

Master of Millions:
King Corn in American Culture

by

Kelly J. Sisson Lessens

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Doctoral Committee

Professor Philip J. Deloria, Co-Chair
Associate Professor Maria E. Montoya, Co-Chair, New York University
Professor Mary C. Kelley
Associate Professor James W. Cook, Jr.

*“Culture is not over and above economic and social relations,
nor can it be ranged beside them.”*

-Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 11.

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To Dave and Michelle.

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Aldo Leopold once wrote that we must learn to think like a mountain, that is, over a very long time and with consideration for the larger cycles in which humans play bit roles. Because nothing I have done in this dissertation exists apart from the people who have helped me along my journey, I'm going to thank in this way.

Growing up in California, I had never seen more than a pile of sweet corn heaped on a picnic table in the middle of July. To be sure, I flew over those big square states with crop circles and even interned at the California State Fair. But the closest I ever got to having corn cross my brain was, roughly, over the lips and over the gums. But then John Enyeart, an undergraduate advisor, asked whether I was thinking about graduate school. I said no, but maybe I could. Though I could not have known it then, that query sent me down a very long, corn-filled path. So my dissertation acknowledgements begin with that seed of an idea. Meanwhile, before I left “the Farm,” Richard White generously gave his time, wisdom, and encouragement. His expert weeding during my senior year, so to speak, helped me establish important roots and has stayed with me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PEOPLE (ABBREVIATED IN FOOTNOTES)

ETB	Edward Thomas Bedford
RWF	Robert W. Furnas
EDG	Emeline Donaldson Guernsey
MDG	Mary Donaldson Guernsey
WDG	William Donaldson Guernsey
CJM	Charles J. Murphy

ORGANIZATIONS

AMP	American Maize Propaganda
ACPM	Associated Corn Products Manufacturers
BPI	United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Plant Industry
CPRC	Corn Products Refining Company
CPC	Corn Products Company
GSRC	Glucose Sugar Refining Company
ILCBA	Illinois Corn Breeders' Association
ILCGA	Illinois Corn Growers' Association
IRC	International Relief Commission
MAC	Michigan Agricultural College
NYGC	New York Glucose Company
OFM	United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Farm Management
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

ARCHIVES AND COLLECTIONS CITED (WITH ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES)

AAS	American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA
ABE	American Broadsides and Ephemera
CWC	Civil War Cartoons
CWE	Civil War Envelopes
EC, FTC	Ephemera Collection, Folio Trade Cards
EC, TC	Ephemera Collection, Trade Cards
	Ephemera Civil War Envelopes
	Ephemera CW Env
	Ephemera CW
	Ephemera Late Trade Food1
	Political Cartoons

Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School,
Cambridge, MA
R.G. Dun & Co. Collection
Historic Corporate Reports: Corn Products Refining Co., 1903-57
Trade Catalogs

Chicago Historical Museum
Chicago Daily News Negatives Collection

- CLEM Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
Janice Bluestein Longone Culinary Archive
Culinary Ephemera
Ephemera: Handy Menus
- GLC Gilder Lehrman Collection at the New York Historical Society, NY
Randall Lee Gibson Papers
William Jones, "Plantation Book, 1839-1858"
- HAG Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE
Soda House
Pamphlet Files
Morris Sayre Papers
Pamphlets
- HNOG Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA
Accession 1982.127.65
- HOU Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
HWLP Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Papers, MS Am 1340
The Gulotta Collection of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- HL Huntington Library, San Marino, CA
GFP Guernsey Family Papers
- IAST Iowa State Special Collections, Ames, IA
ICIA Iowa Crop Improvement Association Records
Iowa Grain and Feed Association Records, 1951-1988, MS 554
- PGHP Perry G. Holden Papers, RS 13/3/11
MLMP Martin L. Mosher Papers, RS 16/03/55
JFSP Jessie Field Shambaugh Papers, RS 16/3/60
HAWC Henry A. Wallace Collection, RS 21/7/5
- LOC Library of Congress, Washington, DC
Manuscript Division
National Woman's Party Records
Prints and Photographs Division

Rare Books Room

- LNHS Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA
HWLDP H.W.L. Dana Papers
- Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
“Feeding America” website
- NACP National Archives, College Park, MD
RG 33 Records of the Extension Service, Record Group 33
LS Letters Sent, 1888-1889
RG 16 Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture,
1839 – 1981, Record Group 16
GC General Correspondence, 1906 – 1975
RG 54 Division of Cereal Crops, Record Group 54
LSPE Letters Sent Relating to the Paris Exposition of 1900
- NARA-Central Plains (KC)
National Archives-Central Plains, Kansas City, MO
RG 75 Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Winnebago Agency
- NESHS Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE
LaFlesche Family Papers, 1859-1939, RG2026.AM
Nebraska Department of Education, RG011, SG 1
RWFP Robert W. Furnas Papers, RG 001, SG 10
- NYHS New York Historical Society, New York, NY
LP Leverich Papers
IRC International Relief Committee Records
- NYPL New York Public Library
Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs
- PAS Pasadena Historical Museum, Pasadena, CA
Dorothy Chancellor Collection, 1885-1985
- SCPM Pearl Street Research Center, Sioux City Public Museum, Sioux City, IA
SC 18
SC 30
SC 55
SC 59
SC 84
- SCHLES Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Culinary pamphlet collection, 1872-2005
Vertical Files: SF Food Conservation #1

- SI Smithsonian Institution
National Anthropological Archives
- UNL Special Collections University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE
4-H clubs F1 Scrapbook #1 1905-1930
- NAL Special Collections, National Agriculture Library, Beltsville, MD
PC Porter Collection
William Allison Lloyd Papers
- SHSI State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, IA
- United States Bureau of the Census. Ninth, Tenth, Twelfth, and Thirteenth
Censuses of the United States, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910 accessed via
Heritage Quest Online
- UIA University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections, Iowa City, IA
Papers of the Farmers' Grain Dealers Association, MsC 141
Redpath Chautauqua Collection
- WIN Winterthur Library, Winterthur, DE
Ephemera
The Collection of Printed Books and Periodicals
The Edward Deming Andrews Memorial Shaker Collection
The Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed
R.T. Hainse Halsey Papers
- WSHS Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI
McCormick Collection

ABSTRACT

Using research drawn from more than two dozen archives and repositories around the nation, and drawing upon sources as varied as scrapbooks, memoirs, trade cards, federal documents, private correspondence, newspaper articles, recipe books, menus, photographs, the minutes from private associations, and census records, *Master of Millions: King Corn in American Culture* explores the cultural, economic, political, and ecologic processes through which corn became “King.” At a larger level, the project builds upon important work in U.S. cultural, agricultural, business, and environmental history and speaks to current concerns about the place of corn in the nation’s foodways.

During the antebellum era, Americans began to imagine corn, their natural resources, and their society in new ways. As the forces of western expansion and industrialization transformed corn into an increasingly utilitarian and economically valuable medium, Americans’ quests to reshape the plant’s nature, its modes of cultivation, and the manners of its consumption responded and contributed to key developments in U.S. political, economic, and cultural histories: the growth of federal power and corporations, revolutions in food systems and environments, and evolving ideas about social relations. By the time that Corn Belt farmers adopted high-yielding hybrid corn seeds and used them to transform the nature of American agricultural production, corn had long been King.

INTRODUCTION

An imperial boundary?

*“Corn is King, but corn will remain king only so long
as we are able to make him do new work in the new world.”*

-Edward C. Elliott, January 6, 1927¹

Speaking at a 1927 banquet for Indiana’s “Corn Kings” and “Corn Princes”—the men and boys who, for more than two decades, had competed with one another in hopes of besting their yields and profits and improving the nature of the corn that they grew—Purdue University president Edward C. Elliott asked the farmers gathered before him to reflect on the crossroads at which they found themselves. Corn, he observed, had shaped “the history of this United States” as “a source of food for animals and men.” But far from being an artifact of the nation’s past, Elliott continued, the commodity was “yet the source[] of our nation’s power.” However, he went on, Indiana’s leading agricultural producers could not assume “that corn can remain king” if such traditional spaces of consumption were to comprise the extent of human uses for the plant. Instead, he encouraged Indiana’s corn kings and princes to produce their crops with more ambitious prospects in mind: “The possibilities of corn as a basis for new industries and new wealth,” he enthused, “have yet to be seriously considered...The corn field as a source for sugars, paper, motor fuels and essential chemicals for industry is to a large extent unexplored.” And in hopes of rallying these farmers’ future endeavors as “craftsmen in nature’s workshop”—men who annually dressed their most productive members with colorful robes and cornhusk crowns—he rosily predicted that “the Kingdom of Corn will have an imperial boundary.” Indeed, he prophesized, “The corn kings of the future will be the masters of millions.”² **[Images I.1 and I.2]**

¹ Edward C. Elliott, "Address At "Corn King" Banquet," in *Twenty Seventh Annual Report of the Indiana Corn Growers' Association. Annual Meeting at Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, January 12, 1927*, ed. G.I. Christie (Indianapolis: Wm. B. Burford, 1927), 49.

² Ibid.



Image I.1 / Indiana Corn Royalty, 1925.



Image I.2 / Indiana Corn Royalty, 1926.

Elliott’s speech encapsulates many of the questions that lie at the core of this project. Why consider corn—a tall, tasseled, perhaps even regal plant, but a vegetable nonetheless—in relation to the broad sweep of American history? What did it mean to call this particular agricultural crop “King,” and where did that idea come from? What led to the transition that Elliot foresaw, when the plant moved from simply producing cornmeal and animal feed to more complex uses, with users tapping it for sugar and chemicals and motor fuels? How did farmers, refiners, consumers, and regulators understand those changes? What effects did producing and using the crop in new ways have on social relations, cultural practices, political debates, and environmental conditions? Who promoted these new practices? Through what networks did they operate? What obstacles did they encounter? And why on earth did this group of Indiana farmers regularly dress one another in robes and cornhusk crowns? How long had *that* been going on?

CORN IN AMERICAN CULTURE, TODAY: AN OVERVIEW

As the speech by Purdue’s president suggests, corn has long been the basis of agricultural production in the United States and, if not the engine, the proverbial fuel for its economic growth. Although consumers have historically viewed wheat with more cachet than corn in the United States, corn’s prolific capacity for reproduction, its human-

manipulated nature, its ability to adapt to a broad range of climates, and the fact that people and many of the animals they raise can eat its kernels make the plant utilitarian and valuable.³ From the 1840s onward, innovative processes for extracting and manipulating its basic components—starch and oil—have made it exponentially more so. Because of the plant’s versatility, corn production has outpaced that of wheat in terms of acreage, number of bushels produced, and total value every year since the United States Department of Agriculture began tracking statistics in 1866.⁴

Many accounts of the environmental degradation of places like the Mississippi River watershed and the Chesapeake Bay, however, as well as current public health crises in the United States and the nation’s political entanglements in oil rich nations point to the end of World War II as the starting point for the growth in the production of and consumers’ demands for corn-fattened meat and the refined corn products that appear in industrially prepared foods. To be sure, new fertilizers, gas-powered tractors, and high-yielding hybrid corn seeds enabled farmers to produce the grain in noticeably larger volumes after the war. And whereas the nation produced 2.5 billion bushels of corn for grain on just over 89 million acres of farmland in 1945, that number soared to 12.5 billion bushels on 88 million acres in 2010.⁵ Today, the corn that U.S. farmers produce in such abundance makes calories from highly processed foods far more affordable than those provided by fresh fruits and vegetables. That cheapness, however, relies on a large number of externalities, including the health care costs associated with Type-2 diabetes and obesity, a reliance on foreign oil, slow-to-regenerate groundwater reserves like the Ogallala aquifer, and taxpayer-provided government subsidies. Moreover, there are long-term environmental and economic costs to all that cheap corn: both the excess synthetic nitrogen that farmers use to augment soil fertility and the animal waste from

³ On the progressive era politics of white versus corn bread, see Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt, "Beating the Biscuits in Appalachia: Race, Class, and Gender Politics of Women Baking Bread," in *Cooking Lessons: The Politics of Gender and Food*, ed. Sherrie Inness (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). See also Aaron Bobrow-Strain, "White Bread Bio-Politics: Purity, Health, and the Triumph of Industrial Baking," *Cultural Geographies* 15, no. 1 (2008). On the 1960s counterculture of wheat bread, by contrast, see Warren Belasco, "Food and Counterculture: A Story of Bread and Politics," in *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader*, ed. James L. Watson and Melissa L. Caldwell (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

⁴ See United States Department of Agriculture, "Quickstats," National Agricultural Statistics Service, <http://www.nass.usda.gov/QuickStats/>.

⁵ Ibid.

concentrated, corn-dominated feeding operations run off fields and into larger watersheds, where these products encourage algae blooms, deplete oxygen supplies for aquatic life, and damage valuable fisheries. Herbicide resistant weeds, meanwhile, have begun to adapt to products like “Roundup,” and are creating costly superweeds in fields around the United States and the world. The propensity of pollen from genetically modified corn plants to “drift” onto adjoining fields, finally, like those bred to contain a “terminator” gene and thereby require farmers to buy seed from year to year, threatens the global viability of non-GMO seed stocks.

In recent years, books and documentaries have brought the twentieth and twenty first century relationships between corn production and these problems to the public eye. Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, for example, excoriates modern oil and subsidy-reliant systems of corn production, and argues that the average American is “processed corn, walking.”⁶ Likewise, Marion Nestle’s *Food Politics*, Vandana Shiva’s *Stolen Harvest*, Eric Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation* and the documentaries *Food, Inc.* and *King Corn* have also increased popular awareness of poor human and environmental health outcomes that arise from relying on corn as the dominant input in industrial food production.⁷

Thanks, in part, to such sources, the politics surrounding the production and consumption of food and ethanol derived from corn have become highly visible in popular culture. People and institutions on different sides of the issues, therefore, tend to portray the plant as either a kind of economic savior or as an arch-fiend marauding against the interests of public health, environmental sustainability, and questions of social justice. In 2006, for example, the Illinois Farm Bureau featured “Captain Cornelius” in a series of television spots. Described as an “ethanol superhero in green tights,” the Captain’s goal was to relate the fact that corn-derived ethanol was supposed to make the

⁶ Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 23.

⁷ Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition, and Health*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000); Ian Cheney et al., *King Corn* (New Video Group, 2008); *Food, Inc.* (Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2009); Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the American Meal* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005).

United States “less dependent on foreign oil and lower[] the price for all of us.”⁸ [Image I.3]



Image I.3 / Captain Cornelius saves the day!

Over the next two years, the pending passage of the 2008 Farm Bill, which would determine the size of the subsidy that corn growers receive from the government for the next five years, prompted heated debate.⁹ During the summer of 2008, meanwhile, consumer resistance to High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS)—a widely-used sweetener made from corn, introduced to the United States during the 1970s, and in essence so well subsidized by the federal government’s payments to corn farmers that food and beverage manufacturers have found it more cost efficient than cane or beet sugar—prompted the Corn Refiners’ Association to run a “Sweet Surprise” advertising campaign. In a series of thirty-second spots, they sought to reassure American consumers who had been avoiding products containing HFCS that it was “made from corn, has the same calories as

⁸ Sebastian Blanco, "Ethanol Superhero Captain Cornelius Blends Corn with Green Tights. See Him in Youtube Action," <http://green.autoblog.com/2006/10/22/ethanol-superhero-captain-cornelius-blends-corn-with-green-tight/>. Shockingly, the Illinois Farm Bureau also has created a Captain Cornelius curriculum for elementary school students. See <http://www.ilcorn.org/grade-school/>

⁹ Michael Pollan, "You Are What You Grow," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 22, 2007; Lauren Etter and Greg Hitt, "Bountiful Harvest: Farm Lobby Beats Back Assault on Subsidies," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 2008; "Long Time in Germination: The Farm Bill," *The Economist*, March 27 2008; Daniel Imhoff, "We'll Reap What We Sow," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2008.

sugar, and is fine in moderation.”¹⁰ But because consumer reticence has continued, the Corn Refiners’ Association began to lobby the United States Food and Drug Administration in the fall of 2010 for the right to label products containing HFCS as made with “corn sugar,” instead. Predictably, this has prompted further uproar.¹¹ Given its centrality to industrial food systems in the United States and the ethical and environmental questions that its subsidized production raises, it is unlikely that corn will disappear from public discourse anytime soon.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Industrial corn production and its attending problems are not, however, simply postwar phenomena. This project locates the roots of these issues within the earlier and more complicated cultural discourses, political and economic developments, and environmental transformations taking place between the 1850s and the 1930s. Although the postwar biological and technological advances that enabled massive revolutions in the sheer volume of corn grown on American soil were but pipe dreams during these earlier decades, corn became an economically valuable industrial product and a potent symbol as the nation, and indeed, the world, industrialized.

One way to think about corn’s industrialization between the 1850s and 1930s and its ascent to “King” of American crops is as a kind of ongoing de-Indianization. Corn, after all, was the product—or rather, given the splendid diversity within the species scientifically known as *zea mays*, represented many products—of thousands of years of indigenous peoples’ innovations and selective adaptations from a wild grain called teosinte. In the early national and antebellum United States, cooks, eaters, and agriculturalists alike recognized corn’s heritage: in their poems, cookbooks, menus, and newspapers, they commonly referred to the grain as “Indian corn.” During the 1850s,

¹⁰ On origins of HFCS, see Brian W. Peckham, "Economics and Invention: A Technological History of the Corn Refining Industry of the United States," (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1979). For sample advertisement, see Corn Refiners Association, "Two Bites Tv Spot," <http://www.sweetsurprise.com/videos/two-bites>.

¹¹ Tara Parker-Pope, "A New Name for High-Fructose Corn Syrup," 2010 <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/14/a-new-name-for-high-fructose-corn-syrup/>; Tara Parker-Pope, "Help Rename High-Fructose Corn Syrup," <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/09/23/help-rename-high-fructose-corn-syrup/>. See for example the online petition, “Stop “Corn Sugar” Now!” <http://www.stopcornsugarnow.com/>

however, northeastern cultural taste makers—influenced, no doubt, by their sense of the nation’s “manifest destiny”—increasingly claimed corn more as a product of the U.S. nation and of white male farmers’ ingenuity than as the fruit of Native women’s physical and ritual labors to improve and maintain specific varieties. Agriculturalists, meanwhile, were adapting eastern corn plants to new western environments even as their acts of settlement literally dispossessed Native peoples from their homelands. In so doing, they laid the groundwork for transformations in food systems, geographic networks of production and consumption, and relations among and between social groups and their environments.

This de-Indianization of Indian corn—though clunky in name—became more explicit during the Civil War, when a newly “whitened” and re-gendered *King Corn* literally and metaphorically defeated the Confederacy’s King Cotton. Thereafter, the growth of western livestock and slaughtering industries, two interrelated products of surging consumer demands and the nation’s expanding rail network, enabled corn to retain its economic value and status. During the latter part of the century, western towns recognized their economic dependence on this crop and used harvest festivals designed in royal fashion to display their ability to produce the commodity and to boost their access to valuable eastern capital.

But as such places succeeded in drawing emigrants to their hinterlands, and as larger numbers of settlers planted more acres of land to corn and used new technologies to do so, the increasing volumes of grain that they produced created both imperatives and opportunities to dispose of it. In times of low crop prices and farmer unrest, western boosters and the U.S. government became interested in augmenting foreign and domestic consumption of the grain, which they imagined as infinitely elastic. Meanwhile, chemists working for new food manufacturing corporations invented ways to profitably integrate the grain’s starchy and oily components into the nation’s foodways. But as the United States became a bicoastal nation, it became clear that simply planting more acres of corn to feed future generations of consumers was not sustainable in the long term: instead, researchers at the nation’s land grant universities, in the USDA, and at private seed companies sought to grow more corn to the acre, and more efficiently, at that. Though they pursued a variety of means to this end, these progressive agriculturalists ultimately

encouraged rural children—the nation’s future farmers—to become champion corn growers in hopes that the stimulus of competition might cultivate better practices of farm management among the boys’ than their fathers exhibited. By the 1930s, when early agricultural corporations and the U.S. government, through the Department of Agriculture, introduced high-yielding hybrid corn seeds to Corn Belt farmers who had grown up in boys’ corn clubs and what became the 4-H program, widespread efforts to produce more corn, more efficiently, had inextricably tied this dietary staple to the nation’s fortunes as a symbol, a leading commodity, and a subject of state policy.

CORN IN THE HISTORY BOOKS

Given corn’s currency, it is surprising that academics in the humanities have paid so little attention to the development of Americans’ relationships with, beliefs about, and uses for the plant during these instrumental decades. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, agricultural leaders authored books about the practical aspects of growing the crop for audiences of progressive farmers.¹² These, as I show in chapter six, are incredibly rich resources for understanding the social relations and the politics of economic development that promoted increasing levels of corn production. Around the mid-twentieth century, texts designed for popular audiences tended to celebrate the “great men” who toiled late into the nights to bring hybrid corn and products like cornflakes to the world.¹³ While useful as sources about key changes in corn production, they lack the historian’s critical distance. Beginning in the 1970s, however, a handful of social historians began to consider corn’s role as a staple food in American history. In 1972, Sam Hilliard published an exhaustive study about antebellum food habits and supplies in

¹² Important early texts include Edward Enfield, *Indian Corn: Its Value, Culture, and Uses* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866); Charles S. Plumb, *Indian Corn Culture* (Chicago: Breeder's Gazette Print, 1895); Frederick Leroy Sargent, *Corn Plants Their Uses and Ways of Life* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1902); Perry G. Holden, *The Abc of Corn Culture: Or, Making Two Nubbins to Grow Where Only One Grew Before* (Springfield, OH: The Simmons Publishing Co., 1906); George F. Will, *Corn among the Indians of the Upper Missouri* (St. Louis: The William Harvey Miner Co., 1917).

¹³ Malcolm G. Rollins, *The Romance of Prairie Gold* (New York: Corn Products Refining Company, 1939); A. Richard Crabb, *The Hybrid Corn Makers: Prophets of Plenty* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1947); Paul Weatherwax, *Indian Corn in Old America* (New York: Macmillan, 1954); Horace B. Powell, *The Original Has This Signature--W.K. Kellogg* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1956); Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

the South, in which he gave special attention to corn.¹⁴ The next year, Daphne Roe investigated the incidence of pellagra in the American South at the turn of the twentieth century, a disease found among populations forced, by financial necessity, to rely on corn-based subsistence diets.¹⁵ At the end of the decade, W.J. Rohrbaugh illuminated corn's role as an item of backwoods trade in what he dubbed the "Alcoholic Republic."¹⁶ During the 1980s, Nicholas Hardeman traced the many ways in which corn sustained "pioneer" life, while John Mack Faragher offered a case study of one frontier Illinois corn and hog-raising community.¹⁷ Janice Longone's 1986 survey of European and indigenous references to maize and corn reflects some of the concerns of social historians, as well.¹⁸ The 1980s and early 1990s also ushered in John Hudson's work on the social origins of the Corn Belt's population and Richard Lowitt and Judith Fabry's research on its twentieth century development.¹⁹ These texts form a starting point for my dissertation.

Scholars' approaches to corn broadened, however, and in 1991, two important corn-related books hit the academic marketplace. In *Nature's Metropolis*, William Cronon argues that the country and the city are mutually constitutive and explains how Chicago grew by exploiting its hinterlands' resources. These included the corn that farmers cultivated so successfully on Illinois prairies. Chicago's growing marketplace, he explains, turned corn—a grain which farmers had, prior to the 1850s, either fed on the farm or sent to market in individual bags from their farms—into an abstract commodity, a "golden stream" which the city's elevators graded and stored and members of the exchange bought and sold on futures contracts. That same year, Deborah Fitzgerald's

¹⁴ Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972).

¹⁵ Daphne Roe, *A Plague of Corn: The Social History of Pellagra* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

¹⁶ W.J. Rohrbaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

¹⁷ Nicholas P. Hardeman, *Shucks, Shocks, and Hominy Blocks: Corn as a Way of Life in Pioneer America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Janice B. Longone, "Mother Maize and King Corn: The Persistence of Corn in the American Ethos," (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1986).

¹⁹ Richard Lowitt and Judith Fabry, ed., *Henry A. Wallace's Irrigation Frontier: On the Trail of the Corn Belt Farmer* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991); John C. Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt: A Geographical History of Middle-Western Agriculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). See also Charles E. Orser, "Corn-Belt Agriculture During the Civil War Period, 1850-1870," in *Look to the Earth: Historical Archaeology and the American Civil War*, ed. Clarence R. Geier and Susan E. Winter (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

The Business of Breeding used the twentieth century creation of hybrid corn to explore the “development of agricultural commodities.” Fitzgerald’s text traces the evolution of this human creation to collaboration (and sometimes, dissonance) among researchers at the University of Illinois, the USDA, and major Illinois seed companies between the 1890s and 1940. Both texts are well researched and proved extremely useful for my third and sixth chapters, respectively. Neither, however, explores corn production or consumption in terms of gender, race, or the other categories that have become standard components of cultural history.²⁰ Moreover, if we compare the social historians’ focus on corn as a popular food—which, aside from Roe’s study of impoverished southerners, tended to decrease around the time that Cronon identifies the plant as being transformed into a golden steam—and jump ahead to Fitzgerald’s, we see that historians have overlooked where and how corn contributed to the nation’s industrialization.

More recently, the tenor of corn-related research has begun to incorporate questions of power, a category of analysis that has defined much of the shift from social to cultural history, and has started to fill in the gaps of corn’s industrialization.²¹ In 1998, Jeffrey Pilcher argued that discourses about corn’s place on the table (in relation to wheat) in nineteenth and twentieth century Mexico shaped the development of class-contingent forms of Mexican nationalism.²² That same year, Iowa State University graduate student Denise Dial defended a dissertation examining the influence of midwestern corn husking contests on the development of industrial agriculture and the gender roles therein.²³ In 2003, the University of North Carolina Press translated the work of Mexicanist Arturo Warman for English-reading audiences. Back in 1988, Warman had offered a critical chapter on the history of “Corn in the United States” in which he pointed at the workings of power during the late nineteenth century. During

²⁰ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Deborah Fitzgerald, *The Business of Breeding: Hybrid Corn in Illinois, 1890-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

²¹ Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005); James W. Cook, "The Return of the Culture Industry," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present & Future*, ed. James Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²² Jeffrey Pilcher, *Que Viva Los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

²³ Denise Dial, "The Organized Corn Husking Contests: Conduits of Industrial Culture in the Rural Midwest, 1922-1941" (PhD Dissertation, Iowa State University 1998).

that era, he writes, “scientific research,” in conjunction with “the patent enthusiasm for corn unabashedly displayed by the cultivators themselves” formed a “component of the accelerated transformation of U.S. agriculture” before World War II. The work of scientists, along with the enthusiasm of corn growing associations and youth groups, created “(a) culture...around corn, a form of social relations between producers, a folklore, and even a mystique.”²⁴ What Warman was getting at were the ways in which turn of the century scientific researchers sought to shape farmers’ behaviors. In 2005, art historian Pamela Simpson linked the creation of nineteenth century Midwestern grain palaces—products of high and vernacular art and manifestations of apparent human control over nature—to the fact that the Industrial Revolution was, for the first time, regularly providing food to the common people in abundance.²⁵ This generation of scholars, then, laid more of a foundation for the kind of work that my dissertation accomplishes.

Recent projects have tackled daunting corn meta-narratives. In 2005, James C. McCann published an ambitious account of corn’s five hundred year history in Africa, from corn’s role in sustaining the slave trade to the twentieth century introduction of hybrid corn.²⁶ The next year ushered in Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*.²⁷ Though I have benefited from each of these texts, no study explores, in detail, the major political or economic access points and the cultural and ecologic processes between the 1850s and the 1930s by which corn became “King” in the United States, and what, exactly, that meant for individuals and institutions.

BUT DON’T WE HAVE ENOUGH SINGLE-FOOD OR SINGLE-CROP STUDIES?

In 1985, Sidney Mintz published a book about the relationship between sugar and power, and asked how something that was once so rare eventually came to supply a

²⁴ See Arturo Warman, *Corn and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance*, trans. Nancy Westrate (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 185. During this same era, Betty Fussell published *The Story of Corn*, where she, in broad, unabashed strokes, celebrates corn in food, celebrations, and global history. Rich in anecdotes, it was written for a popular audience and lacks academic rigor. Betty Fussell, *The Story of Corn* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1992).

²⁵ Pamela H. Simpson, "Cereal Architecture: Late-Nineteenth-Century Grain Palaces and Crop Art," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* (2005).

²⁶ James C. McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500-2000* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

²⁷ Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, 23.

substantial portion of the calories in English diets. Over the past two and a half decades, *Sweetness and Power* has inspired no shortage of research linking questions about what people desire to consume and how they go about making that happen to histories of colonialism, environmental change, and the social construction of race, class, and gender. Academics and popular writers, for instance, have detailed how the production, distribution, and consumption of foodstuffs like cod, bananas, passenger pigeons, pumpkins, oranges, chicken, milk, pineapples, madiera wine, chop suey, coffee, and rainbow trout have shaped important political, economic, ecologic, and cultural developments in the United States and around the world.²⁸

While these single-commodity studies have rendered the intersections among labor, immigration, colonialism, slavery, and environmental change increasingly visible, historians have bypassed the ubiquitous and native-to-the-Americas maize plant and the ways that discourses about and material changes to corn and the ways in which it has been grown have shaped the life and landscapes of the industrializing nation. Perhaps this is because the idea of corn plants does not readily evoke the histories of the enslaved laborers who ran cotton and sugar plantations, or politicians who spurred wars of conquest over banana republics, or merchants who fostered madiera or tobacco-driven circuits of trans-Atlantic capital. Or perhaps it is because most Americans rarely encounter ears of corn, and when they see an actual corn plant, it tends to be from the vantage point of seventy five miles-per-hour. But just because slaves did not produce corn for export does not mean that it wasn't central to the "peculiar institution." And just because it was not something that connoisseurs enjoyed over leisurely meals does not

²⁸ Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985); Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* (New York: Penguin, 1997); Virginia Scott Jenkins, *Bananas: An American History* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Cynthia Ott, "Squashed Myths: The Cultural History of the Pumpkin in North America" (University of Pennsylvania, 2002); Douglas C. Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005); Steve Striffler, *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America's Favorite Food* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Kendra Smith-Howard, "Perfecting Nature's Food: A Cultural and Environmental History of Milk in the United States, 1900-1970" (University of Wisconsin, 2007); Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Gary Y. Okihiro, *Pineapple Culture: A History of the Tropical and Temperate Zones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Mark Anders Halverson, *An Entirely Synthetic Fish: How Rainbow Trout Beguiled America and Overran the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

mean that the plant wasn't an important component of national and international trade. Because of its peculiar utility, as Purdue's president noted, "for animals and men," corn has been more central to the nation's economic growth than any other agricultural commodity.

Corn has also, however, long been a potent national symbol, and in this, the grain has good company. Rice, according to Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, has fomented multiple individual and collective selves in Japan over a long period of time. However, these identities have never been stable, as particular historical contexts have prompted Japanese people to identify with different kinds of rice at specific moments. Through rice's dietary centrality and malleable symbolism, Ohnuki-Tierney makes a compelling claim for the power of a plant—as food, symbol, and product—to construct a "collective self," particularly in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century nationalism.²⁹

So, too, with corn. In 1809, for example, the construction of the U.S. Capitol building afforded Benjamin Latrobe—who may have been acting upon Thomas Jefferson's suggestion to include "native vegetation" into its features—the opportunity to design a set of corn-stalk columns to grace the Senate Vestibule. Capped in ears of corn, these "Americanized" columns featured spirals of cornstalks and, given the need to define the new nation as something profoundly different from any old world entity, merited positive responses from Congressmen and visitors, alike.³⁰ Decades later, as sectional differences threatened to push the nation towards war, a review of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1855 epic poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*, would exclaim that his vignette about "The Legend of Mondamin, or The Origin of the Maize" was "our first and only fable of the origin of corn," a particularly nationalist take on a translated and adulterated Ojibwa legend.³¹ During the Civil War, as we shall see, a coalition of pro-Union northerners and westerners came to view corn as peculiarly American: whereas it

²⁹ See Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. 99-113.

³⁰ Senate Historical Office and Office of Senate Curator, "The Senate Vestibule," United States Senate, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/art/resources/pdf/Senate_Vestibule.pdf; Eugene Ashlon, "The Latrobe Corn-Stalk Columns in the Capitol at Washington," *The Magazine of American History* XVIII, no. 2 (1887).

³¹ *The Protestant*, "Longfellow's Hiawatha," December 22, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 7; LNHS. For more on this, see chapter one.

had once been, one poet insisted, “a sachem... The chief of brave and hardy men,” commerce and the wonders of transformed Illinois prairies had remade that “sachem” into King Corn: “the white man’s lord.”³²

Americans continued to construct local and national identities with and through corn during the latter part of the nineteenth century: in Sioux City, Iowa and in Mitchell, South Dakota, boosters took it upon themselves to bedeck palaces with tens of thousands of bushels of the grain. In so doing, they not only declared their own regions as peculiarly capable of producing the crop, but prompted a resurgent interest in using corn as a symbol of a national domestic self.³³ This idea gained traction during the early 1890s when Edna Dean Proctor’s poem, “Columbia’s Emblem,” inspired a movement (coinciding with the Columbian Exposition) to make corn the nation’s emblem. According to one Massachusetts superintendent who favored the idea, it powerfully depicted corn as “the typical plant of our country” and as peculiarly fit to become a national emblem. Proctor’s words impressed upon her readers, he remarked, that corn “is the symbol of plenty, of joy in its abundance, and of rest when garnered.” Thoroughly convinced, he extolled that “The corn is everywhere” and that “it has strength, and utility which means wealth; it is the appropriate emblem of a rich and mighty nation.”³⁴ Other artists and luminaries quickly adopted Proctor’s call and made it their own.³⁵ In the process, however, “The debate over the choice of Indian corn as a national emblem,” according to one historian, actually became “a battleground on which the meaning of the entire culture was contested.” Thus while the designer Candice Wheeler, who became a leading advocate of corn as the nation’s emblem, believed that corn could symbolize a “feminine-ordered nationalism that included our Indian heritage” and thereby dissent from the industrial, masculine, and imperial visions attached to the 1893 Columbian

³² George Dexter Doty, *Corn-Husks: A Poem for the Times*. (New York: J.G. Gregory, 1864), 160-162.

³³ See chapter three.

³⁴ For the original publication of *Columbia’s Emblem*, see Edna Dean Proctor, “Columbia’s Emblem,” *The Century*, September 1892. For the analysis offered by Albert P. Marble, a superintendent of instruction in Worcester, Massachusetts, see Albert P. Marble, *Columbia’s Emblem: A Study* (Worcester, MA: 1893), 18-19. Item held by AAS.

³⁵ For two other voices in support of Proctor’s proposal, see Celia Loughton Thaxter, “Maize, the Nation’s Emblem,” in *Columbia’s Emblem: Indian Corn*, ed. Candace Wheeler (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893). Item held by LOC.

Exposition, her articulation of corn's virtues ultimately lost out to the fair's more Turnerian manifestations.³⁶

Even so, corn's symbolic utility did not die with its failure to officially become the national emblem. At the turn of the century, the United States sent black and white cooks to work at the "American Maize Kitchen" in Paris to show the world's eaters how they, too, might prepare the national grain.³⁷ And during World War I, nothing was more patriotic—according to U.S. Food Administration posters—than to "eat more corn" (or its refined products) and thereby save wheat, meat, sugar, and oil for soldiers and allies. Even when farmers struggled, during the 1930s, with rock-bottom corn prices and were encouraged to sign corn and hog reduction contracts with the U.S. government in an attempt to decrease supply and raise prices, individuals and institutions latched onto corn as a symbol of the nation's human and agricultural potential. As an economic and symbolic force, then, corn merits closer examination.

ON OPENING DISCIPLINARY SILOS

I like to think of my research as opening inquiries that might otherwise remain housed within disciplinary silos. Following work within environmental history, I denaturalize corn as "nature" apart from human influence: because people plant kernels individually, their acts of seed selection manifest particular expressions of the kernel's color or size, the cob's thickness, or the plant's height.³⁸ And, just as environmental historians frequently place the quest for water at the center of their understandings of the history of the North American West,³⁹ I place the production of corn as a cash crop, the

³⁶ On corn as a cultural battleground and Wheeler's visions for the fair, see Mary Warner Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 67-68. See also Mary Warner Blanchard, "Anglo American Aesthetes and Native Indian Corn: Candace Wheeler and the Revision of American Nationalism," *Journal of American Studies* 27, no. 3 (1993).

³⁷ See chapter four.

³⁸ For a good example of the ways in which humans can shape nature in response to their cultural frameworks or desires, see Ott, "Squashed Myths: The Cultural History of the Pumpkin in North America". See also Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (New York: Random House, 2001); Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Problems of Materialism and Culture*, ed. Raymond Williams (London: Verso, 1985); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995).

³⁹ On water in the west, see Norris Hundley, *Water and the West: The Colorado River Compact and the Politics of Water in the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975; reprint, 2009); Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York:

quest for higher yielding corn, and manipulations to the nature of the plant at the center of the Corn Belt's ascent. Here, I build on a large body of scholarship that explores how Americans have manipulated, commodified, and represented "nature."⁴⁰

This project is especially aware of the ways in which consumption can serve as a stimulus of environmental change. In 2003, Matthew Klingle argued that although historians have examined developments in advertising, the function of consumer desires, and even the ways in which consumers shape national identity, consumers' material world is often missing. For Klingle, this was a significant oversight because "layers upon layers of consumption...have shaped history from the global scale down to the level of the body."⁴¹ More recently, a forum in the journal *Environmental History* reminded readers that "Environmental history begins in the belly" and that the processes linking production to consumption are far from natural. Here, contributor Nancy Shoemaker observed that histories of how "consumer needs and tastes" shaped demands for foods might better inform environmental historians' understandings of processes of change than production-oriented economic narratives. Robert N. Chester III concurred, suggesting that the category of taste has functioned as a behavior-shaping historical actor: as "eating occurs, tastes develop, and patterns of consumption reconfigure local and distant

Pantheon Books, 1985); Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); James Lawrence Powell, *Dead Pool: Lake Powell, Global Warming, and the Future of Water in the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1986).

⁴⁰ For a theoretical analysis of how Americans commonly view(ed) landscape as wealth, see Donald W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Visions of the Same Scene," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D.W. Meinig and J.B. Jackson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 41-42. See also Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination*. For theoretical and comparative studies on the commodification of specific animals, plants, and places see for instance Williams, "Ideas of Nature."; Susan G. Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America*; Jon T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, Western Americana Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Halverson, *An Entirely Synthetic Fish: How Rainbow Trout Beguiled America and Overran the World*; Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden*; Joseph E. Taylor, *Pilgrims of the Vertical: Yosemite Rock Climbers and Nature at Risk* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). On the relationships between agricultural production and nineteenth century market creation, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*; Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996). On the links between agricultural production and artistic representation, see especially Simpson, "Cereal Architecture."; Travis Nygard, "Seeds of Agribusiness: Grant Wood and the Visual Culture of Grain Farming, 1862-1957" (University of Pittsburgh, 2009).

