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## From Wilderness to Wonderland: Anglo-American Views of Ohio Country Landscapes

Bradley Allen Hayes  
*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

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FROM WILDERNESS TO WONDERLAND:  
ANGLO-AMERICAN VIEWS OF OHIO COUNTRY LANDSCAPES

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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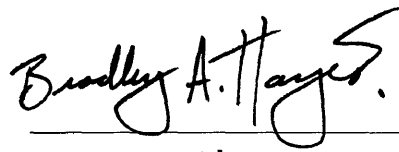
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Bradley Allen Hayes

1998

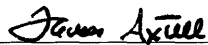
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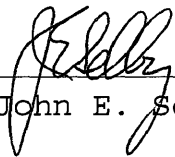
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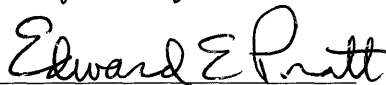
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James L. Axtell

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John E. Selby

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Edward E. Pratt

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
INTRODUCTION	2
PART I: TRAVELERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE LAND	5
PART II: BEING PUSHED AND LURED WEST	39
PART III: MAKING THE LAND THEIR OWN	52
CONCLUSION	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78
VITA	87

## PREFACE

I grew up on a few hundred acres in rural Ohio. The land there is important to me. It was more than just the place I lived, the pastures I ran across, the pond I fished. The land provided me with security, pride, happiness, bountiful food, and even the privilege of an education. The land became a part of me, and I a part of it. I was never told that I should appreciate the color of the soil, the contours of the hills, or the way the fog rises off the fields before dawn. It was simply something that I absorbed by living and working there. A profound reaction must have occurred those many times when I spilled sweat and blood on the clay beneath my feet.

I have such an aesthetic appreciation for the land that I absentmindedly assumed that my predecessors must have shared similar attitudes. This is the assumption that I test and analyze in this study. I have tried to reconstruct late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century perceptions of land. Though I do not believe this study or any other could

fully unravel the aesthetic sensibilities of the past, I do think that it offers an insight into the ways people thought about land in the late colonial and early national periods.

## ABSTRACT

"From Wilderness to Wonderland: Anglo-American Views of Ohio Country Landscapes" focuses on white attitudes toward western land in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The "Ohio country" is roughly defined as the Ohio River Valley above the Wabash River as well as the southern Lake Erie basin. The thesis is divided into three major parts, each based on a different type of primary source. Part One, "Travelers' Perceptions of the Land," examines travel narratives and considers the experiences and reactions of white travelers in the Ohio country. Part Two, "Being Lured and Pushed West," discusses promotional literature circulated in eastern markets and designed to publicize western lands to potential settlers. And Part Three, "Making the Land Their Home," examines memoirs written by some of the first settlers in northern Ohio.

The study asks the question: What did Anglo-Americans see in western landscapes and what did they value about the land? The conclusion is that they saw a multitude of things: novelties, resources, and ideologies. But most of all, they saw opportunities for personal gain.

WILDERNESS TO WONDERLAND:  
ANGLO-AMERICAN VIEWS OF OHIO COUNTRY LANDSCAPES



## INTRODUCTION

Margaret Dwight led a relatively comfortable life. She was born into one of New Haven's elite families in the aftermath of the American Revolution. But her fortunes changed when her father's untimely death forced her to float among sympathetic relatives for several years. She finally decided to seek a new life in the Ohio country. If she had known how grueling the trip to Ohio would be, she might never have attempted it. She quickly learned how difficult the traveler's lot could be. She endured rocky obstacle courses that passed for roads, sexual aggression at her lodgings, rivers without bridges, and debilitating fatigue. "I am so lame I can scarcely walk this morning — I have a mountain to walk over, notwithstanding." As Dwight moved westward, the roads got worse and the locals cruder. But as the landscape became more rugged, so did Dwight. Consequently, her perceptions of the land gradually changed from disgust to appreciation. When she began to consider the hinterland as "the very *backbone of America*," Dwight saw

the potential for agriculture to flourish on the western lands she traversed. By the time she reached "the banks of the pleasant Ohio," Dwight looked forward to the life that awaited her in the nation's youngest state.<sup>1</sup>

Margaret Dwight's story is captivating but not unique. Europeans had been exploring the Ohio Valley for more than a century before Dwight made her trip in 1810. In a little more than a hundred years, the Europeans had removed the Indian inhabitants and gained control of that land.<sup>2</sup> By the late eighteenth century, many settlers were moving around in the Ohio country. That Dwight could travel all the way from Connecticut to Warren, Ohio, in a wagon indicates that the road to Ohio was well trod. Although travelers went to Ohio with different purposes and goals, they came from similar cultural backgrounds and they encountered the same physical

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Van Horn Dwight, *A Journey to Ohio in 1810*, ed. Max Farrand (New Haven, 1913).

<sup>2</sup>Several authors have recently examined the European conquest of the Ohio country. See John A. Jakle, *Images of the Ohio Valley: A Historical Geography of Travel, 1740-1860* (New York, 1977); Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724-1774* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1992); and Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (Cambridge, 1997).

landscape. But did they perceive the land in the same way? What did they see in the land? What did the land mean to them? Addressing these questions will lead to a deeper understanding of the people who seized control of America's interior lands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## PART I: TRAVELERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE LAND

Human relationships with the natural environment are shaped by the culture in which they occur. When different cultures confront one another, relationships within each culture necessarily undergo certain adjustments. This process can be clearly seen in the changing perceptions of land during the first stages of contact between Indians and whites in the Ohio Valley. According to an Iroquois creation story, a transcendent realm, the Sky World, existed above the Earth. One day, a great tree in the Sky World was uprooted and a pregnant woman fell through the hole it left. Water covered the Earth below, so a turtle allowed Sky Woman to rest on his back. Then a muskrat swam to the bottom of the sea and collected dirt, which he brought to the surface and deposited on the turtle's back. Sky Woman used this dirt to create the "island" of North America.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Similar versions of the Iroquois creation story can be found in James Axtell, ed., *The Indian Peoples of Eastern America: A Documentary History of the Sexes* (New York, 1981) and Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The*

The Iroquois believed that everything in the landscape had spiritual power. "All things retained direct links with prototypical spirit beings in the Sky World . . . ."4 The Indians led lives that were intimately related to the landscape. Their habitats, movements, and diets were directly related to the condition of the land. The land provided sustenance and determined behavior. For Indians, the land was a living, active thing. "The life principle flowed through their world, stopping at each animate and inanimate thing."<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, Europeans had a much different cultural perception of land. According to Judeo-Christian tradition, God created the land and all of its accouterments for the benefit of humans. God commanded mankind to "'fill the earth and subdue it,'"6 and Europeans proceeded to do just that. In the process, they increasingly viewed land as an inert commodity. For example, land served as the basis for

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*Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 9-10.

<sup>4</sup>Richter, *Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 24.

<sup>5</sup>Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 46.

<sup>6</sup>Gen. 1.26-29, quote in 1.28.

political authority under feudalism. Moreover, the enclosure movement treated land as a commodity with distinct economic benefits. These social developments show how Europeans took themselves out of the landscape and declared a significant degree of autonomy over the land.<sup>7</sup>

Europeans commodified land even more as a result of the secularization that grew out of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. Consequently, Europeans who went to North America in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries took preconceived ideas about land and its uses. For them, land was "passive and manipulable."<sup>8</sup> These ideas helped colonists build an American economy based on land. After all, "land was the principal capital of seventeenth-century America."<sup>9</sup> Thus, European cultural perceptions of land, especially economic ones, influenced the colonial development of America.

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<sup>7</sup>See Roderick Nash's similar discussion of the separation of *civilization* and *wilderness* in human perceptions of the environment; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3d. ed. (New Haven, 1982), xiii.

<sup>8</sup>Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 7.

<sup>9</sup>John Frederick Martin, *Profits in the Wilderness: Entrepreneurship and the Founding of New England Towns in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 123.

As English settlers pushed westward and French traders traveled to the southern shores of the Great Lakes, they carried European ideas about the land to the Ohio country. Economic activity precipitated the encounter of Indian and European cultures in Ohio. The land there had two things to attract Europeans: resources and markets. By the 1740s, English traders frequently traveled to Ohio to trade with the Indians. George Croghan was one of the earliest traders to firmly establish himself in Ohio. In 1742, Philadelphia merchant Edward Shippen hired Croghan to deliver goods to another trader on the Ohio frontier. Croghan soon became a trader in his own right and was so successful that by 1744 he could afford to buy £700 worth of goods in Philadelphia. In that same year, Croghan established a permanent trading post at a Seneca village on the Cuyahoga River. Within a few years, Croghan's trade network stretched nearly to Detroit.<sup>10</sup>

The success of traders like Croghan upset the French, who viewed such English practices as a violation of France's right to control and profit from the Ohio country.

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<sup>10</sup>Nicholas B. Wainwright, *George Croghan: Wilderness Diplomat* (Chapel Hill, 1959), 3-7.

Convinced of English intentions to drive them from Ohio, the French sent an expedition to reclaim the region. This 1749 expedition literally staked out its claim to the land by burying several lead plates along the Ohio River and its tributaries.<sup>11</sup> The French argued that the engraved plates served "as a monument of the renewal of possession" of the entire Ohio Valley.<sup>12</sup>

Apparently the Indians followed close on the heels of the French and promptly unearthed some of the lead plates. In December 1750 a Cayuga sachem presented one of the plates to English Indian agent William Johnson. The Indians also explained that the French promised to meet all of their trading needs. Johnson cautioned the Indians not to listen to the French, who did not have their interests in mind.

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<sup>11</sup>Perhaps there is no better example of viewing land as a commodity than these Frenchmen burying markers that declared possession and right to use the land for their own purposes.

<sup>12</sup>Jean de Bonnécamps, "Account of the Voyage on the Beautiful River Made in 1749, Under the Direction of Monsieur de Celoron, by the Father Bonnecamps," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vols. (Cleveland, 1896-1901), 69: 165, 185. For a facsimile of the engraving on one plate, as well as an English translation, see E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, vol 5. (Albany, 1855), 610-11.



