FROM FARM TO MARKET: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN WEST

by

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Steven D. Engle, Department of History, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the dynamic change the market revolution had on social and cultural institutions in the American West. Specifically, it investigates how market forces influenced rural life patterns for farmers, urban mercantile culture and regional commercial interests. Davenport, Iowa is the focus for the narrative's hinge, as this midsized western marketplace represented a link between its farmers and the regional markets in Chicago. This project uses wheat and the prairie region in antebellum Iowa and Illinois as a case study and examines the cultural and social development of farmers and merchants in the marketplace. Following wheat from farm to market, both locally and regionally, helps to explain how Americans understood the commodity at each economic level. Time and place were central to the American West's economic, social, and cultural development and this thesis considers just a moment in its history. A intersect of rural, agricultural, technological, and environmental histories are at the project's core, but it also attempts to make sense of frontier capitalism and the

ramifications it had on farming and the grain industry. The market revolution gradually influenced and shaped the nation's agricultural economy and the people that preformed its labor and production.

DEDICATION

To my beloved, Eve Salcito

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INTRODUCTION

Clipped and affixed in Herman Bunts' account ledger was a satirical cartoon that depicted an exchange between a farmer and local townsman on a ubiquitous farm. A plaid suited farmer toured his estate with a fashionable and modish urbanite in tow. The men abutted a fenced-in rye field that caused the visitor from town to question the contents in the enclosed plot. "This? - why, this is what we call a fine field of Rye," the farmer responded. "Don't you know Rye yet?" he queried. The guest responded that he knew the commodity very well, but he "*never saw it in that shape before.*"[1] This cartoon no doubt marked the era of a new age where America was at a juncture in its history. This distinct contrast that juxtaposed pastoral with industrial characters represented the growing fissures between the young republic's past and future, labor and markets, and republicanism that shaped American progress throughout the nineteenth-century. The relationship between people and place and how they viewed the world around them created a uniquely American experience where concepts of land and capital progressed in contention and redefined notions of freedom. The caricatured farmer, therefore, found his freedom and independence in the land he toiled on and the goods he sold, whereas the city dweller found his liberty rooted in a wage-based world that promoted the ability to purchase whiskey in the marketplace. The market's sphere had sweeping effects on

[1]Herman Bunts Account Book, 1852-1861.

economics, society, culture, and politics while its forces whittled new relationships with land and capital and moved Americans through the antebellum period.[2]

This thesis examines the dynamic change the market revolution had on social and cultural institutions in the American West. Specifically, it investigates how market forces influenced rural life patterns for farmers, urban mercantile culture and regional commercial interests. Davenport, Iowa is the fulcrum for the narrative, as this midsized western marketplace represented a link between its farmers and the regional markets in Chicago. This project uses wheat and the prairie region in antebellum Iowa and Illinois as a case study and examines the cultural and social development of farmers and merchants in the marketplace. Following wheat from farm to market, both locally and regionally, helps to explain how Americans understood the commodity at each economic level. Time and place were central to the American West's economic, social, and cultural development and this thesis considers just a moment in its history. An intersect of rural, agricultural, technological, and environmental histories are at the project's core, but it also attempts to make sense of frontier capitalism and the ramifications it had on farming and the grain industry. The market revolution gradually influenced and shaped the nation's agricultural economy and the people that preformed its labor and production.

Themes and Historiography

The market offered a new freedom that eroded at an ideological consensus expressed as republicanism. This eighteenth-century theory defined individual liberty as economic and political sovereignty, unencumbered by another's will and malicious power. Only a unified, virtuous, and landowning civic body protected the public will

[2]William Barney, *The Passage of the Republic: An Interdisciplinary History of Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1987), 1-6.

from encroachment. But as the United States emerged from revolution, the republicanism expressed through its founders quickly splintered as Americans contended whether to tether the nation to economic development or the desire to be free from the control of others. Republicanism's egalitarian tone resonated with a nation of farmers that maintained that the wealthy Northeastern commercial population infringed on their independence. By the 1820s, Jackson's Democratic party encapsulated the nation's fears that the growing market economy overextended its influence and relegated the common man's interests. This egalitarian impulse united republicanism with democracy as the underrepresented needed political voice to preserve their independence. But republicanism also valued self-interest, unhindered by external forces. So as the market developed, Americans either embraced the change or repealed it using republicanism as a common language. Where landowners condemned the market's discriminating effects, capitalists championed the market's liberating power, the wage.[3]

For nearly a century, historians wrestled with understanding the dynamic forces that wrought change in the early republic. The debate over republicanism as a conceptual framework for the nineteenth-century stemmed from Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, in which he argued that patriot leaders consistently displayed a world characterized by libertarian republicanism, or that that their actions against the British were seen as a preservation of liberty over power. The Revolution, according to Bailyn, was not a social, economic or cultural break from the motherland, but a response to acts of power considered uncontrollable and autocratic, which,

[3]For more information on the republicanism in Jacksonian American see Harry T. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), Ch. 2.

therefore, inflamed the colonists ideological currents. His conclusions, summarized as an intellectual consensus in the 1960s, sparked a debate and garnered criticism that led to fruitful historical discovery. Critics, however, confronted Bailyn's treatment of Americans as one-dimensional and homogenous, and socioeconomic historians set out in the 1970s to unveil more than just political and constitutional transformations in republicanism.[4]

The result colored the historiography with new interpretations with different perspectives from the social sciences. Historian Joseph Albert Ernst argued that the economic transformation during the 1700s was critical to comprehend how and why contrasting social groups related to an ideology called republicanism. Ernst contended that conditions in this era pitted local elites against politically roused middle and lower classes, which created a shared experience for socially different colonists. Others found class-consciousness, social tension, and unrest characteristic in colonial American society. Eric Foner and Gary Nash argued that the market created unequal distribution of wealth and restructured city life along rigid class lines, which caused Americans to either cling to traditional communal relationships or embraced a nascent value system that

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[4]Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1967). Also see Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969) and J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). For a more in-depth description on the historiography of republicanism in the Early American historiography see Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Apr., 1982), 334-356; Republicanism, a topic of much debate throughout the 1970s and 80s, is still a prevalent conceptual framework for historians of this period. See John L. Larson, "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 1 (Spring, 2015), 1-23.

nurtured the individual’s free pursuit to profit-seeking. These principles fractured into political parties that divided democratic government along economic lines.[5]

Republicanism was not a shared experience for all Americans, but its basic tenets created a common language and sphere to debate the nation’s goals and direction as well as how they would be reached. The nation’s course throughout the nineteenth-century readjusted scholarship to focus on the progress republicanism had as it went through historical change. Joyce Appleby contended that as Americans came into the nineteenth-century, they displayed an energetic individualism that espoused a modernity that explained the nation’s history to come. Appleby implored historians to view this era as liberal republicanism’s rise rather than classical republicanism’s erosion. Drew McCoy, however, contended that to better understand American republicanism historians must view it as an ideology in transition that accommodated change in response to an expanding commercial economy. Nineteenth-century American political economy was in a state of passage from classical to market-oriented republicanism.[6]

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[5]Joseph Albert Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973); Marvin L. M. Kay "The North Carolina Regulation, 1766-1776: A Class Conflict," In Alfred F. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 71-123; Ronald Hoffman, “The ‘Disaffected’ in the Revolutionary South,” *ibid.*, 273-316; Edward Countryman, “’Out of Bounds of the Law’: Northern land Rioters in the Eighteenth Century,” *ibid.*, 37-69; Eric Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic: Radical Ideology and Social Change,” *ibid.*, 187-232; Gary Nash, “Social Change and the Growth of Prerevolutionary Urban Radicalism,” *ibid.*, 3-36.

[6]Robert Kelley wrote that American republicanism was not a dogmatic faith in “Ideology and Political Culture from Jefferson to Nixon,” *American Historical Review* 82 (1977), 531-562; Joyce Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) and “Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology,” *Journal of American History* 64 (1978), 935-958; Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Barney, *The Passage of the Republic*, 2.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a man shaped by the tumultuous, and extraordinary change that occurred in America throughout his life. His work argued that society's gravitational pull, one that worshiped the spirit of progress, overcame individuality and undermined the spirit of nature; a struggle the many Americans experienced as the market encroached society and disturbed old customs. In "Nature," Emerson urged Americans to retreat to their proverbial cabin, the only place where an individual could feel unadulterated by the constant pressure of culture, and define their own sense of being. This was the American spirit; the ability to protect themselves against the market's encroaching forces. Americans heeded Emerson's warnings and escaped the marketplace's physical representation in eastern cities and moved west into the nation's vast hinterland. Egalitarian principles rooted in agrarian republicanism provided the impetus to migrate away from the expanding market economy.[7]

For much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars championed the notion that American's westward movement defined the countries' unique democracy and sense of identity. Led by Frederick Jackson Turner, this analysis provided a conceptual framework for the generations that followed. According to Turner, independent migrants were the actors in the nation's historical development. Turner believed that as Americans moved westward and conquered a savage frontier, they redefined American democracy. It was on the frontier where Turner found the lifeblood that shaped the America in which he lived. Turner's thesis came at century's end when a frontier line could no longer be established. By 1890, the federal government declared

[7]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in Peter Norberg, ed., *Essays and Poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 7-49.

that census reports would no longer report on frontier statistics, which sounded the death knell to frontier development. Turner and his generation witnessed America's frontier dissolve into a modern developed society, which rid the ability for Americans to break "the bonds of custom" and escape "the bondage of the past" for new opportunity that the frontier offered. As the frontier vanished, so too did the developmental stage of American democracy. "The existence of an area of free land," Turner declared in 1893 to a Wisconsin lecture hall filled with students, "its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explains American development."[8]

Turner's frontier thesis and much about what he thought about the West influenced the field during much of the first half of the twentieth century. Merle Curti, Ray Allen Billington, and Frederic Logan Paxson all used Turner's analysis in their own work and emphasized the west as a significant historical force. In 1907, Paxson emphasized the importance of the frontier in American scholarship and noted that it was "the one constant to be reckoned with in accounting for the development of American life during its first century of independent existence."[9] Even scholars in the social sciences and sociology embraced Turner's thesis. Ellen Churchill Semple argued that the West

[8]Frederick Jackson Turner, "Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Other Essays,* with commentary by John Mack Faragher (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 31, 58-60.

[9]Frederic L. Paxson, "The Pacific Railroads and the Disappearance of the Frontier in America," *American Historical Association, Annual Report,* vol. 1 (Washington, 1908), 118; Gerald D. Nash, *Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890-1990* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 13; Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier Community* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1959); Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion; A History of the American Frontier* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967).

represented a source of inexhaustible opportunities that "never allowed American opportunity to abate" and the frontier kept the democratic spirit youthful.[10]

Although Turner dominated western thought, some historians challenged the importance the frontier played in the nation's history. Charles A. Beard suggested that Turner overemphasized the west's significance and argued that economic conflicts, instead of frontier settlement, influenced western development. While Arthur M. Schlesinger found that immigration was the salient theme of the nation's development, Richard C. Wade contended that Turner overlooked the paramount role urbanization played in the West. These scholars, even though they rejected the frontier thesis, owed their scholarship to Turner's work. The west would play an important role in the future scholarship and remain salient to any scholar that worked on the nineteenth century.[11]

By 1950, however, western scholarship experienced drastic revisions in the wake of the Great Depression, New Deal and Second World War. As a result, western historians began to question Turner's notions that freedom from government defined American identity and independence. In fact, many historians found that the people that moved west replicated familiar institutions and political structures while they stressed the role the state governments played in West. Earl Pomeroy found fault in Turner's analysis and showed that white settlers never rejected their Eastern roots in favor of a different frontier lifestyle. Furthermore, James Willard Hurst illustrated how the lumbering

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[10]Ellen Churchill Semple, *American History and Its Geographic Conditions* (Boston, 1903), 112; Edward A. Ross, "The Study of the Present as an Aid to the Interpretation of the Past," Mississippi Valley Historical Association, *Proceedings*, II (1908-1909).

[11]Charles A. Beard, "The Frontier in American History," *New Republic* 25 (February 16, 1921), 349-350; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., "The Influence of Immigration on American History," *American Journal of Sociology* 27 (July, 1921), 72; Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959); Nash, *Creating the West*, 23-28.

industry in Wisconsin thrived because the state law and institutions allowed them to flourish while James Neal Primm and Harry Scheiber noticed that the state promoted and stimulated commercial growth in Missouri and Ohio in antebellum America. In addition, Paul W. Gates and Howard Lamar accentuated the pivotal role the territorial government acted in the nineteenth-century West. By showing that the government played an important role in America's western history, these historians undermined Turner's notion of frontier ideology.[12]

Historians, however, influenced by the social movements of the 1960s, shifted their focus away from governmental institutions to a "new social" history that studied the past "from the bottom up." These historians challenged the previous generations "consensus" understanding that Americans shared similar values that transcended cultural divisions. This new generation of scholars grew up in a society afflicted by a deep cultural malaise centered on race, class and gender conflict that called into question whether consensus best described America's past. This new lens forced historians to reexamine the nation's history with an eye on the overlooked histories of ordinary Americans with a keen focus on women and ethnic minorities.[13]

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[12]Earl Pomeroy, "Toward a Reorientation of Western History: Continuity and Environment," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 41, no. 4 (March, 1954), 579-600; James Willard Hurst, *Law and Economic Growth: The Legal History of the Lumber Industry in Wisconsin, 1836-1915* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); James Neal Primm, *Economic Policy in the Development of a Western State: Missouri, 1820-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954); Harry N. Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969); Howard R. Lamar, *Dakota Territory, 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956); and Paul W. Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1968).

[13]The "new social" historians took cues from the social sciences, Marxism and Foucault. They collectively agreed, though they may differ in methodology and interests, that historians must dig up the everyday lives of Americans to understand how the common people shaped history. Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961); James Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalité in Pre-Industrial America," *William and*

Western historians followed this ideological and methodological shift and paid more attention to frontier life and less on the role political institutions played in the West's formation. Indians, a grossly neglected western social group, received thoughtful analysis by historians Richard White and Gregory Evans Dowd who explored the complex network of western Indian societies.[14] Placing Indians back into the western storyline greatly affected how historians understood Americans relationship with the frontier. Many scholars, such as John Mack Faragher, for example, mined the experiences of frontier men and women as well as gender in the West while others such as David G. Gutiérrez followed the ethnic migration and conflict as a result.[15]

In the spirit to remove the state from western histories, other historians considered the ways geography and capitalism molded the West. Timothy R. Mahoney's *River Towns in the Great West* argued that the Old Northwest's geographical uniqueness was the salient reason urban developed the way it did along the Mississippi River during antebellum America.[16] William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* masterfully explored the relationship between an urban center and the hinterland and contends that Chicago's rise to prominence in the West owed much of its success to the logical flow of goods and

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Mary Quarterly 35, no. 1 (Jan., 1978), 3-32; Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1970* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973).

[14]Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650- 1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, .1991); Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[15]John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1979); David G. Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1991).

[16]Timothy R. Mahoney, *River Towns in the Great West: The Structure of Provincial Urbanization in the American Midwest, 1820-1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

capital. For Cronon, western development happened at the intersection of geography, urban centers, the region that surrounded and the produce and goods that flowed between them. These historians unveiled that the West was an interdependent region where economic decisions in Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis and had real consequences for the rural and smaller towns on the frontier.[17]

The "new western" historian's work, however, colored with studies on the region's social history and a better understanding of the area's economic development, rarely used the fruitful research of each other. John Mack Faragher's survey of Sugar Creek, Illinois illustrates this penchant nicely. The people of Sugar Creek, Faragher argues, constructed a sense of community that solidified cultural practices, which helped them through the transformation to a civilized and modern political economy. Yet his study wholly overlooks geographic and market influences on the town's growth, either finding them irrelevant to Sugar Creek's history and not commenting on it or he disregards both as plausible historical forces. As a consequence, this approach limits Faragher to comment on, albeit adroitly, frontier life in Sugar Creek, Illinois and not much else and he falls short in describing why the town's story fits with the region's development. Other histories that dissect the social life in western town share the risk of being isolated from each other and nearsighted.[18]

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[17]William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991).

[18]John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986).

Conversely, historians that use market forces to explain the region's maturation ultimately delineate the history of capitalism without individuals that made economic decisions. By focusing on the region as a whole, many historians suggest that the region's interconnected commerce as well as eastern and foreign demand shaped Western urban and rural communities. Timothy Mahoney, for example, explores how the upper Mississippi Valley developed as a sophisticated web of regional forces and argues that the success of a river town did not occur as a result of internal decisions but evolved in a regional context closely tied to the role the town had with the regions economy. By examining Western topography, mapping the volume of traffic that roads could support and charting river levels and cycles, Mahoney's examination, similar to Cronon's, highlights the geographic realities that determined men's actions as well as the anatomy of economic and social interaction. The analysis' strength lay in the unique ability to describe how particular region's responded to market forces specifically how towns and their hinterland specialized their marketplace to fit demand. For example, the expansion of wheat production in the upper Mississippi valley allowed Davenport, Iowa to capitalize on its hinterland ability to grow wheat, which strengthened the town's ties with St. Louis, Missouri. The realignment of the wheat belt further west rearranged the agricultural production strategies and, Mahoney illustrates, contributed to the decline of Alton, Illinois and other upper valley towns. By 1860, however, railroad-based systems altered river commerce and redirected goods through Chicago, completely reorganizing Western business relationships. However, Mahoney, and other historians, tells a story where external forces, more than internal decisions, shaped the West. The region's inhabitants have little to say about the growth and, often subsequent, failure of their town and without agency, the western past becomes a deterministic narrative.[19]

More recently, many western historians have urged others to see federal intervention as an integral historical force in the West's history. Scholars such as Patricia Nelson Limerick challenge Turner's idea that Americans escaped federal influence in the West by highlighting that federal land policy, Indians, immigration, and statehood kept migrants inevitably tied to the federal government. Limerick contends that western inhabitants worked within the structures formed by the federal government and their lives benefited from federal aid, military intervention to remove Indians, and inclusion into the union. Paradoxically, however, since westerners perceived their independence was in danger by federal meddling into their everyday life, she argues, they ideologically resisted more government action.[20]

Richard White found, and traced, the federal government's footprints in the western region's growth and his work promptly puts institutional history back into the western tale. White argues, like Limerick, that Washington affected every facet of western life. Federal agents conquered and removed and the native people, federal bureaucrats governed territorial colonies, they parceled and sold land, supervised the region's resources, fostered economic growth, and established a communication network that strengthened the bonds of commerce. "The government did not pursue pioneers west," White points out and suggests, "It more often led them there." As Americans

[19]Mahoney, *River Towns in the Great West,* 5-20.

