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Fair visions: Elkanah Watson (1758--1842) and the modern American agricultural fair

Mark A. Mastromarino
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FAIR VISIONS:
ELKANAH WATSON (1758-1842)
AND
THE MODERN AMERICAN AGRICULTURAL FAIR

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Mark Anthony Mastromarino

2002
This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Mark Anthony Mastromarino

Approved, December 2001

Robert A. Gross

Dale E. Hoak

James P. Whittenburg

John Ritchie Garrison,
University of Delaware
To
my mother,
who never gave up hope,
and the memory of my father,
whose body wore out before his patience did
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Acknowledgments

My intellectual interest in agricultural fairs did not originate from any sort of epiphany that came to me when I was a kid, as I stayed up late grooming my favorite Hereford steer the night before the Rockingham County 4H show. Nor did such occur as I surveyed from the top of the Ferris wheel all the night lights of the fairgrounds of the Deerfield Fair. Actually, growing up in suburban Boston, I don't remember becoming personally aware of agricultural fairs until my family moved to southern New Hampshire when I was in the fifth grade. Even then we did not live on a farm (although my father and his brother had inherited a pig farm in Wilmington, Massachusetts, from their father, but they ended up selling it, with their disposal contracting business long before I reached adulthood). My high school did have a large Future Farmers of America chapter, as some of the neighboring towns which it served still had some agricultural operations, and my new hometown of Londonderry had several large commercial apple orchards, one of which bounded our property (sadly enough, it is now Apple Tree Mall), but it was my older brother who actively participated in FFA, not me.

No, I was never a farm boy, and my earliest fair memories are of donning a blaze orange vest as a sullen young teenager and having to help my father park cars at the Deerfield Fair in Deerfield, New Hampshire (the Londonderry Lions Club, as did many such fraternal and social organizations in Rockingham County, depended on the annual event as a major fund raiser). I have happier memories of strolling the same fairgrounds with my parents and brother and sister, trying to decide what to eat for lunch, or stopping to toss darts at balloons at the game stalls along the Midway (I never took home so much as a Farah Fawcett poster). For me, the highlight of the fair was the video games in the arcade. Not until high school, when I dated an artsy-craftsy young lady, did I better
appreciate other parts of the fair, such as the domestic arts exhibits. But I had never participated in fairs as more than just a casual visitor. I never entered anything for premiums, nor was ever involved behind the scenes as a volunteer. I was just one of the millions of fairgoers who took the annual event for granted.

Only as a college student did I become aware of the long and interesting history of the American agricultural fair. My becoming intellectually engaged with the subject came about the summer of my junior year as a Boston College undergraduate. As a Summer Fellow at Historic Deerfield, Inc., in 1982, I was casting about for a topic for a research project, and was leaning towards something about the Massachusetts frontier during the French and Indian War. Then director of education for HDI, J. Ritchie Garrison, steered me away from the 1750s and '60s, and, sharing his interest in the antebellum period, instead suggested that I examine the early-nineteenth-century movement for agricultural improvement in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts. It was fertile ground in need of tilling, and the records of local agricultural societies stretching back to the early 1800s were easily accessible. It was not a bum steer. After successfully completing "Cattle Aplenty and Other Things in Proportion": The Agricultural Fair in Franklin County [Massachusetts], 1810-1860" as my Deerfield research project, I expanded it my senior year at Boston College, under Professor Joseph Criscenti's guidance, into an undergraduate honors thesis and Scholar of the College project, "The Best Hopes of Agriculture': The History of the Agricultural Fair in Massachusetts, from 1800 to 1860."

I then let my work lie fallow for a while, while I earned a Master's Degree in History, writing a thesis under ethnohistorian James Axtell on the military use of dogs in colonial America (in which the French and Indian War figured prominently). But I had become more aware of the rich history of agricultural fairs, which I had discovered was all around me. Landing my first professional position, as an assistant archivist in the Manuscripts and Archives Department of Baker Library at the Harvard Business School, I shared an apartment with a friend in Brighton, not far from the site of the fairs held by the
Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture from the mid-1810s through the 1830s. Walking to and from my bus stop each workday, I stopped and studied the society’s Agricultural Hall (which had been moved from its original site and was then serving as a corner drugstore), in my mind stripping away its modern accretions and imagining it in its heyday, when it was filled with models of early agricultural machines and other implements. After only a year of assisting scholars do their research, I felt anxious to dig into my own again. Returning to William and Mary to work on the doctorate, I decided it was time to study the history of American agricultural fairs more carefully, and Robert A. Gross, a scholar of early New England culture and agriculture, generously agreed to be my advisor. As I did myself, he probably assumed that my previous work on Massachusetts fairs would expedite the doctoral research and writing and promised an early completion of the dissertation.

That was over a decade ago. A career as a full-time documentary editor intervened, as did marriage and a growing family of four children, two dogs, and four cats. I have made many trips to county fairs over that period, but no longer as a casual visitor. My wife and each of my children, I can proudly proclaim, have won numerous ribbons in various premium categories, from drawing to hand weaving to organically grown raspberries. My prizewinning wife and kids have served more as an inspiration for rededicating myself to this dissertation than as an excuse for the prolonged delay of its completion.

Although the gratification of expressing in print my gratitude to them and all others who have assisted the preparation of this dissertation has been long delayed, it is no less heartfelt. Unfortunately, the long dormancy might have contributed to memory lapses, which may prevent me from mentioning by name all those to whom I am indebted. If so, I apologize to those people and institutions whose names fail to appear below, be they former colleagues, family members, friends, or total strangers who have aided this dissertation in some way.

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First, I would be remiss if I did not thank the deans of the College of Arts and Sciences of the College of William and Mary who granted the extensions that allowed this volume to be completed and count for something (and thanks are due professors Robert Gross, Carol Sheriff, and Cindy Hahamovitch, all of whom supported my petitions for extensions).

The research for this dissertation was financially supported by grants, fellowships, and other awards given by Historic Deerfield, Inc.; the Department of History, College of Arts and Sciences, and the Commonwealth Center for the Study of American History and Culture of the College of William and Mary; Phi Alpha Theta; the Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums, Inc.; the American Antiquarian Society; the Massachusetts Historical Society; the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture; and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Several paid consultancies, for the Chippokes Plantation Farm and Forestry Museum in Surry, Virginia, the Durham Agricultural Fair, Inc., in Durham, Connecticut, and the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C., also provided necessary cash infusions and enabled me to expand my practical knowledge of American agricultural history in general and agricultural fairs in particular.

I am grateful to the following directors of documentary editing projects who generously granted me release time to pursue my research and writing on agricultural fairs while I served on their editorial staffs: Charles F. Hobson of the Papers of John Marshall, sponsored by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture at the College of William and Mary; Harold D. Moser of the Papers of Andrew Jackson, at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville; and W. W. Abbot, Dorothy Twohig, and Philander D. Chase of the Papers of George Washington, at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. These editorial colleagues, as well as Fredrika J. Teute and Gilbert B. Kelly of the OIEAHC, also proved valuable as scholarly mentors.

The various repositories holding the rare books and periodicals, and records and
manuscripts upon which this work is based are listed in the "Sources Consulted" section at the end of this volume, but such treatment fails to recognize the numerous curators and archivists who personally served this project, in many instances acting above and beyond the call of duty. David Proper and Louise Perrin of the Henry N. Flynt Memorial Library of Historic Deerfield, Inc., and the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association in Deerfield, Massachusetts, assisted the original research of this project's first incarnation, as did Alice Crawford of the Greenfield Historical Society, Geraldine Whitman of the Franklin County Agricultural Society, and Barbara Vanderlick of the Three County Fair in Northampton.

Fred Bassett, James Corsaro, and Jamie Messmer of the Manuscripts and Special Collections Department of the New York State Library put their knowledge of the Elkanah Watson Papers at my disposal during my first trip to Albany for the reincarnation of my Deerfield research as an honors thesis, as well as during succeeding research trips. Ruth Degenhardt of the Berkshire Athenaeum and Barbara Allen of the Berkshire County Historical Society, assisted my research in Pittsfield, and Shirley D. Penna, and, especially, Elizabeth Riley of the Hardwick Historical Society did likewise in Hardwick. Eleanor Thompson of the Wenham Historical Society facilitated my examination of the library of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture and put me into contact with Edward P. Roberts and Charles P. Lyman of the MSPA, who provided valuable assistance, as well as copies of the Society's historical publications. Peter Drummey and Virginia H. Smith helped me plumb the rich depths of the Massachusetts Historical Society's collections, and Georgia B. Barnhill, Marie E. Lamoureux, Barbara T. Simmons, and especially Joanne D. Chaison, helped me use my time at the American Antiquarian Society to my best advantage. Margaret Heilbrun and Annette Blaugrund of the New-York Historical Society; Elizabeth Marzuoli of the Massachusetts State Archives in Boston; Linda Stanley of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia; Karen Richter and Betsy Rosasco of the Art Museum at Princeton University; Kathleen D. Stocking of the New York State Historical Association at Cooperstown; Eleanor McD.

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Thompson of the Winterthur Library; as well as curators and archivists at Harvard
University's Houghton Library, at the Longfellow National Historic Site, in Cambridge,
Massachusetts, and at the G. W. Blunt White Library at Mystic Seaport in Mystic,
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materials for me, and provided photocopies and microfilms through the mail. The services
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The 1989 research fellowship awarded by the Massachusetts Historical Society in
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Brooke, who commented on papers based on my dissertation research that I presented at the annual conference of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, at Sturbridge, Massachusetts, in July 1988, and at the fourth annual OIEAHC conference, in Worcester, in June 1998, respectively, and Peter Benes, specifically for his editorial comments on a paper I presented to the Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, at Deerfield, Massachusetts, in July 1993, and generally for his direction of the Dublin Seminar, the Proceedings of which have greatly enriched my work, as a glance through my bibliography will demonstrate. Marlena DeLong helped me by facilely translating French source material. I am also grateful to Robin A. Dierking and Paul W. Chapman for reading this manuscript and making suggestions for improvement. Any errors of fact, enduring typographical errors, or infelicities of prose are mine, not theirs. Also deserving of thanks for their moral, material, and other support are Bill Opperman, Jim Skeen, Mike West, Sterling Wright, and John Schroll.

Others have had a more direct impact on this work, and greater claims to my heartfelt gratitude, most obviously, the members of my dissertation committee, Robert A. Gross, James P. Whittenburg, and Dale E. Hoak of the College of William and Mary, and J. Ritchie Garrison of the University of Delaware. Most essential, of course, was chairman Bob Gross. His incisive criticism and insightful commentary, which always compelled me to think creatively, read skeptically, probe deeper, and search out hidden meanings and obscure connections, helped transform (not always painlessly) my original work from hagiography to history. His long-distance guidance, patience, and moral support fortified me over the years and helped finally bring this dissertation to fruition. Ritchie Garrison, my original mentor who initiated my agricultural fair research, also well served me by seeing it through to this current resting point, his invisible presence ever fostering the work and motivating the worker. Jim Whittenburg throughout my graduate career and beyond has served as an exemplar of the values of humility, service, compassion, and integrity that identify a true teacher and perfect gentleman scholar. And
Dale Hoak graciously stepped in after the loss of other committee members to attrition.

Finally, less scholarly, but far more significant, was the support provided by Arvilla Chapman Mastromarino—my longsuffering wife, best friend, soulmate, and helpmeet—without whose moral, physical, emotional, and financial support this dissertation could never have been completed. Her greatest gifts to me—Silviano Joseph, Arvilla Elizabeth, Gabriella Maria, and John Anthony Emerson—have never known life without an ABDad. I look forward to showing them what it can be like.
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Abstract

The modern American agricultural fair, an annual harvest-time celebration at which livestock, produce, and handicrafts are exhibited for premiums, originated almost two centuries ago as an innovative response to conditions in rural New England at the time of the War of 1812. This study explains the birth of the institution by scrutinizing the motives and methods of its founders, particularly Elkanah Watson (1758-1842), its chief publicist, a native of Plymouth, Massachusetts. By tracing his early life and mercantile career in Europe, North Carolina, and Albany, New York, until his retirement in 1807 to an estate near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, this dissertation considers his intellectual journey from Puritan youth to Jeffersonian promoter. It also examines the specific economic and political forces shaping Pittsfield society, from its settlement in the 1740s to the passage of the Embargo Act in 1807, that led to the formation of the Berkshire County Agricultural Society in 1811, which organized America's first successful county fairs. Inspired by a vision of a United States no longer dependent on Great Britain for its cloth, the new local elite—professional men and capitalist entrepreneurs—imported fine-fleeced Spanish Merino sheep and established the first woolen factories in Pittsfield. Their new type of agricultural society would hold annual fairs to promote both, as well as to introduce agricultural improvements in general. In addition to being a popular institution of agricultural education, the fair was one of self-improvement, answering deep needs of the rural community. It aimed to replace wasteful and undisciplined folkways with secular ritual, healthy competition, rational amusements, and innocent recreations, all derived from contemporary festive culture. The origins of the agricultural fair can best be understood in its synergistic relationship with the capitalist transformation of the countryside, the amplification of commercial agricultural production for international and urban markets and the early development of American manufactures, the democratization of American society and politics, the secularization of moral reform and the rise of voluntary associations, and the heightened significance of the social sphere (especially for women) and of public festivity that occurred in the era of the early American republic. The fair did not assume today's form, with spectacle, sports, and the entertainments of the Midway competing with agricultural exhibitions, until the railroad came to towns like Pittsfield around the mid-nineteenth century, intensifying the pace of socioeconomic change and bringing many more nonagriculturalists to the county fair.
Chapter One
Fair Beginnings

The American agricultural fair, historically significant as one of the first modern agents of popular "edutainment," has been a prominent part of rural society for almost two hundred years. While its form has remained constant, its features and emphases have constantly shifted to reflect the contours of change in the countryside. The fair's survival, and the persistence of its original form in a society vastly different from that which called forth its creation in the early eighteen-hundreds, make it a fit subject of historical inquiry. Both aspects are traceable to the modern fair's origins and the creativity of Elkanah Watson (1758-1842) and other men of vision who founded the institution in Massachusetts on the eve of the War of 1812.

So enduring are the main characteristics of the American agricultural fair that the institution can be captured in a single definition. The agricultural fair is: a modern rural harvest-time celebration sponsored annually by a local, county, state, or regional, agricultural organization, at which superior farm animals and products are exhibited and compete for pre-announced premiums, and to which attendance is attracted by social, recreational, and commercial opportunities. My work's focus on county fairs to the exclusion of state and regional fairs is a function of chronology, not of philosophy—of tactics, not strategy. State fairs were not inherently different from county fairs, but were greater in scope and magnitude. They were a later phenomenon, however, dating to the mid-nineteenth century, after the advent of rail transportation, and they could not have become the monster events that they are today without the coming of the automobile in the first half of the twentieth century. The first truly successful state fair was held in
Syracuse, New York, in 1841. (Some might argue that the Brighton Fair, first held outside Boston in 1816, was in essence a state fair, as it was sponsored by a statewide organization. But the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture never expected participants from the western part of the state. The fairs of the Agricultural Society of South Carolina in the 1820s similarly attracted chiefly Charleston participants.) This dissertation focuses on the first decade of the agricultural fair's history, from about 1807 to about 1817, not only in order to fill a void in American agricultural fair historiography (as no scholar has yet provided a detailed analysis of the institution's founding in the early nineteenth century), but, more importantly, to open a window upon the interrelationship of agricultural reform, political development, socioeconomic trends, and cultural forces in the early American republic.1

Conditioned by popular culture, most Americans today probably consider the agricultural fair (if they consider it at all) as a quaint holdover in the rural heartland, an institution harking back to simpler, more innocent times. This nostalgic trend began as early as the Great Depression, and was fed by the movie industry. Philip Duffield Stong's best-selling novel, State Fair (Philadelphia, 1932) was about a prosperous and happy contemporary farm couple, Mr. and Mrs. Abel Frake, and the coming of age of their two children, Wayne and Margy, during their week-long vacation at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines. The book proved so popular that Fox Studios produced it as a movie, directed by Henry King and starring the well-known Janet Gaynor as Margy and Will Rogers as her father. The 1933 film was a critical and financial success, receiving an Oscar nomination for best picture, and helping to rescue Fox from near bankruptcy. The enduring appeal of the subject was confirmed a decade later, when Fox re-released the same story in 1945 as a Technicolor* musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein, who won that year's Academy Award for Best Song for the film's "It Might As Well Be Spring." Apparently, the fair's

cinematic popularity was waning by the 1960s, for Fox's third version of the Frake story, filmed at the Texas state fairgrounds in Dallas in 1962 and starring Pat Boone, Bobby Darin, Ann-Margaret, and Pamela Tiffin, was a flop.²

The writing of Stong and artistry of Rodgers and Hammerstein have fixed the modern American agricultural fair in the popular imagination as a chiefly Midwestern phenomenon. This actually reflects regional realities. Table 1.1 illustrates the fact that over one-third (38.57 percent) of the 2,722 American state, county, and local agricultural fairs of the mid-1980s were held in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin (the Midwest's predominance is even slightly greater—39.94 percent—if state fairs are

²The grandson of a director of the Iowa State Agricultural Society, Stong was a former reporter for the Des Moines Register who had moved to New York City and became a minor literary figure before his death in 1957. For Stong and the life of State Fair, see Chris Allen Rasmussen's excellent State Fair: Culture and Agriculture in Iowa, 1854-1941 (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1992), 449-517; and Nancy Wiley, The Great State Fair of Texas: An Illustrated History (Dallas, 1985), 178.

Other films in which fairs figure are the beloved 1939 MGM movie, The Wizard of Oz, in which the title character confessed to being a mere balloonist for the Miracle Wonderland Carnival Co. at the Nebraska state fairgrounds in Omaha, Oklahoma, and Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair (Universal Pictures, 1951), in which Marjorie Main and Percie Kilbride reprised the rustic couple who first appeared in the popular movie, The Egg and I. (Kilbride had also played storekeeper Dave Miller who opened the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein State Fair, singing "I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts that our state fair/is the best state fair in the state."). The 1951 comedy featured the Kettle family at the fictional Cape Flattery County Fair, where Ma planned to win top prizes in the bread and jam contests in order to finance her oldest daughter's college education. Due to various mishaps, the family's hopes instead center on the $1,500 purse for the harness race, in which Ma had accidentally entered Pa's newly acquired broken-down mare.

In 1972 Paramount Pictures produced an animated musical film of E. B. White's delightful children's story, Charlotte's Web (New York, 1952), about "Zuckerman's Famous Pig," the terrific, radiant, humble Wilbur, who went to the County Fair on Sept. 6th in a green crate with gold letters, after the title character had spun his fate in her web. The porcine protagonist escaped the traditional end of being processed as a Christmas ham because he was awarded a special prize by the Governors of the Fair as a token of their appreciation for his attracting so many visitors. For the deep meanings and "social semiotics" of Wilbur and other fair pigs (including Babe, brought to my attention by 7-year-old Gabriella M. Mastromarino—who also recommended Laura Lee Hope's The Bobsey Twins and the County Fair Mystery [New York, 1960])—see "The Fair, the Pig, Authorship," chap. 1, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986), 44-79.
Table 1.1

American Agricultural Fairs by Region, 1986

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<th>County/Local Fairs 8</th>
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<tr>
<td>Southwest 6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.00</td>
<td>2,594</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


1 Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Ohio, Wisconsin.
2 Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia.
3 Alaska, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming. (California's numerous district fairs and statewide citrus fairs inflate the total number of western state fairs.)
4 Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania.
5 Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont.
6 Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Utah.
7 Includes regional, state, district, divisional, and other extra-county events.
8 Includes community and county fairs and livestock, Grange, youth, 4-H, field days, and similar fairs and shows.

removed from the picture and only county and local fairs considered). 3

3 The figures derive from the appendix to Marti's *Historical Directory of American Agricultural Fairs* (New York, 1986), 201-88, which does not consistently categorize events; see also viii, 7. Marti's compilation may have been biased in favor of Midwestern fairs, as he was raised in Minnesota and resided in Indiana in the 1980s. Near century's end, approximately 3,238 regional, state, county, and local fairs drew a total of 125 million annual attendees, close to 44 percent of the total U.S. population (285,701,371), at a time when the U.S. Census Bureau defined the rural population as about 21 percent of the total (61,656,386 rural inhabitants in 1990). The Texas State Fair in Dallas has the largest annual gate attendance, with about 3.5 million visitors over 24 days (the fair attendance figures do not take into account repeat visitors). See "Summer Fun," *Newsweek* (2 Aug. 1999), 6; Marti *Historical Directory of American Agricultural Fairs*.
These calculations, however, reflect only contemporary perceptions and reality. Historically, the agricultural fair arose as a New England institution, and became identified with the Midwest only as that region became the country's breadbasket and cultural heartland. As geographer Fred Kniffen stated in 1949, "it was the New England–New York background that conditioned the pattern of the fair, not only in areas settled by emigrants from that region, but also in others normally deriving their institutions from a different source." Northeastern grain farmers became increasingly unable to compete with western farmers in the first half of the nineteenth century, as transportation improvements brought the cereal crops raised on fresh soils in newly settled western regions to urban markets. The center of American agriculture shifted west, as did its cultural institutions and symbols, including the agricultural fair. In 1820, eighty-four percent (ninety-eight of 114) of American agricultural societies in existence (most, if not all, of which, sponsored annual fairs) were located in New England and New York. The Midwest became the "stronghold of the fair" before the 1870s, and, by the early twentieth century, was home to nearly one-half of all American fairs, even though that region had less than one-third of the country's population.4

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But the beginnings of the fair were inextricably linked to the New England condition of the early 1800s, and the agricultural fair was a symbol of that region's identity before the institution traveled west. Indeed, the fair represented an attempt by rural leaders to stem the flow of westward migration by popularly promoting agricultural improvements that, if adopted, would not only enable rural New Englanders to compete agriculturally with newly settled lands in central and western New York, but would also provide raw materials for the New England textile industry, poised for takeoff. The gentlemen who established the Berkshire County Agricultural Society in western Massachusetts, which in 1811 held in the central town of Pittsfield the first modern agricultural fairs, were the community's social and economic leaders who wished to promote the values of American patriotism and capitalism, as well as agricultural improvement.

In doing so, they sought to involve all parts of the community and every member of the family, not just those who worked the land, and not just male heads of household. The agricultural fair today continues to appeal to diverse interests. As the definition in this chapter's second paragraph implies, the agricultural fair is, and has always been, a multifunctional event. Multifunctionalism was a hallmark of New England Yankee culture, as it developed in the early nineteenth century, when the sober mirth of Puritanism gave way to a sense of rational amusement (which is today represented by the concept of "edutainment"). The fair was created as an improving, as well as an entertaining, occasion, and it was endowed from its very beginnings with a flexibility that enabled it to develop according to the various, and often conflicting, needs and desires of organizers, participants, and attendees. Pa Kettle rightly proclaimed in the 1951 comedy Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair, "The county fair's for folks to have fun," but it also has always been a place to learn, to buy and sell things, to show off one's agricultural successes, and to participate in social and recreational activities. In the animated musical film of E. B. White's Charlotte's Web, the overstuffed Templeton the Rat scurries about the fairgrounds
at night gathering various tidbits and singing in Paul Lynde's distinctive voice that the "fair is a veritable smorgasbord." How astute an observation for a rodent, for it is precisely the buffet-style nature of the fair experience that is responsible for the institution's survival into the twenty-first century. There is something for everyone—young and old, male and female—at the county fair.5

In the abovementioned movies, whole families are shown arriving together at the fairgrounds before their members split up to pursue their individual interests. In Charlotte's Web, the parents went to look at deep freezers and tractors, and the children headed off for the refreshments and rides of the Midway. As other rural institutions, such as agricultural journals, experiment stations, and land-grant colleges, or Grange picnics and mail-order catalogs, and even today's Internet, came into being and assumed various functions of the annual county fair, fair organizers generally would shift the emphasis of particular features in order to engage more fully a greater cross-section of the rural, and, increasingly, nonrural, population.6

The fair's founders intended to reform, not celebrate, popular culture, and they only inadvertently stumbled upon the formula for widespread success. Human nature was well considered, and appropriate compromises made to attract fairgoers (in the local newspaper preceding the first Pittsfield fair, a notice was published that read: "Innocent recreations such as are customary on such occasions will be permitted, but every thing tending to immorality will be discountenanced"). Increasingly, the successors of the founding fathers made greater compromises to popular culture, as society became secularized and fairs became big business and had to compete with a commercial amusements industry. The abovementioned films portray only a partial view of the

5Joseph A. Conforti claims that the "fabled Yankee character did not become central to New England . . . identity" until after 1820 (Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century [Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001], 121). For the "social evolution" of agricultural fairs, see Neely, Agricultural Fair (New York, 1935; reprint. New York, 1967), 251-64.

twentieth-century agricultural fair. The most questionable aspects acknowledged were the burlesque dancers in the 1945 version of State Fair and the gambling that accompanied the trotting race in Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair. Other amusements are not even hinted at, such as sideshows involving the erotic and exotic—strip shows and freak shows, which became staples of the carnival Midways by the early 1900s.7

A century later, such exploitive and exhibitionist entertainment at fairs has generally been replaced by historical and heritage displays, reflecting the nostalgic popular cultural view of the institution. This development not only mirrors a similar trend taking place on many American farms, but also answers the deep-seated mythologizing needs of early-twenty-first-century America.8 For instance, for the last few years, Civil War re-enactors (Confederate Army, of course) have set up camp at my local Albemarle County Fair in North Garden, Virginia. On a grander scale, since the 1930s, reconstructed Storrowton Village has been a popular feature of the fairgrounds of the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield, Massachusetts. Early American houses, a store and tavern, town hall, meetinghouse, schoolhouse, blacksmith's shop, and law office, all dating from 1767 to the 1850s and rescued from decay or destruction, were moved to the fairgrounds to form a nostalgic but anachronistic rendition of the mythical New England village around an idealized green. It provides an oasis from the frenetic bustle of fair days


8A growing number of farm families are attempting to harvest agrotourism dollars along with their crops and livestock, by introducing paying vacationers from the cities and suburbia to their way of life. Old Yankee cynics may laugh up their sleeves at those enjoying oxymoronic "farm vacations," but this creative response, which has been going on since the late 1800s, has, like the fair, educated many Americans about their important rural heritage (see "That Dream of Home: Northern New England and the Farm Vacation Industry, 1890-1900," chap. 5, Dona Brown, Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century [Washington, D.C., 1995], esp. 155-67).
in September, but also serves as a year-round symbol of the New England past upon which the first fair founders felt inspired to improve.  

Considering the agricultural fair as an icon of a lost golden age or as a symbol of America’s country heritage, although entertaining and psychologically satisfying, distorts its historical reality. Although we tend to look back at the fair, with or without rose-colored glasses, the men who created it in the early nineteenth century were looking forward in time, while resurrecting an outmoded socioeconomic institution. A close study of the first regular county fairs held in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, from 1811 on, and an examination of the early history of the Berkshire Agricultural Society that was organized to sponsor them, carefully situating both in the context of their times, show that, in actuality, the American agricultural fair originally was an instrument of modernity. It was a cutting-edge institution that resulted from and contributed to the larger forces that changed American society after the era of the American Revolution. These historical trends and forces included, but were not limited to, the consumer revolution and the uneven shift from a predominantly household economy to rural capitalism; the development of a national economy based on intensifying regionalism, a nascent manufacturing sector, and commercial agricultural production for international markets, as well as the growing popularity of the corporation as a form of business organization; the

rise of national parties and increasingly participatory politics; the growth of American nationalism; the secularization of moral reform and growing voluntarism and associationism; the heightened significance of the social sphere, especially for women, and of public festivity; and the Village Enlightenment and the spread of vernacular gentility.  

The Pittsfield promoters hoped to preserve certain values and aspects of society as they knew it, including a hierarchical order in which they would be deferred to as community leaders. They drew their ideas for agricultural fairs from preexisting events, the most obvious being the market fair, which had existed in Europe since early medieval times and was carried to North America by Dutch and English colonists in the early seventeenth century. It had originated as a part of religious occasions (the word "fair" derives from the Latin "feria," or holy day), when Christian leaders located shrines at the burial sites of ancient heroes, at which pagan funeral games and anniversary festivities had formerly been held. They eventually built churches and monasteries dedicated to the particular saint whose feast day fell nearest to the date of the pre-Christian events. Bishops and abbots, as well as noblemen, manor lords, city corporations, and other English and Continental patrons of fairs, were granted special privileges by the various crowns to facilitate the gathering of merchants who took advantage of the popular

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festivity of the saints' days to sell their wares. Medieval fairs thus became important commercial, as well as festive, events, serving as "the essential tools of long-distance trade" that interrupted "the tight circle of everyday exchanges," according to Fernand Braudel. The market fair and Catholic Church waxed and waned together in England, the former reaching their greatest prosperity between 1200 and 1400, when almost five thousand fair charters were granted. By the eighteenth century, the institution had generally become an archaic form of exchange all across Europe, as the economy had matured and other institutions more efficiently fulfilled its commercial and credit functions. Because of their popularity as a regular festival, however, market fairs never disappeared entirely; many simply "degenerated into amusement centers" and survived "merely as gatherings for pleasure."

Bartholomew Fair immortalized by Ben Jonson exemplifies this transformation. First held in Smithfield near London in the twelfth century on the feast day of Saint Bartholomew (25 August), the fair attracted crowds of the sick who prayed for healing at the altar of the priory's church. Chapmen and pedlars haggled and hawked their wares in the churchyard, where horses, oxen, and sheep were also offered for sale, as was the cloth upon which the priory's wealth depended. Minstrels, mummers, and acrobats entertained the crowds, and the Company of Parish Clerks performed their miracle plays. At the Dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, the chancellor of the court of augmentations purchased the priory and its rights, and the fair continued, but with a different commercial focus, as Smithfield became the center of the London meat trade in

the seventeenth century. Members of the bourgeoisie felt threatened by Bartholomew's
carnivalesque atmosphere at least by the eighteenth century (London petitioners claimed in
1711 that the fair's "lewd and ravenous Crew" was "an open and daring Enemy to good
Government" and "able to make a stand against Authority"). Clerics continued to
denounce Bartholomew Fair for another century, but it was not abolished until the mid-
nineteenth century, after a growing proletariat demonstrated that "the liberties of the fair
could always be articulated politically against the propertied and the State."

The degeneration of Bartholomew Fair might have been intensified by its proximity
to the metropolis, but even in its early days it well represented "the atmosphere of
carnival, license, and general reversal of everyday life which all fairs stood for, whether
lively or not so lively," as implied by the old proverb: "Coming home from the fair is not
the same as coming home from market." Because fairs brought together generally
discrete classes, people, and activities—the lowborn and the gentry, rural and urban
dwellers, locals and outsiders, countrymen and foreigners, men and women, buyers and
sellers—they always caused some anxiety to society's leaders (a similar festive spirit
characterized the annual pre-Lenten Carnival celebrations of medieval and early-modern
Europe, which also provided popular amusement, exciting spectacle, and important public
ritual, as well as a generally safe release of various social pressures that might otherwise
have built up to explosive levels).  

The market fair arrived in North America, albeit, with a dubious reputation,
because it was valued in the infant colonial economies for the same commercial reasons that had compelled its creation in the developing economy of early medieval Europe, as a regular event that brought producers and consumers together to buy and sell, free from the often abusive practices of middlemen. As settlements spread, populations grew, and trade intensified, colonial leaders authorized weekly markets and semiannual and annual fairs. The first American fairs apparently were those for the sale of cattle and hogs decreed by the Dutch on Manhattan Island in New Netherland in the 1620s. The Massachusetts General Court seems to have allowed semiannual fairs in Boston, Salem, Watertown, and Dorchester as early as 1633, and renewed the enabling legislation until at least 1672. New Haven, Connecticut, held fairs as early as 1644, and Burlington, New Jersey, by 1681. The eighteenth century saw the establishment of market fairs in Saint John's Parish, Berkeley County, South Carolina (1723); at Rye, New Hampshire (1726); at Williamsburg (1739), Alexandria (1742), and Fredericksburg (1740s), Virginia; and at Baltimore (1747), and Georgetown (1751), Maryland, to mention a few. The fairs continued to fulfill a real need in the South up to the mid-eighteenth century. They became less necessary elsewhere as commerce flourished in the Atlantic world, the Anglicization of the mainland colonies rapidly advanced, and a public sphere of newspapers, coffeehouses, and voluntary associations grew up in the port towns, where more modern economic institutions were established.14

The last thing that the Puritan founders of Plymouth Colony and Massachusetts Bay wanted to transport to their City upon a Hill was the rowdy carnival culture of contemporary English market fairs, as witnessed by the suppression by the Pilgrim authorities in the late 1620s of a rival settlement called "Merrie Mount." The sins of its founder, Thomas Morton, an acquaintance of Bartholomew Fair's chronicler Ben Jonson, included setting up a Maypole and "pouring out themselves into all profanenes,... inviting the Indean women for their consorts, dancing and frisking together," and "worse practices." According to the Pilgrim's indictment, the "lord of misrule" and his men lewdly spent their time and means "in maintaining drunkenness, riot, and other evils amongst them."15

Massachusetts authorities consequently kept fairs under strict control. New England market fairs, as did those in Old England, featured sales of livestock, produce, and various sundries, and fairgoers indulged in benign popular amusements and spontaneous or informal contests of skills or strength, such as racing, wrestling, and the like. Itinerant entertainers and recreational entrepreneurs were most unwelcome, however, at New England fairs, which "petered out," along with weekly markets, as trade was privatized and the commercial economy matured. Southern fairs often coincided with court days and prominently featured horse racing, and probably cockfighting. Pennsylvania's leaders apparently had more trouble regulating fairs. In 1773, the colony attempted to ban fairs in towns near forges because visits by hard-drinking ironworkers always resulted in "debauchery, idleness, and drunkenness."16

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15William Bradford quoted in George F. Willison, Saints and Strangers... (New York, 1945), 277; see also 273-84. All quotations from primary sources appear with original capitalization, punctuation, and spelling, with occasional editorial insertions within brackets [ ] for the sake of clarity.

16Winifred B. Rothenberg noted that Massachusetts authorized local weekly market days and...
Colonel William Darke of Berkeley County on the Virginia frontier, describing the disastrous defeat and retreat of General Arthur St. Clair's troops from Indians in the Northwest in November 1791, stated that "The whole Army Ran together like a Mob at a fair." Whether he was speaking from personal experience of fairs in America or Ireland is unknown.17

The traditional market fair, then, unlike the modern agricultural fair, had nothing to do with educating and uplifting farmers and families, but was simply a venue for buying and selling farm animals and goods. The American agricultural fair arose independently from market fairs, but the two institutions shared a similar spirit of being a world apart from ordinary rural routine, a threshold between "Ordinary Life, [and] Festival Days."

Abel Frake told his wife in State Fair that people go to the fair to see something new and different. Market and agricultural fairs served, and still serve, as a vehicle of escapism, providing a socially sanctioned suspension of ordinary routines, relationships, and rules. This juxtaposition between reality and temporality not only made the agricultural fair the most popular annual holiday on the rural calendar, but was also responsible for the ultimate failure of the moral reform program of its founders.18

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The American agricultural fair did not arise directly from traditional market fairs, but was more immediately influenced by the Anglo-American agricultural movement of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In fact, one scholar has stated: "The American or English county fair is not a fair in the technical sense but rather a produce and livestock exposition combined with public amusements." The same writer defined expositions as events "intended more as a mode of advertisement to acquaint people with the latest technical achievements and industrial progress rather than for immediate trading."\(^{19}\)

While market fairs briefly flourished and died in colonial America, the pursuit and promotion of agricultural improvement was occurring in other settings under the aegis of individuals and groups with very different purposes from the organizers of market fairs. Agricultural reform was an elite activity, originating among progressive gentry in eighteenth-century England and transmitted to the colonies by example and through print. Christopher Grasso and other historians have shown that the Reverend Jared Eliot of Killingworth, Connecticut, was an early American agricultural innovator. In 1761 the Yale graduate (class of 1706) and Harvard-educated minister (M.A., 1709) published as *Essays upon Field-Husbandry in New-England* an anthology of six agricultural treatises he had written between 1748 and 1759 to circulate ideas formed by his experimentation with English intensive farming. Eliot encouraged open and mutually beneficial communication between gentlemen farmers and other husbandmen, and he created a personal network of agricultural innovators who exchanged information, seeds, and even farm implements. This private network, however, did not survive Eliot's death in 1763, as it had neither public support nor institutional means, unless Eliot was involved with a short-lived Long Island agricultural association that apparently existed as early as 1761.

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But before it can be concluded that traditional colonial market fairs had little direct influence on modern American agricultural fairs, except, perhaps, as a negative referent, one particular market fair in the late colonial period might be considered as a transitional event, tying together the histories of the two institutions. The man responsible for the little-known Hardwick fairs in Worcester County Massachusetts was Timothy Ruggles (1711-1795), who, like Eliot, attempted to advance New England agriculture before the Revolutionary War. The son of a minister, Ruggles commenced a legal career and served in the General Court after having graduated from Harvard College in 1732. Around 1753 he removed from Cape Cod, where he had married the widow of a prominent innkeeper, to Hardwick on the Ware River in western Worcester County, where he developed an elegant estate. In addition to filling the highest town offices, Ruggles held commissions as justice of the peace and colonel, and then of brigadier general, of provincial militia in the campaigns against Canada during the French and Indian War. Ruggles was appointed a judge of the Worcester County court of common pleas in 1757 and became chief justice of the same court in 1762. He also continued to serve in the provincial legislature until 1770, and was elected speaker of the house in 1762. He also secured a sinecure worth £300 a year as inspector of the King's forests in northern New England. Ruggles became an important supporter of Governor Thomas Hutchinson's policies in the early 1770s and remained loyal to King George III in the American Revolution. He was forced to flee Hardwick and eventually settled in Nova Scotia, where the Crown granted him a large tract of land, almost £5,000, and an annual pension of £200, in compensation for his losses.
and in recognition of his services during the Revolutionary War.21

When Ruggles moved to Hardwick, he threw himself into the role of a landed gentleman with his characteristic energy, and after his return from the imperial wars, the General became the leading man of central Massachusetts, and was known far and wide for his famous hospitality. Enlightened farming was an important aspect of the life of the country elite. Ruggles enjoyed showing off his estate with its livestock and farms to visiting gentlemen from Boston, who would ride to his hounds in the twenty-acre deer park he had enclosed and stocked. His homestead farm was cleared and fenced and in excellent cultivation and had two barns and other outbuildings, as well as his well-finished mansion house. A scene was painted sometime in the 1760s or early 1770s by Winthrop Chandler, a cousin of the General's sons-in-law, who depicted the Ruggles homestead. Well-dressed figures look out the door and window of the yellow-painted house that sits at the end of a long tree-lined avenue, and two equestrians sit on their mounts in the middle of the avenue. The foreground is dominated by four large ornamental trees, under which a couple of hounds have just flushed a large hare.22

21Clifford K. Shipton, Biographical Sketches of Those Who Attended Harvard College in the Classes 1731-1735, Vol. 9 (Boston, 1956), 199-223; Ivan Sandrof, "Forgotten Giant of the Revolution: The Story of Brigadier-General Timothy Ruggles of Hardwick," Worcester Historical Society Publications, n.s., 111 (April 1952), 16-28; Joseph Willard, Address to the Worcester County Bar (Lancaster, Mass., 1830), 50-54. Ruggles is best remembered today (except in Hardwick, where he was honored in the town's 250th-anniversary parade in 1989) as father of Bathsheba Ruggles Spooner, who was executed, while pregnant with her lover's child, as an accomplice to the murder of her husband Joshua (see Deborah Navas, Murdered by His Wife: A History with Documentation of the Joshua Spooner Murder and Execution of His Wife, Bathsheba, Who Was Hanged in Worcester, Massachusetts, 2 July 1778 [Amherst, Mass., 1999]).

22"Proceedings of the Loyalist Commissioners, Halifax," Vol. 10, in Alexander Fraser, Second Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario, 1904, Parts 1 and 2 (Toronto, 1905), 2:739-40, 790. The painting, which shows two houses opposite each other (apparently depicting the improved mansion as well as its first incarnation), was owned in the 1940s by Dr. Nathan Green, a great grandson of Ruggles's daughter, Mrs. Mary Ruggles Green. The homestead was demolished sometime before 1883, although archeological features of Ruggles's changes to the landscape still survive (Nina Fletcher Little, "Winthrop Chandler, Art in America, 35 [April 1947], 89, 148-50). For the symbolic importance of agriculture to the 18th-century elite, see Tamara Plakins Thornton, Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860 (New Haven, Conn., 1989), and T. H. Breen, Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution (Princeton, N.J., 1985).
Several items in the inventory of his personal property recorded by state officials in May 1776 testify to Ruggles's progressive farming. These include twenty pounds of white clover seed, twenty-seven harrow teeth, and one square iron-tooth harrow. Ruggles also left behind one unidentified "Farrier's book" and various equestrian equipage. The most informative item in the inventory, however, is "1 Book of Duhamel's husbandry." The French savant Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau had been impressed with the earlier descriptions of drill plowing and other aspects of intensive agriculture described by English agricultural pioneer Jethro Tull, whose work had been largely forgotten after his death in 1741. Duhamel's six volumes of *Traité de la Culture des Terres suivant les Principes de M. Tull*, published between 1751 and 1760, circulated in England in the 1750s and early 1760s. John Mill published an anglicized précis of Duhamel's *Traité* in London in 1759, entitled *A Practical Treatise of Husbandry: Wherein Are Contained Many Useful and Valuable Experiments and Observations on the New Husbandry—Also the Most Approved Practice of the Best English Farmers, in the Old Method of Husbandry*. This was probably the book owned by Ruggles. The volume inventoried

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23. "An Inventory taken by us the Committee of Correspondence Safety and Inspection for the Town of Hardwick of the Rent & of the Real Estate and also the Personal Estate of Timothy Ruggles Late of Hardwick a Mandamus Counsellor," 27 May 1776, U.S. Revolution Collection, Box 2, fold. 3, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.


might alternately have been Philip Miller’s translation of another primer for farmers written
by Duhamel, which appeared in 1764. Bostonian Benjamin Guild and John Adams both
owned copies of Mill’s translation, probably acquired before the Revolutionary War, and
another copy was listed in the library of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting
Agriculture in 1818.26

Ruggles was particularly interested in animal husbandry and was famous for the
fine horses he imported and bred. In the 1780s Colonel Thomas Gilbert testified that
Ruggles "was noted in the province for his particular attention to improving his stock of
horses, sparing neither pains nor expense in procuring the best sires, both English and
foreign, and English mares, by which means his stock had justly acquired the highest
reputation of any stud in Massachusetts." The General’s sons John and Richard stated he
had between thirty-four and forty horses in his stables at the outbreak of the Revolution.
Many of them were considered the finest in the province, and Ruggles received large stud
fees and high prices for the sale of their progeny. His best English stallion, as well as

26 Ruggles’s interest in agricultural can be read back into the 1760s from his post-Revolutionary
War career in Canada. In the 1780s, he was considered "the model farmer of the region" of Nova
Scotia. He immediately recognized the agricultural potential of the area around Annapolis County,
which he predicted would become "the granary of any part of the continent to the eastward of New
York." Ruggles reestablished his orchards from grafts he had acquired from his best apple trees in
Hardwick, and in a sheltered valley near his comfortable house on the southern slope of North
Mountain, he successfully planted fruit and nut trees and grapevines that had never before been
attempted in that northern climate. He continued to import and experiment with various seeds and
plants, and in December 1789 the members of the Society for Promoting Agriculture in the
Province of Nova-Scotia unanimously elected him one of its directors (Ruggles to Edward
Brunswick, 1901], 107. See also Sandrof, "Forgotten Giant of the Revolution," Worcester Hist.
Soc. Pubs., n.s., 111 [April 1952], 27; W. A. Colnek, History of the County of Annapolis,
Including Old Port Royal and Acadia, with Memoirs of Its Representatives in the Provincial
Parliament, and Biographical and Genealogical Sketches of Its Early English Settlement and
Their Families, ed. by A. W. Savary [Toronto, 1897], 227, 591; Letters and Papers on
Agriculture: Extracted from the Correspondence of a Society Instituted at Halifax, for Promoting
Agriculture in the Province of Nova-Scotia. To Which Is Added a Selection of Papers on Various
Branches of Husbandry, from Some of the Best Publications on the Subject in Europe and
America, Vol. 1 [Halifax, 1791], 12, 14-15; Shipton, Sibley’s Harvard Graduates, Vol. 9: 1731-
1735 [Boston, 1956], 222).
some of his cattle, may have been maimed and poisoned by his townsmen when they plundered Ruggles's mansion immediately after his 1774 departure on the back of the only steed he was able to save for himself. About twenty other horses were confiscated by the Hardwick committee of correspondence and sold at public auction in January 1776.27

Ruggles was also interested in improving his neat cattle. Connecticut River Valley residents had been driving fatted cattle to Boston since the late seventeenth century, as well as shipping prepared meat down river. The emergence of the Valley as a center of cattle-raising was accelerated by the Revolutionary War, during which Brighton became the destination of the herds. John Adams commented on the growing trend in his diary in 1771. Hardwick, with a population of almost 1,400 in 1776, was advantageously located, being almost twenty miles closer to the hungry metropolis than most of the Connecticut River towns were. Its soil was generally deep and loamy, and best adapted to grass, pasturage, and fruit trees, because of its rough and hilly quality (Ruggles also owned some richer intervale lands of the Ware River). In his claims to the Crown for compensation, he stated that he "had it in contemplation to have turned his farm to a grazing farm," a claim substantiated by the size of his herd, as well as his possession of clover seed. John and Richard Ruggles stated that their father owned fifty to one hundred head of cattle, including ten oxen. At least one of Ruggles's bulls was well known locally, as tradition maintains it was set against those of other farmers in bullfights and never lost. Thirty of the General's cattle were confiscated and auctioned by the town in January 1776, as well

as his fifty sheep and numerous swine.  

Ruggles's agricultural career resembled that of contemporary members of the Williams family in neighboring Old Hampshire and Berkshire counties to the west, whose agricultural operations help provide a context for his activities. William, Ephraim (Senior), Elijah, Israel, Stephen, and Thomas Williams, like Ruggles, were significant gentlemen in central and western Massachusetts who modeled themselves on the English gentry. These "River Gods" ditched and drained their lands, expanded wheat-growing, introduced grain cradles, grafted fruit trees, raised turnips and potatoes as fodder crops, and planted clover and English grasses in the 1750s and 1760s. All of those methods were undertaken specifically to increase production for markets, not for household consumption. Unlike Ruggles, some of the Williamses were also major inland merchants, which facilitated their commercial exchange and increased their profits. But like Ruggles, they were all Loyalists during the Revolution, a political stance that helps explain their identification with the model of the English country gentry.  

Undoubtedly, Ruggles was interested in establishing a local market in which to sell his livestock when he petitioned the General Court in 1762 for the establishment of a

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Worcester County fair at Hardwick, but he may also have been motivated by the desires to diffuse information on agricultural improvement and cattle breeding, and to provide opportunities for equestrian sport and other athletic contests (he was widely known as a wrestler in his early days). Upon his motion on 15 February 1762, the General Court appointed a committee to consider the expediency of instituting a fair in Worcester County and to draft a bill for that purpose. The next day Ruggles and the other committee members presented a bill for setting up a semi-annual fair in Hardwick, which passed on 12 June. The act licensed the town to hold a two-day fair each May and October for seven years and required it, at each town meeting in March, to choose proper officers to regulate the fair. (The spring fair nearly coincided with the quarterly meeting of the Worcester County Court, at least in 1765, increasing the size of the potential audience.) It also regulated sales by stating that "no bargain and sale, made at any of the said Fairs, shall be deemed valid and effectual in the law, unless the same be made between sun-rising and sun-setting." The September 1762 Hardwick town meeting elected James Aikens superintendent of the fair, Captain Paul Mandell clerk, and Thomas Robinson and Deacon John Cooper constables (Cooper was excused from the duty and replaced by Jonathan Farr). Mandell was also ordered to publish a notice in the newspaper advertising the dates of the upcoming fair (20-21 October). In addition, drummers were appointed for subsequent fairs, which appear to have been extremely popular events. Lucius Paige later claimed that "the Fair attracted much attention, and multitudes flocked to it from all of the region round about." He does provide evidence that the county court granted ten extra licenses to temporary innkeepers (including Ruggles's younger brother Joseph) during the 1762 fair in anticipation of a large influx of visitors, and half of the men renewed their licenses for subsequent fairs. If these licenses also included the privilege of purveying alcoholic beverages, then the Hardwick Fair might have had a carnivalesque atmosphere to it as well.  

30The law establishing the fair is printed in Appendix H of Paige, *Hardwick Centennial*
The 1762 law was apparently renewed after seven years, for the Hardwick Fair continued to be held until 1775, at least according to Nathaniel Ames's *Almanack* (which noted its dates from 1764 through 1766 and in the issues of 1773 and 1775, as well), in which the fairs were given the same prominence as election days and Harvard College commencements. James Aikens continued to serve as superintendent until 1771, after which he was replaced by Thomas Robinson. After Ruggles's departure from Hardwick, the town voted to discontinue the fair, and it is unknown whether or not fairs were held in May or October of 1775. It is unknown why Hardwick was unsuccessful in its 1785 and 1791 petitions to the state legislature to reinstitute the fair; perhaps House members saw it as countenancing the ideas and restoring the reputation of a thoroughly discredited and well-loathed man.31

As neither surviving eyewitness accounts nor any other direct evidence of the nature of pre-Revolutionary Hardwick fairs has been discovered, it is impossible to determine the precise character of that institution. Previous agricultural historians have all but lost sight of them. Historian Percy Wells Bidwell confessed that he was "unable to find any evidence to confirm the statement" of the Worcester *National Aegis* that was reprinted in the *New England Farmer and Horticultural Journal* on 14 November 1828: "Before the Revolution, regular Cattle Fairs were held in the town of Hardwick, under the patronage of Timothy Ruggles" and were a "custom so beneficial to the agricultural community." Local historians had long been aware of the Hardwick fairs, but, because of the scarcity of primary sources, wrote about them according to their own preconceived notions of fairs. John Nelson assumed that Hardwick "cattle fairs" were "merely the

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meetings of buyers and sellers." Lucius Paige stated that the Hardwick fairs were established "after the English pattern" and provided details without attribution: "cattle, and various articles of manufacture and merchandise were exhibited, bought, and sold. Wrestling, and various trials of strength and skill, were practised; and sometimes, it is said, pugilistic encounters were witnessed." Over a century later, John Bear Doane Cogswell noted merely that "At the Fair, there were sales of stock, games &c. &c."32

Whatever its precise nature, the early Hardwick Fair cannot be labeled as America's first modern agricultural fair, at least according to the definition presented above. Half the time it was held not at harvest time but in the spring. Nor was it chiefly an educational event sponsored by an organization devoted to agricultural improvement. There is no evidence that anything other than cattle were exhibited, and livestock displayed were present primarily for sale, not in competition for pre-announced premiums. But the Hardwick fairs were nonetheless significant as transitional events—local market fairs initiated by an individual with a demonstrated interest in progressive agriculture and improved husbandry. Attendees might have been chiefly interested in the fairs' commercial and social or recreational opportunities, but they might also have gained some knowledge of the potential benefits of close attention to and investment in crops, fields, and pastures, as well as of selective breeding and better care of livestock. If so, such a model of agricultural education would not reappear for another forty years, as Ruggles's Loyalism forced him into exile and destroyed his influence, and as elite-focused associations created an American agricultural improvement movement and assumed command of it.

In the early 1700s European physiocrats had begun forming societies devoted to discovering and promulgating the enlightened farming principles advanced by gentlemen

like Jethro Tull, Charles "Turnip" Townshend, and Robert Bakewell. The Society of Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture was founded in Edinburgh in 1723, and the Dublin Society for Improving Husbandry, Manufactures, and Other Useful Arts, in 1731. The Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce was established in London in 1754, and two years later became the first British society to offer specific awards for agricultural improvement. Its leaders were apparently the first agricultural improvers to adapt the traditional fair form to their own ends, when it held its first exhibition, or exposition, in 1756. The Lancashire Society Show held in 1761 was one of the earliest agricultural fairs held in England. The Society of Bath for the Encouragement of Agriculture, Art, Manufactures, and Commerce was formed in 1777 and held a show that year.33

The gentlemen patriots who formed the first major American agricultural associations in the 1780s did not immediately adopt British livestock shows and exhibitions. Their agricultural associations were part of the elite urban culture of literary societies in general, which reflected the common belief that the pursuit of knowledge was a gentlemanly activity. The post-Revolutionary agricultural societies were just one example of the genteel associations to promote useful arts that had as their main goal the stimulation of American production to relieve dependence on Britain. In hoping to harness their personal prestige and prosperity to increased production and the growth of and increasing accessibility to urban and foreign markets, the gentlemen agriculturalists

33See Kenneth Hudson, Patriotism with Profit: British Agricultural Societies in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (London, 1972); Neely, Agricultural Fair (New York, 1935; reprint. New York, 1967), 37-38 and n.11; Addison, English Fairs and Markets (London, 1953), 185; Rodney H. True, "The Early Development of Agricultural Societies in the United States," Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1920 (Washington, D.C., 1925), 295; A. C. True, History of Agricultural Education in the U.S. USDA, Miscellaneous Publications (Washington, D.C., 1929), 6. Agricultural "fairs" and "shows" were not then interchangeable terms, although today they denote the same thing, with the former generally used in the United States and Canada, and the latter in Europe and Australia. Until the 1820s, in America at any rate, a fair still implied a commercial component, most typically an auction of prize livestock, while a show involved a display of farm goods or animals, offered for premiums, usually, but not necessarily for sale (Edward Wiest, "Agricultural Fairs," in Seligman and Johnson, eds., Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences [25 vols.; New York, 1930-1944], 1:544-45).
applied principles of cooperative action and public opinion-making learned from their experiences as leaders of the Revolutionary struggle. Ordinary farmers were considered chiefly as recipients of, rather than participants in, these endeavors. Yeomen were expected to observe and admire the elite as it engaged in conspicuous activities in behalf of its conception of the public interest. As public virtue had replaced economic wealth and social prominence as the main criterion for legitimate leadership, such activities served to maintain the elite's elevated position.\textsuperscript{34}

Gentlemen in Charleston, South Carolina, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1784 and 1785, respectively, formed the first major American associations devoted to agricultural improvement, although the New Jersey Society for Promoting Agriculture, Commerce, and Arts, about whose activities little is known, was established sometime before 1782. An agricultural society was established at Hallowell in the Maine District of Massachusetts in 1787, and the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (MSPA) was incorporated in Boston in 1792, the same year the New York Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts, and Manufactures was incorporated in that state (but the New York society was actually organized the previous year). The first American county society was probably the Dutchess County Agricultural Society, founded in New York in 1793. None of these elite societies sponsored agricultural fairs in the eighteenth century (the Philadelphia and Dutchess societies, however, did apparently hold some of the first American cattle shows and fairs in the early 1800s). Generally, the programs of the elite societies were limited to receiving, adapting, and disseminating knowledge of foreign agricultural progress by offering premiums for agricultural improvements and experiments, and publishing the results in society journals or transactions.\textsuperscript{35}


It is worth considering the early history of the MSPA in further detail, not least because John Adams, an early member and its fourth president (from 1805 to 1813) was personally familiar with Timothy Ruggles and the Hardwick Fair, and was an acquaintance of Elkanah Watson, whom he later called the father of modern agricultural societies and fairs. More significantly, the MSPA represented the philosophy against which Watson and his colleagues were initially reacting in the early 1810s, even while they could not completely escape their own elitist feelings.36

The MSPA, incorporated by the state on 7 March 1792, was an elite learned society far removed from the experience of the ordinary farmers of Massachusetts. Twenty-eight prominent gentlemen, including active Federalists John Lowell, Aaron Dexter, and Christopher Gore, had petitioned the legislature to be chartered as an agricultural society, "whose particular business [it] is to make experiments themselves, and invite others thereto on the subject of agriculture" and "to give handsome premiums to the men of enterprise who have by their inquiries made useful discoveries and communicated them to the public." Samuel Adams presided over the society's first meeting, on 19 April, and seventy-two new members were admitted at its second meeting, on 31 May, at which officers were elected. The MSPA was made up of the Boston's social and political leaders, and other gentlemen from across the Commonwealth. Membership was not free and open, but highly selective: new candidates had to be nominated by an existing member

36 Adams to Watson, 11 Aug. 1812, ALS (fragment), Elkanah Watson Papers, Box 3, Journal D, Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library, Albany; LB, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston (microfilm reel 118); Adams to Watson, 7 Nov. 1817, ALS, Watson Papers, Box 3, Journal D. Both letters were edited and printed in Winslow C. Watson, ed., 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 (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 438, 499. See also Centennial Year, 1792-1892, The Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (Boston, 1892; reprint. Boston, 1942), 68-69.
and accepted by a simple majority vote of the whole society. The new society also followed an elite ideal of agricultural education, based on a program of collecting and diffusing useful information by obtaining and publishing accounts of domestic and foreign improvements, by establishing a private agricultural library, and by offering and awarding premiums for agricultural experiments, improved implements, and superior breeds of livestock.\textsuperscript{37}

In the eighteenth century, the acquisition of higher knowledge was considered a gentlemanly duty, but after the American Revolution, republican statesmen recognized that survival of the new national government depended on an educated citizenry. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the idea of popular self-education became connected with the necessity of diffusing useful knowledge among the multitude, well beyond the boundaries of established institutions, such as churches, public schools, private academies, and colleges. The new spirit of popular self-education was based on the principles of voluntarism, relevance, experiential means, and democratic idealism. The American agricultural society and fair was one of the first popular institutions of adult education in the nation, preceding the important antebellum institutions of the Lyceum, Mechanics Institute, and Chautauqua. Professor Joseph F. Kett described the process of change in agricultural education. The genteel societies like the MSPA "found themselves compelled by the logic of their situation, rather than by any abstract regard for democratic education, to reach out to ever-widening circles of the public," and that, after the failure of publication and premium programs, it "was inevitable that someone would hit upon the

\textsuperscript{37}Centennial Year of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, 1792-1892 (Boston, 1892; reprint., Boston, 1942), 7-9, 24-25; An Outline History of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (Boston, 1942), 12. New members included John Hancock, John Adams, Fisher Ames, Timothy Pickering, Caleb Strong, Elbridge Gerry, Henry Knox, Artemas Ward, Manasseh Cutler, Levi Lincoln, Josiah Quincy, George Cabot, and James Warren. The society's first officers, elected on 14 June 1792, were Thomas Russell, president; John Lowell and Moses Gill, vice-presidents; John Avery, Jr., recording secretary; Oliver Smith, corresponding secretary; Aaron Dexter, treasurer; and Cotton Tufts, Loammi Baldwin, James Bowdoin, Christopher Gore, Charles Vaughan, and Martin Brimmer, trustees.
idea of directly appealing to practical farmers to engage in experiments."\textsuperscript{38}

That someone was Elkanah Watson, who not only "introduced new gimmicks to reach the public but also brought a new psychology to the diffusion of knowledge," elevating "the importance of publicity," which was later exploited by P. T. Barnum for other purposes. Watson, a member of a Plymouth, Massachusetts, Puritan mercantile family of declining fortunes, came of age during the Revolutionary War and eventually pursued a mercantile career that took him to France, Britain, North Carolina, and Albany, New York. Unable to emulate the model of Timothy Ruggles as a progressive patron of the countryside after he retired across the border to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, because of the skepticism of his new neighbors as to his gentility and agricultural knowledge, Watson helped found an elite county society on the model of the MSPA, but which was more open to the influence of yeoman farmers. The foundation of its programs was the modern agricultural fair combining entertainment and educational features. It became a successful vehicle to enlist the common man in the cause of agricultural reform, thereby advancing the commercialization of the countryside. Having spent the war years as a merchant in Europe, pursuing his own economic interest, Watson developed a deep need to convince himself and others of his patriotic fervor, which displayed itself as a burning ambition to be considered a founding father. The Berkshire Agricultural Society and Pittsfield Fair became the means of achieving that goal. Ironically, although Watson envisioned himself as a secular, enlightened reformer uplifting ordinary folk, he created an institution that came to express rural popular and folk culture. The carnival spirit, however, always

\textsuperscript{38}Kett, \textit{Pursuit of Knowledge} (Stanford, Calif., 1994), xi-xv, 106-07. The agricultural fair was merely the first 19th-century institution of practical agricultural education to begin replacing the pedagogy of the traditional apprenticeship system, in which young men learned to farm by exemplification, demonstration, explanation, oversight, criticism, and suggestion on the part of mentors, usually fathers, and imitation, observation, trial, assistance, practice, inquiry, and listening, on the part of sons. A popular agricultural press and formal agricultural instruction in schools, academies, institutes, and colleges, were the final elements of the new system. The same process occurred contemporaneously in manufacturing and the useful arts and the legal and medical professions (Lawrence Cremin, \textit{American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876} [New York, 1980], 326-29, 335-64).
lurked beneath the official events of the modern agricultural fair, even as moralists sought to keep it down and focus all attention on agricultural exhibits and competitions and wholesome amusements.\(^{39}\)

The remainder of this work details the main contours of how and why the modern American agricultural fair developed when and where it did. The following chapter, Chapter Two, has a biographical focus, tracing the key points in the life of Elkanah Watson that contributed to his career as a gentleman-promoter, agricultural organizer, and fair publicist. Unlike Timothy Ruggles, Watson was a tireless scribbler who carefully preserved his papers, the survival of which has disproportionately magnified his historical significance. He also served as the first historian of the agricultural fair, or more accurately, its earliest propagandist, publishing several works on his role in the creation of the institution, which, unfortunately, many later historians have treated as unbiased primary sources.

Chapter Three traces the history of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, from its settlement to the arrival of Watson in 1807, to explain what attracted him to the Berkshire County town and to help understand the origins of the early-nineteenth-century religious, political, social, and economic forces that called forth the creativity and organizational efforts of the town's leaders, resulting in the establishment of the Berkshire Agricultural Society in 1811. Religious divisions within the established church and between it and dissenting sects, particularly the Shakers, were exacerbated by political divisions during the Revolutionary War and the agrarian insurrection that followed, leaving a fractured community badly in need of a new, bonding social institution. The town's post-Revolutionary economic development, based on an agricultural shift from grain growing to cattle raising and reflected by the changing face of the village center, gave rise to, and was created by, a rising mercantile class mostly made up of newcomers, who invested their time and money in local transportation improvements, financial institutions, and agricultural reform.

Watson was neither the first nor the last in the series of elite arrivistes, but he turned out to be one of the most historically significant.

Chapter Four describes the immediate background of the creation of the Berkshire Agricultural Society before the War of 1812 by showing that Berkshire County was a world apart from the Commonwealth's economic, cultural, and political center of Federalist Boston. A Democratic-Republican stronghold oriented toward New York and Connecticut centers of trade by its geographic features and distance from the metropolis, Pittsfield developed early on as a manufacturing center. Watson and moderate Jeffersonian and Federalist members of the local elite established a local textiles industry during a period of uncertain international trade caused by the Embargo and other commercial policies of the Democratic-Republican presidents. National patriotism and economic self-interest combined in the goal of replacing British imports with American manufactured cloth, and the Berkshire Agricultural Society originated in an elite program to promote the establishment of local manufactories and the widespread adoption of the improved breed of Spanish Merino sheep. The chapter also examines the backgrounds of the founders of the agricultural society, undertakes a preliminary analysis of the membership, and describes the initial livestock show of 1810, before tracing the history of the founding of the new agricultural society, which had many similarities to the post-Revolutionary elite societies described above. It also serves as a corrective to Watson's works by introducing his colleagues and considering their real contributions to the new institution.

Whereas the first four chapters examine the biographical, socioeconomic, and political origins of the agricultural fair, Chapter Five focuses on the various features of the early Pittsfield fairs, summarized in the words "éclat" and "emulation." While the entertainment features of the first fairs—a procession, an address, religious singing and prayers of thanksgiving, and formal dining, drinking, and dancing—firmly placed the fairs in the festive cultural context of the early American republic, the modernity of their
educational and other features, including premium competitions, award programs, and the active participation of women, speaks to the visionary ideas of Watson and company.

This chapter demonstrates that the founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society were not interested in agricultural reform alone. Firmly grounded in the ideals and values of capitalist entrepreneurs interested in moral and recreational reform, they intended the fairs to serve as a vehicle for innocent recreation and rational amusements.

The final chapter describes Watson's departure from Pittsfield and his further relations with the society he helped found. It traces the history of the Berkshire Agricultural Society to the end of the nineteenth century, considering its impact on the county's development, and also examines the spread of the fair in New England and beyond during the first few decades of its existence, due in a large measure to the publicity efforts of Elkanah Watson. Finally, this study's main theses are summarized and linked to the historiography of the early American Republic.

What is new and significant about this work? This dissertation extends, challenges, and alters our understanding of the fair by removing it from the restraining context of the history of agricultural reform, in which it has been previously studied. Unlike historians Alfred Charles True and Rodney H. True, who studied early American agricultural education and organization, and Donald P. Marti, who wrote about northeastern agricultural improvement from 1791 to 1865, I am chiefly interested in early agricultural fairs and societies not just for their own sake, but for what they can teach us about rural life in the early American republic, especially sociability, capitalism, democracy, and modernization in general. Other scholars who have previously examined

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the agricultural fair have generally not been interested in its early history. Hurrying on to other aspects—fair sociology, aesthetics, cultural influence, geography, landscape, and architecture, for instance—these scholars tended neither to dig deeply into the primary sources nor to understand thoroughly the era of its founding. Consequently, too much reliance has been placed on long-known and easily accessible sources, especially Elkanah Watson's published works, as well as on studies dependent upon them. The authors of the latter, generally held captive by Watson's own agenda, and captivated by their own conceptions of American exceptionalism and whig progressivism, tended to simplify the story around its most recognizable hero.

A prime example is the best full-length work on the topic: Wayne Caldwell Neely's 1935 Columbia University doctoral dissertation, *The Agricultural Fair*, published by Columbia University Press the same year and under the same title as the second volume in the university's Studies in the History of American Agriculture. Focusing on broad patterns of development, the book ranges too widely over space and time to permit a careful study of Watson and the Berkshire Agricultural Society in the nineteen pages devoted to them. Neely's research on those topics was less than thorough, especially as he was a sociologist more interested in the problems facing rural American society in the 1930s than in early-nineteenth-century agricultural reform.

