

The Attraction of
The Episcopal Church
to the Socio-Economic and Educational
Elite
in the Heart of
the Burnt-over District
of Upstate New York,
1815 – 1830

By Edgar Kim Byham
Montclair State University
M.A. thesis, 2008

The Attraction of The Episcopal Church to the Socio-Economic and Educational Elite in the Heart of the Burnt-over District of Upstate New York, 1815 – 1830

The Episcopal Church has had an image of being the church of the elite – the church of the rich and powerful and the well-educated. Its parent, the Church of England prided itself in the 17th and 18th Centuries, and still today to some extent, of being a cross-section of the nation, albeit that in the 20th Century it came to be called “the Tory Party at Prayer.” On this side of the Atlantic, the titans of the Gilded Age were not all Episcopalians, but a disproportionate percentage were. The Episcopal Church gained the appellation, “the Republican Party at Prayer” and a book was published in the 1970’s called, *The Power of Their Glory: America’s Ruling Class: The Episcopalians*,¹ That book focused almost exclusively on post-Civil War America², and it is probably indisputable that during the era roughly from 1870 through 1915 Americans who had achieved or aspired to wealth often converted to the Episcopal Church.³ On the other hand, Bruce E. Steiner, Professor of History at Ohio University, conducted a study of membership and found that, contrary to prior beliefs, 18th Century Anglicans in rural New England, which included the majority of Anglicans, were not nearly as well-to-do as their Congregational neighbors.⁴ This paper explores a related but different question, whether people of wealth or education in the heart of the Burnt-over District of Upstate New York in the early 19th Century were disproportionately attracted to the Episcopal Church and explores reasons for the conclusions.

¹ Konolige, Kit and Frederica, *The Power of Their Glory: America’s Ruling Class: The Episcopalians*, New York, Wyden Books, 1978.

² *The Power of Their Glory* says relatively little about the Episcopal Church before the Civil War. However, it does mention Nicholas Biddle of Philadelphia (1786 – 1844), president of the Bank of the United States at the time Andrew Jackson abolished it. The two men fought vigorously. The authors call Biddle (who among other accomplishments entered the University of Pennsylvania at age ten) the prototype of “Episcocrats” to come in the second half of the 19th Century.

³ The author’s own great-grandfather is an exemplar of this trend. William Edgar Byham (1863 – 1935) was born poor on a farm in western Pennsylvania to a family which had emigrated two generations earlier from New England. He began as a lamplighter and became the leading undertaker in his town and county chairman of the Republican Party. At some point he left the church of his youth and joined the Episcopal Church.

⁴ Steiner, Bruce E., “New England Anglicanism: A Genteel Faith?” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 27, No. 1 (January 1970), 122-135.

Why This Period?

This was a period of rapid expansion of the upstate New York population. Immigrants were pushing westward from New England and, to a lesser extent, northward from New York City, the Hudson Valley, Pennsylvania and Maryland. It was also a period when the Episcopal Church was beginning to overcome the stigma of its identification with England in the Revolution and, to a much lesser extent, during the War of 1812. It encompassed the majority of the episcopacy of the Rt. Rev. John Henry Hobart, third Bishop of New York, and the first Episcopal bishop in the nation to encourage church growth beyond the Atlantic coast. It was the era of the Erie Canal, which more than any other single factor encouraged the enormous growth in population in Western New York -- along with, inevitably, substantial social changes. And, finally, it was a period of tremendous religious growth. The Second Great Awakening, roughly lasting from 1800 to 1835, had a greater impact on Western New York than on any other section of the country, and the area became known as the Burned-over District.

It is also a time about which comparatively little social history has been done. “We have more generalizations and less solid information on society in the years 1815 to 1850 than on any other period in the American past.”⁵

The year 1815 suggests itself as a logical and convenient starting point, for by that time the distinctive features which characterize American religion of today had already taken form, and in religion as in every other phase of national development the period from 1815 to 1830 was one of rapid organization and expansion.⁶

While individualism remained a key characteristic of Americans during this period, emotionalism also emerged in many areas, and nowhere to a greater extent than in Upstate New York. The variety and number of religious sects was increased with the formation of new, sometimes communistic, societies and by schisms within the older denominations. This had the effect of making all the resulting denominations more homogenous, thanks to the elimination of discordant elements as well as the creation of

⁵ Johnson, Paul A., *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815 – 1837*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1978/2004, 9.

⁶ Edwards, Martha L., “Religious Forces in the United States, 1815 – 1830,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (March 1919), 434-5.

stronger national organizations. During this period, too, the scope of church activity was vastly enlarged; missionary societies multiplied, numerous schools and colleges founded.

In new communities the churches exercised both civic and social functions, caring for the poor and sick, educating the children, providing intellectual diversion and social relaxation, taking the leadership in business and political affairs. With the growth of the religious periodical press the churches gained an additional means of directing public opinion. Religion as a force in American life thus steadily gained in influence and in weight.⁷

Why Upstate New York?

How can one fail to be curious about an area with the appellation, the Burned-over District? The author of the most well-known book on that area, Dr. Whitney R. Cross, described it thus:

Across the rolling hills of western New York and along the line of DeWitt Clinton's famed canal, there stretched in the second quarter of the nineteenth century a "psychic highway." Upon this broad belt of land congregated a people extraordinarily given to unusual religious beliefs, peculiarly devoted to crusades aimed at the perfection of mankind and the attainment of millennial happiness. Few of the enthusiasms or eccentricities of this generation of Americans failed to find exponents here. Most of them gained rather greater support here than elsewhere. Several originated in the region.⁸

The Burned-over District encompassed all of Western New York, running from the western borders of the Catskills and the Adirondacks, on a line slightly east of Utica, to Lake Erie. This paper will look primarily at the middle of that area, an area roughly coterminous with what since 1931 has been the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester. In the early 19th Century, the entire state was part of the Episcopal Church's Diocese of New York. The creation of the Diocese of Western New York in 1838 marked the first division of an American state into multiple dioceses.



What Kind of People Joined the Episcopal Church and Why?

This question is the focus of this paper. While the pews of Episcopal churches contained both rich and poor and while the socio-economic status doubtless varied by

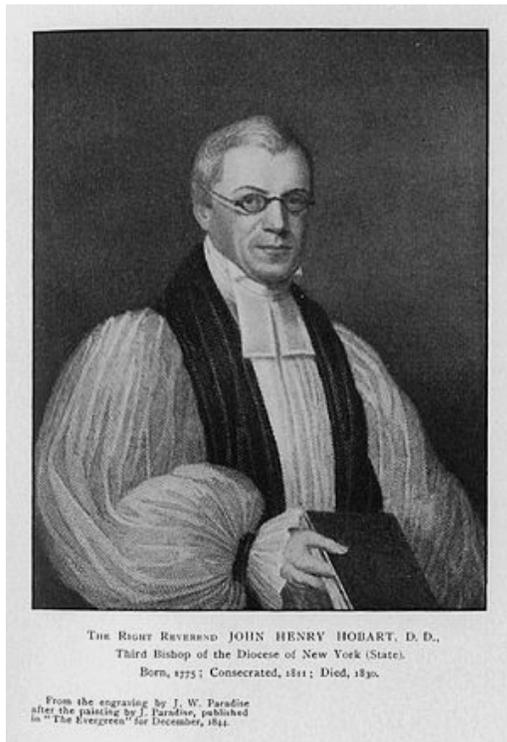
⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cross, Whitney R., *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800 – 1850*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1950, 3.

congregation as it does today, it seems safe to conclude that although Episcopalians rarely constituted a majority of the leadership of an area, the church nevertheless began the process of attracting new memberships from among an emerging elite. They joined because the church offered assurance of salvation through its sacraments and it did not require a public confession of faith, abstinence from liquor, the eschewing of all Sunday labor, or the avoidance of certain fraternal organizations.

The Right Reverend John Henry Hobart Third Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York

It would not be possible to understand why people in Upstate New York became Episcopalians during the period 1815 – 1830 and what kind of people they were without knowing something about Bishop John Henry Hobart. One Episcopal historian has described him as “perhaps the greatest religious leader the American Episcopal Church ever produced.”⁹



John Henry Hobart was born September 14, 1775 in Philadelphia. He was educated at the Philadelphia Latin School, the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania), and Princeton, from which he graduated in 1793, although he proudly rejected the Calvinist theology of his professors.

After studying theology under the Rt. Rev. William White (1748 – 1836), first Bishop of Pennsylvania and first Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Hobart was ordained deacon in 1798 and priest two years later. The Rev. Mr. Hobart became Assistant Rector of Trinity Church, Wall Street, in 1803. He was elected Assistant Bishop of New York, with the

right of succession, in 1811 (what would today be called Bishop Coadjutor), and was

⁹Manross, William Wilson, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1800 – 1840: A Study in Church Life*, New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1938, 56.

acting Diocesan from that date because of the infirmity of Bishop Benjamin Moore (who had suffered a stroke), whom he succeeded to become the third Bishop of New York on the latter's death in February 1816. A classic history of the Episcopal Church summarizes his episcopate:

From the beginning, ... he was solely responsible for administering the Church in New York, a diocese which then covered 46,000 square miles. Every corner of the diocese was soon aware that there was a new bishop, for in the second full year of his episcopate he traveled over 2,000 miles, visited 33 parishes, and confirmed 1,100 persons. ... When he first took office Hobart found only two diocesan missionaries. At his death, nineteen years later, there were fifty. ... In addressing his diocesan convention in 1813 he dwelt primarily on the importance of Church extension. ... After only four years, ... the number of clergy in the State had doubled, and the number of missionaries had more than quadrupled; and after twenty years nearly every important town in the State had an Episcopal church and a rector.¹⁰

He was a principal founder and first Dean of the country's first Anglican seminary, the General Theological Seminary, as well as its Professor of Pastoral Theology. The seminary began operation in the Chelsea section of Manhattan, in 1821.

He was a "High Churchman" as that term was used in his lifetime. By that he meant that episcopacy in Apostolic Succession was an essential ingredient of authentic Christianity. Before he became a bishop he wrote two publications on the subject. *An Apology for Apostolic Order and its Advocates*, published in 1807, was a series of letters to the Rev. John M. Mason, who, in *The Christians Magazine*, of which Mason was editor, had attacked the episcopacy in general and in particular Hobart's *Collection of Essays on the Subject of Episcopacy* published the previous year.

Hobart condemned non-liturgical services such as prayer-meetings and evangelistic meetings, believing that they led to disorder and "enthusiasm."¹¹ His opposition to the ecclesiastical validity of other churches, even those of considerable standing such as the Presbyterian and Congregationalist Churches, was shown by his attempt to dissuade Episcopalians from joining the American Bible Society:

He adamantly opposed the American Bible Society, even though it was led in significant part by Episcopalians, most notably [Chief Justice and Governor] John

¹⁰ Addison, James Thayer, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1789 – 1931*, New York, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1951, 98 – 99.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 101.

Jay and his son William who served as its presidents. Hobart pushed his predecessor, Benjamin Moore, to found the New York Bible and Common Prayer Book Society in 1809. The Bishop was to be the president and every clergyman a member of the board, who were always to out number the laity. This went against the trend in American life to hold the Bible in great esteem – to fight both Deists and Papists. See Nathan Hatch, “*Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum*,” in *The Bible in America*, ed. Hatch and Mark O. Noll, New York, 1982, 62, 67. Indeed, in 1815 Hobart wrote the first Pastoral Letter in the history of the Episcopal Church strongly urging Episcopalians to support their own society rather than the American Bible Society. General societies like the ABS “separated the word of God from the church of God.”¹²

Just as today, many lay Episcopalians defied their bishop on what they considered an issue of principle. Jay¹³ wrote against Hobart’s Pastoral Letter. Also opposing Bishop Hobart were Rufus King (U.S. Senator and Federalist candidate for President in 1818), John Pintard (merchant, philanthropist, and father of free public education in New York) and the author James Fennimore Cooper.

Hobart delivered an episcopal charge to the clergy of New York entitled *The High Churchman Vindicated*, in 1826, in which he defined “the term HIGH CHURCHMAN [as] denoting an eminent degree of attachment to the essential characteristics of the Church.” [capitalization in original] Indeed, Hobart made the point that the term “High Churchman” was previously (erroneously, he claimed) attached to those who supported the monarchy in England:

Doubtless, at a particular period of the history of the Church from which we are descended, the term High Churchman was associated with one which designated an attachment to political principles and views not favourable to the principles of freedom. And yet it is also certain, that in that nation, some of those who have been the strongest advocates of the monarchical features of the British constitution, entertained the lowest ideas with respect to the spiritual character and powers of the Church, and were most emphatically Low Churchmen. The truth is there is no necessary connexion between any set of political and of Church principles.¹⁴

¹² Mullin, Robert Bruce, *Episcopal Vision/American Reality: High Church Theology and Social Thought in Evangelical America*, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1986, 56.

¹³ This author, together with the Rev. Tobias Haller of the Diocese of New York, has initiated action by the Dioceses of New York and Newark, and hopefully by the General Convention in 2009, to begin the process of adding John Jay to the Calendar of the Episcopal Church. He would become the first American man who was neither in nor seeking Holy Orders on the Calendar.

¹⁴ *The High Churchman Vindicated: A Fourth Charge to the Clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York*, at the opening of the Convention of the said Church, in Trinity Church, in the City

Hobart was absolutely certain that High Church Anglican principles were correct; indeed, they were the only completely correct version of Christianity. He said:

For the errors and heresies that deform the fair face of Christianity can be corrected, under God, only by the principles and the policy of High Churchmen. At that period when the discordant sects that now divide and distract the Christian family, profess with "one heart the faith delivered to the saints," and with "one mouth glorify God," the principles professed, the feelings cherished, the language uttered, will be the principles, the feelings, and the language of High Churchmen.¹⁵

Hobart is throughout speaking about "High Church principles" and "policy," not "High Church liturgy" or "ritual." His understanding of High Churchmanship is based on the importance of the historic episcopacy.

