become gentle and Godlike—thus echoing Wendell Phillips's characterization of Brown in his famous funeral sermon. When the painting first was shown in Utica in 1860, Ransom informed a newspaper correspondent that he had intentionally depicted the yellow banner of the State of Virginia so, ironically, it formed a bright halo over the head of a clearly deified figure. As Zoe Trodd has astutely noted, the slave mother "holds up a child in the likeness of Christ, and the only man looking at Brown has a glow around his eyes, as though he had looked upon something holy."⁷⁰



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“The Last Moments of John Brown,” by Thomas Hovendon c.1884

Endnotes

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Revealing Identities

Ammi Phillips' Portraits of Ashbel Stoddard and Patience Bolles Stoddard of Hudson, New York, c.1812-1813

Walter G. Ritchie, Jr.



Attributed to Ammi Phillips (American, 1788-1865), *Patience Bolles Stoddard* (1762-1841), Hudson, New York, c.1812-1813, oil on canvas, ex collection Gerald Kornblau

In the first half of the nineteenth century, itinerant painters, or traveling self-taught artists, executed untold numbers of portraits of middle-class Americans who had achieved prosperity and wished to announce their success by commissioning likenesses of themselves, of their spouses, and frequently of their children. While the portraits lacked the sophistication of academic painting, displaying a charming naiveté that reflected the limited training of the artist, they presented their subjects in a plain, straightforward manner that was appealing to a rural clientele with expectations of only a fairly accurate likeness.

The tradition of itinerant painting developed from the primitive portraiture of self-taught artists practicing in America in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at a time when there were few academically trained painters.¹ Shortly before the Revolutionary War, journeyman portrait painters began plying their trade in the



Attributed to Ammi Phillips (American, 1788-1865), *Ashbel Stoddard* (1763-1840), Hudson, New York, c.1812-1813, oil on canvas, ex collection Gerald Kornblau

fledgling towns and villages that dotted the rural areas of the country. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the number of itinerant artists dramatically increased as the small rural settlements expanded and flourished and the middle class grew and prospered. In eastern New York and western New England, itinerant painters moved from town to town—often crossing the borders dividing states—in the region between the Hudson River and Connecticut River valleys. In the thriving towns, the artists found a steady stream of subjects among the successful farmers, merchants, ministers, and doctors. The advent of photography in the mid-1840s precipitated the demise of itinerant painting in New York, New England, and other parts of the United States, as the skills of the provincial artist were no longer needed to capture likenesses.

One of the most significant itinerant painters of the nineteenth century was Ammi Phillips (1788-1865), who began his career as a portraitist about 1809. In that year, he first advertised his services in the *Berkshire Reporter* while staying at William Clarke's tavern in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, for a two- to three-week period, expressly for the purpose of painting portraits. Phillips returned to the same establishment the following year and placed another advertisement, inviting the ladies and gentlemen of the area to apply to him for the painting of correct likenesses.²

Phillips' portraits from the years 1809 to 1810 have yet to be identified. His earliest known works date from 1811, when he returned to Berkshire County and boarded with Dr. Samuel Barstow and his family in Great Barrington. A doctor and shopkeeper who also maintained a tavern, Barstow recorded Phillips' visit in his diary, which he kept

from 1809 until his death in 1813. Three entries from August to October 1811 make reference to Phillips and his painting of likenesses of the doctor, his wife Lavinia, and their three children, Pluma, Charles, and Oliver. The full-length portraits of Pluma Amelia Barstow and Charles Rollin Barstow were rediscovered in the early 1980s; the location of the others is unknown.³ In late 1811, Phillips executed portraits of four other Berkshire County residents—Reverend Ephraim Judson and his wife, Chloe Allis Judson, of Sheffield, and Gideon Smith, an innkeeper in Stockbridge, and his wife, Allene Northrup Smith. These portraits constitute an experimental period in Ammi Phillips' career, when he was developing a formula for composition and the handling of light and mass. Characteristics distinctive of his next phase emerge during this period,



Ephraim Judson

Portrait of Reverend Ephraim Judson (1737-1813) illustrated in *The Ministry of Taunton, with Incidental Notices of Other Professions* (Boston), 1853

including almond-shaped eyes; full, generous mouths; and an outlining of features.

Phillips was working in Hudson, New York, by 1812 or 1813, when he painted portraits of Ashbel Stoddard (1763-1840) and his wife, Patience Bolles Stoddard (1762-1841), who were among Hudson's earliest residents, settling in the city just one year after its founding in 1783.⁴ Ashbel Stoddard in particular is of great importance in the history of Hudson and Columbia County. He was the first printer in Hudson, one of the earliest printers and publishers in the Upper Hudson Valley region, and publisher of the county's first newspaper.

Born in 1763 in Saybrook, Connecticut, Ashbel Stoddard was one of three children of Simeon Stoddard (1735-1765) and his wife, Sarah Waterhouse Stoddard (c.1739-1803).⁵ Four years after completing theological studies at Yale College in 1755, Simeon Stoddard was installed as minister of a Congregational church in the north parish of Saybrook, Litchfield County, where he met his future wife. Simeon and Sarah married in January 1761 and had their first child, also named Simeon, that same year. Ashbel's sister, Sarah, was born in 1766.

Ashbel Stoddard came from a long line of Congregational ministers on both his father's and mother's sides of the family.⁶ He had a strict religious upbringing, which was later reflected in the themes of many of the books and pamphlets he published in Hudson. His career and accomplishments reflect an education with emphasis on reading and writing as well as religion.

Before settling in Hudson, Stoddard served an apprenticeship at one of New England's leading journals, the *Connecticut Courant* in Hartford,⁷ where he learned the printing and newspaper trades.

In the fall or winter of 1784, Stoddard and his wife took up residence in the fledgling city of Hudson, founded the previous year by thirty Quaker merchant-seamen from Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Stoddard set up a printing shop and bookstore at the southeast corner of Third and Warren streets the following spring.⁸ An early-twentieth-century history of Hudson described the bookstore as a small, one-story building.

On April 7, 1785, Stoddard began publication of Hudson's first newspaper, the *Hudson Weekly Gazette*, in partnership with Charles R. Webster, a fellow apprentice at the *Connecticut Courant*. Webster had arrived in Albany several years earlier and set up a printing shop before reviving publication of the *Albany Gazette*. He withdrew from the Hudson newspaper in 1786. Stoddard continued to publish the *Hudson Weekly Gazette* until 1803 or 1804, by which time he had become discouraged by the acrimony



Profile portrait of Ashbel Stoddard illustrated in *Columbia County at the End of the Century* (Hudson, New York), 1900



Southeastern view of Hudson City, from Academy or Prospect Hill,
Historical Collections of the State of New York, 1846

of party politics. He also published the short-lived literary journals *Columbian Magazine* from 1814 to 1815 and *Messenger of Peace, Devoted to Doctrine, Religion, and Morality* from 1824 to 1825.

Stoddard's printing shop produced more than 400 titles in addition to printing *Stoddard's Diary or Columbia Almanack* from 1785 into the 1830s.⁹ Some of these fell into the category of "chapbooks," or cheap printed material usually containing engraved illustrations. In addition to books, Stoddard also printed pamphlets and broadsides.¹⁰ In the late 1790s, the Hudson city government contracted Stoddard to print paper currency in response to the scarcity of small silver and copper coins.¹¹

Frequently religious in nature, the books printed by Stoddard from 1785 to 1830 included sermons delivered at churches in Albany, Schenectady, and Hudson; histories of the Bible and biblical figures; and compilations of hymns and spiritual songs. In the closing years of the eighteenth century, Stoddard also printed titles relating to the formation and development of the United States government as well as documents associated with the nation's Founding Fathers, including Washington's Farewell Address, printed in 1797. (In his portrait of Stoddard, Ammi Phillips depicted the "pioneer printer of Hudson" holding a copy of this address.) Three years later, Stoddard printed George Washington's will and a schedule of his property to be sold. He also specialized in the printing of instructional books on grammar and mathematics for children, juvenile poems and stories that carried a distinctly moral tone, and a number of works written for the spiritual benefit and edification of women.

In addition to operating a printing shop, Stoddard also maintained a bookstore where he sold not only the titles he printed but Bibles of various sizes, school supplies, letter paper, wrapping paper, blank books, lawyers' and justices' blanks, writing and printing ink, and certificates. The probate records for Stoddard's estate, which include

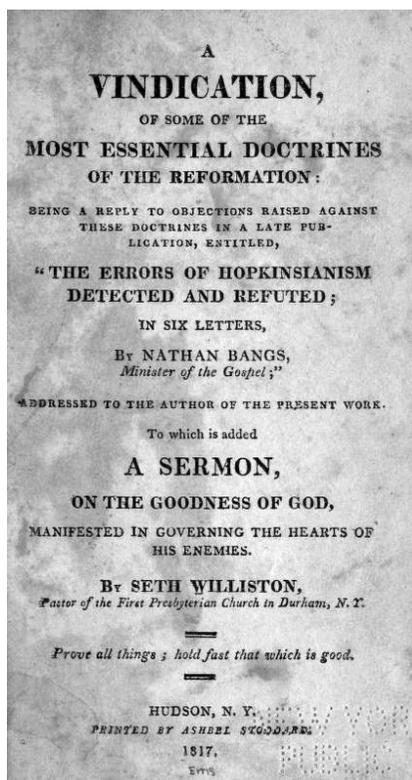
a detailed inventory of the contents of his store, indicate that he also carried scientific texts on chemistry and botany, engravings, medicines, and artists' supplies.¹² One early history of Hudson mentions that the interior of his bookstore was frequently festooned with strings of goose quills that were hung to season.

In February 1793, tragedy befell Stoddard when his printing shop and bookstore were destroyed by fire. At the time, Hudson had no fire company or readily available supply of water to extinguish the conflagration. Consequently, the blaze remained unchecked and the building burned to the ground.¹³ The first fire in the city, it inspired local citizens to take up a subscription for the purchase of Hudson's first fire engines and encouraged civic leaders to form the earliest fire companies. With financial assistance from his fellow citizens, Stoddard rebuilt on the same site and resumed publication of the *Gazette*.

Stoddard had a strong sense of civic duty and demonstrated concern for Hudson's progress and development. It appears that the city's first library, established in 1786, was run from Stoddard's office and may have been located in his bookstore.¹⁴ He presented Hudson's Christ Episcopal Church with a royal quarto Bible as a Christmas gift in 1802.¹⁵ In 1806, he served as one of the incorporators of the Hudson Mechanical Society.¹⁶

Stoddard and his wife Patience had six children, all born in Hudson between 1790 and 1803.¹⁷ Three died in infancy and a fourth passed away at age seventeen. Only Sarah Stoddard (1790-1877) and William Bolles Stoddard (1803-1884) lived to adulthood.

The Stoddard family resided at 131 Warren Street.¹⁸ The photograph of Cyrus Macy's dry goods store, located at 133 Warren Street, shows part of the Stoddard home, a three-and-one-half story frame building with clapboard siding. The residence stood adjacent to the bookstore at the corner of the lot.¹⁹ After the deaths of Ashbel and Patience Stoddard, the house was occupied by William Stoddard; his wife, Anna Maria Rossman, and their ten children; as well as by Sarah Stoddard, who inherited the property in place of her brother according to the terms of their father's will.²⁰



Title page from *A Vindication, of Some of the Most Essential Doctrines of the Reformation*, printed in 1817 by Ashbel Stoddard, Hudson, New York



Cyrus Macy's dry goods store at 133 Warren Street, Hudson, New York. Photograph, c.1860-1870. The Stoddard residence, at 131 Warren Street, stands to the right of the store. Collection of Historic Hudson, Hudson, New York

On October 18, 1840, Ashbel Stoddard died at seventy-seven years of age. He had remained active in business until a few days before his death. One obituary described Stoddard as a small man with a delicate constitution, but noted that “He lived highly respected, and no man ever left a fairer reputation.”²¹

Stoddard ensured that his children were well educated and passed on to them a passion for literature. From 1824 to 1851, William B. Stoddard published in Hudson the *Rural Repository*, a semi-monthly literary journal that featured short stories, poems, biographies, and historical anecdotes.²² His sister Sarah, a talented writer, assisted with the journal's editing and frequently contributed both fiction and poetry.²³

Succeeding generations were just as industrious and accomplished as Stoddard and his children. William's daughter, Sarah Stoddard Eddy (1831-1904), wife of Reverend Richard Eddy, was a reformer actively involved in the women's suffrage movement.²⁴ While she and her husband resided in Boston, Sarah was a member of a number of women's literary clubs, educational unions, and suffrage associations. A photograph of Sarah Stoddard Eddy from c.1893 shows that she bore a striking resemblance to her paternal grandmother, Patience Bolles Stoddard.

In or about 1812, Ammi Phillips left Massachusetts for New York State and settled briefly in Hudson. He arrived when the city was still prosperous but on the brink of an economic decline brought about by the War of 1812. The Berkshire County towns where Phillips painted his earliest known portraits are in close proximity to Hudson, which may account for the artist's choice of this city as his next destination. After 1810, it was no longer necessary for Phillips to advertise his services as a painter of likenesses, for he experienced a steady flow of commissions that came to him through the family and professional ties among his clients. It is quite possible that Phillips' next commission after the Berkshire County portraits of 1811 came through one of those sitters, Reverend Ephraim Judson (1737-1813), who had professional connections and perhaps a personal association with Ashbel Stoddard's father.

Simeon Stoddard and Ephraim Judson were both pastors at Congregational churches in Litchfield County, Connecticut, the latter presiding over the parish in Northbury (now Plymouth). Each was a member of the Litchfield South Association, an organization that licensed, advised, and provided support to Congregational ministers practicing in the southern part of the county.²⁵ The "licentiates," or members, attended two annual sessions of the association in addition to other meetings held throughout the year. A friendship as well as a professional association likely existed between Stoddard and Judson. The two men were born several years apart and raised in Woodbury, Connecticut, where each remained until he left to study theology at Yale College.²⁶ In all likelihood, Ashbel Stoddard's great-grandfather, the Reverend Anthony Stoddard, minister of Woodbury's Second Congregational Church, had baptized the infant Judson. After Simeon Stoddard's death in 1765, Judson may have maintained a relationship with and perhaps provided a certain measure of support to his widow and children.

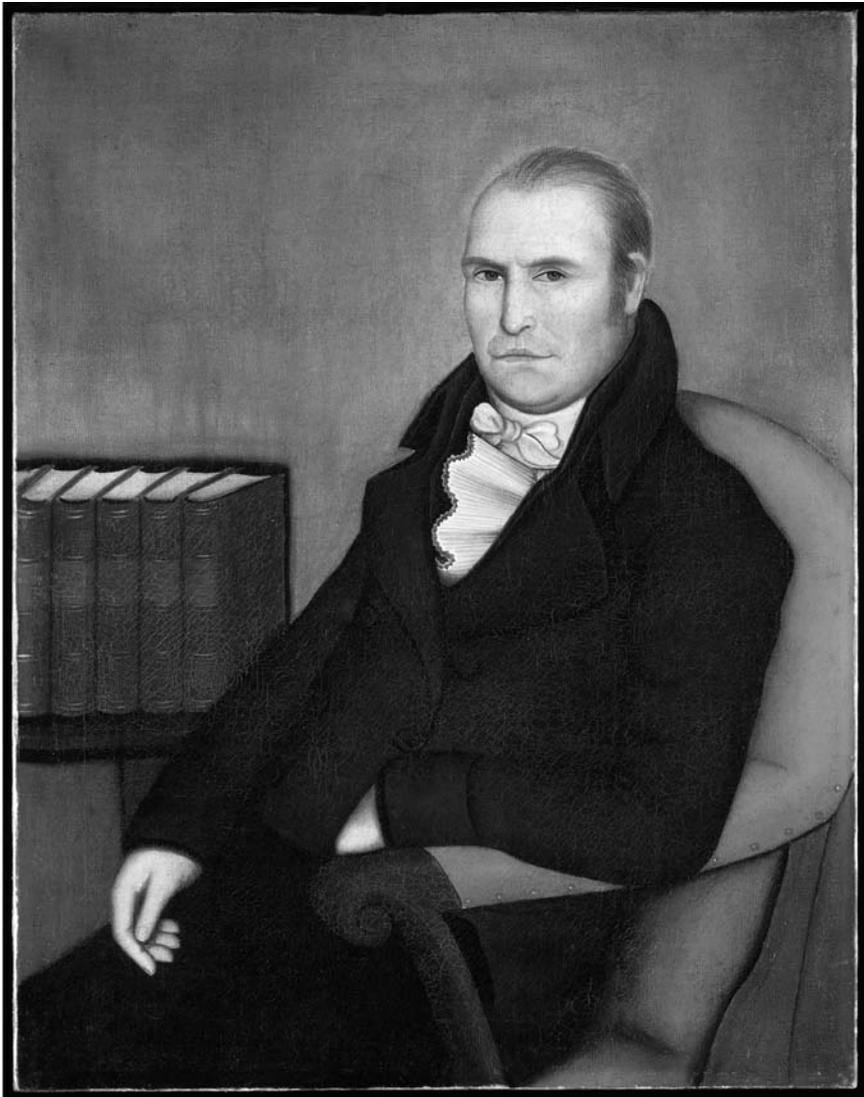
Phillips' portraits of the Stoddards depict a confident, sophisticated, and fashionably dressed married couple who had achieved an enviable level of material comfort and occupied respectable positions in society. The symbol of Stoddard's success as a



Portrait of Sarah Stoddard Eddy (1831-1904) illustrated in *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches* (Buffalo, New York and Chicago), 1893



Portrait of Polspianna Bull Dorr (Mrs. Russell Dorr) and Maria Esther Dorr [later, Mrs. John Henry Newman], Ammi Phillips, Columbia County, New York, 1814-1815, oil on canvas, accession #1958.100.15, image #TC1988-193, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation



Portrait of Dr. Russell Dorr, Ammi Phillips, Columbia County, New York, 1814-1815, oil on canvas, accession #1958.100.16, image #TC1988-499, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

printer is seen in the copy of Washington's Farewell Address held in his left hand. The cultured and leisured lifestyle that Stoddard's prosperous business afforded his wife is implied by the book of poems that Patience tilts forward in her right hand.

The Stoddard portraits represent a transition from Phillips' experimental phase to the beginning of his Border period, spanning from 1812 to 1819, when he painted in the border regions of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. Portraits he executed during this time exhibit a greater degree of realism while retaining many of the naïve elements of the works from 1811. He also introduced to his portraits a light, pearly gray background. This would be supplanted by a dark, velvety ground characteristic of works completed during his Realistic period of 1820 to 1828.

In his portraits of the Stoddards, Phillips accurately depicted details of clothing as well as personal features. The viewer can clearly see the trim on Patience's brown dress, the pattern in her lace sleeves, and the oiled ringlets of her hair. Stoddard's collar and cravat are portrayed exactly, as are the brass buttons on his coat. This realism extends to the folio of Washington's Farewell Address: Phillips has transcribed the text exactly as it was published. The portraits feature the almond-shaped eyes, full mouths, and heavy outlining that continued to appear in Phillips' portraits during the Border years. The palette and background remain dark as in the portraits of 1811; both would gradually become lighter in portraits Phillips executed over the next few years.

It is possible that Phillips painted the portrait of another Hudson resident about the same time he executed the Stoddards' portraits. The collections of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum in Williamsburg, Virginia, formerly included a portrait of a lady attributed to Phillips and dated c.1812.²⁷ The subject was identified simply as "Mrs. Jenkins." While not known for certain, the lady may have been a member of Hudson's Jenkins family. Phillips frequently painted portraits of members of prominent families in the areas where he settled. The Jenkins family had been tremendously influential in the city's political and economic circles since Hudson's founding. Considering the approximate date of the portrait and Phillips' presence in Hudson about the same time, the lady described as "Mrs. Jenkins" may indeed have been a member of the Jenkins family of Hudson. In 1845, Phillips returned to the city and painted a portrait of a member of another prominent Hudson family, a "Mr. Van Hosen."²⁸

Prior to 1819, the end of his Border period, Phillips executed portraits of other Columbia County residents, including the Dorr family of Chatham. The nine Dorr portraits, painted c.1814, portray Dr. Russell Dorr (1771-1824), his wife Polspianna Bull Dorr (1783-1869), and seven of their children born between 1803 and 1814.²⁹ Dr. Russell Dorr, born in Lyme, Connecticut, was Chatham's first doctor. He also held the distinction of inventing the first threshing machine in the United States. The Dorr family had ten children, including Russell Griffin Dorr (1807-1860) and Joseph Priestly Dorr (1805-1879). Russell G. Dorr became the earliest lawyer in Chatham while Joseph P. Dorr followed in the footsteps of his father and practiced medicine.

The Stoddard portraits were acquired in the early 1970s by folk art dealer Gerald

Kornblau.³⁰ When Kornblau purchased the paintings, they presumably had passed out of the hands of Stoddard's descendants many years before, so there was no information on their provenance. While Phillips occasionally inscribed the reverse of a portrait he painted with the name of the subject and the date, neither appeared on the back of the Stoddard portraits. Lacking an inscription and separated from the family who once owned them, the portraits depicted merely an anonymous couple.

For Kornblau, the first clue to the identity of the gentleman was the folio of George Washington's Farewell Address prominently held in his hand. Kornblau was aware that a book or document appearing in a Phillips portrait of a male subject was a device used by the artist to reflect the gentleman's occupation. Through diligent research, he discovered that Hudson's first printer, Ashbel Stoddard, had printed the address in 1797. Further investigation led Kornblau to a profile portrait of Ashbel Stoddard illustrated in *Columbia County at the End of the Century*, a history of the county published in 1900. The illustration reproduces a pen and ink portrait executed by Hudson artist George A. McKinstry (1855-1919) for the April 9, 1885, morning edition of the *Hudson Gazette*, which commemorated the centennial of Hudson's first newspaper.³¹ McKinstry based his drawing on a pencil portrait of Ashbel Stoddard that had descended in the family.³² A comparison of the printed image with the painted portrait demonstrated distinct similarities between the two figures. For Kornblau, the identity of the middle-aged man holding Washington's Farewell Address was confirmed. A search through the Stoddard family genealogy and Hudson cemetery records yielded the name of Stoddard's wife—Patience Bolles Stoddard.