⁴¹ Matthew W. Klingle, "Spaces of Consumption in Environmental History," *History and Theory* 42, no. 4 (2003): 95-97.

ecologies.” Environmental historians, Chester pointed, would do well to consider Donna Gabaccia’s explorations of how cultural markers can influence eating “habits and identities” and Arthur McEnvoy’s analysis of how successive waves of “culture and taste contributed to ecological disruption and reorganization.”⁴² Given scholarly interest in the links between consumption and environmental change, I spend a great deal of time tracing the evolution of consumer desires for various corn-derived foods and products, especially cornstarch, lard, salt pork, bacon, corn syrup or glucose, and the corn sugar that bootleggers used for producing alcohol, under the premise that demands for such products contributed to (but do not entirely explain) progressive agricultural leaders’ beliefs that more corn to the acre was of primary importance.⁴³

My dissertation also speaks to new approaches to understanding agricultural development by framing corn’s place in U.S. society as connected to ecologies, economies, technological innovation, political cultures, and the imagination. In particular, it benefits from and contributes to a fine body of scholarship about the industrialization of American agriculture. Key texts include Frieda Knobloch’s *Agriculture as Colonization*, which insists that agriculture is both material and ideological; Deborah Fitzgerald’s *Every Farm a Factory* and *The Business of Breeding*, which trace the modernization of farm practices and the development of a key agricultural commodity in the early twentieth century; Steven Stoll’s *The Fruits of Natural Advantage* and Douglas Sackman’s *Orange Empire*, which follow the industrialization of California’s fruit industry and the creation of national markets for those products; and arguments by historians Catharine McNicol Stock and Robert Johnson that “rural America,” from the middle of the nineteenth century onward, and

⁴² See Nicolaas Mink, "It Begins in the Belly," *Environmental History* 14, no. 2 (2009); Nancy Shoemaker, "Food and the Intimate Environment," *Environmental History* 14, no. 2 (2009): 341; Robert N. Chester, "Sensory Deprivation: Taste as a Useful Category of Analysis in Environmental History," *Environmental History* 14, no. 2 (2009): 325-326. See also Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Arthur F. McEnvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁴³ This does not contain much discussion about alcohol production and consumption, however, outside of Prohibition, when corn sugar (a refined product) came to be important. Whereas, as Rohrbaugh explains, alcohol was an ideal way for backwoods farmers to send their corn to market before the days of railroads and steam engines, alcohol derived from corn from the mid-nineteenth century on was not a primary driver of economic development in the same way that animal and refined corn products were.

especially after the turn of the twentieth, “served as one of the most important locations for the construction of the modern American state.”⁴⁴

But while American Studies scholarship is rooted in the history of how people have cultivated land and fed themselves—Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*, Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land*, and Annette Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land* come quickly to mind—agricultural history has not been of central concern to Americanists in recent years.⁴⁵ This is surprising, because what and how people put food in their mouths has everything to do with how a society functions. Indeed, if “The destiny of nations depends on the manner in which they are fed,” as one oft-quoted nineteenth century gastronomic philosopher has said, surely the history of how people in the United States have produced the mainstay with which they have fed themselves has something of value to tell us about our nation’s future prospects.⁴⁶

Mostly, however, the dissertation is a cultural history. First, *Master of Millions* shows that the quests for greater quantities and “improved” qualities of corn between the 1850s and 1930s shaped a broad range of social relations in an industrializing nation: Indian and settler, poet and senator, newspaper editor and reader, city booster and western emigrant, farmer and meat packer, culinary expert and housewife, USDA regulator and corporate leader, agricultural professor and railroad superintendent, and corn club member and local banker. Second, by examining how specific individuals or interest groups circulated and received works of literature, advertisements, the meetings of state corn growers’ associations, national yearbooks of agriculture, and other texts and ideologies associated with corn, it explores how culture—functioning in relation to questions of social hierarchies or power as well as to the specifics of particular geographic places or times—can be both transmitted and transformed. By extension, it

⁴⁴ Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*; Fitzgerald, *The Business of Breeding*; Deborah Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Steven Stoll, *The Fruits of Natural Advantage: Making the Industrial Countryside in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnson, “Introduction,” in *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State*, ed. Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 3-6; Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden*.

⁴⁵ Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*; Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Cambridge, 1970).

⁴⁶ Jean Anthelme Brillat Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste; or Transcendental Gastronomy*, trans. Fayette Robinson (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1854), 25.

pays particular attention to the material consequences arising from the transmission and application of economically-oriented values to agricultural practices. Finally, the dissertation speaks to currents within the field of cultural history that propose to “take seriously legal and political history...as critical contexts” requiring “structured points of articulation,” and to integrate the study of “socio-economic structures,” “institutional networks,” and “communication webs” with “the now conventional tools of cultural history” like “discourse, representation, subjectivity, and perception.”⁴⁷

ON ARCHIVES

This dissertation brings together a tremendous variety of sources from some of the nation’s finest archives and libraries as well as from lesser-known gems. These include items held by the American Antiquarian Society, the Baker, Houghton and Schlesinger Libraries at Harvard University, Special Collections at Iowa State University, the Clements Library at the University of Michigan, the Gilder-Lehrman Collection at the New York Historical Society, the Huntington Library, the Library of Congress, the Longfellow National Historic Site, Special Collections at Michigan State University, the National Agriculture Library, the National Archives in College Park and in Kansas City, the Nebraska State Historical Society, Special Collections at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the New York Historical Society, the Archives of the Pasadena Historical

⁴⁷ On legal and political histories as contexts for cultural studies, see Philip J. Deloria, "From Nation to Neighborhood: Land, Policy, Culture, Colonialism, and Empire in U.S.-Indian Relations," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present & Future*, ed. James Cook and Lawrence Glickman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 370, 347. Much as Deloria highlights federal policies as necessary for contextualizing issues within Native cultural studies, Charlene Elliot’s recent study of margarine in Canada demonstrates how particular moments during the butter substitute’s 122 years of legal history reveal how different interest groups “variously embraced” the product, which in turn shed historical light upon “consumer desires and demands.” See Charlene Elliot, "Canada's Great Butter Caper: On Law, Fakes and the Biography of Margarine," *Food, Culture, & Society* 12, no. 3 (2009). Other recent works exploring relationships between legal and political histories and acts of culture include Maria E. Montoya, *Translating Property: The Maxwell Land Grant and the Conflict over Land in the American West, 1840-1900* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005). On using socio-economic structures to engage with cultural history, see James W. Cook and Lawrence B. Glickman, "Twelve Propositions for a History of U.S. Cultural History," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present & Future*, ed. James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 35; Cook, "The Return of the Culture Industry," 300.

Society, the Pearl Street Research Center at the Sioux City Public Museum, the Winterthur Museum and Archives, and the Wisconsin Historical Society.

These chapters also benefited from many institutions' ongoing efforts digitize old newspapers, magazines, journals, and rare books. While the future of the digital humanities is both exciting and uncertain, Google's digitization initiative and its partnership with leading repositories around the United States enabled me to find sources and references that I simply would not have otherwise encountered. It is my hope that such sources enrich this project.

ON SOURCES AND METHODS

Much as the twentieth century writer Aldo Leopold understood that ecological health requires balance among an ecosystem's constituent parts, I have tried to incorporate a variety of sources and perspectives in my research.⁴⁸ In my concern for representative breadth, I have chosen to study materials produced by individuals for circles of intimates alongside those produced by corporations for mass consumption, with the understanding that texts lying within each of these genres can indicate equally relevant social patterns.

Take the genres of cookbooks and receipt books, for example. I frequently turn to these sources as both indicators of the national consumption trends that influenced the Corn Belt's agricultural development and its environmental transformations and as a means to more readily incorporate women's experiences into my narrative of these developments. As other scholars have explained, cookbooks and receipt books offer founts of information about culinary practices, women's roles in society, and trends in consumption.⁴⁹ They are also incredibly diverse documents. Thus while it is tempting to

⁴⁸ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948; reprint, 1969).

⁴⁹ A number of scholars have demonstrated cookbooks' utility as rich historical documents. In 1986, Laura Shapiro used them to explore new dimensions in women's history. More recently, Anne Bower and Janet Theophano have shown that cookbooks enable historians to envision women's domestic spaces inasmuch as the books helped construct ideologies, demonstrate community formations, preserve memories, craft intergenerational bonds, contained archival and autobiographical components, fostered literacy, provided entrées to "economic independence and authority," and became political outlets. Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Anne L. Bower, ed., *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). On cookbooks' utility in framing the construction of

use published cookbooks as definitive sources as to what women were cooking in the kitchen, how, and to what ends, they prove slippery subjects. In *Private Woman, Public Stage*, Mary Kelley identifies a dozen leading female authors as “literary domestics” and explains that writings by these women actively shaped readers’ domestic tastes and influenced their habits nationwide. In so doing, they became significant, if unpretentious, “creators of culture.”⁵⁰ As sources, however, their cookbooks and household manuals also *reflected* culture, for in order to sell well as they did, they had to resonate with their purchasers’ practices and belief systems. They did so by offering utilitarian methods to women operating within particular ideological frameworks and very real limits of time, energy, technology, and resources. Sarah Josepha Hale, for instance, the editor of the Boston-based *Ladies’ Magazine* and *Godey’s Ladies’ Book*, was especially popular. In 1842, Mary Pierce Poor wrote to her mother, “I want Mrs H[ale]’s book [*The Good Housekeeper*] very much [as] all Mrs [Lydia Maria] Child’s nice receipts [in *The Frugal Housewife*] are so antitemperance that they are quite useless.”⁵¹

Looking at nineteenth and early twentieth century cookbooks as complex historical texts, however, raises questions about authorship and power: who, exactly, created the knowledge contained in a given book? Who translated and recorded that knowledge? Where did the practices arise? In 1853, for example, after northerner Harriet Hunt moved to Atlanta, she noted that “the blacks do all the labor,” including

race and gender, see a number of chapters in Sherrie Inness, ed., *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Rafia Zafar, “The Signifying Dish: Autobiography and History in Two Black Women’s Cookbooks,” *Feminist Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999); Benay Blend, “In the Kitchen Family Bread Is Always Rising!,” in *Pilaf, Pozole, and Pad Thai: American Women and Ethnic Food*, ed. Sherrie Inness (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

⁵⁰ See Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 184.

⁵¹ For quotation and evidence of consumers’ demands for these literary domestics’ wisdom, see Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, “Books, Reading, and the World of Goods in Antebellum New England,” *American Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1996): 589-590, 606, 621. On Hale as an editor, see Patricia Okker, *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Woman Editors* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). In “The Folklore of Industrial Society,” Larry Levine points out that consumers ignore or overlook many books, films and radio productions and that audiences contest and challenge government and industry productions, thereby driving notions of “the popular.” Indeed, James Cook explains, “not everything mass produced for the American people was popular.” Lawrence W. Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences,” *American History Review* 97, no. 5 (1992); Cook, “The Return of the Culture Industry,” 296.

food preparation.⁵² Given that practices of feeding corn to hogs arose in the south, as later chapters explain, recipes about preserving and using corn-fed hogs' products are especially suspect as having been shaped by black as well as white vernacular practices.⁵³ Queries about culinary knowledge creation, therefore, are especially important when examining situations where a white author is known or suspected to have employed or overseen the labor of other women—frequently black or Irish—who received wages (or under slavery, did not) for their work in her household. Psyche Williams-Forsen explains that white cookbook authors commonly passed the recipes of their black “help” off as their own when writing cookbooks. At the same time, she contends, those recipes' black creators were in many cases reticent to fully part with them. Idella Parker, for example, complained that her white employer, author Marjorie Rawlings, only gave Parker credit for three of the recipes appearing in *Idella: Marjorie Rawlings' Perfect Maid*, when, in reality, “There were several others that were mine too...and of course it was me who did most of the cooking when we were trying the recipes out.” Williams-Forsen posits that the difference between black women borrowing culinary techniques and ideas from one another and a white woman appropriating a black woman's culinary knowledge in a cookbook that was ultimately sold for a profit has everything to do with “the context of commodification.” If all of black women's nicest recipes are “taken” and published, Williams-Forsen contends, then all that remains of an African American culinary tradition are literally “scraps.”⁵⁴ White and especially Irish women who worked for wages in other women's kitchens in the nineteenth century would have found this claim especially resonant.⁵⁵

Beyond the world of published cookbooks, however, lie other food-centered keys into our nation's cultural, agricultural, and environmental histories. Community-centered

⁵² Harriet Hunt to Emeline Donaldson Guernsey (EDG), September 18, 1853; Guernsey Family Papers, 1837-1957 (GFP); box 3, folder 33; The Huntington Library (HL), San Marino, California.

⁵³ On African American culinary history, especially during slavery, see Frederick Douglas Opie, *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 31-54.

⁵⁴ See Psyche A. Williams-Forsen, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, & Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 167-171.

⁵⁵ For a discussion of white female cookbook authors' publication of working-class women's recipes, i.e. the women who worked in their households, see the discussion of E.S. Borden's 1873 *Recipe Book* in Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*. On the processes in which orally-transmitted folk practices reappeared in published form, by comparison, see Robert Darnton, "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meanings of Mother Goose," in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

charity cookbooks form another genre and may cast a more representative net of what families were actually eating than those published by leading literary domestics. These contain favorite recipes from contributors who lived within a given region or, by sharing some common interest or organization, formed some other distinct sub-population. Because charity cookbook producers had to sell so many copies in order to raise the funds that they desired to use charitably, their contents needed to resonate with their audiences. Given this reality, we can assume that purchasers were generally other female food preparers in similar socio-economic situations. These texts, therefore, provide evidence of vernacular culinary practices in specific places at specific times. They also illuminate women's networks, ascertain widely-used methods of food production, and can demonstrate changes in consumption over time.⁵⁶

Personal receipt books offer yet another lens into the nation's culinary, agricultural, and environmental pasts. Their creators made them by copying recipes from friends, relatives, and well-known cooks, or by pasting recipes that had been printed in local or farm papers into household journals. In 1868, for instance, one J.S. Watson gave her friend or relative, May Wister, a specially created receipt book on the occasion of Wister's forthcoming nuptials. Notably, Watson included her own comments throughout. Regarding a recipe for corn pone, Watson cautioned Wister to serve the dish in the "selfsame" pan it was baked, and not to be "too proud for it is nice & too delicate to turn out!" Likewise, Watson advised that "Almira's Johnny Cake" recipe was "Much eaten at Naushore."⁵⁷ Such advice speaks to food's importance as a marker of taste and hints at questions of class. Although Wister, we may presume, leaned on Watson's trusted culinary wisdom, other women (like Mary Pierce Poor) turned to well-known authors. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, for example, Cincinnati Elnora Blanchard

⁵⁶ On charity cookbooks, see Janice B. Longone, "The Old Girl Network: Charity Cookbooks and the Empowerment of Women," (Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan: 2008); Bower, ed., *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*; Margaret Cook, ed., *America's Charitable Cooks: A Bibliography of Fund-Raising Cook Books Published in the United States (1861-1915)* (Kent, Ohio: Margaret Cook, 1971). Jeffrey Pilcher argues that in Mexico, by comparison, community cookbooks validated indigenous and Mestizo cuisine in the face of European-oriented cookbooks and therefore constructed nationalist sentiments. See Jeffrey Pilcher, "Recipes for Patria: Cuisine, Gender, and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico," in *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*, ed. Anne L. Bower (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

⁵⁷ *Receipts May Wister from J.S. Watson*. Collection 56: R.T. Hainse Halsey Papers, Box 10, Folder "Recipes & Knitting directions", The Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Delaware.

copied Eliza Leslie's recipe for "An excellent Corn Meal Pudding" into her "cook book," a recipe that originally circulated in 1847.⁵⁸ Many women's receipt books, in fact, contain clippings from a range of publications. Although most recipes' sources are unnamed, Winterthur's voluminous collection of receipt books contain extracts from the national and regional publications, including the *New York Weekly Herald*, Colman's *Rural World*, *The Spectator*, the *Ohio Repository*, and the *New York Tribune*.⁵⁹ As carefully crafted pastiches, these documents speak directly to their creators' participation in and sense of belonging to particular publics, and can suggest their political inclinations, socioeconomic status, and education levels.⁶⁰ They also illuminate complicated cycles of cultural appropriation, in which foodways often moved from the kitchens of women who had access to publishing their practices (or those of their employees), to their cookbooks, to consumers' kitchens, and thence to a new generation of hand-selected receipt books.⁶¹

Other sources on culinary history, and by extension, social, agricultural, and environmental histories, may be found in letters of correspondence. I was delighted, for instance, to discover a series of food-related exchanges within the Guernsey family, a clan I discuss at greater length throughout the dissertation. In November of 1853, for example, Brewster J. Guernsey wrote to his sister-in-law, Emeline, for her "receipts...for

⁵⁸ For hand-copied recipe, see p. 200 in Elnora Blanchard, *Cookbook*. ca. 1870-90. Doc. 662, Manuscript Reading Room, Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Delaware. On 1847 Leslie item, see Eliza Leslie, *The Indian Meal Book: Comprising the Best Receipts for the Preparation of That Article* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847).

⁵⁹ "Breakfast Cakes," in Mary Perkins, *Recipe Book (Manuscript) [Ca. 1870-1890]*. Doc. 195, Manuscript Reading Room, The Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Delaware. "Mother's Indian Pudding," c. 1887, and "Graham and Corn Breads. By Miss R.N. Parnham," c. 1906-1910, in *G.H. West Ledger, 1851*. Doc. 345, Manuscript Reading Room, The Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Delaware. "No. 167 To Cure Pork," in *Rappe Family Receipt Book, Ohio Ca. 1810-1840*. Doc. 512, Manuscript Reading Room, The Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Delaware. "Rebel Corn Bread," c. Jan. 1883, in Lizzie Emlen Randolph, *Recipe Book, 1848-1921*. Doc. 1190, Manuscript Reading Room, The Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Delaware. For more on Randolph, see Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*.

⁶⁰ Alice Ross, "Ella Smith's Unfinished Community Cookbook: A Social History of Women and Work in Smithtown, New York, 1884-1922," in *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*, ed. Anne L. Bower (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

⁶¹ On appropriation, see Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Roger Chartier, "Texts, Printings, Readings," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1989).

Jelly Cake, for Indian Pudding & for Bread Pudding.”⁶² A few years later, his wife Mary offered to share “a receipt of [her] own making for Johnnycake” directly with Emeline (though the recipient was not to share it with anyone else, except their mother). “It makes,” Mary promised, “very decent cake.”⁶³ Still later, another Guernsey sister, Amelia, wrote to Emeline of having to “bake bread and fry cakes, besides other victuals” to satiate the group of men working for her husband in an Iowa woodlot that winter. Although this took all of her time, she was able to rely on a hired “girl” who was “as strong as a man” to do her household work.⁶⁴ Rather than simply providing ephemeral color, such exchanges permit the historian to situate this family in a particular economic and ecological place. From these letters and the ingredient lists they contain, for example, we learn that these sisters’ families were fairly self-sufficient. They grew corn (ostensibly with plows and horses), used wooded areas for fuel to heat their stoves, and raised chickens, cows, and pigs. The letters also show, however, that many members engaged in a larger marketplace. Hiring a “girl” and paying male laborers took cash, after all, as did purchasing molasses and cream of tartar required for puddings and cakes.

Recipes, however, were not my sole source while writing this dissertation. Other profitable documents ranged from works of literature that appear to have enjoyed only limited circulation to those, like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *The Song of Hiawatha*, which received tremendous acclaim. Longfellow’s poem, for instance, was celebrated on both sides of the Atlantic and reprinted for generations. My sources also encompassed extracts from farm diaries, advertising trade cards, articles printed in publications like *Harper’s Weekly*, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated*, and *The Prairie Farmer*, farm families’ correspondence, government publications designed to transform Corn Belt farming epistemologies, private memos exchanged within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, angry consumers’ letters to that Department, the self-conscious memoirs assembled by agricultural evangelists conducting “Seed Corn Gospel Trains” across Iowa, agricultural societies’ annual publications, and youngsters’ privately drafted “cultivation narratives.”

⁶² Mary Donaldson Guernsey (MDG) and Brewster J. Guernsey to EDG, November 28 1853; GFP; box 2, folder 11; HL.

⁶³ MDG to EDG, January 20, 1858; GFP; box 3, folder 3; HL.

⁶⁴ Amelia Donaldson Stacey to EDG, February 11, 1858; GFP; box 4, folder 39; HL.

But because understanding the cultural significance of any given source is inherently complex, I have sought to situate the “texts” on which I rely in particular historical contexts and to keep one eye on what their producers intended and another on how their consumers received or appropriated them. “The practices of appropriation,” Roger Chartier writes, “always create uses or representations that are hardly reducible to the wills or intentions of those who produce discourse and norms.”⁶⁵ Similarly, Mary Ryan demonstrates that cultural creations like parades document multiple and overlapping “historical processes whereby cultural meaning is created.”⁶⁶ To illuminate such multiplicity in meaning making, I frequently mimic the approach crafted by Tiya Miles: that is, to deploy multiple storylines, each of which “contains its own pretext and context.” Sometimes, Miles explains, this means that she ends up talking out both sides of her mouth at once.⁶⁷ Given that the majority of the cultural creations that I examine come to the proverbial table with multiple stakeholders and complex local, regional, and national histories, they require similar treatment.

Deep contextual readings contribute much to our understanding of the circulation and reception of those texts and to the cultural work that they performed. Take trade cards, for example, to which I frequently turn. In the 1870s and especially the 1880s, trade cards became important components of corporations’ attempts to advertise their products to national audiences. In order to stimulate consumers’ knowledge of and desires for their wares, companies distributed cards advertising their foodstuffs to grocers, who would distribute them to consumers. They frequently featured colorful chromolithography and were highly collectible. But as Ellen Gruber Garvey writes, consumers did not simply gather the cards and dispose of them. Rather, collectors—especially “middle class girls and adolescents,” the very groups who were being conditioned to become consumers instead of producers and would grow up with magazines and the advertising narratives of the Progressive Era—frequently saved and arranged trade cards in scrapbooks. Through their play, Garvey explains, “the girls

⁶⁵ Chartier, “Texts, Printings, Readings,” 171.

⁶⁶ Mary Ryan, “The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 133.

⁶⁷ Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 5-6.

learned to be responsive to advertising and to become consumers in the new arena of mass-produced, nationally distributed products.”⁶⁸

We can see these processes—and more—at work in a tradecard published by G.H. Hammond’s Meats during the early 1880s. **[Image I.4]** By depicting a sow (probably corn fed) contentedly nursing a litter of future hams, it sketched an allegory of the consumer’s own domestic sphere. “What,” it asked, “is home without a mother?” Their unspoken question, however, had to do with the consumer herself in the context of a market revolution: what, the card implied, was a mother who didn’t purchase the best, most sanitary, and most convenient product for her brood? In a complicated example of highly gendered market knowledge, the company was borrowing from Victorian understandings of mothers as in charge of making the home a haven from the outside world and intimating that purchasing its lard and hams would demonstrate a mother’s own nurturing character. Her choices would be exceptionally wise, the card seemed to promise, because their products were no “manufactured mysteries.”⁶⁹ Indeed, the bucolic, pre-industrial bed of straw suggested that Hammond’s Meats would provide trustworthy foods for the consumer’s own offspring. The irony, however, is threefold: by purchasing their products, mothers would directly participate in the capitalist economy that was simultaneously the source of their packaged foods and the antithesis of that pre-industrial scene. Their daughters, moreover, who might have been collecting such cards, were preparing to become consumers; by eating purchased products, they would be further distanced from knowing where such food came from. Finally, the addition to this particular card—the query in childish handwriting asking whether home could possibly complete “with out a papa?”—reminds the viewer that the man who might have formerly tended the family’s hogs was instead shaping the Victorian home by participating in that

⁶⁸ See Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5, 17-50. See also Robert Jay, *The Trade Card in Nineteenth Century America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).

⁶⁹ G.H. Hammond Meats, *What Is Home without a Mother?* c 1880. Ephemera Collection, Trade Cards, Box 6, Food D-K, The American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. On “manufactured mysteries” see Olive Lyle, “Cottonseed Oil in the Kitchen,” *Good Housekeeping*, June 26 1888, 100; Ann Vileisis, *Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes from and Why We Need to Get It Back* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2008), 79-80, 266. On consumers’ increasing loss of knowledge about their foods’ origins, see Vileisis, *Kitchen Literacy*.

capitalist economy. It was *his* wages, after all, that permitted his wife to stay home and purchase the family's foods rather than render or preserve them herself.



Image I.4 / G.H. Hammond Meats, “What Is Home without a Mother?” c 1880.

But what do hogs, tubs of lard, and ready-made cuts of meat have to do with King Corn’s reign, or why Indiana’s corn growers crowned their Corn Kings and Corn Princes? As the ensuing chapters explain, a great deal more than one might initially think.

SCOPE

Chapter one, ““Our Blessed Gold:” Indian Corn in the American Imagination, 1854-1856,” considers the relationships among antebellum racial and gender hierarchies, the demands of an evolving consumer society, and a land ethic oriented toward colonizing fertile western soils. After introducing the multiple vantage points from which a dissertation about corn might begin and noting that changing consumer demands were accelerating the pace of both Native displacement and agricultural development during the middle of the 1850s, the chapter juxtaposes educated white male agriculturalists’ views of western territories’ “virgin” soils and their own modern farming methods, as evinced in a genre of writing I identify as “cultivation narratives,” with popular representations of less penetrative, female-centered modes of Native corn

production, exemplified in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*. The discrepancy between these narratives, it suggests, comprised a kind of "gender malpractice" which—ideologically speaking—helped transform the plant, as Edward Everett explained in 1856, from an Indian creation into something distinctly American.⁷⁰

Chapter two, "'Cotton Bales Were Sorry Meat:' King Cotton and King Corn in the Civil War," places wartime cultural productions about cotton and corn alongside material changes to their production and consumption. Although southern pontificators had faithfully claimed that Cotton was King and that Europe's need for the raw material would ensure foreign support for southern secession, the realities of wartime embargoes and Europe's concomitant turn to alternative sources for the fluffy bolls that their mills required enabled American-grown corn, which they needed as a grain and for their meat, to hold an increasingly important stature in international trade. For the northern and western citizens of a nation facing the prospect of disunion, therefore, corn became not only food but also a leading commodity. In this process, "King Corn" arose in popular consciousness as a kind of national Self, antithetical to and victorious over King Cotton.⁷¹

Chapter three, "To craft 'Nature's Home:' King Corn at Sioux City's Corn Palaces, 1887-1891," uses Sioux City's five corn palaces to explore a host of interrelated issues. At one level, it explains how, by depicting the region's capacity to supply the corn required to finish the meat that they sought to send to American tables, city boosters used these fantastic edifices to frame their own region as extraordinarily fertile and, therefore, capable of becoming an economic metropolis on par with Chicago. Though the corn palaces were their own creation, other budding western cities shared their sentiments. To this end, Sioux City provides an apt case study for a larger phenomenon. At another level, this chapter understands the palaces themselves as discursive spaces through which multiple stakeholders, including Indians and white women, furthered their

⁷⁰ As I explain in chapter one, the concept of gender malpractice comes from Williams-Forsen, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, & Power*. On Everett's speech, see "Speech of Hon. Edward Everett," *The Prairie Farmer*, August 7 1856.

⁷¹ For work on rice as a national self, see Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time*, esp. 99-113. On Indian selves and others, by comparison, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). On comparative work with corn, and with a keen eye for the significance of gender, class, and race, see Pilcher, "Recipes for Patria: Cuisine, Gender, and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico."

own agendas. To unpack the meanings that creators and participants sought to make out of their buildings' turrets, arches, and dioramas, it turns to historical context. In so doing, it concludes that the nation's first corn palaces benefited from the federal government's ongoing encouragement of extensive production, comprised a direct response to urban consumers' growing demands for corn-fed foodstuffs, and in the long run, naturalized industrial food producers' reliance on farmers' increasing volumes of corn production.

Chapter four, "'To gladden and bless the nations of the earth.'" King Corn in the Kitchen, 1877-1918" looks at the context and process through which political and cultural leaders unwilling to respond to deeper social and economic problems of the late nineteenth century (especially low corn prices as a result of farmers' overproduction) turned to the realm of foreign and domestic corn consumption. Between the late 1870s and the first World War, a series of banner corn crops—thanks to practices promoting extensive corn production—prompted leaders in politics, industry, and branches of the federal government to market excess corn as a desirable "human food" in the United States and in Europe. Although they chose to promote consumption rather than reduce production, they elected to market corn in this way, the chapter explains, because the plant had become so deeply connected, in the popular mind, to something that was only good for feeding hogs, bees, and poor people, frequently of color. By the 1890s, it no longer behooved conspicuous white consumers to eat the grain. To ameliorate overproducing farmers' woes and to convince potential consumers of corn's merits, they turned to the culinary authority of educated white women (and in one case, male French chefs) and the culinary authenticity of black and Native women. While their efforts reified narrow constructions of gender and race, leaders' efforts also stimulated increased cooperation between public and private corn interests. This, the last two chapters show, would become a hallmark of agricultural development during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Chapters five and six hone in on the processes of industrialization and state formation. Between the 1880s and 1930s, farmers, consumers, manufacturers, newspaper publishers, and regulatory arms of government actively envisioned (and sometimes contested) the extent to which new refined corn products ought to become a part of the nation's foodways. Chapter five, "King Corn's Products and the Creation of Industrial

Foodways,” explores how discourses about the nature and labeling of new refined corn products influenced specific legislative and administrative decisions which, in turn, evinced material changes in the foods consumers ate. Although pieces of legislation—which leaders within the Department of Agriculture very much influenced—shaped the market, the chapter also shows how the developing corn refining industry self-consciously and effectively deployed tools of mass culture in order to shape that market.

Chapter six, “Boosting Yields, Making Profits, and Raising Kings: Corn Production and the Modernization of the American State,” shows how, starting at the end of the nineteenth century, individuals from a range of private agricultural organizations and public institutions pursued the twin goals of growing greater corn yields per acre and producing that corn more efficiently. No individual or institution, however, could influence either outcome without a critical mass of farmers altering their behaviors. Given this reality, private associations, newspaper editors, leading corn breeders, state departments of agriculture and public instruction, federally funded land-grant universities and agricultural experiment stations, and branches of the USDA spearheaded a host of cooperative initiatives with American corn growers. By the early twentieth century, these initiatives had formed a veritable movement. But as a core group of self-appointed agricultural “apostles” conscientiously cultivated relationships with rural corn growers between the 1890s and 1910s, they eventually focused on rural youths. And although American corn farmers would not experience substantial increases in either acre yield or efficiency until the 1930s, when drought conditions and economic imperatives persuaded them to purchase and cultivate high-yielding, hybrid corn seeds from commercial producers, rather than save their own seeds from year to year, the apostles’ efforts at disseminating new ideas and practices during the preceding decades were not in vain.⁷² The ultimate product of their efforts, the chapter proposes, was a generation of rural cooperators who would later accept initiatives aimed at modernizing agricultural production and accommodate Federal interventions in their productive practices.

⁷² Hybrid corn, as historian Deborah Fitzgerald has shown, was the product of public and private research nearly fifty years in the making. See Fitzgerald, *The Business of Breeding*. See also A. Forrest Troyer, “Development of Hybrid Corn and the Seed Corn Industry,” in *Handbook of Maize: Genetics and Genomics*, ed. Jeff L. Bennetzen and Sarah Hake (New York: Springer, 2009).

Like the other corn-centric discourses that this dissertation examines—the antebellum reception of Longfellow’s “Hiawatha,” the circulation of Civil War-era King Corn rhetoric, Sioux City’s corn palace boosterism, *fin de siècle* proposals to solve overproducing farmers’ woes by way of increasing consumption, and the Corn Products Refining Company’s insistence on transforming definitions of “sugar” so as to increase consumers’ willingness to adopt their products—the evolution of cooperative work with adult farmers and with boys’ corn clubs speaks not only to the history of American agricultural production but also to the processes in which agricultural leaders shaped policies, transformed environments, and sought to influence the values of an increasingly industrial nation. It is, therefore, an apt place to conclude this project.

BUT WHAT OF INDIANA’S CORN KINGS AND PRINCES?

By acknowledging the men who currently numbered among Indiana’s most successful corn producers and the boys who showed the greatest promise of becoming so, the members of Indiana’s Corn Growers’ Association and their affiliates at Purdue University were not simply nodding to what had, by the 1920s, become the familiar (and given that decade’s farm crisis, decidedly more problematic) phrase: “Corn is King.” Rather, by dressing up in cornhusk crowns and colorful robes, they were validating the industrially-oriented modes of agricultural production which progressive farmers, western boosters, government leaders, university professors, and a nation of eaters had pursued for the past eight decades. This dissertation traces the ways in which specific cultural discourses and political interventions facilitated rise of those ideals and practices. But while President Elliott’s hopes then that “the corn kings of the future” would become the “masters of millions” strikes an eerie chord at this particular historical moment—indeed, we may ask ourselves whether our nation’s corn farmers are today’s kings, or whether the few large conglomerates from whom they purchase their seeds, chemicals, and implements might, in a darker perspective, be the real “masters of millions”—whether his prophecy will still hold true decades from now remains to be seen.

CHAPTER ONE

“Our blessed gold:” Indian Corn in the American imagination, 1854-1856

“I suppose there must be some what of a change in your country & well as here 1 ½ years goe the read man romed over the prairie whare now wheat corn & potatoes are a growing the land here is very productive cucumber & pees are very plenty.”
-Henry Pendleton to Emeline Guernsey, July 13, 1856,
Otoe County, Nebraska Territory⁷³

“Where,” the historian John Demos once asked, “does the story begin?”⁷⁴ Does it commence the moment that a grain of pollen, borne by winds dancing across fields in southern Illinois in the mid-1840s, lands upon and travels through a sticky corn-silk on its way to fertilize a kernel of corn, destined to create a variety theretofore unknown? Or does it begin earlier, perhaps with the fall of the Huron-dominated region once known as the *pays d’en haut* and an ethnographer’s subsequent attempts to translate and retain a people’s legends for settlers who would soon seek to overtake those lands? Maybe the tale starts farther east, as a Virginia housewife writes a cookbook favoring corn-fed bacon, in New York, after an immigrant tinkers with starch manufacturing, or in Washington, D.C., as a contingent of Omaha Indians exchanges land for promises from the U.S. Government. Rife with possibility, the story could just as well begin in the mailroom of the U.S. Patent Office, the Chicago offices of *The Prairie Farmer*, at a writing desk in Massachusetts, in a widow’s Pennsylvania farmhouse as she readies her family for a move to Iowa, on the prairies of Nebraska Territory, or around the podium at the National Agricultural Fair.

THREE STORIES ABOUT THE SOIL

⁷³ Henry Pendleton to Emeline Donaldson Guernsey (EDG), July 13, 1856; Guernsey Family Papers, 1837-1957 (GFP); box 4, folder 28, The Huntington Library (HL), San Marino, California.

⁷⁴ John Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 3.

ONE

Let us assume that the story commences 600 miles west of Chicago, on the eastern bank of the first big bend of the Missouri River, halfway up the state of Iowa, downriver from Minnesota, and at the precise spot where Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota converge. The Niobrara River feeds into the Missouri upstream, as do the Floyd and Big and Little Sioux rivers. In the mid-nineteenth century, European traders and American settlers hastened to what would become Sioux City and its surrounds to take advantage of access to trade routes, prairie uplands, and rich river bottoms. Very quickly, they sought to ensure that its “millions of acres of splendid agricultural lands” and “exhaustless resources” would not “much longer remain in their wild condition, producing only their annual crops of grass and flowers.”⁷⁵ But although these newcomers saw the landscape around them as virgin, mid-century emigrants were far from the region’s first inhabitants.

The Omaha, who would loom especially large in the developments in and around Sioux City, established themselves in what is now eastern Nebraska by the 1720s, having encountered maize long before, when they lived in the Great Lakes region.⁷⁶ Despite the fact that they came to rely on buffalo hunting more than maize cultivation as they moved west, the Omaha continued to hold ceremonial stock in their corn. Each spring, they would “sing” up the crop, and the maize, in turn, would speak to them, still “conscious of its mission” to feed the people. Throughout the nineteenth century, Omaha corn planting rituals required Omaha men and women to work together along creek banks before buffalo hunting seasons began, where they formed south-sloping earthen mounds in one-half to three-acre garden plots on which they planted and tended corn, beans, and squash.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ A.R. Fulton, *The Free Lands of Iowa. Being an Accurate Description of the Sioux City Land District. With a General View of Iowa: Her Resources and Advantages* (Des Moines: Mills & Co’s Publishing House, 1869), 3. Item held by AAS.

⁷⁶ David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 6; Benson Tong, *Susan La Flesche Picotte, M.D.: Omaha Indian Leader and Reformer* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 4. For analysis of Omaha encounter with Maize while in an “eastern habitat,” see Alice C. Fletcher and Francis LaFlesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, vol. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 71-72, 76-78.

⁷⁷ Fletcher and LaFlesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, 269-271. For the continuance of the Omaha’s planting rituals even as they became more buffalo-oriented, see Fletcher and LaFlesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, 261-270.

The Omaha were not the only people to utilize the region, however. Upon arriving to what would become eastern Nebraska, the Omaha had displaced the Arikara, who, in turn, moved farther north.⁷⁸ Arikara women, like the Mandan and Hidatsa, planted annual crops of fast-maturing, starch-laden “flint” corn, along with beans, sunflowers, and squash, on the alluvial bottomlands of the northern Missouri River.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the Oto, Missouri, and Yankton Sioux also claimed parts of what would become Sioux City and its hinterland, and during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, French trappers and traders plied its waterways.⁸⁰ Meriwether Lewis and William Clark passed through the area on their 1804 journey to the Pacific, pausing long enough to convene with the Oto and Missouri and to name the Floyd River after one member of their party, the unfortunate Sergeant Floyd, perished along its banks.⁸¹

Though France ceded its claims to the region when it sold greater Louisiana to the United States, individual French traders remained. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, one of these, a man named Joseph La Flesche, married a Ponca woman. She gave birth to a son who, though he would also be known as “Iron Eye,” inherited his father’s name. Multilingual and widely traveled, the young Joseph La Flesche spent some of his adolescence among the Omaha, who were connected to the Ponca through language and kinship. Eventually, the Omaha chief Big Elk adopted the younger man, and in the late 1840s, La Flesche became part of the Omaha tribal council.⁸² After Big Elk died in 1853, La Flesche replaced him as a principal chief.⁸³

[Image 1.1]

⁷⁸ Fletcher and LaFlesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, 75.

⁷⁹ Waheenee and Gilbert Livingstone Wilson, *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden: Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1987). I explain flint corn later in this chapter.

⁸⁰ *History of Western Iowa, Its Settlement and Growth: A Comprehensive Compilation of Progressive Events Concerning the Counties, Cities, Towns, and Villages—Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers and Business Men, with an Authentic History of the State of Iowa*, (Sioux City: Western Publishing Company, 1882), 176-177.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* By the time that Lewis and Clark arrived, the Omaha had been struck hard by smallpox and were greatly reduced in number. With the Omaha weakened in strength and population, trappers were far less interested in pursuing trade. This left the Omaha vulnerable to tribes with superior technological assets. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians*, 7-8.

⁸² Jeri Ferris, *Native American Doctor: The Story of Susan LaFlesche Picotte* (Minneapolis: Carlrhoda Books, 1991), 13; Judith A. Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 78; Bernd Peyer, *American Indian Nonfiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 286; Alice C. Fletcher and Francis LaFlesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, vol. 2 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 631-634, 638. A number of sources illuminate La Flesche family history. The Nebraska State Historical Society holds the LaFlesche Family Papers, 1859-1939 in RG2026.AM. It also

Meanwhile, a series of Indian land cessions enabled the earliest white settlers to establish themselves in western Iowa, at what would become Sioux City, by the late 1840s. In 1848, a pair of American brothers created the short-lived “Thompsontown” near the site where Lewis and Clark had buried Sergeant Floyd’s body four and a half decades earlier. Shortly thereafter, a Canadian trader of French descent named Theophile Brugier settled two miles upstream with a daughter of the Yankton Sioux chief War Eagle.⁸⁴ From the site of his cabin, a historian of the region later wrote, “the broad winding Missouri” could be “seen for many miles,” along with “the far off Blackbird Hills in Nebraska, with the intervening plains, islands and groves, and a portion of the rich bottom lands of Dakota, stretching as far as they eye can reach...toward the northwest.” In 1853, “an association of capitalists and politicians” chose surveyor John Cook to select a location with precisely such vantage points and advantages, instructing him “to choose for them a site for a city, to be the metropolis of this part of the northwest.” At the end of 1854, a handful of emigrants laid out the streets that would form Sioux City’s core, and by 1856, 150 settlers called Sioux City home.⁸⁵

The year 1854 was momentous for those capitalists, politicians, and settlers in other ways. That winter and spring, the Omaha, still living west across the Missouri in eastern Nebraska Territory, sent La Flesche and five others to Washington, D.C. to “slightly modify, alter, or amend” a new treaty which the tribe had collectively drafted in Council Bluffs.⁸⁶ However, after the government nullified the earlier agreement, La

maintains some basic biographical info: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/manuscripts/family/laflesche-family.htm>, accessed March 31, 2010. Other materials about Joseph, Susette, Susan, and Francis La Flesche include Alice C. Fletcher, "The Omaha and Winnebago Tribes," *Friends' Intelligencer*, December 31, 1887; "Joseph La Flesche," *The Friend*, March 30 1889; Norma Kidd Green, *Iron Eye's Family: The Children of Joseph Laflesche* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1969); Dorothy Clarke Wilson, *Bright Eyes: The Story of Susette Laflesche* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1974); "Susette La Flesche [Tibbles]," in *Native American Women's Writing, 1800-1924: An Anthology* ed. Karen L. Kilcup (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 25, 188-189, 205, 228-229; Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123-127.