Building upon the work of these previous scholars, and inspired by the ideas of recent political and social historians such as David Waldstreicher, Simon P. Newman,


Susan G. Davis, Karen V. Hansen, Christopher Clark, Catherine E. Kelly, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, and Richard L. Bushman, I began my research in Watson's private personal and business papers, journals, and correspondence, which he preserved and left to his son and literary executor, Winslow C. Watson. The papers remained safe in the hands of Watson family descendants (avoiding the destruction of many other collections in the New York State Library fire of 1911) until Watson's great-grandson, Mark S. Watson, and his wife placed them on deposit at the New York State Library in Albany. But, not wishing to accept uncritically Watson's self-appointed centrality to the story, I expanded my research to take in the surviving institutional records of relevant agricultural societies, as well as the private papers of Watson's contemporaries. I hope that the results provide a more rounded picture of the man and a better understanding of the beginnings of the agricultural fair in America, in time for the 2011 bicentennial of the founding of the Berkshire Agricultural Society and the first Pittsfield Fair.42

42As New York state historian, High Meredith Flick became intimately familiar with the Watson papers in the Manuscripts and Special Collections Department, but he never published any major work resulting from his biographical research besides his 1947 Columbia University Ph.D. dissertation, *Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter, 1758-1842* (New York, 1958). Marti was the first scholar after Flick to make extensive use of the collection. In the course of my own research, archivists rearranged the collection and created a new and more effective finding aid.
Chapter Two

From Pilgrim to Promoter:
Elkanah Watson, "Father" of the American Agricultural Fair

More Americans are familiar with the names of Charles Willson Peale and P. T. Barnum than with the odd name of Elkanah Watson, even though the popular cultural institution Watson helped found touched more nineteenth-century Americans than did Peale's and Barnum's museums and circuses. This is ironic, for, more than anything else, Watson wished to be recognized by posterity as the founder of the agricultural fair (as well as projector of a canal system through New York state)—and it is largely through his own propagandistic efforts that he has assumed that historical significance. An 1819 exchange with John Adams, an acquaintance, is informative. Watson requested permission to publish extracts from some of Adams's private letters to him, noting "As I am winding up my 16 years of efforts in building up the system of extending Agricultural Societies as well in my Native State, as in this State [New York,] I find the only way of ridding myself from an oppressive correspondence is to write a book." Watson irrelevantly told the former American Revolutionary and president that "Posterity will do you the justice to consider you the father of Our Navy." He apparently hoped that the flattery would be reciprocated, and the elder statesman obligingly responded, "You have a much better title to the character of father of American agricultural Societies. You have preached with more success and to greater effect." When Watson died at the age of eighty-five in 1842, his

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1Watson to Adams, 3 April 1819, ALS, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston (reel 447). With bitter humor, Adams added: "I lay no serious claim to the title of Father of the Navy or of any thing else, but my family." "My Country has been to me so coy, Capricious and fastidious a mistress that She never would receive my addresses long enough to give me an opportunity of becoming a father legitimate or illegitimate of any Child" (Adams to Watson, 14 April 1819, LB, ibid., reel 447).
epitaph read: "Here Lie the Remains of Elkanah Watson, the Founder and First President of the Berkshire Agricultural Society. May generations Yet Unborn Learn by His Example to Love Their Country." It might seem that his countrymen remembered and honored him for his patriotic part he played in furthering American agriculture, but, of course, Watson himself had prepared the gravestone inscription before his death.2

At least one contemporary shared Adams's opinion of Watson's contribution to American agricultural organization. In 1819, federal judge Richard Peters, president of the elite post-Revolutionary Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, congratulated Watson (and reflected changes in contemporary American Protestantism): "You are an itinerant missionary, gathering your own congregation. You have hearers, whereas I have been for some fifty years a stationary preacher, and until lately have delivered discourses to empty benches." Over a century later, sociologist Wayne C. Neely, whose study of the origins of the American agricultural fair relies chiefly upon Watson's own published works, recognized that Watson deserved his patriarchal title not necessarily because of his originality, but for his perspicacity, organizing genius, and especially, his inexhaustible energy as a propagandist. Neely's conclusion remains unarguable: "Certainly few men succeeded as Watson did in stamping an institution with lasting characteristics. . . . He so zealously propagated his type of society and the annual exhibition which it sponsored that he is justly named 'the father of the agricultural fair.'"3

How did this Mayflower descendant of wealthy Plymouth, Massachusetts, Separatists, a member of a family long-oriented toward trade in the Atlantic world, a

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2Watson had first suggested such a "proud, but simple epitaph" for Berkshire Agricultural Society members in an Oct. 1816 address to the society (History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, in Massachusetts, with Practical Directions for Societies Forming in North-Carolina, on the Berkshire Model [Albany, N.Y., 1819], 33).
successful merchant himself who had little practical experience in farming, come to understand the potential significance of America's unsettled interior to its economic development and national greatness? And how did the self-styled gentleman come to develop the most popular rural institution in the antebellum north to foster the agricultural productivity upon which that potential rested? Only moderately successful at winning his way into elite circles, and handicapped by such personality flaws as insensitivity and insecurity, a bad temper, and an inability to stay focused on a particular project for any length of time, Watson also lacked the common touch. How, then, did he manage to create and publicize for ten years an institution—the agricultural fair—that overcame the gap between gentlemen and common farmers, and enlisted both in the cause of agricultural improvement?

These were not achievements that could have been predicted, nor did they result from any early aspirations Watson may have held. But, keeping in mind that the man did not act alone (despite his failure to describe the contributions of his Pittsfield, Massachusetts, colleagues with whom he founded the Berkshire Agricultural Society), answers to the above questions are suggested by a brief review of Watson's life. His career as an agricultural organizer grew out of his upbringing in colonial Plymouth, his coming of age during the American Revolution, his travels and business successes and failures in Europe as a young man, and his experiences in Albany as a municipal improver and promoter of internal improvements. Each stage in Watson's life—as the Plymouth youth; the Atlantic trader; the inland promoter who envisioned Albany as the gateway to the West; the country gentleman; and the Pittsfield merino promoter, woolen entrepreneur, and agricultural organizer—was marked by a turning point, which Watson realized only in retrospect, if at all. These, however, can serve to structure the story of his becoming the founder of the modern American agricultural fair.

Elkanah Watson, Junior, was a member of a prominent clan that had played an important part in provincial affairs. He was born on 22 January 1758, three years after his
parents' wedding, and was given his father's first name, which appeared along the colonial Massachusetts seacoast only occasionally (although in Plymouth it was more common, having been repeated over several generations in six other families). Elkanah Watson, Senior (1732-1804), shared his first name with various ancestors, including the grandson of the family's original emigrant to America. Both of Watson's parents came from distinguished families. His mother, Patience Marston Watson (1733-1767), was a daughter of wealthy Salem, Massachusetts, merchant and officeholder Benjamin Marston, Senior (1697-1754; Harvard College, Class of 1715), who had inherited his father's successful mercantile business. Marston's wife, Elizabeth Winslow Marston (1707-1761), was a direct descendant of Separatist emigrant Edward Winslow (1595-1655), Mayflower passenger and third governor of Plymouth Colony. Elkanah Watson took enormous pride in his Pilgrim heritage, noting that he was born "within rifle-shot of that consecrated rock, where, in New-England, the first European foot was pressed." He possessed Winslow heirlooms, including a wedding slipper that had once belonged to Edward Winslow's daughter-in-law, Penelope Pelham, and a large oaken chest reputedly carried on the Mayflower, both of which he displayed in Albany in 1820 at a bicentennial celebration. Watson also spoke at that commemoration, about the "courage and perseverance with which the fathers of New-England had resisted oppression, and combatted the dangers and difficulties which environed them." Many of the Marstons and Winslows remained loyal to the British king during the American Revolution and were exiled to England or Canada.

4 For "Elkanah," derived from the Hebrew, denoting "God-possesses," "God bought," or "God has created," see 1 Samuel 1:1 (for instance); Curtis Carroll Davis, "Massachusetts Meets Virginia in Nantes, France: Elkanah Watson Writes to Lewis Littlepage, 1781," Manuscripts, 7 (fall 1954), 22; George R. Stewart, American Given Names: Their Origin and History in the Context of the English Language (New York, 1979), 111; Alfred J. Kolatch, These Are the Names (New York, 1948), 117; and Leslie Dunkling and William Gosling, The Facts on File Dictionary of First Names (New York, 1983), 80. At least 5 of 1,288 male births recorded in Plymouth County, 1640-1699, were Elkanahs, compared to 1 of the 675 male births recorded in Boston, 1630-1669. In 1771, "Elkanah" appeared 9 times in the tax lists of 84 Massachusetts towns (Kolatch,"Men's Names in Plymouth and Massachusetts in the Seventeenth Century," University of California Publications in English, 7 [1948], 111, 115, 116, 131; personal communication to the author from Daniel Scott Smith, 10 Nov. 1997).
but Watson never lost contact with them, and always appreciated their kinship, early understanding the dangers inherent in political division.\(^5\)

Watsons had long been leading residents of Plymouth Town, but Elkanah's immediate family was on the decline, chiefly because his father as a young man had dissipated a large inheritance. Robert Watson the Emigrant (d.1637) had sailed for New Plymouth from London with his wife and children in the 1620s. His son George acquired great tracts of land in the Old Colony before dying in 1689, and George's grandson John (1681-1731) was reputed to be the wealthiest man in Plymouth County at his death, when his large estate was divided among his four sons. Elkanah Senior was the youngest child of John's second marriage. The consecutive marriages of his eldest step-brother George to daughters of two judges of the province's Superior Court show that the Watsons moved in the highest circles of provincial Massachusetts society by the mid-1700s. Three of Elkanah Junior's female cousins were married to Elisha Hutchinson, second son of royal governor Thomas Hutchinson, and affluent Boston merchants Martin Brimmer and Thomas Russell. But their fathers had attended Harvard College, and sent their sons there, too, which largely contributed to their upward social spiral, which was arrested only by their Loyalism during the Revolutionary War. Elkanah Senior never attended Harvard College, nor could afford to send his sons there, which handicapped their future prospects. As he grew up, Elkanah Junior came to realize that he was the poor relative in a rich clan, and would have to make his way to the top with little paternal assistance, relying on ambition, his own internal resources, and the kindness of strangers.\(^6\)


\(^6\)William Reed Deane, "Watson Genealogy," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (hereafter *NEHGR*), 18 (1864), 363-68; William T. Davis, *Genealogical Register of
Elkanah Junior was one of five children. Preceded by his older brother Marston (1756-1800), he was followed by three younger sisters, their births falling in the traditional two-year pattern of childbearing in colonial Plymouth described by historian John Demos. Watson apparently felt much closer to his "sainted mother" than to his father, but lost her in 1767 when he was nine, later remembering that she had been "distinguished for the power and purity of her mind—her retentive memory and extensive information. She was pious without ostentation—charitable, and the best of mothers." Patience Watson's death can be considered as the first event that propelled him from Plymouth into the wider world. Although "her pious admonitions to her 5 children, who gathered around her bed . . . the Evng previous to her death, sunk deep into my heart," the absence of her gentle religious guidance throughout the remaining years of his childhood left him at the mercy of his father's harsher brand of Calvinism, which contributed to his eventual abandonment of the Congregational faith.7

Watson recalled that his mother's final words later triggered a spiritual experience, during which he was "suddenly bless'd with solemn religious impressions." He claimed his whole being became fixed on heaven and its blessings, and "for several months I was in extacy in immagination in the midst of etherial spirits: I shun'd the society of vicious boys—reproach'd them for swearing, & admonish'd them to seek the true road to heaven." Once, seeking "retirement to pour forth in silence the effusions of my soul, in unfeigned and ardent devotion," Watson "enjoyed an indiscrivable bliss I have never experienced since." "[T]hose transitory days of happiness" were fleeting, however. Little did he know that by 1770 he was only a stone's throw away religious skepticism.8

Watson regretfully revealed in his journal the incident that became the "primary cause" of his becoming "somewhat sceptical as to the infalibility of puritanic tenets." One Sunday afternoon, the twelve-year-old Watson picked up a stone to throw at a bird in the family's garden. Perhaps the action was mere reflex, since one of his early chores had probably been to shoo away pests from his mother's vegetable plants (Plymouth boys also could earn spending money by collecting town bounties on blackbirds, crows, and rats). "While reading his bible, my father saw this innocent transaction out the window," and treated it sternly as an infraction of the Fourth Commandment against Sabbath breaking.

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8Journal D, 563-64, Watson Papers, Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library, Albany.
The boy was immediately whipped, prohibited from going in the garden on the Sabbath, and ordered to attend both church services every Sunday, "regardless of the weather." Watson dared complain only in his journal of the "unmerciful long" sermons of Parson Chandler Robbins, which none "but those on the edge of the grave could listen to with patience," and of his sitting in the church, "cold as a barn with no stove" in winter, shivering in cold wet clothes, listening for two hours to coughing churchgoers who sounded like frogs pierced by pitchforks.9

If Watson's mother had lived longer, she might have successfully strengthened his faith by nurturing his positive spiritual experiences, such as his youthful conversion, so that Congregationalism could have served as his anchor in life. Instead, Watson's reaction against his father's punitive Puritanism contributed to his reaching adulthood with no firm foundations, spiritual or religious. "Divested of all parental admonitions," and "ignorant of different religions & different Christian sects," Watson left Plymouth and its church for an apprenticeship in Rhode Island, "the home of religious diversity" in colonial America, where he claimed he first learned of the existence of different and conflicting tenets believed by Baptists, Quakers, Episcopalians, Unitarians, and Universalists. His father's "unfortunate mandate" to the boy's new master to compel the young apprentice to attend church twice every Sunday, "produced an affect precisely the reverse of what he intended, viz a distaste to attend any Church," and Watson, in his own words, "became therefore more and more sceptical as to every Christian form of religion, simply on the ground they could not all be right." Although he was socially and doctrinally drawn to Universalism

(his master countenanced its chief American founder, the Reverend John Murray, and Watson was attracted to the "plan of universal salvation," which "clear'd me intirely of every remnant of puritanic faith—which I had inculcated from my youth"), he admitted he "could not comprehend the line of distinction" and "found them all at opposite points."¹⁰

Watson's loss of faith in the religious mission of established and evangelical churches does not mean that he considered himself an irreligious man, just that his personal sense of spirituality was not fulfilled by organized associations. One result was that "The want of settled religious principles has been a Source of continued unhappiness to myself & my family, in every Stage of Life," and Watson despaired in the evening of his life of ever solving "the great puzzle" as to which religion was right, so that he could sincerely indulge his "inate disposition to be religious and die a pious man." "Bewildered in darkness" at the end of his life, unable to "force belief in any system—I cannot play the hypocrit besides which, our Rev'd Clergy assures us of ourselves we can do Nothing"—Watson feared he would descend to his tomb "In this painful suspence."¹¹

Despite this religious confusion and anxiety, which often release extremely creative forces, Watson's abandonment of Puritanism had some positive effects, contributing to his becoming the father of the American agricultural fair.¹² Like many of his contemporaries, the young Watson was attracted to the "pure morals" inculcated by Freemasonry and looked to it as a substitute to religion after his initiation into the Marine Lodge of Charleston, South Carolina, in 1777. As an active Mason, Watson gained an appreciation


¹²For a later instance of a New Englander's personal confusion over sectarianism serving as a creative force, see Richard L. Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism (Urbana and Chicago, Ill., 1984), 55, 206, n.38. For a detailed consideration of religious anxiety, see Julius H. Rubin, Religious Melancholy and Protestant Experience in America (New York and Oxford, 1994).
of the use and power of secular ritual, before his discovery of "some frail brethren—and vile profligate Characters, heedless of their solemn oaths" aroused his aversion to hypocrisy and contributed to another skeptical withdrawal, which, however, never prevented him from using his fraternal membership to advance his own fortunes. Also, Watson generally cast away religious intolerance when he left the established church, insulating himself from the sectarian conflicts or interdenominational squabbles that disturbed many New England communities. Although unable to escape his Puritan heritage of anti-Anglicanism and anti-Catholicism, they usually took the form of ant clericalism and anti-monasticism, largely irrelevant to the American scene. These hereditary prejudices tended not to intrude into his personal relationships, and only occasionally disrupted his five years in Catholic France.

Watson's break with the bleak determinism of New England Calvinism also contributed to a more rational perspective on religion. He never lost his desire for the social and religious unity provided by the established church of his youth, and he always appreciated the importance of its active secular missions of maintaining social control and community mores. But in his personal belief system, recorded in his private journal

Watson wrote that Freemasonry's "leading principal appears to promote universal fraternity, and brotherly love in all civilized Nations regardless of difference of Language, religion or national prejudices," but that the fraternal "institution [which had] originated in the erection of the Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem many Centuries ago" had "lost its original Spirit, & genius in these remote ages." Consequently, he "never was a zealous Mason, altho I attended many Lodges as well in America as in Europe, but I must frankly add more out of curiosity than from a sense of duty" (Box 4, fold. 2, 120-21, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany; Thomas C. Parramore, "A Year in Hertford County with Elkanah Watson," North Carolina Historical Review (hereafter N.C. Hist. Rev.), 41 (1964), 458, n.45; Steven C. Bullock, Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840 (Chapel Hill, N.C., and London, 1996).

Watson's intolerance against Dunkers, Moravians, Shakers, and Jews was a passive, not active one, and often involved sincere curiosity and an appreciation for their cultural contributions and nonreligious achievements, which he also extended to Catholics (Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution [2d. ed.; New York, 1856], 38, 40, 75-76, 96-97, 100, 120-21, 128-31, 133-37, 151 and n., 192, 292-94, 332-34; [Watson], A Tour of Holland in MDCCCLXXIV. By an American (Worcester, Mass., 1790), 116-17. For anti-Catholicism in Puritan New England culture, see Francis D. Cogliano, No King, No Popery: Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England (Westport, Conn., 1995), 1-18; and W.H.J. Kennedy, "Catholics in Massachusetts before 1750," Catholic Historical Review, 17 (1931), 10-28.
shortly before his death, Watson leaned more and more toward Enlightenment principles. The existence of God the Creator and great Clockmaker could easily be adduced rationally, without revelation—"All nature proclaimed his mighty power and none but an idiot can for a moment doubt his existence. To open our eyes we see the evidence through all his glorious works: to close them, and contemplate the wonderful construction of our own unworthy bodies." Man could use his God-given intellect and talents to discover the laws by which the social and natural worlds were governed, and improve earthly life with the knowledge of those laws. Agricultural efficiency and output could be improved once the principles of genetics and chemistry could be empirically determined and scientifically applied to animal husbandry and the raising of field crops, for instance. Or the basics of human nature could be discovered, and successful governments or beneficial social institutions and economic systems could be created taking such principles into consideration. Watson also believed in the existence of an immortal soul and a spiritual afterlife, and in Jesus Christ as "the redeemer of the human race," but he had difficulty accepting Christ's divine nature. Theological distinctions did not cause him much daily difficulty, however. He was more affected by the remnants in his belief system of Puritan predestination—a sense of personal destiny that applied to his private life, and a providential perspective of national greatness that imbued his patriotism with religious fervor.¹⁵

If the first turning point in Watson's life was the death of his mother and his consequent abandonment of Separatist Calvinism, the second was his apprenticeship to a wealthy Whig merchant from 1773 to 1779, and his resulting fervent embrace of the American Revolution. The ramifications on his life were enormous and far-reaching. Not only did the apprenticeship and the Revolution provide the basis of his own mercantile career, thereby rescuing his social aspirations. But they also contributed to an otherwise

unimaginable geographic mobility for the young man, providing an education in and of itself as he traveled overland to South Carolina and back, as well as across the Atlantic to England, Holland, and France. More importantly, his Revolutionary apprenticeship provided an ideological underpinning to all of Watson's future achievements, and brought him into contact with the leaders who would win American Independence from Great Britain, establish a new national republic, and inspire emulation in Elkanah Watson. The Revolution also ruined his Loyalist relatives and removed his ready access to them, preventing Watson from ever being able to capitalize on the advantages of his elite origins and family connections. It therefore forced him to seek his own fortune, and provided numerous opportunities for young men on the make such as himself to achieve psychic and financial independence.

Watson's early religious troubles with his father were probably compounded by a never-stated resentment of Elkanah Senior's youthful dissipations that had squandered the legacy he had inherited from his own father. Elkanah Junior must have winced in April 1780 to read in a letter from John Adams: "Your father" was "universally respected to have an independent hereditary fortune which I have no doubt he still possesses undiminished, very probably, with large additions, by the profits of business." In fact, however, Watson later described his father as "little accustomed to business, for which he had no disposition," and "distinguished by no trait of character except a native gift of a free epistolary style" and a love of friends and his own ease. By the time he had come into his inheritance in 1754, "whatever power of mind, nature may have conferred on him," had been "neutralize[d]" by "being accustomed" to "consider himself in early life as born to a rich inheritance." Being "hospitable to the last drop," he was forced to sell Watson lands and had to resume the trade of coopering to which he had been trained during his minority. Watson regretted that he was never similarly tested by the burden of an early inheritance, and rebelled against the likelihood of his having to take up the cooper's
Unable to provide his sons with the Harvard College education enjoyed by his nephews, Elkanah Senior was able to apprentice them to prominent and prosperous Whigs, which says as much about his politics and continuing social prestige as it does about his declining finances. Elkanah Senior put his gifted epistolary style and dwindling material resources at the service of the growing Whig protest movement, which provided him in return with connections to a network of leading men who were willing to assist his family. A town selectman since 1766, he served on various ad hoc committees that drafted important addresses, and was appointed to Plymouth's Revolutionary committee of correspondence in the 1770s. John Adams told Elkanah Junior in 1780 that "when the friends to the American cause were not so numerous nor so determined, ... we always found your father firm and consistent as a friend to his country ..., ten years before the war commenced." Watson's brother, Marston, was apprenticed at the age of fourteen to Colonel Jeremiah Lee, a business partner of Elkanah Senior's brother-in-law and one of the wealthiest merchants of Marblehead, Massachusetts. In September 1773, Elkanah

16 Adams to Watson, 30 April 1780, ALS, Watson Papers, quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 5; William T. Davis, Ancient Landmarks of Plymouth (Boston, 1883), 304; James Thacher, History of the Town of Plymouth: from Its First Settlement in 1620, to the Year 1832 (Boston, 1832), 173. Watson claimed that returning from Europe in 1785, he "wrested" from the grasp of "hungry sharks, and vultures" the "wreck" of his father's property, and that he and his brother, "by annual pecuniary aids," "smoothed the pillow" of Elkanah Sr., who was "advanced in years and in confirmed habits of indolence" (Journal A, 2, Watson Papers, quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 6).

17 Adams to Watson, 30 April 1780, ALS, Watson Papers, quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 5. Elkanah Sr.'s public office holding is traced in vol. 3 of Plymouth Town Records (3 vols.; Plymouth, Mass., 1889; reprint. Baltimore, 1995). He was unable to parlay U.S. vice-president Adams's respect into a federal appointment for his son, writing to him on 28 June 1789 and recalling their "former acquaintance in times of old—when it was dangerous to speak with freedom our political thoughts" (ALS, Adams Family Papers, Mass. Hist. Soc., Boston [reel 372]). One example of his selfless patriotism was his delivery, "without remuneration, and, apparently, without regret" of almost all the household's blankets to Washington's army at Cambridge in 1775 upon hearing of its shortage of winter bedding (Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution [2d. ed.; New York, 1856], 91-92).

18 After his master's death in May 1775, Marston Watson married Lee's niece and himself became a prosperous Marblehead merchant after serving in Col. William Raymond Lee's
Junior was apprenticed to Providence, Rhode Island, merchant John Brown (1736-1803), who had withdrawn from the prosperous family firm of Nicholas Brown and Company two years earlier and was soon to become Providence's wealthiest merchant.19

Inspired by his father's patriotism and indoctrinated into the Revolutionary cause by his school teachers, Watson longed to emulate his brother’s military career and chafed under his apprenticeship as the American Revolution swirled around him. His Plymouth teachers, Alexander Scammell and Peleg Wadsworth, were more successful in teaching him the rudiments of republicanism and martial skills than of education (Watson admitted that he was a "sluggish scholar" who had "never made the least progress in Latin or Arithmetic"). Watson remembered: "They formed the boys into a military company; and our school soon had the air of a miniature arsenal, with our wooden guns and tin bayonets Continental regiment. He moved to Boston in 1797 and was elected a member of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, ed., *The Journals of Ashley Bowen (1728-1813) of Marblehead*. *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, Vol. 45: *Collections* [2 vols.; Boston, 1973], 2:665-66, 683; Bradford Adams Whittemore, *Memorials of the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati* [Boston, 1964], 352; George Athan Billias, *General John Glover and His Marblehead Mariners* [New York, 1960], 22, 62, 65, 66, 149; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* [New York, 1994], 125; Watson, "Marston Family of Salem, Mass.," *NEHGR*, 27 [1873], 305, 390; Rogers, "Genealogical Memoir of the Family of Rev. Nathaniel Rogers," *NEHGR*, 5 [1851], 326).

suspended round the walls," and "we were taught military evolutions, and marched over hills, through swamps, often in the rain, in the performance of these embryo military duties." In Providence, Watson joined the volunteer company formed by Colonel Joseph Nightingale in the summer of 1773, as "the Public mind was gradually ripening for the fearful appeal to arms," and he performed various military services with these cadets during the war. He longed, however, to see combat as a regular soldier like his older brother, who, after his master's death had freed him from his indenture, obtained a commission as a lieutenant in the Fourteenth Continental Infantry and saw action with Washington's troops in New Jersey before resigning to take up privateering. Elkanah Senior, however, refused to release his younger son from his indenture bond, obliging Watson to serve as an apprentice until reaching his majority. Watson declined to go against his father's wishes and avail himself of the general weakening of the chains of American apprentices during the Revolutionary period, probably because John Brown proved to be such a benevolent master. The grateful apprentice risked his own life in 1775 in an attempt to free Brown from British imprisonment for his involvement in the burning of the armed schooner Gaspee after it ran aground in Narragansett Bay in June 1772.


For the transformation of the institution of apprenticeship in the 1770s by Revolutionary ideology, economic conditions, and military necessity, see Esther Forbes, _Paul Revere and the
Brown was too preoccupied with Revolutionary activities, war contracting, and privateering to keep close tabs on Watson, who came of age in the bustling Brown household on Water Street in Providence. Empathizing with Watson's restlessness and ambitions (and probably to forestall his running away to join the army), the frenetic master provided his "favorite" apprentice, whose cadet experiences had "unsettled" his mind, "incapacitatin[g] it for the dull drudgery of a store," with as many exciting assignments as possible, including the delivery of a valuable load of powder to General Washington at Cambridge in the summer of 1775. Impressed with the resourcefulness of the young man, and realizing that the siren song of Continental service might prove irresistible because the British blockade of Narragansett Bay had created economic stagnation that forced idleness upon the merchant and his apprentices, Brown, with his brother Nicholas, proposed a mission in August 1777 they knew the adventurous lad would not decline. Unable to purchase bills in Charleston, South Carolina, to reimburse their associate Nathaniel Russell for payment for rice and indigo he had purchased for them for sale in France, the Browns were compelled immediately to send him the money overland (because of the blockade), and they chose nineteen-year-old Watson as courier.22

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22This was neither the first nor the last time Watson's path crossed that of Washington's, whose "august person," "majestic mien," and "dignified and commanding deportment," deeply impressed him. Nightingale's cadets had escorted the General into Providence on 5 April 1776, and Watson visited Mount Vernon after the war (Journal A, 10, Watson Papers, quoted in Flick, Ekanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 9; Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution [2d. ed.; New York, 1856], 22, 23, 25-29n., 30, 32-33, 53; Hedges, Browns of Providence: Colonial Years [Providence, 1958], 158-61, 164, 185-86; and Thompson, Moses Brown [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1962], 109-13. For Russell (1738-1820) and the early development of Franco-American trade, see N. Louise Bailey and Elizabeth
The brothers quilted $26,600 in Continental currency into the lining of Watson's coat before he set out on horseback from Providence on 4 September 1777. Watson and the money arrived safely in Charleston on 18 November, after ten weeks of hard travel through nine colonies in the midst of armed rebellion and civil war, demonstrating that his master's confidence had not been misplaced. Having left for the South a youth, Watson came home a young man eight months later, on 29 April 1778. The 2,667-mile journey along the Atlantic seaboard was another turning point in his life, as he gained faith in himself and confidence in his abilities, as well as knowledge of his expanded American homeland. He not only braved the usual dangers of travel in the late colonial South (such as being threatened in a South Carolina swamp by fugitive slaves, who were put to flight by a vigorous show of arms; or almost having his ferry on the Neuse River in North Carolina sunk at night by a violent storm), but he was also exposed to novelties—such as the disturbingly harsh realities of Southern slavery (which "constantly aroused and agitated" his "New England feelings")—that expanded his limited horizons and informed him of the wider American world. He also asked questions of everyone (which led to his several detentions as a British spy by suspicious Patriot authorities), especially about subjects in which he had already become interested, such as agriculture and inland navigation. Watson also kept a journal, the beginning of a lifelong habit, to the benefit of later historians.23

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23Hedges, *Browns of Providence: Colonial Years* (Providence, 1968), 245-46, 357, n.25; Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution* (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 33, 35-44, 47-49, 51-52, 58, 61-63, 66 and n., 69, 72-74. In Virginia, he learned of the first American canal being constructed near Richmond, and in North Carolina, he heard of Washington's interest in opening a canal in the Great Dismal Swamp. He admired the James and Potomac rivers, and listened to plans for connecting the latter to the waters of the Monongahela and Ohio rivers. He also carefully recorded his observations of the cotton, silk, and rice cultures of plantations in the Carolinas and Georgia.
For the first time in his life Watson could act totally independently, with no pious
mother, overbearing father, patriotic teachers, military superiors, or even empathetic
master, controlling his behavior or directly influencing his decisions. Undoubtedly, this
intoxicating freedom contributed to his optimism for America's future as he then recorded
it in his journal, even before its Independence could be decided by force of arms.
Firsthand observation of its human and natural resources, filtered through the self-
confidence of a youth then passing into manhood, contributed to visions of potential
national greatness that grounded all of Watson's life works. For the first time, he was
seriously able to think continentally and not merely provincially, a rare trait for the day,
one fortified by his spending five years abroad in the early seventeen-eights. The abiding
patriotism he developed during this period was always forward-looking. His vision of a
dynamic, foreordained American empire based upon the interconnected development of
mutually supporting agricultural and manufacturing sectors, as well as Northern and
Southern sections, all tied together by transportation improvements—a vision that
eventually drove all his later promotions—essentially derived from his American tour of
1777-1778.

When Watson's term of service to John Brown ended on 22 January 1779, the
young man's prospects were hardly inspiring, especially since Brown apparently had
reneged on some unidentified promises, according to Watson's later statements: "I attained
the age of twenty-one, . . . having been deeply disappointed in the expectations I had
formed, in respect to my establishment in life," and "The wide world opened before me,
without any capital or friend, to take me by the hand, and lead me in to the road of fortune
as I found contrary to Mr. Brown's repeated promises, that I had to repose myself to the
resources of my own mind, and head." Perhaps Brown had told Watson at the beginning
of his apprenticeship (or Watson had misunderstood him as saying) that, conditions
permitting, he would assist Watson in setting up his own business at the expiration of a
term of faithful and devoted service. Recourse to the original indenture, which has not
been found, would probably not ascertain the truth, as any agreement between the two was probably made later, and verbally. Or maybe even Watson had just assumed such a privilege existed, and that he was entitled to such favorable treatment because he considered himself a superior apprentice, especially after the Charleston mission, which he believed was above and beyond the duties (and competence) of most apprentices. His behavior after his return suggests such a view of himself. Watson spent his last nine months in Brown's service gallivanting around New England, perhaps searching out future employment in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, but also just touring and visiting relatives, his mother's grave, Boston, and Cambridge and the college he never attended. He also traversed the battlefields of Lexington, Battle Road, and Bunker Hill, where "the sons of Pilgrims, determined to be free," repulsed "the British veterans." 24

Whatever promises, if any, had passed between them, Brown was unable to offer Watson much financial assistance in January 1779. Nor was it a good time to be free and independent, as the Rhode Island economy was in shambles. The British continued to occupy its chief town and main harbor for another nine months. The state's financing the war by paper money issues caused severe inflation and drove specie from circulation. The main source of prewar credit, that extended by British merchants, was inaccessible. And tax rates had risen enormously, as Rhode Island was forced to defend itself, meet its Continental obligations, and relieve numerous Newport refugees. Returning home to settle in Plymouth was out of the question, as its fishing industry was disrupted by threats from the British navy, and its economy more generally dislocated by the war (and Watson was not yet humbled enough to return home in failure). He finally could have enlisted in the Continental army, for a soldier's bounty and pay, and for ideological reasons, but he did not. Watson had matured enough to realize that a soldier's life was neither glorious nor romantic. Military discipline held little attraction for him, unless he was able to instill

it from above, but Watson was unlikely to have obtained an officer's commission because of his youthfulness, limited military experience, straitened circumstances, and lack of education.

Watson's adult personality was formed, even if his future was still in doubt. He continued to behave as if he were privileged and entitled, never doubting his "natural" place among great men and his rightful role as a leader of society. He believed that temporary setbacks were the results of the weaknesses or betrayals of others, such as his father's dissipation that robbed him of his ancestor's legacy, or John Brown's supposed betrayal. The relationship with Brown was one that would repeat itself time and again. Watson would continually seek out and attach himself to patrons—John Brown, Jonathan Williams, Philip Schuyler, Robert R. Livingston—but was never able to maintain a positive subordinate position for very long, apparently because of the inherent tensions of the resentments he felt over his dependence upon others. Even after he had acquired an independent fortune, he felt inferior to the grandees, which revealed itself in a concern for the style rather than the substance of social leadership, and a touchiness about his honor and reputation (and style, reputation, and honor became increasingly important in a more mobile society and economy in which credit assumed greater significance). Not having sacrificed for his country on the battlefield or in the cabinet, as had the political leaders of the early republic, Watson was always sensitive about others' views of his patriotism. While the Revolutionary War was being won, he was winning, and losing, personal fortunes in Europe. Perhaps his later career as a gentleman-promoter was to convince others (and maybe himself) that he loved America as much as any Revolutionary veteran or patriot. Never willing to commit his belief in his patriotism and leadership abilities to the decision of his contemporaries by running for electoral office (and none of his patrons ever having appointed him to places of public trust), Watson felt more secure in assuming non-governmental positions and entrusting his reputation to future generations (a more easily manipulated jury).
Watson stated in his journals that he was divinely ordained to further America's destiny, and the comfort he derived from such supernatural support made up for the lack of appreciation from those around him. Watson's boldest remark was: "As I was impressed in a belief, that Providence had marked out my destiny to be an instrument in bringing about great improvements in my native land in my day and generation I was willing to submit to all the pains and penalties attached to such an unprofitable calling."

On 1 January 1839, three years before his death, he even alluded specifically to the divine origins of agricultural fairs: "I have faithfully fulfilled a destiny over which I have had no control," "planting Agricultural Societies on a plan exclusively my Own by personal, or indirect efforts throughout the U. States. . . . At this point—I am impel'd in dread awe to pause—and give glory to the great, and eternal johova, to have thus inspired my heart & mind in self devotion to my native Land in my day & generation, to whom all praise is due." "Altho' unrewarded by my fellow man in a pecuniary light," Watson felt amply repaid by a "review of the thousands upon thousands of my fellow beings whose welfare & happiness have been essentially promoted thro' my instrumentality as well as the millions thro' a long line of successive ages who are in like manner destined to partake the same blessings." This echoed the sentiments he had expressed earlier to the Berkshire Agricultural Society, in 1826, when he informed members: "We have just cause to be thankful to our common benefactor for having been made the humble instrument in his hands in promoting so much good" and noted that that "holy belief" in "Your proud destiny" should be strengthened by the sure marking of "Providence's finger": all sixteen of its fairs had been "blessed with fine weather," with the solitary exception of a few hours.

Such sentiments, developed out of a mixture of Watson's religious beliefs and his psychological needs, served to motivate him and validate his various public endeavors.25

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25Journal D, 447, 500-01, Journal F, 68-69, Watson Papers, New York State Library, quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 103-05; John F. Berens, Providence and Patriotism in Early America, 1640-1815 (Charlottesville, Va., 1978). Watson provided as evidence of the divine origins of his reform efforts the inspiration he had often received in dreams: "my leading projects of a public nature—have uniformly pop[pled
Despite Watson's complaints, the Browns did not leave him high and dry in 1779. Nicholas sent Watson to France as his commercial agent, which served as another turning point in Watson's life. During his half-decade abroad, Watson made careful observations of the more advanced technology, more intensive agriculture, and urban improvements of the more mature European economies, as well as of the monarchical and aristocratic political systems, which reinforced for him the blessings of American republicanism. He also gained the practical business experience that would later support his organizational endeavors, and came into contact with important American diplomats—particularly Benjamin Franklin, who introduced him into French society, and John Adams, who took the young New Englander under his wing in Holland.

The Browns had traded directly with France since early 1776 to supply the Continental army, not only in their own names for their own profit, but also on the account of the Continental Congress's Committee of Secrecy. Allowing Watson a ten percent commission for his efforts, Nicholas instructed him in June 1779 to travel thence to invest over one thousand dollars of bills of exchange in European dry goods to be shipped to arrive in Providence by early autumn, which would allow him to beat to market many of the new interlopers who entered the Franco-American trade after the two countries had signed treaties of amity and commerce, and of alliance, in February 1778. "Agreable to the advise of my friends and my own Inclinations," Watson intended to remain in Europe after fulfilling his original mission, in order to pursue his "mercantile profession (till the war is happily terminated) in France; and of travelling in Europe." He did not sail until 4 August 1779 on the Continental packet Mercury, which was further delayed by a rendezvous with the French frigate La Sensible in Nantasket Roads to pick up dispatches that needed to be sent to the American commissioner at Versailles, Benjamin Franklin. Capitalizing on his ability to be at the right place at the right time, into my busy and restless brain on my pillow while sleeping profoundly" (Journal D, 537, 538-40, Watson Papers, quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter, 105-06; see also 118).
Watson volunteered to deliver those dispatches personally. After reaching France, he immediately proceeded from La Rochelle to Nantes, the city that would be his base of operations for the next four years. Watson reached Paris on 12 September and continued on to Passy, the headquarters of the American commissioners, where he delivered the dispatches and personal letters of introduction to Franklin, the "great man, of whom I had heard familiarly from my cradle."

While return dispatches were prepared, Franklin introduced Watson to French high society by inviting him to the wedding of his Boston grand-nephew, Jonathan Williams, Junior, at which Watson met the mayor of Nantes and other distinguished guests. After a fortnight of sightseeing and theater going, Watson returned to Nantes in early October to deliver Franklin's dispatches to the waiting Mercury, and finally turned his attention to the Browns' mission, purchasing and shipping out their trade goods, but far too late to make the handsome profit they desired, as Nicholas later complained, for the American market was by then flooded with French goods. Watson also obtained a cargo worth 20,000

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27 Nicholas Brown to Watson, 23, 25 June 1779, and Watson to Nicholas Brown, 23 June 1779, quoted in Hedges, Browns of Providence: Colonial Years (Providence, 1968), 247, 250, 252, 357, nn.34-38, 358, n.46; see also 217, 220, 225, 231-38; Watson to John Adams, 10 March 1780, Gregg L. Lint et al., eds., Papers of John Adams, Vol. 9: March 1780-July 1780 (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 32-34; Watson to Nicholas Brown, 31 July 1779, cited in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 43; Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 90, 92, 93-94, 95-98, 102. Watson's delay in leaving New England was probably occasioned by attempts to procure letters of introduction. He carried one from Franklin's sister Jane Mecom, dated Warwick, R.I., 23 June 1779 (Barbara Oberg et al., eds., Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Vol. 29: March 1 through June 30, 1779 [New Haven, Conn., 1992], 722-25; see also Franklin to Mecom, 25 Oct. 1779, ibid., Vol. 30: July 1 through October 31, 1779 [New Haven, Conn., 1993], 582-84), and one from James Warren (Warren to Adams, 29 July 1779, Lint et al., eds., Papers of John Adams, Vol. 8: March 1779-February 1780 [Cambridge, Mass., 1989], 98-103). Watson had also met with Mrs. James (Mercy Otis) Warren, but her letter of 29 July to Adams does not mention Watson, who claimed that Abigail Adams and Robert Treat Paine also wrote to Adams on his behalf. No such letters have been found (see Watson to John Adams, 10 March 1780, Lint et al., eds., Papers of John Adams, 9 [Cambridge, Mass., 1996], 32-34 and n.1).
livres on his own credit, which apparently had been established in France by Franklin, assisted perhaps by Watson's Masonic membership, and he opened in Nantes his own "mercantile house, although sustained by few advantages, either of connection or capital, and almost ignorant of the French language." In an attempt to extend his operations, he associated himself with Jonathan Williams, Junior, whom Franklin had appointed as Congress's agent at Nantes.28

With Franklin's limited support, and access to Williams's expertise, connections, and credit, Watson was well positioned to succeed in his first foreign venture. His ambition got the better of him, however, and he exaggerated his business relationship in a circular letter to his American contacts in December 1779, announcing his partnership in the firm of Williams & Watson. When Williams found out, he sharply reprimanded Watson, denying that the two had ever been partners. Stating that he had "never given the smallest authority for such a representation nor entertained the most distant idea of the kind," he threatened to denounce Watson and his mercantile pretensions. Writing later to Marston that the Williams connection seemed "to be clogged with some inconveniences," Watson soon moved on, a strategy he would continue to follow whenever he encountered inconvenience, unpleasantness, or seeming failure.29 He lured English-speaking Nantes


native François Cossoul away from Williams's countinghouse and established the new firm of Watson & Cossoul around January 1782.30

The new firm shortly equaled "any in the city, for respectability, and [became] known throughout America and in Europe." It soon owned a countinghouse that employed five to seven clerks and a warehouse full of goods, and controlled a small fleet of six vessels, totaling 1,040 in tonnage and employing over three hundred seamen. The arrival of large remittances from America confirmed public confidence in Watson and established his unlimited credit. He estimated the firm's net profits in 1782 at forty thousand guineas. His newfound wealth enabled him to live the life of leisure, comfort, and respectability to which he had always aspired. He attended the college at Ancenis for five months, studying the French language and geography, as well as the more genteel pursuits of music and dancing, before taking up residence in Rennes—the capital of Brittany, "a very dissipated place, but distinguished for the correctness of its French idiom"—in order to "attain the language in its purity, and to rub off my American rust, by a near connection with the polished society of France." He maintained "a kind of American Coffee-hour" in his apartments at Nantes, "keeping an open table . . . twice a week for french and Americans alternately." He also traveled across Europe, visiting Paris again, as well as northern France, England, and the Low Countries. Most

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30 Cossoul was "a Gentl. of this city, of uncommon merit, and exceedingly belov'd," who "is possessed of a handsome capital, and is perfectly acquainted with the American trade, and language; besides which he has lately married a young lady of fortune" and "can command credit freely" (Watson to Priscilla Watson, 10 Dec. 1779; Watson to Marston Watson, 20 April 1781; see also Jonathan Williams, Jr., to Nicholas Brown, 6 Jan. 1782, all quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 53, 54, 55). François and Emily Moriceau Cossoul, "La Belle de Nantes," accepted Watson into their new family, providing him with domestic affection missing since his mother's death. His longstanding attachment to the Cossouls is demonstrated by Watson's later naming two of his daughters Emily and giving one of his sons the middle name of Cossoul.
importantly for Watson, he no longer had to "endure the idea of being dependent upon any mortal in existence." 31

When the good times ceased rolling, Watson showed himself to advantage in times of adversity. He traveled to London in the fall of 1782 with unlimited letters of credit to establish a branch of the firm in England before the conclusion of final peace negotiations, as it was well known that British merchants would easily recapture the American market after the war. As soon as peace commissioner John Adams told him over dinner on 17 December 1782 "that a definitive treaty of peace would, at an early day, be signed," Watson sent Cossoul urgent orders "to countermand our orders for goods; to contract our plans as rapidly as possible, and use every effort to draw in our scattered funds from America." Watson & Cossoul might have survived the resumption of Anglo-American trade, but the firm's fate was sealed in early 1783 when Louis XVI suspended for one year all payments by the National Bank of France, which forced the main branch of the firm to declare bankruptcy on 19 September 1783. With various maneuvers in England, Watson managed to postpone the inevitable until 20 November 1783, when he turned over most of his property to his lawyer to secure his person from arrest on legal actions brought by his various British creditors, to whom he had accrued £20,000 worth of business debts. 32

Despite the failings that had brought Watson to the lowest point in his life, his sense of gentility and honor impressed gentlemen of good will, such as his largest creditor, Blanchard & Lewis, who showed their confidence in the twenty-six year old not only by


32 Too little, too late, Marston Watson arrived in London in the summer of 1783 with funds from America and 2 ships full of tobacco consigned to Watson, who also unsuccessfully solicited the patronage of some of his Loyalist relatives, including Benjamin Marston in Halifax. (Flick, *Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter* [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 58, 66-67, 72-78; Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution* [2d. ed.; New York, 1856], 160, 208, 213).
assuming Watson's debts upon receipt of its assignments in America, but also by vesting in him the power to collect those funds, even paying Watson's travel expenses and allowing him half of any surplus he might collect there. After these successful negotiations, and the compromise Cossoul reached with their French creditors in early 1784, Watson was free to return home. On 21 August he embarked as a passenger on the General Washington, owned by John Brown, and forty-three days later landed again on his native shores.33

Watson's European adventure was a chance for him to step back and examine what was truly important to him. He discovered that it was not necessarily the genteel lifestyle he had had the opportunity to enjoy briefly (although he would never think of renouncing such pleasures). Watson realized the truth on 5 December 1782 as he stood as a spectator in front of the royal throne in the House of Lords, elbow-to-elbow with Admiral Lord Howe, and heard King George III read in apparent agitation his speech declaring the American colonies free and independent states. Watson wrote, "I cannot adequately portray my sensations, in the progress of this address; every artery beat high, and swelled with my proud American blood," and "It was impossible, not to revert to the opposite shores of the Atlantic, and to review, in my mind's eye, the misery and woe I had myself witnessed." He concluded, "The great drama was now closed . . . and the ratification of our Independence by the King, consummated the spectacle in triumph and exaltation."

Watson predicted that "This successful issue of the American Revolution, will, in all probability, influence eventually the destinies of the whole human race."34

Watson had discovered a new love for his new nation, and he brought home a unique and impressive memento of the day he came to that realization. After hearing the king's speech, Watson returned to the studio of his mother's distant cousin's husband, Boston native John Singleton Copley (to whom his father had almost apprenticed young


Watson), whom he had hired for one hundred guineas upon his arrival in England to paint his portrait. The painting had been finished except the background, which the pair had designed "to represent a ship, bearing to America the intelligence of the acknowledgment of Independence, with a sun just rising upon the stripes of the union, streaming from her gaff. All was complete save the flag, which Copley did not deem prudent to hoist under the present circumstances, as his gallery is a constant resort of the royal family and the nobility." Before dinner on 5 December, however, "with a bold hand, a master's touch, and I believe an American heart," Copley "attached to the ship the stars and stripes." Watson added, "This was, I imagine, the first American flag hoisted in Old England." Watson never again left his homeland and always placed its interests before his own, or, more accurately, managed to blend self-interest with national patriotism.\(^{35}\)

The next turning point in Watson's life, pointing him more firmly in the direction of a career as a visionary gentleman-promoter (particularly, as a projector of American canals), was a brief visit in January 1785 to the moral center of post-Revolutionary American nationalism, Mount Vernon. Since his homecoming, Watson had traveled to New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Connecticut collecting the debts owed Blanchard & Lewis, and it was while in Alexandria, Virginia, that he made a short side trip to the home of George Washington, whose countrymen already considered him the embodiment of American patriotism and republican virtue. It was not a spontaneous decision. Watson had obtained letters of introduction from General Nathanael Greene, with whom he had become acquainted in Rhode Island in late 1784, and Lieutenant Colonel John Fitzgerald of Alexandria, one of Washington's former aides-de-camp and a director of the Potomac River Company, over which Washington presided. In addition,

Watson carried with him a ready excuse to stop at Mount Vernon—a bundle of publications on "emancipation and other congenial topics" entrusted to him in London by their author for delivery to Washington.\(^3\)

What for the New Englander was one of the most precious events in his life ("No pilgrim ever approached Mecca with deeper enthusiasm"), was to the Virginian gentleman just another call upon his time and hospitality. Washington had been involved that week in tracking the fate in the state legislature of one of his pet projects, the Potomac River Company. On 17 January 1785, just two days before Watson's arrival, he had received news of the passage of an act of incorporation on 4 January and a copy of the act, which explains why his "conversation [with Watson] had reference to the interior country, and to the opening of the navigation of the Potomac, by canals and locks," and why his "mind appeared to be deeply absorbed in that object." The New Engander later claimed he was "deeply and constantly impressed with the importance of constructing canals, to connect the various waters of America" since his 1779 travels, and that his impressions were intensified by examination of and travel upon "numerous canals in Europe." But Watson stated he was more deeply affected by the "persuasive tongue of this great man," who "fairly infected me with the canal mania." Washington allowed him to copy from his notebooks on the navigation of the upper Potomac, and, according to Watson, pressed him to settle on the banks of the Potomac. On his way home, Watson consequently proceeded twenty-two miles along its southern bank to examine the proposed canal route and lock sites around the Seneca, Great, and Lower falls. And after his return to New England, he discussed the merits of the Potomac improvements with John Brown and

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otherwise advertised them. But Watson never stated why he did not settle on the Potomac, if Washington, indeed, had ever actually pressed him to do so.37

Perhaps he had considered relocating to the Potomac, but François Cossoul's apparently unexpected arrival in New York in the summer of 1785 changed his plans. The old friends and partners once again joined forces the following spring in a final effort to repay their last French creditors. Watson set up half of their joint venture in northeastern North Carolina, and Cossoul proceeded to Port-au-Prince in the French colony of Saint Domingue, where he established an independent firm to serve as the Caribbean base of their new West Indies trading venture. Watson settled in Nixonton, North Carolina, in April or May 1786, but soon left his business in the hands of a clerk and undertook a three-month tour of the healthier western Carolina back country. He was inspired by another projector of canals, Major Hardy Murfree (1752-1809), who planned to construct one from the falls on the Roanoke River to the Meherrin River, where a new town had been incorporated on family property. Watson appreciated the project, which would provide the vast reaches of western Virginia with a navigable outlet to the Atlantic, and he shifted his base of operations and purchased Mount Sion, a deserted plantation on Potecasi Creek, ten miles from Murfreesborough. After the arrival of Cossoul's first cargo from Hispaniola, Watson opened a store in Murfreesborough in partnership with another projector of canals, Major Hardy Murfree (1752-1809), who planned to construct one from the falls on the Roanoke River to the Meherrin River, where a new town had been incorporated on family property. Watson appreciated the project, which would provide the vast reaches of western Virginia with a navigable outlet to the Atlantic, and he shifted his base of operations and purchased Mount Sion, a deserted plantation on Potecasi Creek, ten miles from Murfreesborough. After the arrival of Cossoul's first cargo from Hispaniola, Watson opened a store in Murfreesborough in partnership with another

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Massachusetts native, Joseph Vollintine. The two merchants retailed foodstuffs, liquors, hardware, pewter, and cloth, and accepted payment in cash, barrel staves, naval stores, and tobacco. Their business never really prospered, however, and Watson sold out and returned to Rhode Island after receiving, in early 1788, the sad news of Cossoul's death.38

After returning from the South, Watson spent the summer of 1788 on his father's farm in Freetown, Massachusetts, which the son claimed to have made profitable in 1785, probably by introducing some of the agricultural practices he had observed in Europe. But Watson was too restless to remain tied to the land as a simple yeoman farmer, even though he had a good reason to settle down: he had married Rachel Smith of Norton, Massachusetts, whom he had first met in October 1784, shortly after his return to America.39 Marriage did not cure his traveling bug, however, and August 1788 saw the thirty-year-old heading west. After attending to some unnamed business in Great Barrington, Massachusetts—his first time in Berkshire County—instead of returning home, he proceeded across the New York border to the old Dutch city of Albany, attributing the decision to destiny (he was also prompted by curiosity, wishing to compare the manners of the Albany Dutch to those of old Holland, and to view the glass factory that John de Neuville of Amsterdam, an old business correspondent, had established eight miles from Albany). While in the neighborhood, he also visited his old friend Silas Talbot.

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39The couple's first child, Emily, was born in 1789 or 1790, but died in 1790. Another Emily was born in 1791, followed by George Elkanah on 22 August 1793, Mary Lucia in 1797 or 1798, Charles Marston on 8 October 1799, and Winslow Cossoul on 22 December 1803 (Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution [2d ed; New York, 1856], 304-05, 319; Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 89-90, 93, 94, 98; Vital Records of Norton, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850 [Boston, 1906], 132, 313, 329).
at Johnstown (whom Watson had assisted as a prisoner of war in England). Talbot informed Watson of an Indian treaty to take place at Fort Stanwix, on the Mohawk River.40

Watson naturally desired to attend the treaty, and his travels to and from the site provided him with firsthand knowledge of the unlimited potential of the New York interior and inspired in him grandiose visions of a great American agricultural empire and the profitable role he would play in its projection and creation. This western journey proved to be another major turning point in Watson's life, for "It was on this occasion," he later claimed, "I first conceived the idea of the practicability of counteracting, at least by a fair competition, the favourite plan" of Washington's, to channel western trade to Alexandria. Watson observed that the log-barns of the infant settlements along the Mohawk were full, and land prices had risen from a trifle to three dollars an acre in just a short period. The fact that equivalent lands sold for ten to twenty dollars an acre in New England helps explain why Yankees, whom he believed were "the best qualified of any men in the world, to subdue, and civilize the wilderness," were already pouring into the region.41

Watson continued further west after observing the treaty at Fort Stanwix, following Wood Creek as it flowed into Oneida Lake, and intended to follow the Onondaga and Oswego rivers to Lake Ontario, but was prevented from continuing by bad weather. At that time he received "a strong presentiment that a canal communication will be opened, sooner or later, from the great lakes to the Hudson" and decided that "the state of New-York [would] have it in their power, by a grand stroke of policy, to divert


the future trade of Lake Ontario, and the great lakes above, from Alexandria and Quebec, to Albany and New-York." Realizing that his own social and economic opportunities would be greater in Albany than in the old, crowded communities of coastal New England, with its tired soils, closed society, and impermeable elite, Watson immediately closed out his affairs in Rhode Island and Massachusetts and in October 1789 moved his new family into a small one-story house on Market Street in Albany, joining a handful of New Englanders who called the 165-year-old Dutch town home.42

Watson wisely saw that Albany, a contested cultural arena after the American Revolution, was poised for takeoff in the 1780s. It promised to be a major regional entrepot because its advantageous position near the head of navigation of the Hudson River, at the best portage to the Mohawk River, and at the junction of a number of overland routes, all dictated that the landless sons of Yankee farmers, as well as settlers recruited in Ireland, Scotland, and Germany, would pass through its crossroads on their way to the newly opened New York frontier. The flood of New England emigration would in itself have overwhelmed Dutch culture, a process accelerated by the permanent location of the state capital there in 1797. But Dutch cultural influence in Albany was effectively eliminated by the 1830s, chiefly by the active exertions of the newcomers.43


Watson was one of the most noticeable agents of the destruction of Dutch culture, which he considered had been corrupted by extended contact with Indians in the fur trade. Viewing the Albany Dutch from the ethnocentric perspective of a self-righteous Yankee, he believed that the obliteration of their two-centuries-old culture was a necessary "improvement." Convinced that "Albany from its fortunate locality was destined to become a splendid city," he determined to elevate it from its "state of degradation" caused by "the most illiberal portion of the human race—sunk in ignorance—in mud." Watson's self-image as an "instrument of Providence" in enlightening the Dutch, who were "generally speaking enshrowded in darkness," soured their relations from the start, and the fervency of his feelings of cultural and moral superiority imbued his first efforts as a publicist and municipal reformer with a stridency he carried throughout his entire career as a gentleman-promoter.44

How did the young, little-known stranger of modest means launch a successful campaign to "Yankeefy" Dutch Albany? First of all, Watson did not act alone. Other New Englanders convinced of the superiority of their culture soon arrived in droves. Also, many ambitious members of the Dutch younger generation were already inclined towards an Anglo-American lifestyle and not unwilling to commit cultural suicide. Watson began with culturally neutral civic improvements that brought actual benefits of safety and convenience to Yankees and Yorkers alike, such as street lighting, night watches, clean back alleys, and an aqueduct. Other improvements might have appeared as


innocuous, such as paved streets, a decent private boardinghouse, and stage routes east and west, but served to make it easier for New Englanders to emigrate to New York. In pressing for these municipal improvements, Watson was merely recalling "the elegancies and advancement of European cities" and emulating the early career of Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia. But some improvements struck directly at traditional Dutch style, custom, or material culture, and were violently resented, such as when Watson was menaced by two broom-wielding housewives in May 1793 after his successful his campaign for a city ordinance prohibiting drain spouts from overhanging the gable-ended Dutch houses, and requiring gutters to be moved from the center to the sides of the streets. Watson succeeded in his Albany improvements through tireless energy and strength of will, and he learned how to use the press effectively. Introducing and advancing each new project in the newspapers, as he had learned to do in North Carolina when supporting ratification of the Federal Constitution, Watson published numerous essays under various pseudonyms, in order to motivate politicians, influence policy, and mold public opinion behind his various schemes. It was a strategy on which he would later depend when he turned his attention to agricultural organization.

Another strategy was to magnify his own influence by persuading an interested member of the local elite to champion his cause. Although Watson was not very effective as a team player or group leader, he was realistic. He proved able to suppress his ego when occasion called for it, in order to gain access to the talents and resources that greater men than he had at their command. Having a member of the gentry on the same side was important, particularly a leader who had gained prestige at the forefront of the

Revolutionary struggle, as late eighteenth-century American society was still a deferential one. Watson, however, like many of his contemporaries, wished to choose to whom he deferred. Leadership became more a matter of merit, not family background or landed wealth. In his associations with New York gentlemen, Watson treated them as social equals, not superiors, which never prevented him from demanding due deference of his own social subordinates.

Another trend represented by Watson that began to occur in post-Revolutionary America, north and south, was an accelerating western shift of population and outlook, as people flooded into the back country after its native inhabitants were removed as an organized threat. It was not long after moving to Albany that Watson's own basic orientation underwent a significant transformation. His travels in the interior regions of New York, recently opened for settlement by whites, inspired him with an expansive vision of a great agricultural empire in the West. This member of an old eastern elite mercantile family, who all his life had been oriented towards transatlantic trade, was seduced by the boundless potential of the fertile American frontier. For the rest of his days, as a self-interested entrepreneur and forward-looking nationalist, Watson would be concerned with developing the moral and economic underpinnings and transportation infrastructure of a republican empire. Mercantile pursuits held less appeal to him, as he concentrated on the reciprocal ends of advancing agricultural progress and establishing American manufactures. His promotion of merino sheep, which led directly to the organization of agricultural fairs, was a natural outgrowth of his activities in New York in the 1790s and early 1800s, when he supported canals and turnpikes, speculated in western lands and developed town sites, and established banks. Watson was not the only merchant who turned his eyes from the sea to the geographic or industrial frontier, but most others, especially in New England, did so only with the disruptions to the carrying trade caused by the War of 1812 and the preceding five years of commercial restrictions. Ironically enough, one of the chief reasons that Watson and his Pittsfield associates banded together
to form a society to promote manufacturing and agricultural improvement was to stem the tide of local emigration to the West.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1791-1792 Watson published as "A Northern Centinel" a series of essays in the \textit{Albany Gazette} that became widely influential as other New York newspapers reprinted them. They protested the vast land sales recently made by Governor George Clinton’s land commissioners to individuals and companies, which would chiefly benefit the economic interests of New York City speculators and the personal and political interests of the incumbents. Watson’s essays also criticized the commission’s neglect of road construction and inland navigation. His conclusion that the public interest was being sacrificed to speculating landjobbers, rich foreigners, and self-interested state officials, made him friends among influential anti-Clintonians, including Revolutionary general and Old Dutch grandee Philip Schuyler—Federalist, United States Senator, and father-in-law of the United States Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton.\textsuperscript{47}

The first of Watson’s "Northern Centinel" essays resulted from a 591-mile tour of the Onondaga country in September-October 1791, during which he tested his hypothesis that it would be relatively easy to establish a water connection with Lake Erie. Accompanied by Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, Stephen N. Bayard, and General Philip Van Cortlandt, progressive members of elite Albany families, Watson vowed in his journal that "Under a fixed and settled belief" that "the great object of canals will soon fix the public attention; I shall not fail to excite that attention by every effort within my reach." After


returning home on 10 October, the "Northern Centinel" published in the _Albany Gazette_ "general Remarks and Estimates on the contemplated Western Canals," not only detailing the feasibility of establishing an all-water route west, but also describing appealing opportunities for settlement and investment in western New York's New Military Tract. Watson also shared his journal and report of the tour with Schuyler (who, having failed reelection to the United States Senate, sat in the state senate), which inspired that man to successfully push through the legislature in March 1792 "An Act for establishing and opening lock navigation within the State of New York." It bestowed corporate powers on two companies. The Northern Inland Locks Navigation Company was to open navigation from the Hudson at Troy to Lake Champlain, and the Western Inland Locks Navigation Company from the Hudson at Schenectady to Seneca Lake and Lake Ontario. "While this bill was struggling in its progress," Watson "attended upon the Legislature, and with the utmost assiduity and zeal, sustained the energetic efforts of General Schuyler in promoting its final success." After the subscription books were opened that May, Watson purchased seven shares in each company and also persuaded his friends to subscribe.48

The western company organized itself in Albany on 27 July 1792 and elected Schuyler president. It also appointed Watson a director and later a member of an important committee to examine the Mohawk River, with Goldsbrow Banyer. Stockholders met on 11 September and approved Banyer's 1 September draft of the committee report recommending the location and construction of a canal. Work lurched

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48Watson also convinced Robert Morris, who owned vast speculative tracts in western New York, to subscribe and promote the project among Philadelphia capitalists (Watson, _Men and Times of the Revolution_ [2d. ed.; New York, 1856], 363-68, and _History of Western Canals in New York_ [Albany, 1820], 49, 52, 56-60, 92-93; and Flick, _Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter_ (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 157-70. The New Military Tract consisted of about 2 million acres in the Finger Lakes region that the state had set aside, surveyed, and subdivided in the mid-1780s as veterans' bounties. By the early 1790s, 90% of the 600-acre parcels had been acquired by competing nonresident small-scale speculators like Watson, although confusions over titles guaranteed years of legal wrangling (Richard H. Schein, "Unofficial Proprietors in Post-Revolutionary Central New York," _Journal of Historical Geography_, 17 [1991], 149-51; Alan Taylor, _William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic_ [New York, 1995], 332).
along from April 1793 until the canal was completed in October 1797, permitting the passage of boats of sixteen-tons burden from the Mohawk to Wood Creek, where previously only one-and-a-half-ton boats could traverse. The Western Inland Locks Company cleared Wood Creek in another two years and completed other improvements. By 1813 it had constructed almost fifteen miles of canals and improved many more miles of natural waterways at a total cost of $480,000. Freight charges fell from one hundred to thirty-two dollars a ton, and land values along the route doubled. The company paid annual stock dividends to Watson and other investors of three to almost five percent until it succumbed to the competition of the newly opened eastern section of the Erie Canal in 1818. Long before then, however, Watson had broken with the company's president, ostensibly over a disagreement about the building material of locks, but, in reality, over resentment of Schuyler's leadership (Watson claimed he refused to be "a tool of Schuyler" by signing Banyer's September 1792 report without reading it, and called the other director who did so an"old English spaniel [who] wag'd his tail and yielded"). Schuyler responded by maneuvering Watson's defeat at the election of the company's board of directors in 1793 and having nothing more to do with him or his projects.49

Not coincidentally, Watson owned land in the area of the canals, and personally profited from rising land values, as well as from company stock dividends. Long before any conflict-of-interest laws existed, such blending of private and public interests was a natural pattern. All of Watson's patriotic promotions stood to benefit him personally and economically, as well as psychologically, if adopted, but that does not mean he was chiefly motivated by economic gain. Unlike most New York landjobbers interested in turning a quick profit, he held a relatively long-term view of his western holdings. One scholar has

49Watson commented bitterly in his Common Place Book: "In 1792 I Laboured incessantly, notwithstanding the shamefull treatment I Received from the unworthy President Gen. Schuyler, in oppoising his intemperate & mercinary measures & my endeavours to oppose his Infamous Maneuvers to make the Canals subservient to his Clandestine & detestable Intrigues & party views" (quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 167; see also 165-68, 173-75; and Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution [2d. ed.; New York, 1856], 369).
called him an "unofficial proprietor" of the New Military Tract. Acting more like a modern land developer than an early American speculator, Watson labored not only to sell his own lands but to plan and promote the settlement of the Onondaga country in general. After his first visit in 1791, when the salt works at Onondaga Lake, the beauty of the countryside, and the rich soil all impressed him, Watson shrewdly invested in good agricultural acreage in this "paradise of America," buying numerous parcels convenient to river transportation or along the Genesee Road, owning thirty thousand acres by 1802. Realizing that Albany and its entrepreneurs would prosper only in relation to its hinterlands, and more interested in extending the republican empire of independent yeoman farmers than in immediate profits, Watson sold off his lands to actual settlers on generous terms and in lot sizes amenable to family farming. He also invested time, money, and energy in helping to connect the Onondaga country into the eastern economy, serving as treasurer of two projected turnpikes through the area, as well as a director of the western canal company. Watson also planned and developed town sites in the New Military Tract, his field books of which indicate full or partial ownership of five platted villages, but he was less successful in such speculations as he had hoped.50

Watson's land speculations resembled the activities of the best-known developer of the New York frontier, William Cooper, who settled on the wild shores of Lake Otsego. Like Judge Cooper (who Watson in 1803 said knew better than anyone "the secret of subduing the Wilderness & converting forests into Cultivated fields"), Watson attracted settlers with the sale of freehold titles on credit and at a moderate price. But Watson

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50 Watson had also purchased, with Jeremiah Van Rensselaer and James Caldwell, a large tract in Monongahela County, Va., his share of which he finally disposed for $10,550 in 1818. Before his death he owned at least 559,000 acres in the Ohio Valley, as well as land in northeastern New York (Schein, "Unofficial Proprietors," Journal of Historical Geography, 17 [1991], 157-59; Flick, "Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter" [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 109 123, 128-33, and "Elkanah Watson's Activities on Behalf of Agriculture," Agricultural History, 21 [1947], 193-98; Watson to Silas Talbot, 22 Dec. 1793, and 29 Jan. 1794, in Talbot Papers, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport, Mystic, Conn.). For the relationship between land speculation and investments in transportation, see Wiebe, Opening of American Society (New York, 1984), 139-42.
never considered settling in any of the towns he developed to become a father of the people, as did the squire of Cooperstown, although he definitely possessed a patriarchal and patronizing attitude and, as a Yankee expatriate and a restless striver himself, could empathize with the majority of his land purchasers. It was not just that Watson lacked the will and patience to be an active and vigilant landlord. It was also because he did not wish to set up competition for Albany, the heart of his visions and current business interests. A fertile central New York hinterland populated by prospering farm families and connected to the east by improved roads and rivers would well serve Albany as a growing market for its manufacturers and a provider of produce for its merchants and consumers. Surrounded on all sides by well-organized, centrally controlled land development schemes, Watson was compelled by the competitive land speculation market, as well as by inclination, to act as an unofficial proprietor for the Onondaga country—planning, promoting, and selling, as well as investing in and fostering commerce. As a valuable middleman in the business of settling the frontier of central New York, Watson capitalized on real needs for agricultural land ownership, town development, and transportation improvements. That he never abandoned his commitment to Albany is demonstrated by the fact that when he did move out of New York, it was to Pittsfield, only twenty miles away from the city, and then only for ten years. And when he permanently relocated to New York's North Country along Lake Champlain in the 1820s, he kept a winter home in Albany.51

Watson and Cooper shared another interest in the early 1790s. Sugar produced from the sap of sugar maple trees that grew abundantly in the woods of the northeast seemed a promising native, free-labor substitute for expensive sugar imported from the slave plantations of the British West Indies. National leaders in the federal capital of Philadelphia applauded William Cooper's sugaring and promotional efforts in 1791. In addition to sending samples to the president, Cooper addressed the New York Society for

51Watson to Cooper, 22 April 1803, in William Cooper Papers, Correspondence Box, Hartwick College Archives, quoted in Taylor, William Cooper's Town (New York, 1995), 317, 507, n.2. For Cooper's land settlement strategies, see 97-101.
the Promotion of Agriculture, Manufactures, and the Useful Arts (NYSPAMUA) on the subject at City Hall in New York City, and the address was printed in the society's transactions. Upstate in Albany, Watson himself had taken up the cause of maple sugar, extolling its virtues in numerous newspaper essays, and claiming the commodity was a potential "mountain of gold" that would increase the value of frontier lands. He helped organize a Maple Sugar Society in Albany in 1791, which collected one hundred and fifty dollars from contributors that was awarded as premiums to farmers who had produced the highest quality and largest quantity of maple sugar that spring. In 1793, Watson solicited the aid of another sugar devotee, Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, president of the state agricultural society, who had himself published essays on the subject, to lobby the state legislature for a law granting a bounty on maple sugar.52

Watson's maple sugar activities served as his apprenticeship in agricultural organization, and he himself, in retrospect, considered the Albany Maple Sugar Society "the real Corner Stone of modern Agricultural Societies." The parallels between that early endeavor and his later experience with the Berkshire County Agricultural Society are clear and informative. Both promoted agricultural commodities (maple sugar and merino wool) that promised to provide greater direct profits for farmers and raise property values, foster American manufacturing, and reduce national dependence on foreign imports. Watson was not the first gentleman to suggest the importance of the targeted improvement, but he quickly perceived its importance and initiated his own multifaceted promotional campaign. With both sugar and sheep he published extensive newspaper essays, sought influential patrons to assist his efforts at molding public opinion and lobbying state legislatures, and organized local voluntary associations of interested individuals to complement the efforts

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of state agricultural societies. The primary means of meeting the goals of both the Albany Maple Sugar Society of 1791 and the Berkshire County Agricultural Society of 1811 was a premium program aimed directly at the average farmer, but in both cases it depended on the generosity of local gentlemen.

