



The Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts, with the location of towns mentioned in the text. The six towns that are the basis for this study are shown in capital letters. Franklin and Hampden counties were set off from "old" Hampshire County in 1811 and 1812.

# THE ROOTS OF RURAL CAPITALISM

*Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860*

CHRISTOPHER CLARK

*Cornell University Press*

ITHACA AND LONDON

“wretched and distressed” brother, more strongly implied that Kellogg himself could afford to do this better than his neighbors. “Livelihood” impelled someone in Kellogg’s position to put his own interests first, but it also provoked the resentment of neighbors forced to assume the burdens he had avoided. This tension, together with the other conflicts in the household system drove the rural economy into the nineteenth century. The ways in which rural households acted in their diffuse social structure, pursuing independence but demanding interdependence, powerfully influenced the shape the economy would take.

### Chapter 3

## Households, Farming, and Manufacturing

Historians broadly agree that important changes were taking place in the New England countryside by about 1790. Robert Gross showed how the Revolution subtly altered patterns of life in Concord. Not only the stringent demands of war, with its disruptions, inflation, and indebtedness, but also new awareness of the world beyond the village, created an irreversible thrust for change. The historical geographer J. S. Wood, too, has drawn attention to increasing levels of production, exchange, and other activity in rural areas and has suggested that the period around 1790 was “crucial” in the transformation of rural life. Winifred B. Rothenberg has documented shifts in several vital indexes of rural economic activity. Farmers traveled more to exchange produce than they had in the colonial period. Prices assigned to major items of farm produce, even in local exchanges, increasingly converged with each other and with those in distant urban markets, suggesting greater “market” influence in the countryside and the emergence of commodity markets. Land changed hands more often. Dealings in produce and land called forth greater quantities of negotiable paper, which circulated more rapidly to create, in Rothenberg’s view, a new rural capital market. And, finally, she has also found evidence of an increasing use of wage labor in the countryside, suggesting the creation of a labor market.<sup>1</sup>

1. Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976); J. S. Wood, “Elaboration of a Settlement System: The New England Village in the Federal Period,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 10 (1984): 331–356; Winifred B. Rothenberg, “The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750–1855,” *Journal of Economic History* 41 (1981): 283–314; Rothenberg, “The Emergence of a Capital Market in Rural Massachusetts, 1730–1838,” *Journal of Economic History* 45 (1985): 781–808; Rothenberg, “The Emergence of Farm Labor Markets and the Transformation of the Rural Economy,” *Journal of Economic History* 48 (1988): 537–566. The importance of the 1780s and 1790s for parallel readjustments in family law and ideology is discussed by Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 1985), chap. 1.

OK. This evidence is often taken to suggest that the postrevolutionary period was the point at which rural people abandoned their former isolation from the rest of the country and became "market oriented" in a radically new way. However, this conclusion cannot be drawn without examining the reasons why the changes just described took place. While dramatic changes in rural production and exchange undoubtedly occurred in the half-century after the Revolution, they did so substantially within the household-based economic structure that had become so powerful. Rather than being the "crucial" point in the transformation of the countryside, this period saw a sustained attempt by household producers to maintain control of their ways of doing things. Increased levels of production, exchange, and wage labor took place more as incidental results of this effort than as conscious attempts to change the economy's direction. More important, in the short run they left the structure of rural production essentially unchanged. The ambitions and needs of household producers left a firm imprint on the economy, restraining the creation of new institutions and practices. Although the countryside took on a new dynamism, its precapitalist structure remained recognizable, even in the 1820s.

#### *Population Growth and Inequality*

Late-eighteenth-century circumstances, especially the indebtedness that led to Shays's Rebellion, encouraged rural families to use the forms of production and exchange that they had already evolved in an intensification of their efforts to supply their needs and to fulfill the desire to provide for their children. Two related problems dominated rural households' calculations and underlay their experience of the debt crisis.

One problem was relative land shortage. As settlement in the Valley and its surrounds began to be completed, most usable land came to be appropriated and divided between landowners. Because of continued population growth, access to land became more difficult than it had been in the middle of the eighteenth century. Lower population densities in hill towns compared with the older Valley settlements were counterbalanced by the poorer land available there. Although in Westhampton before 1800 it was still regarded as the custom "in many cases for the father to build a house for his son when the young man was ready to marry and locate," it was much less so in older towns. Everywhere, the opportunities to settle children on land became fewer or more expensive. Amherst, approaching its third generation of settlement, saw land prices rise more steeply after 1790 than they had before.

While taxable real estate values rose by an average of 2.6 percent each year between 1771 and 1790, the rate increased to 4.8 percent between 1790 and 1795 and 6.0 percent up to 1800.<sup>2</sup>

The second problem, coupled with the first, was that land was unequally distributed. In older towns, especially Northampton, landlessness was increasingly common. By 1798, 30.5 percent of Northampton's taxpayers were assessed on no real property at all. Another 5 percent were taxed only on buildings they lived or worked in, suggesting that they did not own the land the buildings stood on. Many who did own land had little beside their homelots than holdings of woodland, rough pasture or other unimproved acreage. The wealthiest tenth of Northampton's families owned half of its taxable property. Although about 5 percent of the town's population lived in families that owned improved land other than their homelots, only 45 percent of taxpayers had the elements of a complete farm: a homelot with buildings, improved land for cultivation, pasture, and woodland.<sup>3</sup>

Even among farmers, however, land was unequally distributed, especially in the older Valley towns. Table 1 sets out the distribution of acreage held by owners of improved land in Northampton and Hatfield.<sup>4</sup> Given the fact that Hatfield farmers' homelots are not counted in these figures, it appears that similar proportions of farmers in both towns held small or middling amounts of land. Only one in five Northampton farmers had more than one hundred acres, while in Hatfield the proportion was about one in four. Although a small number of farmers in the older towns had holdings of two hundred acres or more men like Charles Phelps, with his six hundred acres in Hadley, were notable for being so rare. Even in Amherst and Westhampton, where more recent settlement made inequality less pronounced, the poorest 40 percent of the population owned only one-tenth of the taxable wealth.<sup>5</sup>

2. The problem of land scarcity was explored by Kenneth L. Lockridge, "Land Population, and the Evolution of New England Society, 1630-1790," *Past and Present* 3 (Apr 1968), reprinted with "Afterthought, 1970" in *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development*, ed. Stanley N. Katz (Boston, 1971), pp. 466-491. The Westhampton quote is from Samuel L. Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 3 vols., compiled 1892-1905, 2:36, FL (typescript); Amherst land values are based on Bettye Hobbs Pruitt, *The Massachusetts Tax Valuation of 1771* (Boston, 1978), and Amherst, Tax Valuation Lists 1790-1800, Amherst Town Hall. A useful discussion of inheritance practices is Carol Shammas, Marylynn Salmon, and Michael Dahlin, *Inheritance in America: From Colonial Times to the Present* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1987), chap. 3.

3. Northampton, Tax Assessment List, 1798, Town Papers Collection, 5-7, FL.

4. Northampton, Tax Assessment List, 1798; Bernard R. Kubiak, "Social Changes in a New England Agricultural Community: Hatfield, Massachusetts, 1800-1850" (University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1972).

5. Amherst, Tax Valuation List, 1800, Amherst Town Hall; Westhampton, Tax Valuation List, 1810, Westhampton Town Hall.

Table 1. Distribution of farms by size, Northampton, 1798, and Hatfield, 1800

No. of acres	Farms in Northampton, 1798 <sup>a</sup> (%)	Farms in Hatfield, 1800 <sup>b</sup> (%)
1-25	26.4	33.3
26-50	29.3	19.7
51-100	24.7	23.1
101-150	11.5	7.7
151-200	2.9	8.5
200+	5.2	7.7
Total	100.0	100.0

<sup>a</sup>Including homelots; *N* = 174.

<sup>b</sup>Excluding homelots; *N* = 117.

Sources: Northampton, Tax Assessment List, 1798, Town Papers Collection, 5.7, FL; Bernard R. Kubiak, "Social Changes in a New England Agricultural Community: Hatfield, Massachusetts, 1800-1850" (University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1972), p. 11, tab. 1.

Scarce and unequally distributed land meant that families faced difficulties settling children by dividing up farms, as early settlers had been able to do. By the end of the eighteenth century perhaps as few as one in five Northampton farmers had enough land to consider dividing it between sons. This option was not open to everyone in newer towns either. An agricultural journal claimed in 1819 that opinion as to what constituted a reasonable sized farm had been revised downward over the years. At the start of settlement 200-400 acres had been regarded as necessary. By the early nineteenth century this amount had been reduced to between 80 and 150 acres.<sup>6</sup> But these were the standards of a gentleman farmer. Even in Amherst, average landholdings were only just above 50 acres. Larger amounts of land were beyond most farmers' reach.

Some families, even in older towns, were of course able to settle more than one son on land they owned. Northampton families had maintained a long tradition of settling sons in neighboring towns. As late as 1801 Bela Strong bequeathed land in Westhampton for his elder son to farm on, reserving his own Northampton farm for his younger son. But it was now rare for families to have so much land to bequeath.<sup>7</sup> In Westhampton itself, though, more families had plenty of land to divide up. William Bartlett, one of the town's largest landowners at the end of

6. "Remarks on the Agriculture of Massachusetts," *Massachusetts Agricultural Journal* 5 (1819): 320-322.

7. Bela Strong, Will, Hampshire County, Probate Records, 22:284, Hampshire County Hall of Records, Northampton (microfilm).

the eighteenth century, was able to divide his land between four sons each of whom settled on a farm within a short distance of their father house. The Fisher family, also early settlers in Westhampton, had 3 acres to divide between three sons, at least two of whom were able to carve out new farms for their own sons a generation later.<sup>8</sup> But the majority of families had to find livings for their offspring without such resources so readily to hand. It was their activities in pursuit of alternative means that helped bring change to the countryside.

Migration to land in new regions had been the traditional New England solution to land shortage and inequality, a solution of which successive Connecticut Valley settlements had themselves been result. Migration from southern New England to New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine, and then to upstate New York, Ohio, and elsewhere, which was in full flood by 1800, continued the tradition. Many people left the Valley. Ephraim Wright, a Westhampton tavernkeeper, had seven sons. Three moved to Vermont in the 1790s and settled near one another. One went to Southampton and a fifth son to the West Farm district of Northampton. By about 1810 only two remained in Westhampton. Many other families had similar experiences.<sup>9</sup>

In few cases, though, did families remove from their homes entirely. Both in the Valley proper and in hill towns, "those who stayed behind outnumbered those who migrated."<sup>10</sup> These people had to find ways to make a living within the existing rural economy. The rest of this chapter traces how they did so. Their decisions to stay led to important change.

Two basic strategies were available to those who sought livelihood and provision for their families in the face of scarcer resources. One was to acquire and make more intensive use of land. Pressure to seek out property and constantly to trim landholdings to families' needs and strategies helped generate a new land market. Various strategies for purchasing, exchanging, and renting land were the inevitable consequence of scarcity, but land acquired in the land market was put, not to new uses, but to the kinds of purposes it had long been used for by farm households. At the same time, landholders were devoting more effort to clearing and improving what they already owned, so that over several decades the agricultural output of the Valley significantly increased. The desire to provide livelihoods for family members played a

8. Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 1:172.

9. *Ibid.*, 1:30-34.

10. Of 227 men and women born in the years 1780-89, traced in Lucius M. Boltwood *Genealogies of Hadley Families: Embracing the Early Settlers of the Towns of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby* (1905; reprint, Baltimore, 1979), at least 123 (54.2%) are probably as many as 162 (71.4%) stayed in the six towns or in an adjacent town. If the "uncertains" are removed, of the total 188 known, about 65.4 percent stayed and 34 percent moved elsewhere.

Land  
crunch  
by 1800

② New skms

important role in determining what improvements were made, when, and by whom.

The second set of strategies was to acquire new skills with which to earn a living separately from or in conjunction with farming. As a result, a variety of new manufacturing activities grew up in the Valley in the generation following the Revolution. It has long been commonplace to view these early manufactures as forerunners of the capitalist industrial revolution that was to follow later in the nineteenth century. Undeniably, there were important connections to it. But early nineteenth-century rural industry differed considerably, both from what had come before and from what was to succeed and largely supersede it. It was a vibrant manufacturing sector, organized largely on family or household lines. Again, the essential purposes of the development of rural manufacturing, and the social structure that it arose in, made a strong imprint on it.

Changes in farming and manufacturing were at the heart of a dynamic change in the countryside that took place within the existing social framework up to the second decade of the nineteenth century. In this chapter I will examine them each in turn and then discuss the rural labor system, where household strategies and social structure were also crucial in determining who worked for whom and on what terms. If there was a rural "labor market" it was shaped by familial concerns and had not yet become dominated by the existence of a large class of workers with nothing to sell but their labor.

Before turning to those matters, however, it is worth examining the conduct of the exchange system within which these developments occurred. This was also an adaptation of existing rural exchange practices. Local exchange provided much of the mechanism by which farming and manufacturing were expanded, and labor hired and paid for. It also provided the ethical framework within which change took place and was understood by rural people. Conducting trade with distant markets continued to create tensions, as it had in the 1780s. But it did not fundamentally alter the local exchange system.

#### *Reciprocity and Obligation*

The Hampshire County probate court oversaw the administration of the estates of twenty-two men and women who had died between 1799 and 1802. Between them, these people had an average of \$1,483.13 each in notes or on book accounts that they owed their creditors or their debtors owed them. These obligations, which had to be painstakingly documented and collected by their executors, represented just a part of

the massive volume of debts and credits by which country people were linked to neighbors, kin, and strangers at various distances from their homes. The extent to which people were mutually entangled in credit and debt is suggested by the fact that of the ten decedents in the group who were net creditors, only one did not also have outstanding debts to other people. And of the twelve who owed others more than was owed to them, most had debts to be collected as well as to be paid.

The complexity of these networks of mutual obligation varied enormously according to individuals' circumstances. A Northampton shoemaker, Festus Morgan,<sup>11</sup> who died in 1800 leaving a house, workshop, tools, and household goods, had debts of \$36.67 owing to him, but obligations to pay \$125.26 to sixteen creditors. Two of the creditors, however, were mercantile firms, whom he owed \$73.38. The remainder of Morgan's debts, like the debts owed to him, were small accounts with individuals, averaging only \$3.71 in value. Another man whose obligations were mostly small was the Amherst farmer Asahel Clark, who owned over forty acres of land and one-third of some grist and saw mills. He owed \$279.17 to eighty-three different creditors, in amounts ranging from \$47.80 down to \$0.06 and averaging only \$3.36. Clark had been close to bankruptcy; he had been obliged to sign notes even for small amounts, and the year after his death the probate judge approved the sale of \$750 worth of his land to cover debts and legacies. At the other end of the scale was David Morton of Hatfield, who in addition to a good farm had personal property worth almost \$6,500. He owed more than \$2,560 to thirty individuals, most of them either neighbors, kin, or other creditors within the Valley. The appraisers of his estate traveled to Whately, to Hadley, twice to Amherst, once more to the "further part of Amherst," and several times to Northampton to settle books. They made sixteen journeys in all and did seven and a half days' further work clearing up Morton's affairs. There were compensations; they consumed three quarts of rum at the estate's expense, while witnesses at the probate court received dinners and mugs of flip. But they had to work hard to cut the affairs of the deceased from the complex network of personal and financial obligations in which they were entwined.<sup>11</sup>

The scale of these connections was largely a consequence of the practices of local exchange that governed most rural transactions. Indeed, the transactions that surface in probate court records are only the most formally conducted ones, those set down on paper in a form that administrators could find and act upon. But the evidence of account books and other, more casual, references to dealing show the pervasive-

11. Administrators' Accounts, Hampshire County, Probate Records, for: Festus Morgan, 22:24v.; Asahel Clark, 21:120 and 22:8v.; David Morton, 21:12.

ness of the methods of exchange outlined in the previous chapter. Book accounts, in which debits and credits were accumulated over time, and often left for long periods without settlement, were common enough to require special recognition at law. An opinion of the Massachusetts supreme judicial court noted that "the admission of proof by the book of the plaintiff himself appearing to be of his own handwriting, and supported by his supplementary oath, is a practice, in the extent to which it has been carried, peculiar to *New-England*," but one "which has been long established, and seems to have arisen . . . out of the necessity of the case, and a conformity to the actual state of things." The court also ruled that the six-year statute of limitations did not apply to unsettled debts on running book accounts whose most recent transactions had occurred less than six years ago; debts could be collected even if there were long gaps between settlements.<sup>12</sup> These and other decisions explicitly recognized the practices that had long governed local exchange. They relaxed the tighter rules associated with long-distance exchange in order to permit the debt process to operate in the rural context.

The rules of local exchange were becoming more important. Exchanges using payment in goods and services, rather than coin or other cash representations of value, remained common. In a system in which all payments were made directly in cash we would expect exactly half the entries in ledgers recording individuals' transactions with others to be for cash, whether counting the number of transactions or their value. (This is because for every entry on one side of the ledger describing goods or services advanced, there would be a corresponding cash payment on the other side.) Early-nineteenth-century farmers' ledgers do not show such a balance. Between 1800 and 1805 William Boltwood made 212 entries in his accounts of dealings with his Amherst neighbors. Of these only 7.5 percent in number and 10.6 percent by value were for cash, and another 4.3 percent (5.7 percent by value) were in notes or other paper instruments. Altogether, aside from the 3.5 percent by value of his accounts that were never settled, Boltwood conducted 88.2 percent of his transactions (80.2 percent by value) in goods, labor, or services. He traded rye, wheat, corn, pork, veal, hay, lumber, flax, and other produce from his farm; performed day work or sent his son to do it; and lent out his plow or horse for others to use. He took labor, farm produce, and other goods in return. Other accounts show a similar pattern. Joseph Eastman of North Amherst made a total of 994 entries on both sides of his ledger between 1804 and 1825, of which 902 (90.7 percent) were for goods or services. Abner Brown, in Brimfield in

the early 1820s, took or gave goods or labor in 89.5 percent of his transactions. Even in cases where settlements were made and note given for the balance, payment in goods was often specified. After reckoning with his neighbor Eliphalet Spear in 1810 and finding that he owed Spear \$3.89, Joseph Eastman noted that the amount was "Due to him in Produce."<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, there is evidence that cash payment became less frequent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, at least for the normal run of rural transactions. Cash remittances to some merchants were less common around 1800 than they had been before the Revolution. In 1771, 10 percent of Northampton taxpayers were listed as having "money at interest"; by 1798, the proportion had fallen to only 5.2 percent. In Amherst, the fall was even greater, from 19.1 percent of taxpayers in 1771 to 6.3 percent by 1790. Several factors explain the reduction. War, inflation, and taxation to redeem public debts had drained much money from the countryside. Many private cash holdings were wiped out. "Cash shortage" became a perpetual complaint of the postrevolutionary period, particularly in debt crises when urgent demands for money to repay debts drove what little cash there was into fewer hands.<sup>14</sup>

But the fundamental cause of "cash shortage" was the structure of rural economic activity itself. Lacking a staple crop for sale, the Valley's farmers were not in a strong position to acquire large amounts of cash. Surplus goods that they sold at long distance did bring in some, but particularly if they traded at local stores, farmers' remittances of produce merely tended to balance the goods from outside the region that they needed to purchase. However, "cash shortage" was a problem only in certain contexts. For most of their regular transactions farmers and others in the countryside had no need of cash and could secure necessities without it. Some came to rely on it even less over time. Joseph Eastman, for example, used cash for over 11 percent of his transactions between 1804 and 1809, but for only 4 percent from 1820 to 1825.<sup>15</sup>

In commercial exchange promissory notes and other paper instruments effectively circulated as cash, their negotiability guaranteed by

13. William Boltwood, Account Book, Amherst, 1789-1830, BCJL; Joseph Eastman and Chester E. Marshall, Account Book, North Amherst, 1801-1835, BCJL; Abner Brown Account Book, Brimfield, MS Collection, AAS.

14. Margaret E. Martin, "Merchants and Trade of the Connecticut River Valley, 1750-1820," *Smith College Studies in History* 24 (1938-1939): 150; Pruitt, *Massachusetts Tax Valuation*; Northampton, Tax Assessment List, 1798; Amherst, Tax Valuation List, 1790; "Recollections of Olive Cleveland Clark," in *A History of Williamsburg in Massachusetts*, comp. Phyllis B. Deming (Northampton, 1946).

15. Joseph Eastman, Account Book.

12. Prince, *adm. v. Smith*, 5 Mass. Reports (4 Tyng): 455-459 (1808); Cogswell, *exx. v. Dolliver*, 2 Mass. Reports (1 Tyng): 217-223 (1806).

no  
limit  
on  
open  
accounts

court rulings intended to ease the flow of paper. These instruments were generated in local exchange too, some against outstanding balances on book account, more in relation to land deals and other large transactions. They became more common in the late eighteenth century, but only for certain types of dealing, where pressure was greatest to ease the constraints of direct exchange of goods or work. Farmers and other employers of labor began to pay workers in orders drawn on local stores. More orders against third parties circulated as people with no immediate means to pay pressing debts transferred the burden to their own debtors. But evidence from account books suggests that payment by note or order remained rare for day-to-day dealings. Joseph Eastman used them in fewer than 2 percent of transactions before 1810, even less after that.<sup>16</sup>

This need not have been the case: farmers and others could have insisted on the passing of notes every time they gave out goods or did work. That they did not reflects the ethical restraints that they accepted against pressing for payment and their preference for settling debt by reciprocal exchange over the course of time. Because demanding a note or security for a debt could cause embarrassment, usually it was done only in certain instances. For large debts, it was expected and acceptable. When someone was running close to bankruptcy, or might have other difficulty making payments, it might also reasonably be demanded. This is one reason notes appear so frequently in administrators' accounts. Many people who later died had been old or sick beforehand, less able than others to make payments in the normal course of events. Giving a note to a creditor and receiving a note from a debtor was a device for having affairs straightened out after one's death, when administrators could collect debts owing and make payments out of an estate even where means had not existed while the decedent remained alive. Even so, of twenty-one decedents in the years 1799 to 1802 who owed debts to others, thirteen had not given notes for them. Even of the twelve who were net debtors, seven had not been asked to sign notes.<sup>17</sup>

Cash, too, served particular purposes in local exchange. It was neither a universal equivalent nor a generally convenient method of payment. Even among the well off, desire to acquire cash usually related to its specific uses. Charles Phelps's daughter Elizabeth traveled to Boston in 1800 to buy clothing and other goods before her marriage to Rev. Dan Huntington but found few merchants prepared to sell to her except for cash. She arranged some purchases on her father's credit, noted that others might as well be made for goods or credit in Northampton, and

suggested postponing the marriage until these arrangements could be completed.<sup>18</sup> Charles Phelps, it will be recalled, was one of the Valley largest farmers. His daughter's problem was not the lack of wealth, but of immediate means. Cash was called for in particular circumstances, to acquire certain things, or from certain people, or in certain places. Its uses were socially determined.

Cash was, above all, a medium of exchange between strangers or in circumstances when other available goods and services were not needed and therefore not acceptable in payment. People could go to great lengths to avoid using cash, either because they had none or because they wanted to conserve what they did have for other purposes. After David Mack migrated from Connecticut to the new settlement of Middlefield in the 1770s and needed some goods, he found that the nearest store was twenty miles away at Westfield. Having no cash and preferring not to ask for credit from a merchant who did not know him, Mack chose instead to ride the sixty miles back home to Hebron to get what he needed.<sup>19</sup> Cash was more often demanded of people coming from a distance than from locals. Members of a town committee charged with building a new bridge in Northampton in 1794 were authorized to draw money from the selectmen to purchase plant "providing they are obliged to go out of town to procure them." Northampton storekeeper kept accounts with seventy-two customers between January and March 1804, of whom twenty-seven (37.5 percent) eventually settled in cash. Fourteen of these lived in Northampton, but they represented only 25 percent of the store's customers from that town, the rest of whom paid in produce or services. Thirteen (81 percent) of sixteen nonlocal customers, however, paid cash.<sup>20</sup>

Cash was more likely to be demanded for certain goods. The Amherst farmer Asa Dickinson ran a small store or tavern early in the nineteenth century, selling rum and sugar to several dozen customers, mostly from the neighborhood. Of payments to him over a fourteen-month period in 1804–1805, 44 percent by value was in cash, usually for imported West India rum and sugar. New England rum could be paid for by other means; Dickinson took a note in June 1806, for example, from a farmer who promised to pay "the sum of five cords of pitch pine wood cut and split d[e]livered at his door . . . by the first of October."<sup>21</sup>

Direct reciprocal exchanges were the most common form of transa

16. *Ibid.*

17. Hampshire County, Probate Records, vol. 21.

18. Elizabeth W. Phelps to Charles Phelps, Boston, Sept 28, 1800, PPHH.

19. Joseph Clarke, *A Sermon Preached at Middlefield, at the Funeral of Hon. David Mack* (Northampton, 1845), appendix, p. 16.

20. Northampton, Town Meeting Warrant, Apr 30, 1794, BCJL; Store Ledger, Northampton, 1803–1814, NHS, A.A. 18.24.

21. Asa Dickinson, Account Books, 2 vols., Amherst, 1792–1799, 1804–1811, BCJL

tion. Ethical standards were based on the assumption that this would be the case, and that the yardstick of economic performance was not the ability to make a profit but the ability to have the means available to make payments over time in the normal run of farming or other affairs. These standards for dealing affected not just local exchange itself, but spread into longer-distance transactions when farmers and others could make bargains that gave them the same kinds of latitude they were granted locally. They preferred, when they could, to obtain not only generous amounts of time to settle debts but the ability to pay them off in means they had at hand. They perceived transactions in concrete, not abstract, terms, focusing not on overall questions of price, profit, or loss but on immediate issues such as who needed this, who could let someone have that, or who had enough of the other to pay off an outstanding debt.

This concreteness of approach has two implications. First, it calls into question the suitability of regarding local exchange practices simply as variants of "market" behavior. Certainly many of the instruments of more abstract market exchange were present. Prices, especially for bulk farm produce, did increasingly converge with those in other regions. The account books used by some farmers were similar to those used by merchants and other long-distance dealers, and most rural people who kept them had grasped at least the rudiments of commercial accounting practice, however unsystematic they might be in applying it. But rural practice emphasized what Max Weber called "substantive" over "formal" rationality. When Richard Williams of Williamsburg copied out arithmetical instructions from a textbook in 1791, he particularly noted sections relevant to local exchange. "Equation of Payments," he wrote, "is the finding of a time to pay at once several debts due at different times so that no loss shall be sustained by either party."<sup>22</sup> He conceived "loss" not as an unfavorable balance between incomings and outgoings, but as any need to make an outgoing payment during the normal run of transactions.

Second, in the actual conduct of exchange the concept of "price" was itself something of an abstraction. Farmers used money prices to give book values to the goods and labor they exchanged and these moved increasingly with the rhythm of distant markets. But in a set of long-running book accounts they had less direct meaning than might appear, since their actual value was only notional. The real "prices" for goods were not in cash but in the other goods and labor that were exchanged for them. These, in turn, were constantly being bargained over. It is likely that farmers used "market prices" for farm produce as markers in a complex pattern of dealings. But when two farmers came together to

settle accounts, they often had other goods and work to include for which "market prices" were not available. The ledger belonging to Abner Brown of Brimfield contained prices for work and services but also many entries for goods such as corn, rye, turkeys, and liquor for which no price was given. Pricing was evidently done at the time of settlement; the goods had changed hands without agreement as to their value to be attached to them.<sup>23</sup> Annotations in account books often indicate that particular goods were "called" a certain amount in order to help bring accounts into balance. All this suggests that prior calculations of costs may have played a lesser role in bringing transactions about than practical questions of need and availability. In a decentralized, household-based economy, individuals could use their bargaining skills to determine terms of settlement after transactions had taken place.

Local exchange also had expansionary effects. Long-running book accounts, especially those paid off irregularly or at long intervals, were effective instruments of credit. The credit advanced was informal, based on the needs and potentialities of different households. Often between the same households, the balance of credit and debt shifted from one to the other at different times, so that credit was not simply one-way flow from more to less powerful families but was widely diffused. If it remained simply as book debt, without being subject to interest, this credit was also inexpensive. Avoidance of cash and commercial paper instruments provided a degree of insulation to the local economy against speculative surges. Holding assets in useful goods rather than in cash, was a hedge against price fluctuations. Direct exchanges also stimulated demand for local goods and services, because it was relatively easier to negotiate purchases from local sources than to obtain cash to buy goods from outside the region. As population grew, and pressure on land and other resources became more intense, strains developed in the system. But, compared with the more centralized commercial credit and payments systems of staple-crop regions, the diffused local exchange system may have been crucial in permitting a dynamic household economy to evolve. It evolved, moreover, largely on its own terms, without relying heavily on outside sources of credit.

### *Farming*

Local exchange and the sale of surpluses, along with inheritance production, and acquisition of land, formed the strategies farm families

22. Richard Williams, "Arithmetical Manuscriptum," Williams Family Papers, Box 6, folder 2, PVMA.

23. Abner Brown, Account Book.

used to provide for their own needs and to secure means of advancement for their children. Shortage of land led to more intensive use of all of these, and so to a significant degree of agricultural change and expansion. Although, as population grew, nonagricultural pursuits increased in proportion, farming remained by far the most important occupation throughout the Valley well into the nineteenth century. Even in Northampton, the most diversified town, nearly 63 percent of household heads listed agriculture as their occupation in the 1820 census. In Amherst, the proportion was almost 73 percent. In Hadley, Hatfield, Westhampton, and Williamsburg it ranged from 80 percent to nearly 89 percent.<sup>24</sup> While a few farm families had, as we have seen, adequate land to provide for their present and future needs, most had to seek other ways of doing it. Some examples will illustrate how families with different levels of assets attempted to find security without sacrificing independence.

Caleb Cook of Hadley was one of the substantial minority of landowners who had inadequate land to make a living entirely out of farming and who used local exchange to compensate for this. He had received some land from his father, Aaron Cook, when the latter died in 1800, but Aaron had bequeathed his own farm and the residue of his estate to Caleb's brother Daniel. Caleb was left with thirty acres, which he owned in common with an uncle. Had he controlled this land outright, it might have been sufficient to support a family. As it was, Cook had to supplement his family's takings from the land with work as a carpenter. He or members of his family worked at weaving and shoe binding; Cook also hired himself out in a variety of farm laboring jobs, earning food and small household goods. Local exchange was for Cook an essential means to cobble together a living out of a range of skills and slender resources.<sup>25</sup>

For households with more property, local exchange served more as an adjunct to farming than as a vital part of earning a living. But different circumstances could lead in different directions, as the contrasting examples of Solomon Wright of Northampton and William Boltwood of Amherst suggest. Wright farmed eighteen acres of improved land in Northampton in 1798, as well as ten acres of unimproved outlands, which included a woodlot and probably some pasture. He

24. U.S. Fourth Census, 1820, Massachusetts, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (microfilm). The study of agriculture that follows has drawn on Margaret R. Pabst, "Agricultural Trends in the Connecticut Valley Region of Massachusetts, 1800-1900," *Smith College Studies in History* 26 (Oct 1940-July 1941), and John Ritchie Garrison, "Surviving Strategies: The Commercialization of Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1790-1860" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1985); see also Howard S. Russell, *A Long, Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Farming in New England* (Hanover, N.H., 1976).

25. Caleb Cook, Account Book, 1794-1838, NHS, A.A. 17.9.

was also taxed on a horse, a cow, a few other cattle, and some hogs. Without a grown son to help him, this modest farm would have kept Wright busy, though even if his crop yields were modest too, he should have been able to raise enough to feed his family. He traded his own labor and the produce of his household systematically to obtain things the family needed. He lent his horse and farm tools to neighbors and exchanged day work with them at busy seasons. His wife's work: weaving cloth, making gowns, and mending clothes, exchanged for extra food, footwear, or household goods, also figured prominently in his accounts. Wright maintained extensive contacts with other branches of his family. He swapped work, did weaving, and exchanged produce with his brother Elijah. He had acquired some of his land from his brother-in-law Benjamin Southworth and grew corn and flax "on shares" on land rented from him. He obtained goods from a local storekeeper, Joseph Clarke, for them with farm produce and sledloads of wood in the wintertime. Constant trading and juggling goods for labor gave the Wrights their living. This exchange took place mainly within the confines of the town. Although wage labor and sharecropping were part of his strategy, Wright did not become dependent on them. They were supplementary to the land and household labor that were the family's main assets.<sup>26</sup>

But living in Northampton, where settlement was old and relatively dense and good land was hard to obtain, Wright was able to do little more than get by through these methods. Over in Amherst, William Boltwood used them to build more than just a livelihood. Born in 1766 Boltwood had been trained as a blacksmith but apparently preferred farming. He had received land from his father, and started out with resources roughly similar to Wright's. About the time of his marriage to Eunice Noble in 1789, Boltwood swapped his land with a brother's, procuring a forty-four-acre farm in Amherst's west parish. This was smaller than the average size for a farm in the town but, like Wright, he found that it was more than sufficient for a young man with little help. He raised a mixture of grain crops and reared a small number of animals, trading work with neighboring farmers when he needed assistance. By 1795 he was producing fifty bushels of grain, more than enough for his family's needs; what was left over supplemented the seven tons of hay he also raised for animal feed. By now he was growing flax, too, from which he either exchanged the fiber or, having had it spun into yarn at home, traded it to pay for weaving. In 1796 he started trading in land, carefully buying, selling, and swapping parcels with other Amherst farmers. By 1800, he already had sixteen more acres than

26. Solomon Wright, Account Book, 1787-1810, NHS, A.A. 17.6.

he had started with, and his holdings put him among the most prosperous fifth of Amherst taxpayers. As his sons became old enough to help, Boltwood extended his improved land, from twelve acres to twenty acres between 1795 and 1800 alone. Boltwood was using his land, his family, and his local dealings as a basis for a steady accumulation of land; he would continue doing so until he had secured enough to carve out a new farm for one of his sons.<sup>27</sup>

Taken together, the differing strategies of families like the Cooks, Wrights, and Boltwoods brought about substantial change in agriculture without fundamentally altering the household economy itself. A closer look at the town of Amherst allows us to trace this process. Its position on fertile land at the eastern edge of the Valley proper gave Amherst's farmers good conditions for growing crops. By the end of the eighteenth century, though, the second and third generations of settlers in the town were facing constraints on access to new land, most of which had been divided up. Comparison of the town tax assessment lists for 1795, first with the valuation of 1771 and then with nineteenth-century data, provides evidence about the effects of the settlement process and subsequent scarcity of land.

Although the 1771 returns for Amherst survive only in incomplete form, they provide data for 96 of the 117 taxpayers assessed that year. Between them, these households produced 10,062 bushels of grain from 1,132 acres of tillage, a mean output of 8.89 bushels per acre. This would have been more than adequate to feed the small but growing population of over 900.<sup>28</sup> According to the 1795 returns, Amherst's 170 taxpayers produced only 4,914 bushels of grain from 1,350 acres, a mean yield of only 3.64 bushels per acre. This was almost certainly an underestimate, although it is difficult to be certain by how much. Bettye Hobbs Pruitt's estimates of minimum consumption requirements suggest that the grain output recorded in the assessment list would have been about 12.5 percent less than what was needed to feed the population of about 1,290. However, although the output figures would have to be revised upward, the 1795 assessment list implies that over the revolutionary period Amherst's early grain surpluses were reduced. Since there is no evidence from account books or other sources of a substantial trade in grain or flour in or out of the town in the 1790s, the reduction is likely to have brought grain output more nearly into balance with local demand.<sup>29</sup>

There were two reasons for the decline in grain output. Soil exhaustion almost certainly reduced yields on older farming land, and by the

27. William Boltwood, Account Book; Amherst, Tax Valuation Lists, 1790-1820.

28. Pruitt, *Massachusetts Tax Valuation*.

29. Amherst, Tax Valuation List, 1795.

*Sacrifice to  
non-grain crops*  
Households, Farming, and Manufacturing ;

1790s many farmers were using a portion of their tillage to raise non-grain crops, especially flax for household linen production. At least half of Amherst's farmers grew flax by 1795, despite the fact that most were cultivating less land than their predecessors. Those assessed in the 1771 valuations had an average of 11.8 acres of tillage each. By 1795 this average had fallen to just under 8 acres as a result of the subdivision of land and some redistribution of tillage to new farms. So farmers were heading closer to the margins of adequate provision for the local population. Some years these margins were slim. In Hatfield in 1789, Rebecca Dickinson wrote of the difficulties arising from "the want of bread and the want of money to gain that same article," and noted that harvest were expected to be poor: "there is no hope of the grain." A baker in Northampton faced one or two years in the first decade of the nineteenth century when he was forced to import flour. One of them was in 1809, when local storekeepers took the unusual step of advertising flour for sale and a man from Goshen was moved to write, "Last year we complained because we had more than enough of the good things of this life, and this year the Lord has cut short our crops, so that we have not the wherewithal to subsist upon."<sup>30</sup>

Margins, though sometimes reached, were not seriously breached. Overall, late-eighteenth-century farmers succeeded in diversifying production while maintaining adequate provision. Three things helped prevent a slide into famine during lean years. One was mixed cropping. Another was local exchange. The third was the increasingly important role accorded livestock as guarantors and regulators of the food supply.

