

# FROM FATHERS TO FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE: THE POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL AMERICA, 1775-1810

*Alan Taylor*

(Boston University)

Taking their cue from the social order in Great Britain, most colonial Americans accepted that public authority should be exercised by men who belonged to the so-called «better sort». The phrase referred to an élite who combined superior wealth with genteel manners, classical learning, and a reputation for rigid integrity. Prior to their Revolution, Americans presumed that social, political, and cultural authority should be united in an order of gentlemen. Artisans and common farmers could vote and could hold offices in their locality – offices such as surveyors of roads or viewers of fences, offices that bore little honor, no pay, but some manual labor. But it was unthinkable that any man without all the attributes of gentility should seek the more honorific and lucrative public offices at the county or provincial level. «Surely», Robert Morris of Philadelphia insisted, «persons possessed of knowledge, judgement, information, integrity, and having extensive connections, are not to be classed with persons void of reputation or character». Almost universal and unquestioning expectation, rather than formal law, underlay the unitary authority of the genteel in Colonial America. For lack of an aristocratic establishment, gentility in America depended almost exclusively on acceptance by an audience. You were a gentlemen only if other people publicly conceded that you had crossed, by breeding and education, that critical line separating the genteel few from the common many<sup>1</sup>.

Sheer wealth was necessary but not sufficient for gentility. Consequently,

<sup>1</sup> Gordon S. Wood, «Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution», in Richard Beeman, et al., eds., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1987), 69-109. Morris quoted 100; Charles S. Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1952), 2-8, 60-69; Edwin M. Cook, Jr., *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore, 1976), 95-118, 143-163; Robert Zernsky, *Merchants, Farmers, and River Gods: An Essay on Eighteenth-Century American Politics* (Boston, 1971), 39-74; J.R. Pole, «Historians and the Problem of Early American Democracy», *American Historical Review* 67 (1961-62): 626-646; Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders*, 39-59; Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*, 174-208; Rhys Isaac, «Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists' Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775», *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. Ser., XXXI (1974), 350-352; Richard L. Bushman, «American High-Style and Vernacular Cultures», in Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1984), 353, 356-364.

social mobility was vaguely suspect as subversive of a recognized and respected social hierarchy. The self-made man was vulnerable to the biting epithet of «mushroom gentleman» – one who had sprung up overnight from the dung. A man of new wealth needed the approval of those already accepted by themselves and others as possessing the attributes of gentility. Nothing was considered more foolish, more fit for satire, than the presumptuous upstart who assumed airs he could not master. The acquisition of wealth was the easiest and, usually, the first attainment of gentility. The man who achieved new wealth almost invariably lagged in his acquisition of the other attributes of gentility: polished manners, urbane tastes, literary and legal sophistication, and a reputation for rigid rectitude. Eighteenth-century Americans tended to suspect that the *nouveau riche* could rarely succeed in assuming the *character* of true gentlemen; the crafty arts that facilitated success in commercial competition – in speculative buying and selling – were at odds with the uncompromising integrity of the ideal gentleman. The true gentleman was supposed to rise above daily activity in, and dependence upon, the market. Only those who felt secure in their wealth and leisure could become sufficiently «disinterested», sufficiently «virtuous», to wield authority for the common good<sup>2</sup>.

Colonial society was never fully congruent with the hierarchical ideal of the British empire. Indeed, the acceptance that new families could rise to gentility and authority was a concession to America's divergence from British conditions: to the relative abundance of land and the greater volatility of commerce in the New World. Moreover, because so few American gentlemen could sustain their wealth without continued activity in the marketplace, reputations for disinterested integrity could rarely stand close scrutiny. But, determined to approximate the mores and manners of the imperial center, most leading colonists felt defensive, rather than laudatory, about the relative instability and provinciality of their social order. Moreover, during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the older counties along the Atlantic seaboard were rapidly becoming more complex, crowded societies where the élites enjoyed increasing wealth and power<sup>3</sup>.

The eight years of revolutionary war checked and, at least temporarily, reversed the drift toward a more hierarchical social order. The war divided and harried the genteel sort. The fighting drove out those who remained loyal to the empire, disrupted the established trade routes within the empire favored by more conservative merchants, and frequently interrupted the operations of the judicial system. At the same time, the war expanded popular participation in market transactions and it schooled people in cunning and ambition. The war created unprecedented opportunities for aspiring men – opportunities to

<sup>2</sup> Wood, «Interests and Disinterestedness», 85-89.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth A. Lockridge, «Social Change and the Meaning of the American Revolution», *Journal of Social History*, VI (1973), 403-439; Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, 68-108; Wood, «Interests and Disinterestedness», 97-99.

compete for an expanded number of electoral offices, to supply armies, to engage in privateering, to speculate in public securities, or to exploit the rapidly inflating currency to pay back debts at a fraction of their original value. The Revolution's political turbulence and economic volatility rewarded the shrewd, the aspiring, and hampered those who were slow to adjust or who paused to moralize. In business and politics new men were conspicuous. A Connecticut man lamented,

Every man wants to be a judge, a justice, a sheriff, a deputy, or something else which will bring him a little money, or what is better, a little authority<sup>4</sup>.

Most American gentlemen eschewed Loyalism and supported the new American republic in hopes of controlling the Revolution and minimizing social upheaval. They felt threatened by the presumptuous new men who pushed their way into revolutionary committees and legislative assemblies. In 1776 James Otis complained, «When the pot boils, the scum will rise». Most of the new men possessed some wealth but few of the other traditional attributes of social superiority. Insisting that every society had a natural aristocracy, the republic's gentlemen hoped that independence from British control would allow the meritorious to rise gradually and gracefully to their proper honors. But this hope for a republican meritocracy meant no abolition of hierarchical ranks with a distinct and unitary élite at the pinnacle. Those who acquired new property in the republic were supposed to take the further pains to polish themselves into cultured and cosmopolitan gentlemen and to await social acceptance by the genteel before they sought political authority. Gentlemen expected the new men to prove themselves at least as solicitous of their standing in the eyes of the genteel few as of their popularity with the common many. Otherwise, as the established gentlemen saw it, the new men would lack the strength of character to resist the temptations of turning demagogue in dangerous appeals to the prejudices of the turbulent many<sup>5</sup>.

### I. *Fathers of the people*

William Cooper and Henry Knox were two of the aggressive new men who rose to wealth and power during the years of war (1775-1783) and of national consolidation (1784-1791). There were striking similarities in their origins. Both men began in modest circumstances; Henry Knox was born in 1750 in Boston, the son of a Scotch-Irish master-mariner whose business failed in 1756 and who died six years later, when Henry was twelve. William Cooper was born in Byberry township, near Philadelphia, in 1754, the third son of a Quaker farmer. Both men were apprenticed in artisan trades: Knox as a book-binder and Cooper as a wheelwright. Neither man received more than the

<sup>4</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), 399 (quote), 476-483; Wood, «Interests and Disinterestedness», 78-80.