Another Albany enterprise that served as an important apprenticeship for Watson was his involvement with John de Neuville's glass manufactory, upon which experience he later drew when establishing the Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton Factory in 1809. Watson invested in the glass works soon after his arrival in New York, and by January 1794 he owned at least half of the factory, which by then had three furnaces, employed almost one hundred workers, and annually produced about £10,000 worth of glass. Although it supplied northern and western New York, western Vermont, and Upper Canada with glass, this Hamilton Glass House survived only with legislative aid. It had earlier received state support in the form of a loan of £3,000 in land, and stockholders petitioned the legislature in 1796 to grant a premium on glass and exempt workers from militia duty and taxes. Watson requested Senator Rufus King in January 1794 to support the owners' petition to Congress to impose a protective twenty-five percent tariff on glass imports, as French glass (along with silk, the only exports permitted by the French National Convention), was flooding the New York market. Watson apparently sold out his interest in the manufactory when he moved to Pittsfield, but it became "a nursery for workers in all" the other glass works of New York, and served him as a learning experience in establishing, directing, and promoting manufacturing operations, as well as lobbying for their political support.53

One final business activity of Watson's Albany career was his involvement in establishing the Albany Bank in 1792, when he became closely associated with Robert R. Livingston, whose later merino promotions propelled Watson into his agricultural career.

Writing as "A Citizen" in the *Albany Gazette* in early 1792, Watson called for the establishment of a bank in Albany, as the New York City branch of the First Bank of the United States largely benefitted Gotham speculators. Upstate merchants, who required ready access to pools of capital, as well as the region's farmers, would profit from the economic intensification that would follow the establishment of a regional bank. After a charter was drawn up and a subscription quickly filled in late February, the new bank's supporters petitioned the state for an act of incorporation. As an Albany booster, Philip Schuyler assisted the passage of a charter bill in both houses of the legislature, against the strong opposition of metropolitan capitalists who wished to maintain their state banking monopoly against the creation of an upstart upstate bank. Schuyler feared a veto from the Council of Revision (made up of the governor, chief justice of the supreme court, and chancellor), in the face of the financial panic that gripped New York City after the collapse of William Duer. He urged Watson to travel to the city in April 1792 and use his personal influence with chief justice John Sloss Hobart to persuade him "of the justice and propriety of the measure." The conservative Federalist was Watson's "uncle," with whom he had lived for a month when Watson first arrived in the state in 1788, and the two remained on cordial terms. After meeting with the chief justice, Watson was introduced to the chancellor, Robert R. Livingston, whose objections to the bank charter he was also able to remove, and the Council of Revision approved the act of incorporation of the Bank of Albany. When the bank was organized on 12 June 1792, Watson was elected one of its directors under president Abraham Ten Broek. With an initial capital stock of $260,000, the bank proved profitable for its investors, who received their first dividend, of four and a quarter percent, on 14 May 1793. By 1795, its stock was selling at fifty percent above par. Two years earlier, however, Watson had failed reelection as a director because of a major falling out with Abraham Van Vechten, Henry Cuyler, Jacob Van der Heyden, and Goldsbrow Banyer, the Dutch board members.54

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54 Undated clipping in Common Place Book, 22, Watson Papers, New York State Library,
In 1803 Watson and a "solid phalanx" of Republicans initiated a second Albany banking venture, the New York State Bank, the legislative petition for which "opened a hornet's nest about our ears, in the person of every individual stockholder of the Albany Bank, who were most Dutch." Watson was cursed "by every Dutchman in Albany; many of whom said twelve years previous that I ought to be drummed out of the city for starting that bank; that it was only a Yankee trap to catch Dutchmen." At the end of the legislative session, Watson invited most of the lawmakers to a dinner party, and he and his colleagues "caucassed all our friends in the legislature on a dark evening" in "an obscure house, in a back street." Watson claimed sarcastically that "the virtuous legislators would not breathe aloud, till they could have assurance doubly sure of participating in the loaves and fishes. This we resisted, as indecorous on their parts, on the very threshold of gross corruption, and advised them to await the issue in silence and rely on our honor." The matter "ended in an indirect understanding that 1,500 shares would be held in reserve for such as passed the bill." Watson protested feebly: "We were unjustly charged with bribing the legislature, whereas our utmost efforts were to resist the measure, and guard ourselves from being accessory to such a scandal." The State Bank received its charter and went into operation with a capital of $460,000 under its first president, John Tayler, and cashier John W. Yates. As one of its directors, Watson acquired the land for its office and designed and oversaw construction of its bank building, served on a committee to acquire plates for

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printing its notes, and also traveled to Philadelphia to obtain its paper.\textsuperscript{55}

By the early 1800s, then, Watson was beginning to identify himself with emerging Republican politicians and politics, despite his sincere distaste for the new party system and later assertions of total nonpartisanship. Although Watson traveled the same road as many men of his social rank, from being a moderate Revolutionary Whig early on supporting American Independence but favoring leniency for Loyalists, to a supporter of the Federal Constitution, to a moderate Federalist, to a moderate Jeffersonian Republican, he was always motivated more by personal ideology and interest, and attracted to principles, men, and measures that supported those interests, than he was loyal to any political party. As a merchant in North Carolina, he had supported the creation of a strong, conservative, central government that would control inflationary state emissions of paper currency harmful to business interests, would remove interstate tariff barriers, and could protect trading interests in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Watson also supported the new federal government when he first moved to Albany, because it was presided over by his great hero Washington. Never appreciative of Alexander Hamilton's High Federalism on the national level, Watson found John Adams's more moderate brand more congenial, but because of a common interest in inland navigation, he found himself aligned with Hamilton's father-in-law. New York Federalists in the 1790s tended to be large landholders of long lineage; wealthy merchants, lawyers, and speculators of New York City; and New England settlers in the interior. In Albany, the old Dutch families of Schuyler and Van Rensselaer, united by marriage and interest and represented by General Philip Schuyler and Stephen Van Rensselaer, the Patroon, provided a firm foundation for

Federalism. They were supported by other members of the Old Dutch aristocracy, including Abraham Van Vechten, Johan Jost Dietz, Dirck Ten Broeck, Hermanus Bleecker, and Colonel James Van Schoonhoven. With his Yankee aversion to the Dutch Yorkers, Watson was not able to rest quietly under Albany Federalism for long. According to Watson, Schuyler had promised to support him as a candidate for Congress from the safe Federalist Albany District if he assisted John Jay's election as governor in the heated election of 1792 (it seems unlikely that Watson ever would have organized agricultural fairs if he had been elected and if his first congressional term had led to a career in national politics). But Watson claimed that he was read out of the Federalist party for his refusal to do so. Undoubtedly, though, Watson and Schuyler's personal differences and policy disagreements in the western canal company contributed to their political break.56

As a progressive entrepreneur, promoter, and land speculator, Watson had begun to find himself drawn closer into the oppositionist orbit of long-serving popular Governor George Clinton before the end of Washington's first administration. Clinton's policies of encouraging small businessmen and manufacturers and prudent investment of state revenue in income-producing capital in order to avoid taxes that would fall on the yeomanry gained him the loyalty of the majority of yeoman farmers and men like Watson—former Revolutionaries who had successfully seized economic openings and

56 Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 301; Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 201; Crittenden, Commerce of North Carolina (New Haven, Conn., 1936), 167-68; Leonard L. Richards, "John Adams and the Moderate Federalists: The Cape Fear Valley as a Test Case," N.C. Hist. Review, 43 (1966), 15-16; Young, Democratic Republicans of New York (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1967), 285, 337; Manning J. Dauer, The Adams Federalists (Baltimore, 1953). The only elective office Watson ever held was that of constable in Albany, to which annoyed Dutch freemen elected the obnoxious newcomer because the post involved more nuisance than responsibility. He turned the joke against them the next morning, rounding up and impounding their street-ranging hogs, for which they had to remit fines to have the animals released. The running at large of hogs was an ancient usage, and the Dutch "at once begged off, and made peace" (Munsell, "State Bank: Elkanah Watson's Account of Its Origin," Collections on the History of Albany, 2 [Albany, 1867]: 403n.; see also "Dogs and Hogs in the Street," Paul A. Gilje, The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834 [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1987], 224-32).
political opportunities presented during the war, for whom Clinton's economic program held special appeal. It was based on revenue derived from a state tariff and land sales, both payable in state and federal securities, as well as specie; included commitments to pay off the state's Revolutionary War debt and to provide credit to farmers and others; offered bounties on selected manufactures and agricultural products; and planned on tying the state together with a broad system of improved roads and waterways. Not merely agrarian republicans, the Clintonians followed policies on the state level that were employed by Federalists on the national level. When Watson helped found the Berkshire Agricultural Society in 1811, most of his associates were forward-looking Democratic-Republican merchants and lawyers who were involved in manufacturing and had supported transportation and other improvements in western Massachusetts.37

One of the most consistent of Watson's political tenets was his belief in the illegitimacy of political parties. America's Revolutionaries had inherited from classical republicanism a philosophy that stressed the dangers of permanent factions, and they only slowly backed into the acceptance of a legitimate organized opposition as a necessary evil, as one further check on the power of a strong central government. In 1792 the Federalists did not see themselves as a national party, nor did Washington consider himself to be a party leader, but a republican equivalent of a Bolingbrookian Patriot King, "a figure above party whose task it was to unite the whole nation." An organized opposition to Hamilton's fiscal policies was only beginning to coalesce under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and this polarizing trend was accelerated and inflamed by a series of events related to the wars of the French Revolution, which destroyed the bipartisan prestige of George Washington and eventually stripped him of his nonpartisanship pretensions. National party competition between Federalists and

Democratic-Republicans peaked in the election of 1800 and withered away after the War of 1812. The sophisticated idea of a two-party system based on widespread democratic participation was one that matured only during Watson's lifetime, although he never completely accepted it.58

Watson had witnessed with his own eyes the consequences of political division and partisan excess. His own familial experiences during the Revolutionary War, when he lost many of his Marston and Winslow relatives to exile as Loyalists reinforced his discomfort with doctrinaire political divisiveness. He left Europe before the onset of the French Revolution, but in England witnessed the violence of elections to Parliament. In North Carolina he viewed (and participated in) the same kind of ballot box battles. Ironically, Watson lived in the three American polities in which a popular, partisan, and participatory democratic system first emerged—Rhode Island, North Carolina, and New York—and he probably continued to long for the more deferential, consensus-building politics of the colonial Plymouth of his youth. The "pomp and etiquette" of the quarter sessions of county court on which sat his mother's uncle General John Winslow so impressed him as a child that he vividly recalled, half a century later, the judges' scarlet robes, the sheriff's and deputies' insignias of power, and the procession to the court house. The secular ritual of the first agricultural fairs reflected such occasions, and as first president of the Berkshire Agricultural Society and propagandist of county fairs Watson often stressed the institution's nonpartisan nature and warned of the social disruption caused by political divisiveness.59


59 Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 71-72, 84, 217-18,
Because the practice of politics in New York in the early 1800s had more to do with personalities and party interest than ideology, Watson should have fit right in. Political alignments constantly shifted because they were based primarily on the struggle between those who were in office and those who were not, and not necessarily upon differences of political principles. Watson's one instance of direct political involvement followed this pattern. Because he apparently had given up any ambitions to hold public office by 1800 (if, indeed, he had ever felt any), he felt little loyalty to any party but lobbied and politicked wherever he could find support for his various projects. Not believing in the legitimacy of parties, he was also personally unsuited to be a mere cog in any political machine. Only personal animosity moved him to participate actively in the New York gubernatorial campaign of 1807. His choice of the losing side propelled him into retirement in Pittsfield, the final event that pointed him in the direction of founding modern agricultural fairs, and helped solidify his self-image as a gentleman patriot.60

Watson claimed he acted as "the efficient Man in the grand Albany electioneering committee" that labored for the reelection of his near neighbor, the erstwhile Federalist

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301-03. Watson shared John Adams's view of popular elections, expressed in the *Defence of the Constitutions*: "Every flattery and menace, every passion and prejudice of every voter will be applied to; every trick and bribe that can be bestowed, and will be accepted, will be used," and the winner would always be he "who has fewest scruples; who will propagate lies and slanders," and who will "debauch the people by treats, feasts, and diversions, with the least hesitation." In referring to North Carolina politics, Watson himself stated: "Every decent man, must bring himself down to their level, and take every beast by the paw" (quoted in Robert Allen Rutland, *The Ordeal of the Constitution: The Antifederalists and the Ratification Struggle of 1787-1788* (Norman, Okla., 1966; reprint. Boston, 1983), 160; and Flick, *Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 96.

60Flick, *Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 201; Alvin Kass, *Politics in New York State, 1800-1830* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1965), 9-10, 21, 27, 28-29. Watson informed (Federalist) Rufus King in 1806 that he neither held, "nor wish[ed] or expect[ed] any office of Profit," that he "was a zealous federalist till I was reluctantly drove from the ranks in 1792 by the overbearing conduct of the late Genl S——r," that he "reluctantly Joined the Standard of [George] Clinton," but "from the Same Causes which induced me to quit the federal standard, the overbareing tyranny of D[e]W[itt] C[linton] has also compel'd me to take an earily & an active part with Govr L[ewis] and this is perfectly congenial with my feelings, Since it brings me back in Some measure to my former federal Sentiments. In one word—my own feelings tells me that I have never been the tool of any party, but always acted (as I thought) on Independent Ground" (Watson to King, 9 April 1806, ALS, Elkanah Watson Miscellaneous Papers, New-York Historical Society, N.Y., New York).
Morgan Lewis, who had served as governor since 1804, against Daniel D. Tomkins. In 1800-1801 members of the Livingston interest had united with the followers of George and DeWitt Clinton against Aaron Burr and were rewarded with numerous offices after the Republican victory in the state. Five years later, the Livingstons turned on the Clintonians, while most of the remaining Burrites rejoined the Clintonians. In 1807 Governor Lewis, a brother-in-law of Chancellor Livingston, created a new faction, derisively called the quids (from the Latin, tertium quid, third element), which drew into its ranks discontented Clintonians and Livingstons. Although the Lewisites gained control of the legislature by combining with the Federalists in 1807, and were able to oust DeWitt Clinton from his post as mayor of New York City, Tompkins won the governorship.61

Quiddism was a tendency, not a doctrine, and strained against the old politics of independence, as described by Robert H. Wiebe. The politics of development, as practiced by men like Watson, began to take root in state arenas in the early nineteenth century. Crisscrossing national party loyalties, quiddism was attacked by Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, and party purists reviled quids as men without principle. Watson was not only philosophically committed to antipartisanship, but he supported the New York quids in 1807 because of his previous associations with Chancellor Livingston and his enmity for DeWitt Clinton, who was supposed to be the puppeteer pulling the strings of the pliable Tomkins, and who later managed a national campaign against quiddism in 1808. Watson wrote that he acted not because he had "any particular attachment to Lewis or his principles—but to oppose the tyranny of DeWitt Clinton my Mortal enemy," the "Robespierre" of New York state. After a contest of such "vehemence of personal feeling and bitterness, seldom excited by mere party collisions" (according to Winslow C. Watson, the editor of Watson's published memoirs), Lewis was "defeated

after the most vigorous efforts," and Watson, "disgusted with the thoughts of living under such a tyrant," moved out of the state in June 1807 (his chief regret apparently being the loss of five hundred dollars that he "was fool enough to bet . . . on the issue").62

The experience only strengthened Watson's dislike of partisan politics and confirmed his tendencies to serve the public and give vent to his patriotism not by holding public office but by working outside of the government to promote reforms and improvements, as a not-disinterested private citizen. He had therefore became an astute molder of public opinion, relying on the chief medium of the day, the newspaper, and obtaining the cooperation of men of influence. Watson had also learned of the advantages of working through semi-public institutions, such as business and financial corporations, which could concentrate expertise and capital, and voluntary associations, which magnified the interest and participation of cooperating individuals, creating another bond to unite early-nineteenth-century communities in the face of growing socioeconomic, cultural, and political centrifugal forces. By the time he turned his restless mind to progressive farming and agricultural organization, Watson had already learned much from a long career as a gentleman-promoter.63

62 Wiebe, Opening of American Society (New York, 1984), 194-203; Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 414-18; Common Place Book, 50, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany, quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson, Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 202. See also Robert R. Thompson, "John Quincy Adams, Apostate: from 'Outrageous Federalist' to 'Republican Exile,' 1801-1809," Journal of the Early Republic, 11 (1991), 161-83. According to Wiebe, quiddism was translated into a prevalent American style of politics by the coalition-based, state-centered politics of development only after the War of 1812. In 1812 Congressman Ezekiel Bacon informed Watson of DeWitt Clinton’s presidential aspirations: "Mr. Madison will be I think strongly re-elected, notwithstanding the singular & mercenary combinations against him in favor of D. Clinton.—it has been well remarked by a highminded Federalist, 'that if Clinton should have been able to succeed, it would be a subject for deep regret for men of principle of all parties, since his election would be carried by a combination of the worst portion of the federal party, united with the worst of the Democratic party'" (Bacon to Watson, 17 Nov. 1812, Box 6, fold. 6, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany).

63 In addition to his canal and banking ventures and munipal improvements mentioned above, Watson also helped establish a city library and new bridge in Albany, was active in the creation of a state prison system and the reform of the criminal code, advocated free public education, and supported Union College in nearby Schenectady (Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 87-139).
Watson's close friend Eliphalet Nott advised him shortly after his move to Pittsfield not even to think about returning to Albany. "Remain where thou art," determining "as the Republic has abandoned thee that thou will abandon it," and "do nothing more than sing in thy retirement Vive-la Republique." Nott concluded: "Let thy life be devoted to literature, to agriculture and religion . . . but avoid politics." Watson could never abandon the republic, but the rest was good advice, and well heeded.64

64Nott to Watson, n.d. [1807], ALS in Common Place Book, 50, quoted in Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 208.
Chapter Three

The "Handsomest Village in the Northern States":
Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 1740-1807

The creation of the modern agricultural fair was an institutional, not an individual, effort. Elkanah Watson was only one of the founders, and, perhaps, not even the leading one, of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, which organized annual county fairs in Pittsfield in the early 1810s. Its fairs were soon copied across Massachusetts, New England, and New York by other agricultural societies founded in imitation of the Berkshire one. Anyone familiar with Watson's writings might be tempted to conclude that the site of Pittsfield as the home of the original county fair was purely fortuitous. Wherever Watson might have settled, there fairs would have sprung up, unbidden by context and unassisted by colleagues, driven solely by his ideas and efforts. In reality, however, the creation of the fair is better explained as the cooperative venture of several men who may or may not have been inspired by Elkanah Watson but who definitely were reacting to what was happening in a particular place at a particular time. After having traced Watson's experiences and intellectual development, it is time to consider why the plaque commemorating the site of the first modern agricultural fair is located in Park Square in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.¹

By 1807, when Watson moved there, Pittsfield had developed into something very

¹Watson would have appreciated that the Grange erected in 1937 a bronze tablet in Pittsfield's "City Hall Park" "to the memory of Elkanah Watson, nationally known as the Father of the Agricultural Fair," although its statements that "He was the founder and first president of the Berkshire Agricultural Society. Near the Old Elm in this park 1807 its original exhibition was conducted under his direction" were not entirely accurate. Watson's memorial joined those commemorating Pittsfield's Civil War soldiers, Revolutionary War veterans, and Mr. and Mrs. John Chandler Williams, who donated the land for the park (Berkshire Eagle [Pittsfield], 20 April, 20 May 1937).
different from most communities in eastern Massachusetts, or, more precisely, it had reached a stage of economic development in only seventy years that central places in more established counties had taken almost two centuries to reach. This rapid development had ramifications on Pittsfield society, which had also originated in a manner different from seventeenth-century Puritan settlements, and these facts help explain the origins of the Berkshire Agricultural Society and the Pittsfield Fair. A review of the early history of Pittsfield reveals that less than half a century after its initial settlement it had become Berkshire County's largest and most prosperous town, although it was not even the oldest.

Pittsfield's economic success, based on an agricultural sector that was shifting from a traditional semicommercial mixed system centered on grain production to more intensive livestock raising for market, had early on attracted men on the make. The Revolutionary War was a watershed event. Not only did the Revolution remove many members of the old elite and provide opportunities for ambitious townsfolk and newcomers to assume leadership positions, but it also created a republican form of government, the ideological details of which still had to be worked out. The weakness of traditional communal institutions, most notably the Congregational church, left early-nineteenth-century Pittsfield far more fragmented than most towns in eastern Massachusetts. The Berkshire Agricultural Society may be seen as one organized attempt to reunite a fractured community under secular commonalities still shared by all: respect for the yeoman farmer and the economy's ultimate dependence on agriculture.

It is not known for certain exactly when Elkanah Watson first visited Pittsfield. He probably passed through town in the summer of 1788, when he extended his Great Barrington trip to Albany, New York. By the time he moved his growing family there, Pittsfield had become "a thriving agricultural, manufacturing and mercantile town" of about 2,600 people, the most populous place in the county. Its village center had favorably impressed visitors since the mid-1790s. The exiled Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt described it as "a nice little town" with "large, handsome, and well-constructed
homes, as well as elegantly built houses of worship." The Reverend Timothy Dwight, who visited in 1798, later wrote, "Pittsfield is a beautiful township. . . . A small, but handsome village is built in the center around the church."2

Despite the nucleated New England village facade described by Rochefoucauld-Liancourt and Dwight, Pittsfield's differences from the "little commonwealths" in eastern Massachusetts and the Connecticut River Valley loomed large by the early 1800s. Berkshire towns in general, and especially those in the hill country above Pittsfield, were distinctly pluralistic entities, consisting of several neighborhoods often settled by people from different towns. Pittsfield's divergence from the cultural and political mainstreams of Massachusetts was influenced by: its location on the Berkshire pocket frontier 150 miles from the center of culture and government in Boston; its being surrounded by mountain barriers that contributed to a marked insularity; its relatively late date of settlement; its orientation toward the economic centers of New York and Connecticut on the Hudson and Connecticut rivers; and its radical republican heritage from the Revolutionary era.3

By the time Watson arrived in Pittsfield, no members of the "stalwart generation, who had come over the hills from the fat valley of the Connecticut, and settled down here, to clear up the forests" in the 1740s and 1750s remained active in public life, and a new generation had assumed leadership. This was only one reason why the town, in the early

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1800s, was "agitated by religious and political feuds which extended in a remarkable
degree into the affairs of business and social life." That condition benefitted Watson, who
came, as he claimed, with plans to transform Berkshire County into America's preeminent
region of merino sheep raising, and Pittsfield into a center of woolen manufacturing.  

His plans were largely precipitated by the area's location and topography. Early-
nineteenth-century Berkshire County had developed such strong economic connections
with New York's upper Hudson River ports that it was not unusual for merchants to move
back and forth between Albany and Pittsfield. Berkshire County was geographically
isolated from Boston and the closer Connecticut River towns by the formidable thirty-
mile-wide Berkshire Barrier, made up of the Hoosac Mountain range, with peaks as high
as 2,400 feet. Access to the county from burgeoning Albany, New York, forty miles west,
and the Hudson River trading towns of Kinderhook and Hudson, was slightly easier, as
the Taconic Mountains formed a higher wall, but one only five miles thick at its base and
pierced by several passes. Between the two mountain ranges, the rough and rugged
northern part of the county was drained by the swift Hoosic River streaming northwards.
The less impetuous Housatonic meandered southward through the wider, smoother valleys
of southern Berkshire, which contained the centers of Pittsfield, Lenox, Stockbridge,
Great Barrington, and Sheffield, the last of which was Berkshire's oldest settlement and its
second most populous town.  

Not only did Berkshire's mostly unnavigable rivers offer waterpower resources for
woolen factories, but its hilly pastures offered good grazing. As in neighboring Hampshire

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4Quotations in J. E. A. Smith, *The History of Pittsfield, (Berkshire County,) Massachusetts, from the Year 1800 to the Year 1876* (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 88, 89.

County across the Hoosac Mountains, Berkshire was divided into favorable lowland areas that were populated first and the more marginal upland regions, such as northern Berkshire County in general. The best soils were located in the lowlands, particularly in the river valleys, which also served as transportation corridors. The uplands, once cleared of forest cover, were well-suited for grazing and hay production, as the thinner soils produced grasses well, but steeper slopes and more rugged terrain made tillage and transportation to market more difficult. Also, winters were colder along the ridges, and the growing season averaged twenty to thirty days shorter at the higher elevations. The Berkshire hill towns were the county’s last settled places and the chief contributors to western migration, which began in earnest in the 1790s, and to regional urban emigration in the nineteenth century.6

Although nearly surrounded by hills, as were Lenox and Stockbridge, the six-mile-square township of Pittsfield was a favored location and became the crossroads of the county. Here the convergence of two branches of the Housatonic River provided rich intervale lands, and the confluence of valleys provided relatively open plains through which the practical thoroughfares of northern and southern Berkshire came to be run. The Dutch fur-traders from Albany, who, in the seventeenth century first scouted this area (called Poontoosuck—"Haunt of Winter Deer"—by its native inhabitants), found several thousand Mahican Indians living in villages along both banks of the Hudson from Catskill

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Creek to Lake Champlain, and eastward into the Housatonic Valley. Mohawk enemies forced them east in 1669, until a final peace was made between the two tribes in 1675. Suffering from smallpox and other epidemic diseases, these Housatonics totaled fewer than two hundred by 1689, which number was augmented by Mahicans from the west pushed from the Hudson Valley by Dutch farmers in the 1690s. When the Indians petitioned Massachusetts authorities to send Christian missionaries in 1734, however, only about fifty Housatonics and Mahicans remained in four small villages on the upper Housatonic River. A council in 1735 established the mission village of Stockbridge under the Reverend John Sergeant, who had begun his labors there the previous year. By 1738, all the Indians of the region had permanently removed to this village, although many continued to pursue a semi-nomadic life.7

Only after this buffer between the new settlers and the hostile Indian allies of the French in Canada was established, and the more fertile tracts of the Connecticut River Valley were taken, did white settlement of the Housatonic Valley begin in earnest. The Massachusetts General Court purchased most of the Housatonics' lands by treaty in the 1720s and 1730s and began making liberal grants, in the hopes of forestalling New York occupation of the disputed territory.8

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8 See Smith, *History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800,* (Boston, 1869), 55-60; and *History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876* (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 9-10; Strong, "History of Pittsfield," in Field, ed., *History of Berkshire County* (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 370; and Patrick Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge* (Lincoln, Neb., 1992), esp. 2-38. After Connecticut favorably settled its border dispute with New York in 1722 by having actual settlements in the area, Massachusetts hoped to do the same. Following Queen Anne's War, the colony granted the townships of Sheffield, Great Barrington, Mount Washington, Alford, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge, and Lee to Hampshire County citizens, despite a tangle of conflicting New York claims, royal grants, and ambiguous charters. Settlement commenced first at Sheffield in 1725, on the broadest and most fertile meadows of the Housatonic, but lagged until surveys were completed in 1731. The Massachusetts-
acres to Colonel John Stoddard of Northampton, a member of the elite Hampshire County
Stoddard-Williams clan known as the river gods, and a member of the Provincial Council,
for his services as colonel of the Hampshire County militia during Queen Anne's War. He
carefully selected land at the western terminus of the most convenient pass through the
Hoosac Mountains, which included luxuriant meadows and fertile uplands, as well as some
of the best water-privileges on the upper Housatonic. Instead of legalizing his purchase of
contiguous Indian lands, the General Court granted the adjacent six-square-mile tract to
Boston, the rights to which Jacob Wendell of that town purchased at auction in June 1736.
That deed was executed in March 1737, and the land surveyed in September 1738.
Stoddard and Wendell's claims were not adjusted until 1741, when Philip Livingston of
Albany purchased half of Wendell's interest.9

In 1742, Livingston sold forty Poontoosuck lots (for around £30 each) to settlers
from Hampshire County in order to fulfill the obligations of the original grant. These
consisted of: settling sixty Massachusetts families, with each one building a house and
improving at least five acres within five years; settling and supporting an orthodox
minister; and laying aside lots to support a school and future Congregational ministers.
The forty unnamed settlers of 1743 abandoned their land and labors when King George's
War made the far western frontier of Massachusetts unsafe. Not until the Treaty of Aix-
la-Chapelle was signed in October 1748 did the settlement of Poontoosuck resume.10

The Berkshire frontier in the mid-eighteenth century was a land of opportunity for
the adventurous poor, as well as a source of wealth for rich land speculators. One of the
first returnees was Nathaniel Fairfield. Born into a large but impoverished Boston family
in 1730, he was put out to the Dickinson household in Westfield, Massachusetts, and, in
1745, accompanied his neighbor, blacksmith Dan Cadwell, on an inspection of Cadwell's

New York dispute terminated only in 1773, with the Hartford Conference, when the border was
settled at 20 miles east of the Hudson. The line was finally run in 1787.

9Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 62-68.
10Ibid., 71-73, 84.
recently purchased Poontoosuck lands. Impressed with this reconnaissance, the young man also moved west upon the expiration of his indenture, built a log cabin, and began clearing his own fair fields in the spring of 1749, when the settlement consisted of about sixteen other men. He soon journeyed back to Westfield to marry, but returned to Poontoosuck in 1752 with his new bride and a dray full of household goods dragged by a single yoke of oxen.11

More substantial settlers soon arrived in Berkshire, most of them moving west from Westfield, Northampton, Deerfield, and other towns in the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts. Deerfield selectman William Williams (1711-1785; Harvard College, Class of 1729; known to his contemporaries as Colonel Bill), son of the Reverend William Williams of Hatfield, came to Poontoosuck in 1753 and began clearing land and building a cabin. Williams benefitted from his kinship with the river gods and Poontoosuck proprietors—he was a nephew of both John Stoddard and Jacob Wendell, the latter of whom gave him a lot of land in 1743, and promised another hundred acres if he would settle it himself. Williams was preceded the summer before by Charles Goodrich, "the first man of considerable property" to join the settlement, who drove "the first cart and team," from Connecticut, cutting "his way for a number of miles through the woods." Goodrich was born in Wethersfield in 1720 to Colonel David and Prudence Churchill Goodrich, whose marriage united two of the town's leading families. Connecticut emigrants began outnumbering Hampshire emigrants, especially in southern Berkshire, after 1761.12

11Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 87-88.

The General Court incorporated Poontoosuck's proprietors as a plantation in 1753, and Charles Goodrich was chosen treasurer at the first meeting of the proprietors that September. The old Indian trail along the Westfield River was enlarged to a path for pack-horses and extended another forty miles to Albany. Stephen Crofoot, who probably first came in 1749, built the first bridge across the Housatonic and erected the settlement's first gristmill. Goodrich began construction of the first framed house in the summer of 1754, before upper Berkshire was evacuated after Indians destroyed a Dutch settlement on the Hoosic River in New York, signifying the outbreak of the French and Indian War in the northern colonies. Williams fortified his house as Fort Anson, and Goodrich and Fairfield followed suit. The former constructed a blockhouse called Goodrich Fort in 1756 two miles from Fort Anson, and the latter erected Fort Fairfield in November 1757. All three men profited from the war. Goodrich received a sergeant's commission and pay from the General Court, and was reimbursed for the provisions he supplied to the Connecticut and Massachusetts troops and their mounts. Fairfield himself received soldier's pay while serving six months with the provincial troops. But Williams made out the best, because of his family's influence in Boston. He was elected an officer in the Hampshire County militia and was appointed sutler to the "establishment on the western frontier," and later served as a colonel on General Abercrombie's unsuccessful Ticonderoga expedition of 1758, during which, being senior to Colonel Timothy Ruggles, he was acting commander of the Massachusetts forces. The Poontoosuck garrisons,

however, received little direct material aid from the provincial government; only British victories elsewhere eased the pressure on the western settlements. This contributed to feelings of resentment toward the government in Boston, which became a longstanding Berkshire tradition.13

Unlike earlier settlements in the east, many of which originated as communal adventures motivated by religious as much as economic impulses, most Berkshire towns were "purely speculative ventures" of individuals acting on their own initiative. Poontoosuck Plantation resulted from wealthy, profit-minded river gods who had acquired and resold at profit old Indian lands to heads of families at least as interested in providing land for their children and facing the concerns of everyday life as they were worried about their eternal status as God's elect. John Frederick Martin has revised the standard view of Puritan town founding in the seventeenth century by demonstrating how much entrepreneurship and commercialism accompanied communal cooperation and religious imperatives, and Stephen Innes has shown how successful early New England Puritans were in establishing "moral capitalism" through their federal covenant theology, which "provided an essential counterweight to capitalist development, a measure of solidarity and trust." Absent from Poontoosuck's settlement a century later, however, was the organic relationship of incorporated town and established church that underlay that covenant. Frontier conditions and wartime contingencies created a society in Berkshire County marked by survival, acquisitiveness, and flux, which often subsumed the ideals of civil peace and religious harmony. And, by the time of the first Berkshire County Fair in Pittsfield in 1811, the Protestant work ethic of the Puritans was being transformed by their descendants into the spirit of capitalism. Indeed, the fair was an institution that sought to instill in Berkshire farm families the possessive individualism of a liberal, more modern,

political economy.¹⁴

Those farmers who remained at Poontoosuck during the French and Indian War prospered from selling farm surpluses at inflated prices to military expeditions to Crown Point, Ticonderoga, and Canada, and land speculators found buyers for their lands once the French threat was permanently removed after 1763. Charles Goodrich did particularly well in cashing in on the speculative acres he had amassed, as British military expenditures had injected hard currency into the colonial economy. In June 1752 he had purchased, for £473, one-third of Jacob Wendell's interest in Poontoosuck's undivided lands, becoming owner of one-ninth of "the Commons." By 1759, he had added another 1,136 Poontoosuck acres to his estate, and over the next two years acquired control of large tracts in neighboring Lanesborough and Jericho (later Hancock), as well as in nearby Canaan (later New Lebanon), New York, including the valuable springs there. In selling off much of his land to relatives, he managed to create a "large and influential" family network in Berkshire County, which, although never rivaling that of the river gods, did provide security and opportunity for many of its own Connecticut emigrants. Before the American Revolution, these came to include Goodrich's brother Benjamin, who settled in Jericho in 1764 with his wife and fourteen children, and other kin who settled in Pittsfield, Lanesborough, Lenox, Sheffield, Stockbridge, Egremont, and Great Barrington.¹⁵


¹⁵Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 15, 181, 197-98, 206; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 89-90, 97, 124, 125-28, 436, 503; Stiles, History of Ancient Wethersfield (2 vols.; reprint.; New York, 1904), 2:373, 375, 376 377; Field, History of Pittsfield (Hartford, Conn., 1844), 9, 53; and Berkshire Hills, 2 (1902), 7. Still owning over 1,000 acres in 1790, Goodrich was Pittsfield's greatest holder of real estate when an assessment was made for building a new church. His estate at the time of his death in 1816 consisted of over 6,000 acres; the family homestead of 300 acres sold for $11,000 when his son Charles later removed to New York. For early Berkshire
Stephen Innes has described the dynamism of the mixed agricultural economy of Puritan Massachusetts, which explains the settlement of Berkshire County in the first place. The lack of a tropical staple and chronic shortage of credit on the Massachusetts coast in the 1630s and 1640s contributed to the development of a shipping industry and all of its supporting infrastructure. At the same time, the English mixed-grain-livestock agriculture brought by the first settlers of New England provided a market export for the hungry plantation islands of the West Indies. But that agricultural system itself required plows, gristmills, carts, and the smiths, millers, and artisans to construct and repair them. And it especially required land, for livestock became the chief commodity of the West Indian trade, and it was estimated each head of cattle required over three or four acres of land to sustain it for a year. The General Court first permitted expansion into the Connecticut Valley because of a land shortage by the mid-1630s, and, a century later, Valley farmers looked to Berkshire for open lands for their cattle, horses, sheep, and swine.16

Due to the growing number of proprietors of Poontoosuck Plantation resulting from sales and bequests (many of the new owners having no other interest in the

settlement but to convert their land rights immediately into cash), the proprietors reapplied for a commission and obtained a warrant in October 1759 to divide the Poontoosuck Commons. Unimproved lots were resurveyed and reassigned in 1760, becoming open for sale and settlement. Over sixty families lived at Poontoosuck in 1761, when Colonel Bill Williams, who was appointed clerk to the proprietors, visited Boston to press for incorporation as a town. Governor Francis Bernard approved the resulting legislation in April and supplied the new town's name of Pittsfield, in honor of the popular Earl of Chatham, the elder William Pitt, architect of the successful British war effort. Berkshire became a county the same day, with Sheffield's North Parish, incorporated as Great Barrington, becoming the county seat two months later. Pittsfield's first town meeting, on 11 May 1761, elected Colonel Bill clerk, selectman, and assessor, and, later, a representative to the General Court. Deferential citizens undoubtedly realized that his important family ties to the river gods and other connections at Boston would well serve their interests as he served his own.17

By the end of the 1760s, the number of families living in Pittsfield had more than doubled to 138, consisting of a total population of between 671 and 828 people in 1772, which did not include the thirty or forty transient agricultural wage laborers annually hired in the late 1760s. The town began to emerge from its frontier stage, as lands and houses were improved and an economic infrastructure developed. Two more bridges were built over the Housatonic, one by Goodrich. The town built animal pounds to hold stray livestock and granted water privileges for several mills, including the area's first two fulling mills—the first erected about 1767 by Andrew Baker, which was purchased by

17 Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 89, 123, 124, 128-29, 130-33, 133-34, 139 n.1; Field, History of Pittsfield (Hartford, Conn., 1844), 11; Taylor, Western Massachusetts in the Revolution (Providence, R.I., 1954), 27-32; Frederick W. Cook, Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities and Towns in Massachusetts (Boston, 1948), 7. Provincial authorities appointed Williams a justice of the peace for the new county in 1761, and Israel Stoddard in 1765. Pittsfield elected Williams a town selectman 15 times and a representative to the General Court 11 times (Goodrich served 6 terms as a selectman and 6 terms as a representative; see Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County [Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976], 144).
Valentine Rathbun (1723-1813), who emigrated from Stonington, Connecticut, in the early 1770s—four sawmills, and two more grist mills. Three public school districts were established in 1766 and subdivided five years later, when two more schoolhouses were built. Several pretentious framed houses were built, including Colonel Bill's "Long House," which cost him over £1,373 in materials, property, and labor.  

The decade of the 1760s also saw the intensification of the tensions inherent in Poontoosuck's original settlement. Unlike early towns in eastern Massachusetts, and unlike even the first Berkshire settlements made by families of Westfield and Northampton in the 1720s, the new community did not "hive off" of an older one when church attendance became inconvenient for residents living on the parish's periphery and neighbors petitioned to be set apart as a new church. In Poontoosuck, most families were strangers unto one another, often coming from different colonies, as well as different towns. Nor did they covenant together in Congregational church fellowship until after nearly a decade and a half of settlement. When they did, the process proved extremely contentious, and demonstrated how difficult it was for religious unity to overcome personal, social and economic differences.  

The greatest fracture in Pittsfield society of the 1760s was the resentment felt by the original settlers against the nonresident proprietors and their heirs, who retained thousands of acres off the tax rolls. Charles Goodrich's presence at Poontoosuck as the only major proprietor naturally enhanced his position amongst his fellow settlers, and, when the heirs of nonresident proprietors Oliver Partridge, Moses Graves, and John Stoddard moved to town, Goodrich became "a champion of the townspeople" against them. When Stoddard attempted to have him ejected from a piece of disputed land, the

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settlers rallied to Goodrich's defense. The General Court upheld Goodrich's claims to the Stoddard tract in 1773-1774, but the general dispute between the settlers and the heirs of the original speculators was subsumed by Revolutionary politics, the former generally becoming Whigs and the latter tending toward Loyalism.\textsuperscript{20}

This split contributed to the difficulties and controversies over building Pittsfield's first meetinghouse and settling its first minister of the gospel. The original Poontoosuck grant from the province required the establishment of public worship, the costs of which the settlers had agreed with the original grantees to assume. But when they could no longer in good conscience excuse their neglect by pleading poverty, and first attempted to build a church, in 1760, they argued that the lapse of two decades had nullified the original contract with the grantees. They called upon the nonresident proprietors to pitch in to erect a meetinghouse, and unsuccessfully petitioned the General Court for support. Moses Graves and Solomon Stoddard \textit{voluntarily} agreed to contribute glass, rather than accept the forty-five-shilling assessment on each of their unalienated speculative lots. They would do so, however, only if the building would be large enough to keep pace with the expanding population (which would raise their property values). Instead, the settlers voted to raise a smaller meetinghouse, at a four-shilling-per-lot assessment, and all contributed their labor to the task in the summer of 1761. The building's interior was still finished the following spring, when the first meeting was held in it, nor was the meetinghouse lot cleared of trees, which left the building at risk of peril from wind and fire. Nothing further was accomplished until December 1764, when it was determined to finish the first floor and the front seats of the gallery and defray the expenses by the sale of pews. An auction of fourteen pews in February 1765 raised £83 15s., which was given to Colonel Bill to finish the meetinghouse within the year. He was called upon in 1768 to fulfill his contract, as Deacon James Easton, to whom he had subcontracted the business,

had failed to do so. Only after a decade of continual controversy and desultory effort, and thirty-eight years after the original settlers had first come to Poontoosuck, did they provide themselves with a house of worship. In November 1770 the proprietors agreed to "accept the house as it stood, although not completed according to contract."21

Controversy also marked the five-year effort to fill the pulpit in that first meetinghouse. Details are unclear, but apparently the clashes originated, like the divisiveness that marked many congregations after the Great Awakening, in differing theological opinions. Personal animosities no doubt also played a part. Some souls of the first settlers to Poontoosuck had been touched by the New Light revivals in the Connecticut Valley in the 1730s, and by the Great Awakening that commenced with George Whitefield's visit to New England in 1740-1741, a movement that eventually reoriented American religion and popular piety away from accepted forms and scholarly interpretation and toward personal experience and an ecclesiastical order based upon it. New Light ministers, like Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, emphasized conversion—the reception of divine grace—which was purely a gift from God to the Elect. A man could do nothing to merit his own salvation, but a godly minister might bring him to the realization of his utter dependence on God and the importance of the new birth. The Old Lights, discomforted by the Great Awakening's tendencies to disrupt congregations and to challenge ministerial authority by countenancing the preaching of evangelical itinerants, emphasized rationalism in their theology. Many were by then flirting with Arminianism, which rejected the absolute sovereignty of the Calvinist God and held man's efforts as a necessary part of the process of salvation, stressing morality over theology. This held especial appeal for New Englanders of wealth, social status, and educational attainment. In the Connecticut Valley, the river gods Israel Williams and John

21 With the expansive vision of wealthy land developers, Graves and nonresident proprietor Oliver Partridge protested in 1762 against the inadequacy of the first meetinghouse, which would "scarcely hold the people when sixty families should be in town" (Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 150-54.
Stoddard supported the practices of the Reverend Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, who did away with the Halfway Covenant and opened his church's communion to saved and unsaved alike. Edwards became Northampton's minister in 1729 after the death of his grandfather, the Reverend Stoddard, and aroused congregational opposition when he attempted to roll back the liberal innovation of his predecessor by reinstating the experimental requirement for church membership to exclude the unconverted. Williams and Stoddard helped maneuver Edwards's removal as minister to the Northampton church in 1750, and their kinsmen in Pittsfield probably shared their dislike of New Light principles.22

Since 1743, when he became minister in Great Barrington, the Reverend Samuel Hopkins had worked to make New Light Calvinism the predominant belief system of Berkshire County. This Evangelical Calvinism was based upon the absolute sovereignty of God, the innate depravity of man, the limited substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, and the predestination and election of souls. Jonathan Edwards began to assist Hopkins in 1750, when the exiled Northampton minister was appointed missionary minister to the Indians at Stockbridge. He held the office for seven years, until leaving for Princeton to become president of the College of New Jersey. Another ally was the Reverend Stephen West of Stockbridge. These three men made Berkshire County the center of the emotionally charged Calvinist neo-orthodoxy known as the New Divinity, or New England Theology, which revitalized old-style Puritanism. After Edwards's departure, West and Hopkins organized the powerful Berkshire Association of Ministers in 1763, which helped maintain Edwardsean dominance and theological unity among the county's Congregational churches. Also influential was the longevity of Berkshire's ministers, and

the predisposition to Calvinism of many of their flocks because of the sternness of their agricultural way of life, completely dependent on nature and nature's God. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Berkshire orthodoxy emerged as a conservative attitude of mind inclined toward faith rather than reason, insisting on the supernatural elements of religion and a transcendent God, and pessimistic in its view of human nature.23

At Poontoosuck, the proprietors finally appointed a committee in 1759 to settle a suitable minister, and invited one to preach as a probationer, but did not honor him with a call. In 1760 the Reverend Ebenezer Gamsey of Durham, Connecticut, a student of the Reverend Robert Breck of Springfield, Massachusetts, preached for four months to universal approval, but Colonel Williams, among others, requested that he be examined by the Reverend Jonathan Ashley of Deerfield, "that they might not be taxed with rashness." Gamsey, an Arminian, refused, and he carefully extricated himself from the situation by claiming that he had discovered a "turn of thinking" "among some particular persons" at Pittsfield, which "rendered a happy union very difficult, and almost utterly impossible." In August 1761 the town invited the Reverend Enoch Huntington to settle there, but he decided against leaving his Middletown, Connecticut, congregation. In May 1762 Pittsfield called the Reverend Amos Tompson as a probationer, but that September twelve proprietors (including Joseph Wright and his son, Israel Dickinson, Israel Stoddard, and Israel and Elisha Jones—the last four of whom were of the Williams-Stoddard connection; Israel Stoddard had married Eunice, a daughter of Colonel Israel Williams) so strongly opposed his candidacy that they petitioned the selectmen to submit the choice to the Berkshire ministers, to which the probationer agreed. Instead, however, the town meeting unconditionally offered Tompson the ministry, which he apparently refused, probably leery of the powerful minority arrayed against him. Afterwards, two more ministers preached on probation, the latter of whom, Daniel Collins, was invited to preach permanently, by a

town meeting vote of thirty-two to three in September 1763. The adjourned meeting four
days later, however, was so sparsely attended that the eight men appearing against Collins
held undue influence, preventing any offers from being made to him. The powerful
Williams-Stoddard minority had again triumphed.24

In December 1763 came the seventh and final minister in Pittsfield's parade of
preachers, when twenty-one-year-old Thomas Allen of Northampton was invited to be a
probationer, with Reverend West's recommendation. A product of respectably
conservative Harvard College (Class of 1762), where he ranked high as a classical scholar,
Allen had studied theology for two years at Northampton under the Reverend John
Hooker, a faithful Calvinist. Allen's father Joseph had been a friend, neighbor, and
supportive parishioner of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton. That Allen himself had New
Light leanings is demonstrated by his close ties with the Reverend Eleazer Wheelock and
his visits with the English evangelicals Roland Hill and John Newton in England in 1799.
As historians, however, have differed in their characterization of his theology, Pittsfielders
probably likewise read into Allen's beliefs what they wanted to. Therefore, the Stoddard
and Williams interest probably consented to his appointment because of the apparent
theologically liberal humanitarianism and socially inclusive Christianity that eventually
deeply involved the minister in temporal and political affairs.25

In February 1764 Stephen Crofoot and seven other townsmen assisted by the
ministers of three Berkshire congregations formed the first "Church of Christ in Pittsfield"
by drawing up and signing a confession of faith and a church covenant, after which

24Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 160-63, 198-99, 504; Sweeney, River
Gods and Related Minor Deities (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), 672, 676-77. Collins
accepted a call to serve as minister at neighboring Lanesborough, where, as a Loyalist he opposed
Pittsfield's political radicalism during the Revolutionary War, and died in 1822.

25Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates. Vol. 15: Classes of 1761-1763 (Boston, 1970), 153-
54; Birdsall, "The Reverend Thomas Allen: Jeffersonian Calvinist," New England Quarterly
(hereafter NEQ), 30 (1957), 148-53; Sweeney, River Gods and Related Minor Deities (Ph.D.
diss., Yale University, 1986), 677; and Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County
Reverend Hopkins of Great Barrington preached a sermon. The following month, this church with surprising unanimity elected Allen to the pastorate and announced its desire to the town. That same day, the town meeting also unanimously voted to offer Allen an annual salary of £60, which would be increased £5 a year until it reached £80. Concurrently, the proprietors voted him £90 in three annual instalments to enable him to settle among them. After they added an annual stipend of forty cords of wood, Allen accepted the Pittsfield ministry. He was ordained on 18 April 1764, and his preceptor, Reverend John Hooker, preached the ordination sermon. Thirty-one members joined the church during the first year of Allen's pastorate, including James Easton, Charles Goodrich, William Williams, Joseph Wright, and Woodbridge Little. By the time of the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, another thirty-seven men and fifty-two women had signed the church covenant. For forty-six years Parson Allen made the hard logic of Edwardsean theology accessible and attractive to his congregation "without the formality of logic but with a happy perspicuity and apostolic zeal," according to his nephew. Allen similarly expounded Revolutionary political doctrine to his Pittsfield flock, becoming the most influential radical in Berkshire County.26

While various controversies often disrupted congregations in eighteenth-century Massachusetts, especially after the Great Awakening, Pittsfield was unique in the extent to which the social power of the established church was challenged by dissenters. These emigrants contributed to cultural fragmentation by their stress on charismatic gifts, a gathered church separated from the world, millennialism, and Arminian perfectionism. The Radical Evangelicals described by Stephen Marini found the relatively open society of Berkshire inviting, and many flocked to its uplands, where they contributed to the revival known as the New Light Stir in the second half of the 1770s and the early 1780s, when

renewed religious concern, a new and rapid influx of settlers, and returning veterans created unstable socioreligious conditions. Baptists emerged as a principal religious group in the new settlements, but more radical sects as the Shakers also arose to influence Pittsfield's religious history. Strict admission standards, meanwhile, kept the number of full members of the established church small—only twenty-eight percent of the polls, for instance, owned the covenant in 1780.27

The first Baptist church organized in Cheshire, in the hill country north of Pittsfield, which became the center of Separate Baptist activity in western Massachusetts, was established in 1769, and the Baptist church gathered in 1779 in Sandisfield, in the southeast corner of Berkshire County, was for a time the largest Baptist congregation in Massachusetts. In 1772 a Baptist church was organized in Jericho and enjoyed a powerful revival in 1773 or 1774. Also in 1772 Elder Valentine Rathbun apparently moved his group of Separate Baptists from Stonington, Connecticut, to Pittsfield, and established a sizable Baptist congregation in the neighborhood of his fulling mill. Like the Baptists, the Shakers disrupted the Congregational establishment in western Massachusetts. English immigrant Ann Lee's new Shaker sect at Niskeyuna (Watervliet), New York, came to offer a totally rationalized religious lifestyle based on individual rights, gender autonomy, collective responsibility, communal ownership of property, and the attainment of spiritual perfection through sexual celibacy. The Shakers soon began winning converts in Massachusetts, including Elder Rathbun, his brothers, and a number of Pittsfield Baptists in 1780. Rathbun returned to the Baptist fold three months later and published several exposés that went through numerous editions. Daniel and Reuben Rathbun also recanted and published anti-Shaker tracts, which describe many of the same recruiting strategies used today by modern cults. But one Shaker who never apostatized nor returned to

Pittsfield was Lucy Wright, who became one of Ann Lee's earliest and most trusted American-born converts, and, as "Mother Lucy," was appointed to head the female order of Shakers at New Lebanon, New York, in 1788.28

Even before the Shaker faithful, including many Goodriches, gathered themselves in a separate community in neighboring Hancock in the early 1790s, their presence disrupted Pittsfield society. During the Revolutionary War, a town committee consisting of Parson Allen, Elder Rathbun, Woodbridge Little, and two others reported, in 1781, that "those people called Shakers" near Rathbun's mill (on what became Shaker Brook). "are, in many instances, irregular and disorderly in their conduct and conversation, if not guilty of some high crimes and misdemeanors." It was recommended that Pittsfield take cognizance of such "disorderly and idle persons in the town, and of their families" to the full extent of the law. Also, the town clerk was to inform the commissioners of Albany County, New York, "that great and manifest inconveniences and dangers arise from the correspondence and intercourse subsisting between the people of Niskeuna called Shakers and some people of this town and county disposed to embrace their erroneous opinions." He was also to solicit the commissioners' cooperation in dealing with the sectarians.29

Rathbun, who led a Pittsfield mob that violently disrupted one of Ann Lee's

28Valentine Rathbun led the Pittsfield Baptist church (incorporated in 1795) till his removal from town in 1798, when the church was probably dissolved. From 1800 to 1812 he served as pastor of the Baptist church in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts (Marini, Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England [Cambridge, Mass., 1982], 79, 89, 94, 95, 127-28, 133-34; Goen, Revivalism and Separatism [rev. ed.; Middletown, Conn., 1987], 254-55, 308, 312; Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County [Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976], 216; and Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 [Springfield, Mass., 1876], 136, 142 n.1. The Rathbuns' publications included: Valentine Rathbun, An Account of the Matter, Form, and Manner of a New and Strange Religion, Taught and Propagated by a Number of Europeans, Living in a Place Called Nisqueunia, in the State of New York (Providence, R.I., 1781); and Some Brief Hints of a Religious Scheme, . . . (Hartford, Conn., 1781; Norwich, Conn., 1781; Boston, 1782; Salem, Mass., 1782; New York, 1783); Daniel Rathbun, A Letter from Daniel Rathbun, of Richmond, in the County of Berkshire, to James Whittacor [Whittaker], Chief Elder of the Church, Called Shakers (Springfield, Mass., 1785); and Reuben Rathbone, Reasons Offered for Leaving the Shakers (Pittsfield, Mass., 1800).

29Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 181; quotations from committee report in Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 454.
meetings in 1783, first detailed Shaker beliefs in December 1780, after he left the group. His description helps explain the concern of the Pittsfield authorities. Believers "meet together in the night, and have been heard two miles by people, in the dead of the night," Rathbun wrote. "Sometimes a company of them will run away to some house, get into it," and "raise a bedlam." He added: "They run about in the woods and elsewhere, hooting and tooting like owls; some of them have stripped naked in the woods, and thought they were angels, and invisible." The Shakers threatened not just order and propriety, but also the familial foundation of society, as well as the military success of the Patriot cause. Rathbun stated: "I have heard some of them say, that all our authority, civil and military, is from hell, and would go there again." In addition, "Men and their wives have parted, children ran away from their parents, and society entirely broke up in neighbourhoods." Shakerism and its pacifism ("Every one, as soon as they fall in with this new religion, immediately throw down their arms, and cry out against the means of defence made use against the common enemy") were reprehended to have originated as part of a stratagem of King George and his Cabinet "to work upon the superstition of" Americans.30

According to Stephen Marini, by the first decade of the nineteenth century, the radical sects constituted roughly one-third of all the churches along the New England

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30Edward D. Andrews, *The Hancock Shakers: The Shaker Community at Hancock, Massachusetts, 1780-1960* (Hancock, Mass., 1961), 12-13, cited in Hammett, *Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County* (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 257; Valentine Rathbun, *An Account of the Matter, Form, and Manner of a New and Strange Religion* (Providence, R.I., 1781), 8, 12, 13. Appended to Rathbun's *Brief Account of a Religious Scheme* (Worcester, Mass., 1782) is a fine piece of propaganda, an alleged *Dialogue between George the Third of Great-Britain, and His Ministers; Giving an Account of the Late Mob in London, and the Original of the Sect Called Shakers. The Whole Being a Discovery of the Wicked Machinations of the Principal Enemies of America*, in which Lord Germaine is supposed to have stated, "Our accounts from the persons who were sent to propagate a new religious scheme in America are very flattering. They make converts daily, and it is merry to hear of the weakness and folly of their tenets." "Their leaders, our agents, who stile themselves as elders" hold confessions, inquiring of converts "Whether they have been guilty of taking up arms, which is represented as the greatest sin." He concluded, "These people, if properly increased, might be worked up to any thing, and to any purpose by their leaders, on whom they solely depend for direction, only let them have a divine revelation to take up arms and destroy rebels to God, and rebels to man; but I fear we are almost too late in this affair—we should have began sooner—but it may be that we may yet use these Shaking Quakers . . . to good advantage" (32-34).
fringe. Pittsfield's proportion of radicals was actually thirty-three percent. There were thirty-five Baptist and ten Shaker heads of household (as well as seven Episcopalians) living in Pittsfield in 1789, compared to approximately ninety-one tax-paying members of the Congregational church. By 1800 there were 135 Congregational members (about thirteen percent of the adult population of 1,014), but only forty-one were male.\textsuperscript{31}

Only one church building stood in Pittsfield until close to the end of the eighteenth century. It was centrally located relative to the dispersed farms of the original settlers, sited at the crossroads of what would become North Street heading off toward Lanesborough, West Street to Hancock, South Street to Lenox, and East Street to Dalton. Each of these thoroughfares, despite the civic obligation of all able-bodied adult males regularly to work on them, were choked with dust in dry weather, and clogged with mud after prolonged rain. (Further from the center, farmers encroached on the public roads bordering their lands. For instance, West Street was legally seven rods wide, but less than half of that width was used for travel, as the rest of it served as hayfield or cropland.) The unpainted, barnlike, steepleless Congregational Church stood on a bleak, muddy, four-acre rise of ground that was the meetinghouse lot. Livestock grazed between its uncleared stones and charred tree stumps, fertilizing the grave sites of deceased church members. In addition to a burial ground, the meetinghouse lot doubled as a militia training field and a meeting place for other outdoor public assemblies.\textsuperscript{32}


Historian John L. Brooke has noted that Worcester County's training fields were "literally the common ground for a scattered townspeople, providing gathering places . . . out-of-doors for the acting out of collective, corporate civil . . . duties and privileges." On the drill field, the local train band, or militia company, made up of all the town's able-bodied white males aged sixteen to sixty, was required by provincial law to meet three or four times a year to practice close-order drill and various formations, have target practice, fight mock battles, and stand for reviews and inspections. Training Day was a serious occasion for early Pittsfielders, since Indian raiders threatened their security as long as Britain and France were at war. After the Treaty of Paris of 1763 removed that threat, Training Day became more of a festive occasion, with gaming and sporting, visiting with neighbors, and eating and drinking refreshments provided by Deacon Stephen Crofoot, who opened Pittsfield's first tavern at the village center before 1764. With the new threat of rising militant British imperialism in the 1770s, however, the Pittsfield militia once again began training in earnest.33

The Revolutionary War experience of Pittsfield differed from that of most communities in eastern Massachusetts. British regulars were never quartered in the Berkshires, but the county had more to fear from Tories, particularly those in the neighboring King's District of New York, and from British Indian allies.34 Also, Berkshire


34The strong Loyalism of people in Kinderhook and Claverack in what would later become
Patriots were themselves split politically, and the radicals, thanks especially to Parson Allen, were the dominant power. These radicals were known as Constitutionalists, because they refused to support the new state government under the old charter and demanded the establishment of an entirely new republican constitution created by representatives of the people elected for that purpose and not by the legislature. While wholeheartedly supporting the state’s military endeavors, the Constitutionalists otherwise protested by keeping the county courts closed during the first half of the Revolution, thus curtailing the power of conservative Whigs, as well as protecting debtors from their wealthier creditors. Finally, Berkshire communities on the western frontier were much closer to the theater of action, at least until Burgoyne’s surrender at Saratoga in October 1777, and even afterwards feared Indian raids as long as the British remained in Canada.

While Boston Whigs steadily gained influence in their protest against British imperial policies in the 1760s and early 1770s, Berkshire County remained politically conservative because the “mountain gods,” the county’s representatives of the Williams-Stoddard family network, whose support of the royal governors was rewarded with patronage and a multiplicity of offices, remained influential enough to maintain their control over local affairs. In Pittsfield, Major Israel Stoddard (who was appointed a justice of the county’s Quarter Sessions in 1765), Moses Graves, Elisha and Daniel Jones, and Colonel Bill Williams (whom Governor Hutchinson had appointed chief justice of the Berkshire court of common pleas and judge of probate), were firmly attached to the royal government party in Boston. They soon found an able leader in Woodbridge Little (1740-1813; Yale College, Class 1760) of Connecticut, who had preached in neighboring

Columbia County, N.Y., effected cooperation between radical and conservative Whigs, as in May 1776, when a plot of New York and Connecticut Tories was uncovered and evidence presented to county committees, after which the Berkshire militia, including Reuben and Valentine Rathbun and Nathaniel Fairfield, marched to Kinderhook “for inimical persons,” and again in 1779, when the militia quelled an attempted uprising and captured and tried 20 Tories (see Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 [Boston, 1869], 205, 207, 489; Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County [Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976], 374-75, 437; David Edward Maas, The Return of the Massachusetts Loyalists [New York, 1989], 230).
Lanesborough before being admitted to the bar in 1764 and settling in Pittsfield by 1766, as its first lawyer. Little received a commission as justice of the peace in 1770 and rose in the community's esteem. It was he who drafted the town's instructions to its representative to the General Court (Charles Goodrich) on 19 January 1774, describing the Boston Tea Party as "unnecessary and highly warrantable" and enjoining Goodrich to "manifest the abhorrence and detestation which your constituents have of the said extraordinary and illegal transaction."35

Because of the influence of such submissionists, western Massachusetts did not line up solidly behind the Whig cause until after rumors of the British government's Coercive Acts, aiming directly at individuals' rights and local self-governance, began to filter west in the spring of 1774. On 30 June the Pittsfield town meeting appointed a Committee of Correspondence and chose delegates to a convention held at Stockbridge on 6 July 1774, the province's first county convention. The county convention held at Pittsfield on 4 August was not presided over by conservatives, unlike the first, and it probably organized the obstruction of the first county court to be held in the province after news of the Regulating Act was received: on 18 August a crowd of over 1,500 unarmed men prevented the court from sitting at Great Barrington and forced the judges to quit the town, one of the first open confrontations with British officials in Massachusetts. For the remainder of the war, revolutionary town committees assumed the judicial and regulatory powers of the Berkshire County courts. When river god Israel Williams visited his sick daughter in Pittsfield in August 1774, he was surrounded by a crowd that forced him to promise not to accept his appointment as Mandamus Councillor, not to interfere with the nonimportation movement, and not to attend any court sessions in his home county of Hampshire.36

35Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 169-86. See also Taylor, Western Massachusetts in the Revolution (Providence, R.I., 1954), 11-76.

36Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 187-200; Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 310-99; Taylor, Western Ideology.
The extent of actual Loyalism in the county was not very great, but seemed larger because the Constitutionalists often painted their conservative Whig opponents with the Tory tar brush and applied the label broadly to include mere political opposition and personal animus. In the winter of 1774-1775, roughly fifteen to twenty Pittsfield households sympathized with the King’s cause. Only a few adamant adherents to British rule left town never to return after American Independence was declared. Of the 308 Massachusetts Loyalist refugees listed in the state’s 1778 confiscation and banishment act, only six were Pittsfielders, including Elisha Jones, who left before May 1776 and joined the British forces, for which the town confiscated his estate (except for a slave named Prince who liberated himself the previous year and enlisted in the army), and John Graves, the son of Moses Graves. In May 1776 the younger Graves aided the escape of a British officer and his servant from the Hartford jail and guided them to Pittsfield, where they acquired horses for the journey to Canada. The party was captured in Lanesborough, however, and was returned to Connecticut, except for Graves, who was committed to trial in Berkshire and banished. He apparently was one of the hundred or so Loyalist troops fighting at the side of the British at the Battle of Bennington.37

More typical were the experiences of William Williams, Israel Stoddard, Moses Graves, and Woodbridge Little. Colonel Bill had mixed loyalties and was permitted to straddle the fence in the early years of the Revolution. Heavily in debt by the late 1760s, he depended upon the open purse of John Hancock in order to stay afloat. One of the seventeen Rescinders of 1768 (the minority of representatives in the General Court who voted to rescind the letter that the majority had voted to circulate among the other

37Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 205, 209, 248-50; [Smith], History of Berkshire County (2 vols.; New York, 1885), 1:177; Hamnett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 349-50; Maas, Return of the Massachusetts Loyalists (New York, 1989), 235; Stephen E. Patterson, Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts (Madison, Wisc., 1973), 208-09.
colonies to unite them in opposition to British measures), Williams was nevertheless reelected representative by Pittsfielders the following year. Desirous of remaining popular among the people, he conveniently was too sick to hold his probate court until after the repeal of the Stamp Act. Although resentful of his treatment by British regular officers during the French and Indian War, Colonel Bill remained a half-pay pensioner of the British Army, and convinced the local committee of inspection that he was too old for military service and would avoid any overt act that would forfeit his retirement pay, which he received in gold and spent among his neighbors. From 1775 to 1777, he chaired a Pittsfield committee "to take care of disorderly persons," and induced most of those with Loyalist leanings who remained in the region to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. In 1777 he chaired a county convention that resolved not to permit the state to open the Berkshire courts until it had adopted a democratic constitution, and was once again elected as a town selectman. And in 1779 Pittsfield returned him to the General Court, where he was appointed to a committee to auction off confiscated Tory estates in Berkshire. Colonel Bill's high living, public service, and popular generosity contributed to financial insolvency, and a total collapse was probably staved off during his lifetime by his position as chief judge of the common pleas, as well as the forbearance of the county sheriff, his cousin Elijah Williams of Stockbridge. Colonel Bill's townsmen erected a monument to his memory after his death in 1785.38

As early as December 1774 Israel Stoddard and Woodbridge Little were charged as "enemies of American liberty," for their opposition to the measures taken by the Continental Congress and their probable secret communications with General Gage. In January 1775 a town committee issued a complaint against them, which precipitated their hasty flight to New York. After news reached Pittsfield of the outbreak of hostilities at

Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the hue and cry was raised against the pair, and Little was captured in Albany and sent home. Stoddard soon returned of his own volition, to prevent the confiscation of his property. The two confessed their faults, asked forgiveness, and promised reformation, and the town placed them under house arrest, confining them to their farms. In July 1777, they took the oath of allegiance to the United States in open town meeting, complied outwardly with all Patriot requirements, and were received as friends to the cause. Swearing fealty with them at the time was Moses Graves, who had been jailed in Northampton with Elisha Jones from April to July 1775, but who was sent back to Pittsfield that December after his Tory sentiments had made him obnoxious in Westfield. Late in 1778, however, Stoddard, Little, and Graves were imprisoned with several others on charges of conspiracy brought by three Hampshire County men. They apparently cleared their names, for Graves was elected to two minor town offices the following December, and Little was elected to a town committee on finances, returned as town clerk, and, by the early 1780s, was reelected as a selectman. In secret, however, Little was president of a "Tory Club" (Elijah Williams was a member) that surreptitiously held nocturnal meetings in the home of Moses Graves in 1778 and made plans to disrupt the Patriot war effort by smuggling in counterfeit money from New York City and introducing measures in local town meetings conducive to division and confusion.39

For instance, Little proposed in a town meeting in 1778 that Pittsfield resolve that every town be independent and govern itself by its own laws. But the discord such a measure promised had already been present for several years. In August 1774, in order to damage Parson Allen's reputation, Williams, Stoddard, and Little had accused the minister with "rebellion, treason, and sedition" for his words to a previous town meeting in defense

of the rights and liberties of the people. But the meeting voted the charges "groundless, false, and scandalous," and Allen went on to make Pittsfield the center of Berkshire Constitutionalism. The parson preached radical politics not only in his own pulpit, but in nearby communities, such as Canaan, Kinderhook, and Claverack, New York, in March 1775, and Richmond, Massachusetts, in February 1776, where he described the members of the General Court as "designing men, who sought after emolument for children and friends, without any regard to the good of the people." According to his republican ideology derived from the writings of Thomas Paine, James Burgh, and Richard Price, the people were the fountain of legitimate power. Two of the "designing men" in the General Court were Allen's own congregants, Charles Goodrich and Israel Dickinson, who had secured appointment as justice of the Court of General Sessions and Berkshire high sheriff, respectively, while serving as Pittsfield's representatives in 1775. Dickinson heeded the will of the people and declined his appointment, but the stubborn Goodrich clung to his commission even though the sessions court was never permitted to sit, and he signed several Anti-Constitutionalist petitions to the General Court. He was declared a Tory, assaulted when he resisted being brought before the town's Revolutionary committees in 1777, and was published in the Hartford Courant as one who "had acted inimical to the cause of these States" after he had stoutly resisted another summons in 1778. It was in March 1778, a week after the town protested the General Court's new appointment of Goodrich as a justice of the peace, that the Pittsfield Church adopted a rededication of its covenant. The signatories of the declaration promised to forgive one another and work for the "Restoration of Peace, Union, and Christian fellowship," and hoped that the church could be "if not altogether of one Mind, yet of one Heart again." Both Constitutionalists (including Allen, Williams, Crofoot, and Eli Root) and Anti-Constitutionalists, including Goodrich, signed the document.40

40Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 198, 207, 209-10, 324-88; Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 325-26, 344, 352-55, 359, and "Revolutionary Ideology in Massachusetts: Thomas Allen's 'Vindication' of the
Although it suffered internal religious and political divisions and was at odds with state authorities over a new constitution, Pittsfield united militarily behind the Revolutionary War, contributing leadership, troops, and materiel to both Continental and state forces. A company of Pittsfield and Richmond minutemen under Captain David Noble and Lieutenant James Easton marched east during the Powder Alarm of 1 September 1774, but were turned back at Westfield. Noble had served in the French and Indian War before he moved from Westfield to Pittsfield and became a prosperous farmer, trader, and tavern-keeper. Easton came to Pittsfield in 1763 by way of Hartford and Litchfield, Connecticut. He joined the new church in 1763 and was made a deacon four months later. He was a builder and soon also opened a store and tavern at the village center. Noble and Easton continued on to Boston in September 1774, where they personally observed the state of affairs. After Noble returned to Pittsfield, he sold three of his farms for funds to arm and uniform his men. About this time, the Berkshire militia was reorganized, and Easton was elected colonel in Colonel Bill's place. Two regiments of minutemen were put into effective readiness, one of which was from the northern and middle sections of the county under Colonel John Patterson of Lenox, under whom Captain Noble and fifty-one Pittsfielders served. On the morning of 22 April 1775, the Berkshire minutemen marched for Boston, where the men served for the next eight months.41

Berkshire Constitutionalists, 1778," WMQ, 3d. ser., 33 (1976), 514-27; and Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates. Vol. 15: Classes of 1761-1763 (Boston, 1970), 155-57. Pittsfield representatives to the General Court, Valentine Rathbun, Josiah Wright, and Eli Root, were instructed to reject the state constitution of 1778, which was prepared and considered by the legislature, not a separate constitutional convention. Even though the constitution with a bill of rights of May 1780 did not meet their total approbation, the Pittsfield Constitutionalists accepted it as legitimate. Colonel Bill was the town's delegate to the constitutional convention that drafted it, and Allen, with Rathbun and 3 other committee members, drafted Williams's instructions in 1779 (see Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 [Boston, 1869], 356-57, 364-685).