"The very instrument [the lead plate] you now brought me of their own writing, is sufficient of itself to convince the world of their Villainous designs . . . ." Johnson warned the Indians that the French intended to take their land and cut them off from the English, who could offer the best goods at the lowest prices.<sup>13</sup>

But of course the English also had designs on the Ohio country. In 1748 a group of land speculators known as the Ohio Company obtained permission from the British Board of Trade to settle a large tract of land in Ohio. The Ohio Company hired Christopher Gist to scout the land and record his route, soil quality, products of the land, width and depth of rivers, and how many Indians he found. Traveling during the winter of 1750-1751, Gist endured illness and frequent bad weather but found the land satisfactory. He noted that the region between the Licking and Scioto Rivers was "fine, rich, level land, with large meadows and fine clover bottoms with spacious plains, covered with wild rye; the wood chiefly large walnuts and hiccories, here and there mixed with poplars, cherry-trees, and sugar-trees." This

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<sup>13</sup>O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents*, 5: 608-10, at 609.

was just the type of land that the Ohio Company speculators could hope to sell for a handsome profit.<sup>14</sup>

If intrusions into Ohio by traders like Croghan disturbed the French, the prospect of droves of Englishmen settling on land the Ohio Company claimed was sure to upset them greatly. The French refused to give up Ohio and destroyed the English trading post at Pickawillany in 1752. In addition, the French planned to build a defensive perimeter consisting of forts at Presque Isle, Venango, Le Boeuf, and Duquesne to defend their claim to Ohio.<sup>15</sup>

France's actions in the Ohio Valley appalled Virginia's lieutenant governor, Robert Dinwiddie, who penned a condescending letter to the French and expressed astonishment at their actions. After all, he reasoned, everyone *knew* that England owned the Ohio Valley. He assured the French that he wanted nothing but peace between the two nations, just as long as the French left Ohio

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<sup>14</sup>Alfred P. James, *The Ohio Company: Its Inner History* (Pittsburgh, 1959), 10-14; Christopher Gist, "A Journal," in Thomas Pownall, *A Topographical Description of the Dominions of the United States* (1776), ed., Lois Mulkearn (Pittsburgh, 1949), 171-81, at 181 (hereafter cited as Gist, "Journal").

<sup>15</sup>Wainright, *George Croghan*, 50-51.

immediately. Dinwiddie appointed a young militia officer, George Washington, to deliver his message to the French. In the late fall of 1753, Washington and his guide, Christopher Gist, set off for Ohio. When Washington arrived at Fort Le Boeuf, the French commander, Legardeur de St. Piere, offered a clear and curt response: "As to the Summons you send me to retire, I do not think myself obliged to obey it . . . ."16

Thus, the land became a setting for the confrontation between two imperial powers. But the land was also an integral part of that confrontation. Both powers wanted the land and the fortunes they believed it had to offer. Thus, western land served as a stage for profound cultural, imperial, colonial, and national contests in which the victors won the right to continue playing a part on that stage. While all this was happening, many Europeans and Americans traveled throughout the region for various reasons.

After the traders, some of the earliest travelers in Ohio were land speculators and their agents. Land

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<sup>16</sup>George Washington, *The Journal of Major George Washington* . . . (1754), facsimile edition with introduction and notes by James R. Short and Thaddeus W. Tate, Jr. (Williamsburg, Va., 1959), 3-4, 25-26, at 27.

speculators acquired title to large unsettled sections of the frontier with the hope of selling land at a steep markup. Therefore, when the Ohio Company sent Christopher Gist to Ohio in 1750, he had instructions to look for land that would attract settlers. He looked for soil that could be tilled, rivers that could be navigated, and meadows that could be grazed. Gist also paid special attention to the Indians he met in Ohio. He wanted to know how many of them lived there and if they were strong English allies. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the Indians in Ohio were still strong enough to create significant problems for any frontier settlement that they opposed.<sup>17</sup>

By the opening decade of the nineteenth century, some elite land speculators traveled to the Ohio Valley to personally inspect their lands. In 1809 Joshua Gilpin went from Philadelphia to western Pennsylvania where he owned a sizable tract of land. All along his route, Gilpin took note of soil composition, mineral deposits, and topography.

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<sup>17</sup>Gist, "Journal," 174-75, 177-78, 181-82, 191-92. The danger of Indians on the frontier frightened Gist so much that he refused to go all the way to the falls of the Ohio, where he suspected that Indians allied to the French were gathering (193).

He frequently asked innkeepers about local land values. Presumably, Gilpin was collecting information to help him evaluate his own land claims. As he moved further west, Gilpin lamented that "all now becomes rude solitary, the roughest wilderness composed of high hills covered with forests."<sup>18</sup> But when he reached his own land, Gilpin's attitude changed. As he neared his land, Gilpin got out of his carriage and "looked over the rich and delightful country of Red Stone [on the Monongahela River] watered by the headstreams of the Ohio."<sup>19</sup>

Naturalists and scientists composed a second group of early travelers in the Ohio country. These researchers traveled to the western frontier to collect data regarding the species and distinguishing characteristics of the land. For instance, following the War of 1812, the Botanical Society of Liverpool commissioned a Scot, John Bradbury, to study the flora of America's interior. On his way to

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<sup>18</sup>Joshua Gilpin, "Journal of a Tour from Philadelphia thro the Western Counties of Pennsylvania in the Months of September and October, 1809," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 50(1926), 167.

<sup>19</sup>Gilpin, "Journal of a Tour," *PMHB* 51(1927), 178-82, at 182.

Illinois, Bradbury passed through northern Ohio and took note of what he saw. "In a state of nature," he wrote, "these prairies are covered with a luxuriant growth of grass and herbaceous plants, affording a most abundant supply of food for the stock of the new settler . . . ." The Botanical Society supposedly hired Bradbury to study the land's botany, not to assess its potential for agricultural development. Even though few settlers yet lived in northern Ohio, Bradbury could not help looking at the land through their eyes.<sup>20</sup>

Naturalist Thomas Nuttall also traveled to Ohio. An Englishman born in 1786, Nuttall emigrated to the United States in 1818. He became interested in American botany and decided to take a western research trip. He left Philadelphia in October 1818 and traveled toward the Ohio Valley in the Pennsylvania backcountry. Though Nuttall was a botanist who traveled west to study flora, he became enamored with topography and was irritated when plants got in the way. He complained that "most of the cimes,

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<sup>20</sup>John Bradbury, "Travels in the Interior of America . . ." (1819), in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels*, 32 vols. (Cleveland, 1904-1907), 5: 9, 11, 294-95, at 294.

terraces, and piles of rocks lose their effect beneath the umbrageous forest which envelops them, and which indeed casts a gloomy mantling over the whole face of nature."

Nuttall's commentary is perhaps less revealing of his dedication to botany than it is of the terrain's influence on those who attempted to traverse it. The Appalachian Mountains refused to be ignored.<sup>21</sup>

Religious missionaries represent a third group that traveled in the Ohio country. These individuals hoped to take Christianity to Indians living in the West. John Heckewelder was one of the most notable missionaries. Heckewelder's work began in 1762 when he went to Ohio to help transfer some Delaware Indians to a mission on the Muskingum River. For the next eight years, Heckewelder frequently traveled to western Pennsylvania, where he learned the Indians' language and customs. His experience prepared him for fifteen years of missionary work with the Indians settled in the Moravian villages at Schönbrun and Gnadenhütten on the Muskingum River. During his time in the

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<sup>21</sup>Thomas Nuttall, "A Journal of Travels into the Arkansa Territory, During the Year 1819 . . ." (1821), *Early Western Travels*, 13: 11-12, 35, 44-45, at 41.

Ohio Valley, Heckewelder developed an appreciation for the land. For instance, the area around Mingo Junction never ceased to amaze him.<sup>22</sup> When passing through that area in 1773, he took note of the large orchards and beautiful land. Then in 1788 he declared it to be "the largest and most beautiful stretch of bottom land on the Ohio for 100 miles around."<sup>23</sup> Despite such favorable remarks, Heckewelder did not consider the Ohio country a land of milk and honey. His travels taught him what a harsh place it could be. Nevertheless, he turned to his religious faith even under the worst conditions and explained that "we depended upon our dear Lord who could help us under all circumstances."<sup>24</sup>

Religious motives also drew New Jersey minister David Jones to the Ohio Valley. Jones justified such an expensive and difficult journey by explaining "that the gospel is to be preached to all nations, and that some out of all shall

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<sup>22</sup>Mingo Junction is approximately twenty miles north of present-day Wheeling, West Virginia, on the Ohio River.

<sup>23</sup>Paul A. W. Wallace, ed., *The Travels of John Heckewelder in America* (Pittsburgh, 1958), 223.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 107-108, 217, 221, at 213; Albert G. Rau, "Heckewelder, John Gottlieb Ernestus," in Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 8 (New York, 1932), 495-96.



join in the praises of the Lamb of GOD." In early summer of 1772 he went to Fort Pitt and then down the Ohio River. He noticed that the land had numerous attributes, such as fertile soil, fine timber, and mines, which he predicted would become valuable assets to the colony. Along the way, Jones took every opportunity to preach to the scattered settlers he encountered. Jones saw the spread of white settlement as a religious crusade against the wilderness and noted that "it was truly pleasing to behold the worship of God here, in a land so lately overspread with heathenish darkness and universal ignorance of God."<sup>25</sup>

Jones met with the Delaware Indians living on the Ohio River. He found them extremely cordial and was pleased to learn that they had already heard about Jesus. Jones speculated that the Moravians or their Indians introduced the Delawares to Christianity. While with the Delawares, Jones heard one Indian profess that God provided good things. This Indian's remark delighted him because Jones realized "that man is more prone to forget the providence of

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<sup>25</sup>David Jones, *A Journal of Two Visits Made to Some Nations of Indians on the West Side of the River Ohio, in the Years 1772 and 1773* (Burlington, [N. J.], 1774), 3-12, at 3, 11.

