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From Forest to Freshet: The Development of the Upper Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire, 1750-1820

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Abstract

Outlining the development of the Upper Connecticut River Valley and its effects on the growth of New Hampshire. Concentrates on the period from first European settlements in the region to the early American republic. Especially important to this study are the region's networks of trade and communication.

Keywords

New Hampshire, Connecticut River, trade, COLA, History

Subject Categories

United States History

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River Valley of New Hampshire

1750-1820

Madeleine Beihl
Senior Honors Thesis
University of New Hampshire
Spring 2012

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Introduction

I first became interested in the upper Connecticut River Valley in January 2011. At the time, I was conducting research for my Senior Colloquium on the History of Early New Hampshire. Having grown up in western New Hampshire, I was familiar with the Connecticut River and its connection to farming and industry in the region. But my fascination with the history of the Connecticut River Valley began when I read the work of amateur historian Daniel Doan. Doan's book, *Indian Stream Republic*, poetically reconstructs the process of settlement and development in northern New Hampshire at the source of the great Connecticut River in the late eighteenth century. Although much of the book is constructed from Doan's own imagining of historical events, his recreation of life along the Connecticut captured my interest. One detailed description was of particular interest to me. He writes,

“A river life sprang up comparable to that of the Mississippi: stout men and stout boats, men singing and roistering while their boat moved under sail, men poling the clumsy craft from the walkways along the sides when the wind was unfavorable, or rowing with long sweeps. On the lower river the boats, seventy feet long, housed their crew; upriver the men on boats with shallower draft stopped at farmhouses along the banks.”¹

As I read this, I questioned whether the Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire had truly experienced such activity. I set out to research, but found that few scholars had published works on the upper Connecticut River. Perhaps due to the rural nature of the region or the fact that its settlement came so late in the founding of the New England colonies, few primary sources exist to tell the tale of western New Hampshire in its entirety. I continued to search for an answer, and the deeper I dug into the history of the region, the more I found to support Doan's work. Not

¹ Daniel Doan, *Indian Stream Republic: Settling a New England Frontier, 1785-1842* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 20.

only was the Connecticut River a hub of activity during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but it was crucial to the development of New Hampshire. With this in mind, it became the objective of my senior honors thesis to document the significance of the upper Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire for future historians.

At 410 miles long, the Connecticut River is the largest river in New England. The 255 miles of Vermont and New Hampshire land that stretch along the river make up the fertile Connecticut River Valley, which is often considered to be some of the best farmland in New England. In addition to its abundant natural resources and fertile farmland, the Connecticut River Valley is rooted in a long history of trade, industry, and development dating from turn of the seventeenth century. The river now forms the westernmost border of New Hampshire, merely marking the difference between one State and another. During the early eighteenth century, however, the Connecticut symbolized something much more fearsome; it became the boundary between the farthest reaches of civilized society and a great northern wilderness of New England. Those who settled on the banks of the river and on the floodplains surrounding it were conquerors of New Hampshire's western frontier. Combining elements of their agrarian lifestyle, mercantilist economy, and artistically refined tastes of an industrializing society, the people of the River Valley synthesized a new kind of culture. The development of the Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries became analogous with American progress and the still perceptible European sense of the "New World".

The first chapter of this study will provide a factual description of the Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire and a history of the early peoples of the region up to the year 1750. Although this work concerns mainly the European settlement of the River Valley, it must be noted that the Native American groups of New Hampshire played a major role in its history.

Many of the ways they interacted with the land surrounding the Connecticut River and the river itself set a premise for future inhabitants. Living resourcefully off the bounty of the land, communicating and traveling along the inland waterways, and establishing wide networks of trade and communication were all techniques taken up by Europeans during the eighteenth century. However, the study of the indigenous people of the region is complicated by the fact that the bulk of native settlements along the Connecticut River had fallen prey to disease and warfare by the time the Europeans made contact in the seventeenth century. Aside from the passing observations of settlers and provincial papers noting various skirmishes, few records exist today which document the native peoples of the Connecticut River Valley. A number of secondary sources have been consulted in order to build some semblance of how these people lived, including the works of William Cronon and Daniel Richter; but even the most comprehensive theories assembled by historians on this subject are speculative at best. The most concrete and localized sources available on this subject existed in the form of an archaeological survey of eastern Vermont and western New Hampshire. Within the survey, a number of artifacts and patterns of settlement provide a great deal of the information used to create historical context for this chapter.

The second chapter of the study will focus on details of the permanent European settlement of the Connecticut River Valley. Between 1750 and 1790, the River Valley was truly established as a part of New Hampshire's territory. Its development during this period laid the foundation for the unique society that would emerge in the early nineteenth century. The communities along the Connecticut River had been established by frontiersmen, expanded by farmers, and supplied by merchants with objects of material culture. After only two decades of settlement, the development of industry and trade along the Connecticut River had created an

inland culture unlike that of any other region in New England or the Old World. Development during this period helped to expand and eventually define the territory of New Hampshire, create a lasting economic structure, and connecting the isolated region to the rest of early America and the world. Much of the reconstruction of life in rural western New Hampshire in this section relies heavily on local text. Although the number of existing first-person accounts of the region is limited, the sources that do exist are detailed, and of a relatively high quality. Frequently referred to in this work are the thirty-year journal of Abner Sanger, a young farmer living in the River Valley during the American Revolution, and the works of Reverend Jeremy Belknap, New Hampshire's first surveyor-historian. The detailed descriptions of each tree, shrub, and creature recorded in these texts allow modern readers to imagine the land upon which the Abenaki had lived and died, and eventually relinquished as disease and warfare ravaged their population. This was the semi-wilderness that made up the western portion of New Hampshire territory at the time of its first settlements in the early eighteenth century. A number of contemporary town records and newspaper articles verify and supplement these sources to provide a full picture of the River Valley in the first stages of its development.

The last chapter of the study concentrates on changes in the culture of the River Valley brought on by the industrialization of New England and the independence of New Englanders following the Revolution. From 1790 to 1820, the Connecticut River Valley shifted from a remote community of farmers and woodsmen to a hub of Anglo-American culture and society. As the Industrial Revolution swept across southeastern New England, the region experienced an influx of fine goods and an increased demand for the raw materials that the environment of the Connecticut River Valley provided. An abundance of records exist to document this period of change, most commonly local newspapers including the *New Hampshire Gazette*, the *Farmers'*

Weekly Museum, the *New Hampshire Recorder*, and the *New-Hampshire Sentinel*. In addition, the works of historians David Jaffee and Chris Clark have been consulted to compare models of the material culture and economic change of rural society during this period.

With the changes of the early nineteenth century came a new, clearly defined society—a society that was no longer perched on the edge of the wilderness, but which still possessed the rich natural resources for which it had initially been settled, and a society which demanded more income, improvements, and culture than ever before. The ease of access afforded by the Connecticut River intimately connected the inland population to international ports of trade and commerce in ways that had in previous eras only been possible by sea. Consequently, the once isolated and obscure community of the upper Connecticut River Valley became vitally intertwined with the national and international world of material goods, politics, economy, and culture.

The Early Years, Pre-1750

The ancient culture of the Abenaki people and the world in which they lived before European contact has been all but lost to history. Therefore, we must look past textual evidence and gather information from the archaeological record and elements of modern Abenaki culture to provide the most comprehensive account of the Connecticut River Valley. Throughout their existence in the Connecticut River Valley, small tribes and bands maintained contact with a greater native population—a path which would eventually prove to be both beneficial and destructive to the Abenaki of the Connecticut River Valley.

An expanse of fresh water as large as the Connecticut River allowed for much variety in the composition of its banks and floodplains. Northern areas such as Orford, New Hampshire contain soapstone and copper along the river, while other banks were composed of rich clay or organic matter. The word “freshet”² has long since passed from modern colloquial English into Archaic English, although its usage was short lived. It was first recorded in the mid-sixteenth century, and was originally used to describe a specific kind of flooding that occurred along the banks of rivers in early spring. Snowmelt or seasonal rains caused rivers to swell and overflow with fresh, cold water, drenching the shores and leaving deposits of sediment, minerals, and organic matter. Upon settling in New England in the seventeenth century, the British began to use the word to describe their newly discovered environment. Gradually the word “freshet” evolved and came to mean “floodplains along the banks of a river,” to European settlers in New England. As “freshet” began to fall out of common usage in British English, English-speakers in

² Jeremy Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II III vols (Boston: Bradford and Read, 1813), 48-49.

North America kept the word alive for another two-hundred years—particularly in the region of the Connecticut River Valley.