[20]Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy o f Conquest: The Unbroken Past o f the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987).

moved westward, they found the most basic bureaucracies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Land Office, the U.S. Geological Survey and many other Interior related departments already established in the nascent region. In the West, federal power evolved and flexed its muscle unopposed, as the administrative positions became more professionalized and centralized, because local communities lacked the representative political power that they had in the East. Ultimately, White argues, "the federal government created itself in the West," because the region provided an arena for expansion that was found nowhere else and by applying power, the federal government increased its power. The federal government was ubiquitous to the westerner and White concludes metaphorically that westerners saw the government in their live like a wool shirt in winter: "It was all that was keeping them warm, but still irritated them."[21]

Americans moved west during a market revolution that was an extraordinary agent of change. This seemingly ambiguous force challenged how Americans understood and interacted with the expanding market economy. In his seminal work, Charles Sellers reified this phenomenon by placing it as his primary actor, which acted upon and ruined the subsistence farmer's life as it eroded communal relationships and forced Americans into the city to work for a wage. Sellers treated the market as a wicked villain that wreaked havoc on the egalitarian republican principles that underpinned the nation's past and treated the market revolution as the impetus for social, cultural, and political change. Sellers's conceptual framework had its benefits and limitations; it shaped a generation of scholarship that examined how the market influenced American throughout the nation as

[21]Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own:" A New History of the American West* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 57, 58-59.

well as it moved the field forward through fruitful inquiries to questions that arose from his generalizations.[22]

Sellers, however, neglected to account for the human agency that constructed the market revolution. Regarding the phenomenon as a construction made by people, John L. Larson argued that the market's progress owed much to the individuals that shaped its structures and hashed out its future. Often seen as a political battle between capitalism and classical republicanism, Larson argued that the Second Party System was a debate for rival versions of the market revolution. But economic panics in 1819 and 1837, consequences that resulted from an expanding market economy, unnerved the public who saw internal improvements and national banking systems as a mismanaged failure by the ones who governed. Discontented Americans in the market rebuked the government's involvement in public works and the nation's economy and advocated free enterprise in the marketplace. As a result, the onus for economic development fell onto the commercial class to create systems that functioned unregulated by government control.

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[22]Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1812-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Sellers influenced many scholars before *The Market Revolution* came out, see Michael P. Rogin, "The Market Revolution and the Reconstruction of Paternal Authority," in his *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc., 1975); Wilentz, "On Class and Politics," 45-63 and "Society, Politics, and the Market Revolution, 1815-1848," in Eric Foner, ed., *The New American History: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997): 61-84. For more scholarship that treats the market revolution as a central agent to historical change see Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Anne C. Rose, *Voices of the Marketplace: American Thought and Culture, 1830-1860* (New York: Twayned Publishers, 1995); Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1860* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995). For criticisms see Melvyn and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political and Religious Expression, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

The American West developed with both a malaise and optimism towards capitalism's outreach.[23]

Although western lands theoretically extended the egalitarian republican tenets espoused by farmers who found independence in subsistence living, the market's forces already wore down household and communal relationships and forced people to become dependent on the market for their existence before they settled westward. Historians Joyce Appleby, James Henretta, and Christopher Clark argued that nineteenth-century farmers produced and sold a small surplus to have cash to purchase luxury goods that could not be made on the farm. These small, local exchanges provided the momentum for commercial growth and business interactions that led to intraregional and extraregional development. Historian Diane Lindstrom illustrated that Philadelphia's hinterland production initially pushed the city's progress while the city later pulled the surrounding region because its manufacturing provided goods for sale to farmers. Farmers were a crucial link in the development of a frontier market economy as they provided agricultural products for the rest of the nation.[24]

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[23]John L. Larson, *The Market Revolution in America*: *Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), and *Bonds of Enterprise: John Murray Forbes and Western Development in America's Railway Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); For more on the panic of 1837 see Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For more on the how the market created winners and losers and how that translated into Jacksonian politics see Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); For more on internal improvements see George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1951) and Harry N. Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969).

[24]Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 68, no. 4 (March, 1982), 833-849; James A. Henretta, "The 'Market' in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1998), 289-304; Christopher Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860," *Journal of Social History* 13, no. 2 (Winter, 1979), 169-189; Diane Lindstrom, *Economic*

Capitalism's rise owed much to local country merchants that seized the circumstances to use rural labor for the accumulation of wealth and the western grain trade followed a similar narrative. Merchants were integral to the economic maturation in western backcountry regions because they imported foreign manufactured goods into town and, more importantly, exchanged them for wheat and other produce. Historian Lewis Atherton contended that these country merchants sparked local commercial growth by attracting settlement as boosters, promoting agriculture and the wholesaling and retailing of goods. Other historians placed merchants as agents of change in western city development and essential to commodity industries in both the West and the South. Merchants also created the connective tissues between towns that developed into a regional economy and strengthened the bonds that formed a grain trading industry. John Clark's *The Grain Trade in the Old* Northwest, John Griffin Thompson's *The Rise and Decline of the Wheat Growing Industry in Wisconsin*, and Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* attributed merchants as commercial agents of change, credited for fulfilling their part in capitalism's effect on the frontier. Western merchants capitalized on the Upper Mississippi River Valley's fertile soil, the transportation and communication revolution, and the market's modernization to create a prairie land empire fed by the golden stream of wheat that came off the land. The impressive capital invested in the agricultural trade and made by the mercantile class in antebellum America, supported by the exploitation of

Development in the Philadelphia Region, 1815-1840 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Craig Thompson Friend, *Along the Maysville Road: The Early American Republic in the Trans-Appalachian West* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005) and "Merchants and Markethouses; Reflections on Moral Economy in Early Kentucky," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 4 (Winter, 1997), 553-574; Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Jan., 1989), 120-144.

farmers as laborers, generated wealth accumulation for merchants and left rural communities a new form of subsistence living in the marketplace.[25]

Regional market integration, or rural-urban interactions, developed slowly in the early republic, but as local communities formed connective bonds strengthened through intraregional trade, regional economies offered valuable resources for the national market economy. To understand the symbiotic relationship between cities in which a change in one city would affect others, historians constructed economic development theories to help explain the economic growth in domestic United States markets. An outgrowth from the central place theory that focused on spatial nature and location of economic activity, the Von Thünen ring model argued that the further a town was away from the central city, like Chicago, the less economic activity occurred due to high transportation costs, which also produced decreased property values. Matthew D. Bloom expanded the central place theory, as well as some others, and suggested that local economic centers, such as Davenport, were only central marketplaces for their abutting hinterlands, but that they were apart of a honeycomb system of other small central marketplaces that provided services for their countryside. Market activity between these small towns converged into

[25]Clark, "Household Economy," 177-181; Lewis E. Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 9-26; John Giffin Thompson, *The Rise and Decline of the Wheat Growing Industry in Wisconsin* (University of Wisconsin, 1907); Jeffrey S. Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West: The Rise and Fall of Antebellum St. Louis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 97-147; Susan E. Gray, *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Scott P. Marler, *The Merchants' Capital: New Orleans and the Political Economy of the Nineteenth-Century South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); William M. Snodgrass, "Order in the Marketplace: Commercial Organizations in Antebellum St. Louis." PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2013;); Steven C. Wilkshire, "Markets and Market Culture in the Early Settlement of Ionia County, Michigan," *Michigan Historical Review* 24, no. 1 (Spring, 1998), 1-22; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United states System of Cities, 1790-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

a larger town stimulated by transportation infrastructures. In this subregional model, Bloom argued that economic progress was not only the symbiotic relationship between hubs, but also a network of regional centers, local economic marketplaces, small villages and farms. Bloom understood the centrality that local towns played in the development process in the American West. This paper only uses this subregional model as a narrative tool as it helped visualize the market connections between farm, local town, and regional metropolis.[26]

The new history of capitalism, or what historians referred to as political economy, has now become a buzzword among academia that conflates labor history from the 1970s, the "transition to capitalism" debates in the 1980s, and the "market revolution" conceptual framework into one, rebranded scholarly field. What makes this old wine newsworthy is its intellectual coalitions; it unites many fields into one heading. No longer does our economic history fall into the purview of economic historians. The new history of capitalism allows historians to give voice and agency commercial actors, both laborers and merchants. If this new approach to history allows for an integration of ideologies, this paper identifies its utility. At its core, this project unites themes of republicanism with capitalism, commodification with business practices, land and capital, and economic development with social and cultural change. This new field has its merits, but it would strengthen its hold if historians defined capitalism; as of now it allows historians to rephrase questions and "follow the money."[27]

[26]Matthew D. Bloom, "Creating Connections: Economic Development, Land Use, and the System of Cities in Northwest Ohio During the Nineteenth Century," (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2009), 5-15; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 48-52.

[27]Seth Rockman, "What makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?," *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 3 (Fall, 2014), 439-466; "Interchange: The History of Capitalism," *Journal of American History* 101, no. 2 (2014), 503-536.

THE POLITICS OF PRAIRIE FARMING

In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville toured the nation's interior and noted that Americans seemingly conquered the land and he was in wonder to find a "modern society" of New Englanders living in the wilderness. He marveled at the practical mentality that permeated from the "reasoning and intelligent society" and commented that the Yankee pioneer's goal was ultimately to conquer the backcountry. "The log cabin," he noted, "is only a temporary shelter…when the fields that surround him are in full production…a more spacious dwelling will replace the log house and make a home for those numerous children who will also go out and make themselves a home in the wilds."[28] Tocqueville's commentary on the frontier shed light on the western farmer's experience between the transformative years between 1835 and 1850 as Americans struggled to take meaning from those changes. The migrants that moved into Illinois' and Iowa's fertile prairie lands brought with them borrowed ideas that shaped their understanding towards the land and its connection to the nation's economy. Deeply embedded was a market ideology and their language and actions demonstrated that pioneers travelled with commercial interests in mind. Those that chose to test their luck farming in western lands entered into the market economy whether they knew it or not. The marketplace shaped how farmers cultivated the land and tethered them to a national market economy.

[28]Alexis de Tocqueville, "A Fortnight in the Wilderness," in Justin L. Kestenbaum, *A Pioneer Anthology: The Making of Michigan, 1820-1860* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 20-21.

At a most basic level, pioneers sought to improve their situation in life by picking up and moving west. Aspirations and expectations, however, contrasted to circumstances preceding a settler's relocation westward and varying pioneers accounts demonstrated the different justifications they gave for their actions. Edwin Terril, an optimistic capitalist, sold his eastern farm and moved west to Iowa where he became a squatter, speculated in land, and built a mill. Where Terril capitalized on the profit of selling his land to start anew in Iowa, others had more modest beginnings. Ephraim G. Fairchild of Jones County, Iowa wrote to his family in the East that he could plough and harvest his farm "without being nocked and jerked about with the stones" that was symptomatic of the New Jersey rocky soil so much so that he pleaded his family to move to Jones County to make an easier living. Other pioneers remarked that the westward allure stemmed from the "pernicious and selfish" city lifestyle that made living a "burthen instead of a pleasure." Others, like Henry Eno of Fort Madison, Iowa, could not quite put into words to his father why he gave up living in New York but decided that he was "still of the opinion that I shall better myself."[29]

Iowa's proximity to the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and the tributaries that spread throughout the state shaped how settlers flowed into Iowa's eastern region after the federal government purchased the lands west of the Mississippi River from the Sacs and Foxes. By 1840, river towns like Davenport and Dubuque established lucrative trading centers along the Mississippi and provided the region with capital and commerce,

[29]Henry Eno to Stephen Eno, Pine Plains, New York, March 11, 1837 ("Eno Papers," Special Collections Department, Library, State University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa), Ephraim G. Fairchild to his parents, April 9, 1857, in Mildred Thorne, ed., "Iowa Farm Letters, 1856-1865," *Iowa Journal Of History* 17 (January, 1960), 40; Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1963), 18-19.

which attracted settlers looking to capitalize on untapped lands. From the Mississippi, pioneers penetrated the state's eastern territory, particularly the Iowa, Cedar, and Des Moines River valleys because farm-makers relied on the river system to transport them to their destinations. Counties that lacked access to river transportation, like Poweshiek, Tama, and Grundy counties, lagged in settlement as a result. A labyrinthine set of factors contributed to settlement patterns. In addition to transportation routes and facilities, settlers also chose their destinations on a location's market potential, the land's fertility, and its relation to older settlements.[30]

Despite the myriad reasons western lands attracted settlers, the land was not free once they arrived and pioneers faced the prodigious tasks of buying property, building a farm, husbandry and paying taxes within the first years of settlement. Consequently, this situation rooted early pioneers firmly into a debtor's market economy before the first crop yielded a return. Pioneers seeking to escape inflated land prices in New York found that they needed to spend capital to establish a farm of any size. Even contemporary commentators who readily prompted a man "of small means" or with "the requisite funds" to move west and start a farm, frequently detailed the process and summed up the cost involved. In Michigan, buying and preparing forty acres for crops ran the settler $227.50, but the observer neglected to include estimates for livestock, farming equipment, or housing. John Regan appraised a forty-acre farm in Illinois on wild land that needed little clearing at $550 but potential farmers could purchase land in more settled areas for $1000. Others declared that the average cost in the first year for an

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[30]Marion Richardson Drury, *Reminiscences of Early Days in Iowa* (Toledo: Toledo Chronicle Press, 1931), 7-8; Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt*, 10.

eighty-acre Illinois plot was over $1,700. In Iowa, observers estimated an eighty-acre farm ranged from $522 to $1,065, cheaper than farm prices in Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota, but did not account for breaking and fencing the land, which farmers had to allocate significant funds to hire labor and import lumber to accomplish.[31]

The notion that the unemployed, dissatisfied, and landless eastern laborer could simply move west, start a farm, and reclaim his freedoms from the oppressive market seemed impossible when reviewing the cost of farm building. Historians have debated the precise cost of farm-making since Clarence Danhof concluded that $1,000 must be considered the minimum for western prairie farm-building for a eastern working man relocating on unsettled land. Robert E. Ankli later argued that $500 seemed a more reasonable amount of capital that a man needed to start a forty-acre farm if he was already a western pioneer looking to start a new farm and willing to substitute his labor for some of the capital needed. Jeremy Atack, concerned with the average cost midwestern farmers invested on different sized farms, concluded that a forty-acre farm in the Midwest cost about $1,200, an eighty-acre farm could exceed $2,000, while a 160-acre holding needed $3,000. Frontier western lands were nearly half as much as a comparable eastern farm, Atack argued, which allowed eastern farmers selling out to buy larger plots of land. But even the $1,000 necessary for a basic forty-acre farm placed the household in the upper sixty percent of all households in wealth while twenty percent of

[31]J. B. Newhall, *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846; or, The Emigrant's Guide, and State Directory; with a Description of the New Purchase: Embracing Much Practical Advice and Useful Information to Intending emigrants,* 2nd ed. (Burlington, Iowa: W. D. Skillman, 1846), 59; Fred Gerhard, *Illinois As It Is* (Chicago, 1859), 289, 294-95; *Michigan Farmer* 8 (1850), 265; John Regan, *The Western Wilds of America, or, Backwoods and Prairies; and Scenes of the Valley of the Mississippi,* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: John Menzies, 1859), 353, 356-57; Jeremy Atack, "Farm and Farm-Making Costs Revisited," *Agricultural History* 56, no. 4 (Oct., 1982), 664-666; Robert E. Ankli, "Farm-Making Costs in the 1850s," *Agricultural History* 48, no. 1, Farming in the Midwest, 1840-1900: A Symposium (Jan., 1974), 51-70.

all households could not afford the $400-800 for a forty-acre farm in Michigan, Iowa, and even frontier Kansas and Minnesota. "Farm ownership and operation," Atack argued, "took wealth, more than possessed by a good percentage of the population, and, although time could be substituted for some of this capital, the poorest households could still not enter midwestern farming as farm operators."[32]

Some transplanted pioneers arrived on the Iowa frontier with capital enough to purchase and improve an existing farm, often sold by a farmer who looked to make a profit from the land and move further west. Benjamin F. Gue, a Scott County, Iowa farmer, moved from Farmington, New York to the Iowa frontier in 1852 to try his luck in the sheep business. After he collected his local debts, which provided sufficient resources to establish and maintain a large farm in the nation's hinterland, Gue traversed through the countryside and settled on Iowa's fertile land. Gue's journal detailed his reactions to farms for sale and shed light on what affluent pioneers valued before they purchased improved property. At Rock Island, Gue crossed the icy Mississippi River into Davenport, Iowa and went to the Land Office to research available land. It was possible that Gue viewed more farms than noted, but his logbook described six farms of interest. Gue coveted farms that were larger than 120-acres, improved and timbered, so that he could begin to farm immediately. Gue rejected land that did not have timbered acreage and balked at farms with unbroken soil.[33]

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[32]Atack, "Farm and Farm-Making Costs Revisited," 676, 669-671; Ankli, "Farm-Making Costs in the 1850s," 70.

[33]Earle D. Ross, ed., *Diary of Benjamin F. Gue: In Rural New York and Pioneer Iowa, 1847-1856* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1962), 94-97.

Gue purchased a 200-acre farm on Spring Rock Creek in Scott County for $700.00 that had forty-acres timbered, eighty-acres of prairie, and eighty cultivated acres. With two log houses, fifty-acres already fenced, and a few log stables for livestock, Gue bought into an improved property that afforded him the luxury to cultivate the land and receive immediate returns on crops. With his remaining funds, Gue also bought a horse for $165.00, two saddles for nine dollars, a pair of oxen, an additional plow, a wagon, a stove and other miscellaneous farming and house equipment and within the first month, Gue made a drag and cultivator, split 300 rails, 250 stakes, fenced in fifteen acres, planted three acres for spring wheat, fifteen acres of oats and twenty-five of corn and later that year, Gue purchased 800 sheep for $1,120. According to the 1860 agricultural census, Gue's farm valued at $3,000, his farming equipment totaled $200, and agricultural produce added up to 1000 bushels of grain. Gue's affluence assuaged the initial hardship that was typical for most pioneers on the frontier.[34]

Settlers without significant resources to buy large farms, however, rented smaller and more manageable farmland from landlords that owned significant acreage in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Tenancy allowed land-speculators to extract earnings from the land to pay taxes, make a modest living, and improve the land without fronting the capital. Tenants broke and improved the soil, grazed livestock and used its timber for building and fencing. These verbal arrangements typically rented out forty-acres plots to many farmers who shared the profits from crops with the landlord but also mitigated nature's uncertainties from ruining any one farmer. Cash rent ranged from $1.00 to $3.00

[34]Ross, *Diary of Benjamin F. Gue*, 102-103; 1860 U.S. census, Scott County, Iowa, agricultural schedule, p. 9.

per acre in East Illinois and varied further West dependent on the quality of land, its proximity to urban centers, population density and how much the tenant tilled the soil. The 1860 agricultural census for Jones County, Iowa listed 692 farmers and 126 renters, over fifteen percent, where the Union Township of Davis County, Iowa recorded that over twenty percent of the population participated in renting land.[35]

The correspondence between Ephraim G. Fairchild and John Kenyon revealed how tenancy offered an attractive opportunity for economical farming, but also suggested that the system limited farmers in terms of fiscal prosperity at the same time as it buried them under financial ruin when crops failed or when the nation's economy contracted. John Kenyon's small family lived with Richard Ellis, his father-in-law, on his eighty-seven acre farm in Wyoming Township, Jones County, Iowa and Ephraim G. Fairchild was a tenant farmer for Oliver I. Bill in Jones County, Iowa and both had intentions to cultivate the land for profit. Neither pioneer commented how much rent cost, but Fairchild noted that after he settled and commenced work on Bill's land, he only had $31.68 with neither a cow to help harvest crops nor a hog that he wished would be a positive investment. Both Fairchild and Kenyon went to work and plowed for wheat immediately. His letters paid significant attention to the profits that other farmers made on selling wheat and informed him of market prices and trends as well as the value of the surrounding land. But harsh and unpredictable weather conditions ruined crops and hard times fell upon the Kenyon family in 1859. "John works like a nigger and its all to no purpose," Sarah Kenyon wrote to her family and lamented that the elements kept the

[35]1860 U.S. Census, Jones County, Iowa, Agricultural Schedule; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 63-64.

family from making a profit from farming. “There is something to drag us down the whole time,” she continued, “If we should sell everything we could not pay our debts.”[36]

Once pioneers settled on Iowa’s frontier, the process of farm building occupied the farmer’s time and exhausted his resources. Constructing a dwelling was the first step farmers took to improve the land, though some like Marion Richardson Drury remembered that his family lived in their covered wagon until they could afford to build a log cabin. The first house on a farm had a timber structure usually supplied by the wooded area in the farms proximity. When George Fraseur arrived in Cedar County, Iowa in 1837, the men in his company sharpened their axes and built a shanty, which they had ready the next day. The prototypical frontier log cabin was sixteen by sixteen feet, with a clay fireplace, log flooring, and roofed with clapboards and practicably built with two men. If a pioneer doubted his skills, he could order a Bridges ready-made house that ranged from $200 for a stock twelve-by-twelve lodging to $3,000 for a more personalized house. Other requisite facilities included kitchen utilities like a stove and piping, which Ephraim G. Fairchild purchased for $25.87, iron boilers, tin tea kittle, skillets, gridirons, teapots and griddles as well as provisions for the family until the land yielded edible crops. Fairchild procured 91 pounds of wheat flour, smoked pork shoulder, eggs, salt, tea and pepper sauce to last until his wheat and corn crops sprouted the following harvest. Farmers built other buildings, such as a smokehouse, corncribs, stables, barns, and a roofed threshing floor, as the farm expanded its agricultural output, as capital was needed for more rudimentary needs like tilling the soil.[37]

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[36]Thorne, ed., “Iowa Farm Letters, 1856-1865,” 42, 45,70-71, 74.