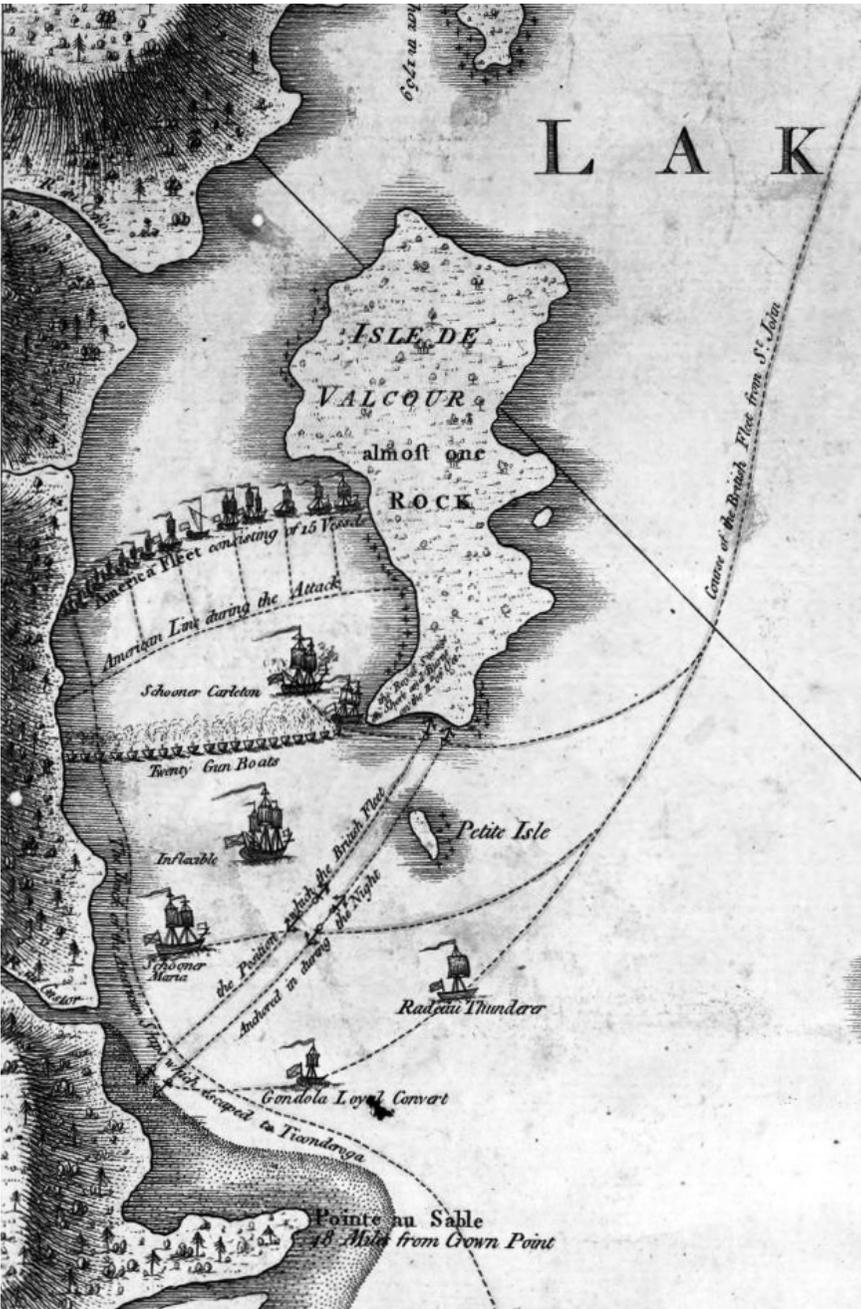
For Ammi Phillips, the Stoddard commission may have provided the path from Berkshire County, Massachusetts to Columbia County, New York. Among Phillips' earliest known works in Columbia County, the Stoddard portraits are one of the first links in the chain of portraits he executed between his experimental period of 1809 to 1811 in western Massachusetts, and his Border phase, which overlapped the first seven to eight years of his activity in eastern New York. While the portrait of Ashbel Stoddard has stylistic significance in terms of the evolution of Phillips' portraiture, it simultaneously bears documentary importance in the history of Columbia County, for it depicts the founder of the region's first newspaper and printing shop.

Endnotes

1. A brief history of itinerant painting in America, with emphasis on New York and New England, is provided in Mary Black and Colleen Cowles Heslip, *Between the Rivers: Itinerant Painters from the Connecticut to the Hudson* (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 1990).
2. For more information on the portraits and career of Ammi Phillips, see Stacy Hollander and Howard P. Fertig, *Revisiting Ammi Phillips: Fifty Years of American Portraiture* (Museum of American Folk Art, New York, New York, 1994). See also Mary Black, Barbara C. Holdridge and Lawrence B. Holdridge, *Ammi Phillips: Portrait Painter, 1788-1865* (Museum of American Folk Art, New York, New York, 1969).
3. Mary Black, "Ammi Phillips Portraits Rediscovered," *The Magazine Antiques*, September 1987, pp. 558-559.

4. Henry P. Smith, *Columbia County at the End of the Century* (Hudson, New York, 1900), Vol. I, p. 268. The year that the Stoddards arrived in Hudson is confirmed in an obituary of Ashbel Stoddard published in the *Hudson Gazette* and reprinted by William Stoddard in the *Rural Repository*, October 24, 1840, vol. 17, no. 10, p. 79. According to an obituary in the *Columbia Republican*, reprinted in the same issue of *Rural Repository*, "Mr. Stoddard was one of the earliest settlers of this city."
5. Elijah Woodward Stoddard, *Anthony Stoddard of Boston, Mass., and His Descendants, 1639-1873, a Genealogy* (New York, 1873), p. 232.
6. *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life*, eds. Frances E. Willard and Mary E. Livermore (Buffalo, New York and Chicago, 1893), p. 271.
7. Smith, *Columbia County at the End of the Century*, Vol. I, p. 268.
8. Anna R. Bradbury, *History of the City of Hudson, New York, with Biographical Sketches of Henry Hudson and Robert Fulton* (Hudson, New York, 1908), p. 68. On the title pages of the books he printed and in issues of the *Columbia Almanack*, Stoddard listed his location variously as "the White-House, Corner of Warren and Third-Streets," "in Main-Street" (later renamed Warren Street) and "Warren-Street, Corner of Third-Street." According to Stoddard's obituary in the *Hudson Gazette*, he set up his printing shop and bookstore in the spring of 1785.
9. Titles printed by Ashbel Stoddard can be found in WorldCat, an online international library catalog. For a discussion of Stoddard's profession as a printer, see John L. Brooke, *Columbia Rising: Civil Life on the Upper Hudson from the Revolution to the Age of Jackson* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2010).
10. An example of a broadside printed by Stoddard is *Gumbo Chaff*. According to a handwritten note at the bottom of the sheet, the broadside was printed by Stoddard c.1827-1832. American Song Sheet Collection, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.
11. Captain Franklin Ellis, *History of Columbia County, New York, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia, 1878), p. 160.
12. Probate inventory for the estate of Ashbel Stoddard, dated February 20, 1841, Columbia County Probate Records, County Courthouse, Hudson, New York. The inventory also lists the contents of Stoddard's residence, but does not reference the pair of portraits. It was not unusual for family portraits to be excluded from estate inventories according to Coleen Cowles Heslip in *Between the Rivers: Itinerant Painters from the Connecticut to the Hudson*, p. 54. She cites the example of the inventory of Dr. Samuel Barstow's estate, which makes no mention of any of the five portraits known to have been painted by Phillips.
13. The destruction by fire of Stoddard's printing shop and bookstore is described in *Columbia County at the End of the Century*, Vol I, p. 270. The same description is also found in Ignatius Jones, *Random Recollections of Albany and of Hudson, with Anecdotes and Sketches of Men and Things* (Albany, New York, 1850), p. 13.
14. Byrne Fone, *Historic Hudson: An Architectural Portrait* (Hensonville, New York, 2005), p. 42.
15. Rev. Sheldon Munson Griswold and William H. Scovill, *Centennial of Christ Church, Hudson, New York, 1802-1902* (Hudson, New York, 1902), p. 15.
16. Ellis, *History of Columbia County, New York*, p. 199.
17. Stoddard, *Anthony Stoddard of Boston, Mass.*, p. 234.
18. Hudson city directories from 1851 (its first year of publication) through the 1860s and 1870s list the home of both Sarah Stoddard and William Stoddard at 131 Warren Street. An obituary of Sarah Stoddard, taken from the *American Art Journal* and reprinted in the *Hudson Evening Register*, November 14, 1877, described the property at the southeast corner of Warren and Third streets as the "old homestead" and stated that it had been in the Stoddard family for ninety years. At the time, it was considered one of the oldest family residences in Hudson.
19. For the April 9, 1885, morning edition of the *Hudson Gazette*, Hudson artist George A. McKinstry prepared a number of drawings of the city's early buildings and landmarks, including "Old Stoddard Corner." These drawings were most likely based on oral descriptions provided by residents who remembered the buildings, for many of the structures were no longer extant at the time the article was published. The April 9, 1885, morning edition of the *Hudson Gazette* was reprinted in the *Register-Star*, April 8, 1985, vol. 32, no. 169.

20. Will of Ashbel Stoddard, recorded February 3, 1841, vol. I, pp. 168-174, Columbia County Probate Records, County Courthouse, Hudson, New York. Sarah Stoddard received two-thirds of her father's estate while one-third passed to Ashbel's wife, Patience Stoddard, to be held in trust for their grandchildren. No portion of the estate passed to William Stoddard, for the stated reason that he was prone to drunkenness and irresponsible behavior.
21. Stoddard obituary, *Rural Repository*, vol. 17, no. 10, p. 79.
22. Bradbury, *History of the City of Hudson, New York*, pp. 68-69.
23. Obituary of Sarah Stoddard, *Hudson Evening Register*, November 14, 1877.
24. For more biographical information on Sarah Stoddard Eddy, see *A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches*, eds. Willard and Livermore, pp. 271-272.
25. Simeon Stoddard became a licensed minister in 1756, Ephraim Judson in 1764. *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut*, eds. Leonard Bacon, S. W. S. Dutton and E. W. Robinson (New Haven, Connecticut, 1861), p. 318.
26. Franklin B. Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College, with Annals of the College History*, Volume II, May, 1745 - May, 1763 (New York, 1896), pp. 381-382 and Volume III, May, 1763—July, 1778 (New York, 1903), pp. 27-30.
27. The portrait is discussed and illustrated in Ruth Piwonka and Roderic H. Blackburn, *Ammi Phillips in Columbia County* (Kinderhook, New York, 1977), p. 7, fig. 9. The publication accompanied an exhibition of the same title. According to the catalog, the location of the portrait is unknown.
28. Hollander and Fertig, *Revisiting Ammi Phillips: Fifty Years of American Portraiture*, p. 75.
29. For more information on the Dorr family portraits, see Black and Holdridge, *Ammi Phillips: Portrait Painter, 1788-1865*, p. 45; and Ruth Piwonka and Roderic H. Blackburn, *A Visible Heritage: Columbia County, New York, a History in Art and Architecture* (Hensonville, New York, 1996), p. 121.
30. Research files of the late Gerald Kornblau. The Stoddard portraits appear to have been exhibited for the first time in 1974 as part of an exhibition of American folk art held at Amherst College in Massachusetts (see notes in the records for the portraits of Ashbel Stoddard and Patience Bolles Stoddard, control numbers IAP 20090035 and IAP 20090034, in the Art Inventory Catalog of the Smithsonian American Art Museums). The following year, Kornblau displayed the portraits at the Winter Antiques Show in New York. In 1976, they were included in an exhibition on Ammi Phillips at the Washburn Gallery on Madison Avenue in New York. The portraits were shown a third time in New York City, in 1994, when the Museum of American Folk Art hosted the exhibition *Revisiting Ammi Phillips: Fifty Years of American Portraiture*. Finally, the Stoddard portraits were displayed temporarily in 2005 at the Columbia County Historical Society in Kinderhook, not far from where they had been painted almost two centuries before.
31. Reprint of April 9, 1885, morning edition of *Hudson Gazette* in *Register-Star*, April 8, 1985.
32. According to the article that accompanied the *Register-Star's* reprint of the April 9, 1885, morning edition of the *Hudson Gazette*, descendants of Ashbel Stoddard had given Hudson historian Stephen B. Miller a pencil portrait of Stoddard, which George McKinstry used as the basis of his illustration. The portrait and other drawings that McKinstry prepared for the 1885 centennial edition were donated by McKinstry's descendants to the Columbia County Historical Society in the 1950s.



The Attack and defeat of the American fleet under Benedict Arnold by the King's fleet Commanded by Sir Guy Carleton upon Lake Champlain in "11th" of "Octr." 1776. From a sketch taken by an officer on the spot. Engraved by Wm. Faden, Charing Cross. Scale ca. 1:70,000.

Valcour Island

Setting the Conditions for Victory at Saratoga

Gregory M. Tomlin

The Hudson River Valley's rich Revolutionary War history evokes images of fortress West Point, the sensational trial and hanging of British Major John André in Tappan, and General George Washington's emotional address to his officers at New Windsor. Just thirty miles north of the valley, another important event occurred: the American victory at Saratoga in 1777. When asked to provide a specific event or date in the American Revolution where the specter of victory shifted from the British to the colonists, many scholars cite the Battle of Saratoga. Colonial military historian Richard Ketchum credits British General John Burgoyne's surrender on October 7, 1777, as essential for convincing the French government to ally with the Americans. In Ketchum's view, without Saratoga "there is no telling what might have happened," since the absence of the alliance may have led the Americans to sue for peace due to the sustained economic strain of two years of conflict and the deterioration of their fighting forces.¹ For the Hudson River Valley, this decisive battle also denied the British control of the river that they had hoped to secure in order to split rabbleroising New England from the crops and manpower of the Middle and Southern colonies.

While the importance of Saratoga is not disputed, some historians contend that Burgoyne's surrender is directly traceable to the Battle of Valcour Island, which delayed an earlier British attack in the fall of 1776, thereby providing the Americans with an additional year to prepare their defenses for the British northern invasion of New York.² This unique naval battle fought on Lake Champlain, seventy miles north of Saratoga Springs, should be considered the opening phase of the Saratoga campaign, making it a relatively obscure engagement that deserves greater attention by students of the American struggle for independence.

Studies of naval operations during the Revolution commonly focus on European sea battles in the West Indies, Captain John Paul Jones' exploits in British waters, Admiral François Joseph Paul de Grasse's success in the 1781 Battle of the Chesapeake, or the transatlantic logistics responsible for sustaining the Continental Army. Rarely do the riverine or lake operations of "green-water" navies significantly influence the outcome of a campaign, let alone a war; however, the Battle of Valcour Island proves to be an

exceptional case due to the centrality of the Richelieu and Hudson Rivers to both British and American strategies during the Revolution. Among the most notable scholars to draw attention to this engagement is naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan who more than a century ago opined, “The little American navy on Champlain was wiped out; but never had any force, big or small, lived to better purpose or died more gloriously.”³

To appreciate the magnitude of the battle it is first necessary to understand the military value of the lake. Situated in upstate New York, Lake Champlain is accessible from Quebec by sailing down the St. Lawrence River to the Richelieu River, which opens into the northern tip of the lake. Due to rapids and falls along the Richelieu, however, large vessels could not sail the entire route.⁴ The southern basin of the 110-mile-long lake is situated sixty miles from the Hudson River, which traverses through most of New York prior to draining into the Atlantic Ocean at New York Bay.⁵ In the early years of the Revolution, these inland waterways served as key terrain for the British, who sought to isolate the rebellious New England colonies through a two-part strategy: occupy the major ports in Boston, Newport, and New York in order to block coastal resupply, and simultaneously secure the Hudson and Richelieu rivers to prevent access to the Middle and Southern colonies. Military historian Russell Weigley observes that the British fascination with the rivers stemmed from the absence of geographic objectives that, if seized, would contribute to the destruction of the Continental Army and colonial militias.⁶ For example, even if the British captured the colonial capital of Philadelphia, the Continental Congress would relocate or possibly scatter prior to admitting defeat.

In the late summer and early fall of 1776, the British army executed a two-pronged assault in New York designed to secure the Hudson River. While British General William Howe fought Washington’s Continental Army at Long Island, Harlem Heights, and White Plains, General Guy Carleton simultaneously led a British column from Quebec toward Fort Ticonderoga, an impressive Vauban-style citadel constructed by the French (Fort Carillon) at the southern end of Lake Champlain during the Seven Years’ War (1754-1763), which the French subsequently lost at the end of the conflict. If all went according to plan, Carleton’s troops would defeat the American garrison at Ticonderoga and continue marching to Albany where he expected to meet Howe and his forces, who would have marched north along the Hudson from New York City. Combined, their regiments would complete the envelopment of New England.⁷

American generals recognized the threat that British control of the Hudson would pose, and they sought to limit the advance of the enemy’s approach from either Quebec or Manhattan by fortifying Ticonderoga as well as West Point, a natural defensive position fifty miles north of New York City on the Hudson.⁸ Washington ordered contingents of his army to augment the militias in manning the ramparts of Ticonderoga and West Point. The Continental commander-in-chief assumed tremendous risk by further reducing the size of his field army to strengthen these forts; of the original 20,000 men under his command at the beginning of Howe’s invasion of New York, fewer than 3,000 remained by the time the army escaped across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania

in December 1776.⁹ Earlier that summer, however, Congress appointed Major General Horatio Gates, Washington's former adjutant, to head the Canadian command, and he departed Albany on July 5 to assess his troops firsthand. He arrived first at Crown Point, a fort ten miles north of Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain. Much to his disappointment, he discovered a devastated American garrison. Describing the scene to John Hancock in a letter, Gates suggested that his new forces "had more the Appearance of a General Hospital, than an Army form'd to Oppose the Invasion of a Successful & enterprizing [sic] Enemy."¹⁰ A committee dispatched to the citadel by the Continental Congress painted a similar image in their report to their colleagues in Philadelphia: here was an army "in a distressed condition," wanting of the most basic necessities and likely to turn their guns on locals to seize enough flour to prevent starvation.¹¹

Despite their appearance, the ragged men at Crown Point had demonstrated a tenacious fighting spirit during the ill-fated expedition to Quebec in the winter of 1775 to 1776. Commanded by Brigadier General Richard Montgomery, 1,200 American soldiers converged on the city from Maine and Montreal to lay a five-month siege in the hopes of capturing it and enticing the French Canadian populace to join the American cause. Despite shortages of able fighting men and supplies, the British garrison under Carleton held out until the St. Lawrence River thawed, allowing for the arrival of both British and Hessian reinforcements in May 1776. On New Year's Eve, 1775, Montgomery perished after being shot in the head by a musket ball while leading the siege.¹² In addition to the loss of the commanding general, nearly two-thirds of the American force died before Colonel Benedict Arnold led the surviving 400 soldiers by foot through the wilderness in a retrograde operation to Ticonderoga.¹³ After learning of the feat, one British writer lauded praise on his adversary: "Their perseverance was astonishing in their circumstances. . . . Arnold, who had hitherto displayed uncommon talents in his march into Canada, (which may be compared to the greatest things done in that kind) discovered on this occasion the utmost vigor of a determined mind, and a genius full of resources."¹⁴ When Gates arrived later that summer, he found the survivors nursing combat wounds or, worse still, succumbing to the ravages of smallpox, typhoid, and malaria.

Gates' opponent, Carleton, commanded a force of nearly 10,000 men whom he forward deployed to St. Jean, a town on the Richelieu fifty miles north of Lake Champlain. Despite being freshly knighted for his stalwart leadership as governor-general during the besiegement of Montreal, Carleton proved to be a cautious field commander, and his pause at St. Jean would be the first of several examples used by his critics to suggest that he was a better general of the defense than the offense.¹⁵ With roads nonexistent, his army needed to travel by water to the south end of Lake Champlain before crossing briefly over land to access the Hudson. However, Carleton worried that the fortifications at Crown Point and Ticonderoga would impede his movement, and he doubted that his British and Hessian troops could successfully assault either site by land. His concern especially peaked when his spies grossly overestimated the number

of Americans garrisoned within the forts, placing the total at 20,000 Continentals.¹⁶ Had his intelligence been more accurate, perhaps Carleton would have gained the confidence necessary to risk the hardships of an overland attack in lieu of waiting to sail the length of the lake.

Two successive major delays impeded Carleton's expedition into New York during the summer and early fall of 1776, the first being the absence of sufficient water transports on the lake. Although workers began laboring dexterously under the supervision of Royal Navy Lieutenant John Shank in July at the hastily refitted dock of St. Jean, construction of the required 200 landing craft to accommodate the regiments and several warships to carry artillery and protect the infantry required three months. Known as bateaux, the flat-bottom vessels used as transports were little more than extended rowboats, being thirty-six to forty feet in length and six to seven feet in width.¹⁷ In addition to the small amphibious assault craft, Carleton ordered several prefabricated small warships from England that Shank put together at St. Jean. To his credit, the general had ordered the ships in 1775, when he first envisioned the need for a fleet on Lake Champlain to ensure British dominance in the region.¹⁸

Carleton originally asked Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, who resided in Boston at the time, for the components to build two sloops of war and 400 bateaux as well as for enough knowledgeable men to construct and operate the vessels. However, when the admiral could not accommodate the governor of Quebec, he forwarded the request to the Admiralty. Although policymakers in London reduced the quantity Carleton appealed for, they did provide materiel with the relief fleet that arrived at Montreal's port in May 1776 and followed with additional provisions in June.¹⁹ Since Canada is rich in timber, the navy did not need to weigh down its ships with such bulky and heavy material but, instead, only those components made exclusively in England. Several warships were also dismantled and carried over a newly made road to St. Jean, where they were put back together in a "remarkable feat of engineering." Captain Charles Douglas, commander of the St. Lawrence fleet, argued that these ships would be essential to securing a decisive victory by overwhelming the inferior American ships.²⁰

The firepower of the British lake fleet proved considerable. Shank built twenty gunboats capable of holding a twenty-gun mix of 24- and 9-pounders, and two gondolas with seven 9-pounders each. Two American schooners, captured by the British in June 1776, arrived overland to be reassembled, fitted with a dozen 6-pound guns apiece, and christened the *Carleton* and the *Maria*, the latter in honor of the governor's wife.²¹ Workers also carried components of the 180-ton frigate *Inflexible* to St. Jean, a ship so heavy that, upon completion, it could not carry the additional twenty-seven tons of its eighteen 12-pound guns until it sailed down the Richelieu and into the lake. Perhaps work crews could have more expediently built two or three smaller vessels in the time required to transport this single massive ship, but Carleton insisted on this addition to the fleet and refused to deploy his vessels onto the lake until his builders completed the *Inflexible* because he remained concerned about the wildly exaggerated strength of

the opposing fleet.²² Shank's men constructed one final vessel, the radeau *Thunderer*, completely from scratch at St. Jean. This nearly flat-bottom platform carried the fleet's heaviest armaments: six 24-pounders, six 12-pounders, and two howitzers.²³

Although impressive in their ingenuity, the time required to construct the fleet kept the British at St. Jean until late September, all the while giving the Americans an opportunity to improve their own defenses on Lake Champlain. The second British delay, one entirely out of their hands to control, began just as Carleton's fleet attempted to sail down the Richelieu. For twenty consecutive days, winds from the south denied them access to the lake, and sailors could not defy their leeward challenge by zigzagging downstream due to the narrowness of the river.²⁴ On October 9, 1776, the fleet finally reached the northern rim of Champlain, and a reconnaissance vessel spotted an American fleet awaiting the invaders twenty-five miles further south on the west side of Valcour Island. From July through September, while Carleton prepared his forces and then waited for the winds to mercifully change, Gates established a dual mission for his own troops: fortify the most suitable land-based positions on the south end of Lake Champlain, and build a fleet to oppose the imminent British invasion force.²⁵ The American commander handed responsibility for defending the lake over to his deputy, recently promoted Brigadier General Benedict Arnold.