The Connecticut River, like many geographic land features in New England, is named for one of its most prominent physical characteristics. The largest river in the northeastern region of what is now the United States, the Connecticut flows down from the largely uninhabited region abutting Canada. As it travels four-hundred miles from the Fourth Connecticut Lake to the Long Island Sound, landscapes change from mountain to hill, hill to forest, and forest to wetland. The river has always been a prominent feature of the New England landscape, but not until 1614 was its name first recorded in a document written by Adriaen Block, a Dutch explorer. Most probably, Block recorded a variation of the Abenaki phrase *kwini tewk*, meaning “the long river.”³

Jeremy Belknap, one of New Hampshire’s first naturalists and historians, often praised the fertility and abundance of natural resources in the different regions of the State. His detailed descriptions of each tree, shrub, and creature known to New Hampshire conjure images of the woodland region that was the western portion of New Hampshire before European settlement and development. Maple, elm, oak, locust, beech, walnut, chestnut, spruce, birch, and pine trees made up the dense forest that stretched from the seacoast to the cool waters of the Connecticut River.⁴

The Connecticut River Valley was abundant in wildlife. The species that inhabited the River Valley corridor were plentiful and valuable. The natives of New Hampshire were very conscientious of their hunting and trapping habits, never taking more than would be sustainable to themselves and the environment. Most species could be used for a variety of purposes. Deer

³ Colin G. Calloway, *The Abenaki* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989).

⁴ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 78-87.

and moose provided hides for clothing, antlers and bone for tools, and of course, a large amount of meat. Other useful animals were groundhogs, wild turkey, goose, grouse, pheasant, and quail. Fish were abundant in the currents of the Connecticut. According to Belknap, trout were found in nearly all freshwater lakes, streams, and ponds in New Hampshire. Salmon and shad were also quite common during their annual migration upstream. After the first instances of contact between Europeans and natives in the seventeenth century, demand for North American fur in Europe changed the way that species were hunted. Raccoon, beaver, and mink were prized for their luxuriant pelts. Muskrat was a valuable source of musk for perfume; and deer and moose hides could be tanned to produce soft leather for shoes, gloves, and breeches.⁵ Although many of these animals were also hunted to provide meat for survival, it is clear that they had much more value as trade commodities than as sustenance.

The Abenaki people were the last Native Americans to claim the lands from which the Connecticut River sprung. The area along the northern Connecticut River has been identifiably unique in its people and culture since the days of earliest inhabitation. The territory which now makes up the States of Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire had been inhabited for nearly eight thousand years even before the arrival of the Abenaki people. By the time of first European contact, the land had been continuously occupied for nearly twelve thousand years.

The predecessors of the Abenaki people were part of the large group of Paleo-Indians who migrated from Asia to North America in a number of ways. Estimated dates of this inter-continental crossing are between twenty-five and eighteen thousand years ago, as hunting tribes gradually followed game to new climates. This period in Old World pre-history is known as the

⁵ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 110-115.

Mesolithic Period or Middle Stone Age, and in New World prehistory as the Archaic Period.⁶ Roughly corresponding to the end of the last Ice Age, change in world climates allowed migratory groups such as animals and humans to travel in a more sustainable and comfortable way. It is likely that the ease of travel along inland waterways such as the Connecticut River Valley significantly influenced the migration of people to the Atlantic coast. By 10,000 B.C., there is archaeological evidence that the first humans had reached the land of Vermont and New Hampshire.

Like many other Paleo-Indians in North America during this time, the first people of New Hampshire lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle. As evidenced by artifacts found at sites in the Connecticut River Valley, sustenance for the Paleo-Indian people came from the herds of caribou that roamed the eastern and northern parts of the continent. Aside from caribou, other supplements to the Paleo-Indian diet included plants, roots, and smaller game foraged by hunting groups. As the herds moved across territories from season to season, hunters followed. Along the way, hunting camps were established for the butchering of game. Ice Age caribou were somewhat larger than their modern North American descendants, thus each kill could be relied upon to provide a substantial amount of meat, hides, and bone for food, clothing, and tools. Stone hide scrapers, spearheads, and knife blades from the period have been preserved alongside antlers and bones in archaeological sites along the Connecticut River, suggesting that the River Valley was a popular corridor for game migration, and thus hunting.⁷

In comparing the size and shape of Paleo-Indian tools found in the New Hampshire and Vermont to tools found elsewhere in New England, it can be seen that upper Connecticut River

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*, s.v. 'Neolithic Period.'

⁷ William A. Haviland and Marjory W. Power, *The Original Vermonters: Native Inhabitants, Past and Present* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994), 17-33.

Valley tools do not resemble those of other areas. This perhaps indicates that Paleo-Indians adapted their hunting and gathering techniques to make the most of the challenging climate of northern New England.⁸ As for the culture and customs of this people, not much can be extracted from the archaeological record. However, some few stone etchings have been discovered along the banks of the upper Connecticut River at Bellows Falls, Vermont. Although extensive research has not been conducted on them, the petroglyphs are generally associated with the people of this period. In addition, a number of artifacts excavated in the Connecticut River Valley correspond to artifacts excavated in the Great Lakes Region, the coast of Maine, and even farther north in Canada. It has been suggested that such artifacts represent the remains of an extensive trade network that was once common to the indigenous people of North America.⁹

Around 2200 B.C., a new wave of peoples arrived from the far north, above the St. Lawrence River, speaking a variation of the Algonquin Indian language. They were the ancestors of the first Abenaki people, and they soon replaced the Paleo-Indian people in the Connecticut River Valley. The term “Abenaki” is commonly used to refer to the group of Native Americans who inhabited the northern regions of New England. The word itself meant “People of the Dawnland” and was in reference to the direction of the rising sun, in the East.¹⁰ Within the greater Abenaki tribe, at least half a dozen distinct bands existed based on geographical location. To the East, in the area of Maine and the Piscataqua River, the Penobscot tribe made its home. The Sokoki, Cowasuck, and Penacook people lived in the western regions of New Hampshire, especially along the Connecticut and Merrimack Rivers. Though the eastern and western

⁸ Haviland and Power, *The Original Vermonters*.

⁹ Haviland and Power, *The Original Vermonters*, 214.

¹⁰ State of New Hampshire, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, *New Hampshire Folklife: New Hampshire's Native American Heritage*, 2004, <http://www.nh.gov/folklife/learning/traditions_native_americans.htm> (21 February 2012).

Abenaki bands shared ancestry, language, trade, and some tradition, they lived very different lifestyles.

For nearly three thousand years, the tribes along the Connecticut River subsisted in much the same way as their Paleo-Indian predecessors. Though the caribou herds had gradually traveled north over time, smaller game was in abundance. The Indians continued to live a somewhat nomadic lifestyle, following game and never staying in one place long enough to exhaust its resources. Despite the continuity of this lifestyle, there was much change during this time, known as the Woodland Period. Hunters abandoned the atlatl, an ancient spear-thrower used for big game such as mammoths and caribou, and turned instead to the technology of bows and arrows. Archery was much safer and more efficient for hunting small game than Paleolithic-style spears. However, spears continued to play a large role in the diet of the Abenaki. The peoples living along the river took advantage of its abundance of freshwater fish, and developed particular techniques for spear-fishing. As evidenced by such fishing spears and dugout canoes found at archaeological sites, the Connecticut River played a large part in the lives of the western Abenaki from the earliest period of their habitation.¹¹

In approximately 1100 A.D., agriculture made its way to the northern Native Americans. The introduction of beans, squash, and maize revolutionized the existence of the Connecticut River Abenaki, for it changed their subsistence practices and living standards more than those of any other tribes in northern New England. Unlike hunting, gathering, and fishing, agriculture required a great deal of commitment and time to ensure its success. One could not merely plant a crop of maize one day and expect to harvest it immediately. The process of cultivating food was constant; clearing, planting, weeding, harvesting, preserving and preparing became the new

¹¹ Haviland and Power, *The Original Vermonters*, 161-163.

rhythm of the seasons. The land and climate along the Connecticut River was good for cultivating, because it was fertile and temperate. The growing season was short, but productive if the crops were properly tended. This new devotion to the land became reason enough for the western Abenaki to give up much of their itinerant lifestyle and establish more permanent settlements along the Connecticut River.¹²

Even as agriculture became the sustaining factor in the lives of Abenaki along the Connecticut River, hunting, gathering, and fishing remained extremely important. This can be seen in the way that tribes structured their newly sedentary lifestyle. Abenaki villages seem to have been established in proximity to specific resources; for example, villages on the banks of the river would have been inhabited during the spring season, when salmon and shad swam upstream to spawn. Living so close to the river at the height of the migration season would allow the Indians to set and monitor their fish traps, or *weirs*, on a more regular basis and obtain the greatest amount of fish for the least amount of effort.¹³ Thus, the yield would be higher and the fish would be able to be preserved as soon as they were caught. Like the fishing villages along the Connecticut, not all villages were lived in year-round.