God, than his existence." Ironically, Jones did not realize that even he overlooked what might be considered the greatest evidence of God's providence: the land. That God created the land was a basic tenet of Christian theology. Jones surely would not have denied that God made the land, but that was not what he thought about as he traveled. He focused on the souls of men, not on land.<sup>26</sup>

Just as people went to Ohio for different reasons, they viewed the land in different ways and saw different things there. This variety defies any attempt to reconstruct a unified attitude toward the land. A single, coherent attitude never existed. Instead, individuals viewed the land on several levels.<sup>27</sup>

First, travelers viewed the land on a utilitarian level. They looked for features that served some definite purpose, and agriculture was the purpose at the forefront of most travelers' minds. They knew that agriculture could be the basis of a frontier economy during the initial stages of settlement in the Ohio Valley. Though land had to be good

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 14-20, at 15.

<sup>27</sup>For a similar discussion of multiple levels of perception, see Jakle, *Images of the Ohio Valley*, 9.

enough to sustain farmers who moved there, most travelers thought of more than subsistence farming. They saw the land's potential to support thriving agricultural communities. Land speculator Joshua Gilpin rejoiced at the sight of rich, fertile soil that required only "the hedge rows, and finished neatness of English farming to make the country one of the finest agricultural districts in the world." Thus, Gilpin assumed that the land was an agricultural cornucopia composed of fields just waiting to be defined and opened by the plow.<sup>28</sup>

Another feature that travelers noticed, one closely related to agriculture, was timber. Farmers relied on wood for fuel, building material, and other products such as maple sugar. Moreover, the type of trees that grew in an area indicated the soil's quality. While surveying northwestern Ohio for the Connecticut Land Company, Seth Pease was happy to find "Choice Land" covered with chestnut, maple, elm, ash, butternut, hickory, red oak, white oak, and cherry. Hardwoods like these seemed to mark the richest

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<sup>28</sup>Gilpin, "Journal of a Tour," *PMHB* 50(1926), 72.

land.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the need for decent stands of timber, agriculturally minded travelers also looked for good meadows. In addition to providing fodder for livestock, grasslands also made the job of establishing a farmstead much easier. The Scottish botanist John Bradbury mused that northern Ohio was the best place to settle for those who did not want to chop trees all day. But a good meadow offered much more than a break from the ax and bucksaw. A prairie could be converted to productive agriculture much sooner than a forest. In order to attract settlers to the Ohio Valley, promoter Manasseh Cutler advertised large meadows with extremely rich soil that could be quickly and easily cultivated because there was no covering thicket to stand in the farmer's way.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Bradbury, "Travels in the Interior of America," *Early Western Travels*, 5: 295-96; [Manasseh Cutler], *An Explanation of the Map Which Deliniates That Part of the Federal Lands, Comprehended between Pennsylvania West Line, the Rivers Ohio and Scioto, and Lake Erie . . .* (Salem, Mass., 1787), 15; Jones, *Journal of Two Visits*, 9; Seth Pease, "Journal of Seth Pease on the Reserve and at Cleaveland from June 6, 1797 - Oct. 25, 1797," *Western Reserve Historical Society Tract No. 94*, 69.

<sup>30</sup>Henry Bartlett, "Henry Bartlett's Diary to Ohio and Kentucky, 1805," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*

Travelers also looked for mineral deposits, especially salt. Cattle required salt in their diet, so anyone planning to have a herd in Ohio would need to find an ample supply of that commodity. Settlers were also told about Ohio's abundant deposits of building stone, iron ore, lead, and clay.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, coal fields interested several travelers. While traveling up the Muskingum River, John Heckewelder noticed "a fine mount of stone coal, lying there like a brick wall."<sup>32</sup> Even though he was supposed to be studying Ohio's botany, John Bradbury thought about the coal fields under Ohio and criticized settlers for worrying about farming so much that they lost sight of just how valuable that coal made their land.<sup>33</sup>

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19(1911), 78; Bradbury, "Travels in the Interior of America," *Early Western Travels*, 5: 295; [Cutler], *An Explanation of the Map*, 10.

<sup>31</sup>Cutler boasted about all of these resources when trying to attract settlers to Ohio. In particular, he explained that Ohio's clay could be used to start a ceramics industry. See [Cutler], *An Explanation of the Map*, 7-8.

<sup>32</sup>Wallace, ed., *Travels of John Heckewelder*, 110.

<sup>33</sup>John Allais Jakle, *Salt and the Initial Settlement of the Ohio Valley* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1967), 1-2; Gilpin, "Journal of a Tour," *PMHB* 51(1927), 178; Bradbury, "Travels in the Interior of America," *Early Western Travels*, 5: 294-95.

A final utilitarian element that travelers noticed in the land was perhaps the one that most directly concerned them: travel conditions. The easiest way to travel in the Ohio country was by river. Individuals could travel by foot or wagon, but if agricultural goods were to reach markets on the east side of the Appalachians, they had to go by water in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This need explains why land promoter Manasseh Cutler went to great lengths to describe the various water routes that could be used for transportation to and from Ohio. The most valuable land was reasonably arable and located near a good, navigable river. The attention paid to soil composition, vegetation, mineral deposits, building resources, and transportation suggests that travelers saw more in the land than just what was there. They thought not only of what was but also of what could be, namely prosperous development that would require these resources.<sup>34</sup>

Second, travelers viewed the land on an ideological level. In the land they saw justification or inspiration

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<sup>34</sup>[Cutler], *An Explanation of the Map*, 5-8; Thomas R. Joynes, "Memoranda Made by Thomas R. Joynes on a Journey to the States of Ohio and Kentucky, 1810," *William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine*, 1st. ser., 10 (1901-02), 158.

for their ideological beliefs and aspirations. Even though travelers rarely expressed religious views regarding the land, these notions occasionally appeared in their experiences. For instance, Joshua Gilpin realized that the land he traveled through was not only well suited for agriculture, it was also fertile ground for evangelical religion. "Certainly nothing of natural situation," he wrote, "can contribute more to enthusiasm than the wildness, the gloom, and the solitude" of the wilderness near the Monongahela River in western Pennsylvania.<sup>35</sup> A Methodist camp meeting just held in the area reminded Gilpin of John the Baptist, who went into the wilderness to baptize the people of Judea and foretell the coming of Christ. Thus, Gilpin's perception of the land was interwoven with his larger worldview.<sup>36</sup>

Travelers also viewed the land in the ideological terms of American growth and prosperity. According to these views, settlers moved west, established a toehold in the untamed wilderness, and gradually conquered that wilderness

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<sup>35</sup>Gilpin, "Journal of a Tour," *PMHB* 51(1927), 369.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 369; Mark 1.4-8.

by transforming it into a productive, civilized landscape. A refined English gentleman, Adlard Welby, traveled to the Ohio Valley in 1821 to see the land he had read about in London newspapers. Although the scenery and agriculture of the frontier impressed Welby, the inhabitants did not. "Man alone here stands an object of disgust," he wrote. He considered the settlers only slightly more civilized than the Indians; the difference was that settlers wore clothes. Welby looked forward to the day when the next generation of Easterners would bring "the letters and refined manners, which alone it [the land] wants to make it perhaps one of the most desirable countries of the globe."<sup>37</sup>

Welby and others saw the birthplace of a new nation in the land's physical properties. The resources of the land represented the economic basis that would sustain a nation. Even more important, the land would play a vital role in determining the nation's character. "Besides the opportunity of opening a new and unexplored region for the

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<sup>37</sup>Welby, "A Visit to North America . . ." (1822), *Early Western Travels*, 11: 13-14 (see this introduction for information on Welby's social status and reasons for writing), 12: 187-88. Welby's impressions of the Ohio Valley seemed to be a metaphor for his general attitude toward the young United States.



range of natural history, botany and the medical science, there will be one advantage which no other part of the world can boast . . . that, in order to begin *right*, there will be no *wrong* habits to combat . . . there is no rubbish to remove, before you can lay the foundation."<sup>38</sup> Thus, perceptions of the land became intertwined with notions of civic virtue. The fresh, unsettled land of the frontier bore none of the scars of corruption and therefore provided an opportunity to build an ideal, virtuous community.<sup>39</sup>

Even though eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century travelers tended to be pragmatic in their views of the land, scenic vistas and natural wonders did not fail to move them. These picturesque impressions constitute a third level on which travelers viewed the land. For instance, when Margaret Dwight reached the top of Allegheny Mountain in western Pennsylvania, she stopped complaining about the roads, weather, and her travel companions long enough to take in the dramatic view. From the top of the mountain she

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<sup>38</sup>[Cutler], *An Explanation of the Map*, 20.

<sup>39</sup>For a discussion of natural resources providing an economic basis for frontier settlements, see Jakle, *Images of the Ohio Valley*, 65.

could look across the next five or six ranges. The view left her speechless, an event that was probably quite rare.<sup>40</sup>

Like Dwight, Joshua Gilpin found the mountaintop vistas of the Appalachians spectacular. When Gilpin and his family reached the summit of the westernmost Appalachian range, they enjoyed looking "over the rich and delightful country" that stretched out in front of them. Gilpin had heard about this view, but it far surpassed his expectations.<sup>41</sup> Gilpin swooned that the scene was "the most rich and sublime view I ever beheld — we alighted from our carriage and stood on the pinnacle of the mountain where the trees did not intercept our view the whole country westward was spread out before us to a prodigious extent . . . ." Of course, Gilpin's rapturous impression was probably colored by the sizable portion of that land that belonged to him.

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<sup>40</sup>Dwight was a feisty young woman who rarely concealed her opinions. Margaret Van Horn Dwight, *A Journey to Ohio in 1810*, ed. Max Farrand (New Haven, 1913), 45-46.

<sup>41</sup>That Gilpin and other travelers had heard about the landscape indicates that they probably did not approach the frontier as an exotic, mysterious place. Depending upon the accuracy of the accounts they heard, there is good reason to believe that most travelers went west with an understanding of what they would find there.

Travelers rarely ventured too far from their practical concerns.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the panoramic scenery that dazzled travelers, they also enjoyed the numerous novelties and natural wonders they encountered. In this sense, even the earliest travelers acted much like tourists. They flocked to the most popular destinations, complained that those sites did not live up to their expectations, and took away all the souvenirs they could carry.

