



A RETURN TO HIS NATIVE TOWN

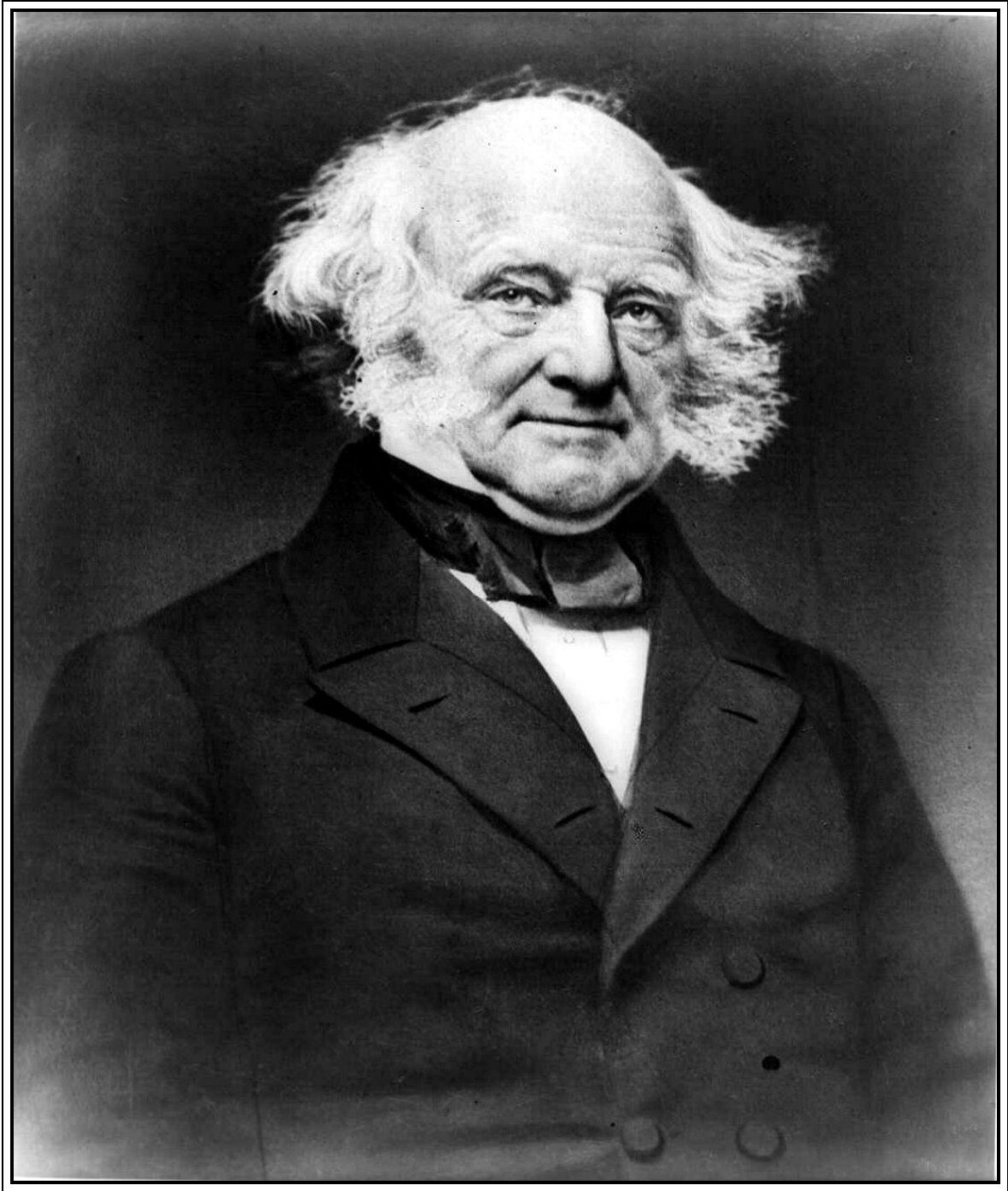
MARTIN VAN BUREN'S LIFE AT
LINDENWALD, 1839-1862



MARTIN VAN BUREN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY

A RETURN TO HIS NATIVE TOWN



Photograph of Martin Van Buren, ca. 1855-1862, Library of Congress.

A RETURN TO HIS NATIVE TOWN

Martin Van Buren's Life at Lindenwald, 1839-1862

A Historic Resource Study

by

Leonard L. Richards

Marla R. Miller

Erik Gilg

Prepared under cooperative agreement with
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

*Reports of a Site Review, November 17-19, 2005, by Sean Wilentz,
Reeve Huston, and Jonathan Earle undertaken in cooperation
with the Organization of American Historians*

**National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior
Printed August 2006**

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Foreword	ix
Document Approval Page	xi
Introduction	1
A Return to His Native Town	
Chapter One	
Martin Van Buren and Contemporary Historical Scholarship	11
Chapter Two	
Lindenwald, 1839-1844: The Campaign to Maintain Control of the Party	17
Chapter Three	
Lindenwald, 1845-1848: The Birth of the Free Soil Party	73
Chapter Four	
Lindenwald, 1849-62: A Politician Retires, A Family Grows	109
Conclusion	135
Works Cited	147
Reports of a Site Review, November 17-19, 2005 undertaken in cooperation with the Organization of American Historians	165

List of Illustrations

Figure 1.	Martin Van Buren in the years just prior to the purchase of Lindenwald. George Parker (d. 1868), engraver. This presidential portrait was based upon Henry Inman's (1801-1846) painting from life. Museum collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site	67
Figure 2.	Close-up of East Elevation of Lindenwald prior to Upjohn's redesign. Martin Van Buren National Historic Site 1797 Elevations. Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress.....	68
Figure 3.	Martin Van Buren National Historic Site 1797 Elevations. Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress.....	69
Figure 4.	Center hall with large dining table. The creation of the dining hall was the major alteration Van Buren made when he took possession of the mansion. The photograph shows the hall as a period room installed by the National Park Service as part of its restoration of Lindenwald. Courtesy of Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.....	70
Figure 5.	Members of the Van Buren household including the extended Van Buren family and domestic servants as counted by the 1860 census. Columbia County, New York, Census Records, 1860. Columbia County Courthouse, Hudson, NY	71
Figure 6.	Bank notes paid by Van Buren to Catherine Kelly, one of his domestic servants, for a monthly pay period. Museum collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site	72
Figure 7.	Nineteenth century barn once located west of Lindenwald. Historic American Buildings Survey, January 16, 1937. Nelson E. Baldwin, photographer. Library of Congress	104
Figure 8.	Martin Van Buren's Lindenwald Farm, c. 1850. Cover illustration by Steven N. Patricia reprinted from David Uschold, <i>Cultural Landscape Report for Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Volume 2, Treatment Plan</i> (Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior 1997)	105
Figure 9.	Angelica Van Buren. Engraving taken from an 1842 Henry Inman portrait. White House Historical Association. Reproduced in Carol E. Kohan, <i>Historic Furnishings Report for "Lindenwald," Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Kinderhook, NY</i> . National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Harpers Ferry, WV	106

Figure 10.	John Van Buren, daguerreotype taken c. 1845 and 1860, Library of Congress	107
Figure 11.	Daguerreotype of Martin Van Buren by Mathew Brady (1823-1896), circa 1856, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution	139
Figure 12.	Van Buren's Lindenwald as enlarged and designed by Richard Upjohn. Having a cupola (or tower) to provide a panoramic view of the countryside was in keeping with the Italianate style of architecture that Upjohn favored when he redesigned the Federal mansion. Courtesy of Martin Van Buren National Historic Site	140
Figure 13.	Lindenwald South Gate House, Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress	141
Figure 14.	Inscription in a Bible given to Van Buren on his 70th birthday, by his niece, Christina Cantine. Museum collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site	142
Figure 15.	Van Buren grandchildren Martin Van Buren IV (1856-1942) and Eliza Eckford Van Buren (1858-c1942). Children of Smith Van Buren and Ellen King James, they were both born at Lindenwald and lived there until 1862. Museum Collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.	143
Figure 16.	Martin Van Buren's tombstone, a plain granite shaft bearing only his name, his title as eighth president, and dates of his birth and death. Photograph by Erik Gilg, 2003	144
Figure 17.	Lindenwald as a private residence in the early 1960s, before it was acquired by the National Park Service in 1975. Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Library of Congress	145

Foreword

Martin Van Buren National Historic Site in Kinderhook, New York, was established in 1974 as a unit of the National Park System in order to preserve in public ownership a significant property associated with the life of Martin Van Buren, eighth president of the United States. The site consists of the core portion of “Lindenwald,” Van Buren’s working farm and country seat.

Van Buren purchased the property in 1839, during his presidency, and from 1841 to his death in 1862, Van Buren made Lindenwald his primary residence, taking up the life of a gentleman farmer while continuing his political activities, and later, while writing his autobiography. Lindenwald was the base from which Van Buren launched two failed campaigns to regain the Presidency, first, as a candidate for the Democratic nomination in 1844, and then as the candidate for the Free Soil Party in 1848.

This historic resource study (HRS) was undertaken in advance of a new National Park Service (NPS) planning effort, the first in twenty years, designed to reassess park themes and significance. While a considerable scholarly literature has been produced on Van Buren’s life and legacy, this literature only tangentially addresses Van Buren’s later career or life at Lindenwald. The NPS’s 1982 historic resource study provides vignettes of family life and a detailed account of decisions affecting the physical appearance of the mansion, but it does not place the chronicled events in a larger historical context. More recent NPS reports, which include a historic furnishings report and a cultural landscape report, document the physical history of the site.

Van Buren’s final years at Lindenwald have up to now often been viewed as a retirement period. Most scholars have focused on Van Buren’s seminal contribution to the making of the American Party System and secondly, on his presidency—on events preceding his move to Lindenwald. NPS researchers have followed this lead. Thus, the park has been presented with the interpretive conundrum of making the park resources relevant to Van Buren’s significance.

This study, by telling a new political story and by including all the residents of Lindenwald—the Van Buren family as well as those who worked on the estate—enhances our understanding of this place in the political and cultural history of the mid nineteenth century. Put simply, Van Buren played a critical role in the emergence of the post 1840 anti-slavery controversy that culminated in the coming of the Civil War. And Lindenwald also witnessed during these years the emergence of changes in labor and gender relations affecting the nation generally. As the authors of the report write, “new scholarship on farming in the mid-Hudson Valley, on domestic architecture and landscape, on labor and gender, reveal Lindenwald to be a complex place that witnessed political and personal dramas both large and small.”

The work was undertaken with the University of Massachusetts and its Public History Program through the North Atlantic Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU). It was conceived as a joint project by Dr. David Glassberg, then head of the university’s Public History Program and Dr. Paul Weinbaum, then History Program Lead for the NPS’s Northeast Region. Dr. Leonard Richards, the principal author of the study, undertook the work in collaboration with Dr. Marla Miller, assisted by Erik Gilg, a graduate student in Early American and Public History. Dr. Richards’ previous works include *The Life and Times of Congressman John Quincy Adams* (1986) and *The Slave*

Power: the Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860 (2000). Marla Miller's primary research interest is women's work before industrialization and she has consulted with a wide variety of museums and historic sites. Dr. Miller is currently Director of the university's Public History Program. Many persons, both within the NPS and the University of Massachusetts made this study possible. We would like to give special thanks to Dr. Patricia West, the park's Museum Curator, whose knowledge of the park, its history, and its collections proved invaluable, and Dr. Mitch Mulholland of the University of Massachusetts, who shepherded this report through to completion.

We are including with this HRS the reports of scholars invited to undertake a site review under the aegis of the Organization of American Historians between November 17 and 19, 2005 following the completion of the study. The primary task of scholars Sean Wilentz, Reeve Huston, and Jonathan Earle, was to assess the park's proposed new interpretive themes in light of the park's significance and historic resources. Together, the study and the findings of the site review team will greatly assist the park as it plans for the future.

Dan Dattilio, Superintendent
Martin Van Buren National Historic Site
July 2006

A RETURN TO HIS NATIVE TOWN
MARTIN VAN BUREN'S LIFE AT LINDENWALD 1839- 1862

Historic Resource Study

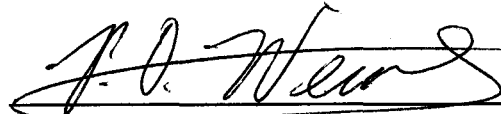
Leonard L. Richards
Marla R. Miller
Erik Gilg

Prepared for
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Under cooperative agreement with
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

February 2006

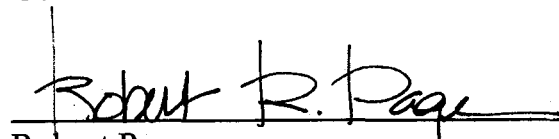
Recommended:



Paul Weinbaum
History Project Manager
Northeast Region

2/24/06
Date

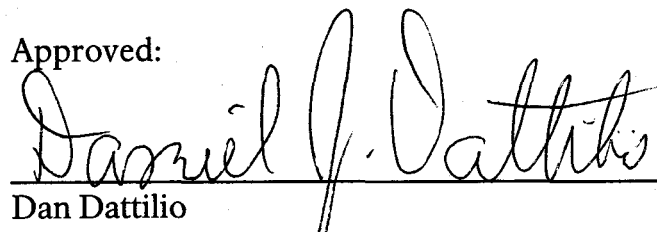
Concurred:



Robert Page
Deputy Associate Regional Director, Cultural Resources,
Resource Stewardship & Science

2.24.06
Date

Approved:



Dan Dattilio
Superintendent
Martin Van Buren National Historic Site

3/3/06
Date

Introduction

The history of Lindenwald as seen from the turn of the twenty-first century encompasses not only the political figure at the family's head, but all of the men and women of the Van Buren families in residence, as well as the men and women whose lives unfolded in the estate's farm and gatehouses, and in the third-floor and basement spaces of the mansion itself. New scholarship on farming in the mid-Hudson Valley, on domestic architecture and landscape, on labor and gender, reveal Lindenwald to be a complex place that witnessed political and personal dramas both large and small. National phenomena from the emergence of the Italianate style to the arrival of thousands of young Irish women emigrants played out in and around Lindenwald, encircling and shaping the lives of the Van Burens in all their dailiness.

Understanding Lindenwald first requires an understanding of the history of American political life in the first half of the nineteenth century. Since the completion of John D. R. Platt and Harlan D. Unrau's *Historic Resource Study* in 1982, political historians have focused more and more on the widespread participation of ordinary white males in the nation's politics. By the 1840s, notes historian Jean H. Baker, political rallies "were better attended than Sunday services or even meetings of itinerant preachers" and elections "became secular holy days" with voter turnouts of 79 percent, 80 percent, and 82 percent becoming commonplace. The electorate, argues Baker, clearly "gave closer attention to politics than is the case today, thereby guaranteeing a broader, deeper understanding of issues." Far more than "any subsequent era," adds William E. Gienapp, "political life formed the very essence of the pre-Civil War generation's experience." Moreover, adds Michael E. McGerr, political parties became far more than just instruments for getting out the vote and formulating public policy. They became "a natural lens through which to view the world."¹

Fueling such widespread political commitment were the parties themselves. At the

¹Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party, The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1983), 23, 269-71; William E. Gienapp, "Politics Seem to Enter into Everything': Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860," in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station, Tex, 1982), 66; Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York, 1986), 13.

grass roots, contends Robert H. Wiebe, they functioned as a "lodge democracy" in which any white adult male who cared to participate could become a "brother" and have a hand in making a fellow "brother" into a leader--or turning a "leader" into just another brother. Equally important, argues McGerr, were the partisan newspapers of the era. They made "partisanship seem essential to men's identity." Also important, notes Joel H. Silbey, was the frequency of elections. With local elections being held every year in the late winter or early spring, state elections in the summer, and national elections every other fall, "Americans were caught up in semi-permanent and unstinting partisan warfare somewhere throughout the year, every year."²

The new male political order also affected female politics. No longer were women in the same political position as young and poor men. The property requirements that had once kept poor and young men from legally voting had been eliminated, and they now voted in record numbers. As a result, notes historian Paula Baker, politically astute women "saw that their disfranchisement was based solely on sex." At the same time, however, women's "political activity expanded in scope and form." In small and large cities, new organizations sprang up and "became forums for political action," focusing especially on the enforcement of moral norms and the care of dependents, two tasks that male politicians had largely abandoned. These organizations "often received male financial support." They also capitalized on the fact that women were generally considered to be "above politics" and more moral than men. They encountered male resistance, however, whenever their actions and demands "too closely approached male prerogatives."³

²Robert H. Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (Chicago, 1995), 74, 81; McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, 17; Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford, 1991), 48.

³Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review*, 89 (June 1984), 625-32. See also Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York, 1984), Chap. 7; Barbara J. Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman & the City, 1800-1860* (New York, 1978), Chaps. 2-4; Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca, 1984), Chaps. 4-5; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, Ct., 1981), Chap. 4; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca, 1999), Chaps 1-3.

While most historians now depict the mid-nineteenth century as an era of intense and widespread political enthusiasm, Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin have challenged this interpretation. Mining such sources as voter testimony in contested elections, as well as cartoons, diaries, autobiographies, and newspapers, they insist that most voters were anything but enthusiastic and well-informed. Instead, they were much like voters today--indifferent, ill-informed, and disaffected, and the parties had to use "cash bribes," free drinks, and intimidation to get them to the polls. But the parties, unlike parties today, did get them to the polls.⁴

Since the 1982 *Historic Resource Study*, new scholarship has also revitalized the study of the American economy, suggesting new insights and raising new questions about Lindenwald's place in the history of agriculture, as well as the role of its occupants in an ever-rising consumer culture. Nationally, this was the time when the market economy expanded exponentially. In the eighteenth century, according to some scholars, most Americans had been semi-subsistence farmers who only occasionally produced for the market. They differed from European peasants in that their landholdings were not encumbered with obligations to some elite. Their male family head usually owned land in fee simple. But, like their peasant forebears, their contact with the outside world was limited. They sold only enough farm products to the outside market to obtain money for taxes and high-utility purchases. Otherwise, they spent the lion's share of their time raising food for themselves and bartering crops and labor with their neighbors.

Were they content with this lifestyle? Historians have hotly debated that question.⁵ Some insist that they were not, that most were at heart "bourgeois

⁴Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2000).

⁵For the debate over farmers and the market economy, see especially Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 308-10; Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, 1990); Winifred Barr Rothenberg, *From Market-Places to Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1850* (Chicago, 1992); Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville, 1992), 13-95; Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860* (New York, 1985); Paul Goodman, "The Emergence of Homestead Exemption in the United States: Accommodation and Resistance to the Market Revolution, 1840-1880," *Journal of American History*, 80 (September 1993), 470-98; Richard L. Bushman, "Markets and Composite Farms in Early America," *The William & Mary Quarterly*, 55 (July 1998), 351-74.

entrepreneurs," and that they under-produced only because poor transportation prevented them from taking advantage of their entrepreneurial values and their market orientation. Another group of historians, however, contends that households resisted the encroachments of the marketplace in an effort to preserve an ethos oriented to family values and family preservation. The hero of one of the new nation's first plays, *Independence* (1805) by William Ioor, summed up their attitude this way: "I am an independent farmer, don't owe five guineas in the world, and my farm yields every necessary comfort for me and mine."⁶

This way of life, to be sure, was hardly the norm in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and other major towns. But, according to some scholars, it was the prevailing way of life in the hinterland, and it had become more so nationally with each passing year. Once pioneer families turned their backs on the scattered fringe of coastal civilization, every added mile away from navigable water took them further and further away from the market economy. Without navigable water nearby, they had no chance, even if they had wished, to participate extensively in that economy. The cost of transporting goods overland was prohibitive.

Yet, every year between 1760 and 1820, more Americans moved away from the market than towards it.⁷ And, from all accounts, they seemingly knew what they were doing. They might own as many as 160 acres, but most of them chose to have only a few acres in tillage and a few more in pasturage, just enough to meet the needs of the family and provide a slight excess. When did it all end? When did they stop trying to be self-sufficient and begin producing bumper crops and livestock for the market? It is impossible to set any exact date, but in New York State it seems certain that the "age of homespun" was on its last legs by 1840. Fifteen years earlier, the average New York

⁶Charles S. Watson, "Jeffersonian Republicanism in William Ioor's *Independence*," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 69 (July 1968), 194-203.

⁷For demographic analysis of migration patterns, 1760-1820, see Wilbur Zelinsky, "Changes in the Geographic Patterns of the Rural Population in the United States, 1790-1860," *Geographic Review*, 52 (Oct. 1962), 492-524; Herman R. Friis, *A Series of Population Maps of the Colonies and the United States, 1625-1790* (New York, 1968); Walter Nugent, *The Structures of American Social History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984); and James E. Davis, *Frontier America, 1800-1840: A Comparative Demographic Analysis of the Settlement Process* (Glendale, Ca., 1972).

family was still making nine yards of "homespun" for each member of the family.⁸ By 1845, the number had dropped to less than three yards, and by 1855 to less than one-fourth of one yard.⁹

What had happened is clear. The market economy began reaching out to the hinterland after the War of 1812. There had been a boom first in road-building, then canals, then railroads. Soon, whether backcountry people liked it or not, they found themselves caught up in the market ethos of the capitalist seaboard. They became dependent on store-bought goods. They thus needed more cash than before. They thus began producing more and more crops for the market.

Few historians today quarrel about the basic facts and figures. That is largely because they were spelled out to nearly everyone's satisfaction some forty years ago in a fine book by George Rogers Taylor entitled *The Transportation Revolution*.¹⁰ But there is a quarrel about who was behind the "transportation revolution." And much of that quarrel now centers on a book by Charles Sellers entitled *The Market Revolution*. Without doubt a monumental work, *The Market Revolution* is the capstone of a generation's work in social, economic, and political history, incorporating what many historians had long called for, a synthesis of the often fragmented findings of the "new social history."¹¹

But *The Market Revolution* is also controversial. For in it, Sellers offers a provocative new interpretation of the "transportation revolution." In his hands, it was not innocent or benign. Nor was it what the "people" wanted. By 1815, he argues, entrepreneurs and their political representatives won control of Thomas Jefferson's Republican Party, and through that, party control of the federal government and nearly all

⁸Winifred Rothenberg, perhaps the staunchest proponent of the farmer as a "bourgeois entrepreneur" thesis, placed the date much earlier--at 1780.

⁹Jared van Wagenen, Jr., *The Golden Age of Homespun* (New York, 1953); Rolla Milton Tryon, *Household Manufactures in the United States, 1640-1860* (Chicago, 1917), 304-5.

¹⁰Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York, 1962).

¹¹Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1848* (New York 1991). See also Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York, 1990), which deals with the same subject matter, but is less controversial and less far-reaching. For a sense of the impact of Sellers' book on the history profession, see Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville, 1996).

the state governments. They then pursued a program of state-sponsored capitalist development--roads, canals, and then railroads--that virtually forced all Americans to become part of the seaboard capitalist economy. This program, in turn, sparked a political insurgency among farmers and urban mechanics, who had no desire to give up their own way of life, much less any desire to come up with the necessary tax money to pay for these state-sponsored ventures. The result was a struggle over the nation's destiny, a struggle that the supporters of the "market revolution" eventually won, a struggle that was all but over by 1840.

The ascendancy of the market economy, however, provides only a backdrop to what was happening at Lindenwald in the 1840s and the 1850s. For while the struggle that Sellers describes fits much of the nation, it doesn't fit the Hudson Valley. The Hudson Valley was different. It had never known those "halcyon" days when most farmers owned their own land in fee simple. Tenant farming had long been the norm in the Hudson Valley, and in the late 1840s tenants on leasehold estates still comprised the majority of the rural population. Indeed, in 1848, census takers estimated that leaseholders numbered at least 260,000, which was about one-twelfth of the entire population of New York State.¹²

Hudson Valley farms, moreover, had been raising crops for the market since before the American Revolution.¹³ Thanks to fertile soil and easy transportation to market, valley farmers had long been engaged in commercial agriculture. Only the residents of the nearby hill towns had been on the frontier of settlement in the late Revolutionary period. Their lifestyle had been roughly the same as other backcountry farmers, and they, too, experienced the transition to a more market-centered economy after the War of 1812. Since this transition occurred at a time of rapid population growth, declining soil fertility, and deforestation, the change-over was undoubtedly far more

¹²Bureau of the Census, *Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (Stamford, Ct., n. d.), 13. Reeve Huston, in *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (New York, 2000), 232 n. 6, maintains that the figure 260,000 is much too low, that there were far more tenants than the census takers estimated.

¹³Some historians argue the same for the northeast.

painful than it was in the valley.¹⁴

While much of this study will focus on Van Buren's post presidential years and the male members of his family, any study of Lindenwald must also necessarily attend to the variety of women who called the estate home, from southern gentlewomen like Angelica Singleton to farm wives like Mary Stephenson to domestic laborers like Catherine Kelly. Looking at these very different kinds of antebellum New York women reminds us, as women's history scholarship has pointed out since the 1980s, that women's lives were not only different from one another's: they were different in ways that were relational. Put another way, Angelica Singleton's life was not just different from Stephenson or Kelly's: Stephenson and Kelly made Singleton's life possible.¹⁵ Any one life is understandable only insofar as it is viewed in the context of the others. Scholarship by women's historians has over the past twenty years calibrated more carefully relations between working women and their more privileged employers, in ways that affirm the close relationship between domestic and public life. Residential spaces have been more accurately understood as the work spaces of the immigrant women employed to clean them; the increasingly well-documented effort to establish class identity via the accoutrements of gentility have been correctly seen as inextricable from the steady access to domestic labor.

In a related development, recent work in the history of women has also been shaped by the long-term effort to dismantle the notion of "separate spheres" that has so long colored historical understanding of middle-class and elite women's lives in the nineteenth century. The newest and best scholarship among women's historians rejects gender-based definitions of the public sphere. As historian Cynthia A. Kierner writes in *Beyond the Household*, the best work on public life and women's role in it looks for a "broader range of extra-domestic activities;" such scholarship defines the public sphere as the "site of actual or figurative exchanges or extra-domestic ideas or issues and envision

¹⁴David M. Ellis, *Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region, 1790-1850* (New York, 1945), 72-80.

¹⁵As Elsa Barkley Brown has phrased it in her discussion of historians of women, race and class, "white women and women of color not only live different lives, but white women live the lives they do in large part because women of color live the ones they do." See "Polyrhythms and Improvisation: Lessons for Women's History," *History Workshop Journal* 31 (1991), 85-90, quotation, 86.

the affairs of the public sphere as embracing not only political participation but also informal civic and sociable life, the world of letters, certain business and market transactions, and religious and benevolent activities." ¹⁶

The women of Lindenwald--Marcia Burns, Angelica Singleton, Ellen James, Henrietta Irving--were powerful women of their era, well-educated and intimately connected to the leading intellectual and political figures of their day. As members of the Burns, Van Ness, Singleton, James, Irving, and Van Buren families they corresponded with other members of leading families, managed their households, and participated in the charitable activities that proved the most effective source of public influence in the decades before the Civil War. Each of the women who would run the household at Lindenwald were also public figures in their day, if we take a broader view of "public" to mean people whose opinions, choices, and actions influenced others in both local and distant communities.

At the same time, Lindenwald itself was as much a public space as a private one, not only during the tenure of the former president, but through the first seventy years of its existence. Historians of the built environment have come to understand that the homes of the political, social, and economic elite in America for most of the two centuries before the Civil War were public spaces. In the colonial and early national periods, the men who held their community's positions of authority--justices, clergymen, selectmen and others--used the formal spaces of their homes to transact the business of their office. Courts were held in parlors, and parishioners interviewed in kitchens. By the second half of the eighteenth-century, elites in the Northeast began choosing elements associated with public buildings for their dwellings, to underscore their family's association with public power. Even as the rhetoric of separate spheres flourished beginning about the 1820s and 30s, dwellings like Lindenwald were inextricably linked to the public work of their residents: clients and associates were entertained there, correspondence was written and received, clubwomen met and financial decisions were executed. The dichotomy of public and private is no longer seen to reflect in any meaningful way the real structure of

¹⁶Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, 1998), 6.

nineteenth century life.

Examining relationships between public and private arenas in the decades before the Civil War also requires attention to recent scholarship on American material life, and changing relationships between people and the objects they acquire. The history of disability and illness has also occupied increasing scholarly attention in recent years, casting new light on the experience of Martin Van Buren, Jr. as a young man suffering from a consumptive disease more than twenty years before breakthroughs in medical science would even begin to improve treatment. Both of these subjects will be touched upon in the course of this study.

Chapter One

Martin Van Buren and Contemporary Historical Scholarship

The historical scholarship on Martin Van Buren's twilight years is, to put it mildly, slim. Most of his biographers give the period 1840-1862 short shrift, focusing almost entirely on his "active" years and then adding on a chapter or two covering his "retirement."¹⁷ Most antebellum historians have done the same thing. The notable exceptions are scholars who have dealt with the battle for the 1844 Democratic nomination, the fight over the Wilmot Proviso, and the rise of the Free Soil party. In their accounts, Van Buren is part of the story, but not the focal point.¹⁸

In telling the Van Buren story, the dominant historiographical tendency has been to make him a key figure in the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian tradition. Leading the way have been the so-called progressive historians--Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles A. Beard, Vernon L. Parrington, and especially Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., whose 1945 classic, *The Age of Jackson*, virtually started a cottage industry. The progressive historians didn't speak with one voice. They differed on details, but they generally portrayed Jefferson, Jackson, and their followers as the champions of the common man in a long, see-saw struggle against the mercantile elite and the forces of privilege. At the heart of their analysis was class and regional conflict. Schlesinger, especially, made the conflict of classes supreme

¹⁷Van Buren has been the subject of a dozen or more full-length biographies. Among the more recent are John Niven, *Martin Van Buren: The Romantic Age of American Politics* (New York, 1983), Donald B. Cole, *Martin Van Buren and the American Political System* (Princeton, 1984), and Ted Widmer, *Martin Van Buren* (New York, 2005). Less detailed is Joel H. Silbey, *Martin Van Buren and the Emergence of American Popular Politics* (Lanham, Md., 2002). In addition to the biographies covering his entire life, there have been major monographs on his early political career, his ideology, and his presidency: Robert V. Remini, *Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party* (New York, 1959); Jerome Mushkat and Robert Rayback, *Martin Van Buren: Law, Politics, and the Shaping of Republican Ideology* (DeKalb, Ill., 1997); James C. Curtis, *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1841* (Lexington, Ky., 1970); and Major L. Wilson, *The Presidency of Martin Van Buren*, (Lawrence, Ks., 1984).

¹⁸See, for example, James C. N. Paul, *Rift in the Democracy* (New York, 1961); Chaplain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill, 1967); Richard H. Sewall, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York, 1976), and especially Jonathan Halperin Earle, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill, 2004).

in depicting the Jacksonian movement as a labor-farmer coalition against an oppressive "business community."¹⁹

Other historians subsequently argued with the progressive historians. Bray Hammond and Richard Hofstadter, for example, took issue with the notion that Jacksonians were hostile to capitalism. Rejecting Schlesinger's contention that Jacksonian America was sharply divided along class lines, they insisted instead that the Jacksonians represented "expectant capitalists" who simply wanted a larger share in the growing market economy. Also rejecting Schlesinger's class conflict interpretation was Lee Benson, who after studying New York State voting behavior maintained that the primary divisions in Jacksonian America were ethnocultural, not class. He was soon joined by Ronald P. Formisano and Michael Holt.²⁰ Yet, while these scholars found fault with Schlesinger et al., they essentially argued within the framework that the progressive historians established. In a word, the progressive historians set the agenda.

The progressive interpretation had its roots in the nineteenth century, indeed, with Van Buren himself. In an 1828 Senate speech, he depicted American history as an ongoing battle between Alexander Hamilton and greedy capitalists on the one hand, Thomas Jefferson and the virtuous people of the soil on the other. He characterized Hamilton and the Federalists as covert monarchists who had hijacked the inheritance of the Revolution and handed it over to merchant capitalists and investment bankers. Had they retained the upper hand, the agrarian republic would have been turned into an urban, industrial wasteland dominated by corporate power. But, said Van Buren, the election of 1800 saved the day, bringing Jefferson and his "plain republican" followers into power. They, in turn, drove the money-changers from the temple and restored an ever-expanding rural

¹⁹Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920); Turner, *The United States, 1830-1850* (New York, 1935); Charles and Mary Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (2 vols., New York, 1927); Vernon Parrington, *The Romantic Revolution in America* (New York, 1927); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945).

²⁰Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, 1957); Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1948), Chapter III; Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, 1971); Michael Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven, 1969).

paradise dominated by yeoman farmers. Their domination lasted through the War of 1812. Then, under the guidance of Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams, the spiritual descendants of Hamilton crept back into power and reestablished the money power. Now, claimed Van Buren, the people had a new hero before them, a new Jefferson, in Andrew Jackson. He, too, would clean out the Augean stable and restore Jefferson's vision of an ever-expanding rural America dominated by yeoman farmers.²¹

Sharply at odds with the progressive historians' framework has been a minority view that makes much of the fact that Van Buren's America was not just a bucolic rural republic. It was a slaveholding republic, and slaveholders generally ran the country down to the Civil War. Historians who have embraced this view generally treat Van Buren as just one of many northern men who made this possible. Probably the best known rendition of this argument is Richard H. Brown's "The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism," which appeared in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* in the winter of 1966. This argument, too, has its roots in the nineteenth century, but not in Van Buren's speeches. It was the view, instead, of blacks, abolitionists, most free soilers, William Henry Seward, and Abraham Lincoln.

Essentially, historians who have embraced this perspective focus on two sets of facts. First, when it came to the race issue, Van Buren and his followers had a long history of catering to white supremacy. At the New York state constitutional convention in 1821, against conservative opposition, they pushed through a provision that disfranchised most of the state's 30,000 free blacks. In this battle, as well as in others, Van Buren's New York followers relentlessly held blacks up to ridicule, denounced them for the urban crime rate, and accused them of lusting after white women. The accusations, indeed, became the stock-in-trade of one Van Burenite after another, who in election after election portrayed themselves as patriots trying to save the country and the white race from Federalist traitors, British conspirators, and Yankee agitators who promoted abolitionism, racial "amalgamation," slave insurrections, and sectional conflict.

The second fact is that the two national parties that Van Buren served--first, the

²¹Martin Van Buren, *Origin and Course of Political Parties in the United States* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), passim.

Jeffersonian Republicans, and then, the Jacksonian Democrats--were southern-based, proslavery at heart, with growing but subservient northern wings. Not only were their leaders major slaveholders, both parties initially had far more support in the South than in the North. In the election of 1800, for example, Jefferson lost the North, but won 80 percent of the South's electoral vote. In 1828, Jackson barely broke even in the North, but won 92 percent of the South's electoral vote.

Van Buren, according to this telling of American history, was a master politician who was well aware of these facts and always acted accordingly. After the War of 1812, when the old Republican party of Jefferson's heyday gradually fell apart, other Republicans from Van Buren's home state joined the heated debate of 1819-20 over admitting Missouri as a slave state. Indeed, they launched scores of attacks against slavery, the three-fifths clause of the Constitution, and southern domination of the national government. These attacks alarmed Van Buren. The collapse of Jeffersonian Republicanism, he feared, might even lead to antislavery political parties. Not only would such a development send shock waves through the nation, it would also destroy the working arrangement between his New York political operation and the Virginia elite and rent New York's political fabric. To offset this, on January 13, 1827, he wrote Thomas Ritchie, editor of the *Richmond Enquirer* and caretaker of the old Jeffersonian party in the South. He called on Ritchie to rally the "old Republicans" of Virginia behind Jackson's presidential campaign. He also suggested that they join forces in constructing a new Jacksonian coalition that would fight the old battles of Jefferson's heyday once again, which in turn would divert attention away from the slavery issue and protect the old alliance between southern planters and plain Republicans of the North. Allegedly, that they did. Then eight years later, as Jackson's hand-picked choice for president, he took further steps to placate the slave states to win southern votes.²²

In a nutshell, then, one school of thought sees Van Buren as he saw himself, as a

²²In addition to the Richard H. Brown piece, see also John M. McFaul, "Expediency vs. Morality: Jacksonian Politics and Slavery," *Journal of American History* 62 (June 1975): 24-39; George C. Rable, "Slavery, Politics, and the South: The Gag Rule as a Case Study," *Capitol Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 69-87; Howard Alexander Morrison, "Gentlemen of Proper Understanding: A Closer Look at Utica's Anti-Abolition Mob," *New York History* 61 (January 1981): 61-82; Earle, *Jacksonian Democracy* and Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge, 2000), Chapter 4.

stalwart in the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian tradition, as a consistent and unwavering opponent of Hamiltonianism and corporate domination, while the other sees him mainly as "a northern man with southern principles," a "doughface" who made southern domination of the national government possible. In both interpretations, there is one problem spot--the one or two years in which Van Buren bolted the Democratic Party and led the Free-Soilers.

Why did he do that? And why, two years later, did he do an about-face, return to the Democratic Party, and support presidential candidates who not only despised the free-soil movement but sanctioned the expansion of slavery? Was he ever a sincere Free-Soiler? These are tough questions, and for the most part Van Buren's recent biographers haven't dealt with them. (More on this later.)

In general, the National Park Service's publications on Van Buren and Lindenwald reflect the paucity of research on Van Buren's twilight years. Overall, they provide valuable insights with respect to the property. They are woefully weak, however, in their coverage of its most famous owner.

Typical is the 1982 historic resource study by John D. R. Platt and Harlan D. Unrau. While it documents the history of the mansion's use and to some extent its physical evolution, it only briefly touches upon Van Buren's political activities between 1839 and 1862.²³ Later studies of the site, including the historic furnishings report and the cultural landscape report of the core property, also have the same strengths and weaknesses.²⁴ One report even has Van Buren becoming "less active in politics in 1847," when in fact just the opposite was true.²⁵

²³John D. R. Platt and Harlan D. Unrau, *Historic Resource Study, Lindenwald, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, New York* (Denver, 1982).

²⁴Carol Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report for Lindenwald, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site*, (Kinderhook, New York, 1986); David L. Uschold and George W. Curry, *Cultural Landscape Report for Martin Van Buren National Historic Site: Site History, Existing Conditions, and Analysis*. (Boston, 1995).

See also, William W. Howell, *Historic Structure Report, Architectural Data Section, Lindenwald, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site*, (2 vols.; Kinderhook, New York, 1985); John Huston, "The 'Little Magician' after the Show: Martin Van Buren, Country Gentleman and Progressive Farmer, 1841-1863" (Unpublished draft); *Interim Interpretive Prospectus: Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Kinderhook* (New York, c. 1985); William N. Jackson, Addendum to the Historic Structure Report, [Martin Van Buren National Historic Site] (Typescript, 1980); Lorraine M. Poll, Report on the Information Found in the Papers of Martin Van Buren. . . Regarding Lindenwald. . . (1978); John Scott, "The Gate Lodges of

These reports also have been strongly influenced by traditional histories of Jacksonian democracy, which Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and others had deemed as "the second phase" of that "enduring struggle between the business community and the rest of society."²⁶ As a result, these reports tend to see Van Buren as he saw himself, as a defender of the "common man" and "agrarian democracy." A few negatives, to be sure, can be detected. Referring to Van Buren as the "red fox of Kinderhook" or the "little magician" naturally implies something more than just political agility. Was he a man of principle? Or a schemer and a deceiver?

There is clearly a need, then, to fully understand Lindenwald's most famous owner. Who was this man who purchased Lindenwald in 1839? What did he do to the property? What was he up to politically in 1844, 1848, and 1852? Was his role as a major political figure entirely divorced from his life at Lindenwald? Or were the two closely connected? Only then will it be possible to relate the history of Lindenwald to themes of broad significance in antebellum America.

Lindenwald," (2001); Llerena Searle, *A Farmer in his Native Town: Cultural Landscape Report for the Martin Van Buren Farmland* (Boston, 2004).

²⁵Uschold and Curry, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 31. In 1847, among other things, he was much involved in the battle over the Wilmot Proviso, so much involved that the following year he agreed to run for president on the Free Soil ticket.

²⁶Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, 307.

Chapter Two

Lindenwald, 1839-1844

The Campaign to Maintain Control of the Party

When Martin Van Buren bought Lindenwald in 1839, he was 56 years old and in the third year of his presidency (Figure 1). Until then, he had never shown much interest in the practical aspects of farming, even though he had grown up just a few miles away, in the village of Kinderhook, the son of a slave-owning Dutch farmer and tavern keeper. Essentially, he had put farming behind him at age 14 when he went to work for a local lawyer. In doing so, he had the full support of his mother, Maria Hoes Van Buren, who wanted him to become a professional man. A decade later, upon finishing his apprenticeship and becoming an accomplished lawyer, he gradually drew away from his boyhood home, first as a lawyer on the court circuit, then as an officeholder moving up the political ladder. In this respect he was no different than many politicians of his day, except that his legal prowess was so widely respected that even a staunch political enemy like John Quincy Adams urged his appointment to the Supreme Court.²⁷

But it was not in the court that Van Buren had made his mark. Nor was it in the numerous political offices he had held. Even though he had progressed up the political ladder, from state Senator, to state Attorney General, and later to United States Senator, Governor of New York, Secretary of State, Minister to England, Vice-President, and finally, President of the United States, his fame rested largely on his talent as a behind-the-scenes political operator. To the public, observing him from a distance, Van Buren was anything but a charismatic leader. He lacked the command presence, the overbearing personality, the colossal ego of DeWitt Clinton, once his chief rival in New York politics. His forte was political organization and political manipulation, and for that his opponents derisively labeled him a "magician" and a "schemer," "the American Talleyrand" and "the

²⁷In the judgment of John Niven, one of Van Buren's biographers, this was just a ploy to get Van Buren out of active politics. It is worth noting, however, that Van Buren was the only one of Adams's many political enemies that he recommended for the Supreme Court. Cf. Niven, *Van Buren*, 135-7, and Charles Warren, *The Supreme Court in United States History* (Boston, 1926), I, 591-94.

Red Fox of Kinderhook."

He had also become something of a "dandy" in his years away from Kinderhook. Although he had retained the folksy Yorker style of conversation that he had learned as a boy, and in politics systematically undermined the power of the gentry who had lorded it over him in his youth, he had clearly embraced the good life and adopted many of the trappings of the aristocracy. The ruffle iron that survives in the Lindenwald collection attests to the labor required to maintain the elaborate shirts and well-tailored suits of which Van Buren was so fond. His dress, moreover, often drew comment. Noted Henry Stanton: "He wore an elegant snuff-colored broadcloth, with velvet collar; his cravat was orange with modest lace tips; his vest was of pearl hue; his trousers were white duck; his silk hose corresponded to the vest; his shoes were morocco; his nicely fitting gloves were yellow kid; his long-furred beaver hat, with broad brim, was of Quaker color." Noted Davy Crockett, in a much nastier tone: "He struts and swaggers like a crow in a gutter."²⁸

Despite Crockett's remarks, however, Van Buren probably didn't overstep the bounds of fashionable male attire of the period.²⁹ He was, after all, the leader of a party that prided itself on being hyper-masculine, a party that constantly belittled the Whig opposition as "the party of women."³⁰ He also had to be careful, as the charge of "dandyism" resonated with tensions over class status in an era associated with democratization.³¹

²⁸Henry Stanton, *Random Recollections* (New York, 1886), 22-23; David Crockett, *Life of Martin Van Buren*, as quoted in James E. Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press* (New York, 1947), 187.

²⁹The classic work on men's fashions is Nora Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600-1930* (London, 1968); the best work for the era of photography (1840s-) is Joan Severa, *Dressed for the Photographer* (Kent, Ohio, 1995).

³⁰For Jacksonian Democrats as the "macho" party, see especially Ronald P. Formisano, "The New Political History and the Election of 1840," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 23 (Spring 1993), 682n.36, and Michael D. Pierson, "'Guard the Foundations Well': Antebellum New York Democrats and the Defense of Patriarchy," *Gender and History*, 7 (April 1995), 25-40; Pierson, *Free Hearts, Free Homes: Gender and Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "Gender Slurs in Boston's Partisan Press during the 1840s," *Journal of American Studies* 34 (2000), 413-46.