<sup>5</sup> Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 476 (quote), 479-480.

rudiments of a grammar school education. But, as young men, they were physically impressive: tall, strong, heavily built, but handsome. They were hearty, talkative, genial, gregarious, generous, flamboyant, and witty men who made friends easily. A political foe once conceded, «Knox is the easiest man and has the most dignity of presence. Knox stayed the longest, as indeed suited his aspect best, being more of a Bacchanalian figure». James Fenimore Cooper recalled William Cooper as «my noble looking, warm hearted, witty father, with his deep laugh, sweet voice, and fine rich eye, as he used to lighten the way, with his anecdote and fun»<sup>6</sup>.

Both men began their ascents with fortunate marriages to the daughters of relatively wealthy and influential gentlemen. Each married at age twenty-one, unusually early for men in colonial America, especially for those with only modest resources. In June 1771 Knox married Lucy Flucker over the strong opposition of her shocked parents who belonged to Boston's social élite: Thomas Flucker was the provincial secretary for Massachusetts and his wife Hannah was the daughter of Brigadier General Samuel Waldo, who had been the largest landholder in New England. In December 1774 Cooper eloped with and married Elizabeth Fenimore, the daughter of a wealthy Quaker landholder in Burlington County, New Jersey. In each case, the new in-laws swallowed their pride and extended financial assistance that rescued Knox and Cooper from manual labor by elevating them into the ranks of shopkeeper-entrepreneurs. A month after his marriage, Knox opened a stationary and book shop in Boston. By 1780 William Cooper owned a general store in Burlington City<sup>7</sup>.

During the war years Knox enjoyed a more meteoric rise by virtue of his enthusiastic participation in the Revolution. As the imperial crisis deepened, Knox was smitten with military ambition; he voraciously read books about military discipline and engineering, and he eagerly served as an officer in Boston's élite militia units drawn from the most respectable tradesmen and merchants. When the Revolutionary War began, Knox was one of the new army's few officers with a sound technical knowledge of artillery and military engineering. He parlayed his knowledge and his ebullient personality into a lifelong friendship with George Washington and into a rapid promotion through

<sup>6</sup> North Callahan, *Henry Knox, General Washington's General* (New York, 1958), 16-17, 23, 281 (MacClay quote); Cyrus Eaton, *History of Thomaston, Rockland, and South Thomaston, Maine...* (Hallowell, 1865), I, 214-215; Lyman H. Butterfield, «Judge William Cooper (1754-1809): A Sketch of his Character and Accomplishments». *New York History*, XXX (1949), 388, 396, James Fenimore Cooper (grandson of the novelist). *The Legends and Traditions of a Northern County* (Cooperstown, N.Y., 1936), 14; James Fenimore Cooper to Susan DeLancey Cooper, June 12, 1834, in James Franklin Beard, *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, Five Vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), III, 41; W.W. Cooper, «Cooper Genealogy», New York State Historical Association, *Proceedings*, XVI (1917), 192-199.

<sup>7</sup> George DeCou, *Burlington: A Provincial Capital* (Philadelphia, 1945), 115-116; Callahan, *Henry Knox*, 24-29; James Fenimore Cooper (grandson of the novelist), *Reminiscences of Mid-Victorian Cooperstown and a Sketch of William Cooper* (Cooperstown, N.Y., 1936), 17; James Fenimore Cooper (grandson of the novelist), *Legends and Traditions*, 221; Butterfield, «Judge William Cooper», 386-388.

the Continental ranks, rising to Brigadier General within eighteen months, and to Major General by the war's end. Among the officer corps and war contractors he developed an extensive network of useful friends who enjoyed powerful positions in the post-revolutionary order. Appointed the United States' Secretary of War in 1785, Knox held the post, at first under the Confederation and later under George Washington's administration, until 1794. He used his clout and army contracts to nurture his friends and garner extensive interests in an array of speculative land companies spread along almost the entire frontier arc from the Ohio territory through New York's St. Lawrence valley to Maine. By contrast, until 1786, William Cooper remained an obscure storekeeper because he had invoked his Quaker pacifism to stay out of the war<sup>8</sup>.

During the 1780s, Cooper and Knox bid for membership in the ranks of America's wealthiest and most powerful men by acting with aggressive cunning to gain control of vast tracts of land on the frontier. They exploited the postwar opportunity to obtain thousands of acres at a critical moment when frontier land values were depressed, but about to soar, when frontier land titles were tangled and uncertain, but about to become more secure. Prior to the Revolution, most of the then accessible tracts of wilderness on the frontier arc from Georgia to Maine belonged to wealthy and politically well-connected land speculators. The years of war and political turmoil ruined the plans and fortunes of many of those speculators who had gone deeply into debt to obtain their tracts or who remained loyal to the British empire. The long years of brutal warfare with Indians and with loyalist partisans along the frontier drove out settlers and depressed land values. Most of the speculators who remained loyal to the empire had their land claims confiscated or, at least, paralyzed during the war years by the new state republics and their new courts. But Cooper and Knox recognized that frontier lands would inevitably soar in value as young families in the relatively crowded east took advantage of the return of peace to migrate north and west to seek new farms. Cooper and Knox saw the opportunity to make their fortunes by employing their political connections to win legal control of certain contested frontier properties in advance of the inevitable tide of settlement. During the 1780s Cooper and Knox embarked on successful land grabs that came at the expense of older, more conservative interests who had been slow to protect and develop their claims. In the process, they acted as new men rather than with the restraint expected of gentlemen<sup>9</sup>.

The centerpiece of Knox's frontier empire was his controlling interest in the Waldo Patent, a tract of over half-a-million acres located in Maine along

<sup>8</sup> Calahan, *Henry Knox*; W.W. Cooper, «Cooper Genealogy», 199. William Cooper's brother James served in the Continental Army during the war.

<sup>9</sup> For the Maine frontier during the Revolution see Adele E. Plachta, «The Privileged and the Poor: A History of the District of Maine, 1771-1793», (Ph.d. diss., University of Maine at Orono, 1975) and Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 14-18. For the Otsego country during the war see James Arthur Frost, *Life on the Upper Susquehanna, 1783-1860* (New York, 1951), 4-5; Francis Whiting Halsey, *The Old New York Frontier: Its Wars with Indians and Tories, Its Missionary Schools, Pioneers and Land Titles, 1614-1800* (New York, 1912), 211-243.

the west bank of Penobscot Bay. On the eve of the Revolution, Lucy Knox's parents owned three-fifths of the Waldo Patent. Loyalists, the Fluckers fled to England during the war. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts confiscated their property, but Knox exercised his political influence to reserve one-fifth to his wife Lucy and, in 1784, to secure his own appointment as the state's agent to manage the confiscated two-fifths. As the agent, Knox was bound to satisfy the many claims by the Fluckers' creditors, claims that threatened to eat up the entire value of the two-fifths. In 1791 Knox used misleading advertising and intermediaries to manage the public auction of the two-fifths in a manner that ultimately secured him possession at the bargain price of \$ 3000, less than a sixth of the price he would pay two years later to the other heirs of Brigadier Waldo for their two-fifths of the patent. One of the intermediaries reassured the anxious General that the sale had been

well conducted and... I believe not more than two in the room had the least idea that it was purchased for you and I assure you not one possible reflection or insinuation has been or can be made, as it respects you in this business.