For those traveling from New England and New York, the most common route to Ohio passed Niagara Falls. As early as the eighteenth century, this cataract had a widespread reputation for grandeur. "The Falls of Niagra are certainly the greatest natural curiosity that I have ever seen," exclaimed Christian Schultz after visiting the falls in 1807. But he was disappointed that the roar of the plunging river was not as loud as he had been led to believe. Schultz timidly ventured to the edge of a rock hanging out over the precipice, then he scampered down to the bottom of the falls. When he looked back at the dangling rock, he

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<sup>42</sup>Gilpin, "Journal of a Tour," *PMHB* 51(1927), 358, quotes on 182.

felt queasy about how dangerous it seemed. After regaining his composure, Schultz decided that he would like to try walking along a ledge behind the falls. He had gone only a short distance along the ledge when he was overcome with panic. He retreated a few steps and pulled himself together before proceeding. But again his anxiety brought him to a standstill. Possibly to warn others but most likely to sooth his own injured pride, Schultz rationalized that the falls must disturb the air pressure in such a way as to make it impossible for any living thing to pass behind them.<sup>43</sup>

Another attraction for travelers was Elephant Bone Lick, a site on the Ohio River just below the mouth of the Great Miami River. Elephant Bone Lick was apparently a salt lick that attracted herds of animals passing through the Ohio Valley. Travelers found enormous bones, teeth, and tusks lying around this location. The novelty of these relics fascinated them. The French who traveled through the area burying their lead plates in 1749 knew about this place. Father Bonnécamps regretted that he did not have a chance to go down and see the bones. When the English

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<sup>43</sup>Christian Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage* . . . (New York, 1810), 62-67, at 62.

traveler Nicholas Cresswell visited Elephant Bone Lick in 1775, he was delighted to find a ten-pound tooth. Cresswell treasured his souvenir of the Ohio country. Following an accident with one of his traveling companions, Cresswell fumed, "A D — d Irish rascal has broken a piece of my Elephant tooth, put me in a violent passion, can write no more."<sup>44</sup>

Inflammable air was another novelty that never ceased to amuse early travelers in the Ohio country. On two separate occasions in his travels along the southern Lake Erie shore, Seth Pease stopped to take notice of springs that emitted "Inflammable Air." These combustible phenomena captured Pease's fascination and focused his attention on the land. He got a kick out of holding a candle to the surface of the spring and watching the rising bubbles burst into flames. While traveling through Kentucky below the falls of the Kenhawa River, Thomas Joynes stumbled across

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<sup>44</sup>John Jennings, "'Journal from Fort Pitt to Fort Chartres in the Illinois Country,' March-April, 1766," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 31(1907), 147-48; Bonnécamps, "Account of the Voyage on the Beautiful River," *Jesuit Relations*, 69: 189; Nicholas Cresswell, *The Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, 1774-1777* (New York, 1924), 88-89, at 89.

some burning springs that emitted inflammable air with considerable force. The ignited air burned with a bright flame until extinguished. Joynes's burning springs, and probably Pease's as well, were actually sulphur springs. The attention paid to these and other natural wonders indicates that even the most pragmatic travelers could not resist being amused and fascinated, if only momentarily, by the land and its occasional strangeness.<sup>45</sup>

If different things could be seen in the land — fertile farmland, opportunities for civic rebirth, or natural curiosities — then qualitative assessments of the land were bound to be equally diverse. Travelers based their judgments of the land on their own personal relationship with it. Why they traveled and what they wanted determined how they evaluated the land. For instance, when George Washington traveled to Fort Le Boeuf in 1753 to request that the French vacate the Ohio Valley, he went as a military officer. Washington understood that

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<sup>45</sup>Pease, "Journal of Seth Pease from Cleaveland to Canadaigua, N. Y., Oct. 18 - Nov. 1, 1796," *WRHS Tract No. 94*, 42; Joynes, "Memoranda," *WMQ*, 1st. ser., 10 (1901-02), 151; Pease, "Journal of Seth Pease on the Reserve and at Cleaveland from June 6, 1797 - Oct. 25, 1797," *WRHS Tract No. 94*, 108.

the French presence in Ohio might lead to war and he probably knew that his next trip to Ohio would be with an army. Therefore, he viewed the land from a strategic perspective. He found what he considered good land at the fork of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers where the terrain was well timbered and elevated. This cover meant that there would be plenty of building material and a defensible site for raising a fort to control both rivers. To Washington, good land meant land with strategic value in a conflict with the French.<sup>46</sup>

For those traveling without military goals, the most important factor for evaluating land was its suitability for agriculture. This is what Christopher Gist looked for when the Ohio Company sent him to select land that it could sell for a profit. The Ohio Company's customers would be farmers. Gist had these settlers in mind when he described the land on the Ohio River as "fine rich, level land, well timbered . . . well watered . . . full of beautiful natural meadows . . . it wants nothing but cultivation to make it a

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<sup>46</sup>Jakle, *Images of the Ohio Valley*, 159; Washington, *Journal of Major George Washington*, 4.

most delightful country."<sup>47</sup> These features of the landscape had little inherent value for Gist; instead, they had instrumental value as the necessary components for an agricultural settlement.

Gist's thinking implied that land did not have much value at all until Europeans settled and cultivated it. Another land speculator, Joshua Gilpin, agreed that the beauty of the land increased as settlements grew. He described the process by which pioneers moved into an area, girdled enough trees to open up some fields, and then cut down those girdled trees as they needed the lumber. "It requires perhaps twenty years before the land is completely cleared to the eye but tho the [girdled] timber thus standing certainly depreciates the beauty of the scene it is by no means as unsightly as may have been supposed as the farm houses, fields, and meadows peeping from among the trees give a pleasing idea of the progress of improvement in the forests."<sup>48</sup> Thus, Gilpin saw an aesthetic beauty in the land, a beauty being lessened by all the girdled carcasses

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<sup>47</sup>Gist, "Journal," 184-85.

<sup>48</sup>Gilpin, "Journal of a Tour," *PMHB* 51(1927), 176.



still cluttering the fields. Despite the mess, the land retained its appeal because of its settlement and cultivation, which were themselves deemed attractive.

If good land conformed to travelers' needs and goals, then bad land failed to satisfy their aspirations. If land lacked the attributes that typically characterized good land, such as sufficient timber, grassland, water, and fertile soil, then it was unsuitable for supporting an agricultural settlement. For example, when traveling through northern Kentucky in 1805, Henry Bartlett complained about the terrible land that was broken, rocky, overrun with beech trees, and poorly watered. Because farming such land would be extremely difficult, it was bad land.<sup>49</sup>

Travelers also considered land bad if it posed immediate problems. Bad land was land that made travel difficult. When Margaret Dwight left Mansfield, New Jersey, on her way to Warren, Ohio, she passed into the hinterland where travel was less common and the roads poorly maintained and sometimes nonexistent. Dwight felt that she "had come

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<sup>49</sup>Bartlett, "Henry Bartlett's Diary," *VMHB* 19(1911), 74-76.

to the end of the habitable part of the globe."<sup>50</sup> Rocky roads capable of jarring away most of a traveler's sense of wonder were not the only obstacles that could lessen a traveler's appreciation for the land. When he traveled down the stretch of the Ohio River just below Mingo Junction, missionary John Heckewelder found the river and surrounding land downright beautiful. This happened to be one of the straightest stretches on the Ohio. Once he swung up into the Muskingum River, the land became more hilly and the water route more crooked, forcing him to lament that "our beautiful landscape disappeared . . . ."<sup>51</sup> It was easier to appreciate the land when one was not fighting against it.<sup>52</sup>

Travelers' goals determined their value judgments. They evaluated the land on the same multiple levels on which they viewed it. Land could have a utilitarian value, as it did for Gist, who found a certain section of land suitable for agriculture. Conversely, the land had a negative utilitarian value for Dwight because it made traveling a

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<sup>50</sup>Dwight, *Journey to Ohio*, ed. Max Farrand, 18.

<sup>51</sup>Wallace, ed., *Travels of John Heckewelder*, 108.

<sup>52</sup>Jakle, *Images of the Ohio Valley*, 47.

grueling experience for her. Moreover, Gilpin assigned ideological value to the land because it revealed evidence of progress and prosperity. Thus, the multiple values that travelers assigned to land were constructions based on individual experiences and objectives.

Romantic views of the land were noticeably absent from the experiences of early travelers in the Ohio Valley. They simply did not swoon with sentiment as they encountered the land. Several reasons explain this reticence. First, they saw the land as a commodity, not a romantic paradise. Second, they went to Ohio for practical reasons, not romantic ones. Father Bonnécamps traveled through the Ohio Valley on an expedition undertaken to re-establish France's imperial hegemony in the region. Seth Pease went to survey the Western Reserve. These people had specific jobs to do; few of them were sightseers or romantics. Third, traveling was neither pleasant nor romantic. "We have concluded," quipped Margaret Dwight, "the reason so few are willing to return from the Western country, is not that the country is so good, but because the journey is so bad."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Dwight, *Journey to Ohio*, ed. Max Farrand, 36-37.

In addition, travelers endured tiring, miserable, and hazardous conditions. Travelers, especially those in northern Ohio near the Cuyahoga River, had to slosh through mucky swamps and battle swarms of gnats and mosquitoes. Debilitating bouts of dysentery awaited many of these travelers. Moreover, they often managed to get themselves thoroughly lost in the woods. During the eighteenth century, the fear of getting lost accompanied an equally disconcerting fear of being killed by Indians. Traveling conditions clearly affected travelers' perceptions of the land. In the early days of his trip down the Ohio River in 1775, Nicholas Cresswell closely examined the land, but as he ran out of food, his thoughts turned almost exclusively to his deprivation: "Our provisions almost done . . . our feet so tender by standing continually wet . . . the small quantity of provision we have is swarming with maggots." Under such conditions it is not surprising that travelers like Cresswell had little concern for sentimental, romantic notions.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Pease, "Journal of Seth Pease on the Reserve and at Cleaveland from June 6, 1797 - Oct. 25, 1797," *WRHS Tract No. 94*, 79; Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage*, 160-64; Cresswell, *Journal of Nicholas Cresswell*, 87-94, at 94; on

For the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century traveler, the land was more than just earth, rock, and water; it was also an interactive construction, a lived experience. Europeans had developed agricultural, economic, and social institutions that treated land as a commodious resource available for use and exploitation. As Europeans took an increasingly active role in the Ohio country after the 1740s, they brought with them notions of land as a commodity. After all, they primarily went to Ohio to pursue economic and military goals. Nevertheless, those who traveled to Ohio did not view the land in a single way. They perceived it and evaluated it on multiple levels. An individual traveler might see the same landscape in both utilitarian and ideological terms. Therefore, the land was as much in the minds of travelers as it was beneath their feet.