While popular history concentrates on Arnold's infamous treason, the officer's contributions to the American war effort have increasingly gained recognition in contemporary historiographies. After he fled West Point on September 24, 1780, upon learning that the Continental Army had discovered his arrangement with the British to change sides, the United States government deliberately scourged Arnold's name from the annals and monuments of Revolutionary War history.²⁶ However, James Martin, a historian who wrote *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero: An American Warrior Reconsidered*, credits his personal interest in the general to an elementary teacher's villainous portrayal of the man: "Not since Judas, I recall one of them saying, had a human being left so wicked a mark on the pages of history."²⁷ Martin, as well as authors Thomas Desjardin and James Nelson, argue in their recent monographs that Arnold's meritorious service quite possibly made him the best general of either side (and certainly the best general to serve on both sides!) during the Revolution, and they question the methodology of other historians who examine his performance strictly through the prism of treason.²⁸ For his distinguished service in the Quebec campaign, Desjardin calls Arnold "America's Hannibal."²⁹ Indeed, few generals of any era led troops through as many forced marches, or sustained as many wounds without retiring from the field, or, as will be detailed momentarily, commanded desperate engagements from the frontline of a battlefield and the helm of a sailing ship.

Gates asked Arnold at the end of July 1776 if he would be willing to serve as commodore of the fledgling American fleet on Lake Champlain. Arnold had already told Washington a month earlier that the only way to secure the lake would be the construction of a fleet of at least twenty to thirty "Gundaleos Row Gallies & floating Batteries,"

so he readily accepted Gates' offer.³⁰ Arnold also recommended that the Continentals expand their defenses by constructing a fortification on Isle-aux-Noix, a small island in the Richelieu about ten miles north of the river's mouth on Lake Champlain; however, Gates denied the request to stretch his meager forces even further.³¹ Martin observes that, with such a high probability for failure, Arnold embraced a mission at which most Continental officers would have balked.³²

Recognizing the importance of ships, either to defend the lake or withdraw troops further south, Gates hoped that Arnold would improve the quality of the craftsmanship and the efficiency of the production of vessels coming from the meager American dockyard at Skenesborough, located twenty miles south of Ticonderoga on the South River. Construction began in the spring, prior to either Gates' or Arnold's arrival, when Major General Philip Schuyler feared that he would need to evacuate the remnants of the American forces from the failed Quebec expedition. However, this initial progress under the supervision of Dutchman Jacobus Wynkoop proved unimpressive.³³ Gates' inspection of the first two gondolas to sail north to Ticonderoga clearly prompted his decision to replace Wynkoop with Arnold. After examining the first two vessels on July 15, he lamented that the sixty carpenters at Skenesborough "must be very ill-attended to, or very ignorant of their business, not to do more work."³⁴ Arnold enthusiastically assumed his new duties, and he increased the number of craftsmen at the American dock from sixty to 200. In a glowing letter to Washington, Gates expressed his optimism with the performance of his new commodore: "he has perfect knowledge in Maritime Affairs, and is besides a most deserving, and Gallant Officer."³⁵ Responding to Gates on August 14, Washington opined that he trusted "neither Courage nor Activity will be wanting in those to whom the business is committed—If assigned to Genl Arnold, None one [sic] will doubt of his Exertions."³⁶ Arnold derived much of his earlier reputation from rallying men to defy insurmountable odds, and the situation for the Americans on Champlain seemed no less daunting. Arnold's scouts reported the British activities at St. Jean, and he knew that he faced an enemy growing in size and lethality.

Production output increased dramatically under Arnold's supervision between early August and October 11, leading to the completion of eight gondolas, three row-galleys with triangular sail, three schooners, the cutter *Lee*, and the sloop *Enterprise*.³⁷ The gondolas comprised the backbone of the fleet, each forty to fifty feet in length with a forty-five sailor crew to man the 12-pound howitzer mounted on the bow, two to four 9-pound cannons on the sides, and eight swivel guns mounted on deck.³⁸ Arnold created a scheme of operations that distributed the labor of ship construction throughout the area: craftsmen at Skenesborough built hulls; army engineers at Ticonderoga made gun carriages; soldiers at Crown Point shaved oars, and scouts located new sources of timber in the nearby woodlands. Completed hulls floated along the South River to their next stop on Arnold's assembly line, Ticonderoga, for rigging and arming. Gates' chief engineer and artilleryist, Colonel Jeduthan Baldwin, supervised operations at Ticonderoga and described in his diary how consuming this task became: "I have my

hands and mind constantly employed night and Day except when I am a Sleep [sic] and then sometimes I dream.”³⁹

Although Arnold corrected for the shortage of shipbuilders, acquiring sufficient shipbuilding material remained vexing throughout the summer. Procurement of military materiel, in fact, proved the bane of most Continental officers throughout the Revolution. A year earlier, as Arnold helped Montgomery prepare for the Quebec campaign from Ticonderoga, Arnold complained about his inability to fund his logistical requirements: “I am reduced to great extremity, not being able to pay off the people who are in great want of necessities, and much in debt.”⁴⁰ In 1776, he used his prewar business connections in Connecticut to acquire sailcloth and cordage.⁴¹ His envoys sent to Philadelphia in search of larger artillery pieces, however, proved less successful, leaving him with only six 24-pound guns to divide between the three galleys and one 12-pound gun for the bow of each gondola.⁴² Acquiring sufficient rigging material proved to be the greatest material shortage, and even though nearly all shipbuilding ended in late August, the galleys were not fully rigged until October 11. Illness, most likely malaria, also contributed to the decline in productivity in late August, and hull construction completely ended on October 2 with the departure of the galley *Gates* from Skenesborough.⁴³

Arnold could motivate the shipbuilders at Skenesborough, but he also had to train inexperienced men for sea duty. He faced three challenges: his soldiers-turned-sailors were inexperienced, the British outgunned his fleet, and the gondolas did not possess maneuverability. Not only were his crews unfamiliar with sailing, but most were from the dregs of the regiments stationed at Ticonderoga and Crown Point. When tasked by Gates to provide volunteers for the ships, officers volunteered their undesirable soldiers, the troublemakers whom commanders readily released to improve the cohesion and discipline of their own units within the tight confines of a fort.⁴⁴ Once the builders completed the vessels, Arnold could train them on sailing and maneuvering on the South River and Lake Champlain, but a severe lack of gunpowder prevented him from training them in the skill most essential to nautical warfare: naval gunfire.⁴⁵ Indeed, it is hard enough to train disciplined gunners how to shoot howitzers on land, but the practice of shooting artillery from a vessel moving on a body of water is exponentially more difficult to master. With gunpowder stores low, Arnold feared the troops at Ticonderoga would not have enough to defend themselves against the advancing 10,000 British and Hessian soldiers, and he privately believed that if a resupply did not arrive before the appearance of the enemy fleet, Gates would be forced to withdraw.⁴⁶

The American generals more or less kept their concerns over the gunpowder shortages to themselves and continued to plan for the defense of Lake Champlain. On August 7, Gates issued his orders to Arnold: “The Preventing the Enemy’s Invasion of our Country is the ultimate End of the important Command which you are now intrusted [sic].”⁴⁷ Two months later the commodore deployed his fleet to the half-mile wide channel between the west bank of Valcour Island and the New York shoreline. In

a letter to Gates on October 10, Arnold shared his thoughts on the tactical situation. The position of the Continental's navy on the lake appeared to Arnold "an object of the utmost importance." The high cliffs and thick woodlands of the two-mile-long and mile-wide Valcour Island concealed his fleet from a southbound armada, and Arnold believed that the narrowness of the channel would prevent the British from massing their fleet against his. He also expressed his preference for the value of the galleys over the gondolas: "I am of Opinion that Row Gallies are of the best construction & cheapest for this Lake."⁴⁸

Despite deploying scouts in August and September to survey British construction operations at St. Jean, Arnold received inaccurate intelligence that purported the British as being well behind the Americans in the race of ship construction for the anticipated engagement.⁴⁹ Indeed, American intelligence remained poor until the day of the naval battle. Neither Gates nor Arnold thought a British attack very likely due to the onset of winter, and Arnold decided that he would return the fleet to Ticonderoga if the British did not emerge by mid-October.⁵⁰ One of Gates' spies, Sergeant Stiles, returned on September 30 from a reconnaissance mission to describe the appearance of earthworks and cannon batteries on the Isle-aux-Noix north of the Richelieu's mouth on Lake Champlain. Gates interpreted these as indicators that the British were assuming a defensive posture and would not attack until the following year's campaign season. On the eve of the green-water battle, Arnold still did not realize that Carleton had deployed his fleet, much less that it was closing in on his position, because the Americans had recently lost the two canoes designated for scouting parties.⁵¹ Fortuitously, Arnold dispatched the schooner *Revenge* north of Valcour Island early on the morning of October 11, where it quickly spotted the British fleet sailing on the eastern side of the island.

When the *Revenge* returned to the American position at eight o'clock the same morning to describe the composition of the approaching enemy, David Waterbury, a general sent by Gates to assist Arnold, encouraged the commodore to retreat south on the main lake. Arnold disagreed, preferring to follow his original plan to remain between Valcour Island and the New York shoreline, despite learning that the British fleet greatly outnumbered his own. He believed that his fleet occupied the most tactically advantageous position. By forming a concentrated front to the enemy, with flanks resting on either shore, he could avoid becoming surrounded by enemy ships.⁵² Positioning the gondolas and galleys in a tight defensive crescent in the channel at nine-thirty in the morning, Arnold ordered Colonel Edward Wigglesworth, his third in command, to sail south in the *Royal Savage* to draw the British ships northward toward the American gunships as they passed the eastern shore of Valcour Island.⁵³

Captain Thomas Pringle of the Royal Navy commanded the British fleet from his flagship *Maria*, which also carried Carleton. Behind the schooners, the gondolas, the radeau, and the frigate trailed forty bateaux holding 1,000 soldiers, and a mosquito fleet of canoes carrying 650 Indian allies, led by Major Thomas Carleton, the commanding

general's younger brother.⁵⁴ The remaining 7,000 troops stood by with their bateaux at Point au Fer, at the northern end of the lake, awaiting orders to sail to Crown Point once Pringle destroyed the Continental fleet.⁵⁵ As the British fleet closed, Arnold signaled for Wigglesworth's sailing ships to rejoin his defensive line. However, due to mishaps by the crew aboard the *Royal Savage*, the schooner missed lining up several times, became isolated south of the American fleet, ran aground, and faced the direct fire of several British vessels, including the *Invincible*. Seeking protection from the west shore of the island, most of the crew abandoned the schooner prior to the arrival of a boarding party from the British gondola *Loyal Convert*.⁵⁶

Near one o'clock, the *Carleton* led seventeen gunboats towards the American line; all the while Arnold's vessels concentrated their fire on the British schooner. Effective fire nearly destroyed the *Carleton* before two British boats towed it out of range of the American defensive line. Pringle did not bring the *Maria* into the fight, a decision likely influenced by an American cannonball impacting against its quarterdeck and severely injuring Carleton's brother, Thomas.⁵⁷ The fearsome *Thunderer* also proved less formidable because its flat-bottom design prevented it from sailing into the wind to reach the Americans. Aboard the radeau, Lieutenant John Enys commented, "We fired some few Shot at the time we first Saw their fleet but believe it might have been just well let alone."⁵⁸ The devastating fire against the Americans originated mostly from the gunboats, which closed within 700 yards of the enemy to form their own line of battle. On the flanks, Indians and British soldiers disembarked to provide musket fire from the shoreline of New York and Valcour Island, although the Americans found this "more annoying than destructive."⁵⁹ The British continued firing broadsides into the American line until about five o'clock, when Pringle ordered the ships to withdraw out of range in order to establish a blockade south of the American position, which would prevent Arnold's mangled fleet from escaping to Ticonderoga.⁶⁰

Assessing his damage reports at dusk, Arnold clearly recognized that his fleet sustained terrible damage: the *Philadelphia* sank around six o'clock; the *Congress* lost its mainmast and began taking on water; the *Washington's* senior leadership were all dead or wounded, and all of the officers, except for the captain, died on the *New York*.⁶¹ Arnold lost sixty men, or ten percent of his crews, in the day's engagement, and they had expended seventy-five percent of their ammunition.⁶² The errors derived from poor seamanship and the lack of gunnery training prior to the battle directly contributed to the loss of American vessels and the inaccuracy of their fires against the British fleet. Arnold later bemoaned to Gates that the battle "suffered much for want of Seamen and Gunners."⁶³ In fact, the crews never managed to bring forty-eight of their guns into action on October 11 because they could not maneuver their watercraft into range of the enemy fleet.⁶⁴ The British also suffered approximately sixty dead and wounded, but their superior numbers made this loss of personnel less detrimental to their ability to continue prosecuting the battle. Both of the fleet's largest vessels, the *Thunderer* and *Inflexible*, suffered structural problems that concerned their captains, who informed

Pringle that they would be unable to participate in hostilities until repaired. As his own vessels formed a semicircle to the south of Arnold's fleet, Carleton ordered the severely damaged *Royal Savage* to be destroyed, and the British used the American schooner's own gunpowder to burn it to the waterline.⁶⁵

At seven o'clock that night, Arnold assembled his captains aboard the *Congress* to provide further orders. The Continental fleet would escape in the night, he told them resolutely; surrender was not an option.⁶⁶ Amazingly, the vessels formed a line in the darkness using one hooded lantern at the stern of each ship to pass between the British line and the New York shoreline of Lake Champlain.⁶⁷ At daybreak the British identified the rear element of the withdrawing fleet well beyond artillery range, and a "greatly mortified" Carleton ordered a quick pursuit.⁶⁸ However, unforgiving winds prevented even the fastest British ships from intercepting them. Pringle later explained that the Americans managed to escape due to the "extreme obscurity of the night," but three of his captains wrote in 1779 that their commodore's negligence in positioning his fleet too far away from the New York shoreline provided Arnold with ample room to escape.⁶⁹ One disappointed British artillery officer concurred, writing in his wartime journal that if Carleton had not consolidated his gunboats the night prior, Arnold would not have found a water gap wide enough to sneak past.⁷⁰

Early on the morning of October 12, as his crews patched up leaks and rebuilt masts from their temporary sanctuary near Schuyler Island, nearly ten miles south of Valcour Island, Arnold wrote to Gates: "The whole fleet will make the utmost dispatch to Crown Point, where I beg you will send ammunition and your further orders for us. On the whole, I think we have had a fortunate escape."⁷¹ Indeed, Arnold enjoyed a very narrow escape. Had the British immediately pursued, they would have discovered easy prey since the American fleet continued to disintegrate. Surveying the damage on the *Providence*, its captain ordered it scuttled. The *New Jersey* ran aground, and a Canadian raiding party captured it the following day. For reasons still unclear to historians, the crew of the *Lee* abandoned their cutter, which the British soon captured.⁷²

By the following day, Arnold's luck began to turn for the worse. The winds shifted to come from the south, and the British resumed their pursuit. When his spotters reported that they identified eleven sails on the horizon, Arnold ordered the hospital sloop *Enterprise* to place three crew members on each oar so that it could make its way to Ticonderoga safely ahead of the enemy fleet. Arnold then signaled his remaining vessels to prepare to engage the British at nine o'clock in the morning. The two fleets closed at ten o'clock, but the second battle did not commence until noon. When three British vessels surrounded the *Washington*, Waterbury surrendered without firing a shot. With Pringle's fleet turning in pursuit of Arnold's flagship, the American commodore led the *Congress* and the remaining four gondolas into Ferris Bay, on the southeastern shore of the lake, ten miles from Crown Point. Run aground, he ordered the cannons to be dumped overboard and the vessels burned, so as to avoid capture by the enemy. The British closed in but did not seek to prevent the destruction of the vessels or

the escape of their crews.⁷³ Marine Sergeant James Wilkinson of the *Congress* later recounted the dramatic affair:

[Arnold] set [the ships] on fire but ordered the colours not be struck, and as they grounded, the marines were directed to jump overboard, with their arms and accoutrements, to ascent a bank about twenty-five feet elevation, and form a line for the defense of their vessels and flags against the enemy, Arnold being the last man who debarked. The enemy did not venture into the cove, but kept up a distant cannonade until our vessels were burnt to the water's edge.⁷⁴

The remaining 200 Continentals followed Arnold on the ten-mile trek to Crown Point, a march that narrowly escaped an Indian ambush.⁷⁵ Upon arriving they discovered that the *Trumbull*, *Enterprise*, *Revenge*, and *New York* had also reached the fort. Arnold convinced Colonel Thomas Hartley, the garrison commander, that they could not hold the fort. The vessels' crews helped the troops burn the buildings prior to withdrawing from Crown Point to the much more formidable citadel at Ticonderoga.⁷⁶ Carleton's soldiers seized the vacated Crown Point on October 14, and the British fleet sailed within three miles of Ticonderoga.⁷⁷ Shortly after their arrival at the stone fortress, several British rowboats, flying the flag of truce, approached the fort to return Waterbury and the surviving crews of the *Washington* and *Philadelphia*, completely stunning the Americans.⁷⁸ Gates and Arnold still anticipated an attack against Ticonderoga, and Schuyler, back in Albany, hastened to order an additional 1,000 militiamen from nearby states to reinforce the garrison and bring its strength to nearly 10,000 defenders.⁷⁹

As the Americans struggled to reinforce artillery batteries on both sides of the South River and construct a log boom across the southern mouth of Lake Champlain, Carleton thoroughly surprised Gates and Arnold by turning his fleet around and returning to Canada on October 20. His ground forces also sailed from Crown Point between November 13 and 15.⁸⁰ Carleton still believed that 20,000 Americans stood behind the walls of Ticonderoga. His conviction in the necessity of reinforcements prior to laying siege to the fortress appears to have weighed more heavily in his decision to withdraw than did his concern for the advent of winter.⁸¹ However, the specter of freezing temperatures also proved daunting. Old Man Winter has led to the isolation and destruction of many an expeditionary force whose commander callously dismissed the threat. As one British officer under Carleton explained, "After the 15th November on account of the frost, which begins to set in with great violence about that time... Canada is as much shut out from all communications with the rest of the world as possible, particularly then, as the country from Ticonderoga was in possession of the enemy."⁸² Recalling their isolation in Montreal during the American's siege the previous winter, many British leaders did not wish to become as vulnerable as their enemy had by taking a similar risk for themselves.

Nevertheless, British records suggest that Carleton's lethargy "had prevented the frontier of New England from being burst open."⁸³ Major General William Phillips, Carleton's chief of artillery, had conducted numerous reconnaissance missions of the

American position at the south end of the lake while the navy constructed the fleet. He doubted that 20,000 troops opposed them from within Ticonderoga. At a minimum, Phillips vented after returning to England, the British should have retained a foothold at Crown Point to expedite preparations for resuming offensive operations in the spring of 1777.⁸⁴ Upon receiving reports from Canada, King George III and Prime Minister Lord North both felt that a more aggressive officer than Carleton would not have waited so long to attack the Americans on Lake Champlain in the fall of 1776, and such an officer would have certainly continued to pursue the defeated Americans after sinking Arnold's fleet off of Valcour Island and in Ferris Bay. Lord Germain, Secretary of State for America in North's cabinet, never particularly cared for Carleton, and he seized the opportunity of the retreat from Crown Point to shuffle the army's chain of command in North America. Prior to the next campaign season, Germain selected Burgoyne to replace Carleton as governor-general of Quebec and commander of the next expedition from Canada into New York in the spring of 1777.⁸⁵

By accepting Gates' offer to serve as commodore, Arnold assumed responsibility to delay the British long enough to enable Gates to establish a suitable defense at Ticonderoga in order to prevent Carleton from seizing Albany and uniting with Howe's forces. Despite the tactical loss and the destruction of his fleet, Arnold's delaying action succeeded because of his officers' "Spirited Conduct During the Action."⁸⁶ Military historian Joseph Mitchell contends that, "It may be true that the year saved at Lake Champlain ... saved the Revolution."⁸⁷ The British did not advance toward Albany for another year, and it is unlikely that Gates could have defeated Burgoyne at Saratoga, or even Carleton had he remained in command, without the ten-month reprieve. Without the high-profile British defeat at Saratoga, most scholars agree that France would not have seen the prospects of an American victory as sufficient enough for Louis XVI's government to declare war on the British.⁸⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan considers the Battle of Valcour Island to be one of the two decisive naval battles of the American Revolution (the other being the 1781 Battle of the Virginia Capes) because it directly led to the French alliance. Mahan defends the necessity of France and Spain's entry into the war on the American side: the European allies provided a counterbalance to British sea power, making it possible for the American forces to receive military supplies and resume, although minimally, its transatlantic trade.⁸⁹

It is improbable that Arnold's fleet could have won the Battle of Valcour Island. Given the significant disparities in men and cannon, as well as the critical shortage of gunpowder for training during the summer months, the American fleet could not have accomplished more than a successful delaying tactic against the British, which it did accomplish on October 11, 12, and 13, 1776. Today the gondola *Philadelphia*, one of the American flotilla's gunboats from the battle, is the oldest intact warship displayed in North America. It is located at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.⁹⁰ The small boat stands in silent memory of a battle hardly remembered in the annals of American Revolutionary War history, perhaps because

of its association with the infamous Benedict Arnold. Nevertheless, the engagement proved critical for setting the conditions for victory at Saratoga, and it also offers fascinating insight into the dynamism and courage of the men of the Revolution as well as the significant contributions of the American green-water navy to the protection of the Hudson River Valley and to the country's struggle for independence.

