The Seeds of Prosperity and Discord: The Political Economy of Community Polarization in Greenfield, Massachusetts, 1770-1820

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THE SEEDS OF PROSPERITY AND DISCORD: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNITY POLARIZATION IN GREENFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, 1770–1820

By Gerald F. Reid

Introduction

In June of 1816 fifty-one residents of Greenfield, Massachusetts, petitioned their state legislature to incorporate themselves as a second congregational society, separate from the First Congregational Society of Greenfield. Six months later the petition was granted and the Second Congregational Society of Greenfield was organized. Early the next year, citing the "seeds of discord thus planted" by the members of the new congregation, the members of the First Congregational Society themselves petitioned the state legislature, in this instance to divide the town and to establish themselves as a separate township.

From one perspective these events in Greenfield in 1816 and 1817 were not uncommon. After all, the members of many New England communities sought to organize new religious congregations and to divide their townships as a result of population growth, changes in settlement pattern, religious differences, and other factors. Yet, from another perspective, Greenfield's experience during these years was unique, rooted in an intersection of local circumstances and external forces that were peculiar to Greenfield. Most importantly, as a result of forces emanating from regional and international economic processes, a transformation of Greenfield's economy and society was set in motion during the final decades of the 18th century that gave rise to two distinct and in many ways antagonistic communities within the single township. The organization of the Second Congregational Society of Greenfield and the attempted division of the town by the spurned members of the First Congregational Society both represented and contributed to this process of community polarization.

Greenfield and Its Economic and Social Transformation

The town of Greenfield is located in the Connecticut River Valley of Western Massachusetts, 100 miles west of Boston and 20 miles south of the state border with Vermont. Originally part of the town of Deerfield and known as "Green River," the area was first occupied by English colonists in 1673, permanently settled in 1727, and set off from the parent town and incorporated as the Town of Greenfield in 1753. From the time of first settlement until the 1770s the Greenfield area was populated almost solely by farm families. The Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771 lists 84 Greenfield heads of household; of this number 87% owned some improved farm land, with the average size holding of all landowners at just under 34 acres. On average, landowners held 12.8 acres of tilled land, about the same as farmers in other Valley farming towns such as
Amherst. 65% of the Greenfield heads of household owned horses, 57% owned oxen, 76% owned cows or cattle, 64% owned goats or sheep, and 57% owned some swine (see Table 1). If one bears in mind the likelihood that many of those heads of household recorded in the tax valuation lists as not owning real or personal property at this time were young men waiting to come into their inheritance, then the agricultural orientation of the community is clear.

The male heads of the earliest Greenfield households originated primarily from the parent and neighboring town of Deerfield. After 1763 Greenfield settlers came from more diverse and distant sources, principally the towns of the lower Connecticut River Valley and eastern Massachusetts. Nevertheless, the community's Deerfield connection remained strong and the large majority of the population continued to engage in agricultural pursuits on small farms (see Table 1). These characteristics are especially evident with regard to the wealthiest members of the community. In 1771 94% of the men composing the wealthiest quintile of local taxpayers were Deerfield settlers or the descendants of Deerfield settlers who had settled on Greenfield lands granted to them or their forefathers. For this same 94% agriculture was the primary economic pursuit (see Table 2). In 1780 78% of the wealthiest quintile of local taxpayers were the same men or their immediate descendants of the men who composed the wealthiest fifth of the population in 1771. The remaining 22% were the sons or grandsons of Deerfield landowners, thus preserving the Deerfield connection. At that time 89% of the top quintile of taxpayers was engaged principally in agriculture (see Table 2). In addition to their common origins and agricultural orientation, intermarriage among the leading Greenfield families no doubt helped to solidify a shared sense of community.

Wealth in the form of taxable real and personal property was not evenly distributed; however, the differences in the distribution of wealth within the community were gradual and do not appear to have divided the community into

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Improved Land</th>
<th>Horses</th>
<th>Oxen</th>
<th>Cows &amp; Cattle</th>
<th>Goats &amp; Sheep</th>
<th>Swine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1771 (N = 84)</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780* (N = 179)</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>53%**</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>49***</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Data for 1780 are slightly underreported due to the destruction of a small portion of the manuscript of the 1780 state tax valuation list.