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the effect of traveling conditions on perceptions of land, see Jakle, *Images of the Ohio Valley*, 47.

## PART II: BEING LURED AND PUSHED WEST

Even after the guns of the American Revolution fell silent, shockwaves reverberated on the western frontier. The Revolution created a small, shaky republic where a large, stable empire had been. For a quarter century that empire restrained its subjects from rushing westward lest they incite a bloody, costly Indian war that would disrupt trade and threaten settlements. Though the British were never successful at stopping the steady stream of white folks into the backcountry, they at least made an effort to slow them down. But after the redcoats left, Americans salivated at the prospect of grabbing the enticing land that lay across the Appalachians.

Promotional literature circulating in the East encouraged Americans to move west. Most of this propaganda was generated by land speculators who claimed sizable tracts of western land they hoped to sell to settlers. Not surprisingly, speculators portrayed the Ohio Valley as a land flowing with milk and honey, a veritable paradise free

of blemish. Their descriptions offered settlers a safe and prosperous lifestyle. They painted such a rosy picture that one wonders whether they were believable even to their contemporaries. Unfortunately, there is no reliable way to prove that settlers were reading, or that the illiterate were encountering, the arguments presented in promotional literature. But there are several reasons to suspect that ideas found in promotional literature reflected generally-accepted attitudes toward the West. First, writings from different promoters bear striking similarity to one another, which suggests that they spoke to a common audience with relatively uniform tastes. Second, the values expressed by promoters closely correspond to those found in accounts left by travelers who went west before and after the Revolution. And third, sources other than those written explicitly by speculators echo the propagandists' thoughts. Taken together, the ideas expressed in the promotional literature constitute a significant body of thought that served to shape perceptions of the West.

Like all good salesmen, authors of promotional literature tried to convince their audience that western land was a limited commodity that should be bought

immediately. They implied that the reticent buyer might miss a chance to acquire choice land in the West. The best land was always for sale just then, and if buyers wanted it they had to act quickly. For example, in 1798 an outfit of land speculators known as the Erie Company distributed a broadside describing "the part of the Tract [the Connecticut Western Reserve] now offered for sale, being large and much diversified in its situation," and claimed that "there is no part of the lands in the whole Tract, which are more inviting to settlers." In other words, it does not get any better than this; do not wait; act now. Through their writing, promoters tried to stimulate a land rush. The secret to successful land speculation was to grab the land and then sell it as rapidly as possible. Therefore, speculators tried gimmicks, such as coyly pretending to sell only a little land, to encourage sales. The promoter's job was to convince people to buy land immediately. Thus, promotional literature both created a demand and offered to satisfy it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Erie Company, *Lands in New-Connecticut* (Norwich, Conn., 1798); Sylvester Fuller, *New Ohio Lands, and Title Indisputable* (Providence, R. I., 1799); G[ilbert] Imlay, A



To facilitate the land rush that promoters tried to create, they also enticed potential buyers with easy credit. Buyers could have the land now and pay for it later. George Washington was one of the largest land speculators of the eighteenth century. Following the Revolution, Washington hoped to lease out about thirty thousand acres in the Ohio Valley. He offered contracts ranging from 10 years to 999 years. To make his offer seem more attractive, Washington promised to exempt a leasee from the first three years' rent in return for clearing five acres per hundred acres leased. He also allowed leasees to pay the rent in currency or crops. If financial considerations worried settlers, this type of offer might convince them to move west anyway. They needed no money down, and if the land was as good as they were told, they could easily grow enough to pay the rent. It was a great deal for Washington because renters formed settlements and improved his land, which made it more valuable. The federal government also recognized the advantage of offering easy credit. When Congress began selling land in the Ohio Valley, it required buyers to pay

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*Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America . . .*, 2 vols. (New York, 1793), I: 41.

only one-twentieth of the purchase price. Buyers could take up to a year to pay the rest. Promoters convinced people that if they wanted good land, they had to buy it immediately, even if they did not have enough money. They made the land seem easy to buy and necessary to have.<sup>56</sup>

Promoters made many promises to their audience. Successful propaganda makes promises that address existing beliefs and desires. Land promoters understood this and were careful to include promises and descriptions that would appeal to anyone thinking about buying land in trans-Appalachia. In other words, they told people what they wanted to hear. Most buyers wanted to know about land's suitability for agriculture. If they planned to settle in the West, buyers wanted to be sure that they could subsist on the land. Moreover, settlers who looked ahead to prosperous agrarian communities sought land that could support such development. In addition, those who bought land on credit depended on their land to produce a crop sufficient to cover their debts. As a result, promoters

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<sup>56</sup>George Washington, *Mount-Vernon, April 2, 1784* (Alexandria, Va., 1784); U.S. Treasury Department, *Public Notice* (Philadelphia, August 8, 1796).

addressed these concerns with enticing descriptions of the land's fertility. They advertised enormous yields, such as sixty to one-hundred bushels of corn per acre, which would astonish farmers familiar with New England's rocky, less-productive terrain. According to army engineer Thomas Hutchins, the West was an area that "for healthfulness, fertility of soil, and variety of productions, is not, perhaps, surpassed by any on the habitable globe." Though there was surely some rich land in Ohio, not all of it was arable. But rather than admit that some plots were not suitable for agriculture, promoters like Washington took a different tack. They suggested that settlers think about livestock instead of crops. If it could not be planted, they should use it for pasture. In either case, promoters assured their audience that the land would support agricultural enterprise.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to good, arable land, settlers sought security in the West. They wanted clear, indisputable title to land near stable settlements. They wanted to start new

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<sup>57</sup>Fuller, *New Ohio Lands*; Thomas Hutchins, *A Topographical Description . . .* (Boston, 1787), i; Imlay, *Topographical Description*, I: 53; Washington, *Mount-Vernon*, April 2, 1784.

lives on the frontier, but they did not want to leave civilization behind. Promoters assured settlers that the West was not a chaotic wilderness bereft of order, law, and community. But after the Revolution, western land titles were admittedly questionable. Various states, such as Virginia and Connecticut, were still trying to sort out what belonged to them. Therefore, individual land claims were decidedly unstable. What you owned today might belong to someone else tomorrow. As a result, when advertising his western lands, Washington went out of his way to emphasize that he had held undisputed title to his land for over a decade. Thus, anyone buying land from Washington could be assured that the title was secure and would not be declared invalid. Moving to the frontier was a momentous decision, so settlers wanted to make sure they had something to hold onto once they got there.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to land titles, settlers had several other reasons to worry about moving west. During the eighteenth century, Indian attacks were a real possibility. Many Indians saw white settlements as encroachments on their

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<sup>58</sup>Washington, *Mount-Vernon, April 2, 1784.*

land, and the Indians were not about to give up territory without a fight. Moreover, maintaining a solitary existence in the wilderness must have seemed disconcerting to many settlers. For these reasons, promoters encouraged migration to the West by describing the viable settlements already there. Presumably, there would be safety and security in numbers. "Instead of being serenaded with howlings of wild beasts, and horrid yells of savages, which ye were warned to expect, on the delightful banks of the Muskingum ye are favoured with the blandishments of polished social intercourse."<sup>59</sup> Thus, the West was not totally isolated from established eastern settlements nor were western settlements void of civilization. Moreover, promoters wanted their audience to see that the frontier possessed an incredible potential to expand and prosper. "The Lands on the various

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<sup>59</sup>Solomon Drown, *An Oration Delivered at Marietta, April 7, 1789, in Commemoration of the Settlement formed by the Ohio Company* (Worcester, Mass., 1789), 9. Drown's piece reveals one difficulty in dealing with promotional literature. Was his *Oration* published for the purpose of promoting western land? Seemingly it was not. It was not a broadside explicitly encouraging settlers to buy Ohio land. Instead, it was simply a speech given to settlers already in the West. But it was printed and, one can assume, distributed in the East. And because the tone of the piece certainly celebrates the virtues of trans-Appalachia, it can be classified as promotional.

Streams . . . conduces [*sic*] to Pleasantness of situation, and lays the Foundation for the Wealth of an agricultural and manufacturing people."<sup>60</sup> Settlers reading such promotional literature could rest assured that they would not be alone when they got to the frontier and that they would be followed west by many more people. As settlements grew, security would be preserved and extended.<sup>61</sup>

During the late eighteenth century, promotional writers were one of the main sources for information on the frontier. Consequently, propagandists played a significant role in shaping perceptions of the West. They crafted western images that they hoped potential settlers and land buyers would appreciate. Among the most notable of these images were those that presented gendered views of the West. Some feared that the frontier would destroy civilization and turn settlers into barbaric savages. Possibly to allay such

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<sup>60</sup>Fuller, *New Ohio lands*. Interestingly, a significant portion of this sentence was plagiarized from Ohio Company propagandist Manasseh Cutler's *An Explanation of the Map Which Deliniates that Part of the Federal Lands . . .* (Salem, Mass., 1787). One wonders why Fuller read Cutler and why he reproduced this phrase.