⁸³ Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 78.

⁸⁴ *History of Western Iowa, Its Settlement and Growth: A Comprehensive Compilation of Progressive Events Concerning the Counties, Cities, Towns, and Villages—Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers and Business Men, with an Authentic History of the State of Iowa*, 176-177.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 178-181.

⁸⁶ ———, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 62-63. For Omaha treaties of 1830 and 1836, which also included land cessions, see Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 305-310, 479-481.

Flesche and the other representatives signed a radically different document.⁸⁷ Ratified April 17, 1854, the revised treaty established that the Omaha were to move to a new, smaller reservation in April of 1855, where members would receive land in severalty.⁸⁸

[Image 1.2]

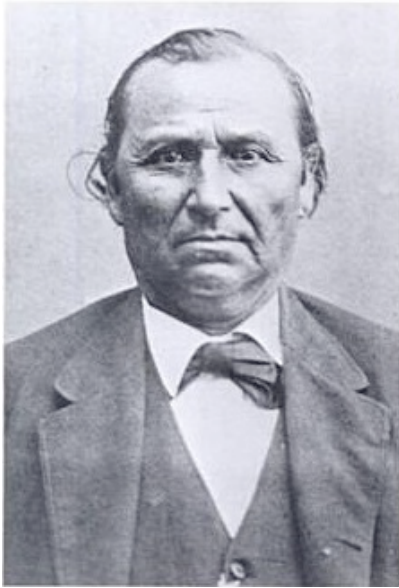


Image 1.1 / Joseph La Flesche.

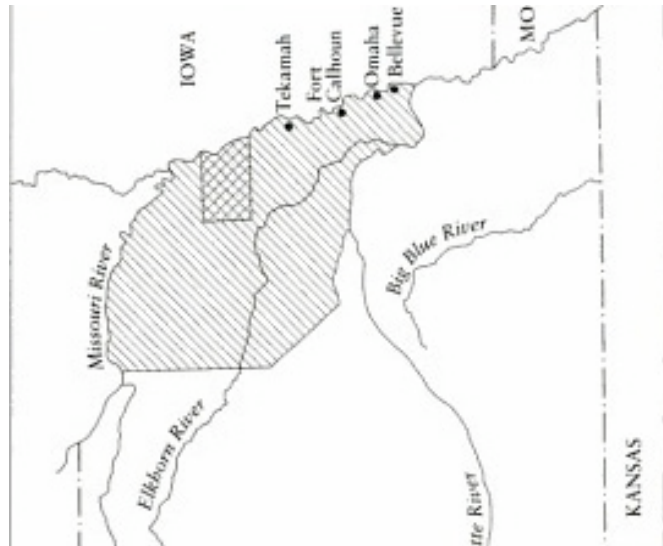


Image 1.2 / Detail, Omaha land ceded by the treaty of 1854.
 Note: Lands ceded = //// Lands retained = XXX

Back on the eastern banks of the Missouri, Sioux City’s new land agents and bankers wrested a local branch of the Government Land Office from a nearby town in the early 1850s. This enabled them to strengthen the young city’s banking and lending capacities.⁸⁹ They also continued to scout for productive lands in the vicinity of the would-be metropolis. When, in 1855, the Omaha declared that they wished to settle southeast of Sioux City in the Blackbird Hills of Nebraska Territory, Iowa settlers and politicians who had designs on eastern Nebraska’s resources protested. Indeed, a petition sent by settlers in Iowa and the Nebraska Territory stated that they did not wish to see

⁸⁷ Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 64.

⁸⁸ However, should an individual refuse to farm the land s/he was allotted, or if s/he should “rove from place to place,” the government could nullify the holder’s patent and withhold their share of the tribe’s annuities. The treaty also established that instead of \$40,000 per year for 30 years, they would receive \$84,000 over forty years in decreasing annuities; established railroad rights of way through reservation; would provide Omaha with buildings like “sawmill, a gristmill, a blacksmith shop, and the services of a miller, a blacksmith, and a farmer for ten years.” *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁸⁹ *History of Western Iowa, Its Settlement and Growth: A Comprehensive Compilation of Progressive Events Concerning the Counties, Cities, Towns, and Villages—Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers and Business Men, with an Authentic History of the State of Iowa*, 178-181.

Indians occupying “the most highly favored section of the territory.”⁹⁰ Addison Cochran, a Council Bluffs businessman and landowner, urged the government on behalf of the “many citizens” in Woodbury and Monona counties to find an alternative location for the Omaha. He even fabricated a story that white settlers were already in the Blackbird Hills.⁹¹ The agent for the Omaha, however, demonstrated that Cochran’s letter was a ruse and that no white settlers lived there yet, though they certainly lived close enough to recognize the value of those well-watered and timber-rich lands.⁹²

The Omaha arrived at their new, smaller reservation in late May, 1855.⁹³ During the ensuing years, they built villages of wood frame houses, one of which was lead by La Flesche and other “progressive Omahas” near the proposed site for a Presbyterian mission.⁹⁴ Having seen Washington, D.C. firsthand, La Flesche had concluded that the Omaha must adopt white settlers’ ways in order to survive.⁹⁵ Along with other like-minded Omahas, he began to fence, plow, and partition about a hundred acres of bottomland for corn and other crops. During the late 1850s and early 1860s, he would cross the Missouri river, when frozen, to sell his surpluses in Sioux City.⁹⁶ La Flesche’s actions during these early reservation years portended the influence he would hold among the Omaha people and white reformers in ensuing decades. They also, as we shall see, set the stage for his eventual participation in Sioux City’s 1887 Corn Palace. In one historian’s assessment, the fact that La Flesche was “an acculturated, high-profile Christian Indian” created an “image [which] possibly convinced reformers and the government that all Omahas could become land owning farmers.”⁹⁷ His decision to welcome assimilation during these early years in eastern Nebraska territory thus facilitated the policy of allotment that would be applied to indigenous peoples across the

⁹⁰ ———, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 73.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 70. For more on Cochran’s life, see Charles Aldrich, “Notable Deaths,” *The Annals of Iowa, a Historical Quarterly* 2, third series, no. 1 (1895): 484-485.

⁹² Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 71-72.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 78, 86-88.

⁹⁶ Joan Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 68.

⁹⁷ Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 81. La Flesche was driven from his position of chief in 1866 after the Omaha agent Robert Furnas, who would later become Governor of Nebraska, removed his title of trader. Though La Flesche temporarily left, he returned thereafter, at which point he became a Christian and unofficial leader of the so-called progressive Omaha. Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*, 68.

nation beginning in the same year that Sioux City’s boosters organized the first Corn Palace. The histories of the Omaha people and the La Flesche family, as chapter three explores, have a great deal of bearing on our understanding of the changing place of corn in American culture.

TWO



Image 1.3 / “The Politics and Poetry of New England,” Carte-de-visite, [Charles Sumner and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1863].

Alternatively, our story might start in April of 1856, as Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner pens a letter to his dear friend, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. **[Image 1.3]** “For some time my mind has been much occupied by Kansas,” Sumner wrote, “& I now expect to make an elaborate speech on it very soon. The occasion is the greatest, as it seems to me, that has ever occurred in our history. I shall plead for that...plundered territory. I wish I could talk with you about it all, & be encouraged & strengthened.”⁹⁸ After wishing to be so heartened, Sumner switched topics and began to lavish attention on Longfellow’s own recent triumphs, adding his praise to the chorus of

⁹⁸ Charles Sumner to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, April 7, 1856; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Papers (HWLP); Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Letters from Charles Sumner to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; Box 56, Item 5394; Houghton Library (HOU), Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

responses to the poet's recent epic, *The Song of Hiawatha*. "Hiawatha conquers as no Indian chief ever did before," Sumner enthused. "All his successes I enjoy."⁹⁹

Longfellow's poem, published five months earlier, tells the saga of Hiawatha, an "Ojibway" who lived by the "shores of the Gitche Gumee" and married Minnehaha, a "Dakotah" woman. Over the course of the poem, Hiawatha unites warring peoples, brings agriculture to his nation, and eventually welcomes the bearers of Christianity to the Great Lakes region. As he rides his birch bark canoe off into the sunset, he effectively closes 10,000 years of Native history and opens the door for the Euro-American civilization to come. Longfellow described *Hiawatha* as "a long poem, a narrative based upon Indian Legends,—the hero a kind of American Prometheus."¹⁰⁰ Squarely aligned with the ideas of a west popular among white middle class consumers in the decade before the Civil War, wherein Indians conveniently, if tragically, removed themselves from agriculturally desirable landscapes, *Hiawatha* built upon the fictional tales of James Fennimore Cooper, the nation's non-fictional policies of Indian removal, and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's ethnographies of Indian peoples in the Great Lakes region. Like other tomes of its day, *Hiawatha* rendered the west open and accessible, its landscapes exoticized, and its peoples either disappeared or rendered as welcoming recipients of Western civilization.¹⁰¹

The Americanization of Indian lore, like the political and physical appropriations of Native lands, has an extensive history. During the 1850s, this genre—to which *Hiawatha* contributed—was at its zenith.¹⁰² In 1856, for example, the year following

⁹⁹ Charles Sumner to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, April 7, 1856; HWLP; Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Letters from Charles Sumner to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; Box 56, Item 5394; HOU.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Ferdinand Freiligrath, April 25, 1855, in Andrew Hilen, ed., *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, vol. III (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 475.

¹⁰¹ Recent *Hiawatha* scholars have said much about its significance in relation to western expansion. Not only did Longfellow's descriptions of the wilderness "open readers' minds to the...wonders and possibilities of the Great West," it "provided an explanatory narrative for a transition from aboriginal inhabitation to white racial dominance" by presenting "a groundwork of native materials in a land whereon European culture could plausibly be grafted." See Michael V. Pisani, "Longfellow, Robert Stoepel, and an Early Musical Setting of Hiawatha (1859)," *American Music* 16, no. 1 (1998): 49; Joe Lockard, "The Universal Hiawatha," *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2000): 114; Cecelia Tichi, "Longfellow's Motives for the Structure Of "Hiawatha"," *American Literature* 42, no. 4 (1971): 550. For a historiographic reading of *Hiawatha*, including scholars who read the poem as "a successful enterprise in passage-of-empire mode," see Charles C. Calhoun, "Hiawatha," in *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 213.

¹⁰² Jared Farmer, like Philip Deloria and other scholars, has documented the pervasive use of Indian legends as sources for "a sense of antiquity in the absence of a deep history." See Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount:*

Hiawatha's release, the Massachusetts Historical Society chose to publish William Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation* replete with its telling of Squanto's first lesson in setting "corne" for the Pilgrims.¹⁰³ Longfellow's poem, ending as it did with Minnehaha's death and Hiawatha's retreat upon the arrival of white men, fit neatly into this edifying cosmology.¹⁰⁴ While Longfellow's work had its detractors, the bulk of *Hiawatha*'s readers—in so far as they purchased the text, sorted through newspaper reviews, attended recitals or musical performances based on the poem, and named their cities after its characters—accepted his interpretations of Schoolcraft's Ojibwa legends as part and parcel of the progress of the United States.¹⁰⁵ Editors of *The Protestant*, for example, reviewed *Hiawatha* as "purely American." It was something, indeed, "of which, as Americans, we ought to be proud." They observed that the poem, like the legends that inspired it, "is peculiarly our property... In scenery and illustration, in outline and in detail, there is no hint of any but a western hemisphere. Ossian-like, it has

Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 297; Deloria, *Playing Indian*.

¹⁰³ Charles Deane, ed., *History of Plymouth Plantation by William Bradford, the Second Governor of the Colony* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1856), 100.

¹⁰⁴ I disagree with Longfellow scholar Christoph Irmscher's contention that while "It would seem likely that Longfellow's softened version of Indian myth was intended to pander to stereotypes then prevalent in white mainstream America," the poet did not, as Robert Berkhofer has asserted, wish "to reinforce the antiquity of Hiawatha's time." Yet as Irmscher himself writes, Longfellow's readers would have found themselves "suspended between...the present in which... "Indians" have well-nigh vanished...and a past world..." Readers remained enmeshed in a nation that defined itself through the sense that Indians belonged to the continent's past. Christoph Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 110-114; Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 90.

¹⁰⁵ A number of critics assailed Longfellow's poem for its Indianness, indicating the degree to which they took his labors with Schoolcraft's ethnographies seriously. Those who fixated upon the poem's Indian sources could not envision how the legends could possibly speak to the concerns of a nation which they supposed was destined for greatness. *The Saturday Review*, for example, disdained that the book's myths are "the songs of men not destined to rise into a nation." Likewise, *The Lady's Newspaper* surmised that while "we read with interest, with admiration—...our hearts are untouched, for there is nothing in so wild a legend to make us happier, wiser, or better." Even the poet Emerson told Longfellow that *Hiawatha*'s Indian sources could not provide serious substance for a growing nation: "The dangers of the Indians, are that they are really savage, have poor, small sterile heads, no thoughts... and I blamed your tenderness now and then as I read, for accepting a legend or a song, when they had too little to give." For *The Saturday Review*'s opinion, see "The Mystic and the Song of Hiawatha," November 10, 1855; H.W.L. Dana Papers (HWLDP); LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 4; Longfellow National Historic Site (LNHS), Cambridge, Massachusetts. For *The Lady's Newspaper*, see "Literature: The Song of Hiawatha," November 24, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 6; LNHS. For Emerson quote, see Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Moncure Daniel Conway, November 30, 1855, describing a letter he received from Emerson dated November 25, 1855, in Hilien, ed., *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 503. [Vol. III]

fixed the fugitive legends of an unlettered race, and comes freighted with the flowers which spring from the virgin soil of a new world.”¹⁰⁶

But Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* did more than reiterate the motif of the vanishing Indian: by romanticizing the Native origins of corn and adapting Schoolcraft’s depictions of Ojibwa methods of maize cultivation to fit the tenor of its narrative, the poem depicted a continent awaiting more penetrative soil usage by agricultural masters of a different gender and race. For Longfellow’s contemporaries and for generations thereafter—populations whose sustenance and industrial development would increasingly revolve around expanding spaces of corn production and consumption—much of the poem’s resonance derived from key passages in which he framed traditional agricultural legends and practices of North American Indians as profoundly anti-modern. In the first of *Hiawatha*’s agricultural sections, “Hiawatha’s Fasting,” Hiawatha conquers the corn spirit “Mondamin” and, following Mondamin’s instructions, brings corn to his people. In the second, “Blessing the Corn-fields,” Longfellow depicts Ojibwa women planting and husking their corn, having learned those arts from Hiawatha. It is in this context that Minnehaha famously walks a “charmed circle”—in the nude—around her field in order to prevent crop damage. When newspapers around the country excerpted and discussed Longfellow’s depictions of the origin of corn and Indian methods of corn culture, they fixated on what appeared to be astonishing differences between Native and Euro-American modes of corn cultivation. Read against the gendered and racialized antebellum paradigms about optimal agricultural practices that farm journals and westward-bound emigrants recorded, *Hiawatha*’s presentation of Native methods for raising corn and managing soil rationalized dispossessing Indian people from their lands. In the same fashion, the enormously popular poem also offered a compelling origin story for those embarking on a decades-long quest to “improve” the nature of corn and transform it from a centerpiece in Native cosmologies to the most important crop in the United States.

THREE

¹⁰⁶ “Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*,” December 22, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 7; LNHS.

Our story might have yet another beginning. Some six months after *Hiawatha*'s publication and six weeks after sending his congratulatory message to the Cambridge poet, Charles Sumner delivered the "elaborate speech" at which he had hinted on the floor of the U.S. Senate. At face value, "The Crime Against Kansas" was a stinging response to Senator Steven Douglas' proposal to let popular sovereignty decide whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free or slave state. At its core, however, it—like the treaty that Joseph La Flesche and other Omaha leaders signed in Washington and like *Hiawatha*—told a story about soil that called for particular kinds of cultivation and, in so doing, rationalized Native dispossession. Addressing his fellow legislators (and, through reprints of his speech, a network of supporters), Sumner explained that only "A few short months" had "passed" since "savage" inhabitants had occupied Kansas Territory. But rather than cultivating its rich earth, he insisted, they merely "ran wild in its woods and prairies." In contrast, he intimated, free Americans of European descent had already started to read the landscape in a different manner. "[M]ore than any other region," Sumner extolled, this territory "occupies the middle spot of North America... To such advantages of situation, on the very highway between two oceans, are added a soil of unsurpassed richness...., calculated to nurture a powerful and generous people, worthy to be a central pivot of American institutions." Now that "this spacious mediterranean country" had become the domain of "freemen," Sumner foretold, American farmers would swiftly transform that wilderness into a veritable garden.¹⁰⁷

As with Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, the Senator's speech reinforced the premise that earlier Native occupants had passed over the Kansas landscape without disturbing its resources. Though they had lived upon the prairie and in the woods, he narrated, they had not utilized its soils to produce economic gains in ways that matched the young nation's aspirations. Given this logic, Sumner dismissed Native claims to the landscape. The processes by which the American government had been and was still removing actual Native people from Kansas Territory and other western regions, therefore, mattered little to him in comparison to the vacuum appearing in their absence. Now, he

¹⁰⁷ Charles Sumner, *The Crime against Kansas. The Apologies for the Crime. The Remedy. Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, in the Senate of the United States, 19th and 20th May, 1856.* (Boston: J.P. Jewett & Co., 1856), 3-4. For key scholarship on antebellum ideals of transforming wilderness, see Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*.

explained in his speech, the Indians' disappearance would enable free white farmers to take full advantage of the Territory's ostensibly untouched soil. American farmers' entrepreneurial spirits, he predicted, would soon transform Kansas into an agricultural cornerstone and a conduit for national prosperity. Sumner closed his story about the soil with the cautionary note that such growth would only occur if the Territory were to enter the Union as a free state. Were Kansas to permit slavery, it would be "the rape of a virgin Territory" and would prohibit the westward expansion of free institutions.¹⁰⁸ Shortly thereafter, his litany of charges against the slavery's expansion into "that...plundered territory" prompted South Carolina Congressman Preston Brooks to approach Sumner in the Senate chamber and cane him to the point of unconsciousness.¹⁰⁹

[Image 1.4]



Image 1.4 / "Southern chivalry - argument versus club's," 1856.

MAKING SENSE OF STORIES ABOUT THE SOIL

CONSUMPTION

¹⁰⁸ Sumner, *The Crime against Kansas. The Apologies for the Crime. The Remedy. Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, in the Senate of the United States, 19th and 20th May, 1856.*, 5. For how the ideology of "free labor" shaped Republican interest in the concept of "free soil" western territories, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁹ For a recent study of the caning, see William James Hull Hoffer, *The Caning of Charles Sumner: Honor, Idealism, and the Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

What are we to make of Sumner's allusion to *Hiawatha's* enormous popularity just weeks before his speech and Brooks' ensuing assault catapulted sectional rancor to the forefront of the public's consciousness? And how might we place Sumner's threat that slavery's extension would rape virgin land in conversation with the treaties that the Omaha signed and with *Hiawatha's* depiction of Native agricultural practices? Although we might read Sumner's letter as that of one friend sharing his worries with another, and—perhaps not wanting to burden the latter with those concerns—celebrating Longfellow's recent accomplishments, a more provocative examination would speculate that the speech for which Brooks would bludgeon Sumner contained a constellation of ideas connecting particular forms of soil use—especially that pertaining to corn production—to American progress and the practices of Native dispossession on which that progress hinged. Through the extent to which we can see these ideas resonating among Longfellow's readers (and inflaming dissenters like Brooks), they remind modern scholars that the “material and ideological” dimensions of agriculture formed the warp and woof of antebellum American culture.¹¹⁰

While historians frequently fixate on Sumner's caning and the struggles over “bleeding” Kansas as key signposts in the nation's march toward the Civil War, to focus on the outcome of the slavery question from a purely political perspective is to overlook the extent to which changing patterns of consumption were shaping antebellum imperatives to use land in particular ways and, in consequence, were accelerating practices of divesting North American Indians from the productive lands on which they lived.¹¹¹ It is, moreover, to elide the pervasiveness of antebellum ideas about how a

¹¹⁰ On agriculture as a material and ideological process, see Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*.

¹¹¹ For more on the relationships between consumption and environmental change, see discussions later in this chapter and in chapters two through five. For the relationship between antebellum racial hierarchies and the ideology of Manifest Destiny, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). On Bleeding Kansas, see James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" And the Coming of the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 124-134; Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 157-187. Louis Warren offers a thoughtful reading of what the disputes meant to families in this disputed region, especially as read through Buffalo Bill Cody's childhood, in Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). For an overview of ardent calls for and practices of removal, see Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating & Empire Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997). For a comparative analysis of postbellum Americans' belief in the necessity of ridding particular landscapes of Indians in order to craft National Parks, see Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford

feminized and racialized landscape, emptied of Indians and awaiting the stimulus of free, white male farmers' plows, ought to be used in the service of agriculture.¹¹²

Before looking west or moving to the realms of print culture or speech-making, therefore, we ought to speculate what Sumner and Longfellow might have consumed at their breakfast tables, perhaps before writing to one another, and ask what Brooks could have used to fuel his body on the day that he caned Sumner. We might even be so bold as to probe what they were wearing. As other scholars have argued, acts of consumption evident in food, fashion, or energy choices do not merely demand or extract select resources from particular landscapes or bioregions: they also transform individual bodies, larger populations, and complex relationships between human social structures and nature.¹¹³ A brief foray into how antebellum food and fashion consumption hinged on practices of corn production, then, may unlock key links between *Hiawatha's* resonance and the constellation of ideas embedded in "The Crime Against Kansas."

Corn played a ubiquitous part in American diets at the start of the 1850s.¹¹⁴ By looking at the "receipts," or recipes, recommended in popular contemporary American cookbooks, we can reasonably imagine that Longfellow, Sumner, and Brooks awoke to breakfasts featuring the grain on a frequent basis. In 1850, for instance, Catharine Beecher recommended breakfasting on Corn griddle cakes, corn muffins, something called a "Sachem's head corn cake," a bachelor's corn cake, one "Mrs. W's Corn Cake," Albany breakfast (corn) cakes, Kentucky corn dodgers, and an Ohio corn cake.¹¹⁵ Other

University Press, 1999). And on Gilded Age policies of assimilation as a means to further dispossess Indians, see Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (New York: Bison Books, 2001).

¹¹² On the ways in which farmers have construed the land in gendered and racialized terms, see discussion of "grammars" of gender and race, below.

¹¹³ Particularly important texts examining the links between consumption and human relationships with nature include William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*; Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Price, *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America*; Klinge, "Spaces of Consumption in Environmental History."; Mink, "It Begins in the Belly."; Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of Des* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

¹¹⁴ See chapter two for greater detail on practices of antebellum corn consumption and the Introduction as well as chapter three for more on the utility of cookbooks as historical evidence.

¹¹⁵ Catherine Beecher, *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book: Designed as a Supplement to Her Treatise on Domestic Economy, 3rd Ed.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1848), 94-104.

well-known cookbook authors articulated similar meals.¹¹⁶ “Hominy,” recommended Sarah Josepha Hale in 1852, “is generally eaten for breakfast” and made an “excellent” dish when “sliced and fried, after it has become cold.”¹¹⁷ In her opinion, New England’s beloved “Hasty pudding,” a well-stirred combination of “Indian meal” (a common name for cornmeal), water, salt, milk and molasses, also comprised a delicious morning repast when cooled, sliced, and browned, as did “Indian slapjacks” and “Indian meal cake.”¹¹⁸

Even if these men preferred wheat, rye, or oat-based foods to corn and, as cultural and political elites, had greater access than most to these other grains, they would have consumed corn in other forms. It would be no stretch of the imagination to speculate that they might have enjoyed thick slices of ham or bacon for breakfast. As later chapters explain, American cookbook authors formally promoted the virtues of corn-fattened animals from the Jacksonian era onwards, though the practice certainly predated the 1820s and 1830s. In 1838, the Virginian Mrs. Mary Randolph wrote that to “make the best bacon,” hogs “should be fed with corn, six weeks at least, before they are killed.”¹¹⁹ Dried beef for summer consumption, she added, should likewise be selected “from an animal well fatted with corn.”¹²⁰ The next year, Sarah Josepha Hale advised her readers that “Pork...fattened on corn is the best” and would be far more desirable for the table than that fed with still-house refuse.¹²¹ The prolific author Eliza Leslie promoted the same in 1840, explaining that hogs “should be kept up and fed with corn at least six weeks before they are killed.” This, she added, would produce much better pork than that from pigs set free to rummage through city garbage.¹²² And in 1848, Catherine Beecher noted in her *Domestic Receipt Book*, “Corn-fed Pork is best. Pork made by still-house

¹¹⁶ For a contemporary book dedicated entirely to cornmeal cookery, see Leslie, *The Indian Meal Book: Comprising the Best Receipts for the Preparation of That Article*.

¹¹⁷ Sarah Josepha Hale, *The Ladies’ New Book of Cookery* (New York: H. Long & Brother, 1852), 237.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 297, 387, 389.

¹¹⁹ Mary Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife: Or, Methodical Cook* (Baltimore: Plaskitt, Fite, 1838), 48-49. This copy was not the first version, and an 1836 edition offers the same advice. I have not yet compared these versions to the earliest, which was published in 1824.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²¹ Sarah Josepha Buell Hale, *The Good Housekeeper, or the Way to Live Well and to Be Well While We Live* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan & Company, 1839), 32-33. For a short analysis of the book’s significance, which notes that only thirty cookbooks had been written in the country until that point, see “Introduction: Sarah Josepha Buell Hale,” Michigan State University, http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/books/book_11.cfm.

¹²² Eliza Leslie, *Directions for Cookery, in Its Various Branches* (Philadelphia: E.L. Carey & Hart, 1840), 114.

slops is almost poisonous, and hogs that live on offal never furnish healthful food.”¹²³ Such advice, as we shall see, both reflected and influenced the nation’s dietary choices for generations.

Having consumed breakfasts of hominy and corn-fed ham, perhaps, these leaders would have finished dressing themselves for the day. But what would they have worn around Cambridge or Washington? In the rosiest of pictures, we might envision Longfellow, Sumner, and Brooks attired in shirts with freshly starched linen collars. Indeed, a historian of the caning incident notes that Brooks had been attired in “glossy waistcoat and tie” when he entered the Senate chamber and that the force of his gold-headed cane had bloodied Sumner’s “coat and shirt.”¹²⁴ If we look closely, drawings of the caning suggest the same. **[Image 1.4]** Such depictions imply that each man required a collar to complete his appearance. Supposing further that these political and cultural elites would have desired to distinguish themselves from the ranks of young urban clerks who relied on disposable paper collars then in vogue, it is likely that they would have selected collars of starched cloth.¹²⁵

The growth of the U.S. starch industry, which had expanded earlier that century in relation to the nation’s industrial textile producers, ensured that the starch required to stiffen such collars was in ample supply in 1855 and 1856.¹²⁶ By the middle of the

¹²³ Beecher, *Miss Beecher’s Domestic Receipt Book: Designed as a Supplement to Her Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 3rd Ed., 29-33. On Beecher, see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

¹²⁴ Hoffer, *The Caning of Charles Sumner: Honor, Idealism, and the Origins of the Civil War*, 7, 9.

¹²⁵ On detachable and paper collars, see Michael Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men’s Dress in the American Republic, 1760-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 96-97, 110.

¹²⁶ The roots of the cornstarch industry trace to 1807, when Britain prohibited other nations from engaging in commercial activity at ports under French control. Although American shipping was neutral, Britain’s intervention impeded the United States’ commerce with France. This prompted President Jefferson to declare an embargo, which temporarily closed the British textile industry from American consumers. A cessation of trade recurred during the War of 1812. During these trade interruptions, ongoing needs for cloth in the U.S. stimulated the growth of the northeastern textile industry and generated a demand for starch with which to finish the cloth. While wheat and especially potatoes could provide a great deal of the starch required to size the cloth produced in Lowell and other mill towns, the former starch was costly while the latter tended to freeze or rot before starch could be extracted. Around 1841, Thomas Kingsford, an English immigrant who arrived in the U.S. a decade before and worked in a Jersey City wheat starch factory run by fellow immigrant William Colgate, discovered that with slaked lime, he could extract starch from corn at lower cost, with greater efficiency, and with fewer environmentally noxious processes than those stemming from traditional methods of wheat starch production. Shortly after Kingsford helped Colgate switch his wheat starch plant to corn, “T. Kingsford & Son” established a factory in Bergen, New Jersey. In 1848, they constructed a new starch factory along the waterways of Oswego, New York, and by 1865, their heavily advertised cornstarch for laundry and kitchen use was commanding premium prices and

1850s, cornstarch had become a cheap replacement for wheat starch in household laundering, an onerous task that Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe wished “expunged” from the calendar of the “American housekeeper.”¹²⁷ As amounts of clothing produced from increasingly affordable manufactured cotton cloth grew, both in quantity and in yardage, more items needed washing, starching, and ironing on a weekly basis. And though the entire laundering process was the “first chore” to be hired out if a woman or family had any extra money, the end result mattered because, from the nineteenth-century onward, many Americans read clean, well-starched clothing—much like their bodies and homes—as signposts of virtue and social *éclat*.¹²⁸ The frequent appearance of stiffened collars and aprons in mid-century literature makes precisely this point. Stowe’s “Uncle Tom,” for instance, was dressed with “faultless wristbands and collar” to please the women in the St. Clare family.¹²⁹ Likewise, in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, “Jo” walked out the door in a “stiff, gentlemanly linen collar” as she left with “Meg” to attend a New Year’s Eve ball. Later, the fashion-savvy “Amy” wrote to their mother wishing that their hired help, “Hannah,” would starch her (Amy’s) aprons more heavily.¹³⁰ In an increasingly image-and-cleanliness-oriented society, therefore,

inspiring many imitators. Much of my data on the growth of the U.S. starch and glucose industries (which I explore in chapter five) has come from Brian Peckham’s long but excellent PhD dissertation on the corn refining industry. See Peckham, “Economics and Invention: A Technological History of the Corn Refining Industry of the United States,” 94-96, 149-163. I thank Deborah Warner for sharing her own scholarship on glucose with me, in which I found this source. For a shorter version of starch history, see E. Clark, *The Corn Refining Industry*. 1936? Accession 1720, Morris Sayre Papers, Box 4: Morris Sayre Public Addresses, The Corn Refining Industry, undated, The Hagley Museum & Library (Eleutherian Mills Historical Library), Wilmington. Though he might not have written it, the speech was attributed to Frederick Morris Sayre, and was probably published in the 1936 “Corn Husking Contest Issue” of the *Ohio Farmer*.

¹²⁷ Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman’s Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Science; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (New York: J.B. Ford & Co., 1869), 334.

¹²⁸ As historian Tera Hunter notes, industrialization meant that “laundry work became more dreadful” during the nineteenth century. Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), 56-57. Recently, Kathleen Brown has explored the laborious creation of genteel cleanliness and orderliness (in which the care of clothing and linen played a crucial role) as part of larger transformations in the Atlantic world. See Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹²⁹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Or, Life among the Lowly* (New York: Hurst & Company, 1901), 190.

¹³⁰ Jo also, much to Hannah’s amusement, starches an entire tub of laundry before “wrench[ing]” the clothes. Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (New York: Signet Classic, 2004), 25, 159-160.

cornstarch was becoming a “household necessity.”¹³¹ For men like Longfellow, Sumner, and Brooks, (corn)starched collars would have been *de rigueur*.

ANTEBELLUM AGRICULTURE

While elite, urban northerners like Longfellow and Sumner may not have regularly contemplated corn’s presence on their tables or in their clothing, Brooks, who represented a slaveholding state, was probably aware of its importance in slave rations.¹³² As a group, however, their likely tastes in eating and patterns in dressing suggest some of the ways in which the nation was relying upon American farmers, their families, slaves, and urban workers to produce greater quantities of corn and transform it into useful products. In places like southern Illinois or Iowa, where farmers were benefiting from ancient buildups of rich prairie loam, settlers were especially active in planting corn and transforming its nature. To satisfy personal needs and consumer demands both north and south of the Mason-Dixon line, as chapter two elaborates, settlers were increasingly apt to plant corn to feed the animals they wished to work and sell.¹³³ But unlike wheat or other crops whose seeds can “shatter,” wherein they fall upon the ground and more or less reproduce themselves without human intervention, corn can only be husked, shelled, and planted through human handiwork. Thus in choosing what kernels to plant for their animals and their own use, antebellum settlers (as humans have always done) selected for desirable characteristics. In this way, they continued to shape the nature of the plant.¹³⁴

¹³¹ For claims to its becoming an item of “household necessity,” see Oswego Starch Factory, *Oswego Starch Factory. Incorporated 1848. T. Kingsford & Son, Manufacturers of Pure and Silver Gloss Starch for the Laundry, Corn Starch and Prepared Corn for Culinary Use*. (Oswego, N.Y.: R.J. Oliphant, 1876), 3. Ephemera Collection, Trade Cards, Box 8, Food T-Z, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Still, not all in-home laundry work relied on cornstarch. Hunter notes that southern Black washerwomen after Reconstruction were still making their own starch from wheat bran. This is probably due to questions of affordability; if Kingsford commanded the premium prices that Peckham contends they did, then working class black women who laundered other families’ clothing in their homes probably found it cheaper to manufacture their own cleaning and starching agents. Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, 57. For comparative purposes, it could be informative to look into what starches that Native girls sent to boarding schools like Carlisle were taught to use, and what urban steam laundries relied upon.

¹³² See chapter two for more on slave rations.

¹³³ For an explanation as to why farmers planted corn at a particular distance from urban centers, see discussion of Von Thünen’s model in Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 48-52.

¹³⁴ For an important early twentieth century anthropological study of Native methods of corn selection, see Will, *Corn among the Indians of the Upper Missouri*. For mid-century corn improvers’ retrospective thoughts on corn selection, see especially Henry A. Wallace and Earl N. Bressman, *Corn and Corn Growing*, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley, 1937); Weatherwax, *Indian Corn in Old America*; Howard

Pollen, however, which carries half of corn's genetic code, is less-easily controlled than is a kernel's germ, which carries the other half. Like other plants subject to what is known as the xenia effect, wherein the male's genetic material influences the seed when it is fertilized, rather than appearing the following season, fertilization can cause kernels on any given ear of corn to differ from one to the next.¹³⁵ When wind carries a grain of pollen from a corn plant's stamen to the sticky silk on an ear of corn, which in turn conducts the pollen through the silk to an individual kernel of corn, much as a fallopian tube functions, that pollen will carry with it the "father" plant's genetic code. If white and yellow corn plants are near enough to one another, the wind may cause them to cross-pollinate; this is why husking sweet corn on summer afternoon might reveal white and yellow kernels on the same ear. Cotton Mather became one of the earliest Euro-Americans to observe and record this then-unnamed trait when he pondered why, on a friend's planting of red, blue, and yellow corn, the "red and blue row...infected three or four whole rows" of yellow on "the windward side," whereas "to the leeward side" much less of this effect was evident.¹³⁶ While agricultural and philosophical societies tinkered with this phenomena through the end of the eighteenth century, westward migration at the beginning of the nineteenth century—and the new forms of physical proximity among particular strains of plants that settlers' movements entailed—enabled settlers to radically change corn's nature and, by extension, their own culture.

As farmers began to settle Ohio, Indiana, and southern Illinois, their open-pollinated fields of corn (wherein wind conducted pollen from one plant to the next) begat generations of plants that were physically unlike anything that Native women had cultivated there before.¹³⁷ This is because settlers initially brought seeds with them when they moved west, rather than adopt what was already there. In particular, northeasterners brought hard, eight-rowed "flint" varieties of maize seeds, as this kind of corn was what

Walden, *Native Inheritance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). For the effects of twentieth century agricultural mechanization and hybrid corn production on Corn Belt culture, see Dial, "The Organized Corn Husking Contests". For analyses of, among other topics, the processes and effects of corn selection in the Americas and in South Africa, see Warman, *Corn and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance*; McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500-2000*.

¹³⁵ On the xenia effect, see Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, *Creating Abundance: Biological Innovation and American Agricultural Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

¹³⁶ Fussell, *The Story of Corn*, 63-64; Olmstead and Rhode, *Creating Abundance*, 77.

¹³⁷ For an overview of Indian agricultural practices, see R. Douglas Hurt, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987).

Iroquoian populations before them had adapted to their region's shorter growing seasons. When southern settlers bound for regions west of Appalachia did the same, they brought seeds from the region's softer, wider, and multi-rowed "dent" varieties. These probably had origins in what is now Mexico, and are thought to have appeared in Virginia and Louisiana through Spanish traders.¹³⁸ Thus when these two settler populations and their corn mixed in southern Illinois and Indiana, they inadvertently (and later, intentionally) created what have since come to be known as the Corn Belt Dents. These dents bespoke a whole new kind of corn. So-named for the dimple that appears on the kernels when the corn is dried, these not only retained the southern dents' excellent animal feeding qualities and particular physiological characteristics—all the better to fatten the hogs Mrs. Randolph preferred—but they also inherited weather-hardiness from the northern flints.¹³⁹

Such is the story of "Reid's Yellow Dent," arguably the most well known of these crosses. In the 1840s, Robert Reid moved, as did many of his time, from Ohio to Illinois. After unsuccessfully planting his new fields with a "gourdseed" dent cultivar from Ohio, which originally came from Virginia, he inter-planted his fields with a "flint" corn that he had procured from a neighbor. Unintentionally, the two strains cross-pollinated in his field. Yet it was to such a utilitarian and aesthetically pleasing effect that he and his son continued their interplanting; some five decades of seed selection and wind-born pollination later, his "Reid's Yellow Dent" won the top prize for corn at the Chicago World's Fair.¹⁴⁰

By the middle of the 1850s, therefore, farmers like Reid were cultivating new kinds of corn plants and in greater quantities, thanks to the government's efforts at emptying large tracts of agriculturally promising lands from their Indian inhabitants and to demands arising from contemporary industrial developments. Other factors supported their efforts as well. The growth of railroads, for instance, enabled settlers to send corn-fed animals to urban consumers with less risk than driving them to market on the hoof entailed. Alternatively, no longer hindered by the limits of waterborne transportation,

¹³⁸ Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*, 47-54.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴⁰ The story of Reid's Yellow Dent is a foundational point among corn historians. This version relies on Olmstead and Rhode, *Creating Abundance*, 72. Their rendition came from Wallace and Bressman, *Corn and Corn Growing*, 208-209.

farmers could deposit crops in new regional elevators to await optimum pricing in relation to consumer demands for corn-based foodstuffs and household supplies.¹⁴¹

CULTIVATION NARRATIVES

As the most “progressive” among these farmers—and for that matter, “progressive” Indians like Joseph La Flesche—plowed tracts of prairie land, sowed seeds, cultivated fields, and dreamt of their markets, they also wrote about their agricultural endeavors. Through a genre of writing I identify as “cultivation narratives,” a kind of widely circulated agricultural-autobiography popular from the mid-nineteenth century well into the twentieth, farmers shared their experiences with one method of farming or another, wrote of their successes in particular landscapes (and less often, their failures), and puffed how their own agricultural knowledge and implements better enabled them to meet market demands. These narratives appeared in government publications, newspapers, and agricultural journals with striking regularity.