** Includes oxen four years old and upwards.

*** Includes sheep only.
Table 2
Occupational Profile of the Top Quintile of Greenfield Taxpayers, 1771–1820

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Manufacturing/ Skilled Trades</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Undetermined &amp; Other*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1771 (N = 17)</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780 (N = 36)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800 (N = 42)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810 (N = 42)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820 (N = 44)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Tax and Valuation Lists, Town of Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1787–1850 (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1974); Greenfield State Tax Lists of 1800, 1810, and 1820 (Town Archives, Greenfield, Massachusetts); Greenfield Tax Valuation List of 1820 (Town Archives, Greenfield, Massachusetts).

* This category includes those in the top quintile of taxpayers whose principal occupations could be determined and those who did not have occupations (such as individuals listed in the tax lists as “heirs”).

The evidence available in a very limited number of farmers' account books for this time period suggest that where household labor shortages for farm work did exist, the labor demands were satisfied by means of short term work arrangements in which kin connections were often important. Some examples come from the account book of John Newton, Jr., the son of a farmer who migrated from Connecticut to Greenfield in 1761 and who himself was a top wealthholder and landowner in 1800. Newton’s account book records transactions involving goods, labor, and cash between himself and his neighbors and kin in Greenfield.
and adjacent towns between 1788 and 1795. On numerous occasions during this period Newton hired out to his kin and neighbors, plowing their fields (with and without his own team), picking and carting their agricultural produce, chopping and sledding their wood, pressing their apples for cider, pasturing their livestock, and mending their shoes. Some, but not all, of the people for whom he worked were among the town's wealthiest landowners. Except in those cases when Newton pastured others' livestock in his own fields, the work he performed rarely lasted more than a few days and tended to be concentrated in the spring, fall, and early winter.  

Only under unusual circumstances does it appear that any of even the wealthiest farmers employed non-kin hired labor for extended periods of time. One example is Hull Nims, who in 1800 was one of Greenfield's wealthiest taxpayers and largest landowners. Transactions recorded in Nims' account book from 1788 to 1800 (and beyond) indicate that he often hired unrelated men to work on his farm for periods as long as eight months. Nevertheless, Nims rarely had more than a single worker in his employ at any one time and his use of long-term hired labor would seem to be directly related to the fact that, save for himself, adult male labor was entirely lacking in his household during this period. 

In general, these early Greenfield farmers appear to be much like their counterparts in other parts of the Connecticut River Valley who have been described by Clark and others. Each household was engaged in a generalized form of agriculture, a portion of which it consumed and other portions of which, depending on land, labor, and other resources, it exchanged with other households or marketed to obtain cash and credits used to purchase a variety of commodities not available through household production or local exchange networks. Together, the Greenfield households were linked to the larger regional economy through a network of independent traders and merchants and their agents based in the major Connecticut River commercial centers, such as Northampton and Springfield, Massachusetts. 

Overall, the impression one gains is that during the 1760s and 1770s Greenfield was a rather homogeneous community of small and middling farmers, many of whom shared common origins and kin connections and among whom wealth differences were not sharply defined. In these respects they appear to by typical of what Formisano defined as “peripheral groups” in his analysis of late 18th- and early 19th-century Massachusetts political culture—rural, agricultural, and geographically, politically, and economically isolated. In contrast, they would seem to have had little in common with the prosperous, urban, cosmopolitan, commercially-oriented “center groups” based in the seaboard communities and the down-river trading centers of the Connecticut River Valley. 

During the final decades of the 18th century this local picture began to change, with signs of growing economic and social complexity and social division. During Shays' Rebellion, for example, there were both active supporters and opponents of the farmers’ uprising in Greenfield. In one instance in 1786 the division was evinced in a most dramatic way when a group of Greenfield insurgents who had supported Shays's attack on the federal armory in Springfield were returning home and in Hadley encountered, surrounded, and disarmed an encampment of Greenfield loyalists. This divisiveness contrasts with the events of the American Revolution a decade earlier, when support for independence in
Greenfield was strong and widespread (and markedly different from the economically and socially more diverse down-river communities where there was active resistance to the revolution and intense community division over the issue of independence).14

