

Editor's Introduction

Stepping from the Erie Canal packet boat *Albany* to the Schenectady wharf, the young Canadian may have politely nodded his farewell to the two “Yankee girls” he had met and chatted with on the boat and who had struck him as being “rather above the common run of American Belles.” Once having landed, his plan was to call on Mr. De Graff, a member of one of Schenectady’s prominent political families, but the stagecoach for Albany, his destination, was leaving almost immediately.¹ During the three-hour drive to New York State’s capital city, he may have reflected with pleasure and more than a bit of amusement on the incidents of the past two days he had spent on the canal coming east from Utica. The uproar he accidentally had caused a few nights earlier, while asleep on board the eastern-bound packet boat *Utica*, had been especially diverting. Reaching Utica early Sunday morning, he had taken passage on the *Albany*, along with a small group of other passengers (including the two young ladies) whose company he had enjoyed.

It was early afternoon that Monday, September 25, 1826, when the stagecoach dropped him off in Albany, where he immediately secured overnight lodging at the Congress Hall hotel. Undoubtedly, he entered his name, Alexander Stewart Scott, and place of residence, Quebec City, in the hotel’s guest register. Traveling since early August, the twenty-one-year-old was nearing the end of his trip across the state and heading home.

Popularly regarded as the “chief hotel” in the city, Congress Hall was well situated, providing a commanding view down State Street, the principal thoroughfare of the city. Just across the street was the State Capitol Building, so the hotel also informally functioned as the “headquarters of the legal fraternity, members of the Legislature, and all distinguished travelers.”² Young Scott was not well known, either in his own country or in the United States, so he wouldn’t have been considered “distinguished,” but, as a law

student soon to become a commissioned lawyer in Quebec, he was part of the legal “fraternity” in Canada. Throughout his trip he had taken every opportunity to observe American legal practices and procedures, comparing them—often unfavorably—with those of British Canada.

Deciding to use the remainder of his afternoon exploring the city, he left the hotel and strolled across the street to the elegantly columned Capitol. He walked through the first-floor Senate and Assembly chambers and then took the stairs to the top floor, where he examined the State Library. An avid reader, he was impressed with what he saw, recording in his journal that the library’s book collection, though small, was “very choice.”³ Ascending to the Capitol’s roof-top cupola, he marveled at the magnificent view.

When he left the building, he little imagined that 128 years in the future, in 1954, his journal would be purchased by the library he had just visited. He would have been astounded to discover that sixty-five years after its acquisition, it would be published. He had recorded that he undertook the writing of his journal for his own amusement and to share with family and close friends. Had he contemplated its publication, he likely would have polished, revised, cut, and elaborated to create something he felt worthy of a public audience. He was a critical reader and would not have spared himself. Fortunately, none of these things ever happened, so his account remains as lively as when he made the final entry on Sunday, November 19, 1826.

Young Scott

Of the young man who took lodging in the hotel that Monday afternoon in 1826 little is known beyond the barest facts. Alexander Stewart Scott was born on May 18, 1805, in the city of Dundee, located on the River Tay along the east coast of Scotland.⁴ His parents, George and Janet Erskine Scott, were both born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland, and were married there, in the Parish of Saint Cuthbert’s, on November 15, 1794.⁵ They continued to live in Edinburgh until sometime between 1798, when their daughter, Ann Semple Austin Scott, was born there, and 1801, when their oldest son, Hugh Erskine Scott, was born in Dundee. An entry for a George Scott appears in the 1809 city directory for Dundee, where he apparently was employed as a tailor with a shop located on High Street.⁶ Sometime between 1811 (when their youngest son, Robert, was born in Dundee) and 1818, they, along with all their children, immigrated to Canada, apparently first to Halifax, Nova Scotia.⁷ In the eight years between 1818 and 1826, the Scott family, through marriage and the pursuit of education and careers,

disbursed throughout the Canadian province of Quebec and to the growing community of Palmyra, New York.

When Alexander undertook his journey, his immediate family was comprised of his father, mother, three sisters, and four brothers. It is clear from his journal entries that family was not only important to him, but that they also supported his travels by providing him with welcoming places to stay along the way. To assist readers, the principal members of his family who are mentioned in his journal are briefly identified here. Where others are tangentially referred to by Scott, their identities are provided in the endnotes.

George and Janet Erskine Scott. Alexander's parents were fifty-two and fifty-five, respectively, in 1826. At the time, George and his wife were living in St. John's, Quebec, where George was employed as a British customs official.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Saunderson Scott. Alexander's youngest sister, seventeen, was living with her parents in St. John's, Quebec.

James Guthrie Scott. Alexander's second-oldest brother, twenty-three, lived in Montreal where he was already practicing law.

Henry (Harry) Stewart Scott. Alexander's younger brother, nineteen, also lived in Montreal. It is unknown whether Henry was in school or working in 1826.

Margaret Jane Scott. Alexander's oldest sister, thirty-one in 1826, was married to William Cunningham Batchelor. Probably sometime after 1821, when the Batchelors' second son, George Scott Batchelor, was born in Quebec City, the family immigrated to the United States and settled in Palmyra, New York, situated on the Erie Canal. William Batchelor was recorded as a merchant on his marriage bond, and it is probable that he continued in that capacity in Palmyra. This supposition is supported by Alexander's journal entries about traveling around the region with him on business.