[37]Ibid., 41; Western Historical Company, *The History of Cedar County, Iowa; Containing a History of the County, Its Cities Towns, etc., A Biographical Directory of its Citizens, War Record of its*

Farmers cultivated the land without delay for two reasons; frontier families needed a successful crop to feed their families just as much as farmers viewed the land as a physical representation of their investment in the marketplace. Before seeds entered the soil, farmers spent considerable time and labor slashing the land of large timber, smaller trees, hazel brush and shrubs while it was imperative that farmer grubbed out the stumps and roots before they plowed the land. Once the farmer cleared the land, he broke the prairie soil with a plow led by oxen, or horses, between late April and early June, which forced farmers to break small plots each season. The farming community debated the best method to breaking soil, particularly the plow's quality and the amount of cattle needed for deeper and more efficient plowing. If a prairie farmer hired out the work for breaking the land, he paid from $2.00 to $4.00 per acre for a man's service. Marion Drury recalled with pride that he operated three to five oxen in a breaking outfit when he was ten. Farmers hitched a large plow to oxen that turned the sod from fourteen to sixteen inches wide and from five to six inches deep that created "a continuous ribbon-like strip of black soil never before exposed to the sunlight, and ready for the seed of the planter."[38]

Frontiersmen worked by trial and error, and through experimentation and discussion in regional forums, they learned the best way to till the soil. Ephraim Fairchild attempted to plow his fields for wheat in late April but found the ground frozen and hard in some places and noted that his neighboring farmers sowed their wheat fields the

Volunteers in the Late Rebellion, General and Local Statistics, Portraits of Early Settlers and Prominent Men, History of the Northwest, History of Iowa, Map of Cedar County, Constitution of the United States, Miscellaneous Matters, etc. (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1878), 586; Lewis Publishing Company, *A Biographical History of Fremont and Mills Counties, Iowa: Compendium of National Biography* (Chicago, Lewis Publishing Company, 1901), 410-11; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 67-69.

[38]Drury, *Reminiscences of Early Days in Iowa*, 19; *Prairie Farmer*, May 1, 1847; *Prairie Farmer*, August 1, 1847.

previous fall, which allowed them to plant their wheat without difficulty. Another farmer complained to the *Prairie Farmer* in 1843 that while plowing his frozen land in September, he could not get an even depth, which caused his crops to yield a meager return. Time, the *Prairie Farmer* responded, was more important than depth when the farmer plowed his fields and breaking should be done between the 20th of May and the first of July. By plowing in September, farmers prevented the sod from decaying, which made breaking land manageable. The newspaper suggested that the best time for breaking prairie was when the grass vegetated because the turf below underwent rapid decomposition. As for depth, agriculturalist debated the proper distance and methodology with a keen focus on the labor and expenses involved as the deeper one plowed, the team it took to break the land increased. But whether farmers plowed five inches deep in even rows, or furrowed at a more shallow depth that left the sod broken and distressed, farmers learned the land's peculiarities and workings by "reading, observation and experience, which he may apply to useful purposes…that what is beneficial to him."[39]

Breaking land symbolized an important transformation in the land's meaning for the farm-maker. As it developed from an uncultivated investment to a farm that provided a source for capital in the prairie marketplace, the need to fence and protect crops intensified. By 1837, the Duffield family cleared and planted crops on twelve acres of their claim in Van Buren County, Iowa. George C. Duffield and his father turned to the

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[39]*Union Agriculturalist and Western Prairie Farmer*, April 1, 1842; *Prairie Farmer*, June 1, 1843, May 1, 1843, July 1, 1846, July 1, 1851; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 71-72. Americans had a long-standing affinity for agricultural almanacs and printed material in general. These sources dispersed information about many subjects and farmers used them as a handbook for seasonal change, quotidian occurrences, and a forum to explore the life of husbandry. Newspapers, therefore, were an extension of an American print culture that citizens already subscribed to and read to be cultured.

wooded area around them and cut rails to build a fence to protect their produce from the family's livestock, itinerant wildlife and other pioneers. Duffield recalled that for some time, his father's only thoughts were "chop, chop, chop," and about enclosing the cultivated land for the family. When one settler sectioned off his land, another followed suit, until they encircled every improved property in the county. The fence, contemporaries observed, liberated the binds of "the half made farm."[40]

Fencing was a major enterprise for farm-makers on the frontier, especially on the prairie where timber was scarce and the labor costs to build a wooden fence rose significantly. The *Prairie Farmer* filled their pages with commentary on the lack of fencing material on the Iowa and Illinois' prairie land. One solution, writers suggested, was to dig a ditch-and-bank fence that needed fewer materials but, as one Illinois farmer commented, livestock fell into the ditch, squealed, which attracted more and knocked it down. Another solution farmers used were live, or hedge, fences. But whether it was hawthorn, honey locust, Osage orange, or red cedar brush, hedge fences took time to grow, and were prone to wildfires. Many farmers abstained from hedge fences and implemented wire fencing, which in the 1840s and 1850s had only mild success in keeping larger animals from getting through and farmers had to paint them to prevent rust. One writer informed pioneers that it cost him almost $100 for 1,418 pounds of wire, the freight to Chicago and the rods, but was more than satisfied as it beheaded the prairie chickens that flew into them. Average fencing costs per rod on the prairie ranged from forty cents for a sod fence to eighty-three cents for wire and $1.75 for board fencing.[41]

[40] *Prairie Farmer*, August 1, 1848; George C. Duffield, "Youthtime in Frontier Iowa," *The Annals of Iowa* 7, no. 5 (1906); 353-54.

Iowa's farmers lamented the capital needed to purchase fencing materials, as much as the labor required to build them, and advocated that farmers confined their livestock rather than enclosing their crops. Fencing costs burdened the pioneer farmers so much in the beginning that one historian argued that western farmers spent nearly two or more dollars to enclose their cultivated land for every one dollar paid for the land itself. Such strain on farmers fostered a movement toward stock-confinement or herd laws that argued that fencing in crops put too much stress on would-be farm-makers and limited their ability to build a functional farm. Herd law supporters couched their complaints in terms with the farmer's investment capital in mind. If new farmers failed because they could not afford adequate barriers, the advocates argued, the discontented must take measures that shaped the market to fix the problem. Philo Clover, an Illinois farmer, judged the situation dire for the "thousands of happy, industrious, thriving, intelligent families" that moved into Iowa and Illinois' choice prairie land, and claimed that in order to "avoid the disgrace and infamy of bankruptcy," and encourage emigration, some enactment must alter the situation where resident farmers who owned the timbered lands capitalized on those farmers in need of protecting his crops and labor. During the 1850s, Iowa and Illinois legislation sided with stock confinement and regulated the freedoms of swine and sheep, and during the 1860s, larger domesticated animals such as horses and cattle in attempt to curtail the fencing problem.[42]

[41]John Goodell, ed., *Diary of William Sewall, 1787-1847: Formerly of Augusta, Maine, Maryland, Virginia, and Pioneer in Illinois* (Illinois: 1930), 137; *Prairie Farmer*, February 1, 1847; September 1, 1845; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 80.

[42]Clarence H. Danhof, "The Fencing Problem in the Eighteen-Fifties," *Agricultural History* 18 (October, 1944), 173; *The Union Agriculturalist and Western Prairie Farmer*, August 1, 1842; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 80-82.

The crops in the field represented the farmer's market value in the economy and the pioneer farmer experimented with what crop worked best for the soil on their farm. But because farm-makers had little capital to work with, grain production offered the best opportunity to extract profit from the land. Raising wheat required no major additional investment, was significantly easier to take to market than other crops, and was consistently in demand both at home and abroad. The ability to sell wheat helped offset the cost required starting a farm. Wheat was also a frontier cash crop that pioneers were familiar cultivating, so many farmers relied on the crop in the fledgling phases of western development. The pioneer wheat-grower, one historian argued, did not devote his entire field to a single crop, but rather should be "visualized in terms of more or less of wheat, corn, oats, barley, rye, flax, and hay…."[43]

Agricultural journals and contemporaries vigorously discussed if prairie soil was adequate soil for wheat cultivation for almost three decades. John M. Peck, Edmund Flagg, and William Oliver concluded that the open prairie lands were not very suitable for wheat production because they were too fertile for the grain to grow, while others suggested that recently broken land tailored to wheat culture more than older prairie fields. The Iowa State Agricultural Society concluded in 1857 that its farmers on prairie lands almost universally raised spring wheat while farmers that abutted timbered acreage principally grew fall wheat, which suggested that the soil dictated which varietal farmers grew. The plowed soil on newly broken prairie possibly offered the wheat plant's roots more protection than the crumbled soil from recycled fields. The barren areas in-between

[43]Paul Gates, *The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 156-157; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 124.

timbered sections, contemporaries contended, yielded superior wheat culture as the topography shielded winter wheat crops from the harsh climate. The volatile prairie weather, especially in winter month, wreaked havoc on winter wheat as sporadic freezing and thawing killed crops and left farmers frustrated with nothing to sell to market.[44]

Harsh climate was not the only deleterious situation farmers faced in growing wheat and between 1847-1852, many endured inauspicious crops caused by chinch bugs, blight, rust, and the Hessian fly. Together, these afflictions disheartened wheat farmers and their discontent littered the *Prairie Farmer* in search for answers. Some answered that farmers needed to plant more spring wheat to balance the loss caused by bugs and flies while others urged farmers to stop growing grain year after year and start varying their pursuits with cattle, horses, sheep, or swine. For rust, one farmer argued that the only remedy was to sow early, but this practice created ideal conditions for the Hessian fly, which ruined the wheat seedlings. Farmers also experimented with different winter wheat strands in the 1840s and 1850s, which included Mediterranean, Red Chaff Bald, White Chaff Bald, Red Chaff Bearded, Black Sea, Yellow Lamas, Soft Siberian, White Flint, Canada Flint, China, Early May and Golden Chaff, to combat pests. These varieties, however, did not eliminate the tribulations that affected winter wheat.[45]

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[44]Iowa State Agricultural Society, *Fourth Annual Report of the Iowa State Agricultural Society to the General Assembly, for the Year 1857* (Des Moines: J. Teesdale, 1858), 256, 434..Now cited as I.S.A.S.R.*;* W in *Prairie Farmer,* April 1, 1851; John M. Peck*, A Guide for Emigrants: Containing Sketches of Illinois, Missouri, and the Adjacent Parts* (Boston, 1831); Edmund Flagg, *The Far West; or, A Tour Beyond the Mountains. Embracing Outlines of Western Life and Scenery: Sketches of the Prairies, Rivers, Ancient Mounds, Early Settlements of the French, etc., etc.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838); William Oliver, *Eight Months in Illinois; with Information to Emigrants* (Newcastle up Tyne, 1843); Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 125.

[45]*Prairie Farmer*, October 1, 1843, August, 1, 1846, January 1, 1847, July 1, 1847, August 1, 1847, October 1, 1847.

By the 1850s, however, farmers found that the best way to eliminate the winter-killing problem was to shift to planting spring wheat. In the 1840s, farmers planted spring wheat as a supplement to winter wheat but soon realized that its growing conditions were less prone to infestation and, more importantly, its demand in the market created a stable prices and better flour. Orace M. Culver, from Tipton, Iowa, urged frustrated farmers to experiment with spring wheat and proclaimed that he and his neighbors successfully raised Red River spring wheat without rust or pests for three years. In 1849, he raised five hundred bushels on less than twenty acres, which he sold to his local merchant in Bloomington, Iowa for sixty cents per bushel. The Iowa's agricultural society reported that the average of spring wheat per acre that farmers could expect was fifteen to sixteen bushels but that Samuel Gilbert, a farmer north of Muscatine, Iowa, raised forty-four bushels per acre with shrewd husbandry.[46]

Farmers who settled in Iowa in the early 1830s witnessed how the steel plow, the corn planter, the wheat drill, the reaper and the thresher transformed farming culture by shifting the pattern of agriculture from subsistence to commercial farming over a few decades. In the thirties and forties, Iowa farmers broke the hard prairie land with basic plows and planted a field of wheat, a field of corn, and one of barley or oats in an attempt to establish a subsistence lifestyle. They used modest tools, usually consisted of a wooden plow, a sickle, a cradle, a flail and a shared iron sheath. The farmer's wife tended to a small vegetable garden that abutted the main house, made clothes, and churned butter

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[46]I.S.A.S.R., *1857*, 195, 225, 355, 385; John K. James, Account Book, 1850-1985 (Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library); *Prairie Farmer*, June 1, 1849. Other spring wheat varieties farmers tested were Black sea, Wild Goose, Hedge Row, Tea, Michigan White, Rhode Island, Canada Cub, Red River, Scotch Fyfe, Scotch Spring Wheat, Crimean, and Galena. Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 127.

for the family. To obtain nonessential commodities, farmers went to town and traded excess wheat, corn or butter at the local merchant store for items such as coffee, paper or farming equipment.[47]

To assuage the rigorous work during harvest, western farmers relied on the labor from his family as well as the recently arrived wage earners that looked for work. Agricultural laborers contracted themselves out for either daily or monthly jobs; daily work proved more profitable but longer arrangements provided housing and stability. In Iowa, however, money was scarce and farmers paid out wages in produce based on market prices. Typical day labor remunerated three bushels of corn at ten cents a bushel or one wheat bushel that ranged from twenty-five to thirty cents. Ordinary work commanded about fifty cents a day and harvest wages, a correspondent for Des Moines County reported in 1854, ran up to two dollars per day. Wages with board cost an Iowa farmer, on average, ten dollars a month. John Kellogg James, a Scott County farmer, arranged a one-year contract with Fredric Dofer in 1853 and John Ragland in 1854 that paid Dofer $138.00 and Ragland five dollars with room and board while he did chores and went to school. Most Iowa and Illinois farmers, however, could not afford nor needed a yearly laborer but many found themselves in need for help when the harvest season pressured farmers to get their grain reaped and they often engaged the community during peak labor periods to mitigate the cost to hire help.[48]

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[47]Marion Richardson Drury, *Reminiscences of Early Days in Iowa* (Toledo: Toledo Chronicle Press, 1931), 12, 19-20. Mildred Throne, "Southern Iowa Agriculture, 1833-1890: The Progress From the Subsistence to Commercial Corn-Belt Farming," in Harry N. Scheiber, ed., *United States Economic History: Selected Readings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964),138.

[48]John K. James, Account Book, 1850-1985; *U*. S. Department of Agriculture, *Wages of Farm Labor in the United States: Results of Nine Statistical Investigations, From 1866 to 1892, With Extensive Inquiries Concerning Wages from 1840-1865* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892), 65.

In addition, local and state taxes also encumbered the frontier farmer's finances. Land duties were the most demanding on farmers during the 1840s and 1850, however, many Illinois settlers benefited from the Illinois Enabling Act, which prohibited land bureaus from collecting taxes for five years from farmers that purchased a farm from the federal government. Landowners, nevertheless, paid taxation based on their land's accessed value per acre. In Muscatine County, Iowa, a farmer expended four cents per acre in 1852, which increased to seventeen cents in 1858 and by 1870, farmers paid twenty cents per acre on average. Road, poll, and drainage taxes burdened farmers more acutely, and yeomen like Benjamin F. Gue and John Kenyon routinely labored on the road to settle local levies. Mill taxes, a local service that was pivotal to the community's ability to turn their grain into flour, additionally hurt the pioneer's coffers as the fee for its usage increased from $7.50 in 1852 to $14.50 in 1858. Although farmers only paid $8.00 to $10.00 dollars in taxes per year, they quickly realized that their farms must produce the capital to settle with the county treasurer.[49]

William Sewall's pioneering experience highlighted the typical problems that prairie farmers encountered and illustrated, anecdotally, the farming culture that evolved during the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. William Sewall moved to Jacksonville, Illinois in 1830 and bought a house and lot for $271.37, and taught at a Presbyterian school. He later purchased 240 acres of federal land at the standard $1.25 per ace and embarked on the prairie farmer's life in the Sangamon Valley. His farm stood within the commercial sphere of Beardstown in Cass County, Illinois on the Illinois River, which washed into

[49]The county sued John Kenyon for not paying road taxes and avoided working to pay it off. Thorne, ed., "Iowa Farm Letters, 1856-1865," 61-62; Ross, *Diary of Benjamin F. Gue*, 110; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 188-189.

the Mississippi just above St. Louis. In 1838, Sewall bought the abutting property from Jordan Marshall for $225.00, which nearly doubled his farm's size and totaled near $725 for his land. Sewall's pioneering experience differed from other prairie farmers in that his four hundred and fifty acre claim was much too large and his enterprise was too ambitious and many farmers in the region farmed in more modest terms. Though Sewall struggled to cultivate his entire land, his own farm management, however, was not an aberration to the smaller operations in the region.[50]

Sewall, nonetheless, pushed forward and improved his land with the help from hired hands. In April, Sewall bought a prairie plow and employed a team to break his land to which he harrowed and planted approximately thirty acres of wheat. By 1837, he tilled almost one hundred twenty acres for cultivation. He sowed primarily in the temperate months when the weather permitted vegetation. As a result, fencing was a winter task. Sewall initially hired help at thirty-one cents a rod and dug a ditch fence around the farm's periphery and capped it with rails to protect his market investments but the cap-and-ditch fencing method did not provide the best protect as hogs ruined his crops. Sewall replaced them with a worm fence and again he hired laborers to mitigate the toil. These contracts varied but some lasted for a month or two and one had a neighbor chop 10,000 rails from his timbered land, which he paid $125 for the work. Other improvements included a renovated and enlarged cabin, the construction of stables, a sheep house, and a meat-house, and a rock walled well.[51]

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[50]Goodell, *Diary of William Sewall*, 125-130, 133, 195; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 243-245.

[51]Ibid., 245; Goodell, *Diary of William Sewall*, 134, 137-138, 161, 196.