In Hobart's time modern ceremonial was yet a long way off. He preached Catholic doctrine in a black gown from the old three-decker pulpit. He taught the Christian year without the help of colors. He magnified the Sacrament of the altar without lights, incense, or vestments.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, Hobart's strong attacks on other churches caused an equally strong reaction. In 1805, William Linn, a Dutch Reformed minister in Albany began publishing a series of "miscellanies" in the *Albany Centinel* in which he attacked the ecclesiological positions in Hobart's two volumes. For Linn the issue was simply one of Episcopal aggression. "It is their proclaiming themselves to be the only true Church," he explained, "and condemning all others, in imperious and insolent language, which has given offense. It is their reviving exploded doctrine about *divine right and uninterrupted succession*, and claiming an *exclusive right* to the administration of the word and ordinances, which has excited both opposition and contempt."¹⁷

Hobart's arrogance, the conviction that the Episcopal Church was indeed the True Church, helped motivate missionaries to go into the wilderness with the promise of salvation in Christ Jesus through that church. This is the same kind of motivation which

of New York, on Thursday, Oct. 17, 1826. By John Henry Hobart, D.D. Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New-York, T. and J. Swords, New York, 1826.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Arnold, Frederick S., "Bishop John Henry Hobart," *The American Church Monthly*, volume 41, 1937, 30.

¹⁷ "William Linn, 1752 – 1808: American Revolutionary and Anti-Jeffersonian," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 55 (1977) 381-94.

sends Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses into the streets today. And Professor Mullin of General Seminary, in his insightful book, *Episcopal Vision/American Reality: High Church Theology and Social Thought in Evangelical America*¹⁸, suggests that Hobart may also have fallen into the kind of error which characterizes sects such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, insisting that the Bible cannot be read alone but requires assistance – in this case the Book of Common Prayer.¹⁹

The Bishop exerted himself greatly in building up his diocese, attempting to make regular visits to every parish. In his first year as bishop, he confirmed 500 persons and consecrated four new churches, including one in Auburn, Cayuga County, where he died 18 years later. In 1813, he reported 1,100 confirmations, 780 in New York City and the rest in towns along the Hudson and in the counties of the 'Southern Tier.' Every year of his episcopate saw the visitation of a large part of the state and usually the consecration of one or more new churches. Not only were the visitations occasions for confirmation and consecration, but they also brought inspiration, advice, and, if necessary, material help to both pastor and people.

Between visitations, Hobart frequently wrote his clergy, who sought help and advice on every problem from the wearing of a surplice or dealing with anti-Masons to saving churches from foreclosure. At Hobart's death, in 1830, the Church had 53 parishes and the same number of clergymen in the western part of the state. By 1840, the newly formed Diocese of Western New York had 105 parishes and 89 clergymen.²⁰

An Episcopalian from Western New York wrote a hundred years later about the impact of Bishop Hobart's episcopacy:

Under such conditions, then, Bishop Hobart visited this wilderness. He came to our little crossroads-missions with his blessing. He confirmed and taught us on the edge of the forest. He heartened the lonely priests, working in a wild land amongst paganized frontiersmen and noisy, heretical preachers, who opposed the holy faith. He cared for the Indian tribes of the Six Nations, or at least the remnant of them.²¹

By 1818, Hobart had also become convinced that an institution of higher education was needed in the western part of New York. He selected the village of

¹⁸ New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1986.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 56.

²⁰ Manross, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1800 – 1840*, 56-57.

²¹ Arnold, "Bishop John Henry Hobart," 24.

Geneva at the head of Seneca Lake as the site for Geneva College in 1820, and the first building was erected in 1822. Geneva College was renamed Hobart College in 1852 in honor of its founder.

Bishop Hobart's failing health led him to visit Europe from 1823-1825. Upon his return, he preached a sermon entitled *The United States of America compared with some European Countries, particularly England* (published in 1826), in which, although there was some praise for the Church of England, he strongly criticized the Church's Establishment, cabinet appointment of bishops, a lack of ecclesiastical discipline, and the minimal requirements of theological education. Not surprisingly this aroused considerable hostility in England, where he had been warmly received.

He died at Auburn, New York, on September 12, 1830, while visiting one of the churches he had consecrated in his first year as bishop. Bishop Hobart is remembered on the Calendar of the Episcopal Church on September 12.

Hobart created an epoch. He found the Church of the old colonial families and left the Church of the growing American people.²²

Hobart influenced not simply New York, but the entire Episcopal Church for years to come. Professor Mullin describes this. In an era when evangelicalism, both without and within the Episcopal Church, seemed to be dominant, Bishop Hobart offered a High Church theology which provided an alternative for those who found the emotionalism, superbiblicism and social meddling of much of Protestantism unpalatable. Hobart's position, which came to be known as the Hobartian Synthesis, was not what, after the Oxford Movement, came to be thought of as "high church" (or "smells and bells" as it is sometimes flippantly called), but rather what he saw as the pure practices of the Apostolic Church, characterized by an uninterrupted episcopal succession. Since the Episcopal Church alone in America adhered to apostolic tradition, in Hobart's view, it was inappropriate to participate in interdenominational ventures.

Thus, Hobart motivated and sent forth evangelists for High Church Anglicanism in Upstate New York and manifested the centrality of the episcopacy by his frequent presence. He presented a church for those repelled by "enthusiasm" and which offered

²² *Ibid.*, 29

salvation to individuals through participating in its liturgy and sacraments, rather than by making elaborate professions of faith before one's community.

The Settlement of Western New York

The Treaty of Hartford, ratified in December 1786, ended the competing claims of New York and Massachusetts to what is now Western New York. The colonial charters for both states described their boundaries as extending to the Pacific Ocean, and thus both had claims to the land west of Seneca Lake, extending to the Niagara River and Lake Erie, and from Lake Ontario to the Pennsylvania border. The accord of 1786 provided that while Massachusetts obtained the preemptive rights to about six million acres, *i.e.*, the right to preempt those attempting to obtain title to such lands from the Indian tribes, the area would become part of New York State. On April 1, 1788, the preemptive rights to all six million acres were sold by Massachusetts to Oliver Phelps²³ and Nathaniel Gorham²⁴ for one million dollars, payable in three annual payments either by coin or through obtaining and thereby retiring certain Massachusetts Revolutionary War debt then trading at about 20 cents on the dollar.

In order to obtain title to the six million acres, Phelps and Gorham needed to extinguish all Native American titles. Due to their failure to satisfy Indian claims as well as their default on the 1790 payment (the Massachusetts debt instruments had greatly increased in price so the amount that would now have to be paid far exceeded the \$200,000 Phelps and Gorham had anticipated), the pre-emptive rights to remaining lands of the Phelps and Gorham Purchase west of the Genesee River, comprising some 3,750,000 acres, reverted back to Massachusetts. The state then re-sold those rights to

²³ (1749 - 1809) Deputy Commissary of the Colonial Army during the Revolution. The connections he thus established aided his efforts in forming the syndicate with Gorham. He was the first judge of Ontario County (1789 - 1793). A depressed land market caused Phelps to get into financial difficulty and in about 1800, he was forced to sell his interests outside New York and settle permanently in Canandaigua. He served a single term in Congress (1803 - 1805). His troubles were not over, however. Purchasers of his land had continued difficulty paying off the mortgages which he held. Phelps died in 1809 in debtors' prison in Canandaigua.

²⁴ (May 27, 1738 - June 11, 1796) The eighth President of Congress under the Articles of Confederation (1786) and a member of the Constitutional Convention. Unlike his partner Phelps who was from Connecticut, Gorham was a Massachusetts resident and thus was more influential in obtaining the land.

Robert Morris²⁵ in 1791 for \$333,333.33. In 1792 and 1793, Morris then sold most of the lands west of the Genesee to the Holland Land Company²⁶, but he did not extinguish Native American title to the land until the Treaty of Big Tree²⁷ in September, 1797. Morris reserved for himself a 500,000 acre strip approximately twelve miles wide and extending from Lake Ontario to the Pennsylvania border along the eastern edge of the Holland Purchase, known as the Morris Reserve. At the north end of the Reserve, an 87,000 acre triangular shaped tract ("The Triangle Tract") was sold by Morris, while a 185,000 tract due east of the Triangle Tract ("The Mill Yard Tract") 12 miles deep and 24 miles long, abutting the west bank of the Genesee River stretching from the approximate locations of the present day city of Avon north to the community of Charlotte at Lake Ontario and encompassing today's City of Rochester, later came into Morris' possession. Additional Phelps and Gorham lands east of the Genesee River which had not previously been sold were acquired by Robert Morris in 1791, who re-sold them to the the Pulteney Associates²⁸, a syndicate of British investors.

²⁵ (January 20, 1734 – May 9, 1806) Signer of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the United States Constitution. Morris is known as the *Financier of the Revolution*, because of his role in personally financing the American side in the Revolutionary War.

²⁶ The Holland Land Company was an unincorporated syndicate of thirteen Dutch investors in Amsterdam, that placed funds in the hands of certain trustees in America for the purpose of investing in land in central and western New York State and western Pennsylvania. Trustees were needed because aliens were not then permitted to own land in New York. The syndicate hoped to sell the land rapidly at a great profit. Instead, for many years they were forced to make further investments in their purchase; surveying it, building roads, digging canals, to make it more attractive to settlers. In 1798, the New York Legislature authorized aliens to hold land directly, and the trustees conveyed the Holland Purchase to the real owners. By 1840, all the land in Western New York was sold off to local investors.

²⁷ Big Tree was on the Genesee River near present Geneseo. Representatives of the Holland Land Company, of Robert Morris, of the Indians, and a commissioner for the United States, gathered at Big Tree in August, 1797. Some of the chiefs and sachems present spoke strongly against selling the land. They held out for "reservations," that is, land which the Indians would keep for their own use. The treaty was signed September 15, 1797. The Native Americans were to receive \$100,000 for their rights to about 3.75 million acres and they reserved about 200,000 acres for themselves. [The first Indian Reservation in the United States is believed to have been that of the Lenni-Lenapes, in Burlington County, New Jersey, in 1758, which was extinguished by the Legislature in 1801.]

²⁸ In 1792, Morris's London agent, William Temple Franklin, grandson of Benjamin Franklin, sold 1.2 million acres of the Phelps and Gorham Purchase east of the Genesee River to the Pulteney Associates. The Pulteney Purchase, or the Genesee Tract as it was also known, comprised all of the present counties of Ontario, Steuben and Yates, as well as portions of Allegany, Livingston, Monroe, Schuyler and Wayne counties. The Pulteney Associates were Sir William Pulteney, 5th Baronet (1729-1805), a Scottish lawyer (3/4); William Hornby, former Governor of Bombay (1/6); and Patrick Colquhoun, a Scottish merchant (1/12). Some of their heirs owned land in Western New York into the 1920s.



Settlement of Western New York began about 1790. New Englanders dominated immigration for nearly a half-century, but before adequate roads stimulated widespread migration from the east by way of the Mohawk Valley, a reasonable portion of the settlers came up the Susquehanna from Pennsylvania. The numerous branches of that river provided natural highways eastward and westward over the southern tier of New York State. Some then crossed the moderate hills from which those tributaries flow, to move down to the mid-Finger Lakes region. This migration was sizable for several decades and, although it dwindled steadily before the rising Yankee tide, its effects could be discerned as late as 1845. Ten counties, forming a triangle in the middle of western New York, with its apex on Lake Ontario and its base on the Pennsylvania border, show in that year a notably lower percentage of New England nativity than do the neighboring counties on either side. New Yorkers from the Hudson Valley also moved across the mountains and joined the Yankees and Pennsylvanians in the western part of the state. Many of them were of New England ancestry. There were also non-native Americans, but only in small numbers before 1825.²⁹

The New England migration to New York is a thrilling chapter in one of the great folk migrations of all time. The Yankees came by land and by sea, in winter and in summer, in groups and as individuals. ... The citizens of Albany watched a continual parade of restless people. During one three-day period in February

²⁹ Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 4-5.

1795 about 1200 sleighs freighted with men, women, children and furniture passed through that city on the way to the Genesee country.³⁰

One authority estimates that between 1790 and 1820 the three states of southern New England lost approximately 800,000 people through emigration.³¹ Most of these settled in or passed through New York. New York by 1820 was becoming a “colony from New England,” according to Timothy Dwight, President of Yale University. The ‘Puritan Pope,’ as he was sometimes called, estimated that 60 to 67 percent of the people of New York had origins in the “land of steady habits.” New England’s small farms with cooperative elements such as common pastures, mowing lots, and forests made emigration almost imperative as each generation grew to adulthood.³²

[T]he Puritan virtues and vices still marked the citizens of New England and their transplanted compatriots in New York. Their thrift at times verged on stinginess; their self-esteem seemed arrogance to many; their soul-searching sometimes led to morbidity; their “conscience” tended to outrageous meddling in the lives of their neighbors. Their stamp on the character and institutions of New Yorkers has been unmistakable.³³

The triangular region drained by the Delaware and Susquehanna Rivers was also flooded with New Englanders, but speculators from Pennsylvania and New Jersey often owned the land along the upper reaches of these rivers which encouraged Pennsylvanians, Jersey men, and some Marylanders to work their way up these river systems, even after the Puritan invasion. Legend has it that the town of Penn Yan on Keuka Lake was so named as a compromise between settlers from the two areas. Even in the triangle, the bulk of the settlers were New Englanders. “Central New York by 1800 had become almost as Yankee in population as Connecticut itself.”³⁴

The year 1825 marks a distinct turning point in the history of upstate New York. It serves in most of the region to set off the pioneering first generation from the second. It dates completion of the Erie Canal, which speeded the economic maturity of the entire state. ... The Erie Canal quickly introduced western New York into a period of relatively stable agrarian maturity. During the twenties population grew more rapidly here than in any other part of the country. Albany

³⁰ Ellis, David Maldwyn, “The Yankee Invasion of New York, 1783 – 1850,” *Pluralism in New York State, New York History*, January 1951, 107.

³¹ Percy W. Bidwell, “Rural Economy in New England at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century,” *Translations of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, XX (April 1916), 352.