Ann Semple Austin Scott. Alexander's next-oldest sister, twenty-eight, was living with the Batchelors in Palmyra when Alexander visited them. She married General Walter Grieve of Geneva, New York, on September 17, 1826, while Alexander was still in Palmyra. Grieve, an American veteran of the War of 1812, was himself a Scottish immigrant to the United States.

Even this simple summation of Alexander's family reveals that he came from people striving to firmly establish themselves in the Canadian middle-class of professionals, merchants, and government officials. While far from wealthy, the Scott family was also far from poor. They held responsible positions, and, as Alexander's journal entries make clear, they had contacts within the Canadian medical, legal, merchant, and military communities.

That Alexander himself was adept at meeting influential people and establishing new connections that might prove useful to him in the future is evident throughout his journal. One of its more remarkable aspects is the number of prominent New Yorkers he met and often spoke with at length. Scott struck up conversations with people wherever he went, but they were businessmen, lawyers, judges, doctors, military officers, and public officials whose names and addresses he diligently wrote down because they had shown him courtesies and kindnesses that he hoped to someday repay, or because they might prove to be valuable future contacts for himself or his family. In all his social dealings he was polite and followed the respectful behavior expected of young gentlemen. Being single, he also endeavored to make the acquaintance of the pretty, young ladies he met along the way, but these were clearly eligible women of social standing. He never gives any indication of pursuing or indulging in casual sexual encounters.

Yet, gregarious as he appears, Scott rarely mentions or apparently even "sees," let alone associates with, people who are laborers, poor immigrants, servants, shopkeepers, or anyone who might be below his level of education and middle-class standing. The only exceptions to this are the stagecoach driver on the route to Lewiston, whom he "tips" to enable him to sit on the front seat with the driver and to take the reins for a few miles; the guide taking him below the falls at Niagara; the canal boat captain of the *Utica*; and the owner of the Congress Hall hotel in Albany. These latter two are the only ones he documents by name.

His modes of travel and places of accommodation reflect this unstated, but clearly apparent separation from the common, less-affluent people who are also traveling. This is illustrated by his, what could be construed as callous, observation that on the steamboat he was taking back home to Quebec from Montreal, there were "only two Passengers besides myself on board," when in fact there were forty-five steerage passengers on the same vessel.⁸ Scott, of course, was in first class with his own sleeping accommodation. Despite his occasional assertion that he doesn't have much money, virtually every hotel he stays at is advertised as the best in its community. When considering his travel experiences, it is important to remember that

in many ways they reflect a different and often separate sphere from those of other less fortunate travelers who are making their way along the same water and land routes at the same time as Scott.

“Passed the best part of the day in reading”

His travel journal also discloses other personal qualities that help define our youthful traveler. For example, his frequent mention of books reveals him to be a keen reader. His journey is barely under way before he confides that he has only a few “not very interesting” books with him to help pass the time. He reads on canal boats, on steamboats, likely in hotels, and when staying with family. His reading ranges from novels to poetry to local newspapers to gazetteers. The fact that while in Albany he visited the State Library and judged its collection as “choice” testifies to his self-defined, critical insights regarding literature and libraries. Reading American author James Fenimore Cooper’s most recently published (1826) novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, he compares Cooper’s literary style with that of British author Sir Walter Scott and concludes that Cooper “slavishly” imitated Scott’s style of writing.⁹ Four years earlier, in its July 1822 issue, *The North American Review*, an American literary magazine, in a lengthy review of Cooper’s 1821 novel, *The Spy*, had agreed with Alexander’s critical assessment, writing:

There is no compliment, in that unmeaning adulation, which has styled the author of the *Spy* the Scott of America; nor do we think public sentiment, in this part of the country [Boston], will bear out a pretension so extravagant. At any rate, for ourselves, we do not hesitate to say, that although uncommon powers are here exhibited, from which we have a right to augur better things, we have discerned nothing in this production which draws the writer a step nearer to the author of the *Waverly* novels . . .¹⁰

In the years between 1822 and 1826, better things did come from Cooper’s pen, and his novels came to represent an emerging brand of American literary nationalism in a way similar to what Sir Walter Scott’s popular historical novels did for Scottish heritage.¹¹

Alexander’s appetite for books and reading easily was satisfied throughout his journey. Publishers, bookstores, and newspapers flourished in the United States, while in Canada the situation in the opening decades of the

nineteenth century was quite different. George L. Parker, in *The Beginnings of the Book Trade in Canada*, convincingly argues that Canada's situation as a British colony created economic and psychological dependence on the mother country that tended to dampen development of its book trade. He further suggests that the long-standing "enmity" between the French- and English-speaking populations of the country, coupled with religious "animosities" among French and English Protestants and Catholics, contributed to the situation. Finally, he asserts that, outside larger urban centers, "pioneer settlements in their isolation tended to be parochial and parsimonious, while the provincial assemblies were reluctant to spend money on schools, libraries and cultural development. To a large extent, reading was an elite preoccupation, and everywhere the wretched state of literacy and education stifled the full benefits of bookselling and printing."¹² Parker also observes that "American books, periodicals, and newspapers always circulated in the provinces . . ."¹³ The Canadian printing trade, Parker suggests, owed much of its early existence to American loyalist printers who had fled the United States during and after the Revolution, New England printers, and Scottish printers, who were "the vanguard of an army of Scots and Ulstermen who dominated nineteenth-century printing and bookselling."¹⁴ Alexander's own Scottish heritage, along with his educated middle-class standing, I believe, strongly influenced his obvious love of learning and reading.