In smaller seasonal villages, shelters were constructed of light, portable materials to provide just enough protection from the elements without expending a great amount of labor. These houses, or *wigwams*, as they were called by the Abenaki, were simple structures. Saplings were bent into the shape of a dome and covered with tree boughs or animal skins to keep out the wind and rain. They could be easily taken apart and carried from one village to the next, but could also be left standing for multiple seasons with minimal upkeep. Wigwams were built for

¹² Haviland and Power, *The Original Vermonters*, 154.

¹³ Calloway, *The Abenaki*.

groups of only a few people, such as a single family, or a small gathering of hunters. However, the harsh New England weather created a need for more complex structures, such as the traditional northern Native American longhouse. Built to house between thirty and sixty people, a longhouse was generally framed with sturdy wooden poles and covered in layers of bark or animal skins. The longhouse was a large building, up to 200 feet in length, and was most often the center of activity in Abenaki winter villages.

Due to the length and intensity of winters along the Connecticut River, winter villages were perhaps the largest and most frequently occupied of Abenaki settlements. They offered a gathering place for people to share provisions, wisdom, companionship, and stories through the dark, cold months. But winter villages and longhouses were not only inhabited during the winter months. During the spring and summer, winter villages acted as a home base for family bands; a place to which all hunters, gatherers, and fishermen would eventually return with their goods. Bountiful as the Connecticut River Valley was during warmer months, food had to be preserved and stored to sustain the community throughout the winter. Meat was cut into strips and smoked, fish was dried, and maize and beans were shelled and dried. All preserves were placed into shallow cellars dug into the earth and fitted with watertight tree bark. The food was subsequently covered with more bark and a layer of soil.¹⁴ Living in this way—eating a mix of undomesticated and cultivated plants, wild game, and fish—the average lifespan of an Abenaki Indian in the Connecticut River Valley was approximately forty years.¹⁵

The division of labor among Abenaki Indians seems to have been distinct, but in no way limiting to either males or females. Women generally remained within the winter villages to tend

¹⁴ John Gyles, *Memoirs of Odd Adventures Strange Deliverances etc* (1736).

¹⁵ Calloway, *The Abenaki*, 35.

crops, gather wild plants, make clothing, weave baskets, and care for children. Men ventured to seasonal fishing sites, hunting grounds, and trade opportunities with other local tribes. Just as important as it had been for the Paleo-Indians, trade and intertribal contact remained crucial to the survival of the western Abenaki people. Pottery sherds found at sites along the Connecticut River suggest that not only were material goods traded from one region of Abenaki territory to the next, but crafting techniques, news, and ideas were also exchanged.¹⁶

Traditional Abenaki trade practices were based on the exchange of goods for *wampum*, or beads carved from the shell of the quahog clam. Due to the scarcity of quahog clams in most parts of New England, the unique beauty of the deep purple shell, and the amount of time it took to carve a single bead, wampum was highly valued. It was a nearly universal form of currency among northeastern Indian tribes, including the Abenaki, Wampanoag, and Iroquois. Depending on the local worth of the goods that were being exchanged, wampum beads were counted out and strung into bracelets or necklaces (for smaller purchases), and even sewn into belts (for large, lasting purchases).¹⁷ Until the arrival of Europeans, wampum-based trade networks crossed from western New Hampshire to the coast of Maine, northern Canada, western New York, and the Long Island Sound.

In the late fifteenth century, traders from Europe began to explore the Atlantic coast of North America. The French and the Dutch were particularly interested in making contact with natives who could provide for them a steady supply of goods to bring back to market. Thus, the Abenaki along the coast of Maine were some of the first native North Americans to deal with

¹⁶ Haviland and Power, *The Original Vermonters*, 214-216.

¹⁷ Lynn Ceci, 'The Value of Wampum among the New York Iroquois: A Case Study in Artifact Analysis,' *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1982: 97-107.

Europeans. Although permanent settlements in Abenaki territory were not established until the seventeenth century, tribes had been exposed to European culture enough through trade networks that cross-cultural contact was reasonably peaceful.

Supposedly, Samuel de Champlain was the first European to enter the Connecticut River Valley in 1605. However, it is unclear whether the Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano also traveled up the Connecticut River during his expedition in 1524. In any case, direct interaction between the two cultures remained at a minimum for a much longer period of time in the River Valley than in other parts of New England. This is perhaps why so few early written records exist referring to the western Abenaki. By the time trading posts were established in the area, European disease spread by neighboring tribes had ravaged the people, decreasing the population of New Hampshire Indians from approximately 10,000 to 500.¹⁸

Despite its relative isolation from the French, Dutch, and English, the Connecticut River Valley was particularly affected due to its use as a corridor for travel among other native tribes. Between 1616 and 1639, three outbreaks of disease spread through the region, killing nearly ninety percent of its inhabitants. The condition that made up the first epidemic has never been identified, but was most likely smallpox or bubonic plague. Introduced by traders to the eastern Abenaki in Maine, it spread quickly West through the New England tribes—a population which had no immunity to the diseases of the Old World. Subsequent outbreaks in 1633 and 1639 were recorded to be smallpox, and spread from North to South along the Connecticut and St. Lawrence Rivers.¹⁹

¹⁸ Calloway, *The Abenaki*, 45.

¹⁹ Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney, *Captors and Captives: The 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 14.

As Europeans continued to arrive in the New World, they gradually spread inland. From the coast of New England, the British and Dutch established trading posts and fortifications on the outskirts of their claimed territory. Meanwhile, French missionaries traveled south from the mouth of the St. Lawrence into what is now Montreal and upstate New York. Generally, the French were quite successful in getting along with Indians. They made an effort to learn native language and trade customs, and allowed Indian converts to Catholicism to live according to the ways of indigenous tradition while upholding Christian morals. However, as more missions were established in the far western part of New England, the French began to encroach upon the home territory of the Iroquois Indians. The Iroquois are traditionally described as much more hostile than Abenaki people, who were reserved in warfare. Under the impression that the Europeans were a threat to their homelands, the Iroquois began to travel to territories which were still uninhabited by Europeans—namely the territory of the western Abenaki in the upper Connecticut River Valley.

Beginning in the 1650s, the Iroquois conducted a series of raids on Abenaki villages. This forced the northward migration of many bands whose strength had already been diminished by outbreaks of plague. In 1663, the Sokoki band of Abenaki established a number of villages along the upper Connecticut River to gather refugees from Iroquois raids and disease-ridden camps. In concentrating this abused, derogated, and weak population to a limited number of locations, the members of the Sokoki village created a sort of “fictive kinship.” Fictive kinship is a complex term used by modern anthropologists and historians to describe groups of people not related by blood, who act and make decisions as family units. In many Native American societies, war and disease often resulted in a number of displaced peoples such as captives of other tribes and orphans. Family groups collected these people and helped them to assimilate into local tribal

culture. This created a strong community bond, despite the diversity of the group.²⁰ Without the existence of such a structure in western Abenaki society during the late seventeenth century, it is doubtful that the culture would have survived the decades that followed.

Despite the conflict, confusion, and change surrounding the people of the Connecticut River Valley, exchange between the Europeans and western Abenaki hit its stride during the second half of the seventeenth century. Development along the banks of the Connecticut River followed the wide mouth of the river northward from the Long Island Sound to towns such as Hartford, Connecticut and Springfield, Massachusetts where it provided easy transportation of goods to newly established inland settlements.²¹ The British and Abenaki continued to trade refined goods for peltry, although the continued violence afflicted by the Iroquois during the 1670s discontinued many trade relations in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. 1689 marked the first of four “French and Indian” conflicts, and proclamations issued by the Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts around the same time declared that all trade with natives—no matter where in New England—must be regulated by the British Crown.²² Similar documents written in New Hampshire in the early 1700s declare all Indians enemies of the crown, despite their past submission and alliances. One such declaration, written by Joseph Dudley of Massachusetts and New Hampshire writes,

“I Do therefore, by and with the Advice of Her Majesties Council, Declare the said Indians...of this Province, with their Confederates to be Rebels and Enemies against Our Sovereign Lady Queen ANNE, Her Crown and Dignity, and to be out of Her Majesties Protection; Willing and Requiring all Her Majesties good Subjects to treat them as such,

²⁰ Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²¹ Margaret E. Martin, *Merchants and Trade of the Connecticut River Valley, 1750-1820* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Department of History of Smith College, 1939).

²² William Stoughton, *Proclamation of 1698* (Boston, 1698).

and as they shall have the opportunity to do and execute all Acts of Hostility upon them. And I do strictly forbid all Her Majesties good Subjects to hold any manner of Correspondence or Communication with the said Indians, or to give them any Aid, Comfort, Succour, or Relief, as they tender the duty of their Allegiance, and on pain of incurring Her Majesties utmost displeasure, and the severest Penalties.”²³

The term “truckmaster” appeared in many documents relating to Abenaki-English relations during the early eighteenth century. Truckmasters were representatives of trade and diplomacy appointed by the royal colonial governor to replace the largely unregulated exchange between natives and European settlers.²⁴ Such proclamations and reforms enforced the dominance of Europeans over native peoples.