During the spring of the year in which Longfellow would release *Hiawatha*, for example, the U.S. Patent Office circulated packets containing a small number of seeds from a strain of corn, patented in 1853 and bearing the name of one John Brown, a resident of Belknap County, New Hampshire, to farmers around the country.¹⁴² After many years of work, according to Brown’s brother, the former had improved a “hardy,” “prolific,” and “much esteemed” eight-rowed strain of yellow corn “originally obtained” from the Wampanoags and known in former times as “King Philip corn,” having been named in honor of that chief.¹⁴³ In 1855, the Patent Office desired to learn how it would

¹⁴¹ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 97-147.

¹⁴² "Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1855: Agriculture," (Cornelius Wendell, Printer, 1856), 169-181.

¹⁴³ D.J. Browne, *The Hasty Pudding; a Poem, in Three Cantos...With a Memoir on Maize or Indian Corn* (New York: C.M. Saxton, 1856), 43-44. The act of naming this corn, combined with the idea that Brown improved it, contributed to a national dialogue that reified the idea that white men were central to the project of improving corn they had “received” from the Indians. This strain of corn, according to the Brown(e) brothers, was said to have been inherited or appropriated from King Philip, also known as Metacomet, an important figure in New England’s history. King Philip’s father Massasoit, a peer of “Squanto,” had been chief of the Wampanoag tribe. When King Philip/Metacomet assumed leadership, he organized a very bloody war against New England’s settlers in the late seventeenth century. Over a number of generations, “King Philip’s War” exerted powerful ideas upon New Englanders about the idea of the “noble savage.” Yet these ideas changed over time, and as one source contends, whereas King Philip had been viewed as “a virulent and implacable enemy,” by 1820, he had become, in memory, “a great warrior, a penetrating statesman, and a mighty prince.” Highlighting the gift of corn as from King Philip—

grow outside of New Hampshire and so sent packets of seeds to farmers around the country. The following year, the Office circulated farmers' reports on their experiences with the improved Brown / King Philip corn during the 1855 growing season. In Boone County, Indiana, A.J. Boone reported that the "King Philip" or "Brown" corn he had received from the Patent Office and planted in early June, 1855 ripened early and yielded "far better than I expected." He anticipated that it would be useful for "meal, and for table use, while green." John P. Haller in Allen County, Ohio said that under his care, his sample of corn matured in ten weeks, as opposed to the four months required by other varieties. G.P. Walker, from Decatur County, Iowa, planted the same corn in his "richest ground, in a very careful manner, on the 9th of May," 1855. He watered it when necessary, and over the summer watched an "abundant" yield ripen "fully" by mid-August. In turn, he "distributed this corn liberally among [his] neighbors, both in Southern Iowa and Northern Missouri, to a distance of 60 miles." He expected it to be "thoroughly tested" in 1856.¹⁴⁴

While the Patent Office used farmers' reports as a form of agricultural reconnaissance about seeds' performances in different geographic conditions, the farmers who collaborated with them gained something else: the opportunity to publicly demonstrate their mastery over a crop and a plot of land. More farmers, however, attempted to access such ideological wages by contributing to the agricultural press, through which they spoke to wider reading publics. In his chronicle of raising 1400 bushels of corn on eighteen acres of ground during 1853, for example, Jonathan T. Comly did not hesitate to share his expansive "cultivation narrative:"

not just any Native figure—and articulating federally-sanctioned improvement upon it denied brutal histories of conquest related to the circumstances preceding King Philip's War and during the decades thereafter. It also rationalized ideologies about land and Native peoples alike as features to be further conquered. By counting kernels, assessing soil qualities, calculating yields, and ensuring the separation of different samples in the field, these farmers performed their duties as model male republican citizens and participated in an explicitly national project that would further de-Indianize corn. For quote about the transformation of King Philip's memory, see Wilbur Lang Schramm, "Hiawatha and Its Predecessors," 1932; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 1; LNHS. Schramm suggested that we may see this sentiment changing within a number of early nineteenth century texts dedicated to the memory of King Philip, for example in Rev. James Wallis Eastburn and Robert Charles Sands, *Yamoyden: A Tale of the Wars of King Philip: In Six Cantos* (New York: James Eastburn / Clayton & Kingsland, 1820).

¹⁴⁴ For experiments by Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York farmers, in addition to the western farmers noted above, see "Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1855: Agriculture," 171-178.

I prepared two acres of ground in the following manner, vis: In January last I spread fourteen loads of barn yard manure to the acre—I ploughed the ground from two and a half to three inches deep. The latter part of April rolled it, then spread eight loads of compost prepared in the hog-pen by throwing in dirt, plaster and straw. I then harrowed the ground well and furrowed it very shallow, four feet three inches apart, and planted the corn two grains in a hill, from eighteen to twenty inches apart—dropping a handful of ashes or plaster on five hills, (one bushel of plaster and two bushels of ashes,) the 10th day of May. In tending, I first harrowed it with the fallow-harrow, going over once to the row. I next cultivated it twice, going once to the row each time, then ploughed it from the row four inches deep, I then drop[p]ed in the furrow super-phosphate of lime (Mapes) at the rate of one hundred and fifty pounds per acre, I then cultivated it again, going twice to the row, then ploughed it to the row two inches deep, then cultivated it going twice to the row, and finished tending by going over it once to the row with the cultivator June 22d. It was topped Sept. 27th, and one acre was measured and husked Nov. 29th, shelled and cleaned the 30th, yielded one hundred and six bushels and twenty-three quarts.—The second acre was husked and shelled Dec. 1st, and yielded one hundred and two bushels and twenty-seven quarts; making two hundred and nine bushels and eighteen quarts from the two acres. We shelled sixty-one ears and had from them one bushel shelled corn.¹⁴⁵

Comly's cultivation narrative relies on specific measures of time, space, and volume and leaves no room for the reader to speculate or doubt how he acted upon the soil with his body, his tools, or his other inputs. More than a dozen times over the course of a year, he explains, he prepared, enriched, and sweetened the soil. Presented in a forum that would have been accessible to readers beyond his immediate neighborhood, his cultivation narrative permitted a wide network of farmers to enact his methods and attempt to reproduce his results. Indeed, the physical location in which the clipping exists as a historical artifact suggests as much. Printed either in an agricultural society's journal or in a local newspaper, someone believed that Comly's narrative was so useful or promising that they pasted it inside the front cover of their family's receipt book. Their action enabled Comly to make a place for himself in a world defined by a particular kind of soil use.

Other cultivation narratives provide additional evidence of the extent to which antebellum agriculturalists celebrated their own progress and, in pushing for collective improvement, shaped idealized images of progressive agricultural practices and

¹⁴⁵ Jona. T. Comly, "Raising Corn" December 10, 1853. Recipe book, ca. 1819-1884, Vol. 2, Document 1381, Manuscript Reading Room, Winterthur Library, Winterthur, Delaware.

agriculturalists themselves. J.S. Yeargin, for instance, believed that his own “experience in farming” would make good material for the “columns of the *Prairie Farmer*” and decided to insert himself in its public.¹⁴⁶ Writing to its editors one evening in May, 1857, the advent of planting season spurred Yeargin to articulate the most important actions a progressive farmer should take:

“The time to plant in this latitude is from the 5th to the 15th of May, having the...ground in good order, and being careful in selecting your seed corn. If it is soaked in water impregnated with lime, it will prevent the cut worm eating it. During ten years of farming I have not had to replant one acre destroyed by the worm. After it is planted your crop is half made. Give it four plowings--it is all it needs. In the fall, it may be to your advantage to cut it up, putting one hundred hills in a shock. If it is well tied, it will keep all winter.”

Like Comly, Yeargin believed that he too had something valuable to share: his ten years of farming with lime-soaked corn, along with his autumnal preparations of corn shocks for winter and spring feed. Yet knowledge was not the only thing he shared, for his cultivation narrative also displayed his thoughtfulness in seed selection, ground preparation, and tying shocks of corn up “well.” These behaviors, he added, differentiated him from farmers who wasted time by improvidently attending “hickory pole” dances and later suffered the financial consequences.¹⁴⁷ Both aspects of his cultivation narrative, therefore, reveal how deploying particular farming practices shaped farmers’ self-images and enabled them to construct public models of ideal farmers.

Though cultivation narratives like these laced the pages of journals like the *Prairie Farmer* or the *New England Farmer*, men like William Beard, who wrote to the *Prairie Farmer*’s editors from Iowa, encouraged more of the same. “Should there not be more said and written on the subject of corn culture?” he wrote. “It has become a very important crop. If our farmers would interchange their modes of culture more freely through the *Prairie Farmer*, very many would be benefited.” Interested in other farmers’ modes of planting, cultivating, and harvesting, he offered to “give you my plan and then will be happy to hear from others.” Like Comly and Yeargin, Beard also articulated how

¹⁴⁶ For theoretical work on reading publics, see Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). For a study of antebellum farm journal readership, see Sally McMurray, “Who Read the Agricultural Journals? Evidence from Chenango County, New York, 1839-1865,” *Agricultural History* 63 (1989).

¹⁴⁷ J.S. Yeargin, “Corn—Remedy for Cut Worm—Cut up Your Corn,” *The Prairie Farmer*, May 21, 1857, 161.

and when he acted upon the soil. The great secret he sought to share was “to plow deep and well.” Acting “well” on the field, however, was subjective at best. While soils and weather cycles made every locality different, in Beard’s case, plowing “well” also meant using two horses and relying on large, expensive equipment. His technologies, of course, helped distinguish him from “many who plow, harrow, and plant, in a very careless manner.” They also differentiated him from those who could not afford the upkeep of horses, the machinery, or even land in the first place, and from traditional indigenous practices. Nevertheless, to those whose “corn is not as good as their neighbors,” Beard asserted that his methods, “practiced...for many years” would be of some assistance:

Plow deep and close—harrow until in good tilth—plant with a machine which has a roller or wheel with a six inch tread to pack the earth on the corn as soon as large enough, (which is sooner than most farmers think it will do.) I take a two horse harrow, made for the purpose, in the shape of a letter V. The side pieces are seven feet long—of four by four inch scantling—the beam or tongue runs ahead of the harrow eighteen inches—run wide end (which is five feet wide) foremost. Attach handles to the other end, a little to one side to avoid walking on the corn—if not heavy enough use weights, that it may do some execution. *Straddle* every row. The hindmost teeth are first put fourteen inches apart. Set nearer if you use it the second time.

The advantage of this form of a harrow is, you have hold of the “critter” in the right place, and can guide it where you wish. The teeth can be set much closer to the corn than if you put the other end foremost. I know of no one who has tried this harrow who has abandoned it. I weight mine down the second time going over, and it does the execution of the common cultivator.

Now, when I come to plow my corn I can do it much better than my neighbors, who commence with the plow in the first place. I use a two horse cultivator or plow, built to run *straddle* of the row. I sometimes harrow twice and plow but once—sometimes plow twice. I have but little use for the hoe.

There is great advantage to be derived in planting corn by horse machinery. The corn occupies a very narrow space and is much easier to cultivate. The first time I harrow, I make the dirt meet in the corn hill—the second time I throw in from one to two inches about the hill, so that, if the corn has anything of a start of the weeds, I cover them all. The great point is, to plow deep and well. My corn does not cost me near as much for cultivation as it formerly did under the hoe system.¹⁴⁸

By using horses and machinery to bring up corn, by planting it more closely together to increase yield, by killing weeds that would otherwise decrease profits, and by writing about it in ways that would spread the gospel of intelligent farming to others,

¹⁴⁸ William Beard, "Corn Management," *The Prairie Farmer*, March 30, 1857, 177.

these farmers did more than act as agents in the agricultural public defining much of the antebellum United States. By writing about their actions in the genre and forums in which they did, Comly, Yeargin, and Beard performed and promulgated the efforts of free, white male agriculturalists who sought to improve or otherwise shape a subservient “nature.” And in circulating their cultivation narratives, they articulated how demands for the land and labor required to produce the crops that the growing nation demanded, as Frieda Knobloch reminds us, also “structur[ed] social and political life.”¹⁴⁹ Finally, their writings hint at important connections among antebellum ideas about gender, race, and agricultural labor; these ideological frameworks, in turn, suggest why and how the same culture that celebrated Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* as it did also engaged in the bloody disagreements over land use evident in the conflicts surrounding Kansas’ entrance into the Union and in the decades of Indian removal bookending the Civil War.

GRAMMARS OF GENDER AND RACE

Patterns of antebellum consumption and widely circulated narratives about idealized cultivation methods illuminate much of the material and ideological contexts in which the Omaha tribe’s 1854 treaty, Longfellow’s 1855 publication, and Sumner’s divisive speech in the spring of 1856 collectively operated. We cannot, however, understand the ways in which they functioned without returning to Sumner’s allegations that slavery’s extension amounted to the “rape” of “virgin territory.” By framing the issue of popular sovereignty in this way, a policy that, if passed, would have permitted slavery in the western territories, Sumner reinforced a set of gendered and racialized paradigms about how the land required to produce the corn and other crops upon which the nation depended ought to be utilized.

His language choices call to mind a long historiography. In 1950, Henry Nash Smith argued that the trope of “virgin” land—and the promises embedded in developing it—influenced the course of American development.¹⁵⁰ Two and a half decades later, Annette Kolodny expanded upon Smith’s premise. She insisted, however, that not the land’s virginity but America’s “experience of the land as essentially feminine”—a

¹⁴⁹ Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*, 2-3.

¹⁵⁰ See Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*.

profoundly imaginative act—was its “oldest and most cherished fantasy.” Looking to nineteenth-century literature as a key body of evidence, Kolodny argued that depictions of the land as either “filial” or tempting, or alternatively, as mother or mistress “affected... movements on the landscape.”¹⁵¹ White, pro-slavery southerners, for instance, harnessed a paternal view of their social relations and so recast what had been “virgin” southern states’ soils as maternal landscapes; in their eyes, these landscapes had become the willing sexual partners which had nurtured their civilization.¹⁵²

Recently, scholars like Virginia Scharff have extended Kolodny’s work by examining how individuals and groups in American history have “acted” on the land based on “grammars of gender” and, importantly, have probed what “consequences for people and other organisms and systems” their actions have held.¹⁵³ But grammars of gender do not, and in the nineteenth century, did not exist or operate apart from what we might call grammars of race. The prospect of slavery’s extension—and the possible presence of African Americans in the west in large numbers—thus complicated the antebellum trope of land-as-female to which Sumner alluded. For many writers and politicians, the environmental degradation that enslaved workers wrought on cotton and sugar plantations precipitated racialized and gendered readings of both southern and western landscapes. Abolitionists, Paul Outka has noted, were aware of the ways in which slavery “explicitly connected racial violence and environmental degradation” through monoculture and how “commodified nature,” in turn, undermined the idea of the

¹⁵¹ See Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, 4, 71-73, 137. For a summary of how Smith and Kolodny have furthered historians’ understanding of how nineteenth-century Americans’ ideas about gender operated to transform the land, see Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*, 7-9. By the early 1990s, Richard White concluded that not just historical actors but historians themselves had been especially culpable in reading the land in gendered terms. Old Western Historians, he notes, “culturally coded this far side of the frontier [where “nature reigned”] as feminine: there Mother Nature took care of her children.” On the near side of the frontier, where eastern “culture” reigned, he notes, “Nature...existed in much the same way women supposedly existed within a Victorian family: Limited to its proper sphere and fruitful within that sphere, nature yielded a proper economy and society.” Thus for these historians, “it was, of course, necessary that the land on the far side of the frontier be “virgin,” awaiting its white American groom.” In this manner, the “Old Western Historians thus formulated...a West that produced...men to match its mountains—that is, men able to overcome and dominate a feminine nature.” Richard White, “Trashing the Trails,” in *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, ed. Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 28, 35.

¹⁵² Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, 131.

¹⁵³ See Virginia J. Scharff, “Introduction,” in *Seeing Nature through Gender*, ed. Virginia J. Scharff (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), xiv.

“slave pastoral.”¹⁵⁴ In contrast to slavery’s advocates, many antislavery activists read the fertility of southern soil as in special likelihood of being raped, or alternatively, as serving as a kind of amoral seductress.¹⁵⁵

Outka’s argument about widespread northern disdain for slave-despoiled southern landscapes resonates with the course of antebellum debates about western lands. For individuals like Sumner, who saw Kansas Territory as virgin in the apparent absence of penetrative Native agricultural activities, and, as we have seen, quite fertile, the fact that slave-grown crops of cotton, tobacco, and rice regularly wore out the lands on which they were grown provided crucial evidence that slavery might violate western landscapes in a like manner. Such proof mattered in a political and cultural milieu idealizing western lands as not only virgin but also as white. During the early national period, Americans’ needs to represent their nation as civilized and stable had shifted their colonial reliance on the image of a fertile, rebellious Indian princess towards the figure of the much whiter and far more chaste “Columbia.” The same cultural currents that reshaped white Americans’ preferences for their national icons altered their views about the continent’s physical spaces and thereby transformed western spaces from “wilderness” inhabited only by Indians to desirable, arable, and white land.¹⁵⁶ Reading western landscapes as Sumner did—gendered as feminine, racialized as white, and seen as yet-unravished by the rapacious practices of slave-grown monocultures—thus helps explain his argument that permitting slavery in Kansas would lead to environmental and cultural decimation. His story about the soil, therefore, functioned not only in relation to the practices of consumption and cultivation that were shaping the course of national development, but also to a set of gendered and racialized representations of the landscape. It is this larger body of (agri)cultural baggage, then, which we must use to read Longfellow’s epic. In this way, we can better gauge the material and symbolic significance of Indian corn in the antebellum United States.

LONGFELLOW’S *HIAWATHA*: “OUR FIRST AND ONLY FABLE OF THE ORIGIN OF CORN”

¹⁵⁴ Paul Outka, *Race and Nature: From Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 7.

¹⁵⁵ Diane Roberts, *The Myth of Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88-89.

¹⁵⁶ Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 51-54.

Audiences on both sides of the Atlantic embraced Longfellow's epic poem upon its release and for years thereafter. *Hiawatha* sold 4,000 copies on its first day of publication, and 10,000 were in print a month later. By March of 1856, shortly before Sumner commented on the poem's "successes," its publishers had issued 30,000 copies. A year later, 50,000 were in print. Longfellow himself expected *Hiawatha* to sell an additional 2,000 copies per year even as late as 1860.¹⁵⁷ In addition to official printings by publishers Ticknor & Fields, innumerable drawing room readings, staged performances, and artistic interpretations circulated *Hiawatha*'s tales for years following its release. Its picturesque and sentimental explorations of love, marriage, and death, along with its racialized narrative of progress and a hierarchical development of civilization suited it for middlebrow musical and artistic adaptations, especially in the operatic and melodramatic stylings in vogue during the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁸ The poem's popularity transcended other cultural spaces, as well. In 1857, the recently retired Massachusetts Senator and Whig orator Edward Everett reported riding on "a noble first class steamer called the 'Hiawatha'" and added that he had heard of another named the "Minnehaha."¹⁵⁹ As *Hiawatha* historian Michael Pisani surmises, the publication of *Hiawatha* was "a cultural event" which "captured the popular fancy as did no other English language poem its size."¹⁶⁰ Its legacy even remains with us today, as place names based upon characters in the poem, especially "Hiawatha" and "Minnehaha," dot the maps in at least twenty-nine and twenty-six states, respectively.¹⁶¹ In 1856, for instance, less than a year after the poem's publication, a group of white settlers arrived to an area just south of Sioux City. Showing both the poem's resonance

¹⁵⁷ Cynthia D. Nickerson, "Artistic Interpretations of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 'The Song of Hiawatha,' 1855-1900," *American Art Journal* 16, no. 3 (1984): 49.

¹⁵⁸ See for example Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). On the work's picturesque qualities, see Virginia Jackson, "Longfellow's Tradition; or Picture-Writing a Nation," *Modern Language Quarterly* 59 (1998). On artistic renditions of *Hiawatha*, see Pisani, "Longfellow, Robert Stoepel, and an Early Musical Setting of Hiawatha (1859)," 49-76; Nickerson, "Artistic Interpretations of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 'The Song of Hiawatha,' 1855-1900," 54.

¹⁵⁹ Edward Everett to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, June 4, 1857, in Andrew Hilen, ed., *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, vol. IV (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 39; Office of History and Preservation United States Congress, "Edward Everett," <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=E000264>.

¹⁶⁰ Pisani, "Longfellow, Robert Stoepel, and an Early Musical Setting of Hiawatha (1859)," 53, 46.

¹⁶¹ Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape*, 253.

among antebellum Americans and their hopes to plow the region's soils to corn, they quickly settled on "Mondamin" for its name.¹⁶²

Though Longfellow struggled to remain true to Schoolcraft's ethnographic research in crafting *Hiawatha*, the poem is far from the accurate depiction of Ojibwa lore that Longfellow implied in his preface and footnotes. Indeed, its sentiments and its popularity derived more from its Euro-American framework, vis-à-vis Longfellow's elaborations upon Schoolcraft's selective interpretations, than from actual Ojibwa legends. As other scholars have detailed, Longfellow superimposed the historic Hiawatha of the Iroquois League onto Schoolcraft's translations of Chippewa-Algonquin-Ojibwa legends. Jane Johnson, Schoolcraft's wife of Ojibwa descent, had procured these legends and did the bulk of the translating. In turn, the Cambridge-based poet wove those legends into European national epic poems.¹⁶³ In a private letter sent following *Hiawatha*'s publication, Schoolcraft himself thanked Longfellow for his efforts. "You have rendered justice to my assiduity in the labor of collecting legends," he wrote. Moreover, he extolled, *Hiawatha*, unlike previous works dealing with Indian mythology, successfully "*generalized* fragmentary legends, & *invested* them with a vitality of description & a poetic garb, which we had no reason to expect from such barren, & disjointed materials" (emphasis added).¹⁶⁴ Yet for all of Schoolcraft's praise for Longfellow's assiduous studies and creative interpretations, the ethnographer himself had, in fact, previously "expung[ed] passages where it was necessary to avoid tediousness of narration, triviality of circumstances, tautologies, gross, incongruities, and vulgarities."¹⁶⁵ The legends that Longfellow conveyed, therefore, did not merely

¹⁶² Their decision to name the region in this way was a self-conscious allusion to the region's fertility and to the settlers' intentions to grow the corn that would, in turn, provide their economic link to the larger world. The town was platted in the late 1860s, and by 1881, had a 100,000 bushel cribbing capacity. Its grain dealers may have handled double that amount, as many as 200,000 bushels of corn in 1881, and boosters touted that "its trade in corn is not second to that of any town on the line of the Sioux City & Pacific railway." See *History of Western Iowa, Its Settlement and Growth: A Comprehensive Compilation of Progressive Events Concerning the Counties, Cities, Towns, and Villages—Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers and Business Men, with an Authentic History of the State of Iowa*, 291.

¹⁶³ Lockard, "The Universal Hiawatha," 110-111. For the ways in which Longfellow staged his dependence on external sources, see Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux*, 106-124.

¹⁶⁴ Henry Rowe Schoolcraft to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, June 16, 1856; HWLP; Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Letters from Henry Rowe Schoolcraft to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Item 4950, HOU.

¹⁶⁵ Quoting Schoolcraft, see Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape*, 298; Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, Conn.:

reiterate those that Jane Johnson had gathered and translated for her husband's research; they were highly mediated products of complicated mid-century cultural mores.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the ways in which Longfellow hybridized Schoolcraft's legends, shortly after *Hiawatha's* publication, Longfellow observed that “[t]here is something in the poem, which has taken hold of the popular fancy.”¹⁶⁶ Much of that fancy derived from the juxtaposition of the anti-modernism embedded in Longfellow's version of Schoolcraft's Ojibwa legends about corn cultivation with antebellum controversies about the future of the west's seemingly “virgin” soils. For a nation increasingly dependent on market-oriented crop production and moving toward war over questions related to soil use in western territories, the poet's depiction of anachronistic, female-centered Native agriculture resonated with a widely shared understanding that free, white, male U.S. citizens wielding plows and other implements would cultivate corn on valuable western soils far more efficiently than Native women who did not produce commodity crops. We can see such viewpoints at work in western settlers' actions, including the 1855 protests that western settlers filed against the treaty that La Flesche and the other Omaha had signed and their insistence that they did not wish to see Indians occupying “the most highly favored section of the territory.”¹⁶⁷ Those settlers did not believe that the Omaha, though their reservation would establish them in one place and though La Flesche would encourage his peers to turn to farming, would use the reservation's water, timber, or soil to the market-driven capacity that they themselves might. In the same spirit, Henry Pendleton, a semi-literate Pennsylvanian who had “bought a clame” in Nebraska Territory just over the Missouri line in the summer of 1856 and had “gone to farming or trying to a little,” used a letter to Emeline Guernsey, the woman he called “Mother,” to explain how his recent attempts at breaking prairie soil and planting thirty acres of corn had granted him a deeper connection to the land than its previous occupants had enjoyed. Whereas, he wrote, “1 ½ years goe the read man romed over the prairie,” in those same lands, he observed, “now wheat corn &

Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 16-17; Henry R. Schoolcraft, *The Myth of Hiawatha, and Other Oral Legends, Mythologic and Allegoric, of the North American Indians* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1856), viii.

¹⁶⁶ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to Ferdinand Freiligrath, March 25, 1856 in Hilien, ed., *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 532. [Vol. III]

¹⁶⁷ Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 73.

potatoes are a growing the land here is very productive cucumber & pees are very plenty.” For Pendleton, as with the other emigrants from Illinois, New York, and New England who settled the land around his, corn production for plow-toting livestock would be the cornerstone of the civilization they hoped to establish. Turning over prairie soil and planting those tracts to the “primary crop” from which he hoped to make a living crowned Pendleton’s husbandry with an aura of legitimacy that his image of far-roaming “read” men could not.¹⁶⁸

Antebellum readers sharing beliefs akin to Pendleton’s fixated upon Longfellow’s relation of the origin of corn and of Indian methods of corn cultivation because those depictions—embedded in the ideals of the vanishing Indian—crafted a sense of the nation’s future. Close readings of the poem’s corn-centered passages and contemporary responses to those sections illuminate much of *Hiawatha*’s resonance. Early in *Hiawatha*, Longfellow used “Hiawatha’s Fasting” to signal a turning point in the Indians’ progress toward modernity and civilization. Praying for “profit of the people, / For advantage of the nations,” Hiawatha begins a seven day fast in hopes of determining more substantive and reliable food sources for his people than game, the fruits of the forest, or the fish of the streams and lakes.¹⁶⁹ On the fourth day of his fast, he receives a vision of Mondamin, who approaches

“Dressed in garments green and yellow
Coming through the purple twilight,
Through the splendor of the sunset;
Plumes of green bent o’er his forehead,
And his hair was soft and golden.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Henry Pendleton to EDG, July 13, 1856; GFP; box 4, folder 28, HL. Pendleton was writing to Emeline Guernsey, a Pennsylvania widow whom he regarded as an adopted “Mother,” a “benefactor & Friend.” Pendleton had spent a summer with the Guernsey family earlier in the decade and though he had moved on, he still regarded Emeline and her children with enormous affection. After leaving their household, he moved to “Illinois” in search of work and affordable land. Finding himself priced out of what the state’s railroads asked for their properties, however, Pendleton moved further west. Over the next few years, the two continued a regular correspondence, and she eventually moved her family to Iowa. While Guernsey’s letters to Pendleton have disappeared, she saved his, and through those we can see his descriptions of life in Nebraska Territory and his attempts to convince her to move west. For additional letters from Pendleton to EDG between 1856 and 1859, see items in GFP; box 4, folder 28, HL. For a later letter from Emeline to her son William about Pendleton’s accident with a threshing machine and his subsequent return to farming, see EDG to William Donaldson Guernsey, March 27, 1863; GFP; box 2, folder 20; HL.

¹⁶⁹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Revised Edition...The Song of Hiawatha*, vol. III (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1873), 184-186.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

Mondamin informs Hiawatha that his prayers had been heard and that “by struggle and by labor / You shall gain what you have prayed for.” For three successive nights, Hiawatha and Mondamin wrestle. On the sixth night of Hiawatha’s fast and the third night of their wrestling, Mondamin informs Hiawatha that he (Hiawatha) will overcome Mondamin on the seventh and last night of his fast. Leaving instructions for the future cultivation of corn, Mondamin instructs Hiawatha to

Make a bed for me to lie in,
Where the rain may fall upon me,
Where the sun may come and warm me;
Strip these garments, green and yellow,
Strip this nodding plumage from me,
Lay me in the earth, and make it
Soft and loose and light above me.
“Let no hand disturb my slumber,
Let no weed nor worm molest me,
Let not Kahgahgee, the raven,
Come to haunt me and molest me,
Only come yourself to watch me,
Till I wake, and start, and quicken,
Till I leap into the sunshine.”¹⁷¹

On the seventh and final night of his fast, Hiawatha defeats Mondamin and begins the process of cultivating corn. Throughout the spring, he “Kept the dark mould soft above [the corn he planted], / Kept it clean from weeds and insects, / Drove away, with scoffs and shoutings, / Kahgahgee, the king of the ravens.”¹⁷² When the maize came up later in the summer, Longfellow writes, Hiawatha called his family and friends, and

Showed them of his wondrous vision,
Of his wrestling and his triumph,
Of this new gift to the nations,
Which should be their food forever.

To celebrate this marvelous event, he “Gave the Feast of Mondamin” that fall “And made known unto the people / This new gift of the Great Spirit.”¹⁷³

Although it seems that Longfellow’s description of Hiawatha’s first cultivation of corn celebrated native histories of Indian corn—indeed, by relying on Schoolcraft’s

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 189-190.

¹⁷² Ibid., 193.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 194.

studies it purports to instruct readers in corn's indigenous origins—it actually placed that creation in a flat, ahistorical past.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Longfellow's poetry conveyed a profound sense of Native passivity. Here, all Hiawatha must do is prepare the soil, notably without a harrow, plow, or even a hoe, remove the husks from the ear of corn, and—without applying lime or other soil enhancers—watch Mondamin grow.¹⁷⁵ In “Hiawatha's Fasting,” the title character does not enrich the ground, select seeds, or use agricultural implements.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, his cultivation of corn, limited to the creation of loose ground and observation, lacks the self-consciousness characterizing the narratives circulated by the Agricultural Branch of the U.S. Patent Office and by farmers in progressive agricultural journals.¹⁷⁷ For Longfellow's readers, such literary evidence of apparent ahistoricity and passivity in Native modes of corn cultivation contrasted with the manner in which antebellum agricultural discourses depicted free, white, male agriculturalists' attempts at crop improvement and soil management. Recall, for instance, John Brown's patenting of the improved “King Philip” corn or the origins of Reid's Yellow Dent. Recall, too, the cultivation narratives circulated by John Comly and others. By counting kernels, assessing soil qualities, calculating yields, and ensuring the separation of different samples in the field, the most progressive among the nation's farmers practiced very different methods than those that Longfellow depicted. Through his poem, therefore, Longfellow conveyed a powerful message of opposition between

¹⁷⁴ Here, his move was not unlike like the poet Joel Barlow's earlier nod to the “tawny Ceres” who, at an unknown and ostensibly ancient date, first ground yellow corn into meal. For the reprinted text of his 1793 poem *The Hasty Pudding*, see Browne, *The Hasty Pudding; a Poem, in Three Cantos...With a Memoir on Maize or Indian Corn*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ In contradistinction to these representations, a variety of sources depict Native corn culture methods. Some well-known examples include Gilbert Livingstone Wilson, Waheenee, and Edward Goodbird, *Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians; an Indian Interpretation*, The University of Minnesota. Studies in the Social Sciences. No. 9 (Minneapolis: 1917); Waheenee and Wilson, *Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden: Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians*; Hurt, *Indian Agriculture in America*. For a wide selection of excerpts of Native corn origin legends and early European colonizers' observations of the extent of various Native peoples' cornfields, see Longone, “Mother Maize and King Corn: The Persistence of Corn in the American Ethos.”

¹⁷⁶ On progressive farmers' activities like saving manure, for comparison, see Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002). For the plow's significance in American (agri)culture, see Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*, 49-78.

¹⁷⁷ As the “improvement” of corn through ground cultivation and seed selection became a central item of business in the mid-1850s, the federal government increased its assistance to farmers. Before Congress created the Department of Agriculture in 1862, the Patent Office distributed seed samples and circulated farmers' reports of those samples' successes or failures. The government's circulation of select discourses about certain modes of producing corn, therefore, facilitated the grain's cultural and genetic transformations.

Ojibwa-Algonquins' agricultural practices and the way that mid-nineteenth century market forces were demanding that farmers act upon their lands. In this manner, Longfellow's poetry crafted an implicit argument—speaking to the issues weighing on Sumner's mind and those of his constituents—that Indian corn and, especially, the land on which it grew would be better managed and cultivated in white (male) settlers' hands.

Following *Hiawatha's* publication and for decades thereafter, the public latched onto this legend of corn's origins. In December, 1855, *Harper's New Monthly* wrote "This is one of the most picturesque fancies of Indian tradition, and under the plastic shaping of the poet is expanding into an episode of wild and striking beauty."¹⁷⁸ *The Atlas*, based in New York, observed that the scene was "One of the most elegant of the mythical adventures" depicted in the whole poem, and suggested that it was even reminiscent of "Jacob wrestling with the angel."¹⁷⁹ The Chicago-based editors of the *Prairie Farmer* included extensive extracts of "Legend of Mondamin, or The Origin of the Maize" in a March, 1856 issue. Observing that "but one opinion can be entertained" of it, they left little doubt of their enthusiasm for Longfellow's presentation of the origins of corn.¹⁸⁰ Tellingly, as *The Protestant* explained in their citation and analysis, the scene was instructive and worthy of discussion "because of the multiplied associations that cluster about it. It is *our* first and only fable of the origin of corn"¹⁸¹ (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁸ *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, "Literary Notices: The Song of Hiawatha," December, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 5, LNHS.

¹⁷⁹ *The Atlas*, "The Song of Hiawatha," November 17, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 6; LNHS.

For references to Hiawatha's Jacob-like qualities, see B.W.B., "Tennyson's Maud and Longfellow's Hiawatha," December 12, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 5; LNHS; and "Longfellow's Hiawatha," December 22, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 7; LNHS.

¹⁸⁰ "Longfellow's Hiawatha," *The Prairie Farmer*, March 27, 1856. *TPF* introduces the excerpts by stating that "On the other side of the Atlantic, this work is pretty universally admitted to be the best American production yet attempted, and by some it is asserted to be the best Poem of the age." For additional praise on the passage circulated in London papers, see *Illustrated Times*, "Longfellow's New Poem," November 10, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 5; LNHS. See also *London Literary Journal*, "Poetry and the Drama: The Song of Hiawatha," November 15, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 4; LNHS.

¹⁸¹ *The Protestant*, "Longfellow's Hiawatha," December 22, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 7; LNHS.

Well into the twentieth century, “Hiawatha’s Fasting” served as a kind of ur-text for the national origins of *American* Indian corn.¹⁸²

If the public responded eagerly to the scene of “Hiawatha’s Fasting,” they responded even more so to “Blessing the Corn-fields,” which takes place after Minnehaha and Hiawatha wed. In this section, Longfellow frames Minnehaha’s actions, which inspired so much public commentary, as part and parcel of an Ojibwa woman’s duties. Early in this passage, the reader learns that women’s work in the cornfields had greatly improved the Ojibwas’ quality of life since the days of hunting and gathering. “All around the happy village,” Longfellow wrote, “stood the maize-fields, green and shining.”¹⁸³ The cause of the plenty, he described, derived from “the women, who in springtime / Planted the broad fields and fruitful / Buried in the earth Mondamin.”¹⁸⁴ Indeed, Longfellow’s first draft of the poem, though it was later excised, placed additional emphasis on the importance of women’s efforts. “This was their peculiar labor,” he wrote, “Their domain and their dominion.” And Minnehaha, he added, was “Ever foremost in such labors.”¹⁸⁵ In the published version, Longfellow showed how women’s work extended from planting to harvesting:

‘Twas the women who in Autumn
Stripped the yellow husks of harvest
Stripped the garments from Mondamin
Even as Hiawatha taught them.”¹⁸⁶

In contrast to these female efforts, Longfellow described “the old men and the warriors” sitting “On the border of the forest / Underneath the fragrant pine-trees... / Smoking in

¹⁸² A cursory text search on Google for one of the most famous passages from “Hiawatha’s Fasting,” specifically the phrase “It is Mondamin! Yes, the friend of man, Mondamin!” reveals that, in the documents Google has scanned and made searchable, the phrase was deployed at least 116 times in books or articles not directly authored by Longfellow between 1855 and 2009.

http://books.google.com/advanced_book_search. Accessed July 13, 2009.

¹⁸³ Longfellow, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Revised Edition...The Song of Hiawatha*, 257.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ For the original text of *The Song of Hiawatha*, and in particular, Longfellow’s original draft of “The Cornfields” from which this quote derives, see Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Hiawatha [First Draft]*. 1854-1855. HWLP, Item 95, 1-23, HOU. The HWLP also include Longfellow’s *Notes for Hiawatha: Indian Words and Names*, which appear to have been taken as he studied Schoolcraft’s work; a file of rejected passages, notes, and cantos; the first drafts and printers copies for Hiawatha; and Longfellow’s correspondence during the period that he wrote the poem.

¹⁸⁶ Longfellow, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Revised Edition...The Song of Hiawatha*, 257.

the pleasant shadow.” Rather than managing or assisting with the harvest, “Looked they at the gamesome labor / Of the young men and the women.”¹⁸⁷

Longfellow alluded to women’s work with corn cultivation in a rare footnote issued in connection with this passage, citing Schoolcraft on the Ojibwa-Algonquins’ gendered division of labor. “[C]orn-planting, and corn-gathering,” Longfellow related, “at least among all the still *uncolonized* tribes, are left entirely to the females and children, and a few superannuated old men... [T]his labor is not compulsory, and... is assumed by females as a just equivalent, in their view, for the onerous and continuous labor of the other sex.”¹⁸⁸ Longfellow’s repetition of the ethnographer’s description of women’s agricultural labor as not “onerous,” but instead, as the practices of *uncolonized* and, by extension, uncivilized peoples, reinforces how profoundly the Ojibwas’ divisions of labor diverged from the cultural predilections about the relationships between gender and agricultural duties that the poet and his contemporaries carried.¹⁸⁹

To borrow from historian Psyche Williams-Forsen, Longfellow’s reliance on Schoolcraft’s explanation of Ojibwa women’s agricultural duties passage enacted a kind of gender malpractice, wherein Longfellow “signified upon” Ojibwa women so as to “misrepresent them.” According to Williams-Forsen, the intentional misrepresentation of black women by white people, especially in relation to chickens, has enjoyed a great deal of cultural currency over the past two centuries. While white representations about black people fulfilled some degree of their psychological needs, she argues, the dissemination and reverberation of such representations have done black women, especially, a grave disservice.¹⁹⁰ So, too, with Longfellow’s depiction of the apparent peculiarity of Ojibwa women’s agricultural duties: while it was not a misrepresentation for the poet to show that Native women worked in the corn fields, his emphasis on the Ojibwas’ satisfaction

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 349-350.

¹⁸⁹ An example of such baggage appears in James Fennimore Cooper’s earlier novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*. It is likely that readers would have empathized with the plight of “Cora,” who, as a woman raised in British-American society, even though she was of mixed heritage, shuddered “with an emotion of disgust she could not control” while contemplating a future defined by raising and feeding corn to her prospective Indian mate, “Magua.” James Fennimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (New York: W.A. Townsend & Co., 1859), 156-157.