During his stay in New York State, Scott discovered that even the Erie Canal packet boats on which he traveled contained, among their furnishings, small libraries with "a pretty good collection of works" available to passengers at a cost of one cent per volume or for nothing at all.¹⁵ His observation suggests that among the population of Canada's neighbor, literacy and reading were not solely confined to the "elite." Indeed, a glance at the front pages of 1826 newspapers of some of the New York communities Scott visited attest to the widespread availability of reading material. If, for example, before he departed the Congress Hall hotel on Tuesday, September 26, he had picked up a copy of the *Albany Argus & Daily Gazette*, he would have seen extensive advertisements for two bookstores, one of which, William Gould & Co., specialized in selling law books. The other, D. Steele & Son's Bookstore, prominently advertised that it had just received "Webster's discourse in commemoration of Adams and Jefferson."¹⁶ This publication was Daniel Webster's *A Discourse in Commemoration of the Lives and Services of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, Delivered in Faneuil Hall, Boston, August 2nd, 1826*. The deaths of both former presidents, occurring as they did on the fiftieth anniversary of the country's declaring independence from Great

Britain, was a momentous event that provided part of the background against which his trip through New York took place. Alexander had read Webster's speech while in Palmyra and was so impressed with it that he wrote a reminder to himself in his journal "to endeavor to procure a copy to take to Quebec with me."¹⁷ It is just possible that Alexander walked down to Steele's bookstore while still in Albany and purchased a copy to take home. During the time he had spent in Palmyra with his sister and brother-in-law, the local newspaper (the *Wayne Sentinel*) ran an advertisement for Tucker & Gilbert's local bookstore, which boasted that it "intended to keep constantly on hand for sale A CHOICE COLLECTION OF Historical, Theological, Medical, Scientific, & MISCELLANEOUS BOOKS."¹⁸ Its ad also provided an extensive list of titles, among which school books predominated. In nearby Lyons, its newspaper, the *Lyons Advertiser*, for September 20, 1826, printed a listing of books carried by E. J. Whitney's bookstore that took up an entire column.¹⁹

These examples, selected from locales where Scott stayed and from dates when he was there, hardly provide conclusive evidence of the extent of literacy or reading in the early decades of nineteenth-century New York. They do, however, suggest the availability, at least in communities located on the east-west route of the Erie Canal, of the wide variety of books, periodicals, and newspapers, for which there appears to have been a market sufficiently large and active enough to support the printers, publishers, and bookstore proprietors who offered them for sale. They also give some limited insight into what community booksellers stocked and, therefore, presumably what people in those communities wanted to read. In Palmyra, Tucker & Gilbert's stock included school books ranging from grammars, spellers, atlases, histories, and dictionaries to selections on surveying, astronomy, and philosophy. They also handled an extensive supply of "family medicines," including "Dr. Godbold's Vegetable Balm of Life."²⁰ E. J. Whitney's bookshop in Lyons tried to draw in customers with titles encompassing both British and American literature (including Sir Walter Scott's popular *Waverley Novels*), along with histories, biographies, and, of course, Bibles, writing and "cyphering" books, and Webster's spelling books.

In Canada, Alexander, a frequent visitor to his brothers living in Montreal, had access to the flourishing book trade in that city.²¹ Also, at home in Quebec City, accessibility to books was provided not only by printer John Neilson, but additionally through an innovative circulating library established by bookseller-journalist Thomas Carey.²² Whether Alexander took out a subscription to Carey's lending library is not known, but given his enthusiasm for reading, it is entirely possible.

“Went out again to the theatre”

Closely allied with his interest in reading was his love affair with the theater. Over the course of his travels, he details his attendance at six theater performances.²³ At the start of his trip, while in Montreal, he fit in two shows: one on Saturday evening, August 5, and the second on the following Monday, August 7. Montreal’s elegant Theatre Royal, which reportedly held approximately a thousand people, had been open less than a year when Scott apparently occupied a seat in its first-tier dress circle (ticket cost: five shillings).²⁴

In Palmyra, where he managed to attend three performances and see four plays, the venue was very different. The traveling theater company of “Messrs. Gilbert & Trowbridge” staged its productions in the “assembly room” of Palmyra’s St. John’s Hotel. The players had announced their performances by placing a prominent advertisement in the *Wayne Sentinel* of Friday, August 18, 1826. In the same issue, the newspaper’s publishers commented that the theater company had “lately been playing in Rochester, with good success, and from the reputation of the company, we count upon respectable audiences for them at this place.” They went on to note that a production staged the previous evening had attracted a “tolerable house.”²⁵ Alexander, accompanied by his sisters, formed part of the “house” on Monday, August 21, and saw two plays that were, in his opinion, “most cruelly murdered.” His critical reaction, however, did not prevent him from accepting gifts of tickets from his brother-in-law, and he attended twice more: on Wednesday, August 23, and Friday, August 25.