<sup>61</sup>Drown, *An Oration*, 10; Imlay, *Topographical Description*, I: 52.

fears, propagandist Gilbert Imlay described the West in refined, effeminate terms. He told of "flowers full and perfect, as if they had been cultivated by the hand of a florist, with all the variegated charms which nature can produce, here, in the lap of elegance, and beauty, decorate the smiling groves." Such purple prose gave the impression of an urbane place characterized by the genteel sensibilities of high culture. The effeminate virtues of civilization would not be lost on the frontier: "While the setting sun gilds those extensive plains, the mild breezes of a summer's eve, playing upon the enraptured senses, softens the heart to love and friendship."<sup>62</sup>

For others, the West offered a chance to escape the emasculating trappings of domesticity. The established settlements of the East failed to provide adequate opportunities for men to be manly. Consequently, some promotional literature appears antithetical to the refined nature of Imlay's writings. For instance, Solomon Drown

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<sup>62</sup>Imlay, *Topographical Description*, I: 57, 66-67, 69. For views of frontier environments as barbaric places, see Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 34, 53-54.

directed his audience to “pay our grateful tribute of applause to that firm band, who, quitting their families and peaceful habitations — forgoing all the endearments of domestic life — in the midst of a severe winter, set out on the arduous enterprise of settling this far distant region.” Drown’s language reflected a distinctly masculine nature. He celebrated settlers who left behind “families and peaceful habitations,” or in other words, the ties that bound men to the feminine sphere. By emphasizing the extreme difficulty of moving west, he portrayed the undertaking as a way to prove one’s manhood. Thus, the frontier became a masculine place where the heroic “enterprise” of settlement was accomplished.<sup>63</sup>

Promotional writers also ventured into the political arena with their propaganda tracts. Perhaps this is not surprising considering the charged political environment of the late eighteenth century. During the Revolution, Americans spurned what they saw as the cultural encrustation and political corruption of England. Later, it was not

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<sup>63</sup>Drown, *An Oration*, 7; Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore, 1996), 32-33, 55, 58.



uncommon for westerners to use rhetoric similar to that used by patriots during the war. They drew analogies between the East and the Old World. They lamented that in the established settlements, "everything has become perverted; and governments, instead of securing happiness to men, have only tended to aggrandize individuals, and thus has flowed in that debasement of character which has marked half the inhabitants of Europe with little more dignity than brute creatures."<sup>64</sup> Thus, promoters suggested that the Revolution failed to create a virtuous republic. The East had gone the way of England. It was scarred by corruption and aristocratic interest that would degrade Americans.

Propagandists promised much to those who ventured westward after the Revolution. They described a land where settlers could find three important things: liberty, prosperity, and security. The Revolution promised these

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<sup>63</sup>Imlay, *Topographical Description*, I: 57-58. For other examples of frontiersmen appropriating revolutionary principles in their struggles, see Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York, 1986) and Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*.

rewards and promoters were quick to assure settlers that the West was the place to find them. The western territory was indeed the promised land.

### PART III: MAKING THE LAND THEIR OWN

The final group in Anglo-America's quest to acquire and use western lands was the settlers. The wave of white settlement that broke over the western Great Lakes during the early nineteenth century marked a turning point for the Indians as well. The whites had been encroaching and interfering for years. But when they formed substantial settlements, they showed that they intended to stay, that they assumed for themselves a proprietary right to the land, and that there would soon be no room for the Indians. These events were all well illustrated on half a million acres along Lake Erie's southern shore: the Firelands.

During the colonial period, many claims were made to land in trans-Appalachia. Virginia, Massachusetts, and William Penn all claimed to have territorial rights to the southern shore of Lake Erie. Moreover, in 1662, England's Charles II extended Connecticut's boundaries all the way to the Pacific Ocean, encompassing a narrow strip of land in

what is now northern Ohio. Therefore, no one had clear title to these crucial western lands.<sup>65</sup>

Western land claims became a source of conflict among the colonies in the revolutionary period. By the early 1780s, for the sake of national unity, most states with land claims in the Northwest had ceded the bulk of their claims to the national government, but Connecticut refused. Then in September 1786, Connecticut finally released all of its land west of a line parallel to, and 120 miles west of, Pennsylvania's western boundary. Because Connecticut tacitly reserved its right to the land between Pennsylvania and the line 120 miles farther west, that parcel of land became known as the Connecticut Western Reserve.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>P. P. Cherry, *The Western Reserve and Early Ohio* (Akron, Oh., 1921), 58; William E. Peters, *Ohio Lands and their Subdivision*, 2d. ed. (Athens, Oh., 1918), 145-46, 151-52; W. W. Boynton, "The Early History of Lorain County," *Western Reserve Historical Society Tract 83* ([Cleveland], 1876), 303; Elbert Jay Benton, *Cultural Story of an American City: Cleveland: Part I: During the Log Cabin Phases, 1796-1825* (Cleveland, 1943), 8; Harriet Taylor Upton, *History of the Western Reserve*, 3 vols., ed. H. G. Cutler, (Chicago, 1910), I: 7.

<sup>66</sup>Kenneth V. Lottich, *New England Transplanted* (Dallas, 1964), 37; Benton, *Cleveland*, 8; John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, D. C., 1934), XXXI: 654; Samuel Adams Drake, *The Making of the Ohio Valley States, 1660-1837* (New York, 1894), 148.

The American Revolution was costly, and several states, including Connecticut, planned to pay their war debts by selling western lands. After two failed attempts in 1786, no one seemed interested in buying Connecticut's Western Reserve. But in 1792, the Connecticut General Assembly gave almost half a million acres to its citizens who had suffered from British attacks during the war. Between April 1777 and September 1781, the Connecticut coast fell victim to four major British campaigns of terror. Nine towns in particular suffered especially severe losses.<sup>67</sup> In addition to direct property damage, citizens, or "Sufferers," of these towns were expected to pay state taxes levied to support the war effort. Thus, the war placed tremendous financial pressure on the Sufferers. In 1787 Sufferers from the nine towns joined together and asked the General Assembly for relief. Though the legislature moved slowly, it finally agreed to reimburse the Sufferers. Connecticut had a lot of land in Ohio that it was not using, so on May 10, 1792, the

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<sup>67</sup>These towns were Danbury, Ridgefield, Greenwich, New Haven, East Haven, Fairfield, Norwalk, New London, and Groton. See Helen M. Carpenter, "The Origin and Location of the Firelands of the Western Reserve," *The Firelands Pioneer*, new series 25 (1937), 112.

legislature granted the westernmost 500,000 acres of the reserve to the Sufferers. This land became known as the Firelands because the Sufferers were victims of British fire raids. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Firelands were remote and still controlled by Indians. As a result, earnest settlement of the region did not begin for another twenty years.<sup>68</sup>

Following the Battle of Fallen Timbers, in which American troops won a significant victory over the Indians of the western Great Lakes, and the Treaty of Greenville, in which the Indians relinquished about half of the reserve, potential buyers began expressing interest in the reserve. On August 11, 1795, a group of investors led by Oliver Phelps submitted a proposal to buy the reserve, less the Firelands, for \$1,500,000. This being the best offer it

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<sup>68</sup>Harlan Hatcher, *The Western Reserve: The Story of New Connecticut in Ohio* (Cleveland, 1966), 31; Randolph C. Downes, *History of Lake Shore Ohio*, 3 vols. (New York, 1952), I: 34, 36; Carpenter, "Firelands," *FLP* 25 (1937), 108-11, 113-14, 116, 127. Incidentally, in his 1787 description of America's western lands, army engineer, and later geographer of the United States, Thomas Hutchins made an account of Indians in the Northwest region. According to his figures, one might conclude that at least 1,500 Indians lived in the vicinity of the Firelands in the 1780s, see Hutchins, *A Topographical Description . . .* (Boston, 1787), 31.

received, Connecticut accepted. On September 5, 1795, the investors met in Hartford to form a business organization they named the Connecticut Land Company. The Connecticut Land Company was a joint-stock trust temporarily created to manage a few specific responsibilities, such as large-scale surveying and Indian negotiations that would be too costly or complicated for investors to handle individually.<sup>69</sup>

The question of jurisdiction and ownership made potential settlers hesitant to move to the Western Reserve. Connecticut never ceded the reserve to the federal government, but did the state actually have a legitimate claim to the land? If not, settlers feared that any deeds granted under Connecticut authority could be declared invalid. If Connecticut never had a legitimate right to the land, settlers, the Sufferers, and the Connecticut Land Company could all find themselves owning nothing.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), 139; Lottich, *New England Transplanted*, 39-40; "Proceedings and Report of the Connecticut General Assembly Committee of Sale, 1795," Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS); Connecticut Land Company Articles of Association, WRHS.

<sup>70</sup>Drake, *Ohio Valley States*, 199; Bond, *Foundations of Ohio*, 454-55.

Territorial governor Arthur St. Clair believed that the reserve rightfully belonged in the Northwest Territory, which Congress created with the Land Ordinance of 1787. When St. Clair tried to tax the few settlers living on the frontier, they refused to pay because they considered themselves citizens of Connecticut. But Connecticut wished to stay out of the matter and turned its back on the settlers. St. Clair was willing to immediately assume jurisdiction over the reserve, but doing so would have had serious implications. First, it might have implied that the 1662 charter was meaningless and Connecticut never had any right to the reserve. Second, it might have implied that the federal government assumed the right to confiscate territory from states. Both possibilities could create headaches. If the former was the case, Connecticut had no right to give land to the Sufferers or to sell it to the Connecticut Land Company.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>B. A. Hinsdale, *The Old Northwest* (New York, 1888), 376-80; Cherry, *Western Reserve and Early Ohio*, 70-71. Hinsdale argues that had St. Clair assumed jurisdiction, it would have implied that the federal government received both jurisdiction and ownership of the reserve in 1786 when Connecticut ceded the rest of its western land. This also would have meant that deeds granted by Connecticut after 1786 could be declared invalid. Hinsdale seems to be on the



In February 1800 the United States House of Representatives appointed a committee, chaired by John Marshall, to look into the Western Reserve situation. The Marshall committee recommended that the federal government assume jurisdiction of the reserve and affirm deeds already granted under Connecticut's authority. As a result, President John Adams signed the Quieting Act into law on April 28, 1800. The Quieting Act confirmed that Connecticut had a right to own the actual land, but that the U.S. government had a right to govern the region. Thus, in a roundabout way the Quieting Act legitimized the Sufferers' and the Connecticut Land Company's titles.<sup>72</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of Connecticut, the Western Reserve was a resounding yet crafty success. Connecticut created ownership where none really existed. Through persistence and defiance, Connecticut perpetuated its claim and profited from its sale. The reserve enabled the state

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right track, but Connecticut explicitly did not give up the Western Reserve in 1786.