The contours of Greenfield's economic and social transformation at this time are suggested by the changing occupational composition of the town's wealthiest residents. As already noted, in 1771 94% of the male heads of household composing the wealthiest quintile of local taxpayers were engaged principally in agriculture; in 1780 the proportion was 86% (see Table 2). By 1800 the proportion in agriculture dropped to 74%, while 17% were engaged principally in commerce and 7% in manufacturing and skilled trades. A decade later the proportion of the top quintile of taxpayers engaged principally in agriculture dropped to under 50%, while the proportions in commerce increased to 31%, in manufacturing and skilled trades to 12%, and in professional occupations such as law and medicine to 5%. In 1820 the proportion of top wealthholders engaged in agriculture stood at 45%, while the proportion in commerce fell to 20% and those in manufacturing and skilled trades and professional occupations rose to 16% and 11%, respectively. An analysis of Greenfield's 1820 population census schedules reveals that for the community as a whole at that time, approximately 56% of the 307 adults enumerated were employed in agriculture, 38% in manufacturing, and 7% in occupations related to commerce.15 This trend toward a broader economic base and greater economic complexity differentiated Greenfield from many of the surrounding valley and hill towns, which had retained a predominantly agricultural character (see Table 3).

This shift in Greenfield's economic and social composition was linked to the community's emergence as a small commercial and industrial center, a development that was rooted in the evolution of the regional and international economies of which the town was a part. Beginning in the second half of the 17th

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Manufacturing</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 307)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deerfield</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 445)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashfield</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 447)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelburne</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 257)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Occupational Distribution in Four Connecticut River Valley Towns, 1820

century the New England region came increasingly to occupy a semi-peripheral role within the developing British Atlantic economy, its farmers producing farm and forest products exported to England and her colonies and its merchants engaged in a wide range of export and re-export activities both at home and abroad. Within this larger region, the Connecticut River Valley emerged as an exporter of grains and other agricultural products and also masts, naval stores, barrel staves, and other forest products, a development that was encouraged and directly related to the evolution of New England’s semi-periphery role. With few and usually minor interruptions, the Valley’s agriculturally-oriented export economy continued to expand throughout the course of the first three-quarters of the 18th century.

Following a period of economic stagnation during and immediately after the American Revolution, New England’s overseas trading activities expanded considerably during the late 1780s and 1790s. Because the West Indies emerged as a key point in this trade expansion and because of the Connecticut River Valley’s long established connections with the Islands trade, the trade boom had a significant positive impact on the Connecticut River Valley economy. In each year after 1794 the region’s trade with the West Indies expanded, reaching a peak in 1802. After 1802 West Indies trading activity declined and held a relatively slow pace until 1806, when war in Europe resulted in a resurgence of the Islands’ demand for American agricultural products. Another important consequence of the trade boom period was an increase in the involvement of Valley merchants in the coasting trade and the trade in European imports. This, in turn, resulted in a shift in the Valley’s economic orientation away from Boston and toward New York. This shift occurred in part because of New York’s growing importance in the European trade at the expense of Boston and also because of New York’s own growth and demand for just the types of agricultural goods (e.g., potash and pearl ash, flaxseed, salted meat, and flour) produced in the Connecticut River Valley.

The expansion of the import-export sector of the Valley economy was spatial, as well. As the pace and volume of commerce increased, migration to and within the region was encouraged and new settlements were established progressively farther up the valley and farther away from the main stem of the valley up into the bordering hill country areas. As with the older established communities, these newly settled areas were tied into the regional economy by an expanding network of merchants, agents, and backcountry traders. With the economic and spatial expansion of trade need emerged within the Connecticut River Valley for up-river bulking and distribution points. Greenfield, for a number reasons, developed into one of these points and, as a result, in the short period of about two decades was transformed from an agricultural hinterland into a small, but thriving commercial and industrial center.

Specifically, local ecological conditions combined with forces in the regional economy to favor Greenfield as a new center of commercial activity. In the 1790s boat transportation on the Connecticut River immediately above Greenfield was hindered by falls, thus favoring the location of a trading point below the falls, but as far up river as possible. Moreover, hydrological conditions below the falls favored commercial operations on the west, or Greenfield, side of the Connecticut River. The site chosen, about a mile south of Turner’s Falls, came
to be known as “Cheapside Landing.” Actually part of the town of Deerfield, Cheapside Landing was more accessible from Greenfield and thus it was this community that benefitted most from the expansion of river trade and developed as the important up-river point of commerce. In 1795 Greenfield’s commercial importance was augmented when down-river canals were completed, enabling river boats bearing heavy goods to reach this trading point. Five years later the town’s commercial importance was expanded further by increased trading activity brought on by the completion of additional canals on the Connecticut River above Greenfield and by the completion of the Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike, linking Greenfield to Boston.