The creditors had to accept payment from the auction's paltry \$ 3000 proceeds, less Knox's considerable expenses as agent. In the end the Commonwealth netted nothing from its confiscation of Flucker's estate, because Knox's expenses and a small part of the creditors' claims exhausted the entire \$ 3000<sup>10</sup>.

In a parallel set of political and legal maneuvers, William Cooper (in partnership with Andrew Craig until 1798) obtained a tract of 29,000 acres of fertile land beside Lake Otsego in central New York. The tract had originally been patented by the Province of New York in 1769 to Colonel George Croghan, an Indian agent and trader. Deeply in debt and harried by multiple creditors, Croghan sold or mortgaged and remortgaged his Otsego lands in the years preceding the Revolution. The war halted his efforts to redeem the mortgages by retailing farm-sized lots to settlers, for the Iroquois Indians allied with the British to destroy the few, small, new settlements at Otsego. Suspected of loyalism, Croghan had to lie low in Pennsylvania during the war. He died in 1782 leaving behind a tangled estate. Despairing of ever collecting from Croghan's executors, one set of his creditors, a cartel of merchants in Burlington and Philadelphia sold their title to one of his mortgages to Cooper and Craig. They engaged the consummate lawyer in New York state, Alexander Hamilton (another new man elevated by the Revolution), to serve their determination to secure the Otsego lands. Without notifying the other heirs and creditors, Hamilton revived a legal judgement issued in 1773 by the New York Supreme Court against Croghan. Hamilton secured a writ authorizing the county sheriff to hold a public auction of the Otsego lands in January 1786 to satisfy the unpaid debt held by Cooper and Craig. Learning of the impending

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Pierce to Henry Knox. July 3, 1791, Henry Knox Papers (HKP hereafter), XXVIII, 164, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS hereafter); Taylor, *Liberty Men*, 39-40.

auction, some of the other creditors engaged the services of New York's other preeminent lawyer, Aaron Burr, to obtain a court order enjoining the sheriff from proceeding with the auction. But, swayed either by Cooper's threats or his promises, the sheriff ignored the injunction and the protests of Dr. John Morgan, one of the creditors who had hastened to the auction held at a crude tavern in a remote frontier hamlet. Cooper and Craig bought the tract for £ 2700 (New York currency); in effect they accepted the land as part payment for the debt (£ 3913.17.6 New York currency) they had purchased from the Burlington Company. By taking possession of the major asset in Croghan's estate, Cooper and Craig deprived the other creditors of the means to collect their debts<sup>11</sup>.

In acquiring their wilderness empires, Henry Knox and William Cooper acted within the letter of the law but violated the niceties of genteel conduct. Noting this violation, Dr. John Morgan bitterly denounced Cooper and Craig as «men who place self-interest the first in the list of moral virtues, and [regard] justice to their neighbours, as an obsolete command». The genteel ideal imposed a paradox on the upwardly mobile. Wealth was a prerequisite, but in a competitive, commercial America, the acquisition of great property required an aggressive, secretive cunning that was at odds with the other attributes of gentility, especially a reputation for disinterested benevolence<sup>12</sup>.

Wealth achieved, Knox and Cooper needed to prove themselves worthy of gentility; they needed to cloak their sudden and aggressive ascent by cultivating the marks of gentility. They needed to reinvent themselves and prove to themselves and to others that they were natural aristocrats innately deserving of the rewards they had seized. At a minimum, they had to present their wealth in a manner that betokened urbane refinement and grandeur. They had to demonstrate that they could not only make money but consume it in a genteel fashion. To this end, Cooper and Knox erected great houses in the midst of their crude frontier settlements. Their mansions were conspicuous monuments to their elevated tastes as well as their superior wealth, statements of their builders' mastery over both their money and the landscape. It is especially significant that both men erected their mansions atop sites identified with the founders of the land claims Knox and Cooper had usurped. Knox's «Montpelier» arose on the hill in Thomaston where Brigadier Samuel Waldo had build his fort, his first mark of ownership in the Maine wilderness. Similarly, William Cooper built «Otsego Hall» precisely where Colonel Croghan had established his compound in 1769 (Cooper named the new village around his home «Cooperstown»). By subsuming the old relics, the new mansions insisted upon the continuity and the superiority of the new claims to ownership of the vicinity<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Mary-Jo Kline, *Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr* (Princeton, N.J., 1983), I, 21; Julius Goebel, Jr., et al., eds., *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, Four vols. (New York, 1964-1981), IV, 91-113.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. John Morgan, «To the Public», *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, Pa.), May 17, 1786.

<sup>13</sup> Eaton, *History of Thomaston*, I, 209; Ralph Birosall, *The Story of Cooperstown* (Coopers-

Determined to emulate the aristocratic hauteur of the great landlords of the Hudson valley, William Cooper designed his mansion as a copy of the Manor House in Albany belonging to Stephen Van Rensselaer, the wealthiest and most prestigious of New York's landed magnates. Otsego Hall was the largest and most elegant dwelling in New York's new, post-war settlements north and west of the Hudson valley. In 1803 the mansion shocked a visiting Quaker who admonished Cooper's

want of good Philosophy in laying out money to adorn thy House which I thought looked more like the Lofty Spaniard, attached to popish Immegary, than the wise and prudent American.

But Cooper was willing to shock the piously plain in order to impress the secularly genteel<sup>14</sup>.

In 1793-1794 Henry and Lucy Knox built their mansion on an even grander scale. Four stories tall, subdivided into nineteen rooms, containing twenty-four fireplaces, surrounded by a double piazza, and trailing two marching crescents of nine outbuildings, Montpelier was the largest and most ornate private building north of Philadelphia. Henry Knox's closest friend, General Henry Jackson, was astonished at the extravagance and expense lavished on a structure sited amidst the new clearings and small houses of a frontier settlement. In March 1794 he wrote to his friend.

From the first to this moment have I *protested* and that in the most serious manner against the *magnitude & expense* of the house you propose building. It will be much larger than a country meeting house and... it will cost more money than you have an idea of or ought to be expended in that country.