Endnotes

1. Richard M. Ketchum, *Saratoga, Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), xi.
2. For one example, see James M. Volo, *Blue Water Patriots: The American Revolution Afloat* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 208-12.
3. Alfred Thayer Mahan, "Major Operations of the Royal Navy, 1762-1783," in William Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*, Vol. III (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1898), 368.
4. James L. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy: The Ragtag Fleet that Lost the Battle of Lake Champlain but Won the American Revolution* (Camden, Maine: McGraw Hill, 2006), 169.
5. In 1823 completion of the Champlain Canal connected the lake with the Hudson River. Constructed simultaneously with the Erie Canal, it served as a link in the system between Lake Erie and the Atlantic.
6. Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 22.
7. Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783* (1964; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 94-95.
8. Benson J. Lossing, *The Life and Times of Philip Schuyler*, Vol. II (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1873), 135, Special Collections, U.S. Military Academy Library, Jefferson Hall, West Point, NY; hereafter cited as USMA Special Collections.
9. Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (1984; New York: Free Press, 1994), 68-69.
10. Letter, Horatio Gates to John Hancock, July 16, 1776, an enclosure to Gates' letter to George Washington, July 16, 1776, *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*, Vol. 5 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 339.
11. Continental Congress Committee report, quoted in Frederic Jesup Stimson, *My Story: Being the Memoirs of Benedict Arnold: Late Major-General in the Continental Army and Brigadier-General in that of His Britannic Majesty*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 207.
12. In 1818, the nephew of Montgomery arrived in Quebec, requesting to exhume his uncle so he could be laid to rest in the United States. With the permission of the British military commander, friends of the deceased located the grave, recovered the body, and processed through several U.S. towns before reburying the general in St. Paul's Chapel on Broadway in New York City; see *The Sword of Brigadier-General Richard Montgomery, A Memoir*, J. M. LeMoine, ed. (Quebec: Middleton & Dawson, 1870), 29, USMA Special Collections.
13. For an excellent account of the Battle of Quebec, see Thomas A. Desjardin, *Through a Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec, 1775* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006). For the day-to-day experience of one Continental officer who survived the campaign, see *The Invasion of Canada in 1775: Including the Journal of Captain Simeon Thayer, Describing the Perils and Sufferings of the Army under Colonel Benedict Arnold, in Its March through the Wilderness to Quebec*, Edwin Martin Stone, ed. (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co., 1867), USMA Special Collections. Dr. Isaac Senter, Arnold's troop physician also maintained a log of the expedition; see *The Journal of Isaac Senter, on a Secret Expedition against Quebec, under the Command of Col. Benedict Arnold, in September 1775* (1846;

- Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1969).
14. Annual Register, 1776, p. 16, quoted in Edwin Martin Stone, "Introduction," *The Invasion of Canada in 1775*, xvii, USMA Special Collections.
 15. Carleton would not learn of his knighthood until his wife joined him in Montreal from England in early November 1776. See John R. Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia and the Battle of Lake Champlain* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 72.
 16. Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 41.
 17. Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, 37.
 18. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 163.
 19. Mackesy argues that part of the reason Carleton received less materiel than he requested stemmed from Lord George Germain's personal dislike of the general. As Secretary of State, Germain found Carleton to be a less competent commander than Howe, and, upon receiving Carleton's reports during the siege of Montreal, he argued that the governor-general painted a much bleaker picture of the situation facing the British garrison and of the American capabilities than reality would suggest. See Mackesy, *The War for America*, 56-57.
 20. Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, 37-39.
 21. The two schooners were originally British vessels that the Americans captured in November 1775; see *Ibid.*, 59.
 22. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 288-89.
 23. Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, 59.
 24. Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 41.
 25. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 227.
 26. One example of how the United States sought to remove Arnold's service record from the history of the American Revolution can be seen in the Old Cadet Chapel at West Point. Bronze plaques line the right wall of the nave, each naming one of the thirty-six generals who served in the Continental Army. The inscription on last plaque beneath the choir loft reads, "Major General, born 1740," without providing Arnold's name or the date of his death.
 27. James Kirby Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero: An American Warrior Reconsidered* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), xi.
 28. See the introductions of the studies in, Desjardin, *Through a Howling Wilderness*; Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero*, and Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*.
 29. Desjardin, *Through a Howling Wilderness*, 187.
 30. Letter, Arnold to George Washington, June 25, 1776, *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*, Vol. 5, 96.
 31. Stimson, *My Story*, 208.
 32. Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero*, 249.
 33. Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, 18, 23.
 34. Horatio Gates, quoted in *Ibid.*, 4.
 35. Letter, Gates to Washington, July 29, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*, Vol. 5, 500.
 36. Letter, Washington to Gates, August 14, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*, Vol. 6 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 21.
 37. Bratten provides period sketches of most of the specific American and British vessels that participated in the Battle of Valcour Island. While some were drawn by shipbuilders on site, others were done by the British Admiralty after Carleton's men captured several of the ships; see Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, Chapters 2 and 3.
 38. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 228.
 39. Jeduthan Baldwin, *The Revolutionary Journal of Col. Jeduthan Baldwin, 1775-1778*, Thomas Williams Baldwin, ed. (Bangor, Maine: De Burians, 1906), 63.

40. Arnold, entry for June 24, 1775, *Benedict Arnold's Regimental Memorandum Book: Written while at Ticonderoga and Crown Point, 1775* (Philadelphia: Collins, 1884), USMA Special Collections.
41. Letter, Richard Varick to Washington, August 3, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*, Vol. 5, 555.
42. One design flaw possibly caused by building hulls and gun carriages in separate locations was that the stem of each gondola needed to be sawed down at Ticonderoga to provide clearance for the 12-pound guns; see Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 160.
43. *Ibid.*, 32-34.
44. Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero*, 248.
45. On October 1, 1776, Arnold wrote Gates a "Memorandum of Articles which have been repeatedly wrote for, and which we are in the extremest want of," which included 1,740 artillery rounds of grape and shot. See memorandum, Arnold to Gates, in *Horatio Gates Papers, 1726-1828*, microfilm, 3:1082.
46. Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero*, 253.
47. Gates, orders to Arnold, August 7, 1776, in *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:315.
48. Letter, Arnold to Gates, October 10, 1776, in *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:1158.
49. Stimson, *My Story*, 216.
50. The British clearly surprised the Continentals, evidenced by Gates' letter to Philip Schuyler written on the morning of October 11, 1776: "Nothing remarkable has lately happened in this quarter." See *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:1164.
51. Letter, Arnold to Gates, October 10, 1776, in *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:1158.
52. Stimson, *My Story*, 219.
53. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 294-95.
54. James M. Hadden, *Hadden's Journal and Orderly Books: A Journal Kept in Canada and Upon Burgoyne's Campaign in 1776 and 1777*, Horatio Rogers, ed. (Boston: Gregg Press, 1972), 18-19.
55. Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 58.
56. Letter, Arnold to Gates, October 12, 1776, in *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:1184.
57. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 304-5.
58. John Enys, quoted in Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 63.
59. Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 64.
60. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 306.
61. Letter, Arnold to Gates, October 12, 1776, in *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:1184, and Lossing, *The Life and Times of Philip Schuyler*, 139.
62. Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero*, 279.
63. Benedict Arnold, quoted in Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 65.
64. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 298.
65. Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 65-66.
66. Letter, Arnold to Gates, October 12, 1776, in *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:1184.
67. Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero*, 280.
68. Lossing, *The Life and Times of Philip Schuyler*, 141.
69. Thomas Pringle, quoted in Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 66.
70. Hadden, *Hadden's Journal and Orderly Book*, 24.
71. Benedict Arnold, quoted in Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 67.
72. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 318-20.
73. Martin, *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero*, 283-84.
74. James Wilkinson, quoted in Bratten, *The Gondola* Philadelphia, 69.
75. Confiding in Schuyler about Arnold after hearing of his escape to Crown Point, Gates wrote, "Few Men ever met with so many hair Breadth Scapes [sic] in so short a space of time." See letter, Gates to Schuyler, October 15, 1776, in *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:1223.

76. Baldwin, *The Revolutionary Journal of Col. Jeduthan Baldwin*, 80-81.
77. Nelson, *Benedict Arnold's Navy*, 319-20.
78. After their release, the prisoners spoke so highly of the medical care and treatment that they received from Carleton that Gates feared they would influence the other men under his command to think more favorably of the British. Therefore, Gates promptly ordered all of the former prisoners of war to be sent home; see Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, 71.
79. Letter, Schuyler to Washington, October 16, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*, Vol. 6, 579-80. Specific militia numbers are provided in Lossing, *The Life and Times of Philip Schuyler*, 144.
80. Hadden, *Hadden's Journal and Orderly Book*, 34.
81. Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, 71-72.
82. Anonymous British officer, quoted in Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 42. To add to the concerns of the British, the first snowfall of the season occurred on Lake Champlain in late September; see Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, 54.
83. Mackesy, *The War for America*, 107.
84. Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 42.
85. Mackesy, *The War for America*, 106.
86. Postscript to letter, Arnold to Gates, October 12, 1776, in *Horatio Gates Papers*, microfilm, 3:1184.
87. Joseph Mitchell, *Military Leaders in the American Revolution* (McLean, Va.: EPM Publications, 1989), 32-33.
88. Volo is one of the few historians who argue that the French Council of State had already determined that it would support the Americans as a way to restore the balance of power in Europe disturbed by the Seven Years' War, and that the French government would have intervened without the victory at Saratoga; see Volo, *Blue Water Patriots*, 232. Nevertheless, it seems more likely that the French would not have declared war on the British if they thought that the American rebellion would imminently collapse, and Gates' victory at Saratoga indicated to French elites that the Continental Army remained a viable threat to British forces.
89. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influences of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (1890; New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), 289.
90. Bratten recounts the salvaging of the *Philadelphia* from Lake Champlain on August 9, 1935; see Bratten, *The Gondola Philadelphia*, Chapter 6.

Scholarly Forum: The War of 1812 in the Upper Hudson Region

In recognition of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812, often considered America's forgotten war, HRVR is looking at where the conflict manifested in the upper Hudson region. Although the most famous aspects of the war are probably the burning of Washington and Andrew Jackson's victory in New Orleans, the following forum reveals that New York State's upper Hudson witnessed considerable action as well.

The Origins of The War of 1812:

Causes, Reinterpretations, and Ruminations

Harold W. Youmans

Mr. Madison's War

In its broadest sense, the origins of the War of 1812 can be said to date from September 3, 1783. It was on that day the negotiators representing the thirteen colonies on the eastern slope of North America and His Britannic Majesty, King George III (1738-1820), meeting in Paris, agreed to end the war that had raged between those two entities since 1775. Yes, the thirteen united colonies, now the United States, were to be free, independent, and sovereign: a state among states in the international community. A nation!

Almost from the start, those brave founding brothers discovered that keeping the peace and growing a nation was to be as challenging as winning the Revolutionary War. Almost from the very beginning, the nations of Europe with whom we quickly found we must have peaceful relations in order to prosper were at times uninterested or even hostile to American interests. The Founders were not unintelligent men. They recognized that statecraft, economic influences, the ability to wage war, and grow were all within their power. One after the other, Britain and France treated the young nation in a manner suited to their national interests. In the 1790s, more and more Americans realized that they, too, had to assert their own self-interest, or fail as a nation.

For the past 200 years, challenged diplomatic and economic historians have debated the causes of the war. Some of these writers came to the debate with a predisposition, others employed the logic of their academic discipline, and still others were writing for the audiences of their time. What we may find is that war between nations almost never has a single cause. One cause will bring the political "right" on board, another the "left." One or two causes will combine to produce a majority in the Legislature or among the advisors of the Executive. Some decisions in a deliberative, political setting may be inexplicable. While the causes of the War of 1812 are well-known, the ques-

tions for today are which, if any, causes predominated the others; which combination produced the “coalition of the willing” in 1812, and which, viewed today, withstand the judgment of history laid bare?

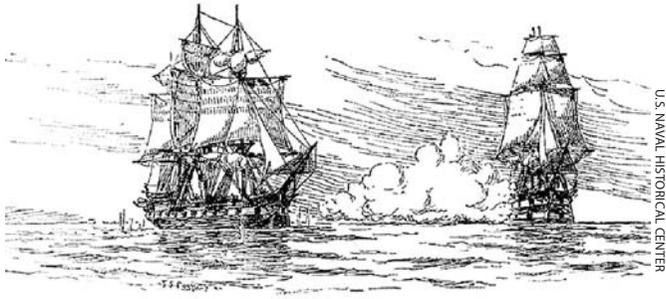
Professor George Rogers Taylor (1895-1983) provided in his short *The War of 1812: Past Justifications and Present Interpretations* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1963), a convenient list of the causes of the war. These were: British violation of American rights of uninterrupted commerce on the high seas, impressment of seamen, arming and incitement of Indians on the frontier, the desire of Americans to annex Canada and Florida, the belief that British measures were responsible for depressing prices, and insults to national honor and self-respect.

This essay will explore but not fully answer the questions bedeviling historians these many years. As we examine their explanations of the causes, ask yourself: Is the commentator's reasoning logical and consistent? Are their arguments plausible? Are they still pertinent? Are the declared motives of the contemporary participants the real ones or are they presented merely to sway public opinion?

The Challenges to American Sovereignty

As the first decade of the new nineteenth century opened, the main challenges to American sovereignty were primarily economic. Along the Atlantic coast, trade with customers and suppliers in Europe and the West Indies dominated economic thought. The export trade had soared. Shipbuilding rose in importance. With Britain occupied in the French Revolutionary War after 1793 and her merchant fleet busy with supporting British interests on the Continent, America was spreading her influence. China had been reached and was becoming a regular port of call. The South Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans were open to American shipping. The new nation had proven that she would assert her rights when she took on the French in 1797 and the Barbary Pirates in 1801. With France and Britain at war, the Americans expanded into the carrying trade, serving the interests of both belligerents. Napoleon's Continental System, seeking to drive the British from European ports, was countered by Britain's economic warfare policy, the Orders in Council. The Americans were being drawn in. Each move by France or reaction by Britain put additional limitations on who Americans could trade with, what goods her ships could carry, and where they could dock. America's economy was being controlled by the belligerents. American independence, at least her economic sovereignty, was being frittered away.

As the Napoleonic War continued with the collapse of the Peace of Amiens in 1803, Britain suffered more and more manpower problems, not the least of which was the need to man the vast navy she had to maintain. Shipboard life in those days was a “floating hell” and desertion was high. Many men assiduously avoided naval service: some by immigration (mainly to the United States), some by “self-mutilation,” and some by active enlistment in the American merchant marine. The British were having none of that; throughout the prewar period they exercised the right to stop vessels on the



Action between USS Chesapeake and HMS Leopard, 22 June 1807. Sketch by Fred S. Cozzens, copied from his 1897 book “Our Navy—Its Growth and Achievements.” It depicts *Leopard*, at right, firing on the *Chesapeake* to enforce a demand that she submit to a search of her crew for British Navy deserters. Photo #: NH 74526

high seas and “impress” known or suspected British citizens into their Navy. There is some question as to the total number of seamen impressed during those times, but there was no question when the captain of the HMS *Leopard* hailed, fired on, and took seamen from the USS *Chesapeake* in 1807. As the fortunes of war shifted, the rate of searches and impressment spiked in 1811.

In the West, friction was developing along three lines. To the old Northwest, Americans immediately came into conflict with British interests in Canada, as both nations rushed to supply the seemingly insatiable appetite for furs and fur products. On the Kentucky and Tennessee farmsteads and in the old Southwest, access to markets down the Mississippi River brought the U.S. into renewed conflict with a decaying Spain, a reemerging France, and the ever-hovering British. While Americans west of the Appalachians sought markets for their goods, foreign influences at New Orleans—above all, Spain and England, which supported the Native Americans—created obstacles to their growth. Suspicions of British support for the Native Americans did no small harm to the fragile peace between the former colonial master and its independent offspring.

National Interests at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century

As the first decade of the nineteenth century came to a close, it appeared to many in the American government that Great Britain was the greater threat to America; by 1810, the Madison Administration was clearly focused on that threat. What was unclear at the time to most Americans engaged in this diplomatic effort was the depth of British commitment to its perceived national interests. Nearly all of Britain’s actions between 1793 and 1815 can be attributed to either one of two overriding national interests—first the defeat of Napoleon (1769-1821) and his allies on the Continent, and second, Britain’s need to maintain access to markets to feed not only its armies, but its people at home. This meant a strong and positive assertion of political, military, and economic power

over the transatlantic and worldwide trade routes. These interests brought them into direct and continuing conflict with the United States.

By 1810, American national interests were no less compelling. It sought to protect and grow its “carrying trade,” assert influence among its border areas (by annexation, if necessary), eliminate any threats caused by contact with the Native Americans, and ultimately gain and maintain respect among the nations of the world.

Diplomatic Postures and Policies

The British government, controlled most often by the Tories, had no real need to treat with the Americans so long as Britain was at war with Napoleon. They did make some early concessions when agreeing to withdraw from the Northwest Territories and submit to arbitration as conditions of the Jay Treaty (1795-96), but after 1807 the Orders in Council were stridently and strictly enforced by the Royal Navy, instigating a growing resentment among a wide swath of Americans. Further, both Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and James Madison (1751-1836), with their Republican allies—at heart pacifists—tried “peaceful” economic coercion to bring around the English policy. Both of their diplomatic attempts, the Embargo (1807) and the Non-Intercourse Acts (1809-11), each with their political variants, failed to prevent tensions from rising. What these policies really did was to play into Napoleon’s hands without extracting any meaningful concessions from England.

Although certainly not insignificant, these diplomatic postures and policies of both Britain and the United States were unavailing. They failed to address the perceived needs of both; then as now, without recognition of the needs and objectives of opposing political entities, there is no avenue of peaceful reconciliation. War was coming in 1810. It was only a matter of time.

President Madison’s War Message

By June 1, 1812, that time had run out. Madison sent his War Message to the Congress. It recounted failed attempts at diplomacy and the events that had driven him to this end. In less than three weeks, the United States was at war. Politicians and editors at the time sharply disagreed over the real causes of the war. Historians and theorists have continued to disagree over them ever since. Nonetheless from June 1812 on, any discussion of the war’s causes have begun with those outlined by Madison in his War Message. In the U.S., the Orders in Council, impressment, search and seizure, and British support for Indian deprecations were held up at the time as just causes for war. Over time and particularly in the twentieth century, however, we have seen major shifts by historians as they interpret the causes of the war.

Two works are of particular interest to those studying the causes of the War of 1812. These are: *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1961) by University of Michigan Professor Bradford Perkins (b. 1925) and *The Causes of The War of 1812* (Philadelphia, PA: University of

**BY THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
United States of America,
A PROCLAMATION:**

WHEREAS the Congress of the United States, by virtue of the Constituted Authority vested in them, have declared by their act, bearing date the eighteenth day of the present month that WAR exists between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Dependencies thereof, and the United States of America and their territories; Now, therefore, I, **JAMES MADISON**, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the same to all whom it may concern: and I do specially enjoin on all persons holding offices, civil or military, under the authority of the United States, that they be vigilant and zealous, & discharging the duties respectively incident thereto: And I do moreover exhort all the good people of the United States, as they love their country; as they value the precious heritage derived from the virtue and valor of their fathers; as they feel the wrongs which have forced on them the last resort of injured nations; and as they consult the best means, under the blessing of Divine Providence, of fabricating its calamities; that they exert themselves in preserving order, in promoting concord, in maintaining the authority and the efficacy of the laws; and in supporting and invigorating all the measures which may be adopted by the Constituted Authorities, for obtaining a speedy, a just, and an honorable peace.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed to these presents.

(SEAL)

DONE at the City of Washington, the nineteenth day of June, one thousand eight hundred and twelve, and of the Independence of the United States the thirty-sixth.

(Signed)

JAMES MADISON,

By the President,
(Signed)

JAMES MONROE, Secretary of State.

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By the President of the United States of America, a proclamation. Washington, 1812

Pennsylvania Press, 1962) by University of Wisconsin Professor Reginald Horsman (b. 1931). Besides adding much that is new and revealing on the internal political situation in Great Britain as well as the United States, both authors make a serious attempt to weigh the various factors involved in the coming war. They are both used in this essay.

The Maritime Causes

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain and France had been at war for almost a decade. Neither paid much attention to what came to be called the “Neutral Rights” of non-belligerents. America claimed its neutrality from the beginning of the conflict at the same time that it experienced a tremendous growth in trade. It was inevitable that these policies (proclaimed neutrality with an insistence on neutral rights) were to produce conflict with the warring European powers. Neither Britain nor France would concede the right of any third party to trade with its enemies. The seeds of the conflict sprouted from these opposing interests.

The maritime issues were directly mentioned in Madison’s War Message and for decades were the most frequently quoted causes. However, if these were the causes, many asked why the U.S. had not gone to war earlier, when the rates of both impressment and seizures were higher than in 1812? As early as 1890, Henry Adams (1838-1918), the great-grandson of John Adams, in his monumental, nine-volume *History of the United States* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1890), hinted at a reinterpretation

tion providing a partial answer. Adams castigated both British policy (suggesting that it was a challenge to America's honor and interests) and the Republicans, whom he cast as incompetent. Nonetheless, he still gave maritime issues as the primary cause.

These views also were also echoed by John Bach McMaster (1852-1932) in *The History of the American People* (New York, NY: D. Appleton, 1885-1913) and Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) in *Sea Power in Its Relations to the War of 1812* (Boston, MA: Little-Brown, 1905). Both the engineer-turned-historian and the naval theorist and philosopher, respectively, held that the British violations of American rights on the high seas were the prime cause of the war.

By the 1940s, many historians were still maintaining these as the primary cause. However, Alfred Leroy Burt (1888-1971), a Canadian-born Rhodes scholar writing in his *The United States, Great Britain, and British North America from the Revolution to the Establishment of Peace after the War of 1812* (New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1940) and Warren H. Goodman, in his "Origins of the War of 1812: A Survey of Changing Interpretations," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (MVHR) 28/2 (September 1941): 171-186, began to show the subtlety of the issue by discussing the role of international political theory and the failure of America's policy of neutrality. Burt went so far as to state that Madison's mention of the Indian menace in the War Message was an afterthought and even Congress did not take that cause seriously.

Some writers maintained that America could have avoided the war if its diplomatic postures had been more attuned to the realities facing Britain. These writers are represented by Louis Martin Sears (1885-1960), who posits in his *Jefferson and the Embargo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1927) that Jefferson and Madison were idealistic dreamers. Another writer pointing to the U.S. diplomatic failure in dealing with the maritime issues was the English economic historian Herbert Heaton (1890-1973). In his "Non-Importation, 1806-1812," *Journal of Economic History* 1/2 (November 1941): 118-197, Heaton pointed to the total failure of American counter moves vis-a-vis the Orders in Council. Leonard D. White (1891-1958) in his *The Jeffersonians, a Study in Administrative History, 1801-1829* (New York, NY: Macmillan & Co., 1951), in the end simply said that American diplomacy only delayed, but did not cause the war. The other two authors above would have agreed. Britain was simply not as vulnerable to this type of economic coercion as Jefferson and Madison thought.

The maritime issues were real enough. The U.S. response to the British policies was in the end unavailing. It is fully within the logic of reason to lay at the feet of these British policies a cause for war in 1812. The persistent question today, however, is what would have been the result if America had 1) abandoned its policy of neutrality early on in the Anglo-French conflict, or 2) moved more aggressively on the diplomatic front, or 3) simply waited to see what outcome the European war was to bring. These questions are the fodder of future fulminating on the causes of the War of 1812.