Most farmers grew a variety of crops. Of the food crops and feedstuff counted in the 1795 tax-assessors' returns—wheat, rye, corn, barley, oats, pulses, and hay—three-fifths of Amherst farmers produced at least four each and 94 percent produced at least three. Rye was raised by 70 percent, corn by 95 percent, and hay by virtually all. The few farmers who produced fewer than three crops each were those with the smallest amounts of land. Invariably the larger the farm, the larger the range of crops it produced; size was associated with diversity, not specialization. Of the two rationales behind this mixed-crop regime, one was the desire to spread the labor burden as much as possible, so as to optimize the use of family, rather than hired labor. The other was to protect against shortfalls. While in poor years one or two crops might fail or produce low yields, this was unlikely to happen to three or four. The strategy's worth was illustrated in 1816, "the year without a summer," when

30. Rebecca Dickinson, Diary Extracts, Hatfield, Spring 1789, PVMA (transcript letter from "A Christian," *Anti-Monarchist* (Northampton), Oct 18, 1809. William Porter the Hadley merchant, advertised wheat for sale when grain was scarce in 1806: see *Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton), Apr 9, 1806.

exceptionally cold and dry weather produced frosts each month and severely jeopardized crops. Whereas most were poor, rye harvests in the Valley and elsewhere were good.<sup>31</sup>

Averting famine depended on redistribution of scarce food. Account books provide abundant evidence that, in good or poor years, foodstuffs were exchanged between households, usually in small quantities, in return for labor or other services. A sample of one in five of Amherst farmers on the 1795 tax list reveals the inequalities in production that underlay this need for local exchange. Farmers in the sample produced a mean of 40.29 bushels of grain each per year. This average was well above the minimum of 25 to 30 bushels which most families would have required for their own consumption, but overall it would have provided no more than what Sarah F. McMahon has called "a comfortable subsistence" for each household. The distribution of output was not even, however. Of thirty-four farms in the sample, sixteen, or 47 percent, produced less than 30 bushels each. On the other hand seven, or 20.6 percent, produced more than double that amount. As suggested in Table 2, farms fell into three categories. Almost half had grain supplies below the 30-bushel "subsistence" level for the average family, although, allowing for some undercounting in the returns, it is likely that fewer than one-third were seriously below it. Another third produced enough to provide a comfortable grain supply. Only the top fifth of farms produced enough to have substantial amounts available for feeding livestock or trading. Exchange of grain and labor between the larger and the smaller producers helped correct the imbalance between them. This accords with Bettye Hobbs Pruitt's finding that exchange in many parts of New England derived not from the existence of substantial surpluses for sale but from deficits on many farms that needed to be made up.<sup>32</sup>

While exchange redistributed uneven supplies of grain and other produce between households, livestock provided the single most important guarantee of adequate food supplies overall. Livestock raising also fitted well into farm households' strategies for using land and

31. Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 1:309.

32. Thirty bushels of grain was established by Bettye Hobbs Pruitt, "Self-Sufficiency and the Agricultural Economy of Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41 (July 1984): 333-364, as the average family minimum annual requirement, a significant downward estimate from those of most earlier studies; see also Sarah F. McMahon, "A Comfortable Subsistence: The Changing Composition of Diet in Rural New England, 1620-1840," *William and Mary Quarterly* 42 (Jan 1985): 26-65. Surpluses and deficits were calculated from crop figures in Amherst, Tax Valuation List, 1795, converted to corn equivalents according to the following ratios: 1 bushel of Wheat equal to 1.104 bushels of corn; Rye, 1.050; Corn, 1.000; Barley, 0.866; Oats, 0.433; Potatoes, 0.220; (Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* [Cambridge, Eng., 1977], p. 247, tab. E-2).

### Households, Farming, and Manufacturing

Table 2. Distribution of annual grain output, Amherst farms, 1795

Total grain output (bushels)	Percentage of farms <sup>a</sup>
Under 15	17.6
15-22	14.7
23-30	14.7
31-38	8.8
39-45	11.8
46-60	11.8
61 or over	20.6

<sup>a</sup>N = 34, a 20 percent sample of Amherst farms in 1795.

Source: Amherst, Tax Valuation List, 1795, Amherst Town Hall.

labor. In the six towns in 1791 there were altogether more than 2,300 beef and dairy cattle older than three years, as well as nearly 2,200 swine. This represented an average of 2 pigs and more than 2 cattle for each family in the region. Swine and cows were owned by many non-farm families as well as farmers. Cattle were particularly important. More than nine out of ten Amherst farmers kept milk cows in 1795 and most kept beef cattle too, while only just over half kept swine.<sup>33</sup> Meat was an important part of most families' diet, and milk, though occasionally drunk fresh, went to make cheese or butter. Hides and skins, tallow for candles, bristles, and other animal by-products found extensive use in households and appeared in local exchange.

Livestock also served another role, as a kind of "regulator," balancing the economy's need for sufficiency and the problems of producing too much. In good years, when grain and hay were plentiful, surpluses could be directed to fattening cattle and hogs for slaughter, or for exports to Boston and other markets on the hoof. Butter and cheese production would also rise, for sale as well as for family consumption. In poorer crop years, however, with feedstuffs rarer, cattle and swine could be slaughtered in greater numbers for household and local consumption, or for export as dried meat. Winifred Rothenberg's research has suggested a link between slaughter rates and urban grain and hog prices by the early nineteenth century, and it is possible that large farmers were beginning to gear their decisions about livestock to the

33. Mass., General Court (Committees), Aggregates of Valuations, 1791, Mass. State Library, Boston (microfilm).

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 "market" conditions indicated by price movements.<sup>34</sup> But it is likely that many farmers responded less to prices than to their households' needs and local crop conditions. David Hoyt, an elderly Deerfield farmer, kept notes in his diary in 1804 about his son's cattle and the decisions that would have to be taken about them as winter approached. When there was already enough snow on the ground in mid-November "that the cattle cannot get anything to Eat abroad," he expected that they "therefore must be put to Dry meat if the weather continues." The weather moderated, however, and the cattle remained in pasture for another month. When they were eventually brought into the barn in mid-December, Hoyt expected that they would now be able to last the winter on the available feed. In especially poor years, meat provided an essential supplement to the diets of families short of grain. At the end of 1816, for example, the West Farms school district of Northampton contemplated having no school for the winter. Grain was so scarce that no family was willing to board a schoolteacher. When a farmer offered a heifer, for which he had no feed, the problem was solved. The heifer was slaughtered, there was now sufficient food to board a teacher, and "school was kept."<sup>35</sup> There was no neater illustration of the regulating function of livestock.

Livestock suited household production strategies because their direct labor requirements for a given output were relatively small. They therefore represented a good return to labor, over which households attempted to keep most stringent control. Dairy cows needed the most constant work and attention, and although most households kept at least one, few kept more than two. Milking and barn chores were among the tasks handled either by men or by women as household conditions dictated, although butter and cheese making was mostly done by women. Pigs, fed on household scraps and other surplus items, also placed few demands on family labor time. Beef cattle, which required hay and feedstuffs for part of the year, were nevertheless handled in such a way as to minimize their use of labor at busy seasons. They were often left to forage for themselves in backlots or woodland. Children too young for other tasks were assigned to drive cattle to and from pastures.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, livestock permitted families to expand somewhat beyond

34. Rothenberg, "Markets and Massachusetts Farmers: A Paradigm of Economic Growth in Rural New England, 1750-1855" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1985), pp. 66-72.

35. David Hoyt, Diary, Nov 16, 18-19, 20, Dec 3, 1804, MS Collection, AAS. Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 1:309.

36. George Sheldon, "'Tis Sixty Years Since: The Passing of the Stall-Fed Ox and the Farm Boy," *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association* 3 (1890-1898): 472-490.

their limited land resources. Cattle and hogs were not restricted to the property of their owners but under certain circumstances could browse freely on unenclosed land. This helped poor families as well as wealthy ones keep stock fed. Some towns, including Northampton and Hatfield, permitted cattle to run at large and browse on highways during the summer. In older towns, such as Hadley, Hatfield, Northampton, Westfield, and Deerfield, they were also permitted to graze in meadow and common fields after the end of the growing season. Toward the edges of the Valley, unimproved uplands served the same purpose. In other words, livestock were not reliant purely on cultivated feedstuff. The use of such land for grazing livestock, however, could lead to friction. Seventeen farmers in Northampton's South Farms district petitioned the selectmen in 1800 against the tendency of others "to turn their sheep and cattle upon our farms" near Mount Tom. But livestock remained at large well into the nineteenth century, as voters at town meetings resisted attempts to end the practice or voted to maintain common-field fences.<sup>37</sup>

Animals and their products appeared in local exchange and long distance trade in multifarious ways. Not only was meat commonly exchanged between households, but it came to be traded over middling distances within the Valley. At least two farmers from Williamsburg started in the 1780s to carry meat to customers in Northampton. One of the two, Orange Wright, set up a permanent butchering business, with customers among Northampton's nonfarming population, and for some time at the beginning of the nineteenth century employed another man to walk around the town selling meat from a basket.<sup>38</sup> But this business remained small-scale. Larger overall, but more intermittent in character, were long-distance sales of livestock, meat, dairy produce, and other animal products, which became Valley farmers' principal source of outside income. But the levels of exports varied with conditions in the local household economy. If grain was short, households slaughtered cattle and swine for dried meat. Supplies of live animals for market fell. The mechanism for handling livestock supplies therefore remained informal and flexible. Country storekeepers, such as Sylvester Judg Sr., of Westhampton, served as collecting agents for cattle from a wide area around, sending droves on to market after farmers had individually consigned the animals in small numbers. Alternatively, drovers started traveling through the countryside collecting cattle for sale, often having to cover long distances putting droves together. Farmers en-

37. *Hampshire Gazette*, Mar 17, 1800; Hatfield, Town Meeting Records, 2:25, Apr 1815 FL (microfilm).

38. Judd MS, "Northampton with Westfield," 2:194, FL; Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:37, reprinted in *SPJM*, pp. 388-389.

sured that their own needs were going to be met before sending animals off to market.<sup>39</sup>

Livestock, though, provided the best means for farmers to adapt their strategies to meet the challenge presented by population growth, land scarcity, and inequalities. Until about 1800 they had relied on "extensive" rearing practices, using unimproved land and browsing rights as major sources of food for their animals. Now more and more farmers sought to increase output, to secure their immediate and future needs within the constraints of the household system.

They approached this goal in two ways. They added unsettled or unimproved areas to pastures, clearing new land in order to modify their existing extensive methods. And they began to make more systematic use of livestock as part of a process of extending and improving tillage and meadowlands, gradually shifting to more intensive methods. Over time, more and more animals were grazed on properly cleared pastures, rather than in woods and wastes, while their manure was also applied more widely to cultivated land.

In Hadley, Hatfield, and Northampton in 1791, tillage accounted for between 20 percent and 25 percent of land recorded in the tax assessments, but in newer towns like Williamsburg, it represented as little as 5 percent. All towns finished the eighteenth century with large amounts of land divided up between owners but uncultivated. Over the following decades, up to 1831, perhaps as much as 30,000 acres of unimproved land were brought into productive use of some kind. Much of this land had been held in reserve by households seeking to use it to help provide livings for their offspring. As population grew and land became harder to acquire, they sought to make better use of what they already had. In Amherst, for example, the average farmer's total landholding in the 1790s was about 56 acres, but only about one-sixth of that was tilled and another sixth used for mowing and pasture. By about 1830, though average holdings had fallen to around 50 acres, more than 75 percent was in use. Tax lists of 1802 and 1822 permit us to see this land improvement in more detail. Of thirty farmers who appeared in both lists, and who had unimproved land in 1802, only four had not increased their improved acreage by clearing or acquiring land twenty years later. Sons inheriting parts of their fathers' farms worked to clear unimproved land to give themselves more room to farm in, or to make small improved acreages into viable farms. Asiel Blodgett, for instance, owned 104 acres in 1818, only 30 of which were taxed as "improved" land. Five years later, he owned the same total acreage, but had 22 more acres of im-

39. Sylvester Judd, Sr., Receipt, Oct 5, 1789, loose papers with Account Books, Westhampton, 1752-1832, MCFL.

proved land. Overall, as many as 7,000 acres of land in Amherst were brought into farming use between 1791 and 1831, at an average rate of just under 1 acre per household per year. Similar improvements were taking place throughout the Valley, both in older and newer towns.<sup>40</sup>

How was this newly cleared land used? Pasture was the single most important addition to farms. In Amherst, the reported increase in pasture, at nearly 7,000 acres, was almost equivalent to the reduction in unimproved land. In Westhampton and Williamsburg pasture expanded by more than 4,000 acres each. Undercounting of land in the 1791 valuations may exaggerate these increases, but there is no doubt that pasture expanded rapidly in this period, especially at the edges of the Valley. Of total farm acreage in the six towns in 1791, it accounted for about one-eighth. By 1831 pasture accounted for one-third. Not surprisingly, there was a substantial increase in livestock raising. The expansion of both dairy and beef production meant that the number of cattle more than doubled, from 2,300 in 1791 to more than 5,400 in 1831. But sheep raising expanded even more rapidly. From a few small flocks at the end of the eighteenth century, the number grew until there were 12,000 sheep in 1831, concentrated in the upland towns, where they were raised partly for meat, mainly for wool.<sup>41</sup>

As well as clearing land for pasture, many farmers also expanded their tillage and mowing lands, adding a total of as much as 7,000 acres throughout the six towns. In Hadley and Hatfield, where the largest changes occurred, tillage and mowing acreage almost doubled. Some of this increase was brought about by improvement to previously unused or unusable land, but given that in Hatfield, for example, the decline in acreage recorded as "pasture" was equivalent to 80 percent of the increase in tillage and mowing, it is likely that the conversion of pasture provided much of the new cultivation. Farmers not only cultivated more land, however, but did so more intensively. The increase in livestock provided manure, which farmers applied more systematically to their land. Sylvester Judd, Jr., while farming in Westhampton between 1817 and 1820, calculated that he increased his hay yields from five or five and one half tons per acre to eleven or twelve tons within three years "from the effects of manure and attention." Improvement such as more careful seed drilling and new strains of grasses helped raise the total output of field crops, as did the gradual spread of grain cradles, which reaped more efficiently than sickles. In Northampton,

40. Mass., General Court, Aggregates of Valuations, 1791, 1831; Amherst, Tax Valuation Lists, 1802, 1822.

41. Mass., General Court, Aggregates of Valuations, 1791, 1831; these may have undercounted beef cattle, in particular, since valuation lists were frequently drawn up after stock was moved to market or to pasture each spring.

total grain production recorded in tax assessments quadrupled in the half-century between 1771 and 1821. In Amherst, Hadley, Hatfield, and Northampton together, the four towns with the most extensive grain crops, grain output tripled between 1791 and 1831. Given that tilled acreage in these towns rose by only 56 percent in the period, it is likely that more than two-thirds of the increased output was due to higher yields. In Northampton alone, grain output rose by 29 percent between 1821 and 1831, and yields per acre by over 30 percent.<sup>42</sup>

Increased crop and livestock production were linked. As grain supplies began to overtake local population increases, more corn in particular became available for animal feed. Together with hay, this provided sufficient feedstuffs for farmers in the older Valley towns to undertake winter cattle fattening on a regular basis, without such concern as they had once had for fluctuations in output near the margins of subsistence. Winter fattening for market became an established practice on more farms. Cattle drives grew in size and regularity. The Judds of Westhampton provide an example of the contrast. In 1789 Sylvester Judd, Sr., collected fat cattle from his and other towns "to drive to Boston market." This was in October, so these were animals that were not to be fed for the winter. The consignment included nineteen cattle belonging to six different farmers. One of these men shipped nine animals, but the remainder sent only one, two, or three each. By 1818, when Sylvester Judd, Jr., sent cattle to Boston, he did so in April after fattening them for the winter, and the twenty-four animals were all his own. Local credit and noncash exchange helped some farmers expand their herds.<sup>43</sup>

As the livestock trade increased, a shift in farming strategies began to take place. Whereas in the late eighteenth century both Valley and hill towns had practiced mixed cropping with a view to undertaking all the functions of farming for themselves, by 1820 elements of specialization were emerging. In Hatfield, pastureland was diminishing, while in neighboring Williamsburg it was increasing. This was an example of a wider process. Valley farmers converted pastures to tillage and sought out new pastures for their cattle in the hills. Animals were driven from the Valley into the hills for the summer and returned each fall for winter feeding and fattening on the grain and hay grown in the Valley meadows. Before the spring drives back to the hills or to market in Boston,

42. Sylvester Judd made notes on his crops in Judd MS, "Book of Fragments," Apr 1818, May 1, 1819; general data is from Mass., General Court, Aggregates of Valuations, 1791, 1821, 1831.

43. Quotation from Judd, Sr., Receipt, Oct 5, 1789, Account Books; Judd MS, "Book of Fragments," Apr 1818. The *Republican Spy* (Northampton), Apr 1, 1806, referred to farmers who had obtained cows with credit advanced by Caleb Strong, against notes payable in produce.

farmers had collected manure in their barns to be spread on the field prior to planting. Meanwhile, hill farmers supplemented their income by renting out pasture or by taking cattle onto their land at an agreed price per head for the summer. The manure that resulted would assist their own crops the following year. Both in Valley and hill towns the increase in cattle permitted greater production of cheese and butter. Indeed, one means of paying rent for pasturing cattle was to permit the owner of the pasture to take all or part of the cheese produced from any cows milked during their stay.<sup>44</sup>

Improving land and establishing this cattle-crop cycle were the most important parts of the new strategies, but farmers also found other ways of increasing output. Especially in upland areas favorable to orchards, cider making became an important side activity. Several farms in the southern part of Westhampton, for example, had cider presses and stills in the early nineteenth century; cider brandy became a common feature of local exchange. As grain surpluses increased, so did distilling, although it was usually done on a larger scale by a few manufacturers. By the mid-1820s there were at least two distilleries in the southern part of Amherst or adjacent Hadley. An article in the *New England Farmer* noted that throughout the Valley in Massachusetts "rye is extensively cultivated, and after supplying the inhabitants, a large surplus is left for the distilleries or exportation." It estimated that as much as 100,000 bushels were consumed by distilleries in Granby, South Hadley, Westfield, and other towns.<sup>45</sup>

On the fertile lands of the river meadows, meanwhile, especially in Hadley, an increasing number of farmers were growing small plots of broomcorn, to supply farmers and workshop producers who manufactured brooms during the slack winter months. This was a gradual adaptation by white farmers of techniques originally used by nonwhites. Corn brooms had originally been made by native Americans, some of whom remained to peddle them around the Valley at the end of the eighteenth century. There is evidence that in the late 1790s small patches of broomcorn were raised by two black farmers in Hadley, but credit for the adoption and expansion of broomcorn raising and corn broom making was left to a white man, Levi Dickinson, who with his son gradually built a regular export trade in brooms during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Other farmers started to follow suit producing broomcorn either to manufacture into brooms themselves or to sell to established makers, such as the Dickinsons.<sup>46</sup>

44. E.g., agreements between Dan Huntington, Hadley, and upland farmers, loose papers in PPHH.

45. *New England Farmer*, Dec 8, 1826.

46. Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:13, reprinted in *SPJM*, pp. 390-391.

*Farmers and Markets*

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 Together, the improvements in farm output increased the volume of goods traded out of the region between the 1790s and the 1820s, giving many households contacts in distant markets they had not had before. As Winifred Rothenberg has shown, journeys to carry goods and make exchanges became more frequent and, as information spread more rapidly through the countryside, prices for staple goods converged. Farmers' incomes from the sales of goods became more important for settling debts or acquiring new property. They complained of "hard times" when prices fell.<sup>47</sup> But this engagement with wider markets did not itself make rural producers "market oriented": the engagement took place on terms largely set by rural people themselves, within the household economic structure. When farmers traded more of their produce outside the region, their chief purpose was not to engage in the market economy but to satisfy the demands placed on them by the household economy. Stronger markets indeed resulted from their actions, but they were the unintentional result, not the cause, of farmers' economic decisions. What arose in this period was not a rural "market" economy but an extension of subsistence-surplus production.

reactive - not initiative  
 All the new strategies that I have described took place with reference to local conditions or involved products that had local, as well as distant, uses. Certainly, some large farmers sought new crops that they could produce for cash sale. A few experimented with hemp during the 1812 war period. Some tried to raise teasels for sale to wool carders. But none of these schemes was widely successful.<sup>48</sup> The Valley remained what it had been in the late eighteenth century—a region without a staple export crop. This had disadvantages, to be sure. Farmers who wanted to escape from the burdens and obligations of local credit networks and noncash payment found few ready sources of cash to enable them to do so. But it also helped sustain the region's independence and enabled the local economy to become denser and more diversified.

Farmers continued to raise all the essential items they could. Hannah Dickinson wrote in 1813 that "Amherst produces almost all the necessary articles of food." People satisfied their own needs before sending goods off to sell. Eli Cooley, a prosperous Deerfield farmer, who received a Massachusetts Agricultural Society prize, or "premium," for hogs he shipped to market in 1815, had raised eight animals—an un-

47. Rothenberg, "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers" passim; in "Markets and Massachusetts Farmers" (1985), pp. 60, 64, however, Rothenberg notes that the process of price convergence occurred later in western Massachusetts than in the eastern part of the state.

48. See, e.g., Joseph Williams, Account Books, WHS.

usually large number—and kept two back for his own family before sending the other six to Boston.<sup>49</sup> Before the 1820s the region did not depend to any significant extent on imports of produce that could be raised locally. Farmers' and merchants' accounts confirm this. Amasa Wells's accounts with the Hatfield traders Fields and Dickinson show that he often purchased groceries such as spices, sugar, tea, coffee, rum, raisins, and codfish from the store, but only rarely items like butter, corn, or cheese. These, indeed, would have been local produce that the storekeepers had accepted in exchange for other goods. Expecting a prosperous year at his Westhampton store in 1815, Sylvester Judd, Jr., stocked it with 146 types of goods, not one of which was a basic food item or of a type that was also locally produced.<sup>50</sup> The goods most rural households purchased from stores continued to be either essentials not produced in the region or "luxury" items. They did not depend on the "market" for their livelihoods. Purchase of sugar, tea, and other imports depended on families' means. A prosperous farmer like William Boltwood made quite frequent purchases of this sort, but those in tighter circumstances could not. The credit columns of Solomon Wright's ledger, for example, mainly feature necessities obtained from neighbors. He did not have the surpluses to trade for imported goods.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, farmers usually raised products with several potential uses. Foodstuffs could be eaten at home, exchanged in the neighborhood, sold at the store, or shipped to market. Grain could be directed to human or animal consumption. By-products such as tallow had household uses, while hides could go for shoes, harnesses, or a variety of other leather goods. Much of the expansion of agricultural production that occurred up to 1820 was in crops that had long been grown in the region. The two chief innovations, sheep and broomcorn, succeeded because they met the test of multiple function. Sheep could supply wool or meat. Broomcorn, though principally intended for its brush, could be allowed to run to seed and the seed used for cattle feed. Farmers remained wary of producing things that committed them in advance to a particular course of action. The Valley's mixed agriculture contrasted with staple crop regions, where production was geared to distant sale.

Goods that did go to market were of a type that had more than one role in the local economy too. Rye was used at home, swapped with neighbors, and sold at a distance, but it also went to supply local distilleries. Indeed, the *New England Farmer* suggested in 1826 that it

49. Hannah Dickinson, "Geography of the Town of Amherst," (Westfield Academy, 1813), BCJL; Cooley's premium was reported in *Massachusetts Agricultural Repository* 3 (1815): 377–378, and *Hampshire Gazette*, Jul 12, 1815.

50. Judd MS, "Book of Fragments," entry for Apr 1815.

51. William Boltwood, Account Book; Solomon Wright, Account Book.

was the distilleries, rather than distant urban markets, that had the most powerful influence on the price of rye in the Valley.<sup>52</sup> Fattened cattle had often circulated to hill and valley farms; contributed their manure to barnyards and grasslands, and played a role in households' summer and winter work before they were driven off to market elsewhere. Broomcorn went through the hands of local broom makers before leaving the region. In other words, unlike many traditional staple crops, these products made several contributions to the local economy and helped reinforce it.

The strategy of seeing to family and local needs first before shipping off surpluses had several consequences. It helps explain the increase in Massachusetts farm prices that took place between 1795 and 1815. Urban populations grew more rapidly than rural producers were prepared to supply them with food. Even though rural production was expanding in the same period, rural households' concentration on their own needs left them unwilling or unable to match supply to demand. The creation of national markets for foodstuffs shipped between eastern port cities in this period was partially a result of these constraints on supply.<sup>53</sup>

When farmers did ship goods, though, they often prompted complaints about the low quality, poor packing, and uneven quantities of the produce they supplied. This, too, reflected the low priority many households accorded the task. Quite apart from the temptation to cut corners or give short measure on goods that would end up in the hands of strangers, the goods households sent to market were often literally "surplus," things for which they had no other use. In 1826 the *New England Farmer* urged farmers to regard it as an axiom that they send their best grain to market, not their poorest, because "it is only in dear and scarce seasons that there is a demand for grain of an inferior quality." Two years before this a Greenfield newspaper had criticized the poor standard of butter shipments from Valley farms, suggesting improvements that precisely reflected the problems of shipping "surpluses." The paper claimed that too much butter had inadequate salt in it to prevent spoilage and ended up being sold for soap grease at minimal prices. Butter was rarely packed properly. To sell in the best market, it should be in kegs, the paper advised, not in "tubs, barrels, boxes, &c" or, worse still, sold in "lumps" to traders. The writer regarded these practices as the result of carelessness, but they were probably more than that. Although he warned that buyers "will not eat our rancid Butter," many families with small surpluses to trade proba-

52. *New England Farmer*, Dec 8, 1826.

53. For price movements, see Winifred B. Rothenberg, "A Price Index for Rural Massachusetts," *Journal of Economic History* 39 (1979): 975-1001.

bly had no choice but to consign it in small quantities and odd sizes, or to send larger amounts packed in layers over a period of time, so that the quality was uneven.<sup>54</sup>

#### *Household Strategies and Productivity*

Closer examination of farmers' reasons for increasing production reveals the importance of household concerns and strategies in creating surpluses. New farming strategies developed firmly within the context of the household system. Households retained control of production and tried to make it serve their needs. Preserving independence and providing for offspring were the motives that impelled many of them Other facets of the system, including local exchange and the rituals of "neighborhood," also continued to play an important role.

Cooperation and "swapping" goods and labor continued. Some farmers took their teams and plows onto each other's land to help out with "spring and fall work." In Hadley, according to Sylvester Judd' later interviews with elderly residents, it was common for two or three families to join together and take turns to make cheese. When William Bliss, a carpenter of Northampton, failed in business and went insane in 1816, a cousin saw to the cultivation of the land left in his wife's hands "He did the sowing and planting," Bliss's son remembered, "without any charge, except a return for this service in the help given on his own farm by [my brother] and myself."<sup>55</sup> Women organized sewing and quilting bees. Slacker seasons were punctuated by corn huskings, cider making, maple-sugaring parties, and other functions that combined production with neighborly sociability. Days were appointed for the collection and presentation of the minister's wood, for which the minister would provide flip or other drinks in return. Barn or house raisings or the framing and raising of public buildings such as meetinghouses were similarly occasions for public drinking at the owner's expense. Sylvester Judd, Jr., reckoned that "Rum Brandy and Sugar" for the raising of his barn in June 1814 cost him thirteen dollars, while the wood house and shed he had raised the following month cost him only two dollars in grog.<sup>56</sup>

54. *New England Farmer*, Sept 1, 1826; *Greenfield Herald and Public Advertiser*, May 25 1824.

55. Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:15; Theodore Bliss, *Theodore Bliss, Publisher and Bookseller: A Study of Character and Life in the Middle Period of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Arthur A. Bliss (Northampton, 1941), pp. 6-7.

56. Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley, including the Early History of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby, Mass.* (Northampton, 1863), p. 339; Judd MS, "Book of Fragments," June and July 1814.

Competition → household system → market  
behavior

88      *Involvement: 1780 to the 1820s*

Even as livestock production increased, neighborly or cooperative practices continued to be associated with it. As noted earlier, towns permitted animals to browse in highways and common fields well beyond this period. At least until 1827, the Hatfield town meeting voted every year to "provide Bulls for the use of the Town." Animals and their meat were a focus for the kind of friendly rivalry the economic historian William N. Parker called "individualistic-neighborliness." Sylvester Judd recalled that "when a man killed an animal, he sold some, and he lent some to his neighbors, who made a return when they killed." Theodore Bliss wrote of the "ardor and zeal" with which Northampton people vied with each other "in having the fattest pigs in the neighborhood," but that when the animals were finally slaughtered the meat was shared out. Even buying cattle for the fattening stall provided occasions for neighbors to restrain someone quietly trying to get ahead: "it was considered a fair game and a good joke for one to cut in and buy upon the sly a pair of oxen which a slower neighbor had spotted and was leisurely trying to get at a bargain."<sup>57</sup>

But competition between neighbors was real enough. Family concerns, not cooperative ones, primarily determined households' strategies and led in the early nineteenth century to increased farm output. Inevitably, pursuit of these concerns caused strains between families and neighbors. Hannah Dickinson wrote of her Amherst townfolk in 1813 that they "are generally avaricious; they want to get as much property as they can; they are generally honest, but tight in their dealings."<sup>58</sup> When households sought to increase their output, it was often to fulfill their immediate needs or to assist in providing for their children. In the context of population growth and scarce, unequally distributed land, new strategies caused friction not only between families but within them as well.

The need to provide for their children's future strongly influenced farmers' decisions about production. When Simeon Cowles began farming in the 1790s he had enough land to put him in the top quintile of Amherst's taxpayers. But as his nine children were born, he felt the need to extend and improve his land in order to provide for them as best he could. Using surpluses from his annual production to obtain materials or credit from neighbors, he bought extra land and devoted time and labor to clearing and fencing what he owned. In fifteen years, from 1798 to 1813, he later claimed, he raised the value of his holdings from \$1,300 to over \$6,000. By the mid-1820s, having passed one-sixth of his property to his eldest son, he was still seeking to obtain land in the hope

57. Hatfield, Town Meeting Records, 1:453, 2:150; Bliss, *Theodore Bliss*, p. 12; Sheldon, "Stall-Fed Ox," p. 481; William N. Parker, "From Northwest to Midwest: Social Bases of a Regional History," in *Essays in Nineteenth-Century Economic History: The Old Northwest*, ed. David C. Klingaman and Richard K. Vedder (Athens, Ohio, 1975), p. 16.

58. Dickinson, "Geography of the Town of Amherst."

of settling the rest of his children before he died. One of his sources of income was the proceeds of the timber he stripped from the land he was clearing.<sup>59</sup>

Family life cycles and concern to accumulate means for children made an even clearer impression on the activities of Cowles's fellow townsman William Boltwood. Having established himself on the land acquired from his brother seven years before, Boltwood initiated in 1796 a twenty-year process of accumulating property. He traded produce with his neighbors to obtain labor and other services to help him work it and sold surpluses to raise the means to buy more land. Having started in 1789 with forty-four acres, of which fourteen were improved, he had acquired another sixteen acres by 1800 and expanded his improved holdings to twenty-two acres. By this time he and his wife had five children, and he was seeking ways to provide for them. He did not use his extra land to grow more grain but kept his output at fifty bushels a year. Instead, as we have seen, he grew flax for household use or local exchange. He added to his cattle, possibly supplementing their feed with surplus flaxseed, and traded meat with local families for work with storekeepers for imported goods, and with two local physicians for cash. Between 1800 and 1810 he continued to trade in land, so that by the latter year he owned ninety-three acres, seventy-two of which were unimproved.

As his children grew up, Boltwood's strategies shifted and he stopped acquiring land. From 1809 on he turned his attention to providing for them from the resources he had accumulated. He gave a dowry to a daughter who married that year, sent his son Lucius to Dartmouth College in 1810, and when a second daughter married in 1813, gave her furniture and household goods worth \$180. Boltwood appears to have paid for these partly from small sales of land, but also from farm income and extra work he did on other farms, at carting, at providing draft animals, lumber, and other construction materials. After this another task arose. His son William, Jr., born in 1802, was reaching the age when he could work, and Boltwood intended to provide him with his own farm in due course. Accordingly, he again changed direction and using his own, his son's, and hired labor, cleared some of the unimproved land he had bought before 1810. By 1820, Boltwood was taxed on twenty-five more improved acres than he had been before. By 1830 William Boltwood, Jr., now married and with two daughters, was settled on a small farm near his father's.<sup>60</sup>

59. Simeon Cowles to Moses Eli Cowles, Amherst, Feb 2, 1826, NHS, A.L. 18.90.

60. William Boltwood, Account Book; Amherst, Tax Valuation Lists, 1790-1820. William Boltwood, Jr., is listed in U.S. Fifth Census, 1830, Population Schedules for Hampshire County, MCFL. David F. Weiman discusses life-cycle effects in "Families, Farms, and Rural Society in Pre-Industrial America," *Research in Economic History* 10 (1988), supplement.

The Boltwoods' activities had varied according to their family life cycle. The different stages, of acquiring, clearing, and disbursing property, made different contributions to the wider economy. As Boltwood purchased and swapped land between 1796 and 1810, he helped generate a local land market, but after that he withdrew from it. Providing for dowries and his son's education led him to increase his production for local and distant sale. Clearing land for his younger son increased his demand for local labor and absorbed farm produce to pay for it. Similar patterns of accumulation and production can be traced in other families. In 1794 and 1798 the farmer Nathaniel Goodale acquired two parcels of land in Belchertown, totaling 75 acres, for between eight and ten dollars per acre. In 1799 he gave half of this land to his son Moses for use as a farm. When Moses in his turn had sons to provide for, he also sought more land. But the market for it had become tighter in the course of a generation and Moses' means were not as great as his father's. Even though he acquired marginal land, for as little as four dollars an acre, it took him the fourteen years from 1815 to 1829 to accumulate 22.8 acres, some of which he passed to his son Asahel in the early 1830s.<sup>61</sup>

Misfortune could thwart such attempts to acquire or work land. Asa Dickinson, the son of one of Amherst's early settlers, possessed ninety acres of land, including fourteen improved, by the time of his father's death in 1796. Six years later, however, he was apparently heavily in debt and lost most of his property. In 1802 he borrowed from a more prosperous neighbor, Jonathan Dickinson (a distant relative), and had to sign an agreement that permitted him to stay on his own farm for one year, but no longer, required him to board his creditor's laborers if necessary, and obliged him to feed his cow and horse on Jonathan Dickinson's hay—in other words to buy hay only from him. From these humiliating terms, Asa Dickinson slowly recovered by renting small plots of land and running a store or tavern, until he had once again accumulated land to pass to his own son. But he never obtained as much land as he had lost. At their peak, his holdings reached fifty acres.<sup>62</sup>

Farming had helped get Asa Dickinson in debt, and he turned to other activities to help get out of it. Sylvester Judd in Westhampton was doing the reverse. His attempts to succeed as a farmer between 1817 and 1820 were part of his effort to pay off the debts he had incurred in storekeeping as a result of the slump of 1815, debts that had been compounded in the disastrous summer of 1816 by financial difficulties

61. Deeds in M. W. Goodell Collection, BCJL.

62. Asa Dickinson, Account Books; Amherst, Tax Valuation Lists, 1800–1820; John Dickinson to Asa Dickinson, Purchase Agreement, Apr 6, 1802, BCJL.

in building a new Westhampton meetinghouse for which Judd had responsibility as a town officer. Judd read the agricultural press and set out to be a model farmer, determining to plant seven crops, to dry seeds, and to introduce new grasses. In 1818 he wrote that he intended to raise no fewer than twenty-eight different species of grass, herb, vegetable, and grain crop. He also listed eighteen different materials that could be used as manure, including old hair, old potash, mud, and leather. But it was the proper application of animal dung that led him to claim a doubling of his hay output within three years. Still, Judd could not pay his debts off and he passed the farm back to his father. But the purpose behind his efforts had been clear. Like many other farmers he attempted to produce more to clear himself from debt. This may have made him more conscious than most farmers of the need to reckon costs. He calculated that the twenty-four cattle he sent to market in 1811 earned him \$311. But figuring that they had cost him "say \$400" he decided to cut back. The next year he raised only four or five animals but still calculated that he had lost \$17.85 on them after they had gone to market. This reckoning, in turn, helped him decide to give up farming and seek another livelihood.<sup>63</sup>

Inheritance also played a part in determining patterns of accumulation and production. As land became scarce and resources dwindled families were faced with the complex decision whether to persist with the patterns of partible inheritance that had been traditional in New England, or to adopt some form of impartibility that would preserve farms and maintain at least one child at a standard comparable with that of the parents. Few seem to have been willing to take the latter course. Of twenty-nine wills probated in the six towns between 1800 and 1803 only six devised land to one son when there was another son surviving. More than two-thirds of the wills provided for a division of land between two or more heirs.<sup>64</sup> As Toby Ditz has suggested in a recent study of inheritance in Connecticut, concern to create new household units for children dominated many families' calculations. Even when parents used what Ditz calls "preferential partibility"—dividing estates unequally so that a substantial share passed to one heir—they often imposed heavy obligations on the favored child to assist parents and siblings. Favored heirs used mortgages to provide payments to siblings; not granted land, or were required to give support to their parents and their minor or unmarried brothers and sisters. Others might receive property that they had to hold in common with relatives.<sup>65</sup>

63. Judd MS, "Book of Fragments," 1818–1819.

64. Hampshire County, Probate Records, vols. 21–23.

65. Toby L. Ditz, *Property and Kinship: Inheritance in Early Connecticut, 1750–1820* (Princeton, 1986), esp. pp. 158–160.