³¹Jonathan Prude explored the class anxiety associated with workingmen "dandies" in this period in the roundtable discussion "Making a Statement: A Discussion of the Social and Cultural Implications of Clothing," Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, June 7-9, 1996. Prude argued that during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, particular tension arose

In any event, Van Buren clearly liked the finer things in life--indeed, so much so that in April 1840, Charles Ogle, an obscure Pennsylvania Whig congressman, made a name for himself by likening Van Buren's lifestyle to that of a king. How, asked Ogle, could a "man of the people" justify living in such "regal splendor" while the rest of the country suffered through a debilitating depression? The Whig press then ran with Ogle's indictment in the "Log Cabin campaign" of 1840, depicting Van Buren as a fop who walked on Royal Wilton carpets, slept on a French bedstead, drank costly wines, ate off a gold plate, and traveled around in a huge gilded coach made in England.³²

Yet, despite an aristocratic lifestyle and lack of any practical ties with farming, Van Buren had long been a spokesman for Jefferson's bucolic vision that identified the nation's vigor and morality with independent yeoman farmers.³³ Also, Jefferson, Jackson, and all the other political giants of Van Buren's day had country estates, plantations in many cases, which they called "farms," and which they claimed reinvigorated them and provided them with "moral balance." And many lesser politicians had followed suit. So, in becoming a "farmer" in Kinderhook, his boyhood home, Van Buren was in keeping

around working-class men who overdressed; middle-class men, Prude argued, found their garish clothing threatening, and accused the workingmen of being, alternately, hypersexual or effeminate.

³²Charles Ogle, Speech of Mr. Ogle on the President's Palace," quoted in Cole, *Van Buren*, 370. For the 1840 election, see Robert Gray Gunderson, *Log Cabin Campaign* (Lexington, Ky., 1957). The charge that Van Buren was a "dandy" or "fop" only once or twice bespoke effeminacy in the 1840 campaign. His Whig opponents, in contrast, had to constantly deal with the charge that Whigs were effeminate--indeed, that most of them rode side-saddle, wore petticoats, and were "Old Grannies." See Zboray and Zboray, "Gender Slurs in Boston's Partisan Press" 413-14, 426-7.

³³Jefferson had waxed eloquent about the virtues of the yeoman farmer on numerous occasions. In his well-known Notes on the State of Virginia (1781-2), he had proclaimed: "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue." A few years later, he had declared: "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous. . . . As long therefore as they can find employment in this line, I would not convert them into mariners, artisans, or anything else." Over the next 60 years, literally hundreds had joined Van Buren in echoing Jefferson's remarks. Typical was the agricultural reformer, Jesse Buel, who wrote that farming was "the parent of physical and moral health" of the entire nation in that it "perpetuates the republican habits & good order of the society." Also typical was Andrew Jackson, who maintained that farming was "the first and foremost occupation of man." Jackson, however, expanded God's "chosen people" to include not only yeoman farmers, but also planters, artisans, and laborers. Cf. "Notes on Virginia," in Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds., *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1944), 280; Julian P. Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, 1950--), 8: 426; Harry J. Carman, ed., *Jesse Buel, Agricultural Reformer: Selections from His Writings* (New York, 1947), 14-15; Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion* (Stanford, 1960), 21 and passim.

with the young republic's dominant political tradition.

Van Buren was well-acquainted with the property that he bought. He had known it since his youth, being a young man of 15, just starting out on his own career, when the brick walls of his future home rose. He purchased the property from William Paulding, Jr., but in his eyes it was part of the old Van Ness estate.

In the 1780s, Peter Van Ness, a Revolutionary War commander, local justice of the peace, state senator, and chief judge, had acquired the place as part of larger 260-acre parcel that included the stone house down on the flats, farmland along Kinderhook Creek, and farmland on the upper terrace, which at that time was on the eastern side of the Old Post Road. Van Ness had dubbed the entire parcel "Kleinrood." He had a workforce of ten servants, including several slaves. Around 1797 Van Ness had built an imposing brick house on the upper terrace, the house that Van Buren planned to live in.³⁴ (Figures 2 and 3.)

The two-story, end-gable, four-over-four dwelling was among the first brick houses in the area, which in floor plan and ornament combined elements of the Georgian style that had long prevailed in the northeast with emerging preferences of the Federal period. The structure became one of a growing number of brick buildings in the area; in 1787, ten years earlier, Columbia County had gained a brick courthouse, also a two-story, end gable structure, with five bays across the facade under a roofline embellished with dentils and modillions, options Van Ness would duplicate at Kleinrood. Houses of the eighteenth-century elite often served public functions, as a community's political and ecclesiastical leadership performed some of the duties of their office in their residences. Justices of the Peace, for example, frequently held court in the most formal spaces of their own home, usually the parlor. In time, elites borrowed elements from the architecture of public buildings to create a clearer resonance between themselves and other symbols of authority on the landscape.³⁵

Whether or not Van Ness harbored such intentions, the house he built in 1797

³⁴The material in this paragraph and the following paragraphs comes mainly from Platt and Unrau, *Historic Resource Study*, 9-51.

³⁵Kevin M Sweeney, "Mansion People: Kinship, Class, and Architecture in Western Massachusetts in the Mid Eighteenth Century." *Winterthur Portfolio*. 19 (1984), pp. 231-256.

echoed this earlier public building, and served as a status symbol, a clear mark of gentility as well as political and cultural authority. It also put further distance between Van Ness and his neighbors. Had he chosen to build the more common, wooden post-and-beam structure, he would have had to turn to the men in the neighborhood for help. Their muscle would be needed to raise the walls. By choosing brick, he had no need to call on his neighbors. All he needed was a mason. And since masons were expensive, his house was a sign of his vast wealth. Only the most prosperous could afford to build brick houses, and everyone knew it.³⁶

In the materials in which Van Ness chose to build, and the plan and ornament he selected, deeply resonant with the courthouse itself, the old judge was sending a message to everyone in the Hudson Valley, making sure that his neighbors knew that his family represented wealth, political authority, and solidity. In its embellishment, however, the dwelling was by no means showy; Kleinrood was not like the Federal-style showpieces of the Center or Van Rensselaer houses that followed.³⁷ Historian Martin Breugel suggests that members of the Hudson Valley's elite leadership, including the Van Nesses, possessed a "self-confidence" that "grew out of the prestige associated with their traditional roles in a society whose social structure prescribed leaders and led."³⁸ The restrained elegance of the old judge's 1797 home reflects that self-confidence, his comfortable position at the pinnacle of the county's political, social, and cultural life.

The acquisition of the house by Van Buren forty years later reflects deep changes in Columbia County society, particularly in political culture, economic opportunity, and social practices. Wealthy families, according to many historians, frequently expressed their privilege as well as their economic and cultural authority via a distinctive material culture. They wanted everyone to recognize their "gentility." They maintained "a

³⁶By 1850 only 5 percent of all the houses in Columbia and Greene counties were brick structures. The banner town was Hudson, which had devastating fires in the early nineteenth century. There, the number of houses in brick eventually approached 25 percent. For details, see Martin Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing: The Rise of a Market Society in the Hudson Valley* (Durham, N. C., 2002), 173.

³⁷Ruth Piwonka and Roderic H. Blackburn, *A Visible Heritage: Columbia County, New York: A History in Art and Architecture* (Kinderhook, 1977), 83, 67.

³⁸Breugel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, esp. 36.

conspicuous and self-conscious style" that was "meant to define a sharp boundary between those included as polite and refined and those excluded as rude and common." To the dismay of the old elite, however, the American Revolution had accented economic and social forces that enabled the sons of even middling tavern keepers to buy goods "above their station" and thus assume "the airs of gentility." About the 1790s, historian Richard Bushman argues, just as Van Ness was formulating his own distinctive architectural statement, the understanding and availability of "gentility" that prevailed through most of the eighteenth-century northeast was giving way to a more widespread phenomena in which larger numbers of people sought to achieve a shallower appearance of gentility, made possible by a greater accessibility to consumer goods. A broader segment of society--the emerging middle class--used these goods to achieve not gentility, but its cousin, refinement, an effort to establish distance between themselves and the laboring classes. To the old guard, that was an unwelcome development. Was gentility now "up for sale"? If so, what was to become of the old social order? How were the "rude and common" to be kept in their place?³⁹

The old judge, as Van Buren well knew, epitomized the established order. He was a Van Ness, an upwardly mobile family that had been a fixture in the Hudson Valley since the seventeenth century, and proud of it. Never would he have allowed his estate to end up in the hands of a political upstart like Martin Van Buren. Yet he never took legal precautions to prevent it,⁴⁰ and when he died in 1804 his estate was divided among his three sons. The brick house and two large lots to the west went to William Van Ness, a New York City lawyer and politician, who was anxious to get out of the city. He had been Aaron Burr's second in the duel that resulted in Alexander Hamilton's death, and

³⁹See Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992), 143-7; Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 24-42; Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992), introduction, 50-4, 61, 99, 186-7; Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America," in Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, Va., 1994), 483-697.

⁴⁰Thanks to the manor system that prevailed in the Hudson Valley, entailing property so that one's heirs couldn't sell it off in small parcels or to whomever they pleased was lawful in New York. Laws making it more difficult were not introduced until 1846. See Irving Mark, *Agrarian Conflict in Colonial New York* (New York, 1940), passim, and Edward P. Cheyney, *The Anti-Rent Agitation in the State of New York, 1839-1846* (Philadelphia, 1887).

Hamilton's backers now wanted him indicted as an accessory to murder. Seeking refuge at Kleinrood, William planted a garden and bred livestock. Van Buren, a young lawyer, defended William in court.⁴¹ Then, around 1810, when memories of the duel had faded, William resumed lawyering and politicking in New York City and used Kleinrood only as a country retreat.

Some sense of the property in this era can be found in the correspondence of Washington Irving, who would come to be connected by marriage to the Van Buren family years later, but, in the early nineteenth century, was an intimate friend of the Van Ness family. After Irving's fiancée Matilda Hoffman died before they could marry, Irving spent some time recuperating and reflecting in the home of his friends. He reported to one acquaintance that the house was "spacious and judiciously planned" and the surrounding country included "a variety of agreeable scenery." It was that natural landscape, however, that particularly appealed to the writer's sensibilities: "There is a delightful meadow at a short distance from the house, through which runs one of the most beautiful brooks I ever saw--broad, fair and limpid; winding in a thousand wild mazes--bordered with spreading trees and tufted bushes, and making a number of picturesque little islands. This meadow seems at present the general resort of all the singing birds in the neighborhood, and is a charming place for a ramble." The following day he mused: "I rather think this will be my summer's retreat--it is exactly the kind of place I have long pictured to myself as an enviable summer's seclusion."⁴² It was not long after that Irving purchased the property that would become his home at Sunnyside.

Irving found his stay in Kinderhook not just personally pleasurable, but professionally rewarding as well, and part of the appeal of the estate was the company of Marcia Burns Van Ness (1782-1832), whom Irving found "a most valuable companion." The wife of New York Congressman John Peter Van Ness, Judge Van Ness's daughter-in-law was already an important figure in her own right. The daughter of David Burns, whose Potomac estate contributed much of the land on which the nation's capital was

⁴¹Cole, *Van Buren*, 19.

⁴²Irving to Henry Brevard, 11, 20 May 1809, Irving to Mrs. Josiah Ogden Hoffman, 19 May 1809; Irving to Brevard, 20 May 1809--all in Richard Rust, ed., *Complete Works of Washington Irving* (New York, 1982), I, 263, 265-66, 268-69.

rising, was a fixture of Washington society by the early nineteenth century. The poet Irving frequented the family home on D Street in Washington, but when he encountered them in Kinderhook, their circumstances had been somewhat altered, not only by the death in 1804 of Judge Van Ness, who left John Peter \$40,000, but also the death in 1807 of Marcia's mother Ann Wight Burns, who left an estate 30 times larger for Marcia. As a visitor to Kleinrood, Marcia Burns Van Ness brought Washington society to Kinderhook years before President Van Buren eyed the purchase.⁴³

Mrs. Van Ness, in Irving's eyes, also possessed the "utmost equanimity of disposition" as well as a "highly intelligent and cultivated understanding." A woman whose "reading" had been "extensive and well-chosen," Marcia Van Ness helped make Irving's visit both pleasant and productive.⁴⁴ He wrote part of his *Knickerbocker's History of New York* at Kleinrood, and would later draw on some of the people he met while living there in other literary work. Schoolmaster Jesse Merwin, for example, became his model for Ichabod Crane.

The Van Ness family could not maintain the rural idyll that made Kleinrood such an appealing retreat in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Eventually, William Van Ness lived beyond his means and found himself in deep financial trouble after the Panic of 1819. Hounded by creditors, he arranged for the court in 1824 to auction off Kleinrood in partial payment of his debts. The property went to a close friend, a two-term mayor of New York City, William Paulding, Jr., for \$8,500.

Why Paulding bought Kleinrood is uncertain, but he may have been just doing Van Ness a favor, just holding the place until Van Ness got back on his feet. In any event, Van Ness never got out of financial trouble and died in 1826, and Paulding for the most part never showed much interest in his friend's estate. Far more important to Paulding were his other investments, his mansion in New York City, and a country home that he was building in Tarrytown. He did buy a neighboring parcel in Kinderhook and may have rented some Kleinrood land to local farmers, but otherwise he let the buildings and fences

⁴³Frances Carpenter Huntington, "The Heiress of Washington City: Marcia Burns Van Ness, 1782-1832," *Columbia Historical Society Records*, Vol. 69-70, 86-101.

⁴⁴Rust, *Complete Works*, I, 265-66.

rot and the fields, which had been under cultivation for 160 years, give way to weeds, wild grasses, and dwarf alders. Thus the estate that Van Buren bought in 1839 was a far cry from what he had known as a boy.⁴⁵

While Kleinrood had seen better days by the time Van Buren acquired it in 1839, the village of Kinderhook and surrounding countryside had changed too. Lacking water power, Kinderhook was still a quiet place with no manufacturing except that of felt and silk hats. But with two stage coach lines, three hotels, and four country stores that no longer competed only for the business of the frugal Dutch farmers who lived nearby, it had more ties with the outside English-speaking world.⁴⁶ In 1790, when Van Buren was a boy, Dutch was ordinarily spoken both in the village and in his father's tavern, and contact with folks living outside the "old Dutch counties" of the Hudson River Valley was minimal.

The Dutch counties in those days were unusually class-ridden, with a few great families such as the Livingstons and the Van Rensselaers owning hundreds of thousands of acres and lording it over everyone else. Yankees from Connecticut and western Massachusetts had already "invaded" the area, and by all accounts they never tired of denouncing the counties' rigid pecking order. Yet Van Buren's parents had to cope with it, and they found it an uphill battle to maintain their status as middling landholders. They were not poor by a long stretch. They owned more property than ninety percent of their neighbors.⁴⁷ But the gulf between their lifestyle and that of the top one percent was enormous, a fact that Van Buren never forgot. The entire family lived in just half of a small story and a half frame house, split down the middle by an entry hall, with tavern guests occupying one side, family members the other. There, three children from his mother's first marriage shared space with six Van Buren children.

The surrounding town in 1790 was much larger in size than it was fifty years later.

⁴⁵Isaac Hill, "A Day in the Country: Visit to Lindenwald," in Albert Lowther Demaree, ed., *The American Agricultural Press, 1819-1860* (Philadelphia, 1974), 290-2; Martin Van Buren to Levi Woodbury, July 24, 1841, as quoted in Platt and Unrau, *Historic Resource Study*, 61-2.

⁴⁶Edward A. Collier, *A History of Old Kinderhook* (New York, 1914), 484, 490.

⁴⁷On the family's wealth, see especially John L. Brooke, "Columbia: Civil Life in the World of Martin Van Buren's Emergence, 1776-1821," unpublished work in progress, Ch. 1, 32.

Within its wider borders, it had a population of 4,661, including 638 slaves. The totals exceeded every other town in Columbia County. The town, like other rural communities that historians have studied,⁴⁸ seems to have been dominated by clan-like networks of related households. More than two-thirds of the 730 families in town had Dutch surnames, and ten had the name "Van Buren." Collectively, the various Van Buren families, who were not necessarily closely related to one another, owned about 40 slaves. Martin's father owned six, thanks to his wife's dowry. Several other Van Burens had one or two; Tobias Van Buren had four; and Peter B. Van Buren owned nine, making Peter one of the largest slaveholders in town. The town's biggest slaveholder was Philip Van Alstine, with 16 slaves.⁴⁹ These folk, like other Dutch slave-masters in the Hudson Valley, probably regarded their slaves as valuable capital and had no intention of freeing them. In any event, their political spokesmen vehemently opposed the New York law that gradually freed slaves born after July 4, 1799, and then later, in 1817, only grudgingly accepted the bill that freed all slaves born before July 4, 1799 as of July 4, 1827.⁵⁰

The two emancipation bills undoubtedly brought major changes to Kinderhook. Unlike his parents, Van Buren wouldn't rely primarily on black servants at Lindenwald.⁵¹ Instead, he hired women from Ireland as his domestic help and a variety of white men as his agricultural workforce. What happened to his parents' slaves? Were they sold off to southern planters? Granted their freedom? No one has traced all of them, but one of them, named Augustus Van Buren, bought his freedom, moved first to Lenox, Massachusetts,

⁴⁸See, for example, Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: The New England Town in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970); Bernard Farber, *Guardians of Virtue: Salem Families in 1800* (New York, 1972); David J. Russo, *Families and Communities: A New View of American History* (Nashville, 1974); Stephanie G. Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1763-1800* (Princeton, 1976); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, England, 1981); David Hackett Fisher, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989), passim; Carlton Jackson, *A Social History of the Scotch-Irish* (New York, 1993), Chapter 6.

⁴⁹Collier, *History of Old Kinderhook*, 552-59.

⁵⁰Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (Syracuse, 1966), 166-67; Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967), 182.

⁵¹Many years later, Peter Van Alstyne, a waiter at The Yates, claimed he was Van Buren's body servant at Lindenwald. If so, he served in the 1850s, as he was born on March 5, 1837 in Kinderhook.

and then to Richford, New York, where in 1818 he purchased 22 acres of land. He claimed that he had carried Van Buren in his arms many times when Van Buren was an infant, and that in return, the president sent him money in his old age to buy tobacco with. Another named Tom, who allegedly belonged to Van Buren himself, ran away to Richmond, Virginia, around 1814. Discovered ten years later by A. G. Hammond, Van Buren agreed to sell him for \$50 if Hammond could "get him without violence."⁵²

Despite emancipation, slavery in Kinderhook was more than just a memory when Van Buren purchased Lindenwald. While some town slaves had moved elsewhere, or been sold off to southern planters,⁵³ others were still around, and many had assumed the surnames of their former masters--Vanderpoel, Van Ness, Barthrop, Burgett, Harder. One, Harry Barthrop, was not only highly respected, but well known for his knowledge of the "occult medicinal virtues or all manner of roots and herbs." Quite a few, according to one contemporary observer, were "neat and well cared for." In 1851 they formed the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Others, especially those who lived in "Guinea Hill," a black settlement on the outskirts of town, resided in "rude huts," often partly underground, and gained "their scanty subsistence from the forest's game and the finny inhabitants of the creek."⁵⁴ In 1840, moreover, one fact stood out: the total black population of Kinderhook had declined. It now consisted of 228 people, about one-third of the 1790 total.⁵⁵

In contrast, the total white population had grown since 1790, but slowly, not by leaps and bounds. In 1790, about 4,000 whites lived in Kinderhook. By 1825, well after the town had been reduced in size, the part that still went by the name Kinderhook had about 2,500 residents, and by the time Van Buren returned home, 3,100. This was roughly

⁵²W. B. Gay, comp. and ed., *Historical Gazette of Tioga County, New York, 1785-1888* (Owego, 1887), 416-17; *Tioga County Courier*, February 3, 1999; Cole, *Van Buren*, 110.

⁵³The minutes of the New York Manumission Society indicate that thousands of slaves in the Dutch counties were sold off to southern planters, but we have no specific evidence regarding Kinderhook slaves. See New York Manumission Society, "Standing Committee Minutes, 1791-1807," and "Minutes II," New-York Historical Society.

⁵⁴Collier, *History of Old Kinderhook*, 147, 497; Paul F. Marr, "Local Church Central to Area's Black History," *The Chatham Courier-The Rough Notes*, Feb. 4, 1999.

⁵⁵United States Census of 1840.

in accord with population growth in the mid-Hudson Valley, which experienced a doubling of its population between 1790 to 1840, about half the national norm.

Nonetheless, despite the modest growth rate, the emerging market economy had taken its toll on the environment. In 1790, most of the 35,000 people living in the mid-Hudson Valley had farmed within ten or twelve miles of the river. Further to the east were the mountains, with just a handful of people, and huge stands of firs, spruce, and hemlock. By 1820, some 61,000 people lived in the Valley, but after that the region grew at a snail's pace, not reaching 70,000 until the late 1840s. Yet, despite the slow growth, the forests to the east were decimated, thanks largely to the skyrocketing building boom in New York City after the War of 1812. By the late 1840s, even the mountaintops were stripped of their timber.

While the loggers were reducing thick woods to barren, rocky projections, the combination of soil exhaustion and the region's adaptability to new grass cultures altered the valley below. In 1790, when Van Buren was a boy, local farmers had practiced mixed agriculture, with large family gardens for themselves, and wheat for the market. Many old-timers were still doing that in 1840, but as the soil became less fertile, especially after 1820, other farmers had decided that they couldn't compete with wheat growers to the west. The gradual opening of the Erie Canal, which began in 1817 and was completed by 1825, had made their old economy unprofitable.

Before the Erie Canal, they had no need to worry much about competition from western New York and beyond. Without a navigable waterway nearby, a farmer "out west" had to pay more than a \$100 to send a ton of goods overland to the Albany and New York City markets. With the Erie, the cost dropped to under \$12. With that drastic change, Hudson Valley farmers found themselves in deep trouble. Their wheat yields had been steadily declining for years, dropping to 12 or 13 bushels an acre by 1813, to 8 or 9 bushels by 1845. How could they compete with a farmer in western New York who could reap 19 or 20 bushels an acre?

Thousands thus searched for alternatives, and many soon found that their land was suitable for cattle raising and fodder crops like hay and oats. They also found that the market for beef, milk, oats, and hay was just like the market for timber--almost insatiable.

Many also found a new niche in fruit production, especially apples, with pears, peaches, cherries and grapes not far behind.⁵⁶

The social order was also changing, but in Kinderhook only at a snail's pace. In 1790, when Van Buren was a boy, every single town officer had a Dutch surname and the town records were kept in "Holland" Dutch. His father, as town clerk, did most of the note-taking. By 1839, the records were in English and occasionally the town had an official with an English surname. John Trimper was now the town clerk, and Van Buren's brother Laurence was the town supervisor.⁵⁷ So Kinderhook, just like the mid-Hudson Valley, had undergone something of a metamorphosis since the president's boyhood, but nothing so drastic as to make him feel uncomfortable.

Van Buren first visited his new estate in the summer of 1839. Almost immediately he took steps to improve the neglected grounds. What were his aspirations? At least to some degree, he had in mind the landscapes of other presidential estates, which expressed the values of their owners in a unique and public, and even politically useful, way. Van Buren had first-hand knowledge of Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's Virginia plantation, which he had visited in 1824. While touring the western states in 1842, he spent some time at the Hermitage, Andrew Jackson's Tennessee plantation. He could not, of course, replicate these estates, nor would he necessarily have wanted to. Kinderhook represented, after all, a very different social and geographic context for Van Buren's establishment of a symbolic and quasi-public home and farm. Van Buren's ethnic origins and the traditions and economics of farming in upstate New York resulted in a very different kind of farming operation at Lindenwald, one naturally more typical of the Hudson Valley than of Virginia or Tennessee. Van Buren obviously had far fewer acres and slavery had been abolished in his home state.

Yet, in important respects, Lindenwald was indeed comparable to other presidential estates. It was improved and managed in part for the expressed purpose of

⁵⁶Percy Wells Bidwell and John I. Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860* (Washington, D. C., 1925), 333-5; David M. Ellis, *Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region, 1790-1850* (New York, 1967), 187; Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 8-11; Searle, *A Farmer in his Native Town*, 19.

⁵⁷*History of Columbia County* (Philadelphia, 1878), 221-22.

receiving visitors--often important public figures--and impressing them with the image and values projected by the ornamental grounds and farm of the estate. The landscape had an important function in Van Buren's public (not to mention private) life, and this was arguably the most important reason for operating and maintaining it the way he did. Certainly profitability was a secondary consideration under these circumstances. Van Buren had always looked to means other than farming to secure his personal fortune. And even in its peak years, Lindenwald returned less than 2 percent of its capital valuation, compared to 5 to 15 percent earned typically by other farms in the region. Van Buren would have done better financially had he invested in bonds. On the other hand, unlike Jefferson, he did make, not lose, money in his agricultural operations.⁵⁸ And this was an aspect of the image he wanted to project as a progressive and capable farmer. While southern gentlemen might affect to be unconcerned by the finances of their estates, small town Dutch farmers made a virtue of thrift and economy, as well as innovative crop rotations, mechanized farming methods, and close attention to potential new and more profitable markets for their products.⁵⁹

In deciding what changes to make, Van Buren corresponded frequently with other gentlemen farmers. Nearly all of them were fellow politicians, old colleagues, and peers, who also had become gentlemen farmers in their twilight years. While this group may not have consisted of former presidents, the scale, character, and geographic setting of their farms were all more comparable to those of Lindenwald. On the list were his Bucktail soul-mate, Governor Silas Wright of New York; the political boss of New Hampshire, Isaac Hill; his former Secretary of the Navy, James K. Paulding; and his long-time advisor, Francis P. Blair, editor of the *Washington Globe*. They provided him with seeds

⁵⁸Jackson also made money from agriculture. While the Hermitage, where Jackson lived and entertained, was largely a showpiece, he had other plantations far away from the public eye that were clearly money-makers. At the time of his death in 1845, his extensive estate included two plantations, 161 slaves, a valuable stable of at least 50 horses, and hundreds of heads of livestock in addition to the well-furnished mansion at the Hermitage.

⁵⁹Huston, "Little Magician," 31 and passim. James Kirke Paulding, who visited Van Buren on numerous occasions, applauded the fact that Van Buren was not into farming for the money. For Paulding's comments, see Ralph M. Aderman, ed., *The Letters of James Kirke Paulding* (Madison, 1962), 352-55, 464-5, and passim. See also, Adam W. Sweeting, *Reading Houses and Building Books: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature, 1835-1855* (Hanover, N. H., 1996), 144-7. For the returns other Hudson Valley farms enjoyed, see Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 167.

and cuttings as well as advice. Thanks to their counsel, as well as the examples of other presidential estates, Van Buren improved his property along lines that allowed visitors to be immediately struck by the sweeping meadows, fine orchards, and fancy garden. The allee of Black Locusts along the curved drive that led to the mansion had already established a more formal, almost ceremonial entrance. Along with impressing men of power, the grounds were also designed to feed them, as a demonstration of wise and productive management of land that had been (when Van Buren acquired it) run down and far less bountiful. But this was not an average farm, even for the Hudson Valley, where estates and gentlemen's farms were already an established tradition. This was a presidential retreat, and visiting politicians and power brokers were taken on genteel fishing parties, walks, and horseback rides through the surrounding area. The landscape of Lindenwald provided an instructive setting that embodied scenic beauty, gentlemanly recreation, and self-sufficient productivity.

Neither Van Buren nor his correspondents appear to have relied directly upon the foremost landscape gardener of the day, Andrew Jackson Downing, the son of a nurseryman in nearby Newburg, New York. The Downing family nursery was small, but offered 102 varieties of roses and several different types of apple, pear, and plum trees, and among its customers were such Hudson Valley luminaries as Washington Irving, the Livingstons, and the Shakespearean scholar and Jacksonian congressman Gulian Verplanck.⁶⁰ Following the publication of his 1841 textbook on landscape gardening, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, Andrew Jackson Downing became the most influential landscape designer of his day, not only in the Hudson River Valley but in the country. As the American proponent of the British practice of landscape gardening, Downing was chosen to lay out the Washington Mall in 1850. He died in a steamboat accident on the Hudson in 1852, however, and the design was never implemented.

Downing had not yet become a national figure when Van Buren purchased Lindenwald, and by the 1840s many of the basic decisions that would reshape the landscape had already been made, apparently without any direct advice from Downing or

⁶⁰Sweeting, *Reading Houses and Building Books*, 2.

his books. Many of the Hudson River Valley estates illustrated by Downing in his 1841 text, however, were comparable to Lindenwald in size and general aesthetic preference for the "natural" or "English" style of landscape gardening. While Downing's influence was not direct, the general and pervasive influence of Hudson Valley culture certainly was. Van Buren's tastes and intentions in managing his property were products of the same social and landscape context that both influenced Downing and made him a success.

In the fall of 1839, Van Buren hired John R. Harder to live on the property and oversee farming. He also bought seeds and fertilizer. He then hired Thomas Mullikin the following spring to plant rye, fence the rye field, work on a hothouse, and construct two ponds, one located near the southern end of the house, the other down the ravine towards the lower terrace. Van Buren apparently worked without a design consultant, making decisions himself, perhaps advised by the employees who were in charge of construction and planting.

The decision to build two ponds was significant. Having ponds filled with fish had become something of a fashion statement among wealthy New Yorkers. No longer did the urban regard fishing as just something rural folks did to feed their families. It was now widely touted as a healthy "respite from urban life and business pressure." But how one went about it sent a message. Just "going fishing" on the Hudson River only proved that a man had leisure time. Having an upscale rod and reel conveyed more genteel status. The ultimate, however, was having one's own private pond. Only the most genteel could afford that.⁶¹

The construction of the ponds went quickly. Mullikin simply built two stone dams across a little brook that flowed from springs on the property and inserted a wooden sluiceway in upper dam so that water flowed into the lower pond. Upon completion, the ponds were stocked with trout, pickerel, and perch. Van Buren later spent many hours on the ponds. He loved fishing and often boasted of having the fish he caught for breakfast. But he didn't do the dirty work. He had a boy at Lindenwald, John Ward Cooney, catch

⁶¹Colleen J. Sheehy, "The Rise of Urbanism and the Romance of the Rod and Reel," in Kathryn Grover, *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940* (Amherst, Ma., 1992), 77-92.

his bait.⁶²

While creating the ponds was easy, much tougher was making bog land covered with useless bushes and stumps into good meadows. The land first had to be drained. Then the stumps and bushes had to be cut out and burned, and the ashes spread on the land. Then a mixture of timothy and red-top seed, three pecks to an acre, had to be sown. To do all this, Van Buren in 1841 hired a crew of workmen. The work cost him \$38 per acre. He hoped the improved land would yield \$100 to \$150 per acre. The venture impressed the editors of the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, who called on other Hudson Valley farmers to follow his example.⁶³

In 1841, Van Buren also worked out a share-cropping agreement with a Mr. Marquette. In exchange for two-thirds of the crop, Van Buren supplied Marquette and his family with housing, equipment, and two-thirds of the grain and potato seeds, as well as all the milk, butter, wood, and apples that the family needed. By 1842 the estate had surpluses of hay, oats, and potatoes. It also had surpluses of plums--and especially apples and pears--the pickings from some two thousand apple trees and one thousand pear trees, some old stock, and some new varieties recently ordered from Hamburg. The apples sold for \$3.50 a barrel, the plums for \$8 a barrel. Yet Van Buren still didn't break even. He paid out \$200 more in wages than he made on his garden and orchard.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, Van Buren kept expanding and making improvements. In 1843, he acquired from a neighboring family, the Dingmans, two parcels totaling just over 40 acres, land that had once been part of the old Peter Van Ness estate. The next year, he hired workmen to build several barns and provide more drainage for his fields. He also terminated his share-cropping arrangement and hired a farm foreman, Patrick Cooney, to work the land. For his foreman, he built "a beautiful cottage . . . on the brow of the

⁶²James K. Paulding to Martin Van Buren, 25 February 1844, in Aderman, *Letters of James Kirke Paulding*, 361-3; John Ward Cooney, "My Recollections of Ex-President Martin Van Buren and his Friends," *Historical Society of Southern California Annual Publications* (Los Angeles, n.d.), 28-33; "John Ward Cooney," *Butte Miner* (Montana), 30 September 1925.

⁶³Stokinger, *Historic Grounds Report*, 61-2.

⁶⁴Huston, "Little Magician," 11, 25, 30.

Hill."⁶⁵ A small house in the Gothic Revival style, the foreman's residence enabled Van Buren to provide housing on site; that he erected a home in the style promoted by Downing suggests that by this time, though Van Buren had not necessarily read Downing's work, he was responding to the fashions of the times in his architectural choices. To work under his foreman, he hired additional laborers--a gardener, a coachman, and field workers--who lived in the cottage or the main house. In 1845, he bought from his brother Laurence, and from Peter Hoes, 43 acres on the east side of Mill Road, thus expanding his holdings to 220 acres, their full extent.

In 1839, when Van Buren bought Lindenwald, retirement was clearly a secondary consideration. He was still president, with nearly two more years to serve, and he planned to run for a second term in 1840. Thus, although Lindenwald was to be a gentleman's farm, it was also to be a politician's retreat, and it was treated accordingly. He needed more space for good Jackson men to get together and plan strategy.

Thus, while making major alterations to the grounds, Van Buren also made some fundamental changes to the mansion to accommodate both his domestic and political life. On the outside he replaced window sashes, installed a door, re-shingled parts of the roof, and, most noticeably, repainted the brick house a fashionable light yellow, the window sashes cream, and the trim brown. Inside, the changes he made "were designed to enlarge and improve the formal entertaining spaces of Lindenwald."⁶⁶

Most important was his decision to create a center hall large enough to accommodate a dining table that would comfortably seat 30 people (Figure 4). To accomplish this, he had a wall and the stairs in the entry hall torn down. That, in turn, necessitated building a new stairway, and its placement mandated several alterations on the second floor, including the installation of a wall along the south side of the new stairway and new doors in some of the upstairs rooms. The new stairway also necessitated a few minimal changes to the basement. He also added to the basement storage rooms, which may have included "wine racks" and "shelving" to replicate the more genteel

⁶⁵Platt and Unrau, *Historic Resource Study*, 67.

⁶⁶Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 17.

lifestyle that he had enjoyed in Washington.⁶⁷

Architectural historian Mark Wenger has explored the evolution of these wide center passages into living spaces, as families in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expanded the functions of their center halls until they became rooms unto themselves.⁶⁸ The innovative floor plan may have proven particularly appealing to men like Van Buren, who, like their predecessors generations before them, needed homes that served public functions as well as private ones. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, tensions between these two functions became more acute as the socially open houses of the eighteenth century were supplanted by the homes-as-refuge celebrated by Victorian Americans. With the emergence of a more carefully articulated separation of spheres in the early nineteenth century, families had to negotiate how to balance the greater emphasis on the home as sanctuary from the public world with their continuing need to use their homes for semi- or quasi-public events.

This was especially true among elite families like the Van Burens, who were both particularly invested in conforming to prescription, and under particular pressure to use their homes for quasi-public events. Their home as originally constructed appears to have had a large second floor room that may once have served the entertainment needs of the Van Ness family,⁶⁹ but, by the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, it was far preferable to better control one's guests movement through the house, maintaining the privacy of the family's rooms as much as possible. The hall/dining room that Van Buren created in 1841 afforded him a showplace in which to entertain, and enabled guests to move between this space and the house's formal parlor without gaining access to any other spaces within the house.

Forty-plus years after the house's construction, the creation of this ground floor

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Wenger only looks at Virginia, but it seems possible that Van Buren may have been exposed to these kinds of spaces in southern homes in the decades before he returned to Kinderhook, and may have been influenced by this practice in converting Kleinrood's former hall and stairway into a central passage wide enough to accommodate entertaining. See Mark Wenger, "Central Passages in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1986), 137-149.

⁶⁹Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 155.

hall/dining hall was thus one way to accommodate the simultaneous demands of the private and the public within Lindenwald. Without question, the new dining room was the house's most important alteration at this time. It established Van Buren as a gentleman, as well as a politician who did not plan on retiring. Furnished with an enormous table that could accommodate 30 people and walls decorated with the finest French wallpaper, it clearly displayed Van Buren's wealth and dignity to his important visitors throughout the 1840s and 1850s.

The room's table alone would have impressed many of his guests. It reflected the very finest craftsmanship in early 19th-century America. Made of mahogany, it was a large accordion-action table based on an English design. According to some sources, the style is similar to that favored by master cabinetmaker Duncan Phyfe, a Scotsman who migrated to New York City, worked with mahogany, and catered to the wealthy and well-born. When Van Buren purchased the table, however, is not known. An 1829 record suggests that he might have had it in his Albany home, and from there had it and "30 dining chairs" shipped to Washington, D. C., and then, years later, to Lindenwald.⁷⁰

Other artifacts, too, point up Van Buren's preparations for large-scale entertaining. The quality and amount of glassware that he purchased in 1839 from Davenport Co. and shipped to Lindenwald in 1841, for example, indicates the kinds of events Van Buren was envisioning at his new residence.⁷¹ He acquired the glassware from the firm of the English ceramist and glass manufacturer John Davenport (1765-1848), who in 1806 had filed a specification for a "new method of ornamenting all kinds of glass in imitation of engraving or etching, by means of which borders, ciphers, coats of arms, drawings, and the most elaborate designs may be executed in a stile [*sic*] of elegance hitherto unknown." Davenport's company subsequently became well known for high class plain, cut and engraved tableware.⁷²

⁷⁰For a suggestive history of the table, see *Sotheby's Magazine*, January 18, 2003. For the role of Duncan Phyfe, see Ethel Hall Bjerkoe, *The Cabinet Makers of America* (Exton, Pa., n.d.), 170-75, and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, "'Gorgeous Articles of Furniture': Cabinet Making in the Empire City," in *Art and the Empire City*, 286- 325.

⁷¹Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 156.

⁷²*British Glass, 1800-1914*, 250-51.

Van Buren bought small and large wine glasses (Queen's pattern), as well as claret, liqueur, hock, and champagne glasses, each in sets of 24, suggesting the numbers of guests he planned to entertain, as well as the beverages he intended to serve. He also purchased 24 water carafes and tumblers (in the Nome's pattern), and 24 wine glass coolers, as well as 2 quart globe decanters. Unfortunately, some of these objects were short-lived: in January 1845 Van Buren speculated that "there is not a house in the country where there has been so much destruction of china and glass; I have scarcely a field which has not been covered with them through the ashery, the great storehouse for broken articles."⁷³

Apparently the domestic staff at Lindenwald, essential as they were to the execution of Van Buren's gentility, occasionally undermined it as well. They apparently had a hard time keeping these fragile items intact, a source of frustration for Van Buren. If at times Van Buren's willingness to let others choose the objects that ornamented his home suggest a certain indifference to the particulars of his home furnishings, his palpable disappointment when the "principle part of a tea and breakfast set" that he "valued above everything in the house" was broken provides a glimpse into Van Buren's own emotional investment in the things he had chosen for his home.⁷⁴

After the completion of the dining room, parlor, and new stairway, Van Buren redecorated the interior of all the first floor rooms and much of the upstairs to both satisfy his taste and to "blend together the new and existing walls and woodwork." Among the alterations were the removal of chair rails (creating the smooth, unbroken wall surfaces preferred in nineteenth-century formal rooms), the replacement of wooden fireplace mantelpieces for marble mantelpieces (upgrading the quality of the interior architectural embellishments), the installation of pier mirrors and wallpapered fireboards, and carpeting various rooms (bringing the house into form with prevailing interior fashions). In addition, Van Buren ordered new wallpaper for every first floor room and some upstairs rooms.

For help selecting appropriate interior furnishings, he turned to Harriet Butler,

⁷³Martin Van Buren to James Kirke Paulding, 4 Jan 1845, Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 157.

⁷⁴Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 74.

whom he had known for over twenty years. Since his wife Hannah died in 1819, the nature of his household had been overwhelming male. He never remarried, and all his surviving children were sons. He didn't acquire his first daughter-in-law until 1838, when his oldest son Abraham married Angelica Singleton. He didn't acquire a second daughter-in-law until after he left the White House, in June 1841, when his son John married Elizabeth Vanderpoel. Then came a third daughter-in-law in 1842, when his son Smith married Ellen James.

Between the time Hannah Hoes Van Buren died in 1819 and Angelica Singleton joined the family in 1838, Martin Van Buren had come to depend on Harriet Butler for domestic advice. She had grown up in nearby town of Hudson, not in a Dutch family like his own but in a family named Allen, and had married his law partner and close friend Benjamin Butler in 1818. She and her husband had moved to Washington after he did, and the two men had been fellow cabinet members during Jackson's administration. He had wanted Benjamin to remain in his cabinet, but Benjamin had turned down the offer, largely because Harriet didn't like Washington, and Benjamin wanted to resume his legal practice in New York. Once they moved back to New York, they still kept in touch, and Van Buren frequently sought her advice. She seems to have been a practical woman who shared his own preferences for "the useful over the ornamental."⁷⁵ What is more, her residence in New York City gave her ready access to the newest fashions and most stylish goods.

The wallpaper and the wallpaper designer Van Buren chose to decorate Lindenwald also indicate his genteel tastes and desire to project his fashion sense and wealth. Toward the end of his presidential term, he requested wallpaper samples from Pares and Faye, the most prestigious wallpaper merchants of New York City, who catered to the metropolitan elite as well as the upper middle-class. Van Buren numbered the samples and sent them to Harriet Butler. For some rooms he had no idea what he wanted. So he told her to "decide for herself." In response, she sent him "two kinds of paper for the lower bedroom--one at \$1 for a piece the other 10/ that at a dollar, one of the firm

⁷⁵Martin Van Buren to Benjamin Butler, April 4, 1846. For more details on the close relationship between Van Buren and the Butlers, see Priscilla Frisbee, *Friends of the Family: Butler-Van Buren* (Stuyvesant: Town of Stuyvesant, 1982).

[Pares and Faye] thought would be best & said he would stand between me and harm."⁷⁶ One of the wallpapers Van Buren purchased was produced by Jacquemart et Benard, a very fashionable Parisian firm under the management of Pierre Jacquemart and Eugene Benard. The Reveilon factory had produced wallpaper for dignitaries throughout the Atlantic world, including Thomas Jefferson and George Rogers Clark.⁷⁷

One year later, in the spring of 1841, Van Buren spent a week in New York City purchasing furniture. He also shopped at Pares and Faye for additional wallpaper and ordered a mantelpiece for Lindenwald at one of the city's most prominent marble yards, Fisher and Bird. Located in the Bowery, Fisher and Bird sold "relative modest mantels from stock" to the rising middle class, but it was best known for the "extremely luxurious" mantels and other marble pieces that it produced for high-end customers, including an elaborate dining room set that it created for the owners of Lyndhurst in Tarrytown and a white Carrara marble mantel for Edwin Litchfield's villa in Brooklyn. As one historian notes, "Fisher and Bird was the manufacturer of Choice for the best-quality mantels of the day."⁷⁸

During this 1841 trip, Van Buren may have purchased a set of six side chairs, two armchairs, and a bed. The *Historic Furnishings Report* suggests that the style of the set of chairs is similar to the work produced by Meeks and Roux, a prestigious New York cabinetmaking firm, which like its competitors produced "middle-range goods" as well as high-end furniture. Such firms were taking advantage of the opening of the upstate New York market. In 1824, Utica alone received ten tons of furniture from New York City cabinetmakers in just one week. In 1843, a total of 4,149 tons was shipped to ports along the Erie Canal. But Van Buren, it seems, was not part of this process, since the documentary record suggests that he purchased the items while in New York City. The

⁷⁶Harriet Butler to Martin Van Buren, May 15 and 17, 1841. See also Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 96. Also see Peck, "The Products of Empire," in *Art and the Empire City*, 275.

⁷⁷Catherine Lynn, *Wallpaper in America: From the Seventeenth Century to World War I* (New York, 1980), 206-7, 232. The wallpaper at Lindenwald is illustrated on p. 232.