Sewall's diary, written from 1830 to 1846, sheds light on the nascent technological revolution that changed the way farmers cultivated the land as his grain production evolved from rudimentary tasks done by hand to an operation that used machinery to increase productivity and decrease labor. Sewall planted his grain by hand, constructed wooden harrows used to smooth the land, reaped his crops with a cradle scythe, stored the bundled wheat in a stockyard, tramped the grain under his own feet, and separated the grain from the shaft in the wind. The only tool that Sewall paid much money for in the beginning was his wagon, which he paid one hundred dollars for and used it to haul crops from his farm to the market in Beardstown. In 1837, Sewall's neighbor let him use his threshing machine to thrash out his grain. It took eight workers to operate the machine but it was the best object to get out his grain that he ever witnessed. The efficiency impressed him and in 1841, Sewall purchased a horsepower machine for one hundred dollars and a Benjamin and Davis wheat separator for $113.00. The machine worked so well that he toured the neighboring farms and thrashed their grain. The only other machinery mentioned in Sewall's journey was a seeding machine, an early horse-drawn broadcast seeder for wheat.[52]

Beardstown, Illinois was Sewall's local marketplace and the security provided by its merchants allowed him to capitalize on his farming operations with immediate capital returns. Sewall sold mostly wheat to the town's merchants who usually paid a more secure rate than larger markets like St. Louis. He hauled his wheat to town after threshing, which ranged between October and March and though he grew corn, most of the crop made it to market as pork because it had a higher market value. On one occasion,

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[52]Ibid., 185-186, 200, 203, 233; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 245-246.

Sewall bypassed the local merchants and shipped forty-eight bushels of wheat directly to St. Louis through a commission merchant only to receive forty cents per bushel because it arrived infested with crickets. A few days later, he sold the same wheat crop in Beardstown and received forty-eight cents a bushel, which gave Sewall the impression that commerce done at far distances had a "mysterious" feeling to it. Like most western farmers, Sewall participated in the nation's developing market economy but was skeptical about the impersonal and distant transactions where he had no control. To him, that peculiar situation stripped the integrity from both his produce and his farm as a business. The market's volatility in distant trading centers persuaded farmers that could not afford to lose out on a seasonal crop to remain connected to their local marketplace.[53]

The aggregate farm income was disproportionate to the amount farmers spent on improvements, staples, luxury goods, and labor, which created a situation where pioneers willingly purchased on credit and settled debts with produce. Sewall derived revenue from his farm by selling wheat, oats, rye, hogs, and cattle to market. While these goods, especially grain, were competitive in market, they often fluctuated. Based off prices that he noted in his diary, Sewall's farm in the 1830s averaged between $400 and $500 per year. This total was an aberration as western prairie farmers with smaller operations did not have land that cultivated as many crops as Sewall's, but suggested that farming on all levels had some income but also debts. Sewall spent considerable capital on labor that

[53]Goodell, *Diary of William Sewall*, 269.

taxed him from $60 to $120. Additionally, the agricultural machinery he purchased to increase productivity ran a bill for roughly $500 from 1839 to 1842.[54]

Sewall's farm management and capital flow, however, trended similarly with other, less affluent prairie farmers that willingly bought and sold produce on credit in their local marketplace. Sewall bought and sold goods on credit through the local merchants in Beardstown. This action was symptomatic for all farmers in antebellum America. In Scott County, Iowa, John James documented many credits and debts with local merchants in Davenport. His account with Burrows and Prettyman characterized the relationship between farmer and merchant. James' diverse purchases varied from a plow, steel yards, hammers and shoes to sugar, flour, coffee, and paper. To farmers like James and Sewall, the merchant's store provided them opportunities to purchase improved farm machinery and quotidian goods, but also connected pioneers with a larger marketplace. Sewall speculated that his farm could produce enough crops to not only pay for his debts, but also make enough to hold savings. He bought both his threshing machinery and horsepower on one year's credit at a six percent interest, four horses from a neighbor for $95 with the intention to thresh the neighbor's grain to repay the debt, and purchased stock in the "Pitts" threshing machine for $500, which he agreed to pay in wheat staggered out over two years at a set rate of $120 each payment. Farmers came to view wheat and other crops as a trading commodity when limited cash flow seized the ability to obtain goods in the 1830s and 1840s [55]

[54]Sewall listed prices for wheat from forty to seventy cents, oats ranged from eighteen to thirty-six cents a bushel, and pork commanded about $3.50. Ibid., 252, 261; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 250.

[55]James, Account Book, 1850-1985; Goodell, *Diary of William Sewall*, 247-248, 250; Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 250.

Sewall's narrative described an eager farmer who invested in haste and accrued irresponsible debt backed by his farm's crop production. Sewall experienced unfortunate circumstances in the 1840s as the rhythmic prices for corn, wheat, and pork netted him nearly half what he got in the mid-1830s and encumbered his ability to pay his debts. Farmers like Sewall lived in a nascent business world where fluctuations in prices seemingly came from nowhere. Fires also destroyed an entire grain field in 1845 and added to the Sewall's economic frustrations. Antebellum farmers not only toiled with the soil but also labored through an adolescent market economy where farmers bore the brunt of economic contractions.[56]

Sewall's story also illustrated the vicious cycle that trapped farmers into a financial system that put them at risk to the market's fluctuations, a pattern that allured Americans with its potential prosperity but left them to deal with its nefarious pitfalls. Because pioneers settled on western lands with informed ideas about the marketplace, they view land and crops as tools for success. Land was the most valuable possession a farmer owned and settlers improved the land to increase its value in the market in an effort to earn a profit. Many pioneers purchased and developed western lands only to sell it to newcomers for modest earnings and moved further west. Some of these frontiersmen arrived on Illinois and Iowa's prairie soil in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s with similar intentions. In order to build a farm and improve the land, farmers used credit to hire labor, obtain materials and purchase machinery to maximize production. Thus started the cycle. Farmers like Sewall borrowed money to buy improvements to make more money, which they would use to pay off their investments and debts. A healthy crop return was

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[56]Bogue, *From Prairie to Cornbelt*, 251.

the fulcrum in this capricious balance and when crops failed, farmers were left with little to show for their labor. Yet, even when the land yielded quality crops, the western farmers unnervingly found failing markets that paid a fraction for crops that commanded significant prices just days prior. The *Wisconsin Farmer* warned its readers that the "slavery of paying interest" was a hazardous and perilous path to take and advised farmers that they lost their independence when they ran a farm on debt. The editor's column revealed more than just fears caused by the financial situation; it suggested that the marketplace governed the farmer's actions. Debt tethered the farmer to labor for the will of another, and lamented that he was obligated to harvest because "he owes and must pay, no matter at what sacrifice."[57]

The financial booms and bust that followed the War of 1812 made pioneer farmers vulnerable to markets they could not control. Promised with economic success, western farmers "dipped their oars" in the market and participated in its operations to gain modest success for their family. Debt and fluctuations in commodity and land prices exposed them to the market's dangerous caveat; there were winners and losers. Western farmers witnessed their experience in the West guided by outside forces that shaped their attitudes about land and their individual politics that governed the farm.[58]

As western farmers hauled crops off their land to their closest town, they entered a local marketplace with a different market consciousness than Americans who lived in the urban setting. For farmers, the land not only gave them agrarian republican freedom

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[57]*Wisconsin Farmer*, 12 (December 1, 1860), 364; Gates, *The Farmer's Age*, 413.

[58]John L. Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 100.

from repressive governance, but also represented their participation in the modern economy. Crops and land value raised capital and western farmers worked hard to cultivate not only the crops and land but also their farm and what it represented in the market. Wheat, a cash crop for farmers, however, had profound implications for the merchant class in the prairie marketplace. Tasked as the middleman between land and market, frontier merchants bought wheat from the surrounding region and shipped it to larger city centers. The prairie marketplace shaped new politics for merchants and distanced wheat from its labor and connection to land

THE PRAIRIE MARKETPLACE

The American economy between 1815-1860 was primarily an agricultural based system that benefited from an interregional and international flow of commodities. While Southerners devoted themselves to the production of a few staple crops to meet large and growing demands for internal and foreign markets, Easterners focused their energy on manufacturing and commerce and provided imports, capital, and finished products to the rest of the country. Westerners, however, supplied the nation with its surplus in grain and livestock. Wheat became the region's key industry, aided by transportation and technological improvements, and rapidly grew into a "golden stream" that fed the country. Often overlooked as a casualty of historical fiction was the human agency that developed the wheat industry. Western merchants were major characters in the industry's development as well as its capitalistic outreach. They used the market revolution's tools to their advantage and acted or reacted to events that shaped their business transactions. Championing banking, credit, internal improvements, and other institutions and governing bodies that lubricated commerce, merchants attempted to bring order to the marketplace on a local level. It was this local order that expanded and deepened regional connections, and had profound national implications. Among the many important river towns, Davenport, Iowa was a midsized urban center that linked its surrounding farmland with regional hubs, and the town and its merchants were emblematic to the market revolution's impact.[59]

Davenport's favorable location along the Mississippi river attracted early settlers who saw the area's potential importance as a thoroughfare between the upper and lower Mississippi Valley. With rapids that offered a natural break in river travel, the confluence of the Rock and Mississippi Rivers, and elevated banks on the west side of the Mississippi, early pioneers recognized that the land provided river travel an organically protected post. The United States government also established many forts between 1808 and 1820, most notably Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien at the mouth of the Wisconsin River, Fort Armstrong on Rock Island, and Fort Snelling near St. Paul. These outposts got their supplies from either St. Louis or by trade with the Indian population and had acute knowledge that informed them of settlement locations when Americans began to move west in the upper river valley.

George Davenport, Sr. was one such pioneer. His knowledge of the fort system granted him an advantage as urban development began in the 1830s. Davenport himself supplied the upriver forts from St. Louis as an agent for the American Fur Company and was present for the construction of Fort Armstrong in 1815. While he participated in opening a trading post shortly afterward, he gave up the agency of supplying the troops to concentrate on Indian trade. Davenport's prudent approach with the Sioux, Sac, and Fox tribes and his business savvy and acumen opened trade routes that shipped lead from the

[59]Douglas North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), 101-121; Louis B. Schmidt, "Internal Commerce and the Development of a National Economy Before 1860," *Journal of Political Economy* 47 (December, 1939), 811; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian American, 1815-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

mines around Dubuque and Galena to St. Louis. Because he ventured to trade between the Indians and St. Louis merchants, it forced him to travel constantly from his many trading post north of the valley's main entrepôt further upstream, which provided Davenport with a clear understanding of the contours of the river system.[60]

By 1821, St. Louis' economic and regional development expanded north into the central and upper Mississippi River valley as groups of settlements took root near the town of Quincy and Adams County. The burgeoning lead industry in the upper valley and waves of population migrating south of Quincy convinced entrepreneurs and traders to establish locations on the Mississippi River that bridged the distance between markets in Dubuque and St. Louis to act as an intermediary for river traffic. Towns developed quickly in an ad hoc manner, and those who were involved with trading and building the fort system were at a distinct advantage when choosing town locations. George Davenport and his close associates founded many of the towns in the area; Russell Farnham, the founder of Rock Island in 1826; John Vanatta, founder of Keithsburg, Illinois, in 1827 and Muscatine in 1835; Antoine LeClaire, one of Davenport's founders; Benjamin Clark, the founder of Buffalo in 1833; James Bourne, of Clinton; and Davenport's son, George L., claimed land just south of Davenport and formed Rockingham in 1836. At first, these towns competed to be an ancillary economic market for eastern Iowa. The regional system already in place designated the upper Mississippi

[60]Franc B. Wilkie, *Davenport, Past and Present; Including the Early History, and Personal and Anecdotal Reminiscences of Davenport; Together With Biographies, Likenesses Of Its Prominent Men; Compendious Articles Upon The Physical, Industrial, Social, And Political Characteristics Of The City; Full Statistics Of Every Department Of Note Or Interests, & C.* (Davenport: Luse, Lane, & Co., 1858), 70-71.

River valley as a hinterland economy, and each new town had to find their place within the pre-established network.[61]

George Davenport and Antoine LeClaire quickly worked to gain traction for land sales by securing the county seat in Scott County. Buffalo and Rockingham were the town's major contenders but after LeClaire and Dr. John Reynolds, a legislator from Muscatine County, moved the county lines upriver, Davenport positioned itself at the center of the county. Aided by its geographic advantages along the river, increased population, and commanding capital, Davenport emerged as the terminal along the Mississippi River's Great Bend and began tapping into the regions trade channels. After securing the county seat, LeClaire stimulated the town's growth by building hotels and housing for potential settlers, sponsored land grants for schools and churches, and polished Davenport's luster as a commercial center. Although LeClaire's influence resonated throughout Davenport's local history, the first merchants who arrived in the 1830s solidified and shaped the town's importance as a regional entrepôt.[62]

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[61]Ronald Raymn, "The Black Hawk Purchase: Stimulus to Settlement of Iowa, 1832-1852," *Western Illinois Regional Studies* 3 (Fall, 1980), 141-53; Timothy R. Mahoney, "Down in Davenport: A Regional Perspective on Antebellum Town Economic Development," *The Annals of Iowa* 50, no. 5 (Summer, 1990), 456-457; J. W. Spencer, *Reminiscences of Pioneer Life in the Mississippi Valley* (Davenport: Griggs, Watson, Day, Printers, 1872), 11. Davenport's history, as well as the region, was deeply steeped in Indian warfare and trade relationships. Davenport's early leaders like George Davenport and Antoine LeClaire were intimately tied to Black Hawk War and its treaty that granted land for fifty miles west of the Mississippi River. The commodity flow of lead, however, is also salient in the region's development.

[62]Wilkie, *Davenport, Past and Present,* 221-223, 233; Mahoney, "Down in Davenport," 460-461. The elections for the county seat between Rockingham and Davenport were contentious and repeated fraud on both sides prolonged the results. The territorial legislature had to step in and mediate the situation in 1836 but by that time, the town's progress outweighed Rockingham's. See John McDowell D. Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa, being the Personal Reminiscences of J.M.D. Burrows, Concerning The Men and Events, Social Life, Industrial Interests, Physical Development, and Commercial Progress of Davenport and Scott County, During The Period From 1838-1888* (Davenport: Glass & Company, 1888), 13-14.

In the summer of 1838, John McDowell Burrows journeyed to the villages of Stephenson and Davenport, Iowa to conduct business and survey the land that stretched west from his Cincinnati home. Aboard the steamer *Brazil*, Burrows marveled at the country's allure, from the "sloping lawns and wooded bluffs" to the wild flowers that grew for miles, so much so he remained on the deck of the boat "enraptured with the beauty of the ever-changing scenery."[63] Davenport was a small town along the Iowa bank of the Mississippi River and provided natural access to southern markets in St. Louis and New Orleans and its prospect as a trading center looked promising to Burrows. His trip convinced him to sell his property in Cincinnati and migrate west. Already an established frontiersman, the westward allure tempted him, like many other Americans in the first half of the nineteenth-century, to pick up and start over.[64]

The merchant's world in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s provided a glimpse into the political economy of the western frontier and illustrated the changing culture that emerged as merchants bridged the gaps between urban markets and farmers in the hinterland. John Burrows' recollection, written half a century later, was representative of this realm as we waded through the difficulties inherent for small towns like Davenport in an interconnected economy and details how merchants shaped the business world before and after commercial depressions and the advent of the railroad. Burrows experience exemplified how produce, specifically wheat, was the stimulus for progress as it compelled western merchants to adopt resources like credit, storage, and advertising, which allowed the flow of wheat to move east and merchandise to move westward.

[63]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa,* 1.

[64]Ibid., 2-5.

Burrow was an important participant in Davenport's development as a sub-regional entrepôt, a representative of the actors that developed the West's regional dominance and played a role in securing the roots of capitalism in the wheat industry as well as a modern economy in the West.[65]

John Burrows settled in Davenport with the intent to become a farmer, but after livestock ruined his first crops he gave up and claimed the farming life too fragile and tenuous for his family. His decision to get into the mercantile business rewarded Burrows for the next two decades. Burrows became a wealthy and successful merchant in Davenport, Iowa, revered through the town's annals, and an integral actor in the growth of the region's economic success. Although early census data for this time was limited, the 1850 census valued his estate at six thousand dollars, which increased exponential to one hundred thousand just a decade later. Burrows & Prettyman, the name for his produce and dry goods business, opened a store in 1839 and capitalized on an inherent need on the frontier. Farmers, he recalled, were compelled to sell their wheat and pork to obtain money for medicine, pay postage, and to pay for general improvements on their farms.[66]

Iowa legislators incorporated Davenport in 1838 and river trade opened in late February with promise, as there was a light snow during the winter. Business began in earnest in April and soon passable navigation on the river brought goods, travelers and

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[65]William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and The Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 97-109.

[66]1840 U.S. Census, Scott County, Iowa, population schedule, Davenport; 1850 U.S. Census, Scott County, Iowa, population schedule, Davenport; 1860 U.S. Census, Scott County, Iowa, population schedule, Davenport; Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 1-11; *The United States Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men, Iowa Volume* (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Company, 1878): 45-47; Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 42.

emigrants into and through Davenport's wharves. The *Iowa Sun*, Davenport's first newspaper, run by Andrew Logan, trumpeted the town's untapped prospects and claimed that "since the opening of navigation our lovely little village has been thronged with travelers and emigrants."[67] He further declared that emigration inflated the town's population and kept its carpenters busy building housing and accommodations while the increased population also created more activity on Davenport's wharves and the surrounding prairies lands that fed into the town. Steamboats and light draught keelboats arrived everyday and the town legislature spent almost a quarter of their expenditures to lay and build roads to improve the town's market functionality. Territorial Governor, Robert Lucas, questioned Davenport's legislative expenditures, specifically the superfluous purchases of knives, stamps, half-a-dozen inkstands, stationary, and furniture, based on the notion to prevent the merchants and citizens from crediting the officers of the legislature and attempted to audit the town's books. The legislature resolved that the governor was "not invested with advisatory [*sic*] or restraining powers over the Legislature" outside the executive responsibilities of signing bills, memorials and resolutions. This conflict, informally called the "penknife and tin-pan controversy," represented the divergence of state and town governance on economic matters with the growth of local autonomy as well as the union between regional maturation and merchants who linked commodities from the hinterland farm to the national, and even global, marketplace.[68]

[67]Wilkie, *Davenport, Past and Present*, 70-71.

[68]Ibid.; Harry E. Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County, Iowa Vol. 1* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1910): 418-427; Mahoney, "Down in Davenport," 463-465.

After middling attempts to improve his lot as a farmer, an occupation he expected to maintain, Burrows established a small business store on Front Street and engaged as a commission merchant to Cincinnati houses. To obtain supplies, he traveled to Cincinnati where his cousin, John A. D. Burrows, of Burrows & Hall, allowed him to stockpile supplies and groceries. Like many other merchants in the West, familial connection helped assuage some of the start up difficulties that Burrows encountered, though most were not as large as the one his cousin John A. D. Burrows advanced. In just one season, his store took root in Davenport's local economy and he had earned enough back to repay his cousin and buy his winter stock.[69]

With this immediate success, Burrows' connections with larger markets and surrounding farmers enhanced his business. Through his cousin, he established a relationship with Andrew W. Sprague & Co., a prominent dry good retailer in Cincinnati, which increased the variety in his store for the locals in Davenport. His cousin also helped shield him from having to pay immediately for his stock and vouched for John M. Burrows using his clout in the Cincinnati market, which allowed the new businessman to circumvent the large start-up costs that plagued many new merchants.[70]

John Burrows expanded his mercantile business enough to attract farmers from throughout Scott, Jackson, Clinton, and Muscatine Counties. These farmers offered to sell their wheat and livestock surpluses to make a profit or make exchange for goods for farm life. Burrows purchased the excess wheat and these transactions started his

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[69]John A. D. Burros wholesale store was the largest in Cincinnati. Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa,* 24; *The United States Biographical Dictionary*, 45-46.