41The Berkshire regiments were held in reserve to protect Cambridge during the Battle of Bunker Hill and were unable to reinforce the lines before the final British assault. Noble died in uniform at Crown Point in July 1776 (see Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 [Boston, 1869],
John Brown (1744-1780; Yale College, Class of 1771) came to Pittsfield to practice law in 1773. Born in Haverhill, Massachusetts, he moved with his family to Sandisfield, in southeastern Berkshire County, in 1752, studied law under Oliver Arnold (a first cousin of Benedict Arnold's) in Providence, Rhode Island, and commenced his legal career in Johnstown, New York, in 1772. An early Whig, he was appointed to Pittsfield's committee of correspondence in June 1774; was a delegate to the county convention at Stockbridge that July; served on the town's board of arbitrators that settled civil disputes after the courts were closed; represented Pittsfield in the Provincial Congress from October 1774 to February 1775; and held an ensign's commission in the county militia. In February 1775 he petitioned the Provincial Congress for more arms for the western militias, as it was expected that, in the event of hostilities, the British would set the French Canadians and Indians against the exposed western county. To forestall such an attack, Brown recommended that Patriot forces move preemptively into Canada, and he volunteered to scout the territory and discover Canadian sentiment toward the revolutionary cause. He reported from Montreal to Samuel Adams and Joseph Warren at the end of March 1775, writing that the strategic Fort Ticonderoga could easily be seized. Brown apparently at the time engaged Parson Allen's cousin Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys of the New Hampshire Grants to pull off the job.\footnote{Like Goodrich, Brown angered the Constitutionalists when, as a representative to the General Court, he was commissioned a judge of the Berkshire court of common pleas in Feb. 1779 (Smith, \textit{History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800} [Boston, 1869], 211-13, 257, 279-81, 348).}

Brown returned to Pittsfield in time to join a similar expedition organized by Connecticut authorities. Its members put up at Colonel Easton's tavern on the night of 29 April 1775, and Easton quietly left town to secretly enlist forty-seven men from his regiment in Jericho and Williamstown. At Bennington the company rendezvoused with Ethan Allen and his men. Final arrangements for the attack were made at a council of war

\footnote{[178, 179, 203-06, 230, 241, 261; [Smith], \textit{History of Berkshire County} [2 vols.; New York, 1885], 1:133, 137, 157-58; David Hackett Fischer, \textit{Paul Revere's Ride} [New York, 1994], 44-49).}
on 8 May, before Benedict Arnold arrived in camp with a commission from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress as colonel and commander of a body of troops to reduce Ticonderoga. He had hurried on from Pittsfield after hearing of the expedition already in motion and determined to assume command of it. Threatened by the mutiny of the men who would only serve under their own leaders, Arnold relented and consented to join the company as a volunteer. The expedition successfully captured the fort on 10 May without loss of life, but the campaign served to arouse the ire of Arnold against Brown and Easton for thwarting his ambitions, which would later cost the two Pittsfielders dearly.43

Brown’s service in the Continental Army during its invasion of Canada was invaluable, and Easton was commissioned a colonel and likewise made a name for himself on the northern front. But Arnold, who became a favorite of the aristocratic new commander of the Northern Department, Philip Schuyler of New York (who was prejudiced against the democratic Yankees, and whom the Pittsfielders suspected because of his social intimacy with wealthy Loyalists of the King’s District),44 vilified the two officers at headquarters and in letters to Congress, blocking any chance at promotion, and preventing them any opportunity to defend themselves in courts martial. Brown and Easton were forced to travel to Philadelphia at their own expense in the summer of 1776 to appeal to Congress. Easton, his financial situation compromised because of Congressional dithering over settling his accounts, was imprisoned for a £1,500 debt suit instigated by Arnold and Easton’s Tory enemies, including Henry Van Schaack. Easton quit the service in exasperation and contented himself with volunteering in the militia. He never recovered his former prosperity, and again landed in debtor’s prison in the early

43Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 211-25.

44Valentine Rathbun chaired a committee in May 1776 to investigate an alleged plot in which Schuyler, with the aid of the British and New York Tories, would have his troops in the Hudson Valley forts raise the Union Jack on a certain day and permit the king’s troops to ascend the river, cutting off the northern from the southern colonies. The Berkshire militia patrolled the northern part of the county day and night, but nothing came of it (ibid., 262-66).
1780s. Brown, who did receive a lieutenant colonelcy, returned to service on the northern frontier, where he attempted to inform Schuyler's successor, General Horatio Gates, of Arnold's true nature. Unsuccessful, he published a handbill in April 1777 that concluded: "Money is this man's God; and, to get enough of it, he would sacrifice his country."

Refusing to serve under Arnold, Brown resigned his commission and returned to Pittsfield, where he was appointed colonel of the middle regiment of the Berkshire militia. He was killed in an ambush by Mohawks and Tories at Stone Arabia (Palatine), New York, in October 1780.45

In addition to colonels Brown and Easton, Major Oliver Root, Captain David Noble, Lieutenant Stephen Crofoot, and Sergeant Daniel Rathbun, almost a hundred officers and men from Pittsfield fought as Continental soldiers during the Revolutionary War and saw action at Cambridge, Montreal and Quebec, Long Island, Trenton and Princeton, and Saratoga. At least fifteen of the privates enlisted for the duration, but more common were three-year or shorter enlistments. Parson Allen served as chaplain to Colonel Benjamin Simonds's regiment of Berkshire levies in the autumn of 1776 and at Ticonderoga the following spring. Many of the Pittsfield troops succumbed to smallpox on the northern front early in the war, until the town permitted Doctor Timothy Childs to set up inoculation there in September 1776.46

Pittsfield also provided coats, horses, and ox teams to state and Continental authorities, and the town voluntarily provided each of its Continental levies with a shirt

45Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 227-41, 255-61, 266-77, 310-15; [Smith], History of Berkshire County (2 vols.; New York, 1885), 1:160-61; Henry Cruger Van Schaack, Memoirs of the Life of Henry Van Schaack Embracing Selections from His Correspondence during the American Revolution (Chicago, 1892), 41. Tradition has it that Brown had called upon Ann Lee on his way to the Mohawk country and said by way of pleasantry that he would become a Shaker upon his return. After his death, his widow, Huldah Kilboume Brown (1750-1834), was visited by two members of the sect, who told her that her husband in spirit had joined Mother Lee and had given orders that she also become a member. Instead, she married Pittsfield tavern-keeper Jared Ingersoll in April 1782 (Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 [Boston, 1869], 314 n.1).

and shoes and socks. Because of Berkshire's proximity to the theater of war until October 1777, the county filled a disproportionate share of the demand for military supplies. In times of exigency, all articles of pewter and lead were taken and melted down, and the county was stripped bare of draft animals and wagons. Cattle and grain were also demanded, but not in such exhaustive quantities. In order to meet all of its state quotas, Pittsfield was forced to petition the General Court for permission to tax the unsold lands of the nonresident proprietors.47

Pittsfield's most significant contribution to the war effort was made in the summer of 1777, when it helped defeat a major portion of General Burgoyne's invading army at the Battle of Bennington. The period from June to November 1777 was one of continued excitement and alarm, as a British army of ten thousand men advanced from Canada, and hostile troops appeared only a dozen miles from Berkshire's borders. Burgoyne's threat to unleash his Indian allies against the exposed rebel communities reawakened an old nightmare. The evacuation of Ticonderoga without a fight by Arthur St. Clair at the beginning of July renewed suspicions of General Schuyler's duplicity and created panic in western New England, which was heightened by news of the murder and scalping of Jane McCrea by one of Burgoyne's Huron allies at the end of the month. Pittsfielders were among the fifty militia sent to Fort Ann at the end of June, and forty-two more under Captain William Francis and Lieutenant Stephen Crofoot reenforced Schuyler's army at Fort Edward on 8 July. Ten days later another detachment of ten Pittsfield men marched to Manchester, Vermont.48

At about the same time that Burgoyne detached a large raiding party of over eight hundred German mercenaries, Indians, and Tories towards the northern Connecticut

47Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 320-21; [Smith], History of Berkshire County (2 vols.; New York, 1885),155; Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates. Vol. 8: Classes of 1726-1730 (Boston, 1951), 654-55.

Valley in order to obtain horses and wagons, General John Stark had established his headquarters at Bennington on the disputed border of New York and Vermont. Here, on 9 August, he had gathered about 1,500 New Hampshire militiamen under his independent command. When he learned of the enemy's movement on 13 August, Stark sent messengers in all directions to summon the local militias, to which five hundred Berkshire men responded. A large portion of Pittsfield's able-bodied men were already in the field, and the remainder were completely engaged in the harvest, but thirty-nine citizens, regardless of legal exemption, including Charles Goodrich, Reverend Thomas Allen, Israel Stoodard, and Woodbridge Little, made for Bennington (Parson Allen traveled in the old sulky he used for his pastoral visits), and at least half of them saw action in the battle that was hotly fought on 16 August. The Patriot victory was complete: having had only about 30 killed and 40 wounded, the Americans killed 207 of the enemy, took 700 prisoners, and captured a great amount of arms, ammunition, and stores, along with four brass field pieces. Depriving Burgoyne of vital supplies and significantly weakening his combat strength, Bennington contributed to the surrender of the entire British army at Saratoga two months later. The victory electrified the region, providing a moral as well as a military victory. It provided further proof to New Englanders, if they needed any, that yeoman farmers embodied under their own elected officers and defending their homes and farms could triumph against the best professional soldiers Europe had to offer (and with little assistance from their own standing army). When 2,500 British prisoners of war from Saratoga bivouacked in Pittsfield two months later, the specie they spent there provided an impressive boost to the local economy and some reward for its patriotic sacrifices. Some of the Bennington prisoners of war were left in charge of the county committees and were permitted to hire themselves out, helping to relieve the wartime labor shortage.49

49Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 290-304, 306, 381; [Smith], History of Berkshire County (2 vols.; New York, 1885), 1:171-77, 179, 182-83; Niles, Hoosac Valley (New York, 1912), 327-41; Charles Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783 (New York, 1979), 28-29, 36-43. For a prisoner's account of his captivity and his view of the "barbaric pastor" Allen, see Mary C. Lynn, ed., An

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The era of the American Revolution marked a turning point in the history of Pittsfield. The community had come of age. Waging war called forth the full exertions of farmers as well as soldiers, and the proximity of the large bodies of troops provided a ready market for any agricultural surpluses families could produce. Traders and innkeepers relocated to Pittsfield during and after the war to take advantage of increased commercial opportunities, and by the early 1790s the local economy was thriving. Kevin Sweeney has shown how the river gods and their Berkshire kin were generally losing ground before the 1770s, and probably would have lost their preeminent social position in western Massachusetts even if the political upheaval of the Revolution had never occurred. Their original source of power and prestige, the French and Indian War, was fading slowly into the past. College education, one of the Williams-Stoddard family's chief claims to distinction, was becoming more accessible, and the established clergy's waning influence also undercut another institutional prop of the rural gentry class. In the 1760s, most members of the family also found themselves caught between Boston creditors and local debtors (as did many of their neighbors in the postwar economic troubles that generated Shays's Rebellion). Increased activity by outsiders and new initiatives by yeoman farmers and merchants further undermined their position as the region's economic middlemen. The membership of the Pittsfield elite of 1790 was very different from that of 1770, as the American Revolution generated new social and economic forces that created a new set of wealthy men. They later tended to become Democratic-Republicans, because of their rejection by the established men of influence, the Federalists. Even in the early nineteenth-century, the upper reaches of Pittsfield society were open enough for a wealthy newcomer such as Elkanah Watson to make his mark in the community.\footnote{Sweeney, River Gods and Related Minor Deities (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), 616-17, 731-32; Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 354.}

The Revolution had a profound effect on Pittsfield politics. Fighting for and otherwise supporting American Independence and the creation of state and national republican governments raised new local leaders such as Thomas Allen, as well as empowered the ordinary citizen. Pittsfield became a center of democratic ideals in the 1770s, as power shifted from county squires to the people. Historians have disputed how much the town supported Shays's Rebellion. None of the town's leaders were active insurgents. Not even former Constitutionlists who had previously closed the county courts were willing to repeat that exigency, and most wished to give the new state constitution of 1780 a full and fair trial. Parson Allen so actively opposed the Shaysites that he feared for his life and always had a loaded musket nearby. Valentine Rathbun was the victim of an assault in Hancock. The friends of order drew strength from a backlash against violence to persons and property, such as the burning to the ground of Woodbridge Little's barn on the night of 26 March 1787.51 Eli Parsons led four hundred Berkshire men east to cooperate with the insurgent army, but the friends of government in the county themselves formed a voluntary association of about five hundred men to mop up any resistance from those Berkshirites fleeing Benjamin Lincoln's rout of Shays and his armed followers at Petersham on 4 February 1787.52

Lincoln himself moved on to Pittsfield with two divisions of his volunteer army that was financed by wealthy eastern merchants. The troops' presence undoubtedly dampened the rebellious spirit in the town. Fewer than thirty-two men, or about fifteen percent of the town's voters, were required to take the oath of allegiance required for reenfranchisement for the April 1787 elections, and only eight men bore arms against the

51David P. Szatmary, Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection (Amherst, Mass., 1980), 112; [Smith], History of Berkshire County (2 vols.; New York, 1885), 1:221-22. The only executions in the county were the hangings of John Bly and Charles Rose in December 1787 for burglaries committed in Lanesborough under the pretense of obtaining supplies for the regulators ([Smith], History of Berkshire County, 1:438).

52Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 399-407; Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 486-87; Field, ed., History of the County of Berkshire (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 127-40.
government.\textsuperscript{53}

Another reason that Pittsfield was not a center of discontent was because of its relative prosperity. Although there were hardships in the early 1780s because of high taxes and scarcity of currency, which led to an increase of debt cases and even a mob action, the arrival of enterprising gentlemen who were attracted to the town by its promising economy cushioned the worst of Pittsfield's economic woes. The newcomers also exerted their influence in town and throughout the county in favor of law and order and the sanctity of property. United with men like Parson Allen and Doctor Timothy Childs, both of whom sympathized with the plight of the insurgents but favored legitimate reform over rebellion, this new elite benefitted from the conservative backlash that followed Shays's Rebellion.\textsuperscript{54}

The most prominent of the newcomers was Henry Van Schaack (1733-1823), "a gentleman of the old school." Son of a respectable Kinderhook merchant of Dutch descent, he was apprenticed to Peter Van Brugh Livingston of New York, and later served as a paymaster and commissary and a provincial lieutenant under Philip Schuyler during the French and Indian War. After the war, he established a fur trade business in Albany, with branches at Oswego, Niagara, Detroit, and Michilimackinac. Van Schaack

\textsuperscript{53}Pittsfield insurgents and sympathizers included Maj. Oliver Root, who saved the remnants of Brown's militia after the ambush of Stone Arabia, Daniel Sackett, Aaron Noble, and Moses Wood (all of whom Henry Van Schaack recommended to the governor for clemency), Thomas Gold, Samuel Rust (who was condemned to death for high treason with five other Berkshire men, none of whom were actually executed), Jared Ingersoll (whose new wife ran his tavern, which served as a barracks and prison, while he was imprisoned in Northampton), Daniel Hubbard, Rufus Allen, Dan Caldwell, Joseph Fairfield, and John Strong (see Van Schaack to John Hancock, Aug. 1787, in H. C. Van Schaack,\textit{ Memoirs of the Life of Henry Van Schaack} [Chicago, 1892], 143-44; [Smith],\textit{ History of Berkshire County} [2 vols.; New York, 1885], 1:224; Field, ed.,\textit{ History of the County of Berkshire} [Pittsfield, Mass., 1829], 140; Lockwood et al., eds.,\textit{ Western Massachusetts} [2 vols.; New York, 1926], 192, 200; Proclamation, 27 Feb. 1787, in Otis G. Hammond, ed. \textit{Letters and Papers of Major-General John Sullivan, Continental Army}. New Hampshire Historical Society,\textit{ Collections}, Vols. 13-15 [3 vols.; Concord, N.H., 1930-1939], 3:511; and Hammett,\textit{ Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County} [Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976], 484-85).

\textsuperscript{54}Smith,\textit{ History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800} (Boston, 1869), 408-17, and\textit{ History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876} (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 94; Hammett,\textit{ Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County} (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 480-84.
remained loyal to the British crown as a matter of conscience. Appointed Albany postmaster, and a justice of the peace and of the quorum after his return to Kinderhook in 1769, his oaths of office prevented him from later swearing allegiance to the state of New York. The Albany Sons of Liberty and a mob of four hundred men sacked Van Schaack's house when they suspected he had applied for one of the hated stamp distributor offices created by the Stamp Act. Arrested in 1776 as a "disaffected person," and for corresponding with Tories in Connecticut, he was imprisoned, then sent to Hartford, where he remained under house arrest for a year. After being paroled, he went to New York City.55

In 1783 Van Schaack was assisted by Theodore Sedgwick and Thomas Gold to settle legally in Berkshire County. After arriving in Great Barrington and living briefly in Richmond with his brother David, he removed to Pittsfield in the autumn of 1784. During Shays's Rebellion, he entertained General Lincoln ("our great man") during his stay in Pittsfield, but refused to wear the paper badge of the friends of government on his hat because "I can be of more service in delivering opinions and giving advice to the poor, deluded people without, than with a piece of paper." Pittsfield voters elected Van Schaack representative to the General Court in April 1787, despite lingering prejudice against his Loyalism, and he voted with the majority for the most lenient terms of amnesty for the insurgents. He was first appointed a justice of the peace in 1793, and was continually reappointed until he moved back to Kinderhook in 1807. A public-spirited promoter, Van Schaack involved himself in many local and regional improvements. In 1793 he joined Wodbridge Little on the board of trustees of Williams College.56


56See sources listed in n.54.
The face of the town, as well as its leadership, had changed much in thirty years. Practically the only feature that remained unchanged amidst the improvements made to the center's open spaces, streets, and buildings during the 1780s and '90s was The Old Elm, the "most famous tree in Berkshire County." The 130-foot-tall arboreal emblem of noble stalwartness, "the pride of the villager" that "never fail[ed] to attract the attention of strangers," owed its survival to Charles Goodrich, who ordered his axemen to spare it when clearing East Street in the 1750s. In the early 1790s, however, The Old Elm almost fell victim to construction of the town's grandest cultural symbol of improvement, its new church.57

By April 1789 the first meetinghouse had become too small for its congregation, as the town's population had exploded from about 400 in 1761 to 1,992 in 1790, according to the First Federal Census. In response to this pressure, and in order to stem "'irreligious habits, contracted in years of war or popular tumult," the town meeting voted to build a new meetinghouse, which would also serve to show off Pittsfield's new wealth. Other Berkshire towns rebuilt their churches around the same time, but Pittsfield's (completed at a cost of £2,188 in 1793) was the most impressive, and, according to architectural historian Harold Kirker, "definitively altered the plan and appearance of the historic New England meetinghouse." Engaging New England's first professional architect, Charles Bulfinch of Boston, the town's new Congregational church served as the prototype for "the cupolaed meetinghouse [that] has become a symbol of the New England" village.

The Bulfinch church manifested to all that Pittsfield had emerged from its western

57Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 6-7, 35-36, 503; Strong, "History of Pittsfield," in Field, ed., History of Berkshire County (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 371; and Berkshire Hills, 2 (1 March 1902), 7; 3 (1 Aug.1903), 133, 135. The tree was struck by lightning in 1841, but the town postponed removing the decaying elm until July 1864. Celebrated in the poetry of Oliver Wendell Holmes and the prose of Herman Melville, it had evolved into a beloved symbol of the fortitude, strength, and independence of Pittsfielders. Local entrepreneurs hoped to profit from merchandising this symbol of sentiment. Its wood was sold at auction for $10.00 to Elijah H. Dodge, who died before he could manufacture mementoes from it. Relic hunters had to satisfy themselves with a small desk, chairs, and tiny miscellaneous pieces of The Old Elm, as the greater portion of its trunk burned when the barn in which it was stored caught fire (Berkshire Hills, 3 [1 Aug. 1903], 136).
Massachusetts provincialism with splendor.58

No little controversy occurred, however, over the construction of the new church, as a dispute arose over its location. The site was limited on the west by the monument to Colonel Bill Williams, and Doctor Timothy Childs and other prominent citizens residing on West Street discovered that their view of the new church would be obstructed by Captain John Dickinson's inn on the north corner of North and West streets. Their supporters in town meeting voted to relocate the new structure further south, necessitating removal of The Old Elm. Local tradition had it that stubborn Mrs. Lucretia Williams (1753-1834), the daughter of Israel Williams and self-proclaimed lifetime Loyalist, interposed herself between the tree and the axe of the woodman who came with a warrant for its felling, and later persuaded her husband, lawyer John Chandler Williams (1755-1831; Harvard College, Class of 1778), a nephew of Colonel Bill, to donate a portion of his land south of The Old Elm equal to that which the town would leave between the tree and the new church. Thus were laid the roots of the site of the first Pittsfield fairs, with plenty of room for animal stalls, Yankee entrepreneurs, and milling crowds.59


59Berkshire Hills, 3 (1 Aug. 1903), 133-34; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 439-41, 444; Nobles, Divisions throughout the Whole (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 136-43; H. C. Van Schaack, Memoirs of the Life of Henry Van Schaack (Chicago, 1892), 137n. John C. Williams was the son of Samuel and Hannah Chandler Williams of Roxbury, his mother being of the family of wealthy Worcester County Loyalists, who financially supported his early years and education. While a Harvard student, he fought at Lexington and undertook a secret mission for the
More significant than the dispute over the location of the Bulfinch church, however, was the controversy that arose over its funding. Pittsfield's growing number of dissenters protested their being taxed to support the new church building, and they found a capable leader in Henry Van Schaack. The merchant had left the Dutch Reformed church for the Anglican church, and after the Revolution became an Episcopalian, one who was tolerant of even his Shaker neighbors, as evidenced by his correspondence with Shaker elder James Whittaker of Niskeyuna. In August 1790 Van Schaack, with five other Episcopalian property holders and Valentine Rathbun and three other Baptists, protested the appropriation of common town property for improvements that would benefit only a portion of the taxpayers. They also claimed exemption from the church taxes of March and August 1790. The Massachusetts constitution of 1780 empowered towns to lay taxes for the support of public worship, which they were required to maintain, but allowed members of minority denominations to pay their assessments to ministers of their own faith. After Van Schaack commenced a suit against the assessors for neglecting to do this, the town promised indemnity to them for any court costs and damages, and appointed John Chandler Williams and Doctor Timothy Childs to aid them with counsel and advice. Van Schaack's continued protests to the selectmen in December 1791 and March 1792 finally moved the town meeting to appoint a committee to ascertain the number of dissenters in November 1789, when the new church was first approved by town vote (fifty-eight property-holding non-Congregationalists were eventually counted). In March 1792 the town also suspended the collection of their taxes for three weeks and required dissenters to provide a written request within three months ordering the collector to pay the sums assessed to their chosen religious ministers. Van Schaack lost his suit in Provincial Congress. After graduating, he studied law under John Worthington of Springfield, Mass., and moved to Pittsfield in 1782. He was appointed deputy sheriff and was elected six times to represent Pittsfield in the state legislature (Sweeney, River Gods and Related Minor Deities [Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986], 752, 778; Stephen West Williams, The Genealogy and History of the Family of Williams in America, More Particularly of the Descendants of Robert Williams, of Roxbury [Greenfield, Mass., 1847], xx, 38-43; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 448).
the court of common pleas, but appealed it to the state supreme court in October 1792, which sustained him the following year.60

Even without the assistance of Pittsfield's dissenters, construction of the Bulfinch church motivated other improvements to the village center, so that by the time of the first cattle shows and fairs two decades later, the meetinghouse green was well on its way to becoming a polished gem instead of just an emerald in the rough. The town spruced up the burial ground with a neat white fence. It also improved the surrounding streets, as demonstrated by a break in the system of the Third Massachusetts Turnpike Company, chartered in March 1797 to build an improved road from Northampton to the east border of Pittsfield, before continuing through Hancock to New York. Pittsfield's "system of roads" was "distinguished for its regularity" by 1800. A public and private building boom accompanied the road improvements, as Pittsfield became a commercial and residential, as well as a civic, center. The erection of a new meetinghouse in 1793 represented the emerging split between church and state. The Bulfinch church was reserved for religious services and unofficial public assemblies, while town meetings and other local government functions took place in the new two-story town house, which cost over £300 to build. Grammar- and district-school classes were held in rooms on its first floor, permitting the

60 See Van Schaack to Whittaker, 20 Nov. 1784, in H. C. Van Schaack, Memoirs of the Life of Henry Van Schaack (Chicago, 1892), 110-13; see also 178-80, 186; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 417, 450-65; Birdsall, Berkshire County: A Cultural History (New Haven, Conn., 1959), 77-83; Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 142-47; Morrill and Teikmanis, comps., Bicentennial Memoirs of the First Church (Pittsfield, 1976), 11; and John D. Cushing, "Notes on Disestablishment in Massachusetts, 1780-1833," WMQ, 3d. ser., 26 (April 1969), 169-90. Methodism was introduced to Pittsfield in 1788 and formally established in 1791, when the Rev. Robert Green preached at the house of Capt. Joel Stevens and organized the Pittsfield Circuit. The first local preacher was Lorenzo Dow, and there were enough Methodists by 1798 to build a meetinghouse in town. A camp meeting held in the nearby woods the week of 14 June 1808 drew as many as 5,000 people, mostly women, as well as scoffers, from neighboring towns in Berkshire County and New York. "A Spectator" was pained by the "noise and tumult" of the prayer meetings and concluded that the "foul stain" of camp meetings brought "greater contempt" upon religion than the "malignant writings of a Voltaire or a Paine" (A Short Account of the Proceedings of the Camp Meeting, Holden by the Methodists, in Pittsfield, June 1808. By a Spectator [Albany, 1808], 5, 17, 21-24; see also Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800, 456; Birdsall, Berkshire County, 78; Mary A. Bristol, The One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary of Methodism in Pittsfield, 1791-1941: An Historical Review [Pittsfield, Mass., 1941], 8).
removal and sale of the first schoolhouse, which had been erected near Reverend Allen's parsonage in the early 1760s. The old meetinghouse was removed or destroyed. By 1800 Pittsfield had become an "unplanned agglomeration" of about forty structures, including public buildings, inns and taverns, the stores of merchants, and the shops of artisans like blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and harnessmakers, who took advantage of the traffic intersection, as well as the homes and offices of professionals, for whom residence at the center of town had come to denote status and prestige. The economic intensification of post-Revolutionary Pittsfield society is suggested as much by the functional diversity of this building boom as by its magnitude.61

The entrepreneurs who followed Deacon Crofoot's lead in establishing hostelries at the village crossroads benefitted from the improved network of local roads that radiated from Pittsfield to connect to strings of roads stretching from Boston and Hartford to the towns of Albany and Hudson, and thence down the Hudson River to New York City. By 1800 Darius Larned, Joseph Merrick, and Lemuel Pomeroy joined or bought out John Dickinson, John B. Strong, Jared Ingersoll, and James Easton, all of whom had opened inns and taverns in the 1770s and '80s. The period of general agricultural prosperity in the 1790s (symbolized by the erection of public hay-scales in the common south of The Old Elm) also spurred greater mercantile activity at the center, and merchants soon succeeded innkeepers as community leaders. At least fourteen men kept stores between 1790 and 1816. With an average wealth holding of $1,510 each, they were the most prosperous of

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61 Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 444-46, 447, and History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Boston, 1869), 12, 17; Brooke, "For Honour and Civil Worship," in St. George, ed., Material Life in America (Boston, 1988), 463-70; and Frederick J. Wood, The Turnpikes of New England and Evolution of the Same through England, Virginia, and Maryland (Boston, 1919), 67. Pittsfield's meetinghouse green did not develop into modern Park Square until a general beautification transformed New England towns beginning in the 1820s. In 1825 John C. and Lucretia Williams's son-in-law, Edward A. Newton, who later inherited their property, piled protective stones around The Old Elm, a year after the public square was leveled and East Street graded. In 1827 the park was enclosed by a wooden fence, and later an elliptical grove of young elms was planted, fountains and benches placed, and graveled walks laid out (Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800, 35; History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 [Springfield, Mass., 1876], 383-85; Berkshire Hills, 3 [1 Aug. 1903], 134; Stilgoe, "Town Common and Village Green," in Fleming and Halderman, On Common Ground [Harvard, Mass., 1976], 25-29).
Pittsfield's various occupational groups. In 1801 they owned a total of $6,000 worth of stock in trade.  

John Chandler Williams opened a store on the village square soon after his arrival in Pittsfield in 1782. Several other merchants also set up businesses after the Revolution, including Colonel Joshua Danforth (1759-1837), of Weston, Massachusetts, who had served as a paymaster in Washington's army before moving to town in 1784. He soon received the federal appointment of postmaster and was entrusted with important political offices, including representative to the General Court throughout the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1808, he was appointed chief justice of the court of sessions, and, in 1812 and 1813, President Madison appointed him a United States Marshal and collector of revenue, respectively. Danforth commenced a partnership with another former Revolutionary War officer who had just arrived in town, Colonel Simon Lamed (1753-1817), a native of Thompson, Connecticut. Lamed served eight terms as selectman, was elected to represent Pittsfield in the General Court, served as county treasurer and sheriff from 1792 to 1812, and was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1804. The partners operated a profitable business, buying surplus produce from local farmers and selling it thirty to fifty miles away in Hudson, Kinderhook, Troy, and Albany, New York (the transshipment points for goods and passengers sailing down the Hudson River). Some merchants accompanied their country produce all the way to New York City, where they would purchase such goods as tobacco, molasses, salt, rum, nails, shoes, books, and mirrors; travel the week or ten days upstream by sloop (and, after 1807, by

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steamboat); and then sell the goods at a mark-up to Pittsfield consumers. In 1788 Danforth & Lamed advertised that the firm would accept as payment wheat and the best house ashes in exchange for nails and European and West Indian goods and cotton. Merchants such as they tied the local exchange economy of reciprocating household producers to long-distance market-oriented trade, and in the process were the dynamic agents of cultural change.63

The store of Danforth & Lamed was soon joined by those of merchants Graves & Root, James & Samuel D. Coit, Jonathan Allen, and John Stoddard. Shopkeepers in rural Massachusetts towns expanded the scope and scale of their economic activities in the 1790s, also investing in local manufactories. Graves & Root established potash operations on Elm Street, whose example was followed by Danforth & Lamed and the Colts in 1788. Lamed also became a partner of Jonathan Allen & Company, which opened an iron forge on Onota Brook. The merchants also supported local improvements and such regional enterprises as turnpikes and banks. Lamed, for instance, not only was an incorporator of the Third Massachusetts Turnpike in 1797, along with his partner, and fellow townsmen Doctor Timothy Childs, Thomas Gold, Henry Van Schaack, and John Chandler Williams, but he also helped found the Berkshire Bank in 1806. As with most investors in turnpikes, the merchants hoped for collateral profits from increased business, as well as direct dividends that generally proved elusive. Historian Gregory Nobles claimed that merchants served as "the central agents of social transformation in their communities" by involving themselves in voluntary associations, by supporting philanthropic endeavors, and by organizing new manufacturing ventures. Not surprisingly, in Pittsfield such men were the

principal founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society.\textsuperscript{64}

Professional men also made up the ranks of Pittsfield's post-Revolutionary entrepreneurial elite, including the town's first physician, Timothy Childs, who moved from Deerfield as a young doctor in 1771, married Colonel Easton's daughter Rachel in 1778, and moved into a house on West Street. In recognition of his Revolutionary War service, the town permitted him to erect a one-room "medicine-shop" in the village center in 1796. Childs, whose real and personal property was worth $2,673, was a leading incorporator of the Worthington Turnpike and the first Berkshire Bank. Eleven more physicians were practicing in Pittsfield before 1816.\textsuperscript{65}

The increasing number of lawyers in Pittsfield well illustrates the town's economic intensification. Joining Woodbridge Little, Daniel Jones, and John Brown at the bar before the end of the Revolutionary War were John Chandler Williams, Thomas Gold (1759-1827; Yale College, Class of 1778), and Ashbel Strong (1754-1809; Yale College, Class of 1776), "a lawyer of ability and a man of scholarly tastes" who represented Pittsfield in the General Court in 1799. This cousin of later Massachusetts governor Caleb Strong was born in New Marlborough, Massachusetts, and settled in Pittsfield around

\textsuperscript{64}Smith, \textit{History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876} (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 508; \textit{Berkshire Hills}, 4 (1 Dec. 1903), 184; William Law Learned, comp., \textit{The Learned Family (Learned, Larnard, Larnard and Lerned), Being Descendants of William Learned, Who Was of Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1632} (Albany, N.Y., 1882), 73-74; Nobles, "The Rise of Merchants in Rural Market Towns: A Case Study of Eighteenth-Century Northampton, Massachusetts," \textit{Journal of Social History}, 24 (1990), 11, 13. F. J. Wood analyzed the general unprofitability of the stock of the 3d. and other Massachusetts turnpikes in \textit{Turnpikes of New England} (Boston, 1919), 61-63, 67. Fisher Ames noted that a chief reason they began to be built in Massachusetts in the 1790s was to facilitate country produce on its way to market, and historian David Jaffe wrote that the new roads were "the visible manifestation of a new commercial order that was spreading out all over New England" and were a prerequisite for the "Village Enlightenment" he described ("The Village Enlightenment in New England, 1760-1820," \textit{WMQ}, 3d. ser., 47 [July 1990], 340). See also G. R. Taylor, \textit{Transportation Revolution} (New York, 1951), 22-28, 132-34.

1781, where he married John Stoddard's daughter Mary. Thomas Allen, Junior (Harvard College, Class of 1789), the son and namesake of Pittsfield's first minister, also practiced law and was a representative to the General Court before his early death. Eli Porter Ashmun in 1792 also became a member of the Pittsfield bar before the turn of the century. At least eight more lawyers joined them over the next decade, including two who were later elected to the United States House of Representatives—Ezekiel Bacon and John W. Hulbert. At least thirteen lawyers were practicing in Pittsfield from 1790 to 1816.66

A shortage of ready capital was the only serious obstacle to the steady development of Pittsfield's economy. Although Henry Van Schaack and several wealthy Berkshire individuals, including judge Samuel Hill Wheeler of Lanesborough, often lent money at interest, sustained commercial expansion required, and generated, concentrations of capital beyond personal accumulations.67 Pittsfield's affluent had $8,387 out at interest in 1801, and owned another 742 ounces of silver. Several of the public-spirited and profit-minded gentlemen mentioned above opened Berkshire County's first bank after the turn of the century. In February 1806, the state incorporated Doctor Timothy Childs, Joshua Danforth, Simon Larned, Joseph Merrick, James D. Colt, Daniel Pepoon, David Campbell, Junior, Thomas Allen, Junior, Theodore Hinsdale, Junior, and Ebenezer Center as the Berkshire Bank. The new bank was to be capitalized at $75,000, and was permitted to issue up to $150,000 in notes. When it was organized in July 1807,


67Wheeler was a successful attorney and associate justice of the county court of sessions. He represented Lanesborough in the General Court from 1804 to 1812, when he unsuccessfully ran for Congress.
Larned, Hulbert, Danforth, Colt, and Pepoon were chosen directors, along with Joseph Goodwin of Lenox and Andrew Dexter, Junior, of Boston, who was one of the largest stockholders. Larned was chosen president, and Center, the cashier, and a "neat, little banking-house" was built at the village center. The local capitalists, however, counted too much upon the honesty and acumen of Dexter, who was proprietor of the Boston Exchange Office, incorporated in 1804. The collapse of his seacoast banking schemes precipitated a run on the Berkshire Bank in 1809, which left the institution bankrupt, its charter vacated by the legislature, and the property of the six Berkshire directors seized. Goodwin and Pepoon fled the county, but the "honest directors," Hulburt, Colt, and Danforth—the "bosom friends" of Elkanah Watson—were committed to the debtors prison in Lenox in 1810. There they remained until the following winter, when Watson persuaded a Boston creditor to drop his suit against them. Another bank would not be opened in Pittsfield until 1818.68

The merchants and farmers, of course, enjoyed a symbiotic relationship, and prosperity for one usually benefitted the other. Pittsfield's commercial economy was still firmly based in the town's agriculture at the turn of the century. In 1801 it had 2,937 acres in tillage, which harvested 25,487 bushels of produce; 2,333 acres of hay meadows, which produced 2,209 tons of hay; and 5,766 acres of pasturage, which supported 488 horses, 1,263 cattle, 936 swine, and an unknown number of sheep. But Pittsfield's economy had already begun to diversify. It had the greatest number of shops (fifty-eight) and mills and other works (thirty-six) in the county in 1801, including one tannery, two pot ash and

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68See Berkshire Hills Quarterly, 1 (1 July 1905), 79; Van Schaack to Peter Van Schaack, 10 Jan. 1784, in H. C. Van Schaack, Memoirs of the Life of Henry Van Schaack (Chicago, 1892), 109; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 181-84; Lockwood et al., eds., Western Massachusetts (New York, 1926), 1:523; Field, ed., History of Berkshire County (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 177; Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 413; Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates, Vol. 17: 1768-1771 (Boston, 1975), 134; Bray Hammond, Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War (Princeton, N.J., 1957), 173-76. Elkanah Watson described Dexter as a "desperado in fortune, and character" (Journal E, 156, Watson Papers, Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library, Albany).
pearl ash works, four grist mills, fourteen saw mills (almost twice as many as
Williamstown, the nearest competitor), one fulling mill, four iron works (almost half the
county total), and ten other types of mills.69

By the time Elkanah Watson arrived in Pittsfield in 1807, the limits of a mixed
agricultural economy based on grain production were beginning to be reached. Although
the pace of western emigration increased, the moral superiority of the yeoman farmer was
never questioned. The "very rich, easily cultivated" intervales of alluvial land, which were
"almost universally fertile" and "happily fitted for every kind of cultivation and product"
were wearing out by the early nineteenth century, due to the successive cropping of spring
and winter wheats, buckwheat, rye, barley, oats, and Indian corn, all of which were raised
first and foremost for home consumption. The settlement of merchants in town, however,
provided farmers with a ready market for their occasional surpluses, and increased
motivation to produce such surpluses. Some gentlemen, such as Colonel Bill Williams and
Henry Van Schaack, were especially interested in increasing and diversifying their
agricultural productivity. Williams purchased a wide variety of seeds in Boston, and even
used grain cradles to harvest wheat, and Van Schaack in 1787 attempted to obtain a
breeding pair of improved Chinese swine from a Boston correspondent. Wheat culture
was fading from the Pittsfield countryside as farmers found more profitable use for their
tired soils, and, by the 1820s, Pittsfield was a net importer of wheat, most of it grown on
new lands in western New York served by new transportation improvements, such as the
Erie Canal earlier envisioned by Watson.70

69 Agricultural and other statistics derived from the Massachusetts State Valuation of 1801 for
Berkshire County, vol. 3, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, cited in Davis, Aristocrats and
Jacobins (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 405, 412.

70 Dwight, Travels in New England and New York, ed. by Solomon (4 vols.; New Haven, Conn.,
1969), 1:155; 3:268-69; Lockwood et al., eds., Western Massachusetts (New York, 1926), 1:416;
Sweeney, "River Gods and Related Minor Deities" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), 599;
Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 127-29, 157; John
Warner, Historical Collections, Being a General Collection of Interesting Facts, Traditions,
Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, &c., Relating to the History and Antiquities of Every Town in
Massachusetts, with Geographical Descriptions (2 vols.; Worcester, Mass., 1841), 1:87; Smith,
Following the example of farmers around Boston and in the Connecticut Valley, Pittsfield farmers were increasingly emphasizing "their mowing and grazing lands" and raising feed crops such as turnips as "the pull of urban markets" prompted them to focus upon cattle raising. Most early farmers owned neat cattle, chiefly for the production of milk, cheese, and beef for home consumption, as well as some sheep for wool and mutton, and hogs for pork. Increasingly, beeves were being driven to market on the hoof, and more preserved meat was also transported to New York or Connecticut for the West Indies trade. Some wealthy farmers, apparently including Charles Goodrich, who had at least one horse of the Narragansett breed, also paid great attention to the breeding of horses and mules for the same market.71

In 1795, William Cadwell, a typical well-off Pittsfield farmer, owned thirty-one cattle, including one bull, five milk cows, and two oxen, as well as about thirty sheep, a few swine, and some turkeys, geese, and hens. By 1808, prime cows were worth between fifteen and twenty dollars a head in the spring, and beef sold at $2.50 to $4.00 per hundredweight. The best horses brought in up to eighty dollars each. Berkshire's butter

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and cheese were reaching the New York market, and had gained fame from the Mammoth Cheese produced and sent to President Jefferson by Elder John Leland and the Democratic-Republican farmers of Cheshire in 1801-1802. But as markets fluctuated, returns often fell below the debits that farm families were running up with local merchants and artisans, and farmers were more likely to search out supplemental nonagricultural sources of income for themselves and their children. Practicing a trade or skill in off-hours or in winter months and finishing products as outworkers for manufacturing entrepreneurs became increasingly common strategies for farm families in search of "competency" in this "seicommercial" economy. Permanent movement off the land and emigration to the village to practice a trade or work as a wage earner in a manufactory became an ultimate solution.72

Although livestock were plentiful (at least once the wolf menace was eliminated), apparently their manure was not widely adopted as a natural fertilizer, as witnessed by the depletion of local soils. The Berkshire Chronicle began printing a series of agricultural essays in May 1788, laying out the main tenets of the new agriculture, but the extant diaries of three Pittsfield farmers kept between 1777 and 1798 make no mention of any artificial soil enrichment. Traditionally, after a field could no longer bear wheat, corn was planted, then, successively, barley or rye, and beans, before it was finally abandoned. When that point was reached, people invested their labor in new land elsewhere. Migration north to Vermont, and, especially, west to New York, created a "constant and exhaustive drain upon the population of the entire county" as early as the 1790s. David D. Field stated in 1829 that "for fifty years, the emigrations from this County have been

almost perpetual." (According to the Federal Census, Berkshire County actually lost population between 1810 and 1820, experiencing a 0.6 percent decline.) Historian Jonathan Prude identified such population movement as "the most powerfully divisive pressure acting upon" the rural communities of Dudley and Oxford in Worcester County in the early nineteenth century, because long-term residency "ceased to be a compelling criterion for membership in town society" and "made it more difficult for local inhabitants to regard shared residency . . . as a distinct, unifying bond." It also left the older generation with a mounting sense of vulnerability that was expressed as general fears for the passing of a way of life and the loosening of traditional morals and values.73

The merchants, lawyers, and gentlemen farmers who founded the new Berkshire County Agricultural Society were responding to all the social and economic forces and psychological pressures mentioned above, and moved not only to introduce the principles of the new agriculture to the general farming population, but to reinforce the political primacy of the yeoman farmer. Their measures matched their background. They would attempt to invest farming with dignity and raise its status and efficiency by promoting: the adoption of the intensive methods of English agriculturalists; the devotion of more attention to maintaining soil fertility by crop rotation and manuring; and a willingness to experiment with new breeds and technology. Despite Watson's claims that he found upon his arrival at Pittsfield in 1807 that the more vigorous farmers had already emigrated, leaving behind an "antiquated and defective" system of husbandry, some permanent Pittsfielders were already practicing more enlightened agriculture, including Joseph

73Field, ed., History of Berkshire County (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 88, 178; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 20-24, 31-32, 34-35; Prude, Coming of Industrial Order (Cambridge, 1983), 25-26, 101-02. Garden crops included corn, peas, and cucumbers. Apples were also raised in abundance in Berkshire, as well as pears and plums, although plums had nearly disappeared by 1829 because of disease (Field, ed., History of Berkshire County 87-88). Berkshire towns offered bounties on wolves into the 1780s, and the last organized wolf hunt occurred in the town of Peru in 1809 (Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 [Boston, 1869], 140, n.1; [Smith], History of Berkshire County, Massachusetts [2 vols.; New York, 1885], 2:182-83, 273). The emigration of Berkshire natives northwards can be read in the names of Berkshire, Hancock, Pittsfield, Richmond, Sheffield, and Stockbridge, Vermont.
Shearer and Thomas B. Strong. Henry Van Schaack, too, had an interest in the new agriculture. He secured subscribers for the publication of *The New England Farmer and Geological Dictionary* by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and was elected a member of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture in Boston, as was Judge Oliver Wendell (1733-1818) of Boston, who began summering in Pittsfield in the late 1770s. Thomas Allen wrote in 1808 that "better farmers were rarely to be found." But Thomas Davis’s analysis of the Massachusetts State Valuation of 1801 found that Pittsfield agricultural productivity ranked sixteenth in the county in yields per acre, which left plenty of room for improvement. Before the founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society could turn to the matter at hand, however, they would first have to bury their own political differences and overcome the partisan animosity that had disrupted Pittsfield society since the 1790s.74

The transportation and communication improvements that had tied Pittsfield more closely to the national market economy also inextricably linked it to the national political system that developed after the creation of the federal republic. This had its benefits. For instance, the town was granted the county’s second post office in 1794, and President George Washington appointed Joshua Danforth as local postmaster.75 The first American party system also influenced the establishment of newspapers in Pittsfield. In 1798 Democratic-Republicans Joshua Danforth and Doctor Timothy Childs, with Thomas Gold,


75Hearing rumors that Danforth, who had defected to the Democratic-Republicans in 1796, was going to resign his office to his deputy, Jonathan Allen, both Van Schaack and John C. Williams asked U.S. Senator Theodore Sedgwick in 1798 if he could obtain the position for Federalist John Stoddard (son of Loyalist Israel Stoddard), or James D. Colt, Junior. Stoddard was appointed postmaster before President John Adams left office, but Danforth was restored after Jefferson’s election and held the office until his death (Davis, *Aristocrats and Jacobins* [Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975], 44-45; Lockwood, et al., eds., *Western Massachusetts* [New York, 1926], 1:510).
patronized the new Berkshire Gazette that was set up in town, but as a subscriber Henry Van Schaack forced it into submission before the end of the year with a bombardment of letters and pro-Federalist articles. In 1800 Reverend Thomas Allen, who a year earlier had characterized the policies of the Federalists in power as a "leprosy on the body politic, destructive of human peace, order and happiness," helped establish the Pittsfield Sun by convincing his twenty-four-year-old nephew, Phinehas Allen, who had apprenticed at the Hampshire Gazette in Northampton and was a journeyman in Springfield, Massachusetts, to move to Pittsfield to start a newspaper. The Sun rose in time for the election of 1800, and immediately countered the effect of the Western Star of Stockbridge, which had served since 1789 as a mouthpiece for Massachusetts First District's first United States congressman, Theodore Sedgwick, the "presiding genius of Berkshire Federalism," and formerly a "brilliant professional ornament" of the mountain gods. The Star moved to Pittsfield in 1807 and became the Berkshire Reporter, before returning to Stockbridge in 1815 under the new name the Berkshire Herald. Meanwhile, the Sun, whose editor noted in its first issue that the paper would be "decidedly Republican," continued to shine steadily in Pittsfield, eclipsing all competition. Until his death, Parson Allen provided his nephew with numerous unsigned editorials praising Jefferson and maligning the Federalists.76

Thomas Jefferson carried Pittsfield in the "Revolution of 1800," the first peaceful

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handoff of federal power to the opposition, and the town also helped elect Democratic-
Republican John Bacon to Congress in a disputed contest. With Parson Allen's influence, 
Pittsfield Jeffersonians outvoted Federalists over the next decade in gubernatorial contests 
by a two-to-one margin. This majority was greater than that of Berkshire County as a 
whole, which was the only county in the commonwealth regularly won by the Democratic-
Republicans.77

The early 1800s were a transitional period for American political development. 
There was a great increase in voter turnout, but those participants in the electoral process 
still generally deferred to the gentlemen who had successfully led the American 
Revolution. Although the political violence of the 1790s had abated, as confidence had 
grown in the survival of the great American republican experiment, political rivalries based 
on Federalist and Democratic-Republican "interests" became more competitive than ever. 
A major paradox stood at the center of early national politics: two embryonic parties, still 
"relatively stable coalitions," but not yet "durable cadre parties of regular internal 
organization and fairly stable, self-conscious mass followings," were developing in a polity 
that refused to acknowledge their legitimacy. Antipartisanship was not the same as 
nonpartisanship: each party identified itself as the real nation, and its opponents as a 
dangerous faction. Shortly before his death, Thomas Allen wrote that Pittsfield was noted 
for its "steady adherence, to the civil and religious rights of the people during . . . the 
present opposition made to our National Government," and he blamed the local Federalist 
opposition (which he estimated as about twenty-five percent of the Pittsfield electorate) to 
the administration's foreign policy on "a small number of monarchists, who were opposed 
to the Revolution, and are now opposed to our republican constitution of government."78

77George D. Langdon, Jr., "The Reverend Thomas Allen of Pittsfield" (M.A. thesis, Amherst 
College, Amherst, Mass., 1957), 115-22; Hammett, Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County 
(Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 491-92; Allen, Historical Sketch of Berkshire County 
and Pittsfield (Boston, 1808), 9.

78See Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political 
Culture, 1789-1840," American Political Science Review, 68 (1974), 486, and The
Woodbridge Little and Henry Van Schaack were the leading Pittsfield Federalists, until the latter's departure in 1806, and the former's death in 1813. Van Schaack served as Theodore Sedgwick's "trusted campaign chief," and became the "leading political manager of Berkshire" Federalists after Sedgwick's political retirement. Van Schaack's mansion was visited by such prominent national Federalists as Alexander Hamilton, Philip Schuyler, John Jay, Egbert Benson, Stephen Van Rensselaer, Jeremiah Wadsworth, Oliver Ellsworth, Fisher Ames, Jonathan Trumbull, Oliver Wolcott, Timothy Dwight, and Bushrod Washington. In 1793 Van Schaack "harangued a multitude" in "Lamed's bar room," informing the men "That my doors were always open to enlighten my Brother farmers whenever they shall think proper to call on me." Van Schaack also published campaign literature in the newspapers and distributed as handbills pieces he had printed himself after Phinehas Allen refused him the Sun's columns. Van Schaack also made financial contributions to Berkshire's Federalist organization, as did William C. Jarvis and John W. Hulbert, who partially filled the void in local Federalist leadership after Van Schaack's return to New York in 1806. Other financial contributors to Federalism were Moses Hayden, Junior, Daniel James, Thomas B. Strong, Joseph Merrick, and Lemuel Pomeroy (the last three of whom were early members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society), according to a circular of the county's central committee that fell into the hands of the Democratic-Republicans in 1811. Other Federalist members of the new agricultural society included Charles Goodrich, Junior—a church deacon and justice of the peace who had oversight of his father's farm—James D. Colt, David Campbell, Josiah Bissell (who,

References:

like Watson, had relocated from Albany), and James Buel.79

Reflective of the general proportion of the town's voters, however, Democratic-Republicans outnumbered the Federalists in the Berkshire Agricultural Society by almost two to one. The Jeffersonians had begun to gain strength in Pittsfield as early as 1796, when Federalists Simon Lamed, Joshua Danforth, Doctor Timothy Childs, and Thomas Gold broke with the party to support Samuel Adams's election as governor and Thompson Joseph Skinner's successful bid for Sedgwick's congressional seat. Childs ran for the state senate in 1804. Lamed was nominated to run for Skinner's vacant congressional seat in 1804, and became chair of the county's Republican committee when it was organized before 1807. Merchant and forge owner William Walker of Lenox, and Jonathan Allen of Pittsfield, both founding officers of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, likewise served as Republican county chairmen. Agricultural society founders Samuel H. Wheeler, a merchant and doctor of Lanesborough, county sheriff Caleb Hyde of Lenox, and Ezekiel Bacon of Pittsfield, all sat on the Berkshire Republican committee. Other prominent Democratic-Republicans in the agricultural society were John B. Root, Doctor Henry H. Childs, Joseph Shearer, mill owner and Revolutionary War veteran Hosea Merrill, and John Dickinson.80

Sometime before 1810, Pittsfield had become the party headquarters of Berkshire's Democratic-Republicans, just as Sedgwick's Stockbridge was the center of the county's


Federalism. Presidents Jefferson and Madison used their federal patronage powers to reward loyal Pittsfield Democratic-Republicans like Joshua Danforth and Ezekiel Bacon. But, unlike the northern Berkshire towns of Cheshire, Savoy, Lenox, Adams, and Williamstown, which cast more than seventy-four percent of its votes for Republican candidates in congressional and gubernatorial elections between 1796 and 1816 (as compiled and analyzed by historian Thomas Davis), Pittsfield remained a mixed, two-party town throughout the period. The average electoral split of the fourteen congressional contests was sixty-two percent of the total votes for Democratic-Republican candidates versus thirty-eight percent for Federalists (with Federalist candidates winning two of those fourteen contests). The average difference in the gubernatorial contests was sixty-five percent Democratic-Republicans against thirty-five percent Federalists.81

Despite Watson's published assertions, the institutional cooperation of the leaders and members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society across party lines was hardly unique, as economic cooperation and socialability often overcame partisanship. Such diverse Berkshire corporations as the Berkshire and Columbia Missionary Society, the first Berkshire Bank, the Pittsfield Female Academy, Lenox Academy, Williams College, and the Berkshire Republican Library in Stockbridge, were all bipartisan ventures. Nor did politics always sever social ties. Watson himself, with Republicans Jonathan Allen and Henry C. Brown, and Federalists John W. and Chauncey Hulbert, and Henry James, stocked Watson's pond with pickerel in 1809, bought a pleasure boat, and formed a fishing club that lasted at least until 1815, when someone stole and sunk the boat. But partisanship sometimes did disrupt personal and professional relationships in the years immediately preceding the War of 1812. Henry Van Schaack had dined occasionally with Republican leader John Bacon, with whom he shared membership in the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, but they separated on political questions, and,

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according to Bacon's son Ezekiel, ceased "their former intimacy." Apparently, Doctor Timothy Childs served only Democratic-Republic patients, and doctors Daniel James and William Kittredge only Federalists. Most illustrative of the breakdown of civility in the face of intensifying partisan rivalry, however, was the division of Pittsfield's Congregational church.82

As previously noted, although church members did not always see eye to eye politically, they never split into irreconcilable factions before 1807, due to mutual forbearance. When a minority of townsmen opposed raising an additional £300 in 1783 to augment the minister's salary, which had suffered due to depreciation of the currency, Parson Allen released the town from the vote, informing the selectmen that it had never been his "intention to be supported in my office by compulsion." But a disgruntled parishioner, probably Woodbridge Little, wrote in 1809 that "feuds and dissentions . . . have existed, through his [Allen's] means, almost without interruption, since the year 1781." The simmering pot began to boil in earnest in 1799, when the minister, "notwithstanding his private assurances to individuals," commenced "an active course of persecution against the federalists, to promote the election of Mr. Jefferson."83

In March 1807 a four-man committee (with at least two strong Federalists—Woodbridge Little and Ashbel Strong) appointed by aggrieved church

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82Sun [Pittsfield], 14 Dec. 1815; Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York and the History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire System (Albany, N.Y., 1820), 117-18; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 195; Ezekiel Bacon to Henry Cruger Van Schaack, 21 July 1845, in H. C. Van Schaack, Memoirs of the Life of Henry Van Schaack (Chicago, 1892), 215; Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 158, 235-37, 239-40. The Pittsfield Female Academy, opened around 1800 by Nancy Hinsdale, had 80 pupils in 1806, when Federalist Joseph Merrick and Republicans Joshua Danforth and Ezekiel Bacon were incorporated as its trustees. They erected a 2-story schoolhouse in 1807 (Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876, 672-73; Berkshire Hills, 4 [1 Dec. 1903], 182; Gold to Maria Theresa Gold Appleton, 21 Sept. 1807, ALS, Maria T. Gold Appleton MSS, Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, Mass.).

members presented a written complaint to Thomas Allen, after the Democratic-Republican celebration of the anniversary of Jefferson's inauguration, at which the minister toasted: "No compromise with Federalists, no concurrence (or no intercourse) with Neuters." This was but the final straw in a long series of provocations that they listed in their complaint. Stating that they assumed no right to dictate his political preference and activities as a private citizen, they expressed resentment of the minister's introduction of political subjects into his sermons, which "endeavoured to convince the ignorant part of your flock, that the federalists were a set of men engaged in a system for the overthrow of our free constitutions of government, and the introduction of monarchy." Claiming that a number of his Republican congregants were also dissatisfied with Allen's mixing politics and religion in his official capacity, the protesters described specific sermons that they considered offensive: those of Thanksgiving Day 1802, and 15 April 1804; the funeral sermon Allen preached at his eldest son's death; and his sermons of the Sunday preceding state elections in April 1806 and of the first Sabbath day of 1807. His ministerial pronouncements included such statements as: "Federalism comprehends the sum of human evil;" "a federalist is necessarily excluded all share in our government, because he is an enemy to it;" "Federalism comprised all the evils which should be forsaken, and Democracy was the summary of all good, including God's testimonies." They also attributed pseudonymous political pieces published in the Sun to his pen, including one on the death of Alexander Hamilton. The committee's letter of remonstrance concluded with the question as to "whether Mr. A's conduct, as a minister of the Gospel, has been such as would have a tendency to promote the peace, union and happiness of the people of his charge; or whether it has been such, as must unavoidably produce strife, confusion and misery among them?"84

Parson Allen defended his prerogative as a minister to preach anything the Spirit

84Concise and Simple Narrative of the Controversy . . . (Pittsfield, Mass., 1809), 6, 9, 10, 12, 38, 47, 48-50, 52.
moved him to declaim, including "the duties of rulers to the people, and of the people to their rulers," and he complained that the protesters did not follow proper procedure in their remonstrance. Neither side would compromise, and their supporters engaged in a pamphlet war and fought in the newspapers, while the elderly parson traveled to Boston to regain his failing health. Throughout the summer, recriminations passed back and forth, and Allen refused to call a church meeting or ecclesiastical council to consider the protest, whereupon most of the 108 aggrieved church members, who had ceased attending services in March 1807, signed a petition to the General Court requesting that their own poll parish be formed. Ashbel Strong had successfully circulated a subscription list for funds to support another minister as the majority might choose, and an Episcopalian minister was engaged and preached several times a month in the town house (as he was refused use of the Bulfinch church). In August 1809, after the failure of a final attempt at reconciliation made by Federalist John Chandler Williams and Republican Ezekiel Bacon, the new church was officially organized as Union Parish. Although the politics of all of its forty-one founding members cannot be discovered, many were Federalists, including Charles Goodrich, Junior and Senior, and their wives, Woodbridge Little, John Chandler Williams, and the wives of Thomas Gold, Ashbel Strong, Daniel Pepoon, and Joseph Merrick. That October, the Second Congregational Church of Pittsfield ordained Thomas Punderson as its minister. On 11 February 1810, the bell in the Bulfinch belltower tolled the death of the enfeebled sixty-seven-year-old Thomas Allen, whose physical health had been hastened by the stress of the controversy.85

85 Concise and Simple Narrative of the Controversy . . . (Pittsfield, Mass., 1809), 15, 17, 18; Birdsall, Berkshire County: A Cultural History (New Haven, Conn., 1959), 89-91; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 105-34; Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 139-40, 318. In Aug. 1810 the First Church ordained Thomas Allen's son William as pastor. Union Parish put off erecting a house of worship until 1811. Woodbridge Little left Union Parish a bequest of $500 in June 1813 with the provision that "if at any time, a union shall be effected between the two societies, on principles of Christian charity, and they become in fact one society and church, then said sum should be given to the united parishes." After the cooling of political passions following the War of 1812, the two churches began the process of reuniting in 1816. Both ministers resigned the following year, and the two churches were officially reorganized as one in July 1817. That October the Rev. Heman
A year and a half later it announced the Berkshire Agricultural Society's first agricultural parade, which provided Pittsfielders an opportunity to publicly unite and act out a secular solidarity. The bell was the most audible improvement at the town center, which evinced the economic revolution of the Federal period. The village's new public buildings, constructed in the latest style, would provide dignified and convenient sites for the other events of the first Pittsfield Fair, such as its exhibits and awards ceremonies. Private homes and business establishments had been enlarged, modernized, and embellished. The unkempt meetinghouse lot became a common on which crowds and herds could easily gather. The streets, though still unpaved, were wide, regular, and level thoroughfares that served as excellent parade grounds in good weather. The village center itself was inhabited by professionals and merchants with money, leisure, expertise, and interest enough to participate in new ventures such as the Berkshire Agricultural Society.

These entrepreneurs did their best to hold Pittsfield society together, even as they contributed to the centrifugal forces that pulled it apart. The rise of dissenting sects and the split within the Congregational Church had resulted in a separation between the town and the parish, which effected a growing secularization of Pittsfield society. The growth of political parties further fragmented that society. As seen in Chapter Five of this work, the factionalization of other public festivities at which Pittsfielders could act out their communal ideals left a need for new unifying organizations and events, upon which Elkanah Watson and the founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society capitalized. This social unity was even more important in the face of the intensification and diversification of the local economy. The leaders who established the new society (its full name was the Berkshire County Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Manufactures) were the same men who developed Pittsfield's economy by founding its first bank and incorporating manufacturing enterprises. They believed the expansion of the local woolen industry

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Humphrey was ordained its minister (Smith, *History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876* [Springfield, Mass., 1876], 263, 271-72, 275-83, 286).
would not only provide steady and morally improving employment, thus obviating the need to emigrate, but would also provide those who remained on the land a guaranteed market for their farm products, especially if they turned to large-scale sheep-raising.

The sixty-four-year-old community of Pittsfield, then, was being pulled apart by various forces when Elkanah Watson arrived in 1807. After uniting for survival's sake during settlement and the French and Indian War, and generally hanging together during the American Revolution and Shays's Rebellion, the town's citizens suffered political division under the new federal party system that developed during Adams's and Jefferson's presidential administrations. Political differences spilled over into everyday life, and the First Congregational Church suffered schism due to the parson's insistence on preaching Republican politics to a congregation in which the Federalists were a minority only in numbers, not in influence and wealth. The result was a weakening of traditional authority, which had taken a hit during the American Revolution, that contributed to the secularization and atomization of Pittsfield society.86

Local transportation improvements and economic prosperity intensified these trends. The completion of the Third Massachusetts Turnpike in 1797, and the extension of the Boston to Northampton stage line to Pittsfield and Albany in 1800 had benefitted not only farm families by enabling them to market agricultural surpluses more easily, but also local merchants who required regular economic intelligence from the port cities. The new toll road was a two-way street: it also made Pittsfield more susceptible to outside influences and more easily drawn into outside struggles. The wealthiest landowners and merchants invested profits from their agricultural endeavors and commercial successes into new financial institutions and manufacturing establishments, which further accelerated economic development and social differentiation. The growing opportunities provided by

86Dudley and Oxford in Worcester County, Mass., contemporaneously underwent a similar process, as "the cumulative impact of transiency, sectarianism, and residential dispersal" contributed to "a gradual erosion of community solidarity" that "limited the jurisdiction of formal, central community authority" and "blurred the calibrations of local hierarchies" (Prude, Coming of Industrial Order [Cambridge, 1983], 26-33).
this development attracted ambitious outsiders, who contributed further to commercial and industrial intensification and the potential for social instability.

The social structure withstood these post-Revolutionary changes and pressures because of its openness and flexibility, as well as the generally conservative community's shared values. Also, new members were constantly being recruited into the elite, which had originally consisted of Pittsfield's leading settlers. Several of the first families lost influence or left Pittsfield as Loyalists during the Revolution; other leaders died in the field of battle or on the home front. But, as wealth began to emerge as a "mark of eminence outweighing all other considerations," a succession of new gentlemen did their best to acquire the regular trappings of gentility, as their predecessors had attempted before the Revolution broke in upon them. Some of those who failed emigrated west, seeking to recapture patriarchal control on the frontier, as did Judge William Cooper in Otsego County, New York.87

Elkanah Watson's transit, however, was neither occidental nor accidental. He came east from Albany in 1807, as the most presumptuous of the arrivistes, to take advantage of Pittsfield's position as a growing manufacturing center. Acting upon shared socioeconomic and moral visions, he and the moderate Jeffersonian and Federalist founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society intended to utilize the agricultural society and fair as a new forum in which the fragmented community could enjoy public displays of unity under their own leadership. By providing the people with new opportunities to work and play together, they hoped to preserve Pittsfield society and the place they had assumed in it. And the key link between agriculture and manufacturing, between the agricultural society and the agricultural fair, was the merino sheep.

87Prude, *Coming of Industrial Order* (Cambridge, 1983), 32-33; for Cooper, see Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York, 1995). One scholar found that Pittsfield moved toward greater social equality between 1761 and 1783 but by 1802 was swinging back toward greater stratification (Hammett, *Revolutionary Ideology: Berkshire County* [Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976], 84-85).
Chapter Four

"Demonstration Will Lead Enlightened Farmers in Pursuit of Their Best Interest":
Elkanah Watson and the Creation of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, 1807-1811

Fleeing New York politics, Elkanah Watson came to the thriving commercial center of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1807, hoping to capture the fame that had eluded him in Albany and oblivious to the seeds of failure he carried within him. Learning nothing from his difficulties with the Dutch, nor understanding his inability to retain the good will of patrons, Watson soon annoyed his new neighbors, though they came from the same Yankee stock as he. His overbearing and insensitive personality, overweening ambition, and unbearable hauteur all hindered his sincere attempts to serve the public, this time as a promoter of woolen manufacturing and merino sheep raising, a joint program he adopted from his New York patron, Chancellor Robert R. Livingston. These new patriotic projects became viable only as economic warfare and military action in Europe, and naval pressure on the seas, as well as the response of the Democratic-Republican administrations, strangled the importation of British cloth. More ambitious than when he began his career as a gentleman promoter in Albany, Watson came to Pittsfield aspiring to be not only a community leader but a figure of national significance. The vehicle for those aspirations was to be the Berkshire Agricultural Society and the new fairs it sponsored.

Because Watson came to rest his claims to fame on his being the "Father of the Agricultural Fair," his published histories and private writings tended to exaggerate his own contributions to the creation of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, which organized and sponsored the first regular fairs in Pittsfield, and to minimize—eliminate, actually—the efforts of Pittsfield gentlemen. The work was, of course, a group effort, and the extant
records of the society help serve as a corrective to Watson's self-centered version of events, even though they frustratingly fail to provide the level of detail desired by the serious scholar. In showing that the Pittsfield Fair was begotten by a brotherhood of founders, rather than a founding father, this chapter identifies the members of that brotherhood and examines their primary motivations in establishing the Berkshire Agricultural Society.