³² Ellis, “The Yankee Invasion of New York,” 105

³³ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

gained 96 per cent, Utica 183%, Syracuse 282%, Buffalo 314%, and Rochester 512%.³⁵

Religion in Western New York – the “Burned-over District”

Referring to Western New York as the “Burned-over District” probably originated with the most famous evangelist of the period, Charles Grandison Finney (1792 – 1875) who in his posthumously published *Autobiography of Charles G. Finney* referred to a “burnt district” (78) to denote that area during the Second Great Awakening. The name was apparently inspired by the idea that Western New York had been so heavily evangelized during the Awakening that there was no “fuel” (unconverted population) left over to “burn” (convert). There is also the theory that it refers to the practice of burning crop fields after the harvest to replenish the soil. In other words, successive revival campaigns may have made the people of Western New York even more receptive to evangelism. The term was popularized by the 1950 masterwork on the subject, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800 – 1850*, by the late Whitney R. Cross, Assistant Professor of History at West Virginia University.

Many historians point to the Cane Ridge Revival in Kentucky in August 1801 as the beginning of the Second Great Awakening in the United States. Professor Cross makes a strong argument that that is inaccurate.

[I]t was [in Vermont and western Massachusetts], chiefly, that the “Second Great Awakening” made thorough and permanent conquests, far beyond its effect on the rest of New England. Indeed, this was far more significant, albeit less sensational, than the contemporary Kentucky revival of much greater renown. Wave upon wave of seasonal enthusiasm swept the Yankee hill country until long after 1825.³⁶

Professor Cross indicates that while “[t]heological differences also existed” in the period 1790 – 1825, “apparently not in such a way as to affect religious emotionalism. All the major denominations (the Episcopal Church was relatively weak in this area³⁷) and most

³⁵ Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 55-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁷ The Episcopal Church was weak during the first 25 of the 35 years to which Dr. Cross refers, but after 1815 the situation began to change.

of the smaller ones were strongly revivalistic.”³⁸ “Religious emotionalism” and enthusiasm in worship may, however, manifest themselves differently in different circumstances.

The winter of 1799 – 1800 was in western New York long called the time of the Great Revival, just as it was in Kentucky. But the violent sensationalism of the southern frontiersmen repulsed the relatively staid Yankees, whose experiences, because more calm, have been the more easily forgotten by historians. Additional factors conspired to diminish the fame of the northern awakenings which occurred throughout western New England and New York in scattered places, in various seasons.³⁹

After 1800 religious furor diminished, then rose again, but to a lesser extent, in 1807-1808, and then wilted again during the War of 1812, which lasted till 1815. Every year, however, saw awakenings in a few communities. Ongoing migration from New England constantly added to church membership and to the general seeking for spiritual fulfillment. The Great Revival of 1799-1800, affecting early arrivals within New York and in New England on those who followed, supplied enduring religious interest during the seminal years of the Burned-over District. The religious cataclysm following the War of 1812 was unprecedented. Although the proportion of converts to the population may have been smaller than it was in 1800, the population had increased so as to give an impression of greater scale. This revival spread more widely and profusely than had the one at the turn of the century. Yankee communities which had participated in the earlier awakening stimulated newer towns. “The Presbyterians of Utica made nearly as many converts in 1815 as in the Finney revival a decade later, and added large numbers again in 1819 and 1821.”⁴⁰ Indeed, many of the places where Finney later became renowned were similarly affected during these years. As at the beginning of the century, enthusiasm permeated the Finger Lakes and Genesee countries, but it also infected younger settlements westward to Lake Erie. Baptists first became a major element in the Western New York religion scene after the War of 1812. They particularly focused on Ontario and Monroe counties. For the first time, extensive Freewill Baptist revivals appeared in southern Erie County, along the shore of Lake Ontario, and in the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

Susquehanna Valley. The Methodists also grew exponentially, gaining 16 percent in numbers in 1818 alone.⁴¹

Since the first climax of 1800, distinct peaks of fervor occurred twice with intervals of quiet. The lowest point in the cycle was in 1820. Then, as now, many people sought God more earnestly in adversity than in prosperity. The postwar years had been a time of depression and hence religious interest, while optimistic expectations associated with the building of the Erie Canal strengthened business activity and diminished spiritual seeking.⁴² The series of crests in religious zeal begun by the Great Revival reached a grand climax between 1825 and 1837. “The Burned-over District experienced in these years a gradual transfer westward from New England of the center of gravity for spiritual stimuli.”⁴³

The Methodists were not the source of Burned-over District peculiarities. The Freewill Baptists and Christians had emerged during the First Great Awakening and developed in the late eighteenth century on the northern frontiers of New England. The former retained Baptist practices but subscribed to open communion and an Arminian doctrine of salvation. The latter (not to be confused with the Campbellites or Disciples of Christ, also often called Christians) might properly be called Unitarian Baptists. They disclaimed creeds and believed in the unity of God, but emphasized regeneration by conversion, immersion, and a literal reading of the Bible. These groups, always in close cooperation with each other, provided a large proportion of the emigrants to Western New York where they settled chiefly in isolated rural areas and probably retained the relatively low socio-economic status which they had occupied in New England.⁴⁴ There were also Universalists and regular Baptists:

More than the Catholics in western New York did the Universalists serve as this kind of foil for the evangelists, stimulating them to ever-more-heroic efforts. Thus a thriving Universalist Church served a dual function, irritating the revivalists to action while providing a stimulus for alternate types of enthusiasm. ... By 1845, [the Unitarian Church] had nearly as many congregations as had the Episcopalians, and twice as many as had the Catholics in the Burned-over District.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 17-18.

The proportionate number of Baptists in the state was equally remarkable, and the missionary campaigns of this church before 1825 were exceeded only by the Presbyterian efforts. . . . Whatever the reason, they gained at a faster rate than the Presbyterians and by 1825 had 40,000 professing members. No adjacent state had over 12,000 Baptists, and only Virginia and Kentucky had over half as many as New York.⁴⁶

Professor Cross gives an example of how the changing tides of the Burned-over District manifested themselves in a single individual. James Parker, one of the wealthiest, most accomplished and most staunch supporters in the early days of the Community of the Publick Universal Friend, a group similar to the Shakers, quarreled with its founder, Jemima Wilkinson, in 1800. He became an ordained Freewill Baptist minister of some prominence, but in 1811 he joined the Universalists and assisted materially in establishing that church in the Genesee country. He may later in life have become a Swedenborgian, but he died a Methodist.⁴⁷

The City of Rochester

Initially it was not the author's intention to examine the socio-economics of Episcopalians in Rochester because the existence of multiple parishes and the size of the city made it difficult to do primary research on the subject. However, the source of secondary material is rich, and while there is nothing available that analyzes the socio-economic position of a cross-section of the Episcopal parishioners of Rochester, the information available gives irrefutable support for the notion that much of Rochester's elite could be found at the Episcopal churches on Sunday mornings.

Colonel Nathaniel Rochester

The origins of the Episcopal Church in Rochester are in the South, not New York City where the diocese was headquartered. This is because the church owes so much to one person, Col. Nathaniel Rochester.⁴⁸

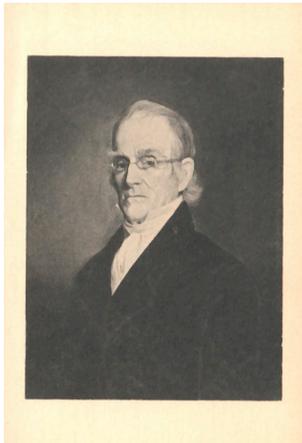
⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁸ Much of this biography appears in *St. Luke's Church, Genesee Falls: Past and Future*, by Virginia Jeffrey Smith, published by the parish in 1967.

Shortly after concluding the purchase in 1788, Phelps and Gorham gave a 100-acre lot within the Mill Yard Tract to Ebenezer "Indian" Allan, on condition he build a grist mill and sawmill on the land by summer 1789. Allan built the mills at the west end of the Upper Falls of the Genesee. In March 1792, with no settlers and no demand for mills, Indian Allan sold the 100-acre tract to an individual who almost immediately resold the property to Samuel Ogden, an agent for Robert Morris. Ogden, in turn, sold the property in 1794 to Charles Williamson, agent for The Pulteney Association. On November 8, 1803, the Pulteney Association issued a purchase agreement for the 100-acre tract to Colonel Nathaniel Rochester, Major Charles Carroll, and Colonel William Fitzhugh, all of Hagerstown, Maryland.

Nathaniel Rochester was born February 21, 1752 in Westmoreland County, Virginia. His father died when he was two years old and five years later his mother remarried. In 1763, Rochester moved with his family to Granville County, North



Carolina. He found a job with a merchant in Hillsborough, Orange County, at age 16, and became partner in the business within five years. During his young adulthood, Rochester served as Clerk of the Vestry of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Hillsborough, and as a delegate to North Carolina's first Provincial Congress⁴⁹ in 1774.

Rochester was appointed a Major in the North Carolina militia and served as a paymaster. He suffered a physical breakdown, however, and was forced to resign from the service. Once recovered, Rochester returned to Hillsborough and was elected to the North Carolina General Assembly of 1777. Also that year, Rochester was appointed Colonel of the North Carolina militia, and Commissioner in charge of building and managing an arms factory in Hillsborough.

Rochester and his business partner, Thomas Hart, relocated to Hagerstown, Maryland in 1780. In Hagerstown, Rochester met Sophia Beatty, whom he married in

⁴⁹ This congress met in New Bern, North Carolina from Aug. 25-27, 1774. It was the first such gathering anywhere in the thirteen colonies held in defiance of British orders. This assembly approved the calling of a Continental Congress and elected the colony's delegates to that congress. The provincial congress also approved a trade boycott to protest British actions against New England.

1788. Rochester and his wife had twelve children, nine of whom survived into adulthood. One son, Thomas Hart Rochester, would become the sixth mayor of Rochester, and another, William, was nearly elected Governor of New York.

Hart and Rochester owned and operated numerous businesses during their time in Hagerstown. One was a wagon hauling operation that transported goods back and forth to Western New York. The partnership with Hart dissolved in 1792. Rochester served one term in the Maryland General Assembly, and two years as postmaster. In 1807, Rochester helped found the Hagerstown Bank, serving as its first president.

Two of the directors of the Hagerstown Bank, Colonel William Fitzhugh and Major Charles Carroll⁵⁰ were, like Rochester, wealthy landowners interested in acquiring land in the new "frontier" of the U.S. In 1800, Fitzhugh and Carroll (who had made a similar journey the prior year) convinced Rochester to travel with them on a prospecting visit to the frontier lands of New York State, and specifically to the lands along the upper portion of the Genesee River. Fitzhugh and Carroll acquired land along the river on their trip, but Rochester chose a 120-acre tract along Canaseragea Creek near the hamlet of Dansville. There were more trips by members of the trio in 1801 and 1802, but in 1803, the three traveled farther up the river to Indian Allan's former tract near the river's Upper Falls. The men saw a business opportunity there as any goods which traveled up the river would need to be unloaded there and portage fees could be charged. They purchased one hundred acres of land around the falls for \$1,750, payable over five years.

Rochester, then 58 years old, decided to relocate his family to New York in 1810. His partners' wives apparently were less willing to move to the wilderness than was Mrs. Rochester. A considerable party departed Maryland including three generations of Rochesters and an unspecified number of slaves⁵¹. In early June of that year, the family

⁵⁰ "Charles Carroll of Belle Vue" (1767-1832) Born in Carrollsburg, Maryland (now in the District of Columbia); he died in Town of Groveland, Livingston County, New York. He established the "Hermitage" estate in Groveland. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, signer of the Declaration of Independence, was his father's first cousin. His father's second cousins were Daniel Carroll, signer of the Constitution and John Carroll, first Roman Catholic Bishop in the United States. This Charles Carroll was a friend of James and Dolly Madison and attempted to assist the First Lady in her evacuation of the White House in August 1814. The Fitzhughs and Carrolls migrated to Western New York in 1815 after selling most of their slaves, which a 1799 Act of the New York Legislature had granted gradual manumission. After a brief sojourn in Missouri, Carroll returned to New York, but he never lived in Rochester.

⁵¹ In 1799 the New York State Legislature passed "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," which allowed masters to keep their younger slaves in bondage for their most productive years, to recoup their

reached Dansville and established a homestead. In 1811 Rochester began the process of establishing a town on the Upper Falls tract. He laid out streets and established plots of land for municipal, church, and business use. Later that year, he began to offer the plots for sale and, at the urging of his partners (he was, after all, the only one of the three in New York State), named the would-be settlement Rochesterville.

While the War of 1812 prevented his partners from moving from Maryland (and Carroll was very busy helping the Madisons in Washington, D.C.), the war helped Rochesterville grow as settlers living along the coast of Lake Ontario sought to move farther inland to escape possible attack by the British across the Lake. In 1812, Rochester moved his family from Dansville to Rochesterville to provide settlers in Rochesterville assurances that the settlement was permanent.

In 1817 Rochester served on a committee to petition the state to build what would become the Erie Canal on a proposed northern route that included a route across the Genesee River at Rochesterville. The eventual decision by the state government to accept this northern route became a predominant factor in the growth of the future city. In 1819, Rochesterville was incorporated by the state legislature. “When workmen digging the Erie Canal reached Rochester in 1821, they found a busy village of 1,500.”⁵²

Politics in New York State have often been counter-intuitive. Rochester, who supported the building of the Erie Canal, nevertheless had close ties with the Martin Van Buren faction of the Democratic-Republican Party (known as the Bucktails), who strongly opposed Governor DeWitt Clinton’s scheme for getting the canal built. Indeed, Nathaniel’s son William Rochester was the Bucktail candidate for governor in 1826 against Clinton, who was also a Democratic-Republican and was narrowly reelected. Rochester got the Legislature to create Monroe County (named for the then President), with the renamed Rochester as county seat, in 1821. He donated the land for the court house, which ensured his land became the most valuable. When the county was officially

investment. The law freed children born to slave women after July 4, 1799 when they reached a certain age – males at 28 and females at 25. Until that time, they would be the property of the mother's master. Slaves already in servitude before July 4, 1799, remained slaves for life, though they were reclassified as "indentured servants." In 1817 a law gave freedom to New York slaves who had been born before July 4, 1799, but not until July 4, 1827. According to *St. Luke's Church Genesee Falls*, Rochester freed all of his slaves upon arriving in New York.