Despite his reservations about the quality of acting in the Palmyra productions, Alexander expressed no surprise that theatrical entertainment was available in western New York. As David Grimsted points out in *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theatre and Culture, 1800–1850*, “Drama was a major form of public entertainment available to all classes and the art form most wholly and immediately dependent on popular appeal.” It was clearly thriving in 1826, especially in those communities made easily accessible to traveling theater companies by the newly completed Erie Canal. In both Montreal and Palmyra, it was mostly melodrama, penned by British playwrights with “gripping plots leavened by sentimentality and humor,” that Alexander saw staged.²⁶ However, he might have been surprised to discover, as historian Glenn Hughes suggests in his history of American theater, that “the extension of the English-American drama into the wilderness” had its origins in Albany, New York, with the formation of a company of actors

specifically recruited to travel and perform in western regions.²⁷ According to the editors of *The Cambridge History of the American Theater*, “there was little that was fundamentally different between the theatre enjoyed by western spectators and that back east.”²⁸

Alexander Stewart Scott’s passion for the theater evidently lasted throughout his life, as will be seen in the afterword of this book, but in 1826 his travel journal discloses not only his eagerness to go to the theater whenever the opportunity presented itself, but also his fascination with British actor Edmund Kean. Hailed as a brilliant thespian, Kean, especially known for his Shakespearean roles, had risen to stardom on the English stage. During his first tour of North America in 1820, his New York appearance in *Richard III* had garnered popular acclaim, but he “battled with the American press and increasingly was depicted as a problematic, if colorful, figure.”²⁹ Kean launched a return tour to the United States and Canada in 1825, but his erratic behavior, coupled with a widely publicized extramarital affair in England, had damaged his reputation. Scott apparently first witnessed Kean act in Montreal on Saturday, August 5, 1826, and, expecting a performance matching Kean’s renown, he was disappointed. Two days later, on Monday, August 7, he again saw the actor and was “much better pleased” with his performance. Just how starstruck Alexander was by Kean is revealed in his journal entry of Monday, October 23, 1826, when, based on a rumor that Kean was traveling by steamboat to New York, he dashed down to the wharf in St. John’s, Quebec, to try to see him. The rumor proved false, but however disappointed he may have been, his attachment to the theater remained undiminished.

“Getting on”

Throughout his journal, Scott uses the phrase “getting on” to indicate his progress toward his next destination. That progress was remarkably rapid, perhaps not by twenty-first-century conceptions of speed, but for the second decade of the nineteenth century, it represented a swiftness not previously achievable using earlier forms of overland transport: walking, horseback, heavy wagon, sledge, and sleigh. For example, twenty-one-year-old James D. Bemis, a bookseller employed by an Albany firm, set off for York (now Toronto), Canada, from Albany in late October 1804. In a letter to his sister, Bemis recounted that it took him sixty-two days just to reach Canandaigua, New York, where he decided to settle.³⁰ He elaborated:

After being detained at Utica, upwards of seven weeks, my patience was so far exhausted, that I determined, notwithstanding the badness of the roads, to make one more attempt to gain the place of my destination; and accordingly hired two wagons to take me to Canandaigua. They had proceeded about fifty rods, when one of them got mired to the hub!—"Good start" you will say. Well! we got out in about an hour, and traveled *eight miles* the first day.³¹

Bemis's experience was extreme, but cross-country travel at any time of year was often challenging and time consuming. Wherever possible, movement by water was preferable. Larger and heavier loads could be carried this way, and under the right circumstances (favorable winds and currents, navigable water depths) water transport was physically easier and faster. While travel in winter was especially difficult, if ice on lakes, rivers, and streams formed to a sufficient depth to support the weight of people, horses, and sledges or sleighs, transport along those routes could continue as conditions allowed.

While the Adirondack and Catskill mountains presented formidable obstacles to easy movement into New York's western regions, the Mohawk River, cutting west from Waterford, where it flows into the Hudson River, provided a narrow opening that proved invaluable to growth and development. Historically, the state's geography has been both an abundant blessing and a bloody curse. Lakes Champlain and George coupled with the Hudson River presented a north-south travel path that had been used for centuries by Native Americans, European explorers, and then the armies of France, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States as they struggled for territorial dominance. What came to be known as the Great Warpath inevitably forced open heretofore largely unexplored (except by Native Americans) lands north and west of the English and American settlements that prior to 1800 were concentrated along the Hudson Valley and not far west of Albany.³²

It was the needs of armies that resulted in the earliest roads—military roads—being hacked out into those areas of the state still largely a wilderness. Earlier explorers, trappers, traders, woodsmen, missionaries, and daring settlers had moved across the country on trails long used by Native Americans. Moving troops, equipment, supplies, and artillery across the same regions required the construction of something better than paths. While military roads served strategic purposes in wartime, those same roads did not necessarily fulfill civilian needs in peacetime. Archer Butler Hulbert, in his monumental series *Historic Highways of America*, went so far as to

suggest that because of the lack of roads, “the interior of New York was an almost unexplored wilderness at the end of the Revolution in 1783.”³³