Sometime in 1806, Watson learned that Henry Van Schaack's handsome estate on the road to Lenox, about a mile south of Pittsfield village, was available for sale, and he apparently inquired about it of Thomas Gold. The Pittsfield attorney informed him in March 1806 that the asking price was $12,500, and he agreed to act as Watson's agent in the matter. Gold also mentioned that the founders of the Pittsfield Female Academy and the Berkshire Bank would appreciate Watson's expert assistance in their endeavors. Such flattery had its desired effect, and Watson was in Pittsfield by 12 March 1807. After signing the deed transferring the property on 29 May, he moved his family into their new home.¹

One might rightly wonder where Watson, with his various business failures and repeated false starts in North Carolina and New York, found the financial resources to acquire Van Schaack's estate, which cost at least $150,000 in today's currency, and to stock it with expensive merino sheep and other imported livestock. Only suggestions can be currently offered, but definite answers probably lie in Watson's account books in his papers at the New York State Library in Albany. Watson undoubtedly personally profited

¹Gold to Watson, 11 March 1806, ALS, Box 13, fold. 1, Watson Papers, Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library, Albany. The Van Schaack indenture was signed and notarized on 9 June, and recorded on 11 June 1807 (Lemuel Shaw Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston [Reel III]). Watson's letter of 12 March 1807 to John R. Livingston bore a Pittsfield dateline (Watson Miscellaneous Papers, New-York Historical Society, New York). In Jan. 1809 Gold blamed Watson for publicizing Gold's confidential opinion that "embarrassments would accumulate on the banks in consequence of the derangement in Commerce & that danger was to be apprehended," adding "a correct mind would have made no disclosure on such a subject" (Gold to Watson, 27 May 1808, ALS, Box 6, fold. 1, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany).
from his involvement in the Albany and New York State banks. It is also certain that his land speculations in western New York provided him with a continual source of income. For instance, during his tenure in Pittsfield, he sold forty-eight separate parcels in Cortland County alone, at prices of up to eight hundred dollars each.2

Watson found his new 246-acre estate "in a high state of improvement." Van Schaack had purchased the land at auction after the state of Massachusetts had confiscated it from Loyalist Elisha Jones, Junior. In 1785 Van Schaack built a large, elegant, Dutch Colonial house, later named Broad Hall because of its impressive entryway, and filled it with fine furnishings. He painted the mansion gleaning white and surrounded it with expansive lawns, excellent and extensive vegetable gardens and fruit yards, and a fine apple orchard, all admired by the many visitors who enjoyed his genteel hospitality. Watson naturally assumed that Pittsfield society would automatically defer to him as the new master of Broad Hall, as he had much in common with Henry Van Schaack. Both men had been New York merchants with business interests in the west. Both moved to Pittsfield after becoming unpopular in Albany—Van Schaack because of his Loyalism, and Watson because of his impatience with the Dutch. The moderate Watson should have been more welcome in the town's political life dominated by the Democratic-Republicans, but he was immediately denounced by a pseudonymous newspaper writer as a "Poor Quid, Nothingarian, and Trimmer." His new neighbors jeered at how hard Watson played the gentleman. After he presumptuously arrived in Berkshire in an old-fashioned, brilliant yellow, high-paneled coach modeled after president Washington's and driven by Jim, one of the Watsons' black servants, the newspaper writer attacked Watson for "daily dashing in all the pomp of Eastern pageantry."3


3*Sun [Pittsfield],* 9, 23, 30 Jan.; 6 Feb. 1808; Flick, *Elkanah Watson, Gentleman-Promoter* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 202-06. For Broad Hall, see Alexander Hamilton to
Watson attempted to reassert his gentility by emulating Van Schaack's career as a gentleman farmer. Recalling his move to Pittsfield, he later wrote that he was "induced, at the age of fifty, to hazard my own, and my family's happiness, on the experiment of seeking 'rural felicity,'—a life I had for twenty years sighed to enjoy." These pretensions belonged to a composite of activities and associations that characterized post-Revolutionary elite culture. Originating in the classical pastoralism of Horace and Virgil, the ideal of rural retirement reached America through the writings of English essayists Joseph Addison and Alexander Pope. Possession of a working rural estate validated gentry status and provided the standard surety of public virtue, as plantation owners like Washington and Jefferson assured each other that their deepest longings were for quiet retirement on their plantations. Northern gentlemen like Chancellor Livingston also sought to emulate the rural lifestyle of British aristocrats and landed gentry, as did wealthy Federalist merchants who built estates near Boston, on which they dabbled in landscape architecture, horticultural endeavors, and agricultural experimentation. Retirement to a suburban estate to promote agricultural improvement was as much an act of private self-characterization as of public beneficence, according to historian Tamara Plakins Thornton.4

Though the soils of Watson's new estate were "much exhausted," they were well


suited for pasturage, and the land was well watered by streams emptying into a thirty-five-acre pond, which Watson stocked with pickerel. An undated appraisal of Van Schaack's farm stock, consisting of twenty-five cattle and forty-seven sheep, all appraised at $334, as well as a cheese press and other equipment and agricultural implements, all appraised at $22.50, suggests that he was producing cheese, beef, and wool for the New York market. One of the two appraisers, Joseph Shearer (who, ironically, was not a sheep farmer), became an associate of Watson's. An "earnest and decided democrat," Shearer (1756-1838) married the wealthy widow of Dalton, Massachusetts, Loyalist William Williams and contributed much of her wealth to local causes (for instance, he provided the funds for Pittsfield's first church organ, purchased by the First Congregational Church). Shearer was elected a trustee of the Berkshire Agricultural Society when it was organized in August 1811, and was later appointed chair of its department of domestic animals. Butcher William Hollister, the other appraiser, also joined the agricultural society, in May 1813, and was made a trustee.5

Like Van Schaack, Watson attempted to improve the local swine. He introduced from Dutchess County, New York, a breeding pair of English short-legged, grass-fed pigs, the male of which he presented to the town of Pittsfield for stud purposes. For the purpose of "ameliorating the breed" of local cattle, Watson also brought from Cherry Valley, New York, a young bull of "celebrated English stock." These gestures were not only unappreciated, but violently resented. The condition he imposed upon the town for the gift of the boar, that it be moved to different neighborhoods, was perversely interpreted, and it "was left to wander from place to place, friendless," until somebody shot it and left it "barbarously mutilated on the highway." To add insult to injury, Watson

5Undated appraisal, Box 51, fold. 1, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany; Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, with Practical Directions (Albany, N.Y., 1819), 9; J.E.A. Smith, The History of Pittsfield, (Berkshire County,) Massachusetts, from the Year 1800 to the Year 1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 7, 78-79, 186, 356, 379, 421, 509; Berkshire Hills, 3 (1 Sept. 1902), 5. Shearer was also an incorporator of the Agricultural Bank in 1818 and the Pontoosuc Turnpike Company in 1825, and was a trustee of the Berkshire Medical College, founded in 1822.
claimed he "stood alone" as a promoter of agricultural improvement, "the butt of ridicule," even though he wrapped himself in the mantle of the illustrious Washington, by using as the epigraph to a public notice Washington's "The multiplication of useful animals is a common blessing to mankind."  

It was especially hard to take Watson's ideas about animal husbandry seriously after news of an incident with merchant and attorney Thomas Gold (1759-1827) made the rounds. Gold had settled in Pittsfield around 1781 or 1782, was admitted to the Berkshire bar, and married a daughter of Doctor Perez Marsh. His support of the Shaysites and his posturings before the General Court against the legal profession in the spring of 1786 upset the conservative establishment, including his uncle, Theodore Sedgwick, and earned him a reputation as a demagogic flatterer—"Tom Tinsel, the Spaniel," as one newspaper mocked. Even Van Schaack, Gold's supposed friend, privately referred to him as a rascal and errant scoundrel after Gold's defection from Federalism in 1796. After Van Schaack's departure, Gold apparently was the wealthiest man in Pittsfield, with an estate valued at $4,050. Watson admitted that Gold was "a respectable gentlemanly man in his personal appearance, and deportment—a Lawyer of some eminence, a man of fortune and respectable connections," but he also accused him of being a "habitual liar," claiming that Gold was "commonly called lying Tom." Watson later grudgingly conceded that "He was a good farmer," and he later elaborated that Gold was "confessedly the best practical—&
theoretical farmer in the County," which helps explain why Watson overcame personal feelings and had Gold to Broad Hall to discuss "Sheep & manufactures," and why Gold was important in organizing the Berkshire Agricultural Society. The incident described below must have occurred sometime after 21 September 1807, when Gold told his daughter, "The family who have succeeded Mr Van Schaack prove agreeable people & treat us with marked attention."7

Apparently, at their first meeting, Watson and Gold started talking about breeds of poultry, and Gold enthused about "the most famous hen we have got in this country—called the Potato hen." Watson bit: "Potato hen says I—in the name of heaven what has a hen to do with potatoes?" Gold explained: "Sir—the GOD of Nature has constructed that singular breed for the peculiar purpose of digging potatoes. . . . Why Sir I have got one . . . which throws out potatoes as fast as four men can pick them up—She springs from hill, to hill; and clears of the whole at every jump, having powerful claws which are evidently constructed for the purpose." Watson was properly impressed, replying "Wonderful! Wonderfull!!," not doubting the fact "in the least from the manner in

which it was told," before Gold changed the subject "to a certain turkey he had which had
the peculiar faculty of dodging a Shot." On his way to examine Gold's hen the next
morning, Watson met several gentlemen in Pittsfield village to whom he explained the
reason of his visit, and "they kept up an incessant roar of laughing much to my
mortification." Indignant at being "thus trifled with," Watson vowed to prevent Gold or
any man from taking "such liberties with me, with impunity." He continued to Gold's,
where he requested to see the hen. "To my utmost dismay and astonishment he
replied—that he had never said a word to me about a hen," and "I was compel'd in justice
to myself to handle him with merited severity. From that moment I had a right to dispise
him as a double refined Liar of the first order."8

Like his old Albany neighbors, Pittsfielders soon found good reason to dislike
Elkanah Watson. He tried too hard to match Van Schaack's refinement and facile manner.
The new, thick-bodied (the 216-pound Watson was over fifty pounds overweight for his
height), thin-skinned tenant of Broad Hall was gullible, ill-natured, and could not take a
joke. His tendency to overreact showed a lack of good breeding. Watson was easy to
mock as the stereotypical gentleman farmer who had a full purse and a library full of
agricultural volumes but no practical farming experience. Apparently, he was ready to
leave Pittsfield as early as January 1808, when John Livingston replied from New York
City to a now lost letter of Watson's, asking if purchasers might be found there for his
farm: "I doubt whether any of our people here would like to go so far from the City." He
informed Watson that William Allen's four-hundred-acre estate was for sale for $15,000,
"as good a place for the marinos as any whatever," and noted, "if you have any thoughts
of such a purchase you could soon arrive there from Albany and take a look at it—I think
it would be a good Exchange for you." Watson had also offered to sell his estate to
Jonathan Allen in February 1809. Three years later he was again (or still) looking to
relocate, but failed to find a purchaser for Broad Hall, as buyers were hesitant to assume a

mortgage in times of economic uncertainty. Watson could not sell his home until 1815, and thus remained in Pittsfield to associate with other Berkshire gentlemen in the interrelated causes of establishing woolen manufactories, promoting merino sheep husbandry, and organizing the Berkshire Agricultural Society.9

These self-interested patriots hoped to profit from Euro-American real politik. The year 1806 ushered in a propitious era for investment in American textile manufacturing, for trade dislocations promised to remove British cloth imports from the American market. These dislocations resulted first from European restrictions, as Britain and France resumed war; then from the subsequent coercive commercial responses of the Jefferson and Madison administrations, including nonimportation, embargo, and nonintercourse; and, finally, from war with Great Britain from 1812 to 1815.

Protesting against the seizure of American merchant vessels after a British court's May 1805 Essex decision banning the system of "broken voyage," by which American merchants had sailed around British navigation laws and enriched themselves in the West Indies trade that aided France, Congress passed the Non-Importation Act on 18 April 1806. This law banned the importation of a long list of foreign manufactures, including woolen cloth valued over five pounds sterling a square yard (fine woolens), as well as all woolen hosiery. Because the American carrying trade was chiefly responsible for the sustained growth of the expansive but predominantly agricultural economy of the United States, upon which the republican "empire for liberty" was founded, president Jefferson was forced to protect it, even though its chief beneficiaries were Massachusetts Federalists. Seizures of American merchant vessels followed France and Britain's trade war carried on in late 1806 and 1807 with Napoleonic decrees and British Orders in

9Livingston to Watson, 29 Jan. 1808, ALS, Box 6, fold. 1; Allen to Watson, 10 Feb. 1809, ALS, Box 14, fold. 1, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany. For instance, Nathan Clark wrote Watson from Rochester, Mass., on 26 July 1812: "I received your favour of the 16th inst. you mentioned selling your farm[.] It is so large & valuable that if the war Continue I could not think of making so great a purchase" (ALS, Box 6, fold. 6, Watson Papers, New York State Library).
Council, between which vulnerable neutral American ships were trapped. While Watson was settling his family into their new home in Pittsfield, the H.M.S. Leopard fired on and boarded the U.S.S. Chesapeake, on 22 June 1807, off the coast of Virginia, killing or wounding twenty-one sailors, and removing another four as British deserters. The unprovoked assault on American sovereignty would have led to a declaration of war if Congress had been in session, but, during the long, hot Chesapeake summer the administration discovered how unprepared the nation was to fight.10

On 22 December 1807, Jefferson signed a temporary embargo act prohibiting American vessels from sailing to and from foreign ports, and foreign vessels from loading cargo in the United States (the resumption of the suspended Non-Importation Act again prohibited the landing of a wide selection of cargoes). Supplemental laws of 9 January, 12 March, and 25 April 1808 and 15 January 1809 created administrative machinery and provided penalties for evasion. Although the original aim of the Embargo was defensive—to allow American merchantmen time to return home, and to provide the United States time to prepare itself for the likely outbreak of war—Jefferson and secretary of state James Madison soon focused on its coercive aspects, of forcing Britain to respect neutral rights by starving its industries of raw materials and eliminating the profitable American market for finished goods. Jefferson hoped that the Embargo would liberate American commerce from devastating foreign restrictions and secure the prosperity of the

agricultural republic before the next session of Congress in the autumn of 1808. It did not, and on 27 February 1809, just before the president left office, Congress repealed the Embargo by a two-to-one majority that included many Democratic-Republicans.\textsuperscript{11}

The political and economic effects of the Embargo were severe, especially in New England, and brought Watson into close association with Pittsfield's leading Democratic-Republicans. The once-thriving seaport of Boston was the center of discontent against the measure, which gave the Federalist party a new lease on life. It captured a slight majority in the Massachusetts General Court in the spring elections of 1808, and, in 1809, as the business depression deepened and spread beyond the seaports, Republican governor James Sullivan was succeeded by Federalist Christopher Gore. The overwhelmingly Federalist bench in Massachusetts proved uncooperative in prosecuting Embargo cases. The established clergy, also overwhelmingly Federalist, aroused public opinion against the Embargo (except in Pittsfield, where the Reverend Thomas Allen continually pointed out the advantages of the measure). But even Democratic-Republicans had turned against the Embargo by early 1809, when it was seen that the measure had little impact on the British economy, but was destroying that of America.\textsuperscript{12}

On 1 March 1809, Congress replaced the Embargo with the Non-Intercourse Act, which prohibited American vessels from trading with Great Britain, France, and their colonies, but permitted commercial relations with other nations. Unenforceable in practice, it was replaced in May 1810 with Macon's Bill Number 2, which prohibited


belligerents' warships from entering American waters, and authorized president Madison to suspend trade restrictions for whichever belligerent first repealed its offending decrees. On 2 November 1810, when Napoleon convinced the administration that he had withdrawn the Berlin and Milan decrees in August 1810, Madison proclaimed complete nonimportation of British goods, effective 2 February 1811. The United States continued its trade restrictions against Britain after war was declared on 18 June 1812, adding enemy trade acts in 1812 and 1815, and another embargo act, which was in force from December 1813 to April 1814. These laws, as well as the British naval blockade that stretched from Maine to Louisiana by March 1814, severely limited the importation of British textiles.13

In contrast to the obstructionism of Massachusetts Federalists were the efforts of those Democratic-Republicans who accentuated the positive moral and economic effects of the Embargo and the continuing Non-Importation Act. Cutting off America's chief source of finished cloth would rejuvenate republican virtue by necessitating a rejection of foreign luxuries, encouraging frugality, stimulating home production of cloth, and promoting the establishment of American textile manufactories. Parson Allen wrote that "Great advantages would result from" the Embargo's "continuance for years to come; by enlarging our manufactures, promoting our independence and lessening our debts, and increasing our real wealth. The country is full of every thing necessary for the comfort and convenience of man. . . . We can do forever without England or France." Jefferson emphasized the Embargo's salutary effect on household production of coarse and middling cloth, compelling female family members (and slaves) to realize their full potential as cloth producers, thereby eliminating the basis for the chronically unfavorable balance of trade with England. Quids and some moderates of both the Republican and Federalist parties, however, emphasized creating high-quality-woolen manufactories. Tench Coxe contended that America could and should advance to the next stage of civilization by developing

complex manufactures to provide itself with its own luxury goods instead of importing them from Britain. Elkanah Watson and the founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society hoped to encourage both home and factory cloth production through premiums offered at its Pittsfield fairs.\(^{14}\)

The leader of the Pittsfield efforts appears to have been Congressman Ezekiel Bacon (1776-1870; Yale College, Class of 1794), a staunch Democratic-Republican like his father John Bacon, whose old congressional seat he had assumed. Bacon served as postmaster of Williamstown before removing to Pittsfield about the time that Watson did. He was elected in September 1807 to fill the vacancy in the House of Representatives caused by the resignation of Barnabas Bidwell, and he supported the president's Embargo until witnessing its wholesale evasion in western New York in the summer of 1808. The fear of a civil war caused by New England's probable secession from the Union led Bacon to vote with the Federalists for repeal, earning him the epitaph "pseudo-Republican" from Jefferson and the animosity of party newspapers in eastern Massachusetts. His more moderate constituency, however, elected him twice more to Congress, where he supported American manufacturing, reflecting the interests of some of his leading constituents. On 31 May 1809, upon Bacon's motion, the House directed treasury secretary Albert Gallatin to prepare a survey of American factories and a plan to foster their growth and protect them from foreign competition. On 15 June Bacon presented a petition, probably signed by, among others, Elkanah Watson, Simon Larned, and James D. Colt, Junior, who had formed the Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton Factory a week and a half earlier. The petition, requesting protection for, and encouragement of, their new venture, was referred to the House's standing committee of commerce and manufactures. Later in 1809, Watson sent Bacon papers that were forwarded to Gallatin as an addendum to Bacon's previous report on Berkshire manufactures. Bacon was elected a trustee of the

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Berkshire Agricultural Society when it was organized in 1811, and served until April 1814. He left Congress in March 1813, after chairing the important House Ways and Means Committee, and was appointed Comptroller of the United States Treasury in February 1814. At home in Berkshire, Bacon sat as chief justice of the circuit court of common pleas from 1811 until he left Pittsfield in 1816 for Utica, in Oneida County, New York, where he died at the age of ninety-four.15

In December 1809 Ezekiel Bacon commented on the state of the American fine-woolen industry by describing to Watson the quality of attire worn at the capital. He noted that the president and secretaries of state and the treasury each had "elegant suits" made from cloth from Colonel David Humphreys's factory in Connecticut, and several New York congressmen had "some very superior ones" made from wool manufactured at Chancellor Robert R. Livingston's broadcloth mill at Poughkeepsie, New York. Pittsfield lay almost equidistant from each factory, in geography, as well as politics. Livingston was a Democratic-Republican, and Humphreys a Federalist, and Watson and his associates in Pittsfield were moderate Republicans and Federalists united around a vision of an America completely self-sufficient in textiles, and economically independent from Great Britain. In emulating Livingston's and Humphreys's programs of promoting and propagating merino sheep and establishing woolen manufactories, the Pittsfield entrepreneurs eventually hit upon the idea of forming a new county-wide voluntary association. It would promote agriculture and manufactures by holding annual shows, or fairs, to exhibit and sell merinos, and publicize the breed by awarding prizes for the best specimens of finished


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cloth made from merino wool. Entertainment, exhibition, emulation, and competition would all serve to advance American industry, as well as agricultural improvement.  

Due chiefly to the efforts of Yorkshire clothier Arthur Scholfield (1757-1827), Pittsfield had become a textile center years before Watson's arrival, and independent of the influence of Humphreys and Livingston. Scholfield had emigrated with his brother John from Saddleworth near Leeds, probably around 1793, and the two opened their first woolen mills in Charlestown and near Newburyport, Massachusetts, before moving to Connecticut in 1799. Arthur soon settled in Pittsfield, where he set up in an old mill on the Housatonic in November 1801 Berkshire's first water-powered carding machine, which drastically reduced the time it took to prepare wool for spinning. By 1802 the mill was also dyeing wool, making chairs, manufacturing nails and Rumford fireplaces, and cutting stone. The most profitable operation became constructing carding machines, of which he sold twenty to thirty units a year by 1803, at four hundred dollars each. The Yorkshire mechanic had begun constructing other textile machinery, including looms and spinning jennies (he apparently had set up his own loom by 1804, when he offered broadcloths for sale to local merchants). That same year, Daniel Stearns emigrated from Killingly, Connecticut, and purchased and converted the old Rathbun fulling mill on Shaker Brook into a woolen mill that was annually producing five thousand yards of broadcloth by 1808. That year Scholfield provided the machinery for Chancellor Livingston's Poughkeepsie mill. He later joined the Berkshire Agricultural Society and was elected a trustee and the chairman of the department of manufacturing and mechanical projects. 

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16Bacon to Watson, 9 Dec. 1809, ALS, Box 6, fold. 2, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany. In 1802 Humphreys returned from Madrid, where he had been U.S. minister to Spain since 1797 (having originally been appointed minister to Portugal in 1791 by president Washington). He purchased mills and a dam in 1803 at Rimmon Falls on the Naugatuck River in Connecticut, where he completed construction of a woolen manufactory 3 years later, hired an English clothier as manager, and planned to "extinguish" the "prejudice against the fabrics of our country" (Humphreys to Dr. Aaron Dexter, 28 Nov. 1807, and Jefferson to Abraham Bishop, 13 Nov., 17 Dec. 1808, all in Frank Landon Humphreys, Life and Times of David Humphreys: Soldier—Statesman—Poet; "Belov'd of Washington" [2 vols.; New York, 1917], 2:359-60, 367-69, 375-80).
arts from 1812 to 1814.17

Watson soon came to depend upon Scholfield's skills and expertise, for he soon interested himself in woolen manufacturing, probably believing that his own business experience with the Hamilton Glass Factory would well serve him. The newcomer had had an academic interest in textile manufacturing since his 1782 tour of England, when he visited Manchester with its cotton factories, examined Clothiers' Hall in Halifax, and attended a twice weekly cloth fair in Leeds, but it is unknown just when he decided to establish his own woolen manufactory in Pittsfield. In Watson's surviving papers is an estimate of the cost of construction of a loom and the operational costs of a spinning jenny. It undoubtedly resulted from Scholfield's input, but, unfortunately, is undated.

Watson was ready to go public with his woolen manufacturing plans by the end of 1808. On 10 December 1808 he published in the Berkshire Reporter a proposal to establish a profitable woolen mill in Pittsfield, and he worked behind the scenes inspiring potential investors. In January 1809 "a large meeting of the Citizens of Berkshire County," presided over by Joshua Danforth, named Watson chairman of a committee to apply for a charter for a woolen and cotton factory, but, apparently, all that resulted was a letter to the trustees of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture soliciting their support and "ardently hoping that no party feelings will ever reach the Object." On 4 June 1809, Simon Lamed and Theodore Hinsdale met with a group of other Pittsfield entrepreneurs at Joseph Merrick's Inn and appointed Lamed, Watson, and James D. Colt.

Junior, a new committee to apply to the state legislature for an act of incorporation for the Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton Factory.\(^{18}\)

It was an opportune time to charter a manufacturing corporation in Massachusetts, as the Commonwealth was beginning to encourage such endeavors. Whereas the legislature incorporated only three such establishments from 1789 to 1796, it chartered fifteen from 1800 to 1809 (and 133 more over the next decade). In 1808 it also passed a general law outlining the conditions under which manufacturing corporations would be created. Consequently, Watson, Joshua Danforth, Simon Lamed, Oren Goodrich, James D. Colt, and Jared Ingersoll had little difficulty obtaining a charter. Meeting in September 1809 as required by the act of incorporation, they named Colt company clerk, and determined to issue one thousand shares of stock, each worth twenty dollars.\(^{19}\)

Watson's associates were all Pittsfield businessmen who cooperated in establishing other institutions even though they belonged to opposing political parties. The principals of the mercantile firm Danforth & Lamed, both veteran officers of the Revolutionary War, Democratic-Republicans, and in their fifties, were members of the county elite: Joshua Danforth was a state legislator and had been appointed chief justice of the county court of sessions in 1808; Simon Lamed was county treasurer and sheriff who had served in congress from 1804 to 1806. Not much is known about Democratic-Republican Oren (Orrin) Goodrich, except that he was related to one of Pittsfield's first and wealthiest


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settlers and was one of the town's representatives to the General Court in 1811, when the act chartering the Berkshire Agricultural Society was passed. He joined that society in September 1811, and served on its domestic animals and agriculture committees.

Federalist James Denison Colt, Junior (1768-1856), the son of Captain James D. Colt, married into an old Pittsfield family in 1791. Also a merchant, he took his half brother Samuel into his business in 1799. Along with Watson, the two were among the 104 incorporators of the Union Parish formed in February 1809 in protest of the Reverend Thomas Allen's politicization of the pulpit of the First Congregational Church. The Colts were also original members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, and James served as its corresponding secretary in 1814 and on its committee on agriculture. Little is known about innkeeper Jared Ingersoll (1745-1835), who was socially prominent enough after having served in the Revolution to marry the widow of one of the town's leading Whigs and lawyers, and who was imprisoned in Northampton for a time as an insurgent during Shays's Rebellion. Most significantly, Lamed, Danforth, and Colt, were incorporators and directors of Berkshire County's first bank, the failure of which left them poor in cash but rich in wisdom. When the subscription book of the Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton Factory was opened in December 1809, only 812 shares ($16,240) of the one thousand total were purchased, 163 of them ($3,260), by Watson. It proved a poor investment.\textsuperscript{20}

The firm was never able to overcome its weak financial position, despite the best efforts of Scholfield and Watson. They commenced operations at their own risk with little further assistance, making it difficult to separate individual from corporate measures (which probably also hindered company profits). Scholfield attached a brick addition to his Housatonic factory to house spinning jennies and broadcloth looms, and he added an ell to his own home, into which several more looms were moved. Watson apologized to Governor James Sullivan in January 1810 for being unable to send "a suit of my broad

Cloth as Mr Scholfield—a professed manufacture from Yorkshire in Eng. [is] so pressed as to put it out of his power to compleat it in time." But, he added, he could supply "excellent Parsons Gray Cloth at a reasonable price & superior quality by mid Feb.," and, if requested, could send some of his black superfine full-blooded merino wool broadcloth. These might have been products of Watson's three looms and spinning jenny that hired women worked on his property. The last record of corporate action taken by the Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton Factory was a meeting of its directors on 23 January 1810. The company was bankrupt by December 1816, when Nathan Willis wrote Watson that "the Directors" could not pay his overdue "note against the P C & W Factory," "considering the state of their accounts & other concerns."

Watson did not give up, although, true to form, he apparently had broken with Scholfield by 1811. He still hoped to buy out an established woolen factory, or, preferably, to "connect with a reputable experienced man in extending my own Establishment." His "Confidential Plan" of a "Woolen Manufactory" is undated but informative. It consisted of: purchasing a mill dam and ten acres for about twelve hundred dollars; finding Boston, Providence, and Albany capitalists to invest a total of about fifty thousand dollars; obtaining a charter granting the sale of one hundred shares of stock at five hundred dollars each; erecting a spacious fireproof brick or stone building, at a cost of fifteen to twenty thousand dollars; limiting manufacturing to the best superfine broadcloths (for which Watson claimed he had already secretly secured prime English artisans) and the weaving of stockings; and hiring a resident superintendent, who would also be a major stockholder, with "T[omas] M[elville] Jr Esqr." being a prime candidate. Watson concluded: "If incorporated A Presdt. & 5 Directors will be necessary—& If I am tho't

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21Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 174-75; MS D of Records, Pittsfield Woolen & Cotton Factory, Box 51, fold. 1; Samuel D. Colt to Watson, 23 Jan. 1810, ALS, Box 6, fold. 3; Samuel D. Colt to Watson, 23 Jan. 1810, ALS, Box 6, fold. 3; Watson to Sullivan, Jan. 1810, copy, Box 6, fold. 3; Watson to Obadiah Lang, 2 March 1811, ADF, Box 6, fold. 4, Nathan Willis to Watson, 30 Dec. 1816, Box 6, fold. 11, all in Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany. See also Lang to Watson, 21 Feb., 18 April, 24 July 1811, all ALS, Box 6, fold. 4.
deserving of the first Station—I shall Subscribe 10 Shares—& will with pleasure devote the residue of Life in Making this my hobby—& turning Out S. fine bd. Cloth equal to Paris—& cultiv[at]ing our Own dies [dyes] & wool. Amen! So be it." The endeavor never materialized, however, and Watson, as usual, moved on to other hobbies.22

Although the Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton Factory was a failure, it did inspire other local entrepreneurs to move into textile manufacturing, and showed them how not to do it. Democratic-Republicans John Burgoyne Root (b.1778) and Richard S. Chappell opened a woolen mill in 1810, incorporating it two years later as the Housatonic Manufacturing Company. The son of Pittsfield Loyalist Ezekiel Root, and brother-in-law of James D. Colt, Junior, Root was apprenticed to merchant Perez Graves until his promotion to partner in the firm of Graves & Root. In 1808 he opened a sail duck manufactory, and took on Eli Maynard as partner in 1810, the same year he and Chappell constructed their woolen mill and advertised merino rams for sale from the flocks of Livingston and Humphreys, stating they would take as payment well-washed and merchantable merino wool. The Housatonic Manufacturing Company prospered during the War of 1812 but suffered after the resumption of British imports, and Chappell sold out in 1816. Watson had earlier considered leasing a water privilege on the firm's dam, but he apparently relinquished his own manufacturing vision by January 1812, when he wrote Root from Boston offering his advice and assistance, and promising to lobby for the firm's petition for incorporation then being presented to the legislature by Pittsfield's representative, Doctor Timothy Childs. Both Root and Chappell were founding members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society in August 1811, and Root (who served as town clerk in 1806, and from 1811 to 1838) was the society's treasurer from 1811 to 1815, and chair of its manufactures and mechanical arts department, and its agriculture department in the

22Watson to Obadiah Lang, 2 March 1811, ADf, Box 6, fold. 4, and "Confidential Plan," Box 51, fold. 3, both in Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany.

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1810s. Rodman Hazard opened the first textile factory in neighboring Hancock, in which he produced the first satinets made in America on a fly shuttle loom. More factories opened during the War of 1812, including a second Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton Factory, incorporated in 1814, with James D. Colt, Junior, as its superintendent of operations. Only the disruption of the British import trade by American trade restrictions and then war enabled these early endeavors to survive and almost prosper. In the postwar period many of them folded after trade was resumed and the British dumped goods on the market to strangle the infant American textile industry. Only after a protective tariff, one of the chief measures of the American System of Henry Clay and the later Whigs, was regularly enacted could American woolens, which were usually about sixty percent more expensive than British, successfully compete in the home market.

Watson's Broad Hall woolen operations successfully publicized his concurrent hobby of merino sheep raising, which he took up "strongly impressed by Chancellor Livingston's example." Just as Watson had drawn inspiration and validation from his brief association with Washington, he had a similar relationship with Livingston, claiming that the two of them were "drawn together, by our congeniality of sentiments and pursuits in agriculture and the arts, and we often reciprocated visits." Livingston learned of merinos

Root & Chappell to Watson, 22 April 1811, DS, Box 14, fold. 5, and John B. Root to Watson, 28 Jan. 1812, ALS, Box 6, fold. 5, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany.

Smith, *History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876* (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 181, 184, 408, 409n, 468-69, 472-73, 477, 487-88; [Smith], *History of Berkshire County, Massachusetts* [2 vols.; New York, 1885], 2:73; Field, ed., *History of Berkshire County* (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 19, 20; Berkshire Hills, 4 (1 Dec. 1903), 183; Wiebe, *Opening of American Society* (New York, 1984), 262. Watson related that, during the War of 1812, 2 British officers imprisoned in Pittsfield told their unnamed American host upon viewing his spacious brick woolens factory just beginning operations that "You may as well stop where you are, and save your money; for depend on it, we will destroy all your manufactories as soon as peace takes place. . . . a few millions sterling, more or less, will be no object to our government, to root up your manufactures in the bud" (unidentified clipping, in Watson's Common Place Book, Journal E, 92, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany; emphasis in original).
while serving as United States minister to France. The breed, originating in Spain and protected by a royal ban on its exportation, was highly valued for the unexcelled fineness and high yields of its wool, with average fleece weights at least twice as heavy as those produced by the common sheep of the northeastern United States, which were mainly descended from English Texels and Wiltshires.\textsuperscript{25} The merino was supposed to be little affected by cold and wet, because of the deep oily yoke of its fleece; to be able to live off the coarsest herbage; and to be more tractable than other breeds. In 1802 Livingston sent home to his Clermont estate two merinos bred at the French national experimental farm at Rambouillet, and, upon his own return home in 1805, bought up the surviving descendants of Don Pedro, a ram imported by Dupont de Nemours shortly after that Frenchman's own emigration to America in 1799. Livingston undertook a successful merino breeding and sales program at Clermont, published an essay on merino sheep raising, and imported more rams in 1807.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25}The Bourbons sent merinos as gifts to the rulers of Sweden in 1723, Saxony in 1765 and 1778, Austria in 1775, and France in 1786, from which stock improved breeds such as the Saxony and Rambouillet originated. A few even reached America, such as 3 that William T. Foster smuggled from Spain in 1792, and 2 that Seth Adams sent to Boston from France in 1801 (Carla Rahn Phillips and William D. Phillips, Jr., \textit{Spain's Golden Fleece: Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century} [Baltimore, 1997], 84-89; H. B. Carter, \textit{His Majesty's Spanish Flock: Sir Joseph Banks and the Merinos of George III of England} [Sydney, 1964], 1-10).

In emulation of Livingston, Watson undertook his own campaign from 1808 to 1816 to promote, and profit from, merino sheep. He not only sold lambs and let out rams to Berkshire farmers, he also finished their wool, published essays in the newspapers, sent letters, and lobbied the Massachusetts legislature to pass laws encouraging sheep raising and woolen production. Watson wrote to his old acquaintance Reverend Jedediah Morse in November 1808: "by a perseverance bordering on enthusiasm for the last 18 months I have inoculated this County with the Sheep Mania—I wish to extend it throughout the State." With the help of Shaker artisans, Watson was able to work the first shearings of his own merinos in 1808 into high-quality superfine woolen broadcloth, which "open'd the eyes of farmers all around—& they begin eagerly to press into the breed." He sent samples to prominent gentlemen in Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C., along with statements of production costs and profits from the sale of the cloth. For instance, Watson sent Morse "a handsome Sample" of his "fine Cloath [that] has done wonders," as well as a clipping of his letter describing its production to Reverend Samuel Shepard that had been published in the Lenox Watch Light, and copies of recent New York laws encouraging sheep raising and woolen manufacturing. He also mentioned his fifty-page compilation of annotated communications from Livingston, Humphreys, and Edward Rutledge about the care of merino sheep.27

While Watson was attempting to create a demand for merinos, other Pittsfield entrepreneurs focused on the more useful task of providing a supply, in which they benefitted from a turn in the war in Europe. Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula

27 Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution* (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 393; Flick, *Elkanah Watson, Gentleman-Promoter* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 212-14; *Sun* [Pittsfield], 30 Sept. 1809; Watson to Obadiah Lang, 2 March 1811, ADF, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany; Watson to Morse, 4, 8 Nov. 1808, both ALS, in Dr. D, fold. 7, MS Records of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; *Watch Light* [Lenox], 7 Nov. 1808.
in the autumn of 1808 to prop up his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne initiated five
years of military operations and civil war that disrupted the Bourbon's ban on exporting
Spanish Merino sheep. The Peninsular War opened the merino floodgates and scattered
flocks across the oceans. David Humphreys made the first major importation into the
United States, when Spanish authorities permitted him to export about a hundred merinos,
which landed at Derby, Connecticut, in 1802. In December 1809 the American consul and
chargé d'affaires at Lisbon, William C. Jarvis, was allowed to purchase two hundred
merinos from the royal Escurial flock, which he sent to America in small shipments early in
1810. As Joseph Bonaparte's army advanced on Madrid, the desperate Spanish Junta sold
off eight thousand merinos, 3,630 of which Jarvis was able to purchase and ship to Maine,
Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia, from the summer of 1810 through 1811.28

If anyone was instrumental in bringing merinos to Pittsfield, it was Jonathan Allen
(1783-1845), not Elkanah Watson. The second son of Parson Thomas Allen and brother-
in-law of Thomas Gold, this Democratic-Republican merchant was in Lisbon in 1810,
when, with Jarvis's assistance, he purchased from the Junta of Estramadura one hundred
Spanish Merinos from the confiscated flocks of the Count of Montaco. Twenty-five sheep
died on the voyage home, and others were sold at Boston (some rams for $1,000 each) to
defray the costs of the venture. Allen returned to Pittsfield with forty sheep, purchased a
farm, and became Berkshire's chief merino supplier. Although Allen cooperated with
Watson in founding the Berkshire Agricultural Society in August 1811, and was elected
one of the society's first trustees, Watson failed to note Allen's contributions—or anyone

28Humphreys, *Life and Times of Humphreys* (2 vols.; New York, 1917), 2:335-48; Mary
Pepperell Sparhawk Cutts, *The Life and Times of Hon. William Jarvis of Weathersfield, Vermont*
(New York, 1869; reprint., Weathersfield, 1991), 270-96; Carman et al., *Special Report on U.S.
Sheep Industry*, USDA (Washington, D.C., 1892). For details on the Peninsular War, see David
(1770-1859), the consul, was a cousin of Federalist attorney William C. Jarvis (d.1836) who
arrived in Pittsfield in 1815 and became a leading citizen, representing the town in the General
Court before moving to Woburn, Mass., in 1825. The Pittsfield Jarvis was a member of the
Berkshire Agricultural Society and served as its secretary from 1815 to 1816 (Cutts, *Life and
Times of Jarvis*, 50, 347, 432-33; Smith, *History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876* [Springfield, Mass.,
1876], 403).
else's, for that matter—in his publications. Allen served as corresponding and recording secretaries, and was twice elected president of the society after Watson returned to Albany. One of Allen's merino lambs won a premium at the society's first Pittsfield Fair in 1811, and his sheep constantly beat out Watson's for prizes at subsequent fairs.29

Watson's neighbors tended to identify his merino measures as self-serving and pretentious. In the autumn of 1807, he purchased what apparently were Berkshire County's first two merinos, from Chancellor Livingston (what is most telling is that the first ram was not full-blooded, as Watson had believed it was).30 Watson later wrote that he was induced to announce their exhibition "under the great elm tree in the public square," which event was attended by "many farmers, and even women . . . excited by curiosity." Watson reasoned from "this lucky accident" that, "If two animals are capable of exciting so much attention, what will be the effect on a larger scale, with larger animals?" Those present are supposed to have responded "with approbation," and "From that moment, to the present [1819], Agricultural Societies, Cattle Shows, and all in connection therewith, have predominated in my mind."31


30Watson almost broke with Livingston over the misunderstanding concerning the ram, which Watson purchased and publicized as full-blooded until he was mortified to discover that it was 15/16 merino, and its fleece inferior. "The consequence is that no body Call's to See my flock," and Watson was unable to compete against Samuel D. Colt, who had obtained true full-bloods from David Humphreys. However, Watson bought more sheep from Clermont in 1809 and 1810 (Watson to John R. Livingston, 12 March 1809, ALS, Watson Miscellaneous Papers, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.).

31Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, with Practical Directions (Albany, N.Y., 1819), 9-10; see also Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York and the History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire System (Albany, N.Y., 1820), 116.
No independent corroboration of this charming story has been uncovered. The exhibit under The Old Elm did take place, in 1808. Watson advertised in the 21 May 1808 Pittsfield Sun that he would show his unshorn full-blooded merino ram and new half-blooded lamb on 24 May, and he requested spectators "not to pluck off any of the wool, as the proprietor has no motive in this exhibition but the public good; and fondly hopes that demonstration will lead every enlightened farmer in the County, in the immediate pursuit of his best interest." It cannot be confirmed or disproved that the seed that later sprouted into agricultural fairs was planted on 24 May 1808, but Watson probably elaborated the details only in retrospect. Otherwise, why did he not immediately act upon the idea, when it was approbated by interested farmers? Why did he stand alone, "the butt of ridicule," for two years before the community supported another livestock exhibition? Finally, when Watson wrote in the newspaper three days after his sheep show that "The most certain and direct road to effect the spread of the Merino" would be "the organization of an Agricultural Society which will ultimately embrace all the respectable farmers of the country, who will bring their stock of experience for the good of the whole," why did he not mention shows and exhibitions as part of its proposed programs?

Watson's call to organize a society to promote merino sheep was attacked by a pseudonymous newspaper writer who suspected his motives, mocked his enthusiasm, and resented the pretensions Watson displayed in a stream of newspaper essays—signed, unsigned, and pseudonymous ("A Friend to Manufactures," "Plebeian," "A Farmer," "A. Z.," "An American," "Projector," and "A Spectator," for example)—on such topics as sheep raising, woolen manufacturing, cider making, agricultural societies and fairs, and merino sheep, that began appearing in the Pittsfield Sun in the summer of 1807. Watson presented in the Sun on 9 January 1808 his hopes "to form an Agricultural Society, for the

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32 Sun [Pittsfield], 21 May 1808.
33 Ibid., 28 May 1808; Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, with Practical Directions (Albany, N.Y., 1819), 12-13.
object of introducing into this County the celebrated breed of Spanish Merino Sheep, which if pursued with general spirit and attention, promises to place us on a footing as advantageous as the Cotton has been to the citizens of South Carolina." He invited Berkshire gentlemen "disposed to promote the great object of introducing the breed of Spanish Sheep into every part of the County" to meet in Daniel Pepoon's tavern early on 20 January "to devise a course of measures necessary to be pursued."34

In the same issue of the Sun, "A Friend to Turkies" declared that the objects of an agricultural society should not be limited solely to promoting Spanish Merinos but should be established on a more liberal scale. Satirizing Watson, he declared that the raising of turkeys was equally important, especially those of "the Raven Black breed, the superior quality of whose meat has long been the admiration of many correct tastes," which could be had much more cheaply than merinos, "for by a little finesse, they may be obtained of a neighbour without the least expence." "Friend" concluded, "Can any one question the propriety of our agriculturalists taking this subject into serious consideration?" Watson could, and did, replying humorlessly as "An American" on 23 January 1808 that if "Friend to Turkies" really believed those birds "are of more consequence than Spanish Sheep, he may with propriety be pronounced a tory—an enemy to the independence of our country," richly deserving to have "his carcase ornamented with their feathers, put on in the old revolutionary stile." Things only got nastier. On 30 January, "Friend" complained about "An American's" love of luxury while recommending that the "admiring throng" confine their ambition and "demonstrate their patriotism and love of country by a plain and simple home-spun garb." He continued: "your day of retribution and shameful exposure now has come; no longer can you hope to exculpate yourself from the indignant voice of an enlightened public; no longer will your insidious and treacherous conduct screen you from the contempt of a censorious world." "An American's" lame reply of 6 February

concluded the controversy. He stated that "Friend" had "perverted and exaggerated" Watson's earlier sentiments and thus deserved "severer chastisement than I choose to apply." Recalling the Potato Hen incident, Watson originally suspected that Thomas Gold, or perhaps his son, Thomas A. Gold, was "A Friend to Turkies," and he petulantly demanded that his family cut off social contact with the Golds.35

Watson's 1808 sheep exhibition was not manufactured out of whole cloth; he merely popularized another activity by which Americans with genteel pretensions identified themselves as patriotic gentlemen. He knew of Chancellor Livingston's Clermont sheepshearings, which were inspired by those held by George Washington Parke Custis since 1803 at his Arlington estate near Washington, D.C. (Phinehas Allen reprinted in the Sun, on 28 May 1808—perhaps upon Watson's request—a description of the April 1808 Arlington sheepshearing from the National Intelligencer). These elites were merely emulating the annual spring events held by the British gentry and aristocracy. British sheepshearings had become by the early 1800s popular annual events consisting of livestock exhibits and auctions, award programs, formal dinners, and speeches, with published premium lists and transactions.36

35Sun [Pittsfield], 9, 23, 30 Jan.; 6 Feb. 1808. Thomas Augustus Gold (1788-1854) studied law under his father after graduating from Williams College in 1806. He was admitted to the bar in 1809. Like his father, he was an officer in the Berkshire Agricultural Society. In the 1830s he promoted a railroad from Pittsfield to West Stockbridge, and in 1846 became cashier of the newly incorporated Berkshire County Savings Bank (Columbian Centinel [Boston], 18 March 1818; Lockwood et al., eds., Western Massachusetts [2 vols.; New York, 1926], 1:524; [Smith], History of Berkshire County, Massachusetts [2 vols.; New York, 1885], 1:418-19). For correspondence between Watson and the Golds concerning the "Friend to Turkies" controversy, see Thomas Gold to Watson, 27 May 1808, ALS; Thomas A. Gold to Watson, 4, 7 June 1808, 13 July 1813, all ALS; and Watson to Thomas A. Gold, 13 July 1813, ADf, all in Watson Papers, Box 6, fold. 1, New York State Library, Albany. Editor Phinehas Allen later disclosed that a man named Casson was "A Friend to Turkies." Casson refused to publish a recantation because he claimed he never intended to be personal but was attacking Watson's quid politics. For the unwritten code of honor concerning newspaper attacks, see Joanne B. Freeman, "The Art of Paper War," chap. 3, Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic (New Haven, Conn., 2001), 105-58.

Watson himself attended Livingston's 1810 Clermont sheepshearing. Two hundred "Gentlemen dined in the great Saloon the walls of which were adorn'd with wreaths, & festoons happily intermixt with white & red roses. At the head of the table was an elegant drawing of the Ram Clermont. Many appropriate toasts were drank, after which . . . the happy guests were well Charg'd with generous Old Madaria," Watson recalled. "We were [then] conducted by the Chancellor, ostensibly to the Sheep Shearing tho in reality to an extensive sale of Sheep at the tune of ten thousand Dollars in One hour" (just who were the shearsers and who were the shorn is difficult to discern). Watson bought a handsome ram to go with the six he had purchased from Livingston the previous fall. He continued: "After dinner . . . they could not fail singing the old well Known catch of 'Baa, baa—black sheep hast thou any wool.'" He concluded: the "learned, brilliant & classical" Doctor Samuel Latham Mitchill offered an after-dinner toast, "The modern Argonautic expedition, whereby our Jason has enriched his country with the invaluable treasure of the golden fleece." The agricultural fair deliberately appealed to those more familiar with "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep" than Jason and the Argonauts, but it consisted of many of the same festive elements of the Clermont sheepshearings.37

Watson's three years of failure in organizing an agricultural society suggests that "A Friend to Turkies" was indeed correct: an institution devoted solely to merino sheep would never succeed. Watson's initial call in the Pittsfield Sun in January 1808 for Berkshire gentlemen interested in merino husbandry to organize was greeted with silence.


That February Watson engaged the right of refusal to sixty-seven merino rams of Chancellor Livingston's, intending to present the right "to an Agricultural Society in this County." But on 20 May 1808 he conceded that "The langour which had attended the organization of the contemplated society" impelled him to relinquish that plan, and he purchased at his own risk forty rams, with the intention of selling them throughout the county, retaining one dollar from the sale of each for the treasury of an agricultural society, if one was formed before summer, "as commencement of a fund to be given out in premiums for the best specimens of broadcloth made in this County, from this mixed Spanish Wool, raised also in the County." On 28 May, four days after Watson's merino exhibition, he, along with Simon Lamed, James D. Colt, Junior, Moses Hayden, Junior, and several other county residents, met at Daniel Pepoon's inn in Pittsfield "for the purpose of organizing an Agricultural Society and promoting Manufactures." They asked each town desirous of introducing merinos "and other improvements" to send two or more representatives to their next meeting, to be held on 5 July 1808. No record of that meeting has been found, nor any further evidence of agricultural organizing in Pittsfield for the next two years.38

Watson complained that his various efforts exposed him "most unjustly in public and in private, to ridicule, to uncharitable inferences, to sarcasms, and to the imputation of every unworthy motive." The undisclosed "scandalous treatment" he received from some professional men at an unidentified public festival, however, only persuaded him to push harder "to revolutionize the public sentiment in the pursuit of their own good." By August 1810 enough interest had been aroused to hold a livestock show in Pittsfield. Only after the improving spirit focused on sheep had been broadened to also consider cattle did it win the support of Berkshire gentlemen. Watson followed elite opinion, he did not make it. On 1 August he "drew up but signed in the background" a proposal to hold a livestock show.

38Sun [Pittsfield], 9 Jan., 28 May, 11 June 1808; Flick, Elkanah Watson, Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 221-27.
exhibit on Pittsfield common on 1 October, and he invited farmers to "show such useful animals as they think proper." Conceding to existing interest, he listed as potential show animals: "bulls, oxen, steers, and other neat cattle," before mentioning "merino sheep of the different grades, as well as other improved breeds." He hoped the exhibit would "lead to permanent annual Cattle Shows" and "an incorporated Agricultural Society" with enough funds to award premiums in order to "promote an amelioration of valuable breeds of domestic animals." Interested gentlemen met at the town house on 28 September to appoint a committee of arrangements for the day and "to digest a plan of an Agricultural Society—to give permanency to annual Cattle Shows in this County."39

The committee appointed that day remained embodied after the cattle show in order to petition the legislature to be incorporated as an agricultural society. The names and residences of the fourteen committee members are known, but little else has been discovered about the six non-Pittsfielders: Samuel H. Wheeler of Lanesborough, Silas Pepon of Stockbridge, Daniel Brown of Cheshire, Oliver Belden of Lenox, Levi Crittenden of Richmond, and Thomas Allen of Hinsdale. Those from Pittsfield were Watson, Ezekiel Bacon, Joseph Shearer, John B. Root, Roswell Root, Oliver Root, Thomas B. Strong, and Nathaniel Fairfield, Junior. A complete analysis of their backgrounds must await further research, but the information uncovered so far on individuals, combined with Berkshire town aggregates compiled in 1977 by historian Thomas Davis from 1798 and 1801 state tax valuations, offers a few preliminary observations (see tables 4.1 and 4.2).40

All of the committee members hailed from prosperous communities in northern or central Berkshire County, and four-fifths of them came from towns in the Housatonic and


Table 4.1
Residence of the Members of the 1810 Pittsfield Cattle Show Committee of Arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>No. of Members</th>
<th>Town's Politics*</th>
<th>Town's Avg. Real Wealth of Individuals ($)**</th>
<th>Town's Aggregate Acres in Tillage***</th>
<th>Town's Aggregate Acres in Pasturage***</th>
<th>Town's Aggregate No. of Cattle***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mixed Republican (62%)</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>2,937</td>
<td>5,766</td>
<td>1,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanesborough</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mixed Federalist (59%)</td>
<td>1,630</td>
<td>1,594</td>
<td>3,803</td>
<td>1,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenox</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Overwhelmingly Republican (85%)</td>
<td>1,176</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>2,221</td>
<td>691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockbridge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mixed Federalist (53%)</td>
<td>1,201</td>
<td>1,387</td>
<td>3,237</td>
<td>604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mixed Republican (49%)</td>
<td>1,239</td>
<td>1,147</td>
<td>4,020</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Overwhelmingly Republican (98%)</td>
<td>1,225</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>3,964</td>
<td>1,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinsdale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Thomas Lawrence Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins in Country Towns: Party Formation in Berkshire County, Massachusetts (1775-1816) (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 168.
**From Massachusetts Direct Tax, 1798, cited ibid., 404.
***From Massachusetts 1801 Valuation List, cited ibid., 405.

Hoosac river valleys. The average real wealth of individual taxpayers in all Berkshire towns in 1798 ranged from $281 (Mount Washington) to $1,630 (Lanesborough), but none of the towns represented by the committeemen had a per capita average less than $1,176. The six towns' weighted average real wealth of individuals ($1,317) was over a third higher than that of all Berkshire towns ($906). This supports Davis's conclusion that Berkshire's cultural institutions developed chiefly in the river valley communities, because of their centrality, concentrations of wealth, and presence of "men of education and fertility of mind." The towns represented by the 28 September committee were also the
Table 4.2
Comparison of Towns Represented by the 1810 Committee and General Berkshire Towns' Ranges and Averages of Wealth, Land Usage, and Cattle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals' Real Wealth ($)*</th>
<th>Acres in Tillage**</th>
<th>Acres in Pasturage**</th>
<th>Number of Cattle**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committee Towns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,176-1,630</td>
<td>1,317</td>
<td>864-2,937</td>
<td>2,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Berkshire Towns</td>
<td>281-1,630</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>71-2,937</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Massachusetts Direct Tax, 1798, cited in Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 404.
**From Massachusetts 1801 Valuation List, cited ibid., 405.

most agriculturally advanced. Because Pittsfield led the county in acres under tillage, acres in pasturage, and number of cattle, its preponderance of representation on the committee is understandable. The aggregate acres under tillage of the committee's towns ranged from 864 (Cheshire) to 2,937 (Pittsfield), compared to the aggregates of all Berkshire towns, which ranged from 71 (Clarksburg) to 2,937 (Pittsfield) acres. The weighted average of the six towns' aggregates (2,263 acres) was over twice that of the average of all Berkshire towns' tillage aggregates (944 acres). The aggregates of the six towns' pasturage acres and numbers of cattle also demonstrate that the gentlemen on the committee came from mature communities whose agricultural economies were concentrating on beef and dairy production. The range of the aggregate pasturage acreages of the committee towns was from 2,221 acres (Lenox) to 5,766 (Pittsfield); that of all Berkshire towns was from 86 (Clarksburg) to 5,766 acres. The weighted average of the six towns' aggregates of pasturage acreage (4,875 acres) was over twice that of the average aggregates of all Berkshire towns (2,144 acres). The same ratio also pertained to the number of neat cattle. The aggregate numbers of all beef, dairy, and working cattle (oxen, steers, and cows) of the committee towns ranged from 604 (Stockbridge) to 1,263...
(Pittsfield), compared to the general county range of 117 (Clarksburg) to 1,263 (Pittsfield). The weighted average of the six towns' aggregate numbers of cattle (1,203) was almost twice the average of all the county aggregates (609). Unfortunately, statistics on sheep were not part of the 1801 valuation.\footnote{No analysis of Thomas Allen's Hinsdale was made by Davis \textit{(Aristocrats and Jacobins} \cite{Davis1975}, 156, 404, 405).}

There are too many blanks that still need to be filled in to make possible a meaningful and accurate analysis of the individuals on the cattle show committee, but general tendencies can be suggested. The politics of only nine of the committeemen is known: eight were Democratic-Republicans (four of them, party leaders at the local or county level), and one was a Federalist. Of those five with undetermined party affiliations, two came from mixed Republican towns (Pittsfield and Richmond), as identified by Davis, one came from a mixed Federalist town (Stockbridge), and one from Hinsdale, whose politics are unknown. The Democratic-Republican elite in Berkshire County were in the forefront of new ventures, according to Davis, and used their talents and wealth in more dynamic ways than the county's older, established leaders, who tended towards Federalism. At least five of the committeemen were lawyers, and at least two were merchants. At least four of them held or had held important local or county offices. The unavailability of dissenting church membership lists prevents a determination of the religious affiliations of the committee members. Three of the Pittsfielders can be identified as Congregationalists, if their status as incorporators of the Union Parish in February 1809 earns them that label (one of the three was Elkanah Watson). Of the fourteen committeemen, seven later became officers or members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society (see Table 4.4).\footnote{\textit{Proceedings in Commemoration of the Organization in Pittsfield, February 7, 1764 of the First Church of Christ} \cite{PittsfieldFirstChurch1889}, 50. Davis identified towns as "overwhelmingly" (75-100%), "strongly" (65-74%), or "mixed" (49-64%) Democratic-Republican or Federalist towns, depending on the total number of votes cast in congressional and gubernatorial elections from 1796 to 1816 \textit{(Aristocrats and Jacobins} \cite{Davis1975}, 156, 168).}
The livestock exhibition the committee organized and held on 1 October 1810 was a true cattle show, and not merely a publicity event for merino sheep. Watson described it as "brilliant" and "eminently successful," which is supported by the number of animals present. In addition to Watson's own full-blooded English boar and eleven of his merinos, over five hundred other animals were exhibited, including 109 oxen, seven bulls, three heifers, one calf, and 382 sheep (one South Down, one Teaswater, one Amsterdam, and the rest merinos). Watson was only a minor exhibitor of merino sheep. Joseph Merrick & Samuel D. Colt displayed the most. Revolutionary War veteran and Federalist Captain Joseph Merrick owned an inn in Pittsfield village and a farm on Indian Hill, and was one of the unlucky incorporators of the Berkshire Bank in 1806. He joined the Berkshire Agricultural Society (which held many of its meetings in his hotel, as did the Freemasons and the Washington Benevolent Society) in September 1811, and was elected a trustee in May 1812. Merrick served in the mid-1810s as chair of the society's department of agriculture. His partner Samuel Dickinson Colt (b.1779) had been since 1799 the junior partner of James D. Colt, Junior, his half-brother (both were also Federalists), in the mercantile firm of J. D. & S. D. Colt. That company first purchased merino rams from David Humphreys in 1809, and Samuel later (not Watson) became Chancellor Livingston's Massachusetts agent for the sale of Clermont merinos. Samuel Colt was elected a trustee of the agricultural society when he joined in September 1811, and served as its recording secretary and treasurer, as well as chair of its agriculture department. Merrick & Colt showed 284 merinos of varying grades on 1 October 1810, and John B. Root & Richard S. Chappell exhibited another thirty-six, probably of the Clermont stock.43

Of the 355 merinos shown on 1 October whose residence is known, 353 (or ninety-nine percent) were from Pittsfield (with the other two from Richmond and Lanesborough). And, since ten percent of those were acquired by Root & Chappell

directly from Chancellor Livingston and David Humphreys, and eighty percent were purchased by Joseph Merrick & Samuel D. Colt directly from Humphreys, Watson's personal efforts in bringing merinos to Pittsfield can be seen as minimally effective. The fault was not entirely his. Although full-blooded rams fetched prices in the thousands of dollars around the turn of the century, the Berkshire supply in 1810 was still too limited, which priced merinos out of the range of ordinary farmers—around $300 for a quality ram, over a year's worth of the average Pittsfield taxpayer's disposable income. Only gentlemen farmers or merchant syndicates could easily afford them.4

The 1810 fair was called the Berkshire Cattle Show for a very good reason. Although twice as many sheep as other animals were exhibited, more than two thirds of the participating farmers had brought cattle (see Table 4.3), and undoubtedly most of the spectators were more interested in them than in the sheep. Bulls of Bakewell’s improved breed and of other breeds imported from England were shown that day, as well as one of an unnamed Dutch dairy breed. Not surprisingly, except for two bulls from neighboring New York counties, the 121 neat cattle all came from northern Berkshire, with the great majority split between the Housatonic Valley towns of Pittsfield (forty-six percent) and Lanesborough (forty-three percent). The other nine percent were driven in from Richmond, Adams, and Cheshire. But there were more than twice as many cattle owners from Lanesborough as from Pittsfield (sixteen compared to seven), as each Lanesborough exhibitor showed under seven animals (most showed one to three). Three of the Pittsfielders (Shearer, Roswell Root, and Erastus Sackett), who each showed off thirteen to eighteen head, later joined the Berkshire Agricultural Society. Proximity undoubtedly explains the fact that although farmers in Pittsfield and its northern neighbor

4"Berkshire Cattle Show," clipped from unidentified newspaper, in Common Place Book, Journal E, 62, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany. Watson paid $175 for the full-blooded ram he purchased from Livingston in June 1810, for which others had later offered him $1,000. After widespread importations in the mid-1810s, he could sell it for only $12 (Watson, Men and Times of the Revolution [2d. ed.; New York, 1856], 394). The cost of living ate up about 80 percent of a worker's monthly wages of around $100 (see Joyce Appleby, Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans [Cambridge, Mass., 2000], 63).
Table 4.3
Residence of Participants and Exhibits at the 1810 Pittsfield Cattle Show

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>No. of Sheep Shown</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>No. of Sheep Exhibitors</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>No. of Cattle Shown</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>No. of Cattle Exhibitors</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Town's Aggregate No. of Cattle*</th>
<th>% of Total of Exhibiting Towns' Aggregate Nos. of Cattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1,263</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanesborough</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1,054</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1,101</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,167</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5,308</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Less than 1%

Lanesborough owned forty-four percent of the 5,308 total cattle in the five exhibiting towns (and thirteen percent of the total of 18,265 cattle in the entire county), they showed eighty-nine percent of the cattle on the square on 1 October 1810. And the five towns that exhibited cattle represented only seventeen percent of the thirty towns in Berkshire County (and twenty percent of its population), but owned almost one-third (twenty-nine percent) of the county's total number of cattle.45

Numbers do not tell the whole story of the 1810 show, however. Because many of the owners initially "held back their animals in the vicinity, for fear of being laughed at," Watson, who had nothing to lose (he was already a laughingstock after the Potato Hen incident), was compelled "to lead the way with several prime animals." As a matter of

fact, Watson claimed he had "taken the lead in every thing," and was pleased that the display "exceeded the most sanguine hopes of its promoters." He wrote that "many had their doubts, and even a dread of being held up for the finger of scorn to point at," but not Watson. His initiative broke the ice and buried all squeamish feelings, as he later recalled. But to what point? The event might have introduced ordinary farmers to improved and imported livestock breeds, in the form of sales pitches by self-interested gentleman farmers who wished to sell the progeny of their animals or the stud services of their bulls, bucks, and boars. But it is not known how many potential learners actually showed up, as no account of the number of spectators has been found. Watson himself declared in the *Sun* that "a large collection of people participated in the day." What was "large" for Watson, however, might be considered modest by more objective observers.4 6

Watson admitted that a cattle show or fair was a "novelty" only "in this part of the world," and he knew that the idea was not original with him. He was aware of European market fairs, such as those held regularly at Frankfort, Riga, and Languedoc. Modern livestock exhibitions and sponsoring institutions had also been organized in England in the eighteenth century. The Duke of Bedford patronized the Smithfield Cattle and Sheep Society in Britain in 1798 to encourage livestock breeders by holding annual shows and awarding prizes to the best animals exhibited. Americans held similar shows after the turn of the century. The first were held at William Thornton's suggestion in Washington, D.C., in 1804 and 1805, probably influenced by Custis's nearby Arlington sheepshearings. The municipal authorities augmented these market fairs with the awarding of prize money

(contributed by private citizens and city officials) for the best animals and products. From 1809 to 1812, the newly organized Columbian Agricultural Society held six semiannual events at Georgetown, which were not sales but true shows, with substantial premiums offered for prime animals and domestic productions. Watson was familiar with an 1809 Dutchess County, New York, livestock show, and was aware of cattle shows held by the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture until 1814, and by the Pennsylvania Society for Improving the Breed of Cattle, whose president, Lawrence Sickel, sent him notice of its 1811 show before the Berkshire Society's first Pittsfield Fair in 1811.47

But the novelty of a livestock show was not enough to attract the general Berkshire public, as the 1810 organizers had learned by the close of the day. Exhibitors were unsure how to tell that the event was over, until Watson was placed at the "head of a senseless procession of farmers, marching round the square, without motive, or object." Returning to their starting point, "and to separate, with some eclat, I stepped in front, gave three cheers, in which they all united, and we then parted, well pleased with the day, and with each other."48

Watson had hit upon the basic element of the modern agricultural fair that evening as he circled Pittsfield square with a mass following (literally) at last. Eclat was to become the watchword of the new agricultural society that resulted from the efforts of that day. It makes sense that somebody like Watson, who was so concerned with his

47"Spirit of the Times" and "A Spectator," Sun [Pittsfield], 28 May 1808, 31 Oct. 1810; Wayne Caldwell Neely, The Agricultural Fair (New York, 1935), 40, 46-48; William Broom to Watson, 2 Aug. 1809, ALS, Box 14, fold. 2; James Mease to Watson, 3 June 1820, copy, Box 5, fold. 2, both in Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany; Mr. Watson's Address, Delivered to the Members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, at the Town-House in Pittsfield, September 24, 1811 (Pittsfield, Mass., 1811), 4-5. For British shows, see Kenneth Hudson, Patriotism with Profit: British Agricultural Societies in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (London, 1972), 53.

public persona and the material assertions of his gentility—the coach, the portraits, the fine woolen suits, the impressive estate house and grounds—would connect the concept to agricultural education. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the now obsolete word derived from the Old French esclater, "to burst, burst out." Its relevant contemporary definitions were: "Brilliance, radiance, dazzling effect" and "Public display, ostentation; notoriety, publicity; ... a public exposure, scandal, 'scene.' [T]o make an éclat: to 'make a noise in the world,' create a sensation."

After seeing that a simple livestock exhibition would not attract those people whom he felt most needed to benefit from acquiring improved breeds, Watson adopted features of the Clermont sheepshearing, a private publicity event organized to sell merinos and educate gentlemen about them, all for Chancellor Livingston's personal profit. The decorations, singing, dining, drinking, and toasting at Clermont all created sensations. Watson would use the same to set his own stages and make his own scenes of public display to dazzling effect, but not for his own personal profit. Others would profit: those awarded prizes for their superior exhibits, and everyone else—spectators and participants alike—who would benefit from the competition and emulation that would naturally improve agriculture, as well as from the solidarity and other positive feelings engendered by the associated public ritual of the early agricultural fairs. Or, as Watson himself wrote (over the disingenuous pseudonym of "A Spectator") in the Sun after the 1810 show (which "was exhibited with considerable éclat"): "We may look forward" to "future animal exhibitions, on a scale vastly more extended—more interesting—and organised under settled regulations which cannot fail to excite a spirit of competition blended with the laudable pride of man and self-interest—hence a grand display" and "extensive sales and purchases, exchanges of animals and other effects."49

The next ten months were spent laying the organizational framework that would make this vision a reality, as Watson and his woolen manufacturing colleagues and other

49Sun [Pittsfield], 31 Oct. 1810.

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community leaders created the administrative infrastructure for annual Pittsfield fairs. Acting upon the January 1811 petition drafted by Watson and the 1810 committee of arrangements, the state legislature incorporated Elkanah Watson, Ezekiel Bacon, John B. Root, and Thomas B. Strong of Pittsfield, Caleb Hyde of Lenox, John Chamberlain of Dalton, Samuel H. Wheeler of Lanesborough, and others who might join with them, as "The Berkshire Agricultural Society, for the promotion of Agriculture and Manufactures" on 25 February 1811.50

The only Pittsfield incorporator not described above is Federalist Thomas Barnard Strong (1780-1863; Yale College, Class of 1800), a native of New Marlborough, Massachusetts, whose father died when he was seven. He studied law in Pittsfield under his uncle, Ashbel Strong, and was admitted to the bar in 1804. A substantial inheritance from his uncle permitted Strong to "gratif[y] his taste for farming," as well as pursue public service (he represented Pittsfield in the General Court in the 1820s, and served in the state senate in the 1830s). Strong was elected recording secretary of the Berkshire Agricultural Society in August 1811, and served on its committee on domestic animals in the 1810s. Caleb Hyde was born in Lebanon, Connecticut, and moved to Lenox at an unknown date. He served as county sheriff during Shays's Rebellion, and was instrumental in suppressing the insurgency in Berkshire County. He was appointed register of deeds for the middle district of the county in 1790, was county treasurer from 1810 to 1813, and represented Lenox in the General Court. Samuel H. Wheeler was born in Lanesborough and later practiced law there. He sat as an associate justice of the county court of sessions from 1807 to 1809, and from 1804 to 1812 represented his town in the General Court, acting as an important leader of the Democratic-Republicans in that body. Nothing has

50 The petition noted the success of the October 1810 cattle show, mentioned the advantages derived from similar events in Europe and Pennsylvania, and stated "The establishment of an agricultural Society cloathed with power to regulate & perpetuate annual Fairs or Cattle Shows" would "stimulate a competition highly honourable—& in its effects generally beneficial to our Common Country" (Petition to the Legislature, Jan. 1811, Df in Watson's hand, Box 6, fold. 4, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany).
yet been uncovered on John Chamberlain, who was probably a member of the leading Chamberlin family of Dalton, Massachusetts. 51

The composition of the group of seven incorporators matched that of the 1810 committee of arrangements: they were not ordinary farmers, but members of the local and county elite. Actually, five of them had served on the previous committee, and two had exhibited livestock at the October 1810 cattle show (see Table 4.4). Again, over half of the new group were from Pittsfield (four of seven), and the rest hailed from neighboring Housatonic River Valley towns. At least three of the incorporators were lawyers, two were merchants, and one was a doctor. At least four held, or had held, local or county public offices. At least two were Yale College graduates (Bacon and Strong). The ages of those four incorporators whose years of birth are known ranged from thirty to fifty-three: these were men in the middle of their careers. Of the six whose political affiliation is known, only one was a Federalist; five were Democratic-Republicans—and four of the Republicans were party leaders. Again, evidence of the religious affiliation of only two of the seven incorporators has so far been found: Watson and Strong, who were also incorporators of the Union Congregational Church in February 1809. Conclusions about the individuals' socioeconomic status must await recourse to tax records unavailable to this current study, but it can be assumed, from what is known, that the incorporators of the Berkshire Agricultural Society were well to do and respected members of their communities.