Inevitably, this affected the terms on which they could run their farms. When Benjamin Wait, a Northampton farmer, died in 1800 he was not a poor man, having twenty-three acres of land in a town where one-third of the men had none, but he only owned a quarter share of a house and one-fifth of a barn. His patrimony had been one acre of land and the share in the barn. He had accumulated the rest himself. But he was insolvent when he died, and part of his property had to be sold to pay his debts, so his own offspring were in as tight a position as he had been.<sup>66</sup> Even prosperous families found that the process of dividing estates to provide for children eroded their position in the long run. William Bartlett was one of Westhampton's wealthiest farmers after he settled there in the 1760s. His sons, who shared his property between them, ranked in the bottom of the first quartile of property owners by 1810. Their sons in turn, though mostly able to retain their relative position, were from the 1820s onward obliged to do more work for other people than their grandfather had done.<sup>67</sup>

Scholars have accorded differing weights to the tendencies in the early-nineteenth-century farm economy discussed here. Winifred Rothenberg has emphasized the creation of markets and the expansion of trade in produce for sale. Toby Ditz has stressed the use of inheritance practices to maintain the viability of households. In addition, Nancy Folbre has called attention to the conflicts within households that occurred as fathers attempted to maintain their patriarchal authority. Using their power to confer land, many fathers sought to influence the terms on which their sons would set out to make livings. Often, particularly when they had relatively little property to hand out, they failed, and their sons took their own courses of action.<sup>68</sup> But these aspects of rural life all related to a single point—families' attempt to maintain the household system of production in a period of dwindling land resources and greater inequality.

Fathers such as William Boltwood and Nathaniel Goodale entered the land market in order to make up for their own shortages of land, as part of a strategy to maintain control over their children. In these cases, the strategy worked, but when Moses Goodale attempted to use it for his own sons, it was less successful. Simeon Cowles was to find, with more bitterness, that enlisting his children's help to provide means for one another would not prevent some of them distancing themselves from his control when they had received their own shares. But into the 1820s

66. Benjamin Wait, Will, Hampshire County, Probate Records, 21:75v.

67. William and Solomon Bartlett, Account Books, 2 vols., Westhampton, 1704–1857. HBS, Westhampton, Tax Valuation Lists, 1810, 1855.

68. Rothenberg, "Emergence of Farm Labor Markets," p. 561; Ditz, *Property and Kinship*, p. 83; Nancy R. Folbre, "The Wealth of Patriarchs: Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1760–1840," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (Autumn 1985): 199–220.

### *Households, Farming, and Manufacturing*

at least, the attempt to maintain the household system was the dominant factor in the patterns of farm production. Contact with the world beyond the Valley was made for purposes and on terms dictated from within it.

The tendency of farmers to give family needs priority over production for market infuriated some gentlemen farmers whose larger resources permitted them ambitions greater than most. One suggested in 1811 that this was why Massachusetts farming practices compared unfavorably with those in Great Britain. Rejecting the common argument that British agriculture was more efficient because labor was cheaper than in New England, he concluded that the difference lay in "the great capital employed by the British farmer, a superior spirit of enterprise and the convenience of more ready markets." The fault for this, he asserted, lay with "our farmers": "How can they ever accumulate capital, if they limit their labour to the raising barely enough to keep the cattle through the year, and to the disposal of a surplus barely sufficient to pay their taxes, and supply them with a few foreign commodities? Although farmers were in fact clearing land, adding to their acreage and increasing output, this writer did not regard the purposes for which they did it as significant.<sup>69</sup> Two years later, however, the founders of the Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society expressed those purposes succinctly: "While our citizens are mutually dependent upon each other, they may be wholly independent of every other portion of the country, in respect of the produce of the soil and the great articles of family consumption." In their view "the encouragement and improvement of Agriculture and Manufactures" was congruent with household production and local exchange.<sup>70</sup>

### *Rural Manufactures*

As farm output increased between 1790 and 1820, so did manufactures. In the late colonial period manufacturing in rural Massachusetts had been largely confined to household production, to essential crafts occupations, such as blacksmithing and shoemaking, and to the skilled crafts conducted in the larger village centers, largely for members of the elite, by carpenters, joiners, and a handful of silver makers and pewterers. By the early nineteenth century, though, manufactures had become more common, more varied, and more widely diffused geographically

69. "Analysis or Examination of the Present State of Agriculture in Massachusetts," *Massachusetts Agricultural Repository* 4 (1816): 284.

70. Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society, Circular, Jan 2, 1811. Broadside Collection, FL.

In 1810, farmhouses, country workshops, artisans' shops in the towns, tanneries, and small mills were producing an impressive flow of goods. Hampshire County was producing yarn and cloth of several kinds, including 60,000 yards of linen and over one million yards of other cloth, as well as silk, fur hats, bar iron, nails, clocks, gold and silver work, tinplate goods, tanned hides, sole leather, boots, shoes, saddles and harnesses, sweet and distilled cider, gin, furniture, paper, rope, brooms, combs, straw bonnets, gunpowder, potash, whips, carriages, wagons, and woodenware.<sup>71</sup> By 1820 just over 30 percent of Northampton's household heads described themselves to the census takers as primarily engaged in manufacturing. The proportions in other towns were not as high, but they were significant—nearly 26 percent in Amherst, 17 percent in Hadley, and 15.3 percent and 12.3 percent, respectively, in Williamsburg and Westhampton. Even Hatfield, always the most "agricultural" of towns, counted over 8 percent of its householders as manufacturers.<sup>72</sup> So while Northampton retained its local preeminence, manufacturing spread widely in the countryside too, for reasons similar to those for the expansion in farming. Manufacturing was largely an outgrowth of the household system.

Since most families had insufficient land to settle more than one or two of their sons in farming, many young men and women faced the prospect of finding alternative occupations. Some migrated, but as we have seen, they were a minority. Young men from families with sufficient means, such as Lucius M. Boltwood, secured a college education. Others sought clerkships in stores or training from lawyers or physicians. Samuel Shaw of Plainfield, who in 1807 suffered typhoid fever attributed to "overwork on the farm," determined to seek a professional career, worked for two summers as clerk in a store, served as a teacher in several towns for a period, and then apprenticed himself to the Cummington physician Peter Bryant.<sup>73</sup>

However, for people staying in the Valley who could not depend on farming, manufacture of some kind was the most common occupation. Boys and girls were apprenticed to craft trades, or adopted manufactures later as part of their own household strategies. It was another channel for energies constricted by the scarcity of land. Joseph Kingsley

71. U.S. Treasury Department, *A Statement of the Arts and Manufactures of the United States of America for the Year 1810* (Philadelphia, 1813). The discussion of manufacturing that follows accords with James A. Henretta, "The War for Independence and American Economic Development," in *The Economy of Early America: The Revolutionary Period, 1763–1790*, ed. Ronald Hoffman, et al. (Charlottesville, Va., 1988), p. 45–87, which became available after this chapter was written.

72. U.S. Fourth Census, 1820, Massachusetts.

73. Clara E. Hudson, *Plain Tales from Plainfield, or the Way Things Used to Be* (Northampton, 1962), p. 49.

of Westhampton had ten children in the 1770s and 1780s. By 1809 I had decided to pass his farm to his fourth surviving son, now twenty-four, who stayed at home to look after his aging father. Even though some of his brothers received land of their own, they undertook small amounts of manufacturing in addition to farming.<sup>74</sup>

In March 1788 the *Hampshire Gazette* printed an extract from the famous description of pin making in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, which the editor commended to readers as a clear exposition "the Advantages of the Division of Labour." But in the very next column there also appeared, as part of the paper's campaign for ratification of the Federal constitution, the verses of "The Raising: A New Song for Federal Mechanics":

Come muster, my lads, your mechanical tools,  
Your saws and your axes, your hammers and rules;  
Bring your mallets and planes, your level and line,  
And plenty of pins of American pine;  
For our roof we will raise, and our song still shall be—  
A government firm, and our citizens free.<sup>75</sup>

The metaphor of the "raising" had strong meaning in a culture that stressed neighborly cooperation. Its juxtaposition with Smith's description of an opposite concept pointed to a tension between the possible ways of organizing production that was to underlie the development of rural manufacture over the next few decades. But the primary assumption was that the household system would form the basis of it. Household preoccupations and priorities shaped manufacture as they did farming, and were to restrain the growth of large, subdivided manufacturing processes before the 1820s.

#### *Patterns of Household Production*

Until the 1820s most rural manufacture was in the direct control of households. Four different patterns of organization were discernible: independent household manufacturing proper; itinerant production; exchange production; and craft manufacture. These distinctions are as conceptual as much as real, because the four overlapped with each other and were often mutually interdependent. A fifth form of production, in custom mills of various kinds, usually involved more invest-

74. Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 1:97–98.

75. *Hampshire Gazette*, Mar 5, 1788, reprinted from *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Feb 6, 1788; see Philip S. Foner, *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, Ill., 1975), p.

ment than a single household could muster. But the work of these mills in the early nineteenth century was very closely linked to the activities of household producers.

Independent production proper, conducted within households with family labor, "on their own account" was roughly divisible into men's and women's occupations. Household textile and clothes making, by far the most important activity, represented a seasonal burden of work on top of women's regular household tasks. Hannah Dickinson wrote of Amherst in 1813 that "almost every family . . . manufactures clothing for its own use, and some of them manufacture for other people." While cloth imported into the region was growing in importance at the end of the eighteenth century, many farm families continued to make their own or acquire it locally. Arethusa Hall, describing a hill town girlhood in the 1810s, recalled that "all the clothing of the family was home-made, in the strictest sense, the wool and flax being raised up on the farm, and the carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving all being done by the household."<sup>76</sup> Inventories taken between 1800 and 1803 show that a considerable proportion of households, regardless of wealth, possessed some tools for textile manufacture. Of twenty-nine inventories, thirteen (44.8 percent) listed at least one spinning wheel, eight (27.6 percent) listed wheels and looms, one (3.4 percent) listed a loom only, and only seven (24.1 percent) contained no reference to either. So nearly three-quarters of these families could have made yarn, and one-third their own cloth as well.<sup>77</sup> As trade was disrupted by the embargo and War of 1812, household textile production probably increased. Hampshire County's annual production of linens, wool, and other cloths was valued at an average of \$7.87 per capita in 1810. This was the highest of any Massachusetts county and the eleventh highest of the fifty counties in New England. Most of this output was produced at home.<sup>78</sup>

Premiums offered by the Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society for the best "household manufactures" show that output was varied, even in the early 1820s. The categories for 1821 included "blue woven cloth," cassimere, flannel for fulling, dressed flannel, "wove carpeting," stair carpeting, hearth rug, cotton counterpane, stockings, mittens and gloves, linen sheeting, shirting and diaper, cassimere shawl, and blankets.<sup>79</sup> Virtually all spinning and a good deal of

76. Dickinson, "Geography of the Town of Amherst"; [Arethusa Hall], "Sathurea: The Story of a Life," p. 9, Judd Papers, 55M-1, Box 2, HCL.

77. Hampshire County, Probate Records, vol. 22.

78. Rolla Milton Tryon, *Household Manufactures in the United States, 1640-1860* (Chicago, 1917), p. 170, tab. 12.

79. Handbill, Northampton Cattle Show, 1821, NHS; Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society, Certificates of Premium, 1821, 1824, MCFL, Oversize Files.

household weaving was carried out by women, who would do the work in "stints" along with other tasks or set daughters old enough for it to work for longer periods. The Amherst farmer Henry J. Franklin provided in his will in 1800 that his two daughters should receive fifteen pounds of wool and "40 weight" of flax each year until they married. Processing home-produced flax and wool or imported cotton involve considerable work. A Hadley woman recalled that spinning flax often began on the Monday after Thanksgiving and could last until May; many families, she said, "cooked so much for Thanksgiving that the night might have the winter to work in." Wool, on the other hand, was spun in the summer, after sheep were sheared each June. Olive Cleveland Clark later claimed that "when she was young every girl in Northampton used to spin," then qualified this, recalling that there were exceptions among the town's "ladies." Farm women were contemptuous of others who had not been trained to "work." In Williamsburg, she was said that Rev. Joseph Strong had taught his own daughters to spin because "his wife was brought up a lady and did not know how to."<sup>80</sup>

Men often used independent manufacture to even out the seasonal irregularities of farming. Winter employment producing brooms, tools, and other woodenware, or boots and shoes for home use or exchange became increasingly common. Thomas Cole of Northampton spent part of his time making tools or pump handles after 1800. Caleb Cook of Hadley worked two days in a neighbor's plane shop one winter but mostly worked for himself, making furniture, kitchen utensils, a clock case, parts for sleighs and wagons, broom scrapers and broom racks, seed harrows, and hayracks. This was custom work, done intermittently when required. But some farmers extended such activities into full-time craft production. After 1810, Eli Dickinson began making wooden faucets in a shop on his South Amherst farm, assisted by three young sons, who worked when they were not attending school.<sup>82</sup>

Itinerant workers frequently assisted with household work, or completed it. While William Boltwood's children were young he hired two local women to come to his house to spin and weave cloth for the family, only ceasing this around 1803 when his elder daughter became old enough to do some of this work herself.<sup>83</sup> Weavers and shoemakers traveled from house to house doing custom work, "whipping the cat as it was known. Tailors, seamstresses, and dressmakers, such as Re

80. Henry J. Franklin, Will, Hampshire County, Probate Records, 21:157.

81. Judd MS, "Miscellaneous," 19:344; Judd MS, "Northampton," 1:326; "Recollections of Olive Cleveland Clark," p. 57.

82. Caleb Cook, Account Book; on Dickinson, see Edward W. Carpenter and Charles F. Morehouse, *The History of the Town of Amherst, Massachusetts* (Amherst, 1896), p. 303.

83. William Boltwood, Account Book.

becca Dickinson of Hatfield in the 1780s and Rhoda Clark of Northampton in the early 1820s, also "boarded around," working for families. For men and women who were often poor and single, it was an ill-paid and precarious living. "My daily bread depends on my labour," wrote Dickinson in 1787. "God has in great mercy this summer back given me work[;] he heard my poor request and has sent employ for my hands." But two months after this she wrote, "This day I am out of employ. . . . How hurried I was formerly at this season of the year." In 1822 Rhoda Clark earned only two meals and 25 cents a day making men's and boys' clothing in Northampton households.<sup>84</sup>

Because they were usually from property-owning households, manufacturers working on an exchange basis—swapping work or goods in the neighborhood—were more secure than this. They fell into two groups. The less prosperous were men like the Westhampton farmer-shoemaker Elijah Norton, whose small property placed him ninety-fifth out of 144 Westhampton taxpayers in 1810 and who "carried on his farm, in part at least, by making shoes for his neighbors in return for which they would work on his farm."<sup>85</sup> In Amherst, Chester Lamb did the same thing, interspersing his shoemaking with day work on other farms too. The Hadley woodworker Joseph Marsh did day work on farms in exchange for assistance in his shop. Women's work also entered these exchange relationships. Among the men Marsh swapped work with was the carpenter Caleb Cook, who, in addition to trading his own custom work in the neighborhood, entered in his accounts large amounts of weaving done by his wife or another member of his family. Asa Dickinson too, struggling out of debt in Amherst after 1802, entered weaving in his book, but the fact that it began to appear only after his marriage suggests that it was his wife's work. Occasionally, a woman such as Submit Williams, married to a Williamsburg farmer, would sign her own name to work she had exchanged, in her case making clothes for various neighbors and their servants.<sup>86</sup>

Larger farmers also used their property and credit to build up manufactures for local exchange. Joseph Kingsley, ranked eleventh in the Westhampton tax list of 1810, established himself as a tanner and shoemaker, taking small batches of hides from surrounding farms. Two of Kingsley's sons were among the Westhampton farmers who set up cider mills to process their own and neighbors' fruit for local consump-

84. Rebecca Dickinson, *Diary Extracts*, Sept 5, Nov 23, 1787; Judd MS, "Miscellaneous," 14:246. Hiring labor for production is discussed in Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn., 1983), pp. 12–14.

85. Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 1:68.

86. Caleb Cook, *Account Book*; Asa Dickinson, *Account Book*; Joseph Williams, *Account Book*, Williamsburg, c. 1802–1841, WHS.

tion. Such activities were often seasonal. They accompanied and depended on farming and its products but provided a means of enhancing these particular farmers' positions in local exchange. Having cider in exchange was literally a potent means of securing day labor.<sup>87</sup> The extension of manufacturing by farmers and the expansion of livestock raising in this period complemented one another. Newly cleared land and larger numbers of livestock provided raw materials, in particular wood, wool, hides, and tallow. The lower labor demands of pastoral farming, especially in the uplands where so many animals were pastured, left more time for manufacturing activities in a family's schedule of work.

Out of such exchange manufacturing grew craft production properly skilled work conducted full time in shops that might also employ journeymen and apprentices. Low levels of local demand and the intermittent pace of work made property ownership an advantage for craft producers. About 85 percent of the craftsmen identifiable in the Northampton tax list of 1798 owned some land. One-quarter of these men held twenty or more improved acres, which could have made adequate farms for them. The majority, however, had been drawn to craft work by their shortage of property. Just over half the Northampton craftsmen owned ten acres or less.<sup>88</sup> With their propertyless neighbors, they were encouraged to establish full-time manufacture. Families whose children had no prospect of land for a patrimony sought out apprenticeship with these craftsmen as the surest means left of securing a livelihood in the Valley. Chairmaking in Northampton, metal tool making in Williamsburg, shoemakers, hatters, and wood turners in various towns grew in number as the number of people obliged to leave the land increased. Groups of artisans in neighborhoods began to provide work for each other, applying a simple division of labor between shops and supplying parts to other makers for final assembly into goods. At first such work was done on a custom basis, but the scale of production outran intermittent local demand. Increasingly, while seeking agreements with local producers to supply parts, craftsmen contracted with Valley merchants or entrepreneurs in larger manufacturing towns to take shipments of completed locally made goods for distant sale.

The unequal distribution of property pushed more and more artisans into making a permanent living from their work. This expanded supplies of goods, but it also placed nominally independent craftsmen in dependence on others. Working arrangements varied. Harris Beckwith, a Northampton chairmaker, appears to have made occasional ex-

87. Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 1:147.

88. Northampton, *Tax Assessment List*, 1798.

changes with other craftsmen to carry on his business. From 1803 to 1806 he made a rocking chair and a little chair for Thomas Pomeroy, provided sashwork and other materials for Pomeroy's shop, and worked in it for half a day. Beckwith entered these items in his ledger and, when the two men settled accounts in 1806, took Pomeroy's note for the outstanding balance due him.<sup>89</sup> A lawsuit between two Northampton cabinetmakers in 1803 reveals a more dependent relationship. Lewis Beals had contracted to complete furniture for David Judd. Judd advanced \$116 worth of materials and also provided store credit on account while Beals was working for him. When Beals failed to fulfill the contract, Judd had his personal property attached. This included not only the materials for two sideboards, six tables, and a cherry stand, but Beals's tools, apron, and greatcoat.<sup>90</sup>

These four types of organization—independent, itinerant, exchange, and craft workshop—formed the basis on which much of the increase in rural manufacturing took place during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Some trades, such as the broom making that grew up, mainly in Hadley, after 1800, straddled all four forms at once by the 1820s. Levi Dickinson and his son had begun production in a small shop built near their farmhouse. Many brooms continued to be made each winter by independent farmers who had grown their own broomcorn the previous season. Occasional itinerant workers may have assisted in their yard or attic workshops, but family labor would have been called upon too. Some farmers secured materials and tools for broom making by exchanging labor with neighbors, and a few larger producers began running workshops that employed several broom workers. Among these was John Shipman, a son-in-law of Levi Dickinson, whose broom workshops were to grow into the largest in Hadley in the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>91</sup>

### *The Local Bases of Manufacturing*

While the social relations of manufactures varied and began to shift, these trades nonetheless shared common features. The bulk of the products listed in the 1810 census were made from local raw materials. Metalworking and some tanning were the chief trades based on imported materials, but they were less significant than the textiles and wooden products that made up most of the output. Local supplies, local

89. Harris Beckwith, Account Book, MCFL.

90. Judd v. Beals, Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Files, Aug 1803, no. 147, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.

91. Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:186-187.

exchange networks, and the structure of the household-based economy helped determine the shape of this manufacturing system and made the costs of entry to it relatively low. Raw materials could be swapped for farm produce or family labor or could be secured on credit in the knowledge that, as with Harris Beckwith's accounts, local exchange practices would not necessarily demand rapid settlement and repayment.

Young men also took up manufacturing to augment income or occupy themselves while waiting for land. Ira Chaffee Goodale, son of the Belchertown farmer Moses Goodale, described how he used family resources, local contacts, and credit in 1824 to go temporarily into making one-horse wagons, so as to finance time to study in preparation for college. Working on his father's farm in exchange for board, he received shop space and the use of tools from a local toolmaker in return for working in the tool shop. On credit, he bought enough wood for four wagons and, working part time between May and November, made and assembled these wooden parts. After resuming his studies over the winter, Goodale again arranged to work on the farm during the 1825 season, borrowed money to pay for more materials, bargained locally to get the necessary blacksmiths' work and painting done on the four wagons, and expanded production to six wagons. His method reveals both a close connection between family work, local exchange and manufacturing and his use of wagonmaking to further his own career.<sup>92</sup>

The initial aim of most manufacturers was to supply customers in the neighborhood or surrounding region. From Hadley, Levi Dickinson, having made 100 brooms in 1798, "took them in a horsecart with some reeds and sold them in Williamsburg, Ashfield, Conway, etc." The Williamsburg blacksmiths who took up ax and edge-tool making about the same time also dealt at first on a relatively small scale within the region. Wagonmaking, which started in Amherst about 1805, was taken up by one or two makers each in Hadley, North Hadley, Hatfield, and Belchertown by about 1809.<sup>93</sup> Always the initial impulse seems to have been toward variety, to secure local patronage, rather than concentration or specialization. Both in the countryside and in village centers, the perception of manufacturing as a locally based activity was reflected in advertisements. A Northampton cabinetmaker, James Dunham, thanked customers for their assistance to him in overcoming debts in 1806. A decade later, the widow Olive Wright sought for her blue dyeing business "the patronage of friends of the widow and the father

92. Ira C. Goodale to Lafayette W. Goodale, New York, June 30, 1874, M. W. Goodale Collection, BCJL.

93. On wagonmaking, see Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:9.

less."<sup>94</sup> Advertisements for property in outlying towns stressed that manufacturers would be serving neighborhood needs. The *Hampshire Gazette* printed a notice in 1787 for "a very convenient and well-adapted piece of ground for pot-ash and tan-works, both of which are much wanted in this quarter," while a house for sale in Worthington in 1794 was described as "where the Clothier's business has been carried on for some years, and it is where one is much wanted." Two advertisements in 1816 used the same language. In Westhampton, one announced, "a Hatter or Edge-tool workman would find great encouragement," while in Hatfield, the other stated, "a good Clothier would have a large run of custom, and be punctually paid by his employers."<sup>95</sup>

Two reasons, though, led some manufacturers to attempt to make more distant sales. Selling goods at a distance could bring in cash or exchange goods not available locally, and so provide means to pay off debts. When Seth Nims set off from his parents' home in Conway to travel to Georgia in the winter of 1822-23, they gave him cloth to sell in the hope that they could settle some pressing obligations. In May 1823, Nims's father wrote to ask about it: "we sent a pice of Cloth by you and we expected to receivd the mony for it this Spring for we are in great want of it if you have sold the cloth and got the money for it if you have any chance to convey the money with safty I should be very glad, if you could send forty or fifty dollers more you would ablige me very much and I would endeavor to make it out to you when you come home." His mother added a warning not to "let money carry your mind from things of more importance," but could not conceal her anxiety about their debts: "if you have an opportunity to send us the money for we are drove."<sup>96</sup>

Second, local demand, particularly for durable goods, quickly became saturated so that outlets had to be found elsewhere. Levi Dickinson rapidly found the saturation point with his Hadley broom business and started annual trips with his products to New London, Connecticut, and subsequently to Boston and Albany too. Eli Dickinson made similar journeys each year from Amherst to Baltimore, with faucets and pumps to sell.<sup>97</sup> Such manufacturers had to learn how to bargain in distant places, without the safeguards of local exchange, and to face the problems of dealing in a growing but fickle nationally based economy. These ventures had a speculative character at odds with the more cautious spirit of most household strategies.

Yet they were also rooted in these strategies. Broom and woodenware

94. *Hampshire Gazette*, Apr 12, 1815.

95. *Hampshire Gazette*, Aug 8, 1787; Mar 26, 1794; Mar 27 and May 1, 1816.

96. Israel Nims to Seth Nims, Conway, Mass., May 3, 1823, BCJL.

97. Carpenter and Morehouse, *History of Amherst*, p. 303.

makers not only continued to function on farms and to use local raw materials but depended on the household-based social structure for labor and for the opportunity to seek out distant buyers for their output. Journeys to sell brooms and pumps, such as those made by the Dickinsons in the 1800s and 1810s, represented an extraordinary investment of time and effort in relation to the value of the products they were carrying, and hence a low valuation on the time they took to sell goods. Men's absence from farms or workshops for weeks at a time was possible only because they traveled in slack seasons, or had other family members and neighbors available to do necessary tasks at home; they work back home by other members of their households effectively reduced the risks of such marketing journeys. These manufacturers did not commit their families' fortunes fully to the market, but made calculated partial engagement with distant buyers.

While small producers were seeking distant buyers for their goods, larger ventures in local manufacturing were based on the provision of services to rural households. The water-powered gristmills and sawmills that had dotted the Connecticut River's tributaries since the colonial period had been the principal exceptions to the rule that manufacturing was located in households. Representing larger investments of capital than other activities, they were usually owned not by individual families but by partnerships. Many had been granted water privilege on condition that they would provide custom services to the locality. Although some operated on a "merchant" basis by the late eighteenth century, buying grain and wood for processing and sale on their own account, they continued to work as custom mills as well, charging a fee for processing materials brought them by local households. From the 1790s onward, new or existing proprietors installed carding and fulling machines at many sites to process wool and cloth for local spinners and weavers. While this represented a change in function, it did not initially change the organization or local relationships of milling, which continued to serve rather than supplant household production.<sup>98</sup>

By the time of the 1810 census, there were fifty-seven carding machines and sixty-seven fulling mills scattered throughout Hampshire County, almost one-third of the total number in Massachusetts. Most were owned by partnerships; all but one of the mills in Northampton in 1798 were held in one-third, one-quarter, one-fifth, or one-sixth share by families who also owned farmland. Their operations were deeply embedded in local exchange practices. When Roger Wing set up a carding mill in Williamsburg in 1803, on land owned by the Bodman family, he agreed to pay his annual rent in carded wool. Most mill

98. On earlier mills, see Judd MS, "Northampton with Westfield," 2:60.

Specificity  
leads to  
growth

Mills run  
year around

good

operated on a custom basis and relied on local demand for their services. A new carding mill in North Amherst drew customers from Hadley and elsewhere in 1804 and 1805, but when a mill opened in Hadley about 1806, families such as the Phelps carried their wool to be carded there instead. By 1815 there were as many as four carding mills in Northampton, two in Williamsburg, one in Hadley, and one in Amherst. In addition, there were two fulling mills each in Northampton and Amherst and at least one each in Hadley, Hatfield, Westhampton, and Williamsburg.<sup>99</sup> Several of these millsites served different functions from season to season. Carding mills ran in the summer, after sheep shearing. The gristmill season peaked in the autumn and early winter, after harvest. Sawmills worked from early spring, after farmers had cleared land and brought lumber in for cutting while snow was on the ground. Fulling also took place in spring and early summer, as households sent in cloth that they had made during the winter to be dressed. Virtually all mills advertised their services in exchange for farm produce, as well as cash payment. The accounts of the farmer Joseph Williams, who owned a share of a mill in Williamsburg between 1808 and 1818, show that in addition to custom work the mill sold cloth on its own account to purchasers in Williamsburg, Hatfield, and Northampton, both for cash and for payment by goods in exchange.<sup>100</sup>

Together, the handicraft and custom-milling sectors deepened the exchange networks on which the household system rested. Much of the work of constructing and equipping manufacturers, from the simple workshops and tools required by hand producers to the more sophisticated installations at mills, was carried out from within the region. A new gristmill built at North Amherst in 1804 was framed by a man from Leverett, raised with help from the neighbors, equipped by a Leverett millwright with stones brought from Pelham, had its wheel pit built by a man from Shutesbury and ironwork forged in Montague. Only some castings made in Springfield did not come from the surrounding area.<sup>101</sup> From the 1780s, when a Hadley craftsman offered his Windsor chairs in exchange for "a few thousand white pine SHINGLES," to the 1820s, when Caleb Cook received full cloth in return for painting some wagon wheels and making "axtrees and gearing" for a wagon, direct exchange of goods frequently provided raw materials and parts.

99. Agnes Hannay, "A Chronicle of Industry on the Mill River," *Smith College Studies in History* 21 (1935-1936): 18; advertisement for Amherst carding mill in *Republican Spy*, Dec 24, 1806; account of Hadley mills in Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:15; Williamsburg carding mill advertised, *Hampshire Gazette*, July 17, 1805; Northampton mill, *Republican Spy*, May 19, 1807. See also Elizabeth Porter Phelps, *Diary*, Hadley, Nov 4, 1804, noting journeys to an Amherst carding mill, and Aug 6, 1809, noting use of the newer mill in Hadley, PPHH.

100. Joseph Williams, *Account Book*.  
101. Paper in Marquis F. Dickinson, *Account Book*, BCJL.

Sylvester Judd traded rags to the Northampton papermaker and printer William Butler between 1814 and 1821, receiving mainly books and paper in return.<sup>102</sup> These exchanges effectively lowered purchase and credit costs by eliminating some of the risks from shifting prices that would have resulted from exchanging rural produce for these goods in distant markets. A local "import-substitution" effect helped broaden the base of rural manufacturing, so that by 1820 it was employing up to one-fifth of the labor force.<sup>103</sup>

Rural manufacturing was both a result of the household-based structure of the economy and an instrument in reinforcing it. Although manufacturing centers such as Northampton continued to grow during the early nineteenth century, the diffusion of activity throughout country districts was more rapid and more striking. With the exception of water-powered mills, which were also diffused along streams throughout the region, there were few technological constraints on the location of manufactures. Accordingly, they appeared where family circumstances or local demand dictated. Access to navigable rivers or good roads played a much less important role in locating production than access to local raw materials and local credit within a reciprocal exchange network. Thus the sights, sounds, and smells of workshops, tanneries, and mills could be found throughout the countryside, from the meadows of Hadley to the hills of Cummington. But the location of particular activities was influenced most of all by the availability of labor. Here the imprint of the household system and its demands were felt in all areas of rural production.<sup>104</sup>

*Labor in the Household Economy*

Throughout this expansion of production the household system restrained the development of a permanent wage-labor force in the countryside, despite the fact that hired labor played an important role, both in farming and in manufacturing. The expansion of wage work helped absorb a growing population into the rural social structure. Large numbers of men, and many women too, exchanged their labor or product with other rural households. Account books show that men commonly exchanged work with neighbors or hired themselves out for payment in goods. Servants were also more common than they had probably been

102. William Shipman, advertisement in *Hampshire Gazette*, May 7, 1788; Caleb Cook *Account Book*; Judd MS, "Book of Fragments."  
103. U.S. Fourth Census, 1820, Massachusetts.  
104. Cf. Henretta, "War for Independence," p. 87, which stresses the precapitalist character of postrevolutionary manufacturing.

# Labor keeps open a line to independence

106 *Involution: 1780 to the 1820s*

in the colonial period. Daniel Vickers calculated that in mid-seventeenth-century Essex County, Massachusetts, male farm servants comprised no more than 5 percent of the population. Data from a sample of Hadley and Amherst families in 1820 suggest that live-in servants of either sex accounted for just over 15 percent of the population and that almost 54 percent of households had at least one live-in servant.<sup>105</sup>

But these figures, while they provide a rough index of the growth of hiring up to the early nineteenth century, tell us very little about the social context or significance of rural labor. By themselves they both overstate the permanent character of waged employment and understate the extent to which people were involved in it. While production was centered on households, wage labor could expand without creating a substantial permanent rural proletariat. Wage work was intermittent. Families used their own labor whenever they could. While many men hired out their labor from time to time, in a society in which perhaps nine-tenths of the adult male population had either property or a skill, they were not fully dependent on doing so. So both the supply and demand for labor fluctuated greatly according to families' individual circumstances.

This situation had several consequences, and various groups of people often paid a price for it. The one-tenth or so of men who had no property or trade of their own were obliged to live with an uncertain supply of the work they depended on. Moreover, as Nancy Folbre has emphasized, the absence of a large permanent wage-earning class in the countryside was possible because women and children in rural households were subject to male authority over their labor. Finally, as we shall see, the intermittent character of wage work in the household economy served to restrain some investors' attempts to accumulate capital and apply it to large-scale production.<sup>106</sup>

## *The Peculiarities of Supply and Demand*

As late as 1830, an almanac summed up the attitude of most rural families in the saying "Don't hire, when you can do the work your-

105. Daniel Vickers, "Working the Fields in a Developing Economy: Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1675," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill, 1988), p. 55. Taking genealogical data from Lucius M. Boltwood, *Genealogies of Hadley Families: Embracing the Early Settlers of the Towns of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby* (1905; reprint, Baltimore, 1979), I constructed age profiles for forty-one families as they would have been in 1820 and compared them with the age profiles given in U.S. Fourth Census, 1820, Massachusetts. "Extra" males or females in each age group up to thirty-four were assumed to be servants. The imprecisions in this method are outweighed by the absence of other evidence and are likely, on balance, to be biased toward overestimating the number of servants.

106. Nancy Folbre, "Patriarchy in Colonial New England," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12 (Summer 1980): 5.

self."<sup>107</sup> Repeatedly we find evidence that households placed first reliance on their own family labor and "hired work done" only when they had to. Ira Chaffee Goodale expressed this impulse to avoid outside help when he proposed to work on his father's Belchertown farm one summer, arguing that it "would save hiring a man through haying." However, when Josiah Quincy addressed the Massachusetts Agricultural Society in 1819, he criticized the maxim "labour runs away with all profits in farming," which led farmers "to do with as little labour as possible."<sup>108</sup>

When they did hire servants or exchange work, families did not regard it as a permanent condition or a permanent necessity. They sought labor for particular purposes, to assist at busy times on the farm or to help with the production of cloth or butter. Abraham Ball, needing boards from the Amherst farmer Chester Marshall, arranged to reap one and one-half acres of rye for him. On another occasion Marshall hired a man to reap two acres of rye in exchange for two bushels of the crop. One of the reasons that local book accounts often ran for considerable periods was that households avoided hiring people at slack times of the year but were prepared to furnish food or other goods on credit in order to secure labor later.<sup>109</sup> Special contingencies often forced families to hire help reluctantly. A Buckland woman wrote that her husband and children had been ill and that "I have stood it very well so far but was obliged to have a girl a few days." When Arethusa Hall went away for a while from her sister's family in Westhampton where she lived, another girl was immediately found to live in and help. The sister wrote her that "she is a very good girl for one of her age. . . . [I] will keep her until you return." A young Amherst woman was sent to help relatives who had recently settled in Vermont. When they installed an aqueduct to carry water to their house they did not need her any more and sent her back.<sup>110</sup> But the most important general influence, apart from the seasons, on households' demand for labor was the family life cycle. Of the households that had live-in servants in 1820, 86 percent were either headed by a man over sixty or included children under ten, or both. Families with young children faced heavier demands and had less labor

107. Nathan Wild, *The Farmer's, Mechanic's, and Gentleman's Almanack for 1831* (Amherst, 1830), p. 5.

108. Ira C. Goodale to Lafayette W. Goodale, New York, June 30, 1874; Josiah Quincy, *An Address Delivered before the Massachusetts Agricultural Society at the Brighton Cattle Show, Oct. 12th, 1819* (n.p., n.d.), p. 13.

109. Chester E. Marshall, Account Book. Important discussions of wage labor on farms are to be found in Rothenberg, "Emergence of Farm Labor Markets," and in Paul G. E. Clemens and Lucy Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1820," in Innes, *Work and Labor in Early America*, pp. 106-143.