Just forty-three years later, when Scott traveled across that same western interior, it was far from an unexplored wilderness. The intervening years had witnessed a series of transforming events that had helped bring about significant changes across the state. One of these events was the 1782 creation by the state legislature of the “New Military Tract,” an area of some 1.5 million acres of land in central New York set aside as a land bounty for veterans of the Continental Army. This, along with a growing fever of speculation in western property, fed a pent-up demand for new land to support long-term settlements and regional growth.³⁴ A second event grew out of the War of 1812, when the federal government learned the hard way that poor roads impede the rapid deployment of troops. With its long border with British Canada, New York was key to America’s defense against British invasions from the north. The need to quickly move men and supplies prompted the government to create and fund a military road policy with the aim of improving military mobility and strength.³⁵

A greatly improved system of roads was essential to the establishment of successful new communities and corresponding economic expansion. As Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin wrote in his 1808 report to the United States Senate on the importance of roads and canals to the new nation:

The inconveniences, complaints, and perhaps dangers, which may result from a vast extent of territory, can no otherwise be radically removed, or prevented, than by opening speedy and easy communications through all its parts. Good roads and canals, will shorten distances, facilitate commercial and personal intercourse, and unite by a still more intimate community of interests, the most remote quarters of the United States. No other single operation, within the power of government, can more effectually tend to strengthen and perpetuate that union, which secures external independence, domestic peace, and internal liberty.³⁶

Gallatin’s words echoed a fundamental concern of earlier federalist supporters of the newly proposed Constitution of the United States, who legitimately worried that without a strong union binding the individual states to each other, those states would ultimately bicker, impose trade barriers against one another, possibly fight one another, and prove easy prey to foreign powers waiting for the entire governmental experiment to

collapse. A strong transportation network was seen as, and proved to be, a tangible way to link and bind together the individual states not only with each other, but also with the new territories rapidly being settled to the west.³⁷ Even some five decades after winning independence from Great Britain, the United States that Scott traveled to was very much a country still struggling to define itself as a nation. Its evolving transportation system was part of that definition.

In New York, some of its earliest roads, like the Great Genesee Road (established by state legislation in 1794 and extended to Lake Erie in 1798), which ran west from Utica through Syracuse, Auburn, and Geneva, and the Ridge Road (1804), linking present-day Rochester with Lewiston, were traversed by stagecoaches similar to those carrying Scott decades later.³⁸ In the first decades of the nineteenth century, numerous toll roads or turnpikes, which charged their users, were incorporated by the state. By law, these roads were supposed to be constructed to minimal standards aimed at ensuring stable surfaces on which wheeled vehicles could move faster and with less danger of breakdown or delays caused by impassible conditions. D. W. Meinig in his chapter “Geography of Expansion, 1785–1855,” writes that by 1821, 278 turnpike companies had been chartered by the state, equaling six thousand miles of roads, “of which two-thirds had actually been built.”³⁹ Writing about the establishment of inns, Katheryne Thomas Whittemore notes that because of the generally slow pace of travel, only limited mileage could be covered in a day, which “resulted in a close spacing of inns. At one time the Ridge Road averaged one inn per mile.”⁴⁰ All of this, what we today would call infrastructure, facilitated settlers moving west, farmers and merchants shipping their goods and products east to market, and increasingly both foreign and domestic travelers expecting to see the new country and its many scenic wonders.

Concurrently, on the state’s lakes and rivers, the invention and practical development of the steamboat revolutionized travel and transport by water. Robert Fulton’s steam-powered vessel (originally, simply called by Fulton “the steam-boat”) successfully completed its journey between New York City and Albany in August 1807.⁴¹ While this new technology initially suffered from setbacks (mechanical breakdowns and occasional boiler explosions) and from a legal monopoly that limited competition until 1824, steamboats rapidly became more reliable, faster, and safer. Able to navigate against adverse winds and currents, they could maintain dependable departure and arrival schedules—a tremendous advantage to the traveling public. They also became larger, their accommodations for dining and sleeping more

comfortable and commodious, and, with increasing competition, their ticket costs more economical.⁴²

Less than two years after its introduction on the Hudson River, regular steamboat service began on Lake Champlain between Whitehall, New York, and Saint John's, Quebec, Canada. Interrupted during the War of 1812, that service was quickly reintroduced after peace was declared. In 1817, the Lake George Steamboat Company launched its own regularly scheduled service between Ticonderoga (where passengers from the Lake Champlain vessels could connect to those on Lake George) and Caldwell (today's village of Lake George).⁴³

In the summer of 1817 construction of the Erie and Champlain Canals began. For its time, this undertaking by the State of New York was a staggering commitment to radically transforming its transportation infrastructure, and it involved audacious financial and technological risks on a scale never before attempted in the country. When completed in October 1825, the canals provided east-west and north-south seasonal, man-made water passages linking Lake Erie to Albany and Canada to Albany (via Lake Champlain, on which canal boats either sailed or were towed by steam-powered vessels between Whitehall and Canada, and then traveled entirely by canal from Whitehall to Albany).⁴⁴ It was a stunning accomplishment and, as intended, it dynamically changed travel across interior New York.

As Carol Sheriff writes in her book *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817–1862*, in 1825 alone forty thousand people traveled on the canal's waters.⁴⁵ It was an indication of the huge number of passengers who would soon take advantage of the smooth and rapid transit offered by canal boats.