[70]Ibid., 27-29; *The United States Biographical Dictionary*, 46.

involvement in the produce trade as well as represented the vital link between land and marketplace, the first linkage between farmer and consumer. Other Davenport merchants criticized Burrows actions and claimed he was a fool for accepting payment in wheat for goods. Burrows was not sure himself, but reflected that he “felt that this country had to be settled up, and to accomplish this, some one must buy the farmers’ surplus, or it would remain a wilderness.” Burrows continued to buy up the wheat and pork surplus farmers wanted to sell, shipping it to Rice & Dowsman at Prairie du Chien commissaries at the Fort. By this time, the country had gone through two economic depressions in the Panic of 1819 and 1837 that crippled the confidence of many American’s and his comments on the beginning of his business highlights how the economic decisions he made impacted Davenport’s maturation as he bought up the first surplus of wheat over the local demand.[71]

While the general store’s primary function was to provide eastern goods for western farmers, the local store, and the merchant himself, also symbolized the fulcrum of an incipient market economy. The relationship between merchant and farmer was one the most important steps in the development of a modern economy. Each relied on the other to fulfill essential needs. For the farmer, the ability to obtain goods and farm equipment proved essential to meet growing demands for produce on a regional and national level as well as it provided a place for local farmers to sell their produce to

[71]*The Davenport Democrat and Leader*, July 16, 1922; Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 33; Burrows bought his first load of wheat from local farmers Horace Bradley and Lucian Moss from Pleasant Valley, for 45 cents a bushel, and he was the first to ship wheat from Davenport to St. Louis. The Scott County Agricultural Society later awarded Horace Bradley the best conducted farm in Scott County for a 80 and 40 acres in 1870. His farm dedicated 8 acres and yielded 18 bushels per acre for a total yield of 144 bushels in 1869. The total profit on Bradley’s farm totaled $900.00 after expenses, repairs, and loss on wheat. *The Daily Gazette*, January 11, 1870.

merchants to get cash to pay taxes or make general improvements to their land. For the merchant, his most obvious service to the community was the retailing of manufactured goods and groceries for the community. The merchant's ability to provide a wide variety of dry goods, hardware, and drugs "liberated," as one historian put it, "the resident on the developing frontier from the necessity of being a jack of all trades and producer of all needs," as well as introduced specialized products from Eastern and European markets that stimulated the frontier to develop "a higher degree of economic organization." This position, however, forced Burrows to operate on both sides of the market, as a seller of commodities and merchandise as well as a buyer of goods, which pressured merchants to be generalist that could appeal to the most customers as possible.[72]

By 1840, Burrows was Davenport's first permanent merchant and his storefront represented an epicenter for commercial trade and created a cultural setting for Davenport's residents and surrounding farmers to meet and artificially connect with a national market. The rural community inundated Burrow's store and forced him to stay open for long hours. "Our store," he wrote, "was well patronized," with farmers from the surrounding counties who walked a full day to sell their grain. Burrows' store was an outlet for farmer's produce and its structure represented the marketplace's presence on the frontier.[73]

When a merchant purchased a farmer's wheat, it arrived in bushels that represented a specific tract of land and distinct characteristics of the farmer's labor. If

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[72]The importance of and equal exchange between merchants and farmers is borrowed from William Cronon's argument that the relationship between the hinterland and city was crucial to the development of Chicago's, or any cities, rise to importance in the West. Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* 318-319; Lewis E. Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant in Mid-America* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1971), 17.

[73]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa,* 78.

distant urban markets wanted to purchase grain to mill or consumer, the transaction hinged on the flavor, weight, and purity of the wheat. The merchant would send a "representative sample" ahead of the shipment to validate its quality and determined the price of sale. Being the local storekeeper, Burrows collected the grain he purchased from the farmers in Davenport's hinterland and floated the sacks of grain down river to St. Louis's bustling docks where he sold it to dealers, who supplied their own local demand, or continued to New Orleans to sell off his goods.[74] At first, wheat flowed through natural routes. The Mississippi and Ohio River, and its arteries, tapped into the countryside and pulled wheat southward towards New Orleans. Cities like Cincinnati and St. Louis organically became trading centers for western merchants and where most country merchants floated wheat to New Orleans. Flour receipts in New Orleans increased 225 percent from 361,000 barrels in 1831 to 436,000 barrels in 1839 though the city's dominance in the grain trade declined as internal improvements redirected the flow of wheat towards the Great Lakes region. The opening of the Erie Canal provided port cities like Cleveland, Toledo, and Buffalo cheaper access to demanding Eastern markets and also profited from regions that were unable to connect to markets. The shift was significant. Cleveland received 2.8 million bushels of wheat and flour in 1839 or 87 percent more than New Orleans and Buffalo had more than one million bushels in excess of that southern entrepôt in the same year.[75]

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[74]Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 120.

[75]John G. Clark, *The Grain Trade in the Old Northwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966): ch. 2-4.

Because ownership rights remained with the seller until the sack reached its destination, and because the journey could spoil the goods on many levels, insurance was an important cultural response to these risks to avoid insolvency. The seller was responsible for the loss of goods if the boat sank with the merchandise aboard, if the water soaked the sacks and ruined the wheat, and ran the risk of price fluctuations before they arrived at a market. These insecurities could ruin or bankrupt a merchant. Fire, marine, and commercial insurance assuaged the precarious nature of the water-based method of shipping. Fire insurance covered storage facilities prone to catching fire and could ruin a merchant's entire stock that supplied the local community. Usually offered through large urban centers like St. Louis and Chicago, these institutions great out of necessity and championed a growing business industry. Chicago had thirteen insurance companies, most being agents from other urban centers.[76]

Finding a market to sell surplus commodities worried most merchants and they often created a sense of demand where it did not exist beforehand. Since farmers lacked the time, money and propensity to retail their produce on a regional scale, merchants bore the burden to advertise, ship, and find buyers for surplus goods. "My great trouble was to know where to place the products," Burrows recalled as his business brought in more produce with no sure markets to complete the transaction. The Chicago markets were not the regional entrepôt they would become in the 1850s, and those in St. Louis were scant,

[76]A. A. Whitney to Samuel Smith, February 1, 1845, in Abraham Skinner Papers. MS 1270, Western Reserve Historical Society. J. W. Norris, *Norris' Business Directory and Statistics of the City of Chicago, for 1846* (Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1883); Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 108.

which forced Burrows to find reliable consumers along the Mississippi River in soldiers, fur traders, and steamboat captains.[77]

Burrows witnessed an increase in wheat production during the year 1841. What amounted to almost double his normal supply, overproduction worried him as well as many merchants reliant on finding a market, which could be flooded with wheat from other regions of the country, driving prices down, and putting the merchant at risk of loss. In an effort to find more secure ways to get rid of his produce, Burrows responded to a government proposal for supplying Fort Snelling and Fort Crawford with a year's worth of pork, flour, and other necessary articles. Not only would this contract alleviate his financial concerns, but also, Burrows argued, that if he could get the contract and fill it with produce from local farms it would benefit Davenport as well as Scott County as a whole. "It would be a grand thing," Burrows proclaimed, "for both the town and the county, and by the means of circulating a good deal of money, of which the people at that time were sadly in need."[78]

Burrows won the bid for Fort Snelling but immediately found opposition by John Atchison. Surprised that Burrows procured the contract, Atchison wanted to buy out the deal. Burrows, however, shrewdly negotiated an arrangement whereby Atchison paid him a bonus of twenty-five hundred dollars cash, allowed Burrows to supply the flour, pork and beans and provided transportation. The wheat surplus Burrows bought in the fall and winter months of 1840 went straight to the Rockingham mill where he manufactured it into flour, which was easier to haul and sell to buyers. Burrows sold his breadstuff

[77]Ibid., 35; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 320.

[78]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 43.

primarily in the beginning to the American Fur Company and the Indians upstream at Prairie du Chien, Fort Snelling and Snake Hollow, a connection that he continued to cultivate and rely on as his produce business grew. Indian traders exchanged feathers and beeswax for flour, bacon and beans, which he would trade in Cincinnati for profit The deal benefited Burrows as well as the economy of Scott County, having given employment to locals and with the money he received gave the "little village and the county a decided boom."[79] Whether Burrows sold his produce to the War Department, the American Fur Company or to travelers, the capital that boosted Scott County's economy trickled down from distant urban markets. "Capital flowed from the urban hierarchy," one historian argued, which sustained the frontier merchant's ventures, allowed farmers to participate in the economy above their own means, and financed the growth of the agricultural trade.[80]

Partnerships were common practice for mercantile business across the nation because they opened up more lines of credit for increased buying power in East markets as well as lessened the burden of running the storefront and travel. In the spring of 1841, Burrows employed Robert M. Prettyman, a former clerk, as a business partner and surrogate for the storefront when he traveled north to conduct business and trade with military outposts and Indians. While the memorandum for business agreement between Burrows and Prettyman was not found, other mercantile contracts from the surrounding region revealed the intentions behind a joint business adventure. When Robert Aull

[79]Ibid., 45. John Atchison owned a large steamboat called the Amaranth and held contracts with Fort Snelling and Fort Crawford before Burrows won the bid. Atchison feared losing such a stable contract, which explained why he provided the shipping for Burrows. For Burrow, Atchison solved the need to procure transportation.

[80]Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis,* 318.

entered into a partnership with Samuel Owens, his most trusted clerk at his store in Independence, Missouri, he used Owen's shrewdness as a businessman to lessen his own responsibilities at the store when he traveled to wholesale centers in the East. This also increased the capital investment to nearly 70,000 and provided Aull with considerable purchasing power to keep his stores stocked. Peter Weddell and Edmund Clark, merchants in Cleveland, Ohio and Buffalo, New York, respectively, entered into an agreement of co-partnership in 1825 to carry on "the mercantile business in the village of Cleveland aforesaid, and in the Brick store now occupied by P[eter]. M. Weddell." Clark agreed to put in six thousand dollars while Weddell provided eight thousand, totaling fourteen thousand dollars to be used in common interest for the firm. The agreements' terms arranged equal responsibilities to run the store where Clark and Weddell were "to use all industry and economy in business for the mutual benefit of each other." The cooperation strengthened the enterprising power of the firm and later Weddell and Clark added George W. Stanton to the firm "for the purpose of transacting storage, forwarding, and commission business in the village of Cleveland, Ohio."[81]

This relationship resembled the contract Burrows entered into with Prettyman. Both committed to a mutually beneficial full-time service that merged into one storefront and split all profits. Certain stipulations, however, were taken to ensure that business partners practiced responsible trade. Contracts also had a set termination date, divided payouts and arrangements that established responsibilities for each merchant in the firm.

[81]P.M Weddell, Edmund Clark, and George W. Stanton's Article of Copartnership, March 8, 1827 and P.M Weddell and Edmund Clark's Article of Copartnership, October 1, 1825, in Peter and Horace Weddell Papers, 1814-1873. MS 1864, Western Reserve Historical Society; Lewis E. Atherton, "James and Robert Aull: A Frontier Missouri Mercantile Firm," *Missouri Historical Review* 30 (1935), 3-27. Robert Aull owned mercantile store in Lexington, Richmond, Liberty and Independence Missouri.

By promoting Prettyman from his clerk to a mercantile partner, Burrows freed himself from the routine work accompanied with running a storefront and enabled him to stretch his endeavors into other entrepreneurial activities. Burrows' wheat and flour business developed as a result of this beneficial cooperation. "I could now leave home on these expeditions," Burrows wrote, "feeling all was right there, for a more honest, capable, and devoted man than R[obert] M. Prettyman, no man ever had in his employ."[82]

Merchants were also agents for local newspaper subscription debts and often provided services that helped facilitate the printing press business. Burrows & Prettyman, for example, acted as representatives for *The Davenport Gazette* for residents who lived near Camanche, a small river town north of Davenport. They accepted payments from locals in wheat and remitted duties to William Van Tuyl, the *Gazette's* standing liaison for the town. These transactions lubricated the channels of exchange for newspaper companies and allowed local residents to trade commodities for journal subscriptions. It also highlighted how merchants acted as middlemen and broker between growing industries and the consumers. An editorial announcement in *The Davenport Gazette* proclaimed that the reader and the publisher were indebted to John Burrows "for his kind attention in having purchased at St. Louis and brought over land to this place, a supply of printing paper to last us until the opening of navigation."[83]

Additionally, the merchant provided a means for exchange in a political economy that deeply distrusted specie and banks. Andrew Jackson's mistrust and campaign against the Second Bank of the United States curtailed the positive effects that centralized

[82]Ibid., 35; Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant*, 115-123.

[83]*The Davenport Gazette*, February 3, 1848.

banking offered for western development. A shortage of cash on the frontier extended the traditional barter system, but as merchants developed more intricate connections with Eastern wholesalers and larger markets in cities like Cincinnati, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Chicago, they began taking on more responsibility as not only an importer and seller of goods but as bankers. This "double burden" expanded their influence as a middleman between frontier farmer and a modern economy. Though farmers typically were not in possession of cash, on occasion they would have country merchants retrieve money owed to them in another market. The farmer would then leave their money at a merchant's general store for security. Burrows noted that because there were no or faulty banks for a number of years on the frontier, "the farmers, consequently, brought their money in and deposited it with me, the same as if I were a banker. This, when I was just starting and my means were limited, was a great help to my business."[84]

Merchant account books revealed the importance of a bartering produce system in the West and shed light on the relationship between merchant and farmer transactions. Since cash was scarce, many farmers balanced their bill with the local merchant by trading produce, goods, or even bartered services. James Aull, a Missouri merchant, for example, accepted three barrels of whiskey from Aaron Overton at $11.33 a barrel, and two more for slightly more, which balanced Overton's account. Another farmer paid in beeswax, where another paid with tallow and country sugar. Some even used labor as a means of exchange. Farmers hauled goods, cut brush and loaded goods as means to settle their bill. The western merchant allowed farmers to unload the burden of debt however

[84]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 28-29; Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant*, 17-19; Mahoney, "Down in Davenport," 463. By the 1880's, Burrows' recollection was likely colored by fifty years of agitation over currency, banks, and his experience within the system. This may have polluted his memory of how it worked and when the system improved.

they could, which buffered the farmer from the market's volatility but also isolated the farming class from the significant capital that merchants acquired.[85]

Most farmers practiced selling the most readily available goods they had on the farm that could account for enough capital to repay debts. Wheat, pork, and flour littered many merchants account books from all regions of the country. In Cleveland, Hermes Bunts's balance sheet showed many farmers paid in flour and whiskey. Jared Warner's ledger book, which documented his Wisconsin store from 1849-1859, noted that a Moses Hacklin settled his bill in cash, pork and flour, Benjamin Brown paid in wheat and flour, and Samuel Rosencrants paid part of his bill in wheat and a note for the remainder. The uniformity of these transaction records also shows that farm crops, like wheat, were crucial in the frontier's development and integration into the nation's market economy. If this hybrid barter system increased business transactions for the merchant, allowing them to make good on Eastern debt, it also shaped the role produce had on the frontier economy.[86]

A well-fostered relationship based on individual interactions between merchants and farmers, and the community at large, strengthened the bonds of frontier market development. Farmers who found an outlet for their produce, whether it was wheat, grain or any other marketable goods, and the merchant who obtain them secured a sense of stability for future engagements. Burrows had one notable relationship like this in Daniel T. Newcomb, a farmer in Muscatine, Iowa, just upriver from Davenport. Knowledgeable

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[85] Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 125.

[86]Jared Warner's ledger book is synthesized in Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant*, 125. Warner was a Wisconsin merchant.

in farming techniques and technology, Newcomb advised Burrows on handling and operating labor saving machinery, such as threshers, reapers, and headers, for wheat cultivation. Newcomb also had a farm in Durant, Iowa and supplied Burrows with more grain than any other farmer in the region, claiming that in one year Newcomb produced thirty thousand bushels and exclusively sold it to Burrow's produce business. Connections similar to this allowed merchants and farmers to participate in a growing financial economy with a sense of security.[87]

In the pre-railroad era, western shopkeepers gambled on future demands for goods when buying produce from local farmers, often with hopes of capitalizing and making a profit. In late 1846, Irad Kelley, a Cleveland merchant, wrote to his father about the state of affairs about his country store and mercantile business. Kelley commented that he thought the demand for corn would continue for some time and noted that he felt confident enough that he could get all the corn he wanted on credit or for salt. "In fact," Kelley wrote, "the people are anxious to exchange corn for goods" at prices much higher than New York wholesalers, giving Kelley the advantage to sell corn at a speculative profit, making more on salt's market value as well as gamble on the future price of corn by buying as much as he could. But many merchants who took risks similar to Kelley's endeavor resulted in failure and left the eager entrepreneur feeling the full effects of a free market economy.[88]

[87]1850 U.S. Census, Muscatine County, Iowa, population schedule, Montpelier; U.S. General Land Office Records, 1841; *The United States Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men,* 559-561; Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 49-52. The 1850 census valued Newcomb's total real estate at $10,000, which was significantly more than other farmers in the area. The U.S. Land Office Records recorded that Newcomb bought up over 2,500 acres of land in Muscatine County, Iowa in 1841, 160 acres in Scott County, and many small portions of land in Lee County, Iowa.

[88]Irad Kelley to Daniel Kelley, November 15, 1846 in Irad Kelley Papers, MS 0485, Western Reserve Historical Society.

Dependable information about supply and demand was central to a merchant's success and since market news travelled slowly by word of mouth, letter or by steamboat before railroads, it often took days or weeks to reach backcountry commissions. A storekeeper in Illinois, for example, wrote to a merchant in Iowa and inquired about the surplus of eggs he had in stock. He requested the Iowa merchant to ship five or six barrels as soon as possible. The transaction could be lucrative if he showed up first, but also created the possibility for significant loss if the merchant arrived and the offer was already contracted. Frequently, merchants went to great lengths to get stock to market based on rumors or old information only to find the demand flooded. In the spring of 1844, Burrows's bought a boat and loaded it with twenty-five hundred bushels of potatoes based on the knowledge that the New Orleans quotations were two dollars a bushel. Because Burrows insured his stock through his friend James E. Woodruff, he accompanied the cargo for New Orleans. After six weeks, Burrows tried to sell his potatoes in Memphis but found the market glutted, and the best offer he found was twenty-five cents a bushel so he backed out and moved further south. Meager prices in Vicksburg and Natchez forced Burrows to hold on to his potatoes until New Orleans where he found an even worse situation. Burrows ended up selling his entire potato cargo for eight cents a bushel, "which was just nothing at all, as it cost me all of that to sprout, bushel, and deliver them; and I had to take coffee as payment."[89]

Business ran at nature's behest and merchants worked around the seasonal cycles that restricted river traffic, closed regional transportation and, more importantly, froze the

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[89]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 56-60; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 320-321.

flow of capital into small towns like Davenport. Winter closed off the market valve to the outside world effectively creating a standstill in commercial trade as no money came and no produce left. To make matters worse, farmers sold their produce to merchants just as winter iced over river trade meaning merchants had to store goods through the harsh conditions and trade merchandise to farmers on credit. At the moment when trade was most difficult and hope to sell produce at its lowest, merchants forfeited their capital to farmers to keep the agricultural produce from going bad and upheld the local economy from impediment because of the weather. Burrow's experience in 1841 illustrated how winter shaped all frontier merchants practices as he found himself tied up in agricultural commodities as the weather thawed. "I found my means all locked up in produce," he wrote, "and that it would be necessary for me to realize on a good portion of my stock early, in order to replenish my store." Concerned that his capital was *locked up* by winter, Burrows understood the necessary function he played in Davenport's economy as an intermediary between the marketplace and laborer. Without merchants like Burrows, the cash economy would seize up during months that did not allow for physical trade.[90]

Investing capital in produce put merchants like Burrows in a tough situation when speculation did not turn out in their favor. Before the winter of 1845, Burrows bought up every barrel of flour and all the grain he could find in Scott County and even into Galena and north of Dubuque, based speculation from James E. Woodruff, a produce house with branches in St. Louis, New Orleans, and New York City. Backed by sound advice and capital, Burrows opened the navigation season with the most wheat and grain in stock in the region but faced sobering circumstances when America went to war against Mexico.