⁷⁸For his shopping spree, see William Marcy to Prosper Wetmore, 12 March 1841, Marcy Papers, Library of Congress; Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 28 April 1841, Donelson Papers, Library of Congress. For Fisher and Bird's prominence, see Peck, "Products of Empire," in *Art and the Empire City*, 263-4. Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 74, mistakenly refers to Fisher and Bird as "Fisher and Boyd."

chairs and bed were all made of mahogany, the most expensive and desirable of woods. Indeed, most of furniture listed and documented at Lindenwald was made of mahogany--side and armchairs from Meeks and Roux, a sleigh bed made by cabinetmaker William Shipman of New York City, a classical-styled sideboard (also possibly purchased in 1841), and various set of drawers purchased over the years. Although satinwood eventually became even more prestigious, Van Buren's preference for mahogany clearly established him as a man of taste and wealth.⁷⁹

In addition to chairs, wallpaper, and a mantelpiece, Van Buren's gentility depended on an appropriate interior workforce to serve Lindenwald's occupants and its many important visitors. Initially taking charge of that task was Angelica Singleton Van Buren, the wife of Van Buren's son Abraham. The daughter of Richard Singleton and Rebecca Travis Coles Singleton, who was a second cousin of Dolly Madison, Angelica had grown up on Homeplace, a coastal plantation in Sumter, South Carolina. She had been educated in Philadelphia at Madame Grelaud's Seminary with her sister Marion where they were taught grammar, languages, music, and history, as well as an array of feminine "accomplishments," like dancing, and drawing.⁸⁰

Among the daughters of the planter class, and particularly the Singleton family's circles, education at one of Philadelphia's several French schools was hardly unusual. Their older half-sister, Mary Rebecca,⁸¹ had also studied at Madame Grelaud's, and their father, Richard Singleton, had frequently visited Philadelphia. Moreover, according to historian Daniel P. Kilbridge, "planter-class southerners had an especially close relationship" with the Philadelphia elite, with whom they "shared manners and habits, devotion to conservatism, and a distaste for democracy and middle-class values of thrift, industry, piety, and sobriety." And, until the Civil War, they frequently sent their sons to

⁷⁹For works on J. Meeks and A. Roux, see Voorsanger, in *Art and the Empire City*, 286-325; shipping figures on p. 288; Charles Boyce, *Dictionary of Furniture* (2d. ed., New York, 2001), 196, 260. For references to Lindenwald furniture, see Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 95-6, 100-1, 106, 117. For the prominence and expense of mahogany, see Boyce, 189.

⁸⁰Lucy Leigh Bowie, "Madame Grelaud's French School," *Maryland History Magazine* 39 (June 1944), 141-48.

⁸¹She is sometimes listed as a step-sister, but she was in fact Richard Singleton's daughter by his first wife. For details on the Singleton family, see The Singleton Papers Inventory, #668, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Philadelphia medical schools and their daughters to Philadelphia finishing schools to learn "the fundamentals of gentility" that "would serve them equally well in London, New York, or Savannah."⁸²

When Angelica attended Grelaud's Philadelphia school in the early nineteenth century, she joined a community of young southern women, and elite southerners, in the "young nation's cultural hothouse." Philadelphia had become a center of activity for elite southerners who, eager to extend their influence beyond the South, wanted to make their mark on a broader, national stage. So many southerners, and particularly South Carolinians, established residences in one section of the city that the block of Federal houses along Spruce Street between 9th and 10th became known as Carolina Row. For their part, wealthy Philadelphians welcomed these families, and their daughters to their female academies, its "cosmopolitan atmosphere" and the "pro-southern, conservative cast of its upper crust" making the city an ideal place for families like the Singletons to educate their daughters, and introduce them to national elite culture.⁸³

Angelica's education was grounded firmly in French culture and preferences. Deborah Grelaud was a Huguenot from the Caribbean and a wealthy widow by the time she arrived in Philadelphia in the early nineteenth century. Tuition at her school around 1813 was some \$500 per year--a fee that even the lordly Calverts of Maryland found "expensive for us."⁸⁴ But families of privilege in the southern states decided that the expense to secure this particular education for their daughters was well worth it. By the early nineteenth century, Philadelphia encompassed the largest French community in the nation, as émigrés from the Caribbean and refugees from the Terror had relocated to the United States' once largest city. Here, society welcomed, and reproduced, the "manners

⁸²Daniel P. Kilbride, "Philadelphia and the Southern Elite: Class, Kinship, and Culture in Antebellum America" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1997), esp.190-245. See also Catherine Clinton, "Equally their Due: The Education of the Planters Daughter in the Early Republic," *Journal of Early Republic*, 2 (1982), 39-60; and Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 147-161. For more general works on women's education in the first half of the 19th-century, see Maris A. Vinovskis and Richard M. Bernard, "Beyond Catherine Beecher: Female Education in the Antebellum Period," *Signs* 3 (Summer 1978), 1856-69, and Barbara M. Cross, ed., *The Educated Woman in America* (New York, 1965).

⁸³Kilbride, "Philadelphia and the Southern Elite," 88, 213.

⁸⁴See William D. Hoyt, "The Calvert-Stier Correspondence," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 38 (June 1943), 296.

and morals of aristocratic Europe."⁸⁵ Historian Catherine Clinton has observed a certain "Francophilia" among the South's planter class. As one planter affirmed, "no lady is considered well bred who cannot converse and correspond in [French]."⁸⁶

The sophistication of Philadelphia and the quality of the people drawn there, moreover, were by themselves selling points to wealthy families seeking out places to educate their daughters. Richard Singleton's fellow South Carolinian James Louis Petigru chose Philadelphia over Charleston for his own daughter because she would see "better society than she would do at home" -- clearly as if not more important to him than any school's particular curriculum.⁸⁷

Women like Deborah Grelaud, herself having escaped the revolutionary Caribbean, opened academies that allowed them to parlay their own education and cultural training into sources of influence and income. The curriculum of Philadelphia's antebellum French academies, which placed more emphasis on feminine "accomplishments" in the arts than on serious academic study, were seriously anachronistic by most standards in the antebellum United States. In the years following the American Revolution, the notion that good mothers in the new republic needed to rear a virtuous citizenry provided justification for more substantive education for women. As a result, schools began to offer women a curriculum that was more academically rigorous than earlier generations had enjoyed. Beginning about the 1810s, the highest-status schools for girls trained young female minds in English grammar, arithmetic, rhetoric, geography, history (ancient as well as modern), composition, and moral philosophy, including attention to religion, ethics, and government. Particularly noteworthy were expanded offerings in the sciences, including chemistry, botany, astronomy, and anatomy. Attention to the ornamental arts became secondary, or was used to support the academic curriculum, drawing maps, for example, or creating embroidered globes.⁸⁸

⁸⁵Kilbride, "Philadelphia and the Southern Elite," 209.

⁸⁶Clinton, "Equally their Due," 51.

⁸⁷Kilbride, "Philadelphia and the Southern Elite," 235.

⁸⁸For a helpful overview of early American women's history, see Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *The American Historical Review*, 89 (June 1984), 593-619. On women's education in the early republic, see Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women's*

In fact, in the early nineteenth century, residential finishing schools like Grelaud's were increasingly perceived to be "avowedly reactionary." Historian Daniel Kilbride notes that, with the founding of institutions like Emma Willard's female seminary in Troy, New York, women's education in the United States was moving in a decidedly different direction from places like Grelaud's. Historian Richard Bushman adds that such schools in fact became sources of real suspicion in the democratizing climate of the period.⁸⁹ Catherine Clinton confirms that southerners were "willfully lagging" when it came to female education (though she is mainly concerned with academies in the south). However, Clinton departs from Kilbride on the subject of constructions of womanhood; where he stresses a common elite culture across regions, and the role of Philadelphia in developing that national culture, she argues that gender ideologies of north and south diverged in early nineteenth, with northerners emphasizing a virtuous woman's industriousness, while southerners prized chastity and purity, a certain removal from the demands of the everyday.⁹⁰

In any event, this particular education appealed to many conservative, wealthy Americans like the Singletons, and suggests the tastes and skills that Angelica cultivated from an early age, tastes and skills she would eventually bring to Lindenwald. But, after leaving Madame Grelaud's, Angelica moved to the nation's capital and lived with her distant relatives, South Carolina Senator William Campbell Preston and his family. Introduced to Washington society by Dolly Madison, she later married Abraham Van Buren, the president's oldest son, in 1838. Shortly thereafter, she took over the hosting duties at the White House. She was young, barely out of her teens, but in the eyes of the French minister to Washington, Adophe Fourier de Bacourt--whose approval her particular education would certainly have elicited--she was "an amiable woman of

Sphere in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven, 1977), 101-25; and Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 189-231. See also Mary Kelley, "Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America," *The Journal of American History*, 83 (Sept. 1996), 401-24.

⁸⁹Kilbride, "Philadelphia and the Southern Elite," 203; Bushman, *Refinement*, 300.

⁹⁰Clinton, "Equally their Due," 51. Cynthia Kiernan in *Beyond the Household*, 147-161, affirms that northern and southern culture diverged, but believes that differences between the two cultures emerged slowly, beginning in the colonial period.

graceful and distinguished manners and appearance."⁹¹

Angelica had witnessed firsthand the everyday experience of running a large and prosperous household in the Deep South. She had also been the main hostess at the White House. She was certainly well prepared to assume the management of a large estate, the outcome that all of her upbringing and education assumed. Still, 24 year old Angelica drew on the greater experience of Rebecca Singleton upon her arrival at Lindenwald. Charged with securing provisions for the estate in 1840, she wrote her mother:

First I want you to send me a list of supplies such as you usually send to Charleston in the Fall when the house is out of everything -- I want it as a guide in ordering groceries, etc., for Lindenwald & I have but an imperfect idea of the quantities of sugar, etc. especially for six month's consumption with a regular family.⁹²

Once Angelica arrived at Lindenwald in 1841, she seems to have been the dominant voice in running the household and to have assumed most of the duties of the mistress of the house in the family's first years at Lindenwald. Some sense of her work there can be glimpsed in passages referring to her needlework. She ordered the necessary supplies from local shops, and purchased the required linens. Like all mistresses of large households, she directed a staff of servants, but performed some of the household work herself as well. Some insight into her skill with a shears is contained in a letter to her mother noting that she was "working hard cutting out all the house linen for Lindenwald." She went on to say that she had "Maria employed upon it."⁹³ Like many women of her station, Angelica performed tasks that required her own particular skill--the cutting of fabric still being something best reserved for someone particularly instructed in this task, and so unlikely to misjudge their cuts and in so doing ruin lengths of costly material--but passed off the more tedious work of stitching long seams to someone in her employ.

Like other women of privilege, Angelica also had the time to experiment with ornamental needlework as well, and in fact, completing examples of such needlework

⁹¹Cole, *Van Buren*, 346.

⁹²Angelica Van Buren to Mrs. Richard Singleton, December 29, 1840, Angelica Van Buren Papers. Quoted in Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 12.

⁹³Angelica Singleton Van Buren to Mrs. Richard Singleton, November 1840, quoted in Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 192.

were incumbent upon women of her position, in order to demonstrate both their genteel education, and their leisure. In November 1843, Angelica wrote her mother that "Mrs. Cambreleng [a relative of U.S. Congressman Churchill C. Cambreleng] has given me the pattern of a new kind of patchwork which she calls 'blockwork.' She was covering a large armchair with it & I am about to attempt a similar one."⁹⁴ This work was probably something akin to the hexagon mosaic template-pieced quilt top of printed cottons that costume and textile historian Lynne Z. Bassett illustrates in *Northern Comfort*.⁹⁵

Churchill Cambreleng, like Angelica, was a southerner. Born and raised in Beaufort County, North Carolina, he had gone to New York City at age 16, became a wealthy businessman, and with Van Buren's encouragement got himself elected to Congress. Whether Mrs. Cambreleng was his mother or his wife is unclear; perhaps this was someone Angelica knew from home, or perhaps she was someone she had met through her family's political connections in Washington. Whatever the case, Angelica clearly admired the intricate needlework this woman had created and hoped to be able to produce an example herself that would demonstrate for visitors her skill, leisure, and access to current fashions in ornamental needlework.

Angelica's frequent letters to her parents indicate that she also performed the hosting duties when she was at Lindenwald, except for a brief period after the death of her third baby, in July 1843, when her niece, Mary McDuffie ("Mary Mac"), filled in.⁹⁶ Yet it is unclear how long this arrangement was expected to last. Angelica and Abraham were often away, summering with her parents in South Carolina. And she was not the only one purchasing goods for the home. She clearly shared that task with Harriet Butler, who in June 1841 reported to Van Buren that she had obtained:

1 pr large size Blankets at \$9, 3 prs at \$7, 2prs servant's blankets \$4.50. I also ventured to get for you three spreads for servant's beds. I hope they will get to you safely & meet your approval.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Angelica Singleton Van Buren to Mrs. Richard Singleton, Nov 25 1843, in Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 193.

⁹⁵Bassett, *Northern Comfort: New England's Early Quilts, 1780-1850* (Old Sturbridge Village, 1998), 28, and discussed 51-4. Thanks to Lynne Bassett for reading this passage and suggesting its probable meaning.

⁹⁶Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 14-15.

⁹⁷Harriet Butler to Martin Van Buren, June 5, 1841, quoted in Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 192.

In addition, Van Buren in October 1842 gave his son and daughter-in-law a piece of property in neighboring Stuyvesant for a home.

Angelica of course didn't run the household by herself. Under her command was a team of servants, in most cases single Irish women who had come to the Albany area from New York City (Figures 5 and 6). In the 1820s, Irish domestic servants had been few in number. Now, they outnumbered black servants by a huge margin, ten to one in some towns, twenty to one in others.⁹⁸ Some were recent arrivals from Ireland; others were American-born. Regardless of their nativity, they were all labeled "Irish" by their Anglo-American neighbors.

As several historians have explained, the primary reason for a high percentage of Irish domestic servants stemmed from the shifting economic and gender relations in 1840s Ireland. The lack of employment there, coupled with the devastating effects of the Great Famine, forced a mass migration to America. As the famine wore on, gender relations in traditional Irish families shifted. No longer did farmers try to provide for all their children. Instead, they returned to the age-old agricultural norm of promising land only to the oldest son. This, in turn, encouraged younger sons to leave home for such distant places as Dublin and London, New York and New Orleans, Philadelphia and Boston. As a result, Irish women had less opportunity to marry, and many joined the mass migration. Coupled with these developments was the distinct Irish tendency of men and women living apart for much of their lives, of marrying late or not marrying at all. As historian Patricia West notes, "the social world of Irish men and women was based on firmly bounded 'separate spheres.'" Irish women were thus accustomed--or reconciled--to migration, delayed marriage, and the relative isolation of live-in house servants. "And though it was hard work with long hours, domestic service was alluring because it paid relatively well."⁹⁹

⁹⁸Arnett G. Lindsay, "The Economic Condition of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861," *Journal of Negro History* 6 (1921), 190-99; Robert Ernst, "The Economic Status of New York City Negroes," *Negro History Bulletin* 12 (March 1949), 131-2, 139-43; Leon Litwak, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961), 162-66.

⁹⁹Patricia West, "Irish Immigrant Workers in Antebellum New York: The Experience of Domestic Servants at Van Buren's Lindenwald," *Hudson Valley Regional Review: A Journal of Regional Studies*, 9 (September 1992), Number 2.

By the time Van Buren began hiring Irish women to work at Lindenwald, his party had become the staunch defender of the Irish. Initially, that had not been the case. In the 1820s, he and his fellow Bucktails had paid scant attention to the Irish. Few realized that the first boatloads of Irish immigrants marked the beginning of a major population movement, that New York City would soon be the port of entry for most Irish, and that the nation's cities would soon be inundated with hundreds of thousands of Irish Catholics.

Like their political rivals, Van Buren and his colleagues initially courted the Irish vote but hardly welcomed the Catholic Irish into the party apparatus.¹⁰⁰ To win elections they had to have the support of native-born Protestants, many of whom were vehemently anti-Catholic. A few ardent Jacksonians, like the famous inventor Samuel F. B. Morse, even led full-scale assaults against the Catholic Church.¹⁰¹ But like their Whig counterparts, these anti-Catholic Democrats operated largely on their own.

The change came in the early 1840s when adamant nativists formed independent parties and won control of several northern cities. The Whigs generally endorsed these efforts, while the Jacksonians tried to appease both sides, holding meetings to denounce nativism on the one hand, but waffling on some issues and keeping Irishmen off their tickets. The Whig-nativist alliance, however, proved decisive. It drove the Irish into the Democratic Party, and, reluctantly, by the late 1840s or early 1850s Democratic politicians became the voice of the Irish and "the party of the immigrant."¹⁰²

Once the Catholic Irish joined the northern Democracy, urban racism became even more acrimonious. The Jacksonians had always been the party of the "white man,"

¹⁰⁰Jackson himself was Irish, and referred to as such, but he was Protestant Irish. People of his ethnic background, who later came to be known as Scotch-Irish, generally had little use for the Catholic Irish and often led nativist attacks against them.

¹⁰¹Leo HersHKovitz, "The Native American Democratic Association in New York City, 1835-36," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 46 (January 1962): 41-60; Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia, 1980), 169-171.

¹⁰²Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (New York, 1984), 83-84, 99-100, 148; Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to America* (New York, 1985), 295-300, 328-31; Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown, Ct., 1986); Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (Westport, Ct., 1975); Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York, 1938), 151-55, 193-211; Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, Ma., 1941), 197-204.

the party that belittled blacks at every opportunity and appealed to hard-core racism.¹⁰³ The addition of the Irish to their political base, however, made matters worse. Starting at the bottom of the labor market and harassed constantly by white Protestant workers, unskilled Irishmen fought with blacks for jobs and living space. Through sheer numbers and terrorism, they drove blacks off the docks, took away their jobs as hackney coachmen and draymen, and stripped them of their livelihoods as domestic servants and ditch-diggers. In 1830 most of New York City's servants were black; twenty years later, Irish servants outnumbered the city's entire black population by ten to one.

Meanwhile scores of would-be politicians, men like Mike Walsh and David Broderick, became mainstays in the Democratic Party. They first became leaders of volunteer fire companies, formed local constituencies, and gained prominence in bare-knuckled ward politics. They then stormed Tammany Hall and other Democratic organizations. The old guard hardly welcomed them with open arms, even sabotaged Broderick's bid for a congressional seat in the mid-1840s, but Walsh and his "Subterraneans" eventually forced the Democracy to run Irishmen for public office. Invariably, these men outdid their rivals in race-baiting.¹⁰⁴

So in hiring Irish help, Van Buren was behaving like a "good" Jacksonian Democrat. This, coupled with the comparatively less virulent hostility encountered by immigrants in upstate New York, may have made Lindenwald a more comfortable climate for Van Buren's Irish domestics than their counterparts in New York City. The women he hired, however, were hardly like the house slaves Angelica knew as a child.

¹⁰³For the race question and party behavior in various northern states, see especially E. S. Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States* (3 vols., London, 1835); James T. Adams, "Disfranchisement of Negroes in New England," *American Historical Review* 30 (December 1925), 543-7; Dixon Ryan Fox, "The Negro Vote in Old New York," *Political Science Quarterly* 32 (June 1917); John L. Stanley, "Majority Tyranny in Tocqueville's America: The Failure of Negro Suffrage in 1846," *Political Science Quarterly* 84 (September 1969), 412-35; Phyllis F. Field, *The Politics of Race in New York* (Ithaca, 1982); Marion T. Wright, "Negro Suffrage in New Jersey, 1776-1875," *Journal of Negro History* 32 (April 1948), 168-224; Edward R. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania* (Washington, D. C., 1911); Ronald P. Formisano, "The Edge of Caste: Colored Suffrage in Michigan, 1827-1861," *Michigan History* 56 (Spring 1972), 19-41; and Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1983).

¹⁰⁴Ernst, "The One and Only Mike Walsh;" David A. Williams, *David C. Broderick: A Political Portrait* (San Marino, Ca., 1969), Chapters 1 and 2. For a sense of the world in which these men thrived, see George Wilkes, *The Mysteries of the Tombs: A Journal of Thirty Days Imprisonment in the New York City Prison for Libel* (New York, 1844).

They weren't tied to the property. They were mobile--indeed, incredibly mobile by the standards of the Deep South. The turnover rate at Lindenwald from one census to the next was one hundred percent.¹⁰⁵ Domestic servants came and went, moving onto new jobs, to new towns.

Who were they? What were their aspirations? What did they think about Lindenwald and its owner? Those are difficult questions to answer. Probing the lives of nineteenth century domestic servants is a daunting task. As Patricia West puts it, "almost all written sources about domestic service were left by employers, because house servants lacked the leisure and, frequently, the literacy to write letters and diaries."¹⁰⁶

That was certainly the case with Lindenwald's servants. While historians know that Van Buren hired many domestic servants in his Lindenwald years, much less is known about them than about the other occupants of the house. According to Patricia West, there appears to have been a "core household staff of four young Irish women at any given time." The work of household help in the antebellum years, like domestic servants for generations before them, revolved around three general areas: food preparation and preservation, the cleaning and maintenance of clothing and household textiles, and the cleaning and maintenance of the house itself, including its heating and lighting. In all cases, the work was hard, long, tedious, and physically demanding. The roles played by Van Buren's staff, not specifically spelled out in the 1850 or 1860 censuses, were necessarily varied. It seems probable that there was a cook, waitress, chambermaid, and, at times a laundress and/or parlor maid. If Lindenwald was like most households, the cook was probably the oldest servant and the one who had been in the United States the longest.¹⁰⁷

Meeting the demands of a large household like Lindenwald was a constant challenge. For purposes of both cooking and cleaning, for example, fires in the kitchen

¹⁰⁵The censuses were taken in five-year intervals. So it is possible, albeit unlikely, that a servant may have served nearly five years and never was counted.

¹⁰⁶West, "Irish Immigrant Workers."

¹⁰⁷West, "Irish Immigrant Workers;" Daniel Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Servants in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge, 1981).

had to be constantly built, stoked, and banked. Fires were built and maintained throughout the house as well. Even in summer, Angelica--perhaps unused to the cooler northern climate--reported to her mother having had a "fire in the sitting room nearly every day & occasionally even in my bedroom." Elsewhere, also in June, Angelica reported that she had only just had the grate taken down in her room, and was doubting whether it wasn't still too early to do so, having had a fire only the day before.¹⁰⁸ Such conveniences for the members of the family meant added effort for the women who carried fuel to these hearths and cleaned them later. Domestic servants also kept the kerosene and whale oil lamps filled, the clothing and household linens in good repair, the dishes clean, the walls washed, and the floors free of dust and dirt.

The care of children was another source of employment for women as well as young boys in antebellum America. Most familiar are the young women who served as nurses and/or wet nurses for new mothers. All of Van Buren's sons employed nurses to help with their newborn children. In the early 1840s, Angelica hired two nursemaids--Rosanna and Alice--to tend her newborn son Singleton. Rosanna "nurses me" and "cares for the Baby," Angelica wrote her mother. But Rosanna stayed only a short while, first turning up in the records in June 1843 and departing by October 1843 because Angelica lost her baby.¹⁰⁹ In 1841, John and Elizabeth Van Buren had a nurse for their first child. In 1843, a "Mrs. Bentley" was hired to help Angelica. A woman named "Ella" was hired as the nurse for Martin Van Buren III in 1845.¹¹⁰ A slightly different position was that of governess. Rose Dalton, a native New Yorker, arrived in the late 1850s, and remained at least two years with the family.

In the 1840s, elite families also employed young boys as "valets" to their children. Angelica and Abraham, conforming to this practice, engaged a boy named George, and later another named Thomas, or Tommy, born in 1830. Thomas was fond of Singleton

¹⁰⁸Angelica Singleton Van Buren to Mrs. Richard Singleton, June 20 and 22, 1843, Angelica Singleton Van Buren to ?, June, 184?, quoted in Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 200.

¹⁰⁹Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 60.

¹¹⁰Angelica Singleton Van Buren to Mrs. Richard Singleton, 21 July, 1843, 20 Sept 1845, Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, Appendix I.

and constantly "frolic[ed]" with him. Such valets provided reliable playmates as well as baby-sitters for the sons of well-to-do families. For the parents of these young boys, finding their children positions as valets meant finding a source of employment for them that was not farm labor or something similarly arduous.¹¹¹

Van Buren also required a coachman. In 1843, a man named "Bell" served in this position. Later, James Stephenson assumed that role. Stephenson (b. ca. 1822) and his wife Mary (b. ca. 1820) had emigrated from Ireland sometime before 1850. They would remain members of the Lindenwald community for at least ten years, as Stephenson became Van Buren's coachman by 1860. Their two children, Jane (b. 1852) and Thomas (b. 1853) were born on the estate, and spent the early years of their childhood there, residents of Lindenwald's gate lodges. The Stephensons surely welcomed the stability that employment at Lindenwald offered them. The fact that they were in their late twenties or early thirties before having children might suggest that they delayed starting their family until they were in a good position to do so, and that their years at Lindenwald seemed like the right place and time.¹¹² The stability of life at Lindenwald may have offered other opportunities as well: Mary Stephenson is noted in the 1850 census as among those residents able to neither read nor write, but by 1860, no such notice is made. Perhaps those ten years in Kinderhook had afforded her the chance to gain new skills as she settled in to life in the former president's household.

While families like the Stephensons, who could set up something of their own household on the property, might stay for many years, the unmarried employees tended to be much quicker to leave when the situation no longer suited them, and were more easily dismissed when their behavior seemed to their employers to warrant it. The turnover of help was a constant problem for Angelica. Not only did she have trouble finding good servants, a few gave her fits. In the summer of 1843, she complained to her mother about

¹¹¹Angelica Singleton Van Buren to Mrs. Richard Singleton, June 20 and 22, 1843, Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, Appendix I. See also Angelica Singleton Van Buren to her mother July 9, 21, August 24, November 25, 1843. For a short list of letters pertaining to the servants, see Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 419-20.

¹¹²It is possible, moreover, that Mary may have been approaching the end of her child-bearing years. The census returns are not consistent regarding her age. The 1850 census lists her as thirty, the 1860 census as forty-six. If the latter is correct, she may actually have been closer to thirty-eight than thirty-two when she became pregnant with Jane, her first child.

a waiter who had "returned drunk from NY and was forthwith packed off." That November, she dismissed a "dining room servant for impertinence." This servant, a male, was found "intemperate" after his dismissal. At roughly the same time, an "excellent cook" who had worked the summer at Lindenwald left because she "found the climate disagreeable." A new cook thus had to be installed.¹¹³

Interpersonal conflict was not the only reason that domestic help might seek other placements. One historian suggests, for example, that the lack of a Catholic church in the area may have contributed to the high turnover rate. The first Catholic church in Columbia County, St. Mary's in Hudson, was not established until 1847, and it was some 15 miles away from Lindenwald. The second, St. Patrick's in Chatham, was closer, 8 miles away, but it was not established until 1855.

Another reason for the high turnover rate might have been the rural nature of Kinderhook. The village, one could argue, just didn't offer the basic social services that could have attracted and retained domestic servants, and it was relatively isolated from nearby urban areas such as Albany which had a vibrant Irish Catholic community by mid-century. Also, Valatie, an industrial area a few miles north of the village, may have absorbed some of the servants through marriage to its Irish Catholic mill hands.¹¹⁴

Employers often harbored mistrust of their domestic help, given how easy it was to steal food, textiles, and other household supplies. Harriet Butler attended to these concerns when she reminded Van Buren that the storeroom would need "a good lock and key always in the hands of a trusty person."¹¹⁵ In New York City, Harriet was herself the mistress of a number of live-in domestic servants, which in 1850 consisted of three young Irish women--Ann Moody (30 years old), Margaret Donaly (26) and Susan Brady (28)--who served Harriet and her husband Benjamin, their three children, several boarders,

¹¹³Angelica Singleton Van Buren to Mrs. Richard Singleton, June 20 and 22, 1843, Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, Appendix I. See also Angelica Singleton Van Buren to her mother July 9, 21, August 24, November 25, 1843.

¹¹⁴See West, "Irish Immigrant Workers," footnote 18, and Brian Greenburg, *Worker and Community: Response to Industrialization in a Nineteenth-Century American City, Albany, New York: 1850-1884* (Albany, 1985), 130-9. Dominic Lizzi, Valatie Town Historian, suggested that many Irish immigrant women might have married male Irish workers in Valatie.

¹¹⁵Harenbrook 1936, 16-17.

houseguests, and other employees.¹¹⁶ Statements like Harriet's--as well as the locks present throughout the house, on the doors to rooms, closets, and pieces of furniture--reflects a widely-shared mistrust of servants. At the same time, possession of these keys signaled the authority of those servants, like the "trustworthy person" Harriet mentioned, at the top of the domestic hierarchy. Together, the locks and keys suggest patterns of access and authority that shaped the domestic landscape of the house for both the Van Burens and the women in their employ.

Whatever the paths that brought domestic servants to work and remain at Lindenwald, this host of servants, such as waitresses and parlor maids, worked in the public spaces of the house in full view of the Van Buren family. Such servant visibility disturbed the landscape architect A. J. Downing. He thought that the "more refined" members of a wealthy household should not have to observe the labor process, and thus the servants should have access to the main areas of the house only through certain passages.¹¹⁷ In this, Downing articulated a cultural preference, which didn't fully emerge until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, to clearly separate the refinement of the parlor from the labor required to sustain it. At Lindenwald, a few servants worked primarily out of sight, namely in the basement, especially the cooks who worked long hours in dimly lit kitchens.

In establishing roots at Lindenwald, Van Buren didn't just alter the mansion, hire a staff, and let Angelica run his household. He also solemnized his past.

Many years earlier, when he was just getting started in politics, he had had a number of "unpleasant collisions" with the house's original owner, Peter Van Ness. Invited to come to the house by the judge's son, he found the old man reading a newspaper close to the front door, an old fashioned Dutch door with the upper half open. The judge purposely ignored him. Van Buren grabbed the knocker near the judge's head and gave it a hard rap. The old man smiled but still ignored him. The son finally came to the door, and the judge left the room. Van Buren never forgot the incident. In remodeling the house, he thus deliberately "preserved the old double-door, and its knocker, as

¹¹⁶United States Census of 1850, New York City, Ward 15, p. 257.

¹¹⁷Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York, 1850).

interesting memorials" of his last meeting with the house's original owner.¹¹⁸

He also hung up two pictures--one of Jefferson, the other of Jackson—in prominent locations.¹¹⁹ The choice was significant. Other political leaders might have thought first of George Washington. Still others might have honored Alexander Hamilton. But not Van Buren. Washington, and especially Hamilton, represented everything that he had opposed in his long political life--national power, national banks, and national supremacy over the states. Jefferson and Jackson, in contrast, represented the opposite political tradition--"the sacred principles of 1798"--states rights and strict construction of the Constitution.

The library, in particular, was where Van Buren did much of his politicking. And here a display of political cartoons revealed much about the occupant. He was hardly thin-skinned. Nineteenth-century political cartoons were harsh, like "The Fox Chace," from the 1840 presidential election that portrayed Van Buren in the "vilest and funniest" ways, noted visitor William G. Bryan in 1846.¹²⁰ Equally important was the desk. Hundreds of letters were written from that desk to old allies such as Senator Thomas Hart Benton in St. Louis, Francis Blair in Washington, and Azariah Flagg in Albany. Nearly every one was devoted to politics and an upcoming election.

Politically, Van Buren faced an uphill battle when he purchased Lindenwald. His opponents, who in most places called themselves "Whigs," had been badly divided when he won the presidency in 1836. They had run three men against him, instead of the usual single candidate, hoping to stop him from getting a majority of the electoral vote, thus throwing the election into the House of Representatives and then blocking his election by the House. Their strategy had failed, and their disunity in 1836 had worked to their long-

¹¹⁸John C. Fitzpatrick, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren* (Washington, D. C., 1920), 17. Did Van Buren consider the judge's behavior an insult? We think he did, but others may interpret his words in this passage differently (Van Buren did note Van Ness's "irrepressible amusement" at his "free use" of the knocker.) Bruegel observes that in the extremely deferential society that was the antebellum Hudson Valley, a "rigorous etiquette regulated social interaction between persons of different ranks," which might shed light on the judge's behavior. See Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 37. See also Peter Van Ness Denman, "From Deference to Democracy: the Van Ness Family and their Times, 1759-1844" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1977), for further reading about Peter Van Ness.

¹¹⁹Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 374.

¹²⁰Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 169. For the cartoon, see 374.

term advantage. Scores of political activists had rallied around their regional candidates and generated close contests where heretofore the Jacksonians had won easily.

Events also had worked against Van Buren. The nation's banks went into a tailspin in the late 1830s, and hard times discredited not only bankers but also the sitting president and his party. A rising Whig vote had swept his backers out of office in Tennessee, Mississippi, Maine, North Carolina, and--most important to Van Buren--in New York. Partial economic recovery in 1838 had briefly stopped the Whig surge, but a second economic tailspin in 1839 gave it new life, just in time for the 1840 presidential election.

The election went badly.¹²¹ Under the guidance of Thurlow Weed, the Whig boss of New York, hard-boiled Whig professionals chose as their presidential contender a minor war hero of the War of 1812, William Henry Harrison. Rather than focusing on issues, they marketed Harrison as "Old Tippecanoe," the man who had defeated the great Shawnee chief Tecumseh and his followers. They also engaged in all sorts of mindless pageantry and hoopla that has made the log cabin campaign of 1840 famous. Harrison himself did his part. He made 23 campaign speeches to crowds of 50,000 or more, and as such was the first presidential candidate to stump the country in his own behalf.

Yet the speeches of Harrison and Whig humbug didn't determine the outcome. By 1840 a new two-party system had come of age. Both parties had scores of strident newspapers, and dozens of spellbinding orators, trying to win supporters in virtually every town and village. Both parties offered candidates for every office from president down to sheriff. Real contests were fought in every state of the Union. For the only time in its history, the nation had a truly national two party system, competitive in virtually every state and virtually every congressional district.

The 1840 election thus brought out the largest number of voters yet seen. For years, getting out the vote had been well-organized in only a handful of states. Van Buren had been especially good at it, almost in a class by himself. Behind him stood the Albany

¹²¹All of Van Buren's biographers cover the election of 1840 at some length. For a different perspective, see also Robert G. Gunderson, *The Log Cabin Campaign* (Lexington, Ky., 1957); Freeman Cleaves, *Old Tippecanoe: William Henry Harrison and His Times* (New York, 1939); and Michael Holt, "The Election of 1840, Voter Mobilization, and the Emergence of the Second American Party System: A Reappraisal of Jacksonian Voting Behavior," in William J. Cooper, Jr., et al, eds., *A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 16-78.

Regency, a group of like-minded men who for nearly thirty years sought to control political office in New York, rule the state Democratic Party with an iron hand, and provide the Empire State with scrupulously honest government. And behind the Regency stood the "Bucktails," a well-disciplined political machine that sought to control the vote in every nook and cranny in the Northeast. The Bucktails were so dominant that a political historian of New York later wrote: "I do not believe that a stronger political organization ever existed."¹²²

In the 1820s and 1830s, their organizational strategy had worked wonders for Van Buren and his followers. Targeting men of small property who had once been disfranchised, they had benefited from higher voter turnouts. Their goal had been to stay one step in front of their rivals in getting men to the polls. And in election after election, voter participation had increased. In Columbia County, Van Buren's home base, 55 percent of the eligible men had gone to the polls in the early 1820s. By 1830, the turnout had shot up to 72 percent. And in 1840, the turnout reached a whopping 91 percent.¹²³

In 1840, however, Van Buren had a problem. The system that he had instituted in New York and the Northeast had been duplicated elsewhere, and as a result 78 percent of the national electorate went to the polls. The most striking feature was the number of new voters. Nearly one voter in three was casting his first ballot. No election before or since has brought out so great a portion of new voters. Nearly every state contest was close. Harrison beat Van Buren by just 411 votes in Maine and a mere 350 votes in Pennsylvania. Overall, however, "Old Tip" scored a smashing victory over "Little Van" in the Electoral College, the only place it counted, and the Whigs carried both houses of Congress for the first time.

After losing the election of 1840, Van Buren still didn't regard Lindenwald as a retirement home. The popular vote had been close. He still had thousands of zealous supporters. He was still the nominal leader of the Democratic Party and the likeliest choice of the party to run for president in 1844. And from Lindenwald he worked diligently to maintain control of the party. He dispatched hundreds of letters, nearly all

¹²²De Alva S. Alexander, *A Political History of the State of New York* (4 vols. New York, 1906), II: 1-2.

¹²³Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 204-5.

dealing with party matters, most dealing with upcoming 1844 campaign.¹²⁴ His main problems lay in the South.

Many southern Democrats didn't trust him, even though he had spent much of his career supporting "southern men" and "southern measures." In 1836, when he first ran for president, he had to fend off all sorts of accusations from southerners who dreaded the thought of a northerner in the White House. Some accused him of Catholicism, others of Mormonism, but most of being a closet abolitionist. Wasn't he a friend of Rufus King, the New York Senator who had clamored against slavery in the great Missouri debates of 1819 and 1820? Wasn't the American Antislavery Society headquartered in his home state? Wasn't its president a New York City merchant? Van Buren found it exasperating. To the wife of a Virginia senator, he wrote: "God knows I have suffered enough for my Southern partialities. Since I was a boy I have been stigmatized as the apologist of Southern institutions, & now forsooth you good people will have it . . . that I am an abolitionist."¹²⁵

His point was valid. As a young man, he had been one of Thomas Jefferson's most devoted followers. And, as a seasoned politician, he had backed Andrew Jackson, the hero of the South, to the hilt. Other northern Jackson men had been reluctant to support Old Hickory in forcing the southern tribes off their ancestral lands, and in the House two-thirds of them had voted against the measure. Van Buren's men, in contrast, had gone the extra mile. Only one of his followers in the House had voted against Indian removal, while 20 had supported it. Other northern Jackson men also had been less willing to support the South's demand for a gag rule in 1836 to stop antislavery petitions from being presented to Congress. Again, only one of Van Buren's followers had voted against the gag rule of 1836.¹²⁶

¹²⁴Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

¹²⁵Van Buren to Mrs. (Judith) Rives, April 1, 25, 1835, William C. Rives Papers, Library of Congress; William C. Rives to Van Buren, April 10, 1835, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress; Cole, *Van Buren*, 261.

¹²⁶For the Indian removal vote, see *Register of Debates*, 21st Congress, 1st Session (1829-30), 1133. For the vote on the 1836 gag, see *Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session (1835-36), 406. For the political affiliation of various congressmen, no single document provides all the necessary information, but the most helpful are *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971* (Washington, D. C., 1971); *Congressional Guide to U. S. Elections* (Washington, D. C., 1975); and Kenneth C. Martis, *The*

As president, moreover, he always went the extra mile to please his southern colleagues. This was especially true in his nominations to the Supreme Court. All his appointees were southern proslavery Democrats and firm defenders of slaveholding rights in the territories. Of these the most extreme was Peter V. Daniel, a Virginia aristocrat who had studied law under Washington's attorney general and married his mentor's daughter. Daniel was anything but a moderate. He was a proslavery fanatic, a fire-eater who likened abolitionists to "monsters" and refused to tread on northern soil, a brooding zealot who hoped that his fellow southerners would go to "any extremity" to ensure that slave property received greater protection than any other form of property. Nonetheless, in 1841 Van Buren appointed Daniel to the Supreme Court. It was his last major act as president.¹²⁷

What undoubtedly added to Van Buren's concern about the South was that southern Democrats had a veto over whomever the northern majority might want for president or vice-president. That had been instituted in 1832, when he was chosen as the party vice-presidential nominee. At that convention, the delegates had decided that Andrew Jackson's running mate had to have a two-thirds majority, purportedly to reduce the weight of delegations from New England, where the party was weak. That decision set the Democrats apart from the Whigs and other parties, which required only a simple majority vote for nomination.

The impact of the two-thirds rule was minimal in both 1832 and in 1836. And in 1840, when the party re-nominated him by acclamation, it was of no consequence whatsoever. But it was still a potential problem, and like any good politician Van Buren was well aware of it. So he had to keep his southern support. But could he do so and sacrifice support at home? Not only did New York Whigs denounce him for supporting "southern measures," they were also fierce competitors on Election Day. And Jackson's Indian Removal Act, in Van Buren's estimate, had cost his followers dearly. It had also

Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress, 1789-1989 (New York, 1989). For identifying the Van Buren men in Congress, also helpful are the Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress, and the Azariah C. Flagg Papers, New York Public Library.

¹²⁷John P. Frank, *Justice Daniel Dissenting: A Biography of Peter V. Daniel, 1784-1860* (Cambridge, Ma., 1964), 154-67, 243-46.

cost him dearly, as his niece, Christina Cantine, had reprimanded him for supporting such a foul piece of legislation. She told him she had even wished that it would cost him the 1834 congressional election. It had not, but it had come close, costing his party "not less than eight to ten thousand voters" in New York alone. It had brought the Bucktails next to "death's door." By the 1840s such losses could no longer be absorbed. In many districts the loss of just one vote in every hundred meant defeat.¹²⁸

To Van Buren, the real issues of the day were economic issues, especially those involving currency and banking. He had backed Jackson in the early 1830s in destroying the Second Bank of the United States. In doing so, he had fought with Bank Democrats in Tammany Hall and elsewhere, coming to terms with some, driving others into the opposition party. Now, on the independent treasury bill, which came up for a vote time and again in the late 1830s and early 1840s, he could count on 97 percent of the Jackson men north and south to support it, and 99 percent of the Whigs north and south to oppose it. Similarly, on the Whig proposal to establish a third national bank, he knew that 99 percent of his Jacksonian colleagues north and south would oppose it, and 95 percent of the Whigs would support it. These issues, in his mind, were the issues that truly counted. These were the issues that bound his followers to southern Democrats. These were the issues that polarized the two national parties. And these were the issues that elections should be about.¹²⁹

¹²⁸Fitzpatrick, *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, 2: 294; Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, September 12, 1842, as quoted in William Ernest Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics* (2 vols., New York, 1933), I: 157; *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U. S. Elections* (Washington, D. C., 1975), 562-3, 570-1.

¹²⁹The literature on what the parties stood for, as well as what the Van Burenites thought the parties stood for, is vast. For brief summaries, along with party voting patterns, see Frank Otto Gatell, "Sober Second Thoughts on Van Buren, the Albany Regency, and the Wall Street Conspiracy," *Journal of American History* 53 (June 1966): 19-40; Jean Alexander Wilburn, *Biddle's Bank: The Crucial Years* (New York, 1964); John M. McFaul, *The Politics of Jacksonian Finance* (Ithaca, 1972); John Ashworth, *'Agrarians and Aristocrats': Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (Cambridge, England, 1983), 47-51, 272-78; Alexander, *Sectional Stress and Party Strength*, 24-36, 137-52; 272-78; Holt, "The Election of 1840, Voter Mobilization, and the Emergence of Jacksonian Voting Behavior," 16-58.

On the state level "bank wars" were also a commonplace, with "radical" hard-money Democrats battling Whigs and "conservative" Democrats over currency and banking policy. See especially James R. Sharp, *The Jacksonians versus the Banks: Politics in the States After the Panic of 1837* (New York, 1970); William G. Shade, *Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865* (Detroit, 1972); Herbert Ershkowitz and William G. Slade, "Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in the State Legislatures during the Jacksonian Era," *Journal of American History* 58 (December 1971): 591-621.

Unfortunately, as he well knew, there were hundreds of New York voters who strongly disagreed. Not everyone in his home state accepted the notion that currency and banking were the central issues of the day. Nor did all regard the "gag rule" and similar matters as just peripheral issues. That was especially true throughout much of upstate New York, New England, and northern Ohio where antislavery and anti-southern sentiment was on the rise. In 1836, the year he was elected president, the American Anti-Slavery Society had 88 local affiliates in his home state. By the time he left office, the number had expanded to 369. In 1837-38 alone, they and like-minded people in other states had bombarded Congress with over 130,000 petitions calling for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the nation's capital, and over 180,000 petitions opposing the annexation of slaveholding Texas.¹³⁰

The upshot, Van Buren concluded, was that his constant support of "Southern men" and "Southern measures" had hurt "every limb" of his state party "often" and "severely." Lemuel Stetson, a Van Buren loyalist from upstate New York, was more specific. The New York party, he predicted, would lose "1/4" of its "friends" if it did not shed its pro-southern image.¹³¹

That was easier said than done. Van Buren still had presidential ambitions, and for that he needed southern help. Van Buren thus made a tour of the South and the West in 1842, mending fences and seeking support. He also spent many days in his Lindenwald study trying to find the right words that would win over southern Democrats. The results, however, were disappointing. While he maintained the solid backing of his old Missouri allies, he fared poorly elsewhere in the South, obtaining a firm commitment from only five of some 90 delegates to the 1844 Democratic nominating convention. In the North, in contrast, where he also had plenty of critics, he obtained the backing of 134 out of 153 delegates. That was enough to be nominated on the first ballot if only a simple majority

¹³⁰Calculated from data, American Anti-Slavery Society, Second through Fifth Annual Reports (New York, 1835-38).