110. Apphia Judd to Arethusa Hall, Westhampton, Dec 17, 1821, Judd Papers, 55M-1, Box 2, HCL. Dudden, *Serving Women*, p. 16, cites the distinction made by a woman in New York State between "hiring to spin" and being "obliged to hire help" with housework.

than others. Elderly people were also likely to require extra help. The presence of servants in their households reflected their particular needs for hired labor. Conversely, 84 percent of households without servants either had no children in them or had children over ten to assume part of the work. Only families with large properties or incomes hired servants and other assistance as a matter of course, and these accounted for a small proportion of the total.<sup>111</sup>

Patterns of hired labor on most farms reflected the attitude that families did their own work when they could. Demand was irregular and generally in short spells. During the 1790s some farmers in Amherst and Hadley hired labor in return for orders redeemable in goods at William Porter's Hadley store. Most of the orders that Porter received were for small sums, reflecting the fact that they represented work for short periods. Of forty orders issued between 1796 and 1800, nineteen were for one or two days' wages, sixteen were for three to five days', and only five were for periods of between ten days and one month. The distribution of orders Porter took between 1819 and 1821 was even more skewed toward short periods.<sup>112</sup> The accounts of a Northampton farmer who hired sufficient help in 1809 that he kept a separate "labor book" to keep track of it, strikingly reflect a similar pattern. Most of his work was done between May 4 and November 14 that year, during which time there were 198 possible workdays. He hired men on only 72 of them and obtained in all 150 man-days of work from them. In other words, he did not have enough work for a full-time laborer. But he employed no fewer than thirty-four different men at various times, who worked for an average of just under 4½ days each. One man worked for 33 full days and 4 half days, another for 22 full days and 3 halves, but there were only three others who worked more than 6 days each. Twenty-nine men worked for a week or less: thirteen did between 1¼ and 6 days' work, the remaining sixteen only 1 day or less.<sup>113</sup>

As in this instance, some farmers did hire laborers for long periods. The man who worked 35 days may have been contracted to work for one month. Monthly, six-monthly, or annual contracts for hire became more common in the 1790s than they had been before. In a region whose population was growing and where land was scarce and unequally distributed, this is not surprising. But these term contracts did not account for the bulk of the work that was done, nor were they used by most families. Nor did the farmers who hired labor this way necessarily rely on it permanently. Joseph Eastman of Amherst, for example, obtained labor by different means from year to year. Sometimes he

111. Data from Boltwood, *Genealogies*.

112. William Porter Papers, Box A, folder 1796-99, and Box E, folders 1819, 1821, OSV.

113. Labor Book, Northampton, 1809-1814, NHS, A.A. 18.3.

contracted with a man or a boy who would work for six or seven months, but in other years he relied on hiring by the day.<sup>114</sup> Population growth may have had the effect of increasing the availability of day laborers in some neighborhoods, so restraining the development of permanent work force. Wage rates altered little during the early part of the century.

However, men like Eastman also varied their hiring patterns because paradoxically, men or boys were not always available to be hired on contracts. Why, given a rising population, land shortage, and inequalities, did farmers often complain of being unable to find people to work for them when they wanted? Rev. Justus Forward of Belchertown had trouble getting his hay mowed in 1786 because men he had engaged would not do it "disappointed me, did not come to mow."<sup>115</sup> Larger farmers often faced difficulty finding enough men and women to do the farm and household work they wanted. Charles Phelps of Hadley complained in 1800 that "we are not more than half Mand, in or out of doors." His son-in-law Dan Huntington faced the same problem. "We have had a *sweat* it, since you left us," he wrote to one of his sons in 1825. "I never knew it so difficult to get help." On one occasion, when "it was necessary to have a man," Huntington hired "for the first time & I believe the last, . . . a Bartlett," which proved less than satisfactory: "It was one day work, very moderately however, & the next a fox-hunt. Within a week we were through with the contract & a new man to be found."<sup>116</sup> Population increase, labor shortages, and stagnant wage rates could exist simultaneously.

The reason for this apparent incongruity was that just as the household system made demand for labor intermittent, it helped keep the supply irregular too. While considerable numbers of people did some hired work, relatively few needed to do it full time or permanently. Most of the live-in servants identifiable in 1820 were young. Four out of every five were under twenty-seven years of age.<sup>117</sup> Few expected that they would remain servants. For men in particular, wage work was often part of a strategy of putting together a livelihood from various tasks and occupations. Thomas Cole of Northampton followed a different pattern of work each summer from 1800 to 1804. In 1800 he combined day work on several farms with shaving bark for a local tanner, for which he was paid by the cord. In 1801 he hired himself out to a farmer for six months. From 1802 onward he obtained day work in

114. Joseph Eastman, Account Book.

115. Justus Forward, Diary, Belchertown, July 10, 1786, MS Collection, AAS.

116. Dan Huntington to Edward Huntington, Hadley, Jan 14, 1825, PPHH.

117. Servants' ages were determined from the comparison of genealogical and census data discussed in note 105, above.

various places but during 1804 began weaving as well. In Hadley, Caleb Cook did short stretches of day work for farmers, usually in the winter or at harvest time. At other times of year he did house-carpentry, repair work, coffin making, toolmaking, and other jobs. Both men owned small amounts of land, but not enough to farm.<sup>118</sup>

The broad but unequal distribution of property and skills caused this situation, in which wage workers were becoming more common but at the same time hard to find. Men and women who from time to time hired themselves out also had other tasks to attend to, or demands on their time from their families. Solomon Wright did considerable amounts of day work for his Northampton neighbors but fitted his work for others around the needs of his own eighteen-acre farm. In 1805, Orange Wright agreed to work for Joseph Eastman during the summer, but only on alternate weeks, so that he could attend to tasks elsewhere.<sup>119</sup>

The growth of by-employments merely exacerbated the situation. Ethan Marshall ran a small farm in Northampton, did hired labor for the judge Samuel Hinckley and was also one of six partners in a company that organized the spring shad fishery in the Connecticut River. By "putting together" various tasks to make a living, people could find themselves proprietors one day and workers the next. This also reflected the seasonal character of farming and rural manufacturing. Moses Woods wrote to his brother in June 1816, "I reside in Hadley with your old friends the Mr Lamsons where I am engaged in the carding business with them. . . . I expect to continue in their employ till August next when I shall return to my own shop in South Hadley, where I carry on the Cloth Dressing business."<sup>120</sup>

The convenience of the households supplying the labor often determined its availability. Families might make their children available as farmhands or servants; Joseph Eastman hired at least eleven of his neighbors' sons at different times between 1803 and 1816. When Arethusa Hall wrote, "If the members of one household were not able, from want of health or from scarcity of members, to do their own work, members of more numerous families were 'lent' as it were, to supply the deficiency," she was emphasizing the role of family strategies in making both the demand for and the supply of rural labor uneven.<sup>121</sup> Families also attempted to control the terms on which their younger

118. Thomas Cole, Daybook, Northampton, c. 1797-c. 1825, MCFL; Caleb Cook, Account Book.

119. Solomon Wright, Account Book; Joseph Eastman, Account Book.

120. Moses Woods to Aaron Woods, Jr., Hadley, June 20, 1816, Woods Family Papers, MCFL.

121. [Hall], "Sathurea," p. 37.

members worked for others. Searching for labor in 1802, Charles Phelps hired a boy from Pelham as a live-in farm servant. In due course, he was visited by the boy's father, who demanded "more liberty" for his son. "I asked him what liberty," wrote Phelps. "Liberty of the house," replied the father. Phelps "told him he would not have more liberty than he had and if he could not put up with such fare as he had, he was welcome to seek other quarters." It was agreed that the boy would "quit after he had tarried his month out." Phelps preferred to let him go, despite being "only half Mand," so as to maintain control of his own household. To avoid such interference, when Northampton straw-hat maker advertised for "8 young Ladies as Apprentices" in 1822, they specified that "those from a distance would be preferred."<sup>122</sup>

#### *Labor and the Limits to Capital*

The influence of households on the supply of and demand for rural labor was sufficiently powerful to restrain the creation of large units of production in the countryside and to affect the terms on which the few factories that were built in this period operated. Particularly during the expansion of domestic industry that occurred as a result of the embargo of 1807, various local merchants and manufacturers attempted to expand production at existing rural millsites, to add spinning and weaving to carding or fulling operations, and to move from custom work into direct production. A classic example of this vertical integration was to be found in Williamsburg, where A. H. Bodman and Company adapted its fulling mill, so that by 1814 it included carding and dyeing equipment and its own looms. Yarn was apparently given out to be spun in local families, probably from a general store in which the Bodmans had an interest. The mill work force remained small.<sup>123</sup>

The Bodman mill survived the depression at the end of the 1812 war but many similar operations did not. Particularly vulnerable were the manufacturers who had attempted to expand mill production to employ a larger work force. In North Amherst in 1809, Ebenezer Dickinson set up the Amherst Cotton Factory in a three-story wooden mill to do spinning by machine. The instability of credit, the presence of household spinners in the neighborhood, and the difficulty of recruiting a labor force probably all contributed to the collapse of this firm in 1812

122. Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Phelps, Hadley, Apr 30, 1802, PPHH; *Hampshire Gazette*, Apr 10, 1822. Advertisements in the *Hampshire Gazette*, May 4 and Oct 12, 1831, for boys to work as laborers or apprentices each specified that "one from out of town would be preferred."

123. Hannay, "Chronicle of Industry," pp. 18, 31.

well before the downturn in trade and the influx of British textiles, which caught out so many other firms at the end of the war. Faced with overwhelming debts, Dickinson fled to the West. A group of his local creditors tried to refloat the business in the hope of recouping their losses, but the end of the war ended their attempts too.<sup>124</sup> The manufactures that survived the postwar depression were either highly capitalized firms backed by substantial funds in trade or small, household-based producers who could trim their sails to the wind by turning to other activities. The Valley had many of the latter, but few of the former. Households remained at the center of the region's manufacturing as a result.

The exception that proved the rule that large businesses would fail in this period was the Northampton Cotton and Woolen Manufacturing Company, established by three sons and a nephew of the merchant Levi Shepard in 1809. With capital of \$100,000 and as many as fifty employees, this was for a while one of the largest woolen mills in America. Three factors helped this firm overcome the difficulties faced by others over the next decade. One was the capital and credit from trade that the Shepards assumed from their father and uncle at his death in 1805. The others derived from the firm's accommodation to the rural labor supply. The Shepards had long manufactured linen, employing outwork labor in local households; although they frequently had to struggle to maintain numbers, they continued to use outworkers to prepare materials for use in the mill. And while evidence about their mill labor force is scanty, it appears that they were able to draw upon the groups whose position in the household economy was most marginal: the poor and the young. One of the Shepards' women operatives, Phila Richardson, came from a Stafford, Connecticut, family so poor that when, in 1811, "she became deranged in her mind," and was returned to her home by the Overseers of the Poor, they "could obtain no remuneration" from her father. As the firm was building up its work force in 1810, it advertised for boys aged seven to sixteen to serve as apprentice carders, spinners, and weavers. Five years later, it sought young men aged eighteen to twenty-five. An apprentice spinner who ran away from the mill in 1815 was aged eighteen. A weaver who was charged with assault the same year was sixteen.<sup>125</sup>

124. Carpenter and Morehouse, *History of Amherst*, pp. 288–291; *Private and Special Statutes of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, 7 vols. (Boston, 1805–1837), 5:22.

125. Hannay, "Chronicle of Industry," p. 32; Phila Richardson: Northampton, Overseers of the Poor, Case Histories, group 2, Town Papers Collection, 5.14, FL; advertisements: *Anti-Monarchist*, Oct 17, 1810, *Hampshire Gazette*, Oct 15, 1815; runaway advertisement: *Hampshire Gazette*, Sept 13, 1815; weaver: Joseph Cook, "A List of Prisoners Committed to Gaol on Criminal Actions," in Hampshire County, Jailer's Book of Record, Feb 7, 1815, MCFL.

The Shepards had the connections and resources to bypass some of the constraints that the household system placed on concentrating labor and capital. Another Northampton entrepreneur, who attempted to invest heavily in labor-saving devices to avoid relying on a large labor force, was less successful. The tanner William Edwards, a grandson of Northampton's most famous minister, moved to the town in 1790 having been brought up in Stockbridge and apprenticed to a tanner in New Jersey. With funds of his own and from his father to use as working capital, and with strong connections to Northampton's leading families, Edwards borrowed heavily for land and equipment from local merchants and lawyers. By 1794 he was shipping tanned leather to Boston, and he expanded his works until a fire destroyed it in 1799. With funds subscribed by local friends to rebuild it, Edwards went further into debt to build equipment specifically designed to save labor in handling and processing. By 1809, he claimed, he had reduced the price of tanning sole leather from twelve cents a pound to four. By then his works included three tanneries with 672 vats, three bark mills, and rolling machines for softening hides, all run by only twenty-five workers. But to do this, Edwards was forced into partnership with Boston creditors who, as his burdens mounted, forced him out of business in 1815. It was twenty years before his local creditors were invited to apply for part payment from a \$20,000 trust fund. If the household system made systematic hiring of labor difficult, the rural economy was also a difficult context in which to borrow and invest large amounts of capital to avoid having to do so.<sup>126</sup>

#### *Careers and the Limits to Families*

The concern for "careers" and the various methods of putting together livelihoods for children was not confined to economic effects nor to the family activities of organizing work, dowries, and inheritances. It sent a strand deep into early-nineteenth-century culture and public rhetoric. The assumption remained strong that young men would move up from poverty to "competence" as they acquired property or skills from their elders and that young women would obtain the benefits of these through marriage. But the increasing uncertainty of these prospects as population grew led to action designed to maintain provision that had once seemed guaranteed.

126. William Edwards, *Memoirs of Col. William Edwards* (Washington, D.C., 1807); see also Edwards to Postmaster of Northampton, Nov 29, 1809, in [Albert Gallatin], *Report from the Secretary of the Treasury on the Subject of American Manufactures* (Boston, 1810), pp. 30–32; notice to creditors, *Northampton Courier*, May 24, 1837.

While apprenticeships were declining in urban industrial areas during the early nineteenth century, rural families continued to make use of the device to obtain labor for themselves and training in other households for their children. The form apprenticeships took was designed to reinforce patriarchal authority and keep young people under the control of families. Families' role in finding positions for their offspring reflected this intention. The children of William Bliss, the Northampton carpenter who went insane in 1816, were left under the control of their mother and male relatives, who placed them in apprenticeships with kin or contacts in Northampton, Pittsfield, and elsewhere. The youngest child, Theodore, later wrote that by the time he was ready to be placed, the matter was in the hands of his eldest brother, who "without any consultation with me," put him under the charge of his own employer, a Northampton bookbinder.<sup>127</sup>

The supreme judicial court underlined the familial, rather than purely economic, character of apprenticeship when it ruled that it was a "personal trust" and illegal, for instance, for masters to assign apprentices to other employers. In political thinking and public discourse households were widely regarded as the central social institution. After the Revolution, rhetoric about bringing up children assigned women the vital role in educating their offspring and inculcating them with the values that would fit them for citizenship in a republic; this set of ideas, which the historian Linda K. Kerber has called the concept of "republican motherhood," stressed the moral superiority of the domestic environment. Discussions of manufacturing, especially among Jeffersonian republicans, shared this emphasis and urged avoidance of the factory system. Benjamin Austin, writing in 1815 to ask Thomas Jefferson to clarify his views on manufactures, argued that "*Domestic manufactures is the object contemplated; instead of establishments under the sole controul of capitalists, our children may be educated under the inspection of their parents, while the habits of industry may be duly inculcated.*"<sup>128</sup>

Yet formal education outside the home also became more important. For those with the means, it was straightforward to arrange. In the will he drew up before his death in 1801 the Northampton merchant Joseph Hunt Breck specified that his real estate should remain in his wife's

127. Bliss, *Theodore Bliss*, pp. 6-7, 10, 18-25. Ditz, *Property and Kinship*, p. 162, notes that the division of labor and the spread of farm-family members into other occupations contributed more to household security in this period than did agricultural specialization and "enterprise management."

128. The court decision was in *Hall v. Gardner*, 1 Mass. Reports 172 (1804); Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980). A discussion of the Jeffersonian emphasis on household manufactures is in Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), pp. 223-233.

hands until his children came of age or married, and that she should apply the income from it to their schooling. Less prosperous families had to find other ways. "Most of the farmers fat cattle," wrote Hanna Dickinson of Amherst in 1813, "and send them to Boston or some other market, which helps to supply them with money to educate their children."<sup>129</sup> Some families, including Dan Huntington's in Hadley, use various exchange arrangements to help provide or prepare for education. He sent a daughter to Emma Willard's school in Troy, New York during the 1820s, taking Willard's son in exchange as a boarder in his own house. Two of Huntington's sons worked summers on the family farm to pay for winters of studying to prepare for college. Ira Chaffe Goodale intended his complicated arrangements for wagonmaking and working on his father's land to pay for board "while fitting for college," an attempt that in his case was to be thwarted by economic misfortune.<sup>130</sup>

Public action reflected these concerns. Throughout the Northeast the desire of many families to obtain more than a primary education for their children led in the 1790s to the establishment of private academies many of them in rural districts. Amherst Academy was chartered by prominent townsmen in 1814, relatively late in the day. But it signaled an outburst of activity over education in the Valley towns that dominated the next decade or so: well-publicized but unsuccessful attempts to relocate Williams College in Northampton; sponsorship of Amherst College in 1821 and a four-year struggle in the General Court to obtain a state charter for it; and the foundation of voluntary organizations to provide charitable support for college education. These organizations included not only the Hampshire Education Society of 1814, formed by worthies from several of the larger towns in the Valley, but local groups such as the Female Education Society of Amherst, set up in 1817 "to aid indigent young men of piety and talents, in obtaining an education, with a view to the gospel ministry," whose constitution was signed by no fewer than seventy-six women and eighteen girls.<sup>131</sup>

College education provided one means for young men to avoid the constraints of the household system. David Allmendinger's research on New England colleges before 1850 suggests that, early on at least, education societies and other charities had considerable success in mak-

129. Hannah Dickinson, "The Farmer's Annual Employment," (Westfield Academy, 1813), BCJL.

130. T. G. Huntington, "Sketches by Theodore G. Huntington of the family and life in Hadley, written in letters to H. F. Quincy," n.d., p. 43, PPHH (typescript); Ira C. Goodale to Lafayette W. Goodale, New York, June 30, 1874.

131. For Amherst Academy, see *Private and Special Statutes*, 5:111. See also Hampshire Education Society Papers, MCFL, Box 1a; Female Education Society of Amherst, Constitution, Sept 9, 1817, BCJL.

ing college available to some children of poorer households. Provision was made in the context of households' needs, often through local exchange. Families had to deploy resources to support one of their number in college. Young men had to work for their own or other households to prepare for periods of study and often had to interrupt their studying to renew their means of support. More than half of Amherst College's graduates up to 1842 were over twenty-three years old when they left the college. Education societies solicited local donations in cash and in goods.<sup>132</sup> For the first few decades of the nineteenth century, provision for school and college education closely followed patterns imposed on it by the household system. The spread of effective school reform from the 1830s onward and the increasing closure of colleges to the offspring of poorer families reflected in part the system's progressive decline.<sup>133</sup>

While productive activity remained largely under household control into the 1820s, the need for households to overcome the system's constraints, to create channels and institutions to help them do so, set off subtle changes in rural society that were to lead to a shift in the balance of power during the following decades. In particular, the burdens faced by households themselves led them to seek new connections with merchants, which would profoundly affect the rural economy, while merchants, in turn, began to act on Josiah Quincy's dictum that "labour [is] the root and spring of all profit."<sup>134</sup>

The shift of power away from the household system accompanied wider cultural changes in the countryside, which signaled the breakup of the social and political order that had fostered it. The long period of Federalist hegemony came to an end, to be replaced by the early 1830s with a period of sharp political conflict out of which arose a new two-party system. At the same time, the longer ecclesiastical hegemony of orthodox Calvinism also collapsed into fragmentation and conflict. The six towns had long been noted for religious stability before 1820; only in Amherst was the town's population divided into two parishes, after a split had occurred in the early 1780s. Now a torrent of issues, some of them tangentially related to the question of rural "careers," burst forth with new energy. Disputes over Unitarianism split the church in Northampton and provoked secessions in Hadley and Hatfield. Population growth and the demand for new churches split Amherst further, so that

132. David F. Allmendinger, Jr., *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York, 1975), p. 136, tab. 13. In *Hampshire Gazette*, Jan 7, 1818, the Hampshire Education Society solicited donations "either in monies, in classical books, in cloth, in clothing or in bedding and furniture."

133. See Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-19th Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York, 1983).

134. Quincy, *Address*, 1819, p. 13.

by 1826 it had four parishes. Revivalism and the growth of new sects produced new congregations—temporary or permanent—in Northampton and Westhampton. Long-serving ministers died or were dismissed, to be replaced by men whose local standing and length of tenure were considerably diminished from their predecessors'.<sup>135</sup>

Behind the rapid development of a revivalist culture in the Valley during the 1820s, when these upheavals were occurring, were the emergence of a new morality of individual economic behavior, the concern for religious education expressed in the campaign to charter Amherst College, and the growth of voluntary organizations—some of them run by women—to sponsor religious causes or enforce moral propriety. Waves of revival activity swept new converts into the churches in the 1820s and 1830s. In Northampton, for example, membership in orthodox congregations alone rose from under 13 percent to over 20 percent of a growing population between 1820 and 1832.<sup>136</sup>

Two groups in particular became prominent supporters of the Evangelical movement. Women formed between 60 and 70 percent of church membership throughout this period, a proportion that did not significantly change during revivals.<sup>137</sup> Foremost among male converts was an emerging group of small storekeepers, merchants, and manufacturers. Both groups played key roles in the economic changes that dominated rural life between about 1810 and the 1840s.

135. The political upheaval of the early 1830s is discussed more fully in Chapter 6, below. Until 1820 the six towns contained only seven permanent churches. By the early 1830s there were seventeen. The origins and growth of Northampton Unitarianism may be traced in *Statement of Facts in Relation to the Call and Installation of the Rev. Mark Tucker over the Society of Northampton* (Northampton, 1824); Henry Shepard, "Some Recollections of the Second Congregational or Unitarian Society and Its Members," typescript of 1895 MS, NHS, Archive Files, and Altina Wilson, "The Beginnings of Unitarianism in Northampton" (University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1972). Records of the short-lived Second Congregational Society of Hadley are in PPHF. Lists of ministers in *Creed, Covenant, and Rules and List of Members of the First Congregational Church in Amherst, Mass.* (Amherst, 1859); Wells, *Hatfield*, p. 343; and *Northampton First Church, Meetinghouses and Ministers from 1653 to 1878* (Northampton, [1878]), reveal the shift from long to short ministerial tenures in many churches. Revivalism reached Westhampton in the late 1820s in a short-lived Union Church opposed to the long-established town minister Enoch Hale. Critical references to this church and its minister may be found in Hale Family Papers, Box 6, folder 209, SSC, and Judd Papers, 55M-1, Box 2, HCL. The more amicable permanent division-into-two of the Northampton First Church after the revival of 1831 is reflected in a circular, "To the Members of the First Church in Northampton" (n.d.), Trumbull Collection, MCFL.

136. Information on church membership is drawn from *Creed, Covenant, and Rules*; First Church in Northampton, *Confession of Faith and Catalogue of Members, Jan 1, 1832* (Northampton, 1832); *The Church Book of the First Church of Christ in Northampton, 1860* (Northampton, 1860); *Catalogue of Members of the Edwards Church in Northampton: to which are prefixed the Confession of Faith, Covenant and Articles of Practice of the Church, May 1857* (Northampton, 1857).

137. Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, 1977), p. 143, suggests that 60 percent of New England converts between 1798 and 1826 were women; some local church membership lists give a higher proportion.

## Chapter 4

# Family Burdens and Household Strategies

Giving an address in 1821, Rev. Henry Colman praised the farmers of New England's interior who, living far from urban markets, had "acquired not only a competency but an independency." Colman saw the best chance to preserve this in "frugality in living" and avoidance of the "foreign luxuries" that "constitute a very considerable item of expenditure." "It would seem a most important rule," he concluded, "for every farmer to live as far as possible within his own resources; to depend upon his farm for the subsistence of his family, as far as it can be applied to this purpose."<sup>1</sup> Over the next two decades, however, many farm households in the Valley were to modify their subsistence-surplus strategies and come to depend more heavily than before on distant markets. Not only would they sell more of their produce to earn income, but they would start purchasing some of the necessities they had once provided for themselves or obtained locally. How did this happen? The growing importance of rural merchants played a key role in this shift in households' strategies. But before examining that, we must explore the conditions within households themselves that brought the shift about.

New Englanders were already conscious of a crisis in the rural economy. The same year Colman spoke, Epaphras Hoyt of Deerfield warned the Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society of the need for improvements that could halt the flow of New England migrants to the West. Although migration was nothing new, the 1812 war period created unprecedented awareness of the opportunities and problems it presented. A man traveling across Massachusetts on his

1. Henry Colman, "An Address Delivered before the Massachusetts Agricultural Society at the Brighton Cattle Show, 17th Oct. 1821," *Massachusetts Agricultural Journal* (1822): 6.

way west in 1818 wrote that people sometimes observed, "I wish I was going with you." In 1819, frustrated by debt, Sylvester Judd, Jr., left Westhampton to visit Ohio, with a view to moving there. Judd came back to stay, but thousands of other individuals and families moved. Samuel Partridge, recalling twenty families that had lived near his home in Hatfield about 1810, noted only four whose children all stayed in the town but six whose children all moved away. Migration had once seemed necessary to relieve the pressures of population growth on limited land. Now men such as Hoyt perceived it as a threat that would remove valuable people from a rural economy already afflicted by labor shortage. Opportunities for a balanced rural life, he argued, lay not in the "uncivilized" West, but at home.<sup>2</sup>

Underlying migration and the fear of its effects lay serious strains in the household economy, especially apparent in the succession of economic slumps and poor harvest years between 1815 and 1820. The increased output discussed in the previous chapter was achieved at a cost. The control that rural households succeeded in retaining over their economic affairs and that Colman praised in 1821 often proved fragile. Household production rested on three types of cooperation and interdependence: between households, in the local exchange system; between generations, in the provisions made by parents for the future support of their children; and between members of households themselves, in family labor and the sexual division of work. Cooperation had always been a source of tensions. As the strains mounted toward 1820, households began to revise their strategies in an attempt to relieve them.

#### *Local Exchange and Indebtedness*

Local noncash exchange would continue to be significant for some decades yet, but it was clear during the early nineteenth century that it created difficulties. By bargaining and negotiation, farmers and craftsmen tried to juggle the conflicting pressures of meeting needs, obtaining equity, and following the market prices that were increasingly influential in dealings involving bulk produce. Elisha Smith of Amherst charged Chileab Smith "for 2 sheepskins that you was to pay for in Hats at Stanley at 3/- each." Joseph Warner of Northampton gave a note to

2. Adolphus Fletcher, *Diary*, June 1818, quoted in Harry A. Wright, *The Story of Western Massachusetts*, 4 vols. (New York, 1949), 2:487. "Recollections of Samuel David Partridge," in Daniel W. Wells and Reuben F. Wells, *A History of Hatfield, Massachusetts, 1660-1910* (Springfield, 1910); Epaphras Hoyt, "Address delivered at Northampton before the Agricultural Society," Hoyt Family Papers, Box 2, folder 5, PVMA.

Orin Kingsley for \$12.65 in produce "at market price" and received a note in order to pay another man "three dollars in Grain or Money" in order to pay "for some Coale that I had of him."<sup>3</sup> While most such arrangements facilitated the provision of households' needs, some undoubtedly added to the complexity of local exchange. After selling his orchard to a neighbor in 1804, a Monson man claimed that he was to be repaid for cider at the rate of 200 barrels a year, together with interest either in cider or in apples. He was also permitted to take apples from the orchard at a fixed sum per bushel, these amounts to be deducted from his neighbor's cider payments at the rate of nine bushels of apples per barrel. This attempt to conduct exchange without cash led only to a lawsuit. The two men had failed to agree on which of them should provide barrels for the cider and whether or not the neighbor should deliver the cider to the seller's house.<sup>4</sup> Contention over such issues tended to grow as output increased and the rate of local exchanges with it.

The language and practice of the debt-collection process reflected the continued power of a local exchange ethic that condemned undue pressure for settlement of debts and demanded closer attention to circumstances than to the letter of the law. Rebecca Dickinson of Hatfield wrote in 1793 that her brother-in-law had "fallen into the hands of that vile oppressor who has wrongfully taken his Property," and wrote of the creditor that "God will requite him[;] as he has meshured so many of the creditor that "God will requite him[;] as he has meshured so many he find the meshure . . . how he has given cause of a curse to his inheritance." Images such as that presented by a republican newspaper in 1809, of a "trembling Debtor" in jail, his wife and family starving while the "vengeful creditor . . . with eyes of fire, / Sneers at her sighs; and scoffs at every moan," expressed the popular sense of justice that had sustained the local exchange ethic. Court officers expressed regret at the hardships that the law obliged them to bring to "honest" and "respectable" farmers and mechanics. "I lament that men possessed of so much goodness should be suffering under the hard hand of misfortune," wrote the county sheriff Ebenezer Mattoon to jailed debtors in Northampton in 1811; "it has been produced by circumstances not under your controul and accompanied by no dishonourable act."<sup>5</sup>

3. Elisha Smith, *Account Book*, Amherst, 1784-1822, BCJL; Sereno Clapp to Joseph Warner, Northampton, [month illegible] 13, 1819, A. S. Warner Collection, MCFE.

4. *Sabin v. Truesdell*, Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Records, 7:53-54 (1804), Hampshire County Courthouse, Northampton.

5. Rebecca Dickinson, *Diary Extracts*, Hatfield, May 1793, PVMA (transcript); the lines of poetry are from "The Debtor," printed in the *Anti-Monarchist* (Northampton), May 22, 1809; "Ebenezer Mattoon to Col. Benjamin Olds and others on the limits of the gaug yard in this town," Northampton, Nov 8, 1811, copy in Amherst Historical Society Collection, Hollinger Box no. 2, JL.

Suits between neighbors were still comparatively rare. Of 174 cases involving the six towns' residents between 1804 and 1809, only 36 (20.7 percent) were between plaintiffs and defendants from the same town. In Amherst, Hadley, Hatfield, and Williamsburg the proportion averaged only 15 percent, and in Westhampton there were no such cases at all. Even when debt suits were most numerous, as for example in the summer of 1804, these proportions remained similar.<sup>6</sup> Advertisements calling upon debtors to settle accounts were usually circumspect, taking care not to cross the boundary between legitimate demand and excessive pressure. Jonathan Richardson of Cummington, announcing in 1806 "that he is in want of MONEY, and that this season of the year renders it peculiarly necessary that his request should be complied with," hastened to add that "necessity alone compels him to request this prompt attendance to his just demands." Pressure to repay was usually justified by special circumstances, such as the creditor's need to settle his own debts before leaving town. Joseph Utley, a Northampton Democratic-Republican, made as much political capital as he could after bankruptcy in 1807 forced him to call in local debts. Having been "made a wreck on these shores and his property sacrificed by the wreckers," he explained that he was compelled to collect small debts "to enable him to pay his passage to another port." He asked his debtors to comply, "lest the more fashionable practice of this place [that is, a lawsuit] should be adopted," but added, "*No Democrat need apply.*" As it happened, Utley shortly died and reached another port for nothing, but his advertisement revealed the popularity of using restraint in pursuing debts.<sup>7</sup>

Although it eased some of the more cumbersome features of direct exchange, the use of orders, notes, and other circulating paper instruments also created difficulties. A creditor's order to a debtor to pay goods to a third party was an efficient way of "discounting" two sets of debts at once. But as the networks of local exchange became more complex and individuals' connections ramified throughout a neighborhood or region, the risk increased that such a call for payment could not be satisfied because it came at an unexpected time or from an unexpected quarter. Similarly, the use of notes could lead to sudden and awkward demands for payment. Court decisions progressively eased the circulation of private paper. At the same time, the law sought to protect creditors against debtors who transferred property out of their own names to avoid payment. These two trends conflicted in the rules of trusteeship. Men who had endorsed the notes of neighbors or otherwise assisted them with the burden of their debts might find themselves

6. Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Records, vols. 7-11 (1804-1809).

7. Richardson advertised in *Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton), Feb 19, 1806; Utley in *Republican Spy* (Northampton), Mar 4, 1807.

sued by the neighbors' creditors as "trustees" for their property. The ethics of protection for creditors' rights and of accommodation of debtors unable to repay debts continued to conflict as they had in the past. But as production and exchange increased, this conflict was brought closer to the heart of local exchange itself.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, the pressure of debt was considerable. Although the never again reached the levels of the 1780s, debt suits remained endemic, and periodic crises provoked flurries of them. Between May and August 1804, for example, 127 cases were brought either by or against residents of the six towns, a rate that involved the equivalent of one twelve of their adult male population. In Northampton 26 percent debt suits between 1804 and 1809 were brought by residents against other townspeople. Every year between 1811 and 1822 there were at least 50 men from throughout the county jailed for debt in Northampton. In peak years the numbers were much higher: 135 in 1812 and 146 in 1817, in each case the equivalent of one-twelfth of Northampton's own adult male population.<sup>9</sup>

Rural people not only came into conflict over debts but contested the conduct of the debt process itself. The county sheriff or his deputies were regularly brought to court for wrongful attachment or seizure of goods, violence, false imprisonment, letting jailed debtors escape, or falsely accounting for fees. When the constable of Belchertown ordered a cornfield harvested and the crop removed to satisfy a debt, he was sued up to the supreme judicial court before the legality of his action was established. A New Salem man unsuccessfully brought criminal complaints against sheriffs' deputies in 1806 for assaulting his wife and "violently removing from under her the bed in which she was lying, but later won a civil suit for trespass, breaking and entering, taking property, and "assaulting, terrifying and falsely imprisoning" his wife and daughter.<sup>10</sup>

The extension of household production and local exchange had broadened and deepened the networks of local credit and noncasual exchange. Transactions governed by the rules of local exchange now occurred over a wider geographical range, blurring the distinction

8. An Act of 1794, chap. 65, which provided a remedy for creditors whose debtors had placed goods in the hands of others, in trust, to avoid the ordinary attachment process, was repeatedly upheld in the courts: see the judgment in *Kidd v. Shepherd*, 6 Mass. Reports (4 Tyng): 238-239 (1808).

9. Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Records, vols. 7-11 (1804-1809); Joseph Cook, "An Account of Prisoners Committed to Gaol in Civil Actions," in Hampshire County, Jailer's Book of Record, Northampton, 1811-1822, MCFL.

10. The Belchertown case was *Penhallow v. Dwight*, 9 Mass. Reports (7 Tyng): 34-35 (1810); the New Salem cases were *Commonwealth v. Sexton*, Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Records, 8:232 (1806) and *Heminway v. Sexton et al.*, 5 Mass. Reports (4 Tyng): 222-223 (1807).

between local and long-distance exchange. As exchange relationships developed like a matrix over the countryside, tensions inevitably grew between needs and opportunities that were locally perceptible and demands from a greater distance. As the evidence presented in Table 3 suggests, most debt suits in the Valley in the early nineteenth century were between debtors and creditors more than a half day's convenient ride apart from one another, but not at a great distance. While relatively few creditors brought suit against their own townsmen, or residents of adjacent towns, they brought a considerable number in towns beyond that or in the adjacent counties. The majority of suits arose between individuals who did not have the opportunity to settle their disputes face-to-face; these accounted for well over half of the total. Taking legal action against neighbors, on the other hand, was relatively frowned-upon.<sup>11</sup>

Yet the presence of local suits at all in towns such as Amherst, Northampton, and Williamsburg reflects the strains placed on local exchange by the expansion of production. No fewer than sixteen Northampton craftsmen appeared in court between 1804 and 1809, four as plaintiffs and twelve as defendants in debt suits. A disproportionate number of these cases were between townsmen, either as craftsmen sued each other for fulfillment of contracts or as merchants sought repayment for supplies they had advanced.<sup>12</sup> Although local exchange practices did much to promote new output by effectively reducing credit costs, it also made the success of production heavily dependent on personal relationships. Especially in times of crisis, these relationships could become very fragile. The diary of Hezekiah Wright Strong, an Amherst storekeeper who was himself to go bankrupt in the 1820s, was dotted with anxious references to economic difficulties in the post-1815 period. Some related to the wider problems of the economy: he noted at the end of 1818 that banks had ceased discounting bills and that there was "great demand for dollars." Others referred to their local effects. Earlier that year a drover from the neighboring town of Pelham had taken fat oxen on consignment from several Amherst farmers, sold them in Boston, and absconded with the money. In June, the Amherst lawyer Noah D. Mattoon, son of the former county sheriff, "fail[ed] for a large amount and elope[d] in the night to avoid his creditors." The "Berkshire Road," leading westward from Northampton toward Pittsfield and the New York line, became popularly known as the "Shirkshire Road," a favorite escape route for debtors overburdened with obligations.<sup>13</sup>

11. Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Records, vol. 7 (May-Aug 1804).