But Knox brushed aside the warning because the mansion bought the effect he sought. In 1796 a visiting clergyman observed, «The General's house with double piazzas round the whole of it & exceeded all I had seen». A decade later, Leverett Saltonstall, the scion of one of Massachusetts's preeminent families, visited Montpelier and remarked, «It seems to fancy the seat of a prince with an extensive establishment»<sup>15</sup>.

In addition to displaying taste and magnificence, genteel wealth was supposed to demonstrate benevolence: gracious and obliging munificence to inferiors. Henry Knox was especially masterful at staging acts of seemingly disinterested generosity to evoke deference from his settlers. To mark

town, N.Y., 1917), 1-2; James Fenimore Cooper, *Chronicles of Cooperstown* (1838), reprinted in the Freeman's Journal Company, *A History of Cooperstown* (Cooperstown, 1929), 12, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Birdsall, *Story of Cooperstown*, 96; J.F. Cooper, *Chronicles of Cooperstown*, 22-23, John Simpson quoted in James Fenimore Cooper (grandson of the novelist), *Reminiscences*, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Jackson to Henry Knox, March 27 (quote), 31, May 8, 1794, HKP XXXV, 74, 75, 99, MHS; Eaton, *History of Thomaston I*, 209; Callahan, *General Washington's General*, 345-348; Paul Coffin, «Memoir and Journals of Rev. Paul Coffin, D.D.» Maine Historical Society, *Collections*, 1st Ser., IV (Portland, 1859): 327; Robert E. Moody, ed., *The Saltonstall Papers, 1607-1815* (Boston, 1972, 1974), II, 333; Carolyn S. Parsons, «"Bordering on Magnificence": Urban Domestic Planning in the Maine Woods», in Charles E. Clark, et al., eds., *Maine in the Early Republic: From Revolution to Statehood* (Hannover, N.H., 1988), 62-82.



Montpelier's completion, on July 4, 1794 the Knoxes roasted a whole ox, erected temporary tables that sat one hundred at a time around the piazzas, and threw open their doors to a gaping throng of curious men, women and children who, summoned by a public announcement, had gathered outside the grounds at dawn. «The house was so much larger than anything they had before seen, that everything was a subject of wonder», one of the Knoxes' daughters later recalled. Determined to ease settler resentments of his claims on them for land payments, Knox toured the Waldo Patent dispensing presents. In October 1794 Henry Jackson reported.

The people are now perfectly contented & happy in consequence of your late visit, and the operation of *Bibles, Rums, Spelling Books, Brandy, Primmers, Sugars and Tea*. The effect of these has worked your salvation with a little gallantry on the part of you... with some of their wives & daughters.

Knox also employed dozens of local men in an array of businesses he established in Thomaston and the adjoining town of Warren: barrel works, saw- and gristmills, wharves, shipping, stores, limestone quarries and kilns, brickworks, fisheries, farms, and a canal. These expensive and unsuccessful ventures drove Knox deeply into debt, but he persisted, not only because he daily expected them to yield rich returns but also because they created extensive webs of patronage that made most of the people in the two towns, directly or indirectly, his clients<sup>16</sup>.

Although possessed of a keener awareness of the bottom line, William Cooper recognized the importance of cultivating a paternal image with his settlers. He took unusual pains to settle his lands quickly and compactly by offering especially good terms and by investing generously in community improvements. During the 1780s and early 1790s, when Otsego's new settlers endured hardship and poverty, Cooper procured emergency food supplies. He also organized maple sugar production so that they could produce an immediate cash crop to purchase desperately needed supplies. Once the settlers mastered the wilderness, began to reap surpluses from their lands, and began to meet their payments to Cooper, he subsidized refined institutions in Cooperstown village: a social library, an academy, and churches<sup>17</sup>.

By acts of benevolent superintendence Cooper and Knox claimed to be «Fathers of the People»: well-meaning superiors assisting their lessers. In 1801 Henry Knox insisted.

My relation to the settlers as a father and guardian and my reputation ought to be the security in the mind of every settler that my intention is to be their close friend and

<sup>16</sup> Eaton, *History of Thomaston*, I, 209-210, 212-213, 224; Cyrus Eaton, *Annals of the Town of Warren* (Hallowell, 1877), 265-267; Lucy Flucker Knox quoted in Thomas Morgan Griffiths, *Maine Sources in «The House of Seven Gables»* (Waterville, Me., 1945), 8-9; Henry Jackson to Henry Knox, October 26, 1794, HKP, XXXVI, 77, MHS.

<sup>17</sup> William Cooper, *A Guide in the Wilderness* (Cooperstown, 1949, reprint of Dublin, 1810), 10-11; James Fenimore Cooper, *Chronicles of Cooperstown*, 19-20; *Otsego Herald* (Cooperstown, N.Y.), May 8, 1795, June 5, 1797.

protector and they are to be assured that all my conduct shall conform to this idea and it will be a duty they owe to themselves to suspect the man to be their enemy who shall make a contrary suggestion.

Although the Waldo Patent's backcountry settlers maintained an armed resistance to his efforts to collect payments from them for the lands they occupied, the inhabitants of the coastal towns (including Thomaston) accepted Knox's claims, paid for their lands, received his patronage, and honored the General with political office<sup>18</sup>.

During the 1790s William Cooper was more uniformly successful in winning the deference of his settlers. Running for Congress in the election of January 1795, William Cooper won 84 percent of the votes cast in Otsego county. When he ran for reelection in 1796 he increased his hold on Otsego's voters to 91 percent. In 1795 Dr. Joseph White insisted that «under the guardianship of a MAN of happy genius, sent by Heaven to civilize this country» Otsego County had passed from «a dismal wilderness: a habitation for the wolf, the bear and the panther» to «a state of high cultivation – producing all the necessaries and many of the luxuries of life». A year later Jedediah Peck lauded Cooper as «the poor man's benefactor and the widow's support – the Father of his County». A third settler celebrated Cooper as «a friend to the Poor & Needy & to Man Kind at Large»<sup>19</sup>.