The act of incorporation, presumably sponsored by Doctor Timothy Childs and Oren Goodrich, Pittsfield's representatives to the General Court, was granted under the state's constitutional authority "to encourage private societies and publick institutions, rewards and immunities for the promotion of agriculture." It granted the society the ability to purchase and own property, as well as legal standing in court. The charter also

enabled it to pass necessary laws and regulations, provided they were "not repugnant in any respect to the laws and constitution of this Commonwealth," and permitted it "to elect and appoint all such officers as they shall think proper," according to the society's laws, and "from time to time admit persons to become members thereof, as shall be provided for in their regulations." The act of incorporation authorized Samuel H. Wheeler to appoint a time and place in Pittsfield at which to hold the society's first meeting, over which he was to preside, and required him to publish a notice of the same in one or more county newspapers at least two weeks beforehand.52

Agreeable to law, the Berkshire Agricultural Society first met on 1 August 1811, adopted a constitution and bylaws (a draft of which, in Watson's hand, is preserved in his papers), and elected its officers. The society's bylaws demonstrate how much its administrative structure and membership requirements resembled those of the elite agricultural societies like the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (MSPA). The Berkshire society originally consisted of the same annually elected officers as the MSPA had—a president, two vice-presidents, recording and corresponding secretaries, and a treasurer, as well as three to nine trustees.53 In May 1812, the Berkshire society formalized its administration by trustees, centralizing its regular operations and external relations under a small group of leaders, similar to the Boston society. A board of fifteen trustees, elected annually by the membership and meeting quarterly, subsequently would have powers to determine when and how to hold an annual fair, and to decide on "the


53 The MSPA was governed by six annually elected officers and a board of trustees, the members of which served at their pleasure. The board met from time to time to "regulate all the concerns of the Society during the intervals of its meetings, propose such objects of improvement to the attention of the public, publish such communications, and offer premiums in such form and value as they shall think proper" (Constitution of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture. Established in 1792 [Boston, 1894]; Centennial Year of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture [Boston, 1892; reprint., Boston, 1942], 25).
object & amount of premiums." As the full membership of the society met only twice a year, once in Pittsfield on the last Tuesday in September (at the annual cattle show and fair), and once in Lenox on the first Wednesday of the spring session of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, much business was presented to the membership as a *fait accompli*. This tendency was reinforced in November 1812, when a committee of three appointed on 2 November to digest a "better Mode of conducting the Concerns of the Society" reported ten days later that business should be classified into four departments—Agriculture, Manufactures and Mechanical Arts, Domestic Animals, and General Administration. The three members of the first three departments were at first appointed, but their successors were annually elected. The fourth department was an executive committee consisting of the society's president and the chair of each of the other departments. After approval by the membership, these departments became essentially fixed as standing committees, with a fairly low turnover of members over their first decade of existence.54

The three members of the 2 November 1812 restructuring committee were Elkanah Watson, Thomas Gold, and Thomas Melvill, Junior, a newcomer to Pittsfield whose membership certificate was not presented until January 1813. Melvill (1776-1845) was the eldest son of patriot merchant Thomas Melvill, who held federal customs appointments at Boston and Charlestown after the Revolutionary War. Young Thomas attended the West Boston Academy and, like Watson, was apprenticed to a West Indies merchant, James Tisdale of Boston, who sent the eighteen year old to France, where Melvill remained for seventeen years. Unlike Watson, he married, in 1802, a French wife, the niece and ward of a prominent Parisian banker. The couple returned to Boston with their children in 1811, and Melvill apparently spent some time in Washington, D.C., seeking a federal appointment, before settling his family in Pittsfield sometime before July

1812, when a fifth child, Henry Dearborn Melvill, was born (Melvill's connections to Henry Dearborn, former secretary of war and senior major general of the army at the opening of the War of 1812, would well serve him). Melvill played a conspicuous role in the Berkshire Agricultural Society during its first decade of existence, as the chairman of its department of manufactures and mechanical arts, as corresponding secretary, and as vice-president, before serving as president from October 1814 to September 1816. He also won several of the society's premiums, including one for the best ploughing performed at the 1818 Pittsfield Fair.5

Another similarity between the Boston and Pittsfield agricultural societies was their self-selective membership requirements. The original Berkshire bylaws stated "That no person can become a member of this Society, without being proposed and recommended by a member, and depositing one Dollar with the Recording Secretary," and "no person shall be admitted a member until he is balloted for." Members could be expelled, disenfranchised, or suspended by a vote of two-thirds of the members present at a meeting. Eighteen new members were elected to the society under this rule. As did the MSPA, the Berkshire Agricultural Society also had a provision for honorary membership, but granted the same only to American gentlemen (unlike the Anglophiliac MSPA, which also honored British agriculturalists), regardless of political persuasion. Honorary members of the Berkshire society came to include David Humphreys, Robert R. Livingston, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington Parke Custis, and Christopher Gore, Caleb Strong, Harrison Gray Otis, Thomas Melvill, Senior, Aaron

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5Berkshire Agricultural Society membership diploma, 1 Jan. 1813, and premium diploma, 3 Oct. 1818, both photostats of originals displayed in Melville Room, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Mass.; photocopy of MS pages from Melvill family Bible (b MS Am 188.7 [3]), and MS, Family Record (b MS Am 188.6 [37]), both in Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The first Mrs. Melvill was Françoise ("Fanny"), Marie des Douleurs, Eulogie Lame Fleury (1781-1814), daughter of a Nantes native and favorite niece of J. Recamier of Paris. Nine months after her death in March 1814, Melvill married at Dearborn's residence in Boston the general's ward and orphaned granddaughter, Mary Ann Augusta Hobart (David Cargill to Thomas Melvill, Sr., 4 Sept. 1802, Melville Papers [MS Am 188 (10)], and Mary Melvill, "Sketch of Thomas Melvill, Jr.," 30 Nov. 1870 [b MS Am 188.7 (1)], Houghton Library, Harvard University).
Dexter, John Lowell, Richard Sullivan, and Josiah Quincy of Boston.  

The Berkshire Agricultural Society adopted its constitution and bylaws at its first meeting, on 1 August 1811, and balloted on and admitted eight new members: William Walker of Lenox, and Doctor Timothy Childs, Joseph Shearer, Jonathan Allen, Hosea Merrill, Henry H. Childs, Richard S. Chappell, and David Campbell, all of Pittsfield. It also elected its first officers: Elkanah Watson, president; William Walker and Samuel H. Wheeler, vice-presidents; Caleb Hyde, corresponding secretary; Thomas B. Strong, recording secretary; John B. Root, treasurer; and Joseph Shearer, Ezekiel Bacon, and Jonathan Allen, trustees (neither nominators nor vote totals were recorded). There was much continuity of effort represented by these gentlemen, as seen in Table 4.4. Although Watson never mentioned anyone by name in his published histories of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Ezekiel Bacon, John B. Root, Joseph Shearer, and Thomas B. Strong, had been involved for two years in founding the society. The very next meeting of the society, on 7 September 1811, was adjourned a week because of the lack of a quorum (not an auspicious beginning). At the following meeting, on 14 September, ten new members were elected: Josiah Bissell, Roswell Root, Arthur Scholfield, Samuel D. Colt, Joseph Merrick, Thomas Gold, Lemuel Pomeroy, James Brown, John Dickinson, and Oliver Partridge Dickinson, all of Pittsfield. It was also voted to add six more trustees to the board, and Thomas Gold, Samuel D. Colt, Roswell Root, David Campbell, Arthur Scholfield, and James Brown were chosen to fill the new openings.

Biographical information has been uncovered about the eighteen new members and their contributions to the society.

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56MS Records of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Vol. 1, 6, 11-12, 16, 18, 22, 28, 33a, 56b, 63, Berkshire Historical Society, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Articles Two and Nine of the constitution of the MSPA, dealing with admission of new members (all of whom would be elected by a simple majority of ballots at an annual meeting), demonstrate how much of a closed corporate community the Boston society was. "The candidate for election shall be proposed by a member of the Society, and, on being balloted for, if the number of votes in favor of such candidate shall amount to a majority of the members present, such person shall be considered as duly elected" (Constitution of the MSPA [Boston, 1894]).

Table 4.4
Continuity of Leadership of Berkshire Agricultural Organization, 1810-1811

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Member, 1810 Committee of Arrangements, 28 Sept. 1810</th>
<th>Exhibitor, Cattle Show, 1 Oct. 1810</th>
<th>Incorporator, Berkshire Agricultural Society, 25 Feb. 1811</th>
<th>Elected Member, Berkshire Agricultural Society, 1 Aug. 1811</th>
<th>Elected Officer, Berkshire Agricultural Society, 1 Aug. 1811</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Allen (Hinsdale)</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezekiel Bacon</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Belden</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Brown</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Chamberlain</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard S. Chappell</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levi Crittenden</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathaniel Fairfield, Jr.</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb Hyde</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silas Peepoon</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John B. Root</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Root</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Roswell Root</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Shearer</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas B. Strong</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elkanah Watson</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Samuel H. Wheeler</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

officers of the agricultural society, but not systematically enough to render anything more than an impressionistic analysis of group characteristics. Most regretfully absent is an analysis of individuals' economic backgrounds, as pertinent tax records have yet to be examined. Of those members admitted on 1 August 1811, William Walker (1751-1831) was probably the most influential. Born in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, near Providence, Rhode Island, he came to Lenox around 1770, opened a store, and later erected an iron forge. During the American Revolution, he was a Constitutionalist, and was elected to several county conventions. He represented Lenox in the General Court for five terms after the war and was elected to the state senate in 1783. Walker served as the Berkshire
register of probate from 1781 to 1785, and was a judge of probate from 1795 to 1828. In 1807 he was appointed to the county court of common pleas. Walker was an incorporator of other Berkshire institutions, including the Berkshire and Columbia Missionary Society in 1816. He was a leader of Berkshire's Democratic-Republicans, serving on the party's county committee and chairing county nominating conventions. Doctor Timothy Childs (1748-1821) also became an influential Democratic-Republican leader after his defection from Federalism in 1796. Originally from Deerfield, he dropped out of Harvard College in 1767 because of poverty, and came to Pittsfield in 1771, after studying medicine in his home town under Thomas Williams. He served as a surgeon during the Revolutionary War, and afterwards opened a medicine shop in the village. He had become the wealthiest physician in town by 1802, when his taxable estate was valued at $2,673. It consisted of one hundred acres of land, four buildings, one-quarter ownership of a mill, and four hundred dollars on hand. Childs served seven terms as Pittsfield's representative to the General Court and was a state senator from 1805 to 1810. He was an incorporator of the Third Massachusetts Turnpike Company in 1797, and of the Agricultural Bank in 1818. His son, Doctor Henry H. Childs (b.1783; Williams College, Class of 1802), was also a Democratic-Republican, later served in the General Court and as Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, and was an incorporator and director of the Agricultural Bank, and of the Berkshire Medical College in 1822. In 1811, his real property was valued at four hundred and fifty dollars, and his personal property at $1,353, which included six hundred dollars on hand and six hundred dollars at interest. Captain Hosea Merrill (b.1761) was also an "ardent" Democratic-Republican. He arrived in Pittsfield from Hebron, Connecticut, in 1773, and served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. He was an "intelligent farmer" who also built up an extensive lumber and construction business. By 1816 Merrill owned 239 acres, a saw mill, and seven other buildings, worth a total of $5,800. Federalist David Campbell, the grandson of a Scottish emigrant, came to Pittsfield from Oxford, Massachusetts, around 1790 and opened a coffeehouse and tavern.
He became a partner of merchant James Buel in 1812, but his chief source of income seems to have been urban land speculation. Local tradition states that there was "not a desirable piece of real-estate in Pittsfield that he did not at some time own." He, or his son David (who in 1814 incorporated the second Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton Factory), exhibited two three-quarter-blooded merino rams with Joseph Goodwin at the 1810 cattle show. Campbell was retained on the agricultural society's new board of trustees established in May 1812, and afterwards served as head of the domestic animals department. 58

Federalist Lemuel Pomeroy (1778-1849) was the most significant new member admitted on 14 September 1811. The descendant of blacksmiths, he moved to Pittsfield from the Connecticut Valley town of Southampton, Massachusetts, in 1799 and established his own smithy, where he manufactured iron implements, including the two hundred plows he had on hand in 1804 (which may help explain his interest in joining an agricultural society). Pomeroy's shop burned in 1805, and he rebuilt it the following year exclusively as a manufactory of muskets. Three years later, he purchased and expanded the mill of a local gunsmith who made fowling pieces, and he was soon manufacturing two thousand stands of arms a year under contract for various state governments. A Congregationalist, he was one of the incorporators of Union Parish in 1809. He was involved in woolen manufacturing in the eighteen-teens until his death. Federalist merchant Josiah Bissell owned a store with his son at the center of Pittsfield near the burial ground. He was a member of the Washington Benevolent Society and served on its various committees. He was a deacon of Pittsfield's original Congregational parish. Democratic-Republican James Brown established a tannery in Pittsfield in 1798 and admitted his brother Simeon as a partner of a second one in 1800. Simeon, who shared

his brother's politics, joined the Berkshire Agricultural Society on 23 September 1811, and served in its agriculture department in 1817. James owned seven hundred dollars of merchantable stock in 1816, and his joint estate with his brother was worth $1,558 that year. Captain John Dickinson, a leader of the local Democratic-Republicans, owned a farm a mile from the inn he kept at the village center from 1798 to 1800. Nothing is yet known about Oliver P. Dickinson, except that he was a Democratic-Republican.59

Obviously, then, the founding of the Berkshire Agricultural Society was no grassroots movement of Pittsfield's farmers. The character of the new society resembled the earliest, elite American agricultural societies, except it was organized on a county level. Its founders were Pittsfield's socioeconomic elite (with a few gentlemen from neighboring towns—see Table 4.5) of both political parties (although predominantly Democratic-Republican), who had leisure time and cash to spare, had already associated together in business and public service or were related to each other by blood or marriage, and primarily earned a living from a profession, skill, or trade other than farming.

The evidence in Table 4.6 supports Elkanah Watson's claims that the Berkshire Agricultural Society was a neutral organization in which political opponents could cooperate. Democratic-Republican Jonathan Allen, son of the famous parson, was a member, as was Federalist John W. Hulbert, with whom Allen earlier had fought a duel over insults to his father. The partisan cooperation of the Berkshire Agricultural Society was hardly unique, as shown by historian Thomas Davis. It was the ideal of most voluntary associations and cultural institutions in Berkshire County, and, in reality, a large minority (forty-four percent) of the county's business and nonprofit corporations founded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had members of both parties (also, sixty-four percent drew their incorporators from more than one town). The Berkshire Agricultural Society's sixty-eight percent Democratic-Republican majority was close to the

party's sixty-two percent majority in Pittsfield's congressional elections from 1796 to 1816. The predominantly Republican membership also supports Davis's contention that members of that party were dynamic go-getters after any opportunity to better their fortunes. Although nonpartisan in membership and leadership (Federalists were not frozen out of the society's offices: over half of the Federalist members were trustees or other officers), the agricultural society pursued a Democratic-Republican agenda, with its emphasis on promoting merino sheep raising and supporting the establishment of woolen manufactories, to the detriment of British manufactures and American merchants, something only moderate Federalists could support. Perhaps this is why local Federalist leaders such as Woodbridge Little remained aloof (although John Chandler Williams and John W. Hultbert later joined when membership became open). On the other hand, ten of the Democratic-Republican members of the society can be identified as local or county party leaders.60

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 show the occupational breakdown of the incorporators and first officers and members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society. Of the twenty-two founders whose occupations are known, only two (nine percent), primarily earned a living by farming. As a matter of fact, the founders of the Berkshire society looked much like those

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of the MSPA, which Tamara Plakins Thornton divided as "roughly one-third were merchants; another third, lawyer-statesmen; and the rest a mix of physicians and ministers." Twenty-seven percent of the Berkshire society were merchants, but these men differed in orientation from the Federalist merchants of Boston, who generally had not yet begun to redirect their profits from the Atlantic trade into manufacturing investments. At least five of the six Berkshire merchants had a stake in woolen manufacturing. An even two-thirds (fourteen of twenty-one) of the entire Pittsfield group had invested time and money in such manufacturing ventures or in the sheep industry. Such figures explain why the full name of the Berkshire society was the Berkshire Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Manufactures. If lawyers and doctors are counted together as professionals, the second category totals thirty-two percent. Innkeepers and tavern keepers and independent artisans (thirty-two percent) replaced ministers as the remaining group. None of the clergy of the established church in Berkshire, which was thoroughly

| Primary Occupation of the Founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, 1811 |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                | Number | % of Known Occupations |
| Merchant                        | 6      | 27              |
| Lawyer                          | 4      | 18              |
| Physician                       | 3      | 14              |
| Innkeeper                       | 3      | 14              |
| Artisan                         | 4      | 18              |
| Farmer                          | 2      | 9               |
| Unknown                         | 2      | ---             |
| Total                           | 24     | 100             |
Federalist after Parson Allen’s passing, joined the agricultural society, and even the evangelical ministers hesitated countenancing the first Pittsfield fairs.61

But, like the agricultural society based in Boston, the Berkshire society was founded by community leaders. At least half of the Berkshire group held or had held public offices: seven at the local level, three at the county level, and one each in the state and federal governments. Birth years of only fourteen of the group of twenty-four are known, not a statistically significant total from which to draw valid conclusions, but from which general impressions may be had. Known ages ranged from twenty-eight to sixty-three years old, with an average of forty-four. Age was not a determinant of leadership, as four of the offices or trustees were younger than thirty-five, and the oldest member of the group, sixty-three-year-old Doctor Timothy Childs, held no office. Only one of the Federalist members of the group was older than thirty-three (Arthur Scholfield’s age of fifty-four brought their average age up to thirty-eight). The average age of the Democratic-Republicans was forty-seven. Further research to determine the birth years of the remaining ten founders of the society, as well as an age analysis of the general Pittsfield population, are still required in order to put the middle-agedness of the society’s first leaders and members in proper perspective. More work is also required to identify the religious background of the founders in order to fit the agricultural society’s creation into Pittsfield’s political-ecclesiastical divisions. Currently, only eleven of the Pittsfield founders can be provisionally associated with a particular church, all Congregationalists: five with the First Parish, and six with the Union Parish. It cannot be stated that there were no dissenting members of the agricultural society, only that membership lists have not yet been uncovered for the Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, and Shaker churches.

At the fourth general meeting of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, on 23 September 1811, the members present voted, upon whose initiative and by what majority are unknown, to change the admission bylaw. The new rule authorized the recording

61Thomton, Cultivating Gentlemen (New Haven, Conn., 1989), 58.
Table 4.8
A Profile of the Founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Summer 1811

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Agricultural Society Status</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Public Office-holding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Allen</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezekiel Bacon</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Incorporator</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Federal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josiah Bissell</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Federalist</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Brown</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Tanner</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Campbell</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>Federalist</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Inkeeper</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Chappell</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry H. Childs</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy Childs</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel D. Colt</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>Federalist</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Dickinson</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Inkeeper</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver P. Dickinson</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Gold</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caleb Hyde</td>
<td>Lenox</td>
<td>Incorporator</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Merrick</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Federalist</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Innkeeper</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosea Merrill</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemuel Pomeroy</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Federalist</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Gunsmith</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John B. Root</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Incorporator</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roswell Root</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Schollfield</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>Federalist</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Clothier</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Shearer</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas B. Strong</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Incorporator</td>
<td>Federalist</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Walker</td>
<td>Lenox</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>County/State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elkanah Watson</td>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>Incorporator</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel H. Wheeler</td>
<td>Lanesboro</td>
<td>Incorporator</td>
<td>Dem-Rep</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>County</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
secretary and treasurer to receive members between semiannual meetings, apparently dispensing with election of new members by the membership. This liberalization opened the association to any county resident who paid the one-dollar annual membership dues. Membership mushroomed with the addition of fifty-four new members admitted on 23 September, the evening before the society's first fair. The following spring the society authorized the trustees "to admit Members at any time under such regulations as they shall prescribe," and the membership doubled over the next year and a half.62

Not much is yet known about this group of individuals, which Watson described in 1812 simply as "farmers."63 Undoubtedly, the great majority of them did work the land to feed and clothe their families and to produce marketable surpluses. A complete collective biography of the rank and file of the Berkshire Agricultural Society is required, but the inaccessibility of local and county church, town, and tax records and census data precluded such a task for this current study. What is known is the residence of ninety percent of the new members, but research in biographical, genealogical, and other secondary sources has provided little further information on individuals. As summarized in Table 4.9, below, the general membership of the society was much more geographically diverse than its leadership and founding membership, representing thirteen (instead of three) towns, all further from Pittsfield, but still concentrated in central and northern Berkshire County. As could be expected, though, many (twenty-one) of the fifty-four new members came from Pittsfield; almost four times as many as from its southern and northern neighbors Lenox (six) and Cheshire (five), which had the second and third most members. Other towns represented by members but not leaders included Stockbridge, Williamstown, Dalton, Adams, Hancock, Becket, Richmond, Windsor, and Tyringham.

62 MS Records of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Vol. 1, 6, 11-12, 16, 18, 22, Berkshire Historical Society, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Annual membership dues for the MSPA were originally one dollar and were soon raised to two, with a provision for a five-dollar lifetime dues category.

63 Watson to John Adams, 19 July 1812, ALS, Adams Papers (reel 414), Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
Table 4.9 shows that six of the new members' towns were Democratic-Republican (three overwhelmingly so), and four were Federalist (one overwhelmingly). Of the personal politics of the eleven new members whose partisan affiliation has been identified, eight were Democratic-Republicans (seventy-three percent), and three were Federalists (twenty-seven percent), which is close to the breakdown of the founders' politics (sixty-eight to thirty-two percent Democratic-Republican majority).

The new towns represented by new members in the agricultural society also ranged further in wealth holding and agriculture than those towns represented by the founders (see Table 4.9). Excluding Pittsfield, Lanesborough, and Lenox, new members' towns had an average real wealth of individual taxpayers in 1801 ranging from $691 (Windsdor) to $1,619 (Williamstown), compared to the range ($1,176-1,630) of the founders' towns. Four of the new members' towns had per capita wealth holding less than that of the average of all Berkshire towns ($906), whereas none of the founders' towns came in under the county average. The weighted average of the ten new towns ($1,138) was almost two-hundred dollars less than that of the founders' towns ($1,331).

The aggregates of agricultural acreage and number of cattle in new members' towns were also less than the founders' towns. The aggregate acres under tillage of the towns represented by the members ranged from 303 (Becket) to 1,548 (Williamstown), compared to the aggregates of founders' towns, from 941 (Lenox) to 2,937 (Pittsfield). Berkshire towns in general ranged from 71 acres (Clarksburg) to 2,937 acres (Pittsfield). The weighted average of the new members' towns' aggregates (947 acres) was less than half that of the founders' towns (2,175 acres), and more in line with the average of all Berkshire towns' tillage aggregates (944 acres). The aggregates of the new towns' pasturage acres and numbers of cattle demonstrate that the agricultural economies of the towns represented by the new members were generally more dependent on livestock raising than the county at large, but were not as intensely involved in the cattle industry as the towns represented by the society's founders. The range of the aggregate pasturage
acreages of the new members' towns was from 1,067 (Becket) to 4,020 (Richmond); that of the founders' towns ranged from 2,221 (Lenox) to 5,766 (Pittsfield). The pasturage aggregates of all Berkshire towns ranged from 86 (Clarksburg) to 5,766 acres. The weighted average of the new members' towns was 3,048; that of the founders' towns, 5,389; and that of all Berkshire towns, 2,144 acres. The same ratio also pertained to the number of neat cattle. The aggregate numbers of all beef, dairy, and working cattle of the new members' towns ranged from 477 (Hancock) to 1,167 (Cheshire), compared to the general county range of 117 (Clarksburg) to 1,263 (Pittsfield). The weighted average of the new members' towns' aggregate numbers of cattle (883) was three-quarters that of the founders' towns (1,207), but one-third greater than the average of all the county aggregates (609). Perhaps new members hoped that belonging to the new agricultural society would increase their farm productivity, especially in the livestock department.64

What is known for certain is that these new members were unable or unwilling to financially support the infant Berkshire Agricultural Society. Most failed to honor their commitment of one dollar a year, and the increase in annual dues to two dollars in November 1812 did not help the society's finances. It only created more delinquents, instead of raising enough cash to support a continually increasing premium program. In October 1814 it was voted that members who did not pay their dues by 1 January 1815 would be expelled, but it is unknown if that measure was ever instituted. If it was, it did not have the desired effect, and the society teetered on the brink of bankruptcy until it received state grants in the late 1810s.65

The chief difference between the Berkshire Agricultural Society and the


65 MS Records of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Vol. 1, 31, Berkshire Historical Society, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The $70 in premiums at the 1811 fair grew to $265 the following year and to over $400 in 1813. For the rest of the 1810s, the society awarded an annual total of over $600 in premiums. Membership doubled from 78 in 1811 to 175 in 1813, which, however, did little to alleviate the annual shortfalls.
Table 4.9
Residence of New Members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, 23 September 1811

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of New Members</th>
<th>% of Members with Known Residences</th>
<th>Town's Politics*</th>
<th>Town's Avg. Real Wealth, Individuals ($)**</th>
<th>Town's Aggregate Acres, Tillage***</th>
<th>Town's Aggregate Acres, Pasture***</th>
<th>Town's Aggregate No., Cattle***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsfield</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Mixed Republican (62%)</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>2,937</td>
<td>5,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenox</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Overwhelmingly Republican (85%)</td>
<td>1,176</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>2,221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Overwhelmingly Republican (98%)</td>
<td>1,225</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>3,964</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stockbridge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mixed Federalist (33%)</td>
<td>1,201</td>
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<td>1,548</td>
<td>3,685</td>
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<td>1,067</td>
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<td>4,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mixed Republican (64%)</td>
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<td>351</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tyringham</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Mixed Republican (53%)</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>1,552</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100</td>
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*From Thomas Lawrence Davis, Aristocrats and Jacobins in Country Towns: Party Formation in Berkshire County, Massachusetts (1775-1816) (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1975), 168.
**From Massachusetts Direct Tax, 1798, cited ibid., 404.
***From Massachusetts 1801 Valuation List, cited ibid., 405.

well-financed elite agricultural associations was the section in the former's constitution mandating a specific measure: there "shall be in the Town of Pittsfield on the last Tuesday
of September annually an Exhibition or Show of Neat Cattle, Sheep, Hogs, all kinds of seeds, Books, samples of compost, manufactures, Patent Rights, improvements in agriculture, machinery, and useful inventions of all kinds. To be under such rules and regulations, as the members of this Society shall from time to time order and direct." In addition, the corporation would award such premiums to society members as it thought necessary. The president and trustees would publish beforehand in the newspapers an annual list of premiums and notice of the fair; they would make all necessary arrangements and rules and regulations for it; and they would also superintend the event. The president and trustees were also empowered to appoint marshals to keep order and silence in the meetings, and to regulate and maintain order among fairgoers.66

The society resolved at its first meeting on 1 August 1811 to hold a two-day fair in Pittsfield at the end of the following month. At a trustees' meeting on 16 September, four committees were formed, and marshals appointed. Roswell Root, Samuel D. Colt, Joseph Shearer, David Campbell, and Thomas Gold would superintend erection of pens for animals to be exhibited. Elkanah Watson, Jonathan Allen, and John B. Root would make suitable arrangements for a procession. Ezekiel Bacon was the sole member of a committee to arrange for music, and Arthur Scholfield and James Brown were appointed a subscription committee to raise money for premiums and other expenses. Notices of the fair to be held on 24 and 25 September, and the announcement of fifty dollars to be awarded as eight premiums, were published in the newspaper.67

The first fair of the Berkshire Agricultural Society on 24 and 25 September 1811 was a huge success, even though heavy rains on the second day washed out the livestock auction. The Pittsfield Sun reported that "the concourse of citizens" in the village center on the twenty-fourth "was more numerous than has probably ever convened in Pittsfield."

67Ibid., 14-18; Sun [Pittsfield], 10 Aug., 22 Sept. 1811.
Watson estimated a total of three or four thousand attendees, at a time when the town's population numbered about 2,665. Obviously, the event was more than a local Pittsfield happening. Although the majority of fairgoers were undoubtedly Berkshire County farm folk, visitors from Boston and Albany also attended (Watson was disappointed by Chancellor Livingston's absence, however), and the fair was reported "in half the papers of America," according to Watson, including the *Albany Gazette*, *Boston Centinel* and *Boston Patriot*.

Although Watson was successful as a publicist, he was a failure as a fund raiser, and even proved unable to inspire the membership to pay its dues. Only donations by the society's officers kept the fairs going, but they could not long continue their generosity. Watson journeyed to Boston in the winter of 1811-1812 to solicit donations and lobby the legislature for financial aid. He received "flattering encouragement" from all, and "a liberal proportion" of "private donations," "furnished by gentlemen in Boston," but departed the capital "much chagrined and disgusted," as he accomplished nothing to permanently resolve the society's financial difficulties. If further funds were not forthcoming, the society proposed in 1813 to discontinue the annual show (despite its constitutional commitment) and instead hold a fair for the exchange of livestock and manufactures. In August 1815 Watson was still forced to state that "the burthen has

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69 Watson to Livingston, 20 Oct. 1811, ALS (copy), Box 6, fold. 3, Elkanah Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany; quotation from Watson's Common Place Book, Journal E, 63n., in same collection; see also 65-66. Although Rev. William Bentley of Salem, Mass., did not attend the fair, he stated in his diary on 4 Oct., probably informed by the Boston newspapers, that "The Berkshire show which was a new thing in New England, was also very honourable to our farmers & the procession which was formed was much noticed for the display of our improvements" (*The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of the East Church, Salem, Massachusetts*. Vol. 4: January, 1811-December, 1819 . . . [Salem, Mass., 1914], 53).
principally rested on the shoulders of a few individuals, the rest is dealt out by the cold and trembling hand of charity."\textsuperscript{70}

The Berkshire Agricultural Society depended almost totally on donations during its first seven years in existence. The fact that those most interested in its success, its members, were themselves unwilling to contribute to its existence must have been a drag to fund raising. Other reasons for limited metropolitan donations were reported to Watson. A Boston merchant wrote that "The times are hard and money hard to get. The object for which it is to be appropriated" is distant from Boston, "and the benefits to be derived, appear conspicuous only to those who have bestowed considerable reflection on the subject, and those who are interested in it." The society, therefore, was lucky to have Thomas Melvill, Junior, who collected $493 in Boston and New York City, and, in 1814, presented a five-year plan based on a county-wide subscription, which helped ease the society's desperate financial straits in 1815.\textsuperscript{71}

Despite their own doubts, the founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society created an institution of popular culture that would long outlive them, and would move far beyond their original conception. No evidence exists, besides his own writings, that Watson was the originator of the innovations that coalesced into the agricultural fair. The society as he conceived of it was the MSPA in sheep's clothing—an elite association of self-selected members focused on promoting merino sheep and woolen manufacturing through literary and popular means, and supported chiefly by the largesse of gentlemen of


broad vision and deep pockets. Watson was a self-styled gentleman himself, operating under an elitist notion of improvement, one guided by social leaders whose economic interests were central to the mission of the new society. He eventually bowed to necessity, however, and the society widened its appeal. It is unknown who first suggested the need for éclat at the 1810 cattle show. The march around the square probably did not result from an individual's decision but a crowd action. Watson was perspicacious enough to seize upon the notion that people needed to be attracted before they could be educated. He never acted alone, however, and his colleagues deserve far more credit than he ever allowed them in his self-serving publications. Unfortunately, none of them have left their own personal accounts of the founding of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, and the institution's extant archives fail to provide detailed information on such matters.

How and why did the first modern agricultural fairs so quickly become an accepted and anticipated annual event in the rural northeast? Like the Berkshire Agricultural Society, the Pittsfield fairs were a product of a particular place and time. Pittsfield before the War of 1812 was a center of Democratic-Republicanism that was blessed with natural and human resources. Its leaders were inspired by economic forces and political ideals to establish textile manufactories and to invest in merino sheep raising. Similarly, the character of the first Pittsfield fairs can be understood only by examining it within the historical and popular cultural contexts of the early American Republic.
Chapter Five

"Excitements Are Necessary":
The Social and Cultural Contexts of the First Pittsfield Fairs, 1811-1820

Tuesday, 24 September 1811, was a bright and crisp day, perfect for the first agricultural fair ever organized by the Berkshire Agricultural Society. Livestock competing for premiums soon filled the pens erected on the village square. All morning crowds ambled around them and spilled into the neighboring streets, as people visited with friends, while a committee of judges went about their duties examining the animals. The marshals of the day—Berkshire County sheriff Simon Larned, and deputy sheriffs Theodore Hinsdale, Oramel Fanning, Jeremy Warriner, and Elisha Ely—conspicuously patrolled for signs of disorder. At noon, they led the formation of an "agricultural parade" that marched to the town house, where the society's president gave an "agricultural address" and emceed the premium awards ceremony.¹

The first Pittsfield Fair of 1811 was different from the previous year's cattle show and, for that matter, from earlier American market fairs and agricultural exhibitions. Market fairs had nothing to do with agricultural education, but were primarily regular commercial events, at which people engaged in buying and selling and enjoyed various informal recreations, such as drinking, wrestling, and gambling. The 1810 cattle show was primarily an educational event, but lacked festivity. Such exhibitions, including those held in Pennsylvania and Dutchess County, New York, and even the sheepshearings of George Washington Parke Custis and Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, as well as Watson's 1808

¹MS Records of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Vol. 1, 13, 17, 18, Berkshire Historical Society, Pittsfield, Mass.; J. E. A. Smith, The History of Pittsfield, (Berkshire County,) Massachusetts, from the Year 1800 to the Year 1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 336-37.
merino display under The Old Elm, merely solicited passive participation. Farmers, gentlemen interested in merino sheep, and the general public were supposed to learn about prime animals just by observing improved breeds of livestock. Such animal exhibits were only one component of the 1811 fair.

More essential to the day's program was the awarding of premiums, which created a more active class of participants and provided fodder for spectators. The elite agricultural societies had earlier offered premiums, or prizes targeted at particular objectives. Premiums had also been awarded at earlier exhibitions, such as those in Georgetown first sponsored by the Columbian Agricultural Society in 1809. But, even premiums alone did not make the agricultural fair. This chapter considers the entertaining, as well as the educational, features of the first Pittsfield fairs.

Firmly grounded in the ideals and values of capitalist entrepreneurs interested in moral and recreational, as well as agricultural, reform, the Berkshire Agricultural Society's fairs were intended to serve as a vehicle for innocent recreation and rational amusements, as well as for popular participation in agricultural improvement. The Pittsfield Fair of 1811, and the four succeeding fairs that Elkanah Watson helped organize before moving back to Albany in February 1816, were founded upon the concept of éclat, which he had discovered at the close of the 1810 cattle show. He understood the value of entertainment and spectacle. The primary purpose of the fairs' organized social and recreational activities, which were common to new nationalist celebrations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was to attract people to the educational features of the fairs, but the secular ritual also had a psychological purpose. As Watson discovered at the close of the 1810 cattle show, "Excitements are . . . necessary to lead the people to a knowledge of their true interests,—giving respectability to the honourable profession of a farmer." Since the new institution of the agricultural fair was firmly situated in a particularly significant moment in the history of American festive culture, the "excitements" of which he spoke were also prominent entertainments at post-Revolutionary nationalist
celebrations, which were in the process of becoming highly politicized events.\(^2\)

Watson divided the popular features of the first Berkshire County fairs into three categories. The first he called "measures of solidity," by which he meant activities of substance that would dignify and add gravitas to the occasion. These consisted of a formal address and a public procession. To his second category, "Music, singing, and dancing," which held an especial appeal for women and the younger generation, was soon added dining and the drinking of toasts, exclusively male events. Watson's third category consisted of "religious exercises"—public prayers of thanksgiving and the singing of hymns. Each of these rituals and entertainments had been part of New England festive culture for almost two centuries, but took on greater significance as public celebrations became formalized and politicized in the 1790s. We can better understand the true nature of the new Berkshire institution by contrasting the first Pittsfield fairs with early New England festivity and comparing them to contemporary nationalist celebrations.\(^3\)

Not all of the elements of entertainment were present at the first Pittsfield Fair in 1811, but all except one were in place by the time Watson resigned as president of the Berkshire Agricultural Society and returned to Albany in 1816. He considered each one integral to the "Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire System." The 1811 fair began with his presidential address. Next, there was a procession of the agricultural society, followed by a parade of floats and other symbols representing the unity of Pittsfield's agricultural, manufacturing, and artisan interests. Fair Day in 1811 ended with the presentation of premiums, but, the following year, these ceremonies in the church also included religious exercises, consisting of a prayer of thanksgiving and choral music. The


\(^3\)Watson wrote, "To animate, . . . some eclat was necessary—music, dancing, and singing, intermixt with religious exercises, and measures of solidity, so as to meet the feelings of every class of the community, and keeping a fixt eye on the main object, all tend to the same great end, promoting agriculture, and domestic manufactures" (ibid., 160).
Pittsfield fair of 1812 was a two-day event, and the second day ended with an "agricultural dinner" for society members and guests. In 1813, the fair closed with an "agricultural ball," to win the support of the younger generation, as well as of women.

Festive dancing, dining, and drinking, of course, are basic to celebrations in any culture. Secular sociable refreshment had always been an important part of colonial New England folklife and public occasions, despite the Puritans' legendary reputation for sobriety. Communal work events continued to require fancy footwork, food, and drink well after the American Revolution. Even after the War of 1812, Berkshire County saw the most "genial, merry times socially," with frequent "Social gatherings [such as] private dancing parties, tea parties, hunting frolics, corn huskings, ministers' 'bees,'" and "evening suppers" rotating at the houses of friends. "Every event, from a Church Council to a military training was made the occasion of hospitality." 4

Across Massachusetts, cooperative tasks such as wood-cuttings or harvestings for the minister or a sick neighbor usually ended with merriment and frolics, such as the dance party that followed moving a schoolhouse in Hingham, Massachusetts, in 1795. Rum was a large item in the construction costs of Pittsfield's Bulfinch church in the early seventeen-nineties. Voluntary private affairs, such as the raising of houses and barns, stumping bees, apple bees, drawing bees (in which ox teams moved buildings), and log rollings, were an important part of the local exchange economy, and these rural workfests typically "were seasons of mirth and gaiety" that concluded with refreshments provided by the host and hostess and the wives of the laboring participants. There was a generational aspect to corn-huskings, at which a farmer would feast the young men of the neighborhood in return for their performing the minor task of husking his corn, which was accomplished with due ceremony and hilarity, as witnessed by Doctor Nathaniel Ames of Dedham. He described

4See "Daniel Vickers, "Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America, William and Mary Quarterly (hereafter WMQ), 3d. ser., 47 (1990), 24, 27-28; [J.E.A. Smith], History of Berkshire County, Massachusetts (2 vols.; New York, 1885), 2:503; Smith, The History of Pittsfield, (Berkshire County,) Massachusetts, from the Year 1734 to the Year 1800 (Boston, 1869), 441.
a husking to which "all the neighboring Swains" were invited, which began with "a Rhum bottle," and ended with a "hearty Meal about 10 at night." As alcohol was involved, sometimes things got out of hand, such as at a Lanesborough tavern after a house-raising in November 1765, when boys set a bonfire and burned "several persons in effigy," and also singed the person of the deputy sheriff who had arrived to arrest a local debtor. Such occurrences explain not only why Massachusetts authorities sought strictly to regulate taverns throughout the eighteenth century, but also why the founders of the Berkshire County fairs were out to reform folk festivities.5

Even on more formal occasions, such as days of thanksgiving, weddings, funerals, and ordinations, and other religious commemorations, civic celebrations, and quarterly militia training, the drinking got out of hand, even by social leaders. Watson's great uncle, General John Winslow, became so intoxicated at a dinner in Boston celebrating the 1762 British victory at Havana that he broke a great number of bowls, glasses, and tableware when he jumped up to dance on the festive board. When Pittsfield learned of the final peace of 1783, the Reverend Thomas Allen preached a Thanksgiving discourse, the militia paraded and fired volleys of musketry, and a "great feast," known ever afterwards as "the Peace Party," was held in Colonel James Easton's unfinished mansion. "Platoons of geese and turkeys" and half a roasted ox were served to the "Young and old [who] flocked from every direction." Wine and cider "flowed in sparkling abundance," and "Punch stood in huge tubs." According to one reveler, even women left for home that night intoxicated.6


6Bruce C. Daniels, Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England (New York, 1995) 83, 86, 91, 94-95, 96, 98, 117 (for Gen. Winslow's dinner dance, see 104, 243 n.27); Shaw, American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 199; Stilgoe,
Pittsfield's first "agricultural dinner," held at the close of the first day of the 1812 Berkshire County Fair, was for members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society who wished to pay the required fee to join the officers and invited guests at trustee Joseph Merrick's tavern. Although the venue continually changed, the annual dinner became a longstanding fair tradition. At the 1813 fair, it was held at David Campbell's Coffeehouse after the awards ceremony, and premium winners were invited to join the company. Dinners were held on each day of the 1816 fair, at Cobin's coffeehouse and tavern and Strong's Hotel. Like the sheepshearing dinner at Clermont attended by Watson in 1810, the event derived from Anglo-American gentleman club culture, as described by David Shields, and shows again how much the Berkshire society had in common with its elite predecessors. Such sociability was important to the leaders of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (MSPA), as evidenced by John Adams's 1813 letter declining reelection as that society's president, in which he expressed gratitude "for the pleasure I have had in" the trustees' "conversation in many of the most social and happy days of my life."7

The drinking of toasts had been an essential part of the Anglo-American ritual of public dining for about a century and a half, and the publication of the toasts of private societies had served as a register of opinion since the early seventeen-hundreds. Toasting supposedly brought refinement to public drinking. It provided an opportunity for each individual to demonstrate his (it was a strictly male occasion) voluntary assent before the

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group. When a toast was announced, each pledge stood and raised and drained his glass to demonstrate his reliability and commitment to the principles expressed. The ritual pledges fell into three general categories: of fidelity to the sponsoring group and its concerns; of loyalty to the polity to which the group belonged; and of adherence to abstract ideals and perceptions. New Englanders had toasted the king on his birthday from the late seventeenth century to the 1760s, and the forms remained after the American Revolution, when toasts to the American Nation or People replaced those to the king's health. Thirteen prepared toasts were usually offered before any number of volunteer toasts were made. The newspaper publication of the sentiments broadcast their influence well beyond the assembly in which they were presented. Newspaper toasts proliferated during the early party battles of the 1790s. Before the Berkshire society's agricultural dinner of 1812, a committee of three had been appointed to "fix upon" a half dozen toasts "applicable to the occasion." Agricultural dinner toasts published in the newspaper after the 1816 and 1817 fairs show how politically neutral the occasion was meant to be: "Berkshire—First in practical exertions to encourage manufactures and agricultural improvements—may she be the last to abandon them," and "The annual first Wednesday of October—The Farmer's Holiday—an era of proud display, denoting industry, intelligence and spirit."8

Increasingly, more people were objecting to even refined drinking. The morally debilitating and socially destructive habit could never be reformed, only abolished. Elkanah Watson himself was as an early temperance crusader, and was particularly concerned about alcohol consumption by the laboring classes, as evidenced by his

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presidential address of 1811. In it, he expressed hope that employment in the new woolen manufactories would gradually diminish "the inducement to resorting" to "tipling houses." Thus would be cured "the excessive use of ardent spirits" that had "gained such a dangerous and lamentable ascendancy over the less wealthy part of the community," which he believed arose principally from "the want of habitual employment at certain seasons of the year." Steady employment would correct "by degrees" an "unfortunate habit, so disgraceful to the character—and so injurious to the morals of that unfortunate portion of the community" (a sober working class was a productive and disciplined labor force). To contribute to the same result among the farming class, the agricultural society's committee on agriculture in 1820 recommended the cultivation of hops and the use of home-brewed beer for the drink of the farm, instead of "pernicious poison, ardent spirits." Watson's ideal fair dinner was "a plain, homespun, but excellent" one, costing only twenty-five cents, "without wine or spirits of any kind," but he conceded to the tastes of the other leaders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society. After the rise of moral reform movements in Pittsfield, championed by evangelical church members, the elderly Watson was delighted upon his last return visit to the Pittsfield Fair in 1837 to see that a new generation had done away with toasting after the agricultural dinner. He observed in his journal that "all was conducted, with the most perfect order & decorum," which he attributed to the fact that no liquor was served "to annoy, this patriotic assembleage." And in his valedictory to the society the next day, he congratulated it that "at your fine social dinners," the "eye of patriotism cannot fail to be gratified in the exclusion of spirituous liquors."9

The first ever "agricultural ball," held by the Berkshire Agricultural Society in the assembly room of Morgan's hotel in the second evening of the 1813 fair, also attempted to use genteel entertainments to modify behavior. According to Watson, its "direct object was to promote domestic manufactures, by exciting emulation, and by inducing females to feel a pride in appearing decorated in the works of their own hands, on a public occasion."\(^n\)

Early New England Puritans did not necessarily disapprove of dancing, although some ministers, like Increase Mather, railed against "mixt dancing" between individual men and women. For most of the seventeenth century, group dancing was generally informal and spontaneous, occurring as a part of celebrations, never as an occasion in and of itself. It accompanied weddings and other private occasions, such as turtle frolics in the seaports and sleighing parties in the countryside; religious celebrations, such as ordination feasts; and civic occasions, such as militia musters. Also, however, more elaborate governors' balls and birthday balls patterned on English practice were being held, and a dancing school had opened in Boston before 1700. With or without clerical approval, dancing grew in popularity with all classes in the eighteenth century, and itinerant dance masters could be found in most inland towns by the early 1800s, as people aspired to the refinement of their social superiors. By then, balls in the state capitals, port towns, and other urban centers had become complex entertainments encompassing subsidiary pastimes like musical performances, card playing, a light evening repast, and conversation.

and Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860* (Cambridge, 1983), 111-16. Suggesting in 1819 that agricultural societies should expel all drunkards and grant liberal premiums for apple orchards and barley culture to encourage the drinking of cider and malt brews instead of "that poisonous draught— . . . detestable whisky," Watson wrote that "If agricultural societies should be so blessed, as to be made instrumental, in checking that dreadful vice, INTEMPERANCE, it would be worth all their labours, even if they rested at that point" (*History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, with Practical Directions* [Albany, N.Y., 1819], 70-71).


As a youth, Watson himself was fond of dancing. According to his published memoirs, he spent a pleasant night on his southern tour of 1778 with an assembly of "young folks of the lower order," and, "willing to contribute to their amusement, as well as my own, I took out my flute, and, play[ed] some jigs. I set them dancing, shuffling, and capering in merry style." In England, four years later, he stopped at a farmhouse on the road to Manchester, "allured by the animating tones of a violin," and found "a country frolic in full tide, lads and lasses dancing, with all their might and hearts." He "mingled with them" and "could easily have imagined myself at a frolic in the bosom of New England." His tastes had become more refined with age, and before Watson left Pittsfield, he invited many of his peers to a formal farewell ball at Broad Hall. Such occasions had become regular events in Pittsfield by then. The "joyous merriment" of the great Peace Party of 1783 featured a dance to which the "ladies came from far and near, mounted on
their pillions, and dressed in fabrics suitable for the ride," carrying with them "the more costly robes in which they were to be arrayed," and "trusting to the house of some hospitable villager" for "making their toilet" (eighty years later, the long-lived Mrs. James D. Colt could still recall that night's glorious ball). Pittsfielders continued to enjoy public balls, assemblies, and dancing parties in private homes in the 1780s and 1790s, and dance instructors could be found in town by the time of the first annual agricultural ball in 1813. The brilliant balls held by the United States Army officers at the Pittsfield Cantonment during the War of 1812 were so impressive as to be remembered half a century later.12

Such formal entertainments would eventually supplant the older folk dances of Watson's youth, and contributed to the reshaping of country people's self-presentation, serving as occasions for the elegant self-display of the genteel. Balls were contests, according to David Shields, and "women were the actors in a theater of cultural power in which the collection of graces, accomplishments, and suitors became the means of asserting preeminence." One excelled "by making oneself the most perfect and stylish embodiment of metropolitan canons of taste." The corollary was that formal dances spurred the most extreme social emulation, especially by women. Unfortunately, the consumer revolution represented by these occasions of conspicuous consumption chiefly benefitted British producers of luxury products (and the merchants who imported such finery). The Berkshire Agricultural Society attempted to change the rules of festive display and presentation of female self. Instead of decrying vanity in one's personal appearance, the society in 1813 shifted the focus to positive patriotism and pride of handiwork by admitting into the assembly room only those clad in American manufactured or homespun cloth.13

12Winslow C. Watson, ed., 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 (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 58, 189; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1734-1800 (Boston, 1869), 322-23, and History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 53, 58-59, 205-06.

13Catherine E. Kelly, In the New England Fashion: Reshaping Women's Lives in the
This appeal to women as the chief consumers of British dry goods was clothed in the heroic rhetoric of the Revolutionary era, when the first stage in raising the political consciousness of women was to boycott British cloth and wear homespun. As did the 1767 song, "Address to the Ladies," the male leaders of the agricultural society asked the county's ladies forty-six years later to "Love your country much better than fine things." Open hostility to British fashion served to mobilize civilian, especially female, enthusiasms and offered a target for civilian anger during the Revolutionary War, and the strategy was repeated with every international crisis of the early Republic, as American ideologues gradually developed an "imaginary sumptuary system that applied only to women." Essentially, it became "up to American women to provide a protected market for domestic goods," according to Linda K. Kerber.14

No evidence has been found concerning the success of the Berkshire Agricultural Society's attempt to impose its homespun values upon Pittsfield's arbiters of fashionable society by making spinning wheels and dancing reels complementary instead of contradictory. At a later agricultural ball at the Schoharie County Fair in New York in 1819, Watson observed that "the principal ornaments of the ladies' dresses, consisted of heads of wheat, artificial flowers, with handsome festoons made of cedar and hemlock twigs, which had an interesting pastoral effect." He reflected "on the immense sums which will be saved to our country, when our females shall generally despise foreign chains and gewgaws, and when they shall evince a general pride in seeking none but native

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ornaments, to add to native graces." But in the central places of Massachusetts with good communication and transportation ties to the metropolitan areas of Boston and New York City, middle-class women came "to depend far more heavily on the performance of fashion than on productive labor for their self-representation," as noted by Catherine Kelly. 15

Watson felt compelled to defend the agricultural ball, stating that "no vain levy prompted it." He also lied, "The society takes no part in them, they are the spontaneous work of young men, and it is very natural for young people to indulge occasionally in innocent recreation." Elsewhere, in fact, he admitted that "the young men, by our request, got up a splendid agricultural ball," and his draft of the order of the day for 12 October 1813 listed an evening ball, to which "the attention of the young gentlemen of Pittsfield is requested." Although the officers of the agricultural society and "many respectable visitors" attended, "to give countenance to the measure," Watson admitted that the "innocent festivity" of the Pastoral Ball was "much reprehended by Quakers and others," including Methodists, who "imperfectly understood" its object. Actually, Watson failed to empathize with Quaker feelings, as demonstrated by a September 1818 incident. He admitted that, in his "zeal to contribute in giving a direction to several societies" in upstate New York, he "unluckily transmitted by mail, one hundred ball cards by mistake, to a rigid Quaker, whose wife was a zealous preacher. To make the matter worse," the wife opened the package, "and to her astonishment, found her worthy husband, exhorted to distribute the cards, and manage the ball." 16 There was little that could be done to answer the


16 Unidentified newspaper clipping, c.20 Aug. 1813, in MS Records of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Vol. 1, 31a, Berkshire Historical Society, Pittsfield, Mass.; Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York and the History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire System (Albany, N.Y., 1820), 126, 129-30, 131-32n, 155n., 172, 186. Watson understood that the entire philosophy of the fair, not just the agricultural ball, was incompatible with Quaker principles. After a "strong impulse" had been created at the first Cayuga County Fair in New York, "the respectable society of Quakers took the direction into their hands" the following
objections of the evangelicals. As late as 1829, the Reverend David Dudley Field complained of the ill effects dances had on Pittsfield youths. "The lateness of the hour to which they are generally continued, and the exposure of the health, especially of the females, still make them no inconsiderable evils." The grand objection was the dance's "tendency to dissipate the mind, and unfit it for serious reflection."  

Surprisingly, the Pittsfield clergy did not even initially support the religious exercises, first held at the Berkshire County Fair in 1812. They refused to accede to Watson's belief in the "propriety of solemnizing these occasions" by "intermixing religious exercises, with appropriate addresses; and the delivery of premiums, . . . as peculiarly proper in devout acknowledgement for the blessings of the year." Believing that such measures "would tend to give popularity to the society, among the graver class of the community," the Berkshire Agricultural Society "suggested our wishes to several of the clergy, who were present," at the 1811 fair, "soliciting their co-operation," but to no avail. Apparently, neither Reverend William Allen of the First Congregational Church, nor Thomas Punderson, minister to the Union Congregational Parish, nor any of Pittsfield's dissenting preachers, believed in the appropriateness "of solemnizing these occasions in the church." Watson claimed the clerics were shy because they considered the agricultural fair "a bubble of the moment, and they would make themselves ridiculous" when it popped. The long association between English market fairs and Roman Catholic feast days might also have given them pause, as well as the bad reputation of market fairs. Apparently, Reverend Punderson relented enough, after witnessing the tightly controlled fair of 1811, to allow the society the use of the newly constructed Union Church in 1812.

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17 Field, ed., *A History of the County of Berkshire, Massachusetts, in Two Parts. The First Being a General View of the County; The Second, an Account of the Several Towns. By Gentlemen in the County, Clergymen and Laymen* (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 175.
Both Congregational ministers, however, again refused to officiate, and Watson called upon the "more liberal" Unitarian minister Eliphalet Porter, who had traveled from Roxbury to attend the fair, to favor the society with "an animated, pastoral prayer" before the address and premium awards ceremony.18

The religious exercises also consisted of sacred choral music. In 1812 a choir of men and women sang appropriate hymns and a pastoral ode composed for the occasion. One visitor described the scene: "My first impression was even much increased by the elegant and dignified manner, with which they sang an appropriate ode, composed for the occasion; exceeding any thing of the kind I had ever heard. The principal singer, a very respectable looking man, took his stand in the middle of the front gallery; in his rear was an organ, and a band of music: the eyes of all the singers were directed to him." The singers also afterwards concluded the afternoon's official program. Richard D. Birdsall noted that the agricultural ode written by Great Barrington lawyer William Cullen Bryant and set to music by Thomas Hastings of Albany, and sung by a choir in the Bulfinch Church at the 1823 Pittsfield Fair, "comprised a high point in Berkshire cultural history—the art and the life of the people fused into an organic unity."19

Music was the most ubiquitous form of entertainment in early-nineteenth-century

18Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, in Massachusetts, with Practical Directions for Societies Forming in North-Carolina, on the Berkshire Model (Albany, N.Y., 1819), 18; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 271, n.1. The identity of the chaplains at the next two Pittsfield fairs is unknown, but in 1815 the Reverend Samuel Shepard of Lenox commenced the fair's ceremonies by reading a vote of the society requesting him "to solemnize the opening scene with suitable expressions of gratitude and praise in celebrating our agricultural prosperity." Shepard then read "a psalm suited to the occasion, which was admirably sung by the numerous choir of singers; after which he addressed the throne of grace in a very impressive and peculiarly appropriate prayer" ("Pittsfield Cattle Show and Fair," 12 Oct. 1815, unidentified newspaper clipping, Watson's Common Place Book, Journal E, 82, Elkanah Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany).

New England and was an important part of the rich festive culture of the early American republic. Three different types of music were heard at the first Pittsfield fairs: the choral music of hymns and odes; the marches played by an instrumental band in the annual parade; and the dance music played at the agricultural balls after 1813.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, an earlier Puritan ambivalence that had constrained musical enjoyment had nearly disappeared, and New Englanders were daily singing, playing, and listening to music. Three strands of musical experience had become intertwined in New England culture: unaccompanied "vernacular" folk ballads and ditties that men and women sang while working, and passed down orally to their children; psalmody in Puritan churches and hearts; and secular singing and instrument playing and performances. In the middle third of the eighteenth century, Puritan ministers and lay reformers had improved unaccompanied congregational psalm singing during worship service by introducing note-singing and standardized tunes. Around the 1720s, itinerant musicians had opened singing schools to teach note reading throughout New England, not only initiating a "golden age of choral music," but also providing an important heterosocial occasion for rural women. Singing schools assumed a central role in provincial social life by fostering neighborliness, sustaining friendships, and occasionally launching romance. They also contributed to a musical sophistication outside of the meetinghouse that led to a general Congregational acceptance of the major engine of musical change in colonial New England, the church organ. The organ came to Pittsfield in 1799, nearly a century after the first New England organ was installed in King's Chapel (Anglican) in Boston in 1708.20

Secular music especially flourished in America's urban centers, where music teachers, instrument makers, and sellers of broadside ballads and sheet music could increasingly be found throughout the eighteenth century. Watson's own musical inclination is informative. As an eleven year old, he probably participated in the first Forefathers Day celebration—organized by the Old Colony Club in Plymouth in 1769 to commemorate the landing of the Pilgrims in 1620—by joining with his schoolmates "in singing a song very applicable to the day" and "in the most agreeable manner." As musical ability was a sign of gentility in colonial America, Watson soon learned to play the flute, which was a popular instrument for provincials with pretensions, as it was relatively easy to learn and inexpensive to buy or simple to make. He had an ear for music and considered two odes composed for and sung at a county fair he attended in New York in 1819 as the best he "had ever heard," excepting psalmody he had enjoyed in a Jewish synagogue in Amsterdam in 1784.21


The pre-Revolutionary Forefathers Day celebrations sponsored in Plymouth by the Old Colony Club—founded by Watson's first cousin John Watson (1747-1826) and more distant cousins, Pelham and Edward Winslow, Junior, among others—like post-Revolutionary nationalist holidays, consisted of outdoor public activities (which were limited by the winter weather), including the firing of a cannon and discharge of small arms, and a procession (in which young Elkanah probably marched in 1770 as one of the "company of children" aged five to twelve, who escorted club members and guests from Howland's tavern to Old Colony Hall). Indoor activities consisted of a tavern dinner for club members, an evening function at which invited guests (which included Watson's father, uncles, and teachers) listened to addresses, sang odes composed for the occasion by Alexander Scammell, viewed a display of ancient artifacts and mementoes, and conversed about and drank toasts to the first settlers (Thacher, History of the Town of Plymouth [Boston, 1832], 179-83; Albert Matthews, "The Term Pilgrim Fathers and Early Celebrations of Forefathers' Day," Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Vol. 17: Transactions,
During the imperial crisis with Great Britain, music served as a major vehicle of Whig propaganda, and some leaders of the movement, including John Dickinson, Benjamin Franklin, Francis Hopkinson, and Thomas Paine, composed patriotic songs that helped prepare hearts and minds for Revolution and Independence. Post-Revolutionary partisanship revivified political music, helping to make secular music a major source of public entertainment. This politicized musical culture was central to New England festivity in the 1790s, as Democratic-Republican printers published French Revolutionary songbooks in Philadelphia and New York, and their partisans made the *Ça ira* and the *Marseillaise* their anthems at public celebrations, while Federalists were inspired to create new songs, such as *Hail, Columbia* and the *President's March*. Historian Simon P. Newman has shown that songs, along with badges and other related emblems, had become a key component of "the discourse of partisan political activity" by the early 1800s. At early celebrations of the Fourth of July and George Washington's Birthday, "women were able to enjoy a relatively high degree of political activity" in the "public singing of political songs and anthems." Therefore, it is not surprising that they were members of the first fair choirs, which sang only religiously oriented works. To sing any contemporary secular anthems risked offending partisans by making a political statement. Their presence in 1816 prompted the following editorial note from Phinehas Allen to Watson's 1816 speech presented before awarding the premiums: "Here the venerable Orator turned towards the


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north gallery, which was exclusively appropriated to a beautiful collection of 
Ladies—female singers included—and the delighted audience spontaneously applauded.
The effect may be better conceived than described."

Another feature of the first Pittsfield Fair ultimately had religious origins—an 
official address presented by the new society's founding president. Of course, a rhetorical 
exercise had to be an important part of early agricultural fairs, as sermons had been the 
"central ritual" of New England's public culture for two centuries, fulfilling the functions 
of religion, education, journalism, and entertainment. In addition to weekly religious 
meetings, Puritan ministers also preached at special religious occasions—such as fast and 
thanksgiving days, ordinations of ministers, and funerals of church leaders—and at civic 
occasions like public executions, annual political and artillery elections, and militia 
musters. Puritans listened to some seven thousand sermons during their lifetimes, and 
public speaking was regarded as colonial New England's highest art form.

Not only did the American Revolution politicize the pulpit, with patriotic 
exhortation increasingly complementing religious instruction, but dissenting preachers 
increasingly challenged the Congregational monopoly on sermonizing. In addition, public 
(oratory became secularized after the Revolution, as new institutions—colleges, 
legislatures, town meetings, militia musters, and voluntary associations—demanded

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23 Waldstreicher, In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997), 170, 20, 23-24, 41-
42, 130, 140, 164, 170, 191-92, 204-05, 212, 257-58; Newman, Parades and the Politics of the 
Street (Philadelphia, 1997), 177-83; Thomas Gold, Address of Thomas Gold, Esq. . . ., Delivered 
before the Berkshire Association, for the Promotion of Agriculture and Manufactures, at 
Pittsfield, Oct. 3d, 1816. Together with the Report of the Committee on Agriculture, and the 
Address of Elkanah Watson, Esq. Previous to Declaring the Premiums Reported (Pittsfield, 
Mass., 1816), 22n. See also James Kences, "Village Harmony": Music and Popular Culture in 
Portsmouth, New Hampshire," in Benes and Benes, eds., New England Music. Dublin Seminar, 

24 Daniels, Puritans at Play (New York, 1995), 80-82; Donald Weber, Rhetoric and History in 
Revolutionary New England (New York, 1988), 150; Donald M. Scott, From Office to 
York, 1986), 3-4, 317 n.4; and Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Meetinghouse Hill, 1630-1783 (New 
speeches, orations, and addresses, and provided experiences for usually silent citizens to speak up in public. Lawyers were the chief beneficiaries of the opened access to the podium, but college professors, doctors, newspaper editors, and politicians were also often called upon in the multiplication of rhetorical occasions. The annual agricultural address at county fairs was part of this post-Revolutionary expansion of public discourse, and representative of the ritual festivity of early-nineteenth-century New England.\textsuperscript{25}

Never having benefitted from college oratory or oral advocacy before the bar, Watson was discomforted by public speaking, and preferred stating his ideas in newspapers and private correspondence. He hesitated when requested by the Berkshire Agricultural Society's committee of arrangements to give the first agricultural address at the 1811 fair, and he apologized for reading his remarks instead of speaking extemporaneously. He later confessed, "Having never spoke in public, and feeling the awkwardness of my situation; standing before the multitude" as a "visionary projector—it was with infinite difficulty I could command my nerves, to commence, and proceed in my Address." His speech reviewed the history of agriculture in Europe, before turning to its current state in Berkshire and an explanation of the purposes and proceedings of the new society. Watson shared examples of particular improvements and described the potential advantages of raising merino sheep and establishing woolen manufactories. Finally, he warned against political partisanship and closed with a benediction, "May the eternal father of us all bless our patriotic endeavors, and direct us to move in such paths as will best promote good morals, and by laudable examples the best interests of the present and succeeding generations of our immediate descendants."\textsuperscript{26}

Extracts of the speech were soon printed in the \textit{Albany Gazette}, and the \textit{Boston Centinel}, \textit{Boston Patriot}, and \textit{Independent Chronicle}. The agricultural society voted to


\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Watson's Address, September 24, 1811} (Pittsfield, Mass., 1811), 2-11, quote on 11.
request Democratic-Republican printer Phinehas Allen to publish it in its entirety as a pamphlet, which he did the following month. Such measures were common for toasts and addresses at post-Revolutionary nationalist celebrations, as festive culture blurred into print culture, reaching a broader audience, and inviting published responses. Since most of these festive occasions had become politicized by the early 1800s, published Washington Birthday toasts or Fourth of July orations further disseminated party ideology and perpetuated controversy (and also preserved the historical moment for historians to examine). As new agricultural societies followed Berkshire's lead, agricultural addresses delivered on fair days became a staple of newspapers and agricultural journals, and were usually printed as pamphlets under the sponsorship of the agricultural society to which they were originally delivered. This was despite Watson's assertion to the Berkshire society in 1816 that it was "not necessary a formal address should be annually made," or that "a literary character should always preside over" the agricultural society. He claimed that "Any plain, respectable farmer, of sound information, of enlarged and liberal views, can with equal propriety discharge the necessary functions, by an annual communication, simply confined to your progressive improvements in agriculture and manufactures, to be read by your Secretary, and published for general information." A correspondent to whom Watson sent a copy of his 1811 address replied that he found it far too general to be of much practical use.27

Despite the line of continuity represented by Elkanah Watson, the public festivity of the agricultural fair did not descend straight from Plymouth's Forefathers Day celebrations, but instead was more directly related to the festive culture of the early national period. The Pittsfield fairs did share essential activities with the Plymouth occasions—dining, toasting, speechifying, singing, and parading—but these features, in varying forms, were basic to public festivity in most cultures. Forefathers Day festivities were different from early-nineteenth-century fairs in important ways, including the presence and participation of women at the latter, and the agricultural ball held consistently after 1812. The attempts of the Berkshire Agricultural Society to distance its fairs from contemporary nationalistic celebrations, and partisan responses to the society and its fairs, firmly place the new agricultural festivals in contemporary popular culture.

Pittsfield and other American communities helped create important new national holidays after the American Revolution. The public celebrations of the Fourth of July and George Washington's Birthday, for instance, consisted chiefly of addresses; parades and processions; dances, assemblies, and balls; and dinners, collations, and barbeques. But just as the bonds of sociability between members of the Old Colony Club were unable to survive the political polarization of the Revolutionary War, post-Revolutionary festivity also failed to bring together Democratic-Republicans and Federalists. Of course, one of the purposes of public ritual in all cultures is to reinforce group identity and unity. But public occasions in Pittsfield, whether they were weekly church services or annual Fourth of July celebrations, became increasingly unable to unify society, as political partisans proved unwilling to sit down to worship, or to break bread and drink toasts, together.28

After two decades of development, republican festive culture was coopted by the volatile new American party system, and festive occasions in the 1800s became more important as partisan events, perfected by Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. Both nascent parties recruited members, mobilized voters, presented candidates for office, and

28Travers, Celebrating the Fourth (Amherst, Mass., 1997), 50-52, 77, 158, 168.
attempted to link local issues to national organizations and policies at popular celebrations of new holidays. After the Election of 1800, defeated Federalists revolutionized party politics in their attempt to turn local nationalist celebrations to their partisan advantage, defensively connecting electioneering to local festivity out-of-doors. Democratic-Republicans soon adopted Federalist forms of festivity, infusing them with different meanings—the Revolutionary past was not so much celebrated, as future political possibilities set in motion. The anniversary of president Jefferson's first inauguration on 4 March, Washington's Birthday on 22 February, and, especially, the Fourth of July, began to define the practical nationalism of the new party system. As the Jeffersonians began to win at the polls, they more confidently claimed Independence Day as their own, and the annual celebrations became increasingly separate and partisan events. By 1810 many participants and spectators took it for granted that an Independence Day orator would praise his political friends and damn the opposing party.29

Such was Ezekiel Bacon's 1807 Independence Day address, in which he told Pittsfielders that Federalists were the "enemies" of "Republican Government" for their lack of confidence in popular liberty and distrust of the current administration. They were "the interested and disappointed partisans of a system which has been put down by the controlling voice of the nation," but who did not yet "relinquish their prejudices and their passions on the Altar of Union." Bacon appealed to his audience: "Let us be true to our Country, our Constitution, and ourselves, and not be deterred from our purposes, by the doubts of political sceptics, or driven from our pursuits by the alarms of designing intriguers." He was elected to Congress in a special election two months later.30

29See Waldstreicher, In The Midst of Perpetual Fetes (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997), 177-245.
30Bacon, An Oration, Delivered at Pittsfield, on the Thirty-First Anniversary of American Independence, July 4th, 1807 (Pittsfield, Mass., 1807), 8, 9, 12, 13, 14. Bacon also presented Independence Day addresses in 1799, 1801, and 1810 (see An Oration, Delivered at Williamstown, on the 4th of July, 1799...[Bennington, Vt., 1799]; An Oration, Delivered at Williamstown, on the Anniversary of American Independence, July 4th, 1801 [Pittsfield, Mass., 1801]; and An Address Delivered before the Republican Citizens of Berkshire Assembled at Pittsfield...July 4, 1810 [Pittsfield, Mass., 1810]). Federalist students at Williams College
The following year, the usually moderate Federalist Joseph Merrick refused to host the Democratic-Republicans' Fourth of July dinner, as Massachusetts Federalists pressed their advantage in the face of the unpopular Embargo. The local situation became heated. Parson Allen's congregation had split over his political activities, and unknown persons burned an effigy of Federalist Governor Christopher Gore on the village square during the night of his visit to Pittsfield.  