⁵² Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 17.

formed, Rochester became its first county clerk and was elected as the county's first representative to the New York State Assembly. By then he was 69 years old.

Nathaniel Rochester and his sons . . . spent Sunday mornings at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. The colonel had donated the land on which St. Luke's was built, and he and his family rented the most expensive pews. While his sons and friends served the congregation as vestrymen, Rochester personally recruited Francis H. Cuming to fill the pulpit. In 1822 the colonel's son Thomas [Hart Rochester] married [the] Reverend [Mr.] Cuming's sister, making the minister's attachment to the Rochester clan official.⁵³

Among various other duties, Rochester served as the first president of the Rochester Athenæum, now the Rochester Institute of Technology. He died on May 17, 1831, at the age of 79, leaving 28 grandchildren.

The City of Rochester and Religion

Paul A. Johnson, Professor of History at the University of South Carolina, has written a major work on Rochester: *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815 – 1837*.⁵⁴ He describes Rochester as “America's first inland boom town.”⁵⁵ Curtis D. Johnson, Assistant Professor of History at Mount Saint Mary's College, convincingly disagrees with the other Dr. Johnson's conclusions.⁵⁶ Paul Johnson says that those who joined any particular denomination in Rochester during this period tended to be relatively well-off:

[I]f we limit attention to men who joined churches [in Rochester] during Charles Finney's [1830] revival, we shall find even fewer for whom migration and participation in the entrepreneurial world had been an isolating or norm-shattering experience. More than others, Finney's converts were firmly engaged in the country trade and in the elaborate and stability-inducing relationships through which it is conducted. . . . Both before and during the revival, churches were filled disproportionately with businessmen and master craftsmen and their families – persons who enjoyed far greater residential stability than did other elements of the Rochester population. More revealing, the men who joined churches during the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁴ New York, Hill and Wang, 1978/2004

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁶ Johnson, Curtis D., *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790 – 1860*, Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1989, 78.

Finney revival were more stable than were others even in the same stability-prone occupations⁵⁷

Curtis Johnson says this claim is skewed by the fact that only the “formal denominations (Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Congregationalist)” had extensive records of membership and hence suffers from “upper-class formalist bias.”⁵⁸

While Paul Johnson is somewhat confused by certain aspects of Episcopal polity and practice, his “bias,” caused by over reliance on, *inter alia*, Episcopal Church records, does not call into question his comments about the first two Episcopal parishes in Rochester.

The First Episcopal Parishes in Rochester

St. Luke’s Church, the first Episcopal congregation in Rochester, was organized in 1818 by Nathaniel Rochester, his family and friends. Paul Johnson says, “At every point in time, this was the wealthiest church in Rochester.”⁵⁹ That may well be true, but Johnson’s scholarship is undermined by his claim a few sentences later that “St. Luke’s adopted Low Church ritual and participated fully in the revivals of 1827-37.” In 1818, and even in 1827, there was no “Low Church ritual,” and it barely existed in reality and certainly not in terminology in 1837. As noted above, prior to roughly 1840, all Episcopal parishes practiced what we would today call Low Church ritual,⁶⁰ and so this is probably a case of historical projection. It is significant, however, that St. Luke’s contradicted the clear direction of their bishop, John Henry Hobart, against ecumenical entanglements and participated in “enthusiastic” revivals. Thus, Hobart would probably have described St. Luke’s as “Low Church” even though their ritual was almost certainly indistinguishable from that at Trinity, Wall Street, then effectively the pro-cathedral of the diocese.

In the late 1820’s divisions over three issues -- the Masons, Temperance and Sabbatarianism⁶¹ -- began to divide various Rochester congregations. At the beginning of that decade, “Nathaniel Rochester could look back from his pew at St. Luke’s and nod

⁵⁷ Johnson, Paul A., *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*, 33-34.

⁵⁸ Johnson, Curtis D., *Islands of Holiness*, 78 footnote.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁶⁰ An Anglo-Catholic wag would call the liturgical practices of that time “lower than the belly of a snake.”

⁶¹ Strict and often rigorous observance of the Sabbath, which in this instance means Sunday.

to a house full of kinsmen and allies. ... Late in the decade, however, the dividing line in politics was not kinship but ideology. Political fights were violent and personal, and they took place within Protestant congregations as well as between them.”⁶²

The Temperance Movement, which ultimately led to the 18th Amendment and Prohibition, began in Rochester with concern that the Canal was bringing too many undesirables who spent their money on alcohol and prostitutes:

In 1828, worried gentlemen formed the Rochester Society for the Promotion of Temperance and affiliated with a national movement led by Lyman Beecher of Boston. ... Every old family and every church submerged their differences and contributed leaders to the society. Colonel Rochester himself, along with his son-in-law Jonathan Child, represented the Episcopal Church.⁶³

It was truly ecumenical. Even the Catholic priest was a member of the society. Unanimity about Temperance did not, however, last very long, and requests for total abstinence, or teetotalism, found virtually no support among Episcopalians.

When in 1829, at the suggestion of several Presbyterian synods, the state legislature adjourned three days to honor temperance fast, the Universalist *Gospel Advocate* seized upon the episode as a dangerous precedent, At Naples [in Ontario County] a crowd of prosperous nonprofessors “who would be thought temperate drinkers,” moved to set up an Episcopal church.⁶⁴

The Masonic issue shook up the Episcopal congregations in Rochester, but apparently not to the degree it did others, principally the Presbyterians, the usual competitor with the Episcopalians for well-to-do members. The Nathaniel Rochester family were prominent Masons, as were almost 40% of the anti-Clintonian Democratic-Republican leaders.

St. Luke’s, for instance, was the old headquarters of the Rochesters and their Bucktail friends. It was here ... that many prominent Masons spent Sunday mornings. The pastor was Francis Cuming, of the Rochester in-laws. The Reverend Cuming was also the highest-ranking Mason in Rochester, having been installed as Grand Commander in 1826 – in ceremonies held in St. Luke’s Church.⁶⁵

⁶² *Ibid.*, 90-91.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁶⁴ Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 131.

⁶⁵ Johnson, Paul A., *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*, 90-91.

Ironically, when Bishop Hobart was in Detroit in 1828 for the consecration of the first Episcopal Church there he forbade the Masons to participate in the service in their ceremonial dress.

The Rev. Mr. Cuming, however, soon became personally involved in a major scandal, one that led to the near destruction of the Masonic Order in America and the creation of a new national political party. The scandal was the 1826 abduction and probable murder of William Morgan of Batavia, with the Rector of St. Luke's accused of providing the carriage used in the abduction. Morgan was a former member of the Leroy Masonic lodge who had been denied membership in the Batavia lodge and was about to publish a book revealing the secrets of their rituals when he was spirited away, likely by a group of Masons. The uproar over the incident allegedly caused the Masons to lose at least half of their membership nationally. It also resulted in the formation of the Anti-Masonic Party in 1828. The scandal lives on, as illustrated by the *Da Vinci Code*-inspired October 31, 2006 History Channel program, "Mysteries of the Freemasons, Part II," in which the Morgan abduction was a centerpiece. Paul Johnson describes what happened in detail:

Cuming was among the first to speak in defense of the lodge, and Antimasons accused him of helping with the kidnapping and eventually had him indicted. Cuming reacted bitterly, and preached from his pulpit against the Antimasons. No doubt most of the congregation sympathized. But there were men at St. Luke's who had helped to bring on the minister's troubles. Timothy Childs, the first Antimason sent to Congress, heard Cuming's counterattacks on his party. So did Thurlow Weed's⁶⁶ henchman Frederick Whittlesey, who had been elected vestryman at St. Luke's a few months before Morgan's disappearance. Men who hated each other shared the pews, and St. Luke's became an uncomfortable place in which to worship. At the center of the controversy, Francis Cuming came under terrible pressure, both from outside and from within his church. In 1829 he resigned and left Rochester.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Thurlow Weed (November 15, 1797 – November 22, 1882) was a legendary New York political boss. While he never held national office himself, he was the principal political advisor to New York Governor and Senator and U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward and was instrumental in founding three political parties (Anti-Masonic, Whig and Republican) and the presidential nominations of William Henry Harrison (1840), Henry Clay (1844), Zachary Taylor (1848), Winfield Scott (1852), John Charles Frémont (1856) and Abraham Lincoln (1860).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

Perhaps not surprisingly, neither the 1917 nor the 1967 histories of St. Luke's Church thoroughly address the reasons for Cuming's resignation.⁶⁸

Finally, was the issue of Sabbatarianism. Very few Episcopalians were rabid Sabbatarians, and it was at St. Luke's that Rochester's "anti-Sabbatarians found their most respectable supporters,"⁶⁹ but some Episcopalians found themselves on opposite sides for business reasons. While Blue Laws had existed in New England since 1607, there had been little pressure for Congress or most states to adopt them. However, the construction crews and boatmen on the Erie Canal upset the transplanted New Englanders in Central New York with their Sunday activities, and New Yorkers both implemented their own laws and attempted to get the nation to follow along.⁷⁰

In 1827, a six-day (not on Sunday) boat line began operating on the canal, the Hudson and Erie line. Early in 1828, organized boycotts began in Rochester and Utica of seven-day boat and stage lines. The *Rochester Observer* remarked: "We have before mentioned that the ground which had been taken ... would make the distinction more apparent between those who serve God, and who serve him not."⁷¹ Those whom Dr. Cross calls the "presbyter-capitalists" next started a six-day stage line, the Pioneer Line, serving Rochester and Utica. Both the six-day canal boat and stage lines were primarily led by Josiah Bissell, Jr. of Rochester, "chief pillar" of the Third Presbyterian Church. He was also a chief sponsor of Finney's visit to Rochester in 1831 and a zealous Antimason. Ultimately the Pioneer Line failed.

Antimasons and – especially – Sabbatarians tended to be Presbyterians, and this no doubt gave a competitive edge to the Episcopal Church in appealing to some of the well-to-do.

⁶⁸ Anstice, Henry, *Centennial Annals of St. Luke's Church, Rochester, N.Y. 1817 – 1917, with Names of Officers, Parochial Statistics and Historical Sketches of the Other Parishes*, Rochester, Scrantom, Wetmore & Co., 1917; Smith, Virginia Jeffrey, *St. Luke's Church, Genesee Falls: Past and Future*, Rochester, 1967. The older history says only that the Vestry accepted Cumming's resignation "deeply regretting the existence of reasons that in his estimation are deemed of sufficient weight and importance to determine him to resign a situation he has so usefully occupied and the duties of which he has so faithfully and satisfactorily discharged." (31) The modern history makes obscure mention of the situation, "Mr. Cuming, like many other civic leaders, was a Mason and it was thought the situation [Morgan's abduction] resulted in his resignation." (17) Neither mentions the Rector's indictment.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷⁰ Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 132.

⁷¹ *Rochester Observer*, II (Feb. 1, 8, 1828), 19, 22, 23.

Paul Johnson relates a story that says a great deal about Episcopalians and Sabbatarianism, but cannot be entirely accurate. Johnson says ideological fighting took place at the second Episcopal church, St. Paul's, founded in 1827. As *A Shopkeeper's Millennium* describes it, the two leading members of the new congregation were Elisha Johnson and William Atkinson. Both were important members of the community, (Johnson was the fifth mayor of Rochester, Atkinson was the leading miller and a leader of the Monroe County Bible Society) but they held diametrically opposite opinions on at least one issue. Johnson was an ardent anti-Sabbatarian, while Atkinson was one of the founders of the Pioneer Line, the six-day a week stage coach company that had been formed to induce business from the Sabbatarians. Atkinson was also a dedicated Mason, even after the scandal over the Morgan abduction, a possible area of conflict with his partner, Mr. Bissell.

The newly formed Vestry of St. Paul's initially called Charles McIlvaine as Rector. Paul Johnson says that McIlvaine was a strong Low Churchman and this allegedly prompted a faction at St. Luke's, led by Thomas Hart Rochester and Jonathan Child (the sixth and first mayors and the son and son-in-law of Nathaniel Rochester, respectively), to seek the help of H.U. Onderdonck to convince the people of St. Paul's that McIlvaine was "a zealous promoter of the schemes that would blend us with Presbyterians." Sabbatarian Atkinson reportedly was not bothered by that idea, and led the Vestry in fighting the Rochesters. However, "the Rochesters won and St. Paul's withdrew the invitation to McIlvaine and adopted High Church ritual in 1829. But not before leading Episcopalians had taken turns insulting each other in public."⁷²

This story does not make complete sense. There was no "High Church ritual" in 1829.⁷³ On this point Paul Johnson relies on Blake McKelvey, then Rochester City Historian, from his book, *Rochester: The Water-Power City, 1812-1854* (Cambridge, 1945), 132-33, so the claim did not originate with Johnson. Tellingly, the history of St. Paul's, Rochester, makes no mention of this incident, though it does refer to St. Paul's

⁷² *Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁷³ The Oxford Movement, which gave birth to a revival of catholic ritual in the Anglican Church began in England in 1833 and, while its tracts reached the United States almost immediately and were generally better received here than in the Church of England, it nonetheless took a few years to develop to the point where parishes could be said to have "High Church ritual." In the 1820's, the Episcopal Church in "High Church" New York, like that in "Low Church" Virginia and elsewhere, eschewed even such "ritual" as crosses and candles on the "communion table."