The «political father» of a rural county in the new republican order had to perform a delicate balancing act in mediating between his common neighbors and the political élite gathered at the state and national capitals. His standing depended upon a mix of local popularity, expressed at polling places, and social acceptance by the translocal brotherhood of gentlemen, manifested in the private circles of the élite. On the one hand, recognized standing among fellow gentlemen could endow a political intermediary with sufficient gravitas to overawe local challengers. It helped Henry Knox that he was known in the Waldo Patent as a Revolutionary War general and an intimate associate of President Washington and the rest of the Federalist national élite. On the other hand, the intermediary who could command local popularity could win acceptance in genteel circles so long as he proved his virtue by profering to them his political interest. Despite his lackluster education and rough manners, William Cooper was welcomed into the homes, correspondence, and confidence of Albany's preeminent political gentleman – Leonard Gansevoort, Philip Schuyler, Abraham Ten Broek, and Stephen Van Rensselaer – partly because of his boisterous charm, intelligence, and good humor, but largely because they appreciated the Otsego votes he offered them. They were willing

<sup>18</sup> Henry Knox to Robert Houston. Dec. 10, 1801, HKP, XLIV, 156, MHS; for a fuller discussion of Henry Knox's problems with backcountry settlers see Taylor *Liberty Men*, 89-101.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph White, «Address», *Otsego Herald*, October 23, 1795; Jedediah Peck quoted in Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763-1797* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 264; Ebenzer Averell to William Cooper, January 21, 1797, William Cooper Papers, Hartwick College. For the election returns see *Albany Gazette*, February 20, 1795; Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 592.

to overlook Cooper's lack of style, of «tone», in gratitude that he forsook the alternative political path of Antifederal populism. In May 1792 Schuyler lauded Cooper's success in mobilizing Otsego's voters in support of John Jay, the Federalist candidate for governor of New York.

Report says that you was very civil to the young and handsome of the [other] Sex, that you flattered the Old & Ugly, and even Embraced the toothless & decrepid in order to obtain votes. When will you write a treatise in Electioneering? Whenever you do afford only a few copies to your friends.

Schuyler could celebrate Cooper's possession of popular arts that he would have found frightening either in the populist opposition or in himself<sup>20</sup>.

Henry Knox and William Cooper had to strike different balances in playing their roles as intermediaries. Knox had taken greater pains to educate himself, by reading the literature in his Boston bookstore and by emulating the mores and manners of gentility; he had also achieved a national reputation for public service and extensive political connections during the years of revolution and war. Compared to Cooper, Knox could bank more on his external standing as a gentleman and concede less to the expectations of his common neighbors. Regarding public office as his due as his town's preeminent gentleman, Knox refused to openly solicit votes from the common folk; he felt that hints properly placed by his managers ought to suffice with the Thomaston town meeting. Knox wanted the townspeople's honorific recognition that he was their «political father» to come reflexively, without overt solicitation. Because Knox would pay his own way to serve in the legislature, because his business enterprises employed so many townsmen, and because they still tenuously shared Knox's conviction that their representative should be their principle gentleman, Thomaston's citizens routinely sent Knox to represent them in the Massachusetts General Court in 1800, 1801, 1802 and 1803. Knox exploited his position in the General Court and his relative independence from his constituents to safeguard his property from legislative interference. In 1803, when some settlers again petitioned the General Court for redress, the Federalist leadership assigned the petition to a committee chaired by Knox, who rejected the appeal on the grounds that the legislature had «no constitutional rights to interfere in the premises»<sup>21</sup>.

Compared to Knox, William Cooper was an unpolished and uneducated rustic unable to spell consistently, write grammatically, cite classical authors, or assume the dignified reserve of a complete gentleman. Cooper recognized that his standing required his active presence among, and management of, his constituents. He took pride in his electioneering abilities, which he called «the art of Hook and Snivery». An election in Otsego was a civic festival of community unity financed and orchestrated by Judge William Cooper.

<sup>20</sup> Philip Schuyler to William Cooper, May 7, 1792, William Cooper Papers, Hartwick College; Alfred Young, *Democratic Republicans of New York*, 267.

<sup>21</sup> Eaton, *History of Thomaston*, I, 260; Henry Knox's draft of the committee report, c. 1803, HKP, XLV, 135, MHS.

Shortly after the polls closed in Otsego, Cooper informed Stephen Van Rensselaer,

I am Preparing to Illuminate as well the town as the Lake on wich We shall Raise Bonfires on Platforms, Cannonading, Musick, Hornes & Conkes Shels, turn out all the wine in my celler & on Jay's Election Huza for Our Side at Last.

Cooper felt the strain of his dependence on local popularity; sometimes his popular persona of bonhomie gave way to angry, uncomprehending resentment of those who declined to return deference and gratitude. At the 1792 election, William Cooper pressed a ballot bearing Jay's name into the hands of a young settler named James Moore. The young man testified,

I opened it, and looked at the name that was in it and made answer in a laughing manner, « Judge Cooper, I can not vote so, for if I do vote for Governor, I would wish to vote clearly from my own inclination, as I did not mean to be dictated to by any person at that time ». Judge Cooper appeared in a joking manner, and in good humour until that time. He then took the ballot out of my hand; which he had given to me, and appeared to be in a passion. Judge Cooper then said to me, « What, then young man, you will not vote as I would have you. You are a fool, young man, for you cannot know how to vote as well as I can direct you, for I am a man in public office ». He then walked away, and seemed to be in a passion.

A more aloof gentleman would have been insulated from such a frustrating encounter with an unusually independent voter<sup>22</sup>.

Variations on a common theme, Knox and Cooper typified the early Republic's several great landlords who recognized their affinities by uniting in Federalist politics. Others of this stripe were Benjamin Lincoln and Robert Hallowell Gardiner in Maine, Matthew Clarkson, Richard Harison, Thomas Morris, David Ogden, David Parish, Oliver Phelps, Robert Troup, James Wadsworth, and Charles Williamson in New York, and William Bingham, Robert Morris, and John Nicholson in Pennsylvania. Most of these men were beneficiaries of the Revolution, prosperous men who had vastly increased their political and economic fortunes by aggressive speculation in public securities, government contracts, and frontier lands. Coming into their fortunes during the war years and the 1780s, they did not believe that the Revolution would or should disrupt the unity of economic, social, cultural, and political authority in the same persons. They accepted the necessity of cultivating genteel ways to complete and, they hoped, perpetuate their new primacy<sup>23</sup>.

Having exploited the revolutionary moment to clamber to the pinnacle of the social pyramid, the Federalist arrivistes wanted to preserve the social

<sup>22</sup> William Cooper to Stephen Van Rensselaer, May 2, 1792, Cooper to Benjamin Walker, Jan. 6, 1802. William Cooper Papers, Hartwick College; James Moore's testimony, February 21, 1793, *Journal of the Assembly of New York*, 16th Sess., 193.