[90]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 36; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 321.

Prices for wheat and flour plummeted and a loss of confidence in travel caused insurance companies to balk at offering coverage or charged exorbitant prices. Before the precipitous drop, Burrows commanded nearly four dollars and fifty cents per barrel of flour and wheat averaged sixty cents a bushel on the market. Subsequently, Burrows sold his produce, what was not spoiled by the journey, in New York for a dollar per barrel of flour and wheat for twenty-five cents a bushel. The gamble nearly bankrupted Burrows & Prettyman but by Woodruff's capital, their mercantile business survived the disastrous turn of events. The consequences of this economic bust hurt the buying power that Burrows commanded for the next season and dampened the cash economy around Davenport. He continued buying up flour and wheat the next season but paid half in cash and half goods or debt or paid a reduced price for all cash. "We told our farmers we were hard up," Burrows wrote, "that our means were all locked up in what they owed us, and urged them to pay up as promptly as possible."[91]

Taking a gamble on agriculture futures paid off for merchants resilient enough to overcome financial busts inherent in a maturing market economy. Burrows entered the next season with vigor, determined to shake off his latest ill-fated venture. Woodruff again advised Burrows to corner the wheat market in Davenport and stock up for the next season. Burrows bought out Charles Lesslie and William Inslee's small warehouse, which carried twenty-five hundred bushels of wheat each for sixty cents a bushel as well as Whisler's large warehouse paying the same price. Burrows and Prettyman closed out all the wheat in town as navigation opened. The demand for flour, for example, topped at seven dollars a barrel where they paid two dollars to obtain. The returns were tremendous

[91]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 61-65.

and by July 1, Burrows paid every debt he owed and even had standing credit at Henning & Woodruff. The quick turn of fortunes illustrated the volatility that frontier merchants experienced as they laid the groundwork for the produce industry on the local level. The market's unpredictable nature in the 1840s laid the foundation for entrepreneurs looking to succeed on the frontier. "Such were the dangers and difficulties of the produce business," Burrows wrote wistfully.[92]

Since seasonal cycles in economy, debilitating travel, and weather setbacks made commerce difficult and because agents bought in bulk from eastern wholesalers, merchants had to invest in warehouses to store the overhaul of goods they brought in from both distant and local markets. Warehouses were everywhere in Davenport and merchants used them to store wheat, pork, and other commodities that came in from the farmers. Burrows had many storage facilities around town and even turned his Albion and Aetna Mill into a warehouse for excess commodities. The warehouse size depended upon the merchant's business acumen. Burrows used multiple storage spaces throughout Davenport because he understood that he could profit from uninhibited trade whether it was for wholesale purchases like salt from St. Louis, or produce from local farmers. If he did not have storage it limited his capital yield and hindered his ability to be solvent. Merchants even rented space out to each other if needed. Warehouses were ubiquitous in western urban centers and symbolized the physical presence of the marketplace in the daily lives of the town's inhabitants simultaneously solving storage problems during

[92]Ibid., 68-69.

harsh weather as much as creating cultural change as merchants worried about the protection of their investments.[93]

The merchant's most important communal contribution was the credit line he established with the wholesale centers where he traded. It was generally easy for merchants to get a loan from Eastern companies in order to buy his goods for the season. Between 1820 and 1850, western merchants managed local stores on one to two years' supply of credit, which unclogged, at least theoretically, the impasse that existed from a lack of cash available for commerce. Credits freed up the merchant to continue supplying farmers' necessary goods, and remain an agent between land and market. Though the process of buying goods on Eastern credit cost more than prices based on cash sale, it was a requisite drawback as the frontier developed into a mature market economy. Hunt and Roby, commission merchants at Detroit in the 1840s, financed their mercantile activities by drawing drafts from correspondents in Buffalo, made payable at Albany or New York, traded into banknotes through the Michigan National Bank and advanced to farmers and millers around Detroit's hinterland. Hunt and Roby's advancements on grain served to meet the needs of the producers and supplied immediate cash to farmers. When the shipment of wheat reached Buffalo, its merchants acknowledged the acceptance and gave notice to banks that backed the loan effectively releasing Hunt and Roby from their eastern debt.[94]

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[93]Ibid., 84-87; Lease Old Warehouse to Brown & Williams from Weddell, G, and Stanton, March, 1827, in Peter and Horace Weddell Papers, 1814-1873. MS 1864, Western Reserve Historical Society.

[94]Atherton, *The Frontier Merchant*, 18; Thomas Odle, "Entrepreneurial Cooperation on the Great Lakes: The Origin of the Methods of American Grain Marketing," *The Business History Review* 38, no. 4 (Winter, 1964), 446.

The acceptance system was not well suited to the limited short-term credit due to price fluctuations in wheat and flour and because the network functioned on the assumption that the economic conditions in American was static. When economic contraction tightened both sides of trade, it brought the system to gridlock. Commission houses stopped giving out credit to merchants, which in turn decreased the ability to buy crops from the laborers. In 1857, “western shippers were unable to buy produce for the reason that they could not draw on their eastern correspondents,” the Buffalo Board of Trade recalled, which undermined the community’s confidence to conduct business. “The state of things,” they continued, “put an effectual check on the movement of the crops, and completely ruined the fall trade.” Grain merchants before the 1850s, nevertheless, operated within this unpredictable financial structure that relied upon the personal relationship between creditor and debtor, whether that be farmer-local merchant or local merchant-commission house. Unpaid debt created instability, yet no credit seized up the ability to trade. The Panic of 1857 exposed the inherent weakness of this system, but it would take the efforts of the mercantile community to replace and refashion the grain industry entirely.[95]

Set in the context after the Panic of 1837, Iowa, then governed by hard-money Democrats, outlawed state-charted banks in 1846 at a time when the state experienced enormous economic development that demanded the utility of a financial system. The state experienced general agricultural and business boom in the 1840s and 1850s owing to the ability to connect to outside markets by water or railway and its fertile farmland attracted immigrants to settle. Iowa witnessed its population grow from 43,112 in 1840 to

[95]John J. Henderson, *Annual Statement of the Trade and Commerce of Buffalo for 1857* (Buffalo, 1858), 28; Odle, “Entrepreneurial Cooperation,” 447.

192,214 in 1850, which swelled to 517,875 by 1856. Without institutions to finance land purchases and extend credit to merchants to conduct trade, enterprising Iowan businessmen established private banks that circulated other chartered banks' currency. State-chartered banks in Illinois and Indiana found their currency scattered throughout the nation's interior.[96]

Burrows had close relationships with regional banks that facilitated and supported his endeavors in the produce business. In 1847, Cook & Sargent, a banking business, opened in Davenport under the auspices of Clark & Brothers, a large private banking house in Philadelphia, to the Burrow's delight. The institution's opening signified a connection between the local county merchant and city, a link that would benefit the growth of Burrow's store and credit line for himself and his customers. Clark & Brothers supplied a branch in St. Louis with a large share of the circulation for the region and was a method to solve the exchange problem. Backed by the larger Philadelphia firm, the Eastern funded banks operated as a reliable resource for merchants rather than the local capricious western banks. "Merchants considered it safer than our western banks," he continued, " as the credit of the house of Clark and Brothers was A No.1, but could not be used for eastern exchange without a large discount."[97]

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[96]Erling A. Erickson, "Money and Banking in a "Bankless" State: Iowa, 1846-1857," *The Business History Review* 43, no. 2 (Summer, 1969), 172-173; Chad Allan Hauser, "Building Iron Rails To Their Future: Examination of Davenport, Iowa's Antebellum Relationship With The Rock Island Line and Mississippi and Missouri Railroads,"
Masters Thesis (Iowa State University, 2012), 72-73. Although land prices sold for $1.25 per acre, the government required payment in hard cash and many settlers needed an institution to cover the start up costs. Bankers were originally land agents before their function as credit suppliers advanced this function.

[97]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 88-89. Cook and Sargent intimately worked with Burrows and trusted him insomuch as to use him as a courier to transport a package of gold (twenty-six hundred dollars) to their branch in St. Louis.

Credit became necessary to carry on winter operations. Navigation and trade closed during the winter months because ice clogged the Mississippi River and created three to five months where commodities could not be shipped. This suspension occurred when Iowa farmers sold their wheat and hogs to merchants. But as merchants could not move the product and acquire currency, they relied on credit and bank notes to pay farmers. Bad weather dictated the importance of credit for merchants and the market economy as a whole because it manifested an obstacle for merchants to overcome. They used credit from bankers as a means to an end, which resulted in a strong relationship between mercantile and banking agencies.[98]

The newspaper was also a tool for merchants to call attention to the storefront, update the community on what merchandise was in stock, and advertise certain deals being offered. Advertising made the mercantile business a household name, the *Juliet Signal* argued, and a merchant that refrained from taking out commercial announcements suffered as a result. Advertising, the editor contended, was more efficient than a merchant's sign or the promotion by word of mouth. "It is beyond comparison the surest, cheapest and readiest way of introducing yourself to the public," the article continued, "the merchant who advertises freely, hangs up his sign in every man's parlor; his name is constantly before the community, and they unconsciously get familiar with it, and resort to him as a matter of course." Burrows advertised his produce and storefront everyday in the local newspapers in Davenport for this reason. He maximized his audience base by taking advantage of the popularity that periodicals had during this time. Advertising

[98]Albert F. Dawson, *The History of the First National Bank in the United States: A History of the First National Bank of Davenport, Iowa, Preceded By Some Account of Banking Under State Laws And Early Banking In Davenport* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1913), 17-18.

evolved to facilitate mercantile business as much as it promulgated political and social news and merchants profited from the exposure.[99]

Newspapers on the frontier kept citizens informed on social, political, and economic issues and brought civilization to the nation's hinterland. Frontier periodicals primarily disseminated the news and democratized political life but also acted as an advertiser for local commercial agencies. Merchants at the local level capitalized on the communications revolution to aid in promoting business on a local level as well as better understand the mercantile world by broadcasting grain prices to minimize the risk of misinformation. Burrows and Prettyman advertised their produce business in the *Daily Davenport Gazette* in an effort to find more farmers to sell them produce. They offered cash at market value for wheat, promoted that their steam-flouring mill was open, announced that flour was for sale, and advertised what goods were for sale. What seems ubiquitous today was revolutionary for nineteenth century merchants. Newspapers opened the opportunity for more people to see Burrows' business.[100]

Burrows and Prettyman advertised to local farmer that they would pay half cash for wheat and relied upon banks like Cook & Sargent to ensure that they had secured notes to trade. At the time, confidence in the Illinois and Indiana state-backed currency slumped. Burrows noted that in 1853-1844, his wheat receipts were so heavy that he kept Cook & Sargent's bank almost empty so much so they issued half in ninety-day bills. The firm also took out large loans from Nathan Corwith & Co. in Galena and Mr. Mobeley in

[99]"Advertising," *Juliet Signal*, June 1, 1847; *The Davenport Gazette*, July 25, 1850; *The Daily Gazette*, November 4, 1854.

[100]*Daily Davenport Gazette*, November 16, 1854. For more information about the significance of newspapers in all facets of American growth, see Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998).

Dubuque that amounted from five to ten thousand dollars during the winter season. The pressure strained Cook & Sargent's solvency, so much so that Ebenezer Cook asked Burrows to suspend payment on checks. For Burrows, this would be ruinous so he instead stalled currency payment until April. He told the farmers that if they could not wait, they could have anything they wanted in the store at cheap rates, which he deduced from their payment, or if they preferred gold instead of currency, they could wait until June to make their deposits. Burrows brought sixty thousand dollars from St. Louis and deposited it in Cook & Sargent's bank to pay the gold checks.[101]

By 1856, citizens lost confidence in the currency backed by the state of Illinois and the "wild cat" notes from Indiana. In response, Cook & Sargent issued currency from the Bank of Florence, Nebraska, through Burrows & Prettyman's firm. Burrows bought wheat from farmers using the "Florence" notes provided by Davenport's primary bank at the time. Thinking that unchartered currency would continue, Burrows invested in the circulation business and bought specie, totaling one hundred thousands dollars, from Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson in New York City for eight hundred dollars. The notes were issued jointly with the Cook's Florence notes through Burrows and Prettyman and exchanged at the Cook & Sargent for the equal value. The Davenport Board of Trade and the local merchants sponsored this currency medium at par in business. This, however, created tension and complication when the banking house Macklot & Corbin made war on Cook & Sargent's usage of "wild-cat" money in 1858. Specifically, Macklot & Corbin attacked a structural problem inherent with the special relationship between the two firms. If someone wanted to exchange one hundred dollars worth of checks at Burrows

[101]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 98-101.

and Prettyman, they would exchange it into Florence notes, which they could take to Cook & Sargent and only exchange them into Burrows & Prettyman checks. “The man was just where he had been fifteen minutes before,” Burrows wrote, “This was called, in those days, ‘swapping cats.’” The two agencies created a local currency that held no value outside Davenport’s sphere of influence.[102]

Cook & Sargent withdrew their Florence notes, which weakened the firm’s influence in banking and led to their eventual failure. Because Macklot & Corbin refused to recognize Cook’s notes, Cook & Sargent had to recall all their notes and informed Burrows & Prettyman that they would only accept Burrows’ notes on “special deposit,” which caused a run on Burrows notes. According to *The Daily Gazette*, the debasement from Macklot & Corbin created uproar among Davenport’s German citizens who held mainly Florence banknotes and came to believe their income to be completely worthless. A public demonstration organized to discuss the dire situation, but turned into a mob after being agitated by the anti-Florence side. They first went to Burrows & Prettyman’s store where they shouted, “hang them up,” and threw stones against the front window. The procession then turned to Ebenezer Cook’s residence where they yelled and groaned for him to come out. They threw rocks at his window, which struck his wife in the chest and left her injured. The violence that transpired can be seen as a moment where the mercantile and banking class’s contentious debate over sound currency injured Davenport’s residents’ sense of stability and shows the divide between business activities and the town’s laborers.[103]

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[102] *Davenport Daily* Gazette, August 10, 1858; *Davenport Daily Gazette*, August 13, 1858; Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 114-115.

[103] *Davenport Daily Gazette*, August 13, 1858; Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 114-115.

The railroad revolutionized the wheat trade, contributed to Chicago's rise in the wheat business, and created a more stable and consistent outlet for the grain trade. The opening of the Chicago & Rock Island Railroad bewildered Burrows and transformed the mode of doing business for his produce trade. The new technology drastically reduced freight prices and created a steady flow of agriculture into Chicago, and Burrows knew that his business needed to follow the trend in order to survive. His language illustrates that the marketplace evolved past his established practice in the grain trade and he needed to embrace the technological advancements. He stated that they "were induced to start a branch store in Fulton; also, a manufactory for reaping-machines and seed-sowers in the same place; also, to invest in the Fulton steam flouring-mill and operate it." Burrows had to follow the course of progress or risk being left behind. He bought up all the wheat in the surrounding Davenport area and started milling as much flour as he could and shipping it on freight cars knowing that he had a market to sell his grain. Railroads, like canals before them, drastically reduced the cost of transport and redirected the flow of wheat from natural to man-made routes.[104]

Market forces shaped Burrows' politics and business operations as they did for all western merchants. While shipping insecurities forced him to purchase crop and boat insurance, his produce business created a new culture that responded to outside influences. Burrows' commitment to credit and capital strengthened the bonds between eastern financial markets and his local economy in Davenport and his response to natural

[104]Burrows, *Fifty Years in Iowa*, 42 For more on the transportation revolution, see George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1816* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1951); to see more information about railroads and Davenport, see Hauser, "Building Iron Rails to Their Future."

obstacles compelled him to invest in storage warehouse and gristmills. His response to the railroads influence prompted him to expand his operations to best succeed in the marketplace. Burrows met financial downturn after both his flourmills collapsed due to fire. Because he had no fire insurance, his fortune evaporated and he became a casualty to the market. John Burrows was an important agent in Davenport’s economic development and he played a significant role in wheat’s movement to larger urban centers. His story was also representative of a nascent merchant culture within the United States’ economy, one that understood the benefits in a fluid and unified commercial world. As wheat left the farm, its physical origins and properties became extraneous to a new merchant culture interested in exploiting grain’s value as a practical way to make wealth. Chicago’s capitalists successfully stripped the land from the wheat and redefined grain as capital.

THE URBANIZATION OF WHEAT AND A NEW MERCHANT CULTURE

The wheat that came from the Iowa farmer's soil, bought and moved through the prairie marketplace, ended up on Chicago's streets and St. Louis' wharfs fundamentally altered from the prairie. This transformation characterized a newly emerged western political economy that reflected the nation's integration of economic, business, and capitalistic outreach. The influx brought more trade and capital to the cities, but as the *Chicago Democratic Press* remarked in late 1854, with it came a new set of problems. "The piles of grain now lying uncovered in our streets," the editor lamented, created an unorganized scene, which caused its merchants to "want more warehouse…more banks and more capital."[105] In harvest season, St. Louis and Chicago's riverfronts bustled with activity as wheat traded hands from local merchants to larger, more distant, and nebulous markets. The cities acted as a portal between land and market; a gateway for commodities to reach distant markets but also a throughway that moved imported goods into the nation's hinterland. By the 1850s, Chicago was the keystone in agricultural trade as railroads eroded at the natural river routes that made St. Louis' advantageous location the primary trading center. Though the commercial rivalry between these urban centers fell into Chicago's favor, their merchants labored to make sense of the progressive marketplace around them by responding to its pressures with tools that lubricated commerce for the mercantile class. While St. Louis merchants debated with the city's

[105]Charles Henry Taylor, ed., *History of the Board of Trade of the City of Chicago* (Chicago: Robert O. Law Company, 1917), 190-191.

legislature over a banking system that created a more fluid system for trade, Chicago's grain merchants assembled into a unified organization and standardized the wheat industry. Merchants that came together to form organizations that broadcasted the price of products, regulated the rules of commerce, and united the mercantile world created the structures of American capitalism in the West.