In the 1790s numerous merchants began operating in the Greenfield area; for example, in 1795 ten Greenfield-based merchants were advertising their goods and services in the Greenfield Gazette. Significantly, the appearance of the merchants in Greenfield was a phenomenon that appears to have occurred almost entirely without the participation of the established agricultural community. For the period between 1800 and 1820 nineteen different merchants could be counted among Greenfield’s wealthiest residents, representing nearly all of the town’s merchants during that period. Of those nineteen, twelve were recent migrants to the community and two were the sons of a merchant who also had migrated to Greenfield. Four of the nineteen merchants could not be identified with regard to their town of origin, however, it is most likely that they, too, were recent arrivals since their surnames do not appear on any of Greenfield’s late 18th-century tax lists or census records. Only one of the nineteen merchants could be positively identified as having roots in the established agricultural community, and he was the son of one of the town’s largest landowners. In this respect Greenfield’s experience was quite different from that of Northampton, 20 miles down-river, which began its commercial rise several decades earlier and where many of its earliest and most prosperous merchants were indigenous to the community.25

At least some of the early Greenfield merchants had strong connections with larger-scale merchants in down-river trading centers. One was William Moore, who shared business interests with several of the Connecticut River Valley’s leading merchant-entrepreneurs, including Jeremiah Wadsworth of Hartford.26 Another was Lyman Kendall, a former agent for the Springfield-based Dwight family merchants and son-in-law of Jonathan Dwight. Kendall established his trading business in Greenfield with the financial backing of the Dwights and by 1820 was one of the most successful merchants in the up-river area and the wealthiest man in Greenfield.

Accompanying the appearance of the merchants in Greenfield was the immigration of numerous skilled artisans and small manufacturers and the development of a variety of small-scale industries linked to the growing river trade. In some instances the merchants were directly responsible for this development, recruiting artisans from outside the Greenfield area and investing their capital in operations such as the processing of animal hides, coopering, milling, tin-smithing, nailmaking, and the production of cotton textiles.27 William Moore, mentioned above, is one example. In 1791 he built a multi-story mill complex on the Green River that housed a flour mill, nailmaking shop, tallow house, slaughterhouse, ginseng preparation shop, and a potash making operation. To
staff some of these and various other operations he recruited several artisans, including coopers from Groton, Connecticut, a blacksmith by the name of Ambrose Ames from Bridgewater, Massachusetts, and a tinsmith and pewterer by the name of Samuel Pierce from Middletown, Connecticut.  

The connections between the merchants and the artisan/manufacturers were strengthened by the direct involvement of some of the latter in trading and other activities related to Connecticut River commerce. Ambrose Ames, the blacksmith, invested in a linseed milling operation. Samuel Pierce, the tinsmith, ran freight on the Connecticut River between Greenfield and Springfield and Hartford, Connecticut and with Ambrose Ames engaged in the sale of salt and linseed oil. Professional men, mostly lawyers, were also attracted by Greenfield’s growing economic importance. Like the merchants and manufacturers, the first generation of Greenfield lawyers originated outside the established agricultural community, most having come to the town in the 1790s. The second generation of lawyers, those who began to practice law in Greenfield during the first and second decades of the 19th century, were mostly the sons of local merchants or the kin of the first generation of lawyers. These lawyers, along with the merchants and their artisan/manufacturer associates, quickly came to constitute a growing, wealthy class within the community.

Locally, the merchant-manufacturer-lawyer bloc came to take on a high economic and political profile and, it would appear, a more self-conscious identity. Together they shared business interests, such as those mentioned above as well as investments in such enterprises as the building of a local toll bridge and the Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike and together they were active and successful in promoting Greenfield as the seat for newly created Franklin County in 1812. They formed the local leadership of the Federalist party and the closely associated Masonic organization, groups in which the local farm population was noticeably under-represented. Members of this bloc also formed the core of local activists protesting the events leading up to the War of 1812 and petitioning for change in and relief from subsequent federal actions they deemed detrimental to the overseas trade on which so much of their livelihoods depended. In 1814 representatives of this merchant-manufacturer-lawyer bloc participated in the Hartford Convention of New England Federalists, ostensibly held to consider secession from the Union. Members of this group also founded the Franklin Charitable Society (1816), established Greenfield’s first bank (1822) and first insurance company (1828), and organized the town’s first high school for young women (1828).