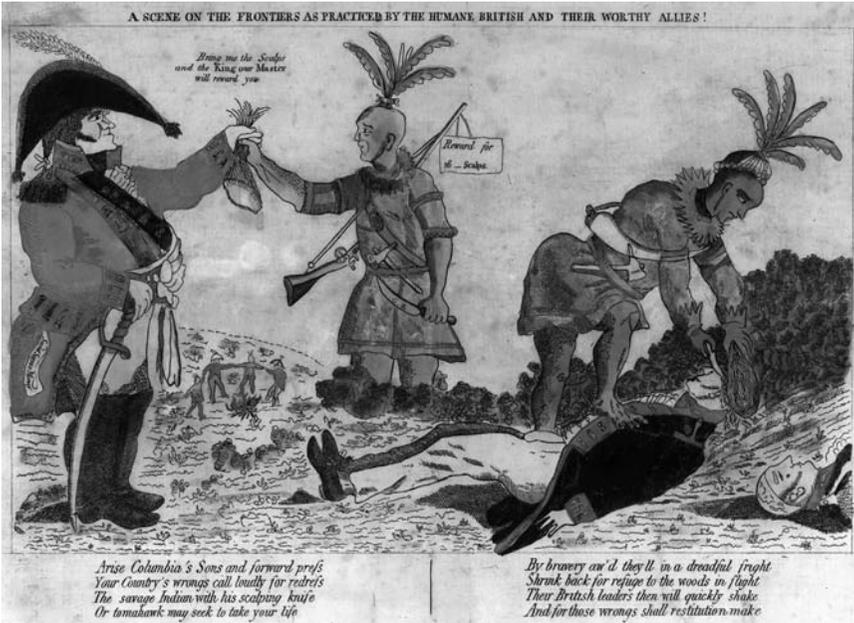
A view of Col. Johnson's engagement with the savages (commanded by Tecumseh) near the Moravian town, October 5th, 1812.

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Land Hunger Causes

The leaders in the Congress from the newer Western and older Southern states and territories saw the elimination of European influences on their western peripheries as the solution to their economic challenges. By the early twentieth century the land hunger thesis was all the rage in academic circles. The first argument to appear in print was by Howard T. Lewis (1888-1973). In his "A Reanalysis of the Causes of the War of 1812," *Americana* 6 (1911): 506-16, 577-85, he flatly stated that Westerners wanted the rich Canadian lands and were quite willing to go to war for them. Dice R. Anderson (1880-1942), also writing in 1911, advanced the view that only by driving the British from Canada could the economy grow and the Indians be quieted (See "The Insurgents of 1811," *American Historical Association, Annual Report for 1911*, I: 165-76).

In "Western Land Hunger and the War of 1812," *MVHR* 10 (March 1924): 366-395, Columbia University historian and dean Louis M. Hacker (1899-1987) reached the same conclusion independently: He thought that the hunger for conquest in the West explained the war. Diplomatic historian Julius W. Pratt (1888-1983) vigorously continued the theme in "Western Aims in the War of 1812," *MVHR* 12 (June 1925): 38-50, stating, "[t]he belief that the United States would one day annex Canada had a continuous existence from the early days of the War for Independence to the War of 1812.... The rise of Tecumseh (1769-1813), backed, as was universally believed, by



A scene on the frontiers as practiced by the humane British and their worthy allies! Charles, William, 1776-1820, artist, 1812. Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-ppmsca-10752 (digital file from original)

the British, produced an urgent demand in the Northwest that the British be expelled from Canada. This demand was a factor of primary importance in bringing on the war.”

Professor Pratt continued this argument in his *Expansionists of 1812* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1925). There he suggested that although the land hunger thesis was but one set of causes, the vote in Congress was a bargain struck between the South and West to achieve their respective ends. Pratt maintained that it was not primarily the land the western states wanted. It was the elimination of the support provided to the Indians, by cutting off their supplies and lowering their resistance to western expansion. In the South, it was Spanish protection to runaway slaves and the limited access to Gulf ports that motivated the business interests there. Pratt, however, does not fully explain the results of the vote for war in Congress. For example, why did Pennsylvania, which by 1812 had no real Indian threat or no real desire for Florida, vote sixteen to two in Congress in favor of war?

Lastly, while George Dangerfield (1904-1986) also stressed the importance of frontier imperialism as a cause for the war in *The Era of Good Feelings* (London: Methuen & Co., 1953), Horsman concluded that there was simply too much emphasis given to the expansionist factors.

Economic Causes

All war on this planet is based in “economics.” Just ask any twentieth-century historian. Again, Professor Taylor (“Prices in the Mississippi Valley Preceding the War of 1812,” *Journal of Economic and Business History* 3 (1930-1931): 148-163, and “Agrarian Discontent in the Mississippi Valley Preceding the War of 1812,” *Journal of Political Economy* 39 (1931): 471-74) analyzed the land hunger argument by bringing forward a thesis that the war was not solely the result of maritime issues, nor land hunger, nor the Indians: it came about because of the government’s failure to provide an atmosphere that kept commodity and trade prices up. The trans-Appalachian western economies depended on 1) foreign trade, 2) access to adjoining lands, 3) peace or at least accommodation with the Indians, and 4) importantly, “national respect” (read: national honor).

Others joined Taylor. Margaret Kinard Latimer (“South Carolina—A Protagonist of the War of 1812,” *American Historical Review* 61 (July 1956): 914-929) notes that in agricultural areas in the U.S. a “depression” drove down prices in 1811 and 1812. It was no surprise that War Hawks John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), Langdon Cheves (1776-1857), and William Lowndes (1782-1822) were all from South Carolina. It was the government’s task, said these new Republicans, to protect and promote the commerce of the country. The argument sounded more like the Federalists of the 1790s than the republicanism of the Jeffersonian Revolution in 1800, but what would accomplish the political and economic aims “faster” than a removal of the perceived impediments to “prosperity”?

National Honor Causes

Some other writers rejected the political, hegemonic, and economic arguments and based their theory of the causes of the war on pure jingoistic “honor.” These theorists were represented by writers Norman K. Risjord (“1812: Conservatives, War Hawks, and the Nation’s Honor,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 18 (April 1961): 196-210), a DePauw University professor, and the renowned Reginald Horsman (“Western War Aims, 1811-1812,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 53 (March, 1957): 1-18).

Risjord maintained that even a casual search through the letters and speeches of the day reveals that those who fought were primarily concerned with the nation’s honor and integrity. Stop search and seizure, restore honor, conquer Canada and take Florida, increase respect among nations, diminish the Indian challenge, improve markets and insure “prosperity”—all this was in the mind of those voting for war! Does this thesis bring us back to the maritime issues as the prime causes of the war? Probably, but...

The national honor thesis does not fully explain sectional divisions. Why did New England ultimately and vigorously oppose the war? My answer is twofold: First, New Englanders were traders and businessmen. Losses at sea were common. Added to all of the other possible reasons for a ship’s loss, search and seizure and impressment were just other costs of doing business. They could live with that. Second, going to war offended their religious upbringing. Note here that the vast bulk of the religious opposition to the war sprang from the New England Puritan traditions.

The Nature of War in 1812

As we today try to understand the causes of the War of 1812, we must keep in mind that our view is backward, not forward. We know today what Madison and the War Hawks did not; we know what Spencer Percival (1762-1812) and his Tories did not. An understanding of what war was from the top down was known to those learned eighteenth- and nineteenth-century leaders who had studied Thucydides. Some may even have read of Gustavus Adolphus (1594-1632) or even Frederick the Great (1712-1786). But our view is tainted today by what we know of Baron Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) and the modern view of war. Clausewitz, our modern “God of War Theorist,” was a twenty-six-year-old Prussian in the service of Imperial Russia in 1812. At his death in 1831, his work, for which today he is so renowned, was unfinished. Madison never read it; neither did Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) or Alexander Macomb (1782-1841) or Jacob J. Brown (1775-1828), until perhaps after the war.

In 1812, the activities of the potential belligerents were only vaguely known to one another weeks if not months after the event. Madison and his advisors could not know what was really happening in London. And perhaps after all is said, Bradford Perkins, the Bancroft Prize-winning professor, was right. In his *Prologue to War*, he maintained that wars cannot often be explained in rational terms and that emotional factors more often than not dictate the course of history.

A unique way of looking at the causes of the War of 1812 was the technique employed by Harold M. Hyman (b. 1924), Rice University professor and editor of the America’s Alternatives Series, written in the 1970s. Hyman, too, realized that the decisions of the Jefferson and Madison administrations between 1807 and 1812 were made only “in the light of” the information “available” to the historical participants. General George C. Marshall (1880-1959) knew the phenomenon well. He made life-and-death decisions for a decade based upon only the information at his command at the time. Using the detailed study of contemporary documents made by Robert A. Rutland (b. 1922), Hyman approached the subject asking:

Why did the decision makers (the legislative and executive branches of the U.S. government between 1805 and 1812) adopt one course of action and reject others? What influence did then-existing expert opinion (their Cabinet, with “portfolios” in State, War, Navy, and the Treasury Departments), administrative structures (an almost non-existent military staff structure), and budgetary factors (the rational opinions of Albert Gallatin, 1761-1849) exert on the decision? What did the participants hope for? What did they fear? On what information did they base their decisions? How were the decisions executed?

In *Madison’s Alternatives: The Jeffersonian Republicans and the Coming of War, 1805-1812* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1975), Hyman, relying on Rutland’s studies, concluded that if Madison had waited just one more year war could have been averted. However, he also noted that Madison and the nation in the years leading to the war reacted daily in face of both “known” and “unknown” facts and factors.

With all this said, here is a strong candidate for the most immediate cause of the War of 1812:

The “Unknown Unknowns” of 1811

In historians’ discussion of America’s march to war in 1812, little has been written about England’s part in precipitating the conflict and the events in 1811. Relations with Britain had been up and down since 1783. Britain had to deal with the perceived threats from Revolutionary France in the late eighteenth century and from Napoleon in the early nineteenth century.

The war between Britain and France had resumed in 1803 and in the intervening time came the *Chesapeake* incident, the Rule of 1756 enforcement that banned American ships from French ports, British intrigues with the western Indians, and impressment, each of which focused the minds of American leaders. Ever hopeful, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison had pursued progressively coercive economic retaliation in an effort to promote a more conciliatory Britain. Their efforts were to fail by June 1812.

Nonetheless, during the winter of 1810 to 1811 there was renewed American optimism. There were domestic political stirrings in Britain that may, just may, presage a new policy. King George III had finally been declared irrevocably insane following the death of his favorite, Princess Amelia (1783-1810). His son, the Prince Regent, later George IV (1762-1830), was a different fellow who had toyed with both the hardline Tories and the realistic and commercially minded Whigs.

A lean toward the Tories would lead to a quickened march to war; a lean toward the followers of America’s friend, Alexander Baring (1774-1848), and the march would lead to conciliation and peace. Yes, 1811 was to be the year. There were still “unknown unknowns” ahead, but it could not go on much longer.

February 3, 1811, is not a date that quickly comes to mind when historians assemble chronologies of the War of 1812, but on that date perhaps the most significant prewar political event of the age occurred. With authority granted by the Regency Act, the Prince sent the message: Spencer Perceval’s (1762-1812) ministry was to stay in office.

The view of Madison and Henry Clay (1777-1852) that the ascendancy of the Prince Regent would lead to a repeal of the Orders in Council was dashed. The further diplomatic efforts of William Pinkney (1764-1822) as American ambassador in London, and those of Augustus J. Foster (1780-1848), the prince’s man in Washington, were to come to naught.

In July 1811, Madison directed the convening of what turned out to be the War Hawk Congress with Henry Clay as the Speaker of the House for the following November. Brushing aside Whig suggestions, Perceval continued to pursue the policies in effect since 1807 that were inimical to the Americans.

Assessing the attitudes of Madison and the Congress given what they knew in the spring of 1811 is difficult. There were still many “unknowns” ahead. The U.S. would reinstate the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809, prohibiting trade with Britain. The USS

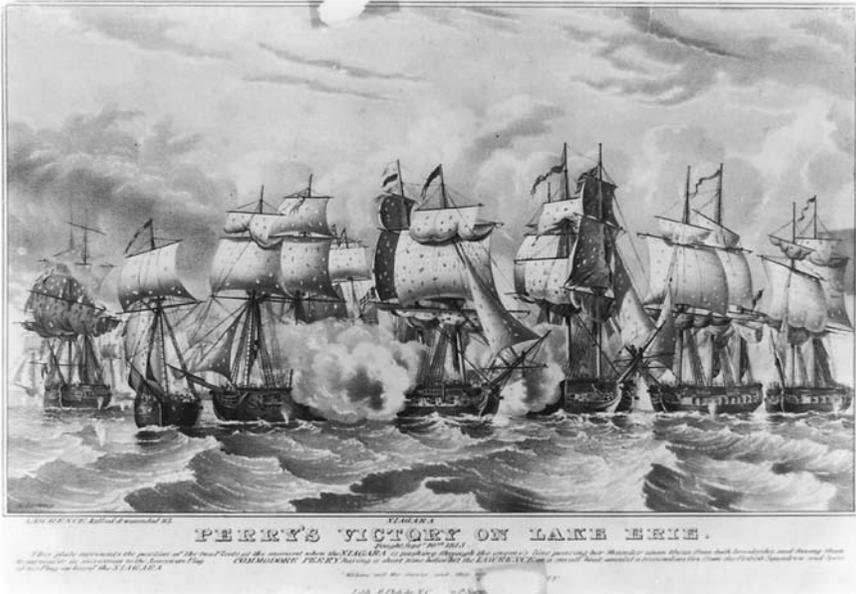
President would strike back at impressment in its battle with the HMS *Little Belt* in May of 1811. Westerners would strike at Tecumseh's Indian confederation at Tippecanoe in Indiana Territory. Georgians would encourage "revolt" in Spanish East Florida. And the British? They would begin their steady march through the Iberian Peninsula under the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) that would lead to Napoleon's first abdication.

In *James Madison: The President, 1809-1812* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1956), Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaperman Irving Brant gives another clue as to Madison's attitude. The President had received a formal communication from the British Foreign Secretary, the Right Honorable Robert Stewart, Lord Castlereagh (1769-1822), through Foster that spring. It seemed to indicate that the Orders in Council would be obdurately defended.

Neither Perceval's death at the hand of a lunatic in April 1812 nor a firm inclination by the Earl of Liverpool (1770-1828), his successor, that the Orders in Council would be withdrawn were enough to head off the declaration of war on June 18, 1812. The final slide toward war was underway. That slide began on February 3, 1811, when the future King George IV supported one of his "known knowns"—a political party whose policies would lead to war with America.

Conclusions

As we can see, each of the causes of the war has been, and will throughout this bicentennial period, be thoroughly discussed and analyzed. What is really clear, though, is that these present and future discussions will do no more than echo the contemporary arguments raised in the spring of 1812. The decision to go to war is, and should be, complicated. One of the enduring strengths of our union is our ability to debate and put forward various and alternative explanations of past events. Whether it was the Price Regent's decision in February 1811, or a broad and deep economic and diplomatic failure, we should welcome the further discussion of the origins of the War of 1812.



Perry's victory on Lake Erie: fought Sept. 10th 1813.
 Hand-colored lithograph published by N. Currier, [between 1835 and 1856]
 Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-2775

How the Battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain Influenced the American Narrative

Joseph F. Callo

In this anniversary year of the War of 1812, there has been quite a bit of attention focused on the apparently never-ending argument about who won the war. That's a relevant question, of course, but what is probably more important are the long-term, strategic effects and the lessons learned from the conflict that has been labeled "America's forgotten war."

In the past, there also has been a tendency to perceive the war as a series of free-standing events. The victories of the U.S. Navy in 1812—the dramatic single-ship actions between the USS *Constitution* and HMS *Guerriere* in August, the USS *United States* and HMS *Macedonian* in October, and the USS *Constitution* and HMS *Java* in December—are prime examples of that "spotlight" approach. So is the Battle of New Orleans. And inevitably there has been a lot of attention paid to the capture

and burning of the Capitol and White House, to the point of distraction from more significant issues.

The time has come—in fact it's past due—to move on to a more thorough analysis of the War of 1812. That involves connecting the events and discussing such issues as the influence of geography and the political environments in the United States and Great Britain that drove the conflict.

Happily, there are some encouraging recent indications that we are beginning to get beyond the superficial discussions of the War of 1812. Two recent books—*1812: The Navy's War* by George Daughan and *Perilous Fight: America's Intrepid War with Britain on the High Seas, 1812-1815* by Stephen Budiansky are examples. Additional positive signs include special programs that are being pursued by the U.S. Navy's Naval History and Heritage Command in partnership with local groups around the country. In addition, the recently appointed Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, announced his intention to focus on the War of 1812 as a way to enlighten Americans about the important role the U.S. Navy has played in ensuring our national security.

Against that background and in hopes of shifting toward a new perspective on the War of 1812, the Battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain represent special opportunities. Those two significant actions were closely related chronologically and geopolitically, and they had a profound impact on the immediate and long-term results of the war. From a geographer's point of view, the two events are classic examples of how geography plays a role in making history. In another context, a sociologist could focus on how those two events became part of the cultural essence of a major national region. And in the seven-volume *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to 1900*, there is a passage that articulates a British naval historian's view about why the Battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain have special geostrategic significance:

These inland waters were the scenes of important naval engagements—important, that is, in their effects, though they were waged between diminutive flotillas. . . . The naval warfare on the lakes, therefore, differed in several points from the naval warfare on the ocean. On the lakes, the success of a sea fight might, and did, determine the success or the failure of military operations the outcome of which would have great weight upon the result of the war; whereas, on the ocean, no success which the American warships could win could possibly have any other than a moral effect.¹

The Battle of Lake Erie

Two reasons—one short-term and one long-term—why the Battle of Lake Erie is of more than passing interest are summarized in *Sea Power: A Naval History*, edited by E.B. Potter and Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz. In that book, the authors state that after the battle:

The British, promptly evacuating Detroit and Malden, retreated up the Thames River Valley with their Indian allies, but (U.S. General) Harrison's forces overtook them. . . . In this encounter, known as the Battle of the Thames, the Indian leader Tecumseh was killed. With his death, Indian opposition to the Americans

collapsed. The “northwest” rested securely in American hands, and British plans to create an Indian buffer state between the United States and Canada had to be abandoned.²

In their evaluation, the authors focused on an immensely important strategic issue, namely the potential future expansion in the Northwest of the United States. That was a subject that was not only of huge political importance at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but had a significant influence on the geographic character, as well as the “cultural personality,” of the nation in which we live today.

In its details, the Battle of Lake Erie is really two tightly intertwined narratives. One story involves how the battle fit in the overall logistics and communications role of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain during the War of 1812. The war along the northern border of the United States was much more than a struggle to occupy land, although some see it in those limited terms. In a rugged frontier area and at a time when ground transportation was difficult—at times impossible—control of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain was critical. The Duke of Wellington reflected a clear understanding of that reality in 1814, when he commented: “[N]either I nor anyone else can achieve success (in the war), in the way of conquests, unless you have naval superiority on the lakes.”³ Wellington, who saw well beyond the ground tactics of his campaigns, made similar comments about the broader importance of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain on a number of occasions.

From a strategic perspective, the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain—more specifically who *controlled* those lakes—was the key to the entire northern theater of the war. And up to the point of the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813, the strategic issues had not been decided. Each side had its successes and failures. Lake Ontario is an example of these alternating fortunes. In the spring of 1813, the United States had transitory control of the lake; on May 27, successful attacks were carried out against the Canadian capital of York (now Toronto) and Fort George. As a result, the British evacuated the entire Niagara frontier. By June, however, the British had taken nominal control of the lake, and as a result a major American expedition into Canada was defeated. Then in August and September the Americans once again held the upper hand. What was developing was, more than anything else, a shipbuilding race between the United States and Great Britain on the key northern lakes.

The second story of the Battle of Lake Erie is that of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, the young naval officer who emerged as its hero. Perry was born in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. His father, Captain Christopher Perry, and younger brother, Matthew, were both career naval officers, and he joined the Navy as a midshipman at age thirteen. Perry served in the Caribbean, Mediterranean, and Atlantic. At the beginning of the War of 1812, he was placed in command of twelve gunboats operating out of Newport, Rhode Island, and New London, Connecticut.

Anxious for a more active command, Perry asked to be transferred. As a result, he was sent to the Great Lakes to serve under Commodore Isaak Chauncey, who was in

command of the U.S. Navy's operations there. Eventually, Perry was sent to Presque Isle (now Erie, Pennsylvania) to supervise the construction of a fleet to be deployed on Lake Erie and then to take command of that fleet. In that assignment he worked closely with Noah Brown to complete six vessels, including two brigs, that eventually joined three other vessels from the area to form the U.S. fleet that fought the Battle of Lake Erie. In gathering and organizing the resources required to build and then train a cohesive fleet from the ground up was a monumental task, something far beyond what might be expected of a young naval officer.

Perry admired the courage of his fellow officer, James Lawrence, who had been killed in combat in June 1813 while captain of the USS *Chesapeake*. When mortally wounded, Lawrence's final command was the now-famous line "Don't give up the ship." Perry adopted Lawrence's entreaty for his battle flag at the Battle of Lake Erie. He was also an admirer of Great Britain's Admiral Lord Nelson, and particularly his combat doctrine, which Nelson defined in a memo to his captains before Trafalgar: "But in case Signals can neither be seen or perfectly understood, no Captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an Enemy."⁴

In important ways, Oliver Hazard Perry was typical of the new breed of U.S. Navy officers who emerged during the War of 1812. They were skilled at their profession and "forward leaning" in their tactics, just as their new country was becoming more outward looking in the global arena.

The Run-up to the Battle of Lake Erie

During the early stages of the war, things had not gone particularly well for the American forces in the Great Lakes Region, especially in the ground campaigns. The British had seized control of Lake Erie when war broke out, and they took advantage of their control to, among other things, capture Fort Detroit. American leadership on the ground was poor and leadership from Washington inconsistent, to put it kindly.

There was a sense among U.S. leaders that most Canadians would welcome becoming part of the United States. Thomas Jefferson reflected that attitude when he wrote to a friend, "The acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching, and will give us experience for the attack of Halifax the next, and the final expulsion of England from the American continent."⁵

Jefferson and the many others in the United States who had similar attitudes about Canada could not have been more wrong. To a large extent, the Canadians were committed to remaining a British colony and were not hesitant to fight to demonstrate that loyalty. One Canadian magazine recently reflected that attitude on its cover, making the unequivocal claim: "The War of 1812—The War that Saved Canada."⁶ Another Canadian magazine recently expressed a similar mindset on its cover: "1812—The War that Shaped our Nation."⁷

The Americans had repeatedly tried to take the offensive on the ground, including attacking and burning York with little militarily significant effect. In contrast,

Commodore Chauncey had pursued a conservative naval strategy that at least maintained a viable American presence in the theater. And he had regained nominal control of Lake Ontario before looking southwest toward Lake Erie.