¹³¹Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, September 12, 1842, as quoted in Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics*, I: 157; Lemuel Stetson to Azariah. C. Flagg, December 31, 1844, Flagg Papers (New York Public Library).

was needed.¹³²

But, as it turned out, he had to face up to the dictates of the two-thirds rule, and by the time the Democratic convention met in Baltimore the annexation of Texas had become the central issue in national politics. For the Van Burenites this issue had always meant trouble. In the mid-1830s, when the Texans rebelled against Mexico, the Texans had tried to portray their revolution as a battle for freedom, but John Quincy Adams and other northern Whigs had labeled it a "Slave Power conspiracy." The Texans, Adams had argued, were not fighting for freedom; they were fighting to keep their slaves in bondage; and Andrew Jackson and other slave-masters were aiding them, not for the sake of human freedom, but to further southern interests and to add a covey of slave states to the Union. Since then, northern Whigs had been dead set against the expansion of slavery, and Whigs in general opposed expansion. And Van Buren, as Jackson's successor in 1837, had decided not to touch the Texas issue. It was too explosive, certain to disrupt the Democratic agenda.¹³³

As president, Van Buren had resisted the clamoring of the pro-Texas lobby, and when he lost the presidency in 1840 the pro-Texas lobby's influence was nil. The victorious Whigs had no appetite whatsoever for acquiring huge chunks of additional land. But the new Whig President, William Henry Harrison, died one month after he took office, and his successor, John Tyler of Virginia, was hardly a Whig at all. He had been given second place on the Whig presidential ticket only because his presence might win the support of Virginians, states-righters, and former Jackson men like himself. He had no use for the nationalistic and pro-business policies championed by Henry Clay and other

¹³²In a recent article, "Martin Van Buren, the Democracy, and the Partisan Politics of Texas Annexation," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (November 1995): 695-724, Michael Morrison minimizes the difference in delegate count and emphasizes the general unhappiness with Van Buren in both the North and the South. In our judgment, ignoring the delegate count distorts the overall picture.

¹³³Of the vast literature on the acquisition of Texas, see Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (Corrected edition; New York, 1941); David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon and the Mexican War* (Columbia, Mo., 1973); Charles G. Sellers, *James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846* (Princeton, 1966); Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York, 1972); Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, 1985), Chapters 2 and 3; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York, 1990), Chapters 20-25. For Van Buren's views on the Texas question, see also James C. Curtis, *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1841* (Lexington, Ky., 1970), Chapter 8.

congressional Whigs. True to his beliefs, he vetoed three different bank bills on constitutional grounds. In disgust Whigs read him out of the party.

Deprived of party support, Tyler decided to push Texas to the fore. Hoping that it would enable him to run for President in 1844 as the candidate of a new pro-Texas third party, or better yet as the Democratic nominee, he launched a propaganda campaign in 1842 that harped on the dangers of a British takeover of Texas. In Congress and in the press, a small coterie of loyal followers, aided by some Democrats, sang the praises of immediate annexation, appealing mainly to the South and the widespread hatred of the British. Meanwhile Secretary of State Abel Upshur, a proslavery zealot, negotiated a treaty of annexation with Texas authorities. The negotiations were all but over when Upshur was killed in a freak accident. To complete negotiations, Tyler turned to slavery's foremost spokesman, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina.

That sealed the link between slavery and Texas. After completing negotiations in April 1844, Calhoun sent the treaty to the Senate, along with a copy of a letter that he had written to Richard Pakenham, the British minister to Washington. The letter was a bombshell. Besides denouncing Pakenham's government for interfering in Texas and supporting abolition throughout the Atlantic world, Calhoun sang the praises of slavery and cited statistics to prove that blacks were better off as slaves than as freedmen--and that southern slaves were better off than white workers in industrial England. More importantly, he justified annexation as a defense measure in behalf of slavery.¹³⁴ The annexation treaty was thus officially labeled a proslavery measure.

No one knows for certain why Calhoun sent this indiscreet letter to the Senate, but according to one theory he wanted to undermine Van Buren's presidential aspirations.¹³⁵ If that was his intention, he succeeded. Senator Benjamin Tappan of Ohio quickly leaked the letter to the press, and suddenly cries of "Slave Power conspiracy" rang through the North. Within four days the front running Whig presidential contender, Henry Clay, announced his opposition to annexation "at this time." The next day Van Buren followed suit. Clay's announcement created only a minor stir among his followers, who by and

¹³⁴Calhoun to Pakenham, 18 April 1844, in *Senate Documents*, 28th Congress, 1st Session (1843-44), no. 341.

large opposed territorial expansion, and he won his party's nomination by acclamation. Van Buren's Texas letter, however, raised a storm of protest among Democrats, especially in the southern and western states. Even Jackson turned on his hand-picked successor. And at the Democratic convention held in Baltimore, pro-Texas strategists pushed through a measure by a 148 to 116 vote mandating a two-thirds majority for the presidential nomination.¹³⁶

That killed Van Buren's presidential aspirations. Although he came to the convention with a majority of the delegates pledged to him, he could not get two-thirds. Nor could his archrival, Lewis Cass of Michigan. Finally, after a long deadlock, the party turned to James K. Polk, a Tennessee slaveholder whose hard-money views satisfied the Van Burenites, and whose zeal for expansion satisfied the annexationists.

The outcome was a bitter pill for Van Buren and his followers to swallow. Although Polk was technically a Van Buren loyalist, he was no Van Buren. Nor was he a charismatic leader like Jackson. He was a "dark horse," the first to be chosen by any major party. A minor hero of the Bank War, he had served two terms as Speaker of the House and won the Tennessee governorship, but had been defeated twice in subsequent gubernatorial races. Thus, in Van Buren eyes, he had been dumped for a nobody.

Who was responsible for this travesty? The leading manipulator, the man most responsible for having the two-thirds rule adopted by the convention, was Robert Walker of Mississippi, and most of the Walker's co-conspirators were from the slave states. On the critical vote to adopt the rule, 90 of the 104 slave state delegates voted with Walker, as compared to 58 of the 160 free state delegates. Finally, after Polk won the presidency by a razor-thin margin, he made Walker his Secretary of the Treasury. That added insult

¹³⁵Sellers, *Polk: Continentalist*, 57-58.

¹³⁶For the controversial 1844 Democratic convention, see especially James C. N. Paul, *Rift in the Democracy* (Philadelphia, 1957); James P. Shenton, *Robert John Walker: A Politician from Jackson to Lincoln* (New York, 1961), Chapter 4; and Sellers, *Polk: Continentalist*, 61-107. For a minority view, which minimizes the sectional nature of the controversy, see Morrison, "Martin Van Buren, the Democracy, and the Partisan Politics of Texas Annexation." For more on how the delegates voted, see Richard C. Bain, *Convention Decisions and Voting Records* (Washington, D. C., 1960), 32-35, Appendix; *National Party Conventions, 1831-1988* (Washington, D. C., 1991), 177; *Albany Argus*, May 30-31, 1844; *Northampton Democrat*, June 4, 1844.

to injury.¹³⁷

Polk's narrow victory in the general election also troubled Van Buren and his followers. The outcome turned on a Democratic plurality of some 5,000 votes in New York, where an outburst of nativism brought thousands of Irish Democrats to the polls, while 16,000 voters supported the antislavery Liberty party. According to the press, the desertion of antislavery Whigs to the Liberty Party cost Henry Clay the election. But to Van Buren and his followers, Polk's success also hinged on the fact that they had talked a reluctant Silas Wright into running for Governor. Wright's name on the ballot, in their eyes, had increased the Democratic turnout and thus offset the impact that antislavery propaganda had against Polk in upstate New York.

What disturbed Van Buren and his close advisors was the magnitude of antislavery and anti-southern sentiment in parts of New England, New York, and northern Ohio. In key districts Polk trailed the Democratic ticket, running several thousand votes behind Wright in New York, and well behind Bucktail congressional candidates. The leadership concluded that the Texas controversy had given the balance of power to the abolitionists in dozens of communities, including ten upstate New York congressional districts, and hence the state was in danger of falling into Whig hands. They decided it was time to distance themselves from the South.¹³⁸

The opportunity came quickly. In December 1844, a month after Polk's victory, Congressman John Quincy Adams once again called for the repeal of the gag rule. He had done this before, and each time had been voted down. This time, without fanfare or debate, Van Buren Democrats refused to come to the aid of their southern colleagues. Instead of providing the necessary votes to table his motion, they provided the votes to get it passed, 108 to 80. Of New York Democrats, 18 sided with Adams and only two

¹³⁷Bain, *Convention Decisions*, Appendix; Congressional Quarterly, *National Party Conventions, 1831-1988* (Washington, D. C., 1991), 177; *Albany Argus*, May 30, 31, 1844; *Northampton Democrat*, June 4, 1844; Shenton, *Robert Walker*, 42-48.

¹³⁸John Arthur Garraty, *Silas Wright* (New York, 1949), 287-329; John M. Niles to Gideon Welles, January 12, 24, 25, 31, 1845, Gideon Welles Papers, Library of Congress. In "Martin Van Buren, the Democracy, and the Partisan Politics of Texas Annexation," 721-24, Morrison points out correctly that Polk won more votes in the Northeast than Van Buren did four years earlier. The problem, in the eyes of the Bucktails at least, was that Polk's candidacy didn't provide "coattails" that helped other Democratic candidates; instead, it was a drag on the ticket.

supported their southern colleagues.¹³⁹

Equally portentous was the vote a few months later on the annexation of Texas. The Senate voted down the treaty of annexation that Upshur had formulated and Calhoun finalized. But since Polk ran as a zealous expansionist, politicians of both parties had assumed that a vote for Polk was a vote for Texas, and after he won by a whisker Tyler and Calhoun claimed that Polk's victory amounted to a popular endorsement of their defeated treaty. Tyler called on Congress to vindicate the treaty by passing a joint resolution that embodied its precise language. That was too much for most northern Democrats who wanted no association with the renegade president or Calhoun's Pakenham letter, but many of them also interpreted the results as a mandate for immediate annexation. A host of counterproposals were soon in the making, nine in the House, six in the Senate. Not one was alike, and for a time it appeared that Congress would get bogged down in endless squabbling.

At this point, however, a few southern Whigs decided that here was an opportunity to reverse an election trend. In the fall elections southern Democrats had roasted them with the Texas issue, claiming that they were in league with British and northern abolitionists in opposing annexation, and these charges had resonated with many southern voters. To avoid further losses at home, Milton Brown of Tennessee with the backing of a handful of southern Whigs offered a resolution that would enable Texas, once admitted to the Union, to expand into five slave states.¹⁴⁰ As usual, northern Whigs would have none of it. But southern Democrats, eager to acquire the votes of Brown and his backers, embraced the proposal.

What would Van Buren Democrats do? If they backed their southern colleagues, they were certain to be denounced as backing a Slave Power conspiracy. If they broke with the southern Democrats, they were equally certain to be denounced for betraying the party's campaign promises. Hadn't the party agreed to a platform calling for the annexation of Texas "at the earliest practicable moment"? Hadn't Polk run on a campaign

¹³⁹*Congressional Globe*, 28th Congress, 2d Session (1844-45), 7.

¹⁴⁰*Congressional Globe*, 28th Congress, 2d Session (1844-45), 129-30. The final wording of the Brown amendment is reprinted in Merk, *Slavery and Annexation*, 289-90.

slogan calling for "the reoccupation of Oregon and the re-annexation of Texas"?¹⁴¹

Given this predicament, most northern Democrats went along with the South, and the Texas bill passed the House, 120 to 98. But the Van Buren Democrats refused to go along with the majority. During the debate leading up to the vote, several spoke openly against annexation. Lemuel Stetson from upstate New York hid his real objections and focused instead on the bill's constitutional shortcomings. But Jacob Brinkerhoff of Ohio lambasted the annexationists for hatching up a purely "sectional question . . . for the benefit of the South; for the strengthening of her institutions; for the promotion of her power; for her benefit, for the advancement of her influence." And George Rathbun, also from upstate New York, not only opposed annexation on antislavery grounds but reminded his colleagues that northern doughfaces who sold their votes to the South during the Missouri crisis had paid dearly with the electorate.¹⁴²

Meanwhile, in the background, trying to organize the vote against Texas, was Preston King, one of the two New York Bucktails who voted to retain the gag rule.¹⁴³ When it came time to vote, he and 26 other Van Buren Democrats conspicuously voted against the annexation of Texas, even though they were accused of being defectors, of violating the dictates of the party caucus. For years, they had been "insiders." Now, they were "outsiders," at odds with their national party.

What, then, did the future hold? That, for Martin Van Buren and his followers, was now the prime issue.

¹⁴¹The predicament of Van Buren and his followers was a constant source of anguish in 1844-45. See Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress; Gideon Welles Papers, Library of Congress; Wright-Butler Letters, New York Public Library; and the Azariah C. Flagg Papers, New York Public Library. See also "Secret Circular" and "Joint Letter to the Democratic-Republican Electors of the State of New York, July 15, 1844," reprinted in Parke Godwin, *A Biography of William Cullen Bryant* (2 vols.; New York, 1883), I: 416-23.

¹⁴²*Congressional Globe*, 28th Congress, 2d Session (1844-45), 173, Appendix 58-61; Lemuel Stetson to Azariah C. Flagg, December 31, 1844, Azariah C. Flagg Papers, New York Public Library.

¹⁴³Preston King to Azariah C. Flagg, December 21, 1844, January, 8, 11, 1845, Azariah C. Flagg Papers, New York Public Library.

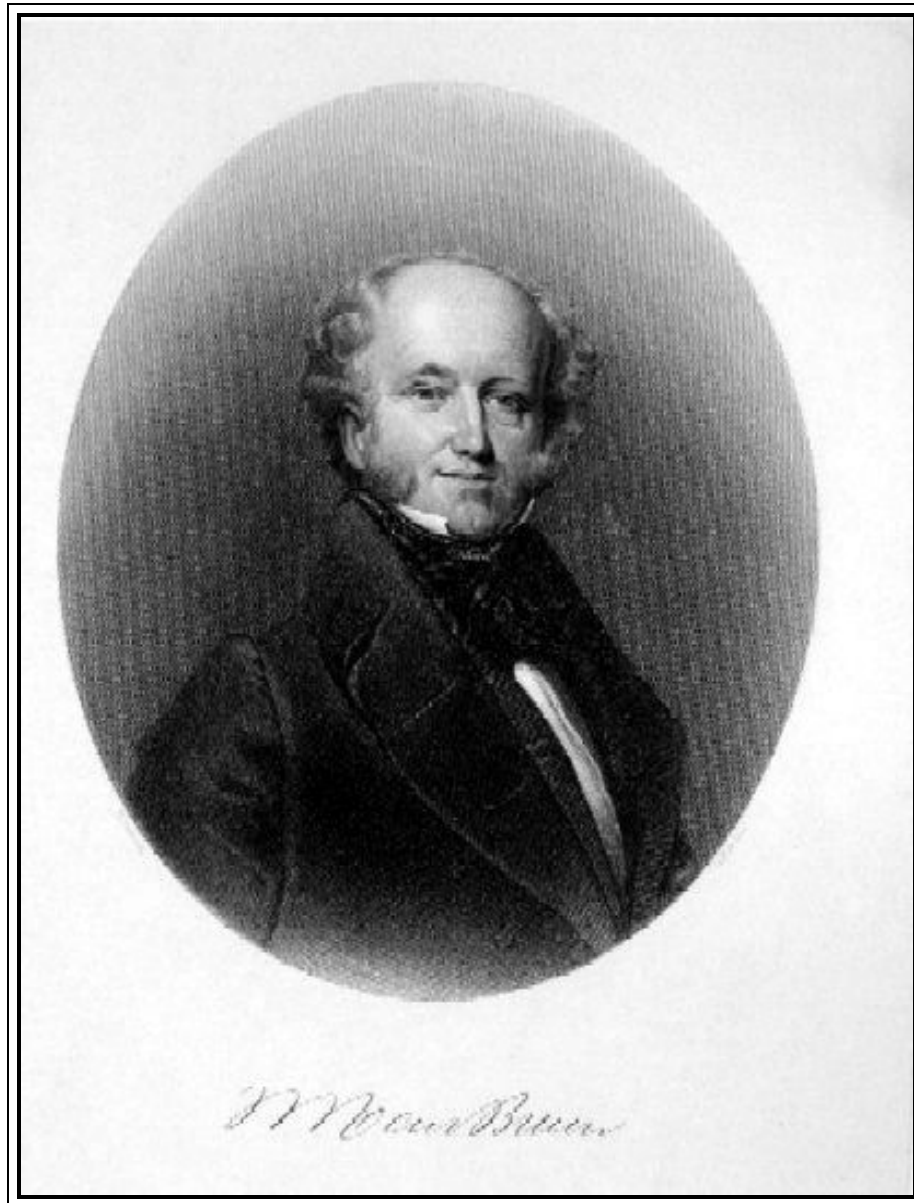


Figure 1. Martin Van Buren in the years just prior to the purchase of Lindenwald. George Parker (d. 1868), engraver. This presidential portrait was based upon Henry Inman's (1801-1846) painting from life. Museum collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.

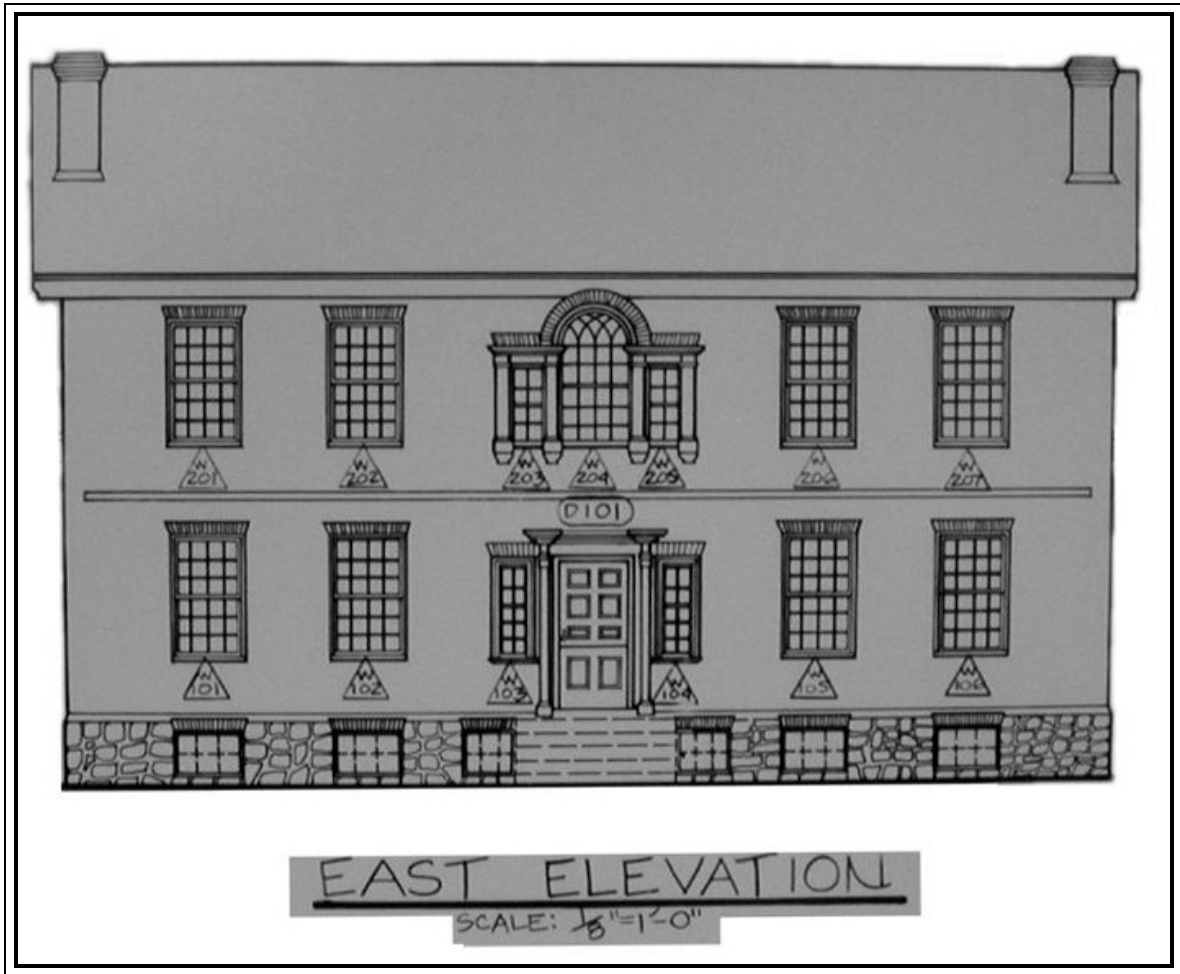


Figure 2. Close-up of East Elevation of Lindenwald prior to the Upjohn redesign. Martin Van Buren National Historic Site 1797 Elevations. Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress.

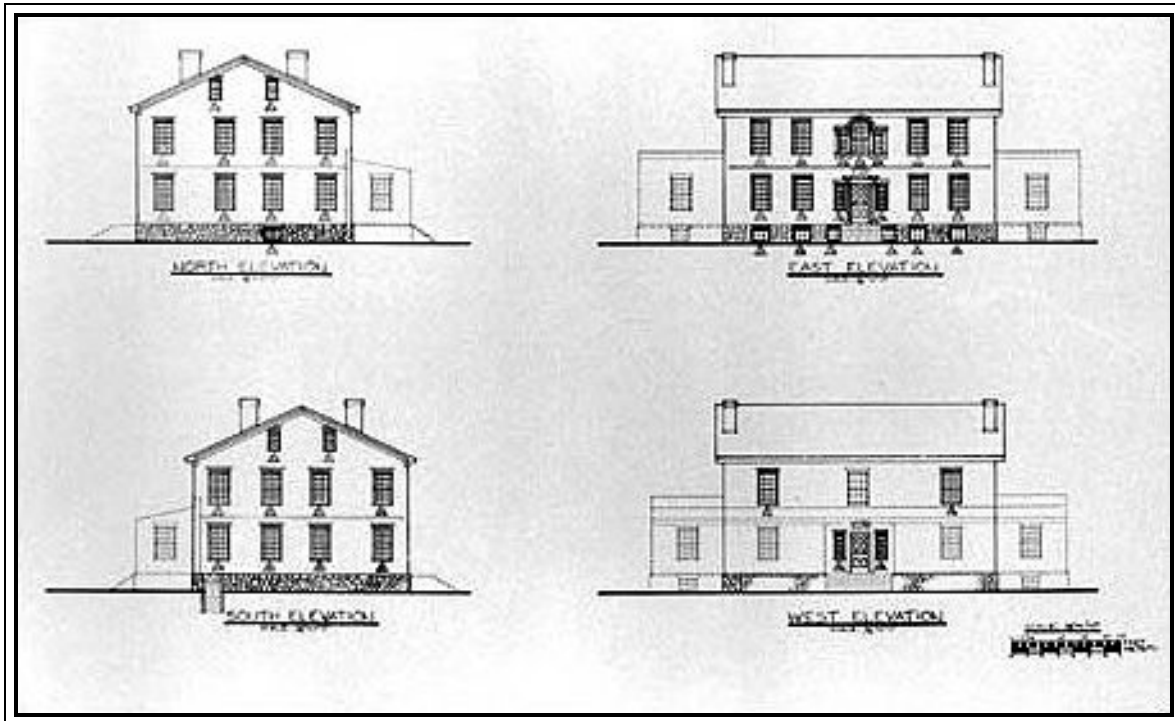


Figure 3. Martin Van Buren National Historic Site 1797 Elevations. Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress.



Figure 4. Center hall with large dining table. The creation of the dining hall was the major alteration Van Buren made when he first took possession of the mansion. The photograph shows the hall as a period room installed by the National Park Service as part of its restoration of Lindenwald. Photo courtesy of Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.

		Thomas	1	M	
649	810	Van Buren Van Buren	77	M	Scotchman
		Smith	42	M	
		Hennetta	26	F	
		Ella	16	F	
		Edward	12	M	
		Catherine	10	F	
		Martin	4	M	
		Eliza	2	F	
		Rose Dalton	26	M	Greeness
		Catherine Kelley	24	F	
		Mary Kelley	24	F	

Figure 5. Members of the Van Buren household including the extended Van Buren family and domestic servants as counted in the 1860 census. Columbia County, New York, Census Records, 1860. Columbia County Courthouse, Hudson, NY.

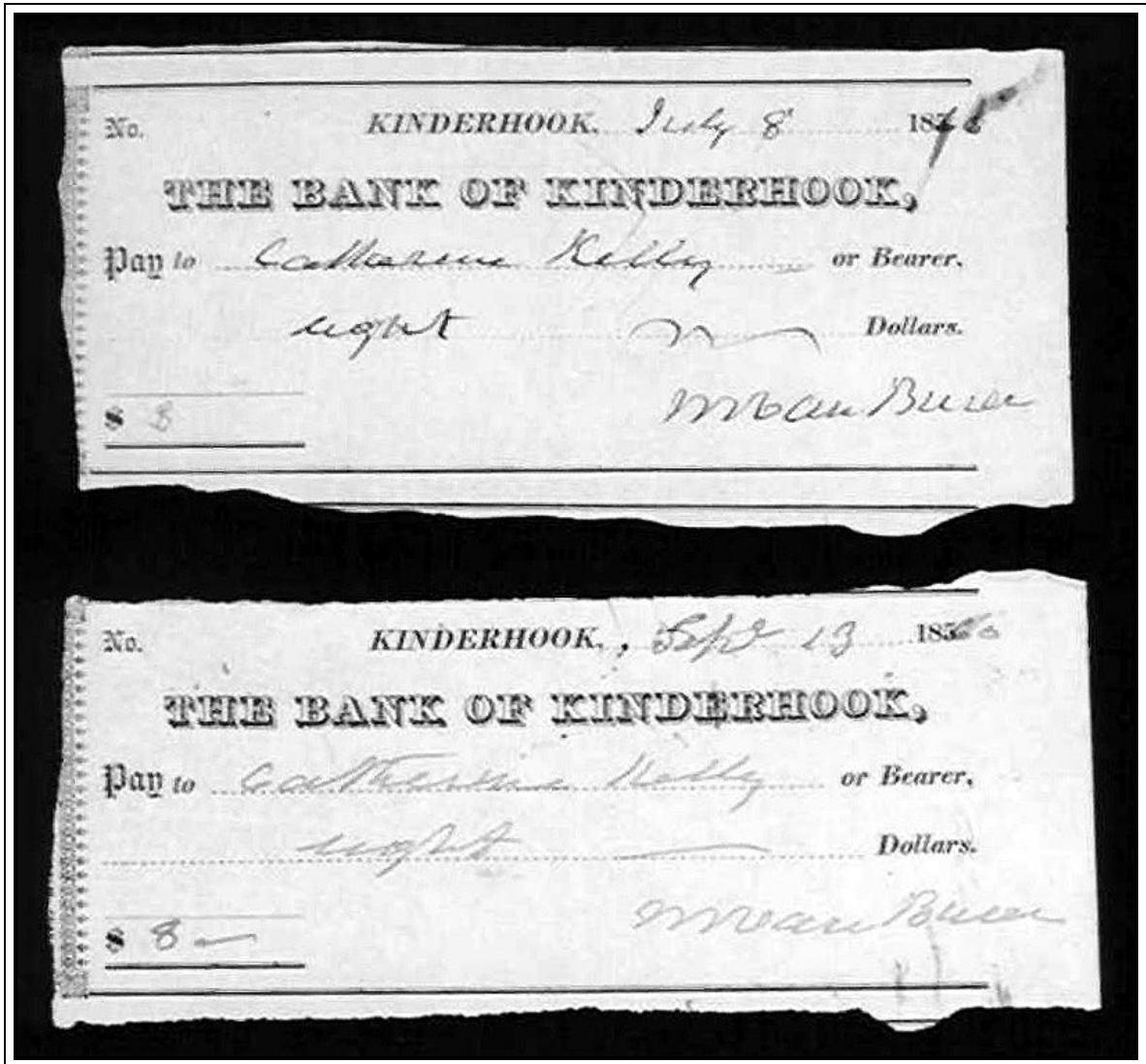


Figure 6. Bank notes paid by Van Buren to Catherine Kelly, one of his domestic servants, for a monthly pay period. Museum collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.

Chapter Three

Lindenwald, 1845-1848: The Birth of the Free Soil Party

Having lost out to Polk, Van Buren had more time to devote to farming. He had already gained recognition as a progressive farmer and was proud of it. In 1841, the *New York Commercial Advertiser* had made much of the example he was setting for other farmers in the Hudson Valley. In 1843, the Democratic activist James Kirke Paulding had sent a glowing report of Van Buren's farm to Andrew Jackson: "The same practical good sense, the same sober, consistent, and judicious adaptation of means to ends, which has carried Van Buren successfully through every stage of his political life, is discoverable in his system of farming. His calculations are all judicious, his anticipations always well founded, and his improvement never fails to quit cost"144

Quitting cost and making improvements were central to men of Paulding's stamp. Although Paulding had been Van Buren's Secretary of the Navy, he was better known as a novelist than as a politician. He had been a leading figure in New York City literary circles until the 1840s. Then he retired to the countryside, buying a 50 acre farm just north of Hyde Park. From there he kept up a steady correspondence with Van Buren on farming. As Paulding saw it, success in the market economy was meaningless. Indeed, the goal of a gentleman farmer was not to make money. Instead, it was to make improvements, to set an example for the next generation, without going heavily into debt. In this regard, Paulding had nothing but praise for Van Buren: "It gives me great satisfaction to find You continue to lay out money on your Farm, as it does not matter whether it Yields You any return, or not. The great pleasure is in Spending it, independently of any sordid calculations of gain, which are utterly unworthy of a Gentleman Farmer, whose first duty is to make experiments for the benefit of the rising

¹⁴⁴*New York Commercial Advertiser*, November 1841, as quoted in Stokinger, *Historic Grounds Report*, 61-2; James Kirke Paulding to Andrew Jackson, 4 October 1843, in Ralph M. Aderman, ed., *The Letters of James Kirke Paulding* (Madison, Wisc., 1962), 352-5.

generation."¹⁴⁵

Of the same bent was Isaac Hill of New Hampshire. A close confidante of Van Buren, Hill was the owner, editor, and printer of the *New Hampshire Patriot*. He was best known as a political wire-puller, a wheeler-dealer who knew how to win elections. He headed the Jacksonian political machine that completely dominated New Hampshire for the better part of two decades. He too had become a gentleman farmer and, like Paulding, thought it was the duty of gentlemen farmers to set good examples for the younger generation to follow. With this in mind, in 1844 he wrote a piece for the *Cultivator*, a progressive farm journal, hailing Van Buren as a model farmer and Lindenwald as a model farm (Figure 7).¹⁴⁶

Van Buren read the farm journal *Cultivator*, founded by Jesse Buel, one of the most prominent agricultural reformers of the era. Buel's mantra was that farmers must take care of their land. Instead of planting the same crop year after and year, and thus stripping the land of all its nutrients, they must alternate their crops, promote root agriculture, substitute fallow crops for naked fallows, and provide drainage for their land. Above all, they must spend time and money on manuring. Indeed, they must "regard manure as part of their capital--as money--which requires but to be properly employed to return them compound interest."¹⁴⁷

Van Buren clearly took Buel's mantra seriously. In his share-cropping agreement with Mr. Marquette, he made it clear that all of the manure on the estate was to be treated as capital. None of it was to be wasted. It was to be used, either in his garden, Mr. Marquette's garden, or in one of the fields. He also had his gardener, Mr. Schenck, try out a new process of composting straw into manure. It didn't work well. He also had his farm hands dig out decaying wetland vegetation in the winter, pile it up in narrow ridges to "sweeten" during the summer, then mix it with manure and spread the blend over the

¹⁴⁵James Kirke Paulding to Martin Van Buren, 6 August 1847, in Aderman, *The Letters of James Kirke Paulding*, 464-5. For more on Paulding's views of farming, see also Adam W. Sweeting, *Reading Houses and Building Books: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature, 1835-1855* (Hanover, N. H., 1996), 144-8.

¹⁴⁶Isaac Hill, *Cultivator* (August 1844), as quoted in Demaree, 216.

¹⁴⁷Van Buren to Henry D. Gilpin, 21 April 1843, Van Buren Papers; Harry J. Carmen, ed., *Jesse Buel, Agricultural Reformer: Selections from His Writings* (New York, 1947), 327 and passim.

fields. At one point he told Andrew Jackson that he spent more time "devising ways & means to multiply the quantity & improve the quality of manure than in forming political plans or any other such matter."¹⁴⁸

Van Buren also attended agricultural fairs and paid attention to what agricultural reform societies had to say. But he was selective. Had he followed the advice of the reform societies, he would have bought a herd of imported livestock. That was what other gentlemen farmers in the Hudson River Valley were doing. But his "propensities" didn't lie in the "cattle lines" and therefore he was "indisposed to branch expensively into outlays of that character."¹⁴⁹ Thus, although he owned a "very fine Durham short hair bull," the bull didn't have much to do. For there were only a handful of cows on the farm, sharing pasture with seven horses, some for riding and some for work, a pair of oxen, and about 100 sheep. The farm also had the usual assortment of goats, chickens, ducks, guinea hens, geese, and swine, but nothing out of the ordinary. The poultry and milk stock didn't even meet the demands of Van Buren's household. In 1842 he had to buy \$125 of butter and \$40 of poultry from outsiders. Years later, there was some surplus, but nothing substantial. In 1855, poultry and eggs earned him just over \$50. At roughly the same time, Van Buren and his tenant, Abraham Kearn, increased the milk cow herd from 8 to 12 cows, and the number of sheep from 103 to 125. But he never reached the ranks of a big-time dairy farmer and wool producer. Of the total acreage in his possession, never more than 16 percent was in pasture.¹⁵⁰

More to Van Buren's liking was crop production. At least three-fourths of his land was in crops--primarily hay, oats, rye, and potatoes. By 1843, he noted, his hay crop was "larger than a single one of his neighbors."¹⁵¹ The individual fields were small and varied in size. Some were fenced, as were the boundaries of the property. A few were along the Old Post Road, but most were on the lower terrace, along Kinderhook Creek, where the

¹⁴⁸Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, 5 January 1843, Van Buren Papers; Searle, *A Farmer in his Native Town*, 39.

¹⁴⁹Van Buren to Erastus Corning, 26 April 1843, Private Collection, Copy on file at Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.

¹⁵⁰Uschold and Curry, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 27-8.

¹⁵¹Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, September 8, 1843, Van Buren Papers.

land was more fertile. The key problem was drainage. In 1847, at a cost of \$500, he hired an "Old Englishman and four Paddies" to dig "a thousand miles of Ditches." Although the "thousand miles" was obviously a wild exaggeration, the crew undoubtedly rebuilt and expanded the existing ditches and probably laid clay pipes under the 28 acre parcel that he bought from the Dingmans in 1843.¹⁵²

Meanwhile, Van Buren also cultivated gentility. He added two wings to the old house. He enlarged the garden and had the ornamental grounds around the house laid out in the English style. In making these changes, while Van Buren apparently never consulted A. J. Downing directly, he probably drew on Downing's teachings, which now permeated the Hudson River Valley. He kept many of the old trees, but had his gardener renovate the lawns so they always appeared "fresh and smoothly shaven." An ardent horticulturist, he had a new greenhouse built and stocked it with exotic flowers and fruit. The new additions, along with the lawns and Locust trees that already marked the approach to the mansion, set him apart from his neighbors (Figure 8).

Struck by the difference was an English woman, Sarah Maury, who visited Lindenwald with her son in 1846. Upon approaching the estate, she noted that it was fit for the British gentry. To her surprise, however, Van Buren himself answered the door. Then, after pleasantries, he offered her and her son "iced water, lemonade and wine" before taking them to "his garden to gather flowers for their room." The room impressed her as did the rest of the house. Its owner was obviously an American, she concluded, but "the comforts and elegancies of his residence exactly resemble those we find in the country house of an English gentleman of fortune who lives upon his estate."¹⁵³

Van Buren added "comforts and elegancies" to Lindenwald throughout the 1840s. One of these improvements was a mechanized bell system that connected all of Lindenwald's first and second floor rooms with the servants' quarters in the basement. The "cranks for this system were mounted on the chimney breasts in each room." Also of importance was the installation of a bath, which Van Buren boasted about in an 1846 letter to his longtime friend and personal banker, Gorham Worth: "When you visit me

¹⁵²Uschold and Curry, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 26-7.

¹⁵³Sarah Mytton Maury, *The Statesmen of America in 1846* (London, 1847), 119.

again you shall wash off the impurities of Mammon in the bath which has been put up in part with the interest you have [been] so kind as to collect for me."¹⁵⁴ Indoor plumbing, while commonplace in many wealthy Manhattan neighborhoods by the mid-nineteenth century, was still rare in rural areas like Kinderhook. The Lindenwald estate thus represented the most aristocratic tastes in the mid-nineteenth century Hudson Valley.

Van Buren's desire to make the house increasingly comfortable probably also reflected his growing concern about his namesake, Martin Van Buren, Jr. Young Martin was his third son, born in 1812. The two men lived together in the Decatur House in Washington, D. C., in the 1830s, and the son served as his father's personal secretary. He also held a job in the General Land Office in Washington. His contemporaries described him as "pleasant, unpretentious, civil, and amiable." Once Van Buren left Washington, Martin Jr. followed and spent much of his time at Lindenwald. He was chronically ill.

Martin Jr. suffered from tuberculosis, which was then called consumption, the same disease that had taken the life of Van Buren's wife Hannah in February 1819. Because of Hannah, Van Buren undoubtedly knew more than he cared to know about tuberculosis. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it was America's deadliest disease, responsible for one in five deaths, without respect to geography or social class. It was also responsible for nearly one-third of all the deaths in Boston in 1851. It was called "consumption" because it literally consumed its victims. In its early stages, it was hard to diagnose. But by the 1830s families knew the symptoms: hollow coughing, irregular appetite and weight loss, night sweats, facial pallor, and, above all, intermittent fevers. When it was diagnosed, it severely limited what upper-class men like Martin Jr. could do. Off limits were "bookish" occupations like the law, the ministry, or medicine. They were deemed too enervating. Much better, so many people thought, was farm labor, which was widely believed to be curative.¹⁵⁵

Regular doctors had no cure for consumption. It was thus a disease made for

¹⁵⁴Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 19.

¹⁵⁵William W. Hall, *Bronchitis and Kindred Diseases* (8th ed., New York, 1854), 301; Sheila M. Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History* (New York, 1994), 3-4, 13-76. See also Barbara Bates, *Bargaining for Life: A Social History of Tuberculosis, 1876-1938* (Philadelphia, 1992).

quackery. In the early nineteenth century, one fashionable London doctor, St. John Long, made a fortune having women patients rub their breasts with mixtures of acetic and sulfuric acid. Another, Meyer Lotinga, got rich prescribing a concoction that was mainly brown sugar.¹⁵⁶ On occasion, the disease went into permanent remission and the doctors took credit for curing it. More often, it came back, slowly weakened the sufferer over many years, or suddenly advanced and killed within weeks. It could be acute and galloping, or chronic. Only two things were certain: there was a proliferation of it in America and it was not a gentle way to die.

Van Buren undoubtedly knew that, as that had been Hannah's fate. Her health had begun to decline soon after he had moved the family to Albany in 1817. By September 1818 she was pregnant, but no longer able to leave the house. She was confined mainly to her bed and able to see her children only for a few minutes at a time. That winter, shortly after giving birth to Smith Thompson, their fourth surviving son, she died. Out of respect for her memory, Van Buren never mentioned her last days. Indeed, he never mentioned her at all in his autobiography.

That young Martin suffered from the same malady must have been heart-breaking. But, again, Van Buren wasn't one to reveal much about deep personal problems. He, along with the Lindenwald staff, just tried to make Martin Jr.'s life less debilitating. In 1841, when Van Buren was shopping for wallpaper, Harriet Butler sent him samples for Martin Jr.'s room that possessed "nothing exciting in the colors," noting that "to an invalid it will be rather quieting to the nerves." The *Historic Furnishings Report* also suggests young Martin's room may have contained an upholstered rocking chair, which had become a standard item for tuberculosis patients. Similarly, the later addition of a porch in 1849-1851 might have been in part for young Martin's well-being, as in some circles having access to plenty of "fresh air" was seen as the best "cure" for tuberculosis. Changes to Martin's room during this renovation--adding a south-facing bay window to Martin's room--not only brought the exterior of the house into form with the desired Italianate style, but also provided a better source of light and air, which may have been

¹⁵⁶Barry Smith, "Gullible's Travails: Tuberculosis and Quackery, 1890-1930," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20 (October 1985), 734-5. Despite the dating of this article, Smith cites the above examples from the 1830s and 1840s.

intended to create optimum conditions for Martin's health.¹⁵⁷

In addition to his son Martin, Van Buren's house in the 1840s was filling up with grandchildren, the offspring of Angelica and Abraham. Singleton was the first. He was born in 1841. Then came Martin III (nicknamed "Marty" and "Mat"), who was born in 1844; and then Travis Coles ("Travy"), who was born in 1848. From all reports, Van Buren became a doting grandfather, played with the children every day, and let them have the run of the house.

Less pleasant were Van Buren's relations with some of his servants. In 1845, he wrote his friend Paulding about one particularly bad episode:

The two women I made swear eternal friendship got jealous of one another, the cook could no longer keep down the Devil that I saw in the corner of her eye when she first arrived . . . and I have a sort of Riot downstairs. Finding that soft words were of no effect I assumed toward them an aspect more sour and ferocious that you can imagine, suspended the cook and a very devout Irish chambermaid, who with all her piety is a devil of a bully.¹⁵⁸

Not all his servants were Irish, however. An English girl was hired to help another servant, Alice. And, according to William C. Bryan, who visited Lindenwald in 1845, Van Buren also employed a French gardener. The servants, moreover, continued to get along with Abraham and Angelica's children. In 1845, Angelica reported that Singleton brought "chops to the cook" and that the servants, especially the coachman, were "fond of him."¹⁵⁹

As a country gentleman, making his estate more comfortable for his ailing son, his grandchildren, and numerous guests, Van Buren largely gave directions. He himself didn't do much physical work on the farm, with the possible exception of sometimes tending to his orchard fruit.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 65, 268-72; Phillip Gallos, *Cure Cottages of Saranac Lake: Architecture and History of the Pioneer Health Resort* (Saranac Lake, 1985), 7-15; Kenneth Ames, *Death in the Dining Room & Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia, 1992), 216-32; Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 163.

¹⁵⁸Martin Van Buren to James K. Paulding, January 4, 1845, Van Buren Papers, as quoted in West, "Irish Immigrant Workers," fn. 24.

¹⁵⁹See Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 420, for the Bryan reference and an abbreviated list of references to the servants, and Angelica Singleton Van Buren to her mother, June 7, September 20, 1845.

¹⁶⁰Edward Townsend Booth, *Country Life in America, as Lived by Ten Presidents of the United States* (New York, 1947), 147.

When weather permitted, he began each day with a horseback ride. After breakfast, he oversaw the farm work or any renovations that he was having done. Once he tired of that, he usually went to the library, read, or wrote letters. Some dealt with farming. And in these, he often boasted of his green thumb, of being on the cutting edge, of daring to put a "subsoil plough" in operation to the ridicule of his neighbors.¹⁶¹ In the evening, he often entertained visitors, as he kept a perpetual "open house." His guest list included fellow politician and long-time friend Silas Wright in 1846, banker and friend Gorham A. Worth, and political colleague Gouverneur Kemble in 1847. Later, in August 1849, Van Buren hosted his old congressional nemesis, Henry Clay, who was up from Washington, D. C., and recuperating in Saratoga that summer.¹⁶² The open house invitations kept Van Buren engaged in current politics as well as displaying himself as a man of leisure, while providing a steady stream of chores for the domestic help.

The library was where Van Buren did his real work. Despite all the time he spent making his farm fit for an English gentleman, playing with his grandchildren, hosting visitors, politics was still his passion. His library, noted one visitor in 1845, contained an "immense" number of books on "all political subjects." Just owning so many books set Van Buren apart from his neighbors. Only 1.5 percent of the households in the mid-Hudson Valley spent money on books in 1846-47, and by 1853-54 the percentage had risen to only 2 percent.¹⁶³

But his books were not just a conspicuous sign of his wealth and gentility. As the traveler noted, they were obviously well-used, "thumbed, the leaves hastily turned down, and the margins often covered with notes and references in his own hand."¹⁶⁴ And from his library, he was still corresponding regularly with his long-time backers. How were

¹⁶¹Van Buren to Erastus Corning, 26 April 1843, Private Collection, copy on file, Martin Van Buren NHS.

¹⁶²Henry Clay to Martin Van Buren, August 9, 1849, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁶³Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 179.