Thus, by the middle of the second decade of the 19th century Greenfield’s economy and social structure had been transformed in important ways by processes rooted in economic developments at the regional and international levels. As regional and international processes produced an expansion of the Connecticut River Valley export-import economy, Greenfield was changed from a marginal agricultural community to a small, but active center of commercial and small-scale industrial activities. Associated with these local developments, the social composition of the town was transformed to include merchants, artisans, manufacturers, lawyers, and others—many of whom were outsiders and who quickly came to occupy positions of wealth and power within the town. Their external economic connections and economic and political interests set
them apart from the established agricultural community of farm families. In Formisano's terms, they were a "center group," or at least representative of "center group" interests. Significantly, their emergence in Greenfield involved not a development within the established agricultural community, but the introduction of new and differing elements from without.

Local settlement pattern emphasized this growing economic and social complexity and division. Prior to the 1790s the local pattern of settlement, driven by the community's agricultural orientation, was characterized by a dispersion of households, primarily in the northern and western areas of the township. During the 1790s, the period of the expansion of river commerce, new forces began to operate, namely, the increase in trading and small-scale industrial activity. These new forces resulted in a new pattern involving condensed settlement in the southern part of the town in close proximity to Cheapside Landing and favorable waterpower sites along the Green River. This southern "Village" district was populated primarily by the merchants, artisans, manufacturers, lawyers, and the non-agricultural population attracted to the employment generated by their economic activities; the northern and western districts remained populated by the community's established farm families.

Religious Differences and Division

Accompanying the increasing economic and social complexity spawned by the emergence of Greenfield as a small commercial and industrial center were differences in religious outlook. The first important signs of religious differences within the town appeared in 1812 when a small group of Greenfield residents incorporated themselves as the St. James Episcopal Society. The period in which this development took place was one in which throughout Massachusetts merchants, lawyers, manufacturers, and other representatives of the "Center" were being drawn away from Congregationalism to Episcopalianism and Unitarianism. These "prosperous and cosmopolitan men," as Banner referred to them, were essentially religious liberals opposed to the orthodox preference for restrictive church membership. In Greenfield membership in the early St. James church consisted in large measure of such "prosperous and cosmopolitan men." Beginning with less than a handful of members in 1812, by 1814 the membership had expanded to include 38 families. An analysis of the membership at that time has not yet been completed, nevertheless, noticeable in its ranks and particularly in its leadership were the wealthy, prominent manufacturers, merchants, and lawyers and other professional men and their families; absent was a significant representation of the town's agricultural community.

Perhaps contributing to this religious division within the community were the hard times experienced by the First Congregational Society as its long-time minister, Rev. Roger Newton, 75 years old, infirm, and distraught by the recent death of his wife, found himself increasingly unable to perform his ministerial duties. Newton's own religious orientation, too, may have been a factor. Newton had come to Greenfield in 1760 after graduating Yale Divinity School in 1758. Trained as he was at Yale in the 1750s, Newton was very likely a member of that group of Yale-educated clerics who, as Banner said, "spearheaded the orthodox counterattack centered in the Second Great Awakening" and whose followers
resided mostly in "the placid towns of the interior" among the "less prosperous and less-informed segment of the population." Given their apparent religious preferences, Newton may well have been a source of some alienation to Greenfield's growing non-agricultural community.

It was under these circumstances that in 1813 an aide to Rev. Newton was hired, only to leave under somewhat difficult circumstances just three years later. In 1813 Rev. Gamalial Olds was brought to Greenfield to "settle in colleague" with Rev. Newton. In his "Answer to the Call of the Church" in which he accepted the appointment to assist Newton, Rev. Olds referred to the fact that the "[d]ifficulties arising out of local circumstances have occasioned greater delay" than he would have preferred in accepting his appointment. "But," he stated, "... after the most serious consideration of the subject, I have finally determined to overlook those difficulties which cannot be obviated and announce to you my acceptance of the call." Olds did not specify what "differences" could not be "obviated," but he may very well have been referring to the growing religious diversity within the community and perhaps also to its growing social complexity and polarization. Apparently Olds was not able to overlook the "differences," however, for in 1816, in the midst of a controversy dividing the First Congregational Society he left Greenfield for a teaching position at Middlebury College in Vermont.