Things were destined to change, however, when twenty-seven-year-old Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry arrived at Lake Erie. Perry's first task was to assemble the fleet he would command. Building a fleet in the wilderness was no easy task, and Perry lacked both manpower and materiel for his assignment. Iron had to be shipped overland from Pittsburgh, as did rigging, cannons, and cannon shot. Canvas came from Philadelphia. Perry's energy and determination overcame these challenges. However, one of the construction compromises he was forced to make in building his new ships was that they were all constructed with unseasoned wood, meaning they would last for one major engagement only. This added to the importance of the impending battle: A standoff with the British would severely damage the U.S. cause.

Perry's fleet of nine ships mounted a total of fifty-four guns, a number that did not equal that of the smallest of Admiral Lord Nelson's ships-of-the-line at the Battle of Trafalgar. Still, with this armament, Perry's fleet could deliver a theoretical "weight of metal" amounting to 936 pounds. In contrast, the opposing British ships, with their capability to deliver a theoretical "weight of metal" of only 496 pounds, were seriously outgunned. This basic firepower advantage of the U.S. fleet is frequently overlooked in popular depictions of the battle.

Among the critical circumstances in events leading up to the battle were Perry's ability to get his largest and most powerful ships—the two newly constructed brigs—out of Presque Isle, where their exit was blocked by a sandbar and British ships patrolling the lake. Perry waited for his moment: at a time when the blockading British ships were off station, he floated his new (and as-yet-unarmed) brigs across the bar and on to the lake. It was a feat that required technical skill, sheer physical strength, and audacity—and it is yet another aspect of the battle that has gotten little attention in contemporary accounts.

The two new American brigs were named USS *Niagara* and USS *Lawrence*. The latter was named for Perry's best friend, and as Perry's flagship she flew the "Don't Give Up The Ship" battle flag. Each of the new ships was armed with eighteen 32-pound carronades and two long 12-pound guns, making them the most powerful warships on the lake.

Perry's opponent in the coming engagement was Captain Robert H. Barclay, a one-armed veteran of the Battle of Trafalgar. Barclay had accepted the command after it had been refused by another officer. Although he was outnumbered, Barclay had a potential advantage of longer range guns. As was the case for the U.S. forces, the British suffered from a lack of supplies, all of which had to be transported overland from York.

At one point Barclay was able to blockade the American port at Presque Isle; at another, he was in turn blockaded at Put-in-Bay, Ohio. By the time the battle started, the Americans were probably in the stronger position.

In an ironic twist, it was Perry, not his British opponent, who imitated Admiral Nelson's famous briefing of his captains before the Battle of Trafalgar. Perry anticipated beginning the battle with the enemy in a line-ahead formation. He hoped to match up his principal ships with the largest of the British vessels: Perry in *Lawrence* against Barclay in the British flagship *Detroit*, the American *Caledonia* against the British *Hunter* and the American *Niagara* against *Queen Charlotte*. Once the action began, the smaller ships in the American fleet would seek out targets of opportunity.

Most important, Perry also copied Nelson's combat doctrine (the overall attitude that takes over in the chaos of battle) by urging his captains to lay their ships alongside those of the enemy. It was a doctrine that that would prove effective in the combat to come.

The Battle of Lake Erie is Joined

Shortly before noon on September 10, 1813, the two fleets were approaching one another. Perry in the USS *Lawrence* was upwind and therefore in the favored position; he and several smaller American ships went for the center of the British line. The USS *Caledonia*, a sluggish ex-merchantman, lagged behind Perry, and the USS *Niagara* inexplicably maintained station on *Caledonia*, leaving the *Lawrence* virtually alone under the guns of most of the British force for two hours.

Lawrence's crew gave a good account of itself, but the ship was eventually reduced to a near-total wreck, with more than half the crew killed or wounded. At that point *Lawrence* struck her colors, and Perry had himself rowed to *Niagara*, which thus far was virtually undamaged. With a fresh crew, Perry rehoisted his "Don't Give Up the Ship" battle ensign and rejoined the action against the main enemy ships.

As the British fleet maneuvered, the HMS *Queen Charlotte* and HMS *Detroit* collided and became entangled alongside one another, facing in opposite directions. The situation could not have been worse for the British or better for Perry. Locked together and unable to maneuver, Barclay's two major ships couldn't bring their guns to bear on the *Niagara*. In that most fortunate circumstance, Perry was able to rake the bow of one enemy ship and the stern of the other.⁸ Before long, both ships struck their colors, and the smaller British vessels followed suit. It was a stunning and clear-cut victory for Perry and his fleet. It was also the first recorded occasion when an entire Royal Navy squadron had surrendered to an enemy. This was another in the string of engagements that provided both a psychological boost and a strategic gain for President Madison and the U.S. general public, while providing further embarrassment at Whitehall and the Admiralty.

Perry's message to General William Henry Harrison is legendary: "Dear Gen'l:—We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop. Yours with great respect and esteem. O.H. Perry"



Battle of Lake Erie. Painted by William Henry Powell. Published: [New York]: Johnson & Miles, c.1877. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-3483

Aftermath

In his book *The People's Navy: The Making of American Sea Power*, Kenneth Hagan summed up the immediate implications of Perry's triumph:

The British position in Michigan and Ohio was now untenable; the Northwest was safely American. Transported by the fleet and joined in battle by the commodore, General Harrison swiftly moved across Lake Erie and broke a British army at the Battle of the Thames on 5 October. By then an elated president had already ordered the young naval officer (Perry) promoted to captain—the navy's highest permanent rank prior to the Civil War.⁹

But Hagan's view only skims the surface of results of the Battle of Lake Erie. At the time, although Perry's victory had a positive effect on American morale, it was counterbalanced in Washington by the defeat of Napoleon, an event that elicited a sobering thought: Britain now was free to devote more attention and greater resources to its war in America.

In fact as events continued after the Battle of Lake Erie, there was a strange mixture of positives and negatives in Washington and London. The battle's outcome was a positive in the United States and surely a negative in Great Britain. The defeat of Napoleon was a negative in the United States and a positive in Britain. Both the Americans and the British were frustrated with the war and anxious to turn their nations' attention to more positive matters. The Battle of Lake Champlain would go a very long way toward clearing the air.

National Intelligencer Office,

Tuesday, September 21st, (noon.)

MOST GLORIOUS NEWS.

Copy of a letter from Com. PERRY to the Secretary of the Navy.

U. S. Brig Niagara, off the Western Sister, Head of Lake Erie, Sept. 10, 1813, 4, P. M.

SIR,

It has pleased the Almighty to give to the arms of the United States a signal victory over their enemies on this Lake. The British Squadron, consisting of two Ships, two Brigs, one Schooner and one Sloop, have this moment surrendered to the force under my command, after a sharp conflict.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Very Respectfully,

Your obdt. Servant,

O. H. PERRY.

*The hon. Wm. Jones,
Secretary of the Navy.*

SOME PARTICULARS.

Chillicothe, September 14.

Late last evening an express arrived in town from gen. Harrison's head-quarters,

bringing the highly gratifying intelligence of the capture of the whole of the British fleet on Lake Erie by Commodore Perry. The subjoined extracts of letters from two gentlemen at headquarters, contain the most essential particulars relative to that brilliant affair.

Camp Seneca, Sept. 12.

"An express has this moment arrived from Commodore Perry, dated the 10th inst at 4 P. M. Head of Lake Erie, with the pleasing intelligence of the British fleet, consisting of two ships, two brigs and two schooners, being in our possession, with more prisoners on board than we had men to conquer them. A great many were killed on both sides"

Camp Seneca, Sept. 12.

"Victory perches on our Naval Standard! Commodore Perry has captured nearly if not all the enemy's fleet; two ships, two brigs, one sloop, and one schooner; and taken more prisoners than he had men on board."

Tuesday, September 21st, (noon.) Most glorious news.

Copy of a letter from Com. Perry to the Secretary of the Navy. U.S. Brig. *Niagara*, off the *Western Sister*, Head of Lake Erie, Sept. 10, 1813, 4 P.M. [Washington 1813]. Printed Ephemera Collection; Portfolio 190, Folder 26

One of the least recognized aspects of Perry's victory was the psychological impact of an American victory in a *fleet* action. Up to that point, the U.S. Navy had, as noted, achieved a number of noteworthy victories in single-ship actions, but the engagement on Lake Erie was the first fleet action between the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy during the war. If the single-ship victories were embarrassing and irritating to the Royal Navy, the British government, and the British public, Perry's victory on Lake Erie had to be more profoundly disturbing. It could well have been the beginning of the realization among Britain's political and military leaders that it was not going

to have its way in the war.

At the beginning of the war and in its early stages, there was a mixed perception of Americans among the British leadership and general public. These perceptions, along with the residual animosity over America's revolt against her mother country, were not unimportant in shaping attitudes about the war.

On the one hand, Americans were frequently perceived as unpolished outlanders, a rebellious and ungrateful group that didn't really know its manners. The other view of Americans was as rough-hewn, rugged, and obstreperous people who could be dealt with if the methods were harsh enough. There was a striking carryover in these views with the British perceptions of the colonists who had declared their independence in 1776. Against that background of perceptions, the events of September 10, 1813, on Lake Erie were profoundly mind-changing. Following the Battle of Lake Erie, the British came to know that the Americans, whatever else they might be, were evolving into a seagoing nation that could stand toe-to-toe against British arms in a *fleet* action—and win. That realization would be emphatically underscored at the forthcoming Battle of Lake Champlain.

The Battle of Lake Champlain

To help us focus sharply on the Battle of Lake Champlain—also referred to at times as the Battle of Plattsburgh—we have the words of a sea power visionary, Rear Admiral A.T. Mahan, and William Jones, who served as Secretary of the Navy during the mid and latter stages of the War of 1812.

Mahan wrote unambiguously, identifying the American victory on Lake Champlain on September 11, 1814, as the tipping point in the conflict:

The Battle of Lake Champlain, more nearly than any other incident of the War of 1812, merits the epithet “decisive.” The moment the issue was known, [British General] Prevost retreated into Canada: entirely properly, as indicated by the Duke of Wellington's words before and after...The war was properly ended by Prevost's retreat. What remained was purely episodic in character, and should be so regarded.¹⁰

For his part, when Secretary of the Navy Jones heard of the American victory off Plattsburgh, he reportedly exclaimed:

[T]o view it in the abstract, it is not surpassed by any naval victory of record; to appreciate its results, it is perhaps, one of the most important events in the history of our country.¹¹

Mahan and Jones, who played an important (and largely overlooked) role in the war's outcome, were both seeing beyond the single event to its larger historical meaning. They recognized that the strategic implications of the Battle of Lake Champlain were in fact even more important than those of the Battle of Lake Erie. For example, if the Battle of Lake Champlain had been won by the British, there is a probability that the United States would have had a very different and less globally focused history. In fact

there is a possibility that there would have been no future United States as we know it.

Just as the Battle of Lake Erie was composed of two intertwined components, one about strategy and one about a person, so was the Battle of Lake Champlain. In this case the personal story was about Master Commandant Thomas Macdonough.¹²

Macdonough was born and raised in the Delaware countryside near Middletown. The sixth of ten children, he entered the U.S. Navy as a midshipman at the age of sixteen. Like many of the officers of his era, he earned a reputation for aggressive leadership during the Barbary Wars. In 1803, he participated as a young officer in the recapture of the frigate USS *Philadelphia*, which had run aground and then been captured by the Dey of Tripoli. This daring action, led by Commodore Stephen Decatur, was carried out under the guns of the harbor of Tripoli. The retaking of the ship in hand-to-hand fighting and its subsequent burning (to deny its use by the Dey) was considered one of the era's most daring naval actions.

Macdonough also was one of the young officers known as "Preble's Boys," a group of standout officers who served under Commodore Edward Preble during the first Barbary War. As a measure of the quality of those designated as "Preble's Boys," seventeen of the eighteen major U.S. naval victories during the War of 1812 were achieved by that group.

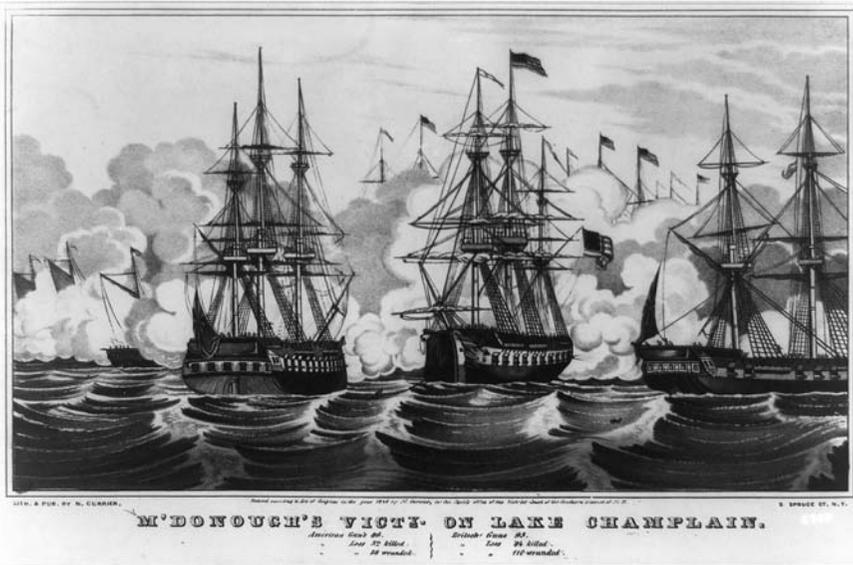
Following the War of 1812, Macdonough went on to command the USS *Constitution*. He also commanded the former Royal Navy frigate that had been captured by the United States Navy, USS *Guerriere*, and the first U.S. ship-of-the-line, USS *Ohio*.

The Run-up to the Battle of Lake Champlain

Whatever boost in morale might have been triggered by Perry's victory on Lake Erie, it would have been short lived, and as the threat from Napoleon was eliminated, the British developed a three-pronged strategy that they believed would crush the United States' will to fight on. The miscalculation concerning the U.S. willingness to continue fighting was yet another error in thinking that characterized both sides during the war.

Among the factors that led to the miscalculation at Whitehall and the Admiralty were the successful blockade that the Royal Navy had applied to the U.S. Atlantic coast, the failure of U.S. efforts to mount a successful land campaign along the Canadian border, and the defeat of Napoleon by Britain and her European allies. Given those factors, the British political and military leadership concluded that the time was right for a series of heavy military blows that would drive President Madison and the Congress to accept Britain's terms in the treaty negotiations at Ghent.

The first element of the British strategy involved expeditionary warfare attacks on the Baltimore, Washington, and Norfolk regions of the U.S. Atlantic coast. Those three areas formed the operating center for the American privateers that were taking a heavy toll on Britain's ocean commerce. These attacks achieved tactical successes, but they failed in their basic objective of ending the activities of U.S. privateers and thus had limited strategic significance. In fact, the campaign, led by Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn, probably strengthened U.S. public animosity toward Great Britain



M'Donough's victory on Lake Champlain. Lithograph by N. Currier, c.1846.
Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-2353

as well as the determination of America's political leadership to press on with the war.

Because of their symbolism, the British anticipated that torching the principal buildings of Washington would show Americans that the British could operate on America's coast with impunity. Perhaps they were right about initial reactions. However, in the perspective of time, the burning of the Capitol and the president's residence only hardened public opinion against the British. It was similar in that respect to the firing into and boarding of USS *Chesapeake* in June 1807 by a boarding party from the HMS *Leopard* and their removal of four members of *Chesapeake's* crew as British deserters.

The second element of the strategy was another expeditionary warfare attack, in this case against New Orleans. This part of the strategy was intended to break the U.S. hold on Florida and the land to its west. This effort ended in a British defeat by General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, which was fought shortly after the peace treaty ending the war was signed in December 1814. But if the battle had no bearing on the final terms of the Treaty of Ghent, it no doubt contributed to the increased sense following the war that the United States was a major international player.

The third and arguably most dangerous part of the strategy involved a ground attack that was intended to drive south from Canada down the west shore of Lake Champlain and then down the Hudson Valley, deep into the Northeast region of the United States. The plan required clear control of Lake Champlain by the British to permit the movement of a British army of 10,000-plus veterans of Wellington's campaigns in Europe. Complete control of the lake was necessary to guarantee resupply of the British force as it moved down the Hudson Valley.

It was anticipated by the British that their thrust into the heart of the Northeast, which had generally opposed the war, might actually split the region off from the United States. They were encouraged in that hope by the ongoing logistical support that the residents of Vermont had provided to British naval units on Lake Champlain, as well as the general opposition to the war among the New England States. But as U.S. political leadership had misjudged the ease of splitting Canada from the British Empire, the British misjudged the strength of the bonds uniting their former American colonies.

This third segment of the strategy, if successful, could have ended the United States as it existed at the time and most certainly would have constricted the development of the nation during the coming centuries. The penetration of a powerful element of the British army down the Hudson Valley was an existential threat aimed at America's heart. Jack Sweetman provides further perspective on this threat in *American Naval History*. In his entry for September 11, 1814, he wrote:

The major British military effort of the war began in August, when an army of 11,000 men under Major General Sir George Prevost, Governor General of Canada, moves down the Richelieu River towards Lake Champlain and the Hudson River Valley...to oppose him on land, the Americans can muster only 1,500 regulars...but Prevost believes ...that he must hold command of the lake, which is contested by Commodore Thomas Macdonough's American squadron.¹³

Paralleling Perry's accomplishment on Lake Erie, Commodore Macdonough had built a significant fleet. Unlike Perry's force, however, Macdonough's was slightly inferior in numbers and firepower to the British fleet on the lake. Macdonough's force included the 26-gun USS *Saratoga*, the 24-gun USS *Eagle*, the 17-gun USS *Ticonderoga*, the nine-gun USS *Preble*, and ten gunboats, for a total of fourteen vessels. When the Battle of Lake Champlain began on September 11, 1814, Macdonough's force was facing a Royal Navy fleet consisting of the 37-gun small frigate HMS *Confiance*, the 16-gun brig HMS *Linnet*, two 11-gun sloops (HMS *Chubb* and HMS *Finch*), and twelve gunboats, for a total of sixteen vessels.

In addition to a slight numerical advantage, the British fleet had an advantage of firepower, with a combined "weight of metal" of its guns of 2,146 pounds against the U.S. fleet's "weight of metal" of 1,907 pounds. Similarly, there were 937 crew members in the British fleet versus 882 in Macdonough's force.

The approaching battle would be a combined army-navy operation, and on August 31, the British Army under Lieutenant General Sir George Prévost initiated the invasion of U.S. soil with a march south toward Plattsburgh. He believed that control of Lake Champlain was critical to his success, and he had been instructed by Lord Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies, to take care to avoid overextending his supply lines. The understanding among the British leaders that naval control of the lake was absolutely essential would play an important role as events unfolded.

Captain George Downie was in command of the Royal Navy squadron that would provide the support that Prévost considered essential. He had just taken delivery of the

newly-constructed HMS *Confiance*, a fifth rate frigate that became the most powerful single ship on the lake when launched on August 25. On paper Downie had a marginally superior fleet than Macdonough, but his crews lacked the degree of skill generally associated with the blue-water Royal Navy.

Weather and geography were two related factors that were of concern to both Prévost and Downie. Late fall in the region was a difficult time for military operations, particularly ground operations. By November roads, such as they were, became impassable. Maintaining supply lines was extremely difficult and basically limited to water-borne transport. Feeding and sheltering an army would be a challenge. These factors must have created a sense of urgency about the invasion for Prévost and Downie; inevitably there would have been doubts about the practicability of the campaign. On the American side of the equation, the weather and geographical factors would have been important causes of optimism for Macdonough and his U.S. Army counterpart for the coming action, U.S. Brigadier General Alexander Macomb.

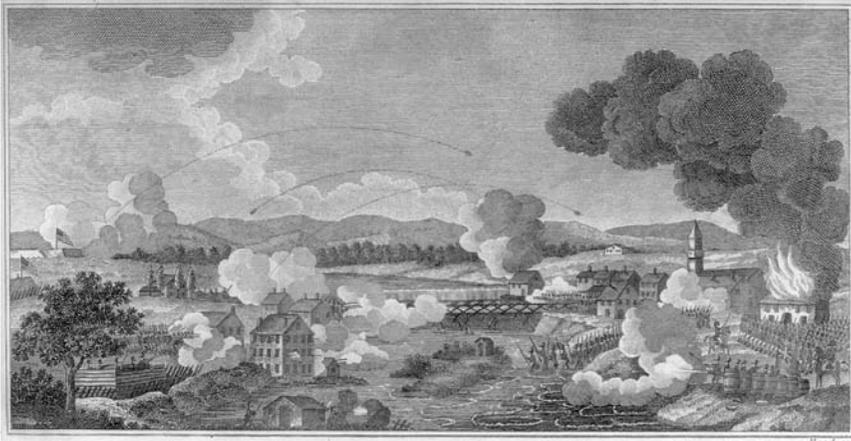
Although heavily outnumbered, Macomb had prepared well for the coming battle. As he braced for the attack on Plattsburgh, he skillfully managed a combination of militia, local volunteers, convalescent soldiers from a nearby hospital, and a small number of regular army soldiers for maximum effect. Small units were sent out for raids against the advancing army and bridges were destroyed to slow the British progress. Still, by September 10 Prévost had reached Plattsburgh, where Macomb had established strong artillery and infantry positions.

The Battle of Lake Champlain is Joined

Macdonough decided to fight from an anchored position, and the skill with which he positioned his ships indicated an understanding of fleet tactics surprising for someone of his age and experience. In the position Macdonough selected—in Plattsburgh Bay, with shoal water at his back—the British would have to sail around Cumberland Point to get at the U.S. fleet. To the south of the American ships was Crab Island. It blocked any effort Downie might make to get some of his ships behind Macdonough's force, allowing him to “double” individual American ships by positioning British ships on both sides of Macdonough's fleet. One of the most significant aspects of Macdonough's position was that it cancelled the British advantage of having guns of greater range.

As so often happens for those who plan well before combat, luck became a factor. And in this case, luck tilted in the Americans' direction when the day began with light winds. In light air, Downie's maneuvering as he rounded Cumberland Point was slow. And as the two fleets engaged, he was sailing directly toward the American ships, which were anchored bow to stern on a north-south axis, with both bow and stern anchors set. Downie was sailing directly into enemy fire for a period of time when he could not return fire. Thus, in the opening round of the action, Macdonough raked Downie's ships as they approached head-on.¹⁴

Macdonough's four main ships were anchored bow-to-stern in a line, with gunboats



Battle of Plattsburg. Engraving. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-49655

occupying the intervals between them. The *Eagle* was at the head of the line, followed by the *Saratoga*, *Ticonderoga*, and *Preble*. Macdonough also had the foresight to rig spring lines to his anchor cables, allowing him to rotate his ships at anchor. This was extremely important, since almost all of a ship's armament in the age of sail was fired through the side. That meant the guns could be aimed right or left through only a few degrees of arc. For major shifts in the direction of fire, the direction of the ship had to be changed. The use of spring lines and kedge anchors made it possible for a ship to change its axis through many degrees of arc.