12. *Ibid.*, vols. 7-11 (1804-1809).

13. Hezekiah Wright Strong, *Diary*, Amherst, Mar, June, Dec 1818, PVMA (typescript).

Table 3. Geographical relationships between opponents in lawsuits for debt involving residents of the six towns, May-August 1804

Residence of plaintiff or defendant	Residence of opponent in lawsuit			
	Same town	Adjacent town <sup>a</sup>	Other in same or adjacent county	Beyond adjacent county
Amherst	2	5	2	0
Hadley	2	7	22	2
Hatfield	0	4	6	1
Northampton	17	11	37	2
Westhampton	0	1	1	0
Williamsburg	5	8	2	2
Total	26 (20%)	24 (19%) <sup>a</sup>	70 (55%)	7 (6%)

<sup>a</sup>There were twelve lawsuits whose plaintiffs and defendants lived in adjacent towns among the six towns. These suits are counted only once in the bottom row, so the figure for the "Adjacent town" column adds up to twelve fewer than the sum of the figures above it.

Source: Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Records, vol. 7, Hampshire County Courthouse, Northampton.

Ira Chaffee Goodale's excursion into wagonmaking in 1824-1825 illustrates the destructive effect these fragile connections could have on output. As we saw, he used several local contacts to enable him to become a small manufacturer. But the outcome of his efforts was determined by the effect of seemingly trivial events, which turned his network of connections into a house of cards. As Goodale's credit collapsed, the local exchange ethic would keep him out of debtor's prison but it could not keep him in business as a wagonmaker.<sup>14</sup>

By the spring of 1825 Goodale had partly completed four wagons and had acquired materials for two more. He hoped that the eventual sale of these wagons would earn him between \$150 and \$180. But he also had outstanding debts, amounting to \$97.50, for materials and labor on the wagons and for board and other costs during the winter. In order to pay for wood purchased the previous year, Goodale turned to his friend and neighbor Chester Bliss, who loaned him \$25 in cash. Goodale then quickly completed two wagons, selling them for the good price of \$30 each and paying off \$60 of the older debts that he owed. However, before he could complete the other four wagons he ran afoul of his most prominent creditor, the merchant James Kellogg, whom he owed \$32.50 for board. Coming out of meeting one Sunday, Kellogg had overheard someone remark that Goodale would not be able to repay further debts

14. The next two paragraphs are based on Ira C. Goodale to Lafayette W. Goodale, New York, June 30, 1874, M. W. Goodell Collection, BCJL.

He promptly sought security from Goodale, obtaining a guarantee of payment from his father. This action caused Bliss to panic.

Fearing that Goodale would be unable to repay his loan and hoping to get ahead of other creditors, Bliss sued for repayment. He brought his action, not in Hampshire County, but in the Franklin County court at Greenfield, and Goodale later accused Bliss of doing this in order to increase the traveling expenses that the court might award him. Given Bliss's anxiety not to lose his cash, this seems plausible. At any event, when Goodale did not appear to contest the action, Bliss obtained a judgment against him. He then accompanied the Belchertown constable, the latter armed with a rifle, to the Goodale farm to see it executed and hovered in the background while the officer searched Goodale's belongings and warned that he would have to take Ira to jail if there were no means of payment. Bliss's presence provoked Goodale's mother, who had been watching from the porch of the house, to attack him bitterly: "Oh . . . what a scathing, and what a blistering denunciation did she pour out upon Chet Bliss, my warmest friend—as well as a friend of my father's whole family. Yes my mother's tongue was all on elocutionary fire, in portraying the duplicity, the treachery, the most diabolical perfidy and blackheartedness even beneath and beyond the devil himself." Chet Bliss, wrote Goodale, "never forgot that awful scarification that my mother gave to his dying day." This, and "the second lashing from my father," made Bliss "so cowed and ashamed and humiliated" that he "agreed to have the business settled amicably." He backed off from a course that he was legally entitled to take but that was, in his neighbors' eyes, wrong. Goodale did not go to jail but was forced into an immediate compromise with his remaining creditors, losing the four uncompleted wagons in the process. He never went into manufacturing again.

Goodale's misfortune supports the observation of the economic historian Maxine Berg that early industry depended less on access to technology or transport than on more contingent issues such as credit, debt, bankruptcy, and the availability of labor.<sup>15</sup> This applied to farming as well. Households maintained control of rural production, but in the context of land shortage and population growth, and with an increasing number of distant exchange connections, even local dealings such as Goodale's were brought under strain. Nevertheless, difficulties of this kind were only part of the dilemma that household producers faced about 1820. They also had to confront two sets of tensions within their own families and households. One was intergenerational. The other was over the division between men's and women's work.

15. Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures: Industry, Innovation, and Work in Britain, 1700-1820* (London, 1985), esp. pp. 118-122.

*Inheritance and Its Tensions*

The central position of the household system was maintained in early nineteenth century only at the expense of severely modifying ambitions of parents to provide livings for their offspring. The assumption that families would themselves be able to pass land, sil or dowries to their children, had in many cases been wrecked by shortage of resources. The best most families could hope to do under the circumstances was to reserve substantial property for one or two sons and make arrangements to give other children a start in the world through gifts, apprenticeships, or education. While this contributed to the broadening of the rural economy and did not in itself undermine the household system of production, it altered the character of relations within families. Above all, as Philip Greven and, more recently, Nancy Folbre have argued, over a long period from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, it undermined patriarchal authority. Fathers no longer able to make full provision for their sons could exercise less control than they had once assumed. Sons facing the prospect of receiving limited resources from their families were more inclined to leave their "independence" away from home, taking to the road or to other occupations. For them, Folbre has written, "the road to prosperity diverged from the road to maturity."<sup>16</sup>

The break was gradual. As Folbre's data shows, sons in prosperous households were more likely to remain at home to a late age than sons of poorer ones, suggesting that they would still choose to take farmland resources when these existed. Moreover, as we have seen, the work of Toby Ditz has drawn attention to the modification of families' inheritance patterns to deal with scarce resources. Though no longer straightforwardly "lineal," in the sense that fathers provided for sons and sons depended on their fathers for provision, bequests continued to reflect the desire to maintain family influence by arranging for collateral provision. Sons receiving substantial parts of their fathers' estates frequently assumed also the obligation to make some provisions for their siblings so that brothers and sisters in turn had to depend as much on each other as they had once done on their parents.<sup>17</sup> This familial, but less linear pattern maintained the tradition of family provision in a new context.

It led to two sets of problems. First, it increased parents' anxiety about relying on their children in old age. Men with resources could continue to provide for their widows by assigning a life interest in all or part

16. Nancy R. Folbre, "The Wealth of Patriarchs: Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1760-1820," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (Autumn 1985): 220.

17. Toby L. Ditz, *Property and Kinship: Inheritance in Early Connecticut, 1750-1820* (Princeton, 1986), esp. pp. 30, 57, 83.

Good example of the fragility - patriarchy

their estates; Ebenezer Pomeroy of Hadley did this in 1800, giving his wife the use of half his land, buildings, and furniture for life. But as children became independent of their parents for livelihoods, or as their resources dwindled, some men sought to achieve the same end by making conditional grants of property to one son. Joseph Kingsley of Westhampton passed land to one of his sons about 1800, with the proviso that the son maintain his parents, while Ebenezer Cowles of Hatfield willed land to two grandsons on the partial condition that they take care of their mother should she be widowed.<sup>18</sup>

Disputes over the fulfillment of such conditions dominated some families' correspondence. The mere fear of noncompliance called forth strong language. In 1827, while in her eighty-fourth year, Eunice Pettengill of Belchertown received a letter from her brother to ask how her son was looking after her: "I hope he is very kind to you in your old age[;] if he is so God will reward him sevenfold in this world & peace will rest in his bosom. if he is not good & kind to you God will regard his deeds by blasting his substance and Conscience will as it were Harrow his flesh from his bones when you are under the Cold Clods of the valley." Pettengill's family had indeed been disputing over the son's treatment of her for at least two years. "We are sorry that Paul and his family are so cruel to Mother," wrote one of her daughters, "but we do not know what to do."<sup>19</sup>

In this case the child-parent dispute was connected with the question of the distribution of property between siblings, which formed a second set of problems families had to face. As a ballad put it before 1800,

From father to mother, from sister to brother,  
From couzin to couzin, they'll bite one another,  
Since biting has got to be so much in fashion,  
I'm afraid it will spread quite over the nation.<sup>20</sup>

In 1821 one of Paul Pettengill's brothers commented after a stormy visit that he had expected "those things I . . . saw woud come to pass" from a "person that will start so low as flattery and deceit to gain property" and

18. Ebenezer Pomeroy, Will, Hampshire County, Probate Records, 20:179-180, Hampshire County Hall of Records, Northampton; Ebenezer Cowles, Will, *ibid.*, vol. 21:161.

19. In his will, dated 1816, now in Goodell Collection, BCJL, Nathaniel Pettengill had bequeathed the residue of his estate, including Eunice Pettengill's life interest in his real property, to Paul, making the mother dependent on her son. The hope that Paul "is very kind" was expressed in Simeon Tyler to Eunice Pettengill, Camden, Aug 20, 1827. References to strife between mother and son had appeared in Jonathan and Lydia Leach to Moses and Susanna Goodale, Harrison, July 28, 1826. Both letters are in Goodell Collection, BCJL.

20. "Broadside Ballads from the Collection of Isaiah Thomas," 1:51, Broadside Collection, AAS (hereafter cited as Thomas, "Ballads").

warned his mother and father to "look out for tyranny and oppression."<sup>21</sup> Parents' efforts to maintain familial cohesion by imposing obligations on particular children to provide means of support to brother or sisters could have the opposite effect from what was intended, sowing discord between them instead.

Child-parent conflicts and disputes between siblings arose not only out of provisions in wills but also in cases where fathers tried to maintain their authority while alive by dictating terms of cooperation to their children. Sometimes this strategy succeeded. Dan Huntington, heir half of Charles Phelps's substantial Hadley farm, sought over three decades not only to provide for his five sons but to enlist their assistance for each other when education or other provision needed to be paid for.<sup>22</sup> But in the case of Simeon Cowles, a prosperous Amherst farmer, it misfired, resulting in a withering correspondence between him and his various sons and in-laws, conducted on and off between 1807 and 1827.

Cowles had decided to split his property between several sons, and he chose when and how much to give each of them. He had to defend himself against his eldest son's claim that he had been given less than his fair share: "I sopose a parent is the most Capebel of doing justis among children knowing all the privileg[e]s and propity that you have had me." He also criticized this son's reluctance to help his brothers, even though they had, he said, helped him set up on his own: "I am doubtful whether Moses Eli will Ever be abel to put all the famoly under so good [situation?] as you are in now for a living." And when another brother fell on hard times, Cowles sought assistance for him: "I hope you will consider your brother Aron[s] sittuashon and put a helping hand rather than to se him sofer as we have done . . . he has not a house or a foot land in the wold to corl his [own]." Simeon Cowles's concern to achieve equity between his sons accompanied anxiety about his own support in old age. Accusing his sons of ingratitude for the efforts that had been made for them and for threatening their parents' support by claiming too much property, he declared that they "would strip father and mother when sick and not abel to help themselves with money strength of body to get a living."<sup>23</sup>

Tension between parental authority and children's concern to set up their own independent households had been part of the spur to increased rural output between 1790 and 1820. If, as most historians have

21. Nathaniel Pettengill to Moses and Susanna Goodale, Middleton, Nov 4, 1807, Goodell Collection, BCJL.

22. T. G. Huntington, "Sketches by Theodore G. Huntington of the Family and Life of Hadley, written in letters to H. F. Quincy," n.d. (typescript), PPHH.

23. Simeon Cowles to Simeon Cowles, Jr., Amherst, n.d., and Feb 26, 1827, NH A.1.18.88 and A.1.18.91.

agreed, the power of fathers was shorn by the reduced availability of land for them to disburse, some men tried to retain it by increasing the value or product of the property that they had. Simeon Cowles complained to one of his sons, "I have worked my self almost to death for to git property for to make you all comfitabel," and claimed to another that between 1797 and 1813 he had "added to property at le[a]st 300 Dolars a year . . . with out any rise of lands."<sup>24</sup> For smaller farmers in particular, such increases in output had to be obtained not only on the land itself but in household production and by-employments. The maintenance of household control of production was also, in part, the maintenance of patriarchal control of family labor, a rearguard action in many families short of the real estate that had once been more readily available.

#### *The Burden of Work*

While most of the effort to achieve increased output was made by household labor—by men, women, children, servants, and hired hands working under family control—its burdens were not equally distributed. As we saw, the substantial division of work according to gender gave men's work a seasonal character, while tasks were frequently added to the continuous burden of household chores that fell to women. Woodcutting, land clearance, farm-based manufacturing, and other "new" tasks were, for men, timed to occupy periods when the demands of field work were not pressing. Stall-feeding of beef cattle, concentrated in the winter months, was also arranged to fit into the slack season. Farm women of the early nineteenth century, by contrast, were taking on new amounts of home textile or dairy production in addition to regular tasks. At the same time many of them were bearing an increasing number of children.

Popular songs and ballads began to express the frustrations perceived by both men and women at the burdens of increased household production. In the song "A Pound of Tow" a young man complains of his wife's shortcomings as a provider, compared with the capabilities she had demonstrated while still living with her parents:

Before my dame was married, she was a thrifty dame,  
She'd do all sorts of kitching work, make pudding,  
cheese and cream,  
She'd weed potatoes, flax and corn, and milk the cow  
and yoe;  
And rock the cradle with her foot, and spin a pound  
of tow.

24. *Ibid.*, n.d., NHS, A.I.18.88; Simeon Cowles to Moses Eli Cowles, Amherst, Feb 2, 1826, NHS, A.I.18.90.

But, once married to him, this paragon did not live up to his expectations:

But now my dame is married, she does not thrifty prove,  
A scolding and a brawling is all that she does love;  
And if her wants are ne'er supply'ed, then out of doors  
must go,  
With the reel and ladle, and distaffstick, she over my  
head will throw.<sup>25</sup>

Battered by the common tools of women's household production, the young man laments his inability to control that production for himself. Two songs published as a pair in 1807 pointed up the contrast between men's and women's perspectives on household work. While "The Happy Man" celebrated the benefit he obtained from his wife's labor: "The Happy Woman" recommended avoiding household work and expressed a woman's resentment at the pressure her husband put on her to produce:

How happy is the maid  
Whose fortune it has been  
To keep a proper distance from  
That paltry creature man: . . .  
Whose parsimonious soul  
Craves profit from the needle  
And gives the wheel's detested din  
The preference to the fiddle.<sup>26</sup>

Ironically, the spinning wheel and other household objects had a prominent place in male political rhetoric as symbols of household "independence." But it was an independence based on increasingly burdensome amounts of family labor. Women writing letters and diaries often reflected on the heavy and conflicting burdens that they had to undertake, whether or not they had servants to assist them. Breaking off to write to her sister in 1821, Apphia Judd remarked, "I have turned my back on mittens suspenders and as many more things that needs to be done as you can guess." Mary Bullard Graham of Buckland gave a sense of the pressure she was under when she hastily signed off a letter, "my slapjacks are all burning and I must stop," while a sister once wrote to her that "Mary is almost worn out she looks like a June shad."<sup>27</sup>

25. Thomas, "Ballads," 2:55.

26. Robert B. Thomas, *Farmer's Almanack for the Year of Our Lord 1808* (Boston, 1807), [143].

27. Apphia Judd to Arethusa Hall, Westhampton, Dec 17, 1821, Judd Papers, 55M-Box 2, HCL; Sophronia Bullard to Lewis Edwards, Buckland, Aug 9, 1831, and Mary Bullard Graham to Ann Edwards, Buckland, Dec 23, 1834, Edwards Family Correspondence, MCFL.

version of the popular song "The Cambric Shirt," from the Connecticut Valley, reflected the impossible demands placed on many women. A young woman promises her sweetheart:

If you will find me ten acres of land  
Between the salt water and the sea sand  
And plow it all up with an old ram's horn  
And seed it all down with one kernel of corn  
Then come unto me and you shall have your shirt  
And then you can be a true love of mine.<sup>28</sup>

The pressure on household women during the early nineteenth century came from both of their principal economic roles, as producers of goods and household "services" and as reproducers—bearers of children. About 1810, women began to adapt their strategies so as to modify household demands on their time. Rather than simply reducing the burdens of their work, women made a shift in work patterns so as to avoid some of the most difficult conflicts between the different demands made of them. There were two strands to this shift: a gradual reduction in fertility rates and a reorganization of women's household production. We shall look at each in turn.

### Fertility

Historians have long emphasized the importance of the "fertility transition," in which the high birthrates and large families of the colonial period gave way to smaller families among much of the New England-born population by the middle of the nineteenth century. In rural areas this transition took place largely between the 1780s and the 1840s.<sup>29</sup> Debate has focused on the reasons for this shift in reproductive behavior. Richard Easterlin and some other economic historians emphasized the role of land shortage. As families perceived greater difficulty in settling their children on the land, they began to restrict family size.<sup>30</sup> Other scholars, including Nancy Folbre in her studies of the Connecticut Valley, have placed greater emphasis on factors internal to

28. Helen H. Hartness, comp., *Ancient Ballads Traditionally Sung in New England*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1960–1965): 1:77. The song was recorded in Miller's Falls, c. 1825.

29. Changes in fertility rates are discussed in Maris A. Vinovskis, *Fertility in Massachusetts from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 1981).

30. Richard A. Easterlin, "Population Change and Farm Settlement in the Northern United States," *Journal of Economic History* 36 (1976): 45–83; Don R. Leet, "Human Fertility and Agricultural Opportunities in Ohio Counties: From Frontier to Maturity, 1810–1860," in *Essays in Nineteenth-Century Economic History: The Old Northwest*, ed. David C. Klingaman and Richard K. Vedder (Athens, Ohio, 1975), pp. 138–158.

Table 4. Mean age at recorded first marriage, Amherst and Hadley families, 1770–1809

Decade of marriage	Women		Men	
	N	Mean age	N	Mean age
1770–1779	49	23.40	54	26.12
1780–1789	71	23.91	59	26.18
1790–1799	66	25.17	58	27.09
1800–1809	53	25.36	49	25.73

Source: Birth and marriage dates in Lucius M. Boltwood, *Genealogies of Hadley Families Embracing the Early Settlers of the Towns of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby* (190 reprint, Baltimore, 1979).

households. Fertility rates were determined less by the availability of resources than by men's perceptions of their ability to control family labor. As long as patriarchal power over women and children remained high, children remained valuable to men and fertility rates were high. As this control slipped, the value of having children fell as well. In particular, the ability of young men to find a measure of independence in work outside the household, and the inability of fathers to keep them under their control, were potent factors in bringing about the "fertility transition."<sup>31</sup>

Data from the towns in the middle of the Connecticut Valley, and especially from families in Hadley and Amherst, suggest that fertility rates declined as a result of the combination of these reasons with the organization of women's work and the pattern of labor available in the household economy. Like that for Sturbridge, discussed by Nancy Osterud and John Fulton, and for Deerfield, discussed by H. Temkin Greener and A. C. Swedlund, the evidence for our region points to reduction in fertility during the late eighteenth century as land became scarce and families faced poorer future prospects than they had done during the expansion of settlement there.<sup>32</sup> Genealogical data on Amherst and Hadley families suggest that women's age at first marriage rose on average by almost two years between the 1770s and the 1800s (Table 4). Moreover, this rise in age was accompanied until the end of the eighteenth century by a rise of almost one year in the average age at first marriage for men. Coinciding with the completion of settlement in the Valley, these rising marriage ages appear to reflect a classic response

31. Folbre, "The Wealth of Patriarchs," p. 220.

32. H. Temkin-Greener and A. C. Swedlund, "Fertility Transition in the Connecticut Valley, 1740–1850," *Population Studies* 32 (1978): 27–41; Nancy Osterud and John Fulton, "Family Limitation and Age at Marriage: Fertility Decline in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, 1730–1850," *Population Studies* 30 (1976): 481–493.

to restricted opportunities. They were followed, moreover, by the fall in family size that could be expected. Women first married between 1780 and 1789 had on average 7.22 recorded live births, while those married during the following decade had only 6.52. Land shortage may therefore have explained a small falling off in family size and marital fertility before 1800.<sup>33</sup>

But this fall was not permanent. Aggregate population figures and genealogical data both point to a renewed increase in fertility early in the nineteenth century and suggest that there was a two-stage cycle to the "fertility transition" in parts of the Valley. Gross fertility ratios (the number of children under ten divided by the number of women of childbearing age) in four of our six towns rose temporarily after 1800 (Table 5).<sup>34</sup> In Amherst and Hadley, the downturn in gross fertility rates did not occur until after 1810 and in Westhampton not until after 1820. Hatfield experienced this second stage in the cycle even later; its ratio fell between 1800 and 1810 but then rose for two more decades before falling off again. The temporary revival of higher fertility rates is reflected in the family data from Amherst and Hadley, where women who were first married between 1800 and 1809 had a mean of 7.12 recorded live births, almost as many as those married two decades before. This increase was in spite of the fact that they were nearly eighteen months older than their predecessors when they married, 25.36 years on the average, compared with 23.91 years in the 1780s.<sup>35</sup>

The explanation for this higher fertility rate lies in the expansion of output that the household economy was achieving in this period. Despite the continuing pressure of population on land, the mean age at which Amherst and Hadley men first married was lower between 1800 and 1820 than it had been in the last three decades of the eighteenth century. Indeed, between 1800 and 1809 it was only three months higher than the mean age for women. As the opportunity increased to transfer land, raise more produce, manufacture goods, or find various combinations of independent and hired labor with which to make a living, more men were able to marry earlier. The same circumstances also enabled them and their wives to have more children. Mean household size in Amherst rose from 6.7 persons in 1800 to nearly 8 persons in

33. There are no published vital records for any of the six towns. Data are drawn from Lucius M. Boltwood, *Genealogies of Hadley Families: Embracing the Early Settlers of the Towns of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby* (1905; reprint, Baltimore, 1979).

34. These ratios are calculated from data in U.S. population censuses, 1800–1840.

35. These data, and those in the three following paragraphs, are based on Boltwood, *Genealogies*. On the mid-nineteenth century, see also Mary Jane Richards Pi-Sunyer, "Households in a 19th Century Town: A Historical Demography Study of Household and Family Size and Composition in Amherst, Mass., 1850–1880" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1973).

Table 5. Gross fertility ratios in the six towns, 1800–1840

	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840
Amherst	1.48	1.67	1.33	1.01	0.91
Hadley	1.62	1.68	1.48	1.49	1.22
Hatfield	1.64	1.14	1.22	1.23	1.05
Northampton	1.47	1.39	1.29	1.03	0.92
Westhampton	1.36	1.42	1.50	1.45	1.27
Williamsburg	2.14	1.66	1.38	1.31	0.93

Note: The ratios are based on the number of children under ten years of age per woman aged sixteen to forty-four.

Sources: U.S. Census Office, *Return of the Whole Number of Persons within the Several Districts of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1801); *Aggregate Amount of Persons within the United States for the Year 1810* (Washington, D.C., 1811); *Census for 1820* (Washington, D.C., 1821); *Fifth Census; or, Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, 1830* (Washington, D.C., 1832); *Sixth Census or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States . . . in 1840* (Washington, D.C., 1841).

1820, and there were comparable rises in Hadley and Northampton. This rise occurred partly because women extended their reproductive lives. Women bearing their last children in the 1820s were, on average, older than at any other time between 1780 and 1860. But it also resulted from reduced birth intervals between children. Women who married between 1800 and 1809 gave birth on average every year and ten months, compared with an average interval of more than two years for women married the previous decade. As they increased their commitment to household production, rural women were also increasing the rate of reproduction, having more children and more often than the immediate predecessors.

It was only after 1810 that the signs of a second, permanent reduction in fertility started to be apparent. Gross fertility rates in Amherst and Hadley began to fall. The marriage age of women rose toward a peak in the 1830s (Table 6). Many women had fewer children. Those who married between 1810 and 1819 had a mean of 7.03 each—slightly fewer than in the previous decade—but in the 1820s this number fell to 6.2 and a decade later to 4.47 (Table 7). By mid-century, New England born women were bearing almost 3 fewer children on average than they had been before 1820. Average household size fell back to between 4 and 5 people. In Amherst in 1850, it was 4.65.

The rise in women's age at marriage now provided only part of the explanation for the fertility decline. Women married only six months later on average in the 1820s than they had done in the 1810s, and after reaching a peak in the 1830s the average marriage age fell. Of growing

Table 6. Mean age at recorded first marriage, Amherst and Hadley families, 1800-1849

Decade of marriage	Women		Men	
	N	Mean age	N	Mean age
1800-1809	53	25.36	49	25.73
1810-1819	45	25.11	57	26.04
1820-1829	29	25.63	32	28.13
1830-1839	30	27.54	30	25.90
1840-1849	38	25.04	25	27.21

Source: Lucius M. Boltwood, *Genealogies of Hadley Families: Embracing the Early Settlers of the Towns of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby* (1905; reprint, Baltimore, 1979).

Table 7. Mean number of recorded live births, Amherst and Hadley families, 1780-1849

Decade of marriage	N	Births
1780-1789	49	7.22
1790-1799	48	6.52
1800-1809	25	7.12
1810-1819	30	7.03
1820-1829	18	6.22
1830-1839	19	4.47
1840-1849	15	4.40

Source: Lucius M. Boltwood, *Genealogies of Hadley Families: Embracing the Early Settlers of the Towns of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby* (1905; reprint, Baltimore, 1979).

importance was the fact that many women curtailed their period of child rearing. The average age at which women last conceived fell by more than fifteen months after the 1820s (Table 8). This lower age of last conception suggests that circumstances within households themselves had an important role to play in the fertility transition. For an increasing number of households family labor was becoming less important than it had been before 1820. That the number of children became a matter of individual family circumstances, such as wealth, rather than broad external factors, is suggested by the variance between women's ages of last conception, which grew as the mean was reduced. Whereas two out of three women who conceived their last children in the 1810s did so within two years of the mean age, by the 1830s fewer than one-third were doing so that close to it. Early-nineteenth-century families shared fairly homogeneous notions about the numbers and value of the chil-

Table 8. Mean age at last conception, Amherst and Hadley women, 1800-1849

Decade of marriage	Age	Percentage within two years above or below mean
1800-1809	38.64	45.5
1810-1819	38.42	66.7
1820-1829	39.00	35.0
1830-1849	37.16	31.6

Source: Lucius M. Boltwood, *Genealogies of Hadley Families: Embracing the Early Settlers of the Towns of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst, and Granby* (1905; reprint, Baltimore, 1979).

dren they brought up, but by 1840 attitudes varied more greatly. Prosperous families could attempt to curb the number of children the raised in order to rationalize the distribution of means to them. Poorer households were still in need of children's labor to help them make ends meet. Having little property to distribute anyway, control of the process was less important to them than maximizing the capacity to earn.

So the fertility transition was less a "Malthusian" response to the availability of resources than a reflection of the social structure through which these resources were distributed. While household production dominated the economy, fertility rates remained high. Tax data for the town of Amherst between 1790 and 1820 suggest that the burden of maintaining the household system fell disproportionately on women. Throughout this period, between 68 and 70 percent of households were taxed on one poll each, showing that there was only one male of sixteen years or over living at home. As household sizes rose between 1800 and 1820, the proportion of women among them rose also. The proportion of households taxed on two or three polls fell slightly, and the number of female-headed households increased.<sup>36</sup>

#### Household Production

The decline in fertility after 1810 accompanied several significant shifts in the production and consumption strategies of households which would alter the terms of their independence. Like the reduction in childbearing itself, these changes modified the character of women's

36. Amherst, Tax Valuation Lists, 1800, 1820, Amherst Town Hall.

work, removing some of the most difficult conflicts they faced in demands on their time. When Rev. Amariah Chandler gave a sermon in Greenfield in 1858 to mark his half-century in the ministry, he recollected the period in which he first entered the pulpit and drew a connection between the decline in fertility and shifts in household work patterns. "Fifty years ago, children were numerous, much more numerous in proportion than now." He continued: "Farmers' houses might often remind us of a hive; not only from the perpetual hum of the spinning wheel and other implements of household industry, but from the numbers which morning by morning during the school term, swarmed forth from the door."<sup>37</sup>

As we have already seen, household spinning and weaving could involve long, heavy periods of work. Early in the century, there had already been a substantial shift away from linens into cotton and wool production because of the heavy demands of flax processing. After harvest, flax had to be soaked, or "retted," the seed removed, and the remainder dried and threshed. Men later "dressed" the flax, separating the woody part from the softer fibers with a flax brake, then removing the fibers with a swingling knife. They then handed the work over to women, who combed or "hatchelled" the fibers to separate the short ones (tow) from the long. Both sets of fiber were then spun into yarn, bleached, woven into cloth, and bleached again. The time involved in these processes was often prodigious. Families therefore had sought to reduce their output of linen by shifting to wool and by purchasing cotton yarn for some types of work. By 1810, according to the census for that year, linen accounted for less than 6 percent of Hampshire County's cloth production. Although the production of woolens was also demanding, wool required less processing than flax. Carding machines, which spread through the countryside in the 1800s, allowed home spinners to increase their productivity by an estimated 50 percent.<sup>38</sup>

37. Quoted in Francis M. Thompson, "Amariah Chandler and His Times," *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association* 5 (1905-1911): 411.

38. Flax processing is described in Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley, including the early history of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst and Granby, Mass.* (Northampton, 1863), p. 367. Textile output is enumerated in U.S. Treasury Department, *A Statement of the Arts and Manufactures of the United States of America for the Year 1810* (Philadelphia, 1813); Arthur H. Cole, *The American Wool Manufacture*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1926), drew attention to the high proportion of household manufactures among the products listed in this report. The spread of carding machines is traced in Chapter 3, above. The productivity gain from using machine-carded wool is given by David J. Jeremy, *Transatlantic Industrial Revolution: The Diffusion of Textile Technologies between Britain and America, 1790-1830s* (Oxford, 1981), p. 126. An important discussion of household production and gender roles is Jeanne Boydston, "The Industrialization of Housework in the Northeastern United States from the Colonial Period to the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1984), pp. 85-123, to which I referred in preparing the remainder of this chapter.

Several reasons lay behind these attempts to reduce heavy bouts of labor. Increases in the general level of household output, particularly of dairy produce, placed competing demands on women's time. Combined with the diffused structure of the household economy, these increases may have made exchanging or hiring outside labor to help with heavy work more difficult or uncertain. But it is likely that these savings in time were insufficient in many households. Those who started families in the 1800s and 1810s raised more children than the immediate predecessors, but there was a relative shortage of available help from the smaller cohort of children born to couples married in the 1790s. Although the demand for household textile production peaked about 1810, families' capacity to fulfill it was taxed to the limit.

Consequently, between 1815 and 1830 most households abandoned textile production. In 1815 some women in Middlefield called on the minister's wife and presented her with money and goods worth \$20 including "116 runs of cotton and linen yarn, . . . cloth, flax, etc.," "a fine instance," according to the *Hampshire Gazette*, "of liberality, and respect for the Christian Ministry, deserving of notice." Five years later, the minister of Northampton and his wife publicly thanked "the ladies of the town" for presenting them with "near 80 runs of yarn and other articles."<sup>39</sup> But notices of this kind became increasingly rare as household textile production declined. Gifts, if they were made at all, took other forms.

In 1824 Elizabeth Huntington received as part of her marriage portion "the promise of all the flax and wool . . . that she could spin, to be made into fabrics." About 1830 her younger sisters still "had their regular morning tasks in spinning wool yarn," but routine of this kind was now unusual.<sup>40</sup> Caleb Cook of Hadley ceased making account-book entries for weaving about 1819. Sylvester Smith's family stopped making woolen cloth in 1822. In Amherst, Asa and Noble Dickinson's account-book entries for weaving ceased after 1822, and no mention of cloth appears after 1827. Chester Marshall's accounts ceased to mention spinning and cloth in 1834.<sup>41</sup> Although as late as 1845 a Northampton storekeeper could find it worthwhile to offer dry goods in exchange for "Domestic Flannel, Woolen Socks, White and Mixed Yarn," most independent textile production had long since retreated to the edges of the

39. *Hampshire Gazette*, May 17, 1815; Apr 17, 1820.

40. T. G. Huntington, "Sketches," pp. 45-46, 50.

41. Caleb Cook, Account Book, Hadley, 1794-1838, N.H.S., A.A. 17.9; Sylvester Smith's recollection of the end of textile production in his family was recorded in Judd MS "Hadley," 3:15; Asa and Noble Dickinson, Account Book, Amherst, 1817-1857, BCJL; Joseph Eastman and Chester E. Marshall, Account Book, North Amherst, 1801-1835, BCJL.

Valley. References to it appear in Westhampton in 1829, in Whately and Conway about 1830, in Williamsburg in 1839 and in Buckland and other Franklin County towns in the 1840s, but these references are scattered and largely relate to spinning. Already in the late 1820s, much of the plain cloth (as opposed to other articles) submitted for display at the annual Northampton cattle show was produced in local mills, rather than in households. By 1831, the show's report on domestic manufactures was complaining at the small number of articles submitted, which its author attributed in part to the "diversion of female industry . . . from household manufacturing."<sup>42</sup>

In place of their own products, or the work they hired done in the neighborhood, rural households now purchased foreign or American factory-made cloth at local stores. Store-bought cloth had played a role in the rural economy for a long time. Since the eighteenth century purchases of dry goods imported to the region had increased. But for long they had consisted mainly of high-quality materials used in wealthier households or of cheap goods intended for laborers, servants, and apprentices. After 1815, though, with the resumption of imports from Britain and the renewed expansion of American factory textile production, a wider range of cloths for rural markets became available at prices lower than before. The most straightforward explanation for households' substitution of factory-made for homemade textiles would be simply that they sought to take advantage of these cheap goods, whose prices now fell below a level that had once restrained them from buying.

Although there is truth in this explanation, it only partially accounts for a more complex series of changes. Both the presence of large quantities of store goods and the decisions of families to buy them were the results of processes involving more than simple calculations of price. The decision to buy rather than to make cloth was not straightforward. It depended above all on having means to exchange for it. This in turn depended on the organization of both women's and men's labor. Between about 1815 and 1830, the increases in household output which had begun in the late eighteenth century were turned more and more toward providing the means to substitute store-bought for home-produced textiles.

#### *New Strategies: Women*

Abandoning household textile production permitted some women to reduce their work burdens. Apphia Judd, after she moved from West-

42. References include M. Colton to Ann Bullard, Conway, Mass., Nov 11, 1826, and C. B. Bullard to Ann Bullard, Conway, Mass., n.d. [late 1820s], both in Edwards Family

*Conway 1817*

hampton to Northampton in 1822, found time from her household task to dress and receive company during the afternoons. When her sister Arethusa Hall returned to live with the Judds for a time in 1825, she was told that "you might employ about half your time in studies and anything else you choose," the rest helping with sewing, washing, and housework: "you could be a *lady* part of the time, but not all."<sup>43</sup> This, though, was in a town household supported by a salary. Most rural women found that, if anything, their abandonment of textiles left them with an even more diverse range of tasks than before. But the nature of these tasks was such that it is likely that they were better able to tailor household work to the labor they had available. By removing a single heavy demand on their time, they left themselves a multitude of jobs that could be accomplished in smaller bouts. The reallocation of work took several forms. There were new activities for the household itself: the continuation of some forms of independent manufacture, and increased processing of farm produce in preparation for exchange. In addition, as we shall see in the next chapter, was the release of women labor to work for entrepreneurs.

Richard and Claudia Bushman have noted the new attention to cleanliness and household amenities that affected various types of household work from the late eighteenth century on.<sup>44</sup> "We have gone through with a great white washing," wrote Charlotte Porter from Hadley in 1813, "& it has caused a pleasing change in the looks of the house." A variety of objects and activities facilitated cleaning. In Hadley, women could buy sand for scouring from peddlers who brought it from Pelham in carts. Hatfield's town meeting preserved the public's right to dig from a bank of suitable sand. Families made soap. Brooms and brushes were an expanding local industry in Hadley and other towns.<sup>45</sup> One sign of the increasing concern for cleanliness was men's uneasy ridicule of it, as in this song of 1817:

Mops, pails and brushes, dusters, mats and soap,  
Are sceptres of control—her joy, her hope.  
Each day we scrub and scour house, yard and limb,  
And on Saturday, ye maids; we swim—

Correspondence, MCFL; Polly Cathcart Tilton, Diary, Williamsburg, Feb 12, Oct 24, 1830; PVMA. C. P. Huntington's report on household manufactures exhibited at the Northampton Cattle Show is in *Hampshire Gazette*, Nov 9, 1831.

43. Sylvester Judd to Arethusa Hall, Northampton, May 19, 1825, Judd Papers, 55M-1 Box 2, HCL.

44. Richard L. Bushman and Claudia Bushman, "The Early History of Cleanliness in America," *Journal of American History* 74 (Mar 1988): 1213-1238.