The ideological split between St. Louis' merchants and the legislature illustrated how banking became a flashpoint in the capitalistic development throughout the region. As the country's economy expanded, banking remained an essential tool for merchants across the nation because it provided the means to maintain control of the marketplace and was a contentious matter between the city merchants and the legislature as each side tried to maintain order in the marketplace around them. When Missouri established a new state bank in St. Louis in February 1837, merchants viewed banks as a means to have control within the marketplace whereas their hard-money opponents in the legislature, who understood banks to be a necessary evil to keep commerce running, believed banks should be governed by the state, so that they held control of the marketplace.[106]

In an address to the Senate floor in 1836, Governor Lilburn Williams Boggs addressed how the new State bank should function in the economy and highlighted the rhetoric of hard-money advocates. Boggs understood the necessity for banks and how they functioned in relation to the growth of the market economy, but balked at full dependence on foreign bank notes and the whims and fluctuations in overseas markets

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[106]William M. Snodgrass, "Order in the Marketplace: Commercial Organizations in Antebellum St. Louis," Ph. D. (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2013), 100-101. For more on the influence merchants had on the St. Louis's development see Jeffrey S. Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West: The Rise and Fall of Antebellum St. Louis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

that were unregulated and not amenable to the American laws for economic stability in Missouri. Though he recognized that foreign capital could not be expelled from the national currency and that it would continue to make up a large portion of the circulating medium, he also mistrusted currency from surrounding states. Boggs suggested that the State Bank was the sole financial institution credible throughout the state, and asserted that the branches of other state banks within the state boundaries were “unwarranted by any statute or constitutional law,” and recommended that “in addition to the entire prohibition of the circulation of their notes within our limits, such penal enactments as will, in the most summary manner, rid us of the evil.” Currency deflation, according to Boggs, plagued the economic stability in markets like St. Louis and foreign, both domestic and overseas, bank notes undermined the flow of commerce. Curiously, Boggs estimation of the market economy rejected the notion of unity within the marketplace, one where a national currency facilitated commerce and stimulated trade.[107]

By early 1837, St. Louis enjoyed economic growth and prosperity unlike most rival cities. While land sales boomed, the consistently high commodity prices and the addition of a new bank attracted pioneers moving west in all professions. The legislature moved quickly to strengthen and link the market throughout the region. Governor Lilburn Boggs advocated internal improvements and claimed that it was the state’s responsibility to facilitate intercourse, lower the costs of transportation, and “give life and vigor to agriculture and commerce.” They issued corporate charters that set in motion the construction of eighteen railroads that connected small towns to major rivers and supervised new insurance companies that insured steamboats and their cargoes in an

[107]*Journal of the Senate, Ninth General Assembly, First Session, 1836-1837*, 15-31, General Assembly, Record Group 550, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City.

attempt to expand and tap into the city's bountiful hinterland. Economic contraction later that year, however, confirmed Governor Boggs' fears and the legislature tempered its involvement in the marketplace as financial hardship ruined not only the state's solvency but also its citizens. The state recoiled its roll in the market and pushed to protect its citizens from the pitfalls inherent in a modern economy by curtailing paper currency's precarious nature.[108]

While there were ideological divides between hard and soft money advocates in St. Louis and the nation, both considered specie, whether circulated with gold and silver or paper currency, pivotal to business practices. But when the nation's economy contracted after 1837 and state banks suspended specie payments, merchants had no choice but to operate within an imperfect system. Because Missouri's hard-money faction controlled the state's bank and discontinued specie as a restraint on the marketplace, its merchants, who recognized that the marketplace worked even with unsound currency, turned to private banks and institutions. The Gaslight Company and at least three insurance companies mimicked lending agencies as they had large cash reserves and liberal credit and the city's merchants used them to offset the state's legislative attempts to limit the market's expansion. Hardened by the Bank of Illinois' failure, the Missouri legislature pointed to the instability paper money caused and pushed to eliminate it from the state's marketplace. Doing this split the banking issues on a rural and urban setting as St. Louis' merchants abandoned the state bank and used available sources. The fight over the state bank illustrated that its merchants, more concerned with capital flow and less

[108]Ibid., 22-25; John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 92-97.

with banking's infringement on republican virtues, fought to keep the marketplace open from restrictions. The hard-money factions, however, vowed to protect its citizens from the market's nefarious influences. After the Panic of 1837, however, the market affected all Americans whether or not they willingly participated or passively watched its effects shape the nation's marketplace.[109]

St. Louis' merchants learned from the Panic of 1837 that the marketplace worked more efficiently when its faculties worked in unison rather than in opposition. Banking was a tool of the market and merchants needed currency, whether state backed or wild-cat, to facilitate commerce. Hard times focused American's attention on the adverse effects intrinsic to capitalistic enterprise and unveiled the unattractive and inconsistent side of economic expansion. For some, these hard times manifested despair and hopelessness. For the nascent merchant class, reoccurring panics were just part of a new economic system. Merchants throughout the United States, however disenchanted by economic hardships, persevered with enthusiasm to maintain order in the marketplace and a new merchant culture began to take shape as a result.[110]

Chicago: The Wheat Capital

While the Erie Canal opened an outlet for commodities to flow eastward, it was the efforts of the business community around the Great Lakes region that instituted the

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[109]The Marine Insurance Company and the Perpetual Insurance Company were two of these agencies that participated as surrogate banks. Governor Thomas Reynolds attacked these institution's charters and rallied against paper money. For Reynolds, politics regulated and set the pace for market expansion. Snodgrass, "Order in the Marketplace," 125-133.

[110]Larson, *The Market Revolution*, 97; Snodgrass, "Order in the Marketplace," 125-133. For more on banking in the West see William Gerald Shade, *The Politics of Free Banking in the Old Northwest, 1837-1863* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1966) and Stephen W. Campbell, "Fighting the Bank War: How Newspapers, Banks, and the Post Office Shaped Jacksonian Era Politics, 1828-1834" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013).

canal as a commercial artery and increasingly specialized moving grain between 1836 and 1842. The centralization of wheat at port cities caused its merchants, specifically the millers or buyers, to deal with the logistical issue of moving grain and flour from port cities like Cleveland to Buffalo. Commission merchants initially acted as buyer, sellers, and transporters of grain, but as the volume of trade increased, mercantile agencies separated the established practice that conflated marketing and transportation services and specialized each facet of the grain trade. Transportation companies, such as the American Transportation Company and the Western Transportation Company, took over the shipment process, which allowed merchants to focus their energies on handling grain at major port cities. Commission merchants in Buffalo formally organized under the auspices of the Buffalo Board of Trade and acted as an official selling agent for Eastern markets. By 1845, this specialization fully developed into a significant marketplace tool that established the structures of the grain industry and solved marketing problems that arose as trade increased.[111]

By 1845, Buffalo emerged as one of the largest grain depots in the world despite its modest population of 30,000 citizens and the city's merchants handled the shipments of grain that totaled 746,750 barrels of flour and 1,770,740 bushels of wheat with the aid of technological advancements. Warehousemen employed steam-powered, endless bucket-belt to lift grain to the upper levels where it was weighted and distributed into large bins and loaded onto canal boats. These grain elevators streamlined the movement

[111]Clark Waggoner, ed., *History of the City of Toledo and Lucas County, Ohio* (New York: Munsell and Company, 1888), 450; Thomas Odle, "Entrepreneurial Cooperation on the Great Lakes: The Origin of the Methods of American Grain Marketing," *The Business History Review* 38, no. 4 (Winter, 1964), 443.

of wheat by condensing the distribution market into one location, which made the city of Buffalo an ancillary market for both eastern buyers and western sellers. Lake crafts unloaded western grain accumulated in distant urban centers onto Buffalo's grain elevators, which stored, sold or moved grain down the Erie Canal into New York and into the world marketplace.[112]

Unlike Buffalo's Board of Trade, which organized and provided an open market for grain, the board of trades for other Great Lakes cities originally organized to solve practical problems related to trade rather than the facilities for buying and selling grain. Detroit organized a Board of Trade in 1847; Cleveland and Chicago established theirs in 1848; and Milwaukee's in 1849. Each organization sought to fix inadequacies of the Lakes as a route for commerce, specifically the shallow waterway through the St. Clair River delta that connected Lake Huron and Lake Erie, which was a major concern that effected commerce in the entire Great Lake region. After the federal government balked at the opportunity to help dredge out the shallow passage at the head of the St. Clair Lake, along with the effects of the panic of 1837 that curtailed state government efforts on public works, commercial men arranged a convention at Chicago to discuss the conditions that obstructed lake commerce.[113]

The Chicago Harbor and River Convention marked an important transition for the region because it demonstrated how effective they could be as an organized agency. Major grain merchants were present during the convention such as William B. Ogden and

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[112]Odle, "Entrepreneurial Cooperation," 445-446.

[113]Ibid., 449. The situation was so dire that merchants confiscated a steam dredge owned by the federal government and towed it the 300 miles from Erie, Pennsylvania to the Flats. The project failed due to insufficient funds in the private sector. This moment, however, demonstrates an early attempt to control the commercial world around them in a physical sense.

George W. Dole of Chicago and James L. Barton of Buffalo, who made up part of its General Committee. The urgent problems that brought together the convention were solved by a rise in water levels in 1848, but the formation of sandbars around major harbors continued to be an issue for the mercantile community. Since many harbors sat at the mouth of rivers, constant sand and silt build up obstructed navigation and needed to be removed constantly. Dredging projects occurred by local boards of trades using government equipment and sponsored by municipal governments. But when the War Department refused to loan out a government-owned steam dredge in 1854 for example, the Chicago Board of Trade seized it regardless of federal support and justified that maintaining the Lakes in good condition was salient for the business community.[114]

Joseph Dart's invention of the steam-powered grain elevator relieved the *Chicago Democratic Press'* editorial complaints about a lack of storage in the city to accommodate for the increased flow of wheat. Congestion "felt different" in Chicago than St. Louis. The 2.1 million bushels of wheat that passed through St. Louis' wharf did so on hundreds of boats across its waterfront and shared the responsibility in getting the grain safely to its destination. Since trains transported nearly one million out of the three million bushels of wheat from the city's hinterland to its docks, railroad managers gained initial importance in the grain trade. At first, railroad managers placed large warehouses at a railroad's terminus in the city, which bottlenecked production capacity and limited capital returns. In response, they had incentive to streamline the process and eliminated congestion by applying the steam-powered grain elevator in the warehouse. In order for this system to work seamlessly, railroad managers redefined grain shipments and

[114]Ibid., 451; Robert Fergus, ed., *Chicago River and Harbor Convention; An Account Of Its Origin and Proceedings* (Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1882); Taylor, *History of the Board of Trade*, 188.

removed shipments as individual “sacks” from local farms but as regional “carloads” that carried nearly 325 bushels each. These multistoried warehouses held large amounts of wheat, one of the biggest being the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad warehouse which held 700,000 bushels, sorted wheat out in bins based on weight rather than volume and used conveyor belts to move the produce and distribute grain onto waiting ships. By 1857, Chicago stored more wheat than St. Louis would ship in that year and became the entrepôt where western merchants looked to sell produce.[115]

Chicago’s ability to handle and store more wheat highlighted the defects in the method that St. Louis used to move wheat around. The *Chicago Daily Press* underlined St. Louis’ dependence on manual labor to carry grain off boats onto the levee “sack by sack” where it had “the privilege of laying twenty-four hours” only to be moved again either to a warehouse or another boat.[116] The editor stressed that St. Louis’ mercantile community balked at elevator construction because they were at the Mississippi River’s bidding and could not guarantee grain would flow like a steady current as the railroads provided Chicago. The river’s fluctuating water levels hindered the advantages that grain elevators offered: If investors constructed them too close to the riverbanks, they were susceptible to floods, whereas as they were too far from the river when its tide was low. This restricted St. Louis’ capital and productivity at the same time it deterred local merchants and farmers from shipping their wheat South into the city’s market as they paid higher premiums for the labor and sacks themselves. One contemporary commented

[115]Chicago’s first warehouse was Captain Robert C. Bristol’s four-story building that held 80,000 bushels of wheat. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis,* 100-124; Guy A. Lee, “History of the Chicago Grain Elevator Industry, 1840-1890” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1938); Joseph Dart, “The Grain Elevators of Buffalo,” *Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society* 1 (1879), 391-404.

[116]Annual Review for 1857, *Chicago Daily Press, 8* in Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis,* 112.

that Chicago smiled down at St. Louis' outmoded techniques and technology and laughed "at the idea of such a town competing for the trade of the prairies with a city of seventeen elevators," where "a stranger walking along our streets might suppose that 'no business' of the kind was going on, and that times were dull."[117]

"To look back and think that trade which commenced in 1838 by a shipment of only thirty-nine bags of wheat should less than twenty years, have attained the magnitude of over twenty million bushels," the annual review of Chicago commerce reported in 1857, "is almost incredible." The first wheat shipment, mixed with Winter and Spring varietal, left Chicago October 8, 1839 in "good order and well conditioned" by a forwarding merchants Newberry & Dole on board the ship called Osceola bound for Black Rock Mills in Erie County, New York. Newberry & Dole's bill of lading recorded that the 1678 bushels of wheat originated from the city's backcountry, most likely from the local merchants who collected the crop from the region's farmers, shipped to Eastern markets for $86.77.[118]

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[117]Ibid., 8; James Parton, "The City of St. Louis," *The Atlantic Monthly* 19 (June, 1867), 656. The *Chicago Daily Press* commended the city's ability to handle, ship, store, and warehouse the enormous grain intake and described the magnitude of the task: "Our warehouses are all erected on the river and its branches, with railroad tracks running in the rear of them, so that a train of cars loaded with grain may be standing opposite one end of a large elevating warehouse, being emptied by elevators, at the rate of from six to eight thousand bushels per hour, while at the other end the same grain may be running into a couple of propellers, and be on its way to Buffalo, Oswego, Ogedensburgh or Montreal with in six or seven hours. And all this is done without any noise or bustle; and with but little labor, except that of machinery." The Illinois Central Railroad Grain Warehouses, for example, sent out twelve loaded cars and load two vessels at the same time, totaling nearly twenty-four thousand bushels per hour and they could receive twenty-four cars at the rate of eight thousand bushels per hour. Quoted from Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 113.

[118]Sixth Annual Review of the Commerce, Manufacturing, and the Public and Private Improvements of Chicago, For the Year 1857: With a Full Statement of Her System of Railroads And A General Synopsis of the Business of the City. *Chicago Daily Press*, 7; *Seventh Annual Review of the Trade and Commerce And Of The Public And Private Improvements Of The City Of Chicago, For The Years 1858; And The General Synopsis Of The Business Of The City, As Published In The Chicago Daily Press And Tribune, January 1, 1859* (Chicago: The Tribune Stream Printing Establishment, 1859), 4; Taylor, *History of the Board of Trade*, 110. Chicago's first grain merchants Newberry & Dole were pioneers in the wholesale trading in Chicago.

Chicago's merchants attributed the city's growth in the regional grain trade to the railroads that imported agriculture from hitherto isolated prairie lands in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa and contributed to Chicago becoming the great depot for produce of the entire Northwest. The annual grain shipments that came through the port emphasize the city's ascendancy. In less than two decades, Chicago increased its wheat shipments from trifling numbers to 10,783,292 bushels in 1857, which capped an upward trend that went from 2,644,860 to 7,115,270 to 9,419,365 bushels in a three-year span. By 1860, three thousand miles of steel rails penetrated the untapped prairie lands, which created a regional web that terminated at the wharves in Chicago. Rail lines, like the Galena and Chicago and the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, built through secluded acreage linked Chicago's hinterland with its market and when railroads connected the Mississippi River region, it effectively turned farmer's and merchant's commercial attention towards the Great Lakes instead of interior trade. Cheaper transportation costs, a more secure market, safer shipments, and better facilities that handled grain mitigated the insecurities inherent in river trade and redirected the flow of wheat along steel rails into modern marketplaces.[119]

Chicago's rise as the main entrepôt for western agriculture resulted in the attenuation of southern cities like St. Louis and New Orleans. Wheat receipts at St. Louis

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[119]The railroad's advent had myriad influences to the region surrounding Chicago. For one, it became the blueprint for the economical success for larger urban cities as Milwaukee vied with Chicago for the grain reservoir in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Both cities constructed railroads to get their farmer's grain to their market. By making it easier for farmers to haul their grain to an outlet, farmers were more inclined to grow more grain. Railroads bridged the market gaps and acted as an impetus to local economic growth. Railroads also carried with them different settlement patterns and higher property values, and provided jobs in construction, maintenance, and operation of its faculties. The railroad, therefore, created the framework for the grain trade after 1850 as well as western development in general. Clark, *The Grain Trade*, 251-263.

from 1853 to 1857 do not show a dramatic decline, which reached almost four million bushels for three years in a row. However, they but pale by comparison to Chicago as the city handled virtually triple the amount of grain in 1857. New Orleans and St. Louis merchants attributed to their market's decline in wheat sales, as New Orleans businessmen, for example, turned their attention to cotton sales, which made them more capital. But the cities themselves played their own part as well. St. Louis was a southern town and therefore rejected the progressive agenda espoused by Whiggish ideology. Internal improvements, whether it was the construction of plank roads or railroads, the city's government balked at investing money into the systems and programs associated with healthy commerce. Because Chicago's merchants, and the Great Lakes merchants in general, took advantage of the auspicious ramifications wrought by railroad and technology, they transformed the marketplace around them, which had profound impacts on not only the grain industry, but also the economic development in the region.[120]

While railroads manifested far-reaching effects for Chicago's hinterland and the city itself, lake transportation completed the link between a farmer' crop and its journey to eastern markets. Economic efficiency deemed the lake route cheaper than shipping wheat and flour on railcars as freight rates per bushel of wheat in the 1850s dropped enough to warrant water transport from Chicago's port to Buffalo. By 1858, the rate from the Chicago market was between four and six cents and tolls on a bushel of wheat from Buffalo to New York was around four cents. This totaled between eight and ten cents to ship wheat between Chicago and New York. This drastic reduction in freight rates gave

[120]Ibid., 30-32; also see Adler, *Yankee Merchants and the Making of the Urban West* and Scott P. Marler, *The Merchants' Capital: New Orleans and the Political Economy of the Nineteenth-Century South.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin farmers and merchants a competitive advantage over their Ohio and Michigan counterparts to supply the East with grain. Chicago's storage capacity during winter months allowed its merchants to buy wheat year round, which they shipped when navigation opened. Lake vessels, mostly three-masted schooners and steamers, carried most of the 212,000 tons in grain in 1851, which rose to 400,000 tons in 1860. It made economical sense to transport grain on the lakes for lake city merchants because it commanded more capital for both farmer and merchant and created a stable system that benefited the entire business community at large; a network that ordered the regional marketplace to work to their advantage.[121]

Pressured by the explosive results wrought by railroads and increased European demands for grain during the Crimean War, Chicago's merchants worked to make the grain trade coherent and unified in an effort to systematize the process and eliminate ineffectiveness. During the 1850s, these market forces provided a catalyst for the city's merchants. They gathered under the auspices of the Chicago Board of Trade and cultivated a centralized market that regulated Chicago's grain trade, promulgated rules, and set uniform standards for all merchants that used its market. This transformation reshaped not only the way business transpired within the city's purview, but also set in motion a standardization of a new mercantile culture throughout the West.[122]

The most important contribution that resulted from the mercantile convention was the wheat industry's transformation, specifically the establishment of standard grain

[121]Congress and Palestine. Congress and Palestine Logbook. 1844-1848. Western Reserve Historical Society; George G. Tunnell, "Report to the Bureau of Statistics on Lake Commerce," *House Documents*, 55 Cong., 2 Sess., No. 277 (1898), Serial 3679, 28; Clark, *The Grain Trade*, 278-288.