Although the French and Indian Wars still raged, settlements began to creep northward from where the Connecticut River narrowed above Deerfield, Massachusetts. In 1724, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony established Fort Dummer in the northernmost part of the colony’s territory. This was just above the settlement at Deerfield in a location that would later become the southeastern corner of the State of Vermont. Between 1735 and 1736, four more forts were established on the eastern banks of the Connecticut by the General Court. It was thought that these northern fortifications would ease the minds of settlers along the southern Connecticut River who feared Indian conflicts trickling down from Canada. However, as contention between the European population and the native population of New England grew, Abenaki still residing in the Connecticut River Valley found themselves in conflict. Their few options were to retreat to French missionary villages in Canada and retain their heritage, or to relinquish their cultural practices, language, and traditions in order to stay on their native lands.

²³ Joseph Dudley, *A Declaration Against the Penacook and Eastern Indians* (Boston: 1703).

²⁴ *Prices of Goods Supplied to the Eastern Indians, By the several Truckmasters; and of the Peltry received by the Truckmasters of the said Indians* (Boston: 14 July 1703).

The Abenaki eventually chose to assimilate into the culture of the New World Europeans, casting off a great amount of history and heritage.

By the eighteenth century, European settlers had broken up the vast trade networks established between the Abenaki of the Connecticut River Valley and distant Native American groups. The English, French, and Dutch relied on both the Abenaki's fur trapping skills and their lands to obtain rich furs, for sale in Europe. With the success of the Europeans came the growth of their population, expansion of their settlements, and their encroachment on native homelands. Warfare among European colonists and the enforcement of British authority over natives caused the Abenaki population of the River Valley to dwindle and retreat in the shadow of imperialism. As the Abenaki people faded from their ancestral lands, they left behind a tradition of trade and communication which stretched across the eastern part of the continent. The Europeans would later continue this tradition and by establishing similar routes of trade and communication. But they also found other ways to experience economic prosperity in the New World, and before long the Connecticut River Valley was once again the hub of a great system of trade.

Settlement and Establishment, 1750-1790

The push toward European development of the upper Connecticut River Valley began in the 1750s, in the midst of England's struggle against the French for dominance in the colonies. King George's War ended in 1748 and the Seven Years' War would begin in 1754. It was in the midst of these wars that colonial focus shifted from the seacoast to the upper Connecticut River Valley. Conflicts between French, English, and Native Americans seemed to culminate in the Connecticut River Valley corridor. The French and Native Americans traveled south from Canada and the English west from Portsmouth and Boston. As the River Valley was more traversed, it became a crossroad of international interaction and the epicenter of western New Hampshire growth. By the late eighteenth century, the upper Connecticut River Valley became a sort of paradox: on one hand, it was a frontier society based on the agricultural goods that it produced for urban centers; on the other hand, its newfound resources and accessibility allowed it to become a place that generated culture and supported commercial endeavors, much like an urban development.

Royal Governor Benning Wentworth was in power at the time of the French and Indian wars. The Wentworth family was well known for its investment in the lumber industry in New Hampshire and they greatly supported the acquisition of land in the Connecticut River Valley for additional sources of lumber. It was of no surprise that Governor Benning Wentworth found the shifted focus to the River Valley to be beneficial. Logging in the plentiful, untamed forest at the western edges of New Hampshire meant economic growth in all other parts of New Hampshire. Lumber allowed manufacturers in Portsmouth to continue building ships for the British Royal Navy, an industry that had been thriving since the mid-seventeenth century. This in turn brought

skilled laborers, revenue, and the need to expand areas of habitation for an increasing population. If New Hampshire was able to secure the land surrounding that great western river from the French, the natural resources upon which the colony relied would be secured as well. Thus, the lumber industry that developed along the Connecticut River was indispensable to the growth of the colony of New Hampshire.

White Pine had once been abundant nearer to the seacoast. It had been routinely sought out for the shipbuilding construction industries in Portsmouth since its earliest days of settlement. Thus, its numbers had diminished after nearly a century and a half of use. In the mid-eighteenth century, White Pine was in higher demand than ever before. Its long, lean form, smooth trunk, and durable wood was ideal for making planks with which to build houses; and White Pine trees which had been unaffected by human contact grew to a height of 150 or 200 feet, perfect for ship masts.²⁵

Aside from the seacoast, where sources of the White Pine had been exhausted, the far western side of New Hampshire was the best location for “mast pine” operations because the proximity to the Connecticut River provided loggers with an easy and cheap way to transport timber to market.²⁶ From the woods along the Connecticut, woodsmen merely had to hitch a team of oxen to felled wood and drag or sled it to the banks of the river where it would be shipped directly to a port city. The first example of this type of operation occurred in 1733, when a company working for the British Royal Navy shipped “an entire shipload’s worth of timbers down the river to Saybrook, Connecticut, where they could be loaded on a ship for transport

²⁵ Strother E. Roberts, ‘Pines, Profits, and Popular Politics: Responses to the White Pine Acts in the Colonial Connecticut River Valley,’ *New England Quarterly*, 2010: 73-101.

²⁶ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 78.

across the Atlantic.”²⁷ This flotilla of shipbuilding material was shipped from the approximate location of present-day Hanover, New Hampshire, a distance of nearly 200 miles, and seems to have created the standard operating procedure for timber collection along the Connecticut River throughout the next century. Although demand for White Pine was what initially drove the western expansion of New Hampshire territory, it was the relative convenience of living and conducting business along the Connecticut River that encouraged the subsequent development of the western part of the State.

In the 1760s, the forts that had been established by the General Court of Massachusetts earlier in the century were granted New Hampshire township by Governor Wentworth, despite the ongoing scuffle over the ownership of the territory. Forts No. 1, 2, 3, and 4 became Chesterfield, Westmoreland, Walpole, and Charlestown. These small fortified towns became anchors of European civilization in a seemingly isolated frontier society. As the backwoods community of the western territory grew in the following decades, communication between the seacoast and the people of the upper Connecticut River Valley was strained. The river provided direct transportation, communication, and trade from western New Hampshire to the cities of Springfield, Hartford, and Boston, but within New Hampshire a lack of maintained roads and standardized communication prevented such crossover between the seacoast and Connecticut River Valley.²⁸ In addition, the differences in population, industry, and environment of the two most developed parts of the state meant that “the coastal area of New Hampshire shared little in heritage or economic interest with the western part of the state.”²⁹ However, the connections to urban markets and industries provided by the Connecticut River allowed settlers in the River

²⁷ Roberts, ‘Pines, Profits, and Popular Politics,’ 84.

²⁸ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 61.

²⁹ Abner Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make: The Journal of Abner Sanger* ed. Lois K. Stabler (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Peter E. Randall, 1986), 85.

Valley to have access to the greater culture of the European mercantilist society. Not only were Connecticut River Valley people able to unite with other New England colonies, but they were able to trade with British, French, Dutch, and Spanish merchants; easily plotting them on the map of international exchange.

New Hampshire's famous Reverend Jeremy Belknap—a naturalist, surveyor, historian, and man of the church—was raised as a contemporary to the expansion of New Hampshire industry and western settlement. At the height of Jeremy Belknap's life, development of the Connecticut River Valley had just begun to pick up speed. As a child in the 1750s, western New Hampshire would have perceived a great mysterious wilderness, populated with only surveyors, woodsmen, travelers to Canada, and the natives that threatened the inhabitants of the forts at Charlestown, Walpole, Chesterfield, and Westmoreland.³⁰ Having traveled throughout much of New Hampshire as a young man, Belknap probably encountered the harsh lifestyle of these men of the wilderness. Here he describes their daily fare: "Men who are concerned in travelling, hunting, cutting timber, making roads, and other employments in the forest are inured to hardships....Their food, when thus employed, is salt pork or beef, with potatoes and bread of Indian corn; and their best drink is water mixed with ginger."³¹ These hardworking men were certainly used to living a life without privilege of fresh foods and conveniences of society; but as the timber industry grew and thrived along the Connecticut River, it became necessary to improve the availability of cultural and mercantile resources to support the settlements that began to spread and develop as a result of the industry. Men who had left their wives and

³⁰ Henry H. Saunderson, *History of Charlestown, New-Hampshire, The Old No 4, Embracing the part borne by its inhabitants in the Indian, French, and Revolutionary Wars, and the Vermont Controversy. Also Genealogies and sketches of families, from its settlement to 1876* (Claremont, New Hampshire: The Claremont Manufacturing Company, 1976), 16.