Division of the Congregational Society and Attempted Partitioning of the Town

The differences and divisions within the Greenfield community—economic, social, religious, and spatial—were brought to the surface during the years 1815–1817 when disagreement arose over the location for a new meetinghouse. When the Green River district was set off from Deerfield and incorporated as the Town of Greenfield in 1753 it was stipulated that the official center of the town and the site of its meetinghouse (built in 1766) would be located one mile north of the area that would eventually develop as the southern "Village" district. In December of 1815 the town meeting decided to replace the aging meetinghouse, it having fallen into disrepair. Those living in the outlying farming areas favored a new location one mile west of the present site, convenient for the numerous farm families scattered in the northern and western parts of the town, while those in the southern part of town—the merchants, manufacturers, and lawyers—favored a location within their "Village" district.

The two factions could not resolve their differences and so in early February of 1816 the town meeting engaged a supposedly neutral committee from Northampton to arbitrate the issue. The committee conducted an extensive tour of the town and of the proposed sites for the meetinghouse, held interviews, and made calculations of distances to be travelled to the proposed sites from various points within the town. In its recommendation issued on May 16, 1816, the committee noted that it had "carefully investigated and maturely considered the whole subject ... with a sincere desire to apportion all the privileges and business which are incident to almost all cases of this kind [and in which in this case] the committee conceive are in no instance surpassed." The committee unanimously recommended a site within the southern "Village" district, explaining
that they were "... satisfied that the peace and prosperity and future happiness of the Town and Society will be more effectively promoted and permanently secured by erecting the new meetinghouse on the Ground proposed than any other spot which could be selected." The committee closed its recommendation with a hope for harmony and unanimity in the community. It was not to be.

Unhappy with the committee's decision, a substantial number of residents in the outlying farming districts refused to help meet the expenses of building the new meetinghouse at the recommended site and the issue remained unresolved. Responding to the deadlock, in June of 1816 the residents of the "Village" district petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts to incorporate themselves as a new and separate congregational society within the town and to construct their own meetinghouse. The identity of those who signed the petition is instructive. Of 34 of the 51 petitioners whose occupations could be determined, 35% (12) were engaged in commerce, 29% (10) were employed in manufacturing activities, and 21% (7) were involved in professional occupations; only 15% (5) were engaged in farming as a principal occupation.

On July 2, 1816, a copy of the petition to incorporate the Second Congregational Society appeared for the first time in the Franklin Herald, the local newspaper. Three and one-half months later, on October 22, in a series of town meeting sessions the following events took place: first, a new attempt was made, and failed, to reach agreement on a site for the new meetinghouse; next, the town meeting agreed to Rev. Olds's request to submit to an ecclesiastical council for the purpose of dissolving his relationship with the First Congregational Society; and finally, a new petition to the state legislature to divide the township, signed by Moses Arms and 114 other members of the First Congregational Society, was read and affirmed by the meeting. The Arms petition sought to establish a new township out of the outlying farming districts, and to this idea the entire town meeting had given its approval; if granted, "Greenfield" would henceforth consist primarily of the southern "Village" district.

The ecclesiastical council called to consider Olds's request underscored the divisions within the town. In its report the council, consisting of clergy from nearby Colrain, Shelburne, Charlemont, Conway, and Gill, referred to the "peculiar state of the Church society in Greenfield relative to the location of the Meetinghouse" and the "unhappy situation of the people." Voting unanimously in favor of Olds' request to dissolve his relationship with the Greenfield congregation, the council cited the ongoing dispute over the location of the meetinghouse and the petitions of the contending factions to divide the congregation and the township as important factors. These circumstances the council believed to be "highly forbidding to the Usefulness of the Colleague Pastor of this Church and very inauspicious as respects the permanence of his continuance with the people."