Before the battle was joined, Downie had been rowed around Cumberland Point so he could see the American ships. He determined to sail past the Americans and then turn and come back up alongside Macdonough's ships. As he took his fleet around Cumberland Head at a little past 9 a.m., Downie's fleet was in a line abreast. At that point, the light winds and devastating fire from the American ships took over. The *Chubb* wound up breaking through under the stern of the *Saratoga*, but she came under the concentrated fire from the American gunboats and struck her colors. The *Linnet* swung up and around the *Eagle*, temporarily taking her out of action.

Downie aboard the *Confiance* maneuvered to the head of the American line, where he planned to anchor across the head of the first American ship. He managed to anchor several hundred yards from the *Saratoga*, and from that point he delivered several punishing broadsides. Macdonough on the *Saratoga* answered in kind, and early in the action Downie was killed. The *Finch* ran aground off Crabb Island (as Macdonough anticipated one of the British ships probably would) and had virtually no effect on the battle's outcome.

At a key point in the action, Macdonough was able use his spring lines to bring his undamaged guns into action. The *Confiance* had attempted but failed to do the same. After more than two hours of constant bombardment, the action was over.

Macdonough was the clear victor, and Lake Champlain was under firm U.S. control.

It would be difficult not to see Macdonough as an exceptional tactician and courageous naval leader. By positioning his ships in a way that negated his opposition's advantage of longer range cannons and then anchoring in a way that allowed him to adjust to the circumstances of the action as it developed, Macdonough was able to overcome an opponent who, at least in theory, should have prevailed in the action.

There is a significant degree of irony in the fact that Macdonough was influenced strongly by Britain's Admiral Lord Nelson in his tactics, particularly those Nelson employed in his victory at the Battle of the Nile in 1798. However, it's important to note that Macdonough did not slavishly follow Nelson's actions. For example, he chose the initial position of being anchored with shoal water to his back. That was the position of Nelson's Nile opponent, French Admiral Francois Brueys. On the other hand, Macdonough imitated Nelson's use of spring lines to increase the effectiveness of his firepower. Macdonough didn't learn just the facts of Nelson's victory, he learned the underlying principles of Nelson's success and applied those to the situation he faced off Plattsburgh. Perhaps most important, Macdonough was thoroughly prepared for the battle.

It may or may not have been deliberate, but it's interesting that even Macdonough's initial assessment of the Battle of Lake Champlain mirrored Nelson's at the Nile. In his report to his commander-in-chief, the Earl St. Vincent, Nelson's words were, "Almighty God has blessed his Majesty's Arms in the late Battle by a great Victory over the Fleet of the Enemy." In his message to Secretary of the Navy William Jones, Macdonough wrote a condensed version with essentially the same thought, "The Almighty has been pleased to grant us a signal victory."

There could be no greater tribute to Macdonough's professionalism than the words of British author William Laird Clowes, who focused on Macdonough's preparations for the battle:

Nothing was left to chance. Not only were his vessels provided with springs [spring lines] but also with anchors to be used astern in any emergency, so that they might shift their broadsides when necessary. If one battery was knocked out pieces he intended to use the other. Macdonough further prepared the *Saratoga* by laying a kedge anchor broad off on either bow, with a hawser and preventer hawser hanging in bights under water, leading from each quarter to the kedge of that side.¹⁵

Clowes also commented on Macdonough's overall performance and its strategic consequences. He was getting beyond tactics and a view of battles as free-standing events when he wrote:

Macdonough had performed a most notable feat, one which, of the whole, surpassed that of any other captain of either navy in this war. . .The consequences of the victory were very great, for it had a decisive effect upon the negotiations for peace which were then being carried on between the American and British commissioners at Ghent.¹⁶

The Immediate Results

The first result of the American naval victory on Lake Champlain and the stubborn resistance of Macomb's greatly outnumbered force of militias, local volunteers, and regular U.S. Army troops was that Prévost withdrew his army back into Canada. At that point it was clear that there could be no invasion of the United States by the British until the following spring, and that was a point in time that would be overtaken by the Treaty of Ghent and the end of the War of 1812 on Christmas Eve of 1814. In the course of events, neither the United States nor Great Britain held the trump card during the negotiations at Ghent. But thanks to the Battles of Lake Erie and Lake Champlain, particularly the latter, the negotiating position of the United States commissioners—John Quincy Adams, Albert Gallatin, and Henry Clay—was immeasurably strengthened.

As might be expected, there was an immediate short-term political benefit to President Madison and the Democratic-Republican Party (sometimes referred to during the era as the Republican Party), which had been established by Thomas Jefferson and Madison. Word of the American victory on Lake Champlain reached Madison at about the same time as news of the failure of the British attack against Baltimore's Fort McHenry. As Prévost and his army withdrew to Canada, the elements of Rear Admiral Cockburn's forces launched against Fort McHenry and Baltimore were withdrawing down Chesapeake Bay. It was finally becoming clear that Madison's overall policies—notwithstanding ongoing misjudgments about specific circumstances—were being vindicated.

Madison's reaction to the two pieces of news was understandably expansive, and he was liberal in his praise of Macdonough's achievement, as well as those of the commanding officers who had achieved the earlier American victories in single-ship combat.

Because of the strong Federalist opposition to the war, Madison's legacy was in considerable doubt during the conflict. Not surprisingly, the war's outcome improved perceptions of his presidency considerably, in both the short and long terms.

The Treaty of Ghent

The Treaty of Ghent was signed on December 24, 1814. The negotiations had been going on since the previous August. The British negotiators were Royal Navy Admiral James Gambier, admiralty lawyer William Adams, and minor British diplomat Henry Goulburn. It was clear in the negotiations that they had no significant decision-making power. That power resided with the prime minister, colonial secretary, and the foreign secretary.

Many observers note that the treaty simply established a "status quo ante bellum." That opinion is frequently followed by the observation that thousands had died in the war for nothing. There were no exchanges of territory, and no punitive features to the agreement. The latter situation was particularly troubling to many in Britain; after all,

it was the United States that declared war. For their part, many Americans were distressed because the treaty didn't address impressment or restraints on U.S. ocean trade, the two issues that became the battle cry for those who had advocated going to war.

As it turned out, the concerns over impressment and free trade had become moot with the fall of Napoleon. Britain began reducing the size of the Royal Navy, eliminating its recruiting problems. As a result, British impressment of American seamen was never resumed after the war. In addition, Parliament had rescinded its Orders in Council, which were the basis for Britain's interference in U.S. trade, assuring free trade for U.S. merchants.

For its part, Britain could be confident that there would be no territorial ambitions about Canada on the part of the United States. This issue also concerned most Canadians. As previously noted, they had no wish to separate from the British monarchy.

There was one group that was devastated by the Treaty of Ghent: Native Americans who had allied themselves with Britain in the war. In return for the Indians' support against the United States, the British had promised that they would have their own nation. The British had intended that the establishment of an Indian nation would block further U.S. expansion into the Northwest. When the Treaty of Ghent was signed, however, from the British point of view there was no further purpose to push for this nation. In a statement loaded with both irony and cynicism, the treaty said that the Indian confederation headed by Tecumseh (who had been killed at the Battle of the Thames in October 1813) would be given "all the rights and privileges they enjoyed before the war."

Lasting Effects of the War

One of the longer-term positive impacts of the War of 1812 was the plain fact that America had survived the war, not just as a viable nation but as one on an upward trajectory of economic power and world influence. Notwithstanding the diplomatic miscalculations, internal political dissention, and military reversals in the field and at sea along the way, America had emerged as a united and vigorous nation. Louis Sérurier, the French minister in Washington at the war's end, saw the new status of the United States in terms of national character and naval power:

Finally the war has given the Americans what they so essentially lacked, a national character founded on a glory common to all. The United States are at this moment, in my eyes, a naval power. Within ten years they will be masters in their waters and upon their coasts.¹⁷

In truth, the minister underestimated the degree of mastery of the seas that the United States' industrial power and naval policies would accomplish. Within decades the United States would be well underway toward becoming not just a regional power but a global one.

Another longer-term result of the war was the recognition among the U.S. political leadership and the general public that if the United States was to have a significant

place among the world's nations, it must have a standing army and navy. The war had begun with the United States woefully unprepared militarily. It ended the war as a nation that was taken seriously around the world. That circumstance was not brought about by America's negotiating prowess. It was the result of negotiation backed by what its army and navy had achieved in combat.

A third result of the war was that it initiated a new relationship between the United States and Great Britain. The fact that there was a deeply emotional dislike between the citizens and the leadership of both countries leading up to the War of 1812 and extending to the Treaty of Ghent is undeniable. The resentment among the American colonies that triggered the War of Independence and the bitterness in Britain over America's renouncing its loyalty to the British crown was palpable. One of the most tangible expressions of this dislike can be found in the newspapers of the two countries. An item from the London newspaper *The Evening Star* is representative:

England shall not be driven from the proud pre-eminence, which the blood and treasure of her sons have attained for her among nations, by a piece of red, white, and blue-striped bunting flying at the mastheads of a few fir-built frigates, manned by a handful of bastards and outlaws.¹⁸

Following the Treaty of Ghent, however, the animosity on both sides began to dissolve. Slowly at first and then more rapidly, hatred evolved into respect and perhaps even familial feelings. The mutual support between the two countries was significant during the periods of war and peace during the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries, to the benefit of the people of both nations.

The Most Critical Consequence

Arguably the most important consequence of all was something that had nothing to do with either the initial reasons for the war or the treaty that ended it. It had to do with ideas of liberty. What the victories and defeats, mistakes on both sides, and the good and bad luck of the War of 1812 all added up to was a happening that is still playing out—the marriage of democratic political concepts to sea power. It was a phenomenon that harks back to Themistocles and the triremes of the Athenian empire of the fifth century B.C. The conjunction of American theories of liberty with global sea power in 1814 was an enormously important—and mostly positive—outcome that has significantly influenced world history.

Endnotes

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6. *Legion Magazine*, Jan-Feb 2012
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8. “Raking” involved firing broadsides into an enemy’s bow or stern, with the shots traveling along the ship’s axis.
9. Hagan, Kenneth J., *This People’s Navy: The Making of American Sea Power* (New York, The Free Press, 1991) 86
10. Mahan, Rear Admiral A. T., *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812* Vol. 2 (Boston, Little, Brown, and Company, 1919) 381, 382
11. Eckert, Edward K. *The Navy Department in the War of 1812* (Gainsville, Florida, University of Florida Press, 1973) 35
12. In the U.S. Navy of the time, Master Commandant was the rank between Lieutenant and Captain. While he was assigned to the Lake Champlain area, Macdonough was referred to as “Commodore,” since he was in command of a squadron.
13. Sweetman, Jack, *American Naval History: An Illustrated Chronology of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, 1755-Present* (Annapolis, MD, Naval Institute Press, 2002) 32
14. “Raking” involved firing broadsides into an enemy’s bow or stern, with the shots traveling along the ship’s axis.
15. Clowes, William Laird, *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to 1900* Vol. 6 (London, Chatham Publishing, 1997) 135
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17. Hagan, Kenneth J., *This People’s Navy: The Making of American SeaPower* (New York, The Free Press, 1991) 90
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March in Rondout Valley

The rain kept on
with strong gusts of wind
all through the night.
This morning the road is clear
where floods were predicted,
the rain has washed away
gravel-covered snow.

There are signs
that the farm markets
will open again this season,

smiling young girls
from ten-generation families,
descendents of New Netherlands
will return to their cash registers,
place fruits and vegetables
in the ancient weathered bins.
Later in the season, cabbages
brought from Katwijk aan Zee
four centuries ago
will once more be for sale.

In this timeless world
there's a tone of blue
rarely seen in the sky.
Maybe azure, or aquamarine-
all I know is, it's beautiful,
a word that looks
and sounds beautiful.

Someday, I will know
the names of the colors,
the birds, and the trees.

Tim Dwyer

Book Reviews



Carved from Granite: West Point Since 1902, Lance Betros. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 2012. (458 pp.)

At Brigadier General (Ret.) Lance Betros's ceremony marking his retirement from the U.S. Army after thirty-five years of service, Lieutenant General David H. Huntoon, Jr., called attention to Betros's latest book, *Carved from Granite: West Point Since 1902*, and singled out the two defining qualities of a cadet—character and intellect—that are the key elements of the book's thesis.

These observations by the fifty-eighth Superintendent of the United States Military Academy (USMA) must have given Betros great satisfaction. Huntoon and his successors clearly are the targets of the author's recommendations for improving the academy so it can reach its potential "to produce even better officers in the future."

Carved from Granite is truly an insider's look at the institutional history of the USMA. Betros graduated from West Point in 1977, a year after his class was buffeted by a cheating incident that rocked the academy's very foundations. He went on to serve as an instructor of American History there from 1986 to 1989 and then (after completing his doctorate at the University of North Carolina) as a professor and head of its Department of History from 2005 to 2012.

Betros devoted his scholarship to the study of West Point. In his first book, a collection of essays entitled *West Point: Two Centuries and Beyond* (2004), he argued that the first century of the "old West Point," after Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer (1817-1833) set up the system, was marked more by continuity than change. Betros's thesis was: "Steeped in military tradition and proud of its long legacy of service, West Point stands like granite against the tide of social currents... Continuity—not change—is what most characterizes West Point and the Corps of Cadets." However, after six additional years of research that informed his writing of *Carved from Granite*, Betros came to a markedly different conclusion, at least regarding the period since the academy's 1902 centennial. During those years, he argues that the granite had shifted, and "change, not continuity best describes the history of West Point." The corpus of his book elaborates on those changes.

The organization of *Carved from Granite* provides an in-depth history of the USMA and a detailed analysis of its core programs. The opening chapter covers the first century of West Point's life—the "Old West Point"—as background for the academy that has continued to evolve since 1902. The rest of the book explores governance, admissions, academics, physical education, military training, leader development, and character development. In each of these areas, Betros can report change, mostly for the better,

as the Corps of Cadets has grown from 500 to 4,417. Philosophically, he found that West Point had moved away from paternalism, the concept that academy officials knew “what was best for young cadets” and permitted no variation to the established program. Additionally, West Point gradually replaced its unforgiving culture of attrition with a more nurturing environment that forgave minor failures and promoted progressive development. In the area of governance, he found that after the cheating scandal of 1976, the locus of administrative power had moved from the Academic Board (representing the major departments) to the Superintendent, the senior military officer who serves as the academy’s president. In short, West Point had undergone a transformation from collegial to centralized governance. In specific programmatic areas, Betros gives high marks to reforms in academics, military training, and leader development based on a diversified core curriculum, an academic majors program, a four-class leadership system, and realistic training for the challenges cadets will face in their military careers.

While *Carved from Granite* is directed at the larger West Point community, its appeal should extend to all educational institutions, as it calls for setting priorities so that the focus of academic leaders is on students’ intellectual and moral development. Betros concluded that “Throughout its history, West Point has been most successful when its leaders focused on character and intellect as the preeminent developmental goals for cadets; conversely, the institution experienced the greatest difficulties when its leaders gave unwarranted priority to other less important goals.”

While Betros stresses the dimensions of the West Point experience that have earned its reputation for excellence, he wants to make it even better—for the benefit of the nation, the Army, and cadets. He cites three problems and proposes solutions for each. In the first, governance, he wants the academy “to reinvigorate the Academic Board to provide counsel on all matters related to cadets, faculty, and the integrated curriculum.” From Betros’s perspective as a former member of the Academic Board (composed of the Superintendent, Commandant of Cadets, and heads of academic departments), a greater role for that body would balance the long-term perspective of the tenured faculty with the more immediate focus of West Point’s chief administrator, who generally serves a five-year term. Such a change would indeed rely on collegiality with the Superintendent and his staff, as many historians have highlighted the inertia against change that epitomized the Academic Board’s pre-1977 performance as West Point’s “dominant policy-making body.” In his introduction to *West Point: Two Centuries and Beyond*, Betros noted that throughout the academy’s history, critics viewed the Academic Board “as the main culprit” to “salutary change.” Since he thinks that the initiatives of the Academic Board have enhanced the quality of education, his earlier caution remains operative: “Only time will tell if the new balance of power will keep the Academy at the forefront of innovation or overwhelm it with constant change.” The Superintendent who implemented the change in governance, Lieutenant General Andrew J. Goodpaster, would applaud what has transpired since he said, in an oral history that I conducted, that he had strengthened the role of the Academic Board

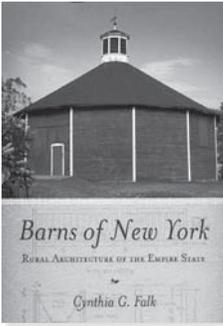
by “making it very clear that they [its members] would be responsible for giving the academic direction needed at the Military Academy.”

The second problem cited by Betros relates to the admission of new cadets. While he found that the academy had improved its system for accessing talented cadets with competitive Congressional appointments, the whole candidate evaluation system, and affirmative-action initiatives, he remains concerned that it has “allowed a large number of lower-quality applicants to enter West Point and thus displace more-qualified applicants.”

The third area of concern, closely related to the second, is “the effect of intercollegiate athletics on the overall quality of the Corps of Cadets.” Even as the scandal with the Penn State football program has unfolded in the summer of 2012, Betros singles out West Point’s “heightened emphasis on intercollegiate athletics” as one of the “most dangerous” problems the academy faces. Since the football program is the flagship for varsity sports at West Point (as it is at many other top-tier colleges and universities), it is the target of many of Betros’s criticisms. From his perspective, it detracts from West Point’s core mission of educating, training, and inspiring the Corps of Cadets. There is irony involved here: West Point recruited Betros to play varsity football and, as he related at his retirement ceremony, he first heard of West Point from the Army football coach who visited his Poughkeepsie home to recruit him for the program. Maybe because of his time as a football player in the 1970s and his work in securing the NCAA’s certification of West Point’s athletic programs in 2009, Betros hopes the academy will “take a stand against the commercialized and professionalized world of intercollegiate sports.” In particular, he would like to see West Point re-embrace its former, longstanding commitment to the principle that competitive athletics “were a complement to the overall physical program and that winning was not the principal goal.” This idea was institutionalized by “Master of the Sword” Herman Koehler, West Point’s director of physical education from 1885 to 1923, but it has waned markedly over the past several decades.

General Betros has leveraged the insights gained by many years’ experience at West Point to propose changes to make a great institution even better. He is proud that “By the early twenty-first century, the Academy had achieved a reputation as an elite undergraduate institution and one of the premier leader development institutions in the world.” In the perennial struggle about following the hallmarks of either ancient Athens or Sparta, he wants the leaders of the U.S. Army and the United States Military Academy to focus on the bedrock that has made this degree of excellence possible—the development of an environment in which leaders of character and intellect can thrive. That’s the academy that must continue to be carved by its leaders from the granite of West Point.

Colonel (Ret.) James M. Johnson, Hudson River Valley Institute



Barns of New York: Rural Architecture of the Empire State, Cynthia G. Falk. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012 (268 pp.)

Farming might be the only occupation in which the better you do, the worse off you are. When farmers increase production, the law of supply and demand drives down the amount paid per pound of milk or bushel of apples. The only possible response is to produce even more, and on it goes.

Farmers who embrace change are the ones who survive.

Not surprisingly then, change—“constant alteration and adjustment” (xii)—is the theme Cynthia Falk keeps coming back to in *Barns of New York*. In the Hudson Valley, for example, the coming of the railroad caused farmers to switch to dairy or increase the size of their herds to accommodate the New York City market. As farmers began to specialize, barns reflected this specialization. The man-made landscape came to include barns of all shapes and sizes, as some farmers built new, some modified what they had, and some tried to make do. Armed with Falk’s book, the roadside observer will be able to distinguish between an English barn and a Dutch barn, between a hop house and a dairy barn. Educated guesses can be made about the ages of barns because Falk gives us dates that correspond to steps in barn evolution. The generous number of illustrations is one of the book’s strong points.

Barns matter, as Falk points out, because they “can tell us more about...history and culture than one-of-a-kind landmarks that are so often pictured in architectural histories and tourist guide books” (i). They are important precisely because they are (most of them) not extraordinary but commonplace. They are commonplace both in the sense that there were many examples built of certain types of buildings, and they were the work stations of the common man and woman. In the early republic, ninety percent of Americans were farmers, and at least fifty percent for most of the nineteenth century. Agriculture remains one of the largest components of the state’s economy. Today, a tiny fraction of the population grows and raises more food than ever, and abandoned farmland covers upstate New York.

Barns can usually be categorized accurately from the outside. Understanding them takes place on the interior. Details in the construction and floor plan of barns tell you more about people—how the farmer spends his day—than houses or other work environments do. In a house, what people bring into it—furniture, pictures, clothes, books—tell us about them and how they use space. Different families might put the same room to different uses. The house itself is a shell that awaits people to give it meaning.

Not so with barns. Certain tasks require certain features in the barn’s construction: Cows cannot be milked in the granary or grain stored in the milking parlor. Barns are the articulation of human behavior in ways houses aren’t.

Falk’s barns are populated with farmers and livestock. Happily for the reader, she

often crosses over from a discussion of architecture to a discussion of processes. The dairymen we meet are concerned about keeping dust out of the milk and cooling fresh milk until it can be moved to market. They design their workspace accordingly. Falk's farmers are here collecting and spreading manure, there threshing, shucking corn, filling silos—up early, working late. There is no clock-watching in farming.

While all the types of barns are covered, there is a certain lack of proportion to the book. The basement barn, which Falk treats together with the bank barn (a barn built into the side of a hill), "is the most common type of barn" (36). She gives it about six and a half pages of text. The three-bay English barn, which evolved into the bank barn, gets just over a page of text. (In most cases, a bank barn is just a three-bay English barn with a basement.) Meanwhile, far less important barns used to store and process tobacco, grapes, and hops are covered comprehensively. Tobacco has never been a major crop in New York, Falk writes, but she gives it twice the space she gives the English barn (169). Alas, the unheralded English barn, not as exotic as its structural cousin the Dutch barn, still awaits its day in the sun.

Falk says the problem is that "documentary sources about vernacular architecture are scarce" (34). By documentary sources, she must mean printed sources, because thousands of vernacular buildings exist today as primary sources. Members of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society and Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture have written dozens of scholarly articles based primarily on observations made of extant vernacular barns.

Indeed, vernacular architecture is under-represented and not explained. "Vernacular architecture" is a term of art in the study of material culture. Henry Glassie, cited several times by Falk as an authority, has written widely about architecture he calls "vernacular" or "folk." "Folk objects," says Glassie, are "non popular, non academic" (*Patterns in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*, 5). Vernacular architecture is often tradition-based and local, developed by a specific people addressing specific needs, utilizing building material and technology available in their time and place. Dutch colonists in the Hudson and Mohawk valleys built barns like the barns they had known across the ocean, and their children and grandchildren continued to build those barns. For over 200 years after European settlement, all barns were vernacular. Very few barns built from the early twentieth century forward can be called vernacular.