³¹ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire Vol II*, 195.

children at the seacoast in search of employment in the 1750s now found that they could purchase land in the budding townships along the river. If they moved their families across the colony, built a permanent residence, and began to cultivate their own crops, life would be simpler and wages would stretch farther. The river's ancient freshets were ideal land to transform for agriculture, and with the abundance of natural resources and wildlife, as well as the added insurance of fortifications to protect against violent French and Indian attacks trickling down from Canada, the upper Connecticut River Valley became a prime destination for New Hampshire's cultural and economic expansion.

Life for new settlers in the Connecticut River Valley was challenging in many ways. They worked to support themselves financially, and were essentially cut off from the kind of refined goods that were in abundance along the Atlantic seaboard. Settlers had to depend on their land and their own handiwork to provide any food, clothing, furniture, or household commodity that was needed. Some of the townships that had been established before the explosion of settlement along the Connecticut River in the 1760s had been able to keep up with the increase in population and economy. Sawmills, gristmills, and other conveniences were constructed to ease the workload of new settlers. Without such amenities to aid them, there was no way to efficiently clear one's land and have enough time to begin planting crops for the coming months—short of hiring a team of men to do the work. The majority of settlers in western New Hampshire did not possess the funds required to hire laborers to clear their land. Besides, without a masting contract with the British Royal Navy, any White Pine timber cleared from private land was illegally felled. All “mast pines” belonged to the King of England according to the White Pine Act of 1691. Those who had a contract to sell to the Royal Navy shipped timber downstream to the nearest city. Those who did not have a contract floated their timber to the nearest sawmill,

where it could be used locally, or sold to the Royal Navy by the owner of the sawmill, who most likely held a contract.³² During the reign of Governor Benning Wentworth, a sort of salutary neglect allowed settlers to clear their land and sell timber as they liked. After the installation of his nephew, Governor John Wentworth II in 1767, a stricter policy on White Pine poaching was put into place. It lasted until the Revolutionary War.³³

Despite the difficulties of merely clearing the land of trees, even more work had to be done in order to prepare it for farming by pulling stumps, cutting back shrubs, burning underbrush, and plowing the cleared land. In another description of life along the Connecticut River, Jeremy Belknap writes:

“Those persons, who attend chiefly to husbandry, are the most thriving and substantial. Those who make the getting of lumber their personal business, generally work hard for little profit. This kind of employment interferes too much with husbandry. The best season for sawing logs is the spring, when rivers are high; this is also the time for ploughing and planting. He who works in the sawmill at that time, must buy his bread and clothing, and the hay for his cattle, with his lumber; and he generally anticipates the profit of his labor.”³⁴

The full process of clearing enough land to keep livestock, plant crops to supply humans and animals with food for the winter, and build a permanent homestead (including house, barn, and outbuildings) would have taken years to accomplish, especially if the head of household was employed in a seasonal position such as logging.

In an agrarian community such as the upper Connecticut River Valley had become, self-sustainability was everything. Each change in season brought a new element of work to the life

³² Roberts, ‘Pines, Profits, and Popular Politics,’ 96.

³³ Surveyor General of the King's Woods in North, ‘Province of New Hampshire,’ (Portsmouth, New Hampshire, January 1, 1770).

³⁴ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 197.

of a farmer. Spring was the time for plowing fields, planting crops, awaiting the birth of livestock, mending fences, tapping maple trees for syrup, clearing debris after winter storms, and preparing for the growing season. Summer, the few months of the year that comprised northern New England's short growing season, was a time of strenuous labor and meticulous detail to crops. Without a farmer's careful attention to his fields and gardens, crops might be choked by weeds, eaten by wildlife, trampled by livestock, or otherwise destroyed by the unpredictable New Hampshire weather. Hay needed to be cut and dried, and vegetables picked, processed and preserved. Autumn brought the ripening of grain, corn, and fruit as well as the slaughter of livestock for the coming winter.³⁵ All produce needed to be stored or brought to market while the household prepared for the harsh New England winter. Winter was a time to clear land, maintain roads, care for livestock, and tend to business that could not be conducted during the more demanding parts of the year. Aside from these seasonal tasks, there were year-round chores like chopping and stacking wood, cooking meals, caring for livestock, washing and mending clothes, hunting and fishing, and constant maintenance of homes, barns, and outbuildings which had to be accomplished. These chores alone provided the average farming family with more than enough work to occupy them for a year—but men who doubled as a labor force for a logging company had to do all these things in addition to the work that the White Pine industry required in the winter and spring months.³⁶

During the first few years of development, families in the Connecticut River Valley lived very simple lives by tending to their land, livestock, and crops if they were not dually involved in the White Pine industry. Although towns were still relatively isolated from other parts of New Hampshire and southern New England, trade between townships became increasingly common

³⁵ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*.

³⁶ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire Vol II*.

as populations grew. In 1762, Walpole's original town road was expanded to connect to Charlestown and Westmoreland to allow more local communication and trade.³⁷ Settlers who relied on agriculture-based income began to match those whose income was in the logging business; eventually agricultural income would eclipse logging altogether as the shipbuilding business slowed during the American Revolution. Corn, rye, oats, wheat, barley, flax, hay, potatoes, turnips, cabbage, onions, white beans, string beans, peas, apples, currants, and pumpkins were staples for the people of the Connecticut River Valley, but not every homesteading family had enough land, time or hands to produce all of these crops in one growing season.³⁸ Families raised what crops they could with the resources they had. Any excess produce could be bartered with neighbors or transported to other towns for sale.³⁹

In addition to fruits and vegetables, livestock, fish, and household goods were often traded at a local level. All possible household goods were made by members of the family or local craftsmen who had brought tools with them from the seacoast. Millers, carpenters, tailors, tanners, coopers, blacksmiths, butchers, and cabinetmakers had set up shop in most towns during their expansion from wilderness outposts to agricultural societies. Bartering was quite common in Northern New England, especially in rural areas where importation of goods could be difficult. Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich outlines this interesting form of local trade in the context of the society of northern New England, "Borrowing was part of the rhythm of life at all social levels. Families not only shared commodities. They shared the work which produced them."⁴⁰ Even as

³⁷ George Simon Roberts, *Historic Towns of the Connecticut River Valley* (Schenectady, New York: N.Y. Robinson & Adey, 1906), 427.

³⁸ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*.

³⁹ David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 20.

⁴⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982), 51. Ulrich also addresses

the small settlements of western New Hampshire began to develop into less rural but still isolated towns, borrowing and bartering continued to play a large part in local economy. Local newspapers frequently printed advertisements for the exchange of one commodity for another, such as “New England Rum exchanged for Flax-seed or grain,” while local merchants accepted “all kinds of Country Produce” in lieu of specie.⁴¹ It may be pointed out that in such a geographically isolated region of New England as the Connecticut River Valley, economic exchange was not fast-paced enough to promote the constant circulation of coins. Certainly Spanish silver, Continental dollars, and Federal cents made their way into the area, but they were perhaps prized more as a way to pay taxes or to purchase much finer goods that could not be gotten from local exchange.⁴² Still, some merchants made sure to advertise the acceptance of cash as well as produce for the benefit of their less rural patrons.

Abner Sanger, a young man living in a small settlement outside of present-day Keene, New Hampshire during the 1770s, kept a journal for three decades and recorded the home and local production of linen, shingles, brooms, sled tongues, barrels, shoes, leather, knife handles, chairs, wooden troughs for maple sugaring, vats for tanning hides, carts for haying, pot ash and lye for gunpowder and soap, tallow for candles, yarn, bricks, flour, liquor, clothing, worsted buttons, quilts, and dyes.⁴³ Some goods, though, could not be manufactured on the homestead or by local specialists, and their high demand merited particular trips to Boston or Hartford. Salt was certainly one of the most important commodities to a family attempting to live off the land,

this topic in her book *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001). She discusses the practices of borrowing and bartering and their deep connection to social relations within early American communities.

⁴¹ *The New-Hampshire Recorder*, 21 August 1787: 4.

⁴² Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 22.

⁴³ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*.

as it was the easiest and cheapest way to preserve a year's worth of meat, fish, and vegetables. Sugar was also essential in baking and cooking, and could be fermented to produce vinegar, another important preservative. The abundance of maple trees in the Connecticut River Valley allowed settlers to create their own crystalline sugar by boiling down the sweet maple sap each spring, thus decreasing the demand for imported cane sugar.⁴⁴ Iron was in high demand in any society, as it could be used for tools, fixtures, and horseshoes; luckily, the nearest source of iron for settlers along the Connecticut River was in Kent, Connecticut, and could be easily transported upriver by cart or river vessel.⁴⁵ Although the river and roads would not be fully maintained until the late eighteenth century, they were just wide enough for small shipments of commodities. Abner Sanger records more than one instance of the transport of firearms, but interestingly, this did not seem to be a priority until the rumblings of the American Revolution had spread past southern New Hampshire and into Canada.⁴⁶

In 1766, the first highway connecting the New Hampshire seacoast to the Connecticut River Valley was built, but the only funds for maintenance of the highway came from the towns that it passed through.⁴⁷ The distance from the Connecticut River to the seacoast was between 80 and 100 miles, depending on the route one took, and the likelihood of finding the highway wide enough for one horse and rider, let alone a team of oxen to pull a wagon with fine goods imported from the city, was slim. Less essential commodities such as pewter hollowware, prefabricated clothing, brimstone, tobacco, rum, silk, gold, silver, fine furniture, etc. were

⁴⁴ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 86-87.