45. Charlotte Porter to Caroline Porter, Hadley, Apr 29, 1813, Williams Family Papers; Box 7, folder 11, no. 2, PVMA; on soapmaking see Judd MS, "Miscellaneous," 15:27; broom making is discussed in Gregory H. Nobles, "Commerce and Community: A Case Study of the Rural Broommaking Business in Antebellum Massachusetts," *Journal of the Early Republic* 4, no. 3 (1984): 287-308.

or an Amherst man's description of a visit to his aunt a decade or so later:

She rises about daylight, and *trots* incessantly till ten or twelve at night, and every moment is spent in *cleaning up*. She began at the bottom of the cellar and has gone over the whole house, at least three times, during the past week, to the top of the garret. . . . As nigh as I can calculate the granite hearthstone in the kitchen and dining room lost each about one inch . . . ; and this she did by main strength, and under the greatest disadvantage, having nothing to work with, but an old broom, mop, soap and sand.

In addition to cleaning and other housework, women were also making an increasing range of items to enhance the comfort and decoration of their houses. A cattle-show report from the 1830s noted the award of premiums for "pieces of flannel and . . . dressed cloth blankets, quilts and counterpanes, carpeting, hearth rugs, hosiery, and a great variety of fabrics of a useful as well as an ornamental character."<sup>46</sup>

But before they had time for these things, most women still had to make and keep in repair the bulk of their households' clothing. Substitution of store-bought for home-produced cloth did not end independent household manufacture but merely pushed the most important part of it one stage along in the production process. Where spinning and, to a lesser degree, weaving had once occupied women's time, sewing became a constant activity for mothers, daughters, and, where they were present, servants and visitors as well. When Irene Hall of Norwich prepared to leave to teach in Virginia in 1829, her sister wrote that "we found many who interested themselves in her welfare and have assisted . . . without reward" in making clothes for her. In 1830, the first "Ladies' Fair" held in Northampton displayed the products of domestic sewing.<sup>47</sup>

While much of this work was for families' own consumption, women who needed income continued to manufacture various items for exchange as well. In Hawley in 1830, Esther Grout, living at home with her mother and "finding my health insufficient to do anything which required much strength" determined "to earn something with my needle," and started to learn millinery. Over the next year she worked at bonnet making for local customers, naming each one in her account book, interspersed with short spells of work in other households for pay in cloth, materials, and cash. "I already began to realise some

46. Verses: *Hampshire Gazette*, Feb 5, 1817; description: Martin Field to Esther S. Field, Fayetteville, Vt., Nov 9, 1828, Jones Family Papers, BCJL; report: *New England Farmer*, Oct 24, 1838.

47. Apphia Judd to Arethusa Hall, Northampton, Dec 27, 1829, Judd Papers, 55M-1, Box 2, HCL; *Hampshire Sentinel* (Belchertown), Nov 3, 1830.

profits," she wrote, "and perhaps flattered myself too much with the idea of being able to bear my own expenses," when she suffered a bout of fever that left her health worsened. A number of Hadley women wove carpets during the 1830s, while the South Amherst widow Judith Nutting wove rag carpets for local customers throughout the 1840s.<sup>48</sup> Up and down the Valley women found substitute work as they and their households sought to earn extra income from independent production.

Above all, women's work helped to raise the income with which farm families obtained store-bought cloth in the first place. Reduction of flax cultivation had helped farmers shift toward the increased livestock production that we noted earlier. This increase included larger numbers of dairy cattle. By 1831, there were nearly 2,900 cows listed in the valuations from the six towns, an increase of 135 percent or more over the previous four decades; in Northampton alone the number had increased by about 50 percent since 1821. Women were largely responsible for processing the products of these animals into cheese and, increasingly, butter, which became significant exchange items with local stores. At Sylvester Judd's Westhampton store in the early 1820s, not only did dairy produce form a considerable part of his business, but it was the principal item brought in by all the women who traded in their own names. The historian Joan Jensen has estimated that by 1840 between 14 and 23 percent of New England farm incomes were earned from dairying. In the Connecticut Valley, Amherst in particular became an important center of butter making, producing at one point the fourth largest quantity of any Massachusetts town.<sup>49</sup>

Women's redeployment of their time into dairying and the processing of other farm goods involved coordination with men's shifting farm strategies and an unprecedented engagement in exchange with local stores to satisfy part of their households' essential needs. The shift out of textile production therefore had profound consequences for the whole position of farm households in the economy. It represented much more than an adjustment to changing price levels, although lower cloth prices were necessary for the shift to occur at all. It was part of a

48. Esther T. W. Grout, Diary, Hawley, Feb 13, 1831, Grout Papers, no. 57, PVMA; Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:18; Mary Nutting to Eli Nutting, Amherst, Aug 26 and Oct 20, 1842, Harriet Nutting to Eli Nutting, Amherst, July 3, 1847, and Apr 6, 1848, Nutting Family Correspondence, BCJL.

49. Mass., General Court (Committees), Aggregates of Valuations, 1821, 1831, Mass. State Library, Boston (microfilm); Sylvester Judd, Jr., Account Books, 2 vols., Westhampton, 1813-1822, MCFL; Joan M. Jensen emphasized that the purpose of such output was usually "to make ends meet rather than to consciously make profits" ("Cloth, Butter, and Boarders: Women's Household Production for the Market," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12 [Summer 1980]: 21). In *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women* (New Haven, 1986), chaps. 5 and 6, Jensen analyzes household dairying in detail.

drawn-out readjustment of household orientation, which placed farmers in closer dependence on distant markets than they had been before.

Moreover, because patterns of household work were now more flexible than they had been during the height of independent textile production, demand for women's labor fluctuated more. Because of this fluctuation, young women in particular had more time to work outside the home, in education or in factories, or to do outwork at home for local merchants. At least two of Moses and Susanna Goodale's daughters, for instance, worked in Chicopee and Springfield mills in the late 1820s and 1830s. Some women traveled as far as Lowell and other towns in eastern Massachusetts to work. But only small numbers of women from the Valley proper can be traced in the employment records of large textile manufacturers. In areas such as this, where farming remained prosperous, they were more likely to find livelihoods in or near their homes than were women from the poorer hill towns. As Jensen noted, dairy production gave rural women contact with wider markets without altering their ties to households or to the male-dominated property relations on which they were dependent.<sup>50</sup>

#### *New Strategies: Farm Production*

The shift in household production and the need to rely more than beforehand on income to purchase goods accompanied a shift in farming strategies. The increased output and more intensive cultivation that farmers had achieved in the opening decades of the century allowed many of them to increase their sales of produce after about 1820. For farmers with enough land to support their families, however, family provision remained the first priority.

The Valley continued to produce most basic foodstuffs. In 1822 a list of the produce raised in Northampton included beef, pork, fowls, eggs, cheese, butter, corn, rye, wheat, oats, potatoes, and cider, together with wood, lime, and flaxseed. In Westhampton the previous year, Sylvester Judd, Jr., had noted the products of his father's farm, which included butter, beef, apples, cider, quinces, potatoes, fowls, eggs, and

50. Elizabeth Goodale to Susanna Goodale, Springfield, Aug 25, 1827; Susanna Goodale to Moses and Susanna Goodale, Cabotville [Chicopee], Apr 8, 1837, and Feb 7, 1838, Goodell Collection, BCJL. A check of the Registers of the Hamilton Manufacturing Co., Lowell, revealed only small numbers of workers, male or female, from the Connecticut Valley towns (vols. 481 [Jul-Dec 1830] and 485 [Oct 1839-Apr 1841], Hamilton Mfg. Co. Collection, D-11-12, HBS. For a general discussion of migration to factories, see Thomas L. Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York, 1979), and Dublin, ed., *Farm to Factory: Letters from New England Women* (New York, 1981).

wool, aside from grain and hay crops. At the end of the 1820s, Charles P. Phelps of Hadley was calculating that the annual value of the produce of his farm devoted to family use was over \$260. Again, this included rye, corn, potatoes, cider, pork, butter, poultry, wood, and garden vegetables.<sup>51</sup> Although few farmers depended on them to a great extent, the gradual introduction of potatoes during the early nineteenth century somewhat lowered the amount of land needed to feed a family.

So farmers continued to raise a variety of crops, and families expected that homegrown or locally grown produce would be the mainstay of their diets. When a widow from Conway married a Whately farmer in 1842, her daughter, reporting that she would "get a good husband and a good home," noted that her new stepfather and his family had "a good farm, fruit of all kinds, raise pretty much all that they want to live on, thirty-bushels of wheat this year besides all the rest of the good things and Maple sugar in the bargain." Three years later, a young Amherst woman, trying to persuade her brother to visit for Thanksgiving, described the produce that would await him: "We have got some rye, and buckwheat and corn & potatoes. . . . Only think of buckwheat cakes for breakfast pudding and milk for dinner and jonny-cake for supper, and perhaps an apple or a walnut in the evening[;] now don't your eyes water to taste of some of the good things[?]"<sup>52</sup> Mixed-crop production and subsistence-surplus strategies remained a framework within which farmers continued to work.

Onto this framework, though, they grafted an increasing involvement with distant markets, which intensified as the demand for household income increased. The continued expansion of livestock production, for meat, dairy produce, and wool, strengthened the connection between Valley and hill towns, as Valley farmers sought summer hill pastures for their cattle or purchased cattle for winter stall feeding each autumn from drovers and dealers who moved them from the hills. Having provided for family needs, larger farmers in particular concentrated extra effort on the crop/livestock cycle, raising field crops for animal feed, rather than just for sale. Northampton farmers, for instance, raised their total grain output from 31,497 bushels in 1821 to 41,473 bushels in 1831, an increase of nearly 32 percent. Of this, the proportion of corn rose from 63 percent in 1821 to 73 percent in 1831. They also raised 38 percent more hay over the decade.<sup>53</sup> A substantial

51. Northampton produce was listed in *Hampshire Gazette*, Nov 20, 1822; Sylvester Judd, Jr., Account Book, 2:38; Charles P. Phelps, Account Books, 5 vols., Hadley, 1805-1858, HBS, esp. vol. 2, entries for Dec 1829 and Dec 1830.

52. Hannah Nutting to Eli Nutting, Amherst, Nov 11, 1845, Nutting Correspondence 53. Mass., General Court, Aggregates of Valuations, 1821, 1831.

Susanna Goodale

farmer such as Charles P. Phelps might raise over 90 percent of his household's food on the premises, but by the 1840s he was also feeding nearly nine-tenths of his grain and hay crops to livestock. Some methods intentionally favored livestock feeding over other uses. The *New England Farmer* noted in 1838 that "many farmers on Connecticut river" had adopted the practice of storing hay when it was still comparatively green, rather than drying it in the fields. This made the hay unmarketable, but suitable for stall feeding. "They say much labor is saved and the hay spends better for their cattle."<sup>54</sup>

While Northampton farmers focused their attention on beef cattle, Amherst increased dairy output, and the hill towns increased the size of their sheep flocks, farmers in the most fertile sections of the Hadley and Hatfield meadows turned increasing attention to raising broomcorn as a supplement to their existing crops and sources of income. The introduction and spread of broomcorn in Hadley at the end of the eighteenth century and its role in supporting wintertime broom making by local farmers were noted earlier. After 1815, however, the crop became increasingly important. In 1816 it was introduced in Hatfield. As market demand rose, cultivation of broomcorn and manufacture of brooms spread more rapidly. More farmers became involved. Some, like the Shipmans of Hadley, built larger broom workshops and began to seek the benefits of more concentrated production. Purchasers of broomcorn from outside the region also began to appear.<sup>55</sup> By 1823, Dan Huntington could write that "The Sun in the pride of his strength sends forth his rays, in all directions. *Old Hadley*, in the pride of its commerce, sends forth its broom carts to all the winds of heaven." Writing to his daughter, Huntington pondered whether this was a good thing. Drawing a moral from it, he concluded that it was: "*Broom corn*, in fact is not an evil in our land. It contributes to the making of neat housewives, when otherwise, perhaps, we should look for them in vain." "Besides," he added, "I sold to a shaking quaker the other day, without the trouble of manufacturing it, nearly sixty dollars worth."<sup>56</sup> By 1826, the *New England Farmer* reported, more than 1,400 acres of land in Hadley and Hatfield were under broomcorn. This was over one-quarter of the towns' total tillage, and the crop of broom brush and broomcorn seed raised that year was expected to total over \$40,000 in value. Had this been shared among every farm in the two towns it would have represented more than \$150 each. Earnings like this from a single crop were a new phenomenon.<sup>57</sup>

54. *New England Farmer*, Aug 8, 1838.

55. Early developments in broom production are noted in Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:13, and summarized in Judd, *History of Hadley*, pp. 368-369.

56. Dan Huntington to Bethia Huntington, Hadley, Jan 3, 1823, PPHH.

57. *New England Farmer*, Dec 29, 1826. This was roughly corroborated by a report in the *Franklin Herald* (Greenfield), Jan 2, 1827, which estimated broomcorn acreage in Hadley

As broomcorn became established, its cultivation and handling progressively acquired "market" characteristics and practices. The crop spread to Northampton, at first not because local farmers were planting it, but because Hadley and Hatfield farmers rented land there to grow it on.<sup>58</sup> However, the burgeoning demand for broomcorn had its limits. The boom up to 1826 led to a rapid depression of prices. As the *New England Farmer* felt it necessary to point out, "when the cultivation of any article has reached the amount of consumption, an increase of the crop will lower the price."<sup>59</sup> As prices fell in the late 1820s, farmers cut back production, so that by 1831, Hadley and Hatfield output was only two-thirds of what it had been five years before. This in turn helped raise prices, and output increased again in the early 1830s. But there were also considerable seasonal price fluctuations. A sudden early frost in 1830 apparently damaged at least one-quarter of the broomcorn crop in the fields and prices rose sharply, by as much as 25 percent in a few days.<sup>60</sup> As farmers attempted to adjust to these rises and falls, some earned unexpected windfalls and others learned hard lessons. The 1831 frost sent speculators into the fields to buy up crops rapidly. While one dealer was reported to have netted \$600 from a quick purchase and resale of fifteen acres of the crop as prices rose, the story was also told of a farmer who had contracted that spring to sell his crop at a price that was now half the going rate. Similarly, an unexpected price rise in 1831 left some farmers "uninformed," according to a report, and selling their crops to dealers at the previous year's prices.<sup>61</sup>

Not surprisingly, larger landowners stood to benefit more from broomcorn production than small farmers. They could afford to devote a portion of their tillage land to the crop without disrupting their normal mixed-crop strategies, whereas small farmers were faced with the choice of depending on broomcorn or continuing to raise their food crops. Some small farmers attempted to resolve the dilemma by renting land on which to grow broomcorn, but even so, their advantages were not great. Rent alone varied between one-third and one-half of the expected value of the crop at the beginning of the season, depending on how much preparation had been done to the land. In 1830 Thaddeu Smith rented five acres of land from Charles P. Phelps "for the purpos

and Hatfield at 1,500 (quoted in Charles Jones, "The Broom Corn Industry in the Counties of Franklin and Hampshire, and in the Town of Deerfield in Particular," *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association* 4 [1899-1904]: 105). This and other reports claimed yields of 600-1,000 lbs. of brush per acre, and prices between \$0.035 and \$0.06 per lb. According to these figures the crop's total value would have been between \$31,500 and \$90,000. Since published reports usually gave optimistic accounts of yield and returns, the lower figure is likely to have been nearer to the real value of the crop.

58. *Hampshire Gazette*, Mar 30, 1831.

59. *New England Farmer*, Dec 29, 1826.

60. *Hampshire Sentinel* (Belchertown), Sept 22, 1830.

61. *Hampshire Gazette*, Sept 17, 1834.

of raising broom corn the present season." For the use of the land and for thirty "common loads of manure" Smith was to pay \$90 that December. At the low prices prevailing when he made the agreement, Smith could have expected a return of little more than \$50 for the crop after paying rent and before paying for labor or other expenses. This, of course, was a smaller return than Phelps was earning from the rent. Smith's fortunes that year are unknown. If his crop escaped frost damage and he was able to sell it at the high prices that prevailed at the end of the season, then he could have made as much as \$190 before expenses. Owning or renting land made the difference between earning enough to cover debts and earning sufficient to accumulate more property. As a landowner Phelps was able to take the middle route, of securing a certain return for his land without having to worry about fluctuations in the price of the crop. Northampton farmers rented land for others to grow broomcorn for up to a decade before they started raising the crop themselves.<sup>62</sup>

Broomcorn became the Valley's closest thing to a staple crop since the decline of wheat. But it accompanied, rather than displaced, farmers' subsistence-surplus strategies. It made heavier demands for labor than Indian corn. Only farmers who habitually hired summer workers tended to grow it in large amounts. Large landowners who could not find sufficient labor rented to farmers who had the means to organize the family or exchange labor required. Pressure to use family labor was such that women and children frequently went into the fields at harvest time to begin processing the broomcorn after it had been cut. Moreover, broomcorn fitted in with other farm production. Mixed with corn, broomcorn seed could be fed to cattle. Some farmers regarded broomcorn and cattle fattening as necessary complements to one another because of the cycle of feedstuffs, manure, and crops they permitted. Broom brush was of course destined for local broom shops. In other words, while the crop represented a new source of cash income and gave rise to procedures that had up to now been unusual in the countryside, it represented only a partial and hesitant step away from older patterns.<sup>63</sup>

#### *Food Consumption*

Nevertheless, the rapid growth of the Valley's nonfarm population, especially in Northampton, meant that by the 1830s the region was far

62. Charles P. Phelps, *Account Books*, vol. 2, Mar 1830.

63. Jones, "Broom Corn Industry," pp. 105-107, provides a detailed account of the production of the crop and the use of seed for feed. Henry Colman, *Fourth Report on the Agriculture of Massachusetts: Franklin County* (Boston, 1841), pp. 30-34, discussed broomcorn and its connection with cattle raising.

from able to supply all of its own food requirements. While an enquiry into the Valley's trade in the late 1820s found that "the surplus product of some towns are almost all disposed of in the vicinity," demand was beginning to outrun supply.<sup>64</sup> Farmers might feed their own families and their hired hands, but they could no longer maintain regional self-sufficiency. The intermittent grain shipments that had occurred up to the early nineteenth century gradually became a regular flow, especially after the opening of the Erie Canal. By 1827, according to the trade survey, between 20,000 and 30,000 bushels of wheat each year were being brought from the canal via New York to Northampton "for the supply of a flour-mill in the town." If these figures were accurate, there would have been more than enough grain to supply the basic needs of the town's whole population. Rochester flour appeared in stores in outlying towns as well.<sup>65</sup>

The expansion of trade prompted new proposals for transport improvements for the first time in two decades. In the late 1820s, as river groups promoted river improvements and a canal scheme to link Northampton to New Haven, there were early stirrings of an East-West railroad or canal project too. The completion of locks at Enfield, Connecticut, in 1829 at last provided direct access from the lower to the upper sections of the Connecticut River, although only small craft could reach upstream. By the time the New Haven-Northampton canal was fully opened in 1837, boats carrying flour and other cargoes were arriving in Northampton several times a week. Estimating total New England flour imports at 389,000 barrels in 1838, a Massachusetts legislative report noted in addition "an almost perpetual transportation by means of wagons, from Troy, Albany and Hudson, into the county of Berkshire, for the supply not only of the inhabitants of that county, but for consumption by the people of many towns in the counties of Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden."<sup>66</sup>

Under these circumstances farm families as well as others were likely to increase their dependence on imported foodstuffs as well as other goods. This was particularly so in fertile sections where broomcorn and cattle raising enhanced farm incomes. The trade survey of the late 1820s suggested that the shipment of goods in and out of a Valley town such as Westfield was ten times as much as shipments in and out of an

64. *Hampshire Gazette*, Feb 13, 1828.

65. Returns from the survey were published in *Report of the Board of Commissioners for the Survey of One or More Routes for a Railway from Boston to Albany*, Mass. Senate Doc. no. 1 (Boston, 1828), pp. 49-52; the quotation is on p. 52. The *Boston Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser*, Feb 9, 1828, also printed data from the survey. Flour advertisements appeared e.g., in the *New England Inquirer* (Amherst), Apr 3, 1828.

66. Grain and flour shipments were noted on the canal by the *Northampton Courier*, July 5, 1837, and on the river by Sylvester Judd, "Notebook," vol. 1, July 12, 1837. The legislative report is quoted in Percy W. Bidwell and John I. Falconer, *History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860* (Washington, D.C., 1925), p. 238.

upland place like Belchertown.<sup>67</sup> Even in the Valley, though, household strategies varied. Charles P. Phelps continued to supply most of his household food in the 1840s, and the pattern of mixed-crop production meant that it was unlikely that many farmers came to rely extensively on imports. But after the poor harvests of 1837, Sylvester Judd noted that "very many people, farmers as well as others, have to buy bread-stuffs raised in other states." According to Rev. Henry Colman, Hatfield cattle fatteners by the end of the 1830s were purchasing, rather than growing, rye to feed to their stock, even though it cost one third more than the corn that they continued to grow in their fields. Like the Concord farmers Thoreau was later to criticize, these men fed grain to their cattle to sell in order to purchase flour for themselves at the store.<sup>68</sup>

#### *The Implications of New Strategies*

The altered household consumption patterns that saw many rural families purchasing essentials that even two decades before they would have acquired locally enhanced the local importance of merchants, storekeepers, and other traders whose position had previously remained somewhat marginal. As we shall see shortly, this helped change the balance of power in rural society and brought households increasingly to the point where their "independence" was compromised, not in this case by the need for interdependence with other rural households, but by essential connections with entrepreneurs.

Nevertheless, even as it grew, households' dependence on distant markets became a matter for protracted debate. By the late 1820s and early 1830s a number of consequences were becoming clear. Price fluctuations could send a season's plans awry. Cattle fatteners frequently found themselves caught out by short-term changes in the prices of cattle, beef, grain, and hay. In 1836 sudden rises in feed prices due to shortages caused "distress among the farmers, or among their stock in some places."<sup>69</sup> In 1830, 1834, and 1838 the decline of beef prices on spring markets made it hard for farmers to recover their costs. A committee of Franklin County farmers complained in 1834 that "the cattle which many of us purchased last autumn for the stall, and in feeding

67. *Boston Patriot*, Feb 9, 1828. Westfield's population was only about one-fourth higher than Belchertown's.

68. Judd, "Notebook," vol. 1, June 6, 1838. Colman, *Fourth Report*, p. 27. Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854; reprint, New York, 1937), p. 57, criticized the farmer who feeds his own grain to cattle and "buys flour, which is at least no more wholesome, at a greater cost, at the store."

69. Judd, "Notebook," vol. 1, Mar 9, 1836.

which nearly the whole produce of our farms has been expended, and not worth to us now more than we paid for them." A Hatfield farmer put it more pithily: all he had earned from his beef cattle was "swearing pile of manure." When, as in 1834, prices for farm produce fell generally, difficulties were widespread. The Franklin County meeting blamed President Jackson's bank policies for their trouble. Petitioning Congress for relief, they explained that "our fat cattle, our wool and our grain . . . are upon our hands, and there is no possibility of getting rid of them, except by a great sacrifice."<sup>70</sup>

Because the expansion in the Valley's farm output for sale accompanied an uneven fall in produce prices between the early 1820s and the mid-1840s, these conditions became endemic. Behind the decline, in turn, was the opening up of fertile western farm regions capable of shipping grain, meat, and other produce to eastern urban centers at competitive prices. As early as 1828, the *Hampshire Gazette* noted the poor road conditions in the spring would give Valley farmers a chance to get their cattle to market before drovers from Ohio and New York could reach the area. Citing competition from New York and other regions, the Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Societies commented in 1830 that "the produce of the farms of this country can hardly be said to be of such kind and quality as, in the present depressed state of the markets, and where the price of labor is comparatively so high, to yield a fair profit to the cultivator."<sup>71</sup> Fear of transportation improvements that could make this western competition easier played an important role in local politics at the end of the 1820s. The Massachusetts governor Levi Lincoln, who had enjoyed strong support in Valley elections for several years, suffered a sharp drop in votes in 1829 after a rumor spread that he favored an East-West railroad.<sup>72</sup>

Opinion divided as to the best response to this situation. Some writers urged acceptance of it and stated that New England farmers should rely on producing the goods that could not easily be transported from a distance.<sup>73</sup> Others were more cautious. Although he criticized

70. "Proceedings of a Meeting of Inhabitants of Franklin County, in favour of a National Bank," U.S. Congress, House Doc. no. 480 (Washington, D.C., 1834), p. 3; Judd, "Notebook," vol. 1, Apr 6, 1838, Mar 31, 1840. The Hatfield farmer's remark was quoted by George Sheldon, " 'Tis Sixty Years Since: The Passing of the Stall-Fed Ox and the Far Boy," *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association* 3 (1890-1898) 474.

71. *New England Farmer*, May 28, 1830, quoting the *Greenfield Gazette*.

72. *Hampshire Gazette*, Apr 8, 1829.

73. W. Buckminster, in the *New England Farmer* (1838), quoted in Lester E. Klimm, *The Relation between Certain Population Changes and the Physical Environment in Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin Counties, Massachusetts, 1790-1925* (Philadelphia, 1933), p. 76.

those who "look for nothing from their farms beyond the bare support of their families," Henry Colman argued nevertheless that "agriculture can never be looked to in this part of the country, as a source of wealth. Yet it may be made to yield an ample competence." Colman and others drew attention to the danger that excessive reliance on fluctuating markets posed to farmers' independence. Among them was Rev. Samuel C. Allen, who gained considerable local support as a Workingman's candidate in gubernatorial elections in the early 1830s, warning of the dangers of the financial entanglements markets posed to farmers. As prices fell, he argued, farmers made use of tenancy or took out mortgages to an extent that appeared to threaten their households' integrity. Some evidence bears this out. Whereas in 1810–1811 mortgage deeds had accounted for 13.8 percent of land transactions in Hampshire County, by 1830–1831 the proportion had reached 27.1 percent by number and 30.3 percent by value.<sup>74</sup> An article published in the *New England Farmer* in 1829 warned smallholders in particular to grow their own food grains and vegetables. Having a garden would both provide work at slack times for those who needed to hire themselves out as laborers and "almost subsist your family, instead of taking part of your day's wages for marketing." "The market is a canker," the writer warned, "that will, by degrees, eat you out, while you are eating upon it."<sup>75</sup>

In practice, many farm households sought to take a middle course, preserving their ability to raise supplies for themselves while raising extra surpluses for sale. Rarely did farm strategies stress seeking out profit in particular markets at the expense of maintaining a balance between subsistence and surplus. A debate in the *Hampshire Gazette* in 1829 on the cost of feeding cattle focused, not on the maximization of profit, but on the minimization of loss at a time of falling and fluctuating prices. All the participants accepted that fattening cattle was necessary to a farm's overall cycle of production even if it earned no income itself.<sup>76</sup> Advocates of agricultural improvements urged farmers to take up profit-earning crops, such as hemp, teasels, and mulberry. But it was widely recognized that these should accompany and not replace other activities. The few farmers who grew teasels, for example, were the larger landowners in hill towns such as Williamsburg, who could supply local carding mills with a crop they grew alongside the usual

74. Samuel C. Allen, *Address Delivered at Northampton before the Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society, Oct 27, 1830* (Northampton, 1830), p. 27. Mortgage data were drawn from Hampshire County Registry of Deeds, Records, Hampshire County Hall of Records, Northampton.

75. *New England Farmer*, Oct 23, 1829.

76. The debate appeared in the *Hampshire Gazette*, Apr 1, 8, 1829.

range of grains and hay.<sup>77</sup> When Northampton promoters set to work in the early 1830s to encourage farmers to grow mulberry trees, whose leaves could be fed to silkworms, they emphasized that this would not disrupt existing strategies. Trees could be planted on spare land, they argued; looking after them and collecting leaves "requires . . . the attention of women and children only," who they evidently assumed had nothing else to do. Mulberry leaves "therefore may be produced without at all interfering with other operations upon the farm."<sup>78</sup>

A speaker at an agricultural show remarked in 1828 that commercial standards of profitability did not apply to farming:

There is not a farmer . . . who, if he opened an account with his farm, and kept it after the manner of merchants and manufacturers, but, by such account, would find himself ruined every five years of his life. Let the farmer charge his farm at the reputed value, . . . charge the labor of himself, his boys, and hired labor, charge interest on his investments—then credit his farm with all the produce, at cash price, and . . . by such an account every farmer will find himself ruined, farm, stock, and all sunk.

Yet, he concluded, "our farmers obtain a comfortable living."<sup>79</sup> Charles P. Phelps of Hadley, the one Connecticut Valley farmer who is known to have used accounting procedures such as these in this period, appears to have been an exception to the speaker's rule. But he owned half of one of the Valley's largest farms and had had a legal and mercantile career in Boston before returning to Hadley.<sup>80</sup> Phelps also fed his own family from the farm. Like most of his neighbors he would have seen his activities as part of a whole strategy, not purely designed to pursue profit in the marketplace.

The 1820s and 1830s marked a crucial period in the transition to rural capitalism. Not only did households shift their production and consumption strategies but, in doing so, they created unprecedented opportunities for local merchants to expand their role and influence in the countryside. The people most carefully calculating profits were not farmers but shopkeepers and traders, who began to handle more business. They expanded their role, inserted themselves into existing exchange patterns, and extended their influence beyond trade itself into the control of household labor. It was this, in particular, that signaled the beginnings of a new rural social structure and the curbing of the autonomous household system.

77. Joseph Williams, Account Book, c. 1802–1841, WHS.

78. Quoted in the *New England Farmer*, May 28, 1830.

79. Quoted in the *Hampshire Gazette*, Mar 26, 1828.

80. Charles P. Phelps, Account Books.

## Chapter 5

## Merchants and Households

When farmers sought to dispose of surplus produce, they had a number of options. They could make local exchanges with people who worked for them, but often these did not bring in cash or credit with which to acquire goods from elsewhere. They could carry goods to distant markets themselves. This practice was common early in the nineteenth century, but as rural production increased and overall prices tended to fall, small producers perceived that it was more time-consuming than it was worth. There were other risks, too. As George Sheldon pointed out, farmers with cattle to sell could drive them to Boston or other markets themselves, but they faced the danger that butchers in the market would combine to "roast" them, "both for sport and profit."<sup>1</sup> In many instances farmers sought out friends or relatives in the cities who could provide advice or handle their goods for them. Moses Goodale of Belchertown, for example, sent a load of brooms each year in the late 1820s to a Boston merchant, Levi Bliss, a former neighbor; in addition to discussing the market for brooms, the men's correspondence passed news of the health and affairs of mutual acquaintances.<sup>2</sup> But over time direct sales of small quantities of produce tended to be conducted over shorter distances. It was to local merchants that much of the responsibility for handling goods into and out of the region fell. As production and trade grew, the number and relative power of these traders increased as well.

We saw in Chapter 2 that the structure of the household economy and the increasing density of local exchange networks created particular

1. George Sheldon, "'Tis Sixty Years Since: The Passing of the Stall-Fed Ox and the Farm Boy," *History and Proceedings of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association* 3 (1890-1898): 481.

2. Levi Bliss to Moses Goodale, Boston, Feb 5, 1828, Sept 1829, Goodell Collection, BCJL.

Table 9. Stock-in-trade in the six towns, 1791

	Stock-in-trade (\$)	Stock-in-trade per capita (\$)
Amherst	1,736	1.41
Hadley	5,000	5.67
Hatfield	1,423	2.02
Northampton	18,731	11.50
Westhampton	433	0.63
Williamsburg	567	0.54

Source: Massachusetts, General Court (Committees), Aggregates of Valuations, 1791, Mass. State Library, Boston (microfilm).

problems for the region's traders in the late eighteenth century and led the more prosperous of them to support schemes for internal improvements and other means of profiting from the limited and diffuse output of the Valley.<sup>3</sup> Substantial traders were concentrated in a small group in Northampton and Hadley at the center of the Valley, where there were perhaps a dozen or so at any time between the 1780s and the 1800s. These firms, in addition to handling local retail trade, were wholesaler suppliers to small stores scattered unevenly through the remainder of the region. In some cases, these smaller stores were effectively branches of the Northampton or Hadley ones, partly owned by the latter in conjunction with a local relative or business partner. For trading into more sparsely populated neighborhoods, merchants like William Porter of Hadley fitted out peddlers with small assortments of goods.<sup>4</sup> These trading connections resembled the spokes of a wheel, radiating from the two river towns.

In 1791, Northampton's stock-in-trade was valued at \$18,731 and Hadley's at \$5,000 (Table 9). Not only were these figures considerably higher than for any of the surrounding towns, but they also represented

3. Contemporaries used three terms employed in this chapter—"merchant," "storekeeper," and "trader"—without drawing hard and fast distinctions between them. Broadly speaking, I use "trader" to refer to anyone who made a living from handling goods carried into or out of the region, and "storekeeper" for people who kept stocks of goods to sell. I employ "merchant" as a generic term to cover both functions, but usually indicate by the context the nature and scale of a particular individual's business.

4. The standard account of trading patterns at the end of the eighteenth century is given by Margaret E. Martin, "Merchants and Trade of the Connecticut River Valley 1750-1820," *Smith College Studies in History* 24 (1938-1939). Evidence of the widespread connections of traders in Northampton and Hadley is to be found, e.g., in Levi Shephard "A List of Notes and Book Accts due at this Time to the Late Compy of Shephard & Hur and this day set off] to Levi Shephard," Northampton, July 12, 1784, MCFL, Box 3; William Porter of Hadley supplied stores in Worthington and Conway in which he was partner or had an interest (William Porter Papers, Box D, folder 1815, OSV) and supplied goods to be sold on commission by peddlers (Box I, misc. undated papers).

much larger amounts of goods per head of population than elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Even Hadley, whose mercantile activity was less than one-third of Northampton's and, in proportion to its population, less than half as large, had trade three or four times more significant than its neighbors Amherst or Hatfield and ten times greater than the hill towns of Westhampton and Williamsburg. A comparison of individual stores underlines this contrast. The substantial Northampton merchant Levi Shepard reported that his store inventory was worth \$8,000 in 1804. When Sylvester Judd, Jr., counted the stock in his Westhampton store in 1815 he found it worth only \$416.51. In fact, this could understate the difference, because while Judd was taking inventory for his own purposes, Shepard was providing a figure for the Northampton tax assessors and may have underestimated the true value of his goods.<sup>6</sup> As they had for more than thirty years, Shepard's business contacts radiated across western Massachusetts, tying small traders and producers into a web centered on his own store.

In the rural economy of the late eighteenth century, with its small surpluses and lack of a staple crop, substantial traders could best function at points such as Northampton, where they could organize the collection and shipment of small quantities of varied and diffused products. To most rural households these traders were geographically distant. They were also at the margins of most local exchange networks. Between the 1790s and the early 1830s, however, this hub-and-spoke pattern changed substantially. As household production increased, patterns of trade became relatively diffused, so that they came to resemble a more complex matrix, with connections running in many directions. Traders increased in number, were distributed more evenly throughout the countryside, and became more closely integrated into local exchange networks. In the long run this would give some of them an increasingly powerful role in the rural economy, although not without many difficulties and uncertainties.

#### *The Diffusion of Rural Stores*

Although in absolute terms Northampton retained its mercantile pre-eminence in the region, Hadley did not, and trade in both towns grew slowly in comparison with that of their neighbors. Northampton's stock-in-trade per capita grew by 22 percent between 1791 and 1821,

5. Mass., General Court (Committees), *Aggregates of Valuations, 1791*, Mass. State Library, Boston (microfilm).

6. "Levi Shepherd and Sons List for the year 1804," MS fragment, MCFL, Box 31; Judd MS, "Book of Fragments," Apr 1815, FL.

Table 10. Stock-in-trade per capita in the six towns, 1791-1831

	Percentage increase in stock-in-trade per capita		Total stock-in-trade, 1831 (\$)
	1791-1821	1791-1831	
Amherst	—	450	20,250
Hadley	—	11	10,600
Hatfield	—	352	8,150
Northampton	22	77	73,450
Westhampton	—	108	1,200
Williamsburg	—	1,174	8,500

Source: Massachusetts, General Court (Committees), *Aggregates of Valuations, 1831*, Mass. State Library, Boston (microfilm).

and by another 45 percent in the next ten years, but Hadley's rose by only 11 percent over the four decades (Table 10). Trade in all the other towns grew much more rapidly between 1791 and 1831, Amherst's and Hatfield's by over four or five times relative to population and Williamsburg's by over twelve times. Even Westhampton, always the least commercialized of Northampton's neighbors in the nineteenth century, more than doubled its stock-in-trade per capita. In other words, the towns with the lowest levels of trade at the end of the eighteenth century developed it most quickly in the early nineteenth. Amherst, whose stock-in-trade had once been only one-third of Hadley's, now had nearly double its neighbor's, while Hatfield's and Williamsburg's were each almost as valuable as Hadley's. The distribution of trade goods had become more decentralized.<sup>7</sup>

The comparative reduction that occurred in the importance of Northampton and Hadley was reflected in events, as well as in the figures. The mixed fortunes of the first investors in public improvements were also experienced by the early sponsors of the Northampton Bank, founded in 1803 to discount local paper. After the bank nearly failed in 1810 it had to be reorganized and refloated. Several of Northampton's most prominent trading families faded from the scene between 1800 and the 1820s. The Shepards switched into manufacturing, and James Shepard eventually went bankrupt in 1827. Levi Shepard's son Thomas also suffered financial reverses and ended up as Northampton's postmaster—a less exalted position than his father's had once been. The Brecks left town or entered other occupations. Benjamin Tappan maintained his Northampton store, but his sons found the town too small for

7. Mass., General Court, *Aggregates of Valuations, 1791, 1821, 1831*.

their ambitions and left to seek their fortunes in Boston and New York.<sup>8</sup> In Hadley, while the number of stores remained about four, only William Porter's stayed in the same hands throughout the period. Others went through various failures, reorganizations, and changes of ownership.