[122]Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 116-117.

grades and the advent of a new marketing system called “to arrive” contracts. The economic panic of 1857 crippled the acceptance marketing system and exposed its weaknesses in relation to maintaining fluid commerce. Variances in wheat quality, economic instability, and the pitfalls caused by unpaid debt created a fragile infrastructure and disrupted both the producer and consumer side of the equation. The transition to grain standardization accompanied the implementation of “to arrive” contracts as each function complemented the other. Under contracts for future delivery, the price of sale was settled in advance of shipment, which created more time between sale and delivery but reduced the lag between the purchaser and the sale to the consumer. This marketing strategy reduced the need for credit, stabilized grain prices, and in turn made shipments safer to insure. Formerly, large commission houses purchased surplus wheat on credit, which predicated value on the fluctuations of the market. “It was…always a necessary mode of conducting the business,” one contemporary commented about the perils of the acceptance system, and if the value of wheat fell “then the commission house failed, and often the ruin extended widely into the interior.” Merchants reformed the old system by creating contracts that were settled on a fixed price and paid out on delivery instead of loaning cash up front creating fiscal security.[123]

In order for this new marketing system to function, merchants adopted a grading system that established a standard for trading wheat. The Chicago Board of Trade transformed the wheat industry by designating three categories of wheat --- white winter, red winter and spring --- to set standards based on the quality or grade of grain. The implementation of the grade system solved the issue of mixing different owners grain

[123]Odle, “Entrepreneurial Cooperation,” 453.

once it arrived at the elevators as well as it smoothed out the “to arrive” system. No longer did Chicago commission merchants have to send samples or certificate of quality to Buffalo that proved a certain grain conditions sold by an independent seller. As long as the industry treated wheat on a grading scale, shippers who dropped off grain to the elevators received a receipt for the grade of wheat they delivered. Anyone with that receipt could return and receive an equal quantity of equally graded grain. Once a wheat shipment left port, the buyer knew they would receive a quantity that represented an industry standard, which eliminated the unknown element that interfered with fluid trade. The grading system simplified a problem for the Chicago wheat merchants but separated the physical ownership to a theoretical one based on receipts and later on future and speculative options. This can be seen as a moment where the business community created a division between the farmer and consumer that had profound implications for the marketplace.[124]

To ensure that the grain elevators abided by the Board’s new grading system, they appointed official grain inspectors who were responsible for maintaining quality throughout the city. These inspectors visited city elevators and checked that each bin represented the quality they claimed in their shipments. Inspections, one historian argued, “underpinned the integrity of the grading system, which underpinned the integrity of the elevators, which underpinned the integrity of the Board’s own markets.”[125] While

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[124]Ibid., 154; Taylor, *History of the Board of Trade of the City of Chicago*, 220-221, 228. The Chicago Board of Trade finalized the grading system to actually have six grades with distinct descriptions. No. 1 White Wheat, No. 1 Red Wheat, and No. 1 Spring Wheat characterized a plump berry, well cleaned and free from other grains. No. 2 Red and No. 2 Spring Wheat were determined to be anything less than the standard of No. 1. The last category, Refuse Wheat, included all unsound or dirty wheat. Also see Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 117-119.

[125]Ibid., 119.

inspection fraud occurred, the Board and the mercantile class had an invested interest in honoring the grading system. If grading failed at this juncture, it failed for all merchants that benefited from its formation. The Board sought out and replaced dishonest and incompetent inspectors and dissuaded merchants from fraudulent behavior when they wrote standardized grades and inspection rules into Illinois law in 1859. Grain merchants that joined the Board's private membership swore an oath that bound them the to the bylaws passed by its committee. In essence, the Board became a self-regulating entity with legal power over its merchant's conduct and business practices. The Board's right to regulate trade and character on its employees signified that it governed the grain market as a whole.[126]

The revolutionary changes in Chicago's grain market reshaped how merchants traded wheat as new technology and a centralized market stripped grain from its labor and identity as a physical crop from the prairie land. The buyer no longer knew that the wheat he bought came from an Iowa farmer and, instead, only held stock in the regional wheat aggregate. Grain elevators performed similar functions that banks had in that farmers or shippers deposited their crops in exchange for a receipt that redeemed similar, but not the same, graded grain. Chicago's enormous and constant grain supply theoretically guaranteed that notes were backed up in its vaults, or warehouses, and merchants could conduct trade simply by exchanging receipts, which created a new currency supported not by gold but by grain. The elevators, governed and regulated by the city's Board of Trade, "accomplished the transmutation of one of humanity's oldest foods," one historian argued, by "obscuring its physical identity and displacing it into the

[126]Ibid.

symbolic world of capital." This transformation distanced the politics between farmers and merchants as each came to see wheat through different market lenses.[127]

As railroads and technology propelled merchants in the marketplace to create new applications that enhanced trade, the communication revolution moved news at an exponentially faster rate, which shaped cultural change for western merchants as well as the nation. Information and speed were keys to effective business. Before 1840, market news stemmed from New York City and dispersed into the country by steamers and relay express riders and news, on average, reached the Appalachian foothills in five day, ten to arrive in Philadelphia and over a month and a half to get to what would become Chicago. Merchants predicated their activity on delayed knowledge, so being the first to know crop prices and security fluctuations from abroad had an advantage over others. But the expansion of the national postal service, which accompanied westward expansion and what one historian called "the lifeblood of the communication system," overthrew the tyranny of distance and time and what one great contemporary called a "great link between minds" that penetrated into "the heart of the wilderness." After 1840, the time-lag for public information from New York City decreased over seventy-five percent as Chicago received reports in only ten days.[128]

While grain elevators obscured wheat's physical nature, the telegraph diminished its connection with geography. By 1860, 56,000 miles of telegraph wire stretched throughout the nation and shortened communication between major urban centers from

[127]Ibid., 120. Also see Joseph J. Klein, "The Development of Mercantile Instruments of Credit in the United States," *Journal of Accountancy* 12 (1911), 321-45, 422-49, 526-37, 594-607.

[128]Quotations from Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 225, 222-227; Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information, 1790-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 13, 31, 36-46.

hours to seconds. From its inception, the telegraph linked the nation together at the same time it “became the handmaiden of commerce.”[129] Western and eastern markets became increasingly synchronized and merchants who had better information about commodity prices had a better opportunity for future trade. One lucky merchant, the *Chicago Democrat* observed, received a telegraph that suggested that wheat’s value would rise and he went to the docks and bought a man’s cargo for eighty cents per bushel. “In less than fifteen minutes,” the editor wrote, “the market rose to eighty-five, and the fortunate possessor of the news by the last flash pocketed the cool five hundred.”[130] Faster information created a more efficient market economy assuaged the dangers and uncertainties that plagued local merchants on the frontier and knowledge about foreign or local events dictated prices both in Chicago and New York. The telegraph brought hitherto isolated local economies into a “national mind” or “new market geography” concerned more with commodity prices and information about the economy than with soils, climate, and farm conditions.[131]

The organization revolution occurred in all major markets throughout the nation’s interior and while Chicago’s Board of Trade grew into the preeminent agency in the region, other boards of trades formed to broadcast prices for the merchants and business community in their area. St. Louis’ merchants, working within the structures of the

[129]Quoted from Richard DuBoff, “Business Demand and the Development of the Telegraph in the United States, 1844-1860,” *The Business History Review* 54, no. 4 Business History and the History of Technology (Winter, 1980), 459.

[130]Taylor, *History of the Board of Trade*, 1:147; Buffalo experienced the telegraph’s favorable effects well before Chicago. See John Langdale, “The Impact of the Telegraph on the Buffalo Agricultural Commodity Market: 1846-1848,” *Professional Geographer* 31 (1971), 165-69; Pred, *Urban Growth*, 151-156.

[131]DuBoff, “Business Demand and the Development of the Telegraph,” 459; Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 121.

market economy, created an institution that organized the business world by consolidating commercial activities into one shared experience. The St. Louis Exchange brought buyers and sellers together as well as it brought together the Chamber of Commerce, Post Office, and insurance company agents. Disputes were settled within the confines of the Chamber through the Committees of Arbitration and Appeals. As merchants consolidated the many different aspects of commerce, they began to take control of the market from those outside the confines of the Exchange.

The publication of commercial advertisers that reviewed the trade and commerce of city markets allowed the hinterland to be informed of the general trends of the national marketplace. The annual trade and commerce statements in cities like Buffalo, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Minneapolis focused on the state of the wheat, flour, and grain industry in their respective regions and this singular focus reinforced the assertion that grain, and, more fundamentally, agriculture was at the heart of the antebellum economy. These reports ranged from the condition of banks to the price and receipts of wheat and flour for a given period of time. This information gave larger firms and smaller dealers the knowledge to make smart decisions backed by informed judgments. The *Ottowa Free Trader* encouraged all merchants to be a part of the larger mercantile world by subscribing to commercial agencies. “Every step taken independent from them is dangerous,” the editor proclaimed, and argued that the commercial agency was “a business record office, where all the details are gathered in regard to character, capital, and social standing of business men in all sections of the country.” These agencies warned the merchant of faulty creditors and fraudulent traders, aided in established safe connections between county and city merchant to conduct honesty business, and curbed rash speculation and overtrading. “Commercial agencies,” the article continued, “may be justly called one of the *chief aids* to commerce” at a local and national level and for all institutions related to trade.[132]

On a larger scale, merchant networks liberated the volatility of space and time. Hunt’s Merchant Magazine, Chicago’s Board of Trade, and other merchant journals created a sense of unity and promulgated rules in the mercantile world. Hunt’s magazine provided the information and knowledge necessary to guide the adventures of merchants to successful termination and explained the complex and difficult commercial world that evolved at random. Hunt’s first volume began with understanding the need for an interconnected mercantile community. “There is a demand for the publication of a magazine like this, by the commercial community,” who often failed in their ventures because “the sources whence it is to be obtained are not always accessible, and operations are often begun in a reckless spirit of speculation, and end, as might have been anticipated, in defeat, simply because some element necessary to success, or some piece of information essential to the adventure, had, in the ardor of pursuit, been disregarded.” These networks, like the Buffalo and Chicago Board of Trade, publicized wheat and grain prices at major market centers and highlighted trends and the possible commercial future in an attempt to minimize risk and maximize profit. But Hunt’s objectives were to raise and elevate the commercial character to be more than just an accumulation of

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[132]“Commercial Agencies,” *The Ottawa Free Trader*, May 2, 1857. For examples of commercial agencies see *The Commercial Advertiser’s Twentieth Annual Statement of the Trade and Commerce of Buffalo, for 1857, Including Statistics, Showing The Whole Export of Flour and Grain From The Lake Regions, Together With A Brief Notice of the Manufactures of the City* (Buffalo: Commercial Advertiser Steam Press, 1858); *A Review of the Trade, Commerce and Manufactures of Cincinnati, For the Commercial Year Ending August 31st, 1850, As Reported to the Camber of Commerce, And Published in the Cincinnati Price Current* (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, 1850).

money but a “profession embracing and requiring more varied knowledge, and general information of the soil, climate, production, and consumption.”[133]

Another Panic, A Different Response

After twenty years, the American economy matured into a highly dynamic system delicately hinged on the relationships between producers and distant markets, speculative currency and responsible debt provided by sound banking, land sales and railroad stocks, and the confidence from the American people that the business world could handle the market’s volatile fluctuations. But in 1857, panic struck again from the heart of the commercial world as the New York stock market overcommitted to land and railroad sales, defaulted on stocks and lost over $300,000,000 million dollars overnight. Dubious business practices by railroad companies, like the Michigan Southern, revealed that officers had robbed the company’s coffers, which left stockholders in New York holding deflated shares. This situation coupled with perceptive financial men, who balked at reinvestments after the initial plummet, caused regional banks, like the Ohio Life & Trust Co., to default on loans back in New York. The *Ottawa Free Trader* covered the “extreme gloom” that spread like “wild fire” over the country, which caused a general milieu where, as the editor succinctly phrased it, “everybody lost confidence in everybody.”[134]

Confidence was paramount for an American economy that functioned on a system based on artificial currency and distant market trading. The Panic of 1857 demonstrated another example of how economic contraction traveled down capitalism’s chain of

[133]*Hunt’s Merchant Magazine*, vol. 1 (1839): 1-3.

[134]“Progress of the Panic,” *The Ottawa Free Trader*, October 10, 1857.

command from New York financial institutions to small western towns in tiers. As Wall Street faltered, it caused doubt and fear in Chicago, which supplied stability for the Upper Mississippi Valley's money markets. Merchants who carried currency backed by Illinois and Wisconsin banks found it hard to pay eastern creditors because they could not procure exchange and their money became worthless. Farmers who held debts with their local merchant could not settle up because there was no market for grain. Consequently, the local merchant could not pay the city merchant who could not meet the demands from the banks that recalled loan to remain solvent. Everything was at a stand still and from one end of the country to the other, the business world tumbled together. But confidence, the *Ottawa Free Trader* reminded its readers, was the stimulus to a modern economy that boomed in the 1840s and early 1850s. In fact, if banking houses failed during prosperous times, than it was due to faulty and unsound business practices and commerce would become better and stronger without them. The marketplace weeded out the losers and rewarded the winners. "Further failures may undoubtedly take place before general confidence is restored," the periodical proclaimed, "but it is a favorable circumstance that such disasters have been looked for some time past, and are therefore not likely seriously to affect the market long," and "apart from these possible troubles, there can be no question that commercial men are already seeing how baseless is the actual panic, while a similar feeling is apparently entering into financial circles." It was the commercial world that insulated the rest of the nation from the nefarious effects of the marketplace even though the panic stemmed from the core of its institutions.[135]

[135]Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The new merchant culture that emerged in the antebellum American West, from the concentrated commercial activity in urban centers to local brokers in small villages, believed in the system they built. Confidence in the complex trading network, the cash and credit institutions used to finance the system, the technology developed to solve issues of time and space, and the credence that this capitalistic world created rules by which all commerce operated, was paramount. Unity also underlined this enterprising class in the sense that wheat merchants in the nation's interior bought into the directives made by the Chicago Board of Trade because commerce worked better within the union rather than outside its purview. Merchants expanded the structures and tried to make sense of the market revolution, but the market's capricious nature taught them that it was just as elusive to control. Entrepreneurs participated in the marketplace with aspirations of wealth and power, risked significant capital and reputation to achieve it, and often failed in the heartless expanding markets. Republicanism, the social and economic values in the nineteenth-century that valued the guarantee of liberty to all, allowed Americans to embrace taking a risk that put many Americans in a vulnerable state of financial ruin. The economic fluctuations that resulted from a modern market economy forced the mercantile class to look within to justify their success or failure in the marketplace. In a capitalistic world, a merchant's actions defined his character.[136]

[136]Larson, *The Market Revolution in America*, 135.

The modern capitalist society transformed what business activity meant for the public good. Debt, credit, and risk, once thought about as excess and a lack of restraint, became a necessary responsibility for enterprise and advanced the public welfare. The individual character became an important tool that weeded out risky, dishonorable businessmen and championed virtuous and moral commerce. Founded in 1841 by Lewis Tappan, R.G. Dun & Company established America's first commercial reporting agency that sent agents into merchant stores throughout the nation and cataloged a business's integrity. These accounts were available for all who subscribed and pressured merchants to conduct sound business as well as created a transparent commercial world; a dubious businessman would be branded as such and lost clients. These credit reports, coupled with the contemporary literature that dictated virtuous commercial stature, developed a framework for all business to follow. John McDowell Burrows was a virtuous merchant. Not prone to drink, and respected in Davenport, his honorable trade enhanced his frontier enterprise. Burrows, however, lost everything when fire burnt down his mills and storage facilities twice. Without fire insurance, the only thing he lacked in the new merchant culture was a full subscription to the capitalist world. Even as a model entrepreneur, Burrows lost in the marketplace because he did not exploit the institutions created to protect him.[137]

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[137]R.G. Dun & Company credit report volumes are located in the Baker Library at Harvard Business School. These reports shed light on the growing geography of capital as well as merchant culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These valuable reports are a source that historians have turned their attention to understand the complex business world and would be a wealth of knowledge that would have enhanced the analysis in this project. See Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 263-333; Larson, *The Market Revolution in America*, 136.

By the end of the 1850s, Chicago's merchants thrived as they created institutions that changed wheat's tangible properties as a product from a farmer's labor and land to an abstract commodity traded with receipts without a stalk of grain moving an inch. The telegraph's advent, or more importantly its incorporation into the marketplace, strengthened business connections across the nation and conquered the structural difficulties inherent in spreading the news and commodity prices as well as the tyranny of space and time. While changes in technology radically changed the way Americans traded wheat, it was the futures market that exposed hazards in the system that relied upon labor they did not control. Future trading, or the theoretical exchange between a buyer and seller on grain that was not available at the moment of the transaction, used forecast reports to speculate the price of wheat. No longer were Chicago grain markets concerned with the agricultural world where wheat originated as they were with price speculation at a later date. Futures, and later commodity corners, fashioned a sense that the market was no longer natural and free but guided and maximized by wealth grain traders. The artificial second nature built by Chicago merchants created a sentiment amongst rural farmers, the laborers in the equation, that Chicago's marketplace benefited most in the grain trade. For the decades after the Civil War, farmers developed a profound distrust towards the mystifying markets run by profit-seeking capitalists.[138]

In the ideal agrarian republic, independent yeomen farmers populated the nation. They were masters of the land, their household, and free from oppressive governance. Americans moved into the nation's unsettled hinterland with both a republican ideology

[138]One historian called the futures market as a place where "men who don't own something are selling that something to men who don't really want it." See Morton Rothstein, "Frank Norris and Popular Perceptions of the Market," *Agricultural History* 56 (1982), 56; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 120-132.

that tethered freedom with the land and a Yankee understanding that the market also provided individual liberty. Some speculated in land value, others used their labor to advance themselves, but the majority of Americans had integrated principles of land and market. Western farmers found themselves at a crossroads; in order to preserve the ideals inherent in classical republicanism, they had to buy into liberal capitalism. Land provided freedom, but at a cost that put the farmer in the underbelly of American capitalism. When a farmer purchased and cultivated land, he did so as a debtor, which drew the western farmer further into a market economy that required capital to pay off obligations. Hedging their luck on agriculture, they felt marginalized in the marketplace as they witnessed the emerging urbanization of wheat and the merchant class that ran its system bore the fruits of the farmers labor. In the antebellum West, Americans experienced an intersection between two rival ideologies for the country's future.

The caricatured figures pasted into the merchant's ledger conceptualized the themes and currents Americans experienced in the nineteenth-century. It represented a passage from classical republicanism to liberal capitalism on the one hand, and how the market shaped two distinct cultures based on people and place. The market encroached into the agrarian ideal slowly, but not without the farmer's participation as a consumer and producer, at the same time it shaped how farmers approached husbandry and farm management. The merchant fully embraced the market revolution and used its tools to build the structures of the industry and took advantage of the yeomen farmer as a source of its labor. Wheat itself also experienced a dramatic change in the market as it went form a physical plant grown from the soil to a medium traded in a financial money market to a distilled substance.

By following wheat from the farm to market, one can better understand the dynamic change that wrought nineteenth-century western life in an expanding market economy. The politics of prairie farmers argued that the market's forces sculpted how Iowan farmers cultivated the land and entrenched them further into a debtor's economy, at the same time as it developed the nation's, and subtly eroded principles of freedom and land. The subsequent chapters illustrated the journey wheat took once it left the farm and how it changed as a result. From a sack to a receipt, wheat's value to the farmer and merchant were similar in that wheat was a means to make capital. But merchants divorced themselves from the rural world from where it grew and forced their energies on the second, manmade nature in the urban cities and a national commercial network.

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