⁴⁵ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*, 215.

⁴⁶ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*.

⁴⁷ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 59.

mentioned in passing, but did not seem to preoccupy the people of the Connecticut River Valley until the early nineteenth century.⁴⁸

Commodities and fine goods that were imported to the Upper Connecticut River Valley during the early years were a testament to the lifestyle of its people. Between the 1750s and post-Revolutionary period, the highest demands for import lay in salt for food preservation, iron tools for logging and farming, and firearms for hunting and self-defense. The small population of most early settlements allowed for borrowing and lending these goods between neighbors, thus decreasing the frequency of their purchase in the area.⁴⁹ As the living became easier and family homesteads were established in place of backwoods camps, the comforts of home grew to be in demand in New Hampshire's rural towns just as much as in its cities. A culture of material comfort emerged during this period. From 1780 and 1790, the number of advertisements for items such as pewter hollowware, brass fixtures for the home, tin ware, fine paper, reading materials, tea and coffee accessories, handkerchiefs, and spices for cooking seem to have greatly increased in local papers.⁵⁰ Shops in Walpole and Keene offered not only goods from Boston and New York, but "English and West-India Goods", an indicator that the consumers of the Connecticut River Valley were reaching out beyond their farms and villages to access goods from other regional and national sources.⁵¹

The last few decades of the eighteenth century brought great change and vast improvements to the infrastructure of the Connecticut River Valley. Changes in the governance of the colony came with the successful rebellion against English rule in the 1770s. The dynasty

⁴⁸ Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, 16.

⁴⁹ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*.

⁵⁰ *The Farmer's Weekly Museum*, 19 September 1794: 4.

⁵¹ *The New-Hampshire Recorder*, 21 August 1787: 4.

of Royal Governors of New Hampshire fell, pushing the influential Wentworth family out of power, and forcing the loyalist Governor John Wentworth II to flee the colony. Volunteers from every region of New Hampshire flocked to Boston to join the colonial militia, including Abner Sanger and his neighbors from the River Valley. Not all of these men saw action in Revolutionary skirmishes, but their recorded presence and awareness of political unrest indicates that the Connecticut River corridor was once again the most effective method of travel and communication during this time.

After the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the newly self-proclaimed United States of America discussed the formation of a national government. Meanwhile, each individual State laid down a governing body to replace the Royal Governor, and a system of government. The General Court, which had existed since early colonial days, remained the principle governing body in New Hampshire. New Hampshire worked to make official the borders of its territory, and in doing so, continued Benning Wentworth's tradition of granting townships to settlers in the western part of the state. In response to the influx of settlers, the populations of Walpole, Charlestown, and Chesterfield doubled from 1775 to 1790.⁵² With this explosion of growth came a new, clearly defined society—a society that was no longer perched on the edge of the wilderness, but which still possessed the rich natural resources for which it had initially been settled, and a society which demanded more income, improvements, and culture than ever before. Since the timber industry had dwindled in the decades since the American Revolution, hogs, oxen, horses, heifers, and sheep, as well as agricultural products such as wheat, rye, corn, barley, butter, and cheese had become the main sources of income for inhabitants of the upper

⁵² Saunderson, *History of Charlestown, New-Hampshire*, 714.

Connecticut River Valley.⁵³ Local trade was still as strong as ever, but the increased population of the postwar period meant more cultivated land for farming, more production of local goods, and ultimately increased agricultural surplus that could be shipped downriver to city markets in exchange for fine goods.⁵⁴ This ease of access afforded by the river intimately connected the inland population to New England's urban centers of trade and commerce in ways that had previously only been possible by sea.

Modes of communication and travel also improved during this time, allowing the passage of ideas to move from place to place just as easily as goods.⁵⁵ In 1781 John Balch, a contemporary and neighbor of Abner Sanger, became the first "postrider" in western New Hampshire territory. Previous to Balch's mail delivery service, letters and parcels were carried by the occasional passerby traveling from one town to the next.⁵⁶ Although this method seemed to be effective, it was not particularly efficient or reliable. With a designated postrider, one could ensure that local mail would reach its destination in a definite amount of time.

In addition to roadway communication, waterways were improved when, in 1784, Enoch Hale's bridge became the first to span any part of the Connecticut River. Built at Walpole, New Hampshire and Bellows Falls, Vermont, the bridge stretched 365 feet from one side of the river to the other. This bridge would be followed by many others, not least of which included the bridge built at Charlestown in 1804. Before the construction of bridges along the Connecticut, ferries were the safest way to cross. However, the difficulty in ferrying was that one had to be

⁵³ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*.

⁵⁴ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 105.

⁵⁵ Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, 125.

⁵⁶ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*, 22.

granted by the State “exclusive privilege of keeping a ferry,”⁵⁷ which often resulted in few ferrymen and high tolls. Further south on the Connecticut, regulations were put in place for the size and appropriate tonnage of river vessels travelling upriver. Saybrook, Connecticut—slightly south of Hartford—had been the traditional place at which ships returning from an Atlantic voyage offloaded their cargo, and from which small watercraft would load these goods to transport upstream to communities in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont.⁵⁸ These improvements in travel and transport on the Connecticut River helped to make river life safer and more reliable for all those involved.

The number of cultural contributions made to Connecticut River Valley society in the last years of the eighteenth century was infinitely expanded by the addition of trade, communication, infrastructure, education, literature, and art. Yet its identity as an agricultural community never left. It was truly a unique place—neither city nor country, connected commercially but isolated geographically—setting the tone for a new kind of region in New England for years to come.

⁵⁷ ‘A Proclamation,’ Exeter, New Hampshire, (January 12, 1782).

⁵⁸ ‘Say-Brook Barr Lottery,’ Hartford, Connecticut, (June 5, 1773).

Growth and Change, 1790-1820

Since its first permanent settlement in the early eighteenth century, the upper Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire had been a unique case in the development of New England society. Far removed from the urbanized regions of New England, this frontier society was initially formed by woodsmen, trappers, loggers, and farmers. The fertile floodplains of New England's largest river lent themselves well to agricultural pursuits. Natural resources found in and around the Connecticut created ample opportunity for other trades to take shape. Despite its origin as a geographically isolated frontier society, by the early nineteenth century, the Connecticut River Valley had become the axis of a broader trade network which gave even the most remote towns of the region access to national and international goods.

The most extensive period of development of the western region of New Hampshire occurred during the formative years of the United States. By the late eighteenth century, the Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire had become one of the most fertile and productive regions in northern New England. High demand for White Pine in the Atlantic shipbuilding industry and the establishment of a strong agricultural tradition sparked a period of great migration to the banks of the upper River Valley. Subsequent population growth created the need for an infrastructure which would support the rapidly changing region.⁵⁹ Transportation, communication, education, economy, and local government were established or improved to reflect the needs of the towns along the river. As more infrastructure developed, easing travel

⁵⁹ Roberts, 'Pines, Profits, and Popular Politics,' 96.

from cities and trade ports to new and open tracts of land, population in the River Valley continued to increase. Following the northern migration and promise of economic opportunity, tradesmen and artisans from Boston, Hartford, and New York began to settle there. Small villages such as Charlestown and Walpole became satellites of the bustling coastal cities of Exeter, Portsmouth, and Dover, New Hampshire. Some historians refer to such developments in these small but influential towns as “cosmopolitan,”⁶⁰ a term which implies both a relationship to, and a separation from, the urban centers of the Atlantic seaboard.

As populations grew in the northeast, settlements spread west of New Hampshire into Vermont and upstate New York. The western frontier of New England, which had for so long been defined by the Connecticut River, shifted even farther inland to west of the Hudson River. As a result, the demographics of towns along the Connecticut River began to change. No longer were western New Hampshire towns merely connected farmlands. No longer did River Valley landowners simply attend the same meetinghouse, outposts for White Pine contractors, or isolated mills and workshops as their neighbors out of convenience. These towns had evolved not into clusters of remote frontier settlements, but established communities with regional, national, and international connections.⁶¹ Certainly they remained rural, but their agrarian roots which had been established for decades allowed them to retain a unique identity among New England communities.

⁶⁰ Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*.

⁶¹ Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*.