One reason for this reorientation of trading patterns into a more diffused matrix lay, of course, in population growth. Amherst's population more than doubled between 1790 and 1830, while other towns also grew in size, although some only slightly. As more people lived in the outlying towns of the Valley, they provided the basis to support stores. David Mack, one of the first settlers of Middlefield, emerged as the town's leading trader in the late eighteenth century, serving as a conduit for imported goods and surplus produce in and out of his neighborhood. Advertisements well into the nineteenth century reflected the view that stores, in the same way as gristmills or particular craft occupations, provided a local service for which neighborhood patronage could be expected.<sup>9</sup> But this is only a small part of the picture. Northampton and Hadley actually increased their share of the total population of the six towns during the period, while some of the most rapid growth in trade occurred in Williamsburg, whose population grew most slowly.<sup>10</sup> The factors affecting the distribution of trading activity had more to do with social structure than the size or growth of the population. Two in particular stand out, each of them closely related to the conditions of household production discussed earlier.

### *Careers and Family Strategies*

Entering trade by setting up a store to sell goods in the locality was one of the means by which rural families enhanced their incomes or

8. On Shepard, see Martin, "Merchants and Trade," pp. 99–101. On the Tappans, see Lewis Tappan, "Autobiographical Sketch," Lewis Tappan Papers, Container 14, LC (microfilm, reel 7), and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1969), chaps. 1, 8.

9. A notice in the *Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton), May 8, 1805, offered for sale a house and land near an intersection of roads in Plainfield "extremely well situated to accommodate a trader, there being none, at present, in the town."

10. The comparative percentage increases were as follows:

	Population (%)	Stock-in-trade per capita (%)
Hadley, 1790/91–1830/31	91	11
Northampton 1790/91–1820/21	75	22
Northampton 1790/91–1830/31	122	77
Williamsburg 1790/91–1830/31	18	1,174

provided careers for children. Three examples, two from Westhampton and one from Hadley, will illustrate the different ways that storekeeping fitted into some families' strategies for advancement. For Joseph Kingsley of Westhampton, the small variety store that he kept on his farm was just one of a range of activities that he organized after 1800, including farming, cider making and distilling, shoemaking, tanning, and butchering. None of these operations was large, but they enabled Kingsley to enhance his income and his position in the town by drawing on exchange labor from throughout his neighborhood. The store, financed by Kingsley's credit as a substantial farmer, provided more varied goods with which to attract labor than were available on the majority of farms in the town and so increased his ability to retain the help he needed to run his varied activities.<sup>11</sup> Informal small stores of this kind were scattered throughout the countryside, doing intermittent trade entirely according to local labor patterns. The description of Kingsley's as a "variety store" suggests that he handled dry goods, notions, hardware, and the other small items that were the staple of peddlers' packs and store "assortments." Kingsley would also have exchanged liquor from his cider press and still for labor, as did other large farmers across the region, who bought quantities of liquor to give out or operated taverns in conjunction with their farms.<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Kingsley parlayed his position into a measure of political power, too. After serving as a selectman in Westhampton in 1817 he was elected three times within the next decade to serve as the town's representative in the General Court. He also succeeded in obtaining a commission as a justice of the peace, despite the opposition of the Judd family, whose early prominence in Westhampton's affairs he was now beginning to rival.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, Kingsley was using his store as one of the instruments for his and his family's advancement at the same time and in the same way that Sylvester Judd, Jr., was using his older store and trading connections to try to save himself from debt. Beset by the depression that followed the end of the 1812 war, the effects of the poor summer of 1816, and the failure of a neighbor with whom he was engaged on town business, Judd was increasingly entangled in a pattern of debt from which his trading activities could not in the long run save him. He rejoined an earlier partnership with his brother-in-law William Hooker but suffered further reverses in 1817 when prices fell and the store's profits were wiped out. In 1818 Judd entered a tanning business, which he helped run in conjunction with his store "in one last

11. Samuel L. Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 3 vols., compiled 1892–1905, 1:146–147, FL (typescript).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

13. The petition against Kingsley's appointment is in Judd Papers, MCFL, Oversize Files.

desperate attempt to better my affairs," but the depression of 1819 ended his hopes of making profits out of that either. He ran his store until 1822, when he moved from Westhampton for good, but he had meanwhile relinquished his farm and other activities to his father. Although his store business increased in size by about one-fifth between 1815 and 1820, an inventory of between \$500 and \$600 was not enough in itself to support Judd and his family.<sup>14</sup>

More successful in using a store to further his family's provision for the future was Dan Huntington of Hadley who, although he had inherited half of Charles Phelps's large farm in 1816, also had seven sons and four daughters to set up in the world. Starting in the early 1820s, Huntington used his credit to form a succession of partnerships with the small traders who ran a store at North Hadley Village. In 1826, one of these men expressed a wish to sell out. Huntington was able to get him to agree to wait for his share of the business to be paid for from future profits, and used the opportunity to bring in his own son Edward to run the store. For the next ten years or more, the store was Edward's "career," but the family made more of it than that. Profits from it helped to finance at least two of Edward's brothers through college. When Edward left the business in the late 1830s, his father resumed partnerships with outsiders. But he did not give up his connection with the store until his youngest son completed college in 1846. As he wound it up, he found that there were debts of \$275 to be paid and asked each of his sons for contributions to cover them: "if I have to tax each of my boys . . . with \$50 apiece, they will have it back again by and by." For the Huntingtons, trade was a means to other family ends, relinquished when the need for it had passed.<sup>15</sup>

Setting up stores for such purposes did not go uncriticized. "One fruitful source of idleness, dissipation and bankruptcy," ran an article printed in the *Hampshire Gazette* in 1817, "is the multiplication of small stores in the country." The author not only mocked young men's ambitions, but accused them of laziness and their parents of poor judgment:

A young man who has obtained some money by his industry, or obtained some from his friends soon finds labor irksome and desires to be a mer-

14. Sylvester Judd, Jr., Account Books, 2 vols., MCFL, and Judd MS, "Book of Fragments," Apr 1815, July 1820, relate to the store. The account of Judd's affairs in the 1810s is based on Judd MS, "Commonplace Book," and Arethusa Hall, ed., *Memorabilia from the Journals of Sylvester Judd of Northampton, Mass., 1809-1860* (Northampton, 1882), Apr 10, Nov 20, 1810, and Aug 21, 1821.

15. This account of the Huntington family's strategies is based on T. G. Huntington, "Sketches by Theodore G. Huntington of the Family and Life in Hadley written in letters to H. F. Quincy," n.d., pp. 57-59, PPHH (typescript); Dan Huntington to Edward P. Huntington, Hadley, Oct 21, 1826; Dan Huntington to J. W. Huntington, Hadley, Aug 31, 1829, May 12, 1830; Dan Huntington to Frederic D. Huntington, Hadley, Apr 6, 1842, all in PPHH.

*chant*. . . Such men had better stick to their farms and workshops. . . It is a great error in fathers to prefer rearing a son behind the counter, rather than in the workshop or in the field. Can it be more honourable to measure rum and molasses, tape and ribbons, than to follow the hardy pursuits of agriculture or manufactures?<sup>16</sup>

The image of merchants as lazy died hard. As late as 1859 a Hadley woman recalled an early-nineteenth-century trader in the town whose family "despised labour as much as any and were above work. He and some daughters have died poor."<sup>17</sup> There is little doubt, however, that parents with means or connections sought to obtain positions as store clerks for sons in the hope that they would use this route to earn their own livings away from the land. However, some young men appreciated in this way did not like the work. Samuel Hall of Norwich, sent a clerk in a store at Heath in Franklin County, petitioned his family for permission to leave again: "he could not reconcile his mind to the idea of spending his days behind a counter dealing out good to A, B, C, etc, etc. Others, including Sylvester Judd III, were dismissed for incompetency by the merchants they had secured places with.<sup>18</sup> But the spread of stores across the countryside in the first two decades of the nineteenth century owed more than a little to the demand for "careers" outside farming from families limited by their resources, and to farmers' and others' willingness to use this labor to do the humdrum tasks of retailing.

#### *Stores in Local Exchange*

While family needs often provided the impulse to set up stores, the conditions of local exchange profoundly influenced the character of the business they could conduct. It was the local exchange system that more than anything else, reordered the patterns of retail trade and made the connections between traders and customers more diffuse. Critics such as the author of the *Hampshire Gazette* article just quoted were right to emphasize the risks that storekeepers faced when they set up in rural trade. An almanac printed in 1820 repeated the warning that "many who have thriven as farmers and mechanics, have ruined the circumstances by forsaking these callings and going into trade."<sup>19</sup> Price fluctuations and trade depressions between 1815 and 1820 had exagger-

16. *Hampshire Gazette*, July 2, 1817.

17. Judd MS, "Hadley," 3:187.

18. Aaron Hall to Arethusa Hall, Norwich, Nov 9, 1831; Sylvester Judd III to Sylvester Judd, Jr., Hartford, Oct 14, 1830, both in Judd Papers, 55M-1, Box 2, HCL.

19. [John Howe], *The Massachusetts Agricultural Almanac, for the Year 1821* (Enfield 1820), [pp. 5-7].

ated them, but the difficulties were more fundamental. As the larger traders of the central Valley towns had long known only too well, retailers inhabited an uncertain position on the boundaries between local exchange and long-distance trade, with their contrasting rules and expectations. While merchants had remained few in number, they were able to survive partly by maintaining a distance from their customers, hoping to fulfill demand and soak up surplus produce along a widespread network of connections. As the number of stores increased, they were necessarily forced into closer relationships with their local customers. In the short run they had to adapt to local exchange patterns. Over a longer term they began to transform them.

According to the *Gazette's* critic of 1817, the problem was that a trader would open his store, "purchase . . . goods to the extent of his capital and credit; and as country people are fond of running to a *new store*, he gets rid of his goods, and gets in return a list of bad accounts."<sup>20</sup> Although this description oversimplified the issue, it correctly indicated the contradictions of a trader's position. On the one hand, he was obliged to buy his stock and to promise to pay for it on terms dictated by the rules of long-distance trade. These terms usually involved fixed credits of three, four, or six months, depending on the type of goods and the trader's own credit. Moreover, he was obliged to make payment either in cash or by consigning goods that his supplying merchant had agreed to accept. The store's customers, on the other hand, were used to dealing in the local exchange economy. They were accustomed to paying for goods as it was convenient, with whatever they had on hand surplus to their needs and on terms they were prepared to negotiate. Successfully matching these conflicting ethics of exchange took skill and good fortune.

Store accounts show how difficult it often was for traders to command cash payment for goods. One factor in this was the effect of competition between stores. Where farmers and mechanics had a choice of store to deal with, they could readily enforce their local customs of exchange on either storekeeper. Traders were often hesitant to demand terms less favorable than their rivals'. But competition was only a partial reason. Even stores that had local monopolies had to accept a high proportion of noncash payment because their customers frequently had no means to pay other than in goods or services. So according to Amasa Wells's accounts, when he paid for goods taken from the Hatfield store of Dwight and Partridge in the 1790s, between 65 percent and 70 percent of his payments were in produce. After 1800 he began to fall behind on his repayments and ended up giving the store

20. *Hampshire Gazette*, July 2, 1817.

a deed to twenty-two acres of mountain land, valued at \$330.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Sylvester Judd's receipts from his Westhampton customers between 1820 and 1822 included only 30 percent cash and the remainder in goods and services.<sup>22</sup> A Hadley farmer ordered goods from the store of William Porter in 1810 promising that "I will pay the same in Produce in course of the season." This pattern was reflected further up the chain of supply. Porter supplied goods to a store in the town of Worthington that he ran in partnership with a local man. Against goods worth \$1,302.10 that Porter sent out in 1815, he received cash repayment amounting to only \$317.99, just under one-quarter of the total.<sup>23</sup> Corresponding with his father about the affairs of Hooker and Judd of Northampton in 1816, Hophni Judd remarked of one account he had settled "I thought it best to accept of *Money* from whatever quarter it might be offered."<sup>24</sup>

New stores commonly faced the difficulty that they had obtained goods for cash or on short credit but were unable to command prompt cash payment from their customers. As a result, many stores were short-lived. Early in 1807 a man named John Fitch advertised confidently that he had opened a new assortment of "General Goods" in a former printing office in Northampton. Three months later, he announced a second "New Store," this time in partnership with another man. Not long afterward he disappeared from the records. Two Northampton physicians opened a hardware and fancy-goods store in 1806, but although they remained in town, their store did not last. An Amherst farmer, Friend Smith, was sued as a "trader" for a debt he owed a Hadley merchant in 1802, and may have been in business for only a short time. At least until 1810 he retained his sixty-three-acre landholding, but by 1815 he had lost his property. Two years after that, working as a day laborer on the Shepard family's farm in Northampton, he fell into the Connecticut River and was drowned.<sup>25</sup>

The terms and conditions for repayment at country stores coincided in most respects with those of other local exchanges. In only 1 out of 150

21. Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Files, Mar 1818, no. 59, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.

22. Sylvester Judd, Jr., Account Books, 2 vols., MCFL.

23. William Porter to Porter and Smith, William Porter Papers, Box D, folder 1815, OSV.

24. Hophni Judd to Sylvester Judd, Sr., Northampton, June 11, 1816, Judd Papers, MCFL, Oversize File.

25. Fitch's second advertisement appeared in the *Republican Spy* (Northampton), Jan 7, 1807. Friend Smith was a defendant in *Hopkins v. Smith*, Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Files, Nov 1802, no. 15; his dwindling property can be traced in Amherst Tax Valuation Lists, 1800-1815; his drowning at the age of fifty-two was reported in the *Hampshire Gazette*, Dec 31, 1817.

transactions he conducted in January 1822, for example, did Amherst's leading trader Hezekiah Wright Strong receive immediate cash payment. The rest were on credit. As Sylvester Judd found in Westhampton at the same time, prompt settlements of any kind—in cash or goods—were the exception rather than the rule. In sixty-one of Judd's accounts where repayment dates are indicated, only five were settled immediately or within one month, twenty-five were settled over a period from one to six months, and another thirteen between six months and one year from when they were opened. This left eighteen, or 30 percent of the total, to be settled in more than one year or not at all. While Judd sold goods worth \$581.58 in 1820, he received payments of only \$510.04. Over 12 percent of the goods were not paid for, in spite of the fact that Judd was winding up his business by early 1822 and making an effort to collect debts, so this figure underestimates the extent to which balances remained unsettled in the normal course of events.<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly, considering the pressures that they were under, traders were the most likely group to bring the insistence of long-distance trade into local exchange. They were not always popular. Perhaps it was after having a hard bargain driven by one of Northampton's prominent merchants that an unidentified person scribbled a note in the form of an account settlement: "Mr Benj<sup>n</sup>. Tappan is very hard as Witness my hand Every Body." Joseph Kingsley, with his network of local connections that probably represented a considerable degree of obligation to him by his neighbors, was remembered as "the best hated man in Westhampton."<sup>27</sup> Traders were the most likely group to sue for the recovery of debts. Of 173 debt suits involving the six towns between 1804 and 1809, no fewer than 76 (44 percent) were brought by plaintiffs described as "merchant" or "trader," while another 39 (23 percent) were brought by "gentlemen," some of whom at least were merchants. Not only was this far in excess of their proportionate presence in the population, but their situation was noteworthy in that they were rarely sued themselves except by other traders.<sup>28</sup>

However, they did not exercise their power carelessly. Like other plaintiffs, they pressed suits most commonly when money was scarce and they were themselves under pressure to make remittances. The plaintiff in several suits brought during a minor panic in 1804, for example, was David Stockbridge, a Hadley trader who by all accounts

26. Hezekiah Wright Strong, Account Book, BCJL; Judd, Account Books, vol. 2.

27. The remark about Tappan is on an anonymous fragment in Accounts Collection, MCFL, Box 1; that about Kingsley, in Wright, "Westhampton Local History," 1:149.

28. Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Records, vols. 7-11, (1804-1809), Hampshire County Courthouse, Northampton.

was heading into financial trouble himself. Within a year, he too had been sued and his partnership with a Sunderland man broken up. On October 7, 1805, a Hatfield farmer, having obtained a writ of execution for a debt of over \$200 for which no property could be found, had Stockbridge sent to jail in Northampton, where he stayed until he escaped the following March.<sup>29</sup>

As merchants grew in number and rural output increased, they sought to resolve the contradiction between long-distance and local rules not by violating local exchange but by inserting themselves more closely into it. They tried to ease their position by practicing the same kinds of direct exchanges among themselves that farmers did. William Porter swapped rags for the wrapping paper he acquired from a paper mill, exchanged cattle for leather with a tanner and, when the Northampton bookseller Simeon Butler sought a consignment of brown sugar in 1814, agreed to supply it in exchange for dictionaries, other books, stationery, four dozen almanacs, and two dozen primers.<sup>30</sup> Stores' local business was conducted face-to-face. When Judd, Hooker and Company of Northampton submitted a \$200 cash payment to their supplier in 1811, the Boston merchant returned a counterfeit two-dollar bill "supposing you may recollect of whom you received it."<sup>31</sup> Although the names in their daybooks and ledgers were usually those of merchants they dealt with any member of a household whose head had an account with them. They conducted trade on the basis of trust engendered in personal relationships. They accepted the word of children, servants, and apprentices who came to the store that they were authorized to charge to their father's or their master's account the goods that they took. Advertisements for runaway apprentices or servants usually include the warning that "he [or she] is not to be trusted on my account. Periodic accusations of theft arose when goods were taken from store by men or women claiming to represent a local customer.<sup>32</sup> Although the final settlements of accounts may have occurred irregularly and sometimes over long periods, the perpetual traffic in and out of country stores by men, women, servants, and children bringing and taking

29. Stockbridge was plaintiff in several suits, Hampshire County, Court of Common Pleas, Records, vol. 7 (1804), and was in turn sued by Joseph Smith in Aug 1805. In *Stockbridge v. Mattoon*, 8:230 (Nov 1805), the trader attempted to regain possession of goods attached by the county sheriff. The following year, in *Smith v. Mattoon*, 9:215 (Mar 1806), Smith in turn sued Mattoon for the debt owed him by Stockbridge after the latter had escaped.

30. William Porter Papers, Box A, folder 1.

31. Matthew M. Hunt to Judd, Hooker and Co., Boston, Sept 10, 1811, MCFL, Box 1A.

32. E.g., notice of Nathaniel Coolidge, Jr., and Co., Hadley, *Hampshire Gazette*, Aug 11 1816, seeking information about a man and woman who had taken yarn from the store in June 1815, "directed it charged to David Thayer of Belchertown" and had not been heard from since.

goods for exchange meant that a storekeeper such as Sylvester Judd could keep his remittances to suppliers up to date by gathering small payments into larger shipments.

Early critics of the expansion of local storekeeping lamented its effect in expanding demand for "unnecessary" goods in the countryside. A writer in the *Hampshire Gazette* in 1788 urged farmers not to trade their surplus produce at local stores but to carry it directly to a market where they could receive cash. While farmers might receive some necessities from the store and some "convenient" goods (though "not such as [they] would pay cash for"), they would be forced to take the balance due to them in "superfluities," because there would be no other choice. This in turn would obstruct the settlement of other debts, because each farmer would be "obliged to take goods for all he had to sell."<sup>33</sup> Partly to overcome this kind of resistance to dealing with them, merchants sought ways of enhancing their role in local exchange.

Many traders did so by accepting orders from their customers to pay goods on account to third parties. William Porter of Hadley took large numbers of these orders between the early 1790s and the mid-1820s, many of them drawn by farmers in favor of men they had hired for day work. Joseph Kingsley, similarly, seems to have built his network of customers in Westhampton by accepting such orders.<sup>34</sup> Although they had the immediate effect of extending further the credit the trader granted against his stock, store orders had the longer-term strategic result of drawing him more closely into patterns of local exchange that might otherwise have been conducted without him. They had three sets of implications. They permitted farmers to settle debts for labor rapidly, without drawing immediately on their own resources and to use their connection with the store to settle pressing debts of any kind. Although there was no marked seasonal pattern, more orders were written between April and June than in other three-month periods, reflecting the fact that farmers needed labor but did not always have foodstuffs or other goods to pay for it.<sup>35</sup> By the same token, laborers received more prompt payment than they might otherwise have done, though probably at the disadvantage of having to accept the store's prices for the goods they needed. Finally, merchants themselves, by granting credit in this manner, both increased their custom and potentially solved part of their difficulty in securing goods or cash to remit for supplies. They furnished goods to laborers and other creditors who would otherwise

33. *Hampshire Gazette*, Dec 3, 1788.

34. William Porter Papers, Boxes A-F; Solomon Bartlett of Westhampton settled an account with his hired laborer John Gay in 1805 by giving him an order on Kingsley (William and Solomon Bartlett, Account Books, Westhampton, 1704-1857, vol. 2, HBS).

35. Porter Papers, Box A, folder 1796-1799, 1800; Box E, folder 1819.

have been paid directly by their debtors and, moreover, they divert into their stores a portion of the annual product of farmers who might otherwise have sold their surplus somewhere else. Their interests dictated caution in accepting store orders too freely and they readily close off this line of credit to men they considered overextended or otherwise liable not to pay their bills. It may have been such a rejection by William Porter that prompted this rather pathetic request from Samuel Marsh of Hadley in 1797:

Docter Porter

i want [to] know if you would not be willing to Let me have what i want & charg it if i should not Live i shall Leave Enoug to pay . . . i Beleive it Save me a great Deal of trouble if you conclude to Let me ha[ve] one pint of [West Indian] & one quart [New England rum].<sup>36</sup>

But the insertion of traders into local exchange dealings is evident in early-nineteenth-century accounts such as that of Amasa Wells with the Hatfield store of Dwight and Partridge. Between 1802 and 1806 Wells traded his produce, including livestock, with the store, taking in exchange, among the imported goods, various items of local production. These included small quantities of corn and wheat, a broom, shirting and "2½ yards home made cloth." By 1818, as the nonfarm population was increasing, a Hadley store held nearly 700 bushels of wheat, rye, corn and oats in stock, in proportions similar to those raised by farmers in the town as a whole.<sup>37</sup> Accepting the terms of local exchange enabled traders to divert more and more of it into their own hands.

#### *Merchants Expand Their Power*

Close relationships with rural households and conformity to the standards of local exchange enabled merchants to capitalize on the shifts in household production and consumption strategies noted in the last chapter. There was a significant increase in stores' business after about 1810 and especially after 1820. In Northampton, for which the available evidence is best, the number of stores rose from nine to fifteen between 1805 and 1815 and to more than twenty during the 1820s. Total stock-in-trade nearly doubled between 1791 and 1821 and then doubled again

36. Samuel Marsh to William Porter, Hadley, Dec 13, 1797, Porter Papers, Box A, folder 1796-99.

37. Wells's accounts are in Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Files, Mar 1818, no. 59. Nathaniel Coolidge, Jr., and Co. of Hadley advertised grain on hand in the *Hampshire Gazette*, Aug 11, 1818.

within the next ten years. The town's stock-in-trade per capita, which rose at an average rate of just over 7 percent each decade up to 1821, jumped by 45 percent from then until 1831. The expansion continued in the 1830s, but at a slower rate. Nevertheless, the number of stores and shops in the town rose faster than its population, reaching more than thirty by the early 1840s. Increases in the number of stores and the value of their stock took place in other towns. In Amherst during the 1830s stock-in-trade rose by nearly two and a half times.<sup>38</sup>

In part, this expansion took place across the range of goods that stores had traditionally handled. Sylvester Judd in Westhampton and Hezekiah Wright Strong in Amherst both sold the salt, hardware, crockery, notions, books, sugar, molasses, rum, and spices they had stocked in the past. But the 1810s and 1820s witnessed a significant increase in the volume of cloth and other dry goods sold by stores. In 1810 dry goods formed about one-fifth of William Porter's purchases for his store. By the 1830s they represented more than half.<sup>39</sup> Traders' advertisements stressed the range of textiles they had available for purchase. Nathaniel Coolidge, Jr., who ran a store in Hadley in the years around 1820, announced that he carried "Bombazetts, Scotch Plaids, Broadcloths, Cassimeres, Pelisse, Flannels, Baizes, Kersey, Coating, Blankets, Shawls, Handkerchiefs, Velvets, Silk, Nankin, Canton, Crepes, Lustings, Ribbons, Trimmings, Fringes, Silk Buttons, Gingham, Calicoes, Muslins, Cambrics, Bedticking, Satinets, Checks, Sheetings, Cotton yarn, Batting [and] Wick yarn."<sup>40</sup> These included not only the high-quality cloths, trimmings, and accessories that stores had sold for a long time, but cheaper, everyday materials that households had, until recently, often made or exchanged for themselves and that were now increasingly factory produced. Families came to depend on stores for their supplies of cloth. In 1830, for example, the Belchertown farmer Moses Goodale traveled to Amherst with eleven brooms and a peck of chestnuts that he took to the merchant Luke Sweetser in part exchange for three and one-half yards of sheeting, two and three-quarters yards of woolen cloth, half a yard of cambric, some buttons and twist, and an ounce of indigo. By the early 1850s, Sweetser's firm held two-thirds of its stock in dry goods and another 10 percent in men's and boys' clothing.<sup>41</sup>

To maintain this close connection with rural households, traders had

38. Evidence on the number of stores is drawn from advertisements in the *Hampshire Gazette*, 1790–1840.

39. Calculated from receipts in Porter Papers, Box C, folder 1810, Box H, folder 1836.

40. *Hampshire Gazette*, Oct 30, 1822.

41. Luke Sweetser, Receipt, Oct 30, 1830, BCJL; Sweetser, Cutler and Co., Account Books, 2 vols., BCJL, inventories for 1852 and 1853.

to offer their goods for sale in ways families found convenient. Well into the middle of the century most stores accepted "country produce" in exchange for goods. "When harvests are in I will accept the tender of grain and goods as may be convenient," the Conway trader John Williams told his supplier; in nearby Charlemont Lewis Bodman would, he said, "sell grave stones for almost any thing except clocks and honey."<sup>42</sup> An Amherst store took 51 percent by number and 42 percent by value of its payments in goods in 1827, including veal, nuts, cheese, rye, corn, and cloth in quantities never worth more than two dollars, and wood, shoes, paper, tool handles, brass, and hats in amounts whose value only occasionally exceeded twenty dollars. Cash represented only 30 percent of the value of payments. The balance was made in labor, services, notes, or orders. At the Huntingtons' North Hadley store in the 1830s, the proportion of cash payment was even smaller. In 1831 Dan Huntington remarked in a letter that the store had "traded yesterday above eighty dollars, upwards twenty cash." In the depression following the 1837 panic, cash became even more difficult to obtain. In 1839 and 1840 the store took only 18.5 percent of its payments directly in cash.<sup>43</sup>

Merchants sought to make profits from the resale of the farm produce and other goods they collected and on the premiums they could charge for noncash payment. When Hezekiah Wright Strong received corn in 1822 and resold it on the same day, he marked the price up about 10 percent. Premiums on noncash payment varied according to the goods involved and the form of payment agreed on for them. Differentials of about 20 percent between cash and noncash prices were probably common. The actual size of markups and premiums is often difficult to measure, however. On bulk items such as grain and other foodstuffs for which market prices were known, the opportunities for merchants to swell their profits from transactions were probably small. Strong's prices for butter, for example, almost exactly matched those quoted in Northampton newspapers. But there were no widely known "market" prices for many of the dry goods, hardware, crockery, or other household items that stores held in stock. While prices for particular items may have remained consistent in a particular store for a period of time, the quality of goods sold under the same description varied so much from time to time and from store to store that comparisons are risky. It is significant that the goods, such as textiles, whose sale to households

42. John Williams to James B. Porter, Conway, June 8, 1837, NHS, A.I.18.21; Lewis Bodman to Luther Bodman, Sr., Charlemont, Nov 3 [1835?], Bodman Family Papers, Box 2, SSC.

43. Store Account Book, Amherst, 1827, BCJL; Dan Huntington to J. W. Huntington, Hadley, Apr 12, 1831, and Store Ledger, North Hadley, 1839–1840, both in PPHH.

increased so rapidly in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, should have been made available on noncash terms. Traders were prepared to do this partly in order to stimulate demand from households with little cash to spare and partly because the character of the goods allowed them to evade the imposition of market prices, thus potentially increasing their profits. Given that immediate payment for goods in cash remained comparatively rare, the concept of "price" retained a nebulous quality. Although money amounts were written down in account books and goods or other payment tendered to balance the accounts, the actual form and timing of payments varied so much that effective prices remained largely a matter for negotiation between storekeeper and customers.<sup>44</sup>

Merchants manipulated the terms on which they offered goods for sale in order to secure the returns that they needed. If they were seeking particular items of local produce in quantity they advertised for them, offering store goods "at cash prices" or even cash itself as an inducement to trade.<sup>45</sup> Often, however, they were seeking cash in order to ease the burden of making their own payments. They might insist on cash payment for certain goods, especially imported items that they had obtained on short credit or in markets for which no return in goods was possible. An Amherst store announced in 1828, for example, that it would receive "country produce" from its customers for all their stock "with the Exception of Iron, Steel and Flour."<sup>46</sup> Merchants sought out the patronage of prosperous families and of individuals such as physicians, who often received part of their own payments in cash. Where the economy created limited amounts of cash, traders needed to induce as much of it as possible to come in their direction. Cash was like water in a sponge. The sponge had to be squeezed to get at it.

Accordingly, trade remained unstable even as it expanded. The increase in volume of rural trade and traders' connections with households roughly coincided with a shift in its personnel. Half a century ago, Margaret E. Martin concluded her study of Connecticut Valley merchants between 1750 and 1820 with the observation that their influence, and that of merchant capital, declined after the beginning of the nineteenth century. Martin was right to note that many of the merchant families whose members had dominated the restricted world of late-eighteenth-century trade had indeed faded from the scene by the

44. Hezekiah Wright Strong, Account Book, BCJL. On the store prices of staple goods, see James D. Norris, "One-Price Policy among Antebellum Country Stores," *Business History Review* 36 (1962): 455-458.

45. E.g., Seth and Daniel Wright sought flaxseed, "for which the highest price will be given in ready pay, one half in Cash, the other in English or West-India Goods," at their Northampton store (*Hampshire Gazette*, Aug 29, 1787). In the same paper, Sept 25, 1816, another storekeeper offered to pay for butter partly in cash and partly in goods.

46. *New England Inquirer* (Amherst), Jan 24, 1828.

1820s.<sup>47</sup> The change was partly a generational one. As we saw, Le Shepard had died in 1805, and Benjamin Tappan's sons had left for larger cities. Smaller traders such as Jonathan Judd of Southampton had also died. Others, like his nephew Sylvester in Westhampton, had moved on. A few, including Hezekiah Wright Strong of Amherst, were bankrupt.<sup>48</sup> As storekeeping and other mercantile activities became geographically diffused, they lost some of their connection with social and political preeminence. But this did not mean that retailers were economically less important than they had been. In fact, the situation was quite the reverse. The interaction of stores with households and the increased dependence of local families on imported textiles and foodstuffs provided a basis for a new generation of merchants who would come to play a dominating role in the Valley's economy.

As the older generation receded, it was replaced by new men, some of whom were to retain control of their businesses for the next generation or more. Samuel Clarke, a saddler in Northampton who had started his trade there in 1796, brought three sons in as apprentices as they came of age in the 1810s. Branching out into retailing and, in one case, banking, these three set up separate businesses that were to be among Northampton's most prominent stores into the 1840s. David S. Whitney, who had become Benjamin Tappan's partner in 1809, later carried on the store under his own name. In the 1820s William F. Stoddard became a clerk and then a partner in Whitney's business before setting up his own store, which would become the town's leading dry-goods retailer. By about 1830, John P. Williston, a minister's son from Easthampton, was also established in business in the shire town where he was to remain a prominent merchant, manufacturer, an investor for three decades or more. Similarly in Amherst, Luke Sweetser, clerk to Hezekiah Wright Strong in the early 1820s, escaped the wreck of his employer's business to become the town's leading trade between about 1830 and 1854.<sup>49</sup> Few of these merchants were at first as grand as the River Gods or had the connections of a man like Lev

47. Martin, "Merchants and Trade," p. 264.

48. Strong became insolvent in May 1827 and was subsequently in jail for debt. Testimony about his difficulties was given in *Allen v. Clark*, 34 Mass. Reports (17 Pickering 45-57 (1835)), and in a libel suit he brought against the editor of the *Northampton Courier* the same year, *Strong v. Atwill*, Hampshire County Court of Common Pleas, Files, Mar 1836 no. 52.

49. A memoir of the Clarkes appeared in the *Northampton Daily Herald*, Nov 23, 1915. Whitney was described in Lewis Tappan, "Autobiographical Sketch," p. 25. On Stoddard, see Stoddard Family, "Journal of a Family Meeting Held in the Month of August 1837," NHS, A.S.M.d.18.2, esp. p. 16. On Williston, see letters in the Williston Papers, NEHGS. Brief biographies of Northampton merchants were printed in the *Northampton General Directory* (Northampton, 1860) and in Henry S. Gere, *Reminiscences of Old Northampton: Sketches of the Town as It Appeared from 1840 to 1850* (n.p., 1902). Sketches of Sweetser and other Amherst traders appear in Edward W. Carpenter and Charles F. Morehouse, *The History of the Town of Amherst, Massachusetts* (Amherst, 1896).

Shepard. They had to adapt themselves to the more diffuse structure of trade and power that had arisen since the end of the eighteenth century.

In some cases, this adaptation had literally been a struggle. As patterns of production and exchange became more widespread over the countryside few storekeepers or others could be certain that their particular location would retain its geographical significance. Early in the century Northampton citizens campaigned vigorously to prevent the breakup of "old" Hampshire County into three. They feared that the loss of court business associated with a shire town would adversely affect its traders and manufacturers too. As their efforts failed, and Franklin and Hampden counties became separate entities in 1811 and 1812, Northampton's leaders set about improving the facilities of the town center. Between 1809 and 1820 a new church, county courthouse, town hall, and store buildings were completed, giving the place an air of consequence that it had previously lacked. Northampton's pride in its response to difficulty became legendary. According to a story printed in 1830, a stranger calling at a house in the town was told by the servant that her master was away in the country for a few days. On being asked whereabouts, she explained that he had gone to Boston. Nor was this just myth. A prominent resident solemnly remarked in a private letter that the arrangement of Northampton's new buildings was "perhaps equal to any other in the civilized world."<sup>50</sup>

Citizens of Amherst's small village center in its west parish had difficulty resisting pressures for decentralization. Population growth and the development of manufactures took place more rapidly in other parts of town. In particular, the growth of workshop industries in the east parish, a mile from the common, and the opening of at least one new store there, threatened to displace the West Village from its preeminence, and a strong rivalry grew up between them. In 1820, when the east parish won a vote to build a new road that would bring traffic from the north into their village without passing through the West Village, virtual warfare erupted. Residents of the west parish succeeded in rescinding the vote. East Villagers determined to build the road anyway. As they spent their days laying the road out, West Village men came down at night to dig the work up. After a confrontation, which probably amounted to no more than some pushing and shoving, a number of men ended up in court, accused of riot. The road was finally completed in 1821.<sup>51</sup>

50. The story was published in the *Hampshire Sentinel* (Belchertown), Sept 8, 1830. The letter was from Daniel Stebbins to Rev. Perkins, Northampton, Oct 17, 1842, Lathrop-Stebbins Collection, MCFL, Box 33.