“opting for a ‘higher’ style of service,”⁷⁴ presumably than St. Luke’s. St. Luke’s was “militantly Low Church,”⁷⁵ so why would two members of the Rochester family try to prevent St. Paul’s from being similarly “Low”? No doubt there is some truth in the story; it has likely been distorted in the retelling. McIlvaine (1799 – 1873) was indeed an ardent anti-ritualist, although that was after he became Bishop of Ohio in 1832. He founded Bexley Hall Seminary at Kenyon College in 1843 which became a “Low Church” training ground.⁷⁶ Another problem with this story is that the Rev. Henry Ustick Onderdonk, M.D. (1789 – 1858) was elected Assistant Bishop of Pennsylvania in October 1827, the same year he was allegedly interfering in the initial calling process at St. Paul’s, Rochester. Onderdonk was Rector of St. Ann’s Church, Brooklyn from 1820 until his election to the episcopacy, but prior to that he had served as a missionary in the Canandaigua area from 1816. He was the organizing priest of St. Luke’s and hence knew the Rochesters and others at St. Luke’s, but would he have become actively involved in a dispute so far away? He was a High Churchman and disciple of Bishop Hobart, as was his brother, Benjamin Tredwel Onderdonk, who succeeded Hobart as Bishop of New York. But High Churchmanship, as it was understood by Bishop Hobart and his disciples, had to do with episcopal leadership, not catholic ritual.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Indeed, the history suggests relatively little antagonism between the parishes. *St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Rochester, NY 1827-1977: A History of the First 150 Years*, Edited by Vincent S. Jones, May 27, 1977: “From the thousand hardy pioneers clustered around the falls of the Genesee in 1817, the community had grown to nearly 8,000 And while many contended that the rapid growth of the village justified a second Episcopal parish, others argued that it was better to have one large, strong church than two weak congregations. Elisha Johnson, who became one of Rochester's early mayors, and Samuel J. Andrews, both original incorporators of St. Luke's Church, and Enos Stone, one of the largest land owners on the East Side, were among those urging the organization of another parish. And so, on May 7, 1827, the vestry of St. Luke's Church met in William Pitkin's counting room. Present were the Rev. F. H. Cuming, Rector, William Atkinson and William Pitkin, Wardens; S. M. Smith, Giles Boulton, Elisha Johnson, Jared N. Stebbins, and Messrs. Child, Whittlesey and Lathrop. A committee of five (Messrs. Atkinson, Johnson, Boulton, Whittlesey and Pitkin) was named to proceed with the project along with the rector. Three weeks later, on May 28, in a room of the year-old Franklin Institute, the Rev. Mr. Cuming presided at a meeting at which Messrs. Atkinson and Boulton were elected wardens, Messrs. Johnson, Stebbins, Smith, Stone, Elisha B. Strong, Samuel 3. Andrews, Daniel Tinker, and A. B. Curtiss were elected vestrymen of the new church which was named St. Paul's. Fourteen communicants were transferred from St. Luke's to the new Parish. While many congregations and denominations split over basic issues in this period, the traditional "roominess" of the Episcopal faith resulted only in the new parish opting for a "higher" style of service.” The history of St. Luke’s is also silent about any such controversy.

⁷⁵ Smith, *St. Luke's Church*, 17.

⁷⁶ Bexley Hall, after a sojourn in Rochester from 1968 to 1998, is now in Bexley, Ohio and describes itself as “Anglo-Catholic.” McIlvaine is turning in his grave.

⁷⁷ The first rector of St. Paul’s was the Rev. Sutherland Douglas, who was called in April 1828 but resigned because of ill health in August 1829.

The real story behind this story may well have more to do with business interests than with churchmanship. Jonathan Child was the owner of the Pilot Line, the largest canal boat company and the subject of the boycott made possible by the existence of the Hudson and Erie Line, of which Presbyterian Bissell was principal owner, as he was of the Pioneer stage coach line of which St. Paul's Atkinson was a co-owner. The Rochesters may have feared that McIlvaine was a Sabbatarian and would preach in favor of the boycott.

The fact that St. Paul's subsequently became the relatively "higher" liturgical parish *vis-à-vis* St. Luke's probably led to the assumption that it had been so from the outset. Judging from his lack of familiarity with Anglican jargon, it appears that City Historian McKelvey was not an Episcopalian and he may well have confused various aspects of his story.

Western New York politics have always been strange.⁷⁸ The Rochesters, probably because they were from the South, were part of the Jackson wing of the Democratic-Republican Party that became Democrats. But they apparently were the exception at St. Luke's, according to Paul Johnson:

Episcopalians played a major role in forming the Whig Party in Rochester in 1834. Of the seven initial members, five were Episcopalians, one Presbyterian and one Baptist. The Episcopalians included three Antimasons and two Democrats and Masons. Almost immediately a political structure emerged that conformed to the social divisions of the town. 32% of the Whigs and 19% of the Democrats were among the richest tenth of taxpayers. "Sixty-four percent of Whig activists were full church members. Only 36% of Democrats belonged to Protestant churches, and many of these huddled together at St. Paul's Episcopal, where High Church ritual and the fellowship of other Democrats insulated them from Whig evangelicals."⁷⁹

St. Luke's own histories emphasize the social standing of its lay founders. "A 'highly respectable' [initial] vestry was chosen – so respectable that it sounds like a

⁷⁸ "Although the majority of Burned-over District folk customarily voted for what turned out to be the conservative political party, opposing the more hopefully egalitarian Jacksonians, their poll was determined rather by accident than by principle. The emigrants from the minority sects and the rugged hills of western New England had been bred in the Jeffersonian opposition to Yankee Federalism, but upon reaching New York they found many of the landlords' agents and other scions of aristocracy associated with the Democratic Republicans. Many also proved to be Masons. Antimasonry seemed a more genuine vehicle of optimistic democracy than the Democratic Party itself. Many upstaters failed to perceive the gradual shift of their ebullient movement toward Whiggism." [Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 79]

⁷⁹ Johnson, Paul A., *A Shopkeeper's Millenium*, 129.

“Who’s Who” of the village.”⁸⁰ They were. Samuel Andrews was, with Nathaniel Rochester, one of the initial wardens. A New Englander and Yale graduate, Andrews had already made and lost a fortune before settling in Rochester, where his real estate interests renewed his prosperity. John Mastick, Vestryman, was the town’s first lawyer. Another lawyer Vestryman was General Vincent Matthews, who after studying with Noah Webster became Canandaigua’s first lawyer and a member of Congress before coming to Rochester. Also on the Vestry were Augustine Dauby, printer and publisher of Rochester’s first newspaper; Jonothan Child, Rochester’s first mayor; Elisha Johnson, the town’s leading engineer; William Atkinson, the leading miller; Oliver Culver, ship builder; Roswell Babbitt, the man who did the legwork on creating Monroe County; and Silas O. Smith, the first storeowner in Rochester and one of the most successful.⁸¹

Of course, just because the leaders of the congregation were also leaders of the community does not mean that all members of St. Luke’s were prosperous. Steiner mentions that several of the urban 18th Century New England Anglican parishes included both rich and poor, but, unlike 19th Century New York, there were no Methodist churches in the New England of Steiner’s study.

The Village of Palmyra

Palmyra seemed a logical choice for this study. It is a quintessential “Burnt-over District” town, its Episcopal parish dates from the Hobart era, and there is much written about the community because of its association with Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of the Mormon Church. Palmyra, which is today less than twenty miles east of the Rochester suburbs, seemed much further away in the early 19th Century.

The Village of Palmyra, originally called "Swift's Landing" was settled beginning in 1789 and was renamed after the ancient Syrian city in 1796, reputedly to impress a new school teacher. There were almost one thousand people in the town in 1800. The Erie Canal was completed to Palmyra in 1822. In 1823 Wayne County was created from Ontario County, named after General Anthony Wayne, with its seat about 12 miles east of Palmyra in Lyons. It was only in the 1830 census that Rochester surpassed Palmyra in

⁸⁰ Anstice, *Centennial Annals of St. Luke’s Church*, 4.

⁸¹ Smith, *St. Luke’s Church Genesee Falls*, 21-26.

size. Its citizens came chiefly from Connecticut and Vermont.⁸² It had numerous evangelical churches from its beginnings, and as a result of the “miscellaneous immoralities in general, and . . . desecration of the Sabbath in particular” formed a society for the suppression of vice in 1823.⁸³

The Episcopal Church in Palmyra began at about the same time as Joseph Smith starting having his encounters with sacred beings. Although it is not clear exactly when Smith had his “First Vision” (sometime between 1820 and 1823 God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared near the Smith home, about three miles south of Palmyra, and told the teenager they had “a great work” for him to do in restoring the True Church to Earth), Smith received the golden tablets on which were written the Book of Mormon from the angel Moroni in 1827.

The Smith family had arrived in Western New York from Vermont in 1816 when Joseph was ten years old. “[T]he Smiths could in no way be considered uncommon in westering horde. Like the bulk of their fellows [from Vermont], they sought a new start in the acres of New York just about to be enriched by the projected Erie Canal. Unwisely perhaps, again like many others, they shunned the rugged pioneering life demanded by the more primitive regions of Ohio or west of the Genesee in New York, in favor of a community of some age, respectability, and commercial prospects, where they would have a greater struggle to pay for their land. [T]he farm [the Smiths purchased near Palmyra] had been foreclosed by 1830.”⁸⁴

1830 was also the year the Book of Mormon was first published (in Palmyra) and the year the church now known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized in the nearby Town of Fayette, Seneca County. The church relocated to Ohio the following year.

Smith’s revelations were not particularly well received in Palmyra. Prior to the release of the Book of Mormon, the *Palmyra Freeman* called the prospective book “the greatest piece of superstition that has come to our knowledge.” Almost six months before publication, the *Palmyra Reflector*, which shared a printer with Smith and hence gained access to the book galleys, reprinted mocking excerpts until Smith threatened a lawsuit.

⁸² Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 140.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁴ Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 139, 141.

Lucy Mack Smith, the prophet's mother, had been an active church explorer in New England and after she arrived in New York. Sometime after 1824, she and three of her children, Hyrum, Samuel, and Sophronia, joined Western Presbyterian Church in Palmyra. Neither Joseph, Sr., who had joined the Methodist Church years earlier but had fallen away, nor Joseph, Jr., joined them.

Thanks to the historical interest in the Smith family we know that there were numerous revivals in the Palmyra area between 1816 and 1825, with large multi-denominational ones during those two years and smaller scale Methodist ones occurring in some of the intervening years.⁸⁵

A Congregational church was the first church in Palmyra, organized in 1793, but fairly early in the town's history it became Presbyterian and soon there was a second Presbyterian congregation. This illustrates the primarily-New England background of the residents of Palmyra since, thanks to the 1801 Plan of Union, New England Congregationalists became Presbyterians when they crossed the New York State line.⁸⁶ Next to arrive were the Methodists, who were primarily indigenous converts⁸⁷, and the Baptists, who were mostly transferees from New England but included a substantial portion of indigenous converts. Fourth to arrive in Palmyra were the Episcopalians.⁸⁸ Zion Episcopal Church was organized June 28, 1823, but its "roots actually began 20 years earlier. ... The first Episcopalians in Palmyra were helped financially by the stronger, established congregations in the east. They were instrumental in the construction of the first Zion church and the first organ."⁸⁹ The cornerstone of the first church building was laid on September 28, 1827, with full Masonic rites (which would not have pleased Bishop Hobart, but he was not present). The church was completed in

⁸⁵ Bushman, Richard Lyman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, New York: Knopf, 2005, 36, 46.

⁸⁶ The Plan of Union ended in 1837, primarily at the insistence of the Presbyterians although they had been the overwhelming beneficiaries of it.

⁸⁷ The Methodists arrived too late in many places to get the leading members of the community. In Ithaca, for example, no Methodist preached until 1817, (they organized in Palmyra in 1811) when "every family of influence and means was fast in the Presbyterian Church." [Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 45]

⁸⁸ There may have been other denominations that arrived before 1825 but they are no longer present in Palmyra. Probably coincidentally, what is perhaps Palmyra's main claim to fame other than the Mormon heritage, is the fact that at each corner of the town's main intersection there is a church, and they are the four denominations – Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and Episcopal – that were first to arrive and stay in town. The current church buildings are all 19th Century but postdate the period of this study: Presbyterian - 1832, Methodist - 1867, Baptist - 1870, Episcopal - 1872.

⁸⁹ [www.zion-episcopal-church.org/Zion History](http://www.zion-episcopal-church.org/Zion%20History)

early 1829 and was consecrated by Hobart, who also consecrated churches in Oswego and Geneseo on the same trip.⁹⁰

The Episcopal Church in Palmyra did not have the advantages that it did in Rochester with the principal founder of the town being Episcopalian, as were his rich and powerful family and friends. Instead, as in so many other small towns in New York State, the founding of Zion, Palmyra was the result of local people showing interest and existing area clergy, supported by the diocese, encouraging them. Thus it may well be that the membership of Zion, Palmyra, was more representative of the Episcopal Church in Western New York than that of St. Luke's, Rochester.

With the assistance of the Parish Archivist of Zion Church,⁹¹ and thanks to a book listing every time a name was mentioned in any of the several local newspapers during this period,⁹² it was possible to examine both who were members of Zion Church during the period in question (and a bit beyond) and, insofar as their names appeared in the newspapers, some information about them.

Attachment A includes 211 persons with connections with Zion, Palmyra during and somewhat beyond the period in question.⁹³ These names are taken from the parish roles and are unlikely to be completely accurate. Clergy are and were usually punctilious in recording baptisms and marriages, but much less so in listing those who join the parish, particularly if they have been baptized and confirmed elsewhere.⁹⁴ Of the 211 names, 91 appear on the communicant roles, which suggests that only about half of the total number were full members, although the percentage is likely somewhat higher given the questionable completeness of communicant lists. Seventy-one names are people who were baptized or whose children were baptized at Zion but who appear to have no other association with the parish. This would be in keeping with the Anglican tradition

⁹⁰ Dix, Morgan, *A History of Trinity Church in the City of New York*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905, 467.

⁹¹ The volunteer archivist/historian is Edie Miglietta. Many thanks to her.

⁹² Meyer, Mary Keyser, ed., *Genealogical Abstract from Palmyra, Wayne County, New York Newspapers 1810 – 1854*, (originally transcribed by S. D. Van Alstine with additions by Harriet Everetts Wiles), Mt. Airy, MD, Pipe Creek Publications, 1996.