Since earliest days of habitation, the Connecticut River had been the most effective and convenient way for people to travel. As the new American republic established itself during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the newly founded States within the republic did the same. New Hampshire took advantage of the development on the western side of the state to incorporate federal and state-sanctioned improvements in transportation and communication. Maintained highways, federal mail delivery, and a variety of other advances took primary focus off the river and for the first time established a real land connection between the seacoast and inland communities of New Hampshire. Meanwhile, inter-state regulations continued work begun in the 1770s to improve transportation on the river itself.

Methods of travel along inland waterways were assessed for safety and practicality and evaluated for potential advances that could be made. In the last years of the eighteenth century, the upper Connecticut River became the focus of many such improvements.⁶² Crossing the icy, rushing water was dangerous, even with an experienced ferryman as a guide. The river narrowed above Deerfield, Massachusetts, allowing a relatively simple answer for the problem of connecting the east and west banks. Beginning in the 1780s, bridges were commissioned by the New Hampshire General Court to safely carry people, animals and cargo over the Connecticut's deep rapids. The General Court, as it had been called since its earliest establishment in the royal colonies, had acted through New Hampshire history as its largest governing body. After the American Revolution and subsequent reformation of state governments, the General Court became synonymous with the Legislative Branch of New Hampshire government. Similar to the

⁶² Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II.

process for land and ferry grants discussed in earlier chapters, the state General Court granted exclusive bridge privileges to those who petitioned.⁶³ Many of the bridges built between 1790 and 1820 were advertised as “toll bridges,” and as such required a small fee for use. The bridge built at Charlestown, New Hampshire in 1804 seemed to be a source of great pride for the engineer, as it was mentioned a number of times by Reverend Jeremy Belknap and in contemporary newspaper articles.⁶⁴ Bridges, whether they were built of wood or stone, were satisfyingly simple and permanent solutions for the people of the upper Connecticut River Valley.

The narrowing of the Connecticut River which proved beneficial to bridge construction had the opposite effect on the actual navigation of vessels up or downstream. Tight waterways were difficult to negotiate, as they often hid obstacles and varying depths of water. The Connecticut was particularly treacherous, as its narrows were known to drop in elevation, creating steep, rocky falls along the way. For a long period, the upper Connecticut River was under consideration for the installation of locks and inland canals. Locks would allow vessels to overcome the change in elevation, and would regulate the width and depth of narrows along the river. Canals would establish a network of interconnected bodies of water across northern New England, allowing faster, safer, and more direct transportation than navigation of its natural waterways. An article written for the *Boston Commercial Gazette* expresses one New Englander’s thoughts about the proposed projects:

“As it is in contemplation to remove the obstructions and make improvements in the navigations of the Connecticut River, so that the produce of the upper part of

⁶³ Nathaniel Parker, ‘State of New Hampshire’ (Amherst, 14 June 1794).

⁶⁴ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 59-60.

Newhamshire & the State of Vermont may be brought to market by that conveyance; it has been suggested that opening a passage from Buzzard's bay to Barnstable bay would greatly facilitate the conveying that produce to Boston, where it is well known that grain and pork will find a better market than at Newyork. When these commodities have descended Connecticut River to its mouth, the difference between carrying them to Newyork and bringing them to Boston, by the proposed canal, will be so trifling that a prospect of a quicker sale and higher price at Boston will invariably determine the owners to come this way."⁶⁵

Beside concerns of practicality and safety of the locks, the author of the article seems most interested in promoting the further opening of the Atlantic market to inland goods. The proposed structural improvements of waterways in New Hampshire never took place. However, improvement of the river remained a priority as the General Courts of New England continued to grow and expand.

In the midst of the American Revolution, Abner Sanger wrote in his journal "I conceit that I hear great guns at Boston but it proves to be thunder."⁶⁶ This short entry speaks to an image perhaps carried by many River Valley inhabitants that Boston, and the seacoast in general, was much closer in their minds than it proved to be geographically. If this perceived proximity to urban centers existed during years in which overland roads were nearly inaccessible, the feeling of closeness only grew as internal improvements were made to transportation and communication. The State appointed highway supervisors in each New Hampshire town. Road maintenance improved as a result, making travel easier for longer distances. Because the roads

⁶⁵ 'Barnstable and Buzzard's Bay Canal,' *Medley* (New Bedford, Massachusetts, February 1797).

⁶⁶ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*, 57.

along the Connecticut River were narrow, steep, and “clayey,” a greater network of highways allowed travelers to bypass the most dangerous of these thoroughways.⁶⁷

Increased movement of people, animals, raw materials, fine and manufactured goods, and communication between communities helped to enforce the need for constant upkeep of the inland roads. In 1792, eleven years after the establishment of the relatively local mail service by John Balch of Ashuelot, mail delivery in the Connecticut River Valley had been replaced by the creation of the United States General Post-Office.⁶⁸ The creation of a centralized means of communication signified a new era of contact between rural and urban regions of New England. However, there were many difficulties instituting such a large-scale operation. Although it was an improvement over the single post-rider system, delivery of the mail was still relatively localized. Therefore it was not always delivered in a timely or predictable manner. In 1796, the General Post-Office improved upon its delivery system in northern New England when a “mail stage” was established, allowing the transportation of mail from Hanover, New Hampshire, to Hartford, Connecticut. The Hanover to Hartford Mail Stage ran predictably—a loop every three days.⁶⁹ Standardization of communication and transportation across New Hampshire and New England made way for many other developments in the upper Connecticut River Valley, both physically and culturally.

⁶⁷ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 59-60.

⁶⁸ ‘General Post-Office,’ *Vermont Journal* (Windsor, Vermont, 15 May 1792).

⁶⁹ Reuben Sikes, Calvin Munn, and Samuel Dickenson, ‘Hartford and Hanover Mail Stage: On the West side of the Connecticut River’ (March 1796).

Between 1790 and 1800, the population of the western region of New Hampshire increased two hundred percent.⁷⁰ As the population of the upper Connecticut River Valley grew and diversified, so did the structure of towns and communities. Of this change historian David Jaffee writes, “New England town settlement entered a new stage during the 1790s. Such communities as Walpole [NH] and Windsor [VT] coalesced at the town center, with stores and shops, merchants, artisans and professionals...Walpole was transformed by the commercial and cultural revolution that swept through the rural northern United States after the Revolution.”⁷¹ The towns which had been established merely as places for farmers and woodsmen to congregate had made a transition from remote and rustic villages to “a region with a cluster of cosmopolitan towns.”⁷² The Connecticut River Valley was quickly becoming the heart of culture in inland northern New England.

Agrarianism continued to dominate the region, despite the market revolution taking place in other parts of the northern United States. David Jaffee defines the market revolution of this period as “a constellation of incremental changes occurring at different rates in different communities rather than a single cataclysmic event, but it entered into every facet of life.”⁷³ Building on the rural desire for fine and imported goods that had emerged in the years after the American Revolution, the turn of the century brought the material delicacies of a well-established society in the upper River Valley. Development of infrastructure and evolution of industry in the upper Connecticut River Valley and the United States as a whole hardly changed

⁷⁰ Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma*, 16.

⁷¹ Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, 124-125.

⁷² Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, 106.

⁷³ Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, 56.

the economic system of the region. Bartering was still a fully acceptable way to procure goods, regardless of the decorative or practical nature of the item.

As western New Hampshire became more developed, farms matured and began to produce a larger surplus of goods. Historian Christopher Clark states that this was not the result of a new form of economy in the region “but an extension of subsistence-surplus production.”⁷⁴ The people of the River Valley continued to ship their produce downriver to Boston, New York, and Hartford. In exchange for barley, flax, rye, sheep, pigs, and lumber, they were still able to obtain the imported goods that had been essential to their rural subsistence for decades.⁷⁵ The larger surplus of trade goods ushered in by the nineteenth century allowed New Hampshireites to reach even farther across trade networks to obtain non-essential and luxury items. This duality of refined goods and agrarian living was what made the culture of the upper Connecticut River Valley a remarkable part of New England.

Regional and national improvements in transportation and communication allowed rural craftsmen to more efficiently advertise their goods in urban areas and vice versa. When an order was filled, the item could be transported from the manufacturer to the customer with relative ease. By the turn of the century, beautifully made products from western New Hampshire craftspeople had joined the steady stream of natural materials, agricultural produce, and surplus homespun goods that were being brought to market. Formally trained artisans based in Boston, New York, Hartford, and Springfield, recognized the valuable resources of the upper Connecticut River

⁷⁴ Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 84.

⁷⁵ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II, 153.