In the late summer and early fall of 1826, as Alexander Stewart Scott made his journey across the state, he benefited from the integration of all the aforementioned transportation changes. Whether by steamboat, stagecoach, ferry, or canal packet boat, his progress was significantly aided by published departure and arrival schedules, along with established points of connection where the traveler could handily change from one form of transport to another better suited to the destination or the traveler's inclination. For example, the Rochester newspaper the *Album*, for Tuesday, August 1, 1826, featured a prominent advertisement in the middle of its front page heralding a "New Line of Stages" that operated from Saratoga Springs to Utica. The line's scheduled route was explicit: "Leaves Wheeler's *Columbian Hotel*, at Saratoga Springs, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, stopping at [and continuing to list the seven hotels and communities it served] . . . and

at the York House in Utica; arriving at the latter place the same evening, where it intersects the Great Western Line of Stages from Albany to Buffalo.⁴⁶ Steamboat advertisements providing detailed departure and arrival times between Albany and New York City were spread over the first three pages of the *Albany Argus & Daily City Gazette* for Tuesday morning, September 26, 1826, the same morning that Scott departed the capital city. Page 3 of the same paper carried an extensive advertisement touting the Lake George steamboat *Mountaineer*, the same vessel on which Scott had enjoyed a scenic voyage early in his New York adventure.⁴⁷

In his thought-provoking article “‘Ticketed Through’: The Commodification of Travel in the Nineteenth Century,” historian Will Mackintosh suggests that “travel was increasingly provided by a capital-intensive service industry that produced a commodity for sale into an expanding market that served a nation that was growing both geographically and demographically.” In Scott’s travel experiences, I think we can see reflected the beginnings of this trend. Mackintosh believes that travel commodification “happened gradually, partially, and unevenly throughout the nineteenth century . . . ,” and he tellingly adds that “individuals’ access to commodified travel varied significantly with their race, class, and gender, as well as the varying goals of their travel.”⁴⁸

What then was the goal of Scott’s travel? Was he heading south into New York as a tourist, joining a growing host of others acting in that role, or did his journey have another purpose? He never clearly articulates why he undertook his trip, although there are hints. His aim was not merely to see the natural beauties of the state, although he was clearly appreciative of them. Fellow passengers aboard the steamboat *Congress* had to convince him to modify his original intention of going straight to Whitehall by detouring slightly to enjoy the scenic splendors offered by an alternate voyage down Lake George. Initially, Scott was worried about the added expense, but he quickly concluded that their advice was well worth it. Having arrived at his sister and brother-in-law’s home in Palmyra, he writes that he “began to think of going as far as the Falls of Niagara,” but he again has reservations about the cost involved. It seems fair to conclude that as a young student with, in his view, limited finances, he had not embarked on a tour primarily to see the sights.

He obliquely mentions conducting business for his father, and it seems possible that this might have been a purpose for his trip. Since Geneva, New York, and the home of General Grieve was an objective early in his journey, it also is conceivable that—although Scott obviously had

never previously met Grieve—some prior business or personal connection had been established by his family with the general. That Grieve already knew Scott's brother-in-law, living just a short distance away from Geneva in Palmyra, is apparent, and since Grieve married Scott's sister Ann just a month later, it seems reasonable to speculate that this impending marriage was another reason for undertaking his trip. It is puzzling, however, that in his journal Scott records very little about this wedding and even seems somewhat surprised by it. With no other family correspondence known to exist from this period, it is impossible to arrive at a definitive conclusion for the reason or reasons for his trip. That he enjoyed his travel, however, is evident. Whatever else, it offered him a welcome break from his law studies and a chance to strike out on his own before settling down to a career. This latter aspect of his trip suggests a faint parallel, of a limited scope and duration, with the established English tradition of young men taking a grand tour of Europe as a culmination of their education before starting their vocations.

The Northern Tour

Probably some of Scott's fellow passengers aboard the steamboat *Mountaineer*—perhaps the very ones who urged him to see Lake George—had embarked on what was popularly called “The Northern Tour.” Especially since the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in December of 1814 that had ended the War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain, traveling for pleasure had become increasingly possible and popular. Richard H. Gassan suggests in *The Birth of American Tourism: New York, the Hudson Valley, and American Culture, 1790–1830* that in addition to its transportation systems, New York's rapidly expanding population, financial wealth, geographic position, and “remarkable scenery,” including “some of the country's most sought-after destinations,” all contributed to the growth of tourism in the state.⁴⁹

In its September 16, 1826, issue, the *Niles' Weekly Register*, a newspaper reputedly “as well known as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are known today,” ran an article, titled “Visitors of the North,” on that summer's “emigration of the southern citizens to the north” for “health or amusement” and the significant amounts of money spent by those visitors. The anonymous author elaborated on the attractions and popularity of the state of New York:

abounding with the most stupendous and interesting natural and artificial curiosities, and containing the great commercial emporium of the United States, in itself worth a long journey to see; and then her cataracts and falls, mountains and plains, lakes and rivers, mineral and salt springs, canals, roads, bridges, aqueducts, great manufacturing establishments, splendid public institutions, a rich and highly cultivated soil, and a thousand delightful villages, vary the scene and gratify the most wandering fancy.⁵⁰

While Scott did not venture down the Hudson River to visit “the great commercial emporium” of New York City, his travel route adroitly managed to encompass just about every other significant sight listed by the *Register* article. Lakes Champlain and George; Saratoga Springs; the Erie Canal; the fast-growing cities of Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo; and Niagara Falls, along with ruins dating from the War of 1812 and the Revolutionary War, all found their way into his travel journal.