¹⁹⁰ Williams-Forsen uses the term to demonstrate how “black women, cooking, and chicken have been signified upon to essentially—but not necessarily intentionally—misrepresent them. As a result, black women’s voices have been eclipsed or erased.” See Williams-Forsen, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, & Power*, 8, Chap. 6.

with their divisions of labor as evidence that they were “uncolonized” people, and, it would seem, uncivilized, created an epistemological framework of Otherness through which Longfellow asked his readers to absorb his narrative.¹⁹¹

Even so, his depiction of women working in fields while men smoked in the shade was a less insidious illustration of Ojibwa Otherness than was his portrayal of Minnehaha’s oft-cited midnight cornfield blessing, a passage which appears in the poem shortly thereafter. One evening after the spring planting, Longfellow wrote, Hiawatha instructed Minnehaha to “bless to-night the corn-fields” to make the fields “more fruitful.” She was to

Draw a magic circle round them,
To protect them from destruction,
Blast of mildew, blight of insect...
In the night, when all is silence,...
Rise up from your bed in silence,
Lay aside your garments wholly,
Walk around the fields you planted,
Round the borders of the corn-fields,
Covered by your tresses only,
Robed with darkness as a garment.

Thus the fields shall be more fruitful,
And the passing of your footsteps,
Draw a magic circle round them,
So that neither blight nor mildew,
Neither burrowing worm nor insect,
Shall pass o’er the magic circle;
Not the dragon-fly, Kwo-ne-she,
Not the spider, Subbekashe,
Nor the grasshopper, Pah-puk-keena,
Nor the mighty caterpillar...¹⁹²

Following Hiawatha’s instructions, Minnehaha, awoke one night and

¹⁹¹ Literary scholar Christoph Irmscher argues that Longfellow specifically desired readers to recall the poem’s imagery. See Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux*, 116. Much of what Edward Said describes as structuring the Orient(al) can be said to structure the Other. “Knowledge of the Orient,” he writes, “creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world...the Oriental is *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks.” This “intellectual power” that he identifies as “Orientalism,” he writes, relied upon and in fact “was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held.” See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 39. The information that Longfellow bestowed upon his readers via his Schoolcraft citations functioned in much the same way, by crafting an archive of vernacular knowledge about Native corn cultivation. On Otherness, see also Deloria, *Playing Indian*, especially 20-22.

¹⁹² Longfellow, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Revised Edition...The Song of Hiawatha*, 257-258.

“Laid aside her garments wholly,
And with darkness clothed and guarded
Unashamed and unaffrighted,
Walked securely round the corn-fields,
Drew the sacred, magic circle
Of her footprints round the corn-fields.”¹⁹³

Though she was to be clothed in darkness, Longfellow’s descriptions highlighted her implied nudity and left her highly sexualized and available for the reader’s mind.

No one but the Midnight only
Saw her beauty in the darkness,
No one but the Wawonaissa
Heard the panting of her bosom...
So that none might boast, “I saw her!”¹⁹⁴

Despite the figurative cloak with which Longfellow dressed Minnehaha, the poem exposed his readers to figure of a naked Native woman walking around a cornfield to insure its fertility and to protect it against pests.¹⁹⁵

Like Longfellow’s treatment of Hiawatha’s conquest of Mondamin and like his presentation of Native women’s efforts in the fields, his description of Minnehaha’s cornfield blessing performed powerful cultural work. Namely, as it showcased the agricultural possibilities of Western landscapes, coding their fertility and availability through the body of the Native woman, it simultaneously connoted Native unfitnes to use that soil properly. Though antebellum farmers still used signs from the natural world to guide their planting seasons—indeed, while John Mack Faragher has noted that many Illinois backcountry farmers operated according to lunar cycles in the 1830s and 1840s, Conevery Bolton Valencius has found that early twentieth century folklorists still encountered traditions in which a male farmer would toss seeds at his wife’s bare backside as a means to ensure fertility—one would have been hard-pressed to find a self-

¹⁹³ Ibid., 259.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Scholars have demonstrated the many and malleable links between female sexuality and representations of the land. See for example Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Virginia J. Scharff, "Man and Nature! Sex Secrets of Environmental History," in *Seeing Nature through Gender*, ed. Virginia J. Scharff (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 208-214. Others have focused on the utility of representations of Native female sexuality in depicting Anglo-American or European desires for access to North American land and resources. See for example Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 29-32, 51-53.

described agricultural journal or its contributors suggesting that farmers in the 1850s fight infestations of bugs by dragging clothing on the ground or by walking around a field in a state of nudity.¹⁹⁶

We can see additional evidence of Longfellow's skepticism about these methods—and another instance of his gender malpractice—when he returns to Schoolcraft's interpretations of Ojibwa lore to explain his presentation of Minnehaha's midnight walk. In another footnote, Longfellow cites Schoolcraft's opinion that the Ojibwa's views on “the mysterious influence of a woman” in a garden or field were “singular” and of “ancient” heritage.

“A singular proof of this belief [of ensuring the fertility of the fields], in both sexes, of the mysterious influence of the steps of a woman on the vegetable and insect creation, is found in *an ancient custom which was relegated to me*, respecting corn-planting. It was the practice of the hunter's wife, when the field of corn had been planted, to choose the first dark or over-clouded evening to perform a secret circuit, sans habillement, around the field. For this purpose she slipped out of the lodge in the evening, unobserved, to some obscure nook, where she completely disrobed. Then, taking her matchecota, or principal garment, in one hand, she dragged it around the field. This *was thought* to insure a prolific crop, and to prevent the assaults of insects and worms upon the grain. It *was supposed* they could not creep over the charmed line.”¹⁹⁷ (emphasis added)

Public reviews of “Blessing” reflected the dismissive attitude toward the Ojibwas' divisions of labor that Schoolcraft and Longfellow shared in their attempts at conveying Ojibwa lore. Where the American press excerpted Minnehaha's “Blessing of the Corn Fields,” they associated Minnehaha's actions more closely with those of Lady Godiva than as an example of proper soil cultivation. The *Boston Daily Chronicle*, for example, described the scene as set in “a sort of Ojibway golden age in which agriculture and the arts of peace are cultivated, and rural festivals and merrymakings of the genuine Arcadian sort are celebrated.” However, rather than address the purpose of Minnehaha's walk—to prevent insect damage and blight, concerns which regularly occupied farmers across the nation—the paper observed that “Minnehaha... divests herself of her garments and walks around the corn-fields to bless them, in a nude state like the Saxon dame Godivia of

¹⁹⁶ Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie*, 97; Valencius, *The Health of the Country*, 211.

¹⁹⁷ Longfellow, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Revised Edition...The Song of Hiawatha*, 350.

Coventry.”¹⁹⁸ Likewise, the *Prairie Farmer* also fixated on Minnehaha’s nudity. Unlike the *Chronicle*, however, this paper did not even deign to mention that the scene had an agricultural context or purpose. The publication simply observed that “Minnehaha, Hiawatha’s spouse blesses the corn-fields something after the manner of the Lady Godiva of history.”¹⁹⁹

By the standards of antebellum farm journals, newspapers, and Patent Office communications, the gender malpractice embedded in the circulation of these scenes framed traditional agricultural practices of North American Indians as profoundly outside of the market and therefore unworthy of continuing on lands that farmers and politicians coveted. Longfellow’s presentation of Ojibwa practices, which he substantiated by citing Schoolcraft’s research, contrasted with the methods circulated among antebellum agricultural societies and journals, whose members strove to meet growing market demands for their products. In an era of grain grading, futures-making, and government-sponsored seed trading, on one hand, and bloody disputes over western land, on the other, Longfellow’s intentional (mis)representations of Native women crafted powerful evidence that the Native peoples who had helped bring maize into being in North America were unfit to cultivate corn—and by extension, other crops—on the rich, seemingly virgin, and newly “whitened” soils of the middle west. *Hiawatha*, therefore, conveyed a sense of Native incompetence at managing valuable soil and reinforced the desirability of dispossessing Native people from fruitful western lands so as to extend free, white male farmers’ efforts thereon. Just as New England literati had appropriated Indian legends and place names in their quests for authentic, ancient histories of what had become the United States, Longfellow’s poem entered into a very public, decades-long quest to disassociate soil and corn management from their Native pasts and align them

¹⁹⁸ B.W.B., “Tennyson's Maud and Longfellow's Hiawatha,” *Boston Daily Chronicle*, December 12, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 5; LNHS.

¹⁹⁹ “Longfellow's Hiawatha.” *The Lady's Newspaper* also chose to excerpt this passage, but said nothing about it. See “Literature: The Song of Hiawatha,” November 24, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 6; LNHS. For reviews of the passage from London, see *London Literary Journal*, “Poetry and the Drama: The Song of Hiawatha,” November 15, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 4; LNHS and *Illustrated Times*, “Longfellow's New Poem,” November 10, 1855; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 117, folder 5; LNHS.

with forces of nationalization and industrialization. Because Longfellow's text encapsulated and reconfigured corn's legendary connection to North America, *Hiawatha* would serve an (agri)cultural touchstone for decades to come.²⁰⁰

FROM "INDIAN CORN" TO "OUR BLESSED GOLD"

Shortly after Sumner's caning and just two years into the Omahas' life on their smaller reservation in western Nebraska Territory, Edward Everett spoke at the National Agricultural Fair. Though pressed by the August heat, Everett could not contain his enthusiasm for western farmers' crop raising successes. He reserved the majority of his praise, however, for corn. While the nation's wheat and oat crops produced some 275 million bushels of foodstuffs, Everett asserted, "the Indian corn, our precious vegetable gold" was more impressive. "[A]t one thousand millions of bushels!" he crowed, there would be "a bushel at least for every human being on the face of the globe." Colorfully detailing its prolific capacities for reproduction, he argued that the value of "our blessed gold" was inestimable, and that its cultivation be further extended.²⁰¹ Moreover, he in a moment of foreshadowing observed that this gold offered an important counterweight to "the whole crop of cotton, which the glowing imagination of the South sometimes regards as the great bond which binds the civilized nations of the earth together."²⁰²

Like Henry Pendleton's reflection that corn would form the "primary crop" on his Nebraska claim now that the "read men" were gone, like the *Prairie Farmer's* interest in Longfellow's poem, and like Sumner's observation that because "savages" no longer occupied fertile Kansas, it could become the crossroads of American civilization, Everett's words in praise of "our...gold" evoke important material and ideological shifts occurring across the antebellum United States. As settlers schooled themselves with government or agricultural publications to improve their cultivation methods, shared seeds with one another in hopes of ascertaining the optimal cultivar for their climate, used plows and teams of livestock to improve the fields over which they imagined Indians had "romed," and brought their grain to market, they placed corn production at

²⁰⁰ Chapters two through five, which take us well into the twentieth century, all contain portrayals of *Hiawatha's* agricultural anachronisms in public corn-centered discourses.

²⁰¹ "Speech of Hon. Edward Everett," 125.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

the center of their aspirations. Because urban consumers were demanding greater quantities of meat and lard from corn-fed animals as well as other refined corn products, and because corn grew almost everywhere and provided sustenance for survival both and for participation in the market, the plant factored into many of the representations and realities attached to westering.²⁰³

As chapter two explains and as Everett's speech alludes, the plant came to serve new kinds of material and ideological needs during the Civil War, shifting, as one Pennsylvania poet would explain, from "sachem" to "king."²⁰⁴ The juxtaposition of Longfellow's *Hiawatha* with histories of Indian removal, on one hand, and practices of antebellum consumption, cultivation narratives, and rhetoric about virgin land, on the other, thus provides an entry point to understanding how mainstream antebellum depictions of Native corn cultivation crafted a compelling origin story entrenching the place of "our blessed gold" in the nation's history.

²⁰³ Hardeman, *Shucks, Shocks, and Hominy Blocks: Corn as a Way of Life in Pioneer America*.

²⁰⁴ Doty, *Corn-Husks: A Poem for the Times*, 160.

CHAPTER TWO

“Cotton Bales Were Sorry Meat:” King Cotton and King Corn in the Civil War

*“You perceive how strongly and with what great intensity
my mind runs upon the results of Agriculture.
It is natural for one to think of that by which he lives.”
-President John Tyler to his son Robert Tyler, April 16, 1850²⁰⁵*

KING COTTON AND KING CORN, 1855-1865

In December of 1862, a striking lithograph lit up the page of a Northern periodical. “Corn is King! Abdication of Cotton!” the caption announced. As a grizzled and apparently deposed King Cotton sobs under a setting moon, pouring his woes out to a slave and pointing to his former throne, a young, wily King Corn sits surrounded by a rake, plow, and scythe—the tools of his trade—and gleefully eyes his new crown. Strewn about under his throne of cheese—a product generated by feeding corn to farm animals—excess ears of corn and a paper blaring the words “Trade Report” prove Corn’s abundance and validate his claims to agricultural royalty. Henchmen corn “Whiskey” and corn-fed “Beef” flank the new King, armed and ready to defend his reign. Below, the reader learns about the cause of Cotton’s sobs: the nation’s growing grain trade with Europe had displaced the economic power of Southern cotton on the world markets.²⁰⁶ As one poet would later write about the material effects of this transition, “men must eat, / And Cotton bales were sorry meat.”²⁰⁷ **[Image 2.1]**

²⁰⁵ John Tyler to Robert Tyler, April 16, 1850; GLC06397, 296; The Gilder Lehrman Collection (GLC) at the New York Historical Society, New York City, NY.

²⁰⁶ “Corn Is King!- Abdication Of “Cotton!”” December, 1862; Civil War Cartoons (CWC); box 3, folder 2: American Civil War Caricatures: Confederacy, #36c; American Antiquarian Society (AAS), Worcester, Massachusetts.

²⁰⁷ Doty, *Corn-Husks: A Poem for the Times.*, 139.



Image 2.1 / “Corn Is King!- Abdication Of “Cotton!”” December, 1862.

As the lithograph suggests, planting, harvesting, and consuming crops in accordance with trade demands dominated the rhythms of daily life through the antebellum era and the Civil War. When farmers, planters, slaves, and consumers tilled, harrowed, plucked, reaped, shucked, spun, sewed, baled, cooked, and ate, they transformed staples like corn and cotton into a combination of sustenance and profits. They also, as this cartoon demonstrates, fashioned sectional identities, state policies, and symbols.²⁰⁸

This chapter explores changes in the production and consumption of cotton and corn during the Civil War and shows how, over a very short period of time, “King Corn” replaced “King Cotton” as the most important agricultural link between the meaning of the nation and its growth. As slave-grown cotton came to dominate the economic and political culture of southern states, as well as much of their agricultural energies, southerners and northerners alike associated “King Cotton” with the South’s economic

²⁰⁸ The Free Produce Movement offers an important example where northern antebellum consumers used their purchasing power to attempt to promote the production and circulation of “free produce.” See Lawrence Glickman, ““Buy for the Sake of the Slave:” Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism,” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2004).

ties to Europe, its defense of slavery, and its push for secession. Searching for an equally powerful crop to present to themselves and nations around the Atlantic, northerners and many westerners crowned corn—a grain whose economic influence was growing rapidly at mid-century due to improvements in cultivation, transportation, and utilization—as “King,” and used that symbol to stand for the cause of the Union and to call for abolition.

If we were to explore the Civil War through the lenses of traditional agricultural or economic history, the story might hew tightly to southern states’ antebellum surge in cotton production for export to northeastern and British mills; their general self-sufficiency in corn and pork before the Civil War, thanks to an emphasis on home-grown corn production and border states’ high corn-cotton production ratios; the Confederacy’s drop in cotton production and its expansion of acres devoted to maize as a matter of policy; and the postwar expansion of both western grain production and the intensification of sharecropper-produced southern cotton. In the middle of the twentieth century, for instance, Donald Kemmerer used U.S. census data to demonstrate that Southern states grew more corn than did Northern states before the Civil War, and that their grain actually had greater economic value than their cotton; unlike western farmers who sold corn for cash, southern planters did not plant corn for profit.²⁰⁹ In the late 1970s, Gavin Wright applied econometrics to the history of slavery in order to better understand self-sufficiency patterns in the South before and after the Civil War. He argued that while planters could have grown cotton to maximize profits, they relied on corn as a nonmarket buffer; thus, the smaller the farm or plantation, the larger the percentage of land they chose to plant to corn.²¹⁰ Likewise, Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman’s quantitative analysis of northern agriculture before the Civil War uses Census records to trace changes in crop production and in social demographics.²¹¹ More recently, Sven Beckert has placed the study of the Civil War and the shifts in U.S. cotton

²⁰⁹ Donald L. Kemmerer, "The Pre-Civil War South's Leading Crop, Corn," *Agricultural History* 23, no. 4 (1949).

²¹⁰ Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978), 43-88.

²¹¹ Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman, *To Own Their Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1987).

production within a far more global context, arguing that the War altered regional and global agriculture and spurred Europe's imperialist tendencies.²¹²

Other scholars have used agriculture to explore a host of connected issues. Sam Hilliard's work relies on census data to understand food production, movement, and consumption patterns in the antebellum and Civil War South.²¹³ Agricultural historian Allan Bogue's history of the Corn Belt's origins is a "production" history wherein Corn Belt farmers during and after the Civil War were shaped by their changing "natural and institutional environments."²¹⁴ In their more environmentally-informed study of Civil War economics, Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode have identified how farmers' biological innovations throughout the nineteenth century shaped the growth of the cornfields of the Middle West before and after the Civil War and, in turn, influenced the South's shift from antebellum food self sufficiency to postbellum specialization in cotton and dependency on pork and grain imports.²¹⁵

Turning more to the cultural analysis of agriculture, broadly considered, geographic historian John Hudson asks how regional expressions of cultural patterns change over time and space and argues that the Civil War reoriented the antebellum trade of the "five islands of good land" west of the Appalachians—regions in the Miami and Ohio river valleys whose shared livestock feeding practices constituted the "First Corn Belt"—from a north-south axis along the Mississippi River to an east-west transfer, with Chicago as an epicenter.²¹⁶ Charles E. Orser, Jr. has proposed using historical archeology to examine the Corn Belt's changing modes of production and its hierarchical social relations, particularly as they pertain to household labor patterns and tenancy rates, both before and after the Civil War.²¹⁷ Offering a counterweight to Henry Nash Smith's work, Annette Kolodny explores how antebellum white women's views of Middle Western landscapes differed from those projected by their male counterparts. However, her study does not probe in any depth the material effects of those different ideologies on

²¹² Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War," *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (2004).

²¹³ Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*.

²¹⁴ Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century*, Reprint ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), xii.

²¹⁵ Olmstead and Rhode, *Creating Abundance*.

²¹⁶ Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*.

²¹⁷ Orser, "Corn-Belt Agriculture During the Civil War Period, 1850-1870," 173-190.

those lands or how those women understood various relationships between cotton and corn production.²¹⁸ Finally, Conevery Bolton Valencius has examined how, in southern states and territories during six decades before the war, planters, their families, and their slaves surveyed and settled land for its health-giving properties and suitability for cotton production.²¹⁹

Though each of the aforementioned works has bolstered our understanding of national and regional agricultural practices and/or ideologies, they have not examined Civil War-era agricultural production and consumption with an eye for interregional trade, changing *mentalities* about society and resource use, or how (excepting Valencius, Kolodny, and to a lesser extent, Hudson) profoundly hierarchical ideas about race and gender informed Euro-American ideologies about land as something to be conquered. Such a model, however, can be seen in the work of Frieda Knobloch, who argues that nineteenth century agriculture, as a “material” and “ideological” force, was a historically specific system of food procurement which “inform[ed] tools, laws, ambitions, knowledge gathering, wars of conquest, [and] preferred forms of territorial occupation.” Through it, she adds, we can understand the era’s “social agendas” at work.²²⁰ By a similar token, environmental historian Matthew Klingle argues that “layers upon layers of consumption,” as well as production, “have shaped history” and that studying those “public and private” spaces of consumption can yield fruitful “new relations within society and between society and nature.”²²¹ Therefore, to bridge from the first chapter’s discussions about gendered and racialized antebellum ideas about western territories and “Indian corn” and in order to contextualize the postwar developments in agriculture, food systems, social agendas, and environmental changes that I address in subsequent chapters, this chapter juxtaposes Civil War cultural productions about cotton and corn with an overview of material changes to their production and consumption.²²²

²¹⁸ Annette Kolodny, *The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

²¹⁹ Valencius, *The Health of the Country*.

²²⁰ Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*, 1-2.

²²¹ Klingle, "Spaces of Consumption in Environmental History," 95-99.

²²² While I have yet to uncover much research on the symbolic use of cotton or corn in the Civil War, aside from Frank Owsley’s early efforts to trace the rise of “King Cotton” rhetoric as part and parcel of Southern states’ belief in the political and economic power of their crop, there are a number of agricultural histories on the War. See for example Paul W. Gates, *Agriculture and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965); John Solomon Otto, *Southern Agriculture During the Civil War Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood

KING COTTON'S ASCENT

As chapter one's discussions of *Hiawatha*, "The Crime Against Kansas," and records left by western farmers remind us, antebellum Americans confronted a set of extraordinarily divisive questions concerning the "open" land in the U.S. West. Foremost among these lay the question of whose labor would cultivate those landscapes. With war, disease, and force having removed Native populations from many of the nation's richest soils, would a system of slave labor expand westward in order to grow more cotton to export to mills in Lowell and in Lancashire? Or would free white settlers, armed with their newly improved steel plows and mechanical reapers, plant corn and wheat for profit?²²³ How would changes in the production of key agricultural commodities reshape international relations? How would they transform Americans' understandings of themselves and their nation?

In 1850, Congress passed a set of laws temporarily settling a number of issues related to the kind of labor to be utilized in the territories newly acquired from Mexico. Texas would enter the union as a slave state and California free, but newly organized territories of Utah and New Mexico would follow the doctrine of popular sovereignty. Meanwhile, the Fugitive Slave Law would assuage the worries of southern slave-owners. As former President John Tyler privately explained in a letter to his son that year, the United States' annexation of Texas had arisen from the demands that a global economic system had come to place on U.S.-grown cotton; with Texas entering the Union as a slave state, systems of cotton production might expand in lucrative directions. In this light, he

Press, 1994); Lou Ferleger, ed., *Agriculture and National Development: Views on the Nineteenth Century* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990). For Owsley, see Frank L. Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931).

²²³ On wars and native removal from the Great Lakes and Midwestern regions of the now-United States, see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); R. Douglas Hurt, *The Indian Frontier: 1763-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002). On the expansion of slavery, see Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*; Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*; Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War*; Valencius, *The Health of the Country*. On the growth and fall of cotton mill industries, see Laurence F. Gross, *The Course of Industrial Decline: The Boott Cotton Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1834-1955* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); William Moran, *The Belles of New England: The Women of the Textile Mills and the Families Whose Wealth They Wove* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002); Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire." On plows, reapers, and the mechanization of agriculture, see Donald Worster, "Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (1990); Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*.

explained to his boy Robert, “The monopoly of the cotton plant,” he wrote, “was the great and important concern. That monopoly, now secured, places all other nations at our feet.” Highlighting Europe’s growing dependence on American-produced cotton, and foreshadowing the southern states’ policies as they marched toward war, Tyler surmised that a cotton “embargo for a single year would produce in Europe a greater amount of suffering than a fifty years war. I doubt whether G[reat] Britain could avoid convulsion and civil war.”²²⁴

Tyler’s musings foreshadowed a sentiment that would dominate the next decade of southern states’ politics. Coming less than six decades after Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, global reliance upon this staple was weaving economies together as no other commodity had done before. As Gavin Wright explains, industrial demand for cotton at the end of the eighteenth century was a driving force in both the extension of slavery and the expansion of cotton cultivation. Long-staple Sea Island cotton brought its growers hefty profits during the 1780s and 1790s, but that cultivar would not grow outside of the Sea Islands’ particular climate. Whitney’s gin revolutionized the world of slave-grown cotton because it efficiently extracted seeds from the more versatile short-staple cotton plant, which could be cultivated across the climates and terrains of the upland south. This enabled planters in a wider geographic area to grow and gin short-staple cotton, causing demands for fresh land and slave labor to expand accordingly.²²⁵ For the next six decades, grow and gin they did, feeding Europe’s expanding cotton industry and Northeastern mills, alike. Cotton historian Sven Beckert calculates that, by the 1850s, slave-grown U.S. cotton comprised no less than “77 percent of the 800 million pounds of cotton consumed in Britain, 90 percent of the 192 million pounds used in France, 60 percent of the 115 million pounds spun in the German Zollverein, and as much as 92 percent of the 102 million pounds manufactured in Russia.”²²⁶ Of these destinations, England commanded the majority of the southern market.²²⁷

By the middle of the 1850s, accelerations in southern cotton production and international flows of credit wove U.S. and European economies tighter together with

²²⁴ John Tyler to Robert Tyler, April 16, 1850; GLC06397, 296; GLC.

²²⁵ Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 14-15; Olmstead and Rhode, *Creating Abundance*, 98-133.

²²⁶ Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire," 1408-1409.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*: 1408.

every planting, picking, and spinning season. During these same years, however, antislavery movements moved forward through the writings of William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northup, William Lloyd Garrison, and members of the Beecher family.²²⁸ Thus even as scenes of the “weary, dispirited” slaves on Simon Legree’s fictional plantation, or of Northup’s own beatings for having picked cotton too slowly mobilized Northern readers to tear down the “peculiar institution,” southern authors, politicians, and the press began to use the moniker “King Cotton” to validate why slavery was necessary in maintaining cotton’s influence in foreign policies.²²⁹ David Christy’s 1855 treatise *Cotton is King*, for example, released after Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and in the same year as Northup’s biography, countered such accounts with the first public affirmation that the reign of “HIS MAJESTY, KING COTTON” created tightly-laced alliances among agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial interests. Christy’s work argued that southern interests in maintaining slavery—backed by cotton’s significance on domestic and international stages—would have to be respected by northern anti-slavery advocates.²³⁰ That August, Virginia politician and soon-to-be-governor Henry Wise echoed Christy’s sentiments and Tyler’s earlier thoughts, observing that through the power of King Cotton, the nation “holds the British Lion, and the Gallic cock, and the Russian Black Eagle by cotton strings, which [it] may

²²⁸ On the “constants” within the antislavery movement and the changing populations who participated in antislavery over three and a half decades, see Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeals: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). On abolitionists see James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976); John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). For Northup’s writings, see Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave. Narrative of Solomon Northup, Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1852 from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River in Louisiana* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855). For Douglass, sources begin with his autobiography, Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845). On the Beechers, see Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or, Life among the Lowly*, vol. II (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1852); Mary Niall Mitchell, “Rosebloom and Pure White,” Or So It Seemed,” *American Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2002); Milton Rugoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

²²⁹ For key passages set in weighing rooms and cotton fields, see Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or, Life among the Lowly*, 194; Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 163-175.

²³⁰ David Christy, *Cotton Is King; or, the Culture of Cotton, and Its Relation to Agriculture, Manufactures and Commerce; to the Free Colored People; and to Those Who Hold That Slavery Is in Itself Sinful; by an American*. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keyes, 1855), 186-188.

pull at any time.”²³¹ By 1858, South Carolina Senator James Henry Hammond famously warned New York Senator William Henry Seward of the problems that would befall nations around the world should northern states formally challenge the system of slave labor that was so central to cheap cotton production. With an embargo, Hammond declared, “we could bring the whole world to our feet. What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years?...England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her. No, you dare not make war on cotton! No power on earth dares make war upon it. Cotton is King.”²³² These sentiments did not simply circulate across the South. According to historian Frank Owsley, “King Cotton became a cardinal principle upon which all the men who were to lead the South out of the Union and guide its destiny through the Civil War were unanimously agreed.”²³³

Given the ubiquity of antebellum public discourses around cotton as they pertained to questions of free and slave labor, the politics of crop production, and consumers’ demands for industrially finished cloth, it is not surprising that such a catchy, anthropomorphic phrase caught the public’s attention.²³⁴ Beginning in the mid-1850s and intensifying at the start of the 1860s, sectional representations figured King Cotton as either a benevolent leader or a tyrannical despot.²³⁵ Yet just as a seed planted into the ground must stretch its roots deeper before it grows taller, so too we must embed

²³¹ James P. Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise, with a History of the Political Campaign in Virginia in 1855...* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1856), 438.

²³² James Henry Hammond, "On the Admission of Kansas, under the Lecompton Constitution, Speech before the United States Senate, 4 March 1858," in *Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina* (New York: John F. Trow & Co., 1866).

²³³ For a thorough summary of the ascent of “King Cotton” rhetoric between 1855 and 1860, see Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 15-24.

²³⁴ On the question of “free labor,” see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, 1995 ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). On the clothing industry as a significant consumer of cotton, see Michael Zakim, "A Ready-Made Business: The Birth of the Clothing Industry in America," *Business History Review* 73, no. 1 (1999).

²³⁵ In 1860, E.N. Elliott published *Cotton is King And Pro-Slavery Arguments*, a collection of writings from Hammond and other Southern orators. See E.N. Elliott, *Cotton Is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments: Comprising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on This Important Subject*. (Augusta: Pritchard, Abbott & Loomis, 1860). That same year, Marcus Bell published “South-Side View of Cotton is King, a statement of support of slavery dedicated to the ladies of the U.S. Marcus A. Bell, *Message of Love. South-Side View of Cotton Is King and the Philosophy of African Slavery* (Atlanta: Daily Locomotive Job Office, 1860). A year later, Frederick Law Olmsted labeled his travel narrative through the South *The Cotton Kingdom*, and publications like *Harper’s Weekly* began to identify the Confederacy as simply “Cotton.” See Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States. Based Upon Three Former Volumes of Journeys and Investigations by the Same Author.*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861); "The North and the South," *Harper’s Weekly*, February 9 1861, 96.

ourselves in the systems of crop production that supported planters' dedication of slaves' labor toward cotton cultivation before we can fully explore how representations of King Cotton's reign worked and to what ends. And that requires returning to corn.

CORN AND COTTON IN THE ANTEBELLUM MARKETPLACE

Corn figures prominently in nineteenth century folklore, slaves' narratives, planters' account books, and women's receipt collections. As these sources reveal, chattel slaves, slave owning planters, and southern urban dwellers alike depended on corn and corn-fed pork as the two primary means of sustenance during the decades before the Civil War.²³⁶ Although antebellum farmers in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio had started to emphasize corn as a livestock feed rather than a human food as early as the 1830s and 1840s, historian Sam Hilliard concludes that southerners continued to appreciate its ease of preparation throughout the nineteenth century and especially valued its cheapness. It is no wonder that it was a staple of the slave diet. For these and a variety of other reasons, he writes, southerners "continued to demand it" even when wheat, whose cultivation expanded in the upper Midwest during the 1850s, could have been purchased in greater quantities.²³⁷

While slaves consumed about a peck of corn per hand per week, white southerners also consumed corn in large quantities. Antebellum travelers like Frederick Law Olmstead reported eating cornbread while visiting rich and poor tables alike.²³⁸ Given its ubiquity, southern women, like their northern and western peers before the War, continued to concoct myriad ways to roast, bake, and fry it. Sometime before 1840, a woman in the Rappe family, who may well have been among the Virginians who settled Ohio's rich soil early in the century, detailed a series of recipes reflecting the region's reliance on corn production. "To Make" Mrs. Folgers' receipt for "Corn Pudding," for example, one grated "3 Dozen rosten ears" and added milk, eggs, salt, and "sougur." The dish, observed the author of the receipt book, "Eats well warm or Cold some Peopel slice

²³⁶ See for example Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 540-549; Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 171-172. On antebellum non-slave corn consumption, see Hardeman, *Shucks, Shocks, and Hominy Blocks: Corn as a Way of Life in Pioneer America*.

²³⁷ Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 48-49. On wheat expansion in 1850s and information on other crop yields, see Atack and Bateman, *To Own Their Soil: Agriculture in the Antebellum North*, 162-185.

²³⁸ Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 157, 149.

it & butter it.” Other receipts in the family collection directed the preparations required for “an indian Pudding Baked,” which the author noted “is a Luxury superiour to rice or custard,” alongside instructions for “Indian Batter Cakes” and “a good pone.”²³⁹ In a very different book of recipes, given its author and its postwar publication, the African American author and cook Mrs. Abby Fisher recalled her antebellum familiarity with corn. Her repertoire included “Circuit Hash” (a form of succotash); “Breakfast corn bread” (made with a mixture of corn and rice—a reflection, her biographer notes, of having spent three decades as a slave in rice-producing South Carolina); “Plantation Corn Bread or Hoe Cake;” “corn and tomato soup;” “corn fritters;” “corn pudding;” and “boiled corn.” Though Mrs. Fisher’s talents had, by the 1880s, catapulted her into her own realm of fame—culinary historians have identified her as an award-winning chef and the nation’s first African American cookbook author—it is probable that she, like the woman in the Rappe family who carefully gathered favorite recipes and like other free and enslaved women who worked at and took pride in their cooking, was familiar with corn because it was so integral to southern foodways.²⁴⁰

But humans who consumed the grain in the form of freshly roasted ears or in hominy, pone, and bread in southern states also consumed and worked alongside corn and corn-fodder-fed livestock. In fact, it appears that people accounted for little more than half of southern states’ corn consumption. In 1860, hogs, horses, and mules ate through forty-eight percent of the rest.²⁴¹ While southern hogs often rooted for mast in

²³⁹ Information from the Rappe Family Receipt book, housed in the Manuscript Reading Room at the Winterthur Library, implies that the author or authors of the book received clippings from the *Ohio Repository* and the “*Fredrick town Publick advertiser*.” Today, Fredericktown, Ohio lies to the north of Columbus. This appears to be just north of the Virginia Military District, a region John Hudson identifies as populated by Upland Southern farmers largely from Virginia’s Piedmont, lying on the eastern edge of the nascent corn belt. See *Rappe Family Receipt Book, Ohio* Ca. 1810-1840; Doc. 512, Manuscript Reading Room, The Winterthur Library (WIN), Winterthur, Delaware; Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*, 64-74.

²⁴⁰ See Karen Hess, ed., *What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking. Reprinted in Facsimile with Notes*. (Bedford, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, 1995). The text of the original book is available on Michigan State University’s “Feeding America” website at http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/books/book_35.cfm accessed June 25, 2009. See Abby Fisher, *What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking* (San Francisco: Women’s Co-Operative Printing Office, 1881). Chapters three and four discuss changes in corn cookery more in-depth.

²⁴¹ This figure based on data found in Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 226, fig. 219. I used data for the year 1860 in his table, “Corn production and consumption by states, in thousands of bushels,” which was based on US Census records for Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. I looked at his statistics for total consumption, human consumption, horse and mule consumption, and hog consumption, exclusive of production records or surpluses.

the forests, especially in the Tennessee upcountry, animals penned for fattening and those whose labor assisted the work of the plantation or farm consumed corn in the ear, in the “shock,” or cured from the stalk. These practices, other historians have noted, varied by location. For slaves and yeomen living in or coming from places like Virginia or Kentucky, feeding corn to livestock meant placing entire cornstalks into shocks of corn, where the plants would cure, stay protected during winter precipitation, and provide easily accessed fodder.²⁴² While visiting Cincinnati in March, 1847, for example, and reporting both on the “Pork market” and Ohio’s prospects for corn yields, D. Humphreys instructed his brother Joseph to mind how the cattle and hogs were fed back at home. “[S]hould the weather turn cold the cattle... must have some corn given them one or 2 shocks to each lot per day,” he wrote. Then “several days” after the cattle worked through those shocks, Joseph was to “put the Hogs after them,” where the hogs would recover any missed or undigested kernels.²⁴³ For planters and slaves in other parts of the south, livestock feeding revolved around a different set of practices. Slaves on William Jones’ Georgia plantation prepared corn fodder for his livestock by stripping leaves from the stalks between late July and mid-August, which they let cure before feeding.²⁴⁴ And as a kidnapped slave himself, Solomon Northup had observed the same practice. However, he emphasized that the pigs on his former master’s plantation, unlike slaves who received corn in the ear for grinding, also received “*shelled* corn” to fatten them before slaughter.²⁴⁵

Humphreys’ concern about his hogs, and by extension, that of Northup’s “Master Epps,” mattered because bacon, salt pork, and lard formed ubiquitous parts of nineteenth century American diets. On plantations and farmsteads alike, hog feeding was one of the most important and efficient uses of maize. Thus in addition to encountering cornbread on the tables he frequented, Olmstead also reported seeing bacon “at every meal” as he

²⁴² Corn Belt historian John C. Hudson finds that upland Southerners migrating to the Ohio Valley brought the ubiquitous corn shock to the region and, consequently, developed the midwest’s livestock feeder industry. Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*. See also Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century*, 133-134.

²⁴³ D. Humphreys to Joseph A. Humphreys, March 19, 1847; Randall Lee Gibson Papers; Letter 57, GLC04501; GLC.

²⁴⁴ See entries dated July 25-30, 1839, July 29-Aug. 5, 1850, and July 26-Aug. 15, 1852 in William Jones, “Plantation Book, 1839-1858”; GLC03703; GLC.

²⁴⁵ On shelled corn and the practice of curing leaves in the plantation’s corn fields, see Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 169, 171-172.

traveled through the South, while countless others observed dining on it once, twice, or even thrice daily.²⁴⁶ Viewed as an energy-giving food, pork was a staple part of slaves' diets. Standard slave rations fell between two and five pounds per hand per week, or—factoring in children, half-hands, and the aged—about 150 pounds of pork per slave year.²⁴⁷ Given that many slave owners would have eaten more meat than their slaves, estimates for white southerners' pork consumption are just as high, and in some cases, even higher. In 1848, the U.S. Patent Office estimated that (ostensibly white) Georgia consumers downed 180 pounds of pork and 150 pounds of beef, while in South Carolina, they ate their way through 150 pounds of pork and another fifty of beef.²⁴⁸

Producing the volume of pork required by a plantation or even a smaller farm required large herds of pigs. Many plantations turned their hogs loose for the summer and fall, where they foraged for mast in nearby forests or swamps. Penning and fattening the hogs in the late fall and early winter, slaves and farmers would slaughter, salt and smoke, or brine the pork for preservation during the forthcoming year. However, not all plantations or farmsteads produced pork in these quantities, and many planters chose to import salted or barreled pork from sources up the Mississippi River or from the Tennessee or Kentucky upcountry. Southern Louisiana, coastal, central and northern Alabama, western lowland and coastal Mississippi counties, upstate South Carolina, the “rice coast” along Georgia and the Carolinas, along with central North Carolina and Georgia's eastern piedmont, were all major pork-importing regions. In addition to plantations, urban populations and the steamboat trade formed important markets for pork consumption.²⁴⁹

Yet before a plantation's four- or two-footed workforce ate corn, and certainly before slaves, farmers, planters, or steamboat passengers ate bacon or fried their cornmeal cakes in lard, a crop needed to be produced. Thus to meet their plantations' caloric needs, the majority of slaveholders—and non-slaveholding white farmers—grew some corn. And understanding the ubiquity of corn production in the antebellum South is where the fiction of King Cotton's dominance wears thin. Grown throughout southern

²⁴⁶ Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 41. Hilliard cites Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back Country* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1863), 161.

²⁴⁷ Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 104-105. Hilliard estimates 3.5 pounds as a standard ration.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 41. I relied on Hilliard's statistics for “Estimated annual meat needed per adult, by # of pounds.”