<sup>23</sup> John T. Horton, « The Western Eyries of Judge Kent », *New York History* XVIII (April 1937), 165-166; David M. Ellis, « Rise of the Empire State, 1790-1820 », *New York History* LVI (1975), 16; Margaret L. Brown, « William Bingham, Eighteenth Century Magnate », *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* LXI (1937), 387-434.

distinctions traditionally enjoyed by the colonial élite. They meant to consolidate the revolution and freeze America's social flux before it elevated over their heads newer, cruder men. Federalists feared those more impatient new men who wanted to take a shortcut to political authority by eschewing the efforts necessary to win approving nods from those already comfortable in the ways of gentility. To preserve their tenuous supremacy, the Federalists strove mightily to weave tighter hierarchical networks of dependency binding lesser men, as clients, to their betters, as patrons. The Federalists wanted to sustain gentility within a republican polity; they wanted to perpetuate a society where men could clearly identify their superiors, from whom patronage flowed, and their inferiors, from whom deference was due. Banding together in mutual recognition, the Federalist élite expressed obsessive dread of impending anarchy. In 1800 Knox luridly warned that unless troops dispersed his militant backcountry settlers, «a collection will soon be made of the most audacious and bloodthirsty villains that ever disgraced the surface of New England». The Federalists were convinced that the common folk needed paternalistic protection from their own worst instincts abetted by the delusive flattery of irresponsible demagogues. The Federalists eloquently preached the importance of a hierarchical and stable society, guided by precedent: the sort of society that America had begun to approximate prior to the Revolution, the sort of society that would have obstructed the rise of William Cooper and Henry Knox<sup>24</sup>.

## II. *Friends of the people*

But other new men – with less wealth, fewer connections, and less gentility – recognized the threat posed to their further ascent by the Federalist effort to reconsolidate authority in the new republic during the 1790s. In the northern states, the Antifederalist new men wanted to preserve the social flux and mobility of the war years. During the 1790s they began to coalesce in mutual recognition and in mutual reaction against the individual Federalist grandees of their particular communities. They looked to Thomas Jefferson as their national leader and called themselves Republicans. Shrewd opportunists in pursuit of self-interest, they recognized élitism's redundancy in America's new republican framework, and sensed the possibilities for themselves in promoting a more democratic society. Denouncing Federalist paternalism, the Republican challengers spoke of themselves as «Friends of the People», equals rather than superiors<sup>25</sup>.

The northern Republicans promoted a liberal vision of society where an impartial, minimal government would secure equal opportunity for all by refusing to countenance superior privileges for the élite. They promised

<sup>24</sup> Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order; the Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984, 51-53; and David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1965), 1-17, 250-251.

<sup>25</sup> Wood, «Interests and Disinterestedness», 69-109.

voters that equal rights and equal opportunity would free the market to properly reward the industrious poor rather than perpetuate the idle rich, gradually eliminating all vestiges of hierarchy from American politics, society, and culture. The Republicans defended the ambitions of the common folk enhanced by the recent revolution and they decried the efforts of elitists to perpetuate their superiority. The Republicans dismissed the Federalists' anxiety that further social mobility would culminate in anarchy. Instead, the Republicans warned that the Federalist efforts to sustain the supremacy of gentility would lead to the subversion of the republic and the substitution of an aristocracy. In Maine the leading Republican newspaper, Portland's *Eastern Argus*, denounced the leading Federalists as «supercilious Lordlings, whose haughtiness, folly, and vanity you find on trial to be so insufferable». The newspaper exhorted,

Turn Out! Turn Out! Therefore to the election. EVERY MAN, TURN OUT! Let no one stay at home through sloth or cowardice. If you will turn out, you will carry the point, you will secure your cause, & these haughty, selfish Aristocrats will be no longer in office, to control your meetings<sup>26</sup>.

William Cooper and Henry Knox each found his republican nemesis in a formerly trusted lieutenant: Jedediah Peck and Dr. Ezekiel Dodge. Peck and Dodge were aggressive, ambitious men who initially enjoyed the patronage of the dominant Federalist in their respective counties. But ultimately Peck and Dodge felt confined by the limits of the patronage that Cooper and Knox felt was appropriate. To maintain the full value of their new status, the Federalist gentlemen felt obliged to be sparing of the patronage they extended to men they could not accept as peers. By constraining the ambitions of Peck and Dodge, Cooper and Knox gave one more proof to themselves and onlookers that they were discriminating gentlemen. Peck and Dodge came to recognize that further advance to community preeminence required undercutting their mentors.

Peck and Dodge emigrated to the frontier in search of better opportunities to obtain property and higher status than their crowded hometowns in southern New England could provide. Peck began life inauspiciously in 1748 in Lyme, Connecticut; he was one of thirteen children born to an obscure farmer. After at least one voyage as a sailor, and at least three years' service in the Continental Army as an enlisted man, Peck emigrated westward to settle in Burlington, one of William Cooper's settlements in Otsego County. A frontier jack-of-all trades, Peck was at once a farmer, surveyor, millwright and sometime Baptist preacher. A political associate remembered,

<sup>26</sup> James Sullivan, *The Path to Riches* (Boston, 1792, Evans 24829), 6-7, 53; Paul Goodman, *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts; Politics in a Young Republic* (Cambridge, Ma., 1964), 70-96, 155-161; Edward Augustus Kendall, *Travels through the Northern Parts of the United States in the Years 1807 and 1808* (New York, 1809), II, 233; Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order*, 90-84; Joyce Appleby, «Commercial Farming and the Agrarian Myth in the Early Republic», *Journal of American History*, LXVIII (1982), 833-849; *Eastern Argus* (Portland, Me.), July 5, 1805, and March 15, 1805.

Judge Peck, although a clear-headed, sensible man, was an uneducated emigrant from Connecticut. His appearance was diminutive and almost disgusting. In religion he was fanatical, but in his political views, he was sincere, persevering and bold; and although meek and humble in his demeanor, he was by no means destitute of personal ambition. ... He would survey your farm in the day time, exhort and pray in your family at night, and talk on politics the rest part of the time. Perhaps on Sunday, or some evening in the week, he would preach a sermon in your school house.

Although poorly educated beyond a memorization of much of the Bible, Peck possessed a persistent, shrewd intelligence that earned him great popularity among his fellow farmers<sup>27</sup>.

Dodge shared Peck's ambition but not his piety. Born in 1765 in Abington, Massachusetts, Dodge was the prodigal son of a Congregational minister who died in 1770. The Reverend Dodge's stern friend and fellow minister, Rev. Jones, became young Ezekiel's guardian. According to tradition, Dodge was an exceptionally unruly boy who delighted in tormenting his elders. Once Dodge removed the minister's pocket handkerchief from his black Sunday coat, wrapped the handkerchief around a deck of playing cards, and restored it to the coat pocket. That Sunday, when the minister reached for his handkerchief in mid-sermon to wipe his beaded brow, he scattered the cards about his pulpit to his congregation's horror. No doubt, it was with a deep sigh of relief that Rev. Jones saw fifteen-year-old Dodge off to an academy in Charlton, Massachusetts in 1780. Little did Rev. Jones realize that he was entrusting his ward to a teacher who would, within a few years, become the most notorious confidence man and counterfeiter in New England: Stephen Burroughs. One day Burroughs found his school in an uproar because Dodge «had gone into the upper loft of the house, and had most scandalously insulted some young women, who were at the back side of the schoolhouse». Impressed, Burroughs declined to punish the young man. Dodge proceeded to attend college at Harvard. To no one's surprise the college soon expelled him. After serving an apprenticeship with a doctor, Dodge migrated in 1789 to the frontier town of Thomaston in search of his fortune. By developing the valley's leading medical practice and by investing in mercantile voyages, local land speculations, and loans to cash-strapped farmers, Dodge became one of the town's most prosperous and influential men<sup>28</sup>.