¹⁶⁴William B. Hesseltine and Larry Gara, eds., "A Visit to Kinderhook," *New York History* 35 (1954), 178-81.

they faring with the Polk administration? How were they doing in Albany?¹⁶⁵

The news from Washington and Albany was rarely good. His followers were being squeezed out of power and put in untenable positions. Especially troubling was the Polk administration's aggressive foreign policy. Although Polk ran for President as a zealous expansionist, a man who would expand the United States to include "all of Oregon" and "all of Texas," he compromised on the Oregon question. In 1846 he agreed to split with Great Britain the vast Oregon country that stretched all the way from the northern California border to southern Alaska. The British got all the land above the 49th parallel along with Vancouver Island, and the United States got the land to the south. But while Polk was willing to compromise on the Oregon question, he was not willing to compromise with Mexico on the Texas question. He wanted as much of northern Mexico as he could get, particularly California with its three magnificent harbors, and he deliberately courted war with Mexico to get it. He not only demanded that Mexico give up vast chunks of land, but also dispatched troops onto soil that most observers, not to mention Mexicans, regarded as Mexican land. Then, when these troops were fired upon in April 1846, he stampeded Congress into declaring war against Mexico.

The president's actions, in turn, affected only a few households in Kinderhook, but one was Van Buren's. The oldest of his four sons, Abraham, was a West Pointer. He had enrolled at the U. S. Military Academy in 1823 at the age of 15. He had resigned from the army in 1837 and served as his father's private secretary in Washington, a post that carried with it the title of Second Auditor of the Treasury. After Van Buren vacated the White House in 1841, Abraham and his wife Angelica joined him in moving back to the Hudson Valley, eventually establishing a home in the nearby town of Stuyvesant (Figure 9).

When Polk called for troops, the task of actually raising them fell to the nation's governors. As in the past, the national army was just too small to fight a foreign war, and the national government thus turned to the state militias. The New York governor was

¹⁶⁵The claim in Uschold and Curry, *Cultural Landscape Report*, that Van Buren became less active in politics is wrong. At least one hundred politicians, and probably as many as two hundred, still took their cues from him. See, for example, the Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress; Gideon Welles Papers, Library of Congress; Wright-Butler Letters, New York Public Library; and the Azariah C. Flag Papers, New York Public Library.

Silas Wright, a long-time Van Buren lieutenant. He was anything but an ardent supporter of the war. The year before, as a United States Senator, he had voted against the annexation of Texas. He had also been an outspoken critic of Polk's aggressive foreign policy. Yet, as the commander in chief of the state militia, Wright did his duty. He called for volunteers.

The quota for New York was seven regiments, or roughly 5,500 men. Only a few men in the Hudson Valley responded. Abraham, a good West Point man, was one of the few. He reenlisted as a major and became the paymaster in General Winfield Scott's army of some 12,000 troops. Abraham along with the rest of Scott's forces invaded Mexico by water, making an amphibious landing just south of Vera Cruz in March 1847, and then advanced on Mexico City. The battle for Mexico City began in late August, with fighting at Contreras, followed by an engagement at Churubusco. On both occasions, Scott's army won handily against far greater numbers. Abraham participated in both battles and was duly promoted for his "bravery" to Brevet Lt. Colonel.¹⁶⁶ In mid-September, the Mexican commander, General Santa Anna, tried to rally his forces for one more major battle. When he could not, he abandoned Mexico City, and Scott's army took possession of the Mexican capital.

The United States, literally at the point of a gun, then negotiated peace terms. Abraham was part of the negotiations. At Scott's urging, he accompanied the chief negotiator, Nicholas P. Trist, to the first three meetings with Mexico's hapless peace commission.¹⁶⁷ Trist, officially the head clerk at the State Department, had been sent to Mexico under the protection of Scott's army, but he had subsequently been fired by Polk and ordered home. With Scott's blessing, he defied the president's order and negotiated the Treaty of Guadeloupe-Hidalgo in February 1848.

A harsh treaty, it was still the most lenient that Trist could have negotiated under Polk's instructions. It took from Mexico more than one-third of its territory and added over one million square miles to the United States, including California and what is now

¹⁶⁶Joseph E. Chance, ed., *The Mexican War Journal of Captain Franklin Smith* (Jackson, Miss., 1997), 218 n. 23.

the American Southwest. In return, the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million and settle claims of American citizens against Mexico which amounted to slightly more than \$3 million. The terms upset the president. He wanted more land. But, facing growing dissension at home, he was in no position to reject the treaty.

Upon returning home, Abraham remained in the army as a paymaster. He held that position until 1854. The decision to remain in the army forced him and Angelica to move to New York City. No longer did they split their time between the Hudson Valley and South Carolina. In New York City, Angelica became known for her charitable work. By the 1850s, the city had a flock of religious, benevolent, charitable, and reform organizations. Women provided the labor power for most of them, but some were rather tame, while others like the New York Female Moral Reform Society were widely regarded as "radical." Angelica, one suspects, never got involved in anything deemed "radical." Women of her background--southern and high church Episcopalian--rarely did. She was, however, moderately religious, which of course was a marker for upper class women in the mid-nineteenth century, and upon her death in 1877 much was made of her religiosity and charitable work.¹⁶⁸

For most West Pointers, the war was a splendid war, a war in which nearly everything went right. Yet, despite the war's success and Abraham's participation, the war

¹⁶⁷Dean B. Mahin, *Olive Branch and Sword: The United States and Mexico, 1845-48* (Jefferson, N. C., 1997), 116; George Wilkins Kendall, *Dispatches from the Mexican War*, ed. by Lawrence Delbert Cress (Norman, Okla, 1999), 362-3.

¹⁶⁸The evidence here is anything but clear. Following Angelica's death on December 29, 1877, *The State*, a South Carolina newspaper, made much of the fact that she "attended church less than two weeks before her death," but such remarks in obituary notices were so commonplace that they are almost meaningless. Her collection of books, currently gathered and displayed as the University of South Carolina, also indicates at least a moderate interest in religion. Included are *The Village in the Mountain: Conversion of Peter Bayssier; and History of the Bible*, a religious tract combining story and sermon; and a *Memoir of Reverend Sydney Smith*, a collection of essays from the Scottish clergyman who was famous for "his witty challenges of political, social, and religious orthodoxies." But this is just part of her book collection, which includes numerous literary and travel accounts, and which indicates that she had wide assortment of interests, gained perhaps from her education at Madame Grelaud's.

For some of the more important works on women's charitable and moral organizations in the mid-nineteenth century, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, England, 1981); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca, 1984); Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Sylvia D. Hoffert, *A History of Gender in America* (Upper Saddle River, N. J., 2003); Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, the State, and Welfare* (Madison, Wisc., 1990). The evolution of "republican motherhood" to "true womanhood," a major historiographical debate in the past thirty years, is proposed in Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Williamsburg, Va., 1980).

troubled his father. The former president's followers in Congress, like most congressmen, were dragooned into supporting Polk's claim that Mexico had invaded American soil. None sided with John Quincy Adams and the handful of Whig congressmen who voted against the president's war message. But some privately agreed that the Polk administration and its southern supporters wanted to acquire territory in the southwest to expand the dominion of slavery.

Such suspicions, Van Buren was convinced, would lead to political trouble. Even before the war broke out, he had warned the historian George Bancroft, Polk's Secretary of the Navy that the utmost care had to be taken to avoid any war "which the opposition shall be able to charge us with plausibility, if not truth, that it is waged for the extension of slavery." In any such war, he predicted, northern Democrats would "be driven to the sad alternative of turning their backs upon their friends, or of encountering political suicide with their eyes open."¹⁶⁹

By the time the war broke out, moreover, Van Buren and his followers were furious at Polk for his handling of federal patronage. Had not the Bucktails made Polk President? Had not they delivered New York for Polk in the 1844 campaign? Was not one of their men entitled to a top cabinet post, either Secretary of State or Secretary of the Treasury? Various major offices had been dangled before their eyes, but in the end they got nothing. Instead, they saw Treasury go to Robert Walker, the Mississippi schemer who had blocked Van Buren's nomination, and the War Department go to William L. Marcy, once a New York ally but now a conspicuous enemy. To make matters worse, scores of federal appointments had gone to "Hunkers," a rival faction that had sprung up in New York and was now trying to gain control of their New York party. And finally, Francis Blair's *Washington Globe*, long the symbol of their dominance nationally, had been replaced as the party's official newspaper by the *Washington Union*, edited by Thomas Ritchie of Virginia. The message, as Van Buren and his followers saw it, was clear: Polk was deliberately trying to weaken their position and strengthen rival factions

¹⁶⁹Martin Van Buren to George Bancroft, February 15, 1845, "Van Buren-Bancroft Correspondence, 1830-1845," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* XLII (June 1909): 439-40. See also Gideon Welles to Van Buren, July 28, 1846, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

not only in the nation-at-large but also in New York politics.¹⁷⁰

Hence, while Van Buren and his men were unwilling to openly oppose the administration's war efforts, they were angry at Polk and highly suspicious of his war aims. They wanted no part of any war that might lead to the expansion of slave territory. They hesitated, however, to buck the president. Then, during the last days of the congressional session, in August 1846, a small band of Van Burenites decided to take a stand. They had been in session for nine months, and just about to go home, when Polk sprang on them a last minute request for two million dollars "to provide for any expenditure which it may be necessary to make in advance for the purpose of settling all our difficulties with Mexico." During a two-hour recess they decided to amend the bill so as to prohibit slavery in any land obtained by virtue of the appropriation. To present this amendment, they looked to David Wilmot, an obscure Pennsylvania Democrat who was friendly with the South and would have little trouble gaining the floor. If Wilmot had had any previous antislavery tendencies, he had kept them well hidden. The previous December he had voted with the South to annex Texas and against an amendment prohibiting slavery in part of Texas.¹⁷¹

When Wilmot presented this proviso it created only a minor stir. Half the members clearly had their minds on getting out of Washington's unbearable heat and

¹⁷⁰Joseph G. Rayback, "Martin Van Buren's Break with James K. Polk: The Record," *New York History* 31 (January 1955): 51-62; Ivor Debenhorn Spencer, *The Victor and the Spoils: A Life of William L. Marcy* (Providence, R. I., 1959), 133-34, 139-40; Garraty, *Wright*, 342-56.

¹⁷¹*Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 1st Session (1846-47), 64-65. Wilmot's motives--as well as his role in formulating the proviso--have long been a matter of dispute. Along with Wilmot, at least nine other Democrats had a role in formulating the Proviso: Preston King, Martin Grover, Timothy Jenkins, and George Rathbun of New York; Hannibal Hamlin of Maine; Paul Dillingham of Vermont; James Thompson of Pennsylvania; and Jacob Brinkerhoff of Ohio. (Some accounts also list John Parker Hale of New Hampshire, but he was not a member of this particular Congress.)

All ten men were Van Buren Democrats. And all came from districts where the antislavery vote was significant or Polk clearly had been a drag on the Democratic ticket. In Wilmot's district, for example, Polk had run roughly 700 votes behind Wilmot and 200 behind the Democratic gubernatorial candidate. In Dillingham's district, the Liberty Party had captured 10 percent of the vote. In his fine dissertation, Jonathan Earle indicates that these men also represented constituents who had frequently petitioned Congress to set aside the public lands for white northern farmers and their children. See Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 132-134.

Of the literature on the proviso, we have relied mainly on Charles Buxton Going, *David Wilmot: Free Soiler* (New York, 1924); Champlain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy* (Chapel Hill, 1967); and Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *Journal of American History* 61 (September 1969): 262-79.

catching a train home, and some of the most outspoken antislavery Whigs were already on their way home. The first round of voting, however, proved that the Proviso had bite, resonating well beyond the small antislavery faction in Congress. The ayes and nays were not generally recorded that hot August night, but in the one case they were, southerners were in opposition, 67 to 2, and northerners in favor, 83 to 12. The Proviso passed the House by a four to three margin, but neither the Proviso nor the Two Million Bill got through the Senate in the few hours before adjournment.

That fall relations between the White House and Van Buren and the Bucktails deteriorated even further. In a battle for control of the New York party, some of Polk's "Hunker" appointees sabotaged the re-election bid of Governor Silas Wright, the Bucktail candidate. Polk threatened to fire the miscreants, but his words proved to be only words and Hunker officials continued to work against Wright. When Wright lost the election by 5,000 votes, Preston King and many other Bucktails were livid. As they saw it, the treachery of the White House had cost them control of the state government. Why, then, should they back Polk and his southern supporters in the interest of party harmony? He wasn't loyal to them. Nor were his southern backers. Moreover, his identification with slaveholding interests was clearly a liability for them in New York politics. The Whigs had roasted them time and again for being the junior partners in a proslavery and pro-southern party.¹⁷²

Thus when Congress resumed in December, King and his associates were anxious to reintroduce the Wilmot Proviso. "The time has come," announced King at the turn of the year, "when the Republic should declare that it will not be made an instrument to the extension of slavery on the continent of America." But the White House played a waiting game. One month passed, then two, before Polk renewed his request for money. This time the request was for three million dollars to cover "extraordinary expenses" in making peace with Mexico. To this bill King and his cohorts prodded Wilmot to add a tougher version of his proviso, one that would bar slavery in "any territory on the continent of

¹⁷²Garraty, *Wright*, 362-88; Herbert D. A. Donovan, *The Barnburners* (New York, 1925), 74-83; Hammond, *Political Parties in New York*, II: 677-690.

America which shall hereafter be acquired."¹⁷³

On reintroducing his proviso, Wilmot appealed to northern racism. "I have no squeamish sensitiveness upon the subject of slavery, nor morbid sympathy for the slave." he declared. "I plead the cause of the rights of white freemen. I would preserve for free white labor a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil, of my own race and own color, can live without the disgrace which association with negro slavery brings upon free labor."¹⁷⁴

This fusion of antislavery with racism clearly had wide appeal, especially among northern Democrats. Hence, more than ever, the Proviso was a threat to the South. This led to long and heated debates, along with a series of parliamentary roadblocks. Finally, in February 1847, King and his cohorts succeeded in bringing the Proviso up for a vote. The administration worked frantically to defeat the measure, and 18 northern Democrats joined the South in opposition. But none of these votes came from the Van Burenites; the Bucktails and their allies voted overwhelmingly for the Proviso, as did the northern Whigs. The Proviso and the Three Million Bill thus passed the House, 115 to 106.

Four days later in the Senate, Calhoun lambasted the Proviso. The passage of the Proviso, he thundered, would give the North overwhelming power in the future, and such a destruction of sectional balance would mean "political revolution, anarchy, civil war, and widespread disaster." As a southern man, a cotton planter, a slaveholder, he would never acknowledge inferiority. "The surrender of life is nothing to sinking down into acknowledged inferiority."¹⁷⁵ Shortly thereafter, the Senate rejected the Proviso and passed its own Three Million Bill without any mention of slavery.

The Senate bill gained the upper hand and came before the House on March 3, the last day of the session. If the bill passed as it was, then Polk would have his three million with no strings attached and the Proviso would be dead. To prevent this, antislavery forces again tried to attach the Proviso, but this time they were defeated, 97 to 102. The

¹⁷³*Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 2d Session (1846-47), 114-15. Preston King to Azariah C. Flagg, January 18-February 22, 1847, Azariah C. Flagg Papers, New York Public Library; Going, *Wilmot*, 161-63.

¹⁷⁴*Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 2d Session (1846-47), 317; Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery*, 123-37.

¹⁷⁵*Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 2d Session (1846-47), 453-55.

administration, stepping up its efforts to kill the Proviso, got six northern Democrats to switch their votes and six more to absent themselves from the proceedings. As a result, while every northern Whig voted for the Proviso, 22 northern Democrats now voted with the South. Not one of the 22 men who voted with the South, however, was a Van Buren loyalist--not even one of the three New Yorkers. All the big names in the Van Buren coalition voted against the South. Relations with Polk and southern Democrats thus deteriorated even further.

During the next year Van Buren tried to keep the younger generation in check, counseling them to proceed with caution rather than declare open war against the Polk administration. But both his old followers and the youngsters were in constant battle with Polk's New York supporters. These men, who were generally Hunkers, portrayed themselves as dependable Democrats, men who were much more supportive of the South and slavery than their Bucktail rivals. And they profited from it. In 1847, they displayed their muscle at the state convention in Syracuse. They first managed to get a majority of their delegates seated. Then, they voted down a resolution in favor of the Wilmot Proviso. The free-soilers were livid. The young radicals called for revenge. Van Buren, home in Lindenwald, was appalled. In desperation, he wrote Azariah Flagg, asking him to stop the radicals from further breaking up the Democratic Party.¹⁷⁶

His effort failed, and the problem lay partly with his second son John. Nicknamed "Prince John" by the Whig press, partly because he had been earmarked to take over his father's place in New York politics, and partly because he had once danced with Princess Victoria in England, John had gone to Yale and trained for the law under Van Buren's old law partner, Benjamin Butler. Then, after carrying out numerous errands for his father, he had affiliated with the radical wing of the New York party that had opposed the extension of the New York canal system. After the death of his wife Elizabeth in 1844, John had thrown himself headfirst into New York politics. He had won the race for Attorney General in 1845 and gained notoriety for getting into a fistfight with the opposing counsel in an Anti-Rent War trial. (Figure 10)

The Anti-Rent War was the dramatic final chapter of a struggle that had been

¹⁷⁶Van Buren to Flagg, 12 October 1847; Flagg to Van Buren, 13 October 1847, Van Buren Papers.

going on in the Hudson River Valley for 200 years. Thanks to political connections, as well as fraud, bribery, and other shenanigans, a few families had acquired vast estates in the 1600s from the Dutch West India Company and its English successors. The Livingston had 160,000 acres; the Van Rensselaers, 1,000,000 acres; the Cortlandts, 86,000; and the Philipses, 205,000. These families had refused to offer their lands for sale. Instead, they leased their lands and behaved much like feudal barons. At first most of their tenants were of Dutch descent, but as New Englanders began pushing west, the great landlords had to deal more and more with Yankee farmers. The Yankees, by all accounts, never tired of denouncing the system. They thought it abominable that a few rich and powerful families had the power to withhold from the market several million acres of prime land, and they continually clamored for the establishment of New England-style towns in which middling farmers owned farms in fee simple.

This unrest had led to armed revolt in 1766. In response the royal governor had sent in troops to quell the rebellion. Ten years later, during the American Revolution, some of the great landlords had sided with King George III. With his defeat, many farmers expected that the manors held by these Tory landlords would be confiscated and sold to small farmers. They were bitterly disappointed. The patriot landlords had so much power that they, rather than the farmers, acquired most of the confiscated land. And, even though New York became a republic in 1777, this dramatic change had no effect on the manor system. It remained a monument to special privilege.¹⁷⁷

In 1839, trouble again broke out when the heirs of Stephen Van Rensselaer tried to collect \$400,000 in back rents. The heirs had at least 60,000 tenants, maybe as many as 100,000, on their manor Rensselaerwyck, which embraced nearly all of Albany and Rensselaer counties and part of Columbia County. Rather than pay the back rents, even some of their more timid Dutch tenants took up arms and joined "Yankee troublemakers" in what came to be known as the "Helderberg War." The Whig governor, William Henry Seward, denounced the leases as "anti-republican" and "degrading." Yet, at the same time,

¹⁷⁷For early land conflicts in the Hudson Valley, see Irving Mark, *Agrarian Conflict in Colonial New York* (New York, 1940), Chapter 5; Dixon Ryan Fox, *Yankees and Yorkers* (New York, 1940); Patricia U. Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York, 1971), Chapter 6; Edward Countryman, "Out of Bounds of the Law': Northern Land Rioters in the Eighteenth Century," in Alfred F. Young, ed., *The American Revolution* (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 40-46, 53-60.

he censured the tenants for their lawlessness and sent in troops to restore law and order.¹⁷⁸

Peace, however, was short-lived. South of Albany, anti-renters formed secret societies in which the members masked themselves as Indians and their leaders bore such names as "Big Thunder," "Little Thunder," and "White Chief." These societies terrorized supporters of the landlords and prevented sheriffs from seizing the farms of debtors. Usually they tarred and feathered their victims, but in early 1845 one band murdered a Columbia County farmer who had refused to support them. Then, in August 1845, another band murdered a deputy sheriff. This resulted in all of Delaware County being placed under martial law.

By this time, both major parties were sharply divided on how to handle the anti-renters. Both had men with close ties to the aristocrats. Both had a law-and-order element. Both had reformers who deemed the rents "feudal exactions" and "villain services." And both worried that the anti-renters might become a decisive voting bloc. Into this mix, a close comrade of the Van Burens, Silas Wright, became governor of New York. What was he to do? John Van Buren, among others, told him to take a hard law-and-order stand against the rioters.

Wright initially followed this advice. Twice, he sent John, the Attorney General, to help with the prosecution of Dr. Smith A. Boughton, alias "Big Thunder," the leader of the "murderous Indians" of Columbia County. The doctor was a sympathetic character, generous and warm-hearted by nature, a man who came at all hours of the night to tend sick children and risked his life and fortune for his neighbors. Nonetheless, John was determined to get him. And in the second trial, so too was the judge, a toady of the landowners. The judge helped John hand-pick a jury and sided with John on virtually every legal issue. Finally, the frustrated defense attorney angrily challenged the admissibility of some of John's evidence. That led to a harsh rejoinder and an exchange of insults. Then, to the shock of a packed courthouse, John swung at the defense attorney, hitting him full in the face, provoking a full-scale fist fight.

¹⁷⁸For anti-rent disturbances in 1830s and 1840s, see Henry Christman, *Tin Horns and Calico: An Episode in the Emergence of American Democracy* (New York, 1945); Edward P. Cheney, *The Anti-Rent Agitation in the State of New York, 1839-1846* (Philadelphia, 1887); Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (New York, 2000).

John got his conviction, not the death penalty he wanted, but a life sentence. He then insisted on handling the prosecution of even bigger game, Moses Earle, who had been arrested for the murder of the deputy sheriff. This time, however, he did not have a compliant judge on his side. The judge thought the evidence was weak. It only proved that Earle had refused to pay rent and had fed the "Indians" who may have killed the deputy--and, at best, it added up to a misdemeanor and not a capital crime. For some reason, however, the defense attorney panicked. He got his client to plead to manslaughter. And, as a result, Earle was sentenced to life in prison.

The two court victories, however, did John little good. The political aspects of Boughton trial, as well as several trials that had led to death sentences, convinced many that anti-rent doctrine would eventually triumph. It now had the support of the "educated classes," wrote James Fenimore Cooper, the squire of Otsego Hall. The Livingstons and several other landlords agreed. To cut their losses, they decided to sell their lands "on fair and equitable terms" and invited their tenants to discuss the purchase with them. The anti-renters meanwhile decided to rely less on force and more on political persuasion. They formed the nucleus of an Anti-Rent party that would run on the slogan "equal chances to all, and privilege to none." They also waited for the two major parties to make their selections and endorsed only those candidates who had consistently called for reform. They garnered a huge vote in Delaware County.

After the fall 1845 elections, the Van Burenites decided to backtrack. Their slogan had been "No man can be one and the same time a friend of law and order and an Anti-Renter." They dumped that slogan. Silas Wright commuted the death sentences to life imprisonment. And in January 1846, in his annual address, he called for legislation restricting the duration of farm leases and abolishing distress for rent in all new leases. He and his backers then made sure that his proposal went to a friendly legislative committee headed by Samuel J. Tilden, a young Van Buren Democrat who thirty years later would run for president. In March, Tilden's committee recommended the passage of laws abolishing seizure for debt and equalizing taxes so that the landlords had to pay a larger share. That, to the shock of the landlords, was done. Then, at the state constitutional convention that summer, the delegates declared all New York lands alodial--that is, freeholds--and forbade all restraints on sale.

Nonetheless, Wright failed to win over the anti-renters. They refused to endorse him in the 1846 elections. He had not been a consistent supporter. They recommended instead a split ticket, the Whig John Young for governor, Wright's running mate Addison Gardiner for Lt. Governor. Both men won. Young in 1847 pardoned Dr. Boughton and other imprisoned anti-renters.

In a nutshell, then, John had bet on the wrong horse. Making a name for oneself as a tough prosecutor of anti-renters was hardly a sure-fire winning political strategy. For Silas Wright, it may have even been suicidal.

In the same year that John took up the cudgel against the anti-renters, he also became a free-soiler. He joined that wing of the New York party, often called "Barnburners," who cared more about opposing their "Hunker" rivals and stopping the expansion of slavery than healing rifts within the New York party.

To many, John's behavior was inconsistent. For his most recent nemesis, Dr. Boughton, was an ardent free-soiler. Indeed, Boughton had stressed the identity of the free-soil and anti-rent movement wherever he went. They were just two sides of the same coin, said Boughton. The goal of both was to provide ordinary farmers with good land of their own. Was not Boughton right? Did he not have a point? Why, then, had not John acknowledged that fact? Why, instead, had he gone after a fellow free-soiler?

These questions never seem to have troubled John. In fact, there is not much evidence that he was even aware of them. He just became an ardent free-soiler. In October 1847, to the dismay of his father, he rallied 4,000 Barnburners to meet at Herkimer. There, they agreed to oppose any candidate who in any way supported the expansion of slavery. Their actions, to the elder Van Buren's chagrin, further split the New York party and led to a sweeping Whig victory in the state elections.

Shortly thereafter, the elder Van Buren decided to reassert his leadership over the New York party. To do so, he moved into Julian's Hotel, in Washington Square, New York City. From there, with editorial assistance from his son John and Samuel J. Tilden, he wrote what came to be called the "Barnburner Manifesto." The tone was uncompromising. The manifesto defended the Wilmot Proviso, treated the Hunkers as heretics, and demanded that the Democratic national convention seat only Barnburners

from New York.¹⁷⁹

The manifesto infuriated Hunkers but was so well received by Barnburners that John tried to convince his father that he should let the Barnburners nominate him for president. The elder Van Buren would have none of it. The South, he noted, wouldn't accept him. But he refused to relinquish leadership. He gave his son and the Barnburners explicit directions for the upcoming convention. They should work within the party and not challenge party traditions. They should stress that their only concern was in opposing slavery in the territories rather than promoting their own "selfish" interests. They should be ready to support any number of candidates, not just those who opposed slavery's expansion, but several proslavery Democrats as well. Above all, they must insist on being recognized by the party. If the Baltimore convention refused to seat them, or admitted Hunkers, they should walk out.

In May 1848, at the Baltimore convention, the matter finally came to a head. Van Buren's followers did what they were told. They insisted on being seated as the only valid New York delegation. But they failed to gain the upper hand and saw their rivals treated as equals and in some quarters as superiors. Livid, they bolted the convention. What now? Some were at a loss at what to do. Others called for decisive action. They agreed to convene within 30 days at Utica. They rounded up almost all the old Van Burenite leadership as well as many younger followers. Together, at Utica, they created the Free Soil Democratic Party.

Soon afterwards, the majority decided to join forces with dissident Whigs and Liberty party men. Another convention was now necessary. It met at Buffalo. Attended by 465 delegates from 18 states, it created the Free Soil party. The chief goal, according to the party's platform, was to stop the expansion of slavery, southern domination of the national government, and "the aggressions of the slave power."¹⁸⁰

Van Buren at first tried to keep his distance from the new organization. But his

¹⁷⁹Van Buren to Gorham Worth, 2 January 1848; "Address of the Democratic Members of the Legislature of the State of New York," 2 April 1848, both in Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁸⁰Of the literature on the Van Burenite decision to bolt the Democratic party, see especially Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York, 1976), 142-56; Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848* (Lexington, Ky., 1970); Donovan, *Barnburners*, 90-97; O. C. Gardiner, *The Great Issue . . .* (New York, 1848), 45-176.

old law partner, Benjamin Butler, convinced him that the time had come to form a "northern Democratic party" that would bring "the despots and ingrates of the South . . . to their senses."¹⁸¹ And his son John constantly put pressure on him.

John was in an awkward position, to put it mildly. In forging a new party, he had to work hand-in-hand with old enemies who not only had denounced the Slave Power for years but also had characterized his father as the North's "worst doughface."¹⁸² Nonetheless, at the Buffalo convention, John and his allies made one former enemy, Seth Gates of Wyoming County, their candidate for Lieutenant Governor. They made another, the son of their old nemesis John Quincy Adams, the presiding officer of the convention. They also ended up making him their vice-presidential candidate. Most important, they got Van Buren to be the party's standard bearer.¹⁸³

In lambasting the Slave Power, Van Buren and his followers were latecomers to the fight. They also had a much different story to tell than the men and women who had been carrying on the battle for years, and especially those who came out of the New England Federalist tradition. Instead of blaming Thomas Jefferson and his Virginia associates, they celebrated the author of the Declaration of Independence and called their local organizations "Jefferson Committees."¹⁸⁴ And instead of tracing the Slave Power back to the days of Jefferson, they focused on the last years of the Jackson era.

To them the movement to acquire Texas and the fight over the Wilmot Proviso marked the turning point, the time when aggressive slave-masters stole the heart and soul of the Democracy and began dictating the course of the nation's destiny. Until then, so many argued, the nation's leaders had regarded slavery as a curse that in time would die out completely if confined to its existing limits. To prove their point, they often quoted Jefferson and cited the prohibition of slavery in the Old Northwest in 1787. Had not the

¹⁸¹Benjamin Butler to Martin Van Buren, 29-31 May 1848, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁸²*Liberty Standard*, 20 July 1848; Joshua Leavitt to Joshua R. Giddings, 6 July 1848, Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society; John Greenleaf Whittier to William F. Channing, 1 July 1848, as quoted in Samuel T. Packard, *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier* (2 vols., Boston, 1894), 1:333-34; Amos Tuck to Gerrit Smith, 2 August 1848, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

¹⁸³For the convention, see Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 142-56; Rayback, *Free Soil*; and Donovan, *Barnburners*, 90-97.

noble Jefferson denounced slavery and the African slave trade in the original draft of the Declaration of Independence? Had not he called for barring slavery in the entire West in 1784? And had he not successfully blocked its expansion north of the Ohio River in 1787?¹⁸⁵

Just as Jefferson was often central to their story line, so too was the Jacksonian tradition. Rejecting the notion that they had broken with their Jacksonian past, they portrayed themselves as carrying on the sacred Jacksonian battle in behalf of producer's rights, widespread land ownership, economic equality, and "extending the area of freedom." In the past, so they argued, they had led the battle against banks and monopolies that had threatened the rights and liberties of the people. Now, just as they had overcome a "monstrous Money Power," they would overcome a much more dangerous threat, a "monstrous Slave Power" that intended to seize the West, add to its power over the federal government, and wreak further havoc on the liberties and aspirations of northern white men and women.

Yet, despite the different story line, the Van Burenites also shared much with those who came out of rival political traditions. For they now echoed even the sentiments of their old nemesis, John Quincy Adams. They too now claimed that the combination of

¹⁸⁴Donovan, *Barnburners*, 106.

¹⁸⁵See, for example, the speeches of Preston King, George Rathbun, Timothy Jenkins, John Dix (all of New York), Robert McClelland (Michigan) and James Dixon (Connecticut), in *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 2d Session (1846-47), 114, 365, 420, 523, Appendix, 180, 335, 392; the speech of Martin Grover at the Barnburner Convention at Utica, New York, June 1848, in Gardiner, *The Great Issue*, 108; *The Herkimer Convention: The Voice of New York!* (Albany, 1847); Theodore Sedgwick, Jr., ed., *A Collection of the Political Writings of William Leggett* (2 vols; New York, 1840), Preface and II passim; Sedgwick, *Thoughts on the Proposed Annexation of Texas* (New York, 1844); "What Shall Be Done for the White Men?," *New York Evening Post*, April 27, 1848; "Address of the Democratic Members of the Legislature of New York, April 12, 1848," in Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress; "Letter of John M. Niles to the Free Soil State Convention of Connecticut," in *The Barnburner*, August 12, 1848.

The same themes were also popularized outside New York and New England. See, for example, the speech of Senator Thomas Morris of Ohio in *Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 1st Session (1838-39), Appendix, 167-175; B. F. Morris, *The Life of Thomas Morris* (Cincinnati, 1856), 176-202; Salmon P. Chase and Charles Dexter Cleveland, *Anti-Slavery Addresses of 1844 and 1845* (Philadelphia, 1867); Chase, *Reclamation of Fugitives from Service; An Argument . . . in the Case of Wharton Jones v. John Van Zandt* (Cincinnati, 1847); "Free Soil Platform of 1848," in Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, compilers, *National Party Platforms, 1840-1960* (Urbana, Ill., 1961), 13-14.

In crediting Jefferson for the ban on slavery in the Northwest Territory, the Van Burenites undoubtedly overlooked the central role that Timothy Pickering and other arch-Federalists played in that piece of legislation. This may have been intentional. But overlooking Pickering--and giving all the credit to

three factors--equal representation of slave and free states in the Senate, additional representation for three out of five slaves in the House of Representatives and the Electoral College, and southern regional solidarity wrought by the "black strap of slavery"--enabled a declining and small minority of slave-masters to run roughshod over the "plain republicans of the North," corrupt their leaders, and effectively rule the nation.

John carried the campaign for his father. While the candidate stayed home at Lindenwald tending his garden, the son hustled for votes. Taller and more handsome than his father, John had an advantage on the hustings. He had the charisma that his father lacked. Whereas his father tended to be grave, urbane, and deliberate in debate, John could sway crowds with wit and enthusiasm.¹⁸⁶

Loyalty to his father propelled John to a Herculean effort. So did his desire to square accounts with his father's enemies. Yet no great stampede to his father took place. Only in New York was John effective. Elsewhere, even his father's close friends--Thomas Hart Benton, Francis Blair, George Bancroft, and Theodore Sedgwick--stuck with the party of their youth. As a result, while Van Buren fared better than most third party candidates, he was roundly defeated, winning just over ten percent of the popular vote and none of the electoral vote.

In a sense, however, Van Buren determined the outcome of the election. For in New York, his name on the ballot split the Democratic ranks. He polled 120,000 votes to 114,000 for Lewis Cass, the regular Democratic nominee, and thus the state's 36 electoral votes went to the Whig candidate, Zachary Taylor.

The free-soil movement not only affected Van Buren and his son John. It also impacted on other members of Van Buren's household. For Angelica Van Buren, especially, it must have created some awkward moments. She was, after all, a South Carolinian. And without question, South Carolina was not just another southern state in the eyes of Free Soilers. It represented everything that Free Soilers detested. Nearly two-thirds of all South Carolinians were black slaves. The state was clearly dominated by the

Jefferson--had become commonplace by the 1840s. It is also commonplace today, even among American historians who should know better.

¹⁸⁶Henry Stanton, *Random Recollections* (New York, 1886), 175.

slaveholding elite. Its political leaders not only defended slavery, but glorified it. And they all regarded the Wilmot Proviso, "free soil," and Martin Van Buren as abominations that had to be destroyed.

Moreover, Angelica was not just an ordinary South Carolinian. Her older half-sister Mary Rebecca, now deceased, had been the wife of George McDuffie. The owner of a 5,000 acre cotton plantation manned by 175 slaves, McDuffie had long been one of the state's most rabid fire-eaters. As an assemblyman, congressman, governor, United States Senator, he had always made men like John C. Calhoun seem rather tame by comparison. Indeed, when it came to strong words, it was hard to outdo Angelica's brother-in-law.

By the time of the Free Soil contest, McDuffie was ailing from tuberculosis as well as the bullets he carried in his body from numerous duels. But he was still a master of harsh words. He thus didn't just join Calhoun in proclaiming that slavery was a positive good. Nor did he just join Calhoun in insisting that "slavery followed the flag," that the threat to exclude it from the American West was thus unconstitutional, and that excluding it would destroy the delicate balance between slave and free states that had been maintained since the Missouri Compromise. McDuffie went further. He portrayed Angelica's father-in-law as a monster, a man who wanted to "pen up" the South's "superabundant slave population . . . within their present limits," and thus foment slave rebellions throughout the Old South.¹⁸⁷

What Angelica thought of all this is uncertain. But it is hard to imagine people sitting around the dining table at Lindenwald and pretending that McDuffie didn't exist, or that there wasn't serious talk in Angelica's native South Carolina of leaving the Union.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, while it is difficult to know what views Angelica expressed publicly or held privately, recent literature on southern women during the antebellum period underscores the degree to which white women in the South participated, albeit in ways

¹⁸⁷See Philip M. Hamer, *The Secession Movement in South Carolina, 1847-1852* (Allentown, Pa., 1918); William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge, 1978), Chapter 7; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York, 1990), Chapters 26 and 27; and Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York, 1988), Chapter 5.

shaped by their gender and class, in the political struggles of their day, challenging notions that white women of privilege were not politically engaged.¹⁸⁹

In the South as well as the North, voluntary associations, in particular, were vehicles through which these women helped shape the public sphere. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, middle class and elite women began to form and join a host of organizations from benevolent societies to more politically oriented abolitionist societies. Such activities provided arenas in which women worked with local and state government officials, conducted petition drives, undertook fundraising ventures, and participated in other forms of public political culture. Marcia Burns Van Ness, for example, in the 1810s helped found with her close friend Dolly Madison, the Washington City Female Orphan Asylum, an effort to help families rendered homeless and fatherless during the War of 1812. Such activities created opportunities for women to learn organizational structure and business skills, build networks, and later on express their views on slavery, attend political rallies, work toward sectional reconciliation, and, eventually, to work for the Confederate cause. We don't know all of the organizations Angelica or the southern women with whom she corresponded during these years supported, contributed to or participated in, though we do know that many women in Washington (including Madison), Philadelphia, and other cities were engaged in such work. We also know that Angelica was inclined--as were most elite women of her generation--to participate in voluntary work, and after she and Abraham moved to New York City, she was regularly active in charitable organizations.¹⁹⁰ But how the sectional crisis unfolded within the confines of her new family remains, for the time being, a mystery.

There was another consequence of the Free Soil movement that also shaped Angelica's life. Thanks to the split in her father-in-law's old party--the Jacksonian

¹⁸⁸For the extent of secessionist talk in South Carolina, see Hamer, *The Secessionist Movement in South Carolina*.

¹⁸⁹See, e.g., Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

¹⁹⁰For a thorough study of the volunteer landscape of New York in this period, see Ann Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

Democrats--the gender gap in New York was narrowed.

That was hardly intentional on Van Buren's part. His old party had long appealed to the more "macho" of the New York electorate. In election after election, they had characterized their Whig opponents as being "the women's party," as being "feminine" in their adherence to moral reform issues and in their "language of fraternal love." Most also had scorned as "petticoat politics" the moral reform movements of the day. Only a few had supported the temperance crusade. Fewer yet had supported the abolitionists. And only a handful were advocates of "women's rights." The vast majority portrayed themselves instead as the champions of the patriarchal family and ordinary white males.¹⁹¹

In the 1820s, moreover, Van Buren and his followers had been instrumental in widening the gender gap in New York. Their goal then had been to drive the sitting governor, DeWitt Clinton, out of office. They claimed that he held office only because the New York constitution of 1777 discriminated against middling white males. Under that document, New York had a three-tier voting system. If a man owned a freehold estate worth \$250, he could vote for governor and state senator. If he had an estate worth \$50, he could vote for assemblyman. If his holdings were worth less than \$50, he couldn't vote. Under this system, about 70 percent of the adult male population could vote assemblyman, but only 40 percent for governor.

To cause trouble for Clinton, Van Buren and his Bucktail followers pushed for replacing the old three-tier system with a taxpaying qualification for voting, that they achieved in 1821. In the next election, they styled themselves as the "voice of democracy" and drove Clinton from office. In seeking revenge, Clinton formed what he called the People's party and pushed for the elimination of all property requirements for voting. At the same time, he fought to take the power to choose presidential electors away from the state legislature, which the Van Burenites controlled, and give it directly to the "people." That, he said, was "true democracy." He triumphed and regained the governor's office in 1825.

¹⁹¹All of this is well-established in the vast literature on the moral reform movements of Jacksonian America, but for convenient summaries covering Van Buren's New York, see Pierson, "Guard the

In this oft-told tale, virtually all white adult males ended up with the right to vote in New York.¹⁹² What about black males? The Van Burenites, against conservative opposition, successfully stripped the right to vote from all black males with less than \$250 in real estate. What about women? They never even considered giving the ballot to women. Over the next thirty years, a number of unsuccessful efforts were made to restore black male voting. In opposition always were Van Buren's followers. At the same time, efforts were made to protect women, especially the property rights of women. Again, in opposition always were Van Buren's followers. What the Van Burenites offered women instead was strengthening "the family circle," the patriarchal family system that allegedly had been instituted by God back in the days of Adam and Eve.

Under this system, a woman's assets and debts became her husband's on her wedding day. She no longer had any right to control property that had been hers the previous day. Nor did she have any right from that day forward to acquire property, make contracts, keep or control her own wages or any rents, transfer property, sell property, or file suit. On the plus side, she was no longer responsible for the debts she acquired before marriage or during marriage. All her rights and liabilities now belonged to her husband.¹⁹³ That was the lot of Angelica Singleton, Elizabeth Vanderpoel, and Ellen James when they married Van Buren's sons. All of these women brought assets to the marriage, and Ellen James, in particular, came from an exceptionally wealthy family.

The system lent itself not only to endless debate over whether it was "divinely inspired," but also to two very different "hard-luck" stories. Reformers, for example, particularly liked to recount the sad tale of a rich widow with grown children who

Foundation Well': Antebellum New York Democrats and the Defense of Patriarchy;" and Pierson, *Free Hearts, Free Homes*.

¹⁹²Of the many accounts of the battle over suffrage reform in New York state, probably the most enlightening is Merrill D. Peterson, *Democracy, Liberty, and Property: The State Constitutional Conventions of the 1820s* (Indianapolis, 1966). For a short synopsis, see also Leonard L. Richards, *The Advent of American Democracy, 1815-1848* (Glenview, Ill., 1977), 122-5.

¹⁹³For legal details, see Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, 1982). The Basch book, while good on details, is rather poor on the party politics of the period. For the party politics, see Pierson, "'Guard the Foundations Well': Antebellum New York Democrats and the Defense of Patriarchy," and Pierson, *Free Hearts, Free Homes*. For woman's rights generally, see Sylvia D. Hoffert, *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* (Bloomington, Ind., 1995).

married a wastrel who frittered away the widow's hard-earned wealth on one hare-brained venture after another. In the end, the woman and her heirs were left with nothing, and there was nothing they could do about it. The traditionalists, who included most of Van Buren's followers, invariably rejoined with the story of a poor widow who was being hounded by creditors and was but one-step away from the poor house. Upon her marriage, her assets went to her husband, but so too did her debts, and her new husband like any good patriarch kept her creditors at bay, paid off the debts, and she lived happily ever after.

Though outside the system of party politics, women were of course active players in the push for reform. Middle class white women in particular were acutely aware that the expansion of male suffrage had created an electoral gulf between white women and white men that was a new feature of the political landscape.¹⁹⁴ From the turn of the nineteenth century, a steady proliferation of voluntary associations allowed women to convert responsibilities for home and family, cast in the years following the American Revolution as women's most important contribution to civic life, into vehicles for public action on a variety of social issues. As they gained increasingly sophisticated political and financial skills, women, particularly those of the middling and upper classes, became increasingly aware of the obstacles created by their political and legal disabilities, experiences that led to critiques of both property law and access to the vote. As historian Paula Baker observes, "when states eliminated property qualifications for suffrage, women saw that their disenfranchisement was based solely on sex. The idea of separate spheres had a venerable past, but it emerged in the early nineteenth century with a vengeance."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴In 1824, fewer than 24% of adult white males voted in the presidential election. In 1828, more than 57% did, and by 1840, more than 79% of white men voted. Being shut out from that phenomenon prompted middle-class women, who had long enjoyed political influence, through other channels, to begin organizing on their own behalf. See Lori D. Ginzberg, "Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash: Women, Politics and Social Activism in the 1850s," *Journal of American History*, 73 (Dec.1986), 601-622, esp. p. 604. In fact, it was frustration with the lack of the vote to implement temperance reform that prompted Susan B. Anthony to embrace the suffrage movement.

¹⁹⁵Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review*, 89 (June 1984), 629. Norma Basch finds the same to be true in *In the Eyes of the Law*, 121, noting that "mounting pressure for improving the legal status of women in the 1830s was part

Middle-class white women harnessed the rhetoric of separate spheres even as they strained against it, using multiple means of persuasion to influence public opinion in their favor. Grounding their activities in women's roles as guardians of the home, women formed and joined benevolent and reform organizations, lobbied legislators via petition and personal connections, and harnessed the power of the press, publishing accounts of their activities, as well as the names of legislators who had voted against their interests.

As time passed, the reformers gained steam. The long depression that began with the Panic of 1837 had given them more horror stories to tell. Wealthy New Yorkers increasingly took steps to get around the law, setting up trusts whereby only some of a beloved daughter's property fell into the hands of her husband. The various reform movements of the period--especially temperance and antislavery--provided many women with the training to agitate for change. The high point for the reformers probably came at the famous July 1848 women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, a gathering of some 200 women and 40 men at which one speaker after another called for a Married Women's Property Act.