<sup>72</sup>*Annals of the Congress of the United States* (Washington, D. C., 1851), 6th Congress, 1st Session, 166, 527, 548, 638, 662; Hinsdale, *Old Northwest*, 381-82, 386-88.

to pay its citizens for damages incurred during the Revolution. Though few immediately ran to Ohio, especially the Firelands, settlers eventually went there. When they did, they traveled with a set of perceptions and expectations that they tested against the reality they found.

What compelled a person to move west? What was there in the Western Reserve that would make people turn their backs on their homes and travel to a distant "wilderness" that had a reputation for insect-infested swamps, savage Indians, and remote desolation?<sup>73</sup> Moving to the Firelands was a risky venture that not too many dared to attempt for the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century. But "directly after the close of the war of 1812, it was common to see in the streets of eastern towns and villages, as well as around the social hearth, persons engaged in conversation, and who were discussing the merits and advantages of removing to some new or untried occupation, or else of becoming cultivators of the soil, and Ohio was the burden of their

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<sup>73</sup>These are all images recorded by travelers who had journeyed through the West as early as the mid-eighteenth century. For more on the hardships they encountered, see Part I.

song."<sup>74</sup> These folks were restless — there was a big world opening before them and they wanted to settle it. Their hope and excitement overcame any fear they had.

In addition, Firelands settlers had other good reasons for joining the westward migration. The War of 1812 fueled migration in two ways. By freeing the area of British and Indian threats, the war made the Firelands seem safer and more secure. Second, the failure of some eastern businesses to bounce back to health right after the war prompted many people to consider looking for opportunities in the West. For the young and the young-at-heart, Ohio held out the irresistible lure of adventure and novelty. Daniel Sherman, the son of an Ohio land agent, grew up in Norwalk, Connecticut, listening to his father and others discuss the new settlements taking hold in the distant wilderness. "I early made up my mind to go West," recalled Sherman, "and as soon as I was of age." He did just that. At the age of

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<sup>74</sup>Benjamin Benson, "Memoirs of Townships. — Clarksfield," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 2 (1858), 18-19. In the 1850s, residents of the Firelands formed the Firelands Historical Society and began publishing a quarterly journal entitled *The Fire Lands Pioneer*. The original issues of the *Pioneer* were filled with personal memoirs written by individuals, such as Benson, who had settled the Firelands thirty-five to forty-five years earlier.

twenty-two, Sherman and a couple of his friends left Connecticut on their way to the Firelands. He later explained that "the Spirit of adventure and novelty in the West kept us in good cheer." For settlers like Sherman and his companions, the West was no longer a frightening unknown, it was a beckoning place of excitement.<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps the most common reason for migrating to the Western Reserve was economic advancement. There was financial opportunity in the West and it came in the form of land. Americans had been trying to get their hands on that territory for over three generations. The dreams of eighteenth-century travelers and land speculators were becoming reality for their early nineteenth-century grandchildren. There was rich, valuable land virtually for the taking, just as the writers of promotional literature had promised. Many settlers went west in hope of pulling themselves up from poor or mediocre economic straits. And acquiring Ohio land enabled them to do just that. In the summer of 1814, Samuel Lewis bought two hundred acres of

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<sup>75</sup>Benson, "Clarksfield," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 19; Daniel Sherman, "Memoirs of Townships. — Ridgefield," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 3 (1859), 26.

land on the Firelands for \$2 per acre. A few months later, he sold the same land for \$5 per acre. He then turned around and bought another two hundred acres for \$1.50 per acre. By the spring of 1815 Lewis had been in Ohio for less than one year, he owned his own homestead, and he had already earned \$300 through real estate appreciation.

Not only did their land have investment potential, most Firelanders were satisfied that it had enormous agricultural potential as well. "The soil consists of a mixture of clay, a little sand, and a goodly portion of rich, black muck or loam, which together constitute a soil well adapted to the culture of any crop. . . ." Travelers, traders, missionaries, and propagandists all foresaw flourishing agricultural communities taking root west of the Appalachians. By the early nineteenth century, the Firelanders were making those visions come true.<sup>76</sup>

Even though the heaviest migration to the Firelands occurred after the War of 1812, some settlers had taken up residence there before the war began. Therefore, the events

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<sup>76</sup>Samuel B. Lewis, "Memoirs of Townships. — Norwalk," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 1 (1858), 33; Benson, "Clarksfield," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 19.

of the war were pivotal in the early development of the Western Reserve. The War of 1812 resulted, in part, from economic policies followed by Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in their attempt to protect American commerce from European wars. Once the war began, Madison's attention focused on the old Northwest Territory and Canada. In July 1812 Madison sent General William Hull into western Canada with two thousand troops. But when Hull met a thousand British troops, Canadian militiamen, and Indians commanded by General Isaac Brock, he turned tail and retreated to Detroit. There, Hull was bluffed into thinking that the Indians were about to massacre his army so he surrendered to Brock. Hull's actions had severe ramifications in the Firelands. "The surrender of Hull exposed the whole North West to the ravages of the enemy. The frontier settlers had to abandon their homes, or run the risk of having their families masacred [*sic*] by the savages." The war turned the Firelanders into roaming nomads who had to take their few possessions with them as they fled before the enemy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>My thanks to Dr. Steven E. Siry of Baldwin-Wallace College for his help with the War of 1812 military aspects

Increased British presence in the western Great Lakes during the War of 1812 enabled Britain's Indian allies under the leadership of Tecumseh and his brother the Prophet to temporarily regain strength that they had not had for years. Tecumseh was a Shawnee warrior who dreamed of building a western Indian confederacy to resist American encroachments on Indian land. Tecumseh refused to accept the validity of agreements such as the Greenville Treaty in which a handful of sachems relinquished territory that Tecumseh believed belonged to all Indians. He planned to build a pan-Indian military alliance, much as the English colonies had done during the American Revolution. With the outbreak of the War of 1812, Tecumseh found willing support from the British, who also wanted to squelch the Americans' land hunger lest they grow to covet British Canada. During the war, combined British and Indian forces posed a constant threat to settlers on the Firelands. Therefore, the war

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and background details that appear here and elsewhere in this chapter. Charles B. Simmons, "Memoirs of Townships. — Greenfield," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 2 (1858), 14; William W. Pollock, "Firelands Reminiscences," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 1 (1858), 45.

halted nearly all migration to the region for several years.<sup>78</sup>

The war took a decisive turn in the autumn of 1813. General William Henry Harrison replaced Hull as commander of the United States Army of the Northwest. British Colonel Henry Proctor had Harrison pinned down in the newly constructed Fort Meigs on the Maumee River. Commodore Oliver Hazzard Perry was given the job of cutting off British supply lines running across Lake Erie to Proctor. Perry built a small fleet of ten ships with which he met the six-ship British fleet commanded by Captain Robert Barclay on September 10, 1813. Perry narrowly escaped defeat and emerged the victor from the Battle of Lake Erie. His supply line cut, Proctor retreated into Canada. Harrison caught up with him on October 5, 1813, ninety miles east of Detroit at the Battle of the Thames. Harrison won that battle, but the most significant event that day was the death of Tecumseh.

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<sup>78</sup>Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 323-24, 331-40; Simmons, "Greenfield," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 14; F. W. Fowler, "Memoirs of Townships. — Milan," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 2, (1858), 28. See also R. David Edmunds, *The Shawnee Prophet* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1983) and Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, 1992).



With Perry's victory on Lake Erie and Tecumseh's death at the Thames, the British and Indian strength in Ohio was broken. Firelands settler Daniel Sherman remembered that "when news came of the total defeat of the British fleet, there was great rejoicing among the settlers. And the battle of the Thames, and the death of Tecumseh soon relieved us of all further fear of Indian hostilities."<sup>79</sup>

The settlers' experiences during the War of 1812 prove that the Ohio Indians were not as weak and negligible as the promotional writers had assured them. Instead of a few poor, docile vagabonds, Firelands settlers faced thousands of Indian warriors. But perhaps the promotional writers were not deliberately attempting to deceive settlers about the Indian presence in Ohio. Settlers who went to Ohio before the War of 1812 enjoyed amiable relations with the Indians they encountered. Likewise, peaceful friendships with the remaining Indians resumed after the war.

When William Pollock arrived in the Firelands in May

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<sup>79</sup>Sherman, "Ridgefield," *FLP* 1, no. 3 (1859), 27-28; Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 334-42; John Sugden, *Tecumseh's Last Stand* (Norman, Okla., 1985), 3-8; Frederic L. Paxson, *History of the American Frontier, 1763-1893* (Boston, 1924), 173.

1808, he met Indians from several different tribes living in the area: Miamis, Chippewas, Senecas, and others. The earliest white settlers valued the Indians and their ways. The settlers quickly learned that if they were to survive in their new surroundings, they would be wise to adapt to their environment by adopting Indian dress and customs. Once white settlements were established, their residents tried to maintain amiable relations with the Indians. Some settlers even opened their homes to Indians who needed a meal or temporary lodgings. The Indians reciprocated by offering gifts such as venison to their white friends. In 1822 the Reverend Alvin Coe opened a school for Indian children on the Firelands. The school attracted forty to fifty pupils before being moved to Maumee, Ohio, in 1827.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, the whites who moved onto the Firelands in the early nineteenth century brought numerous changes for the Indians already living there. First, they altered the Indians' cultural landscape. The Reverend Coe's Indian

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<sup>80</sup>Pollock, "Firelands Reminiscences," *FLP* 1, no. 1 (1858), 43; Fowler, "Milan," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 29; Benson, "Clarksfield," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 22; Lewis, "Norwalk," *FLP* 1, no. 1 (1858), 35; Simmons, "Greenfield," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 18.

school is an excellent example of what the white settlers had in mind. They did not want to coexist with the Indians but to inculcate them with Anglo-American cultural traits. They would educate the Indian children to be more like their white neighbors. Second, the white settlers altered the Indians' physical landscape. Settlers' conceptions of property rights and boundaries stood in the way of Indian hunting customs and usufruct rights.