Independence Day, 1808, saw a divided Pittsfield. Denied appropriate quarters, the Democratic-Republicans spread their festive board in Jared Ingersoll's orchard, "within a rustic bower . . . handsomely constructed with evergreen boughs and beautifully decorated with flags, mottoes and flowers." The effect was "extremely pretty and very romantic," but, unfortunately, not weatherproof. Torrents of rain that day convinced the bedraggled Jeffersonians to assert their own festive independence. Seventy-seven donated funds towards the purchase of a lot on East Street upon which to build their own hotel. Simeon Griswold was unable to open it for 4 July 1809 (when the Republicans tolerated cramped accommodations at a small tavern kept by William Clark), but they enjoyed the following Fourth in Griswold's three-story Pittsfield Hotel. When confronted with disagreements over the agricultural society's first dinner in 1812, Watson brought the parties together by suggesting another outdoor dinner. No one called his bluff.  

publicly burned a copy of one of his Williamstown addresses ("Hon. Ezekiel Bacon," NEHGR, 26 [April 1872], 205).  

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31Thorp Lanier Wolford, "Democratic-Republican Reaction in Massachusetts to the Embargo of 1807," NEQ, 15 (March 1942), 35-61; Allen, Historical Sketch of Berkshire County and Pittsfield (Boston, 1808), 6; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 114, 185. See also Louis M. Sears, Jefferson and the Embargo (Durham, N.C., 1927).

Because most of the features of the first fairs were identical to those of the politicized nationalist holidays, including the delivery and publication of speeches, addresses, and toasts, the founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society were hard put to disassociate their new institution from contemporary partisan festive culture. They continually protested that the society was nonpartisan, even antipartisan, and that the annual fair was never intended as an opportunity for politicking.33

Watson emphasized the Berkshire Agricultural Society's neutrality, closing his first presidential address in 1811 with that subject: "Finally, gentlemen, permit me most cordially to felicitate you, that although the baneful spirit of party has found its way into every other public object in this County, and invaded the circle of social harmony, I can solemnly declare no shade of its deadly poison has yet, to my knowledge, entered into this institution." He added, "On the contrary, . . . we will strangle the monster at every approach," to "prove to the world that Berkshire has erected one monument, where every man can march in procession intent only on the public good, without being pitted in hostile array and deadly hatred against a counter current of compatriots."34

Watson specified marching united for the public good, for, just two months earlier, the Fourth of July "presented an assemblage of federalists, and republicans, from twelve, to fourteen hundred; on either side, marching, and counter-marching in procession; little short of two hostile armies, crossing each others tracks." In contrast, the first Pittsfield Fair parade, which commenced as soon as Watson finished his 1811 address was designed

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34Watson’s Address, September 24, 1811 (Pittsfield, Mass., 1811), 10-11.
to illustrate the ideal of communal harmony about which Watson had just spoken.\(^{35}\)

Directly inspired by the spontaneous procession that closed the 1810 cattle show, the parade at the first fair in 1811 was pure éclat—spectacular scene setting arranged by a committee consisting of Watson, Jonathan Allen, and John B. Root. They drew upon a rich tradition of early American processions. Street drama and related pageantry, such as the illumination of houses in Pittsfield village the night of the 1812 Berkshire County Fair, had long served as the centerpiece of most community celebrations. Colonial New Englanders had marked such solemn occasions as court days, funerals, and executions with public processions, and military reviews and parades were essential to regular training days.\(^{36}\) The processions that accompanied Pope's Day bonfires, which the rowdies of colonial Boston and other Massachusetts seaports had early adopted from the English Guy Fawkes Day (5 November), "had degenerated into a turbulent, licentious frolic" by the early 1770s.\(^{37}\) Street drama was politicized and carefully controlled by the elite leaders of

\(^{35}\)Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, with Practical Directions (Albany, N.Y., 1819), 28.


\(^{37}\)Watson was probably too young to have participated in a particularly disruptive pre-Revolutionary Pope's Day in Plymouth, when "thoughtless young men" broke the windows of townspeople who had refused to illuminate them that evening. Upon being sued, the young men retained James Otis, who, "Thinking the prosecution to have been illnatured and vindictive, . . . kindly engaged in their defence, exerted all his powers of humour and argument, described [Pope's Day] as a common, annual frolic, undertaken without malice, and conducted without substantial injury; obtained their acquittal and refused all fees" (William Tudor, The Life of James Otis, of Massachusetts: Containing Also, Notices of Some Contemporary Characters and Events from the Year 1760 to 1775 [Boston, 1823], 25; see also, 26-29; David Cressy, Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England [London, 1989], 202-06; Shaw, American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution [Cambridge, Mass.,
the Revolutionary movement, who determined to maintain their ascendancy over public pageantry after Independence was won and new national holidays commemorated. Their Grand Federal Processions in Philadelphia and New York City demonstrated (and created) the popularity of the newly ratified Federal Constitution, and annual parades in the 1790s and early 1800s became statements of political partisanship on the Fourth of July, Washington’s Birthday, and the anniversary of Jefferson’s first inauguration.38

Watson enthused with characteristic hyperbole that his first agricultural parade in 1811 was "imposing, beyond any thing of the kind, ever exhibited in America," and well worth the "infinity of trouble, and some cash" that it cost, for it excited "general attention in the Northern states," and dignified the Berkshire Agricultural Society, placing it "on elevated ground." The 1811 fair procession also advertised the potential productivity of American industry, making a political statement by manifesting the moderate Jeffersonianism and commercial republicanism of the leaders of the agricultural society, who wished to ground American independence in a fusion of improved agriculture and woolen manufacturing. Like all public events, which are constituted through their intentionality, as well as their performance, the first Pittsfield parade can serve as a privileged point of penetration into the organizers' and participants' social and cultural universes.39


39 The only surviving descriptions of the 1811 parade are Watson's, and differ in specific details (History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, with Practical Directions [Albany, N.Y., 1819], 16-17; History of Agricultural Societies on the Modern Berkshire System. From the Year 1807, to the Establishment of the State Board of Agriculture in Albany, January 10, 1820 [Albany, N.Y., 1820], 123; History of the Rise,
At exactly noon on 24 September 1811, the unidentified members of a local band were given the signal to commence playing their instruments—probably oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns—to gain the attention of spectators and inspire all with patriotic airs, and the marshals of the day, on handsome mounts, led off the parade.\textsuperscript{40} They were followed by Pittsfield's two oldest farmers—eighty-one-year-old Nathaniel Fairfield and ninety-two-year-old Charles Goodrich—both original settlers, veterans of the Seven Years War and the Revolution, and former officeholders. They held the parade's place of honor, expertly commanding a huge team of fifty or sixty yoke of oxen drawing a plow. This symbolized the power of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, which harnessed together individual efforts and united the community's divergent economic and political interests, as members and townspeople ideally pulled together and worked as a team.\textsuperscript{41}

The elderly plowmen themselves were symbols representing the republican virtue of the sturdy yeoman farmer. Fairfield and Goodrich were also mobile memorials of pioneer strength and fortitude that linked Pittsfield's present to its heroic past, and their participation in the procession gave the blessing of the town's founders to the mission of


the new agricultural society. In his address, Watson stated that "we shall find this day in our procession the venerable C. Goodrich, Esq., holding a plough drawn by 50 yoke of oxen, at the age of 94—and he was the first man who stuck the plough in the earth in the township of Pittsfield, about 60 years ago—and cut his way 15 miles through the woods, as he informed me this day—to reach the spot where he now resides." The active presence of the two men was meant to movingly remind everyone of the sacrifices made in planting and defending Poontoosuck Plantation in the 1750s, overseeing its incorporation and growth as a town in the 1760s, and guiding Pittsfield through the Revolutionary struggles of the 1770s and 1780s. By permitting Fairfield and Goodrich a final public bow, Watson hoped to recall a mythical golden age of communal cooperation that overcame all hardship, as well as to inspire emulation in the descendants of the original settlers. Most significantly, however, since Fairfield was a Democratic-Republican, and Goodrich, an ardent Federalist, the pair symbolized the nonpartisanship of the agricultural society (to which neither of them actually belonged). Of its seventy-eight members and officers on 24 September 1811, thirty-three have been identified as political partisans. Twenty-three (seventy percent) were Democratic-Republicans, and ten (thirty percent) were Federalists, including Goodrich's son, Charles Junior.42

It is unknown how many officers and members of the Berkshire Agricultural Society marched together in apparent unison after Fairfield and Goodrich's ox team that day, under a banner depicting a sheaf of wheat on one side and a plow on the other. Each man wore the society's badge, heads of wheat, in his hat: members had two tied together with pack thread; the society's officers and trustees had three fastened with green ribbons. Even though local wheat farmers were losing the home market to farmers of newly opened lands in New York, wheat culture retained its symbolic power as the staff of life, and of free labor and independence, as opposed to the tobacco and cotton crops of Southern

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slaveholding plantation lords. The plow, opposing the hoe, was freighted with similar meanings, and also served as a potent symbol of yeoman husbandry, since it bound the origins of agriculture in antiquity to the technological innovations of the present. It also evoked feelings of republican virtue and patriotism, as George Washington, and Rufus Putnam and thousands of minutemen, including Pittsfield's Revolutionary War veterans, had emulated Cincinnatus, who had left his plow in the field to defend the republic, and returned to it again once the war was won.43

Behind the agricultural society rolled "one of the most striking and best-remembered features" of the parade. A yoke of oxen hauled a large, wheeled platform, upon which artisans operated a spinning jenny of forty spindles and a broadcloth loom with a flying shuttle. These machines, probably constructed by Arthur Scholfield for Watson's Broad Hall operations, manifested a Republican vision of a self-sufficient America able to clothe itself in homespun cloth, supplemented by textiles produced in small rural manufactories. Unlike the large demoralizing factories that crushed wage earners in crowded, unhealthy British cities, American establishments were supposed to rise benignantly in country towns. Operatives would earn good wages, guaranteed by cheap land on the frontier, and would also be morally uplifted.44

Watson devoted much of the day's presidential address to manufacturing, "a favorite theme with me the last three years." He predicted that "this County is destined to


44This float recalled a massive one in Philadelphia's Grand Federal Procession of 1788 that all "viewed with astonishment and delight." Behind the gentlemen of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture rolled a large carriage drawn by 10 horses. Upon it, 2 men worked a cotton carding machine, a woman tended an 80-spindle spinning machine, weavers worked 2 looms, and 6 other workers printed designs on chintz (see Francis Hopkinson, An Account of the Grand Federal Procession, Philadelphia, July 4, 1788. To Which Is Added, a Letter on the Same Subject [Philadelphia, 1788], quoted in Travers, Celebrating the Fourth [Amherst, Mass., 1997], 74-75).
become" a "respectable manufacturing County," and its "future wealth and respectability" would be built on the "substantial foundation" of "the manufacture of woollens... Owing to the fortunate introduction of a new and invaluable species of Sheep." Watson foresaw "obvious and important advantages" to the establishment of Berkshire manufactories, "exclusive of those, of the interest of individuals." The chief one was "constant and regular employment to all classes and ages." He fondly hoped "that constant employment will tend to enforce in the rising generation a correction of morals, habits of industry, and due subordination." Watson also stated that the growth of manufacturing would "tend to check the spirit of emigration, which holds our population nearly stationary," and to reduce alcoholism among the lower classes. Ironically, the artisans on the parade float in 1811, James Wrigley, Junior, and James Standring, both Yorkshire emigrants, were heavy drinkers: the former died in middle age, "a somewhat frail constitution being unequal to the demands of free living which prevailed among the Yorkshire artisans in Pittsfield;" and the latter, too, was "a victim to the fashionable dissipations of the day."45

Behind the textiles float marched a group of Berkshire mechanics holding aloft a flag with a saw and shuttle device. These unidentified skilled handicraftsmen, both master craftsmen (who worked either for themselves or as foremen for contractors or merchants) and journeymen (who worked for daily or weekly wages), owned their own tools and worked in Pittsfield's small shops, mills, and manufactories. Although they labored in trades and services as varied as breadmaking and blacksmithing, they were not differentiated by trade, as were those artisans in the Grand Federal Processions. No evidence has been found demonstrating that the mechanics of Pittsfield had as yet developed as a self-conscious class, and they still had much in common with yeoman farmers. Both groups labored by themselves or in small groups, and their work was

usually task-oriented and still tied to natural rhythms. The mechanics had few, if any, opportunities to gather together and develop a group solidarity: the 1811 parade apparently was the first time that Pittsfield mechanics acted in unison.46

A horse-drawn wagon piled high with local manufactures followed the mechanics, and above it fluttered the flags of the United States and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The muskets, anchors, and leather goods, as well as the rolls of woolen broadcloth, piles of blankets, and bolts of sail duck, all demonstrate that, by the autumn of 1811, Pittsfield had become Berkshire County's chief manufacturing center. This was in part thanks to the officers of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, who capitalized, incorporated, directed, and otherwise established local manufactories. The parade represented the institutionalization in the new society of the interdependence of Berkshire's agricultural and manufacturing interests, which was chiefly a Democratic-Republican ideal.

The parade at the second Pittsfield Fair, on 6 and 7 October 1812, three months after Congress had declared war on Great Britain, was escorted by a detachment of troops from the Pittsfield Cantonment, and United States Army officers served as marshals. A six-horse stage carrying Massachusetts manufactures, including a number of superfine broadcloths from Hampshire and Berkshire entered for the society's new premium, was again present, but neither textile machinery nor artisans. The society had almost achieved a major coup by having an elephant lead its 1812 parade, which would have provided a grander spectacle than the previous year's ox train. There are two handwritten notices of the committee of arrangements, both dated 5 Oct. 1812, in Watson's papers. The first mentions the elephant; the second does not, but gives the order of the parade that would commence at noon the next day: 1.) the stage bearing the manufactures; 2.) the band; 3.)

the marshals; 4.) the officers of the society followed by members; 5.) the orator of the day
followed by the clergy; 6.) honorary members; and 7.) "Farmers & strangers in
homespun." The pachyderm's presence in Pittsfield would have been entirely fortuitous, as
its owner apparently had been exhibiting it in the area. As the first or second elephant
ever seen in America, depending on its exact identity, it would have elicited some sort of
written comment if it had appeared in the 1812 Pittsfield parade, but no surviving evidence
has been found. (Apparently, however, an elephant was exhibited in the open space near
Campbell's Coffeehouse six days before the fair of 1813). 47

At the 1813 fair, the society decided "to confine the exhibitions to objects of
practical utility, without consuming any portion of the precious time in procession or
parade." Fair Day, 12 October 1813, would be "but a day of business, in promoting
objects of practical utility, in a stile which, it is presumed, will do honor to the County."
At the 1815 Pittsfield Fair, society members simply "formed themselves with many
respectable Strangers & Citizens in procession," after the annual meeting at Major
Archippus Morgan's hostelry, "and moved under the escort of Captain Allen's Company of
Infantry to the old Meeting House." In 1816 the society assembled on the town square at
eleven o'clock A.M. on 3 October, and requested all spectators to join in the procession.
This was the ultimate symbol of inclusiveness and communal cooperation. Apparently, the
parade's power of attracting Pittsfielders to the annual fair diminished as time marched on

47Notes of the Committee of Arrangements, 5 Oct. 1812, Box 51, fold. 1, Watson Papers, New
York State Library, Albany; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876),
209; Berkshire Hills, 3 (1 May 1903), 107. The 1812 elephant was either an unnamed one
imported by Jacob Crowninshield of Salem, Mass., in 1796, which toured New England, New
York, Pennsylvania, and the South until 1818, or, more likely, Bett, or Old Bet, which arrived in
New York City sometime before 5 June 1812. Her exhibition was advertised in the Northern Whig
She was shot and killed by a Maine farmer in 1816 (see Peter Benes, "To the Curious: Bird and
W. Flint, "Entrepreneurial and Cultural Aspects of the Early-Nineteenth-Century Circus and
Annual Proceedings, 1984 [Boston, 1986], 133-34; and Jennifer L. Mosier, "The Big Attraction:
and novelty wore off, and the organizers decided to devote precious resources to
arranging other, more popular features, such as the new plowing matches.⁴⁸

But the first Pittsfield Fair parade, along with the day's other secular rituals,
answered unstated, often deep, human, needs of all the participants. A local historian
realized its powerful messages: "There appears . . . to have been nothing in the display
very showy or gorgeous, even for a country-town, but it was sufficiently striking to please
the common fancy," and was "full of pregnant meanings which impressed themselves with
great force upon the popular mind." The agricultural parade did this by depending upon
the conventions of post-Revolutionary urban parade style, such as musical
accompaniment, hierarchical ordering, emblems and banners, and occupational
theatricality and the enactment of work processes. The first Pittsfield Fair parade served
as dramatized ideology, communicating the ideas and ideals of the Berkshire Agricultural
Society, and conjuring up emotional power and aesthetic expressiveness evocable by
neither the printed nor spoken word. United public actions, such as marching in a body
and observing the same, are predicated on some level of public consensus and strengthen a
common social identity. The Pittsfield marchers made the democratic assertion of their
prerogative to participate actively in the creation of local culture, and "to write their
identities on the streets in full public view," in Mary P. Ryan's words. The symbolic power
of the parade also provided a comforting social vision in an era of increasing
socioeconomic stress, or as Ryan generalized, "Parading spanned the harrowing transition
from urban village to industrial city."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Samuel D. Colt, "Pittsfield Fair," 20 Aug. 1813, advertising copy (Box 51, fold. 1, Watson
Papers, New York State Library, Albany); unidentified newspaper clippings, c. 19 March-20 Aug.
1813, MS Records of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Vol. 1, 29a, 31a, 56a-57, 66a, Berkshire
Historical Society, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. When Watson visited the 1823 fair, the society gave
him the place of honor, and he led the parade with his 5-year-old grandson, whom Watson
"decorated with the badge of the Society" (Journal D, 463, Watson Papers, New York State
Library, Albany).

⁴⁹ Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 338. My understanding
of secular ritual is informed by Shaw, American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution
(Cambridge, Mass., 1981); Ryan, "The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-

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The fact that opposing partisans organized a society to dispute the Berkshire Agricultural Society's use of public space and festivity firmly situates the first Pittsfield fairs in the politicized festive culture of the early 1800s. Berkshire Federalists founded the county's Washington Benevolent Society (WBS) in Pittsfield in June 1811, possibly in reaction to the political force they perceived in the newly incorporated agricultural society. John W. Hulbert, a member of the agricultural society, was founder and first president of the Berkshire WBS. During his frequent travels to New York City, he had come into contact with Gulian C. Verplanck and the young Federalists who had organized the first WBS in 1808. The new fraternal order combined the mummery, benevolent activities, and partisan enthusiasm of existing Democratic-Republican organizations, such as the Tammany Society, with patriotic filiopietism. Whereas the Berkshire Agricultural Society had almost two hundred members in 1813, the Berkshire WBS had 2,300, including its secretary, Thomas A. Gold, son of the second president of the Berkshire Agricultural Society.50

Although nominally a charitable fraternity, the WBSs were blatantly political, unapologetically promulgating Federalist principles, supporting Federalist candidates, and providing financial reserves for Federalist party leaders. David Waldstreicher described the new association as "nationalist and nonpartisan in promise," but "local and partisan in practice." That practice included elaborate public exercises on Washington's Birthday, the anniversary of his first inauguration (30 April 1789), and the Fourth of July. Not

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surprisingly, these events typically consisted of a parade with militia companies and members with badges and banners; public programs consisting of prayers, odes, orations, and a recital of Washington's Farewell Address; and private dinners in taverns with numerous toasts. Not to be eclipsed by Simeon Griswold's new Republican hotel, Federalist innkeeper Joseph Merrick expanded his own facilities in Pittsfield in 1810, replacing a gambrel roof with a spacious third story. The enlarged space became Washington Hall, utilized by the Mystic Lodge of Freemasons, as well as the new WBS.51

Just as Phinehas Allen published Watson's 1811 address at the first fair, Federalist printers Milo Smith and Company of Pittsfield published the Fourth of July address that William C. Jarvis (another member of the Berkshire Agricultural Society) presented to the WBS in 1812 (other Federalist printers published WBS orations, odes, handbills, and chapbooks, strengthening their own financial positions and increasing the amount of Federalist propaganda in circulation). Despite the usual Federalist rhetoric in Jarvis's 1812 address (the gentlemen of the WBS were "the real friends of order, religion, and good manners;" true religion should be protected "from the assaults of the licentious, and the attacks of fanaticism;" and the last two presidential administrations failed to provide a competent national defense to protect American maritime interests), his disingenuous claims of nonpartisanship were as shrill as Watson's: "Should we suffer either personal, or party views to contaminate the fair objects of our association; we shall deservedly incur the censure of our countrymen, and justly become the theme of obloquy." Although Berkshire Democratic-Republicans organized a truly partisan and little-known society called the Sons of Liberty in response to the WBS, they could never match the efficiency of the Federalist organization. Just as the massive Washington's Birthday celebration

organized by the WBS in New York in 1812 helped the Federalists recapture city government, so, too, did the Berkshire WBS help win the county for Federalist governor Caleb Strong in 1812, and helped elect its president Hulbert to Ezekiel Bacon's congressional seat in 1814. By effectively presenting its messages and missions through the medium of public festivity with its successful annual county fairs in the 1810s, the Berkshire Agricultural Society, a nonpartisan association, unwittingly contributed to the politicization of Berkshire's festive occasions, as partisan organizations coopted the forms and features of the medium for their own political ends.52

The essential, and most effective, feature of the first Pittsfield fairs, the Berkshire Agricultural Society's new premium program, could not be easily adapted to political ends. The purpose of the premiums was to stimulate "fellow-citizens to enquiry, to adopt improvements, to increase exertions, and to produce the greatest industry, economy, and good management" in the practice of farming. Emulation and competition were at the heart of the premium program. The Berkshire society occasionally gave out the same sort of prizes—silver medals—that the MSPA did, but it more often awarded inscribed trophies consisting of silver tableware, flatware, and holloware (these comprised the society's chief expenditure). The three major differences between the premium programs of the two societies were: 1.) Berkshire premiums were not aimed at specific experiments that required scientific analysis, careful record keeping, and the drafting of final reports, as did some of the MSPA premiums, but were awarded for visible results, and the only written production needed was a certification of ownership and of Berkshire County residence; 2.) Berkshire premiums could be awarded only to members of the agricultural society; and, most significantly, 3.) the Berkshire society awarded its premiums publicly at

its Pittsfield fairs, orchestrating the awards ceremony for maximum psychological impact.

The society awarded only twelve premiums, worth a total of seventy dollars, at the first Pittsfield Fair in 1811, for the best sheep, cattle, and swine shown that day (lack of funds prevented the offering of premiums for domestic productions and models of useful inventions). Handsome diplomas accompanied the engraved silver trophies handed to premium winners. Watson noted that the presentation "always produced great effect. Our constant aim was not only to excite an ardent spirit of emulation among the candidates for premiums, but to impress the minds of the audience, and produce some tincture of envy, so as to call forth more extensive efforts." No eyewitness accounts of the 1811 awards ceremony in the town hall have been found, but at the 1812 ceremony, held in the new Union Church, the silver premiums were "placed to great advantage" on a green-clothed table in front of the pulpit. As president Watson announced the names of the winners, they rose in place, as the head marshal delivered their trophies and certificates. Watson described the finale: "The band strikes up a national air, every countenance beaming with pleasure, under the impression the fascinating measure never fails to produce."53

This public validation of one's agricultural skills in the form of a few seconds as the center of community attention and admiration, accompanied by the permanent reminder of that moment of fame in the form of silver trophies prominently displayed on Berkshire mantelpieces and framed certificates of honorable testimony hanging in the best rooms of county homes, was supposed to be coveted by neighbors who would be inspired to increase their efforts to win next year's premiums. Emulation, which eighteenth-century Americans understood as the endeavor to equal or surpass others in any achievement or quality, or simply the desire or ambition to equal or excel, was an important part of

classical republican ideology, as demonstrated by John Adams's 1790-1791 *Discourse on Davilla*. Adams identified this "love of praise" as a "principal source of the virtues and vices," and the "great leading passion of the soul." He believed that the Roman republic addressed everything to the "emulation of the citizens," which was the only "consistent method of preserving order or procuring submission to the laws" in republics. Adams considered the competitive passion for individual distinction as the best basis of effective government under the Federal Constitution, not the self-interest of competing factions mentioned by James Madison in *Federalist Ten*, nor any other springs of group action. By the War of 1812, some American moralists "bluntly and explicitly connected emulation to an ethos of competition," such as the author of *Moral and Prudential Maxims and Sayings...* (Philadelphia, 1810), who wrote, "By a virtuous emulation the spirit of man is exalted within him; he panteth after fame, and rejoiceth as a racer to run his course." By the 1830s, emulation increasingly carried negative connotations, and became identified with female vanity and women's desires to follow fashions.54

The founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society were the first American agricultural reformers to institutionalize—in the premiums and award ceremonies of county fairs—emulation, personal ambition, and the liberal values of competition and self-interest. They deliberately "seize[d] upon the human heart," according to Watson, and "excite[d] a lively spirit of competition, giving a direction to measures of general utility." The society led "the way by great exertions, into the heart of the community" by "touching a string which never fails, (if properly directed,) to vibrate in unison with all, viz.—self-love,—self-interest, combined with a natural love of country." Watson stated that "The great business, in the first stages, is to kindle up a spirit of ambition,—a love of country,—in a word, a general strife—which individual, and which county shall excel."

"General strife" could also describe the growing market economy based on the often conflicting self-interests of competing individuals. Earlier, Watson had realized that "Self-interest," as "the strongest stimulus in the human breast," would "require no other incitement to a general attention to th[e] new mine of wealth" of merino sheep.55

This philosophical underpinning is one reason the self-styled "Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire System" were, in fact, modern. The glorification of the market values of competitiveness and acquisitiveness, essential to the reform mission of the new agricultural fair, appealed to Pittsfielders in a period of uneven economic transition. The social and economic goals that had grown out of the moral or household economy of the settlement era were shifting—for those families that had the capital and labor resources to compete successfully in the marketplace—from possessing a competency, or comfortable independence, to ceaseless material accumulation. General social tension intensified because change did not occur evenly within and among families, and because capitalism was inherently a system of competition and conflict instead of cooperation—the fulfilment of one's aspirations often prevented that of another's. The Berkshire Agricultural Society intended to tame competition and self-interest by openly embracing and ritualizing the values within a framework created by a new institution of collective unity. Its premium program appealed to deep and conflicting needs of individual men, and women, and helped defuse potentially explosive social tensions.56


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In contrast, the premium programs of the elite post-Revolutionary agricultural societies appealed only to the patriotism of gentlemen farmers. *Amor patriae not amour propre* was their motto; disinterestedness, not self-interest, was their watchword. Watson claimed that many of the MSPA premiums were not awarded because its leaders "did not pursue any efficient measure to excite emulation. They depended too much on types, and too little on personal efforts." Their "defective system" could never "excite sufficient emulation to divest themselves of premiums, which were constantly held forth to the public," as "Few felt much interest in their proceedings." Even as late as 1820 Watson did not pretend his system was yet perfect—"many valuable improvements, will doubtless, be made"—but, unlike the Federalist MSPA in Boston, the Berkshire Agricultural Society could "demonstrate practical effects, from practical measures."57

Another example of the modern pragmatism of the Berkshire Agricultural Society was its marked attention to women. The society moved deliberately to "enlist the sympathies and arouse the interest of the females of the county" in its fairs, and to induce them "indirectly, to identify themselves with the society," all the while maintaining the contemporary relationship between the sexes. Genteel ladies and young women were not mere spectators at post-Revolutionary nationalist celebrations, but had assumed meaningful roles (but not without some criticism). They appeared in processions, sang in choirs, and presented banners, flags, and standards to the elite voluntary militia companies, during which presentations they even gave speeches, some of which were later printed in newspapers. Iconographic images of women, and even real women, had an increasing symbolic presence in nineteenth-century parades, and there was at least one toast to them

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57Watson, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York and the History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire System* [Albany, N.Y., 1820], 159-61. It is ironic if, as claimed, financial difficulties prevented the state society from adopting the Berkshire program of fairs and premiums when "Mr. Emulation," John Adams himself, was president of the MSPA from 1805 to 1813.
as the "American Fair" after most dinners, from which they were usually excluded. 58

The Berkshire Agricultural Society early added two features to the Pittsfield Fair (in addition to the religious exercises) to attract female participation: the agricultural ball, discussed above; and premiums for household productions awarded exclusively to women. The society resorted to Revolutionary rhetoric to mobilize Berkshire women, as producers, not mere consumers, of cloth, which served to enunciate their economic importance, and eventually contributed to their increased public presence. By the novel expedient of making women eligible to compete for and receive premiums offered for domestic manufactures, the fair's organizers not only recognized the meaningful contributions women made to the household economy, and, consequently, to the local and national economies, but also attempted to reinforce a traditional female role that women who were able to were gladly relinquishing across New England.

At the 1813 Pittsfield Fair, the Berkshire Agricultural Society appropriated the assembly room over the Pittsfield Female Academy to display woolen cloth, carpeting, flannel, blankets, worsted stockings, linen shirting, woolen plaid, woolen shawls, chip hats, bombazet (thin woolen cloth, either plain or twilled), and sewing thread that women had entered for premiums. The society awarded silver bowls, cups, tea spoons, and medals, valued at $138 in all, to the winners, including a five-dollar medal to Mrs. Elkanah Watson for the second best piece of carpeting. But the successful women had to be prepared before they would publicly accept their prizes. 59

58 For nuanced explorations of female participation in early national public festivity, see Waldstreicher, In The Midst of Perpetual Fetes (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997), 55, 82-84, 166-72, 186, and 232-35; and Newman, Parades and the Politics of the Street (Philadelphia, 1997), 66-68, 77-78, 95, 102-03, 106-07, 128-29, 146-47, 155-56, 166-70. See also Kelly, In the New England Fashion (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999), 207-12; and Travers, Celebrating the Fourth (Amherst, Mass., 1997), 135-41. These works revise the claims of Mary P. Ryan, Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880 (Baltimore, 1990), 16, 19, that early-19th-century women did not actively participate in public celebrations and could be found only on the margins. For a comparative view of women in French Revolutionary celebrations, see Mona Ozouf, Festivals and the French Revolution, transl. by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 40-41, 44-45, 76-78, 98-99, 101-02, 114-16.

59 Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the
Feminine modesty apparently recoiled at the thought of receiving awards in a public ceremony. One Southern visitor who described the awarding of premiums in 1822 noted that "the eyes of an exhilarated audience were flying in every direction," to see the "fortunate, blushing female, with downcast eyes, especially if young." The idea of publicly recognizing the meritorious accomplishments of individual women in their private station as household cloth producers was an innovation for which the Berkshire Agricultural Society felt compelled to prepare the community. At the 1812 fair it announced a special event, a cloth show exclusively for Berkshire women. The society invited them to compete for six premiums—silver cups and medals each valued at from five to twenty dollars—for "Domestick Household Woolen Manufactures," specifically, woolen cloth at least twenty yards long and three-quarters of a yard wide, the quality of which would be judged by a committee chaired by professional clothier Arthur Scholfield. These requirements show that Pittsfield followed the late-eighteenth-century trend, described by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and others, of rural New England women increasingly involving themselves in the weaving of cloth. Thirteen women are known to have entered the January 1813 contest, demonstrating that at least that many Pittsfield households owned looms, including that presided over by agricultural society trustee and later president Thomas Gold, whose wife, Martha Marsh Gold, won the six-dollar silver cup for fifth place (five of the seven prizewinners were married women).60

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On the day of the first female cloth fair, 12 January 1813, Washington Hall was filled with an exhibit of "many excellent articles of domestic manufactures, (especially woollens and linens)," according to Watson, but no contestants appeared to claim their prizes, as he supposed, because none dared to "be the first to support a new project." The officers found it "a very difficult, and a very delicate matter to open the way, and induce the women to assemble even in a private room." Watson claimed later that, "Such was their timidity, and dread of being laughed at," he had to resort to a maneuver to "break down this folly." He returned home and prevailed upon his wife Rachel ("with no little difficulty") to accompany him to a private room at Merrick's tavern.61 He then dispatched messengers to the contestants stating that "she waited for them at the cloth show; they poured forth,—farmers' wives, who were lying in wait to watch the movements of the waters, also issued forth, and the hall was speedily filled with female spectators, and candidates for premiums." In awarding the premiums, Watson addressed the women, assuring them of the propriety of their participation. "It is as novel, as it is interesting, to find the female portion of the community, called to a public exhibition, on any occasion," he stated, but "the interesting events of the day will convince you all of the propriety of the measure, by the honourable competition it will necessarily excite, to excel each other in laudable efforts to promote the best interests of our common country, by the rapid


61In 1819 Watson wrote of his wife, Rachel Smith Watson: "If I have been beneficial to my country in my day and generation—to her the praise may be justly ascribed. My rambling habits from early life—divested of parental cares, and directions to guide my course through the thorny paths of youth—I think it altogether probable had my evil stars have cast my lot to have been yoked to a termagant—or to a woman of captious and irritable disposition, to torment my sensible nerves—I should have lived and died unknown—a mere blank in creation—most probable a vagabond—but in no extremity a drunkard" (Journal B, 383, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany, quoted in Hugh Meredith Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter, 1758-1842 [Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958], 90).
increase, both in quantity and quality, of home made domestic manufactures." He added that "The labours of the society, and your efforts, will go hand in hand; mutually supporting and animating each other."\footnote{Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York and the History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire System (Albany, N.Y., 1820), 127-29.}

"Mutual support" better describes the rural system of cloth production within and between households into which the Berkshire Agricultural Society hoped to instill the commercial and competitive values of liberal capitalism and national patriotism. Creating and maintaining family wardrobes remained the most time-consuming domestic duty of rural New England women in the early nineteenth century, even as some of the stages of cloth production were mechanized and/or moved out of the home to local fulling, carding, and textile mills. To produce all of the family's cloth was never the goal of most rural New England families; instead, spinning, and especially weaving, became part of a strategy by which they made profitable use of female time segmented by child rearing and nurturing; educated daughters in habits of industry; and produced useful material that might otherwise drain their credit with local merchants. Spinning, carding, combing, or otherwise dressing wool, flax, and cotton fibers into yarn and thread, as well as weaving or knitting, and bleaching and dyeing the resulting fabric, and cutting, sewing, and quilting it into articles of family clothing and bedclothes, made up a major, and valuable, part of the housework of rural women. Those of western Massachusetts produced almost two and a half million yards of cloth in 1810, valued at over a million dollars.\footnote{See Susan Strasser, Never Done: A History of American Housework (New York, 1982), 125-44; Rolla Milton Tryon, Household Manufactures in the United States, 1640-1860 (New York, 1917; reprint. New York, 1966), 170. See also Kulikoff, Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism (Charlottesville, Va., 1992), 31.}

Spinning was the most time-consuming (and symbolic) of the tasks of household cloth production, despite improvements to home spinning wheels, such as Amos Miner's accelerated head, patented in 1810, which facilitated work with machine-carded fibers and
merino wool. In addition to its economic importance, spinning was significant as a universal bond of womanhood that tied together generations—as daughters learned it from their mothers—neighbors, and kin. Spinning continued after marriage, and was often returned to in old age or widowhood as a means of support. Almost eighty percent of the households in rural Hampshire County, Massachusetts, and Litchfield County, Connecticut, had spinning wheels around 1774, according to Laurel Ulrich. Weaving, which was open to men, was increasingly adopted in the late eighteenth century by New England families that had the resources and aptitude. Where field labor for women was unseemly, and wage labor seen as a sign of declining fortunes, "household manufacturing allowed men to employ their girls without appearing to do so." Traditionally, such contributions remained invisible to society, except in times of national crisis, but not to the women whose weaving and spinning were able to reduce their husbands' or fathers' expenditures for everyday linens and children's clothing, at least, and helped pay for other consumer goods. Ulrich concludes that "As sons moved into wage work, daughters became increasingly responsible for producing their own portions. Learning to weave as well as to spin, they borrowed implements from and exchanged work with neighbors, expanding their own productive capacities."65


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The household manufacture of textiles did more than provide families with marketable products and lessen their dependence on store-bought dry goods. As Ulrich eloquently stated, female production of cloth also wove a social web. The entries dealing with cloth making in the diary of Hallowell, Maine, midwife Martha Ballard, "document a personal relationship as well as a process." Household cloth production was part of an elaborate community system of the exchange of skills, material, time, and tools, chiefly between women, that had social as well as economic functions. Manufacturing cloth and clothes was a cooperative venture not just within the family, but also between households, an important example of the ethic of local exchange of labor, or "changing works," that was so important to an economy of household production. This pattern of mutuality and exchange structured women's daily routines, and they customarily worked cooperatively on a variety of tasks with female friends, kin, and neighbors. Linked together in "flexible, multidimensional networks of mutual aid" within "the milieu of kinship and friendship," women "valued the sociability of sharing labor, and they created opportunities to do so." The system of "changing works" involved individual neighborhood women possessed of varying skills individually assisting each other in different tasks. This system easily moved into one of cash exchange involving, first, home production of finished goods for market, and then, the performance of piecework for rural entrepreneurs. As Ulrich noted, "Household production shaped female consciousness and reinforced habits of neighborly opportunism: from handweaving to mill production, 1700-1830," in Benes, ed., Textiles in Early New England. Dublin Seminar, Annual Proceedings, 1997 (Boston, 1999), 135-51, esp. 142-44, 149; and Clark, Roots of Rural Capitalism (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), 139-42. Patricia Baines, Spinning Wheels: Spinners and Spinning (London, 1977) describes the practice and artifacts of spinning, and Jane Schneider, "Rumpelstiltskin's Bargain: Folklore and the Merchant Capitalist Intensification of Linen Manufacture in Early Modern Europe," in Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, eds., Cloth and Human Experience (Washington, D.C., 1989), 177-213, provides a useful comparison to the American experience. For the symbolic importance of spinning, see Ulrich, Good Wives (New York, 1987), 34, 82, and Age of Homespun, 93-95; and Kelly, In the New England Fashion (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999), 227-28. As late as 1825, at the New York City parade celebrating the opening of the Erie Canal, a fire company still represented industry (i.e., industriousness) by a float with a woman working a spinning wheel (Ryan, Women in Public [Baltimore, 1990], 26; see also Waldstreicher, In The Midst of Perpetual Fetes [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997], 84 n.57).
exchange," but it also "laid the groundwork for early industrialization." 66

Cooperative cloth work also laid the foundation for female charitable associations. Groups of women originally congregated for social activities that involved cloth work. For instance, Ruth Henshaw of Leicester, Massachusetts, recorded in her diary various communal spinning frolics, wool breaks, twisting parties, and quilting bees in the late 1780s and 1790s. In a study of thirty-four women's diaries kept from 1754 to 1850, Lynne Zacek Bassett found that sixty-one percent of the entries concerning quilting record assistance from outside the quilter's household, most commonly, informal afternoons spent with two or three neighbors. In the 1820s, informal quilting bees were still held in rural Massachusetts, such as one described by Francis Underwood: a dozen farm wives collected around a quilting frame in the sitting room of a farmhouse, chatting and gossiping while they stitched pieces of patchwork to a padded lining, finally adjourning for tea in the late afternoon. Only occasionally did games or music and dancing with invited men follow in the evening. The number of such quilting parties significantly decreased by the first half of the nineteenth century. 67

It was not too far a stretch from such sociable activities of "mutual assistance" to women actively organizing themselves to assist strangers with the profits from the sale of the products of their cooperative cloth work. Provincial women created and joined


sewing circles that formed, in Catherine Kelly's words, "the backbone of antebellum Protestant benevolent and missionary work." In doing so, they expanded upon their Revolutionary War activities, such as when Pittsfield women held spinning matches and clothing bees, at which groups—such as the married against the single—competed against each other, with all the finished product going to clothe Patriot troops. Pittsfield women established two benevolent associations before 1821, whose charity was applied to religious purposes. The eighteen to twenty members of Pittsfield's Young Ladies' Benevolent Society met weekly to labor together with their needles, raising over one hundred dollars in one year from the sale of their products. By the 1830s, women were organizing themselves to support more political causes of moral reform, such as abolition, and began sponsoring fairs of their own. The charitable fairs of women's benevolent associations served as more than popular annual fund raisers. Like the agricultural fair, they were educational and social events that propelled women into public activity and politicized their private domestic charitable efforts, while providing mixed-gender rituals to unite the community in a particular cause, according to Deborah Van Broekhoven.68

The male leaders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society could not predict these later developments of women's increased involvement in public movements, especially from the initial hesitation of Pittsfield women to cooperate with them. But pride of handiwork soon overcame discomfort with competition or with individual recognition for what they knew to be the products of cooperative labor. Individual recognition as a patriotic premium

winner did not necessarily conflict with a woman's self-identity embedded in the complex
web of familial and social relationships and domestic duties, but it did require an assertive
self-confidence in one's abilities more amenable to the market economy than the
cooperative attitude that characterized traditional female cloth work. Female competition
and the awarding of prizes to individual women at fairs can be seen to represent the
beginning of the end of the cooperative system of cloth production, but it may also have
eased tensions over the shift from a household economy to a market economy by
structuring and reducing those tensions to an open and formal competition. Watson's
reiteration of the rhetoric of the American Revolution, when the home manufacture of
cloth was first politicized, may also have provided psychic support to those women whose
cloth production was more directed toward cash exchange and who increasingly forsook
the local labor exchange network (and perhaps also their recollection of the informal
Revolutionary cloth competitions served as a comforting precedent for premium contests).
Viewing home cloth production as a pillar of American "substantial independence,"
Watson told Pittsfield fairgoers in 1814 that "The only pride of our females, in these
gloomy times" should be "to be attired in the work of their own hands,—and to see their
fathers, their husbands, their brothers, nay, their lovers, marching by their side, clothed in
homespun, also, of their own making."69

One last aspect of the modernity of the agricultural fairs of the Berkshire
Agricultural Society, its reformation of traditional amusements and folk recreations, is best

69During another crisis, of economic panic and depression, Watson told the women at the 1819
Schoharie County Fair, "If there ever was a moment which should excite the female amor patriae,
and call forth their united efforts to save their country from ruin, this is that moment," and
exhorted: "Let then the patriot . . . be once more cheered in" his morning rambles "with the musical
hum of the spinning wheel, and the clanking of the busy loom, at every turn" (History of the Rise,
Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York and the History
of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire
System [Albany, N.Y., 1820], 140-41, 197). For Revolutionary cloth rhetoric and activities, see
Linda Grant De Pauw, Founding Mothers: Women in America in the Revolutionary Era (Boston,
1975), 154-55, 169-73; Ulrich, "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-
(Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), 38, 42; and Norton, Liberty's Daughters (Boston, 1980), 20.
represented by one final component added in the eighteen-teens to make it universally acceptable to the Berkshire community. It was not until October 1818 that the agricultural society conceded to the demands of that element of the rural population that required more excitement than that provided by formal dancing, dining, and drinking, and well-choreographed awards programs. The plowing match, which Watson stated in 1819 was adopted from the "Brighton society" (the MSPA's first plowing match was held at its second fair in Brighton in 1817), represented the kinetic activity and sporting competition that came to be associated with the laboring classes. Only three or four teams competed for two premiums at the 1818 Pittsfield Fair, valued at ten and five dollars, but the contest was attended by "great numbers of citizens." Seventeen teams entered the 1826 plowing match, which Watson, who had returned to Pittsfield for that year's fair, compared favorably to "the combats of gladiators," "cruel and inhuman boxing matches," and "bull fights, horse-races, &c. of modern times."70

Folk plowing competitions were typically held in early modern England on Plough Monday, an occupational holiday for plowmen that followed Twelfth Day after Christmas, and plowing contests continued to accompany traditional Whitsun festivities in the spring throughout the eighteenth century. No evidence of colonial New England plowing competitions has been uncovered. The Puritans heatedly denounced ball and blood sports for their pagan or Popish origins, because they frivolously wasted time and tired people, were noisy and disruptive, often deliberately inflicted injury and encouraged the defilement of the Sabbath, and led to gambling. Puritans did, however, approve of hunting, fishing, and martial competitions, and probably would have considered plowing matches as a useful and enjoyable sport. English agricultural improvers apparently first adapted the folk contest to their purposes. An unidentified correspondent replied to Watson's undated

70 Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, with Practical Directions (Albany, N.Y., 1819), 44; Sun [Pittsfield], 20 Oct. 1818; unidentified newspaper clipping, Journal D, 500, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany.
request for information, stating, "In England the Candidates plough about an Acre each they take their Own time[.] the Judges are not permitted to be spectators[.] the candidates leave the ground before they come on[.] each acre is Numbered & the only" criterion "for the prize is the superior excellence of the work."71

As seen by a report on a Pittsfield Fair plowing match of the late 1820s that introduced "ploughs of the most finish'd construction," education was the ultimate justification of the event, which demonstrated new plow designs or yoking systems in action. The plowing match, however, held wider appeal, as it touched something deep inside rural New Englanders. Not only did the plow evoke a complex of feelings, but oxen were also beginning to take on value as a regional symbol, representing New England culture across the nation. As mules and horses began to figure more prominently on farms elsewhere in America, working cattle became "integral to the Yankee's sense of self-definition," according to folklorist Jochen Welsch, and the ox elevated to a "near-mythical status." Plowing matches at fairs demonstrated appreciation for oxen as an integral part of rural work in New England. A farmer is said to have stated in 1843, "Well, I had rather see such a pull as those oxen made, than to see Fanny Ellsler dance!"72

Plowing matches were popular for their sport value, as they tested the skills of the plowboys and drivers, as well as of oxen. Indeed, according to Welsch, the "man-maneuvered ox-drawn plow rather than just the oxen themselves symbolized the


prosperity and promise of an enlightened agricultural system." Plowing matches were not races but tests of skill. Speed was only one factor judged; also considered was the workmanship of the contestants, including how straight and evenly they turned their furrows and how easily drivers worked their cattle. Docility of oxen was generally valued over brute strength, at least in the county shows (many town cattle shows, especially on the periphery of New England, had trials of working oxen to see which teams could haul the greatest load, and these eventually replaced plowing matches at New England fairs). A crowd's enthusiasm sometimes even overcame racial prejudice, as when whites cheered the victory of a black plowman at a fair match in the late 1820s. "Godfrey Greylock" noted that the 1851 Pittsfield plowing match on a field two miles distant from the main fair activities was "the most exciting part of the festival." The "very brilliant and imposing" "scene has all the interest of the race ground." In that arena, "the strength and training of the best cattle in the county are tested, and the skill and coolness of the flower of our ploughmen are displayed, before dames whose favor is quite as well worth winning as that of any who ever, in chivalric tournament, inspired blood guiltiness."73

The plowing match was the agricultural society's chief attempt to draw young men and laborers away from their traditional amusements on festive occasions. These consisted of wrestling, racing, and other informal athletic competitions, all commonly accompanied by drinking, gambling, and carousing. Other spontaneous recreations and reasonable refreshments were allowed on the public fairgrounds, however. Before its first fair in 1811, the Berkshire Agricultural Society placed the event firmly in contemporary festive culture by announcing that "Innocent recreations Such as are customary on Such

73 Welsch, "Real Yankee" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1994), 6, 24, 26, 32, 53, 71; Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828 (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1829), 2:54; "Greylock" [perhaps J.E.A. Smith], Taghconic; or Letters and Legends about Our Summer Home (Boston, 1852), 164-65. Mention must also be made of the poem that Oliver Wendell Holmes claimed, as a conceit, he found on the grounds of the plowing match of the 1849 Pittsfield Fair and submitted as part of the report made by the committee on plowing, which he chaired. "The Ploughman," later republished became "one of his most famous and best loved odes" (see Birdsall, Berkshire County: A Cultural History [New Haven, Conn., 1959], 176).
occasions will be permitted, but every thing tending to immorality will be
discountenanced." Its bylaws permitted charging rowdies a one-dollar fine for every act of
disorderliness within the bounds of the fair. The society's records never mention the
levying of any fines, but Jonathan Tenney reported from Berkshire that an 1851 cattle
show "was very quiet, for as soon as anyone began to make a disturbance, he was hurried
off to the 'lock-up.' I believe they had seventeen in at one time."74

No surviving eyewitness accounts describe the acceptable popular out-of-doors
activities that probably complemented the official program of the early Pittsfield fairs. The
market economy was represented by various entrepreneurs. According to J.E.A. Smith,
the hawkers and vendors who had haunted general musters and Fourth of July celebrations
set up booths for the sale of Yankee notions and refreshments on Fair Day. Bootblack
booths for shoe shines were also erected. By the 1840s, "North Street was lined with
booths and peddling carts" during Pittsfield fairs, "and the Park was the Tattersalls for
trading and selling horses, wagons and harness in the last stages of decrepitude."75

Apparently, the carnival rides of later fair midways were also represented at the
first Pittsfield Fair, as Smith asserted that the "fandango," or aerial phaeton, was also in
full swing in 1811, offering "its dizzy pleasures to the youths and maidens." This
contraption, invented by John H. Montgomery, had originally been erected in Pittsfield in
1801 near Jonathan Allen's tavern by John F. Parsons and Company, which offered rides
for nine pence each. The inventor promoted its health benefits, stating in 1801 that
"Persons debilitated will [give] much service to their health by aerial flights," elaborating

74 Berkshire Agricultural Society's Trustees' notice, 1 Aug. 1811, AD, Box 51, Watson Papers,
New York State Library, Albany; Sun [Pittsfield], 22 Sept. 1811; MS Records of the Berkshire
Dunham, 6 Oct. 1851, ALS, Jonathan Tenney Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester,
Mass., quoted in Birdsall, Berkshire County: A Cultural History (New Haven, Conn., 1959), 177,
n.51. The corporate privileges of policing the fair and prosecuting troublemakers harked back to
the piepowder courts of European market fairs (William Addison, English Fairs and Markets
[London, 1953], 11-13).

75 Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 333; Berkshire Hills, 2 (1
Dec. 1901), 7, and (1 May 1902), 4.
in 1827: "This method of recreation and amusement has been highly recommended by the most eminent Physicians," and "will be found the best mode of taking an airing, by those whose lives are sedentary." Montgomery added that "Every attention will be paid to company and all things done 'decently and in order.'"

"Decency and order" were also the watchwords of early fairs. At a Pittsfield Fair in the early 1820s, Theodore Sedgwick, Junior, noted in his presidential address to the agricultural society that "Here, Sir, will be a fine sight, far superior to the lions, or rope-dancing, or a bull-baiting, or Master Hunter in the Circus.—Besides our shows bring money into the pocket, those take it out." Henry Dana Ward specifically praised the plowing match for its moralizing tendencies, noting that the one at the MSPA's Brighton Fair in 1823 "absorbs the attention without creating an intoxicating interest. It improves the breed without cruelty to the animal or hazard of human life. It gives no license to passion or excess. It is a healthful nourishment to the social spirit and moral feelings of the community."

Plowing matches, and the agricultural fair itself, represented the intensifying undermining of traditional popular recreations by American social reformers, such as the founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, who sought to replace competitive folk recreations and lower-class pastimes with "innocent recreations" and "rational amusements." Reform began in the eighteenth century. Card playing in taverns and horse racing became punishable offences in Pittsfield before and during the Revolutionary War.

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76Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 333. In 1827 Montgomery described an aerial phaeton to be erected in Litchfield, Conn., as consisting of 4 carriages (to carry 2 riders each), each supported by 2 arms attached to a central axletree. A "Propelling Machine" would raise in succession each carriage 50 feet high at speeds of up to "ten miles a minute [sic; 600 m.p.h.]," or slower, as suits the wishes of those occupying the carriages, and all with perfect ease, and safety" (broadside or newspaper ad in Alain C. White, The History of the Town of Litchfield, Connecticut, 1720-1920 [Litchfield, 1920], 125, quoted in Esther Alice Peck, A Conservative Generation's Amusements: A Phase of Connecticut's Social History. The Maine Bulletin, 40, University of Maine Studies, 2d. ser., No. 44 [Bangor, 1938], 8-9).

The race course near Goodrich Pond in the East Part of town was abandoned during the war, when horse racing was suppressed by the Continental Articles of Association. But racing again flourished after peace was restored and the course was reopened. The Reverend Timothy Dwight stated in 1798 that "there has been more horseracing" in the Berkshire towns of Sheffield and Great Barrington "than in all the state of Massachusetts."

A biased observer, the Reverend David Dudley Field, reported that the "vulgar and barbarous practices" of "cock-fighting, and boxing, [were] never prevalent" in Berkshire, and were "nearly extinct" in 1829, when only the "dregs of society alone" were still interested in them, and when horse racing was "scarcely thought reputable in the better part of society." Also, "the cruel and barbarous indulgence" of turkey shoots still "continued in some places," attended with disorder and the "brutalizing of the feelings" of participants. Wrestling was "rare as an amusement," and fishing and hunting were "followed by all whose taste or pursuits allow them the indulgence." 7 8

A comparison of the treatment of ball sports by authorities in Pittsfield and Derby, England, is informative. Field noted in 1829 that "Playing at ball, in its variety of games, is practiced occasionally by many" in Berkshire County, and that "the game of ball, called wicket, has been one of great interest," "enlisting the feelings and rousing the efforts of the old and young." Ball games were the "most attractive games" on the "most jubilant holidays" of election day and the Fourth of July in Sandisfield (in the southeast corner of Berkshire County). In Pittsfield, sometime between the completion of the Bulfinch...
Church in 1793 and the death of agricultural society member John Chandler Williams in 1831, the town meeting prohibited "any game of wicket, cricket, base-ball, bat-ball, football, cats, fives, or any other games played with ball" within eighty yards of the new church. This still permitted ball play by the "lovers of muscular sport" (whom J.E.A. Smith did not identify, but who, presumably, were young men) on the meeting-house common, "their favorite resort." Williams, however, was "ever at hand, with his voice of courteous warning, to ward off the threatened bombardment, when the danger to the meeting-house windows became imminent." In Derby, on the other hand, the mayor and "rational recreationalists" suppressed street football and offered alternative sports and amusements to its players on the traditional game days of Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday, finally calling in troops every year from 1845 to 1848 to restore order when their efforts were opposed. Obviously, the social conflict that accompanied the suppression of informal sports in England in the 1840s was sharper because of the symbolism they had attained for the working-class players, who had already developed a group solidarity. 79

As Pittsfield was only at the beginning of the process of working-class formation at the time of the first Berkshire County fairs, the efforts of elite reformers to impose their moral values and recreational program upon local laborers apparently met only mild resentment, and little, if any, organized resistance. Watson's classist comments in his 1811 address about "tipling houses" show that a major impetus of recreational reform was the socioeconomic imperative of creating a steady and disciplined work force for Pittsfield's new textile manufactories. The desire of the agricultural society's founders to replace the traditional pastimes of the countryside, which they identified as lower-class amusements

that were wasteful, frivolous, demoralizing, dehumanizing, destructive, and even
dangerous, with constructive, formal, efficient, enlightened, educational, and elevating
events under their own control was consistent with Watson's stress on the benefits of
"constant employment" of the new factories. Another impetus was a self-directed quest
for refinement, as prosperous farm families and rural consumers began to assume middle-
class values and sensibilities and acquired what Richard L. Bushman has called "the
requisite accoutrements of . . . vernacular gentility" that enhanced their private spaces and
social environments. Public celebrations became occasions to watch and be watched, to
display and perform, and to shine in the best company. Those with genteel aspirations
separated themselves from those who participated in traditional sports and rude
amusements and sought the company of refined persons. Membership in the agricultural
society and participation in indoor events at annual county fairs provided opportunities to
improve one's status as well as one's farming.80

Another impetus to replacing rural folk festivals with improving holidays was the
religious and the moral imperatives of evangelical reformers during the Second Great
Awakening. A major religious revival in 1820 and 1821, which brought over 150 new
members into Pittsfield's Congregational church (and finally erased the last traces of the
old feud occasioned by Reverend Thomas Allen's politics), created "deep religious feeling"
that caused "a very marked change in the tone of society, producing a great restriction of
the latitude previously allowed in manners and customs, especially those relating to social
life and amusements." Reverend Field stated in 1829 that "The progress of more
enlightened principles and the influence of moral causes, are diminishing the evil practices
[specifically, turkey shoots], and preparing men for the higher object of acting consistently

80Herbert G. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919,"
American Historical Review, 78 (June 1973), 531-88; E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline,
Working Class (London, 1963; reprint. New York, 1966); Bushman, The Refinement of America:
Persons, Houses, Cities (New York, 1992), xiii; Kelly, In the New England Fashion (Ithaca,
N.Y., 1999).
with their rational natures." Watson himself had earlier expressed similar feelings, in 1787, when he witnessed a cockfight "surrounded by many genteel people, promiscuously mingled with the vulgar and debased" in Southampton County, Virginia. He "soon sickened of this barbarous sport," claiming he was "greatly astonished to find men of character and intelligence giving their countenance to an amusement so frivolous and scandalous, so abhorrent to every feeling of humanity, and so injurious in its moral influence," by wasting time and fostering gambling, drinking, fighting, and dueling.81

The tensions created by evangelical reform in Pittsfield literally exploded on the Fourth of July, which fell on a Sunday in 1821. The incident shows that differences over popular festivity cannot be drawn completely along class lines. A temperance reformer, the Reverend Heman Humphrey, who had been appointed minister over the reunited Congregational parishes in 1817, was indignant at Pittsfield's Masonic celebration of the 26 June 1821 festival of St. John the Baptist—with an address, procession, and dinner at Ebenezer Center's coffeehouse, "with the usual festal accompaniments." The minister determined to substitute solemn religious services for the ordinary celebrations of the upcoming Independence Day holiday. With the influence of "most of the elder citizens," who were "among the subjects of the revival," he induced the town's committee of arrangements to accede to the new program: the church bell would ring at sunrise on the Fourth to signal a prayer meeting in the lecture room; and at two o'clock Humphrey would direct a public worship service in the church and deliver an appropriate sermon. The decision that Independence Day would be devoted to public worship was not universally accepted, however.82


82Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 285, 293-94, 300; Sun [Pittsfield], 27 June 1821.
Many determined to celebrate the Fourth with the usual morning procession, reading of the Declaration of Independence, oration, prayer, singing, and the afternoon dinner, drinking, and artillery salute. All went well that morning (the Reverend Robert Green substituted as chaplain for the protesting Reverend Humphrey) until the committee of arrangements informed celebrants that the dinner would be delayed until after the conclusion of Reverend Humphrey's religious exercises, "so that all who might wish should have an opportunity to attend without interruption." Unfortunately, the gathering of the usual noisy Fourth-of-July crowds on the common grated on the minister's nerves. Especially offensive was the parading of the militia, whose members had already started celebrating the day with drink, and marched as best they could around the square, passing "with drums beating and fifes screaming" close to the church, "with the insolence of intoxication." Humphrey, believing that the disturbance was incited by the gentlemen in charge of the secular celebration (including Berkshire Agricultural Society members Timothy and Henry H. Childs and William C. Jarvis), deliberately prolonged his sermon. The committee of arrangements, in turn provoked, ordered the dinner to proceed, with the ordinary cannon salutes (less than a hundred feet from the church) after each regular toast. The thunder served merely to punctuate Humphrey's words and "produced a solemnity more profound than the sermon would have occasioned," according to the minister.83

The battle for the Fourth of July in 1821 helps explain why Pittsfield's ministers had remained aloof from the first Berkshire County agricultural fairs. Fully cognizant of Parson Allen's troubles when he involved himself in Democratic-Republican politics, perhaps they initially refused to participate in the agricultural society's fairs until they determined that the institution was truly nonpartisan. Public festive space was not undisputed territory. Not only could clerical reputations be easily destroyed by public

83Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 294-99. Regular toasts that day included: "Religion and Patriotism—They are not incompatible, and may the political Sabbath of our country be celebrated, solemnized, as the dictates of good and honest men may incline them," and "Religious Liberty—without which freedom is but a name" (Sun [Pittsfield], 11 July 1821).
activities irrelevant or hostile to pastoral missions, but communal harmony could be
disrupted by mixing religion with secular ritual. Watson correctly assumed that once the
nonpartisan agricultural fair proved more solid than a bubble, the local clergy would be
more likely to support it as chaplains of the day. As a matter of fact, the religious
component of American agricultural fairs—the prayers of thanksgiving and singing of
hymns—came to distinguish them from European fairs by the mid-1820s. The MSPA's
John Lowell, who was familiar with European cattle shows and fairs, stated in 1824, that
"The French excel us, on such occasions, in speeches and dancing; but we believe we are
the only people who combine religion with these public festivals." Religion, then, which
continued as an integral part of American society in the nineteenth century, also remained
an important aspect of the agricultural fair, as other agricultural societies were created on
the Berkshire model after Watson had left Pittsfield.⁸⁴

The modern agricultural fair was intended not only to improve the soil and the
mind, but also to reform the manners and mores of the rural community by providing to all
members of society—male and female, youths and adults, and farmers and non-farmers—
self-disciplined, educational forms of leisure under the sponsorship of a new voluntary
association. Scheduled after the intense labor of the summer hay harvest, the Pittsfield
Fair joined state election day, the Fourth of July, general training and court days, and
Thanksgiving as Berkshire's "seasons of amusement and relaxation" before 1830. The fair
was "an annual jubilee, or 'farmer's holiday,'" combining "innocent recreations" with
"measures of the most substantial utility," and "uniting the hearts, and interests of every
class of the community, male and female, in seeking the general good." Although not
universally approved of—Watson noted in 1820 that "Some have objected to the parade

⁸⁴Lowell, Massachusetts Agricultural Journal (1824), quoted in Smith, History of Pittsfield,
1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 325 n.1. For the influence of religion on American society
in the 1800s, see Jon Butler, Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People
(Cambridge, Mass., 1990); Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity
(New Haven, Conn., 1989); and Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, The Kingdom of Matthias:
A Story of Sex and Salvation in Nineteenth-Century America (New York, 1994).
introduced—others the folly of the wheat cockades—others to dancing—others of more
dissolute minds, the intermixing religious exercises, as totally irrelevant to the promotion
of agriculture"—the fair became an accepted annual event in Berkshire and beyond.85

The first Pittsfield fairs reflect not only the public festivity that had developed in
rural New England by the early nineteenth century, but also an ideological perspective that
Federalists, as well as elite commercial Republicans could appreciate. It encouraged the
development of an industrious, constantly employed workforce, the members of which
would accept their places under the direction of employers, or participate in programs to
improve agricultural output, to adopt imported livestock breeds, and to increase the
production of home manufactures, acting out of their own enlightened self-interest, which
would also restrain them from participating in self-destructive pastimes and nationally
destructive patterns of consumption. Distinguishing the individual from the group in an
act of competitive achievement, the premium program of the Berkshire Agricultural
Society, recognizing the superior results of male and female labor, served as an agent for
altering rural New England society, or at least appealed to many Yankee husbandmen and
farm wives who were clearly ready for such competition and recognition. Premiums
enlisted their participation, calling on psychological orientations that were facilitating the
shift to a competitive market economy. Fair entertainments channeled recreational
impulses into educational ends; fostered work habits necessary for a capitalist society; and
helped diffuse specific agricultural knowledge and techniques. Though often considered
as a quaint, backward-looking institution today, the agricultural fair originated as a
forward-looking rural institution that fostered the values of liberal capitalism and the
market revolution, and thus helped create the conditions from which modern American
society developed.

85Field, ed., History of Berkshire County (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 176; Watson, History of the
Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York and the
History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the
Chapter Six

Fairways and Midways:
The Legacy of the Pittsfield Fairs

Elkanah Watson was not one to stay focused on a particular project for very long. He was not content to remain in retirement in Pittsfield, nor did he consider himself permanently bound to the Berkshire Agricultural Society. Even Watson's commitment to the county fair as an instrument of agricultural education proved temporary, and he soon concentrated his organizational efforts on lobbying for permanent government agricultural agencies instead of voluntary associations. As the form of the agricultural fair perpetuated itself, however, Watson never surrendered his claims of paternity. The world of increased agricultural productivity and industrial production that he and his colleagues envisioned for Berkshire County and the United States lies at the heart of modern American society.

Watson had considered leaving Pittsfield before 1815, but only in that year finally made arrangements to do so. It is not known for certain why he had decided to return to Albany. The simple explanation for his abandoning the Berkshire Agricultural Society is that he was just acting in character—he had never been able to work cooperatively with other intelligent, independent, industrious gentlemen for very long. His public reasons for resuming "the dull scenes of a city life" were his self-satisfaction in "fulfill[ing] all the duties I had imposed upon myself" in Pittsfield and the "impossibility of encountering personally the fatigues, and cares, of a large farm." The fifty-eight-year-old Watson "indulged the unworthy hope of basking out the residue of my life in inglorious ease."1

His children at least, who had grown up in Pittsfield, probably resented the decision to move, and the departure was also probably difficult on his wife, Rachel, who had made many close friends. George, the eldest Watson child, had already grown up and moved out, but Winslow Cossoul and Charles Marston, aged twelve and sixteen, respectively, and their sisters, Mary Lucia and Emily, nineteen and twenty-five, still lived with their parents.²

Not unsurprisingly, Watson sent farewell cards to the town's respectable families with invitations to a "splendid ball" at Broad Hall, as he was "anxious to take a final farewell of this interesting community in an impressive manner." He also wished to announce the engagement of Emily, with whom he had often shared "many pleasant moments of recreation with link'd arms in Viewing the gambols and innocent sports of skipping merino Lambs by fiftys & hundreds in droves." At the close of the farewell ball, Watson joined "a group of bleached heads" in an "old folks dance," the first time he danced in years, according to the reminiscences of Winslow. Before the Watsons took their final leave of the town, Pittsfield society reciprocated by throwing them a hugely successful "elegant public ball" as a token of appreciation for Watson's eight years of service to the community.³

As with his removal to Albany three decades earlier, Watson, like many of

²Even Watson had made friends, apparently including Joshua Danforth, who wrote him afterwards: "I most sincerely regret that you thought it for your Interest to leave Pittsfield—It has made a great breach in our society" (Danforth to Watson, 13 March 1816, ALS, Box 6, fold. 10, Watson Papers, Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library, Albany).