Initially, Peck and Dodge got ahead with the assistance of the great men in their counties. When the New York state legislature established Otsego County in February 1791 William Cooper and Jedediah Peck named one of his

<sup>27</sup> Levi Beardsley, *Reminiscences; Personal and Other Incidents; Early Settlement of Otsego County...* (New York, 1852), 71-72; Throop Wilder, «Jedediah Peck, Statesman, Soldier, Preacher», *New York History* XXII (1941), 250-294; Jabez D. Hammond, *The History of Political Parties in the State of New York*, 2 vols. (Albany, 1842), I, 123-124.

<sup>28</sup> Eaton, *History of Thomaston*, I, 181; Joseph T. Dodge, *Genealogy of the Dodge Family of Essex County, Mass., 1629-1984* (Madison, Wis., 1894), I, 77-78; Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates: Volume XII, 1746-1750* (Boston, 1962), 367-369; Stephen Burroughs, *Memoirs of the Notorious Stephen Burroughs of New Hampshire* (New York, 1924), 7-8.

associate judges in the county court of common pleas. At first Peck was a loyal subordinate who testified for Cooper in 1793 when a hostile state assembly investigated his electioneering practices and who promoted Cooper's candidacy for Congress in 1794<sup>29</sup>.

Dodge's services and rewards were more covert than those exchanged between Peck and Cooper. Knox liked to boast that he never brought lawsuits against his settlers, that men accepted his terms simply because they recognized how just and reasonable they were. In August 1800 he assured the governor of Massachusetts.

I have in no instance attempted to turn off a settler nor have I yet brought a suit against an individual, deeming it most preferable to give the usurpers full time to inform themselves of the conduct that would best secure their true and permanent interests.

But Knox confronted many settlers who declined to play their appointed roles as grateful clients. To harry selected squatters from the land without sulling his paternal identity, Knox enlisted the services of Dr. Dodge to serve as an unscrupulous alter ego. Knox preserved his genteel image by subcontracting to Dodge the overt, aggressive acts inappropriate to a true gentleman. At bargain prices, Knox sold Dodge title to lots possessed by particularly recalcitrant settlers who refused to purchase Knox's title. Dodge then applied his considerable talents at intimidation to oust the occupants; he hired men to topple fences, seize cabins, and forcibly mow the targeted settlers' hayfields; he engaged lawyers to conduct protracted litigation that exhausted the targets' finances. Eventually the lands fell into his possession. The arrangement allowed Knox to highlight the disasters befalling those who failed to buy his title, and it enabled Dodge to acquire valuable land at reduced rates. Sharp-witted, and ambitious, Dodge did not let any paternalistic notions complicate his relentless pursuit of individual advantage<sup>30</sup>.

Peck and Dodge became restive with their status as clients, as inferiors. They meant to become political insiders by encouraging popular resentment of the existing élite. Cyrus Eaton of Thomaston, who knew both Dodge and Knox, later explained that because the Doctor was

naturally predisposed toward the Jeffersonian or Democratic party, as embodying greater latitude in thinking and action, [he] could not but chafe under the overshadowing prestige and influence of Knox. He accordingly did not scruple to foster the suspicions and charges of unfairness which he found existing in certain quarters, in

<sup>29</sup> John Lee Frisbee, «The Political Career of Jedediah Peck», (Masters thesis, State University of New York at Oneonta, 1966), 2-5; Young, *Democratic Republicans of New York*, 510.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Knox to Governor Celeb Strong, August 1, 1800, HKP, XLIII, 75, MHS; Henry Knox and Ezekiel G. Dodge, «Memorandum of Agreement», October 31, 1795, HKP, Box 3, Maine Historical Society. For Dodge's harassment of squatters see the July 3, 1796 depositions by Asa Bennet, Benjamin Brewster, William Gregory, Elijah Holmes, Benjamin Jordan, Thomas Stevens Jr., John Thompson, and William Thompson, and the July 6, 1795 depositions by Willard Fales and Thomas Stevens, in SCF 141425, vol. 928, MA; «Brewster v. Dodge», July 1796, Supreme Judicial Court Record Book for 1796, 172, MA.



regard to the manner in which the Waldo property had come into the gentlemen's hands.

Displacing settler resentments onto Knox, Dodge used the Jeffersonian party «as a stepping stone» to become «the acknowledged leader in the town». Much the same could have been said of Peck and Cooper<sup>31</sup>.

In 1796 Peck began to pursue his ambitions beyond William Cooper's wishes. In the spring of 1796 Peck boldly sought a seat in the state senate without first consulting William Cooper. Although Peck ran as a Federalist, his precipitate campaign upset Cooper's delicate efforts to mediate the conflicting ambitions of three of his other lieutenants for Otsego County's two seats. Peck lost the election and the two candidates preferred by Cooper prevailed, but the bitterly contentious campaign offended Cooper who cherished harmony in his county. In 1798 Peck won a seat in the state assembly and proceeded to infuriate the Federalists by breaking party ranks to vote with the Republicans on key issues. The Federalists concluded that Peck was further proof that common men should not be entrusted with high office. In January 1799 a Federalist writer in the Cooperstown newspaper, the *Otsego Herald*, attacked Peck, insisting, «No minds are more susceptible of envy than those whose birth, education & merit are beneath the dignity of their station»<sup>32</sup>.

In 1799 Cooper moved to reassert his control over his county's politics. At this critical moment he reiterated his allegiance to gentility by defining the populism promoted by Peck as sedition. Cooper desperately needed to restore his authority over his people, or lose the basis for his claim to be a natural aristocrat worthy of admission to the Federalist inner circle. He knew that the Federalists in Albany expected him to act. Daniel Hale, a leading Albany Federalist, wrote to Cooper about Peck,

This man appears to me and to many who know him, to be a strange, inconsistent, turbulent and I believe unprincipled Character... I agree with you that it would be best for himself and for Society in general that he was reinstated in his original obscurity. This I believe will be *completely* the case before long and I am happy to find that you are disposed to further the business.

In March, with Cooper's vigorous assent, Governor Jay removed Peck from his position as a county judge, A month later, in the midst of Peck's campaign for reelection to the assembly, Cooper published a newspaper notice warning,

Every man who circulates two seditious printed Papers, disseminated by Jedediah Peck, through this County, is liable to two years imprisonment, and a fine of two thousand dollars, at the discretion of the Court.

<sup>31</sup> Eaton, *History of Thomaston*, I, 260.