Falk's book is top-heavy with discussion and illustrations of barn plans published in architectural journals, textbooks, and government publications as a way to press her point that the farmer was constantly being educated about improvements that would lead to greater productivity. However, innovations were not universally adopted. Statistically, most farms went out of business because the farmer went into another type of employment, or his children did, and so it is safe to say *most* farmers did not adopt modern equipment and practices. There is a danger, therefore, in relying too heavily on what agriculture school professors and salesmen said farmers should be doing. For instance, Falk reports that "horse powered machines remained prevalent until the turn of the 20th century." (184) Actually, on marginal farms in the Hudson

Valley and Catskill Mountains, of which there were many, horses were common until after World War Two.

The missing link between the farmer and the plans developed by experts is the adaptation of those plans by the farmer. Except where we are being shown plans of an identified barn on an identified farm, Falk provides no examples of barns that actually followed the plans she uses to demonstrate progressive farming practices. Data collected through field work showing which recommendations in new barn construction were followed would be an interesting addition to the literature.

Curiously, there is a lack of farmers cited as sources. The endnotes contain one citation of an interview in the first 156 pages, which may or may not have been of a farmer. While photos of barns are used to illustrate the text, there are no barns cited as sources.

Generalizations have been made from limited printed material when more care could have been taken. Hay presses, Falk says, “were usually portable” (124). She cites in her endnote an advertisement for a portable hay press from an 1855 agricultural journal. Next she reports that the hay press was replaced by the hay baler. The hay press and hay baler, however, fulfilled different needs. Here in the Hudson Valley, where farmers were happy to help feed the tens of thousands of horses on New York City streets, non-portable hay presses were installed in barns and created bales that were shipped downriver, even as the same farmers stored loose hay for their own use. Later, after World War Two, hay balers pulled in the field by tractors eliminated the practice of storing loose hay.

For Falk, associate professor of Material Culture at SUNY Oneonta, *Barns of New York* is an ambitious undertaking. This is the first book dedicated to a statewide overview. She has filled a void on an often overlooked, richly deserving topic and covered a lot of ground in a concise manner.

Don't leave Falk's book on the shelf. Take it with you on a drive and use it to make sense of those buildings you ordinarily pass without recognition. The architecture of barns is the architecture of work done mostly, not long ago, by man and animal. If you are looking for a place to connect with the past, you cannot do much better than a barn.

Ted Hilscher



***My Reach: A Hudson River Memoir*, Susan Fox Rogers. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011. (240pp.)**

Susan Fox Rogers, visiting associate professor of Writing at Bard College, strikes out on her own with her first book, a well-structured memoir. She captures many fascinating aspects of the Hudson River Valley, including its natural and environmental history, industry, famous individuals, early explorers, and native tribes. With Rogers as a guide, the reader follows her gaze, adopting her unique perspective as she ruminates about the local histories of towns along whose shores she paddles. The narrator tells us: “Being on the water does magical things—purifies and heals, washes and cools, enlivens and frightens.” As she voyages forth in her kayak, she also confronts the loss of her parents, whose voices reverberate throughout the narrative. In this search for solace, she is not afraid to face the emotional force of mourning. Throughout, she is sustained by the river. This is a noteworthy account, equally impressive as her brave and gripping journey by kayak from North Tivoli Bay to Manhattan. Propelled by a sense of discovery, the reader is launched onto the Hudson River, the central pervading presence. With this adventurous memoir, we experience the narrator’s great array of firsthand reflections, thereby gaining an intimate acquaintance with all she perceives.

A “reach” is a section of the river, and the author affectionately calls hers in Tivoli “Rogers Reach.” Toward the outset, she shares an intimate glimpse: “The life of a river I wanted to know would be found in exploring abandoned icehouses or cement factories that stand on the banks. Learning the river would mean seeing the sturgeon that course its depths, the snapping turtles and crabs lodged in the mud, and the osprey that plunge dramatically into the water as they hunt for food. If I wanted to know the river, I had to venture out.”

From the vantage point of her kayak, Rogers observes an abundance of wildlife and constructs surprisingly endearing portraits of often taken-for-granted species, such as the snapping turtle and sturgeon. Staying keenly alert to weather patterns, she spies migrating Canada geese and monarch butterflies. She demonstrates environmental sensitivity and refined sharp eyes while sharing her appreciation for “wisteria and lilac in irresistible bloom,” reeds and cattails, great blue heron, beaver, mute swans and osprey, Bald eagles, and spatterdock. She also shares information on lesser-known species: “there were heath hens, now extinct, and mountain lions, the last one shot in the 1850s.” Though not preachy, Rogers is an environmentally conscious observer who develops a caring ethos, choosing to include information about the Storm King Case and pollution, including PCBs.

For instance, Rogers offers an especially intriguing description of the snapping turtle: “there is something so prehistoric, so monstrous, in the fleshy, clawed feet and

almost-flat carapace that I find the turtle fascinating, even beautiful.” Then, she cleverly builds a bridge between environmental degradation and her mother’s illness: “Hudson River turtle soup holds 230 ppm of PCBs. Did my mother ever make turtle soup? Where did her cancer come from?”

Her account of the sturgeon is also particularly impressive, as Rogers explains the scientific basis for a revelation: “Sturgeon are a relict species, that is, they haven’t changed since the Mesozoic era, some 65-230 million years ago. So I was, in fact, touching something with a genetic code more ancient than the dinosaurs.” Continuing her illustration, she asks: “What did touching a sturgeon feel like? Smooth, like leather. Slick, like time. Solid, like love and death.” Weighing 120 pounds and boasting a “toothless oval underslung mouth,” sturgeon, she reminds us, were once referred to as “Albany beef.” Such engaging scenes are reminiscent of Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

After the loss of her parents, Rogers’ observations serve an essential function. Part paean to fauna, she celebrates: “there was nothing as glorious as the turtle or the eagles, nothing as affirming as the pair of ducks or the nesting cormorants, nothing as simple and as beautiful as each paddle stroke, nothing as sure as the movement of the river.” Impressively, she is able to express profound emotion without overwrought prose. Certain lines become appropriately poetic, as when she writes: “The thrum of dawn was on.” Her language is aptly descriptive but not overly indulgent or flowery, and she constructs precise imagery. Like her father, she holds an “allegiance to truth,” thereby constructing realistic rather than romanticized or idealized depictions. One senses an unmasked human being with a fine intelligence coming off the page.

The memoir achieves variation with nods to Hudson Valley industry; some of her jaunts contemplate ice harvesting, tugboats, and brickyards. While recounting her swim across the Hudson, she notes matter-of-factly: “Oil spills that coat the river or sewage pipes that break are not uncommon events.” During this suspenseful and dramatic episode, a barge closely approaches her: “I’m not sure why I didn’t see the *Virginia C.* as I crossed the river from Beacon to Plum Point.” This leads to a striking simile: “The vision of the barge on the horizon made me feel like a butterfly in a stiff wind trying to dodge an oncoming car.” Rogers does not shy from the fact that this is “a working river,” with tugs transporting “oil, junked cars, a huge range of building supplies.” Due to her newfound realization of the extensive pollution in the Hudson, she volunteers to clean up the river, and remarks: “hailed spent tires out of North Tivoli Bay, as well as a range of other stuff people toss overboard—dolls, coolers, Styrofoam, plastic jugs.”

Furthermore, the narrative recalls early explorers, famous inhabitants, and contemporary, often quirky river dwellers whose lives take shape along the Hudson. At times, she presents deeper considerations of the region’s landmarks, interjecting precious tidbits of local history. One historical figure who strongly stands out is Dorothy Day. Landing near Rose Hill in the aftermath of her mother’s death, Rogers recounts Day’s mission, concluding: “Solace for our suffering, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, could be found in community.” In an interesting fashion, she notes of Rose

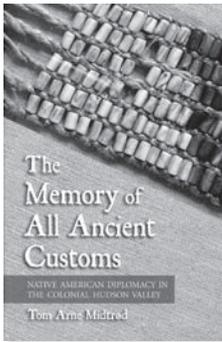
Hill: “That one house could move from sheltering the wealthy to orphans to Catholic radicals, and now an artist, is a story that, with variation, can be told throughout the valley.” As her paddle cuts through waves, she imaginatively conveys the perspective of Robert Juet, the *Half Moon*’s first mate, admitting: “When I read Juet’s journal, I want in on this voyage, to feel the miracle of seeing this land in such a pure state.”

Importantly, Rogers does not leave out the deep history of the indigenous peoples of the region. She reminds readers of important place names; for example, she explains that the Algonquian name Cocksackie translates to “owl hoot.” One of the most compelling scenes occurs when Rogers, along with Mary Burns, explores Magdalen Island. With the investigative acumen of Nancy Drew, she asks Mary, “What are all the little pink flags?” only to learn that they indicate “looter pits,” holes dug by people in search of Native American relics, “where someone had taken arrowheads, pottery, the story of a people.” Rogers explains she recovered “burned fish bone, nutshells, and seeds.” For readers whose interest is piqued and would like to learn more about the history over which Rogers lingers, she provides a “Books Consulted” section with over 40 selections.

Spending such a great deal of time on the river allows Rogers rewarding reflections and she maintains a sense of magical discovery. She confesses: “the river had seeped into my life so fast, so naturally. When I spoke about my kayak outings, I caught myself saying ‘I love the Hudson River.’ And I wondered if it was possible to love a river.” These powerful realizations help her to cope with the loss of her parents and are essential to her healing. Through this journey, the reader implicitly realizes the cathartic nature of the writing process as well as the restorative benefits of creating close connections with place. In this respect, *My Reach* is reminiscent of Terry Tempest Williams’ *Refuge*. Both texts transform grief into renewal through intense bonds—Williams with Great Salt Lake and Rogers with the Hudson. As Rogers’ memoir eloquently memorializes her parents, the beneficent powers of the river become even more apparent.

This is a rewarding and highly engaging memoir that Hudson Valley readers will no doubt want to share with their loved ones. Rogers’ main messages remain relevant: she reminds us of the therapeutic value of near-at-hand nature, the importance of companionship, and that we must all continue forth courageously. As her mother emphatically told her, “You have to commit to life.” She similarly affirms, “I was, as I had hoped, paddling toward light.” The memoir ultimately transmits a healing ritual, in which kayaking becomes almost ceremonial. At its core, Rogers’ text is held together by a building sense of solid rejuvenation and unending possibility.

Stephen Mercier, Marist College



The Memory of All Ancient Customs: Native American Diplomacy in the Colonial Hudson Valley, Tom Arne Midtrød. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012. (289 pp.)

Retelling the native past of the Hudson Valley is like making a quilt out of scraps. Thankfully, Tom Arne Midtrød has the patience to do patchwork. Meticulously, he stitches together many fragments of published and archival evidence in this new book about the valley's Indians in the colonial period. Along with the growing shelf of new titles on the region's natives by Robert S. Grumet, Paul Otto, and Amy C. Schutt, this study deepens our understanding of the people who lived in one of the busiest corridors of British North America yet too often are misunderstood or forgotten.

Midtrød's study focuses on both downriver and upriver folks who lived from the modern site of Greater New York City all the way to the Albany area. All of these people spoke close variants of the family of Algonquian tongues known as "Delaware" or "Lenape." As Midtrød demonstrates convincingly, "strong ties linked these various groups to one another." Villagers belonged to real and metaphoric extended families, shared a set of diplomatic customs and ideas, and had a general tendency to side with their fellow river folk when dealing with intrusions from outside Indians or Europeans (xix). In telling the story of the first two centuries of colonization, Midtrød faces a number of challenges. The seventeenth-century Dutch accounts are both sparse and maddeningly unspecific; many Dutch authors wrote about Indians as a generic monolith, making no distinction between inland, river, and coastal peoples. And later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English administrative sources are sometimes spotty. The Indian peoples of the Hudson appear inconsistently and under a changing set of group names.

Midtrød aims to write a study with "relations among Native peoples at center stage" (xii). His "central premise" is that valley folk "tended to deal with the colonizers as they did any other group of people," and that this insight can take us beyond the simplistic "binary juxtaposition of Natives and newcomers" (xv, xiii). A glance at the chapter titles might give the impression that the book is a narrative. They progress from "Struggling with the Dutch" to "Living with the English" to "Disaster and Dispersal." But the nine chapters are only loosely chronological and often draw evidence from a wide range of time periods. The result is not exactly a story, but a stage-by-stage analysis of the river's native politics from contact to the American Revolution. The author also devotes the bulk of his attention to the seventeenth century, when valley Indians figured more prominently in colonial papers on native affairs.

The book's topical approach helps trace the contours of the native political landscape. In his first two chapters, which describe the workings of Indian diplomacy, Midtrød makes a number of sensitive observations about the power of metaphor and fictive kinship in the river Indian political culture, and he is cautious never to overgen-

eralize. His method of mixing early and later evidence helps him argue convincingly that river Indians had a sustained tradition of respecting each other's local authority while often forming loose alliances in times of trouble. They were "no mere collection of disconnected groups," but rather independent villages that shared old and lasting bonds of blood, sympathy, and friendship maintained without "permanent councils or other forums" (23, 60). Upriver and downriver villagers held common beliefs about how to avenge murders, settle boundary disputes, and welcome native refugees into their homes. The central problem river folk faced was that colonists did not care for these customs, nor were they as committed to the ideal of peace.

Instead of narrating the grim series of aggressive wars led by New Netherland governors Willem Kieft and Petrus Stuyvesant from the 1640s to 1660s, Midtrød steps back to examine larger trends. Primarily, he finds the Netherlanders guilty of general indifference to Indian practices and customs. For example, the Dutch were "unwilling to adapt to Native notions of reciprocal gift exchange" and the Indians were "disappointed to find [the colonists] openly scornful of their religion" (65). While "Native leaders could not make the newcomers find their place as junior partners beholden to the locals," they did reach "a second best outcome": "the Dutch and Natives were in principle equals in their treaties and agreements" (78). But as the English took command of the Hudson Valley's colonial settlements in the 1660s and 1670s, this idea of equality between began to fade.

The book's finest moments come when Midtrød traces the "change in posture" in river Indians' political position in the 1660s and 1670s (87). Making excellent use of a number of unpublished sources, he shows how the Hudson natives navigated a series of confluent events. Around the same time that the English drove the Dutch out of the governor's house on Manhattan Island, King Philip's War broke out in New England. The inland Iroquois Confederacy seized this opportunity to make themselves the regional broker between all Indians in the Northeast. During this turmoil, the river Indians increasingly began to use the honorific "father" for English governors, rather than "brethren." The English in turn began to call the natives "children." Yet Midtrød is quick to show that these terms were not necessarily loaded with "European connotations of stern and authoritarian patriarchy"; the river folks also used the metaphor of elder brethren when speaking with the Iroquois (88). Thus by the 1690s, "Hudson Valley Indians had two senior relatives in their immediate neighborhood: the Iroquois and the government of New York" (129). Placing the river peoples within their larger imagined family explains how they saw the century to come—they could appeal to both their brothers and fathers or play one off against the other.

The book moves rather briskly from the 1690s to the 1780s, as disease and land loss led to the fracturing of the native political world, with the majority of river peoples heading west and only a few small communities remaining after the Revolution. As their numbers thinned from disease, many decamped to Anglican and Moravian missions, while others began slow and fitful moves toward future homes in the American and

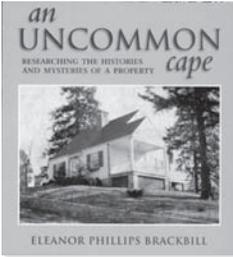
Canadian Great Lakes and Plains, where their communities survive today. Still the eventual exodus inland “should not obscure the fact that the Indian societies of this area had been remarkably tenacious” for two centuries of the colonial invasion (210).

While his analytical bent is generally a strength, it unfortunately lets Midtrød slip into jargon. When discussing gift-giving, talking, marrying, mating, fighting, and gossiping between Indians, he favors abstract terms like “modes of intergroup relations” or “spheres of interaction,” or else he borrows phrases that seem to belong in a corporate boardroom. At one point, he describes sachems’ dealings with their neighbors as “an integral part of their strategic outlook” (100). He is especially fond of the buzzword “network,” a term that better evokes blinking servers and plastic-coated wires than the reasons people paddled canoes and followed paths from one wooden village to another.

Still, with its hard-earned insights drawn from wide and deep research, *The Memory of All Ancient Customs* is a valuable resource to historians of the region. Midtrød’s admirable attention to Indian perspectives helps him put together his many swatches of evidence and recreate the fabric of the colonial-era Hudson.

Andrew C. Lipman, Syracuse University.

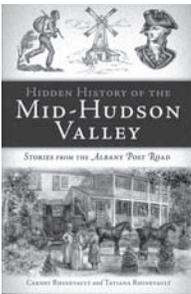
New & Noteworthy Books Received



An Uncommon Cape: Researching the Histories and Mysteries of a Property

By Eleanor Phillips Brackbill (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012)
259 pp. \$24.95 (hardcover) www.sunypress.edu

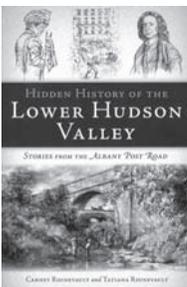
The Hudson River Valley is filled with houses rich in history and architectural significance. Among these is the author's 1930s-era Cape Cod style, an example of a McCall's mail order home common during that era. Enduring a relocation to allow for the construction of Interstate 95 as well as thirty-two different landowners over 350 years, the history of Brackbill's property is intertwined with the history of the region surrounding it. Focusing on four of its many owners, the author tells the story of a structure and land that encompasses generations' worth of societal development.



Hidden History of the Mid-Hudson Valley

By Carney Rhinevault and Tatiana Rhinevault (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011) 192 pp. \$19.99 (paperback) www.historypress.net

The first of two new books chronicling stories from the Albany Post Road, once the Hudson River Valley's main travel artery, this volume focuses on Dutchess and Columbia counties. It covers famous residents (Samuel Morse, Martin Van Buren) as well as lesser-known individuals (Nathaniel Pendleton, the Smith Brothers) who had an impact on the region. Important local events and places—the Anti-Rent Wars in Columbia County, the Underground Railroad, and the 1963 Poughkeepsie book burning—also are highlighted. Using a combination of historical resources and local lore, this book sheds new light on this important road.



Hidden History of the Lower Hudson Valley

By Carney Rhinevault and Tatiana Rhinevault (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012). 192 pp. \$19.99 (paperback) www.historypress.net

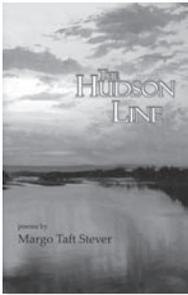
This second set of stories from the Albany Post Road covers its passage through Westchester County and down into New York City. The authors bring to life a wide array of people, places and events—including the Philipse family of Yonkers and Sleepy Hollow, Sing Sing Prison, and the 1949 anti-Communist riots at Cortlandt. Complete with hand-drawn images to supplement the text, the book also includes a three-part section chronicling Revolutionary War spies.



Apostle Islands

By Tommy Zurhellen (Kensington, MD: Atticus Books LLC, 2012)
240 pp. \$14.95 (paperback) <http://atticusbooksonline.com>

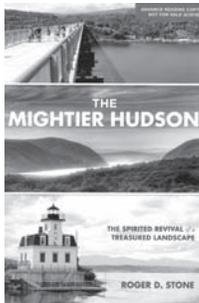
In the sequel to his debut novel *Nazareth, North Dakota*, Hudson River Valley author Tommy Zurhellen once again delivers modern myths and miracles that will delight the faithful reader. Set mostly in the present, and mostly around Lake Superior, Zurhellen uses vivid imagery to create relatable characters and situations. Whether it is the Last Supper or an innovative twist on the Book of Revelation, the style and character of writing makes *Apostle Islands* an exciting and enjoyable read.



The Hudson Line

Poems by Margo Taft Stever (Charlotte, NC: Margo Taft Stever, 2012).
38 pp. \$8.50 (paperback) www.mainstretrag.com

A collection of poems from a Hudson River Valley author. Using the region as a backdrop in a number of poems, *The Hudson Line* explores a variety of themes, including longing and uncertainty. The author utilizes vivid and at times stark visual imagery to create and manipulate the reader's emotions. While many of the sentiments are familiar, Stever's unique presentation conveys a new and refreshing approach.



The Mightier Hudson:

The Spirited Revival of a Treasured Landscape

By Roger D. Stone (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2012)
264 pp. \$24.95 (paperback) www.lyonspress.com

The industrial history of the Hudson River and its waterfront towns has shaped the region for centuries, with both beneficial and detrimental results. As the economic focus of many towns has shifted from industry to tourism, the Hudson River Valley has undergone an ecological revitalization both in the water and on land. In *The Mightier Hudson*, the author highlights some of the many transformations taking place, among them turning the former Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge into the Walkway Over Hudson, the City of Hudson's renewal, and the many recreational opportunities the river now provides. Complete with quotes from individuals responsible for these initiatives as well as many personal memories, the book sheds light on the triumphs and challenges surrounding the environmental restoration of the Hudson River.

Andrew Villani, The Hudson River Valley Institute

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about the Hudson River Valley,
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Dr. David Schuyler



Arthur and Katherine Shadek Professor of the Humanities and American Studies at Franklin & Marshall College, Dr. Schuyler will discuss his most recent book, *Sanctified Landscape: Writers, Artists, and the Hudson River Valley, 1820-1909* (Cornell University Press, 2012), which explores the formative role the Hudson River played in settling the 19th-century national debate on

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The Hudson River Valley Institute

The Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College is the academic arm of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. Its mission is to study and to promote the Hudson River Valley and to provide educational resources for heritage tourists, scholars, elementary school educators, environmental organizations, the business community, and the general public. Its many projects include publication of *The Hudson River Valley Review* and the management of a dynamic digital library and leading regional portal site.

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- **Invitation to HRVI events**

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- \$100 **Militia** (includes 1 issue of *The Hudson River Valley Review*)
- \$250 **Minute Man** (includes 1-Year Subscription to *The HRVR* and choice of Thomas Wermuth's *Rip Van Winkle's Neighbors* or James Johnson's *Militiamen, Rangers, and Redcoats*) Please circle choice.
- \$500 **Patriot** (Includes same as above and a 2-Year Subscription to *The HRVR*.)
- \$1,000 **Sybil Ludington Sponsor**
(Includes all above with a 3-year subscription to *The HRVR*)
- \$2,500 **Governor Clinton Patron**
(Includes all above with a 5-year subscription to *The HRVR*)
- \$5,000 **General Washington's Circle** (Includes all above with 5-year subscription to *The HRVR* and a copy of Myra Armstead's *Mighty Change, Tall Within: Black Identity in the Hudson Valley*)
- Enclosed is my check, made payable to Marist College/HRVI.
- Please charge my credit card: # _____
Expiration Date _____ Signature _____
- VISA DISCOVER MASTER CARD

Phone: _____

Please fill out your contact information on the other side of this form.