But passing such an act would have been all but impossible had Jacksonian Democrats continued to dominate the state legislature. While some reformers were Jacksonian Democrats, the most notable being Thomas Herttel of New York City, the vast majority were Whigs. Only the Whigs were likely to put such a measure through. The Free Soil campaign made that possible. It split the old Van Buren coalition, and as a result the Whigs gained an overwhelming majority in the legislature. The result was "an act for the more effectual protection of the property of married women." The act, passed in 1848 and amended in 1849, gave a married woman the same property rights she would have had if she had remained single.

New York's Married Women's Property Act became a model for many other states. Indeed, just a few months later, in far away California, a one-time New York Whig named William Shannon moved to include such a provision in the state constitution. The delegates, who were anxious to attract women to the state, endorsed the proposal by unanimous vote. The state legislature then went a step further and placed the state under

of the woman question, a broad-based effort that simultaneously defined and questioned the place of women in Jacksonian America."

the Spanish law of "community property" whereby a wife jointly owns everything she and her husband acquire during marriage.¹⁹⁶

The new law dramatically changed the rights of any woman who married into Van Buren's family. The July 1848 convention at Seneca Falls had only recently concluded as Ellen King James Van Buren, one of the thousands of New York women to benefit from the Married Women's Property Act, began planning her new residence in Kinderhook. By the time Henrietta Irving entered her marriage with Smith Van Buren in 1855, it was a different world for married women. As a result of this legislation, Henrietta's relationship to Lindenwald would be by definition dramatically different than any of her predecessors.

The difference, however, was only pertained to property in states that adopted the New York rule. South Carolina did not. Thus, when Angelica Singleton Van Buren came into possession of 210 South Carolina slaves, they were not hers to sell. They were her husband's. And in 1858, Abraham sold them to an Arkansas planter, Elisha Worthington, "for \$147,000, or an average of \$700."¹⁹⁷

The free-soil movement thus impacted upon the residents of Lindenwald in startlingly different ways. It brought Van Buren back into the national limelight. It made his son John a major figure in the New York political landscape. It provided the women of the house with rights they never had before. And it may have created some uneasiness between the northern and southern members of the household.

¹⁹⁶J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution* (Washington, D. C., 1850), 259, 478-9.

¹⁹⁷*Kinderhook Rough Notes*, December 30, 1858.

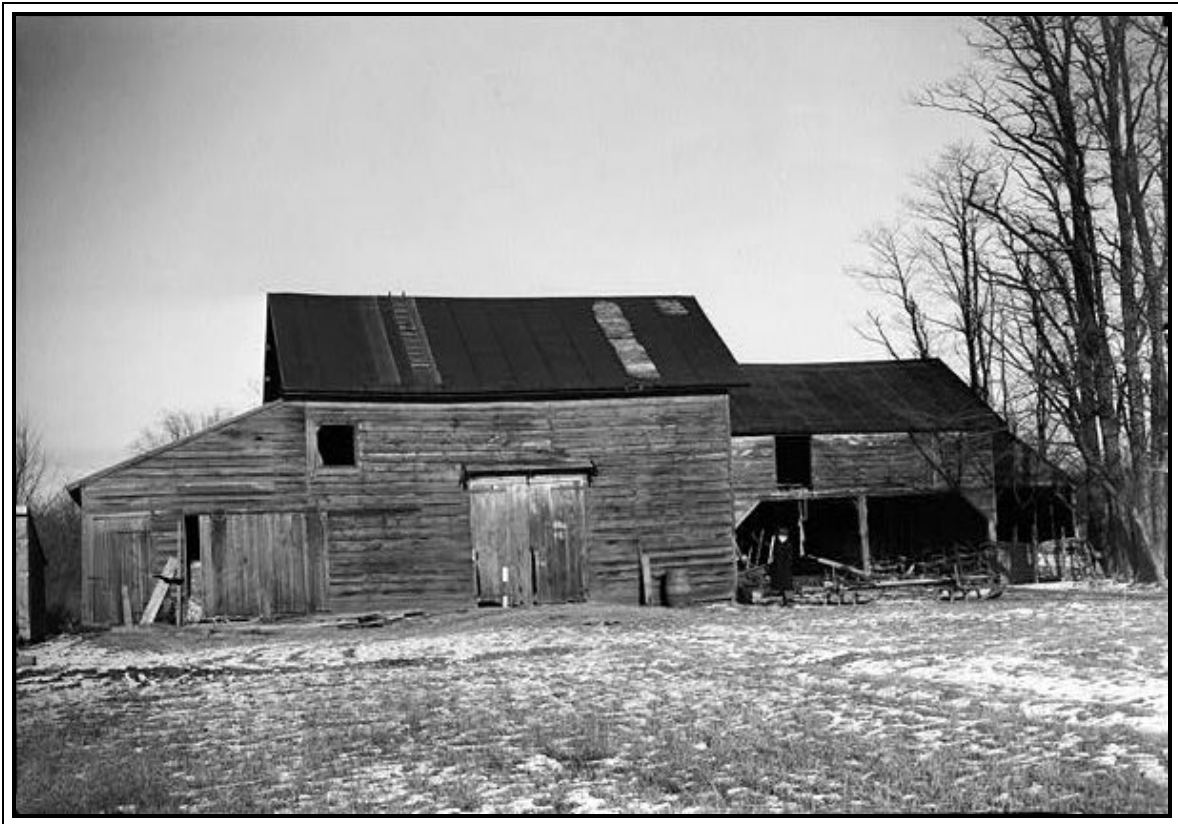


Figure 7. Nineteenth century barn once located west of Lindenwald. Historic American Buildings Survey, Nelson E. Baldwin, photographer, January 16, 1937, Library of Congress.

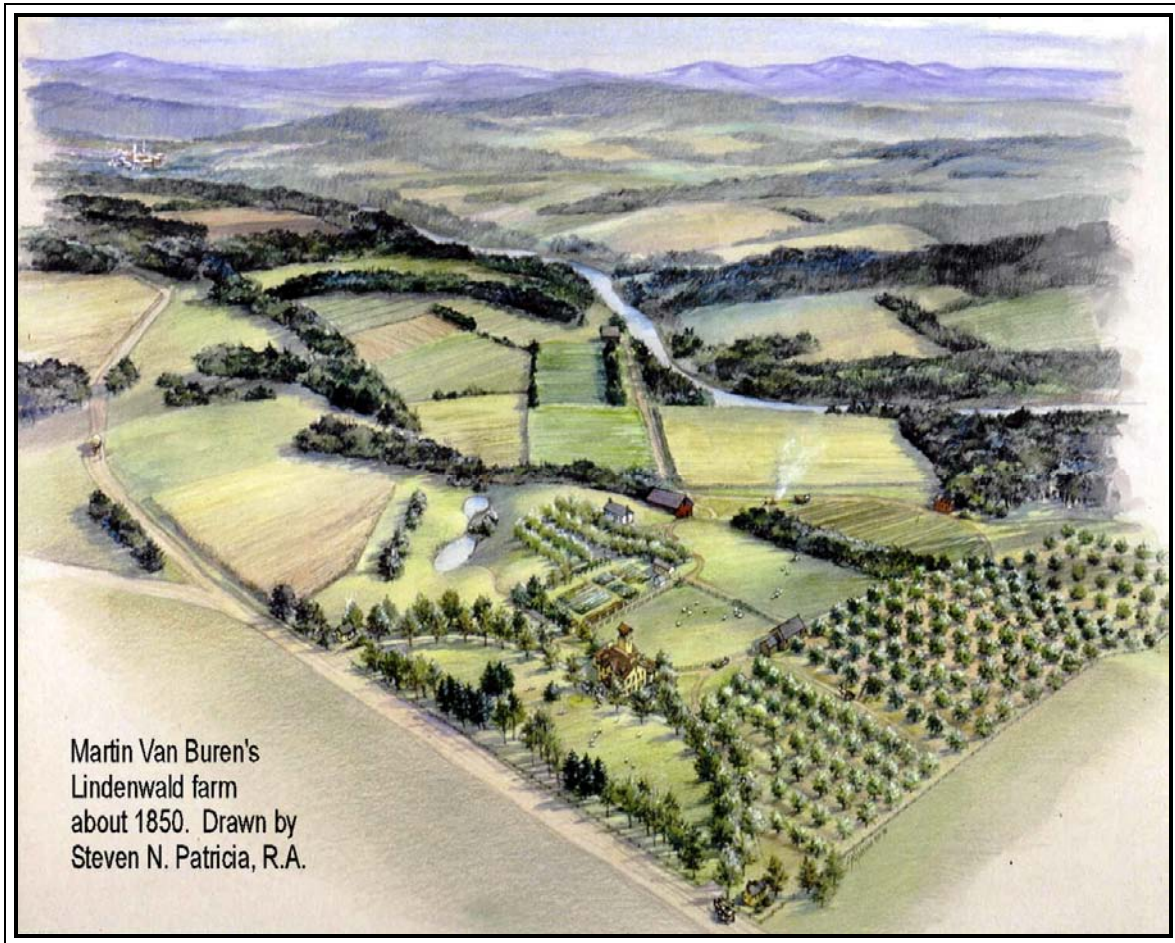


Figure 8. Martin Van Buren's Lindenwald Farm, c. 1850. Cover illustration by Steven N. Patricia, reprinted from David Uschold, *Cultural Landscape Report for Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Volume 2, Treatment Plan* (Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior 1997).



Figure 9. Angelica Van Buren. Engraving taken from an 1842 Henry Inman portrait. White House Historical Association. Reproduced in Carol E. Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report for "Lindenwald,"* Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Kinderhook, NY. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Harpers Ferry, WV.



Figure 10. John Van Buren, half plate daguerreotype taken between 1844 and 1860. Daguerreotype collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Chapter Four

Lindenwald, 1849-62: A Politician Retires, A Family Grows

After the 1848 election, Van Buren gradually withdrew from public life. Now in his mid-60s but in good health, he focused more of his energies on Lindenwald. In April 1849, within six months of the election, he told his friend and banker Gorham Worth that he had been away from his farm "only three or four days" since the previous spring, and that he would "not again" trust his "nerves to so near an approach to one of the seats of political & Bank corruptions." He advised Worth to "plant" himself on a farm in "my neighbourhood" and thus to become "an honest & virtuous man."

Van Buren also told Worth that after taking stock of his farm he had decided to make a "more effective provision" than old Peter Van Ness had made in keeping the estate within the family. The estate would not be divided among his sons. The entire estate would go to his youngest son, Smith Thompson, provided that Smith and his family would come live with him and make Lindenwald their permanent residence.¹⁹⁸

Seven years earlier, in 1842, Smith had married Ellen King James, a member of the wealthy and influential James family.¹⁹⁹ William James had emigrated from Ireland to New York in the 1780s or early 1790s, along with some 5,000 others each year. Unlike the Irish Catholic migration to come, which brought the impoverished young women who would come to labor in wealthy New York households, William was part of a migration mainly comprising Presbyterian families of comfortable status. He found work as a clerk in an Albany dry goods shop, and before long he had five commercial enterprises in Albany and another on John Street in New York City. As the same booming commercial environment that altered Van Buren's Kinderhook transformed Albany, James's fortune continued to grow, and soon the James family was among the wealthiest in the state of

¹⁹⁸Martin Van Buren to G. A. Worth, April 9, 1849, Van Buren Papers.

¹⁹⁹The following is drawn from R.W.B. Lewis, *The Jameses; A Family Narrative* (New York, 1991), and Alfred Habegger, *The Father: A Life of Henry James, Sr.*, (Amherst, 2001).

New York. He became well-connected with the men of political and financial influence, including Van Buren's old rival DeWitt Clinton, whom he supported tirelessly.

Born in Albany in 1813, Ellen King James was William's fourth and final daughter. Interestingly, she was named for her older sister Ellen, the daughter of William's second wife (an Irish Catholic woman named Mary Ann Connolly), whose marriage in 1818 was nearly jeopardized by Martin Van Buren long before his future daughter-in-law was born.²⁰⁰ To gain permission to marry her, Ellen's intended, James King, had had to promise her strong-willed father that he would abstain from politics, but, when the "bitter quarrel" between Clinton and Van Buren erupted that year, King could not resist sending an anonymous denouncement of Clinton to the *Argus*. When James demanded the name of the author, Van Buren himself stepped in to ease the situation and the wedding occurred as planned. Ellen King was alive and well, but probably in failing health, when William and Catherine Barber James's fourth daughter was born and named after her oldest sister.

One of more than eight of Catherine's surviving children, Ellen King James grew up among the northeast's social and cultural leadership. The family home in Albany was an impressive three-story brick mansion, and its occupants enjoyed a "princely standard of living."²⁰¹ Little is presently known about Ellen's childhood and youth, but evidence suggests that her education was surprisingly traditional in a family that would become known for its adventuresome intellectual spirit: the only documentation concerning the James girls' education suggests that they attended private boarding schools that tutored wealthy pupils in geography, French, manners, religion, and the usual female "accomplishments." There is no indication, for example, that they attended the Albany Female Academy, where young women received education in Latin and calculus, in addition to the usual subjects. Nevertheless, the family stood at the center of the region's religious, philosophical, and cultural life. The nieces and nephews who would transform American intellectual life in the nineteenth century (William, Henry, and Alice, the children of her brother Henry) were only small children when Ellen died in 1852, but she

²⁰⁰Habegger, *The Father*, 26.

²⁰¹Habegger, *The Father*, 50.

and her own eight brothers and sisters were themselves full participants in the religious and cultural currents of the antebellum years. Henry's household, in particular, was closely associated with the New England transcendentalists; Longfellow, Thoreau, Emerson, Tennyson, Hawthorne, Greeley, J.S. Mill and other philosophical and literary luminaries visited his home.

The Van Buren and James families were long acquainted by the time of Martin Van Buren's presidential administration, when Smith accompanied Ellen to a state dinner that her brother had declined to attend. Smith and Ellen married in 1842. Like her sister Jannet, who had married the son of a New York banking family, and her sister Catharine, who married West Point graduate Robert Emmet Temple, Ellen chose a man of considerable public influence as her life partner.

In the 1840s, they were living in Albany, near Ellen's mother and her several brothers and sisters who had remained in that city. By 1849, they had had three children and were living in Washington, but they were not happy there. Would they move to Lindenwald? They were inclined to accept Smith's father's offer to join him at his Kinderhook estate, but there was one condition. "Smith made it an indispensable condition," Van Buren wrote his friend Francis Blair, "that he should be permitted to add sufficient to my house to make as many rooms as he may want without entering upon what I now have."²⁰²

Van Buren agreed. Retaining complete control of the grounds, he gave Smith and Ellen permission to expand the size of the house. They accepted Van Buren's offer to move to Lindenwald. Overall, the terms of the agreement pleased Van Buren. "The idea of seeing in life," he noted, "the changes which my heir would be sure to make after I am gone, amuses me."²⁰³ But did he relish the construction project that Smith and his wife had in mind? Not in the least.

Smith and Ellen elected to hire a renowned architect revamp the mansion. Having an architect-designed home had become "fashionable and popular" not only among the national elite but also among the Hudson Valley elite. Back in 1800 just having a mirror,

²⁰²Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, March 5, 1849, Van Buren Papers, quoted in Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 19.

carpets, curtains, framed pictures, and silverware had been enough to distance the top 5 percent from the bottom 95 percent. Now, 40 percent of the Valley's homes had carpets and silverware, 35 percent had curtains, 25 percent had framed pictures, and nearly 20 percent had silverware. The average resident, however, spent no more than \$500 or \$600 on a simple frame farmhouse. Only a few families could afford brick homes, and fewer yet could afford architect-designed brick homes. Thus, to display their material success and cultural awareness, wealthy and powerful men such as the cotton entrepreneur James Wild of Stockport and the merchant James G. Foster of Athens, built elaborate brick mansions. True, these structures were no match for the great estates of the Livingstons and Van Rensselaers, but they set their owners far above the thousands of artisans and dirt farmers who worked with their hands.²⁰⁴

One key in this struggle for social distinction was to employ a noted architect. Accordingly, Smith hired Richard Upjohn, a 47-year old Englishman and famous ecclesiastical architect, to oversee renovation. Upjohn had rebuilt Trinity church in New York City. The Trinity project, which began in 1839, set a new standard in Gothic architecture, and churches across the country--especially Episcopal churches--soon sought Upjohn's help in building more modest structures. Among the many were St. Paul's Episcopal in Kinderhook (1852) and two others in Columbia County: St. John's Wilderness Episcopal (1852) in Copake, where Upjohn also designed the parsonage, and St. Luke's Episcopal Church (1859) in Clermont. Also bearing Upjohn's influence was Christ Church, designed by William G. Harrison, in nearby Hudson.²⁰⁵

By the time Smith approached Upjohn, the architect had developed an interest in a new style of architecture. Dubbed the Italianate style, it was derived from the country villas of Renaissance Italy.²⁰⁶ Usually these villas had a cupola on the roof that were not

²⁰³Martin Van Buren to G. A. Worth, April 9, 1849, Van Buren Papers.

²⁰⁴Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 161, 173-5.

²⁰⁵Piwonka and Blackburn, *A Visible Heritage*, 132-5; Everard M. Upjohn, *Richard Upjohn, Architect and Churchman* (New York, 1968).

²⁰⁶The Italianate style was not just the preference prevailing among the most fashionable. Sally McMurry in *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change* (New York, 1988), 12, observes that the New York agricultural press associated Italianate design with progressive

just decorative but provided a panoramic view of the countryside. Sometimes the villas were asymmetrical with an attached Romanesque bell tower. In keeping with this fashion, Upjohn wanted to drastically alter the Federal mansion that Peter Van Ness had built back in 1797, adding a tower and greatly enlarging the size, embellishment, and creature comforts of the old structure. Inside, however, he planned on retaining the finely executed Federal style woodwork.

Upjohn's plans called for building a five-story brick tower topped by a belvedere and gabled roof on the west side of the original house, as well as a full basement that would increase the downstairs space by a full ten rooms. The new addition would have arched windows with a six-over-six sash, along with a square skylight and a hipped roof covered with a terneplate. The plans also called for major changes to the original house, most notably building a Romanesque/Gothic porch over the main entrance, altering the roof line by adding several gables and the fenestration by filling in some windows and replacing others with single arched windows, and replacing two chimneys on the south end of the house with one huge chimney (Figure 12).²⁰⁷

Upjohn's Italianate design now put Lindenwald squarely in the context of contemporary Hudson River Valley estates of the type illustrated by Downing and described by Downing's partner, architect Calvert Vaux, as "villas" and "cottages." Lindenwald's belvedere tower also made it possible to have fine views of the entire property, with the Kinderhook Creek as a middle ground and the Catskill Mountains in the distance. Van Ness had originally sited the house in an earlier era and in response to more practical considerations. The house was too far from the escarpment (that separated the upper and lower terraces of the farm) to take advantage of the scenic prospects available elsewhere on the site. Short of moving the house, the construction of the tower was one way of making a classic passage of Hudson River Valley scenery part of the experience of the house, as it was for so many newer residences in the region that were sited specifically to take advantage of scenic viewpoints.

farm houses. She notes C. Butler Rider in *Moore's Rural New Yorker* (Jan. 1860) saying that the "Italian style" is "the one most perfectly adapted to the wants of the farming community."

²⁰⁷Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 20.

Van Buren dreaded the rebuilding process. Well before the renovations began, in February 1848, he complained to his friend Blair: "Don't think me deranged when I say to you that my quiet & as was generally supposed my perfect or at least comfortable establishment is to be turned topsy-turvy, & the music of its feathered visitors drowned in the harsh sounds of the ax, the saw, & the trowel." Equally distressing, he noted, was the cost, \$10,000.²⁰⁸

The ordeal began in the spring of 1849. It was barely underway when Ellen gave birth to the couple's second daughter, Catherine Barber. Then, just a few weeks later, on October 30, Ellen suddenly died of consumption. Smith thus went through the same experience that his father had some thirty years earlier when Smith was just two months old. He, too, had suddenly become a widower with small children. He, moreover, was the second of Van Buren's sons to have this experience. Within the decade, his brother John had also lost his wife, Elizabeth Vanderpoel, after only a few years of marriage.

The elder Van Buren shared his son's pain. He had planned to rent a house in Kinderhook while the remodeling was under way, but now decided to remain with Smith and the children, wintering with them in New York City, and returning in the spring.²⁰⁹

Upon returning, the remodeling was going full bore. Months later, when completed, Van Buren had what seemed to him like an entirely new house. In the basement, he had ten new rooms, which included a kitchen, laundry, stair hall, basement entry, chamber, hall, vaulted tunnel, privy pit, and coal storage room. On the first floor, he now had 12 rooms, which included a new library, two bedrooms, a stair hall, a bathroom, a water closet, a small hall, a nursery, a main entrance hall, another small hall, a privy, and a closet. Equally drastic were the changes to the second floor.

One telling decision in the construction of the new rooms was the inclusion of a nursery. Rooms devoted specifically to children were on the rise in the first half of the nineteenth century, especially in farm households like the Van Burens, where it was assumed that the children would not actually become farmers themselves.²¹⁰ The

²⁰⁸Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, February 16, 1848, Blair Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 22.

²⁰⁹Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 23.

nurseries described in progressive farm literature of the period were, like the Van Burens', located on ground floors, usually adjacent to kitchens, sitting or dining rooms, bath rooms, and bedrooms. As at Lindenwald, they were also generally suggested to be adjacent to a bedroom occupied by adults, typically the parents, in order to save the parents unnecessary steps.

The advent of nurseries reflects a change in thinking about children that was unfolding in middle decades of nineteenth century. Unlike the previous age, when children had no space to call their own, a new regard for children as individuals with specific needs prompted the creation of new, dedicated spaces. Also, a confluence of new ideas about child rearing--a new religious liberalism (as opposed to a theology emphasizing innate depravity), Lockean philosophy, and the political ideology of republicanism--occasioned a "reassessment of the nature of the child."²¹¹

Important here too was the transforming role of middle class white women. Just as the notion of "republican motherhood," which emerged in the Revolutionary era, had led by these years to political action, it had also placed much greater emphasis on the mother's role as caregiver.²¹² Agricultural journals of the period, and other places throughout cultural landscape, stressed the mother's role in developing a child's conscience, cultivating obedience, as well as other qualities required of good citizens. The nursery was a prime center for this instruction, the place where Ellie, Eddie, Kitty, Bessie, and Marion would play, master their ABCs, and learn how to be proper Victorian children.

Ellen Van Buren may have looked forward to occupying this space, and this role. After her death, Smith took it on himself, and later with his second wife Henrietta, all with the help of a governess who may also have had living quarters adjacent to the nursery. In 1852 at the Arts Union sale Smith bought an inexpensive painting entitled "The pets," an 11 x 14 watercolor by an F. Dewchet or Dewhert, which depicts a young child sitting on a doorstep with a bowl and spoon, sharing his breakfast with a dog and cat. Perhaps Smith intended to place this image in the new nursery, to encourage his

²¹⁰This and the following are drawn from McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses*, 177-208.

²¹¹Ibid, 182.

²¹²For more on this, see Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 158-59.

children to cultivate the desire to share. Little is known about any other furnishings here, apart from evidence of a large piece of case furniture that for some period occupied most of one wall.

Lastly, another essential in any good nursery was a governess, and the family regularly supplied this as well, hiring a series of nurses, valets, and governesses to see to the children. Families as well off as the Van Burens would have had a governess in any event, but women like Rose Dalton were surely indispensable in the years following Ellen's death.²¹³

While the nursery provided a dedicated space for the youngest members of the household, other rooms in the house catered to the eldest. Smith's correspondence details his precise plans for the library, the place where his father read, made notes, and wrote letters to his political allies during the last ten years of his life. Here, too, his father found words for his unpublished autobiography and history of the early Republic. In selecting a furniture style for the library, Smith looked to an Albany neighbor's library for inspiration. "I saw a library designed for Mr. Barnard in Albany which pleased me and only cost \$200. It was black walnut and plain. . ." After selecting the material and pattern, Smith hired Isaac Hellenbeck, a cabinetmaker from nearby Berne, to make bookcases for the room. Inspired by Upjohn's architectural vision, the bookshelves were Gothic in style.²¹⁴

At the same time that Smith created new spaces at Lindenwald, he also introduced new furnishings and artwork into the house, choices that shed some light on his own tastes and preferences. In December 1852, for example, the Van Burens bought more than a dozen pieces of artwork at the American Academy of Fine Arts at the American Art-Union. Among those purchased by Smith Van Buren was "Indian Girl Giving Drink to a Trapper," by Alfred Jacob Miller (1810-1874), a painter who specialized in the American

²¹³Interestingly, the rooms Smith added did not include a bell system. The Historic Structure Report suggests that this indicates that Martin Van Buren's servants did not serve in these rooms. This interpretation is not entirely convincing, but it is an intriguing question that bears further consideration.

²¹⁴See especially Smith Thompson's letters of April 20, May, 13, June 20, July 29, 1850, in Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 262-75.

West.²¹⁵

Born in Baltimore, Miller studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and later at the English Life School in Rome. In 1837 he had moved to New Orleans where he was selected by Capt. William Drummond Stewart as the artist to record a journey to the annual Rocky Mountain fur traders' rendezvous, where trappers and Indians sold their furs to Eastern traders. The expedition journeyed by wagon along what was to become the Oregon Trail. Miller sketched Native Americans along the way and also recorded the rendezvous itself in what is now southwestern Wyoming.²¹⁶ When Miller's views of the trip were exhibited in New York City in the spring of 1839, huge crowds turned out to see them, many catching their first glimpses of Native Americans from the Western states. "Indian Girl giving drink to a trapper" depicts a native woman aiding a trapper, who remains on horseback.

Historian William Cronon has this to say about Miller, and this painting in particular:

Miller openly incorporates fur trades into his visual narrative of life on the plains, and seems little concerned about trying to construct a "pure" image of how Indians might have lived before Europeans appeared among them. One gets little sense from him of an endangered way of life or a culture threatened with destruction of forces beyond its control. Far from being imperiled by the arrival of Europeans, his Indians seem quite capable of persuading white trappers to throw off their civilized ways and embrace the gentle pleasures of the forest. Miller's narrative is thus about a return to the garden, not a fall from it. The Indian maiden in Giving Drink to a Thirsty Trapper, undated, offers far more than water to her guests. Her beauty, her generosity, her innocence, and her unashamed nakedness remind the viewer of a romantic myth not just of sexuality but of bounty itself.²¹⁷

Miller settled in Baltimore in April 1842, and established a studio there where he

²¹⁵Miller's work has been published in Bernard Devoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston, 1947); Marvin C. Ross, *The West of Alfred Jacob Miller* (Norman, Okla, 1968) and Alfred J. Miller, *Braves and Buffalo: Plains Life in 1837* (Toronto, 1973). See also Jules Prown, et al, *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West* (New Haven, 1992). A watercolor related to this painting is in the Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, and is illustrated in Prown, et al, 60.

²¹⁶See Lisa Strong, "Images of Indigenous Aristocracy in Alfred Jacob Miller," *American Art*, 13 (Spring 1999) Number 1.

²¹⁷Cronon, "Telling Tales on Canvas, Landscapes of Frontier Change," in Prown et al, *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts*, 37-88, quotation, 58.

duplicated his Indian and Western sketches of the 1830s in both watercolor and oil for the northeastern art market. It seems likely that the work Smith purchased was a copy of this image generated between 1842 and 1852.

Two more costly images the family purchased, however, were scenes of Europe: a "View in Paris" by Thomas Doughty (1793-1856), chosen by Smith, and a "View of the Drachenfels" by Thomas Worthington Whittredge (1820-1910), purchased by another member of the family. Interestingly, both Doughty and Whittredge are today best remembered for their paintings of American landscapes, a genre especially appealing to Americans in the middle of the nineteenth century; these European landscapes were, in both cases, works generated during the European tours undertaken by artists in training during this period. Doughty came to painting comparatively late in life, abandoning a career in the leather business at the age of 27 to take up painting. He received his first public recognition in 1822 when the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts displayed eight of his landscapes. Two years later he was elected to membership in that institution, an occasion marked by the exhibition of eight additional paintings, which reportedly prompted the young Thomas Cole to be "profoundly moved and humbled."²¹⁸

In 1837 and 38, while Jacob Miller was touring the American West, Doughty traveled through Europe, and painted, among other things, the "View in Paris" that Smith acquired, a scene in which spires rise through foliage, with the Seine visible in the distance. Upon return to the United States, Doughty's work became increasingly popular, with the Art-Union being among his main supporters. Interestingly, Whittredge was himself influenced by Doughty's work.

Born in Springfield, Ohio, in 1837 Whittredge left home for Cincinnati, where first he worked as a house painter, advanced to sign painting, then to making daguerreotype photographs, and, still less than three years in the southern Ohio city, began portrait painting. About 1843 he turned to landscape painting. Influenced by the Hudson River School, his earliest surviving paintings, from about 1845, already reflect the influence of Thomas Cole, Doughty, and most especially Asher B. Durand, whom he had met and who had greatly encouraged his ongoing professional pursuit. Following the

²¹⁸See Kohan, *Historic Furnishings Report*, 171, 180, and "The Democratic Ideal: The Mid Nineteenth Century."

pattern of serious artists of the time, in 1849 he went to Europe, eventually settling in Dusseldorf, Germany. It was probably during this trip that he painted the "View of the Drachenfels," which coupled the aesthetic style associated with the landscape painting so popular in these decades with European vistas, that Smith so admired.

Far and away the costliest work purchased, however, was Thomas Hewes Hinckley's view of rabbit hunting, in which two terriers are poised at a rabbit hole, ready to pounce.²¹⁹ The hunter is absent but implied by the dead rabbits and gun sitting on the ground beside them. The selection of this work and the price Van Buren was willing to pay for it are intriguing. Smith spent \$475 on this 54-x-40-inch work, more than three times the cost of the next most expensive, the \$140 "View of the Drachenfels." In 1852, Hinckley was by no means the well-known or well-connected figure that the other artists they patronized were.

Born in 1813 in Milton, Massachusetts, Hinckley moved to Philadelphia to learn the merchant's trade, but began taking art classes in the evenings. He eventually became a sign painter, returning to Milton in 1831. After 1843, however, he devoted himself to animal paintings, and enjoyed a highly successful career painting portraits of pets and livestock, as well as scenes involving dogs and game, and farmscapes. In 1852, at the time of the exhibition of his painting at the Art-Union, Hinckley was on his own European pilgrimage, where he studied masters of animal painting there. He had not yet achieved the reputation he would after a pair of 1858 paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy brought him widespread attention. Smith's interest in Hinckley's work in 1852, and willingness to pay handsomely to acquire it, may suggest that the scene itself, more than the artist's reputation, drew him to the work.²²⁰

But perhaps Smith was aware of Hinckley growing reputation among a few northeastern notables. Several had asked Hinckley to capture likenesses of favorite animals. In 1845, for example, Daniel Webster had commissioned Hinckley to sketch his Ayrshire cattle in 1845, and Milton ship captain Robert Bennet Forbes commissioned him

²¹⁹On Hinckley, see Marjorie Shaw, *Thomas Hewes Hinckley, Artist to a Generation* (Milton, Mass., 1985), and Joseph Rishel, "Landseer: Queen Victoria's Favorite Painter Copied in America," *Nineteenth Century*, 7 (1981): 42-46.

to paint two hunting dogs that were possibly his own along with his gun and game bags. Perhaps Smith hoped the painting he purchased and placed in his new home would suggest that he, too, enjoyed the gentleman's sport.²²¹

If the arrival of Smith and family altered domestic life at Lindenwald and the spaces that encompassed it, these renovations also changed the lives of the hired help who occupied the site. First, the Italianate tower included a stairwell that became the primary passage for the domestic servants traveling between the various floors and the basement. The house's workspaces were greatly elaborated with addition of basement rooms. Smith had a new kitchen constructed in the south bay of the ca. 1850 addition, which became the new command center for domestic life at Lindenwald. Adjacent to the new kitchen was another room dedicated to laundry, one of the most important, and arduous, chores in a household the size of Lindenwald. At the center of the east wall was a large fireplace, essential to the heating of water and irons, as well as the drying of damp clothing and household textiles.

The renovations also created more space for Lindenwald's servants. While the servants worked in the basement and the first two floors, they slept in the distant third floor in three adjoining rooms. These rooms were sparse compared to the wallpapered and carpeted rooms below, boasting only whitewashed plaster walls and plain pine floors. The rooms also housed a call bell system that allowed the Van Buren family to access them from one of the two floors below. The furniture was otherwise sparse. Indeed, the "rows of pegs on the walls suggest the absence of a chest of drawers and a meager wardrobe," a far cry from what the family below enjoyed. Moreover, there were no "fireplaces in these rooms, no furnace ducts, and no evidence of stoves." How the servants kept warm in their meager quarters is unclear.

With the addition of three additional chambers under third-floor dormers, the low-ceiling garrets were more spacious.²²² Already noted are the locks that secured many, if

²²⁰A similar painting, "Landscape with Dogs," showing two hunting dogs in pursuit of a pair of woodcocks, is in the collection of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. See Shaw, *Thomas Hewes Hinckley*, 19.

²²¹The Forbes painting is today owned by the American China Trade Museum in Milton. The gun and game bags in the painting can be identified as belonging to Forbes. The two dogs have not been so identified as his. A similar painting, with minor alterations, is owned in a private collection in Marshfield, suggesting that Hinckley made and sold copies of these commissions, too. See Shaw, *Thomas Hewes Hinckley*, 17.

not most, of the interior rooms,²²³ allowing space throughout the house--not just the storeroom or closets and cupboards--to be tightly controlled. But there were locks present, too, on the doors in the third-floor servants' quarters. This might suggest that the servants could also control to some degree who had access to these spaces, but these doors locked only from the inside, not the outside, enabling someone in the room to prevent others from entering, but not to secure the room, or their meager possessions, while absent.

The alterations also created more space for farm hands. But Van Buren and Smith decided they needed still more room. So they had two small gatehouses constructed for the help at either end of the curving entry drive. Built in the same style as the main house, both were one and one-half stories tall. The one at the north gate had a dormer, which made it slightly bigger (Figure 13).

Both farm hands and servants still came and went, but those employees who were able to live apart from the Van Burens, in the gate lodges and farm cottage, tended to stay for longer periods of time.²²⁴ Among the women who worked and lived in the main house, for example, the censuses of 1850, 1855, and 1860, indicate complete turnovers in help. It also seems that the servants became increasingly more female and Irish as the years went by. Some were first-generation Irish, a few second. Employed at the time the 1850 census was taken were Sarah O'Connor, Hannah O'Connor, Catherine Link, Catherine Jordan, and Alan Kearn; in 1855, Sarah Hail, Margaret Kelly, Mary McEntire, and Ellen McDonough had joined the household.

In addition to Rose Dalton, the governess who was brought to Lindenwald by Smith to help with the children, by 1860, another six women were working to keep the household running smoothly. All of them were young, single, and Irish (either first-, or later-, probably second-generation immigrants). While there was not a large Irish community in Kinderhook in these years, there was a certain community among the domestic servants of Lindenwald. Among these, for example, were Catherine and Mary Kelly, both 24 years old in 1860 (b. ca. 1836), suggesting that they were perhaps twin

²²²West, "Irish Immigrant Workers."

²²³Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 337-345.

²²⁴Scott, "The Gatelodges of Lindenwald."

sisters. That Van Burens employed Margaret Kelly five years earlier raises the intriguing possibility that the Kelly sisters were not the first members of their family to work in Kinderhook. The Kellys were born in New York state, however, and so unlike the rest of the house's Irish domestics, were at least second-generation immigrants. These women labored alongside Bridget Clary, May O'Brien, Ann Gray, and Margaret Neeling.

One wonders how the Kelly girls' status as U.S. born domestics of Irish descent affected their relationships with the young women who had just come over. Years later, Irish immigrant Sarah Walsh would come to idolize her older sister, who had emigrated first and seemed so glamorous and comfortable in her new situation. Did the more recent arrivals from Ireland look likewise to the Kelly girls for advice and instruction on how to negotiate American culture?²²⁵

Even the brief glimpses provided by the terse lines of the census remind us of the multiple families who shared Lindenwald at any given time. Not only were families in residence around the grounds, in the gate lodges, the farm manager's cottage, and other spaces around the property, but within the walls of the main house, there were several families within the Van Burens, and also, families within the community of domestic servants. At the time that the census of 1850 was taken, 42 year old Sarah and 24 year old Hannah O'Connor lived together at Lindenwald. Were they mother and daughter? Sisters? Aunt and niece? Whatever their relationship, it seems likely that they were somehow family. The Kellys a decade later, too, were both 24 years old when working there. Were they twin sisters working and living together in Kinderhook? Whatever their relationships, these women had their own family life, and family dynamics, however limited, within the spaces of Lindenwald.

Likewise, Catherine Jordan worked at Lindenwald in 1850, and lived there with what appears to have been her infant son Percivelle Michael. Pregnancy among unmarried servants was a perennial problem for employers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Working class women's values concerning sex outside marriage and unwed motherhood were often markedly different than those of their middle-class or elite employers. They did not hold themselves, or aspire to, the values associated with the Cult

²²⁵On Sarah Walsh White, see Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagan: Storytelling in the American Past* (New York, 1998).

of True Womanhood that shaped the experience of privileged white women like Henrietta Irving Van Buren, for example.

Moreover, as the nineteenth century unfolded, the values associated with the notion that respectable men and women should occupy separate spheres tended to separate men and women of the middle classes, but did not affect to the same degree working people who did not or could not aspire to conform to emerging gender sensibilities. Working side by side in kitchens, storerooms, farmyards, and gardens, laboring men and women often cultivated romantic liaisons, many of which resulted in children. Some of these new parents married and set up housekeeping; some women, on the other hand, remained single, out of preference or necessity, and found themselves, like Catherine Jordan, raising their children in their workplaces.²²⁶

The expansion of the house overseen by Smith Van Buren created third-floor living spaces for the domestic help, as well as basement work spaces, separating the servants that much further from the family during both their workday and private time. With the effort behind it increasingly hidden from casual view, the leisure and entertaining enjoyed by the Van Burens was increasingly able to appear effortless, contributing to the illusion that the nineteenth-century home was a place apart, a refuge from the world of work that men inhabited. Though women like Henrietta Irving Van Buren may have shouldered considerable responsibility in managing the household, and probably performed some physical labor themselves as well, the hiring of these servants and their placement in the least visible spaces within the house enabled the Van Buren women to cultivate a particular public image of their station as women of comparative

²²⁶In 1850, the house next to Lindenwald was home to, among other people, a Cornelia Mickle, a twenty-eight year old woman from New York state, and probably a domestic worker. It seems possible that this "Mickle" may be in some way related to the "Michael" who fathered Percivelle. Servants' ability to combine family and work life may have been facilitated by the arrangement of the rooms at Lindenwald. For example, Howell, *Historic Structure Report*, 71, indicates that the servants' dining room under the southwest corner of the original house "where a fire has been used every winter since the house was occupied by" Van Buren was possibly the house's kitchen before the 1850 renovation. Certainly the house's basement kitchen created in the renovation created a workspace that was quite separate from the family rooms. This is consistent with a preference for "lower kitchens" among some elite families at least in Massachusetts and Connecticut in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in part to contribute to the larger, ongoing effort to separate employees from members of the family. As one Connecticut woman, forced to hire a servant who unfortunately came with a child in tow, wrote: "as we have a lower kitchen, she will not make much trouble." See Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, 20 June

leisure. This image elaborated on a process that had origins as far back as the 1797 building of Kleinrood. As historian Jeanne Boydston observes, this effort among privileged white families to separate "home" from "work" was integral to the construction of the theory and illusion of "separate spheres."²²⁷

This "pastoralization" of housework, as Jeanne Boydston has so deftly explicated, was a largely rhetorical process in which privileged white women's household activities were distinguished from actual "work." At Lindenwald as elsewhere, renovations to the family home gave that pastoralization physical form, but the effort to cloak the labors of the mistress of the house also kept paid laborers hidden from view: kitchens drifted further from parlors, servants' rooms were removed from the family's, while the expansion of rear service areas channeled working women away from the formal spaces entirely.

Alterations to the house during these years also introduced new technologies to the property, increasing the comfort of the family while both easing some burdens and creating new challenges for the domestic staff. The ca. 1854 advent of the hot-air furnace may also have been welcome, reducing the effort required to heat rooms throughout the house. Hot-air registers throughout the house meant fewer trips with heavy coal scuttles. But the servants may have found the work of the renovations as frustrating as Martin and Smith did. During construction of the 1849 addition, for example, problems with the chimney construction caused the flues to smoke so badly that the walls in the addition's ground-floor washroom, bedroom, and bathroom became "entirely black." How many times did Sarah O'Connor or Catherine Link try to wash soot from the plaster before the problem was remedied? Installation of the new sink, bathtub, and water closet certainly a boon to the Van Burens, meant more surfaces to scrub and scour for the domestic help, who themselves probably continued to use the more traditional privy.

Lindenwald also gained a new cookstove at about this time, though it's likely that this was not the house's first. Breugel notes that cookstoves "became widely available in

1801, Porter Phelps Huntington Papers, Amherst College Library Special Collections and Archives, Box 13 folder 5.

²²⁷Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York, 1990).

the mid-Hudson Valley in the 1830s and seemed to have entered the category of necessary household equipment by the early 1840s."²²⁸ The Van Burens were otherwise early adaptors of new technologies, and it seems unlikely that they would have waited until nearly mid-century to acquire their first cookstove.

Historian Priscilla Brewer describes the flourishing of this new technology in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, its appeal partly prompted by diminishing supplies of firewood.²²⁹ Between 1815 and 1839, some 329 patents for cookstoves were issued--102 between 1835 and 1839 alone. Consumers resisted the new technology at first, finding these stoves much harder to light. But a concentrated advertising effort convinced buyers of the stove's benefits, and they soon became widespread. But, like many inventions intended to ease consumer's lives, this one created new burdens as well, burdens that at Lindenwald fell to the household staff. Indeed, "once in place, a stove required more care than a fireplace. Ash removal was a continual chore. Keeping oven flues and draft openings clear was necessary but difficult. Stoves also had to be 'blacked' to keep them free of rust. Stovepipe also had to be cleaned periodically to keep it soot free, an awkward, messy undertaking that could cause domestic friction."²³⁰

At first, Van Buren was uneasy with the extent of the changes occurring all at once around his home. In time, however, he accepted them and ultimately with much pleasure. Yet, overall, they had little affect on his daily routine. As he had before, he spent his days horseback-riding around his land, fishing in his pond, surveying his crops, playing with his grandchildren, dining well, and frequently entertaining. Among the first to be invited to his rebuilt mansion was his old Whig rival, Henry Clay.

One change that did affect Van Buren's daily routine involved religion. His niece, Christina Cantine, who periodically lived at the mansion between 1850 and 1862, apparently took the Bible and its teachings more seriously than he did. The daughter of his wife Hannah's sister Christina and Judge Moses Cantine, who had presided over his

²²⁸Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 176.

²²⁹Priscilla Brewer, *Fireplace to Cookstove: Technology and the Domestic Ideal in America* (Syracuse, 2000).

²³⁰Interestingly, A.J. Downing was "in the vanguard of the anti-stove movement." In his 1850 treatise *The Architecture of Country Houses*, p. 97, he urged readers not to embrace them.

and Hannah's marriage in 1807, she constantly tried to convert him to the finer points of the Bible.

The ex-president, as she undoubtedly knew, had never been particularly religious. He was just a church-goer--and nothing more.²³¹ He had been baptized into the local Dutch Reformed Church when he was a boy and frequently attended the village church when he was at home and Episcopal services when he was outside the "Dutch counties." He also had been a major political figure when churches--especially evangelical churches--had grown by leaps and bounds. The Methodists had led the way, followed by the Baptists. His home state, moreover, had been caught up in one revival after another. It had been the home base of the most famous revivalist of the day, Charles Grandison Finney, and the upstate had seen so many revivals that the area had been dubbed the "Burned-Over District."²³² But Van Buren had not been a part of any of this.

Indeed, the growth of evangelical churches had disrupted his political agenda. Before 1844, his goal politically had always been to make sure that the old issues of Jefferson's heyday dominated the nation's politics. As long as the two major parties fought over banks, currency, the tariff, and "Hamiltonianism," that was fine. As long as the so-called "principles of 1798"--states rights and strict construction of the constitution--were on the table, that too was fine. Foiling his plans had been the evangelical churches. Out of their ranks had come the temperance and antislavery crusades, which in turn had compelled northern legislatures to pass local option laws and "Maine laws" and the national government to deal with the explosive issue of slavery. Thanks to their zeal, it became difficult--if not impossible--for seasoned politicians like him to control the agenda.