Valley. Many traveled upriver to join the emerging culture of local craftspeople and artists, bringing with them the ability to handcraft fine goods without having to wait for the shipment of materials. Painters, cabinetmakers, clockmakers, cloth makers and globe makers established shops in the towns along the Connecticut and began to contribute to the material wealth and culture of western New Hampshire.⁷⁶

The influx of artisans and merchants to the River Valley at the turn of the century had brought with them new, urban living standards and a taste for the decorative arts. Fine manufactured goods from New England cities, and imported goods from England, France, the West Indies, and Asia became more common than ever before. One advertisement written by a Keene merchant asserts that “a generous price will be given in English and West-India Goods” for anyone wishing to barter.⁷⁷ Christopher Clark writes that by the year 1800, an estimated twenty-five percent of goods in use in rural regions of New England were crafted “outside their localities.”⁷⁸ International goods, such as silk, muslin, chintz, ribbon, bonnets, chocolate, fine wines, parasols, sugar, gloves, and fringed shawls were advertised by nearly every merchant as items of style, not necessity.

As life in the Connecticut River Valley progressed into the early nineteenth century, it became a society that seemed to lead a double life. Still a rural society based on the exchange of agricultural surplus, the River Valley people continued to subsist in much the same way that they had always done. But as New England communities began to invest in new infrastructure and

⁷⁶ Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, 62-106.

⁷⁷ *The New Hampshire Recorder* (21 August 1787).

⁷⁸ Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism*, 28.

economy toward the end of the eighteenth century, many rural families began to specialize in producing one craft or commodity for market to maximize their income. According to some economic historians this new way of goods production was a predecessor to the heavy industrialization that dominated the New England economy in the nineteenth century.⁷⁹

This streamlining of production did in some cases result in semi-industrial ventures in New England, such as the manufacture of fine linen by the Irish community of Londonderry, New Hampshire, or the processing of iron in Kent, Connecticut.⁸⁰ However, industrial development seems to have grown strongest along the lower Connecticut River in western Massachusetts. In the upper Connecticut River Valley, production of a single commodity more frequently appeared to have taken the form of a craft or an art. A great example of this is seen in the Dunlap family of New Hampshire. Samuel Dunlap and his apprentices crafted high chests and sideboards in a manner distinctive of northern New England craftsmen. Many of the pieces produced by Dunlap and his apprentices were used throughout New England by a diverse population.⁸¹ Thus self-taught craftsmen and artisans began to emerge along the upper Connecticut River, producing goods for both a uniquely local audience and a more diverse market.

Southern and eastern portions of New England industrialized with waterpower-generated mills and urban workforces, but the upper Connecticut River Valley society remained centered around agriculture and local handicraft. By the early years of the nineteenth century, the

⁷⁹ Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism*.

⁸⁰ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*, 215.

⁸¹ New Hampshire Historical Society Collections (Concord, NH: March 2012).

merchants and artisans of the upper Connecticut River Valley had merged into a new social class. This class was no wealthier than that of the farmers and agrarian laborers of the River Valley, but it was innately different. While farmers' wealth could be measured in land holdings, yearly produce, livestock, and "homespun" goods, merchants and artisans showed their wealth in a material sense. The merchant class did not possess the land or resources to subsist the same way as woodsmen and farming families. Their shops were located in the small town centers for the convenience of rural patrons. As they had been late settlers in the area, their landholdings were limited to the plots which had not been claimed by farmers and their sons. This restricted them to small, in-town properties.⁸² Merchants and artisans could measure their wealth in the stock of goods in their shops, the coins and banknotes in their purses, and the non-essentials and luxury items in their homes. But differences in material wealth had little to do with the life and culture of the Connecticut River Valley people. Both townspeople and homesteaders relied on the products of farm life to get through the winter.

In the early 1790s Walpole became the first community in the western part of the state to acquire a printing press. Previous to the installation of the printing press in Walpole local, national, and international news was printed in the *New-Hampshire Mercury* of Dover, the *New-Hampshire Gazette* of Portsmouth, and the *Boston Gazette* of Massachusetts. None of these publications were delivered to the Connecticut Valley on a consistent and timely basis, thus the majority of information about current events was brought by merchants or travelers.⁸³ The possibilities that the printing press offered—such as the ability to print local news as it happened

⁸² Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, 56.

⁸³ Sanger, *Very Poor and of a Lo Make*.

or the publication of advertisements—revolutionized the way that River Valley people communicated. Local newspapers made their way from one town to the next, connecting communities and building a sense of regional identity among River Valley people.

The turn of the century transition from agricultural hamlet to sophisticated town is reflected in the title of Isaiah Thomas and David Carlisle, and later Joseph Dennie's *The New Hampshire Journal and Farmers' Museum*, a publication which received great acclaim as "one of the most famous literary-bohemian clubs of the time."⁸⁴ The *Farmers' Museum* printed local and national news as well as interest pieces, letters, and philosophical essays for the enrichment of River Valley society. Other publications based in towns along the upper Connecticut River Valley soon followed; the *New Hampshire Gazette*, renamed *The Keene Sentinel*, in 1799, eventually became one of the longest-running newspapers in the country. Some historians credit the establishment of a local print culture with much of the rapid expansion of the upper Connecticut River Valley after 1800. This could very well be, as printed word represented much more than just a medium for information and entertainment.

Literature became more common in the upper Connecticut River Valley as a result of the Walpole printing press, as did the institutionalization of literary academies. In 1769, Dartmouth College was established in Hanover, New Hampshire, and became the first school on the western side of New Hampshire. Two decades later, the tradition of institutionalized education continued when Charlestown resident Lemuel Hedge established a Literary Academy in 1791. The drive behind its founding must have been strong and the resources plentiful to offer such an

⁸⁴ Roberts, *Historic Towns of the Connecticut River Valley*, 429.

establishment outside of an urban area. Young people's academies were more likely to be in Boston, Dover, Springfield, New York, or Hartford. This rurally located school was unusual in more than just this; the academy acted not only as a boarding school for young men from all across the State, but as a public school for Charlestown residents.⁸⁵ That the school served pupils in both a private and public context spoke to the evolution of education in rural areas. Dartmouth College had been established earlier in the century for the original purpose of educating and anglicizing the Native American population of the region. However, as communities developed, culture grew, and educational resources became more readily available, schools adjusted their systems and structures to match.⁸⁶

Though it remained a mere pinpoint on the map of the anglicized world, the Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire continued to grow and prosper throughout the nineteenth century. As the United States expanded its territory, improved its infrastructure, revolutionized its economy, and gained a national identity, western New Hampshire solidified its own regional identity. The upper Connecticut River Valley was a place of fertility and production in both a physical and intellectual sense. The "cosmopolitanism" which came to describe it resulted from the cultivation of regional, national, and international goods and ideas which had been planted there. The distinctive forms of literature, art, education, infrastructure, and trade which emerged along the freshets of the Connecticut allowed local and non-local cultures to come together in one place and society. Despite its far-reaching networks of trade and communication and the

⁸⁵ Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire* Vol II.

⁸⁶ Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, 68-73.

culture which developed as a result, the upper Connecticut River Valley remained true to its original identity as a community deeply connected to the land.

Conclusion

The upper River Valley existed as a great paradox in early America. On one hand, it was the heart of cultural and economic growth in northern New England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On the other hand, it was a relatively isolated region which retained much of the same character and tradition that had emerged during its time as a frontier society. Although scholars have written of the period between 1750 and 1820, this was the time when development of the upper Connecticut River Valley was most crucial to the development of New Hampshire. Whether or not Daniel Doan's description of life along the Connecticut River accurately reflects its heyday as "comparable to that of the Mississippi," there is no doubt that the Connecticut River developed an identity just as distinctive as that which would arise along the Mississippi later in the nineteenth century.⁸⁷

Development of the upper Connecticut River Valley occurred in three stages. The first took place in the years before European contact, when the Abenaki inhabited the land. The river's fertile freshets supported an abundance of wildlife and vegetation. The Abenaki took advantage of the length and breadth of the Connecticut to establish vast networks of trade and communication. Though the native population of the River Valley was small, its influence was wide.

Early Europeans who settled along the upper Connecticut continued to utilize the river and its freshets in much the same way as the Native Americans. Over time, the Europeans' use of the river evolved to fit the needs of the Old World, as opposed to the New World. New Hampshire was an English colony, and England needed raw materials. In exchange for a steady

⁸⁷ Doan, *Indian Stream Republic*, 20.

supply of natural resources, both imported and refined goods were made available to the people of the Connecticut River Valley. Though it remained a rural society on the edge of the New England frontier, it nonetheless established and retained solid connections with the rest of the western world.

At the height of its development and growth during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the upper Connecticut River Valley established itself as an entirely unique and influential region of the newly founded United States. Combining its identity as a rural community and its historic penchant for building networks of trade and communication, the upper Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire became a foil for the rest of the anglicized world. It clung to its heritage as an agrarian society, despite the market revolution that was gradually converting centers of rural economy to societies of consumers. The region relied on its farmers, craftsmen, and artisans to produce goods for market, despite the industrialization of goods production in the rest of New England. Not only was the river indispensable to the inhabitants of the region, but the establishment of settlements, industry, transportation, and communication along its banks helped it to become an anomaly in the history of New England society.

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