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 106, 213-220.

states for household and plantation consumption, corn was an easily planted hedge against market uncertainty. In rural areas where transportation methods were less than ideal, large amounts of heavy corn were ill-suited for marketing. However, as the livestock feeders surrounding the Rappe family in Ohio had discovered, corn could go to market on the hoof, and as slaveholders across the South knew, home consumption of the crop meant less outlaid expenses for provisions. According to an 1847 report in *DeBow's Review*, corn was “an indispensable article” to the plantation and “assumes a vast importance...beyond the measure assigned to it at the current rates in dollars and cents.” Therefore, it added, “The cultivation of maize on nearly every plantation... to the extent at least of its own consumption, ought to be considered a fundamental principal of management.”²⁵⁰ While the total acreage and the number of slaves any given planter held may have shaped how much corn he grew relative to cotton, it is clear that a plantation’s cotton outputs depended on the maize inputs which sustained its workforce’s energies.²⁵¹

Thus for planters who directed their slaves to raise corn on plantations in addition to cotton, or for yeomen farmers who invested their own labor in a mix of cotton and corn, weather patterns and soil conditions affected the former—and thus bottom lines—as much as they did the latter. Confronted with a droughty spring early in 1839, for example, slaveholder William Jones wrote of his compounded dismay at observing “not more than half of the cotton out of the ground” and seeing his “corn...suffering very much.” Without any signs of rain in the near future, he bemoaned, “my prospect for a crop altogether is the most gloomy I have ever had.”²⁵² Over three decades of meticulous plantation records, Jones detailed a fairly self-contained agricultural world designed to sustain his workforce throughout the year. Located about thirty miles outside of Savannah along the South Newport River, the plantation’s primary function was to produce cotton and later, rice, for sale. For decades, his “men” and his “women” also cultivated corn, peas, oats, potatoes, and sweet potatoes or slips, raised hogs and cattle (Jones sold some of the former for them), and tended their own plots of land, where they

²⁵⁰ "Agriculture of Louisiana," *DeBow's Review*, May 1847, 415; Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 63.

²⁵¹ Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 55-74.

²⁵² Entry dated May 6, 1839 in William Jones, “Plantation Book, 1839-1858;” GLC03703; GLC.

might have grown additional produce.²⁵³ And while the financial emphasis in his account book revolved around the bales “his” hands grew and picked each year, he could not have prospered without the corn they labored over. Thus his attention to corn, and his ebullience following a good maize harvest, played a close second to cotton in his accounting.

When Jones gathered his corn in the fall of 1839, for example, he reported with pride that he “made twelve hundred and 20 bushels more than I have ever made,” despite the year’s early lack of rain. Similarly, in 1848, he boasted that his crop of over 1,500 bushels of corn was “the largest crop I have ever made.” And when, in the summer of 1862, a Confederate general called for planters’ “hands” to help fortify the city of Savannah, an incensed Jones indicted the policy on the grounds that his loss of their labor during a particular point in the corn-growing season would result in a “Great loss” of the leaves which his slaves stripped from cornstalks and used for fodder. As Jones elaborated, “any one acquainted with farming operations [sic] knows that when corn is molested the blades must be pulled or they will be lost; there is no postponing the work.”²⁵⁴ In so many ways, therefore, corn was integral to Jones’ understanding of successfully operating a cotton plantation. For others like him, homegrown corn formed the basis of their plantation’s energy system; without its caloric value, its ease of long-term storage, and its utility for humans and animals, plantations could not have sustained the volume of slaves who chopped, picked, and baled their cotton.

Jones, however, was an anomaly. Not only did he hold over 100 slaves, but along with his son, he would later go on to edit the agricultural paper the *Southern Cultivator*.²⁵⁵ His position, therefore, enabled him to allocate a sizeable workforce both to cash crops and nonmarket foodstuffs needed for the plantation’s subsistence. Moreover, his agricultural knowledge—and the community to whom he turned for

²⁵³ For the plantation’s geographic location, see Lucinda H. MacKethan’s Introduction to the memoir left by his daughter in Cornelia Jones Pond, *Recollections of a Southern Daughter: A Memoir by Cornelia Jones Pond of Liberty County* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1998), ix-xviii. MacKethan identifies Jones’ plantation as a rice plantation, and indeed toward the end of his account book, he details an increase in rice production, but the account book shows that cotton was a primary cash crop.

²⁵⁴ See entries dated September 20, 1839 and September 18, 1848 in William Jones, “Plantation Book, 1839-1858,” GLC03703; GLC.

²⁵⁵ Mary Carroll Johansen, “Review of Cornelia Jones Pond, *Recollections of a Southern Daughter: A Memoir by Cornelia Jones Pond of Liberty County*,” H-SAWH, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3261>. Accessed March 28, 2008.

advice—ran deep.²⁵⁶ Other planters lacking the time, resources, or inclination to grow much of their slaves' staple foods chose to import both corn and pork in order to meet their plantations' caloric needs. Evidence suggests that it was not grown in large enough quantities to sustain its human and animal populations, for example, along the Gulf coasts of Alabama and Mississippi, or along the Carolina and Georgia coasts.²⁵⁷ And to meet those populations' needs, cash-crop oriented planters and urban populations turned to the granaries of the upper South and the western states.²⁵⁸

While hill country farmers in Tennessee and Kentucky, along with northern parts of Georgia, Alabama, and North Carolina remained significant exporters of food to the cotton producing regions through 1860, a fact which became an important component of the Union's Civil War strategy, the states in the Old Northwest had already become the nation's largest producers of corn and pork.²⁵⁹ The rich western granaries of the 1850s and 1860s to which some southern food importing regions turned had own their roots in the destruction of the region that Richard White identifies as the *pays d'en haut*, and in British and American policies of Native removal. In 1750, in the midst of imperial struggles for an interior empire, a group of Virginia and Maryland colonists petitioned King George II for a tract of land along the Ohio River, which they hoped would provide profitable returns as an inland colony. A year later, Christopher Gist, a surveyor hired by the Ohio Company, identified one such promising stretch of land, which, he wrote, "wants nothing but Cultivation to make it a most delightfull Country." Yet virgin land it was not. The Shawnee and other Native peoples who occupied those lands had improved the land by burning, clearing trees, cultivating and otherwise tending grassy openings for their own uses.²⁶⁰ After the region's native empires collapsed, all that its newly vacant tracts of land needed to make a crop were settlers and seeds.

²⁵⁶ Jones participated in something of an annual ritual where he and a group of peers would ride out to one another's plantations and give estimates of one another's corn and cotton yields. One imagines that they may well have traded suggestions for improving those yields during those events. For example, see entries dated June 27, July 3, 20, 24, and 27, 1844 in William Jones, "Plantation Book, 1839-1858;" GLC.

²⁵⁷ Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 158. For his maps of corn production-consumption ratios in 1840, 1850, and 1860, see pages 159-161.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 234-235.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁶⁰ Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*, 31-44. For comparative analyses of Native land management and ecological change in relation to market integration further south and west, see Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*

While settlers' appropriations of Native lands in the *pays d'en haut* were far from guaranteed, these new arrivals had moved onto many of those lands by 1815.²⁶¹ Through the first decades of the nineteenth century, migrating upland southerners and westering Pennsylvanians sought out formerly Native landscapes in Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and later, southern Indiana and Illinois, where they began mixed agriculture with a special emphasis on feeding livestock from surplus corn.²⁶² By 1839, Tennessee and Kentucky led all other states in the nation in corn production. While they continued to out-grow other southern states for at least two more decades, the western state of Ohio eclipsed both of its southern neighbors in corn production in 1849. Meanwhile Illinois surpassed Tennessee and ranked third in production behind Kentucky. By 1859, Illinois, Ohio, Missouri, and Indiana were the country's top producing corn states.²⁶³

Especially from the 1830s onward, as historian William Cronon has documented, the government and settlers transformed the Illinois and Indiana prairies by rationalizing and selling plots of land. Following Thomas Jefferson's plans for the Northwest Territory, the federal government sold land to farmers who in turn used new steel plows to turn under thick root systems and replace prairie grasses with corn, wheat, and other crops. By the 1850s, the cumulative changes fostered by grain elevators, social organizations like the Grain Exchange, and nascent pork packing industries gave the region terrific economies of scale in corn and pork production.²⁶⁴

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). For pre-contact corn cultivation in the Mississippian and Caddo cultures, see Collin G. Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 96-115.

²⁶¹ White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, especially Chapter 8. Michael Witgen's forthcoming book, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Modern North America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), argues that settlement at this time was still fairly spotty.

²⁶² As L.E. Dupuy, of Shelbyville, Kentucky explained in 1855, the farmers in his county relied on corn and blue-grass, "the most valuable staples of our country," to "graze and feed all our cattle, hogs, and mules." Corn was especially important in solidifying his participation in a larger market economy. "We sell but little corn, and export none," he wrote. "It is fed to cattle, hogs, mules, &c., and, in this way, brings us, in beef and pork, from \$15 to \$25 per acre, according to the value of the animals fed and the care and attention bestowed in feeding them." "Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1855: Agriculture," 172-173. See also Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*; Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*.

²⁶³ See table, "Corn Production by States in Number of Bushels," calculated from U.S. censuses of 1840, 1850, and 1860, in Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 156.

²⁶⁴ On pork packing, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*; Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century*; Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*.

While some of the region's excess crops were bagged and sent downriver to consumers along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and other portions distilled into whiskey, large amounts were fed to cattle and hogs. These animals were slaughtered, driven to eastern markets, or sent to the *entrepôts* of the Midwest's burgeoning packing industry. Indeed, a humorous poem from the late 1850s evokes the relationships among corn, pork, and river transportation. Using *Hiawatha's* well-known meter as the vector for its plot, a poem in the *Cincinnati Gazette* described its city as "the town where swine are slaughtered, / Slaughtered, barreled, and exported" and set its tale within the city's pork packing district, "on a landing where the steamboats / Stop for spare-ribs and for whisky... / Stands a block of ancient buildings / dedicated... / Wholly unto...sausages entirely..."²⁶⁵ While some might dismiss the *Gazette's* form of Saturday morning humor as simply that, it illuminates the ways in which the movement of corn and cotton linked regional geographies of production and consumption and suggests the extent to which a population recognized that its livelihood revolved around corn and pork.

Although acres of corn outnumbered acres of cotton grown in the South, the latter was more politically visible than the former because southern cotton fed European mills and, in turn, united planters and statesmen in political, economic, and social arenas. By the same token, northeastern cotton mills depended on the regular outflow of ginned bales from New Orleans and other southern ports in order to keep their workers employed, machines running, and investments profitable. But not only did locally produced corn sustain the southern plantations which produced northward-bound cotton, so too did western grain and—especially—corn-fed pork shipped downriver. In similar fashion, U.S. grown corn and wheat, which were undergoing dramatic developments of their own, increasingly fed industrial workers toiling in European factories.²⁶⁶ Such multivalent forms of interregional and trans-Atlantic exchange, then, ultimately complicated Secessionist assumptions of "King Cotton diplomacy."²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Jas. W. Ward, "The Song of Higher Water," December 1, 185-; HWLDP; LONG 17314 Series XIII, Subseries D, Section 2: Poems and Prose, 1755-1971, box 118, folder 5; LNHS.

²⁶⁶ For the effects of the grain elevator, the Chicago Board of Trade, the influence of the Crimean War, and the inventions of grain grading and the futures market, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.

²⁶⁷ Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*. See also Louis B. Schmidt, "The Influence of Wheat and Cotton on Anglo-American Relations During the Civil War," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 16 (1918).

BLOCKADES AND EMBARGOES: KING COTTON DIPLOMACY DIMINISHED

Given the complicated and potentially controversial ties binding North American and European sites of production and consumption, it is understandable that some northern policy makers, western farmers, and New York merchants professed sympathy for the Southern cause, and that, by extension, many southerners believed that demand for their cash crops would shape the outcome of the growing crisis to their ends.²⁶⁸ Even as late as December of 1860, for example, New Orleans merchant William E. Leverich explained that the United States' "practical" needs for slave-produced cotton *should* prevent dissolution of the Union. In a letter to his brother Charles, his New York-based business partner, William explained that from a cotton-centric perspective, "slavery is productive of moral & natural good to... Society at large as much to the North as to the South." Thus, he calculated, "if this Union is to be preserved, the sooner they [the Abolitionists] back down the better."²⁶⁹ William reasoned that Yankee merchants' trade in cotton and with New Orleans and Liverpool should logically cause them to side with the South.²⁷⁰ Imagine, therefore, his shock and utter dismay upon discovering that Charles had come to side with the Union.²⁷¹

Just as southern states' calls for secession transformed the relationships within the Leverich family and the regional business communities with which the brothers traded, perceptions of King Cotton's power on the global market shifted after the attack on Fort Sumter. In April of 1861, Lincoln imposed a blockade on key Southern ports. On paper, this was designed to prevent cotton from moving out of southern ports, and by extension, British credit and supplies from flowing into the Confederacy in exchange for cotton.

²⁶⁸ See E. Merton Coulter, "The Effects of Secession Upon the Commerce of the Mississippi Valley," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 3 (1916); Philip S. Foner, *Business and Slavery: The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 168, 171-172; Michael Zakim, "The Dialectics of Merchant Capital: New York City Businessmen and the Secession Crisis of 1860-1861," *New York History* 87 (2006).

²⁶⁹ W.E. Leverich to C.P. Leverich, December 10, 1860; Leverich Papers (LP); Series I, box 11, folder 9; New York Historical Society (NYHS), New York.

²⁷⁰ W.E. Leverich to C.P. Leverich, December 15 and 24, 1860; LP; Series I, box 11, folder 9; NYHS.

²⁷¹ For William's realization that Charles was supporting the cause of Union, see W.E. Leverich to C.P. Leverich, May 6, 1861; LP; Series I, box 11, folder 10; NYHS. This is understandable given that Charles' own business receipts spanning the war years demonstrate a lively trade with coopers, soap makers, lace importers, ice cream makers and other artisans and merchants. Had Charles sided with William, "King Cotton," and the cause of secession, it is plausible that his business might have been ruined. Instead, according to the collection's finding aids, it was William who ended up working for his brother after the war. For a selection of receipts, see Series II, boxes 25 and 26.

The blockade also sought to block the movement of foodstuffs from western to southern states. However, the state of the U.S. Navy was woefully inadequate in 1861, and even with a concentration of vessels at key Confederate ports, in the gulf stream, and at neutral ports in Mexico and the West Indies, blockade runners were able to enter and exit Confederate ports with impunity.²⁷² Lincoln's blockade, then, did very little to prohibit the movement of cotton from southern ports to British looms during the first years of war.

What did affect this trade, however, were a series of extra-legal embargos promoted by Confederate newspaper, planter, and merchant (factor) interests. Though President Jefferson Davis never officially permitted such an embargo, state governments, private associations, and individual planters across the South sought to ban the export of Southern cotton throughout 1861 and into 1862, under the ongoing assumption that King Cotton could bring Britain's "John Bull" to his knees, and the related belief that European importers of U.S. cotton would have to intervene in favor of the Confederacy.²⁷³ From July to September of 1861, for example, New Orleans merchants imposed a kind of internal blockade on cotton, whereby they refused to accept bales shipped from interior regions to their port city in hopes that they could prevent the movement of cotton abroad, at least until Britain came calling for those supplies with military assistance.²⁷⁴ While the Confederate government did not condone the New Orleans embargo and other attempts like it, such actions were popular. Meanwhile, an oppressively low price of cotton on the world market reinforced unofficial blockades. Together, these disincentives, more than Lincoln's blockade, prevented Confederate

²⁷² Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 250-252.

²⁷³ As Jeffrey Rogers Hummel explains, "[t]he Confederate government did not directly enforce this policy." Rather, "Voluntary compliance, local committees of public safety, and state governments policed the cotton embargo instead." Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American Civil War* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1996), 167. This resonates with Stanley Lebergott's argument that the Confederacy's lack of central control over its cotton exports dramatically influenced its losses. See Stanley Lebergott, "Why the South Lost: Commercial Purpose in the Confederacy, 1861-1865," *Journal of American History* 70, no. 1 (1983): 60-62. It also corroborates what Frank Owsley has said about the influence, on one hand, of newspapers, planters, and factors in imposing an embargo through the spring of 1862, and, on the other, the hand of President Davis in prohibiting an official confederate embargo. See Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 27-44.

²⁷⁴ Scott P. Marler, "An Abiding Faith in Cotton: The Merchant Capitalist Community of New Orleans, 1860-1862," *Civil War History* 54, no. 3 (2008).

cotton from feeding European mills such that British imports of U.S. cotton fell by ninety-six percent between 1860 and 1862.²⁷⁵

Unfortunately for the Confederacy, this precipitous decrease did not commandeer British demand in ways white Southerners had anticipated. In part, this was because 1860 had been a banner year for cotton exports and British firms remained relatively well stocked in cotton during the early years of the war. In addition, Britain's growing dependency on U.S. grain, along with European nations' efforts at sourcing raw cotton in India, Egypt, and Brazil, made the drop in southern cotton not especially significant. Thus as European nation-states increased the availability of raw cotton from markets outside of North America, and as they remained cognizant of other dimensions of their North American alliances, King Cotton diplomacy revealed itself to be far less potent than planters, factors, and Confederate leaders had hoped.²⁷⁶

Changes in the production and movement of foodstuffs were among the most important outgrowths of the Union's blockade. With key internal waterways closed, and—more significantly—with western shippers choosing or unable to send their products downriver, transporting foodstuffs and livestock south from points west and north became exceedingly difficult. One cartoon, for instance, depicted an Ohio father and son defending rich stores of corn, pork and oats from a lean Confederate scavenger. **[Image 2.2]** As fighting in the War's western theater escalated throughout 1861 and 1862, Union and Confederate battles for control of the Mississippi River and for the key corn and pork producing border states of Tennessee and Kentucky affected geographies of food production and consumption. With key Midwestern food sources shut down and a Union chokehold on Tennessee and Kentucky cornfields, the Confederacy's needs for corn, beef, sugar, salt and other goods prompted a shift from market crops like slave-produced cotton to the nonmarket agricultural products which would better sustain the population. Home-grown corn was first among the items that could be procured without the risks of running the blockade.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire," 1409-1410. For combined effects of low cotton prices and the embargo, see Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 282.

²⁷⁶ Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire," 1411. Owsley also attributes British non-intervention to incentives for earning "war profits." See Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 562-578.

²⁷⁷ E. Merton Coulter, "The Movement for Agricultural Reorganization in the Cotton South During the Civil War," *Agricultural History* 1, no. 1 (1927).



Image 2.2 / “The Situation in Ohio,” *Harper's Weekly*, September 20, 1862, 602.

As early as the fall of 1861, Richmond leaders circulated word that planters should switch from cotton to corn production. Initially, the Northern press met those calls with skepticism. *Harper's Weekly* explained that the Confederate government's move amounted to a kind of radical abolitionism; because the price of slaves hinged on the price of cotton, and because cotton had no market, the magazine inferred that there would be no market for slaves and in turn, the system of wealth-accrual through slavery would break down. Indeed, it wrote, “Growing corn and wheat with slave-labor is like manuring the earth with patés de foie gras. The harvest will be fine, no doubt; but every ear of corn will cost its weight in gold.”²⁷⁸ Yet even though a planter's turn toward slave-grown corn may not have been profitable in the sense that cotton had been, such a shift was practical and patriotic. The planter William Jones counted himself among those who heeded the Confederacy's call to produce more foodstuffs. In the summer of 1862, before he protested the loss of field hands during the fodder-producing season, he was among the planters who had “responded most patreoctally” [sic] to the call to produce

²⁷⁸ “Abolitionists at the South,” *Harper's Weekly*, November 23 1861.

corn instead of cotton. In consequence, he observed, “the largest grain crop the South has ever produced is now being made.”²⁷⁹ His patriotism may also have had financial incentives, however. In July, the *Scientific American* told its readers that governors of some Confederate states had compelled planters to transform cotton fields to corn by taxing the value of cotton to its full price, thereby making “King Cotton” a “deposed monarch” in the South.²⁸⁰ While marching outside of St. Louis that summer, Iowa volunteer William Guernsey wrote to his mother Emeline and confirmed such accounts. He reported walking past fields of “300 or 400 acres of corn, sometimes 6 or 7 hundred that being nearly all the crop raised.”²⁸¹ That fall, even the *Southern Cultivator* commented on the remarkable transformation. “Hurrah for the reign of King Corn,” it wrote. Praising the Confederacy’s corn yields and the lower prices, fatter horses, and plumper chickens they foretold, the *Cultivator*’s Confederate editors mused that “[w]ith corn in plenty, we shall have a general improvement and mitigation in [prices] and other necessities of life.”²⁸² As evidence from the *Southern Cultivator* and other papers demonstrate, western merchants’ decision to respect (or their inability to profit from) the blockade impelled shifts in the outputs of southern fields, which in turn overlapped with self-imposed embargoes to ultimately diminish the quantities of cotton available for export to Britain. By the end of 1862, therefore, King Cotton’s economic and political weight abroad was sinking fast.

But during the first year of the war, it was not yet clear how Britain’s need for cotton would shape the war’s outcome. Even though “Liverpool,” according to Sven Beckert, was “the most pro-Confederate place in the world outside the Confederacy itself,” Northern presses used the idea of the North’s bountiful granaries to reassure themselves and their readers that European nations would side with the cause of Union.²⁸³ In October of 1861, the *New York Herald* explained to its readers that a banner harvest of U.S. supplies of corn and wheat would be available for export to Europe. Conveniently, Europe was dealing with a severe crop shortage. Because the blockade meant that the South was not going to consume Northern “bread, pork and whiskey,” as

²⁷⁹ [Summer of 1862], William Jones, “Plantation Book, 1839-1858;” GLC.

²⁸⁰ “Suspension of Cotton Growing at the South,” *Scientific American*, July 5 1862, 8.

²⁸¹ William Donaldson Guernsey to EDG, July 24, 1862; GFP; box 3, folder 23; HL.

²⁸² “The Corn Crop,” *Southern Cultivator*, September/October 1862, 180.

²⁸³ Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire,” 1416.

had been done in years past, excess crops available might secure European alliances. With great confidence in the Union's ability to fill cotton operatives' bellies, the *Herald* crowed, "our surplus breadstuffs" would be "of more importance to those countries than Southern cotton." For this reason, *Herald* writers assured, "King Cotton is already dethroned and King Corn stands above him in England and France."²⁸⁴

Similar editorials appeared throughout New England. A Maine paper reported that because "the price of bread [in Europe] is already producing some popular disorder," neither Britain nor France was expected to recognize "the Southern Confederacy."²⁸⁵ According to the *Saturday Evening Post*, "The revolution in commerce...has dethroned the Southern King Cotton." Therefore, it added, "the Northern King Corn now reigns instead. Poor Cotton cannot feed his own subjects at home, has no revenue, and gets no more adulation abroad."²⁸⁶ That fall, the *Daily National Intelligencer* took pains to assure its readers that "the economical interests of European States [would be] best consulted by the maintenance of [the] Union." Even though the South had informed European governments that they would have access to its cotton only if they raised the Northern blockade, it explained, the *Intelligencer* deployed the Union's position as an exporter of food to England to downgrade the significance of the Confederacy's attempt to mastermind an Anglo-Confederate alliance. "[W]hat," it asked, "would foreign Powers think if the loyal States...should declare that no corn shall be exported to any European country which does not actively array itself on the side of [the Union]?"²⁸⁷ *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* responded to the *Intelligencer's* query by warning that "[a]n embargo on the export of grain would plunge Europe into social anarchy and political revolution." Thus while "Cotton may be great," *Leslie's* crowed, "Corn is the lord of the hour!"²⁸⁸

CASTING BREAD UPON THE WATERS

²⁸⁴ "Our Civil War in England and France--King Cotton Dethroned by King Corn," *New York Herald*, October 12, 1861.

²⁸⁵ "King Corn on Our Side," *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, October 24, 1861.

²⁸⁶ "No Title," *Saturday Evening Post*, November 9, 1861, 6.

²⁸⁷ "King Corn," *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 13, 1861.

²⁸⁸ "King Corn!--Long Live the King!," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated*, November 16, 1861. Here, I diverge from Owsley's argument as to the significance of American grains on the outcome of the war, as he placed more weight on Britain's possibilities to profit. I don't discount the latter argument, but evidence clearly suggests that western grains, corn and wheat alike, played a significant ideological role in convincing Britons of American Union benevolence. See Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 565-569.

Delving deeper into the market-driven worlds of King Cotton and King Corn demonstrates how anthropomorphic sectional representations of agricultural production and industrial consumption could and did attain concrete political aims. By late 1862, the Union blockade, Confederate states' own shifts away from cotton growing and toward food production and depressed prices for cotton on account of previous harvests had prevented much southern cotton from entering Britain's mills for well over a year. But because Britain had not fully expanded its colonial sources for raw cotton, many in the north still feared that mill owners might pressure British politicians and merchants to formally recognize and lend material support to the Confederacy. Therefore, when speculations and reports began to circulate through the Northern press that Britain's mill workers were expected to be in great privation over the coming winter, members of New York's mercantile community allied with businessmen, farmers, and religious communities across the Great West in an attempt to provide Britain's cotton workers with American corn and other foodstuffs, where they hoped to stymie the prospect of British assistance toward the Confederacy.

In early November, 1862, the *New York Times* published an editorial asking members of leading mercantile institutions in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and New York to consider sending foodstuffs to cotton operatives in Manchester. Pleading that Britain's working-class cotton weavers and spinners would face a winter with dramatically diminished resources, the *Times* asked whether Americans might send "a boatload of corn and wheat out of the God-given bounties of our land?"²⁸⁹ Pressing further, it argued that Britain's cotton workers deserved this assistance because the operatives steadfastly remained the Union's true friends, in contrast to that country's political, social and economic elites who had provided ships and rifles to the Confederacy and were considering recognizing it as a separate entity. "[E]ven though their distress

²⁸⁹ "Our Friends in England a Practical Suggestion," *New York Times*, November 8, 1862. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook," International Relief Committee Records (IRC), NYHS. See also Douglas Maynard, "Civil War "Care:" the Mission of the George Griswold," *The New England Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1961): 291-292. For British papers' discussions of mill closings and their effects on cotton spinners and weavers, see clippings "Lancashire Distress and Relief Organization" and "The Cotton Distress—To the Rescue!" both probably from *The Illustrated London News*, Saturday, November 22, 1862, which had been sent "From the American Consul at Manchester to the New York Chamber of Comm[er]ce," and were pasted inside the "International Relief Committee Scrapbook."

has necessarily always been traced directly to the war,” the *Times* praised, “they have resolved by votes...that there should be no interference.”²⁹⁰

By the end of the month, a number of interest groups had popularized the idea of sending relief to England, especially in the shape of American corn.²⁹¹ In late November, a group of merchants were invited to meet in New York’s Chamber of Commerce to discuss the state of affairs for “the poor starving operatives of Lancashire, England.”²⁹² At the first meeting of what became the International Relief Committee (hereafter the IRC), a dozen city leaders debated the merits of sending aid overseas.²⁹³ The issue of the operatives’ hunger and perceptions of the North’s agricultural bounties shaped debates about sending aid. It was not a question, according to William Dodge, whether there was enough to feed the Union in addition to overseas consumers. For two years, he rationalized, “we have had super abundant crops; enough to feed our large army, millions to export, and enough left in our granaries to prevent those who have sympathized with us, who have worked up the products of our soil for years past—to prevent them from dying for the want of food which we have in such surplus.”²⁹⁴ Indeed, the early years of the Civil War had been good for Union foodstuffs, another speaker added, and “our granaries [are] full to overflowing with all manner of stores.”²⁹⁵

Despite their confidence in the Union’s excess grain capacity, many of these leaders were aware that the process of sending aid to workers overseas was inextricably bound within larger debates about foreign intervention in the Civil War and European nations’ recognition of the Confederacy. The war—having prompted southern states’ embargoes and the Union’s blockade of the Confederacy—was almost wholly to blame for the British operatives’ cotton famine. The question of the day remained whether

²⁹⁰ "Our Friends in England a Practical Suggestion."

²⁹¹ When a “Buffalo Corn Man” volunteered to donate 500 bushels of corn and proposed that others give 20,000 more, the *Times* challenged other eastern cities to donate 20,000 bushels of corn apiece. See "The Proposed Relief for the Suffering English Operatives," *The New York Times*, November 26, 1862; "The Distress in Lancashire," *The New York Times*, November 26, 1862; Maynard, "Civil War “Care:” the Mission of the George Griswold," 292.

²⁹² See Invitation, issued November 28, 1862, in “International Relief Committee Scrapbook.” See also International Relief Commission, “Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee,” December 1, 1862- July 9, 1863; IRC; NYHS.

²⁹³ The Chamber of Commerce and the Produce Exchange also began to sponsor relief efforts for Britain at about this time. See Maynard, "Civil War “Care:” the Mission of the George Griswold," 295-296.

²⁹⁴ "The Meeting to Aid English Starving Operatives," [December 3?], 1862. In “International Relief Committee Scrapbook.”

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

Britain, whose mills and mill owners had thrived on the trade of slave-grown American cotton, would formally recognize the Confederacy. Thus however the members of the IRC couched their mission of charity within disavowals of partisan interest, the issue on everyone's mind was whether providing cotton operatives with American corn would, in fact, assist the cause of the Union.

As the press, private societies, and the public skittered around the questions of Christian charity, duty, and British recognition of the Confederacy, the discourse about relieving the cotton famine with corn and other grains actually revolved around the (agri)cultural future of the nation. Would King Corn come to rule a dominion of "free soil," free labor republicans marching ever westward? Or would King Cotton's slave labor rule the day, and would Britain's so-called wage slaves have a hand in ensuring its survival? Through their efforts at assuaging the real hunger British operatives felt as a result of the War-imposed cotton famine, the IRC, the national press, corporations, and private citizens alike placed the provisioning of American corn at the center of ideals about private, corporate, and national duty. Moreover, they linked the agriculturally rich Great West to economically powerful cities along the eastern seaboard and further entrenched the figure of King Corn—as a counterpoint to King Cotton—as a symbol of Union beneficence.

Two days after the IRC's initial meeting, the Boston shipping firm of N.L. & Geo. Griswold, which had extensive experience in the flour and tea trade, offered their new ship, the *George Griswold*, to the nascent relief effort.²⁹⁶ Assuming that the IRC could stock it with foodstuffs, the *Griswold's* 1,800 tons would serve as a floating relief larder for its maiden voyage. To accomplish this, IRC leaders started a subscription and requested donations, "especially from the great food producing States." They also ran advertisements in a variety of newspapers, which in turn circulated beyond New York, and printed 1,000 copies of an "Appeal for the Suffering Operatives of Great Britain" in New York's religious and secular papers.²⁹⁷ Through these media, the IRC emphasized

²⁹⁶ Ibid. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook." For more on the firm of N.L. & George Griswold, see Robert Greenhalgh Albion, "Yankee Domination of New York Port, 1820-1865," *The New England Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1932): 672-673.

²⁹⁷ For donation and subscription requests, see December 1 and 4, 1862 meetings detailed in the International Relief Commission, "Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee." The papers in which the IRC submitted paid announcements included *The New York Herald*, *The New York*

that American corn would be central to assuaging the British cotton famine. “[T]he operatives of Lancashire, temporarily deprived of American cotton,” the IRC stated, “have more occasion than ever for American corn.” Their proclamation requested that public servants and clergy ask for donations, encouraged railroad companies and lake-going vessels to furnish the transportation costs of the grain, and “especially” looked to “food-producing states for prompt and generous contributions from the grain accumulated on their hands.”²⁹⁸

While support began to pour in immediately, it was not done in name of Christian charity alone. By and large, money and foodstuffs came attached to statements of support for the Union and for British workers. A group of ten donors, for example, promised to each “furnish...1,000 bushels of prime shipping corn.”²⁹⁹ Another individual sent a \$1,000 check to the IRC and requested that it purchase ““one thousand barrels of flour” from one whose loaf will taste the sweeter for sharing it with a famished Brother, and brand it ‘Union.’”³⁰⁰ Praising “the operatives of the cotton districts and their representatives in Parliament [who have] resisted reiterated efforts to secure their co-operation against our blockade and in favor of [int]ervention,” another donor gave an additional \$1,000. He cajoled others to “make haste to “cast our bread upon the waters,”” with the expectation that good tidings would return to the nation who cast it.³⁰¹

Although the IRC repeatedly framed its mission as one of charity and duty, devoid of “any consideration of political expediency, or the slightest allusion to any action, either in the past or future, taken or expected to be taken either by the British

Times, *N.Y. World*, *N. Y. Tribune*, *Journal of Commerce*, *Evening Post*, *Evening Express*, *Commercial Advertiser*, and *The New Yorker* (Weekly). See December 18, 1862 meeting noted in “Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee.”

²⁹⁸ “International Relief Committee, to the American People: An Appeal for the Suffering Operatives of Great Britain,” in “International Relief Committee Scrapbook.”

²⁹⁹ “The Produce Exchange Relief Meeting,” [December 8?], 1862. In “International Relief Committee Scrapbook.” For other descriptions of support, see letter from William E. Dodge, December 5, 1862, in “International Relief Committee Letterbook, December 1862-July 1863;” IRC; NYHS. In the “International Relief Committee Scrapbook,” see also “The Charity of New York,” *The Journal of Commerce*, December 5, 1862; *The Delaware Republican*, December 8, 1862.

³⁰⁰ “Union” to IRC, December 4, 1862, “International Relief Committee Letterbook, December 1862-July 1863;” IRC; NYHS.

³⁰¹ “The International Relief Committee,” *Evening Express*, Saturday evening, December 6, 1862. In “International Relief Committee Scrapbook.”

Government or British people,” its relief mission spoke to precisely those concerns.³⁰² Donations of money to purchase American corn, along with (corn-fed) bacon, butter, flour, rice, and bread, would serve the national defense by crafting material and symbolic relationships with British laborers. Indeed, the Reverend Theodore Cuyler noted that loading sacks of grain onto the *George Griswold* would “sack” Britain into a powerful alliance:

“We will load her [the *George Griswold*]...with the golden produce of our prairies, and with the best brands from the vallies of the Ohio and Genesee. When she is so full that she will not hold another ham, or even a red herring, then run up the Stars and Stripes, and...Let her go into the harbor of Liverpool—that hotbed for secession...Lay her alongside of those magnificent docks, and then let her open—not her batteries, but her *butterys*—discharging one hundred bags of bacon every hour. Then let her bombard the city with a broadside of flour barrels—sending each barrel as straight to hungry mouths as Admiral Foote sent his deadly shells into Fort Donelson! And when Liverpool has been thoroughly sacked with sacks of grain, and bombarded with flour casks—when the starving poor have heard the proclamation, “come and buy bread without money and without price,” then if John Bull is not conquered, there is no merit in gospel-gunnery.”³⁰³

Cartoonists in nationally circulated magazines reiterated Cuyler’s flour-y warmongering by figuring corn in representations of American assistance to Britain. *Harper’s Weekly* took no pains to tiptoe around the need to quell John Bull’s support of the Confederacy. In one cartoon panel, “Mr. Confederate” appears at the “John Bull Vari[ety Store]” to load up with guns and a model of the ship *Alabama*, which Northern readers would have recognized as a known raider and blockade runner. John Bull remarks in parting that Mr. Confederate’s money was “all right,” and invites him to “Call at our little shop again, Sir.” The magazine contrasted this representation of the dangers of an Anglo-Confederate alliance with an adjoining panel showcasing Union benevolence. Recognizing the humanity and hunger of British cotton operatives, the familiar stock figure of Brother Jonathan looks down kindly upon a family of “hungry English workmen,” huddling together and looking up for American assistance. Grasped firmly in his massively corded arms, Jonathan holds a giant bag labeled “CORN.” Large barrels of butter and pork, along with flour, emphasize western agricultural abundance

³⁰² "International Relief," *The New York Times*, December 8, 1862. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook."

³⁰³ "Local Intelligence," *New York Times*, December 7, 1862; Maynard, "Civil War "Care:" the Mission of the *George Griswold*."

and tantalize the hungry workers with the prospect of Union benevolence. Though he offers assistance to the workers, Jonathan can't help but critique that their hunger was caused by Britain's long affiliation with Southern interests. "Starving, eh!" he remarks. "Your old man hasn't behaved like a *friend*, or else you wouldn't have been in this pickle. But I can't see you hungry, so fire away."³⁰⁴ **[Image 2.3]**

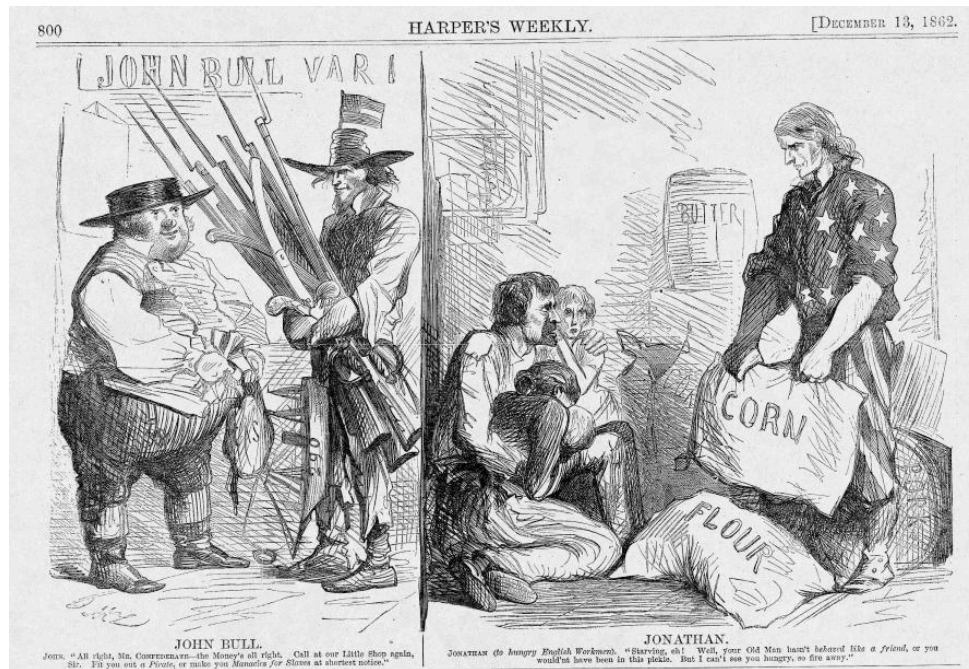


Image 2.3 / “John Bull” and “Jonathan,”” *Harper's Weekly*, December 13, 1862, 800.

Similarly, *Vanity Fair* ran a full-page drawing featuring Columbia dutifully supplying “England’s Poor” with money and bags of “Corn” and “Wheat,” even as visual cues like a painting of the *Alabama*, a stick-wielding John Bull, a barking British bulldog and a rifle labeled “Intervention” reminded readers that “John Bull’s [supposed] neutrality” might be all the payback the North would receive.³⁰⁵ **[Image 2.4]**

³⁰⁴ ““John Bull” and “Jonathan,”” *Harper's Weekly*, December 13, 1862, 800; Maynard, “Civil War “Care:” the Mission of the George Griswold,” 301.

³⁰⁵ Bobbett-Hooper, “Columbia Brings Substantial Blessings to Her Poor Relations over the Sea,” *Vanity Fair*, December 20 1862, 295. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Referenced in Maynard, “Civil War “Care:” the Mission of the George Griswold,” 301.



Image 2.4 / “Columbia Brings Substantial Blessings to Her Poor Relations over the Sea,” *Vanity Fair*, December 20 1862, 295.

Representations of Britain’s starving cotton workers, its mercantile elites, and America’s agrarian surplus featured corn as the key assurance of the Union’s survival. Indeed, in yet another cartoon, Uncle Sam—flanked again by bags labeled “CORN”—lobbed loaves of bread into a crowd of British elites. The caption quipped, as readers would have understood, that those bags of corn, loaves of Graham Bread, and barrels of flour would indeed help “Defeat...the British Aristocracy.”³⁰⁶ **[Image 2.5]**

³⁰⁶ “Glaring Outrage by Uncle Sam Upon John Bull, and Another Defeat of the British Aristocracy 1863;” CWC; Box 1, Folder 2: Humor of War, 1863; AAS.