²³¹Franklin Steiner, in *The Religious Beliefs of Our Presidents* (New York, 1995), puts Van Buren in the "doubtful" category.

²³²The classic on the various New York revivals is Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, 1950). For the nation as a whole, see also Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, 1989), and Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith* (Cambridge, Ma., 1990). For the impact of evangelism on northern politics, see Daniel Walker Howe, "The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North during the Second Party System" *Journal of American History*, 77 (March 1991) 1216-37, which suggests that religion was a decisive force in shaping the Second Party System.

His niece had always been of this bent. In the 1830s, she had chastised him for providing the necessary votes to get Jackson's Indian Removal Act through Congress. What he had done was morally wrong, she said, and he should pay dearly for it at the polls. Now, in the 1850s, she tried to redirect his life. As he explained to his religious friend Mrs. Enos Throop in 1852, "Between you and my niece my chances of becoming a good man are not as desperate as I feared they were." Now, upon retiring, he found the Bible opened and steering him toward selected passages for the next morning. Three years earlier, his friend Francis Blair had sent him a volume of hymns at the urging of a "Mrs. Martin." And on his 70th birthday in 1852, his niece presented him with a new Bible with her personalized prayers and inscriptions (Figure 14), in which she evoked not only the moral and religious calamities of the day, but also the political: "O Lord stir up Thy strength and come and help us. Take and defend our country in this its hour of peril."²³³

During these years, Van Buren still kept his hand in politics. His correspondence from Lindenwald, as before, was nearly all political. More often than in the past, however, his focus was on the lives of his sons and their offspring.

His oldest grandson, Singleton, was a worry. The young man followed in his father's footsteps and went to West Point. He did poorly, however, and eventually flunked out. Angelica, the boy's mother, was distraught. Van Buren suggested she look to the future. "The first . . . thing . . . to ascertain is whether his present humiliation has had the effect to brace his nerves and stimulate him to the greatest possible efforts in what he next undertakes."

Much of Van Buren's time was spent with his son Smith. The two widowers thus grew closer together, and in the mid 1850s Smith helped his father author two books that were published posthumously. Unlike his father, however, Smith didn't remain a widower for the rest of his life. Five years after his wife Ellen's death, Smith began courting Henrietta Eckford Irving, the 33 year-old great-niece of Washington Irving, whose estate Sunnyside lay further down the Hudson River. Henrietta was the daughter of Gabriel and

²³³Martin Van Buren to Mrs. Throop, Throop Martin Papers, Princeton University; Francis Preston Blair to Martin Van Buren, March 30, 1849, Library of Congress; Bible inscription, museum collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Catalogue #14029.

Eliza Eckford Irving; Gabriel's father John Treat Irving was Washington's brother. While little is presently known of Henrietta's upbringing, Irving's correspondence sheds some light on the life of privilege she enjoyed as a young woman, which included extensive European travel and a rich social world including the leading families of the region. Washington Irving was extremely fond of his nephew Gabriel, who he believed to be "a plain, sensible, manly fellow with some spice of humor," but he was especially smitten with Gabriel's wife Eliza, who he described as "a most excellent little being; strong-minded, sweet tempered, and with a head full of generosity and kindness."²³⁴ Some light on Henrietta's upbringing might be found in Irving's observation that Gabriel's "contempt for the follies and false refinements of life" sometimes caused him to "err in the opposite extreme."²³⁵

The celebrated novelist and essayist, as we have seen, knew Lindenwald well. He had been a close friend of the Van Nesses, and in 1809 spent two months at Kleinrood recovering from the death of his fiancée Matilda Hoffman. Years later, in the early 1830s, he had become a close confidante of Van Buren when he was secretary of the London legation and Van Buren was appointed minister to Great Britain. He had subsequently been offered the post of Secretary of the Navy in Van Buren's cabinet but declined the opportunity. In February 1855, his great-niece Henrietta became Smith's second wife and the new lady of Van Buren's house, as well as stepmother to Smith's children. The couple married at Grace Church in New York City with the famous author in attendance. Within a few years, she was active in Kinderhook society, as a manager of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, an organization of "republican women" who in attempting to preserve George Washington's home as a national shrine for the "rootless" populace to visit in a dignified and cultivated manner, were also trying to overcome the growing rift between North and South.²³⁶

Smith had raised three children from his marriage to Ellen James at Lindenwald: Ellie, Eddie, and Kitty (Catherine Barber, named after Ellen's mother). With Smith's

²³⁴Rust, *Complete Works*, III, 73.

²³⁵Ibid.

second marriage would come two more daughters: Eliza (or "Bessie," named after Henrietta's mother) and Marion. The house that was full of bachelors in 1841 thus was supplanted by 1860 by a houseful of little girls. With the additions to the household of Henrietta Irving, Dierke Van Buren Hoes, and Christina Hoes Cantine, governess Rose Dalton, and the constant handful of young Irish women workers, the generally masculine tenor of Lindenwald during its earliest years had long shifted.

When Smith and Henrietta married, Van Buren wasn't even in the country. He was in Europe. His son Martin's health had gone from bad to worse. Worried by his son's failing health, he had sought medical advice and had been told to take Martin to see doctors in Europe. This might have been bad advice, as Europe and especially England were the heartland of quack remedies, and London's damp and foggy winters were later blamed for the city's high tuberculosis mortality.²³⁷ But Van Buren had been desperate. In the spring of 1853, therefore, he had left Lindenwald for the Old World. He put his son under doctors' care, mainly in London, and then traveled extensively, first to Ireland, then France and Holland, then Switzerland, sightseeing and dining, with both relatives and the European elite. He ended up in Naples, where he settled down for an extended visit. Suddenly, however, he was summoned to Paris. His ailing son, who had come over from London, was declining fast. The tuberculosis that had ravaged his body for so long had finally triumphed. In March 1855, Martin Jr., like many of consumption's victims, died far from home, as they desperately sought relief, if not a cure, for their illness.

The elder Van Buren also kept a close eye on the career of his second son John. Politics was still Van Buren's passion, and John was the political heir apparent. But John's political career was going nowhere.

For John and the Barnburners, the Election of 1848 had been a disaster. In the previous election they had lost the New York governorship by 5,000 votes; this time they lost by 95,000 votes. In the New York congressional races, they lost every seat except the one held by Preston King. Their Hunker rivals did no better, winning only one House seat

²³⁶"To the Ladies of the Town of Kinderhook," *Kinderhook Rough Notes*, October 21, 1858. For the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, see Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of the America's House Museums* (Washington, D. C., 1999), 1-37.

and losing the gubernatorial election by even a bigger margin than the Barnburners. Against a divided Democracy, the Whigs had had an easy time of it, winning virtually every office in the Empire State, including 31 of 34 congressional seats, and winning most contests by huge margins.²³⁸

After the debacle, pragmatists in both camps tried to reach a truce. But hard-line Hunkers would have none of it and insisted on punishing Free Soilers for desertion. Shortly thereafter, the two camps split into three factions: Hard Shell Democrats, Soft Shell Democrats, and Free Soilers. The Hards under the leadership of Senator Daniel S. Dickinson called for the purging of all Free-Soilers, firmly backed the South, and chastised the Softs for trying to find "middle ground." The Free Soilers were isolated in most districts but willing to work with the Softs provided that they nominated suitable candidates. In 1850, enough of these warriors temporarily banded together to win half the state's congressional seats and to come within 250 votes of putting a Soft Shell Democrat into the governor's office. And in 1852, the same coalition prevailed in the governor's race by some 25,000 votes and carried two-thirds of the House districts.²³⁹

John, by all accounts, led the backtrackers. In 1847-48, he had vigorously campaigned against proslavery Democrats and helped bring old-guard Bucktails--including his father--into the antislavery fold. But after the election debacle of 1848, he turned tail and quickly made amends with proslavery Democrats. By 1852, he was back in the Democratic Party, supporting a pro-southern Democrat, New Hampshire's Franklin Pierce, for president. And in 1856, he supported yet another pro-southern Democrat, Pennsylvania's James Buchanan, for president. Some of his father's followers took the

²³⁷Mary Kilbourne Matossian, "Death in London, 1750-1909," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 16 (Autumn 1985), 194-5.

²³⁸There was a third Democratic victor, Gideon Reynolds of Rensselaer County, a former Whig who broke with his party over the Anti-Rent War and ran as an Anti-Rent Democrat. Neither the Van Burenites nor the Hunkers ran candidates in his district. For the election returns, see *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U. S. Elections*, 518, 739-40, 743-44.

²³⁹For details on the various attempts to reconstruct the New York Democratic party, see Walter L. Ferree, "The New York Democracy: Division and Reunion, 1847-1852" (Ph. D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1953). For the 1850 and 1852 elections, see *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U. S. Elections*, 518, 747, 751-52.

same twisted path; others remained stalwart Free Soilers.²⁴⁰

Many sought the old man's advice. What should they do? The ex-president went along with his son, backing him to the hilt. He supported Pierce for president in 1852. He had trouble, however, supporting Stephen A. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska bill, which in 1854 repealed the Missouri Compromise and substituted popular sovereignty in its place. The bill disturbed him. Why open to slavery federal territory formerly closed to it? The bill, he concluded, was obviously wrong-headed. He "mourned over its adoption."²⁴¹ But he didn't speak out against it.

Van Buren's silence disturbed many. How could the former head of the Free Soil party keep his mouth shut? Surely, a man with his free-soil commitments in 1847 and 1848 must be alarmed. Had not he, in accepting the Free Soil nomination, declared his full assent to the party's antislavery principles? With this in mind, a New York Free-Soiler, Edwin D. Morgan, decided that just a little nudging was necessary.

Morgan thus turned to one of Van Buren's old allies, Francis P. Blair, to find out if the former president would serve as a delegate, and perhaps even the presiding officer, at the upcoming 1856 Republican convention. Blair, who had become an ardent Free-Soiler, made the offer. Van Buren turned them down. The new party then nominated John C. Fremont, a former Democrat and the son-in-law of his old friend, Thomas Hart Benton, for president. Would Van Buren support Fremont, the nation's best known explorer, the heroic pathfinder? No! Instead, he reluctantly supported for president James Buchanan, a man who had won the support of southern Democrats largely because he had endorsed adding slaveholding Cuba to the United States.

None of this did much for John's political career. It went from bad to worse. Had John remained with the Free Soilers, they probably would have nominated him for one office after another. His chances of winning might have been slim, but at least he would have had an outside chance. Once John did an about-face, he was a pariah in Free-Soil circles. At the same time he had trouble winning the trust of doughface Democrats, even though he endorsed the Compromise of 1850, the party's national ticket in 1852, and the

²⁴⁰For a recent account, see Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 181-198.

²⁴¹Silbey, *Van Buren*, 209.

Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. To many, he was just a schemer with no lasting principles.

Then, in 1855, John once again did a double about-face. He first championed Free Soil. His purpose, so he said, was to forestall defections of life-long Democrats to the new Republican Party. This turn-about, however, was short-lived. Within months he was again supporting a proslavery Democrat, James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, for president. Then, in 1860, he went a step further. For president, he backed John C. Breckinridge, the southern Democratic candidate, arguing that major concessions were necessary to keep the Deep South in the Union. It hardly mattered. John's views no longer carried much weight. For all practical purposes, his political career had ended at the same time as his father's.

Only the old man, however, was treated with respect (frontispiece). Many still saw the former president as a sage, others as an important voice from the past. And, as a voice from the past, he began working on a history of American politics and on a full-length autobiography, first while traveling in Italy in 1854, then upon returning home to Lindenwald in 1855. Not surprisingly, he found political parties to be the key to a healthy republic. He held in contempt James Monroe and others who opposed political parties. He celebrated Thomas Jefferson and his "plain republican" allies. And, above all, he made Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists the villains of the story. But he didn't go much beyond the War of 1812 in his political history, and he reached only the 1830s in his autobiography. He laid both manuscripts aside before he finished them.²⁴²

In 1861, on the eve of the Civil War, Van Buren was again asked to get involved in the nation's politics. As the nation's oldest ex-president, the hope was that he would lead a group of ex-presidents in finding some solution to the nation's sectional crisis. He turned down the offer. It was futile, he decided, to even try to heal the rift. Sectional hostility had gone too far. He was right. The war came quickly, and over the next four years 407 of his Lindenwald neighbors went off to war.²⁴³ Before most of them came

²⁴²In 1867, five years after his death, his surviving sons edited and published his political history. His unfinished autobiography, however, gathered dust for many years and was still in manuscript form when Smith's second wife, Henrietta, donated it to the Library of Congress in the early twentieth century. It was then edited and published in the American Historical Association's annual report of 1918.

²⁴³*History of Columbia County*, 151, 429-32.

back, he died. The date was July 24, 1862, just two months before the Battle of Antietam and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

Van Buren thus died as he was born, in a slaveholding republic. The funeral services were first held at Lindenwald, where the Reverend J. Romeyn Berry offered prayer, and then at the village church, which was packed, with thousands standing outside. The pallbearers were all local men, some of whom had known Van Buren since he was a boy. Among the onlookers were the Governor of New York and a large deputation from Tammany Hall. The Reverend Berry delivered the tribute, nearly an hour in length. A former pastor, the Reverend Benjamin Van Zandt, gave the closing prayer. Then the multitude, one by one, passed the casket and paid their respects. Engine Company No. 2 led the procession to the cemetery, followed by the hearse and 81 carriages, and then hundreds of people on foot. A bell tolled, but conspicuously absent was the pageantry, military display, and music that normally accompanied state funerals. At the grave, Bishop Potter of Pennsylvania read the Episcopal Burial office. The tombstone was a plain granite shaft bearing just Van Buren's name, his title as the eighth president, and his birth and death dates (Figure 16).²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴Collier, *History of Old Kinderhook*, 423-24.

Conclusion

In the one hundred and forty one years since Van Buren's death, much has been made of Van Buren's presidency, his many years of government service, and his last 22 years as Kinderhook's most famous resident. But little scholarship has focused on what has become the major interpretative problem concerning Van Buren's political life during his Lindenwald years. That is, how does one characterize a man who jumped on the antislavery bandwagon one year and then forsook it completely several years later? Indeed, he backed proslavery men for president? Was he ever a sincere Free-Soiler? Was his son John? Or did the Van Burens, father and son, act out of spite? Did they act out of a desire for revenge?

Most of their contemporaries thought the latter. They insisted that the two men wanted to "square accounts" for what happened at the 1844 Democratic convention. They also claimed that the two men were "smarting" from the blows that the Polk administration had dealt Silas Wright and their New York party. They generally treated John worse than his father, but depicted both as being scheming spoilsmen rather than men of principle.

One young man, a senior at Wesleyan University, captured the prevailing view. In the late summer of 1851, he caught a train in Owego, New York, on his way back to college. Writing home afterwards, he explained:

From Owego to Binghamton, I had the pleasure of riding in the car with ex-President, Martin Van Buren. He is apparently about 65, fast striding the downhill of life. He is near the size of James Wright of Owego, had a Rockwood countenance, blue eyes, lion white hair and whiskers passing from his ears to the corners of his mouth, and a great lover of peaches. Yet the sound of his name gives not those pleasurable emotions to the patriot that it did once. In this age of the world, it seems to be death for any politician to change his political views. At both Owego and Binghamton it was hardly known that he was in the cars. Yet there have been times when even the intimation that Martin Van Buren was to pass those places would have created the greatest enthusiasm.²⁴⁵

Not nearly as critical, however, have been Van Buren's recent biographers. Most either minimize the sharp change in his political views or dodge gently around it. Worth noting, for example, is how Donald Cole handles the matter. An able historian, Cole is

well aware of the problem. He knows that the two men wanted to "square accounts" for what happened at the 1844 Democratic convention. He also knows that they were "smarting" from the blows that the Polk administration dealt Silas Wright and their New York party. Yet while noting that Van Buren wanted to "get back at his opponents in the party," Cole also maintains that Van Buren "was not the sort of man who harbored grudges or sought to destroy anything--especially a political organization." So what, then, motivated Van Buren? Cole's answer: "If anything, he believed that he was defending his organization in New York and was helping his Barnburner friends." He thus "acted neither as a moral idealist nor as a revengeful cynic, but rather as the loyal New York Democrat he had always been."²⁴⁶

Joel Silbey, another able historian, in the most recent Van Buren biography also gives Van Buren the benefit of the doubt. He first says that in joining the Free Soil movement Van Buren might appear to have been "the most fallen man" and "the Kinderhook Iscariot" that President Polk and other Democrats depicted. He then contends that there was "much more to his behavior" than what Polk and others claimed. "For one, had he left the party or had the party left him?" And here Silbey repeats an argument that Van Buren himself once made--that Polk, Cass, and the Hunkers had defected from the true Democracy of Andrew Jackson. Hence, hints Silbey, the main reason that Van Buren and the Barnburners joined the Free Soilers was to deliver a "stinging blow to their longtime former allies" and teach them "an important lesson." And that, in Van Buren's "optimistic" judgment, they did.²⁴⁷

What about Van Buren's subsequent decision to forsake the Free Soilers and back their "doughface" opponents? Here, again, Silbey repeats an argument that Van Buren himself once made--that the 1848 election resulted in "the elevation of an old-school Federalist to the Presidency," and such an outcome had to be prevented from happening again. This time, however, Silbey doesn't endorse Van Buren's excuse, which is a bit of a stretch as Van Buren undoubtedly knew long before the votes were counted in 1848 that

²⁴⁵As quoted in "Private Letters: The Correspondence of Re. James S. Griffing and J. August Goodrich," www.griffingweb.com.

²⁴⁶Cole, *Van Buren*, 418.

his candidacy would elevate the Whig candidate, General Zachary Taylor, to the presidency.²⁴⁸

What about the larger issues of the day? According to Silbey, Van Buren's "basic commitments" never changed, and his "deep and abiding faith in the Democratic party" never faltered. Consistency was the hallmark of the man. "To him, the core issues facing the American people remained as they always had been: the best means of keeping an always fractious Union together and the reenergized need to forestall the new Federalist onslaught embodied in the rapidly growing Republican Party."²⁴⁹

But such explanations don't fully address the problem. They just minimize what the former president did. They make it seem that he merely made a slight turn to the left followed by a slight turn to the right. That, in turn, necessitates some historical amnesia. For to Van Buren's contemporaries, these turns were anything but slight. They were full-scale reversals. They also involved the most divisive issue of the day. Free soil was hardly a secondary concern. It was splitting the nation into two warring camps. Thus no longer did the sound of Van Buren's name on a New York train generate the respect that it once did.

Since the completion of John D. R. Platt and Harlan D. Unrau's *Historic Resource Study* in 1982, therefore, the most pressing question concerning Lindenwald's most famous owner still remains unresolved. Otherwise, much has been accomplished. New scholarship on farming in the mid-Hudson Valley, on the ascendancy of the market economy, on domestic architecture, on labor, on gender, and on national politics has enriched our understanding of Lindenwald and all the men and women who resided there during Martin Van Buren's twilight years.

Additional research will undoubtedly enrich our understanding further. In a recent article, for example, historian Martin Bruegel has found that the gender division among farm families in nineteenth-century Columbia County shifted, women participating fully

²⁴⁷Silbey, *Van Buren*, 198-99, 201.

²⁴⁸Silbey, *Van Buren*, 203. In 1848, Van Buren had even toyed with the idea of supporting Taylor for president. That, however, was before Taylor accepted the Whig nomination. See Martin Van Buren to John Van Buren, May 3, 1848, Van Buren Papers.

²⁴⁹Silbey, *Van Buren*, 210-11.

in harvesting and planting before technological and economic changes during the second quarter of the century redirected their energies to household and artisanal work, and away from the fields.²⁵⁰ Bruegel suggests that it was not the cultural construction of separate spheres that prompted this change, but instead material transformations in the organization and processes of agriculture itself. Were women as well as men working in the fields around Lindenwald? They may well have been, but until we know more about the women who accompanied the men who farmed the fields here, it is difficult even to speculate as to their role in the agricultural workforce of Lindenwald.

Hopefully, in the next few years, scholars will uncover the answer to this particular question. Hopefully, too, they will learn more about all the men and women whose lives unfolded in the estate's farm and gatehouses, in the third-floor and basement spaces of the mansion itself, as well as the men and women of the Van Buren families in residence. And, finally, maybe they will also unravel the mystery of why the political head of the family, the one-time solid party man, seemingly jumped back and forth across the political spectrum in his years at Lindenwald.

²⁵⁰Martin Bruegel, "Work, Gender and Authority on the Farm: The Hudson Valley Countryside, 1790s-1850s," *Agricultural History*, 76 (2002), 1-27.



Figure 11. Daguerreotype of Martin Van Buren by Mathew Brady (1823-1896), circa 1856. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.



Figure 12. Van Buren's mansion as altered by Richard Upjohn. Having a cupola (or tower) to provide a panoramic view of the countryside was in keeping with the Italianate style of architecture that Upjohn favored when he redesigned the mansion. Photo courtesy of Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.



Figure 13. Lindenwald South Gate House, Historic American Buildings Survey Library of Congress.

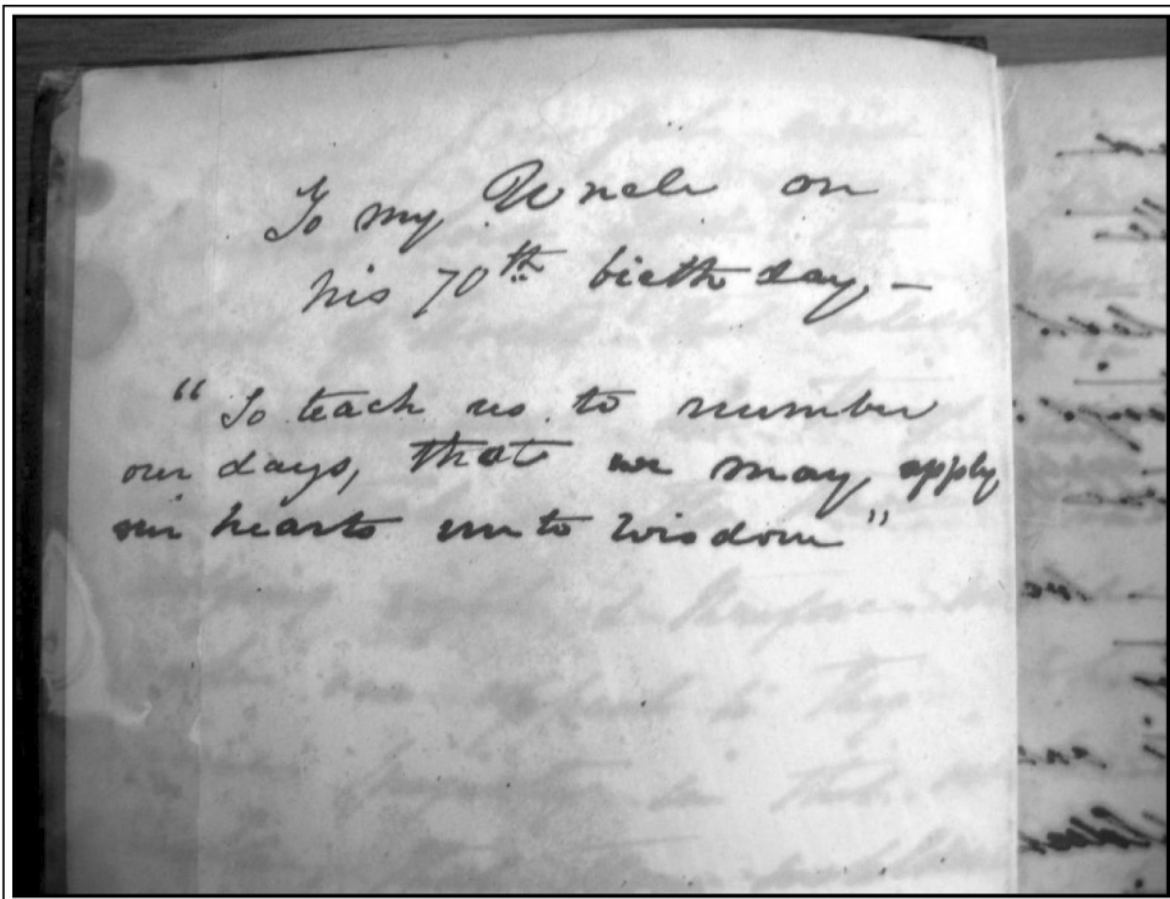


Figure 14. Inscription to Van Buren on his 70th birthday, from his niece, Christina Cantine. Other portions of the inscription, not shown, reference the sectional conflict that would soon engulf the United States. Museum collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.



Figure 15. Van Buren grandchildren Martin Van Buren IV (1856-1942) and Eliza Eckford Van Buren (1858-c1942). Children of Smith Van Buren and Ellen King James, they were both born at Lindenwald and lived there until 1862. Museum Collection, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.



Figure 16. Martin Van Buren's tombstone, a plain granite shaft bearing only his name, his title as eighth president, and dates of his birth and death. Photograph by Erik Gilg, 2003.



Figure 17. Lindenwald as a private residence in the early 1960s, before it was acquired by the National Park Service in 1975. Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Library of Congress.

Works Cited

PRIMARY SOURCES

Archival Collections Cited

Andrew Jackson Donelson Papers, Library of Congress.

Azariah C. Flagg Papers, New York Public Library.

Gerritt Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

Gideon Welles Papers, Library of Congress.

Joshua R. Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

New York Manumission Society Papers, New-York Historical Society.

Porter Phelps Huntington Papers, Amherst College Library Special Collections and Archives.

Singleton Papers Inventory, #668, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Throop Martin Papers, Princeton University.

William Marcy Papers, Library of Congress.

Wright-Butler Letters, New York Public Library.

Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Published Sources

Abdy, E. S. *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States*. 3 vols., London: J. Murray, 1835.

Browne, J. Ross. *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution*. Washington, DC: J.T. Towers, 1850.

Buel, Jesse. *Jesse Buel, Agricultural Reformer: Selections from His Writings*. Edited by Harry J. Carman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1947.

Works Cited

Bureau of the Census, *Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present*. Stamford, CT: Fairfield Publishers, 1965.

Chance, Joseph E. ed. *The Mexican War Journal of Captain Franklin Smith*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997.

Chase, Salmon P. *Reclamation of Fugitives from Service. An Argument for the Defendant, Submitted to the Supreme Court of the United States, at the December Term, 1846. In the Case of Wharton Jones v. John Van Zandt*. Reprint. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.

Chase, Salmon P. and Charles Dexter Cleveland. *Anti-Slavery Addresses of 1844 and 1845*. Philadelphia: J. A. Bancroft & Co., 1867.

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *The Architecture of Country Houses*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1850.

Gardiner, O. C. *The Great Issue*. New York: William C. Bryant & Co., 1848.

Hall, William W. *Bronchitis and Kindred Diseases*. 8th ed. New York: Redfield, 1854.

Jefferson, Thomas. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Edited by Julian P. Boyd, Lyman H. Butterfield, Charles T. Cullen, and John Catanzariti. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950.

Kendall, George Wilkins. *Dispatches from the Mexican War*. Edited by Lawrence Delbert Cress. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.

Maury, Sarah Mytton. *The Statesmen of America in 1846*. Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847.

Morris, Benjamin Franklin. *The Life of Thomas Morris*. Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys and Overend, 1856.

Paulding, James Kirke. *Letters*. Edited by, Ralph M. Aderman. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962.

Register of Debates in Congress, 21st Congress, 1st Session: 1829-30. Washington, DC: Gales & Seaton, 1825-1837.

Sedgwick, Theodore, Jr., ed. *A Collection of the Political Writings of William Leggett*. 2 vols. New York: Taylor & Dodd, 1840.

Sedgwick, Theodore, Jr. *Thoughts on the Proposed Annexation of Texas*. New York: D. Fanshaw, 1844.

The Herkimer Convention: The Voice of New York! Proceedings of the Herkimer Mass Convention. Albany: Albany Atlas, 1847.

Works Cited

Van Buren-Bancroft Correspondence, 1830-1845. Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society XLII. June 1909.

Van Buren, Martin. *Inquiry into the Origin and Course of Political Parties in the United States*. New York, Hurd and Houghton, 1867.

Van Buren, Martin. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick. *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920.

Wilkes, George. *The Mysteries of the Tombs: A Journal of Thirty Days Imprisonment in the New York City Prison for Libel*. New York: 1844.

Newspapers and Magazines

Albany Argus

Congressional Globe

New York Evening Post

Northampton (MA) Democrat

Sotheby's Magazine

The Barnburner (New York)

The Chatham (New York) Courier – The Rough Notes

Tioga County (New York) Courier

SECONDARY SOURCES

Unpublished Works

Brooke, John L. Columbia: Civil Life in the World of Martin Van Buren's Emergence, 1776-1821. Unpublished work in progress.

Denman, Peter Van Ness. "From Deference to Democracy: the Van Ness Family and their Times, 1759-1844." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1977.

Ferree, Walter L. "The New York Democracy: Division and Reunion, 1847-1852." Ph.D. Dissertation University of Pennsylvania, 1953.

Huston, John. "The 'Little Magician' after the Show: Martin Van Buren, Country Gentleman and Progressive Farmer, 1841-1863." Special History Study [ca. 2000]. Martin Van Buren National Historic Site.

Jackson, William N. Addendum to the Historic Structure Report [Martin Van Buren National Historic Site]. Typescript, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, 1980.

Kilbride, Daniel P. "Philadelphia and the Southern Elite: Class, Kinship, and Culture in Antebellum America." Ph. D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1997.

Prude, Jonathan, "Making a Statement: A Discussion of the Social and Cultural Implications of Clothing," Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, June 7-9, 1996.

Published Secondary Sources

Adams, James T. "Disfranchisement of Negroes in New England." *American Historical Review* Vol. 30, No. 3 (April 1925): 543-547.

Alexander, De Alva S. *A Political History of the State of New York*. 4 vols. New York: H. Holt & Company, 1906.

Alexander, Thomas Benjamin. *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study of Roll-Call Voting Patterns in the United States House of Representatives, 1836-1860*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1967.

Altschuler, Glenn C. and Stuart M. Blumin. *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Ames, Kenneth. *Death in the Dining Room & Other Tales of Victorian Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

Ashworth, John. "Agrarians" and "Aristocrats": *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1983.

Bain, Richard C. *Convention Decisions and Voting Records*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1960.

Baker, Jean H. *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Baker, Paula. "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920." *American Historical Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (June 1984): 620-647.

Basch, Norma. *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Bassett, Lynne Z. *Northern Comfort: New England's Early Quilts, 1780-1850*. Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998.

Bates, Barbara. *Bargaining for Life: A Social History of Tuberculosis, 1876-1938*.

- Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.
- Beard, Charles and Mary Beard. *The Rise of American Civilization*. 2 vols. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927.
- Benson, Lee. *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.
- Berg, Barbara J. *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism: The Woman & the City, 1800-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Bidwell, Percy Wells and John I. Falconer. *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860*. Washington, DC: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1925.
- Billington, Ray A. *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938.
- Bjerkoe, Ethel Hall. *The Cabinet Makers of America*. Exton, PA: Schiffer Ltd., 1978.
- Bonomi, Patricia U. *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.
- Booth, Edward Townsend. *Country Life in America, as Lived by Ten Presidents of the United States*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947.
- Bowie, Lucy Leigh. "Madame Grelaud's French School." *Maryland History Magazine*. Vol 39 (June 1944): 141-148.
- Boyce, Charles. *Dictionary of Furniture*. Second Edition. New York: Facts on File, 2001.
- Boydston, Jeanne. *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Boylan, Ann. *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Brewer, Priscilla. *From Fireplace to Cookstove: Technology and the Domestic Ideal in America*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- Bridges, Amy. *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Brown, Elsa Barkley. "Polyrhythms and Improvisation: Lessons for Women's History." *History Workshop Journal*. Vol. 31 (Spring 1991): 85-90.
- Bruegel, Martin. *Farm, Shop, Landing: The Rise of a Market Society in the Hudson Valley*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
- _____. "Work, Gender and Authority on the Farm: The Hudson Valley Countryside,

1790s-1850s." *Agricultural History*, Vol. 76 (Winter 2002): 1-27.

Bushman, Richard L. "Markets and Composite Farms in Early America." *The William & Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (July 1998): 351-374.

Bushman, Richard. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Knopf, 1992.

Butler, Jon. *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Carson, Cary. "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America," in Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994: 483-697.

Cheyney, Edward P. *The Anti-Rent Agitation in the State of New York, 1839-1846*. Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1887.

Christman, Henry. *Tin Horns and Calico: An Episode in the Emergence of American Democracy*. New York: Holt, 1945.

Clark, Christopher. *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Cleaves, Freeman. *Old Tippecanoe: William Henry Harrison and His Times*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1939.

Clinton, Catherine. "Equally their Due: The Education of the Planter Daughter in the Early Republic". *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 39-60.

Cole, Donald B. *Martin Van Buren and the American Political System*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U. S. Elections. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1975.

Cooney, John Ward. "My Recollections of Ex-President Martin Van Buren and his Friends." *Historical Society of Southern California Annual Publications*. Vol. 9. Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 1914.

Cooper, William J. *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978.

Cooper, William J. Jr., Michael F. Holt and John McCardell, eds. *A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985.

Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

Works Cited

Cross, Barbara M. ed. *The Educated Woman in America: Selected Writings of Catharine Beecher, Margaret Fuller, and M. Carey Thomas*. New York: Teachers' College Press, 1965.

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

Curtis, James C. *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1841*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970.

Davis, James E. *Frontier America, 1800-1840: A Comparative Demographic Analysis of the Settlement Process*. Glendale, CA: A.H. Clark Co. 1977.

Demaree, Albert Lowther, ed. *The American Agricultural Press, 1819-1860*. Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974.

Devoto, Bernard Augustine. *Across the Wide Missouri*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947.

Donovan, Herbert D. A. *The Barnburners*. New York: New York University Press, 1925.

DuBois, Ellen Carol. *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Earle, Jonathan Halperin. *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Ellis, David M. *Landlords and Farmers in the Hudson-Mohawk Region, 1790-1850*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1946.

Ellis, Franklin. *History of Columbia County, New York*. Philadelphia: Everts & Ensign, 1878.

Epstein, Barbara Leslie. *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981.

Ernst, Robert. "The Economic Status of New York City Negroes." *Negro History Bulletin* 12 (March 1949): 131-132.

_____. "The One and Only Mike Walsh." *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 36 (January 1952): 43-65.

Ershkowitz, Herbert and William G. Slade. "Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in the State Legislatures during the Jacksonian Era." *Journal of American History* Vol. 58, No. 3 (December 1971): 591-621.

Works Cited

- Farber, Bernard. *Guardians of Virtue: Salem Families in 1800*. New York: Basic Books, 1972.
- Feldberg, Michael. *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975.
- Field, Phyllis F. *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Fischer, David Hackett. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Foner, Eric. "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited." *Journal of American History* 56 (September 1969): 262-279.
- Ford, Lacy K., Jr. *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Formisano, Ronald P. *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- _____. "The Edge of Caste: Colored Suffrage in Michigan, 1827-1861." *Michigan History* 56 (Spring 1972): 19-40.
- _____. "The New Political History and the Election of 1840." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (Spring 1993): 661-682.
- Fox, Dixon Ryan. "The Negro Vote in Old New York." *Political Science Quarterly* 32 (June 1917): 252-275.
- _____. *Yankees and Yorkers*. New York: University Press, 1940.
- Frank, John P. *Justice Daniel Dissenting: A Biography of Peter V. Daniel, 1784-1860*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Freehling, William W. *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Friis, Herman R. *A Series of Population Maps of the Colonies and the United States, 1625-1790*. New York: American Geographical Society, 1968.
- Frisbee, Priscilla. *Friends of the Family Butler-Van Buren*. Stuyvesant, NY: Town of Stuyvesant, 1982.
- Gallos, Philip. *Cure Cottages of Saranac Lake: Architecture and History of a Pioneer Health Resort*. Saranac Lake: Historic Saranac Lake, 1985.
- Garraty, John Arthur. *Silas Wright*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1949

Works Cited

- Godwin, Parke. *A Biography of William Cullen Bryant*. 2 vols. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883.
- Gatell, Frank Otto. "Sober Second Thoughts on Van Buren, the Albany Regency, and the Wall Street Conspiracy." *Journal of American History* 53 (June 1966): 19-40.
- Gienapp, William E. "Politics Seem to Enter Into Everything: Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860," in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*. College Station: Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1982.
- Ginzberg, Lori D. "Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash: Women, Politics and Social Activism in the 1850s." *Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986): 601-622.
- Going, Charles Buxton. *David Wilmot, Free Soiler: A Biography of the Great Advocate of the Wilmot Proviso*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924.
- Goodman, Paul. "The Emergence of Homestead Exemption in the United States: Accommodation and Resistance to the Market Revolution, 1840-1880." *Journal of American History* 80 (September 1993): 470-498.
- Gordon, Linda, ed. *Women, the State, and Welfare*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.
- Greenberg, Brian. *Worker and Community: Response to Industrialization in a Nineteenth-Century American City, Albany, New York, 1850-1884*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.
- Gunderson, Robert G. *The Log Cabin Campaign*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957.
- Habegger, Alfred. *The Father: A Life of Henry James, Sr.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.
- Hajdamach, Charles R. "British Glass, 1800-1914," *Antique Collectors Club* (1991): 250-51.
- Hamer, Philip M. *The Secession Movement in South Carolina, 1847-1852*. Allentown, PA: H.R. Haas & Co., 1918.
- Hammond, Bray. *Banks and Politics in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Hammond, Jabez D. *The History of Political Parties in the State of New York*. Syracuse: Hall, Mills, and Co., 1852.

Handlin, Oscar. *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865: A Study in Acculturation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941.

Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Herskovitz, Leo. "The Native American Democratic Association in New York City, 1835-36." *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 46 (January 1962): 41-60.

Hesseltine, William B. and Larry Gara, eds., "A Visit to Kinderhook." *New York History* 35 (1954): 177-182.

Hewitt, Nancy A. *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Hietala, Thomas R. *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Hoffert, Sylvia D. *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents and Articles*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003.

_____. *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Hofstadter, Richard. *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948.

Holt, Michael F. *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.

_____. "The Election of 1840, Voter Mobilization, and the Emergence of the Second American Party System: A Reappraisal of Jacksonian Voting Behavior," in *A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald*, Edited by William J. Cooper, Jr., Michael F. Holt, and John McCardell. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985.

Howe, Daniel Walker. "The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North during the Second Party System." *Journal of American History* 77 (March 1991): 1216-1239.

Howell, William W. *Lindenwald, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Historic Structures Report, Architectural Data Section*. 2 vols. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1985.

Hoyt, William D. "The Calvert-Stier Correspondence." *Maryland Historical Magazine* 38 (June 1943): 261-272.

Works Cited

- Huntington, Frances Carpenter. "The Heiress of Washington City: Marcia Burns Van Ness, 1782-1832." *Columbia Historical Society Records*, Vol. 69-70 (year???): 80-101.
- Huston, Reeve. *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Jackson, Carlton. *A Social History of the Scotch-Irish*. Lanham: Madison Books, 1993.
- Kelley, Mary. "Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America." *The Journal of American History* 83 (September 1996): 401-424.
- Kerber, Linda. *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- Kierner, Cynthia. *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Knobel, Dale T. *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986.
- Koch, Adrienne and William Peden, eds., *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: The Modern Library, 1944.
- Kohan, Carol. *Historic Furnishings Report for Lindenwald, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Kinderhook, New York*. Harpers Ferry: National Park Service, 1986.
- Kulikoff, Allan. *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992.
- Laurie, Bruce. *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.
- Lebsock, Suzanne. *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*. New York: Norton, 1984.
- Lewis, R.W.B. *The Jameses; A Family Narrative*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991.
- Lindsay, Arnett G. "The Economic Condition of the Negroes of New York Prior to 1861." *Journal of Negro History* 6 (January 1921): 193-196.
- Litwak, Leon. *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Lynn, Catherine. *Wallpaper in America: From the Seventeenth Century to World War I*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1980.
- Mahin, Dean B. *Olive Branch and Sword: The United States and Mexico, 1845-48*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1997.

- Mark, Irving. *Agrarian Conflict in Colonial New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1940.
- Martis, Kenneth C. *The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress, 1789-1989*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989.
- Matossian, Mary Kilbourne. "Death in London, 1750-1909." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (Autumn 1985): 183-197.
- McFaul, John M. "Expediency vs. Morality: Jacksonian Politics and Slavery." *Journal of American History* 62 (June 1975): 24-39.
- _____. *The Politics of Jacksonian Finance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972.
- McGerr, Michael E. *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- McManus, Edgar J. *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966.
- McMurry, Sally. *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Merk, Frederick. *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*. New York: Knopf, 1972.
- Meyers, Marvin. *The Jacksonian Persuasion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960.
- Miller, Alfred J. *Braves and Buffalo: Plains Indian Life in 1837*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.
- Miller, Kerby A. *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Morrison, Champlain W. *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967.
- Morrison, Howard Alexander. "Gentlemen of Proper Understanding: A Closer Look at Utica's Anti-Abolition Mob." *New York History* 62 (January 1981): 61-82.
- Morrison, Michael A. "Martin Van Buren, the Democracy, and the Partisan Politics of Texas Annexation." *Journal of Southern History* 61 (November 1995): 695-724.
- Mushkat, Jerome and Robert Rayback. *Martin Van Buren: Law, Politics, and the Shaping of Republican Ideology*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997.

- National Party Conventions, 1831-1988*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly 1991.
- Niven, John. *Martin Van Buren: The Romantic Age of American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Norton, Mary Beth. "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America." *The American Historical Review* 89, June 1984: 593-619.
- Nugent, Walter. *The Structures of American Social History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Packard, Samuel T. *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*. 2 vols. Boston: 1894.
- Parrington, Vernon. *The Romantic Revolution in America*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927.
- Paul, James C. N. *Rift in the Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957.
- Peterson, Merrill D. *Democracy, Liberty, and Property: The State Constitutional Conventions of the 1820s*. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Company, 1966.
- Pierson, Michael D. *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- _____. "Guard the Foundations Well: Antebellum New York Democrats and the Defense of Patriarchy," *Gender and History* 7 (April 1995): 25-40.
- Piwonka, Ruth and Roderic H. Blackburn, *A Visible Heritage: Columbia County, New York: A History in Art and Architecture*. Kinderhook: Columbia County Historical Society, 1977.
- Platt, John D. R. and Harlan D. Unrau, *Historic Resource Study, Lindenwald: Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, New York*. Denver: National Park Service, 1982.
- Pletcher, David M. *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon and the Mexican War*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973.
- Pollard, James E. *The Presidents and the Press*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947.
- Porter, Kirk H. and Donald Bruce Johnson, compilers, *National Party Platforms, 1840-1960*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961.
- Prown, Jules, Nancy Anderson, William Cronon, Brian Dippie, D. Martha Sandwies, Susan Schoelwer, Howard LaMar. *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Works Cited

- Prude, Jonathan. *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Rayback, Joseph G. *Free Soil: The Election of 1848*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970.
- Remini, Robert V. *Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.
- Richards, Leonard L. *The Advent of American Democracy, 1815-1848*. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1977.
- _____. *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000.
- Ross, Marvin C. *The West of Alfred Jacob Miller*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968.
- Rothenberg, Winifred Barr. *From Market-Places to Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1750-1850*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Rothman, Sheila M. *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- Rubertone, Patricia, William Stokinger, and Brona G. Simon. *Historic Grounds Report, Lindenwald: Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, Kinderhook, New York*. Boston: National Park Service, 1981.
- Russo, David J. *Families and Communities: A New View of American History*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1974.
- Ryan, Mary P. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr. *The Age of Jackson*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1945.
- Searle, Llerena. *A Farmer in his Native Town: Cultural Landscape Report for the Martin Van Buren Farmland*. Boston: National Park Service, 2004.
- Sellers, Charles G. *James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.
- _____. *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1848*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Seventh Census of the United States*. Washington DC: United States Census Office, 1850.

Works Cited

- Severa, Joan. *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1995.
- Sewell, Richard H. *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Shade, William G. *Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972.
- Sharp, James R. *The Jacksonians versus the Banks: Politics in the States After the Panic of 1837*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.
- Sheehy, Colleen J. "The Rise of Urbanism and the Romance of the Rod and Reel," in Kathryn Grover, *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.
- Shenton, James P. *Robert John Walker: A Politician from Jackson to Lincoln*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- Silbey, Joel H. *Martin Van Buren and the Emergence of American Popular Politics*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.
- _____. *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Sixth Census or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States*. Washington DC: United States Census Office, 1840.
- Smith, Barry. "Gullible's Travails: Tuberculosis and Quackery, 1890-1930." *Journal of Contemporary History* 20. October 1985.
- Smith, Justin H. *The Annexation of Texas*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1941.
- Smith, William Ernest. *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics*. 2 vols., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933.
- Spencer, Ivor Debenhorn. *The Victor and the Spoils: A Life of William L. Marcy*. Providence: Brown University Press, 1959.
- Stanley, John L. "Majority Tyranny in Tocqueville's America: The Failure of Negro Suffrage in 1846." *Political Science Quarterly* 84 (September 1969): 165-188.
- Stanton, Henry. *Random Recollections*. Second Edition. New York: MacGowan and Slipper, 1886.
- Steiner, Franklin. *The Religious Beliefs of Our Presidents: From Washington To F.D.R.* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995.