Aiding all travelers, but specifically written for tourists, was what Richard Gassan calls a new form of travel literature (other than published, personal travel accounts): the “tourist guidebook.” Gassan credits Saratoga Springs, New York, printer Gideon Minor Davidson with publishing America’s first tourist guidebook in 1822. Davidson’s *The Fashionable Tour: or, A Trip to the Springs, Niagara, Quebeck [sic], and Boston, in the Summer of 1821* “codified and modified a route that had become the accepted path among highly adventuresome travelers prior to the War of 1812.”⁵¹ Davidson soon had competitors. Among these was Theodore Dwight, whose guidebook, *The Northern Traveller: Containing the Routes to Niagara, Quebec, and The Springs, with Descriptions of the Principal Scenes, and Useful Hints to Strangers*, was published in 1825. (It is from this publication that the annotated maps used in this book were taken.) Dwight’s book promised to provide “all the information of most importance and interest to such as travel for pleasure or health.” This included listing the routes and mileage “between all principal places. . . . the best inns. . . . the finest natural scenes . . . and the places which have been rendered memorable by important historical events.”⁵²

Whether Scott used Dwight’s or any of the other similar works available in 1826 is unknown. He might have carried with him any of the following: *A Northern Tour: Being A Guide to Saratoga, Lake George, Niagara, Canada, Boston, &c. &c.*, by Henry Dilworth Gilpin, published in Philadelphia in 1825; *A Pocket Guide, for the Tourist and Traveller, Along the Line of the*

Canals, and the Interior Commerce of the State of New-York, by Horatio Gates Spafford, second edition published in Troy, New York, in 1825; *The Northern Traveller: Containing the Routes to Niagara, Quebec, and The Springs, with the Tour of New-England, and the Route to the Coal Mines of Pennsylvania*, by Theodore Dwight, Jr., published in New York City in 1826; *A Gazetteer of the State of New-York*, by Horatio Gates Spafford, published in Albany, New York, in 1824; or *The Traveller's Pocket Map of New York*, published in Utica, New York, by William Williams in 1826, which also contained a "Canal Guide, for the Tourist and Traveller." What is certain, however, is that he was familiar with or saw a copy of Spafford's 1824 *Gazetteer* because there is a quote almost verbatim from it in his journal.

Guidebook in hand or not, Scott almost certainly benefited from the travel knowledge and advice of his family. As a British customs official stationed at St. John's, Quebec, his father would have been very familiar with the schedules, costs, and details of all the vessels plying Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River. Living and working as a merchant in western New York, his brother-in-law would have been equally familiar with the best travel routes, stagecoach and Erie Canal packet boat lines, and schedules in that region. It is entirely possible that Scott, relying on his family for up-to-date travel information, needed no guidebook with which to direct his way.

Along the main routes of travel—whether on canal, river, lake, or land—accommodations to lodge and feed the increasing numbers of travelers were rapidly established by entrepreneurs who recognized both the growing demand and the profits that could be made meeting that demand. Many of the destinations identified by the travel guides boasted more than a few large inns or hotels. Canal packet boat builders adapted and scaled down the sleeping and eating arrangements of their vessels to provide features that had become synonymous with the much larger steamboats. The confined dimensions of the typical packet boat resulted in clever adaptations, such as the stacked berths that folded up out of the way on both sides of the single central cabin during the day. Many travelers' accounts—including Scott's—comment on these arrangements, sometimes with praise, sometimes with loathing. Whichever the reaction, these floating "hotels" offered by both steamboats and canal packet boats were another innovation that enabled travel by all sorts of people.⁵³ Indeed, as Colonel William L. Stone of New York City wrote of his own experience on a brand-new Erie Canal packet boat, *The Superior*, not all passengers were "strangers of wealth and taste; . . .," as Theodore Dwight had assured readers in his 1825 guidebook.⁵⁴ Stone recorded in his journal entry for September 21, 1829:

An excellent band of music was on board which had come by invitation from Rochester—it being the first trip of the Superior. The musicians were very respectable young men. But a few of the passengers were so exceedingly vulgar in the eyes of all but themselves, that all on board were rendered uncomfortable. Upstarts, of both sexes, who are innately vulgar, but who have seen just enough of the world to render themselves pert and impudent, who in the consciousness of inferiority are over-anxious to command respect, and who imagine money a substitute for manners, are the most disagreeable travelling companions in existence.⁵⁵

Even the most cursory examination of surviving Erie Canal packet boat passenger lists for 1828–1829 suggests the wide range of people using these vessels. For example, the passenger list for the period from August 11 through September 17, 1828, submitted by packet boat captain Calvin DeGolyer states that among the passengers conveyed on August 13 on his boat were an “Indian & Squaw.” He also lists unnamed passengers and the miles he carried them, along with formally named persons such as a Mr. Durling and a Miss Junel.⁵⁶ Of course, we have no way of determining the accuracy of this captain’s entries (or spelling of names) or those of any of the other surviving passenger lists, but they do suggest two important points. First, the canal packet boats, as with stagecoaches, were egalitarian; anyone with money enough to pay the modest fares could and did ride them. Second, some passengers got on and off the boats after traveling comparatively short distances, indicating that this form of transport was also used simply to get from one place to another within a region. Scott’s journal suggests that this is exactly one way his brother-in-law traveled in pursuit of his business interests.