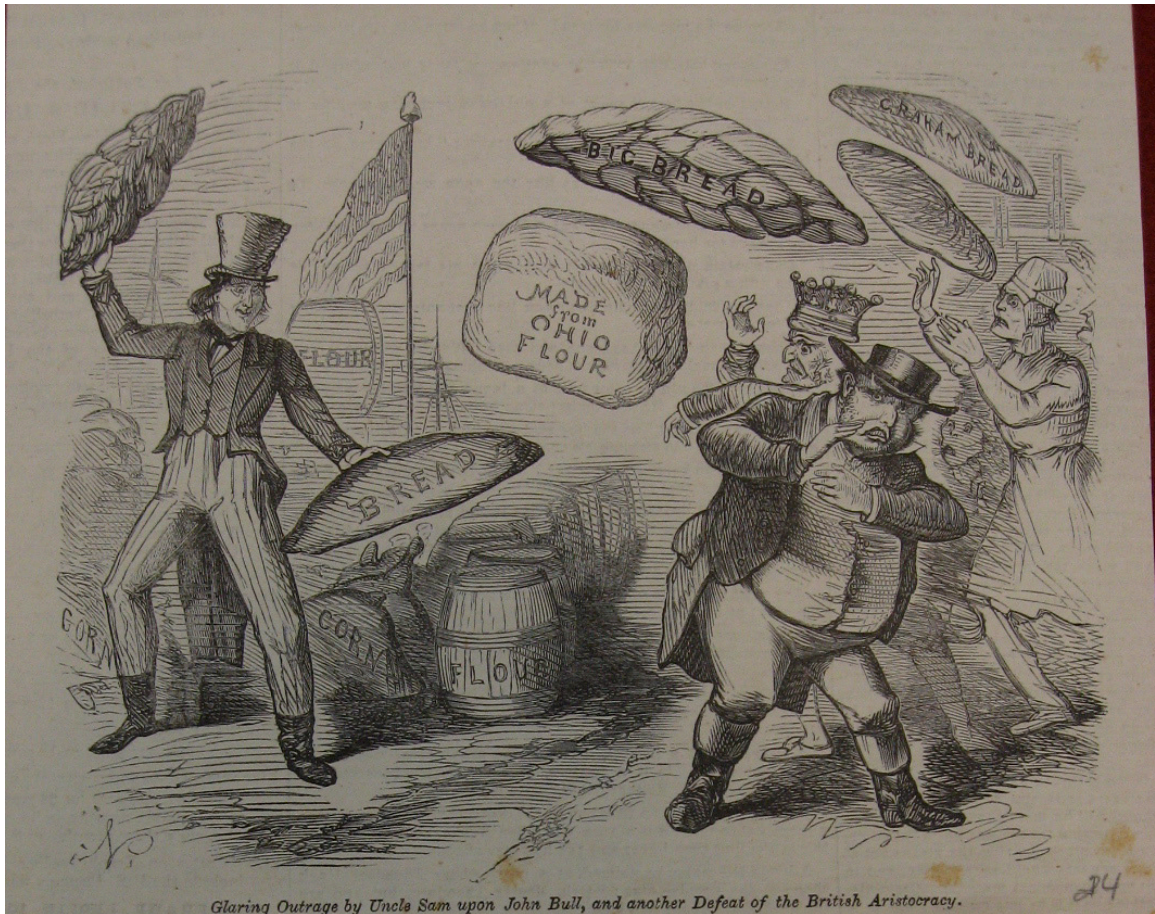


Image 2.5 / “Glaring Outrage by Uncle Sam Upon John Bull, and Another Defeat of the British Aristocracy,” 1863.

Writers also wielded their pens to rouse Americans to action in defense of the Union. England “has been rendering the rebellious States all the secret aid in its power,” the *New York Herald* protested. “Iron-clad ships have been built in her docks, and let loose to prey upon and destroy our merchant vessels. Vessel after vessel has been fitted out with improved weapons of warfare, and dispatched to Southern ports, many of them breaking through the blockade,...[to] secure the success of the wicked rebellion.” By feeding the laboring classes with corn, the *Herald* exclaimed, “we are, by this generous act, “heaping coals of fire” upon the heads of the aristocracy of England.”³⁰⁷

Even with wide support, the IRC and the other organizations associated with the cotton workers’ relief movement could not conjure corn out of subscriptions alone. The press, in turn, requested direct assistance from western farmers and a system for

³⁰⁷ “Aid to the Lancashire Operatives,” *New York Herald*, December 8, 1862. In “International Relief Committee Scrapbook.”

transmitting donated foodstuffs to the eastern seaboard. The editors of the *Commercial Advertiser* voiced their belief that “the honest and kind-hearted population that raise our cereals,” swayed by the idea that the relief effort would defend “the existence of civil liberty and the rights of free labor,” would certainly “open their garner, and of their abundance contribute to the sustenance of the manly Britons, who bear all manner of suffering with a sublime patience, rather than have their government do an evil deed by taking openly the side of the foulest wrong the world has ever known.”³⁰⁸

Chiming in on the duty of western farmers to contribute to this effort, a contributor to the *New York Times* highlighted corn as the means to the desired end. “While traveling in Central Illinois, a week or two since,” he wrote, “I was told that the farmers living from ten to twenty miles from a railroad were burning their ripe yellow corn in the ear for fuel, it being cheaper six cents a bushel than the current price of coal!”³⁰⁹irate, and seeking to tug on the sentimental heartstrings of patriotic readers, he contrasted the image of the smoldering kernels with the vision of a Lancashire family, “in fancy standing outside that Western farmer’s ruddy window looking, with eyes so hungry” at the sight of the American farmer and his family warmed and fed “by the superabundance of his fields.” “What a luxury,” cajoled the writer, “would a handful of these half-charred kernels be to that starving group looking in at the farmer’s window?”³⁰⁹

In response to these rousing depictions, support for the IRC poured in from points near and far.³¹⁰ Subscribers ranged from wealthy eastern advocates such as J. Pierpont Morgan and William Astor to workaday donors like “a poor man,” “Union forever,” and “A Soldier in the Army of the Potomac.”³¹¹ Throughout December and January, the IRC received letters from citizens and church organizations in Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin,

³⁰⁸ “The International Relief Fund,” *Commercial Advertiser*, December 9, 1862. In “International Relief Committee Scrapbook.”

³⁰⁹ E.B., “The Lancashire Sufferers—to the Editor of the New York Times,” *The New York Times*, December 12, 1862. In “International Relief Committee Scrapbook.”

³¹⁰ Maynard states that the only other city to act in response was Philadelphia, and minimizes the role that states west of the seaboard played in making donations. However, it is difficult to imagine that he, who relied mostly on printed reports about the IRC, was able to find substantial evidence of inland states’ donations. My findings, based on newspaper clippings and letters saved by IRC members in the IRC’s minute book, scrapbook, and letterbook, hint at a wider participation than he found. Maynard, “Civil War ‘Care:’ the Mission of the George Griswold,” 298-299.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*: 301.

Illinois, New York and Ohio, asking how they could support the IRC's efforts.³¹²

Businessmen rallied, as well. A Cincinnati businessman, for example, announced that he would accept donations on behalf of Lancashire operatives.³¹³ Similarly, the Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce formed a subscription list to generate funds to support the IRC's efforts. In a private letter, S.J. Hooker, the president of that organization, expressed his hopes that Milwaukee's citizens and other Wisconsin residents would donate on behalf of the cause. Most assuredly, he added, "[t]he sufferings caused by the subjects of King Cotton will be amply relieved by the Subjects of King Corn."³¹⁴

Relieving Britain's subjects of King Cotton required more than the generous hearts of King Corn's, however. "Now there's the rub," the *Times* added. "The farmer will give it. Who will convey it to the seaboard, and who thence across the Atlantic." Pointing to the "Railway Companies, permeating the Great West," it asked whether they would "do this one thing" and "run an ordinary freight train one trip the length of their lines, laden with corn for the sufferers in England, without charge?"³¹⁵ Responding to the calls of the press and to the IRC's originally published "Appeal," railroads sent letter after letter of support, offering free transport of goods along their lines. The Board of Directors of the Pittsburgh, Ft. Wayne, and Chicago Railroad, for example, volunteered to "transport over their lines free of charge, all articles of provisions donated...for the benefit of the English suffering operatives."³¹⁶

While it is difficult to ascertain the amount of produce ultimately freighted eastward from the grain growing regions versus cash donated to purchase those goods, it is certain that the *George Griswold*, when fully loaded, was prepared to unleash a goodly

³¹² In a letter from Rev. W.L. Githens (Cannelton, Indiana) to Solon Robinson, January 3, 1863, Githens stated that members of his congregation had family and friends in Manchester, and wanted to send items to specific individuals. His letter was read in an IRC meeting ten days later, and "[t]he Secretary was directed to reply that if the flour was sent free to the Treasurer it would be forwarded as desired." See records for January 13, 1863 in "International Relief Committee Letterbook, December 1862-July 1863" and "Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee." See also records for January 10 and 17, 1863, in "Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee, December 1, 1862- July 9, 1863."

³¹³ *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, December 12, 1862. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook."

³¹⁴ S.J. Hooker to John Taylor Johnson, January 3, 1863, in "International Relief Committee Letterbook, December 1862-July 1863."

³¹⁵ E.B., "The Lancashire Sufferers—to the Editor of the New York Times." In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook."

³¹⁶ See, for example, letters dated December 9, 1862 in the "International Relief Committee Letterbook, December 1862-July 1863." See also minutes for December 11, 13, 17, and 22, 1862 in "Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee, December 1, 1862- July 9, 1863."

and symbolic quantity of corn and other products from the nation's "butterys." On January 9, 1863, just over two months after the *Times* first raised awareness of the operatives' distress, the ship left its pier on the East River. To date, the IRC had received \$108,000 in donations, in addition to produce and the use of the ship.³¹⁷ The *Griswold's* departure was too "peculiar" and "significant" to have gone unmarked. A letter from a member of Parliament, read to those attending the send-off, praised the work of the committee for relief and the operatives for not intervening on behalf of the South. "The working class of England," the writer noted, "have had a vague notion that the cause of the North is their cause. They have not had a very clear comprehension of the character of the quarrel, but they know on the one side there is Slavery and on the other Free labor, and that has decided them in their support of the North." And although members of the IRC steadfastly maintained that their "work was a noble duty of charity" and disavowed any political intentions that the writer of the letter, the New York press, and their many donors attempted to ascribe to their mission, the editor of the paper was more direct. Laden with corn, pork, and other goods, the *George Griswold*, readers were told, was "a scuttle full of the hottest kind of coals, and we with heartfelt pleasure pour them on the aristocratic pates of the revilers of republicanism and of American nationality who inhabit the little island of England, and control dominions from whose horizons the sun never sets."³¹⁸

Despite splitting a topsail in transit, the *George Griswold* arrived safely in Liverpool on February 9th, 1863.³¹⁹ Over the weeks that followed, its holds were emptied

³¹⁷ With their funds, the IRC purchased an additional 11,236 barrels of flour, 50 of pork, and 125 of bread, along with 277 boxes of bread, 200 boxes of bacon, and 500 bushels of corn. In addition, the Produce Exchange invested \$23,000 in 1500 barrels of flour, 50 of beef, 200 boxes of bacon, and rice. See minutes for January 9, 1863, in "Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee, December 1, 1862- July 9, 1863." See also *The New York Times*, January 10, 1863. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook." Presumably, more corn was donated than was listed in this inventory of purchases. One article, for example, noted that "a considerable quantity of corn, bacon and pork" was onboard the *George Griswold*, "the free gift of generous merchants." The "Committee of the Corn Exchange" had donated "200 boxes of bacon, 50 barrels of pork...500 bushels of corn, and 50 barrels of beef," while a "Buffalo Corn Man" donated "Eight casks and two barrels of rice...and 500 bushels of Corn." *The New York Times*, December 30, 1862. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook."

³¹⁸ "Ho! For England...Food and Comfort Sent to Lancashire by the Merchants of New York.," January [?], 1863. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook."

³¹⁹ The IRC read a letter from Lunt dated February 11, 1863 during their meeting on February 26, 1863. See "Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee, December 1, 1862- July 9, 1863." See also "Local Intelligence. Arrival in England of the Aid to the Lancashire Laborers," *The New York Times*, February 28, 1863. "The American Food Ship. Address to the Captain of the *George Griswold* in

and distributed to over 120 towns. Mill workers throughout Britain responded to this demonstration of Union benevolence by expressing their thanks, their earnest desires for peace in America, and their resolve that their support should be directed in favor of the Union. At a meeting on February 24th in Manchester's Free Trade Hall, for example, a "great anti-slavery demonstration" was held in honor of the arrival of the *George Griswold*. At least 6,000 attended, and based on reports of loud and repeated cheering, the *Griswold's* mission appears to have accomplished a great deal more than filling workers' bellies. As one Joseph Barlow pointed out in his speech, it was "[n]ot corn, flour, and other food alone" that the Americans had sent to Britain, "they had sent us peace between America and England" in the form of British support for the Union. Another speaker, J. H. Raper, exclaimed, "no amount of privation will induce the people of the cotton districts to sanction any recognition of a Confederacy." And as E. O. Greening resolved, "Our sympathies are entirely and unalterably with the friends of freedom, and we earnestly desire the maintenance of the Union, on the basis of emancipation and constitutional liberty for all men of every creed, colour, and race." Indeed, to the "advocates of the South" who had tried to appeal to working men and women's "self-interest" by suggesting the need to maintain the cotton supply, Barlow concluded that "the people had said there was something higher than work, more precious than cotton, more glorious, indeed, than a satisfied stomach—it was right, and liberty, and doing justice, and bidding defiance to all wrong... To recognise the South was not the way to lead us to a certain and continuous supply of cotton. A restored union was the basis of a constant cotton supply."³²⁰

Liverpool." Both in the "International Relief Committee Scrapbook." In a letter from Daniel James (Chairman of Liverpool Committee), to John Green (chairman IRC), dated Jan. 24, 1863, James reported that flour on *Hope* had been distributed via the Central Relief Committee of Manchester. At the same meeting, the IRC read a private letter from James (possibly to Green), saying that the relief work "has already had a most decided good effect here on the public feeling toward the United States, and in this way will do much good, and has done much already." See February 14, 1863 in "Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee, December 1, 1862- July 9, 1863." See also "The Lancashire Relief Fund," *Commerical Advertiser*, February 16, 1863. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook."

³²⁰ "Anti-Slavery Meeting, in the Free-Trade Hall," *Examiner and Times*, February 25, 1863. In "International Relief Committee Scrapbook."

By the time their activities ended in July of 1863, the IRC had done more than simply raise large sums of money for relief.³²¹ One way of measuring the significance of U.S. corn in the *George Griswold*'s mission is to look at the shift of British sentiment in favor of the Union that took place after 1863. While the quantity of the foodstuffs delivered on one American vessel was insufficient to meet all of the British operatives' needs, the symbolism of such a widely organized donation—in the midst of the nation's own war—is said to have moved British public opinion in favor of the Union.³²²

Another perspective of looking at the mission, however, arises by observing the ways in which corn upstaged cotton as the primary symbol of the Union, its agricultural bounties, and the intertwined ideologies of free labor and republican agrarianism. Significantly, the IRC-driven discourses around corn as a product and symbol of the nation's free laborers, and an abundant one at that, suggest some of the directions that corn's agricultural future would take. In a war fought over the very existence of the United States, representations of corn's abundance in the North and the West, along with the commercial ties uniting the regions, struck directly against the supposed economic primacy of slave-grown cotton. Americans' success in feeding hungry British operatives with grain, compounded with Britain's expanding colonial cotton sources, only further emphasized Confederate cotton's relative weakness on the world stage.

KING CORN IN AMERICAN CULTURE

If Lincoln's 1861 blockade, which prevented farmers and merchants in rich western lands from sending foodstuffs to hungry mouths downstream, was a key step in inaugurating "King Corn's" new reign, another came into being as European crop failures necessitated European reliance on American grain, as the outcome of the IRC's work in 1862 and 1863 highlights. Together, along with Confederate interest groups' less than

³²¹Maynard, "Civil War "Care:" the Mission of the George Griswold," 300. For July date, see minutes for July 9, 1863, "Minutes of Meetings of the General and Executive Committee, December 1, 1862- July 9, 1863."

³²²In his own study of the *Griswold*'s mission, Douglas Maynard has observed that the sending of the *George Griswold* "was a major force in the early months of 1863 in rallying mass public opinion [in England] behind the North and in giving vigorous expression to it." Because this event "caught the imagination of the English people and led to a strong and unmistakable expression of public opinion in favor of the North," he added, "a more sympathetic policy toward the North was adopted by the government in 1863 as a result of that change in sentiment." *Ibid.*: 304-310.

successful decisions to embargo their cotton bales until European nations intervened on the South's behalf and intense fighting in key regions of the upper South, a host of material factors contributed to the coup on King Cotton and assisted in elevating King Corn to his throne. The effect, as the northern world of print culture both reflected and helped shape, was the newly entrenched identification of Corn-as-national-Self and Cotton-as-Other.

As the chapter's introductory cartoon reminds us, King Corn's cultural cachet increased once corn production literally linked products and profits of the west with the political and economic regimes of the larger nation. In turn, its promoters metaphorically embodied the ideals of Union victories, moral righteousness, and profitable trade in the green and gold colors of this staple. "In an exuberance of patriotism" during 1862, for example, members of New York's Continental Club composed and published a lampoon juxtaposing Northern good against Southern evil. Their pasquinade expressly contrasted King Cotton's "old kingly way" of dominance, violence, and vengeance with King Corn's noble actions of feeding "hungry millions" and living "life without a stain." While King Corn easily called "millions forth, / To fight... The battle of the North," these patriotic writers foresaw that, by the end of the war, "poor King Cotton, thin and pale," would "fall[] before King Corn," the new "monarch of the land, / Whose blessings from his golden horn / Bestows with lavish hand!"³²³ Similarly, in August of that year, the *Continental Monthly* offered readers a new song to entertain and keep them abreast of their changing nation. To the tune of "Battle Hymn of the Republic," verses declared "Honest" and "Yellow" corn as the jubilant successor of "Pallid" and "Tyrant" Cotton. Reading, and perhaps singing along, the magazine's readers may well have felt an urge to hum along with the chorus: "Join, join for God and Freedom! Sing, Northmen, sing: Old King Cotton's dead and buried: brave young Corn is King."³²⁴

³²³ The Continental Club, ed., *Lyrics for Freedom; and Other Poems* (New York: Carleton, 1862), 185-192, 217.

³²⁴ "Corn Is King," *Continental monthly: devoted to literature and national policy* 2, no. 2 (1862). Given the competition between the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Continental Monthly*, and the tendency of publishers to borrow from one another's texts, there is probably a correlation between the fact that Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in February of 1862 and that "Corn is King" was published in August 1862. For "Battle Hymn of the Republic," see Julia Ward Howe, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," *The Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics*, February 1862, 10. On antebellum cultures of reprinting, see Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

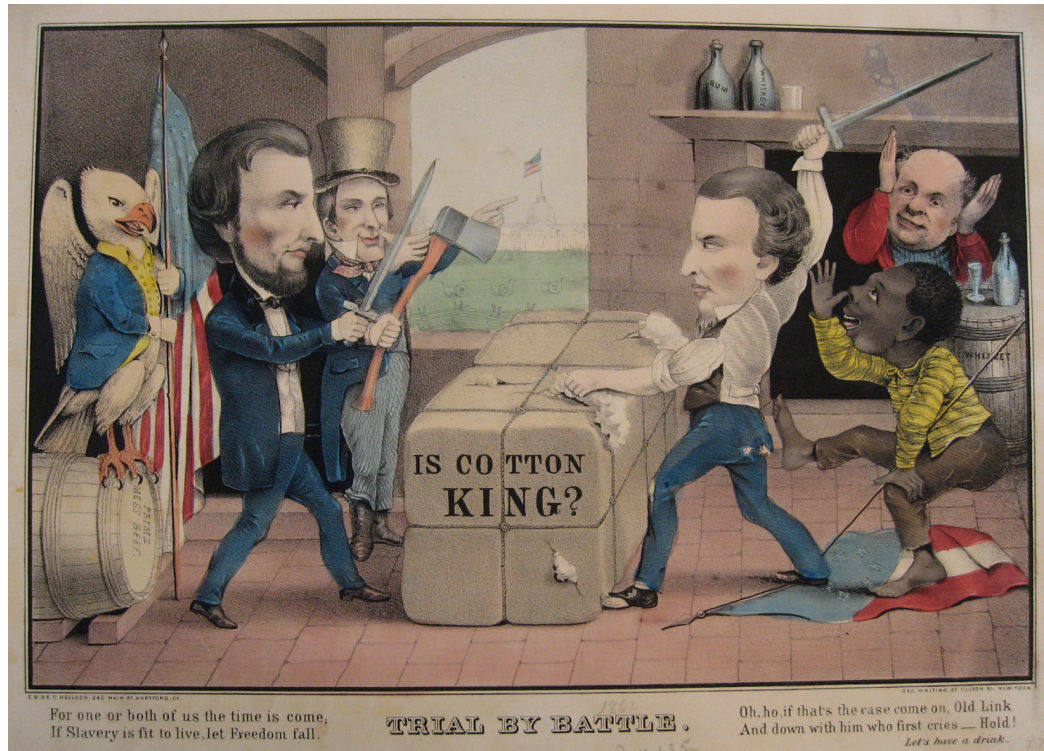


Image 2.6 / “Trial by Battle,” 1861 or 1862.

It was during this time that northern printers, like the unknown publisher of the illustration described at the beginning of this chapter, unleashed a flurry of King Corn related imagery on their publics. In 1861 or 1862, for example, the New York firm of George Whiting published a full-color lithograph asking “IS COTTON KING?” Facing off over a large bale of cotton, President Lincoln and President Davis grasp armaments as they fight over whether “slavery is fit to live.” As an eagle perched on “beef” backs Lincoln’s defensive stance and an outlandishly caricatured African American man—perhaps a slave—kicks Davis in the backside and tramples the first flag of the Confederate States of America, the creator’s intent seems to have been to demonstrate the survival of the Union (as predicted by Brother Jonathan’s indelicate thumbing of his nose at Davis, in the direction of canons protecting the U.S. capitol building) and the demise, in triplicate, of King Cotton, slavery, and Davis’ presidency.³²⁵ **[Image 2.6]**

Persuasive cultural productions didn’t have to occupy large amounts of newspaper space or use impressive lithography skills, however. Media as mundane as envelopes enabled creators and consumers to circulate political messages over time and space, and

³²⁵ George Whiting (publisher), “Trial by Battle,” 1861 or 1862; Political Cartoons, Polit. Cart. T769; AAS.

extant evidence suggests that corn and cotton were hot figures with which to circulate one's politics during the war. Probably printed towards the war's beginning, one envelope depicts England submitting to Confederate demands. Featuring a "Manchester" merchant kneeling before King Cotton, resting unfeelingly upon the trampled body of a slave, no less, it made the point that Cotton might well "insist upon the African Slave Trade" in exchange for selling Britain more "of the staple."³²⁶ **[Image 2.7]** In response to fears about British assistance towards a cotton-rich south, printer J. Gates of Cincinnati published an envelope featuring two American flags growing out of what appears to be a corn plant. Explaining that this "Sweet Flag of Our Country" was "A Plant of remarkable virtues," the corn plant reiterated the idea that "King Corn," like the system of free soil food-procurement it implied, was an antidote to "King Cotton."³²⁷ **[Image 2.8]** Similarly, another envelope contrasted a "Southern Privateer" with a "Northern Private-ear," linking corn to the cause of the North as much for humor, we might surmise, as for disdain of Confederate raiders' activities.³²⁸ **[Image 2.9]** Yet another envelope illustration featured a young man with a shock of corn and stated simply that "CORN (NOT COTTON) IS KING."³²⁹ **[Image 2.10]** Perhaps once it became clear that cotton was doing very little on the world's economic stage, S. C. Upham, probably of Philadelphia, printed an image of "Jeff" Davis, "King of the Cotton plant-nation," sulking upon a bale of apparently unmarketable cotton.³³⁰ **[Image 2.11]** Such an image might well have imparted the idea among northern consumers that with King Cotton's powers frozen, another agricultural King might take his place. As these bits and pieces of ephemera reveal, Northern merchants and the press used a range of cultural productions to transform corn into an important symbol standing for the survival of the nation and for the end of slavery.

³²⁶ "Cotton Is King!" ca. 1861; Ephemera Civil War Envelopes; AAS.

³²⁷ J. Gates, "Sweet Flag of Our Country," 1861-5; Civil War Envelopes (CWE); box 8: Flag with motto and without motto; AAS.

³²⁸ E. Cogan, "A Southern Privateer. A Northern Private-Ear," 1861-1865; American Broadsides and Ephemera (ABE), Series 1, no. 25025; AAS.

³²⁹ "Corn (Not Cotton) Is King," 1861-1865; Ephemera CW, Env 0705; AAS.

³³⁰ S.C. Upham, "Jeff. King of the Cotton Plant-Nation, on His Throne," 1861-1865; Ephemera CW, Env 1132, AAS.



Image 2.7 / "Cotton is king!" 1861-5.



Image 2.8 / "Sweet Flag of Our Country," 1861-5.

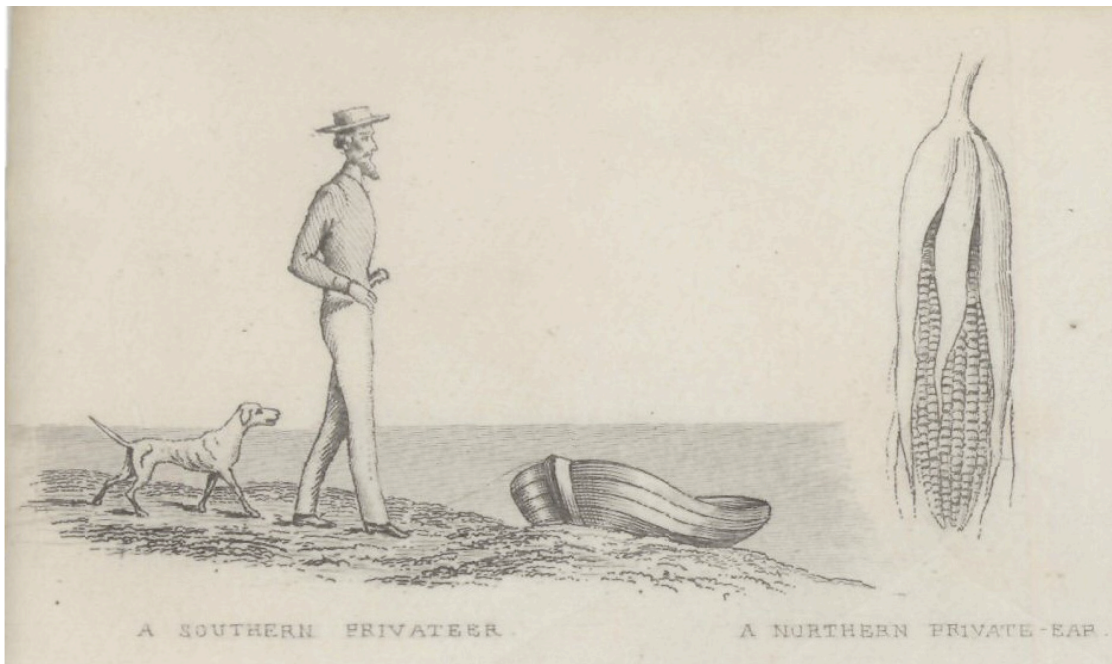


Image 2.9 / "A Southern privateer. A Northern private-ear," 1861-5.



Image 2.10 / “Corn (Not cotton.) is king,” 1861-5.



Image 2.11 / “Jeff. King of the cotton plant-nation, on his throne,” 1861-5.

Figuring corn as a national symbol was laden with other implications, however. While the association between King Corn and the cause of the Union hinged upon corn’s ascending economic fortunes and cotton’s descending prospects, the identification of corn-as-national-self and cotton-as-other reflected and reinforced the racial hierarchies structuring antebellum and Civil War America. Much of King Corn’s ascent rested upon corn’s antebellum material and ideological de-Indianization. This process came about both as agriculturalists sought to change the nature of the grain and as cultural taste-makers, as chapter one explains, metaphorically whitened its Native pasts. Concomitantly, the rejection of (King) cotton-as-other stemmed from culturally determined ideas about racial hierarchies as much as it did from northern antipathy to Confederate secession.

Northern representations of King Cotton’s otherness had a great deal to do with widely shared antebellum notions that African Americans would be incapable of holding full citizenship, even when and if they were freed. Until the Thirteenth Amendment passed, legal citizenship had been a federal fiction throughout the United States. Where

slavery was practiced, this was a given. But even in states where slavery was prohibited, as a number of historians have explained, African Americans were frequently excluded from full civic participation on the basis of white Americans' racial antipathy. According to John Hudson, for instance, the nascent Corn Belt was populated with settlers who were neither for radical abolition nor proslavery; rather white residents in "Ohio, Indiana and Illinois" simply wanted "no African Americans in their midst."³³¹ Through a set of highly restrictive "Black Laws" in Ohio, Steven Middleton explains, white residents attempted to discourage African American emigration by making prospective emigrants' lives as difficult as possible.³³² Even after such laws were stricken from the books, corn belt states' "racism," Hudson observes, "continued to deepen" during the decade before the war, particularly after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act raised the specter of slavery's westward expansion.³³³ Yet questions of racialized citizenship and restricted civic participation were not only limited to western and southern states. David Roediger argues that Blacks were "seen as *anticitizens*" across much of Jacksonian America, and shows that by the time of the Civil War, concepts of *herrenvolk* republicanism—which assured working class white ethnics of the value of their whiteness when all other advantages appeared lost—profoundly tainted their views of Blacks in the United States.³³⁴ By 1863, for example, New York's working class Irish population had absorbed a great deal of propaganda alluding to the notion that they would have to compete with freed slaves who would migrate north for work. When, that year, the federal government excluded black men from the draft on the grounds that they did not count as citizens, these outraged working-class Irish communities engaged in five days of anti-black rioting across New York City.³³⁵

Even while pro-Union voices used the figure of King Corn to counter the Confederacy and to call for abolition, many others were content to simply let Corn stand

³³¹ Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*, 113.

³³² See Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

³³³ Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*, 123.

³³⁴ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Revised ed. (New York: Verso, 1999), 57-60.

³³⁵ Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 279-288.

for the cause of a reunited nation, exclusive of African Americans' inclusion into that entity. In other words, the slave that Corn would rescue from Cotton's tyranny would, as a freeman, remain outside of the national body. Indeed, when we look more closely at "Trial by Battle," the colorful lithograph noted earlier **[Image 2.6]**, we see that the African American kicking Jefferson Davis in the backside is little more than a garish shadow of a man. His expression markedly contrasts with that of stoic Lincoln or fierce Davis, or even the gently humorous expressions marking the other stock characters. Rendered lower than the other men, smaller, and even animalistic, his position evokes the infamous bodily movements made popular—especially among urban, working-class, white workers—by T. D. Rice "Jumping Jim Crow" and the wildly fashionable genre of minstrelsy. Though he kicks Davis with some suggestion of glee, it may also just be a "Jim Crow" dance-step.³³⁶ His head, moreover—tipped back, slanted, and with apparently smaller brain capacity than the egg-headed Lincoln, or even Jefferson—recalls the damning ethnological images published in Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana*.³³⁷ Given that the battle is rendered as a fight between white men, the African American male is not a part of the leaders' disagreement, nor does he form a threat to either party. His servile, joking character threatens no one and suggests that his future—once the cotton question and slavery could be settled—would be separate from that of the nation.

By a similar token, one verse in the *Continental Monthly*'s 1862 version of "Corn is King," mentioned earlier as a spoof upon the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, stands apart from the others. Whereas high-minded and eloquent phrases elsewhere in the song call upon (white) residents of "the Granite mountains" and "the Bay State" and "Through all Yankee land" to high-mindedly wave the flag and shout their support of King Corn's freedom-giving nature in juxtaposition to King Cotton's tyranny, the verse

'Brudders, God is takin' vengeance For de darky's wrong!
Shout, shout for God and Freedom! Sing, darkies, sign!
Old Massa Cotton's dead foreber: Young Massa Corn am King!'³³⁸

³³⁶ On Jim Crow, see Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (New York: Verso, 2003), 165-181; W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³³⁷ Samuel Morton, *Crania Americana; or, a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America: To Which Is Prefixed an Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839).

³³⁸ "Corn Is King."

calls upon the same popular minstrel heritage as “Trial By Battle,” thus maintaining an implicit racial hierarchy even as it pushes for abolition. Showing how the “darky” depicted in the stanza would simply trade one “Massa” for another, the singer or reader might well have extrapolated the message that African Americans would form no threat to a reunited political body because they would be excluded from it. Productions such as these, which showcased and contributed to African Americans’ exclusion from civic participation, thus formed much of the mortar for constructing King Cotton’s alterity in relation to King Corn.³³⁹

CORN HUSKS: A POEM FOR THE TIMES

We can further illuminate the dialectical relationship between de-Indianized corn-as-national-self and cotton-as-slavish-other and show the extent to which the sentiment resonated outside of northeastern centers of cultural production by turning to *Corn Husks: A Poem for the Times*. Authored by George Dexter Doty, an eighteen-year old schoolteacher from rural Pennsylvania, and dedicated to Horace Greeley, “the LIFE-LONG CHAMPION of the RIGHTS OF CORN against the usurpation of Cotton,” this epic poem anthropomorphizes the horticultural world of an Illinois farm over the course of four cantos. Published in 1864, following Doty’s enlistment and his untimely battlefield death, “Corn Husks” is an exceptionally useful piece with which to close this analysis.³⁴⁰

Over the course of the poem, which follows one year of growing and harvesting, Doty’s cast of characters—Corn, Cotton, Wheat, and Ragweed, along with the farmer’s dog “Tiger”—trade barbs and stories in rhyme and meter. Their self-assigned task is to ascertain whether Corn or Cotton is the true king of American agriculture. In order to establish each plant’s legitimacy, the plants cull through the histories of each would-be King. Through Doty’s careful pen, their banter links Cotton to slavery and his heartless

³³⁹ For historians’ analyses of African Americans in—and exclusion from—the public sphere, see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*; Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*.

³⁴⁰ Doty, *Corn-Husks: A Poem for the Times*.

attempts to co-opt global trade. Moreover, Doty orientalizes Cotton, the better to reiterate the plant's alterity from the course of national progress.

In contrast, Doty constructs an extraordinary narrative—rooted in Longfellow's own *Hiawatha* both in form and content—highlighting Corn's Native origins as a means to establish its legitimacy to the title of American agricultural King. Strikingly, Doty deploys the legendary battle between Mondamin and Hiawatha—the very narratives popularized by Schoolcraft and Longfellow—in order to place Corn as an authentic product of American soil. Moreover, his characters argue that maize only became significant when Pilgrims and their descendents began to utilize the grain, symbolically embracing the modernity encapsulated in the prospect of free white settlers' further westward expansion and in their material improvements to agriculture.

As Doty begins, the early rays of dawn filter down upon an Illinois farmstead occupying the recently transformed prairie. On a brisk spring morning, roosters and chickens awaken and scratch at grubs and seeds, cows complain of their need to be milked, and hogs root about the granary and fields, mindless of their future as pork. A pile of carefully guarded manure awaits its placement on the fields, and somewhere in the distance, the early train blows past. Out beyond the house and barnyard, rows of corn push their roots deeper into the rich black loam and stretch their stalks toward the sky. The scene is orderly, progressive, and utterly uneventful.

Doty's poetics thicken as the farmer's loyal dog, "Tiger," trots to a shady fencepost, far out of range of any human ears. As he settles into his spot, he welcomes the recent emergence of a contraband cotton plant from the soil alongside the usual corn stalk. Introducing Corn to Cotton, Tiger and the resident farm crops learn that Cotton, who had arrived in a sack of seed from Tennessee not three weeks earlier, has staked a claim to the title of "King."³⁴¹ At this puffery, Tiger interjects that he had heard his

³⁴¹ Ibid., 51. This appears to have strong historical grounding. Over the course of my research, I have found a number of records alluding to northerners' interests in growing cotton after about 1863. See for example an advertisement touting agricultural possibilities for cotton in Illinois, in Illinois Central Railroad, "Equal to Any in the World!," *Harper's Weekly*, June 20 1863. See also a letter from William Donaldson Guernsey to his mother Emeline, where he alludes to sending her a boll of southern cotton to plant on their farm in Iowa, in William Donaldson Guernsey to EDG, March 1, 1863; GFP; box 3, folder 23; HL. Likewise, see the account book of Pennsylvania farmer Christian Shank, who adds cotton to his farm production on March 30, 1863, in Christian H. Shank, *Diary and Account Book, 1858-1867*; Doc. 370, 127, WIN.

“master sing / In times full often, ‘Corn is King,’” and suggests to Cotton that Corn has an equally strong claim to the nation’s agricultural throne.³⁴²

Not wanting to boast on his own accord, Corn calls upon the Northern Wind to tell the tale of his origins. Keewaydin, the wind, obeys and presents Corn’s origins in “The Legend of Mondamin,” which, like Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, was set within the “Ojibway’s mighty nation.” Building upon the narratives popularized by Schoolcraft and Longfellow—indeed, using the latter’s meter—Doty deploys the same legendary seven-day fast and the ensuing struggle between Mondamin and man (though here in place of Hiawatha he inserts Chiabo, another name for the corn-bringing figure) in order to authenticate Corn’s New World creation.³⁴³

With the plants duly informed of Corn’s rightful place, Corn asks Cotton to explain his own claims to agricultural royalty. When Cotton rebuffs that request, Corn calls for another plant to relate Cotton’s origins. Wheat responds by informing the assembled plants that “King Kau-ton” not only originated far across the sea, but also traced his ancestry to a history of “malice,” “wiles,” “artificies,” “boastings,” and “cunning.”³⁴⁴ While Wheat’s partisan tale of Cotton’s rise to power would seem textually significant in its own right, Doty’s “Notes,” which accompany the poem, add complexity to this work of fiction. Justifying the appropriateness of Wheat’s version of the “Legend of King Kau-ton” to his readers, Doty cites the “general opinion” that “Wheat and Cotton both originated in southern or southwestern Asia; hence the propriety of introducing them under [this] peculiar circumstance.”³⁴⁵ This explanation of their geographic origins is significant because his decision to call Cotton “Kau-ton” connects the plant to a vaguely Chinese heritage. As the works of Krystyn Moon and John Kuo Wei Tchen show, antebellum theatergoers and westerners alike would have been familiar with this kind of “yellowface” linguistic play; during the 1850s the figure of “John Chinaman” appeared throughout western states as a commonly performed Other originating from “Canton.”³⁴⁶ Doty’s construction of connections between Cotton/Kau-

³⁴² Doty, *Corn-Husks: A Poem for the Times.*, 56.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 61-69.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-87.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁴⁶ John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface:*

ton and behavioral taboos such as “malice” and “cunning,” therefore, seem to speak directly to Tchen’s analysis of the shifting grounds upon which ideas about and representations of Chinese people stood during the mid-nineteenth century. Tchen argues that New York’s mid-century consumer culture began to connect Chinese people and representations of China to ideas of slavishness and fixity. In the media’s shift from “respect and admiration” to “pity, and eventual disdain” for China, he writes, “[r]acialized stereotypes” of Chinese people became integral, even “standard” components of a “commercialized visual culture” such that “both Chinese and Americans were being defined—one as the other and one as the self.”³⁴⁷ By a similar token, Moon reminds us, the arrival of Chinese contract laborers in the west during the 1850s and 1860s precipitated anti-Chinese sentiment among California’s citizenry. Though Doty’s work is not among the visual or musical cultures that Tchen and Moon analyze, a strong sense of Cotton’s Oriental alterity nevertheless resonates from Doty’s literary allegories. Doty used Wheat to “other” King Cotton as King Kau-ton, a product of an Asiatic heritage, because this form of Orientalism, a component within the nineteenth century’s racial hierarchies not unlike blackface minstrelsy, resonated with anxious consumers in a changing cultural marketplace. In Doty’s text, therefore, with Cotton clearly marked as a foreign, agricultural “other,” Corn could serve all the more as an authentic “self.”³⁴⁸

Even when Cotton defends his heritage in response to Wheat’s accusations, Doty still distances the plant from making a genuine connection with the nation’s future prospects. In Cotton’s own version of his origins, his arrival from abroad brings commerce and power to a nascent nation. He describes landing upon “The mighty continent” then occupied only by the “lonely Indian,” wild animals, and endless forests.³⁴⁹ Once on this virgin land, Cotton explains, he helped shape a world where “mighty cities stand like doors, / Through which the wealth of ocean pour.” As he pridefully recants how his product soon controlled land “From Maine to Texas” and

Creating the Chinese in America Popular Music and Performance, 1850s-1920s (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 30-38.