- Stokes, Melvyn and Stephen Conway, eds. *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.
- Strong, Lisa. "Images of Indigenous Aristocracy in Alfred Jacob Miller." *American Art* 13 (Spring 1999): 63-83.
- Sutherland, Daniel. *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Servants in the United States from 1800 to 1920*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.
- Sweeney, Kevin M. "Mansion People: Kinship, Class, and Architecture in Western Massachusetts in the Mid Eighteenth Century." *Winterthur Portfolio* 19 (Winter 1984): 231-255.
- Sweeting, Adam W. *Reading Houses and Building Books: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature, 1835-1855*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996.
- Taylor, Alan. *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995.
- Taylor, George Rogers. *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1962.
- Tryon, Rolla Milton. *Household Manufactures in the United States, 1640-1860*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917.
- Turner, Edward R. *The Negro in Pennsylvania*. Washington, DC: The American Historical Association, 1911.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. *The Frontier in American History*. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1920.
- _____. *The United States, 1830-1850: The Nation and Its Sections*. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1935.
- Upjohn, Everard M. *Richard Upjohn, Architect and Churchman*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1968.
- Uschold, David L. and George W. Curry. *Cultural Landscape Report for Martin Van Buren National Historic Site: Site History, Existing Conditions, and Analysis*. Boston: National Park Service, 1995.
- Van Wagenen, Jared, Jr. *The Golden Age of Homespun*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1953.
- Varon, Elizabeth R. *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Works Cited

- Vinovskis, Maris A. and Richard M. Bernard. "Beyond Catherine Beecher: Female Education in the Antebellum Period." *Signs* 3 (Summer 1978): 856-869.
- Voorsanger, Catherine Hoover. "Gorgeous Articles of Furniture': Cabinet Making in the Empire City," in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861*. Edited by Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000.
- Warren, Charles. *The Supreme Court in United States History*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926.
- Watson, Charles S. "Jeffersonian Republicanism in William Loor's *Independence*." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 69 (July 1968.): 194-203.
- Watson, Harry L. *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1990.
- Waugh, Nora. *The Cut of Men's Clothes, 1600-1930*. London: Faber, 1968.
- Wenger, Mark. "The Central Passages in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture II*. Columbia: University of Missouri: 1986: 137-149.
- West, Patricia. *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of the America's House Museums*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999.
- _____. "Irish Immigrant Workers in Antebellum New York: The Experience of Domestic Servants at Van Buren's Lindenwald." *Hudson Valley Regional Review: A Journal of Regional Studies* 9 (September 1992): 112-126.
- White, Richard. *Remembering Ahanagan: Storytelling in the American Past*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1998
- Widmer, Edward L. *Martin Van Buren*. New York: Times Books, 2005.
- Wiebe, Robert H. *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Wilburn, Jean Alexander. *Biddle's Bank: The Crucial Years*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.
- Williams, David A. *David C. Broderick: A Political Portrait*. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1969.
- Wilson, Major L. *The Presidency of Martin Van Buren*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1984.
- Wolf, Stephanie G. *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1763-1800*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Works Cited

Wood, Gordon. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1992.

Wright, Marion T. "Negro Suffrage in New Jersey, 1776-1875." *Journal of Negro History* 32 (April 1948): 171-177.

Young, Alfred F., ed. *The American Revolution*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976.

Zboray, Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray. Gender Slurs in Boston's Partisan Press during the 1840s." *Journal of American Studies* Vol. 34, No. 3 (2000): 413-446.

Zelinsky, Wilbur. "Changes in the Geographic Patterns of the Rural Population in the United States, 1790-1860." *Geographical Review* 52 (October 1962): 492-524.

Zilversmit, Arthur. *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Zuckerman, Michael. *Peaceable Kingdoms: The New England Town in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970.

Reports of a Site Review, November 17-19, 2005
undertaken in cooperation
with the
Organization of American Historians

by

Sean Wilentz

Reeve Huston

Jonathan Earle

Rethinking Martin Van Buren National Historic Site

Interpretive planning for Van Buren's Lindenwald began even before Martin Van Buren National Historic Site was established. The 1970 Master Plan dedicated the site to "the life of Martin Van Buren, eighth President of the United States, and his contribution to the American political tradition."¹ Fifteen years later, an Interpretive Prospectus added detail to the somewhat vague original theme. The new themes were (1) Martin Van Buren, President and Statesman, (2) Martin Van Buren, Master Politician, and (3) Martin Van Buren and Lindenwald.²

These themes reflected the influence of twentieth-century scholarship, which emphasized Van Buren's role as President and party-builder, rather than the substantial post-presidential career that unfolded while he lived at Lindenwald. It is not surprising then that the Prospectus asserted that Lindenwald "does not illustrate Van Buren's public service, but his retirement years, his lifestyle and personality." The first two themes reinforced the tendency to separate discussion of Van Buren's political career from interpretation of Lindenwald, and the third set forth the oft-repeated notion that Lindenwald was simply Van Buren's "retirement home," when in fact it was also the base of operations for a major historical figure in the tumultuous decades preceding the Civil War. This missed opportunity meant the site overlooked a dramatic story that linked Van Buren's politics directly to the place.

In 2000, preplanning work was initiated for a General Management Plan (GMP), the park's first comprehensive plan since its establishment. By this time the limitations of themes in the 1985 Interpretive Prospectus had become clear. After a series of internal and public meetings, park staff drafted proposed new themes in 2001, which then received scholarly review.³ These themes incorporated more recent scholarship and attempted to conquer the problems generated by the Prospectus. The themes drafted in 2001 argued that Lindenwald was not a "retirement home," and that to be effective revised themes had to integrate interpretation of Lindenwald into discussion of antebellum politics. This formed the basis for the proposed themes in an Interpretive Foundation, facilitated in June of 2003 by the Harpers Ferry Center, a unit of the NPS that assists parks with interpretive planning. Both the 2001 and 2003 documents stated the importance and relevance of the sectional controversy that led to the Civil War and identified the farm as a major theme. As presented, however, the new themes seemed somewhat speculative given the fact that they called for a major shift in interpretive focus. In addition, the park's new Historic Resource Study, then in preparation, while

¹ Master Plan, Lindenwald National Historic Site, February 1970, p. 23

² Interim Interpretive Prospectus, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, 1985, p. 8-9.

³ Reviewers included Dr. Donald Cole, author of *Martin Van Buren and the American Political Tradition* (Princeton, 1984); Dr. John Brooke, a prominent early national historian and author of a forthcoming book on Martin Van Buren; Dr. John Marszalek, noted antebellum historian and author of *The Petticoat Affair* (Free Press, 1998); and Dr. Herbert Parmet, Emeritus, CUNY, a scholar of the presidency.

confirming the importance of Van Buren's Lindenwald years, did not place the site within the context of Van Buren's entire career.

The reports that follow resulted from the tentative status of the new interpretive direction. At a GMP scoping meeting, held at the park in April 2005, NPS planners, after reviewing the 2003 Interpretive Foundation, recommended that prior to the GMP the park sharpen the relevance of the themes to contemporary audiences while making certain that they aligned with current scholarship. In response, Dr. Paul Weinbaum, the Northeast Region's History Program Manager, suggested that the park utilize the Organization of American Historians (OAH) site visit program to bring noted historians of the antebellum period to Lindenwald.

Since 1995, the OAH has organized site reviews for fifteen National Park Service sites, including Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Gettysburg National Military Park, Independence National Historical Park, and Vicksburg National Military Park. The site reviews are designed to build relationships between NPS staff at a given park and historians working in a similar field. In cooperation with park staff, the OAH assembles a team of historians to visit a site and offer their individual suggestions for relating its specific history to the larger themes of American history. In addition, the staff at an NPS unit often asks the scholars to weigh in on particular planning and interpretive issues.

The OAH site visit was held at Martin Van Buren National Historic Site on November 17-19, 2005. Team members included Dr. Sean Wilentz of Princeton University, author of the classic *Chants Democratic* (Oxford, 1984) as well as the recently released *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (Norton, 2005); Dr. Jonathan Earle, an expert in the politics of the 1840's and author of *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Dr. Reeve Huston of Duke University. Dr. Huston authored a 1999 NPS Special History Study on the Van Buren farm which has assisted the park in understanding the importance of the larger landscape. Dr. Huston's recent work focusing on 19th-century land and politics, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (Oxford, 2002), was also pertinent.

Park staff provided questions to the historians in advance of their visit. The scholars were asked to reflect on the significance of Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, and to assess the revised interpretive themes in the 2003 Interpretive Foundation—specifically to comment on the links between Van Buren's early and presidential career and his post-presidential career at Lindenwald. In this connection a key question was posed: How should the story of the political turmoil of the 1840s and 1850s be told, particularly Van Buren's departure and return to the Democratic Party? The scholars were also asked to evaluate the draft Historic Resource Study and place it in historiographical context. Resource based questions that reflected interpretive issues included: What links Van Buren's public and domestic life? How can the larger social context of the diverse community at Lindenwald be tied to themes in Van Buren's political life? For GMP purposes in particular, questions regarding potential facilities and boundary changes were raised: What stories can and can't be told effectively inside Lindenwald? What other facilities or spaces are needed to tell the significant stories? Is the extended Lindenwald farmland an important resource for telling these stories?

The following three reports, written by the individual scholars each from their own perspective, respond effectively to these questions and address issues of both

relevance and site significance. They place NPS research on Van Buren and Lindenwald in historiographical context and offer specific suggestions for both interpretation and development. Taken together, the Historic Resource Study and the OAH reports provide NPS planners with a cogent, engaging analysis of the meaning of Van Buren's Lindenwald.

Patricia West, Curator
Martin Van Buren National Historic Site
July 2006

Site Visit Report

Sean Wilentz

The Martin Van Buren National Historic Site at Lindenwald is potentially a superb and unique historic resource. Located near the birthplace of President Martin Van Buren, the current site, featuring the estate home where Van Buren resided over the last two decades of his life, can tell numerous important stories. Not the least of these concern the invention of modern American democratic politics, in which Van Buren played a leading role, as well as the political crises that led to the Civil War. The current curator and staff are dedicated, top-flight professionals, with the requisite knowledge and passion for public history required to make the site all that it could be. What seems necessary, above all, is a rethinking of the park's major themes (which the staff has already undertaken) as well as an investment of funds for further improvements to the site itself.

Our visit was, paradoxically, hampered by continuing improvements to the site. The current installation of new heating, dehumidifying and fire-suppression systems within the homestead is crucial to insuring the site's lasting safety and integrity; unfortunately, it meant that most of the house's interior, on the day we visited, was shrouded in plywood casings and other protective coverings. On the basis of my recollections from earlier visits to Lindenwald, however, as well as the staff's guidance about what is there, I gained a fairly good idea of how impressive the interior will be once the installation work is complete—and how it might be utilized even better than it has been in recent years.

The key to the reinterpretation is, obviously, the story of Van Buren himself. Several other arresting nineteenth-century Hudson Valley estates—including Sunnyside, Olana, Springwood (Hyde Park) and Montgomery Place—are open to tourists; what makes Lindenwald special is Van Buren. Yet this immediately poses certain problems, as Van Buren is nowhere near the iconic historical figure that, say, Franklin D. Roosevelt is. Because Van Buren was president, and because the estate is located in an especially beautiful corner of the Hudson Valley, the site will always have a certain attraction. But its lure can be heightened, and the educational importance of the site greatly amplified, by

emphasizing certain themes now well-known to historians but largely still unknown to the general public.

Since the 1970s, historians have rediscovered Van Buren's importance as one of the chief architects of democratic party politics in the United States and of the Democratic Party. During his years as leader of the so-called Bucktail faction of New York's Jeffersonian Republicans, and then as a leading political operative behind the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, he helped shift American political life decisively away from the patrician style of deferential politics ushered in by the founding generation to a more rough-and-tumble style of party democracy—a form of politics that provided the lineaments for modern American politics. As Jackson's Vice President from 1833 until 1837, and then during his own presidency, Van Buren helped develop this model of politics to the point where even anti-Jacksonians followed suit—a process completed, ironically, in the famous “Log Cabin and Hard Cider” presidential campaign of 1840, in which the Whigs ousted Van Buren from the White House. “We have taught them how to conquer us!” the pro-Van Buren *Democratic Review* lamented—yet Van Buren's defeat marked the coming-of-age of his vision of party democracy.

Since its opening, the Lindenwald site has done its best to capture this side of Van Buren's career. The trouble is that this phase of Van Buren's life transpired mostly in Albany and Washington, D.C. Van Buren only purchased Lindenwald in 1839, just before his defeat. This fact—compounded by the existing historical literature and the common propensity to emphasize presidencies in American political history—led to portrayals of Lindenwald chiefly as Van Buren's retirement home, with little or no direct link to his political career. Although the park evoked Van Buren's significance to American political history in a general way, there always seemed to be an unavoidable disconnection between the estate and its resident's singular career.

The latest historical research offers ways to mend the situation and change the site's overall themes in fundamental ways. First, Van Buren's rise to political importance before 1819 was, historians now stress, an important part of the story of how he emerged as a new kind of political figure. That rise took place largely in neighboring Kinderhook, with at least one early incident (involving his snubbing by the estate's original owner, Peter Van Ness) occurring on the stoop of the current house. The site's coverage of Van

Buren's career has long discussed the Van Ness anecdote, but more could be done, perhaps in conjunction with the village of Kinderhook (which remains a beautiful little town, with some lovely late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century buildings, as well as the state Van Buren birthplace marker) and with the support group, Friends of Lindenwald. At the very least, I can envisage a map of off-site places which would encourage visitors to explore the neighboring area where Van Buren got his start.

Second, Van Buren was still president when he purchased Lindenwald, which allows for some greater interpretive entrée into his presidency. Long slighted as a failed single term, Van Buren's tenure in the White House has received renewed attention of late. On the more positive side, reinterpretations of the struggles over the currency and the rise of the Independent Treasury have seen Van Buren's policies less as a desperate, backward looking effort to restore Jeffersonian orthodoxy than as a principled attempt to keep private business interests from exerting undue control over the nation's financial and economic life. Important initiatives in support of the Van Buren Democracy—including the founding, by Van Buren's supporters, of the *Democratic Review*, an important literary as well as political vehicle—have also gained renewed attention, notably in Edward Widmer's recent book, *Young America*. On the more vexing side, events like the Amistad affair of 1839 (highlighted by Stephen Spielberg's recent film, which badly caricatures Van Buren) have renewed interest in Van Buren's long-standing effort to placate southern slaveholders in the name of party and national unity. And there are also large opportunities to make more of the 1840 campaign, a crucial event in the rise of American party democracy.

Third, and most important, historians have recently rediscovered Van Buren's central political role after he left the presidency, especially in connection with the politics of slavery and free soil—a role he played largely while in residence at Lindenwald, and that was thus directly relevant to the site. This phase of Van Buren's career offers a fascinating and paradoxical counterpoint to his earlier efforts to keep the slavery issue out of national politics. In 1844, Van Buren refused to support the annexation of Texas, then being eagerly pursued by the Tyler Administration and its pro-slavery Secretary of State, John C. Calhoun. In so doing, he virtually killed his chances for re-nomination for the presidency. And over the next four years (in part at the goading of his son, John), Van

Buren drew closer to the political antislavery movement, culminating in his support of the so-called Barnburner faction of the New York State Democratic Party in 1848, and then his candidacy for the presidency on the Free Soil Party ticket that same year.

Although hardly an abolitionist, Van Buren's stance on the question of slavery's extension changed dramatically. And current historical scholarship (notably Jonathan H. Earle's book *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil*) discards the old arguments that Van Buren acted as he did simply in order to exact revenge against the southerners who had torpedoed his nomination in 1844. Van Buren's support for the principle of non-extension, as propounded by the Wilmot Proviso, was sincere (though it took time for him to articulate it). His decision to depart, at least temporarily, the Democratic Party he had helped create and to head the Free Soil ticket was a mark of growing northern alienation from what the Free Soilers denounced as the Slave Power. In short, Van Buren was an important figure in the rearrangement of national politics along sectional lines. Although he himself would later rejoin the Democrats, his efforts in 1848 help nurture a political antislavery movement that gave rise, in the mid-1850s, to the Republican Party—and led directly to the coming of the Civil War.

There are several other themes that the NPS has already begun exploring, and that add a great deal to the site's value as an educational resource as well as a pleasant place to visit. At Lindenwald, Van Buren prided himself on his efforts to introduce the most up-to-date forms of scientific agriculture. The estate's extensive grounds thus serve as a kind of outdoor museum, where visitors may learn about the tremendous changes in rural life that overtook the northeastern states during the first half of the nineteenth century—the period that brought what recent historians have called the nation's "market revolution." Likewise, the house itself presents numerous opportunities for examining various aspects of the period's social history, from the lives of Irish servants (already nicely captured by the NPS) to the introduction of indoor plumbing. Each of these themes adds enormously to the site's importance, combining (better than any single site I've ever visited) important developments in the nation's political development with large-scale rural "living farm" features, as well as social historical features about working-class and immigration history.

I am convinced, though, that the political themes ought to be preeminent. These are, after all, what made Van Buren important—and, in the light of current research, make Lindenwald a site of intrinsic and enduring historical significance. Especially in the 1840s, Van Buren, while at Lindenwald, participated in events of enormous importance, involving antislavery politics as well as Democratic Party politics. The more the interpretation of the site can emphasize these events, placed in the context of Van Buren's larger political career, the better. I can imagine that the site could take its place among other important political sites of related interest, not least the Franklin D. Roosevelt NHS (only an hour and a half's drive away) and the Sagamore Hill NHS further south in Oyster Bay. Likewise, Lindenwald holds a place in the history of anti-slavery, connecting it to such far-flung places as Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims in Brooklyn and John Brown's Farm in North Elba.

I would hope that, in pursuit of amplifying the site's importance, consideration can be given to further investments of various kinds to enhance the visitors' experience. The present visitors' center, though bravely sustained by the staff, is a cramped space located inside a converted trailer. It seems to announce that the site itself is nowhere near as important as it actually is. A larger and more attractive center (as well as new offices for the site staff) would add tremendously to the site's potential.

Likewise, thought might be given to obtaining materials to aid in the interpretation of the key political themes. These might include everything from period political cartoons and campaign artifacts (especially from the 1840 and 1848 campaigns) to key documents (or high quality reproductions) that illustrate the events of the time. These could, I think, be incorporated into the overall interpretation without in any way compromising the basic integrity of the site.

Let me stress that I do not wish to see Lindenwald turned into a kind of museum of antebellum political history. It is, first and foremost, the home and estate of an important American in the later decades of his life. But to enhance its importance—which may not be immediately apparent to the average visitor—the political themes sketched out above ought to be emphasized even more than they are, particularly those from the 1840s when Van Buren was in residence. In combination with the themes

already presented (and with improvements to the visitors' center), this shift in emphasis will make a fine national site into a true gem of American history.

Site Visit Report

Reeve Huston

My visit to Martin Van Buren National Historic Site in November 2005 left me very impressed. The site is a very important one, and the staff and management are smart and dedicated. Furthermore, for years, the staff and management have been working to rethink their interpretation in ambitious ways, some of which (i.e., the inclusion of domestic servants in the interpretation) are already in place.

I think that Leonard L. Richards, Marla R. Miller, and Erik Gilg's Historic Resource Study, "A Return to His Native Town: Martin Van Buren's Life at Lindenwald, 1839-1862," is an excellent synthesis of the scholarship relevant to interpreting Lindenwald, and believe that it should be used as the basic roadmap for interpretation. I have no major problems with the interpretation of the study. I do see one place (in interpreting Van Buren's and his allies' motivations in forming the Free Soil party) where an alternate interpretation also needs to be taken into account; and I see a handful of places where important subthemes require supplementary reading. I discuss these minor reservations in detail below.

I find that the interpretive themes listed in the "Comprehensive Interpretive Plan Foundation" are quite good, but a little vague. Below, I state my own sense of the significance of the MVBNS and enumerate what I see as the most salient interpretive themes. The interpretive themes I list are, in essence, almost identical with those stated in the "Comprehensive Interpretive Plan Foundation," but are, I think, stated in more precise and concrete language—or at least language that I find more useful.

SIGNIFICANCE

Lindenwald is significant because it provides material resources that help us understand the political accomplishments and the social world of Martin Van Buren, a towering figure in antebellum American politics and the primary architect of two-party democracy in the United States.

THEMES

1. Lindenwald provides a window through which to understand Martin Van Buren's most important accomplishment: playing midwife to the re-emergence and consolidation of two-party democracy in the United States.

More than any other single human being, Martin Van Buren bears responsibility for the re-emergence and consolidation of two-party democracy in the United States between 1820 and 1840. During these years, several dramatic changes took place in American political life:

- The abolition of property qualifications for the vote in all but two states, ushering near-universal white male suffrage. (This change took place over a longer period of time, between the 1810s and the 1850s).
- The adoption of intensive and widespread grass-roots organizing among parties—intensive get-out-the-vote drives, frequent partisan rituals (meetings, parades, picnics, liberty-or hickory-pole raisings, etc.), the development of rank-and-file activists through local meetings and electoral committees.
- The development of a partisan information and propaganda network: partisan newspapers and cadres of partisan speakers in almost every county seat in the country; the widespread distribution of partisan pamphlets, campaign songbooks, cartoons, and broadsides.
- The enforcement of a high degree of party discipline among activists, requiring that all activists support all party nominees and all important party policies.
- As a result of the last three factors, an unprecedented level of popular participation in elections and partisan rituals. Just as important, the vast majority of voters came to identify fiercely with one party or another, to remain loyal to that party through their lifetime and to see all social and political issues through a partisan lens.
- The emergence of a new conception of politics: a celebration of ordinary white male citizens' capacity for self-government, and an acceptance of partisanship as a salutary part of political life.

- The end of the gentry's control over electoral and legislative politics, and the rise of a new political elite—self-made men, mostly lawyers, from humble or middling backgrounds. (This development began around 1800, and reached its culmination in the 1820s and 1830s).

Martin Van Buren was not the only leader to usher in this new political order. Partisan editors and other activists created a short-lived two-party order and began mobilizing ordinary white men in favor of the Republican Party between 1795 and 1815. Between 1820 and 1840, activists in several states outside New York adopted the political innovations that Van Buren championed in New York. But Van Buren stands out as the pre-eminent pioneer of democracy for three reasons. First, the innovations of the Republican activists of the period before 1815 were short-lived, as they were poorly organized and lacked an institutional infrastructure. The first American two-party system collapsed after the War of 1812, and widespread democratic mobilization disappeared with it. Van Buren's and his contemporary's accomplishment was to revive a partisan order based on popular mobilization, and to make it permanent. They did so by building strong partisan institutions—dense and widespread partisan newspapers, permanent local, county, state, and national partisan committees, and a permanent leadership cadre nourished by patronage appointments. Second, Van Buren and the New York Bucktails whom he led were by far the most effective political innovators of the antebellum period. They created the most thoroughgoing partisan political order in New York. Finally, Van Buren was the leader of the effort to adopt these innovations on a national level. As manager of Andrew Jackson's presidential campaign in 1828, he oversaw the spread of these innovations, which up to that point had been adopted only in a handful of states, throughout most of the United States. In the process, he forever linked the new, partisan, democratic politics to struggles over power and policy in Washington D. C.¹

¹ For good introductions to Democratization in politics, see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005); Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990). Richards, Miller, and Gilg provide an excellent synthesis of Martin Van Buren's role in that transformation.

Focusing on Van Buren's accomplishments before he moved to Lindenwald creates a problem: how can MVBNHS interpreters interpret Van Buren's accomplishments with a house and furnishings that he bought more than a decade after those accomplishments were complete? I believe that there is a solution to this dilemma: to present the house as material evidence of Van Buren's creation of a political order that destroyed the political power of the gentry and that allowed self-made, low-born men like himself to make a career out of politics and thereby join the political and social elite. Lindenwald originally belonged to the Van Ness family, a genteel family that dominated the social hierarchy and political life of Kinderhook during Van Buren's youth. In his autobiography, Van Buren tells at least two stories of being humiliated by members of this family—memories that seem to have stung him still, more than fifty years later. Although Van Buren maintained friendly relationships with members of the gentry throughout his political career, the political system he helped create destroyed the political power of the gentry and allowed low-born, self-made men like him to win control over politics and thereby to enter the elite. Van Buren's purchase of the Van Ness home and farm, his renaming of them, and the renovations that increased their refinement and grandeur were the culmination of this process. Doing these things allowed Van Buren to replace and surpass the elite family who had humiliated him—to establish himself as the new great man of Kinderhook.² The elegance of the house, the French wallpaper, the paintings, the furnishings—all of these are material evidence of a critical element of the new political order: the political defeat of the gentry and the rise of a new political elite in people like Van Buren.

I don't think interpreters should focus only on this element of the new democratic, partisan politics—all of the elements of the new order that I outline above were important. But I do think that this issue provides a "hook" with which to introduce Van Buren's importance in creating a democratic, partisan order, one which allows visitors to

² Reeve Huston, "The Little Magician After the Show: Martin Van Buren, Gentleman Farmer and Agricultural Reformer," *New York History* 85 (2004):92-121; Sean Wilentz, Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56-61.

see how the genteel refinement of the house and its furnishings were made possible by that order.

2. Lindenwald was the place where Martin Van Buren plotted his political comeback and served as the presidential candidate of the first mass antislavery party in U.S. history—the Free Soil party.

The story told by Richards, Miller, and Gilg in the Historic Resource Study is, to the best of my knowledge, quite reliable, and should be the basis for the interpretation of this theme, with two exceptions. The Historic Resource Study emphasizes the more sordid motivations for the Free Soil rebellion—the Bucktails’ outrage at federal patronage going to their factional enemies and their anger at southern Democrats for having dumped Van Buren from the Democratic ticket in 1844. These motivations were real, and should be discussed. But interpreters should also take seriously both Sean Wilentz’s and Jonathan Earle’s argument that long-standing anti-slavery principle also lay behind the Free Soil rebellion.³

Interpreters should also emphasize the critical importance of the Free Soil party in the transformation of the American anti-slavery struggle—a significance missed by the Historic Resource Study. Before this party, antislavery politics had been the affair of a tiny minority of northerners, most of whom adopted the politics of evangelical reform: moral agitation, petitioning, and publicity. (Some abolitionists had embraced party politics by joining the Liberty party, but they were miserably ineffective at the polls). As Jonathan Earle has argued, the Free Soil Party marked the beginnings of an anti-slavery politics conducted through the very political system and political practices that Van Buren had helped develop. They were the first party to try to win through partisan electoral politics, and they pioneered the strategy of tying an anti-slavery message to other grievances and aspirations felt by a majority of northerners (most notably, land hunger). They did not succeed in building an electoral majority, but the Republican Party did, and

³Jonathan Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 49-78; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*.

they did so by following the example of the Free Soilers.⁴

How can staff at MVBNS interpret this? First by narrating the events that led to the Free Soil rebellion, Van Buren's behind-the-scenes efforts to promote his nomination for the presidency in 1848, and Van Buren's support and advice for his colleagues who were in the antislavery wing of the Democratic party. Then by describing how the Free Soil Party created a new kind of antislavery politics, a politics which would succeed with the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860.

One "hook" for discussing this is, once again, the sumptuousness of the house and grounds. As Richards, Miller, and Gilg shrewdly point out in the Historic Resource Study, Van Buren's improvements of Lindenwald were consciously designed to facilitate Van Buren's return to the White House. Building political support required receiving and entertaining politically influential visitors and impressing them with one's refinement and gentility. Lindenwald was designed for just such a purpose, among other things: "The landscape had an important function in Van Buren's public . . . life"⁵

3. Lindenwald provides a window onto class, ethnic, race, and gender relations in the Hudson Valley (and in the rural North in general) in the 1840s and 1850s.

I see two sub-themes to this theme.

a. Lindenwald provides a stellar example of the genteel tradition of rural retirement in American life.

The Historic Resource Study does a terrific job of explaining how Van Buren's renovation and management of Lindenwald was essential to his performance as a gentleman. As I argued in my report to the National Park Service (also published in *New York History*), this performance was part of a particular elite tradition in the United States and England: that of rural retirement. In retiring to Lindenwald and turning it into a gentleman's pleasure-ground with

⁴Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*.

⁵Richards, Miller, and Gilg, "A Return to His Native Town," 30 (above).

manicured lawns, state-of-the-art orchards and fields, and a refined home, Van Buren was participating in what Tamara Thornton calls a gentleman's tradition of "rural retirement." Refined country life was a key way in which gentlemen performed their gentility—a particularly important performance for men like Van Buren, who were not born to that club. Gentlemen like Van Buren saw rural life as a retreat from the crass materialism and the pursuit of power associated with business and politics; living in the countryside allowed them a life of peaceful contemplation, communion with nature, and aesthetic refinement. Rural retirement was not an ascetic life: it was a sumptuous and expensive life, based on ever-rising standards of genteel consumption and entertainment. Van Buren pursued this life with enthusiasm. In doing so, he cemented his status as a national-level gentleman and as the great man of Kinderhook.⁶ And as Richards, Miller, and Gilg suggest (and as I discuss above), his genteel performance was essential to his efforts to regain the White House.

Of all the themes I enumerate, this is the easiest to convey to visitors. The evidence of Van Buren's display of rural retirement is everywhere: in the imported wallpaper in the entrance hall, in the refined furniture and paintings, in the ghastly neo-Italianate additions to the house. All the interpreters have to do is to suggest to visitors what all this refinement meant to Van Buren.

There was another element of rural retirement that will be harder to convey with material resources: Van Buren's practice of progressive farming. As I make clear in my report and as the Historic Resource Study also describes, Van Buren was an avid progressive farmer who experimented with and adopted cutting-edge breeds, seeds, and agricultural techniques. His progressive agricultural practice was inseparable from his performance as a gentleman: he frequently traded advice, cuttings and seeds with other gentleman farmers, and even more frequently boasted about the success of his endeavors. Interpreters can certainly

⁶Reeve Huston, "The Little Magician After the Show: Martin Van Buren, Gentleman Farmer and Agricultural Reformer," *New York History* 85 (2004):92-121; Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

discuss this part of Van Buren's life at Lindenwald, but there are limited material resources to work with. More on this below.⁷

b. Lindenwald provides a window onto the lives of the rural working class and into rural social relations in the mid-nineteenth century.

Two groups of workers carried out the daily work that made Lindenwald function and permitted Van Buren and his family to act as members of the gentry: domestic servants and agricultural laborers.

To their great credit, the staff at MVBNHS, led by Patricia West, has already done research on the mostly female, mostly Irish immigrant domestic servants, and includes a discussion of those servants in their interpretation of Lindenwald. It has been quite a while since I've had a full tour/interpretation of the house, so I'm not sure what the current public interpretation is. If interpreters are not already doing so, they should make heavy use of the excellent analysis in the Richards, Miller, and Gilg's Historic Resource Study (above, pp. 46-53 and 121-23—itsself largely based on Patricia West's first-rate article on the subject). Themes that should be included are: why so many Irish people were in the U.S. and Kinderhook; the gender dynamics among Irish families and migrants that made the migration such a heavily female one; the reasons so many Irish and Irish-American women chose domestic service; the character and difficulty of domestic work in homes like Lindenwald; and the relationships between the Van Buren family and the servants, including conflict and discipline/firings.

In addition to discussing these themes, staff might also want to draw on Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America* to understand more fully the family strategies that sent so many young Irish women to the United States and into domestic service here.⁸

⁷Huston, "Little Magician after the Show."

⁸Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

A second group of workers was essential to the functioning of Lindenwald farm: agricultural laborers, farm managers, and, at certain periods, tenant farmers. I am aware of only two surviving material resources that are linked to these workers: the gatehouses and the farm manager's house. If interpreters are willing to give tours of the grounds, I recommend using those structures to offer a brief discussion of the men who worked the farm. The Historic Resource Study does not discuss these men at length. The source to go to is my report to the National Park Service/*New York History* article. Issues to include in the interpretation: what their jobs were; who these workers were (nativity, race, sons of local farmers or not, age), and where they came from; the changes in Hudson Valley agriculture (and more generally in the Northeast) and in immigration patterns that made for so many landless young men available for wage work; the different chances that each group of workers (managers vs. laborers; native-born vs. Irish and African American; young vs. old) had to use their waged, salaried, or sharecropping work as a stepping-stone to independent proprietorship; the high level of turnover among all agricultural workers on Lindenwald.⁹

COMMENTS ON FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

It would be a good idea to build a guest/interpretive center with displays and perhaps a film or slide show that will introduce visitors to Van Buren's life story and, more importantly, to how that story and the story of his life in retirement fits into the history of American democracy, political conflicts over slavery, and northeastern social relations during the mid-nineteenth century. Done right, such an interpretive center will orient visitors well and prepare them to see how Lindenwald and Van Buren's life there related to some of the most important issues in American life before the Civil War.

In addition, it would be a good idea to move the offices of MVBNHS behind the Van Buren house. Where they are, the trailers make it extremely difficult to imagine what the grounds looked like during Van Buren's time.

In general, I am less supportive of the plan to buy and/or gain access to more of the farmland that once constituted Van Buren's farm. The question is: how could such

⁹ Huston, "Little Magician after the Show."

land enhance the staff's ability to interpret Van Buren's life and its relationship to American history? My belief is that the only way that the land can do so is for the land to be farmed more or less as Van Buren's employees farmed it. If this can be accomplished, that would be wonderful, but expensive. One over-ambitious possibility: turn the land into a small living museum of a nineteenth-century Hudson Valley farm. If, however, running a farm on progressive nineteenth-century principles is not possible, I don't see how the land itself can aid interpretation.

With one possible exception. I do not know if the farm manager's house is on land currently held by the National Park Service. If it is not, and if the management of MVBNHS is interested in interpreting Van Buren's farm practices and his farm workers, I think it would be very worthwhile to buy the land on which that house sits, or gain access to it. The house sits on a bluff overlooking the land; the house would provide both a material resource for talking about Van Buren's farm operation and farm workers, and a view of the land that was once in the farm itself.

With this exception, I think it would be far better to restore part of the land that the National Park Service already owns to something like its state during Van Buren's ownership than to acquire more land and leave it in its present state. As I have said above, several of what I see as the core themes of Lindenwald are linked to the estate's role in establishing Van Buren as a gentleman. This fact cannot be presented, and the related themes developed, by looking at twentieth-century farmland and second-growth forest. Far better to invest in one or more projects of historic restoration/re-creation: putting in something like Van Buren's landscaping (a well-tended lawn, well-chosen and elegantly spaced trees, the curved driveway) in front of the house; building a nineteenth-century style greenhouse and growing some of the exotic species (orchids, grapes) that Van Buren grew there; restoring nineteenth-century style landscaping around the one remaining fishing pond; planting an orchard to represent the orchard Van Buren planted and maintained. One or two of these projects would go much further in introducing visitors to the kind of genteel consumption and performance that were at the heart of the significance of Lindenwald.

Site Visit Report

Jonathan Earle

The Martin Van Buren National Historic Site is unquestionably a place of great historical significance that, given the right planning, execution, and resources, should become a destination site for people visiting the Hudson Valley region. The site has a surfeit of strengths, including an appealing setting conducive to learning and recreation, a committed and impressive staff, and an interesting building that is a rare example of 19th-century taste and architecture. The NPS staff has done a terrific job outfitting Lindenwald with artifacts and other pieces that make it an extremely good museum of country life in the 1840s and 50s, comparable to many other "living history" sites that are popular with the general public. There is also a seemingly boundless interest by the general public about all things presidential—presidential libraries have become giant tourist attractions and "presidential historians" garner lucrative media appearances and publishing advances, to name but two examples. It seems the MVB NHS should be able to tap into (and even enhance) this interest.

There are some obvious weaknesses as well, chief among them the difficulty of telling clear and compelling stories about Martin Van Buren (a man of ideas and politics) in a domestic setting, a century and a half after his death. Van Buren's time period—the years between the Revolution and the Civil War—adds to the difficulty, as the once vaunted "Age of Jackson" has been eclipsed by other historical eras by recent historians. Finally, there is the difficulty posed by Van Buren's personality. Unlike George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin or even Theodore Roosevelt, Van Buren did not possess a "larger-than-life" presence and was very much a "behind-the-scenes" political operator and coalition builder. He did not deliver particularly quotable speeches or utter memorable turns-of-phrase. He did not lead the nation in a time of war or upheaval obvious to 21st-century Americans (although, as I will describe below, it WAS a time of immense upheaval and change). And unlike the above-mentioned Presidents, he was driven from office in a convincing electoral defeat. Finally,

in an era of seemingly never-ending presidential and political scandal, it is hard to paint a complex political animal like Van Buren in flattering (or even compelling) light, despite his significant contributions to American politics, democracy, and reform movements.

SIGNIFICANCE

Lindenwald clearly meets the NPS' criterion for historical significance ("properties that are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant to the history of the US") even though Van Buren didn't live there while President.¹ Van Buren, of course, was a nationally-important figure well before his Senate term in Washington (as the builder of the first state-wide political machine, a valuable ally of Aaron Burr's and Jefferson's, and the leader of the opposition to Gov. DeWitt Clinton) and after his defeat for re-election in 1840 (when he helped to broaden the political antislavery movement). But, as the existing presentations on the site make clear, Lindenwald held a special importance for Van Buren dating at least to his young adulthood, being the seat of the powerful Van Ness family. So it had significance for Van Buren both during his early Columbia County and Albany days, his time in Washington, and, more obviously, during the time of his political "retirement" after 1841. His time in residence at the house, in my opinion, is the piece of the puzzle that needs to be more forcefully utilized at the site.

Today ex-Presidents are almost always in the news. Jimmy Carter, another one-term President, has made his post-White House years into a fabulously successful cottage industry in philanthropy; Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush are nearly always making important speeches and appearing (often in tandem) to raise money for noble causes. Van Buren's post-White House years at Lindenwald were years that he remained extremely active in public life and a figure of historical importance. Between 1841-1844, for example, Van Buren was universally viewed as the front-runner for the Democratic nomination and heavily favored to return to the White House. William Henry Harrison died well before he could build a reputation or enhance the standing of his party; his successor John Tyler was a fabulously unpopular President and never possessed

¹ NHL Criterion 2

legitimacy as a party leader; and the hundreds of thousands of loyal Democrats viewed the 1840 election as a hard-to-believe anomaly. The only way they believed the Democracy could lose an election was if it had somehow been rigged! So this first chapter of Van Buren's "retirement" was spent in almost constant "campaign mode," 1840s-style. The elaborate drawing room at Lindenwald was the center of what was essentially a "government-in-exile." This fact should be emphasized at the site, especially as the various San Clementes, Santa Barbaras and Crawfords become household place names in our own century.

When Van Buren shocked the political establishment by announcing he (like the presumptive Whig nominee Henry Clay) opposed the annexation of Texas into the United States as a slave state, arguing it would lead to a costly and inevitable war with Mexico, it began the next chapter of Van Buren's post-Presidential life. First and foremost, it was the single bravest political stand Van Buren ever took, and it cost him politically. It made his candidacy unacceptable to the slaveholders and their northern allies in the Democratic Party, and laid the foundation for his ignominious defeat at the convention in 1844 in favor of the southern "dark horse" James K. Polk. Second, it began the fascinating (and surprising) period of Van Buren's life where he stood at the head of a growing political movement to halt the spread of slavery. Van Buren's tentative first steps and his increasing centrality to the emerging "free soil" movement (culminating with his acceptance of the Free Soil Party's presidential nomination in 1848) are, in my opinion, *the most compelling story to be told at Lindenwald*. It was there that he met with his old and new political allies, first to observe and finally to join the growing political movement to halt slavery's advance in the West. Free soil ideas were discussed and manifestos were composed in the drawing room. Van Buren's position at the center of so many significant political coalitions and movements (the Albany Regency of the 1810s and 20s; the Jacksonian coalition of the late 1820s; the mature Democracy of the 1830s; and the Free Soil revolt of the 1840s) is how his time at Lindenwald can be tied to the larger themes of his political life. Van Buren consciously made Lindenwald the type of place he could continue his career as an architect of politics and parties that continue to shape American life today. In fact, it is not much of a stretch to say that he was the central figure in the creation of both the Democratic Party (in the 1820s, as a way to

revive the Jeffersonian political coalition in a new era) and the Republican Party (which he never joined but helped to fashion on the issue of slavery restriction).

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned above, stories about "party formation" and "slavery restriction" (big areas in the current historiography) are difficult to convey in a house with period furniture. But there are some ways that the farmland around the house and the room exhibits could be used to tell them. The labor that helped run the household at Lindenwald (mostly provided by immigrant Irish women) was very different than that used at, say, Ashland (Henry Clay's lush plantation in the bluegrass region) or the Hermitage (Jackson's profitable cotton plantation in the Cumberland valley). The "free" versus "slave" labor question could be emphasized in the servants quarters, from both sides. Similarly, the scientific, mixed agriculture practiced in the fields around Lindenwald were very much associated with free labor, and Van Buren took pride in his crops, fruit, and the farm's (modest) profitability. This story will be hard to tell with a 21st century organic farmstead, but I will leave it to Reeve Huston (a real expert on agricultural history) to further describe this.

The room displays are a more difficult problem. But by emphasizing the political story—that politics were conducted in drawing rooms such as Lindenwald's—rather than famous visitors or luxurious surroundings, Van Buren's own significance could be stressed more successfully. All three visiting scholars loved the story about Henry Clay's visit to Lindenwald after the 1844 election—any new information on this visit between two still-powerful but weakened national leaders would be useful. On a slightly different note, a topic that I deal with nearly every day in my capacity as director of programming at the Robert Dole Institute of Politics is how to portray politics as a noble profession in a cynical age. This is a tough sell, I know. But I do believe that using the story of a Dutch-speaking tavern-keeper's son who became an architect of our current party system and, eventually, President, can help further this goal. Many scholars have portrayed Van Buren as a cynical figure—an "American Talleyrand" and forerunner of the Nixons and Karl Roves of the world. I disagree. I think his story is one of building institutions that can even out unequal political playing fields. At first, he enlisted planters as part of a

coalition of "producers," and, by the 1840s, reversed his position. But it was a reversal my research suggests was based on very real political principle.

CONCLUSION

The Martin Van Buren National Historic Site has the building blocks in place to tell coherent and fascinating stories that is significant in several ways. The "rise of the common man" and the increasing sectionalism resulting from conflicts over slavery's expansion seem to me to be the two most compelling. I'm not a marketing consultant, but it seems to me that the NPS should emphasize Van Buren as:

- A symbol of social mobility in post-Revolution America
- The architect of the Democratic Party and our current party system
- A significant figure in the political antislavery movement (and, at the same time, the embodiment of a free-labor gentleman farmer)
- A President and statesman during extremely trying times (panic of 1837 and the slavery issue becoming more central to American life)

These stories should connect with people and draw them off the interstates and parkways to a beautiful and significant piece of American history.

OAH Site Review Team for Martin Van Buren National Historic Site
November 17-19, 2005

Jonathan Earle

Assistant Professor of History

University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS

Selected Publications:

- *The Undaunted Democracy: Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- "The Making of the North's 'Stark Mad Abolitionists': Anti-Slavery Conversion in the United States, 1824-1854." *Slavery and Abolition* (2004).

Reeve Huston

Associate Professor of History

Duke University
Durham, NC

Selected Publications:

- *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- "Popular Movements and Party Politics: The Case of the New York Anti-Rent Wars." *Beyond the Founders: Explorations in the Politics of the Early American Republic* (2004).
- "The Little Magician after the Show: Martin Van Buren, Gentleman Farmer and Agricultural Reformer." *New York History* 85:2 (2004): 92-121.
- "The Parties and 'the People': The New York Anti-Rent Wars and the Contours of Jacksonian Politics." *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (2000): 241-71.

Sean Wilentz

Dayton-Stockton Prof. of History

Princeton University
Princeton, NJ

Selected Publications:

- *Andrew Jackson.* New York: Times Books, 2005.
- *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln.* New York: Norton, 2005.
- *Chants Democratic : New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.