<sup>32</sup> Young, *Democratic Republicans of New York*, 510-513; James Morton Smith, «Jedediah Peck», *New York History*, XXXV, 63-65; Hammond, *History of Political Parties*, I, 123-130; «Otsegonius», *Otsego Herald*, Jan. 3, 1799.

Yet, Peck won reelection and his supporters continued to circulate provocative handbills charging that the Federalists meant to destroy the republic and establish an aristocracy in the land. Cooper announced his determination «to silence those wretches. Mercy is a cardinal Virtue, but the Public tranquillity is a Consideration not to be neglected». In late September 1799 Cooper had Peck arrested for sedition and hauled in irons to New York City for trial<sup>33</sup>.

Cooper's desperate act proved disastrous for New York's Federalists because the public regarded Peck as a political martyr. The Federal district attorney released Peck on bail and never dared to bring him to trial. Reeling from the collapse of his popularity, Cooper announced, at the end of October, that he would not stand for reelection to Congress and would resign his post as first judge of Otsego County. He regarded his retirement as his ultimate act of paternalism, as he sadly explained to Governor Jay,

The Great Violence of Party amongst us, makes it necessary to strive for a Cure and my withdrawing from all offices will not only make way for Others but also in some degree show that to give way and to forgive is the Onely Balsom that can heel animosities of the kind Existing among us and it will Come from no Person in the first instance better than from William Cooper, who had rather the child should be Nursed by a stranger, than that it should be hewn in pieces.

Cooper hoped that the Otsego Federalists would rally around other, less controversial figures. But his retirement did not stem the steady erosion of Federalism. In the spring election of 1800 a Republican slate led by Jedediah Peck won control of Otsego's delegation to the assembly. Otsego's transformation was critical to a statewide Republican triumph that had national consequences: by winning control of the new state assembly that would choose the presidential electors in the fall, the New York Republicans secured the victory of Thomas Jefferson over the Federalist incumbent, John Adams. Known as «the Revolution of 1800», Jefferson's victory sent the Federalists into a permanent decline<sup>34</sup>.

After 1800, the Federalists continued to cling to power in much of New England, but, in one county after another, Republican «Friends of the People», emerged to topple the local «Fathers of the People». By 1804 Ezekiel Dodge sensed an opportunity for himself in the emerging public longing to defy Federalist élitism. Dodge declared himself a Republican and invited his neighbors to assert their equal access to respect by symbolically smiting their preeminent gentleman. The recently shrunken employment at Knox's

<sup>33</sup> Daniel Hale to William Cooper, January 9, 1799, William Cooper Papers, Hartwick College; William Cooper, «Caution!», *Albany Centinel*, April 23, 1799; Cooper to Oliver Wolcott, September 16, 1799, Oliver Wolcott Papers, XV, 59, Connecticut Historical Society; United States v. Jedediah Peck, September 1799, U.S. Circuit Court, Southern District of New York, Record Group 21, National Archives; Smith «Jedediah Peck», 65-66.

<sup>34</sup> William Cooper to Governor John Jay, October 25, 1799, Document 1550, New York State Library; Cooper, «To the Electors of the Western District», *Albany Gazette*, November 14, 1799; Hammond, *History of Political Parties*, I, 131-132; Election Returns, *Otsego Herald*, May 15, 1800.

financially battered business enterprises helped the Doctor's efforts to promote the candidacy of Isaac Bernard to replace Knox as the town's representative to the General Court. Moreover, Dodge persuaded Joshua Adams, a blacksmith and moderate Federalist, to run, splitting the Federalist vote. Regarding probable defeat in open town meeting as an unendurable humiliation, Knox withdrew his name and Adams prevailed. A year later the town meeting extended the Republicans' gains, electing Bernard their representative. On March 28, 1805 Henry Jackson Knox broke the news to his father.

The Jacobins of this town turn out so strong & the Federalists are so lukewarm that at March meeting all the Federal officers were turned out, and such men put in (as dismal to relate) who cannot neither *read nor write* intelligibly.

Persistent, but a proper Federalist gentleman to the end, Knox penned a rather plaintive note from Boston to his Thomaston business manager on the eve of the March 1806 town meeting:

I suppose the representative will be a democrat. ... But if it should be otherwise and the town should think proper to choose me I should not decline but good previous arrangements ought to be made. Of this hint you will make a discreet use.

Not thinking Knox's candidacy proper, the townspeople reelected Bernard. In the summer of 1806, Charles Willing Hare, a fellow Federalist, visited Knox and reported «that his political and private influence was gone and therefore that there was no use in being longer connected with him». Where Cooper fell because he aggressively defended elite rule, Knox fell because he remained too aloof, banking on a deference that no longer existed among the people of Thomaston<sup>35</sup>.

By making themselves over into elitists during the 1780s, Knox and Cooper underestimated the American Revolution. Indeed, they set themselves up for their falls by attempting, during the 1790s, to bring the Revolution to a premature end. It is possible to imagine the ill-educated, rough-hewn William Cooper (if not the more polished Henry Knox) taking the alternative path, allying with Jedediah Peck in celebration of social mobility and public equality: the values of a new liberal social order. Instead Cooper and Knox succumbed to a mirage that prevailed at the moment (the late 1780s and early 1790s) when they achieved wealth and power: the Federalist illusion that gentlemen could restore the colonial era's unity of economic, social, political,

<sup>35</sup> Eaton, *Thomaston*, I, 260; William A. Robinson, *Jeffersonian Democracy in New England* (New Haven, 1916), 46; Henry Jackson Knox to Henry Knox, March 28, 1805, HKP, XLVI, 38, MHS; Henry Knox to John Gleason, April 24, 1806, HKP, XLVI, 132, MHS. Charles Willing Hare to the Trustees of the Bingham Estate, February 11, 1807, in Frederick S. Allis, Jr., ed., *William Bingham's Maine Lands, 1790-1820* (Vols. XXXVI and XXXVI of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications*, Boston, 1954), II, 1215 (on Knox's notorious fiscal irresponsibility see II, 912-913). For the identity of Thomaston's representatives see *The Massachusetts Register and United States Calendar for the Year of our Lord 1805...* (Boston, 1804, Shaw-Shoemaker #6750), 35; *The Massachusetts Register and United States Calendar for the Year of Our Lord, 1806...* (Boston, 1805, Shaw-Shoemaker #8874), 24; and *The Massachusetts Register and United States Calendar for the Year of our Lord 1807...* (Boston, 1806, Shaw-Shoemaker #10832), 26.

and cultural authority. They failed to recognize the enduring potential of the American Revolution's legacy to legitimate upstarts unwilling or unable to achieve or endure genteel authority. America's future belonged to the Dodges and the Pecks: the avowed friends, rather than the would-be fathers, of the people.