Among the Americans

Just three days after he left Albany, Scott admitted in his journal that he had come “among the Americans a good deal prejudiced against them.” Although the War of 1812, between the United States and Great Britain (and, of course, Canada), had been ostensibly over for eleven years, some of the most bitter fighting had taken place in New York and Canada, especially on the Niagara frontier. As historian Alan Taylor observes, “At war’s end in Upper Canada, the retreating invaders [Americans] left behind a wasteland

of plundered farms and burned mills and villages. . . . The plundering and burning embittered Upper Canadians.”⁵⁷ The British had returned the favor to the Americans, capturing Fort Niagara in a night bayonet attack and quickly following that up with the destruction of the settlements at Lewiston, Black Rock, and Buffalo.⁵⁸ Both sides reaped a bitter harvest of death and destruction, and mutual suspicions continued to linger. The Americans had long entertained the thinly veiled desire to invade, “liberate,” and incorporate Canada into the United States. That desire did not end suddenly with peace, and, as Jon Latimer argues, “its repercussions were felt well into the twentieth century.”⁵⁹

Still, as soon after the war as June of 1819, there were respectful relations between officers of the previously contending sides. American Captain Roger Jones, accompanying Major General Jacob Brown, commanding officer of the northern division of the army, on an inspection tour, kept a journal of that trip and recorded on June 3 that the Americans visited the British commander of Newark (then called “Niagara”), Upper Canada, which had been “entirely destroyed” by the American army just six years earlier. They were “very politely received” and Jones’s wife, Mary Ann, “never having seen British soldiers before, was well pleased with what she saw. The band was ordered to play for our amusement—the music was excellent.”⁶⁰ Two years later, in her 1821 travel journal, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, touring in the same area of the Niagara region, noted that “the memorials of the War are nearly effaced and all is dressed in smiles of prosperity.”⁶¹

Sedgwick’s “smiles of prosperity” in some quarters barely concealed mistrust. The British military forts and garrisons Scott records visiting show the British to be acutely aware of the military threat still posed by the United States facing them across the border in New York State. In April 1825, the British War Department sent a three-person, secret commission composed of Major General Sir James Carmichael Smyth, Lieutenant Colonel Sir George Hoste, and Captain John B. Harris to the United States. Each of these officers had distinguished himself in 1815 at the Battle of Waterloo. They were now entrusted to gather vital intelligence. Back in Great Britain, the officers submitted a written report. Historian James J. Talman, writing in 1933 about this secret military document, concluded that “the most interesting feature of the report is that the possibility of war between the United States and the British American provinces was considered . . . to be very real and that they thought a plan of attack on the United States might well be drawn up.”⁶² That plan of attack, suppressed in their published report, included targeting key structures of the Erie Canal, such as

the aqueduct at Rochester, with the strategic purpose of impeding movement of American military supplies to Lakes Erie and Ontario. Obviously, these secret invasion plans were never implemented, but the spying mission into New York State resulting in their formulation provides some indication of the extent of military tensions between the two nations.

However much or little those tensions were evident to the common citizen of either country, the relics, crumbling fortifications, battlegrounds, burial sites, and memorials dating from past conflicts abounded. As Thomas A. Chambers observes in *Memories of War: Visiting Battlefields and Bonefields in the Early American Republic*, “Battlefields where Americans had fought to win and maintain their independence, whether in 1776 or 1812, provided an ideal venue for reflecting on not just valiant struggle and martial glory, but also emotional responses to landscape and memory.”⁶³ Nor was it just Americans who experienced such responses, as Scott testifies by his own account of wanting to visit the Canadian memorial to the British hero of the Battle of Queenston Heights, Major General Sir Isaac Brock.

While Scott and his family had not immigrated to Canada until after the end of the war and, so far as is known, were not directly affected by the North American conflict, as British citizens they very likely experienced the wider implications of Britain’s simultaneous war with France. They also must have been exposed to anti-American propaganda. As his journal makes clear, Scott was proud of his Scottish heritage and was certainly pro-British.

The United States he traveled to was not simply a foreign, recently antagonistic adversary, it was also a country of thriving business, expansion, and opportunity to which two of his sisters and their families had themselves immigrated. On some personal level he must have felt his allegiances torn. Americans, and especially New Yorkers, in 1826 were in a celebratory mood. The Erie Canal was in its first year of full operation from Buffalo to Albany and was proving to be a tremendous commercial and financial success. New settlers, merchants, entrepreneurs, and businessmen were flowing into the state along its path. The country was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary of independence and was feeling more assured of its ability to hold its own against any foreign power wishing to interfere with its future. Just the year before, in 1825, the Marquis de Lafayette, French hero of the American Revolution, had returned to make a grand tour of the rapidly expanding country. As Laura Auricchio points out in *The Marquis: Lafayette Reconsidered*, his reception proved to be “the grandest celebration the young nation had ever seen.” In every community he visited, people turned out to see and honor him. “He was a living embodiment of the nation’s founding principles,