⁹³ Communicants are listed through 1839, Removals through 1849 (though only if the person had been on the Communicant list by 1839), Baptisms through 1839 (listed are the parents' names, not the children in instances of childhood baptism), and Marriages through 1830.

⁹⁴ This is particularly true when clergy are in a parish for a short period. They often simply do not know who actually is a communicant, as that is defined by the canons of The Episcopal Church, and who is not.

inherited from the Church of England in which baptism is open to all children without any firm commitment to the Church by their parents. Similarly, twenty-six names appear only on the marriage list, again probably reflecting the openness of English Church tradition; indeed, only one person who was married at Zion Church prior to 1830 was listed as a Communicant.

Of the total 211 names appearing on the Zion parish lists, 70 or 33.18% appeared also in the Palmyra newspapers through 1854. Of these, ten names appear only in marriage announcements. It would take a detailed study of all Palmyra citizens and of the membership of other denominations to determine if the percentage of Zion members who appeared in the various newspapers was disproportionate in comparison to the community at large or to other churches.

The newspapers do, however, provide considerable information about the congregation. One of the communicants, Jacob W. Hallett, was the first judge of Wayne County. The newspaper reported that his second marriage was performed by Bishop Hobart in New York City. Three medical doctors were among those named on the church roles, which is likely a sizable percentage of the local profession during this period. Only two of these, however, are listed as communicants. In the case of the third, his wife is a communicant but his name appears only in connection with the baptism of their children.



William Phelps General Store Museum

Ten of the men listed appear as merchants of various products. [The store of Episcopalian William Phelps is preserved as a museum.⁹⁵] Four served as postmasters of local communities, usually for very short terms. Three owned interests in local newspapers, usually for brief periods, but then many newspapers came and went rapidly. There were three lawyers in the congregation, including Judge Hallett, and one of the three also advertised as a druggist. Three from Zion were listed as investors in 1831 in a railway between Palmyra and Canandaigua, which was never built. [Very few of the numerous railways

⁹⁵ The William Phelps General Store Museum, 140 Market Street, is a commercial building, erected in the late 1820s, which gives “the sense of stepping back into a turn-of-the-century general store. It has remained intact with original merchandise on the main floor store and original Phelps family furnishings and artifacts in their home in the upper floors.” Open June-September, weekends 1-4 PM, or by appointment

proposed in New York during the early 1830s received state charters, and few that did were built.] Other than marriage and death notices, perhaps the most consistently reported event were the members of the 4th of July Committee. Apparently, this was a major civic event, perhaps the leading event of the year in Palmyra. Eight members of Zion served on the committee in different years, and every year there was at least one Episcopalian, usually several, sometimes as many as 25% of the committee.

One of Zion's communicants, Truman Heminway, offered to give every family in Palmyra a free copy of the Bible in 1827.

All of this is not dispositive about the relative socio-economic position of members of Zion, Palmyra. It suggests that they doubtless represented at least the upper half of Palmyra society, but that may be true of church members in general across Western New York.⁹⁶ Did the Presbyterians have more doctors or the Methodists more merchants? After all, as Professor Cross notes:

The Presbyterians of western New York had as good intentions as did other sectarians, and ... [t]heir membership and affiliated population having comprised from the start the best educated, most prosperous, and socially most established class of Yankee migrants, their assumption of superiority was strongly inbred. It was reinforced by their position in the young communities of the new section.⁹⁷

Another claim to fame of Palmyra is that it was the home for a time of Sir Winston Churchill's maternal grandparents, Leonard and Clarissa Hall Jerome. Although they lived in Palmyra at the time the records were examined, neither Leonard nor Clarissa are listed among those associated with Zion Church, though Leonard's aunt by marriage, Mrs. Eleanor Jerome, whose husband was Hiram Jerome with whom Leonard practiced law, is listed as a communicant.

Palmyra's most famous and successful businessman, Henry Wells, founder of both Wells Fargo and American Express, as well as Wells College, was a Presbyterian.

⁹⁶ So says Paul Johnson in *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, while Curtis Johnson in *Islands of Holiness* strongly disagrees. If true, it would be consistent with various socio-economic studies conducted in the 20th Century. "A clear, positive relationship between social status and church attendance in the USA has been reported by Lazerwitz (1961), Lenski (1963) and others. Members of the middle class are more likely to attend church or become church members, and the finding in most American studies has been that members of the lower classes are least likely to be church members or to attend church services (Burchinal, 1959; Hollingshead, 1949; Lenski, 1953)." Argyle, Michael, and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Social Psychology of Religion*, Routledge, 1975, 161-162.

⁹⁷ Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 46.

All in all, it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions about the relative socio-economic position of those who were associated with Zion, Palmyra in the first decade after its organization. But it is clear that some of Palmyra's leading citizens were members of Zion, despite the "head start" that the Presbyterians had with the scions of New England who dominated the community. In addition, although the records are incomplete, and what is available only suggests this, it appears that Zion's early members may have often been "self-made," which in turn might reflect that the old establishment in town were Presbyterians (née Congregationalists) while the emerging entrepreneurial class were perhaps more likely to become Episcopalians (as well, perhaps, being more likely to be Masons, which order at the time played a role more like that played by the Rotary today – a place to make connections important to business). This, however, is far from clear from what information is available; and the lack of records concerning adult confirmations and transfers leaves a question about prior church memberships of those connected with Zion during this period.⁹⁸

What does seem clear from looking at the Zion, Palmyra records against newspaper accounts is that some reasonably prominent citizens of Palmyra who did not belong to a church were married or had their children baptized at Zion, and that probably bode well for the future of the parish. Like numerous new Episcopal congregations of the period, it was many years – until 1851 -- before Zion had a Rector who stayed for more than a short period, and when the parish did get a "permanent" Rector it began to grow both in numbers and relative affluence so that, after the Civil War, the congregation was able to build its current imposing church.

The Village of Bath

Bath falls within the "[t]en counties, forming a triangle in the middle of western New York, with its apex on Lake Ontario and its base on the Pennsylvania border, [that] show [during the period being examined here] a notably lower percentage of New England nativity than do the neighboring counties on either side."⁹⁹ Much of that area

⁹⁸ As discussed below, Professor Steiner in *New England Anglicanism* was, insofar as his conclusions were concerned [regarding "farm communities and rural villages"] looking at communities with a single church and hence he was comparing the relative wealth of communities, not individuals within communities.

⁹⁹ See Footnote 34 above.

was part of the land owned by the Pulteney Associates.¹⁰⁰ Colonel Charles Williamson was the primary agent for the Associates in New York and he chose Bath as his headquarters in 1792, moving there with his family the following year.

Sir William Pulteney, the 5th Baronet Pulteney, was an eminent Scottish lawyer, a Member of Parliament, and reputedly the richest man in Great Britain. In 1760 he married Frances Pulteney, niece and heiress of the 1st Earl of Bath. He took her name and her father's title, while she became the Countess of Bath on her uncle's death. The Pulteney Purchase, also known as the Genesee Tract, included all of what are now Ontario, Steuben and Yates Counties, and portions of Allegany, Livingston, Monroe, Schuyler and Wayne Counties. The Village of Bath was either named after Mrs. Pulteney, their daughter, or after the ancient city of Bath where the couple lived. The former is probably more likely since Henrietta, in Monroe County now a Rochester suburb, was named after Sir William's daughter, who subsequently became Countess of Bath.

Bath became the county seat with the formation of Steuben County in 1796, which was named after General von Steuben of Revolutionary War fame.

Captain Williamson was a Scot who had served in the British navy but had resigned his commission at the outset of the American Revolution. He spent the war in America, married an American, became an American citizen, returned to Britain and there he connected with Pulteney, who needed an American citizen to represent him in New York. Captain Williamson vigorously encouraged land sales and he attracted many settlers to the Bath area, as well as to other Pulteney properties.

There is disagreement about the origins of the settlers of Bath. David Ellis cites two conflicting perspectives:

The Rev. James Hervey Hotchkin, in his *A History of the Purchase and Settlement of Western New York and of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Presbyterian Church in that Section*, New York, M. W. Dodd Co., 1848, is highly critical of Captain Williamson and the settlers he brought. "They were principally from Europe or the States of Maryland and Virginia, with a sprinkling of Yankees who came in to make money. The early state of society was very dissolute. The Sabbath was disregarded. Drinking, gambling, carousing, horse-racing, attending the theatre, with other concomitant vices were very general, and

¹⁰⁰ See Footnote 28 above.

numbers of those who moved in the high circle were exceedingly depraved in their habits.”¹⁰¹

The minister’s claims about population origins were strongly refuted five years later in: *History of the Settlement of Steuben County, New York Including Notices of the Old Pioneer Settlers and their Adventures* by Guy H. McMaster, 1853, R. S. Underhill & Co, Bath, NY, 473. In his book, McMaster quotes General George McClure, commander of American forces at the Niagara frontier during the War of 1812:

There were not more than four or five families from Maryland and Virginia that settled in Bath; the other parts of our population were at least one half Yankees, and the other half foreigners and Pennsylvanians. Now I would say that instead of a “sprinkling of Yankees,” we had a heavy shower of them.¹⁰²

There may not have been many southerners, but those who were apparently brought a number of enslaved African-Americans with them:

To the early settlement of Bath two things lent a picturesqueness that was peculiar. The first was the personality of Capt. Williamson, the other the immigration hither of Southern gentlemen with their slaves. My earliest memory recalls a succession of negro houses filling all the space between the old village graveyard and the forks of the road above, and many more besides ...¹⁰³

In 1850, about 200 of Bath’s 1200 residents were African-Americans, a high percentage by Western New York standards.

Wherever they came from, the early settlers were overwhelmingly Presbyterian. However, Captain Williamson, who was Scottish, apparently had nothing to do with the first church in Bath being Presbyterian. The Rev. Mr. Hotchkin, in his book, said, “Col. Williamson, as a European, entertained the views, and was addicted to the habits, of Europeans of his grade. He soon erected a theatre and prepared a race-course for the lovers of pleasure. But no preparation was made for the worship of God.”¹⁰⁴ The first worship in the community was conducted by a lay Baptist preacher. The first church was organized in Bath in 1808 and affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in 1811. By 1845

¹⁰¹ Ellis, “The Yankee Invasion of New York, 1783 – 1850,” 77.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Address of Sherman S. Rogers, Delivered at Bath, N.Y., June 7, 1893 at the Centennial Celebration of the Settlement of the Town of Bath, 35-36.

¹⁰⁴ Hotchkin, *A History of Purchase and Settlement of Western New York and the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Presbyterian Church in that Section*, 478.

there were five churches in Bath: Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopal and “African.”

The Episcopal Church began in Bath only a few years after the Presbyterian. At the behest of Elizabeth Hull Townsend, the first service from the Book of Common Prayer in Steuben County was conducted at the Court House in 1815 by a priest from St. Gabriel’s Church, Coles Creek, Pennsylvania, in the vicinity of Wilkes-Barre.

From that time on there continued to be Episcopal services in Bath. It is not entirely clear when a church became officially organized or when the name St. Thomas became attached to the congregation. The parish register begins in 1825 and in 1826 the first Vestry was elected. On September 14 of that year, Bishop Hobart visited and there was already a Rector in place. The Bishop confirmed five people.

Information about St. Thomas comes from the Parish Historian¹⁰⁵. Attachment B contains the names of thirty-nine persons who were either confirmed or served on the Vestry of St. Thomas between 1826 and 1832. For Bath there is no source comparable to the *Genealogical Abstract from Palmyra, Wayne County, New York Newspapers 1810 - 1854*, to allow a complete review of all thirty-nine names but the Parish Historian has done considerable research on the listed individuals.

It is noteworthy that not all of St. Thomas’s members were Bath residents. Apparently a significant portion of the Vestry was not. "Of the first wardens, one was from Campbell and the other from Avoca [about nine and eight miles from Bath, respectively, in opposite directions]...the Vestrymen were yet more widely scattered."¹⁰⁶

Not surprisingly, those St. Thomas members we have information about were prominent citizens. One member of St. Thomas’s initial confirmation class was John G. Metcalfe, who was probably either the founder of Bath’s first tavern (in 1793) or a relative of that John Metcalfe. The second confirmation class, in 1829, included Henry A. and Elizabeth Hull Townsend. Mr. Townsend was Town of Bath Supervisor in 1802, Surrogate Judge from 1800 to 1805, a New York Assemblyman (1809-1810), and State Senator (1811-1815). Mrs. Townsend, as already noted, was the initial organizer of Bath Episcopalians. At the third confirmation, this in 1832 and the first by the new Bishop of

¹⁰⁵ The volunteer historian is Ronald Wyatt. Many thanks to him.

¹⁰⁶ Woodford, Clayton, W., *History of Steuben County, New York*, Philadelphia, Lewis, Peck & Co., 1879, 181.

New York, the Rt. Rev. Benjamin T. Onderdonk, one of those confirmed was James Reed (or Read), who may have been one of Bath's earliest teachers.

W. Woodford Clayton, author of *History of Steuben County, New York*, says of one of St. Thomas's initial wardens, "One of the families, that of Zalmon Tusey [or Tousy], quite marked among the surrounding population for literary taste and intellectual culture, preferred the Episcopal mode of worship."¹⁰⁷ Among the other initial Vestrymen was Paul C. Cook. Paul's brother, Constant Cook, was a railroad builder and banker and became a major donor to St. Thomas Church. Paul was Postmaster of Cohocton [about twelve miles from Bath] (1820-1844), Cohocton Town Clerk (1820-1822, 1839-1840), Cohocton Town Supervisor (1822-1827). State Assemblyman (1827-1831), Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (1828-1839), and Steuben County Clerk (1845-1850).¹⁰⁸

William H. Bull, owner of an early tavern/hotel as well as a sawmill and several other businesses was also a Vestryman. He was Town Clerk of Bath 1819 to 1821 and again in 1832.¹⁰⁹ He served as Warden or Vestryman at St. Thomas, Bath for fifty years.