51. The "Triangle Fight" is described in Carpenter and Morehouse, *History of Amherst*, pp. 431-433, and by Theodore Baird, "A Dry and Thirsty Land," in *Essays on Amherst's*

The new generation of merchants had to work in a structure that compared with the older "hub-and-spoke" pattern, was diffused and had more complex connections between wholesalers and retailers. Northampton and Hadley storekeepers continued to supply goods wholesale to outlying towns; William Porter supplied the new Amherst trader James Kellogg in the late 1810s and early 1820s, for example. But their focus was increasingly on retail trade, as local storekeepers forged connections of their own for supplies from within and beyond the region. This was partly a response to market developments elsewhere. The days of the small dry-goods "assortment" from a single supplier were finishing. Even quite small stores drew their goods from a variety of specialist suppliers. By 1840-1841, for instance, the Hatfield firm Childs and Rice was buying its goods from at least twenty-five different merchants or factories, only four of whom were based in Northampton once an important conduit for wholesale goods.<sup>52</sup> The distant sources of goods also changed over time, obliging local merchants to forge new connections outside the region. William Porter's business provides an example. In 1815 he had fifty-five suppliers outside the region, of whom forty-two were in Boston, eleven in Hartford, and two in Albany. By 1836 the number of suppliers had fallen to thirty-five. Of these, eleven remained in Hartford, but only twelve were now in Boston and the other twelve were in New York City. By 1844 the shift to New York was even more pronounced. Ten out of eighteen suppliers of more than fifty dollars worth of goods to the Hadley store were New York firms.<sup>53</sup>

Even as retail trade expanded, however, the very dependence of households on store goods presented merchants with a problem. As the number of stores increased, they were drawn into the need to offer goods on extended credit merely to avoid succumbing to competition. However, as wealth inequalities grew and as the nonfarm population of most towns increased as well, comparatively fewer people were able to trade conventional "country produce" for their goods. If traders restricted their business to farmers and others with goods to trade they would limit the number of their customers and possibly lose out to competitors. In the period after 1815, therefore, an increasing number of stores, particularly in the countryside, began to forge a new set of connections with rural households. By putting out materials for house

*History* (Amherst, 1978), p. 85. Seven Amherst "yeomen" were indicted for riot, found guilty at their trial in 1823 and fined (Hampshire County, Court of Common Pleas Records, 2:339).

52. William Porter to James Kellogg, Hadley, May 2, 1819, William Porter Papers, Box E, folder 1819, and receipts from Kellogg in folders 1819 and 1821. Childs and Rice, Account Books, 2 vols., Hatfield, 1840-1841, PVMA.

53. Receipts, Porter Papers, Box D, folder 1815; Box H, folder 1836; Box I, folder 1844.

hold manufacture, they not only secured customers for their goods but obtained a degree of control over household labor, from whose products they could also profit. This connection complemented the one households made with stores from which they sought textiles, for outwork became an important occupation for the women and children who had once produced domestic yarn and cloth.

#### *Country Merchants and Household Labor*

Although the level never approached that of the farm produce they received, stores had taken an increasing quantity of household manufactures from their customers as population and production grew in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the late 1780s and 1790s Amherst and Hadley stores credited customers' accounts with homemade cloth, shirts, gloves, and other clothing. By 1810 William Porter of Hadley was handling a small portion of the town's broom output; he received at least 259 brooms that year, which he consigned to two different merchants in Boston. He also handled a consignment of forty-five pairs of shoes from a local maker. By 1827 an Amherst store was receiving hats, bonnets, chairs, shingles, shoes, paper, and wood-ware along with the grain, butter, and other farm produce that its customers brought to trade.<sup>54</sup>

The potential to earn profits on some of these goods was considerable. When William Porter took in brooms from a Hadley customer in 1826 and forwarded them to Hartford, he received the equivalent of a 600 percent markup on them, even after deductions for freight and commission. But opportunities such as this may have been rare or limited in size. Porter's profits on this transaction were about \$200, but it probably arose because he was able to negotiate a favorable arrangement with a customer who was in debt to him.<sup>55</sup> At these markups, makers of brooms and other articles were encouraged to look elsewhere for purchasers; as noted earlier, Moses Goodale of Belchertown sent brooms directly to Boston in this period. Stores continued to handle such articles. Porter's was still receiving combs, suspenders, whips, and brushes from customers in 1844. But their supply was too irregular, too dependent on the individual decisions of local makers, for merchants to rely on them for their business.<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, merchants had from the late eighteenth century onward forged closer ties with household manufacturers by putting materials

54. Porter Papers, Box C, folder 1810. Store Account Book, Amherst, 1827, BCJL.

55. Porter Papers, Box F, folder 1826.

56. *Ibid.*, Box I, folder 1844.

out for them to work on. William Porter was shipping occasional bags of raw cotton up to Hadley by 1790 and distributing it to customers who spun it into yarn at home in return for store goods. As textile manufacturing expanded in the next twenty years, rural putting out of this kind provided part of the new labor force for New England entrepreneurs, and it is possible that some of this yarn worked up in western Massachusetts households found its way back into the new cotton mills of eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. By the 1812 war period, putting out had expanded into weaving. Various country stores scattered over the Valley held stocks of yarn to be woven into cloth locally in exchange for goods, while a Pelham faucet maker was making regular journeys to Providence to sell his wares and bringing back yarn to be made into cloth for Rhode Island manufacturers. A Hadley merchant was putting out blue and white yarn "to weave into Bedticking for us" in 1815. At the same time a new store in Amherst's East Village announced that it had "COTTON YARN, of an excellent quality, constantly on hand to WEAVE."<sup>57</sup> Local carding and fulling mills also used outwork to expand into spinning and weaving. A Williamsburg mill partly owned by the farmer Joseph Williams in 1816 and 1818 had both wool and linen produced in local families, sometimes putting both spinning and weaving out to the same person. A Worthington wool-carding mill also put out cotton yarn for weaving.<sup>58</sup>

There were limitations to this early outwork, however. From households' point of view it was hard to rely on. Supplies of material and demand for the work were irregular. References to outwork in this period are scattered, but the fact that the names of widows quite frequently appear in connection with it suggests that it was often done by people whose other means of support were marginal. Returns were small. Widow Sarah Scott's weaving for Joseph Williams earned her either sixpence or sevenpence a yard, depending on the cloth. Since Williams was selling cloth at prices ranging from 5s. 8d. to 15s. a yard, this suggests that Scott received only between 4 and 9 percent of the final price.<sup>59</sup> Consequently merchants also found outwork hard to organize on a regular basis, and their high markups reflected the risks they felt they were taking. They relied on the labor of households, which also

57. On putting out by early textile mills, see Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: A Study of Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1813-1860* (Cambridge, Eng., 1983), pp. 72-73. The Pelham faucet maker, Ezra Brown, is cited in Clifton Johnson, *Historic Hampshire in the Connecticut Valley* (Springfield, 1932), pp. 275-276. Nathaniel Coolidge, Jr., and Co., Hadley, notice in the *Hampshire Gazette*, Aug 16, 1816. Dyer and Goodman, Amherst, advertised in the *Hampshire Gazette*, Apr 12, 1815.

58. Joseph Williams, Account Book, Williamsburg, c. 1802-1841, WHS. T. and W. Ward, Worthington, advertisement, *Hampshire Gazette*, Dec 6, 1815.

59. Williams, Account Book, account with Widow Sarah Scott, 1816-1818.

had many other things to do, including production for their own use. Moreover, because raw materials, yarn, and cloth of various kinds were ubiquitous in the countryside, particular merchants had very little control over materials once they had left their hands. Although they debited the cost of materials they gave out to the accounts of the customers who took it, merchants had no certainty that the finished goods would be returned to them. The debts might be paid off in other produce and the yarn or cloth sold elsewhere or used in the household. Indeed, as long as independent household textile production remained common, there was very little means of distinguishing between it and outwork.<sup>60</sup>

Evidence from as early as the 1790s points to the difficulties preventing merchants from controlling household textile production. An address by Hartford merchants, published in Massachusetts newspapers in 1790, lamented the "large quantities of woollen cloth . . . made in private families . . . a great part of which is not calculated for market." In an attempt to obtain the quality of material they wanted, the merchants issued instructions to sort wool properly, to weave cloth in greater widths to allow for shrinkage during fulling, to weave standard lengths, instead of the three- or four-yard pieces commonly offered, to make white flannel instead of checked cloth and to avoid mixing yarn when making it.<sup>61</sup> But in addition to lacking control of the product, merchants had difficulty organizing the labor they needed. Levi Shepard took advantage of government bounties and orders for sailcloth from 1788 onward to produce canvas duckcloth from his Northampton store. He relied on local farmers to produce flax, hired workers to process it, and outworkers to spin and weave it. He faced constant problems. He urged farmers with whom he had arranged supplies of flax to deliver it promptly "so that he may be enabled to pursue his Duck Manufacture . . . without interruption." The quality of output was poor—as one local observer put it, "no kind of linen which we have lately attempted to make, has given the least encouragement for us to continue it, any further than for our own consumption." The steady supply of family labor he needed was not always forthcoming.<sup>62</sup> Again, in 1810 and 1811, when the political crisis with Britain redoubled the rhetoric about the need for "independent" manufactures, the Hampshire Homespun Society was formed in Northampton to promote the making and wearing of homemade cloth. But the fact that its president was Thomas Shepard, now helping run his family's woolen mill, suggests that part of its rationale was to drum up household labor to do outwork.<sup>63</sup>

60. Gregory H. Nobles, "Merchant Middlemen in the Outwork Network of Rural New England," *Acadiensis* (forthcoming), discusses the emergence of outwork from independent production. See also Chapter 3, above.

61. *Hampshire Gazette*, Sept 22, 1790.

62. *Hampshire Gazette*, Nov 30, 1791.

63. *Anti-Monarchist* (Northampton), Mar 21, 1810.

The intermittent character of putting out before 1820 suggests some significant contrasts between its role in New England and the more prominent place it had taken in the early industrial expansion of much of northern and western Europe during the early modern period. Historians of "protoindustrialization," following Franklin F. Mendels, have suggested that rural outwork helped initiate the shift from "premodern" to "modern" economic structures and demographic cycles, and was often the "first phase" of industrialization. Starting in many parts of Europe in the seventeenth century, at the bottom of a population cycle, outwork grew in rural areas, where, because labor patterns varied from season to season, it could provide employment in slack parts of the year. It became a means by which demographic growth became possible in the unequal and poorly resourced rural economies of northwestern Europe and was one of the means by which an industrial proletariat was created.<sup>64</sup> New England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries displayed some similarities to this pattern, but they are only superficial. Outwork was often seasonal, and at this stage it accompanied a demographic expansion. But it was more the effect than the cause of this expansion. Landholding was more widely distributed than in most parts of Europe, and independent household production occupied more of peoples' time and attention. Merchants in the Valley and other regions could rarely, before 1820, organize the large, regular networks of outworkers that were common in Europe. One reason that early textile mills often had to scour the countryside over a wide radius to find families prepared to spin and weave for them was that demand for the work was intermittent.

#### *Rural Outwork: A New Phase*

Critics of the "protoindustrialization" theory, such as Patricia Hudson, have pointed out that forms of outwork continued to exist in

64. Franklin F. Mendels, "Proto-industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrialization Process," *Journal of Economic History* 32 (1972): 241–261, has prompted a widespread debate among European scholars. See also Gay L. Gullickson, *Spinners and Weavers of Aufray: Rural Industry and the Sexual Division of Labour in a French Village, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, Eng., 1986). For a summary of European scholars' arguments that protoindustrialization led to rural demographic growth, see Hans Medick, "Structures and Function of Population Development under the Protoindustrial System," in Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jürgen Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization: Rural Industry in the Genesis of Capitalism*, trans. Beate Schempp (Cambridge, Eng., 1981); Myron P. Gutmann and René Leboutte, "Rethinking Protoindustrialization and the Family," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 14 (1983–1984): 587–607, esp. 589–590. These authors present Belgian evidence that population growth did, indeed, follow industrial developments but suggest that protoindustrialization was not the primary explanation for such growth. Other critics of the concept include Patricia Hudson, "Proto-industrial-

industries such as the Yorkshire woolen trade well after factory production had been established, and that they spread into new trades as factory production increased.<sup>65</sup> Rural New England provides a clear parallel with this. Not only did outwork complement early factory operations, but new forms of it developed in the countryside as factory textile production became regularized in the 1820s. For it was not in the "early" stages that outwork was most common in western and central Massachusetts and neighboring regions. Systematic, widespread outwork networks grew up only after 1820, as household textile production declined. The shift also occurred precisely as the demographic transition from high to low fertility was taking place. In other words, unlike parts of Europe where outwork served to boost population growth, in New England it was associated with the peak of a demographic cycle that was leveling off. Its causes and effects were economic rather than demographic.

For two reasons, the outwork that developed after 1820 was more widespread, systematic, and regular than before. The first lay with households. As they reduced their own textile production, families, especially women and children, had labor time available for other tasks. As noted in the last chapter, this time was deployed in a variety of ways. But since most households shifted their consumption patterns so as to increase their need for textiles and other goods purchased from stores, they had to find ways of raising the income to afford them. Larger farmers and other prosperous households could afford store goods, or had sufficient crops, livestock, or dairy produce for the purpose. But middling and poorer households did not have these resources. The labor time "freed" from independent production was now available for merchants to engage in outwork. Indeed, the process was a two-way one. As the types of outwork expanded and more merchants put goods out for processing in local families, households who had been slow to relinquish older patterns of work were encouraged to do so, as one observer put it, "because it is easier to make buttons than to weave cloth."<sup>66</sup>

Second, merchants gained a greater degree of control over the new

isation: The Case of the West Riding Wool Textile Industry in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries," *History Workshop* 12 (1981): 34–61; R. Houston and K. D. M. Snell, "Proto-industrialisation: Cottage Industry, Social Change, and Industrial Revolution," *Historical Journal* 27 (1984): 473–492; L. A. Clarkson, *Proto-industrialization: The First Phase of Industrialization?* (London, 1985).

65. Patricia Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital: A Study of the West Riding Wool Textile Industry, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, Eng. 1986).

66. This and the next two paragraphs are based on data in *Documents Relative to the Manufactures in the New England States*, 22d Cong., 1st sess., 1833, House Executive Doc. no. 308, 2 vols., 1:298–324 (hereafter cited as *McLane Report*).

outwork system because they were handling materials not otherwise widely available in the Valley. The growth of outwork after 1820 occurred particularly in two activities, button making and palm-leaf-hat production. The vegetable ivory, silk, japanned metal, and other materials given out to button makers were imported to the Valley or, late manufactured in local shops and factories under the merchants' control. Similarly, palm leaf, put out for braiding and shaping into hats, was an imported material, which merchants alone could handle. Families wanting to earn income for working on these materials had to acquire them from stores. Unlike the locally produced flax and wool, which had accounted for a good deal of earlier outwork, they were not available anywhere else. By the same token, distribution of the finished goods was largely in merchants' hands. Hats and, particularly, buttons were items of low value that families were asked to produce in quantities far beyond their own possible demand for them. "Leakage" of the finished goods into local exchange was therefore rare. Moreover, merchants had the best connections with the distant urban buyers of these goods. So when they put out button-making material or palm leaf into rural families, they had a reasonable expectation—quite apart from the debt recorded in each customer's account—that it would be returned again.

The button and palm-leaf-hat industries in the Connecticut Valley had clear differences between them. They were based in different areas and were largely organized by different groups of merchants and followed distinct paths of development. Button making, which was centered on the western side of the Valley, started first. About 1822 a Williamsburg woman devised a technique for making cloth-covered vegetable-ivory buttons. She began manufacture at home, selling her goods through a Northampton merchant to New York buyers. Other households took up making buttons as well, including the woman's daughter, who had married the Easthampton farmer Samuel Williston in 1822 and who carried on home production with some hired help. In 1827 Williston sold his farm and used the proceeds to open a store, from which he gave out button-making materials to local households. By the early 1830s he was supplying as many as one thousand families in Easthampton, Williamsburg, and other towns within ten or twelve miles to the west of Northampton, as well as traders as far away as Buckland in Franklin County, who put out work in their own neighborhoods.

As button making replaced independent household textile production it remained firmly under entrepreneurial control. The *McLane Report* noted in 1832 that "materials are furnished and contracts made with some hundreds of females residing in several adjoining towns, by one person who [is] considered the capitalist. They call upon him once a week and procure molds, silk and lasting, etc., and at the same time

bring the product of their labor for the previous week."<sup>67</sup> Payment was usually in goods. Not only did button making provide families with an inducement to trade at Williston's store, it reduced his need to rely on cash to conduct transactions and permitted him to charge the customary premium for noncash payment on the goods he sold.

Meanwhile, on the eastern side of the Valley, a comparable development was occurring in palm-leaf-hat making. Early growth of the industry in Worcester County and elsewhere encouraged Amherst traders to put palm leaf out to families on a small scale in the 1820s. In 1829 Leonard M. Hills, who a few years before had moved to the town from Connecticut, opened a small store in Amherst's East Village specifically to put out palm leaf in exchange for goods. Families split the leaf by hand, braided it, and sewed and fashioned it into hats, returning them to the store for credit or payment. Evidence as to the numbers of households involved at this early stage is hard to obtain, but like button making, the industry spread rapidly. Amherst remained its local center.<sup>68</sup>

Both east and west of the river, outwork became sufficiently attractive to merchants and customers that networks proliferated. In Williamsburg, the brothers Joel and Josiah Hayden opened a store for button makers in 1831. By 1834 Williston had at least one rival store in Easthampton, and three men formed a partnership to put button-making materials out from Sylvester Judd's old store in Westhampton.<sup>69</sup> Other Amherst stores followed Hills into the palm-leaf business. When Joseph Howard opened a new drugstore there in 1831, he was optimistic that "my orders will be considerable" and told his New York supplier that "You must put the price as low as possible—especially in such articles as dyes and hatters materials—as the profit is mean though the amo[unt] is considerable." By the following year Edward P. Huntington was handling shipments of hats from his North Hadley store, including consignments sent to him for forwarding by a North Amherst or Sunderland trader. In 1836 a store in Whately, which later went out of business, was also dealing with hat braiders.<sup>70</sup>

By now, however, button and hat making were following divergent courses. Williston and other button merchants began to concentrate more of their production in central shops, particularly in Williamsburg,

67. *Ibid.*, p. 324.

68. Carpenter and Morehouse, *History of Amherst*, pp. 291–292.

69. Luther Clapp, Easthampton, advertisement, *Hampshire Gazette*, Jan 29, 1834; Sylvester Judd, "Notebook," vol. 1, Apr 18, 1834.

70. Joseph Howard to George B. Archer, Amherst, June 22, 1831, BCJL; "Account of Sales of Palm Leaf Hats by Edw. M. Greenway and Co. on a/c of E. P. Huntington and Co.," PPHH; notice of assignees' sale of the stock of Levi Bush & Co., Whately, *Northampton Courier*, Jan 11, 1837.

and to mechanize some stages of the process; for this purpose, Williston formed a partnership with the Hayden brothers in the mid-1830s. Part of the rationale was to cut down competition in the rapidly expanding industry by restricting effective access to it. The other factor was that button making quickly became highly varied, requiring a range of products made from different materials and in different styles. This demanded greater control over production than outwork would permit.

Palm-leaf hats, by contrast, were more uniform. Different types were introduced over time, but the basic product varied chiefly according to the size and weight of leaf that was used, something that the merchants could regulate when giving it out. Concentration in workshops did not begin until the late 1830s and 1840s. Nevertheless, the shift of button making into shops did not much reduce the outwork available. Williston and others continued to put out button molds for making up families, and palm-leaf-hat making also spread into the western part of the Valley. By 1842, for instance, Joseph Bodman was putting out palm leaf from his Williamsburg store to forty-three families in seven towns from nearby Goshen and Ashfield to Plainfield and Savoy in the Berkshire hills. Not long after, the Hayden brothers' store was also supplying palm-leaf braiders.<sup>71</sup>

By the mid-1840s there were at least eleven Amherst merchants putting out palm leaf for braiding, as well as stores in Hadley, South Hadley, Belchertown, Shutesbury, and New Salem. Leonard M. Hills still one of the leading Amherst suppliers, provided palm leaf to merchants in other towns, including William and James Porter in Hadley. The production of hats recorded for Amherst alone grew from 60,000 in 1837 to 317,000 in 1845. Although prices fell slightly, from an average of \$2.40 per dozen to \$2.16, the total value to its merchants of the town's output increased more than fourfold, from \$12,000 to almost \$56,700. Given that production in neighboring Hadley increased only slightly in the same period, it is likely that these figures reflect not the output of Amherst outworkers so much as the amount of business now controlled by Amherst merchants.<sup>72</sup> In 1839, for example, Huntington's North Hadley store had sixteen outworkers on its books. By 1850, Sweetser Cutler and Company of Amherst alone had 284 people listed in its "braiding accounts," many of whom lived in the surrounding area.

71. Joseph Bodman, Receipts, May 1842, Bodman Family Papers, SSC, Box 2.

72. Based on advertisements in the *Hampshire and Franklin Express* (Amherst), 1845–1848. See also bills of L. M. Hills to W. Porter, Sept 17, 1845, Nov 23, 1846, BCJL.

73. John P. Bigelow, *Statistical Tables: Exhibiting the Condition and Products of Certain Branches of Industry in Massachusetts for the Year Ending April 1, 1837* (Boston, 1838; hereafter cited as Mass. Industrial Census, 1837); John G. Palfrey, *Statistics of the Condition and Products of Certain Branches of Industry in Massachusetts for the Year Ending April 1, 1845* (Boston, 1846; hereafter cited as Mass. Industrial Census, 1845).

rather than in Amherst itself.<sup>74</sup> Both sets of figures, however, demonstrate the importance and widespread character of outwork hat making up to the middle of the century. What was its role and significance for rural people?

#### *Outwork and Rural Households*

In addition to the factors already mentioned, there are some indications that rural households were initially attracted to outwork because it was well paid in comparison with other available opportunities. An article in the *Hampshire Gazette* claimed in 1833 that payments in goods worth \$1,500 to \$2,000 a week were being made to button makers who dealt with the stores in Easthampton and Williamsburg. If the estimate is correct that one thousand families were engaged in button making by then, this suggests that earnings averaged \$1.50 to \$2.00 per family per week. Although not large, this amount equaled the wages that most women could earn from household or other employment and so was at least comparable with other sources of income. Moreover, because buttons were made at home, married women and other household members with commitments that kept them at home could contribute to family earnings at a rate commensurate with working elsewhere. So many women had been attracted to outwork, the paper claimed, that "housework is going out of fashion" and farmers looking for domestic help found it as hard to find as people in town.<sup>75</sup> Later evidence from the hat industry suggests, further, that, at least as long as production remained relatively undercapitalized, returns to labor formed a larger proportion of the end price for these products than was usual, say, in textile manufacture. Women in Belchertown making hats of the finer qualities in the late 1840s may have received as much as 40 percent of the final price charged by the merchants they dealt with, compared with the sums below 10 percent that Sarah Scott had received for weaving thirty or so years earlier.<sup>76</sup>

74. Store Ledger, North Hadley, 1839-1840, PPHH; Sweetser, Cutler and Co., Accounts, Amherst, BCJL, "Braiding Account" for 1850. The discussion that follows owes much to Thomas Dublin's important work on the outwork palm-leaf-hat industry in New Hampshire, "Women and Outwork in a Nineteenth-Century New England Town," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America*, ed. Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude (Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 51-69. Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana, Ill., 1988), traces the parallel emergence of outwork shoemaking in eastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire.

75. Quoted in *New England Farmer*, Oct 16, 1833.

76. Calculated from Belchertown North Baptist Female Benevolent Society, Records, 1848-1855, BCJL.

However, this evidence needs to be treated with caution. The *Gazette's* figures could well have been exaggerated, or at least an estimate of what *could* be earned by full-time work, rather than what *was* earned in fact. The margins that the Belchertown women apparently earned were not matched by work on lower-quality hats. In time, as production in both button and hat making became concentrated in workshops and factories, the portion of the whole process left to outworkers was reduced. Correspondingly, prices tended to fall and outworkers' share of the returns was squeezed. It is noteworthy that the rapid growth of hat production took place during the depression that followed the panic of 1837, as farm families faced the need to make up income lost through underemployment or declining produce prices. Evidence from the hat industry in the middle of the century points to three important qualifications to the suggestion that households were attracted to outwork by the returns it gave them. On the one hand, the households that took to braiding and other outwork tended to be ones that had special need for the income. They were not attracted to it but, rather, could not do without it. Moreover, production was usually intermittent, so earnings were not equivalent to those from full-time work. Finally, production was skewed toward the lowest-paid types of work.

Who did outwork? Sixty of the 284 households Sweetser, Cutler and Company had on its books in 1850 lived in Amherst itself. The analysis that follows is largely based on these families, traced in the U.S. census for the town. The census index suggests that most of the remaining two hundred or more families lived in neighboring towns. Of fifty-six men from outside Amherst who appear in Sweetser, Cutler's accounts and who can be traced in the index, twenty-three (41 percent) lived in Hadley, seven in Leverett, six in Shutesbury, and three in Pelham. These four towns account for two-thirds of the "outsiders." Other men came from Sunderland, Belchertown, Granby, South Hadley, Northampton, and from as far as Hatfield, Whately, Deerfield, Conway, and Dana. Sweetser, Cutler and Company's network therefore covered much of the eastern part of Hampshire County and overlapped slightly with the sphere of influence of the next large palm-leaf-hat center to the east, the town of Barre in Worcester County.<sup>77</sup>

The Amherst families that braided leaf in 1850 fell into a number of distinct categories. The work was almost always done by women and children. There are no contemporary references to men's household work at hat braiding. Many women, especially from the locality of th

77. This and subsequent paragraphs are based on Sweetser, Cutler, "Braiding Accounts"; U.S. Seventh Census, Population Schedules, 1850, Massachusetts, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (microfilm); Ronald V. Jackson and Gary R. Teeple, comps. *Massachusetts Census Index, 1850* (Bountiful, Utah, 1979).

store, had accounts there in their own names, regardless of their marital status. Seven of the sixty households were headed by women, at least four of them widows. Of the men listed in the accounts none was single and all lived in households where there was at least one woman of working age.

Most families doing outwork were connected with old rural occupations. Exactly half of the household heads were farmers. Another sixteen (27 percent) of the total were artisans or craftsmen; they included four "mechanics," three joiners, two each of masons, shoemakers, and butchers, a painter, a broom maker, and a cooper. Only five out of the sixty household heads were engaged in commerce or the professions; there was a teacher, a clergyman, a factory agent, a manufacturer, and a stable keeper. The overwhelming preponderance of farm and craft households suggests that outwork continued to fill the gap that had been left two or three decades before by the decline of independent household textile production. Evidence from Joseph Bodman's accounts with outworkers in 1842 confirms this. In nearly 95 percent of cases the store goods he exchanged for finished hats were cloth, clothing, notions, or footwear; only a handful of his braiders purchased such groceries as tea or tobacco, and none bought basic foodstuffs. Outwork allowed rural households, especially the women in them, to organize their income-earning activity around the other demands on their time.

Commentators reflected this when they praised outwork as a means for preventing "idleness" among women and children. The McLane Report noted that women did outwork "in scant times, when there is nothing else to do." Hat making, wrote one newspaper editor, "is, with many, a work of odd moments which would otherwise be unimproved, so the frugal housewife will include in her day's work a 'stent' of so much braiding to be done." But there was a clear division between those who took up outwork and those who did not. The families who took palm leaf to braid from Sweetser, Cutler's store were not its "best" customers. None of the physicians, lawyers, professors, and other prominent Amherst citizens who frequented the store took outwork there. Most braiders were of middling or poor economic status, who did outwork because they had to, in order to help make ends meet. Susanna Goodale of Belchertown had a young woman working for her as a servant in 1845, whom she gave time off to braid palm leaf on her own account; "she was owing," Goodale wrote, "and wanted to braid the hats to pay family debts."<sup>78</sup>

The census recorded the real estate holdings of fifty-eight of the sixty

78. McLane Report, p. 324. Goodale is quoted in Stephen A. Aron, "The Minds of Hands: Working People of Amherst in the Mid-Nineteenth Century" (Senior honors thesis, Amherst College, 1982), p. 93.

Amherst braiding families. Over one-third of them had no real property. Over half of those who did own land or buildings had less than \$2,000 worth. However, as might be expected, it was the farm families that had the most land. Only three of the thirty farmers reported property, and half of the remainder had over \$2,000 worth. Artisans, on the other hand, were much more likely to be propertyless. Eleven of sixteen had none and only one of the remainder had real estate of more than \$2,000.

While a relative shortage of property was likely to bring families to undertake outwork, it was not the only factor. A closer look at women in outworking families—either those named in the accounts or those who probably did the work when their husbands brought palm leaf home from the store—suggests that they fell into three groups, each of which took on braiding under different circumstances. Of the seven women identified, thirteen were single, forty were married, and four were widows living at home with children.

Of the single women, eight were less than twenty-five years old; the others were older but apparently living with parents; three more of the women were living with kin or working as servants. So nearly one-quarter of women outworkers were using it to help support themselves in the households they lived in while waiting for marriage or to supplement other small earnings. To these could be added another two households in which the eldest women were married and aged for five or over, but which included girls in their teens or early twenties who may have done much of the actual work at braiding. Charlotte Dickinson, a single woman, braided hats over a considerable period, working for one merchant in 1844 and appearing in Sweetser, Cutler's account for 1850. For her, it was a means of supplementing the board provided by her family. She exchanged finished hats for cloth, including calico and gingham, and bought other small items such as ribbon, cord, candy, salt, and a whip. Dickinson evidently worked to a seasonal pattern. In 1844 she took goods from Sweetser, Cutler and Company between May and September, returning twenty-two hats to the store between December that year and February 1845. Three years later, she had goods on credit from Peter Ingram and Company between September 1847 and March 1848 but completed thirty-three hats for them between February and March.<sup>79</sup>

Thirty-seven of the forty married women had children at home. Fifteen were young, in the age group twenty-five to thirty-four, another ten were between thirty-five and forty-four. Most had young children and were at a stage of the life cycle when demands on them

79. Charlotte Dickinson, Account Books, Amherst, 1812-1848, BCJL.

labor were greatest and assistance with it scarce. Outwork provided them with a flexible means of raising small amounts of extra income without excessively disrupting other household tasks. But households with other income from farming or a trade may only have done it intermittently, to compensate for falling prices or loss of work. In the 1830s, Mary Bullard Graham worked in her husband's shoemaking shop when times were busy and took in outwork on button molds when trade was slack.<sup>80</sup>

For the widows who had older children at home, outwork also provided an essential supplementary means of raising income that could be accommodated to other requirements. Letters from the family of Judith Nutting, one of Sweetser, Cutler's customers, reveal something of the place of palm-leaf braiding in her household and amply demonstrate that braiding was not, as male commentators liked to think, a task for "idle hands." It had to be fitted into household work routines that were already crowded. One of Judith Nutting's four daughters described a typical couple of weeks in the 1840s: "Last week Mother wove . . . carpet I sewed for Doria Cook, the girls braided. this week we have took up the carpets and cleand house and made soap and cut five dresses and made two or three sun bonnets Amelia has been to the Academy one day . . . all this besides braiding [which] we wont say anything about." When their brother walked off his job with a building contractor in 1841, mother and sisters had to increase their efforts to help make ends meet. "Mother will take in all the [carpet] weaving she can get hold of," wrote one of them, while another sister worked hard at braiding, finishing six hats in one day. Two years later, when her mother and sisters were away from home, Harriet Nutting had to cover their chores: "I have to be Hannah and mother in the house and John at the barn, besides braiding double rim[m]ed hats when there is 'nothing else to do'."<sup>81</sup> Harriet's ironic quotation of the conventional contemporary view of the role of outwork speaks volumes for its irrelevance to the poor and middling families who usually did the work. Baptist women in Belchertown who braided hats to help support their minister in the late 1840s fitted the work in among their other tasks, sometimes sharing it between them. Thirteen women, for example, braided seven hats between mid-May and early June 1848, nine more in just two weeks in mid-June and another six by the end of the first week of July.<sup>82</sup> Like the Nutting family's, their work rate varied considerably. Braiding was just one of the strategies for maintaining a livelihood.

80. Mary B. Graham to Sophronia Bullard, Buckland, Apr 18, 1836, Edwards Family Correspondence, MCF.L.

81. Mary Nutting to Eli Nutting, Amherst, Sept 29, 1841; Harriet Nutting to Eli Nutting, May 11, 1843, June 6, 1845, Nutting Correspondence, BCJ.L.

82. Calculated from Belchertown North Baptist Female Benevolent Society, Records, 1848-1855.

Some families used their women's or children's labor at outwork raise income for special purposes. In Buckland in 1841, the shoemaker Mary and Lucius Graham were planning to move to the West. They sent their children to making button molds. Mary wrote in February 1841, "our children are helping us to get ready, they have earned since the forepart of June seventy dollars."<sup>83</sup> But there were disadvantages to outwork, especially as prices were whittled away over time. It came to be regarded as "light work," suitable for children. There was no distinction between adults' and children's wages. Women were paid at undercut children's rates. As a newspaper editor put it, "a nimble-fingered girl of ten can earn in a day as much as an adult woman."<sup>84</sup> Although the Belchertown Baptist women, working intermittently for their minister, sought to maximize the return for their work by braiding fine-grade number four palm leaf, which fetched up to \$0.25 a hat, the majority of braiders working for their own households opted for coarse number two leaf, which could be braided more roughly for a much lower sum. When Judith Nutting's daughter finished six hats in one day, she earned the family exactly \$0.54. Two-thirds of the hats returned to Joseph Bodman's store in 1842 were number twos, paid for at \$0.09 to \$0.13 each; fewer than one in ten were number fours. The Graham four children averaged earnings of \$2.50 a month each between June 1841 and February 1842, at best one-third of the winter wages of a farm laborer and half those of a woman domestic servant. Even when our workers pressed their hardest they earned what a newspaper admitted was a "mere pittance." In 1857 two girls and a boy in Barre completed a record stint of braiding, in which they produced 800 hats in thirty-seven days. At \$0.08 per hat, they earned an average of only \$0.575 a day each still well below the daily rate for a farm laborer. Above all, for much of the period, outworkers usually received payment only in store goods rather than cash. Mary Graham commented of the \$70.00 that her children had earned, "it is all store pay but it helps a great deal, implying that cash would have been better."<sup>85</sup> With low rates and "poor pay" it is no wonder that families usually did outwork only when circumstances required it.

### *Merchants and the Rural Economy*

Nevertheless the growth of outwork represented a considerable extension of the influence of local merchants over rural households. Be-

83. Mary B. Graham to Lewis Edwards, Buckland, Jan 26, 1842, Edwards Family Correspondence.

84. *Amherst Record*, May 3, 1871.

85. The Barre stint was reported in *Hampshire and Franklin Express*, June 12, 1857.

fore 1820 they had been dependent on households' willingness to trade with them and obliged to adapt their methods to seek out what business they could get into their stores. With the shift in rural consumption patterns merchants became surer of the demand for their goods. With the development of outwork, they could redouble their connection with customers and be assured that their poorer neighbors in particular would have means to pay for the goods that they "took out of the store." Outwork not only helped boost their sales but earned direct profits for them from the labor embodied in the work. Although, according to one account, most merchants who "take leaf and put it out in their neighborhood . . . are satisfied if no profit is made on the braiding, for they pay for it from their stores, making the increase in business thus secured afford them a fair profit," some "make a profit at both ends."<sup>86</sup> Scattered evidence about the charges for work and materials in the palm-leaf hat business suggest that merchants charged braiders for leaf put out to them as much as 35 or 40 percent more than the wholesale price and that markups on finished hats were in the 25 to 50 percent range.<sup>87</sup>

In contrast with parts of Europe, where rural outwork often long preceded the development of the factory system, the creation of substantial putting-out networks in New England largely coincided with the establishment of factory textile production. The same shifts in production and consumption strategies that released families and young women to work in the new textile mills also encouraged many rural households, especially poorer ones, to take on hat or button making, and merchants were quick to take advantage of the opportunities for income this afforded them.

As they added the profits of domestic manufacture to the profits of trade, merchants not only provided means to expand their own businesses but built a basis for exercising increasing power over the rural economy in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Together, retail trade and outwork enabled successful merchants to accumulate capital with which to further the concentration of manufacturing in the 1840s and 1850s. Yet, as they sought to achieve greater power and influence, merchants, like other rural people, faced considerable risks and uncertainties. In trying to overcome uncertainty, they helped alter the rules of exchange in the local economy.

Several leading traders between 1830 and the 1850s—including J. P. Williston, William H. Stoddard, and Luke Sweetser—were active

86. *Amherst Record*, May 3, 1871.

87. Calculations based on values reported in Mass. Industrial Censuses, 1837, 1845, and store accounts of Huntington (North Hadley), Porter (Hadley), Sweetser, Cutler (Amherst), and Joseph Bodman (Williamsburg).

churchmen during the height of the Evangelical revivals. Williston associated his early success in trade with his conversion in the revival of 1831, writing to his wife the following year that "the Lord seems at last to be smiling on us in our effort to earn an honest livelihood," and remarking that "He has wisely deferred it until we were willing to acknowledge that 'unless the Lord build the house thy labor is in vain that build it.'"<sup>88</sup> But, while he prudently attributed his success to divine Providence, Williston was also adopting new methods of running his business. Applying principles of system and self-discipline propagated by revivalist culture, Williston and his colleagues would help influence the course of economic change.

88. John P. Williston to Cecilia L. Williston, Philadelphia, June 17, 1832, Williston Papers, 1/B/9, folder 1, NEHGS.