³Winslow Watson, quoted in Hugh Meredith Flick, Elkanah Watson: Gentleman-Promoter, 1758-1842 (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 254-55. Emily and Capt. George B. Lamed (1794-1824), the son of Simon Lamed, were wed in Albany on 12 March 1816. Watson later wrote that his son-in-law "could have no claims to so much excellence and purity; either from his standing in the community—his limited talents—his literary acquirements or his pecuniary Condition. It was the most painful sacrifice of my Life, to yield her up to him, after devoting 20 years attention to her education, and the refinements of her accomplishments. The poor girl was most strangely fascinated by misplac'd affection" (Journal E, 133, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany; emphasis in original; see also William Law Learned, comp., The Learned Family (Learned, Lamed, Learnard, Larnard and Lerner), Being Descendants of William Learned, Who Was of Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1632 [Albany, N.Y., 1882], 74-75).
Berkshire's gentlemen (eventually including agricultural society officers Ezekiel Bacon, Ebenezer Center, Thomas Melvill, and Samuel Wheeler, among others), was once again seeking out greener pastures in the west. He had purchased lands at Detroit owned by his friend, the unfortunate General William Hull, and he anticipated "the probability of the great utility I may hereafter be to the district of Michigan." He wrote to Major General Jacob Brown in January 1815, soliciting a military appointment there for his son George, a merchant's apprentice in New York City. Watson himself traveled to Michigan in 1818 and spent two years at Detroit before returning to New York, but his speculations never prospered, and the death of his children there broke his heart and destroyed his interest in the region. Watson concentrated the energies of his final decades of life on developing New York's "North Country," along the shores of Lake Champlain.4

Watson's departure from Pittsfield became messy. He sold Broad Hall to his Berkshire Agricultural Society colleague Thomas Melvill, Junior, completing preliminary arrangements for the sale in December 1815 (when the family apparently left for Albany). Melvill moved into the mansion sometime before the end of February 1816. On 23 February, the day the title to the property was to be transferred, Watson received an amazing express from one of the Pittsfield hotel keepers, who had played host to a stranger from England. The man turned out to be one of Melvill's creditors from his earlier business career. Apparently, like Watson & Cossoul, Melvill's company in France went bankrupt, but, unlike Watson, Melvill fled his creditors, instead of working with them to make good his debts. Ironically enough, the Englishman had traced the defaulter through the publication of Melvill's 1815 presidential address to the Berkshire Agricultural

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Society or of other accounts of its proceedings reprinted in British newspapers. Watson rushed back to Pittsfield to demand that Melvill pay for Broad Hall in cash, and he obtained almost two-thirds of the $15,500 asking price then and there. When the Englishman belatedly struck, Melvill's property was attached for his foreign debts, reducing him to genteel poverty. Apparently, he mortgaged Broad Hall to his father, who allowed his son to remain on the estate and manage it for him. Melvill's resignation as Berkshire Agricultural Society president was presented to the meeting of its executive committee on 2 September 1816, but he continued to serve on committees, and won the thirty-five-dollar premium at the 1818 Pittsfield Fair for the best farm in the county.

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5 Flick, Elkanah Watson, Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 255-56. A document signed by both Watson and Melvill on 1 March 1816 (agreeing to indemnify Melvill for damages if 2 disputed acres on the north boundary of the property were alienated) states the deed to the estate was dated 23 Feb. 1816 (Box 15, fold. 7, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany). Melvill's widowed sister-in-law summered at Broad Hall in 1832 with her children, including young Herman Melville, who returned to look after his Uncle Thomas's estate in 1837, while briefly teaching school near Pittsfield. Melvill bequeathed Broad Hall, which Ezekiel Bacon described in 1845 as "standing or rather tumbling down, in a state of complete dilapidation and ruin," to his son Robert, who renovated it into a genteel boardinghouse (Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle, eds., Moby-Dick or The Whale. Vol. 6, The Writings of Herman Melville [Evanston, Ill., 1988], 588-89, 610-11; C. P. Smith, Housatonic [New York, 1946], 337; Bacon to Henry Crueger Van Schaack, 20 Oct. 1845, in H. C. Van Schaack, Memoirs of the Life of Henry Van Schaack Embracing Selections from His Correspondence during the American Revolution [Chicago, 1892], 3; J.E.A. Smith, The History of Pittsfield, (Berkshire County,) Massachusetts, from the Year 1800 to the Year 1876 [Springfield, Mass., 1876], 7; Herman Melville to Evert A. Duyckinck, 16 Aug. 1850, in Merrel R. Davis and William H. Gilman, eds., The Letters of Herman Melville [New Haven, Conn., 1960], 110-11; Bernard Carman, "Bygone Berkshire: Names Made News at Stately Broadhall," 13 Aug. 1960 clipping from unidentified newspaper, Local History File, "Pitts.—Hist. Sites—Broad Hall," Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Mass.).

6 Flick, Elkanah Watson, Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 255-56; Address of Thomas Melvill, jun. Esq. Delivered before the Berkshire Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Manufactures, at Pittsfield, October 3, 1815, Together with the Premiums Awarded on Said Day (Pittsfield, Mass., 1815); MS Records of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, Vol. 1, 67, Berkshire Historical Society, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. "Honorable Testimony. Pittsfield October 3, 1818. Thomas Melvill, Esq., of Boston produced the Best Cultivated & Organized Farm, in the possession of Thomas Melvill, Jr., Esq., of Pittsfield. The best in engagements as to oeconomy and use of buildings, fences, farming implements, farm and fold yards, and other conveniences appertaining thereto" (Berkshire Agricultural Society premium diploma, 3 Oct. 1818, signed by President Thomas Gold and Recording Secretary Jonathan Allen, photostat of original displayed in Melville Room, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Mass.). Melville continued as a respected member of the community, being elected to the state legislature in 1832. Briefly leaving his family behind while he attempted to establish a new
The Berkshire Agricultural Society suffered from Melvill's financial fall, as he had been one of its chief contributors and fund raisers. In a startling commentary on the society's (and Watson's) lack of commitment to its charter responsibility, the society, in 1813, had proposed discontinuing the annual agricultural show if further funds for premiums were not forthcoming. It considered instead holding a fair for the exchange of livestock and manufactures, a commercial event reminiscent of the pre-Revolutionary Hardwick fairs. Premium money was found, but in vain did the Berkshire society appeal for it to the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (MSPA). In 1812 the MSPA's recording secretary, Richard Sullivan, personally satisfied with the propriety of the Berkshire society's application for financial assistance, told Watson that the Berkshire officers would "not be disappointed." They were, however, disappointed with the response from the MSPA's trustees in 1812. That board did not conceive itself authorized by its charter to make appropriations out of its funds that would exclusively benefit one section of the state over another, "however much it may wish for the prosperity of the Berkshire Society." The most it could do was offer statewide premiums for measures supported by the Berkshire society, such as on the dyestuff madder.7

John Adams, president of the MSPA from 1805 to 1813, privately explained his institution's lack of cooperation to Elkanah Watson on 11 August 1812: "Your Berkshire Agricultural Society and our Mass. S. for promoting Agriculture, will assuredly quarrel, and go to War." Adams hinted, "I could Say Something about Hemp, Flax, Mulberries, Silk Worms, Silk Stockings, and Tim. Ruggles and Hardwick Fairs." But he did not

7 25 Jan., 29 Feb., 26 Dec. 1812, 29 May 1813, Record Book Vol. 2, Box 20; Carlisle Correspondence, Miscellaneous Records, Vol. 3, Box 33; Watson to the President and Trustees of the Massachusetts Agricultural Society, 29 Jan. 1812, ALS, Watson to Richard Sullivan, 21 April 1812, ALS, Box 11, Drawer C, all in MS Records of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; see also Centennial Year, 1792-1892, The Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture (Boston, 1892; reprint. Boston, 1942), 68-69.
elaborate for another five years.8

Adams did not send details until 1817: "I was myself against Advancing you Money because I thought We had no Right to do it; and because I thought as Soon as our Finances would allow, We ought to institute Cattle Shows." Eventually the MSPA did organize its own fair, in 1816, but the political differences between the two agricultural societies undoubtedly contributed to the MSPA’s refusal to help. Boston’s Federalist elite within and without the MSPA hesitated in countenancing the new Berkshire society because they perceived it as a Democratic-Republican institution. Its location in Republican Berkshire County damned it, as did the apparent Jeffersonianism of most of its leaders. The MSPA leadership was discomforted by the thrust of the Berkshire society’s policies, which emphasized promotion of American manufacturing and supported the federal administration’s trade and military measures, no matter Watson’s continual claims of his society’s nonpartisanship. When Jedidiah Morse forwarded to MSPA vice-president Aaron Dexter Watson’s suggestions in 1808 that the MSPA promote merinos and manufactures, along with Watson’s request of a grant to publish a merino manual, the reverend noted, "Were it less congenial to the visionary projects of the present Administration, I shd. like it better—Abstractedly this thing is good." As Adams, who had himself fallen afool of the Federalist party, later told Watson: "there are no fanatics in religion,—no visionaries in philosophy,—no heroes in an army,—no, nor any misses in dancing and music,—more enthusiastic, than the devotees of agriculture and horticulture." He accurately predicted in 1812: "You will get no aid from Boston. Commerce, literature, science, theology, are against you;—nay, medicine, history, and University, and universal politics might be added.9

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9 Adams to Watson, 16 Sept. 1812, 7 Nov. 1817, ALS, Watson Papers, Box 3, Journal D. Both Adams’s letters appear in Winslow C. Watson, ed., *Men and Times of the Revolution; or*,
Although the two agricultural societies differed in constituency and political philosophy, they had striking similarities, which serve to modify the argument of historians who view the Berkshire organization as the exemplification of the nineteenth-century democratization of the agricultural improvement movement. In addition to resemblances in their social compositions, original membership requirements, and organizational structures discussed in Chapter Four, the two agricultural associations initially shared the same elite literary program. Ironically, Watson himself desired that such measures would eventually supplant the fair as an instrument of agricultural education, and it was the MSPA's adoption of the agricultural fair that guaranteed the form's survival.

Incorporated in 1792 to collect and diffuse useful agricultural information, the MSPA attempted to fulfill its mission by obtaining and publishing accounts of domestic and foreign improvements, by establishing a private library, and by offering and awarding premiums for experiments, improved implements, and superior breeds of livestock. The new society appointed a standing committee to select from incoming communications those worth printing in local newspapers. The society eventually published a regular series of its own transactions, the semiannual *Massachusetts Journal of Agriculture* (later the *Massachusetts Agricultural Repository and Journal*), which was distributed to members from 1813 to 1827, and afterwards appeared irregularly until 1832, when it ceased publication. The journal was offered free to local agricultural societies and was sold to individuals for fifty cents an issue. The MSPA also established, in 1797, an agricultural library for its members' use, four years later appropriating five hundred dollars for new accessions. By 1814 it had deposited in the Boston Athenaeum at least fifty-four agricultural volumes published in Europe. In 1815, honorary member Sir Joseph Banks, the president of the British Royal Society, assisted MSPA trustee Samuel G. Perkins in

*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* (2d. ed.; New York, 1856), 439, 499; Morse to Dexter, 3 Dec. 1808, ALS, MS Records of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, Drawer D, Box 20, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
purchasing more books for the library, and that September the society deposited an additional forty-six British agricultural and horticultural volumes in the Athenaeum. When the society published a catalog of its collections in 1819, the library consisted of eighty-two titles, all but ten of them with European imprints.¹⁰

In its 1792 petition for incorporation, the founders of the MSPA stated that financial contributions had already provided the means to award premiums to "men of enterprise" who communicated their "useful discoveries" to the public. The society offered its first two cash prizes in March 1793: fifty dollars for "the most satisfactory account of the natural history of the canker-worm," and one hundred dollars for "the most effectual and cheapest method of destroying these insects." It soon offered other premiums, including those for the cultivation of wheat, improvement of wild lands, raising of trees, best winter provender for livestock, most and best wool from a certain number of sheep, best cider making process, and best maple sugar production. The society understood that most of the candidates for premiums would be gentlemen farmers who had the leisure time, education, and resources for agricultural experimentation, and who

were not necessarily actuated by "pecuniary awards," but "would be more gratified by the most honorable testimony of their merit." The trustees therefore voted on 26 April 1793 that prizewinners might, at their option, receive "a medal 3 Guineas weight emblemistically engraved and called the Society's Gold Medal" instead of cash. By 1808 the MSPA was offering over one thousand dollars worth of premiums each year.\textsuperscript{11}

A relevant example of the MSPA's threefold strategy was its promotion of Spanish Merino sheep in the early 1800s, an object that also motivated the organizers of the first modern agricultural fairs. The MSPA reprinted "The History of the Merino Sheep in Europe" from Lord Somerville's 1802 address to the Bath and West of England Agricultural Society, and sponsored a translation of Louis Jean Marie Daubenton's \textit{Instructions pour les Bergers et pour Les Propriétaires des Troupeaux; avec d'autres Ouvrages sur les Moutons et sur les Laines} (4th. ed.; Paris, 1810). It also collected for its agricultural library at least ten volumes on sheep raising, half of them dealing specifically with merinos.\textsuperscript{12} In 1801 the MSPA offered an annual thirty-dollar premium for five years for the introduction of a superior ram or ewe into the Commonwealth for the purpose of propagation, and offered an additional twenty dollars if the sheep were imported from abroad. Seth Adams of Dorchester was awarded a medal worth fifty dollars for his importation of a pair of Spanish Merinos from France that year, and in 1802 David Humphreys was given the society's gold medal for his importation of Spanish Merinos into

\textsuperscript{11}Centennial Year of the MSPA (Boston, 1892; reprint., Boston, 1942), 8, 28-29, 41; "Notes on the History of the MSPA," Miscellaneous Records, Box 33, MS Records of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Thornton, \textit{Cultivating Gentlemen} (New Haven, Conn., 1989), 61-63.

Connecticut. In 1809 the MSPA awarded two hundred and fifty dollars in premiums to Captain Cornelius Coolidge for landing a large cargo of merinos at Boston.13

Unlike the Berkshire society, the Boston society could well afford such disbursements. The "monies . . . placed in their hands" before its March 1792 petition for incorporation had grown to $3,363 that November, including at least one thousand dollars contributed by president Thomas Russell. The new funds came not only from the annual membership dues but also from a successful subscription initiated at one of the early meetings. At the January 1793 session of the General Court, the society first petitioned, unsuccessfully, the state legislature for a financial grant. In 1805 the state did grant the MSPA a six-mile-square township in the district of Maine, to aid the society's sponsorship of a professorship of natural history at Harvard College. The proceeds from the sale of the tract, and of another granted in 1809, freed up money in the permanent fund that would otherwise have been expended on the college projects. By 1813 the society's permanent funds, including interest, amounted to nearly twenty thousand dollars. This was one year before the legislature began making an annual grant of one thousand dollars to support the society's publications program, seed or plant raising, and other agricultural experiments, and three years before another annual state grant of five hundred dollars was initiated to increase the premiums offered at the society's new cattle show and fair, first held at Brighton in 1816.14

But by then, of course, the Berkshire Agricultural Society had created an entire system of popular agricultural education centered around six successful cattle shows and fairs in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and Elkanah Watson jealously guarded Berkshire's claim of priority as the organizers of modern American agricultural fairs. MSPA president John


14Centennial Year of the MSPA (Boston, 1892; reprint., Boston, 1942), 8, 26, 27, 40-42.
Lowell conceded in 1823 that the Berkshire society did "first to give a spring to agricultural efforts by introducing the British and French system of public shows of cattle and manufactures," but added, "Still, too much must not be claimed on this score. It was not an original thought. Many of us had visited the European shows, and the subject of introducing them had been discussed, and there can be no doubt, that long ere this, they would have been in full operation from the successful effect of European example."\textsuperscript{15}

The MSPA trustees claimed they had considered a proposal for holding an annual or a semiannual cattle show and fair in Cambridge as early as 1801, but had not done so because awarding premiums in the name of Massachusetts agriculture to livestock from only the nearby counties of Essex, Middlesex, and Norfolk "might have been deemed not only invidious as respects other counties, but inadequate and unjust as respects the proper renown of the whole State in the particular of the agricultural art." Another explanation, ironically, was that the English shows had been patronized by the aristocracy, and that the MSPA "had prejudices enough to overcome, and epithets enough to endure without exposing itself, needlessly, to the embarrassment of the one or the other." The High Federalists of Boston who led the MSPA apprehended that their founding a fair "would be declaimed about as an attempt to introduce 'a monarchical institution.'" Having already distanced themselves from the British aristocracy, the Anglophobic Democratic-Republican leaders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society could safely coopt the fairs and shows of the British gentry. They were merely asserting Jeffersonian confidence in the common man, as well as in a new spirit of pedagogy that increasingly appeared in American institutions after the Revolutionary War.

But Elkanah Watson never fully abandoned his faith in the efficacy of printed media for the diffusion of agricultural improvements, and viewed the fairs only as a temporary expedient. In 1820 he believed that such "excitements [we]re no longer necessary" in Berkshire County "to lead the people to a knowledge of their true interests,"

\textsuperscript{15}Lowell quoted in \textit{Centennial Year of the MSPA} (Boston, 1892; reprint., Boston, 1942), 66.
and only "the powerful operation of annual premiums" need be retained "to excite a spirit of emulation." He wrote that "hereafter they will have leisure to contemplate agriculture as a science, which they will gradually approach, with the collateral aid of a well selected annual volume, in which will be developed successful experiments, applicable to our soil and climate." According to the past president of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, nine annual Pittsfield fairs had given "respectability to the honourable profession of a farmer." They had also raised the alert for women, who were now "striving to excel in domestic manufactures." Watson concluded that "no farther efforts will be required, as all will move in harmony and system, from year to year. Books and science will then become all important, as an auxiliary aid," and "Much will depend on the Board of Agriculture."

Watson had resigned the presidency of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, to which he had been elected for the fifth time on 1 August 1814, sometime before 16 October 1814. Thomas Melvill, Junior, announced at its meeting on the latter date that he was honored to be the new president and proposed that Watson, "As a merited mark of our high consideration of our late President, and in order that we may profit of his

\[16\] Elkanah Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals in the State of New York and the History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire System (Albany, N.Y., 1820), 148, 182 (emphasis in original). Watson's view of fairs as necessary only as an early measure is elaborated in a March 1820 note of his: "one of these exhibitions [at Troy, N.Y.], conducted in this [impressive] style, at this period, will produce more practical good, than ten studied, wiredrawn books" (ibid., 168n; emphasis in original). Thomas Gold shared Watson's faith in the efficacy of literary means, telling the Berkshire society in his 1817 presidential address that "The industry and solicitude of divers distinguished men of our own country, has led them to compile, from their own observations, many valuable essays, which will prove most useful aids," before recommending the Massachusetts Agricultural Repository and Journal, the Memoirs of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, Chancellor Livingston's Essay on Sheep, "Lawrence's general treatise on cattle, and other animals," and Virgil's Georgics. He also saw as a continuing function of the agricultural society the diffusion of knowledge through traditional literary means, "With these aids [the above-mentioned publications], a reading and thinking agriculturalist cannot fail of acquiring that degree of information which shall guide him successfully in his ennobled pursuit." The society was "the proper channel through which" new discoveries should be made known, "and its officers will take care to transmit to the public, in decent form, every essay which shall be entrusted to their care" (Address of Thomas Gold, Esq. . . . Delivered before the Berkshire Association, for the Promotion of Agriculture and Manufactures, at Pittsfield, Oct. 2d, 1817 [Pittsfield, Mass., 1817], 8-9).
knowledge & experience," be "adjoined as an honorary member of the sd. committee [of administration] & as such be requested to attend our meeting." We do not know explicitly when or why Watson had decided to end his official connection with the society. On 6 June 1815 he wrote to Rufus Briggs of Red Hook, New York (a former agent of the late Chancellor Livingston), thanking him for his "friendly & patriotic declaration, that you could probably obtain for the use & support of Our Society probably 200$." Watson stated: "I am going [on] a Journey & have no more direct agency in this important Society," adding, "Being no longer an Officer of the Society I can without delicacy say—that we have no funds—and the whole fabric is upheld, by the ardent & patriotic zeal of a few Individuals." When the society learned he would be moving from Pittsfield, President Melvill, who had been reelected on 7 October 1815, conveyed to Watson the society's high sense of "the important services he has rendered, by his patriotic efforts to encourage and promote Agriculture and Manufactures, and by his perseverance in the establishment of this interesting institution." On 8 January 1816, the society unanimously voted to thank Watson officially and to publish that resolution as a "Tribute of Respect" in the local paper. In addition, it voted to offer an annual premium for the best full-blooded merino buck—the "Silver Cup, of the value of $12, to be called the Watson Cup, . . . to perpetuate our gratitude to the founder of this Society."

Watson wrote next to the clipping of his official reply to the society's tribute that he had pasted in his commonplace book: "Thus ends my carrier in Berkshire County[.] Amen! Now for New York—God grant me the power to call forth the Sleeping energies of that Noble State." He did not, however, completely turn his back on the Berkshire Society. He returned to Pittsfield for its 1816 fair, at which he presented "a concise and elegant address on the general interests of the institution," delivered the annual premiums,

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and was a guest of honor at the society's Agricultural Dinner on 3 October, at which he presented the toast "Independence, the reward of the intelligent and industrious farmer."

Although the society successfully held five popular annual fairs under Watson's direction, it still was not financially secure, and Watson wondered if it would long survive his departure. He referred to his two presidential successors, Melvill and Gold, as "a convicted thief" and a "a notorious Liar," respectively, and lamented since "So much [is] depending on the President—I greatly fear all my Labors are in danger of being prostrated."18

Watson overreacted, as usual, and the Berkshire Agricultural Society survived long enough to influence permanently the course of American agricultural organization and education and rural recreation in the northeast. As seen above, the MSPA had earlier considered sponsoring fairs, but adopted the Berkshire system only after five successful fairs were held in Pittsfield. In December 1815 a committee reported to the MSPA's board of trustees that the society in October 1816 should hold a fair in Brighton, the site of an important weekly livestock market, and the society offered twelve premiums worth $260 to be awarded at it. Watson triumphed to the Berkshire society at the 1816 Pittsfield Fair that "It will be peculiarly grateful to every member of this society, to know that the mother Society in this state, is at length aroused from her lethargy—cautiously treading in our footsteps[;] . . . they will now excite a laudable spirit of emulation in the vicinity of the capital; from their powerful example extensive benefits will doubtless, spread in every direction." With the much greater resources the MSPA had at its disposal, its Brighton fairs were more impressive and commanded greater attention. That society awarded thirteen hundred dollars in premiums at its second fair, in 1817, and spent almost two hundred dollars on the Cattle Show Dinner alone. The following year, it acquired land in

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Brighton for permanent fairgrounds (probably the first in the nation), and completed construction of its Agricultural Hall, which was dedicated on Fair Day 1818. Newspapers across the Commonwealth reprinted the Brighton Fair's premium lists, and for the next twenty years, candidates for Brighton premiums came from as far as the Connecticut River Valley.¹⁹

Other Massachusetts counties soon followed the lead of the Berkshire and the state agricultural societies, organizing associations to hold annual fairs. Essex County organized its own agricultural society and fair in 1818. A general meeting of Connecticut Valley gentlemen met in January 1818 and decided to organize the Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society, which was incorporated the following month and held its first Tri-County Fair in October. The Worcester County Agricultural Society was formed in 1818 and held its first county fair in October 1819. Bristol County organized an agricultural society and a county fair in 1823. Watson's native county of Plymouth organized an agricultural society sometime before July 1819, when its corresponding secretary asked if the trustees could consult with him before their first fair that autumn. Watson had intended attending, and had even drafted an address to the society, in which he fondly remembered "the unclouded days of youth" in "this venerable town," and recalled "the innocent gambols & boyish sports" of his childhood. But illness prevented him from traveling that year. In 1823 both the Bristol County and Plymouth County...
agricultural societies again requested Watson's presence at their annual fairs, and, in replying to the latter that "It is again my fix't & settled intention . . . to attend your next exhibition," he drafted some "delicate suggestions" for the occasion, requesting that the exhibition be held in Plymouth and that all the ceremonies be held "in the Church of my youth," as the effect "after an absence of 50 years will be peculiarly impressive." But he was unable to travel that year, too, and, in fact, never returned to Plymouth.20

After leaving Pittsfield in 1816, Watson traveled extensively around New York state, corresponded with local and county leaders to help organize agricultural societies on the Modern Berkshire System, and published several pamphlets when that correspondence became too burdensome. Watson directly inspired and guided the leading men of Otsego County in January 1817 to organize New York's first county agricultural association, which conducted the state's first county fair that October, at Cooperstown. Fifty-one other New York counties followed suit in the late 1810s, with Watson personally involved in the organization of agricultural societies in Jefferson, Oneida, and Cayuga counties in 1818. From June to October 1819, he began extended "missionary agricultural rambles" in western New York, where he assisted the formation of societies and attended fairs in Steuben, Seneca, Schoharie, and Rensselaer counties. Watson also lobbied the New York legislature to pass an act to promote agriculture similar to that passed by Massachusetts. In March 1818 he was openly scorned on the floor of the house for "pretended patriotism" that "had its source in personal, selfish ambition." One member called him a Bonaparte "seeking to lord it over the farmers of this state," and complained that he constantly harassed the legislature to obtain a "salary for himself and family." After another winter of work, and with governor DeWitt Clinton's support, the New York legislature passed a comprehensive agricultural law that granted a total of ten thousand dollars in annual

grants to county societies for fair premiums.21

In 1818 George Washington Jeffreys of North Carolina suggested that Watson "could essentially promote the organization of Agricultural Societies in this State, by furnishing me for publication, a history of the rise, and progress of the Berkshire Society" and its imitators in New York. He wished it would include "an account of the prejudices, and opposition they encountered—the means which gradually removed them—and the measures adopted which promoted their prosperity and usefulness," as well as details of "the happy effects which resulted from the establishment of these societies." Watson, who had begun collecting materials for such a work upon his return from Detroit that summer, protested that a publication would necessarily "in some measure" make himself "the burthen of the song," and expose him "to the imputation of egotism—always odious when it can be avoided." But, for the public good, and to relieve himself "from an extensive correspondence," Watson refused "to bury the MSS.—food for moths." He therefore submitted for publication in the spring of 1819 his History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society in Massachusetts, with Practical Directions for Societies Forming in North Carolina, on the Berkshire Model. To increase the effect of "This little busy volume" of eighty pages, Watson, at his own expense, sent two copies to all of New York's agricultural societies, "whether organized or not," and to most of the counties in New England, as well as to the governors of the several states. He claimed that this measure led to the formation of Berkshire-modeled societies in all the counties in the state of New York, as well as in New England, North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, South Carolina, and Georgia (although new societies

organized in Connecticut and Kentucky, at least, had already held fairs before 1817). In 1820 Watson published an expanded version of the work as an appendage to his history of New York canals, which he again realized would subject him "to be assailed on various grounds."22

He never expected his pamphlets would involve him in controversy with the leaders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society. He blamed the whole trouble on Thomas Melvill and Thomas Gold, who apparently had convinced a majority of the executive committee on 4 October 1819 to pass a resolution stating that Watson's 1819 book "presents an incorrect and inadequate history of the rise, and progress of the society, and we can not patronize the same." Watson replied to the committee two days later that "such base ingratitude could not have eminated from a majority of your Committee but from an insiduous Trio of Toms who have contrived to smuggle this dirty document on your minutes, to gratify malignant jealousies, and their personal hatred 'ward me." He demanded that the committee state in frankness and candor which facts in the history that they considered incorrect. Watson's son Charles delivered the letter and attended the Pittsfield Fair that month, apparently obtaining satisfaction for his father (the following autumn Watson received a "special and earnest invitation" to attend the fair, which he did, and had the pleasure of seeing the offensive vote expunged from the society's record book). Rumor had so magnified the affair that by the time news of it had reached New York, it had been turned into open warfare between the society and its founder, who had been accused of embezzling three hundred dollars of the society's funds. Watson was

forced to obtain an affidavit from treasurer Samuel D. Colt testifying that had never been
the case, and to circulate a letter from the society's John W. Hurlburt, a congressman,
stating that Watson's publication was correct and that he had been "much abused by the
proceedings of some of the members."23

The affair arose principally from the renewed personal and political conflict
between Watson and his old nemesis, DeWitt Clinton, but, undoubtedly, the self-important
nature of Watson's historical publications did contribute to the ill feeling between Watson
and his presidential successors, whose names appear nowhere in the works. As a matter
of fact, neither are the names of other officers mentioned, nor the individual efforts of any
officers or members. The creation and early development of the Berkshire society and
Pittsfield fairs apparently sprang straight from the head of Watson, with minimal assistance
from an unidentified "we."

The Berkshire Agricultural Society easily survived without Watson at its head,
slowly improving its financial situation and continuing to hold annual fairs in Pittsfield.
After the War of 1812, Massachusetts made its first grant to the society, giving it two
hundred dollars for premiums. The following year, it granted another two hundred
dollars, which still left the society six hundred dollars in debt after the 1818 Pittsfield Fair,
occaisioning a desperate petition in January 1819 requesting additional funds. The
following month, the General Court passed an "Act for the Encouragement of Agriculture
and Manufactures." This authorized five years of grants (of two hundred to six hundred
dollars, depending on the size of a county's population) each October to every
incorporated county agricultural society in the Commonwealth that held at least one
thousand dollars in capital stock. The law also required each society to submit to the
secretary of the state an annual report of its expenditures, along with any useful

23 History of the Rise, Progress, and Existing Condition of the Western Canals and the History
of the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agricultural Societies, on the Berkshire
System (Albany, N.Y., 1820), 190-92; Flick, Elkanah Watson, Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss.,
Columbia University, 1958), 291-96; affidavit, 6 Oct. 1820, and clipping from unidentified
observations on agriculture and manufactures it had to offer.24

The Berkshire Agricultural Society remained solvent throughout the nineteenth
century, and held agricultural fairs until the end, despite Watson's hopes for a return to
more traditional means of agricultural education. In 1822 Thomas A. Gold suggested to
the society's trustees that it lease the Cantonment from the federal government or purchase
land elsewhere in Pittsfield for permanent fairgrounds, but the recommendation was not
acted upon then, and the common at the center of the village continued to be the site of
the Pittsfield fairs. The increased crowds brought by the completed Western Railroad,
which connected Pittsfield to Boston and Albany in 1841-1842, finally necessitated a
larger space. In 1855 the society purchased thirty-one acres about a mile north of the
village center and held its first fair there that year, before construction of various
improvements to the grounds were finished. These included "a substantial and high fence
enclosing the whole grounds" (an admittance fee began to be charged to nonmembers in
1860, income unavailable when the fairs were held on the town common), a half-mil race
track, stables, a treasurer's office, and a four-thousand-square-foot Agricultural Hall. The
society paid off its seven-thousand-dollar mortgage on the land and improvements in
1859, by which time the annual fairs had expanded to cover three days, and premium
awards amounted to $1,137.50 (J.E.A. Smith served as chairman of the fair's Floral
Department that year). Expenditures, primarily for fairgrounds maintenance, continued to
exceed income, however, and, by the early 1900s, the society was almost ten thousand

24David W. Baker, "Legislation as to Bounties to Agricultural Societies," MS, 1893,
Miscellaneous Records, Vol. 3, Box 33, MS Records of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting
Agriculture, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Watson, History of the Rise, Progress, and
Existing State of the Berkshire Agricultural Society in Massachusetts, with Practical Directions
for Societies Forming in North Carolina, on the Berkshire Model (Albany, N.Y., 1819), 73-75;
John H. Lockwood et al., eds., Western Massachusetts: A History, 1636-1925 (2 vols.; New York,
1926), 1:477; Josiah Gilbert Holland, History of Western Massachusetts. The Counties of
Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin, and Berkshire. Embracing an Outline, or General History, of
the Section, an Account of Its Scientific Aspects and Leading Interests, and Separate Histories of
Its One Hundred Towns (2 vols.; Springfield, Mass., 1855), 2:396. The act was renewed every 5
years until 1840, disbursing a total of $115,000 to the dozen or so agricultural societies in
Massachusetts.
dollars in debt. The directors were authorized to sell the society's property to pay off what they could, and Elkanah Watson's Berkshire Agricultural Society passed out of existence in January 1902.25

How much he might have mourned its passing if he were alive is questionable. "Excitements" had upstaged emulation and education by mid-century, if not earlier. "Godfrey Greylock" described the 1851 "Cattle Show and Fair of the County Agricultural Society" as a two-day "Festival of all festivals." The streets "were densely thronged with all sorts of people, . . . with no very definite notion of what they were after." Pressing through the "motley crowd," he took his stand on an open common near the railroad depot, and witnessed how the American agricultural fair had come full circle from the European market fair. "Here booths, stalls, tents, merry-go-rounds, and raree shows had sprung up in the night, like so many mushrooms. Babel and Vanity Fair! Such a discord of tongues and chaos of merchandise one does not often meet." Book vendors, oyster sellers, razor-strop men, and numerous other petty entrepreneurs competed for the crowds' attention and cash. "Having run the gauntlet of pedlars, showmen, and auctioneers," the writer took "desperate refuge" in the "jaws of some gigantic show-tent . . . where, a stupendous hand-bill informed us, could be seen all the notabilities of the day." After paying the admission fee, "Greylock" found "a waxen crowd of horrors and heroes, very distinguishable, the one from the other, by the aid of labels."26

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25Transactions of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, for the Year 1859 (Pittsfield, Mass., 1859), 3, 5, 7, 19, 36-37; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 2:347-49, 530-31, 541-42; Lockwood et al., eds., Western Massachusetts (2 vols.; New York, 1926), 477-79; Holland, History of Western Massachusetts (2 vols.; Springfield, Mass., 1855), 2:397, 402-03. Southern Berkshire was never committed to the Berkshire Agricultural Society, even when Theodore Sedgwick, Jr., of Stockbridge was its president. After the failure of their 1825 attempt to have the fair held every other year in a southern town, southern Berkshire gentlemen created the Housatonic Agricultural Society at Great Barrington in 1841, which held its first fair in 1842, was incorporated in 1848, and purchased permanent fairgrounds in 1854 (which no doubt influenced the Berkshire society's decision to do likewise). The Hoosac Valley Agricultural Society was formed and held its first fair in North Adams in 1859, and was incorporated in 1860.

26"Godfrey Greylock" [perhaps J.E.A. Smith], Taghconic; or Letters and Legends about Our Summer Home (Boston, 1852), 157, 162, 163-64.
It might be supposed that moving the Pittsfield Fair to private property in 1855 presented the Berkshire Agricultural Society an opportunity to regain control of the event and reemphasize its original educational mission. This did not occur. In order to encourage as wide a participation as possible, the society later arranged with the New York and Hartford Railroad and the Boston and Albany Railroad companies to sell excursion tickets from various Berkshire towns that included admission to the fair. Also, before the end of the nineteenth century, the society began holding regular Farmers Institutes, at which specialists would lecture on particular topics. For instance, the secretary (probably Charles H. Wright) wrote to the state board of agriculture in 1899, requesting that George Cruickshanks speak on 15 December on "Small Fruits, Their Culture and Variety." With other, more frequent, events fulfilling the society's educational mission, then, it was inevitable that entertainment features would begin to predominate at its annual fairs. This was because society members gained free admittance to the fairgrounds, but the trainloads of paying customers, who were not necessarily interested in agriculture, represented a large potential source of income. The bottom line increasingly pressured the society's trustees to appeal to the "motley crowd" of paying nonmembers.27

Surviving correspondence from the society's last years illustrates the concerns of its officers as they made arrangements for the penultimate Pittsfield Fair, in 1900. Although some letters dealt with finding qualified (and paid) judges for the livestock exhibitions and fair marshals (Harry H. D. Ewen replied to secretary Wright from Lenox on 7 September that he would be pleased to serve as marshal—for four dollars a day—and closed his note: "Hoping we may have a big success and make lots of money"), most of the mail concerned advertising, merchandising, and sport and spectacle. Charles Wright ordered five hundred fifteen-by-eighteen-inch "flag signs" saying "BIG PITTSFIELD FAIR, SEP. 11TH, 12TH, 13TH" from the Ithaca Sign Works, Stanford and Company, on

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27Wright to J. W. Stockwell, 8 Dec. 1899; C. T. Hempstead to Wright, and A. S. Hanson to Wright, both 17 Aug. 1900, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1899-1902, Berkshire Agricultural Society, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.
23 August, for an undisclosed sum. He also informed potential vendor A. Palmeri and Company of Brooklyn, New York, "Manufacturers and Jobbers of Jewelry and Novelties" that booth space rented for one dollar per foot of frontage on the fairgrounds, and two dollars per foot inside Agricultural Hall. Wright also replied on 24 August to P. F. McMahon’s now lost letter "of recent date" that the society’s booth rental did not grant "an exclusive privilege," for which special prices could be mutually arranged. He concluded, "As I imagine we would not have more than one snake eater at the fair, I think we could give you a reasonable rate." McMahon replied from North Adams, Massachusetts, on 4 September, reserving fifteen feet of booth space and inquiring "whether you have any other kind of a snake exhibition?" 

The society took an active interest in providing entertainment for fair visitors, and expended much money and effort in contracting for the services of professionals, showing that fairs had become big business by the early nineteenth century. Charles J. Gorman of Gorman’s New England Amusement Company, of Boston, which also owned a pleasure park at New Downer Landing near Quincy Point, wrote (apparently to the society’s secretary) on 7 September: "I would like to furnish you with some acts for your Fair[.] I will Guarantee to give them at a low figure—If you see any thing you like on the list I will let you have it cheap." Unfortunately, the enclosed list has not been found, but the acts could not have differed markedly from those offered for the society's 1901 fair by Transatlantic Amusement Attractions, Harold Cox, managing director, with offices in New York, London, and Paris. Traveling representative R. F. Trevellick wrote from its Albany, New York, branch office on 8 August 1901, describing some of the firm's "American and European Novelties of the Highest Class Only" (not a snake eater in the bunch). These

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28 A. Palmeri & Co. to Superintendent, 28 April, and [Wright?] to A. Palmeri & Co., 2 May 1900; Wright to Ithaca Sign Works, 23 Aug., and Stanford and Company to Wright, 24 Aug. 1900; Ewen to Wright, 7 Sept. 1900, all in Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1899-1902, Berkshire Agricultural Society, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. For letters concerning judging, see Frank A. Lovelock to Wright, 26 June, and H. A. Jones to [Wright], 14 Aug. 1900; Stockwell & Gifford to [Wright], n.d., and to Joseph W. Lewis, 14 Aug. 1901; and J. E. Gifford to [Lewis?], 20 Aug. 1901, in same collection.
included: tight rope and slack wire acts (including Cadieux, "Parisian Bounding Wire Artist Supreme, a Confident Master of All the Seemingly Impossible Feats," who could turn "Backward & Forward" and perform "A Complete Row of Somersaults in Mid-Air"); trick and fancy bicycle riding; high divers; contortionists and acrobats; "The Sigberts (Man & Woman) in 2 acts: 1. Comedy revolving ladder with a sensational breakaway finish. 2. Double trapeze act" (both for $125); "Gilberts Goat Circus (Much the best goat act in the business—a novelty in animal acts)" for $125; and "Reed's [5] acrobatic Bull Pups," for $115. The letterhead of Transatlantic Amusements, which provided acts for other Massachusetts fairs, the Danbury Fair in Connecticut, and "½ the Fairs in N.Y. State," also listed some other competition the Berkshire Agricultural Society had to face: "Open-Air Entertainments, Suburban Parks," and "Pleasure Resorts."29

Organized sports were the other major spectacle by which the agricultural society's trustees planned to draw customers to the 1900 Pittsfield Fair, and these were not just plowing matches. Town tugs-of-war and baseball games were considered in 1900, and probably held at earlier fairs. Horse racing, of course, was the biggest draw, and the chief (and most costly) improvement to the fairgrounds was the track and grandstands built in the 1850s. But bicycle racing was also a major attraction at the 1900 fair. The Berkshire Agricultural Society became an associate member of the National Cycling Association, Inc., in August 1900, and first brought organized cycle racing to Pittsfield. The society held races, officially sanctioned by the national organization, on Labor Day and on the first day of that year's fair. Prizes of furniture and jewelry for the two races cost the society

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29Gorman to [Charles Wright?], 7 Sept. 1900, R. F. Trevellick to Lewis, 8 and 16 Aug. 1901, all in Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1899-1902, Berkshire Agricultural Society, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Some of the performances at the 1900 Pittsfield Fair were marginally educational, such as chemist Hudson Maxim's demonstration of various explosives, "a display of both spectacular and scientific interest which they [fairgoers] would probably never see duplicated" (he had exhibited his brother Hiram Stevens Maxim's machine guns at a previous Pittsfield Fair), which he offered free of charge to the society's trustees, asking only for his expenses to be covered (Hudson Maxim to Wright, 25 and 30 Aug., 7 Sept. 1900, and [Wright] to Maxim, 28 Aug. 1900, all in same collection).
two hundred dollars.\textsuperscript{30}

The year 1900 was important to Pittsfield sports history for another reason. It was the year the first private country club in the area found a permanent home. The heirs of Sarah Ann Morewood, who had purchased the Broad Hall estate from Robert Melville in 1850, sold it to the Pittsfield Country Club in 1900. The home of Henry Van Schaack, Elkanah Watson, and Thomas Melvill, Junior, and the vacation residence of Oliver Wendell Holmes (who modeled the Venner mansion in his novel \textit{Elsie Venner} after it), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (the grandson-in-law of Thomas Gold), and Herman Melville (who had probably intended to "make a book" about the "piece of mouldering rural grandeur," according to his editor), would welcome a new elite through its doors. Appropriately, the top executives of General Electric, who in the twentieth century had inherited the industrial legacy of the woolen manufacturers and founders of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, hooked and sliced away their Sunday afternoons on the same green fields where once grazed the merino flocks of Elkanah Watson.\textsuperscript{31}

The Berkshire Agricultural Society, of course, was not solely responsible for the industrialization of the local economy, despite the claims of its founders that the institution

\textsuperscript{30}Charles Wright to R. F. Kelsey, 3 Aug., Kelsey to Wright, 6 Aug., A. A. Mills to Wright, 9 Aug., Herbert M. Stilson to Berkshire Agricultural Society, 14 Aug., and to Wright, 15 Aug. 1900; and Arthur F. Paro to [Wright?], 7 Sept. 1900 (tug of war), P. J. Keliger to Wright, 8 Sept. 1900 (baseball), all in Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1899-1902, Berkshire Agricultural Society, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts. See also C. M. Murphy to Wright, 14 Aug., Wright to Murphy, 15 Aug., T. W. S. to Wright, 16 Aug., Claud Whalen to Wright, 4 Sept., and John L. Decker to Wright, 7 Sept. 1900, all in the same collection. For the horse-racing program, see C. J. Seymour to Wright, 14 and 22 June 1900, and Wright to Seymour, 23 June 1900, in same.

was responsible for the county's commanding position in merino sheep raising, as well as for the rapid increase and improvement of native sheep, and the consequent establishment of woolen manufactories. Such claims failed to move the MSPA in December 1812, and should be carefully analyzed today. In announcing the premiums for the 1817 fair, president Thomas Gold on 4 February described the positive effects of the previous Pittsfield fairs. Six years of labor had resulted in "accessions of industry, of agricultural products, of household manufactures, and of apparent improvements in economy, skill and good management." Through its fairs, the society "had awakened our fellow-men from the torpor of ancient habits," and had "infused a spirit of useful enquiry, and an ardent and persevering spirit for improvements."32

The society's claims of stimulating agricultural productivity must be examined in the context of the wartime intensification of Pittsfield's economy. Five months before the War of 1812 was declared, a general rendezvous for military recruits was established in Pittsfield, after Congress voted in January 1812 to raise an additional twenty-five thousand United States troops. That May, Reverend William Allen sold the federal government the gambrel-roofed cottage, which had served as Phinehas Allen's first printing office, with one acre of land. At the end of May, Major General Henry Dearborn visited Pittsfield and obtained from the late Parson Allen's estate a thirteen-acre lot (which was later doubled) for a cantonment, or military post, to which was added in 1813 a prisoner of war depot. The establishment of this United States Army supply center and troop rendezvous provided work for Pittsfield builders, as well as federal appointments for local gentlemen. Most significantly, the Pittsfield Cantonment gave local farmers and manufacturers a steady and convenient market for their produce and products.33


On 1 July 1812, Thomas Melvill, Junior, was appointed commissary and superintendent of supplies for the army, with the rank of major, and was later made deputy marshal and agent for prisoners of war. His agricultural society colleague, Jonathan Allen, obtained appointment as assistant deputy quartermaster general, with the rank of captain, in April 1813. In meeting their duties of constructing and maintaining buildings and barracks and acquiring horses, uniforms, arms, and other military stores and supplies, both men awarded contracts to agricultural society members, including William Holliston and Hosea Merrill, but the farming population as a whole also benefited. With between four to five hundred troops in Pittsfield, and up to fifteen hundred prisoners of war to be fed and clothed, Allen's annual budget alone ran to about twenty-four thousand dollars. This stimulated exertions on the part of farmers far more noticeably than the six hundred dollars worth of premiums annually distributed at the Pittsfield Fair.

The existence of the Pittsfield Cantonment also stimulated manufacturing, both in the home and in the factory. In December 1812, repeating their Revolutionary War service, Pittsfield women provided Major Melvill with 193 pairs of woolen socks and mittens they knitted for the soldiers, and the women of other Berkshire towns sent in another 294 pairs. Textiles manufacturers also profited from the presence of the Cantonment, and from the war in general. Investing in power looms, the Scholfields

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34 On 12 April 1812, Eliza Parke Custis, who had "seen much of Melville since he has resided in Washington" and "esteem[ed] him as a brother," wrote to his father about the Senate's rejection of Melvill's appointment as deputy quartermaster general of purchases for the army, stating "his talents, information, & energy, marked him as peculiarly qualified for a Post which required all," but "bad men" opposed the nomination, which Madison presented with other appointments, on 1 April 1812. The Senate approved most of the other nominations, but rejected Melvill's on 10 April. His later positions apparently did not require Senate confirmation, but, when controversy developed in 1813 over his service, Watson wrote to vice-president Elbridge Gerry "to plead with you to say a word to the President—and the Secy. at War in favr. of our mutual, afflicted & injured friend," Melvill, "one of the most efficient & usefull Officers . . . in calling forth the resources of this County" (Custis to Melvill, Sr., 12 April 1812, Melville Papers [MS Am 188 (15)], Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America, Vol. 1 [Washington, D.C., 1828], 242-48; Watson to Gerry, 14 June 1813, ADf, Box 6, fold. 7, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany).

produced and sold (at fifteen dollars a yard) to the officers considerable quantities of fine
gray mixed broadcloth for uniforms. Spurred by the war, Berkshire Agricultural Society
member Lemuel Pomeroy and his sons built in 1814 a three-story brick woolen
manufactory southwest of Pittsfield Village. A second Pittsfield Woolen and Cotton
Factory was incorporated the same year, capitalized at $130,000, much of it invested by
Thomas Gold's son-in-law, Nathan Appleton, and his cousin, William Appleton, both of
whom were involved in the Boston Company's Waltham manufacturing establishment.36

Other local manufacturers profited from increased markets provided by the War of
1812. Lemuel Pomeroy's expanded armory won federal contracts for muskets during the
war (and returned to the manufacture of cast-iron plows after it, heeding the biblical
injunction). Root & Maynard's sail duck manufactory on Elm Street annually produced
twenty thousand yards of material before the war, and, with Seth Moore's nearby
ropewalk, helped clothe the frigate U.S.S. President (both factories required large
amounts of flax and hemp, respectively, from local farmers). The war also expanded
production at Abner Stevens's drum factory, which he had moved from Hancock to
Pittsfield in 1809. United States Army contracts greatly increased the usual demand for
drums (which was already considerable, because Massachusetts law obligated every town
to furnish a militia company, each of which required at least one drummer), and the great
increase of sheep in Berkshire County supplied sheepskins for drum heads.37

36Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876 (Springfield, Mass., 1876), 204, 210-11, 468-69;
David Dudley Field, ed., History of Berkshire County (Pittsfield, Mass., 1829), 19, 20; [J.E.A.
Smith], History of Berkshire County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent
Men (2 vols.; New York, 1885), 2:73; Berkshire Hills, 4 (1 Dec. 1903), 183. Gold's company
went under in 1817, and its directors leased the mill to Pomeroy, who subsequently bought out his
12 fellow shareholders and managed to make a go of the business (Robert F. Dalzell, Jr.,
Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made [Cambridge, Mass., 1987],
40). Melvill advertised in the Sun from 1812 to 1815, seeking to purchase kerseys, checked and
striped flannel, blankets, and stockings (see, for instance, Sun [Pittsfield], 15 Oct. 1812, 4 March,
2 Dec. 1813, 22 Dec. 1814, 20 July 1815), and purchased 30,000 yards of soldiers cloths in

37Field, A History of the Town of Pittsfield, in Berkshire County, Mass. With a Map of the
County (Hartford, Conn., 1844), 12-14, 18, 22-23, 32; Smith, History of Pittsfield, 1800-1876
It is difficult, therefore, to separate out the influence of the Berkshire Agricultural Society from the economic impact of the War of 1812, which contemporaneously accelerated agricultural production and industrial growth by providing a secure and convenient market for all sorts of military supplies and stores. Even in Watson's pet project of merino sheep promotion the society's influence cannot be measured accurately.

Before the organized merino campaign, Berkshire County had only a relatively few sheep, which provided a staple only for family homespuns. But, by 1815, approximately eight thousand sheep ranged within a mile of Pittsfield. Only 852 were of the old common breed; the rest were of blooded stock, half of them three-quarters merino or better. By the time of Watson's last visit to Pittsfield, in 1837, there were 10,534 merinos and 2,428 other sheep, representing a capital investment of almost three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, with their fleeces valued at $19,443 (Berkshire had 74,042 sheep in 1850). The reason for the growth was the local market for wool provided by the six woolen manufactories still in operation in Pittsfield, which required 315,000 pounds of wool each year, and annually produced 233,000 yards of cloth, valued at $547,000. Saxony sheep were beginning to replace merinos by the 1830s. Most of the imported breeds probably belonged to large flocks owned by wealthy gentlemen, but even small farmers benefitted from improvements made to their flocks by crossbreeding them with blooded stock. Even so, the local sheep industry became increasingly unable to compete with cheaper western wool, and was always susceptible to the vagaries of the manufacturing sector.38

Local woolen manufactories survived and expanded only because of the passage of a protective tariff on woolen imports, not necessarily because of any direct action on the part of the Berkshire Agricultural Society (although it did actively support the tariff). A tariff of five percent on imported woolens was first laid in 1789, and was raised to seventeen and a half percent in 1804, but its chief purpose was to provide revenue, not to protect American woolen manufacturers. Trustee Ezekiel Bacon realized before the War of 1812 that Congress would pass a protective duty only with great difficulty, because of the universal opposition of Federalist Representatives in Congress, as well as of the seaboard mercantile class, and of a large portion of the South in general. The outbreak of war changed the political equation, and Congress passed a thirty-five percent tariff on woolens in 1812. But, as seen above in Chapter Four, the postwar resumption of British trade required even sterner measures to preserve the new American woolens industry. At a public meeting called in November 1817 by the executive committee of the agricultural society, a memorial to Congress was drawn up under Thomas Gold and John B. Root, stating that "the public good requires of government to restrain, by duties, the importation of all articles which may be produced at home," and it was forwarded to Berkshire's representative, Henry Shaw, a Saxony sheep farmer and woolen manufacturer of Lanesborough. In 1821 the society appointed William C. Jarvis, William Walker, Lemuel Pomeroy, Samuel D. Colt, and Samuel M. McKay—manufacturers all—to prepare a petition to Congress (over the signatures of president Jonathan Allen and secretary Thomas A. Gold), which Shaw presented. Shaw became close to Henry Clay, who successfully advocated passage of a protective tariff in May 1824 as the foundation to his American System. That duty of thirty percent on woolen goods (to automatically increase to thirty three and a third percent after two years) did little to stem the flow of low-priced British imports, however. Shaw marshaled local support behind the stronger Tariff of

1828 (of forty-five percent), which aroused bitter opposition in the South, and he hosted Clay's visit to Pittsfield later that year.39

The woolen industry laid the foundation for Pittsfield's antebellum economic expansion, reaching its peak production, employment, and value in the 1860s, and remaining the principal industrial activity until the 1870s (it employed 1,308 people in 1869, and had an annual revenue of four million dollars), when the population of Pittsfield reached 12,267. The densest population concentrations were in nine villages clustered around the major manufacturing centers along the branches of the Housatonic River and its tributaries. The ethnic composition of that population had begun to change as early as the 1840s, when Irish laborers constructed the railroads. After new industries proliferated in the 1870s and 1880s, Italian, Polish, and French Canadians swelled the ranks of Catholic congregations and provided an easily exploitable pool of unskilled labor. The infrastructure for the twentieth-century industrialization of Pittsfield, ushered in by the new electrical machinery, was in place before the death of the Berkshire Society for Promoting Agriculture and Manufactures. In 1890 the three-year-old Stanley Electric Company, capitalized by the woolen manufacturers, began manufacturing in Pittsfield alternate current power generators, transforming a declining textile mill town into a thriving industrial city. General Electric bought out the Stanley plant in 1903 and greatly expanded its operations, until it employed over six thousand workers by World War I. During its years of peak production, in World War II, GE had twelve thousand employees on its payroll in Pittsfield, and the city's population reached 53,560 (it peaked in 1970 at around 57,000).40


A satirist in the October 1900 issue of the Berkshire Hills, calling himself "Farmer Brown," wrote his "Discourses on the Late Cattle Shows" at "Sidehill Farm" on 20 September 1900, reflecting on the changes in turn-of-the-century Pittsfield society. He observed that the cattle shows, or "kritter looks," as he called them, were "not at all like they used to" be. He saw "Not near so many oxen, cows, pigs and poultry, nor cheese, butter, squashes, pumpkins and garden sass generally," but "Lots of beautiful needle work" hung where "the old patch quilts, knit shawls and such used to hang, that our mothers and grandmothers used to make and show for silver spoons" ("Farmer Brown" recognized that "Machinery's doin' the knittin', spinnin' and weavin' "). He guessed that most farmers were leaving their livestock and farm produce at home on fair day, and came "down for a day to see the horses, bicycles and flowers on wheels, and go around among the showmen and fakirs and see if there's anything new under the sun. There were lots of these at all the fairs this fall." His old Uncle Tom, who had visited all the Berkshire fairs every year "since he was knee high to a toad," refused to "go to any of 'em this year," because he "liked the old-fashioned ginger-bread ways better." The old man said that "the professions who didn't know a artichoke from a tater had crowded the farmers all out of the ring, held all the offices, while hired experts squinted over all the goods for a salary." ("Farmer Brown" noted as an aside that his Uncle Tom "used to get on the bread and honey committees at all the old fairs and used to get a good dinner out of it without costin' him a cent, though he'd forever save a quarter to buy a bowl of oysters with on the last day").

But Tom refused to accompany "Farmer Brown" to the Hoosac and Berkshire Agricultural fairs in 1900. "He said they would all break up and go home like a lot of sheared lambs when the last hoss race was done," and "there wouldn't be any fightin' and pushin' as there used to was when Bill Hodskins used to lick the fightin' fellers off the grounds at the Hoosac, and Tim Hall rap them on the heads with his gold-headed cane

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until he had planted half an acre with their prostrate trunks at the Old Berkshire." "Farmer Brown" postulated that "perhaps older pharm folks than me have got tired of the fairs the same as they seem to be of fishin', huskin' bees and circuses. . . . But I don't blame 'em, for they've worked hard and long and late in the past to get their bread and butter, pork and pertaters out of our Berkshire soil, God bless their patient old souls."  

Brown supposed he would just have to consign himself to change, "as the world keeps growin' bigger and bigger and wonderful things have come to pass so quickly." Of course, the "kritter looks" were also bound, with all the past and future changes, to "'cast off the old man and put on the new,' as the good book has it." His acquaintance, Bill Smith, told him "that as a agriculturalist I'm playin' a lone hand in stickin' to cattle shows; that pretty soon I'll have to pass, and that if I knew it now I'm progressively euchred as a tiller of the soil tryin' to show up in them. He says the schools and the factories, the race horses, automobiles and bicycles have the floor and are goin' to have it." "Farmer Brown" was advised "That the best thing that I can do hereafter with what the old farm soil, trees and animals yield to me is to exhibit the same to the groceryman and get all I can for 'em in spot cash or otherwise." Smith had wisely observed "That though the farmer is a necessity to the public, that he is no longer drawin' a good house as a showman. That the public are ready to buy what he raises to eat, but have got out of the fashion of payin' an entrance fee to look at it, before in flesh and fowl, fruit and vegetable it smoke on or graces the dinin' table." The optimistic "Farmer Brown" concluded: "Maybe he [Bill Smith] is sound on the goose, but I shan't yield to him until we've had the old Great Barrington Fair and the Hoosac and Berkshire have another heat in 1901." That 1901 Pittsfield Fair apparently was the last ever held by the Berkshire Agricultural Society.  

Elkanah Watson last visited Pittsfield half a century earlier, in October 1837, when he was seventy-nine years old, and he considered the two days spent at his final Berkshire

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43Ibid.
County Fair "the most grateful and consoling to my Soul I had ever experienced—for none hesitated to accord to me the exclusive merit—the founder of the Society—and many with tears of gratitude especially in taking my last farewell of 500 members and 1500 Ladies." If one of the principal hallmarks of the modern agricultural fair is the exhibition and recognition of superior rural productions, then the central exhibit at the 1837 fair was Watson himself, or, more accurately, his public image. Twenty years of systematic cultivation of that image had already borne fruit, as the public plaudits he received in 1837 demonstrate that Watson had convinced his contemporaries, as well as himself, that he deserved recognition as the founding father of American agricultural fairs. Although historians have overlooked Watson's public performance of 1837, a premium production if ever there was one, they have relied upon Watson's published works, which have generally set the tone for a century and a half of historical work on the origins of agricultural fairs.44

Watson arrived in Pittsfield on 3 October 1837, spending that day and night at the home of Oren Goodrich, an early officer of the Berkshire Agricultural Society, and the two waxed nostalgic over old times and departed colleagues. At ten o'clock the next morning, Goodrich drove Watson in a little wagon to the house of Nathan Willis, who served as Watson's escort to the fair. Watson later recorded that "The pleasant, & thriving Village of Pittsfield soon made its appearance with the Old elm tree towering over its center, the appearance of several new Steeples indicated—its great increase, & wonderful improvement—mainly owing as I was told to the measures and effects of the Agl. Society." Naturally, the trip around "the public Square" "brought fresh to my recollect'n former exhibitions in which I had taken a prominent direction." He spent the cold day of 4 October huddled up in a heavy blue cloak, rambling at large among the crowds of fairgoers at the village center. Many recognized and welcomed him back to town, politely asking after the health of his wife and surviving children, and he was gratified by an invitation to dine as a guest of the agricultural society at its elegant annual dinner. At the

head table, he sat beside the society's president, Henry W. Bishop, Esquire. On Watson's other side sat the evening's featured speaker, the Reverend Henry Colman, who had recently been appointed by Massachusetts governor Edward Everett to make an agricultural survey of the commonwealth.

President Bishop visited Watson before he retired for the evening and "intimated to me in delicate terms—the wish of the Society and the public at large—to hear my voice once more as he said from the same pulpit, from which I had often address'd the Society to great advantage, adding—'I am confident it will do great good, however brief.'" Watson simply replied, "If such be your opinion, Mr. President I shall not hesitate." Ever susceptible to flattery, and jealous of opportunities to do good, he began work early the next morning on what was supposed to be a five-minute address. The task deprived him of the pleasure of attending the plowing match, which was held two miles east of the village that day.45

The next afternoon, 5 October 1837, after the annual procession of the agricultural society had marched from Solomon L. Russell's Berkshire Hotel on the public square to the church, Watson was seated on the stand with president Bishop and the day's distinguished visitors: Colman, New York agricultural journalist Jesse Buel, and Mark Hopkins, president of Williams College. Watson reported the church was full to overflowing, with "500 members and 1500 Ladies who occupied all the Side Seats—and gallaries" and "Spectators jamd pell-mell—in the ally's." According to his own estimate, Watson spoke with such self-command and deliberation that he confidently winded off his periods with full pauses, despite his faltering voice and teary eyes when mentioning departed members. He also noted that his speech was well received. During the ceremonies, a cold rain began to beat upon the church windows and continued to fall throughout the evening, making everyone's journey home a miserable one.

Watson's final farewell speech to Berkshire County and its agricultural society

45Emphasis in original.
lasted twice as long as it was supposed to. Its self-congratulatory main theme was a review of the society's well-deserved fame that "pervaded every section of the United States by its practical effects, its usefulness, and its example." With typical presumption (and, perhaps, in reaction to the afternoon's weather), he compared the Berkshire society to the sun, enlightening the nation and casting shadows on the efforts of the many other agricultural societies modeled after it. Watson hoped that its exertions might pave the way to "the institution of an Agricultural Seminary, to qualify your farmers to conduct these societies, as well in theory as in the practical knowledge of the science of Agriculture," and asserted that its efforts would eventually end emigration from the county (after almost thirty years it still had not). He commented on two of his lifelong concerns, nonpartisanship and temperance, before concluding with a prayer for God's continued blessings on the society, and "a long—long—farewell," which drew great applause.46

Watson spent the rest of that day taking his leave, and fully appreciated "the intire community evincing—a deep sense of gratitude—the most respectfull deportment t'wards me—and their gratification that I had made them the visit." On 7 October, he returned to Albany by stage, where he spent two more days with his friend Judge Ambrose Spencer and made social calls. His steamboat from Whitehall landed at his home of Port Kent on Lake Champlain in a stiff gale late in the evening of 12 October, and he returned to his patient wife "after an absence of 13 days, the most interesting off my Life." He closed his account, "Blessed be GOD for his unremitted goodness t'wards me and mine. Amen."

Faith in God was one of the few constants in Elkanah Watson's long and eventful life, one that remained steady while almost everything else had changed within and around him since his boyhood, including even the tenets of that faith. Watson was an early

46 Watson's speech was printed in "Great Cattle Show and Fair at Pittsfield, Mass.," clipped from an unidentified newspaper and pasted in Journal F, 58, Watson Papers, New York State Library, Albany; see also Flick, Elkanah Watson, Gentleman-Promoter (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958), 341.
representative of Tocqueville's "new man," the archetypical antebellum American. Gratefully nudged by the Revolutionary struggle against Great Britain out of a quiet life as an erstwhile cooper's son in a backwater New England fishing port, Watson became a restless risk taker, experiencing amazing geographic mobility as he chased social and economic opportunities back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean, up and down the eastern coast of the United States, and into the new nation's developing interior. As his life's journey took him from Plymouth, Massachusetts, to Port Kent, New York, by way of Providence, Rhode Island; Nantes, France; London, England; Hertford County, North Carolina; Albany, New York; Pittsfield, Massachusetts; and Detroit, Michigan, its course and the contours of his value system reflected many of the changes that would affect the generation that inherited the American Revolution and made the American agricultural fair its own.47

The opportunistic and ambitious Watson, ever anxious about his own prospects and reputation, but supremely confident about America's future, experienced numerous potholes and pitfalls on the road to success. His apprenticeship to a successful overseas merchant in one of New England's busiest seaports introduced him to the world of religious sectarianism and international trade. He matured to manhood not within the confining communalism of a Calvinist congregation, but under the wings of the market economy that relied upon individual initiative and eschewed authoritarian direction. Immersed in the culture of capitalism as apprentice to a merchant who sank profits into a spermaceti candle manufactory and iron forge, and later as a merchant himself who invested in glass and woolen manufactories, as well as turnpikes, canals, and banks, Watson learned new lessons and followed different imperatives than those he imbibed from his pious parents in late-colonial Plymouth. Self-interest and competition became natural regulatory forces in economic relations instead of proofs of man's inherent

sinfulness. The purpose of wealth was not to serve as a godly determinant of who
deserved social and political leadership, but to be reinvested to create new wealth for the
ultimate good of the individual, community, state, and nation. Learning that appearances
and perceptions often mattered more than reality when selling things, Watson became an
adept publicist, manipulating words and truths while purposefully presenting his ideas in
print, promoting his values and projecting his ideals onto his readers. Watson served as a
mediator between an older way of life and a newer one, much as his contemporary
Abraham Bishop of Connecticut mediated between the old and new politics, and the
agricultural fair Watson helped create in the early nineteenth century was an important
post-Revolutionary instrument of mediation and modernization.48

Its creators themselves emphasized the progressive character of agricultural fairs
by describing their sponsoring organizations as "Modern Agricultural Societies, on the
Berkshire System." Prototypical agricultural shows and exhibitions had existed earlier and
elsewhere. British noblemen before the American Revolution, and emulative Anglophilic
American gentlemen after it, organized societies to promote agriculture, manufactures,
and the arts. The post-Revolutionary American cattle shows and exhibitions held by these
elite associations, as well as the private spring sheepshearings held by Anglo-American
gentlemen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, proved only temporary,
and died out with the old elite that sponsored them. In the New England interior, as a
mature agricultural economy pushed against its natural limits, new social, political, and
economic leaders with new agendas and values adapted the fair form to their own ends
and maintained the institution. The new agricultural societies, which paid more than lip
service to a republican constituency, nursed the fair through its early years, winning the
financial support from state legislatures that guaranteed its survival, until it spilled with
settlers across the region's western bounds and became a self-sustaining permanent annual

48 For Bishop and the concept of mediation, see David Waldstreicher and Stephen R. Grossbart,
"Abraham Bishop's Vocation; or, The Mediation of Jeffersonian Politics," Journal of the Early
Republic, 18 (winter 1998), 617-58.
holiday in the rural calendar throughout the Northeast and Old Northwest before the Civil War.

The agricultural fair was a modern institution created by forward-looking American patriots inspired by a particular vision of society, men wishing to promote the liberal values of democracy and capitalism, as well as agricultural improvement. In Berkshire County, Massachusetts, the town of Pittsfield had emerged in the early nineteenth century as a manufacturing center because of its easy access to market hubs in New York and Connecticut, ample sources of water power, and the presence of a technologically savvy family of English emigrants who had settled there. The town's new social elite, who had risen to the top during the Revolutionary War, replaced local leaders whose power had depended upon royal patronage or upon their increasingly irrelevant status as original settlers. Merchants, lawyers, and other professionals, these new gentlemen invested in local transportation improvements, financial institutions, textile manufacturing establishments, and agricultural reform. National patriotism and economic self-interest combined as they sought to replace cloth imported from Britain with American materials made from the wool of newly imported merino sheep. County fairs would assist their endeavors not only by introducing farmers to the new breed, ensuring a steady supply of raw material, but by providing improving recreations that could instill the proper values of self-discipline in a potential industrial labor force.

They acted not through the institutions of power controlled by the colonial elite—church and government—but through voluntary institutions and semi-public corporations. Reflecting the changes that had taken place in American politics since the adoption of the Federal Constitution, the new republican elite molded public opinion through the press and informal public assemblies, acquiring the consent of fellow citizens and valuing the practical experience of yeomen farmers, rather than imposing its programs upon deferential social subordinates. Just as the Democratic-Republican clubs had mobilized opposition to Federalist policies in the 1790s, motivating voters and citizens...
through public ritual and symbolism, as well as inspiring and coordinating action through private correspondence and newspaper publications, the Berkshire County Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Manufactures, challenged the authority and assumptions of the existing elite agricultural societies. Regular outdoor festivals became a major medium of the nascent party system that developed after the peaceful Democratic-Republican Revolution of 1800, as well as of the antebellum agricultural movement. Jeffersonian ideals of inclusion and optimism, which had been fostered by the national economic expansion sustained by the policy of the Republican administrations, undergird the developments in both politics and agricultural organization before and after the War of 1812. Both reflected a popular desire for active participation, a democratic impulse, the widespread aspirations of individuals to get ahead, and faith in the energy and native intelligence of the common man.

That faith was tempered with a realistic estimation of human nature—with the knowledge that self-interest took many forms. Thus, emulation, education, and the need for excitement would draw families from their farms to participate in the annual agricultural fair for their own good and for that of the community. The basic psychological urges to mingle, to see and be seen, to compete for attention, as well as for premiums, to lord it over other lords of the soil, to enjoy the company of friends, and to view sport and spectacle, complemented the economic motivation of learning about the latest agricultural improvements. Participation in the cooperative and cumulative venture of advancing agricultural knowledge and furthering community cohesion was exacted by the competitive desire to prove oneself better than one's neighbor and the chance to advance one's fortunes by learning new principles that might increase agricultural or domestic productivity and by finding new marketing opportunities. The system of interrelated motivations remained in balance only as long as the great majority of fairgoers shared an agricultural background and a common sense of purpose, which no longer held true in Pittsfield and other central places in Massachusetts by the mid-nineteenth century.
The modern American agricultural fair, then, is an institutional expression of the early-nineteenth-century culture of the northeastern United States, and historians can better understand rural New England around the time of the War of 1812 by a close examination of the first decade of the fair's existence. The new agricultural societies and their annual fairs synergistically reflected and contributed to the capitalist transformation of the countryside, the intensification of the market economy, and the growth of American manufacturing. The new organizations represented the democratization of social and political institutions, and of education in general. Their largely middle-class membership believed in individual self-improvement and the efficacy of agricultural and social reform, and many members most likely belonged to other voluntary associations and attended other popular institutions of the Village Enlightenment. Although not members of the agricultural societies, women came to play an important role in county fairs, reflecting the increasing significance of the social sphere of public activity. In addition to educating and entertaining early American farm families, the agricultural fair helped popularize the entrepreneurial culture and enterprising spirit that came to define modern American society and its liberal economy. What is just as interesting is how it outlasted many of its original purposes and other contemporary institutions of popular education and entertainment in order to survive into the postmodern era. But that is another story altogether.
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