Moreover, the land showed evidence of the Indians' ancient presence. The first settlers found mounds and earthen works built by Indians who had inhabited the land generations before. Inquisitive whites defaced these monuments by digging them up to see what treasures they held. They were impressed by what they found. The unearthed artifacts showed "clearly to any rational mind that a race of people understanding science, had, at some former period, inhabited" the land. The settlers asked some local Indians about relics taken from the mounds, but the Indians did not know much about them.<sup>81</sup> The settlers'

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<sup>81</sup>This is not at all surprising because the Indians living on the Firelands in the early nineteenth century would have been as foreign to the mound builders as the settlers were themselves. The Indians who probably built

actions show how the land records the human history of a place. The mounds, elements of the physical landscape, were markers that told white settlers about those who had come before them. They were not the first to inhabit that land. But the Firelanders thought of themselves as pioneers and in their quest to explore and harness the land, they cleansed the landscape of evidence that suggested they were only followers, temporary holders of the land. Just as the white settlers changed the culture of the people they found on the Firelands, so too they changed the landscape. In both cases they were trying to make the unknown familiar.<sup>82</sup>

The settlers who migrated to the Firelands in the early nineteenth century actually had much in common with the Indians who moved there a century before. First, they both

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the mounds had left centuries before. The Indian groups living in Ohio in the early nineteenth century arrived there between 1720 and 1750 after being pushed out of their eastern homelands by advancing waves of European settlement. See Michael N. McConnell, *A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724-1774* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1992), 5-21.

<sup>82</sup>F. W. Fowler, "Further Reminiscences of Milan Township," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 2 (1858), 12.

brought their cultures with them.<sup>83</sup> They brought their religion, their political organization, their customs, and an enormous body of beliefs and expectations for the land they were about to possess. Moreover, the Indians were pushed into Ohio in stages. That is, each generation was driven a little farther from its ancestral homeland. Likewise, many whites arrived in the Firelands via broken voyages — perhaps their grandparents lived in Massachusetts, their parents in Pennsylvania.<sup>84</sup> Also, like Indians of various tribes who converged in Ohio, the Firelands drew white settlers from all over the northern states. Even though Connecticut created the Firelands to satisfy its own citizens, people from New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and eastern Ohio ultimately settled the land.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between the Indians who entered Ohio during the eighteenth century and the whites who went to the Firelands during the nineteenth

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<sup>83</sup>Certain parts of the modern Western Reserve are said to look more like New England than New England does.

<sup>84</sup>Benj[amin] Summers, "Vermillion — S. E. Quarter," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 2 (1858), 43.

century is that they all traveled in groups. Just as entire Indian villages migrated together, so too did white communities. It was not uncommon for several young men from an eastern town to join together and head west.<sup>85</sup> They also went as families. Young men in their mid-twenties often went to Ohio, marked off their land claim, erected a crude dwelling, and got some crops started before sending for their wives and children. Once the young family was reunited in Ohio, they were often joined by siblings, parents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. Families grew on the Firelands — young mothers brought a child or two with them and then had several more once settled. Families also joined together to make the arduous trip west and then face the difficulties of the frontier.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>A good example of this phenomenon is the partnership of Daniel Sherman, Samuel Seymour, and Buel Fitch, who all traveled to the Firelands from their homes in Norwalk, Connecticut. Another example is that of Elihu Clary and William Smith, both of Deerfield, Massachusetts, who joined Henry Adams of Halifax, Vermont, to settle Peru Township in the Western Reserve. See Sherman, "Ridgefield," *FLP* 1, no. 3 (1859), 26; Elihu Clary to G. T. Stewart, August 25, 1857. *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 1 (1858), 41.

<sup>86</sup>Lewis, "Norwalk," *FLP* 1, no. 1 (1858), 32; Levi R. Sutton, "Memoirs of Townships. — Peru," 1, no. 1 (1858), 37; Polly Bull, "Fire Lands Reminiscences," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 3 (1859), 29; Rebecca Bostwick, "Fire Lands

Indeed, the Firelanders endured countless hardships as they settled the Western Reserve. One early settler recalled that "the privations and sufferings I have seen in this country, caused by the want of the necessaries and comforts of life, by the climate, fear and trouble from the Indians, to the inhabitants in the first settlement of this country are beyond all conception, and it makes my blood chill at the thought of it. . . ." <sup>87</sup> Taking hold of the land and settling the frontier was not an easy task. Despite the early presence of doctors in the Firelands, death from illnesses, rattlesnakes, Indians, and even accidents (such as one man who was killed by a falling tree) was a constant threat to Firelanders. In addition, the settlers faced frequent food shortages. Daniel Boones they were not. They typically did not live off the land by hunting wild game and collecting the land's natural produce. Instead, the first settlers in the region relied on supplies that were shipped to them, such as pork from

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Reminiscences," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 3 (1859), 31. The Bull and Bostwick families — men, women, children, and servants — all traveled together to the Firelands from Danbury, Connecticut.

<sup>87</sup>Fowler, "Milan," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 30.

Cincinnati and other goods from Detroit. When poor weather, war, or other circumstances prevented the delivery of those supplies, the Firelanders suffered.<sup>88</sup>

In order to cope with the difficulties they faced, the Firelanders turned to each other. They found strength and comfort in the companionship of their neighbors. After all, they shared common experiences and cultural backgrounds. Many of them had even been neighbors back in New England. They enjoyed large social gatherings, and the women in a particular area got together almost daily. They also worshiped together. They organized religious meetings held at a different person's house each week. At these meetings, Methodists, Baptists, Universalists, and other denominations all worshiped together. "None were trying to build up their own denomination exclusively, but were glad to have the privilege of worshipping God in this humble way. . . ."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Ezra Wood, "Memoirs &c. — Clarksfield," *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 1 (1858), 45; Sutton, "Peru," *FLP* 1, no. 1 (1858), 40; Clary to G. T. Stewart, August 25, 1857, *FLP* 1, no. 1 (1858), 41; Pearley C. Sanders to G. T. Stewart, September 17, 1857, *Fire Lands Pioneer* 1, no. 1 (1858), 42; Pollock, "Firelands Reminiscences," *FLP* 1, no. 1 (1858), 44; Benson, "Clarksfield," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 21.

<sup>89</sup>Sanders to G. T. Stewart, September 17, 1857, *FLP* 1, no. 1 (1858), 42; Benson, "Clarksfield," *FLP* 1, no. 2



The Firelanders even joined together to cultivate the land. The best example of this communal spirit is the group led by David Barrett in 1809. Barrett, along with his wife and family, the Nathaniel Glines family, and about five other individuals moved to the Firelands together. They shared a common dwelling until separate houses could be built. And they also worked together to cultivate the land they had come to inhabit.<sup>90</sup>

The Barrett group and their fellow Firelanders transformed the Western Reserve into a productive agricultural landscape. Just as significant, though, they built communities of families who shared similar roots, experiences, and goals. This was not the land of rugged individualism described by some promotional writers. Men did not move to the Firelands to prove their masculinity by conquering the virgin wilderness. They went there with their families in search of affordable land that would enable them to provide a simple but comfortable life for their loved ones.

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(1858), 21.

<sup>90</sup>Fowler, "Milan," *FLP* 1, no. 2 (1858), 27.

## CONCLUSION

The view from the top of Mount Holyoke has attracted aesthetically minded individuals to Northampton, Massachusetts, for nearly two centuries. The rugged terrain of the mountain falls away to reveal miles and miles of the meandering Connecticut River. Today, the mountain's summit is adorned with a lookout tower and picnic tables for the many tourists who visit the spot to take in its scenic vistas. What is perhaps surprising is that the mountain was just as big a tourist destination when Thomas Cole painted *The View from Mount Holyoke (The Oxbow)* in 1836. In his analysis of Cole's painting, Alan Wallach explains that the panoramic landscape seen from the mountaintop appealed to the nineteenth-century middle class for a specific reason: it symbolized their growing social hegemony. Standing at the summit, surveying the landscape unfolding below, the middle-class tourists felt like kings and queens of the mountain and all that was below them. "The ascent of Mount

Holyoke was in this respect a stunning metaphor for social aspiration and social dominance."<sup>91</sup>

Although few of the writers examined in this study viewed the landscape with the same aesthetic sensitivity as Cole and his adoring audience, the land took on broader significance for western pioneers. Their notions of power, independence, and financial reward became intertwined with their perceptions of the landscape.

Travelers', promotional writers', and early settlers' attitudes toward the land evolved rapidly over a seventy-five-year period between 1750 and 1825. The first white traders who ventured into the Ohio country valued the region for its Indian populations. The Indians represented lucrative markets and trading partners. But it did not take long for Anglo-Americans to shift their priorities to the land itself. They saw what a valuable commodity it was. Travelers of all types, especially land speculators, realized the potential for thriving agricultural communities in the West. In just a few years, pioneers such as those

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<sup>91</sup>Alan Wallach, "Making a Picture of the View from Mount Holyoke," in *American Iconology*, ed. D. C. Miller (New Haven, 1993), 83-84.

who settled on the Firelands made those predictions a reality.

The travelers, promotional writers, and settlers all had one question on their minds: What can the land do for me? This is what ties them together — the quest for opportunity and personal advancement. Travelers who viewed the land as utilitarians looked for features and characteristics that could be put to some practical use. Promotional writers wanted the chance to profit from the sale of western lands to settlers. And settlers expected the land to give them the possibility of being self-sufficient, financially stable, and beholden to no one else for their livelihoods. The land signified potential gain, in some form or another, for all three groups.

People of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century would probably find the aesthetic sensibilities of Thomas Cole or Ansel Adams incomprehensible. For most pioneers, the landscape was something they needed to survive, not attractive scenery to be savored. For settlers, the heirs of a pragmatic tradition passed down from travelers and through promoters, the beauty of a hill or valley lay simply in its ability to feed their children.

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## VITA

Bradley Allen Hayes

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Born in Oberlin, Ohio, January 25, 1975. Graduated as valedictorian of Wellington High School in Wellington, Ohio, June 1993. Received B.A. (summa cum laude) in history and philosophy from Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, June 1996. M.A. candidate, the College of William and Mary, 1996-1997, with a concentration in colonial American history and scholarly editing.