One name that might be expected to have been connected with St. Thomas is William Rochester, eldest son of Nathaniel, who practiced law in Bath. He was the one who ran against Governor DeWitt Clinton as the Bucktail candidate, and nearly won. From 1816 to 1818 he represented Steuben County in the State Assembly and served as a member of the United States House of Representatives from 1821 to 1823. He then served as State Circuit Court Judge from 1823 until he resigned to run for Governor in 1826. He was not, apparently, often in Bath beginning in 1821 which may explain why he does not appear on the St. Thomas records as a confirmand or Vestryman.¹¹⁰

Once again, we are left with the knowledge that several prominent residents of the Bath area were Episcopalians, but it is difficult to put this in clear perspective *vis-à-vis*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁰⁸ Folts, James D., Jr., *Bicentennial History of Cohocton, New York, 1794-1994*, 1994:139, 140, 143, 144.

¹⁰⁹ Clayton, *History of Steuben County, New York*, 169.

¹¹⁰ In 1826, he became Secretary to the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Colombia. In 1827 he was commissioned by Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, to be Charge D'Affaires to Central America. His duties were to observe the civil war in Central America. He was ordered home in May of 1828. That same year, a branch of the Bank of the United States opened in Buffalo. He was appointed president of this branch by Nicholas Biddle and served until 1836. [See Biddle in Footnote 2. Note the Episcopal connection. Note, too, the incongruity of someone who ran for Governor as a Jackson Democrat in 1826 becoming an official of the Bank of the United States two years later.] In 1837 he was appointed president of the Bank of Pensacola, Florida and director of the Alabama and Florida Railroad Company. He died in 1838 when the ship he was on sunk off the coast of North Carolina.

the total community and the other churches. Were many of Bath's settlers actually from Virginia and Maryland? (William Rochester was.) If, however, the vast majority of the residents were either New Englanders or Pennsylvanians/New Jerseyans, then the Presbyterians began with an enormous advantage (the former as transformed Congregationalists and the latter as "real" Presbyterians, usually of Scottish ancestry) and Episcopalians of prominence seem more remarkable. Guy H. McMaster says in his book, *History of the Settlement of Steuben County, NY: Including Notices of the Old Pioneer Settlers and their Adventures*¹¹¹ that most people arriving in Bath were Presbyterians.

Not all of those of Scottish ancestry, however, remained Presbyterians after they reached Bath. One notable original Vestryman of St. Thomas, Bath was Dugald Cameron, about whom it was said:

Among the number of the most respectable Scotch emigrants were Charles Cameron and Dugald, his brother. These two young men were first-rate specimens of the Scotch character for intelligence and integrity, as well as for other amiable qualities. . . . Few men possessed stronger intellectual powers than Dugald Cameron. He was highly respected by all classes of his neighbors and acquaintances. . . . He was a great favorite of the people of Steuben. In 1828 they elected him as their representative in the Legislature of the State, which appointment with some reluctance he accepted. While at Albany attending to the duties of his station, he was seized with a violent complaint, and after a short and painful struggle departed this life, leaving a wife and a numerous family of children, most of whom have since died. His death was lamented by all his relations, friends, and acquaintances.¹¹²

It seems fair to conclude that a number of the early leaders in the area around Bath were Episcopalians.

Other Communities

Canandaigua

The City of Canandaigua, county seat of Ontario County, has appeared several times previously in this paper because of its early importance and its pre-Hobartian Episcopal parish which was parent to so many other parishes in the area. Canandaigua is one of the two oldest towns in western New York, and had until the 1820s enjoyed a

¹¹¹ Bath, R. Underhill, 1853, 1893.

¹¹² McMaster, *History of the Settlement of Steuben County*, 78.

dominant position in the region's economy. Up to 1824, it was the seat of all the major banks in Western New York. It also was the principal seat of culture for the Finger Lakes, a title it held for decades. It was the country seat of great landlords and their agents. It had a strong Episcopal church.¹¹³

St. John's, Canandaigua began on February 4, 1799, (eight years after the town was organized) with a small group of residents meeting with the diocesan missionary for the area, the Rev. Philander Chase. Chase was later to become the first Bishop of Ohio, predecessor in that office of Charles McIlvaine, and like McIlvaine a Low Churchman. The group organized as St. Matthew's Society and was the first Christian congregation in Canandaigua, which alone makes Canandaigua unique in Western New York.¹¹⁴ Services initially were held in private homes. Dr. Moses Atwater, pioneer physician of Ontario County and also a judge, who was a founder of St. Matthew's Society, secured the incorporation of St. John's Episcopal Church on September 27, 1814 and became its first Senior Warden. For several years, services were held in the Ontario County Court House. Eventually funds were raised to purchase land and construct the first church, a wooden gothic structure which was consecrated by Bishop Hobart on December 12, 1816. The first Rector was the Rev. Henry Ustick Onderdonk, at the time, an assisting diocesan missionary of the district, who, as noted above, left for Brooklyn in 1820 and became Assistant Bishop of Pennsylvania in 1827.

Canandaigua preceded not just the Erie Canal, which bypassed it by thirteen miles and led to the town's decline in importance,¹¹⁵ but also the influx of New Englanders. Indeed, although Canandaigua is as far east as Palmyra, it never experienced the degree of Yankee saturation as that other community. Nevertheless, there were sufficient New Englanders that the Congregationalists of Canandaigua, who avoided becoming Presbyterians in 1801, incorporated (1799), called their first resident minister (also 1799)

¹¹³ Cross, *The Burned-over District*, 139-140.

¹¹⁴ First Methodist Church in Canandaigua, however, claims to have originated in 1796, and their first chapel was built in 1818. It may be that their actual "organization" postdates the Episcopalians, but this is unclear.

¹¹⁵ Henry, Marian S., *New York Essays*, Boston, New England Historical Genealogical Society, 2007, 203.

and built their church (1812) before the Episcopalians.¹¹⁶ Neither congregation appears to have had a monopoly on the elite of the community.

Seneca Falls¹¹⁷

Seneca Falls is famous as the site of the first women's rights convention in the United States, held in 1848. That convention was held at Seneca Fall's Wesleyan Church, a denomination which broke with the Methodist Church in 1843 in opposition to slavery. That congregation no longer exists. Another famous incident in Seneca Falls was the 1843 ecclesiastical trial of Rhoda Bement, a member of the First Presbyterian Church, Seneca Falls. She was charged with "unchristian and unladylike behavior," because she had criticized her minister when he refused to publicize the speech of abolitionist, Abigail Kelley. She was found guilty by the Session Court and left First Presbyterian Church – and Seneca Falls. Glenn C. Altshuler, Assistant Dean at Cornell, and Jan M. Saltzgaber, Associate Professor of History at Ithaca College, wrote an analysis of this trial, *Revivalism, Social Conscience and Community in the Burned-Over District: The Trial of Rhoda Bement*.¹¹⁸ Although it is after the period addressed by this paper, their observations are helpful.

Protestant church membership certainly numbered no more than a quarter of the total [Seneca Falls] populace and possibly less. Nevertheless, with few exceptions, the economic and social leaders of the village were affiliated with one or another of the churches. Denominational loyalties and doctrinal differences were muted. Preference dictated church membership, but the chief thing for Seneca Falls's elite was their identification with the discipline of organized religion.

[T]he presence of Seneca Falls's most prominent citizens as vestrymen testifies to the elite character of Trinity Episcopal Church. There were probably no more than 150 Episcopalians in Seneca Falls. Thus, no more than one thousand people claimed a Protestant denominational affiliation in Seneca Falls in 1843 [of a total township population of 4,281 in 1840].¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ That church, built in 1812, is still in use and is one of the great historic structures of Upstate New York. There is no Presbyterian church in Canandaigua, one of the few towns of its size in Upstate New York without one.

¹¹⁷ Seneca Falls is somewhat east of the other communities described here. It is in the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York, not Rochester.

¹¹⁸ Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1983.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

A Possible Overview

Although there has been no published work which looks at exactly the question examined in this paper, others have raised related questions. One who looked at the socio-economic positions of Episcopalians nationwide during the same general period was William Wilson Manross, Ph.D., listed as Fellow and Tutor at the General Theological Seminary, the institution fathered by John Henry Hobart. His book is *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1800 – 1840: A Study in Church Life*.¹²⁰ The problem is that Manross's scholarship is not very convincing, and in some instances his conclusions seem simply incorrect:

The social standing of the Episcopal Church varied to some extent in the different sections. In the South, where most of the wealthier planters, if they belonged to any church, were Episcopalians, it ranked first in social prestige, and this was probably true in New York State also, though some of the oldest families remained in the Dutch Reformed Church.¹²¹

In fact, the Dutch Reformed Church lost many if not most of its wealthy and educated members early in the 19th Century because of its refusal to conduct services in English, which did not become common until after 1820.

Dr. Manross provides a breakdown of occupations of Episcopal laymen from 1800 to 1840. Unfortunately, he doesn't make it entirely clear how he compiled his list, although he hints at it. This looks at 424 men and lists their 564 professions.

Merchants:	99
Manufacturers:	26
Financiers:	38
Professional Men:	126 (<i>inter alia</i> , 36 judges, 36 other lawyers, 28 physicians, 11 teachers, 8 journalists)
Real Estate:	6
Sailors:	10 (9 of whom are captains)
Craftsmen:	16
Political Officeholders:	134 (<i>inter alia</i> , 2 Presidents, 6 Cabinet Members, 9 U.S. Senators, 12 Congressmen, 6 Governors, 24 state legislators, 6 mayors)

¹²⁰ New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1938.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

Army men:	26 (7 of whom are generals)
Navy men:	10 (1 Commander and 1 Commodore)
Miscellaneous:	73 (33 farmers, 11 innkeepers, 5 master builders, 17 “independent means”) ¹²²

Manross describes the significance of this inventory:

It will be seen that all of the men listed were of the middle class, that most of them belonged to the upper part of that class, and that a great majority of them were town or city dwellers. It is not contended that the evidence of the table on these points is all conclusive. It accounts for only 424 persons [and all men] out of all those who belonged to the Episcopal Church during the forty years with which we are concerned, and these are mostly wardens and vestrymen, or others who held positions of leadership in their parishes, if not in the Church at large. It is also weighted in favor of city dwellers, since it is generally the larger parishes that got their histories written. On the other hand, the evidence of the table is supported by the testimony of one of the most intelligent observers of the period that, “although many of the first families in the United States are enrolled” in the Church, “its field of usefulness is generally limited to the cities and towns,”¹²³ and by the statement of many others that its membership was derived largely from the more prosperous classes.^{124 125}

Manross’s analysis represents an outdated approach to the study of history – the elite are analyzed and then assumptions are made about a wider population. However, there remains no alternative unless one does enormously detailed studies of a given population.

Reasons for People Becoming Episcopalians

The final question is, why would the elite be attracted to the Episcopal Church during this period? Although Episcopalians often claim that a majority of the Founding Fathers were Episcopalians, the truth is that many of those nominally affiliated with the

¹²² *Ibid.*, 180-182.

¹²³ Caswall, Henry, *America and the American Church*, London, J.G. & F. Rivington, 1839, 64, 264. This is the Anglican equivalent of *Democracy in America* by de Tocqueville and was written at roughly the same time.

¹²⁴ Buckingham, I, 440; de Roos, p. 59; H.B. Fearon, *Sketches of America* (London, 1818), p. 46; Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, I, 45; T. L. Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life* (London, 1860), I, 370; Meade, I, 50; Griswold, *Address to the Tenth Convention*, p. 11; *Spirit of Missions*, II, 298; Fish, p. 300; Dix, *St. Mark’s*, p. 116.

¹²⁵ Manross, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1800 – 1840*, 182-183.

Church, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison (whose cousin, also James Madison, was the first Bishop of Virginia), were non-believers.¹²⁶ Even George Washington, who famously went to St. Paul's Chapel to pray after he was inaugurated the first President, and served on several Vestries, was not a Trinitarian. The Church had little to recommend it to the elite or anyone else during the First Great Awakening (1730-1760) or immediately after the Revolution. What it ultimately offered, particularly under the leadership of Bishop Hobart, had greater appeal to the elite than to the masses.

The first set of reasons was related to worship. The Episcopal Church relied on the Book of Common Prayer, which meant that there was an assurance of articulate, indeed poetic, liturgy – no matter what the ability of the clergyman. The clergy were educated, though not more so than the Presbyterians. There was no “enthusiasm” in the services. It was not required for members to make a public statement of their faith, nor to make public confessions of their sins (except using the general language of the Prayer Book).

Secondly, there was little interference in one's life outside of church. There was no promoting of Sabbatarianism, or of total abstinence from alcohol. The Episcopal Church did not prohibit or even discourage membership in organizations such as the Masons, though Bishop Hobart drew the line at having Masonic rituals as part of the liturgy. There were social issues on which the Episcopal Church did take a position, but there is no record of enforcement of such prohibitions.

Public opinion, again under Puritan influence, still regarded certain amusements now generally considered innocent – specifically, attendance at the theater, dancing, and card-playing – as either definitely immoral, or, at least, so useless and frivolous as to be unbecoming to the character of a Christian. The Episcopal Church was more lenient in this respect than were most Protestant denominations, and, within the Church, the High Churchmen tended to be more tolerant than the Evangelicals, but most earnest Episcopalians probably looked upon card-playing and the theater with definite disfavor and regarded dancing with a great deal of distrust. .¹²⁷

In 1817 the General Convention passed a resolution condemning the theater, and in a pastoral letter of that year the bishops denounced both “gaming” and the theater,

¹²⁶ John Jay is one of the few Founders who was a devout Christian and an Episcopalian, which is why the author is working to get him added to the Calendar.