In its concluding remarks the council lamented the controversy dividing the Greenfield people. They stated,

The Council entertain a deep sensibility for this people in their present divided and unhappy condition. They exceedingly regret that a train of circumstances so adverse to their religious prosperity should early deprive them of the pastoral labors of One whose favorable introduction among them and whose ministerial qualifications promised extensive usefulness in this place.... It constitutes, also,
Several weeks later, on December 5, 1816, the Massachusetts state legislature approved the petition of the “Village” district residents for the incorporation of a new congregational society. On December 17, 48 members of the First Congregational Society requested dismission and on January 17, 1817, most of this number organized themselves as the Second Congregational Society in Greenfield. The membership of the new congregation consisted primarily of merchants, manufacturers, lawyers, and their families; since as yet they had no meetinghouse, they held their meetings in the county courthouse near the main street of “Village” district.42

On January 30, 1817, the petition of Moses Arms and the farm families of the First Congregational Society to divide the township was presented in the state legislature. The petition complained that “the dismemberment of the Congregational Society [was] very unpromising” and that it was a “serious regret to behold these divisions taking place.” The petitioners observed that such divisions in a small town “must and will act as rivals to each other and each will constantly entertain a hope to embrace every opportunity to better itself at the expense of the other.” “Hence,” they stated, “the seeds of discord thus planted cannot fail to spring up and weaken the friendly affection and brotherly love so essential to the prosperity and happiness of both civil and religious societies.” The petitioners went on to say they believed their security, union, and prosperity could not be attained without establishing a separate township, which they proposed to call “Green Meadow.” The petition very specifically defined the boundaries of the proposed town, including in it all of the western and northern farming districts and excluding the southern “Village” district.43 On June 11, 1817, the Arms petition was considered before the state legislature, referred to its next session, and was eventually denied.

Conclusion

Complexity, division, and discord were the price paid for development and prosperity in Greenfield at the beginning of the 19th century. Historical, political, and economic forces combined with local circumstances to transform this small, hinterland farming community into an active center of commerce and industry. In particular, it was changes in the international and regional economies and a change in Greenfield’s role within those systems that brought about the transformation. In the short span of just two decades social and demographic changes that were both part and product of this transformation resulted in the development within the town of two distinct communities: one “peripheral,” long-established in the town, and oriented toward farming; the other of external origins, newly emerging, prosperous, outwardly-directed, and oriented toward commerce and industry. The differences between these two groups polarized the town, manifesting itself in the division of the local congregational society and, very nearly, the division of the township itself. Greenfield was but one of many
early American communities, and a small one at that. Nevertheless, its economic and social transformation holds lessons for the study and understanding of rural America in the 18th and 19th centuries. It shows that a consideration of how local areas are tied into wider systems and how local processes of change are constrained and promoted by the forces emanating from those wider systems provides useful insights into the complexities of the transformation of the early American countryside.

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ENDNOTES
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3. The top quintiles of wealthholders for 1771–1820 were determined with the use of the following sources: Massachusetts Tax Valuation List of 1771, Greenfield tax valuation lists for 1780, 1811, and 1820, and Greenfield state tax lists for 1800, 1810, and 1820. For a detailed discussion of the procedures employed to determine the top quintiles of wealthholders, see Gerald E Reid, From Dependence to Development: A World Systems Analysis of Local-Level Elite Formation in Greenfield, Massachusetts, 1770s–1840s, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, 1987.


5. Ibid., pp. 439, 444–449.


7. Clarence H. Danhof, Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820–1870 (Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 124–126. Danhof suggests that during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the maximum acreage that could be farmed by a single adult male was 20 acres, excluding pasture land. Using Danhof's formula of one adult male per 20 acres of land farmed, the number of rateable polls in each household (as determined from local tax lists) was taken as a rough measure of the adult male labor present in each household and was related to the total number of acres of tillage and hay land owned by the household (also as determined from local tax lists) to arrive at an approximation of
each household's shortage or excess of adult male labor. For more information, see Reid, Dependence to Development, pp. 199–203.


17. Martin, Merchants and Trade; Albert P. Van Dusen, Puritans Against the Wilderness: Connecticut History to 1763 (Chester, CT, 1975), p. 24.

18. Martin, Merchants and Trade.


20. Martin, Merchants and Trade, pp. 61–64.
21. Ibid., p. 58.


27. Jenkins, *Conservative Rebel*, p. 82.

28. Ibid., p. 50.


33. Ibid., p. 201.

34. Gamalial S. Olds, "Answer to the Call of the Church (1813)," Record Group TC4/52/2, Town of Greenfield Archives, Greenfield, MA.


37. Samuel Wells, et al., "Petition to the Hon. the Senate and House of Representatives, in General Court assembled at Boston in June A.D. 1816," Archives of the Second Congregational Church, Greenfield, MA.


40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.