¹²⁷ Manross, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1800 – 1840*, 188.

asserting that participation in either was a “practice immoral in itself, or so customarily allied to immorality, that the one is necessarily countenanced with the other.” Similar resolutions were adopted at various times by several of the dioceses, but none of these made participation in the condemned amusements an offense for which the participant could be disciplined.¹²⁸

Curtis Johnson points to another factor, probably related to the Episcopal Church’s reluctance to condemn individual “failings,” the acceptance of those excommunicated from other denominations. “The Episcopal and Universalist churches often accepted those excluded from evangelical congregations.”¹²⁹ Johnson cites Asa Austin and Augustus Hitchcock who were both “disfellowshipped” from the Homer Congregationalist and subsequently appeared on the roles of Homer’s Calvary Episcopal Church.¹³⁰

Finally, there was the issue of salvation. This is the subject addressed by Robert W. Prichard, Professor of Church History at Virginia Theological Seminary, in his book, *The Nature of Salvation: Theological Consensus in the Episcopal Church, 1801 – 1873*.¹³¹ Dr. Prichard’s premise is stated on the first page, “Americans of the nineteenth century worried about their salvation.” Bishop Hobart’s view was that a believer’s assurance of salvation derived from baptism and the subsequent participation in the worship and sacraments of the church. Prichard says that this became the consensus position of the Episcopal Church, adopted by both the Evangelical and High Church wings, through most of the 19th Century. This kind of formulistic approach to salvation would seem ideally suited for people busy with worldly matters.

Dr. Manross, although his conclusions are not well supported, gives a reasonable rationale for his conclusion.

Though the Episcopal Church [between 1800 and 1840] seldom encountered the bitter opposition that had often been shown to it in colonial times, its disinclination to co-operate fully in the popular religious movements of the day,

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹²⁹ Johnson, Curtis, *Islands of Holiness*, 170 footnote.

¹³⁰ Although Johnson does not say, or perhaps know, why these men were excommunicated from the Congregational Church, it may be similar to the founding of what is now Trinity and St. Philip’s Cathedral in Newark where, in 1733, Col. Josiah Ogden was disciplined by First Church (née Congregational in 1667, Presbyterian since 1720) for violating the Sabbath, withdrew and was the chief founder of Trinity Church, the first Episcopal congregation in what is now the Diocese of Newark.

¹³¹ Urbana, Univ. of Illinois Press, 1997.

and especially the fact that so many of its members held aloof from religious revivals, [resulted in it being] relatively unsuccessful in its efforts to reach the common people, but [it] did draw to itself many persons who were wealthy enough to prize its poise and dignity or cultured enough to appreciate the beauty of its liturgy and venerability of its traditions. Some of these ... lacked any strong religious convictions, but felt it was a good thing to ally themselves with some Christian denomination, and found the Episcopal Church best suited to their tastes. Others were more genuinely pious, but, with the educated man's distrust of emotionalism, preferred to express their piety in the formal and dignified language of the Prayer Book. Thus the Church tended increasingly to draw its support from the upper middle class, and, in consequence, to find its strength chiefly in the larger communities, where this class was represented in substantial numbers.¹³²

All of these factors put the Episcopal Church in an increasingly advantageous position versus its primary contender for the elite – the Presbyterian Church. In upstate New York and in many other places, the Presbyterians had an enormous advantage in elite membership in 1800, but, by 1830, the tide was turning, preparing the way for the emergence of the Episcopal Church as the pre-eminent society church after the Civil War.

Why Steiner's Conclusions are so Different From These

This paper confirms the popular notion that the Episcopal Church during this period appealed disproportionately to the comparatively wealthy and well-educated. It is always disappointing when what aspires to be a scholarly study reaches conventional conclusions, but there are reasons to think it is accurate.

Dr. Steiner began his 1968 report on the Anglican Church in 18th Century New England by pointing out that most historians had serious misimpressions of the socio-economic status of members of the Church of England in New England before the Revolution as a result of five major works and numerous “textbooks and by the casual comments of other scholars.”¹³³ While this paper does not represent the same kind of research as Dr. Steiner exhibited in his report, there are numerous reasons to suggest that his conclusion “that New England Anglicanism in its area of greatest numerical strength [i.e., rural]... was in good part a lower class movement” is not applicable to Central New York in the early 19th Century.

¹³² Manross, *The Episcopal Church in the United States 1800 – 1840*, 229-30.

¹³³ Steiner, 122.

Steiner looked at the period from 1725 to 1775. The church in question was the Church of England. The area included the four colonies of New England. Although these were the colonies most likely to challenge British decisions during this period, the Anglican clergy of these colonies were far more pro-British than their fellows elsewhere in America. The majority of them left after the Revolution.¹³⁴ Two wars with Great Britain separated the periods of Steiner's study and this one, and the now thoroughly American Episcopal Church did much to distance itself from "a Tory taint." Bishop Hobart was a leader in this effort.¹³⁵

It is also important to note the differences in the geography. Steiner's conclusion, quoted above, applies to farm communities and rural villages, not all of New England, though he says that they represented two-thirds of all Anglicans in the region. Only 13 congregations of the 74 in New England were in urban areas, Steiner reports. He mentions that in more urban areas there were numerous well-to-do Anglicans and they made up a disproportionate share of the parishioners in Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island. There were even tendencies in Massachusetts and Connecticut to greater wealth among Anglicans in larger towns as well.¹³⁶ As noted above, Upstate New York may have been a "colony from New England" in the early 19th Century, but there were portions of it where other immigrants were also numerous. The major area where that was true was in the central Southern Tier (as in Bath in our examination), with the Pennsylvania/downstate/southern immigration penetrating as far north as Rochester, in roughly a triangular shape. Hence, early Palmyra, only slightly east of Rochester, was much more Yankee in its population origins than early Rochester. But even if Palmyra's Episcopalians represented a lesser portion of the town's leading citizens than did Episcopalians in Bath and Rochester, they nevertheless included several prosperous individuals.

¹³⁴ Albright, Raymond W., *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, New York, Macmillan, 1964, 123-124.

¹³⁵ Ellis, David Maldwyn, *New York: State and City*, Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1979, 157.

¹³⁶ Steiner's discussion of St. Peter's, Salem, is instructive of the differences in his study and these conclusions. He says St. Peter's parishioners were typically "of the lower class." But by 1772 there were at least a few people of substance among the members, even though the members included "[n]one of Salem's principal merchants." [p. 126] This study is not looking at whether the majority of Episcopalians in Central New York in the early 18th Century were relatively well-to-do but rather whether the relatively well-to-do or educated were disproportionately drawn to the Episcopal Church.

New Englanders did not, however, simply bring their religion with them when they moved to New York. Congregationalists turned into Presbyterians (except in Canandaigua), and in Palmyra the richest man was a Presbyterian. Poor New England Anglicans who moved west had the option of becoming Methodists, a group unknown in their home communities in the time of Steiner's study.¹³⁷ And, of course, the Burnt-over District was the home of numerous new denominations, appealing to a variety of socio-economic groups.

The Rochester family had no parallels in colonial New England – a family with Southern and strong Anglican roots.

Moreover, the planting of Episcopal churches in Central New York in the 19th Century was fundamentally different than that done by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England in the 18th. Steiner may be faulted for not noting what seems obvious from reading a history of the colonial parishes of Connecticut – every town in Connecticut had a portion of its land set aside for a church but some towns were too poor to build or staff one.¹³⁸ These were often the communities that asked SPG to build them a church and send a clergyman. Thus, while Steiner is technically correct about the relative poverty of rural New England Anglicans, his conclusions are much less significant when one realizes he is describing a society where there was no choice of churches and where the Church had sent missionaries to the poor. In Central New York there was ample choice of churches and the Episcopal Church was not making a particular effort to minister to the poor, as had SPG.

The most parallel study to Steiner's work covering the period of this paper is Curtis D. Johnson's *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790 – 1860*. Johnson used primary sources and documented his conclusions. The problem is that Johnson's study is accurately named – it looks at what was one of most rural counties in Central New York, but unfortunately it is one that had few Episcopalians. Cortland County, New York, is now in the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York. Of the 24

¹³⁷ In 1784 there were no Methodist churches in New England. At its formation in 1797, the New England Conference of the Methodist Church had 6,563 members, about 4% of the Methodists in the country. Richardson, Faith, *History of The New England Conference of The United Methodist Church, 1796-1995, 1992/1995*. neumcsite.brickriver.com/page.asp?PKValue=74

¹³⁸ Jarvis, Lucy Cushing, ed., *Sketches of Church Life in Colonial Connecticut*, New Haven, Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1902.

congregations Johnson lists as having built churches in Cortland County between 1805 and 1838, one is Episcopal, which was built in 1832. That was Calvary, in Homer, a small village. There simply were no towns of any size in the county – the Erie Canal did not traverse it – until a railroad was built to Cortland in 1854, which community subsequently eclipsed Homer in size and which established its own Episcopal parish. (The Homer church ceased to exist, sometime after 1960.) The prime thrust of Curtis Johnson’s study was to call into question the accuracy of Paul Johnson’s conclusions in *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*, at least insofar as Paul Johnson sought to generalize his conclusions about Rochester to all of Central New York. Contrary to Paul Johnson, Curtis Johnson says, “Male evangelical church members had about the same wealth and occupational profiles as did male household heads across the county.”¹³⁹ Paul Johnson said that evangelical church members had higher than average economic profiles, but Curtis Johnson dismisses this as a result of urban and formalist bias. Curtis Johnson includes Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the “evangelical” category, while the only “nonevangelicals” were Episcopalians, Universalists and Christians.¹⁴⁰

Strangely enough, however, Curtis Johnson more strongly supports the conclusions of this paper than did Paul Johnson, saying unequivocally that Episcopalians, along with Presbyterians and Congregationalists, “[i]n any given community ... were generally the best educated .. [and] were generally wealthier” than members of other denominations.¹⁴¹ This might seem to contradict his later conclusion, but apparently wealthy Presbyterians and Congregationalists were offset by Baptists and other evangelicals. In Cortland County the numbers were small – 44 Episcopalians “at some point between 1829 and 1840” versus 676 Congregationalists, 746 Baptists, 81 Universalists and 109 Seventh Day Baptists.¹⁴² But not reported by Johnson is the fact that even with tiny numbers, the Homer Episcopal congregation until 1839 included “wealthy merchant” and subsequently the richest man in Syracuse, Horace White, father

¹³⁹ Curtis Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 168.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 78 footnote.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 193.

of Andrew D. White, first President of Cornell University. Andrew was baptized at Calvary, Homer in 1835.¹⁴³

Curtis Johnson supports Steiner's position that one must not ignore rural members when looking at the socio-economic status of members of a given religious denomination. But Johnson's example suggests Episcopalians were rare in rural parts of New York, and the parish he references, and his conclusions, suggest that Episcopalians included some of the elite of the area.

Conclusion

No less an expert than Nathan O. Hatch, writing in 1989 in *The Democratization of American Christianity*, said that the issue of religion in America during the Jacksonian era was understudied. This is in contrast to the colonial period, about which Hatch said, "... so many historians have concentrated on the relationship between religion and politics before the American Revolution. Over the last two decades, no single issue in all of American history has attracted more talent than that of linking the Great Awakening and the Revolution."¹⁴⁴ Steiner, then, while not writing about the Great Awakening or the sentiments leading to the Revolution,¹⁴⁵ was looking at a subject broadly of current interest to historians. He did an admirable job, apparently,¹⁴⁶ of examining primary

¹⁴³ Fitch, Charles Elliott, *Encyclopedia of Biography of New York*. New York, American Historical Society. 1916, 321-326. In addition, H. P. Smith's *History of Cortland County*, Syracuse, D. Mason & Co., 1885, 183-236, describes the founding of Calvary, Homer and lists the initial Wardens and Vestrymen. Of these men, Augustus Donnelly was the first President of the Trustees of the Village, Marsena Ballard is listed as one of the original settlers of the village, Daniel Glover was a "thrifty mechanic" and co-owner of the most prominent commercial building in town, and the previously mentioned Asa Austin was a mill owner.

¹⁴⁴ Hatch, Nathan O., *The Democratization of American Christianity*, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1989, 221.

¹⁴⁵ Steiner subsequently addressed some aspects of Revolutionary sentiment in his book, *Connecticut Anglicans in the Revolutionary Era: A Study in Communal Tensions*, Hartford, American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Connecticut, 1978.

¹⁴⁶ His paper did not attach a summary of his primary studies comparable to the attachments hereto or to those in Curtis Johnson's *Islands of Holiness*. Instead, he pointed the reader to his then unpublished Ph.D. dissertation from the University of Virginia, entitled "Samuel Seabury and the Forging of the High Church Tradition: a Study in the Evolution of New England Churchmanship 1722-1796," which includes a discussion of the data on which these conclusions were based. His dissertation was subsequently published as *Samuel Seabury 1729-1796: A Study in the High Church Tradition*, Athens, Ohio, Ohio Univ. Press, 1971.

sources, but he ignored critical secondary sources (*i.e.*, parish histories) which would have put his conclusions in better context.

Hatch went on to say, “At the same time, popular religion in the early republic has failed to catch the attention or spark the curiosity of historians seeking to address large and fundamental questions about the evolution of early American culture.”¹⁴⁷ Hatch ignored Cross’s important work of three decades earlier, and there are a few books which were roughly contemporaneous with *The Democratization of American Christianity* which address the issue of popular religion, most notably Curtis Johnson’s *Islands of Holiness* published the same year as Hatch’s book, but there have been precious few in the two decades since Hatch made that comment. Only Daniel Walker Howe’s *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in History in 2008, has clearly fulfilled Hatch’s call. Perhaps this will open the floodgates to further study of this critical period from a religious perspective.¹⁴⁸ There is much that remains to study since Howe’s book looks almost exclusively at the emerging evangelical/enthusiastic denominations and very little at the declining but still influential non-evangelical/enthusiastic ones.

This paper, since it addresses a peripheral aspect of the evolution of early American culture, does not supply insights. And, as said above, it reinforces popular beliefs. It does so with real but distinctly limited primary study. However, what constitutes the elite/leadership/upper-crust/educated element of any community is to some degree a matter of perception, and this paper shows that both contemporaneously and historically the Episcopal Church in Central New York from 1815 to 1830 was considered, in general, to be attractive to the elite – not necessarily drawing the richest folks in town but appealing to a disproportionate share of the above-average socio-economic population.

¹⁴⁷ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 221.

¹⁴⁸ The enormous success of Jon Meacham’s popular *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*, will no doubt also increase interest in this critical era.