³⁴⁷ Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*, 80, 88, 94-95, 129-130.

³⁴⁸ For theoretical comparisons, see Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time*.

³⁴⁹ Doty, *Corn-Husks: A Poem for the Times.*, 102.

commanded England's obedience, readers are given glimpses of other plants' disdain.³⁵⁰ When Cotton alludes to British workers' reliance on the American staple, for example, he explains that British workers' demand for bread will force intervention from Lincoln's blockade in favor of the Confederacy:

“no power can quell
When starving mobs for bread rebel'
And Manchesters and Liverpools
Are not—cannot be ruled by fools...
Britain's sword shall fall in might
To save itself rebellion's blight
And tear away the ships like straw
Which block the way of Traffic's law!”³⁵¹

To Cotton's prediction, Corn disdainfully projected that John Bull would, instead, “draw his bales, as best he can, / From Africa and Hindostan.”³⁵² In suggesting that England would not intervene on behalf of King Cotton because of the plant's growing availability elsewhere, Doty projected his own hopes and beliefs onto Corn. By extension, the reader may well extrapolate Doty's premonitions that slave-grown cotton would not be a part of the nation's future.

While more can be said about Doty's observations on the war's progress, his identification of corn as a national Self and cotton as an Other forms the poem's crux. This is especially evident at the end of the poem when the farmers' hired hands come to harvest Corn with reapers in hand. Set at the end of the season, Tiger gives a poignant speech highlighting the farmer's reliance on Corn. Doty uses Tiger's words to demonstrate how the relationship between Corn and the success of the Union symbolized national agricultural progress. Returning to the trope of the empty landscape, populated only by the Indian and awaiting the settler's plow, the faithful dog tells King Cotton, once and for all, that his place as King paled in comparison to King Corn's rightful lordship. “Time was...years ago,” Tiger spoke,

When Corn knew not a single foe;
His kingdom stretched its boundaries far,
From Southern Cross to Northern Star,
And undisturbed, undared, alone,

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 105.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 125.

³⁵² Ibid., 153.

For ages held his ancient throne.
For this broad land was all his own;
Hereon 'twas first from earth he sprung,
Here to the winds his banners flung....
“He therefore holds, 'tis very clear,
A rightful sway by birthright here.”³⁵³

Yet even with this ancient heritage well established, Tiger relates, Corn's true Kingliness derived from its utilization by white men, the Pilgrims and their descendents. While “King Corn” was but “a sachem then— / The chief of brave and hardy men,” something transformative took place when “Mondamin's power” was given to a starving group of “strangers” through the “pity” of “savage bosoms.” Thenceforth “[h]eld in the white man's hand,” Doty's readers are told, “King Corn's dominions grew / Beyond what fiction ever knew.” Transforming land from “a howling waste” to one in which “forests sank” as development and commerce-oriented “cities marked the river's bank,” King Corn “soon... saw himself the white man's lord.”³⁵⁴ Though King Cotton's own “black” realm grew after the invention of the cotton gin and the explosive growth of slavery, readers are told, Corn's reign of free-labor continued its inexorable spread, “Calling to life, with every year, / New States upon the west frontier,” and found its ultimate expression amid “The waiting prairies rich and wide.”³⁵⁵ Having established Corn's definitive Kingliness over Cotton's, and through that triumph, having expressed his hopes for the Union's survival upon the end of the War, Doty closes his text with the inevitable harvest. Bowing faithfully to the reapers held in the hands of his farmer's hired workers, King Corn's season in the sun ends with a swift, glorious, sacrificial chop of the blade. Savvy readers, however, may intimate that the King's next generation—his kernels—will return the following year to take up their rightful reign in the West.

Having projected his Unionist sentiments through the figure of the corn plant, built upon the form and some of the substance of *Hiawatha*, reflected on the chasm between North and South, and contributed to the popular discourses attaching Corn to North/nation and Cotton to South/foreign lands, Doty's work encapsulated the issues of the day. It is truly a remarkable production. Though we have no way of knowing the

³⁵³ Ibid., 159-160.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 160-162.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 164-167.

extent of its circulation, that it exists at all signifies Americans' familiarity with sectional representations of Cotton and Corn.³⁵⁶ Moreover, it shows how the production and consumption of these commodities were situated within a global context. Further, it underscores white settlers' longstanding interests in improving corn's nature as they struggled over and sought to transform the land in which it grew.

CONCLUSION

Corn Husks, the records of the IRC, and other manifestations of sectional partisanship illuminate the significance of agricultural production and the politics of consumption in the United States at the middle of the nineteenth century. Collectively, Doty's poem, contemporary cartoons, songs, and evidence of commercial changes suggest that corn's ascent to "King" hinged on the material and ideological work of agriculture, so far as the cultivation of the soil—with corn—shaped ideas about race, gender, nation and nature. In looking ahead, we can anticipate how Doty's farmer's cultivation methods, the fictional homestead's spaces, and its proximity to the "Illinois Central Railroad" anticipate how demands rooted in women's cookery—especially away from "traditional" foods made from "Indian meal" and toward corn-fed meat and refined corn products—operated alongside a series of acts passed by the Republican controlled Congress in the midst of the Civil War—namely homesteaders' land grants, railroad routes, land-grant universities, and the Department of Agriculture—and collectively encouraged Midwestern emigrants to cultivate corn on unprecedented scales.

³⁵⁶ I examined copies of the book at The Huntington Library and at The Library of Congress. WorldCat shows that there may have been two editions, one published in 1863 and one in 1864, and that a number of research universities and a handful of private libraries also hold copies of the text.

CHAPTER THREE

To Craft “Nature’s Home:” King Corn at Sioux City’s Corn Palaces, 1887-1891

*“The corn palace...is in truth a revelation...
It is a spectacle to enchain attention, to command admiration...
a form of decoration to please the eye and catch the thought.”
-Los Angeles Times, 1887³⁵⁷*

35,000 BUSHEL OF CORN

In August of 1887, a group of Sioux City businessmen met to organize a fall harvest festival that would “attract the attention of every one.”³⁵⁸ Building upon the nation’s residual familiarity with the slogan that “Corn is King,” one among them suggested building a “statue of King Corn” in honor of the year’s bounty.³⁵⁹ Yet that idea did not strike the group as grand enough, so the assembly concurred when another participant proposed building a palace in which to host the festival.³⁶⁰ By the end of the meeting, the boosters had formed the “Sioux City Corn Palace and Grand Harvest Jubilee Festival.” Within a month, members drafted architectural plans and approached the “ladies of Sioux City” to see if they might organize the task of “decorating the interior” of the Corn Palace.³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ "The Corn Palace," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1887.

³⁵⁸ "Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 8, 1887.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.* A major cause for celebration was the fact that Sioux City was not struck by the drought that had plagued other corn growing regions in 1887.

³⁶⁰ E.W. Irish, *Sioux City's Corn Palaces* (Sioux City: Pinckney Book and Stationery Company, 1890).

³⁶¹ A.W. Erwin to Mrs. H.R. Smith, September 19 1887; 1993.043.2; Sioux City Public Museum, Pearl Street Research Center (SCPM), Sioux City, Iowa; J.R. Kathrans, “Corn Palaces Thrilled All,” *Sioux City Journal*, October 3, 1937; SC 55 Corn Palaces-Misc, 1, SCPM.

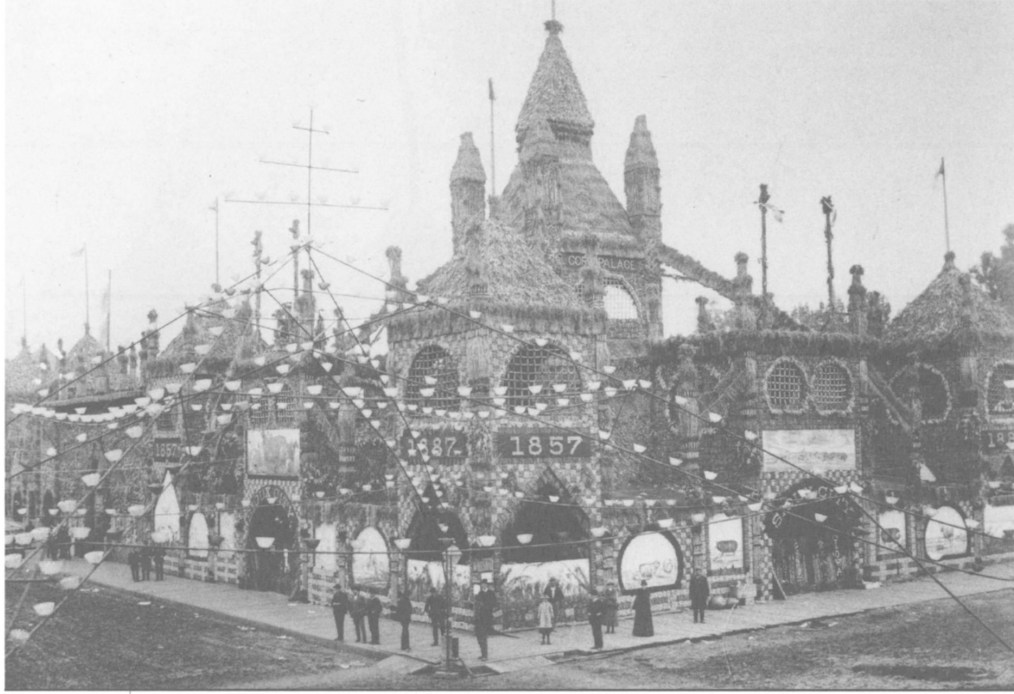


Image 3.1 / Sioux City Corn Palace, 1887.

The building that Sioux City's businessmen envisioned and its ladies' organizations transformed—the nation's first corn palace—opened to the public on October 3rd, 1887. For one proud week, it proclaimed Sioux City, Iowa the home of King Corn. Even among populations whose visual vocabularies were well versed in artistic depictions of King Corn, the semiotics of regional agricultural rivalries, and—as we shall see—the aesthetics of industrial expositions, the first Corn Palace was unlike anything anyone had seen. A one hundred foot high Moorish-style spire crowned the palace, which occupied a space of over one hundred by two hundred feet in downtown Sioux City.³⁶² Atop the building stood a statue of King Corn, while “archways,” “airy minarets,” a “cupola,” “flying buttresses,” and three towers standing for Nebraska, Minnesota, and Dakota further distinguished it from the surrounding town.³⁶³ When President Cleveland and his new bride detoured from their honeymoon in order to view the building, the President remarked, “[t]his is the first new thing that has been shown

³⁶² "Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia."

³⁶³ "The Letter-Box," *St. Nicholas; an Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, February 1888; "Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia."; John Ely Briggs, "The Sioux City Corn Palaces," *The Palimpsest* 45, no. 12 (1963): 552; "The Corn Palace."

[to] me.”³⁶⁴ **[Image 3.1]** While fantastic, vaguely Oriental buildings were becoming more prevalent in the United States during the 1880s, none were so self-consciously bedecked in a substance that simultaneously called to mind a gendered “mastery” of nature, histories of racialized land conquest, commodified objects of trade, and the basis of what might be served for dinner.³⁶⁵

But the building’s physical structure provided only some of its exceptional qualities. Corn covered the palace in every imaginable color, outside and in. “Imagine,” cried one contributor to the *Sioux City Journal*, “these proportions clothed all about with the products of the cornfield...in a profusion of beauty—one grand, harmonious whole, a stately witness to the bursting bounty of the Northwest, the realm of King Corn.”³⁶⁶ Within and on the palace’s walls, newspapers reported, the city’s ladies’ organizations had outdone themselves. In some areas, they carved out domestic spaces, covering furniture, floors, and chandeliers with grains as they “deftly fashioned the products of “God’s” green earth onto bowers of beauty” and crafted “the atmosphere of nature’s home.”³⁶⁷ Elsewhere, panels of their handiwork invoked the passage of time and representations of abundance. Figures of “Mondamin, the god of corn,” and Ceres, “clad in a robe of satin husks and bearing a cornstalk scepter...upon a stairway of yellow corn,” metaphorically “shower[ed] the golden products of the northwest from the horns of plenty.”³⁶⁸ In one diorama, the ladies crafted “the figures of an Indian and an eagle”

³⁶⁴ Frankwilll Ellis, *Columbia's Letters to Uncle Sam. Columbia; the Guest of the World's Corn King, Whose Palace Is the People's Hall, Which Sits Directly under the Star of Empire* (Sioux City: Ellis & Taft, 1888), 16. On his brief, early morning visit on October 12, a week after the palace closed, President Cleveland is said to have praised the town and the “grand and matchless” Northwest, adding to Mayor Cleland, “You have the making of a beautiful city.” See “Kansas City's Greeting,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 13, 1887, 2; “A Long Flight Southward,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1887, 1.

³⁶⁵ By the late 1880s, Moorish, Turkish, and otherwise “Oriental” stylings had become popular architectural forms in the U.S., especially in public pleasure spots. On Moorish Revival designs in Montana, for instance, see Hipólito Rafael Chacón, “Creating a Mythic Past: Spanish-Style Architecture in Montana,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 51, no. 3 (2001). In this genre, the first corn palace followed in the steps of the recently established St. Paul, Minnesota Ice Palace. See “The Corn Palace.” It also inspired a host of imitative alfalfa, coal, and other product-palaces. For possible food-as-art precursors to the corn palace, like sugar molding, see Simpson, “Cereal Architecture.”; Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*; T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 22-23. On the artistic uses of crops at expositions during the preceding decades, see discussion later in this chapter.

³⁶⁶ “The Corn Palace.”

³⁶⁷ Sioux City Public Museum, “Sioux City Corn Palace,” 19--; SC 55 Corn Palaces 1887-1891; SCPM.

³⁶⁸ Sioux City Public Museum, *Sioux City Corn Palace*. 19--. SC 55 Corn Palaces 1887-1891, Sioux City Public Museum, Pearl Street Research Center, Sioux City; Briggs, “The Sioux City Corn Palaces,” 554.

from “the blade and grain and stalk of corn.”³⁶⁹ In another, a not-so-veiled reference to the city’s future bridge across the Missouri, they depicted “a train of cars pass[ing] over a bridge; the rails are cars of [corn] and the ties of the track and trusses of the bridge are of red and white ears of field corn.” For a separate vignette, women used cornstalks to fashion a scene of “a log cabin with well beside complete with sweep and bucket.” Here, images of “[h]ogs,” like everything else, were “covered with kernels of corn.” This latter display, a newspaper noted, was “typical of the best use to which the farmer” could apply his crop. Not content to merely showcase products and symbols of their lands in corn, the decorating ladies rendered a flag and map of the United States in corn and other seeds. And to reiterate their city’s ability to feed the demands of the industrializing, hungry country, they constructed a sign—written in corn and visible as visitors exited—reminding Corn Palace tourists that “Sioux City Never Sleeps.”³⁷⁰

Residents participated in every possible way. Many attempted to cover the rest of the town, including themselves, in corn. Alongside a “[m]ammoth triumphal arch...span[ing] the chief thoroughfare,” shopkeepers decorated their storefronts, “awnings, [and] verandas” with corn, squash, and pumpkins.³⁷¹ **[Image 3.2]** And although a *Chicago Daily Tribune* article may have jested, it observed women adorning themselves in corn kernel necklaces and men donning corn-husk neckties while twirling cornstalk canes. The “whole city,” it reported, was “thoroughly “corned.””³⁷² Other nearby counties contributed to the festivities, as well. For its part, Nebraska’s Cumming County chose to exhibit an ear of corn personally grown by none other than Joseph La Flesche, the mixed-blood Omaha chief. While there may have been additional samples of Omaha-grown corn, La Flesche’s ear not only “attracted universal attention” from visitors but also merited “astonishment” on the part of President Cleveland, particularly “at...the size of the ears of corn [he and other Indians] had grown.”³⁷³ La Flesche

³⁶⁹ "The Corn Palace."

³⁷⁰ "Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia." On the interior, see also Ruth S. Beitz, "Sioux City's Splendid Corn Palaces," *The Iowan Magazine* 9 (1961): 19; Briggs, "The Sioux City Corn Palaces," 554.

³⁷¹ "A Long Flight Southward."

³⁷² "Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia."

³⁷³ Fletcher, "The Omaha and Winnebago Tribes." On “astonishment,” etc., see *Sioux City Journal*, Oct. 13, 1887, 1, quoted in Travis E. Nygard and Pamela H. Simpson, "Indians at the Corn Palaces: Race and Reception at Two Midwestern Festival Buildings," in *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* (2010).

received “a letter of acknowledgment under the seal of the county...and award of twenty dollars in gold, a part of the prize money, as a recognition of what he had done towards helping to secure the premium.”³⁷⁴

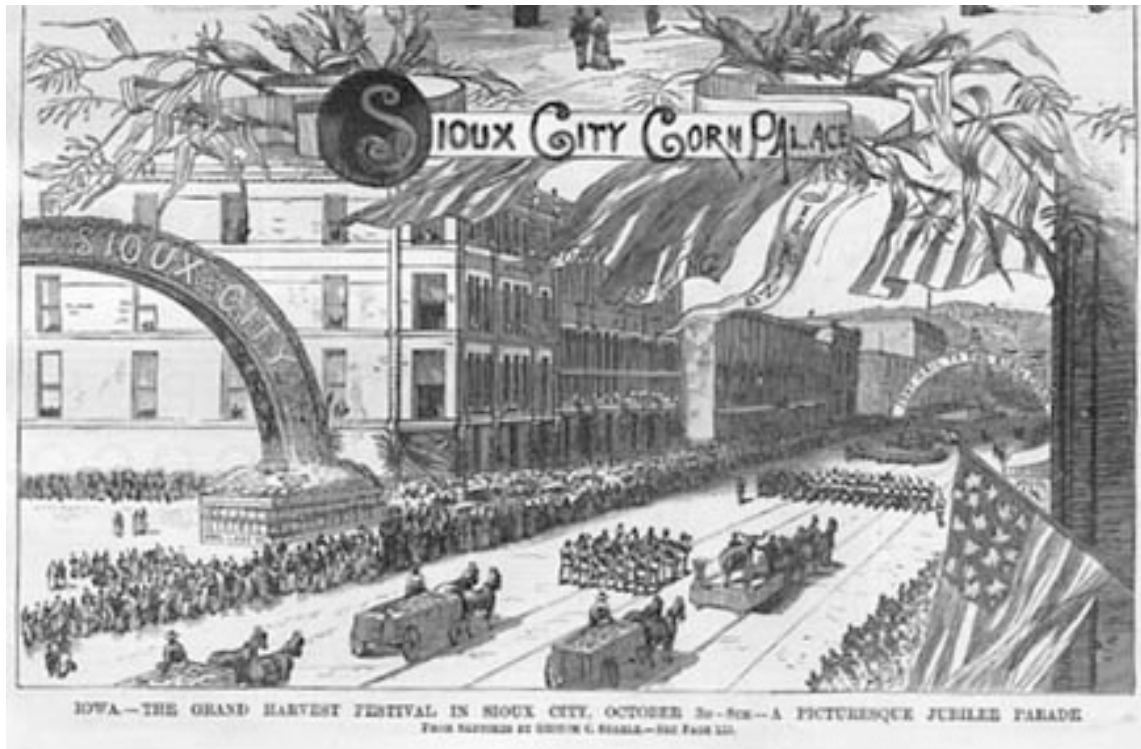


Image 3.2 / Parade detail, “Iowa—The Grand Harvest Festival in Sioux City... A Picturesque Jubilee Parade,” October 1887.

A week of events entertained a nonstop flow of visitors, each day featuring a new attraction. On the second morning, organizers staged a “Grand Characteristic Parade, representing Sioux City in 1852.” Though initial plans were for the parade to be “headed by a band of one hundred Omaha, Winnebago and [Santee] Sioux Indians, in aboriginal costume,” newspaper accounts suggest that nearly three times that number actually appeared.³⁷⁵ According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, some “275 Winnebago” sang and danced their way through town, and among the main body were one hundred “braves...mounted and painted as if for the war-path.”³⁷⁶ Other entertainment that afternoon included “Squaw Races on Third Street,” an event which featured “about two dozen Indian squaws” and followed the “Trotting” and “Horse vs. Bicycle” races. The

³⁷⁴ Fletcher, “The Omaha and Winnebago Tribes.”

³⁷⁵ *Sioux City Corn Palace and Harvest Jubilee Festival, October 3d to 8th, 1887*; SC 55, Corn Palace 1887 Program Booklet; SCPM.

³⁷⁶ “A Realistic Wild-West Show,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 5, 1887, 5.

next day, visitors enjoyed a “Pacing race” and “Amateur Bicycle race” followed by another “Indian foot race on Third Street.” Friday, October 7th began with a “Mammoth Consolidated Parade by the Agricultural, Labor, Mechanical, Industrial, Civil, Military and Masquerade Organizations.” The day ended with a “Grand Characteristic War Dance by a band of one hundred Winnebago, Omaha, and Sioux Indians,” again “in aboriginal Costume.” On Saturday the 8th, the final day of the 1887 palace’s run, “Mondamin’s Carnival, King Corn’s Agricultural Parade” provided the morning’s entertainment, while a “Magnificent Corn Costume Ball in the Corn Palace” occupied residents and visitors alike in the evening.³⁷⁷

Descriptions of these events were effuse, and visitors remembered the palaces well into the twentieth century.³⁷⁸ In the 1920s, E.D. Allen, the architect of the first Corn Palace, described the closing parade in tremendous detail. Following a brass band came a float featuring “the tall and grizzled Theophile Brugier, [Sioux City’s] first white man citizen.” Seated on the corners of his float were “descendents of “War Eagle,”” presumably Brugier’s mixed-blood children or grandchildren, “decked with war bonnetts [sic] and fully garbed with paint and feathers, carrying in their Arms bows and arrows and Tomahawks.” The next float featured the old fur trapper George Tackett, “leaning on his tall trusty shot gun as tho’ in thought of the days of the past.” He, too, sat surrounded by four Indians “in full garb of the “Red Man.”” After these floats “came a band of Indians from the Winnebago Indian Reservation, all bedecked in Indian Garb” followed by “Indian Squaws leading ponies that were dragging behind them “Travois.”” A military company marched behind this display, as did “a long line of covered freight wagons, each drawn by four mules” which had been brought to town from a freighter servicing “the Black Hills and the upper Indian Agencies.” Then, Allen added, “came

³⁷⁷ For “two dozen Indian squaws,” see *Ibid.* For other event descriptions, including plans for the War Dance, see *Sioux City Corn Palace and Harvest Jubilee Festival, October 3d to 8th, 1887*; SC 55, Corn Palace 1887 Program Booklet; SCPM. For a report that the War Dance actually took place with 225 Winnebago, see “Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia.” However, Nygard and Simpson quote the *Sioux City Journal*, Oct. 8, 1887, 1, and report that the War Department cancelled the event. See Nygard and Simpson, “Indians at the Corn Palaces: Race and Reception at Two Midwestern Festival Buildings.” Further research into War Department communication is needed.

³⁷⁸ Leah Hartman, “From Centennial to Bicentennial, Interview with Leah Irvine,” September 19, 1977; Siouxland Oral History Program, SC 18; Irvine, Leah, T35; SCPM; Leah Hartman, “The Flour Mill Industry, Interview with Mrs. Vesta Ketels,” August 7, 1979; Siouxland Oral History Program, SC 18; Ketels, Vesta, T236, 6; SCPM.

scores of “Cow Boys”...mounted on their wily cow ponies with their Lariots [sic] coiled and hanging from the Horn of their saddles.” They were followed by “Stock Yards Riders...laborers with pick and shovel over their shoulders, and...horse-drawn wheel dirt scrapers,” all clamoring to be recognized as part of Sioux City’s proud march toward economic development and national recognition. Merchants’ floats followed, decorated with corn-centered displays of their stores’ wares and carrying “beautiful females dressed in white.” Groups of “prominent citizens in carriages, country side people in wagons,” and citizens’ associations finally closed the parade.³⁷⁹

Though rain muddied the streets at the end of the week, lending an inglorious end to an otherwise grand chain of events, papers estimated that 170,000 visitors had flocked to Sioux City throughout the weeklong run.³⁸⁰ The editor of *The Christian Advocate* explored the city from 4 a.m. to midnight over a period of three days. The *Sioux City Journal*, he noted in his own article, had exclaimed corn as “the main-stay of an empire” and called the palace “a typical representation of the utilities and beauties of the distinctive prop and foundation North-western production.” The visiting editor concurred.³⁸¹ Other visitors were equally impressed with the spectacle of abundance, if somewhat in awe. “Isn’t it a pity,” one from New England is said to have remarked, “to waste so much corn.”³⁸² But shock at such quantities of grain was precisely the idea that organizers and boosters had hoped to convey. “Corn,” the *Atchison Daily Globe*, the *Milwaukee Daily Journal*, and the *Bismark Daily Tribune* all reiterated, “is a thing [for the West] to be proud of...since it is its special source of wealth and commercial strength.” During the previous two and a half decades, the papers added, corn’s “kingdom has been growing.”³⁸³ Indeed, just a few years earlier, *The International*

³⁷⁹ E.D. Allen, ““Sioux City. . . In the Corn Palace Days” a Lecture Delivered March 27th, 1928, by E.D. Allen, before the Academy of Science and Letters, in the Lecture Room of the Main Library Building, Sioux City, Iowa,” 1928; SC 55 Corn Palaces-Misc; SCPM. It is unclear whether this was the parade of the last or second to last day, given that newspaper reports suggested that Saturday’s parade was cancelled. For the parade cancellation, see “Iowa-King Corn Abdicates,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 10, 1887. For additional recollections, see E.D. Allen, “Sioux City Corn Palaces,” November 22, 1913; SC 55 Corn Palaces-Misc; SCPM.

³⁸⁰ “Iowa-King Corn Abdicates.”

³⁸¹ The Editor, “Rolling over the Continent,” *Christian Advocate* 62, no. 45 (1887).

³⁸² “Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia.”

³⁸³ “A Palace of Gold. King Corn and His Temple in the West.,” *The Atchison Daily Globe*, October 4, 1887. The same article ran in the *Milwaukee Daily Journal* on the same day, and in the *Bismark Daily Tribune* on October 7th.

Review had praised “the rapidity with which the Western states” like Iowa had “developed their vast resources,” and “reassured” readers “about the continued abundant yield” of western lands, even after so much had already been accomplished.³⁸⁴ Corn Palace organizers, who looked forward to the civic progress and prosperity that the region’s future corn yields promised, did not perceive the 35,000 bushels of corn reportedly used at a cost of \$28,000 as wasteful; rather, each ear nailed to the wooden structure reinforced aspirations that boosters and residents entertained as they sought to transform the city’s hinterland from prairies to cornfields to animal flesh and send those resources to dining tables across the continent.³⁸⁵

FOUR MORE YEARS OF PERIPHERAL SHOUTS

By the time that the palace and its accompanying festivities closed, the city’s boosters and palace contributors had inaugurated a new genre of cultural production. Each fall between 1887 and 1891, Sioux City became the corn capital of the nation. And as the city embarked on its annual cycles of designing, signing contracts for the corn required to adorn the palaces, and decorating, organizers crafted each palace in grander fashion than its predecessors. Barely six months passed before Sioux Cityans began to advertise the 1888 corn palace by asserting that “Sioux City not only is the home of the Corn King of the World but it is also the Pork Metropolis of the Northwest.”³⁸⁶ In June, they sent a Corn Palace train—replete with bunting, the slogan “Corn is King,” and drawings of the upcoming palace—to the Republican Convention in Chicago.³⁸⁷ **[Image 3.3]** And as that fall’s palace drew near, railroads prepared to make “[e]xcursion rates...on all the principal railroads for visitors from Canada, Mexico, Central America and all the States of the Union.”³⁸⁸ Sioux City’s ladies again provided the handiwork for the decorations on the 1888 palace, which featured a ninety-foot hexagonal tower atop the center of the building and fifty-foot tall towers on the other walls. **[Image 3.4]** Designers emphasized novelty throughout, covering walls “entirely with corn, corn

³⁸⁴ Robert P. Porter, “Our Goodly Heritage,” *The International Review*, June 1880, 666.

³⁸⁵ “Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia.”

³⁸⁶ Ellis, *Columbia’s Letters to Uncle Sam. Columbia; the Guest of the World’s Corn King, Whose Palace Is the People’s Hall, Which Sits Directly under the Star of Empire*, 6.

³⁸⁷ “The Corn Palace Train,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 17, 1888, 30. For image, see “Corn Palace Train from Sioux City to Republican Convention,” 1888; SC 59, Corn Palace Train (1888); SCPM.

³⁸⁸ “Sioux City Corn Palace,” *Southern Cultivator*, September 1888, 391.

stalks, husks and ears, white, yellow, red, and parti-colored, arranged in many beautiful designs.”³⁸⁹ In addition to its larger size, the 1888 palace carried the heft of a new architect, a new design, a new location, and novel “gas jets with colored globes” which enticed an estimated 350,000 visitors.³⁹⁰ That year, organizers also commissioned the services of the nearby Santee Reservation’s recently created brass band. Comprised of twenty Santee men and youths, the group played marches, waltzes, overtures, and “Home, Sweet, Home,” for four days. They received great accolades for their efforts, reported the *Sioux City Journal*, and when this “novelty...played in the Corn Palace and about the streets,” it was “always surrounded by a crowd.”³⁹¹ Likewise, the “Indian races on Third street” formed another popular draw, attracting “several thousand” observers.³⁹²

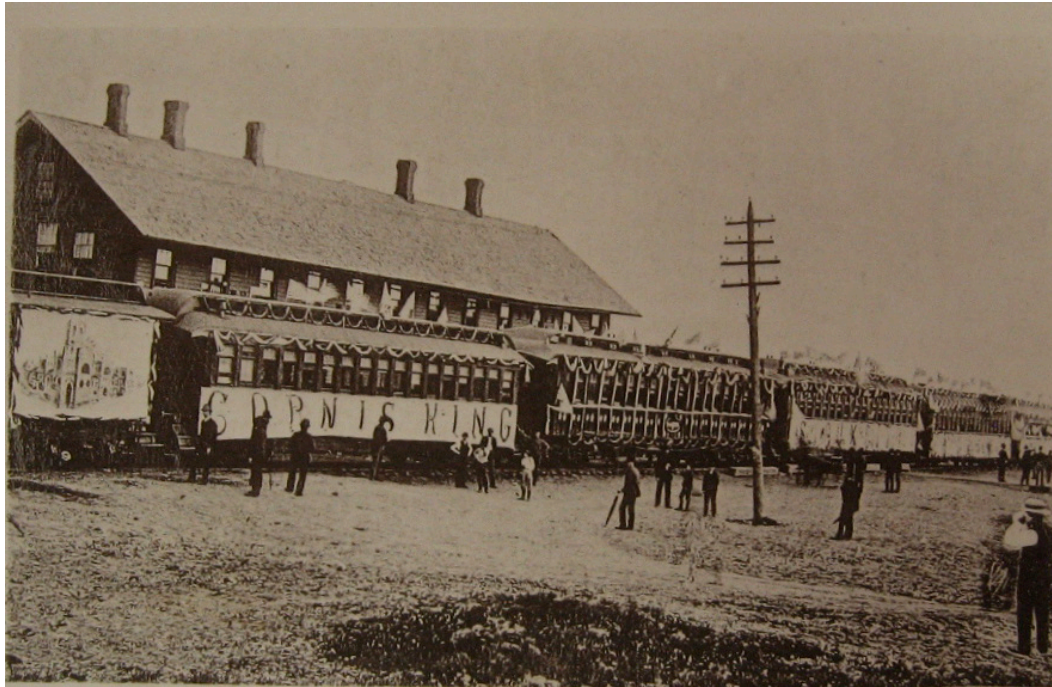


Image 3.3 / “Corn Palace Train from Sioux City to Republican Convention,” 1888.

³⁸⁹ Irish, *Sioux City's Corn Palaces*; G. Allen Fitzgibbon, *Souvenir Album of Sioux City's Corn Palaces* (Sioux City: G. Fitzgibbon, 1890); "In Honor of King Corn a Fine Parade and Large Crowd at Sioux City's Festival," *Daily Inter Ocean*, September 26, 1888.

³⁹⁰ Irish, *Sioux City's Corn Palaces*; Fitzgibbon, *Souvenir Album of Sioux City's Corn Palaces*; "In Honor of King Corn a Fine Parade and Large Crowd at Sioux City's Festival."

³⁹¹ "The Santee Band," *Lapi Oay*, December, 1888, (p) 40, in Book 95, Winnebago Santee Agency, Vol. XVII, No. 12; Series 1, Winnebago Agency Subject Correspondence Files, 1900-1929; Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Winnebago Agency (RG 75); National Archives and Records Administration-Central Plains (NARA-Central Plains), Kansas City, Missouri. The Santee Band also appeared at Mitchell Corn Palace in 1892 and in 1893. See Nygard and Simpson, "Indians at the Corn Palaces: Race and Reception at Two Midwestern Festival Buildings."

³⁹² "In Honor of King Corn a Fine Parade and Large Crowd at Sioux City's Festival."

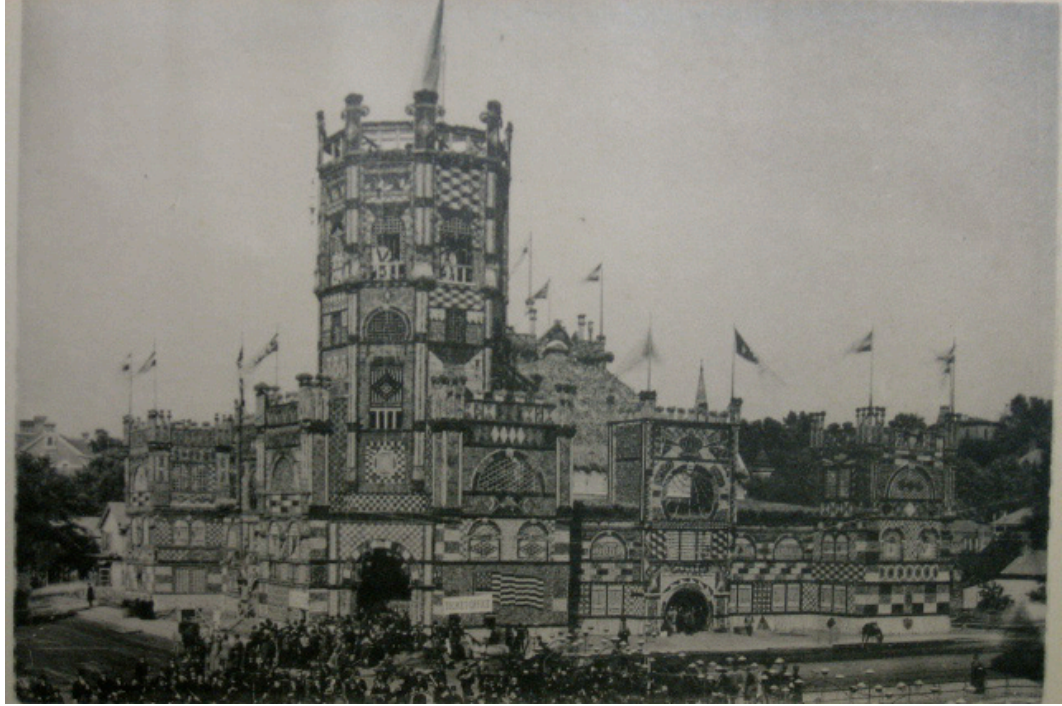


Image 3.4 / Corn Palace of 1888.



Image 3.5 / Corn Palace of 1889.

Sioux City's boosters sent another Corn Palace Train east in the spring of 1889, this time to Washington, D.C. in honor of President Harrison's inaugural ceremonies. According to E.D. Allen, the train attracted "much free Publicity" for Sioux City. With

the “entire outer sides” of all “Five Wagner Sleeping Cars and one Baggage Car” entirely “covered with corn and other cereal decoration,” it is no wonder that the train captured both “wonder and admiration” and “Head Line Publicity.” While it stayed in Washington, “thousands of visitors,” including the new President, soaked up the spectacle and “expressed admiration at its novelty.”³⁹³ When the city completed the Palace of 1889, the “Eighth Wonder of the World” featured a central tower two hundred feet tall. **[Image 3.5]** Inside the main building, visitors encountered open spaces for music performances and booths for smaller exhibits. Well over two hundred ladies labored over the decorations made from corn and other grasses.³⁹⁴ In what may have been a nod to their efforts, or perhaps a juxtaposition of the town’s growth and an allusion to the region’s fertility, *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly* superimposed an image of three young white women onto three husked ears of field corn.³⁹⁵ **[Image 3.6]** But because the organizers still sought additional emigrants and investors to secure the city’s future, that fall, Arthur S. Garretson—a local banker, Stock Yards founder, and railroad entrepreneur—personally “chartered a special car” of “Boston capitalists,” for whom he organized an excursion to show these investors the Corn Palace and to demonstrate “the way in which Sioux City does things generally.”³⁹⁶ Though it is difficult to ascertain the influence the trip may have held on Sioux City’s fortunes, the New Englanders took pains to publicly commend both the corn palace and “the...public spirit and enterprise of the businessmen of Sioux City and...the great resources of an immense district of which it is the natural centre.”³⁹⁷

³⁹³ E.D. Allen, ““Sioux City. . . In the Corn Palace Days...” 1928, 4-5; SC 55 Corn Palaces-Misc; SCPM.

³⁹⁴ Fitzgibbon, *Souvenir Album of Sioux City's Corn Palaces*; Irish, *Sioux City's Corn Palaces*.

³⁹⁵ John H. Patterson, "Sioux City, Iowa: The Corn Palace City of the West," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, October 1889, 509. In his doctoral dissertation, Travis Nygard observes that artistic representations of corn types varied depending on context. In some instances, artists specifically detailed field corn—notable for the dent when dried—which had come to serve as animal, not human, food. But in places dining rooms, artists showcased the plump kernels exclusively found on ears of sweet corn. See Nygard, "Seeds of Agribusiness".

³⁹⁶ Fitzgibbon, *Souvenir Album of Sioux City's Corn Palaces*. For additional biographical material on Garretson, see Sioux City Public Museum, "Arthur Garretson," http://www.siouxcityhistory.org/people/morea20f.html?id=38_0_2_0_M.

³⁹⁷ Sioux City Excursion Association, “Resolutions Read October 5th, 1889 on the Occasion of the Departure from Sioux City, Iowa of the Members of the Raymonds’ Excursion to the Great Corn Palace Festival September 30th to October 8th, 1889. New England Excursionists to the Citizens and Officials of Sioux City, Iowa,” 1889; SC 84 Corn Palaces, 1889; SCPM.



Image 3.6 / “Maidens of the Maize,” 1889.

Perhaps in hope that the commendation of eastern capitalists would further transform the city’s prospects, boosters constructed the corn palace of 1890 as even more spectacular than previous iterations had been. [Image 3.7] Atop its “Arabic” or “Turkish” themed architecture sat a globe, forty-five feet in diameter, featuring blue corn for the oceans, yellow for the continents, and red for the lakes. Cornstalks, to no one’s surprise, sketched out both longitude and latitude. Over the globe and visible for miles around rested a “framework” designed to represent King Corn’s crown. A dome soared higher still, the dark red corn at its base blending into kernels of lighter red, calico, and deep yellow, culminating with white corn at the top. Below, figures of “America,” featuring a “white female with a ruling wand,” and “an Indian, also a buffalo,” created with cornhusks and tobacco leaves and sorghum heads, respectively, graced the entrance. Inside, the central building hosted a larger main hall than ever before. Here, visitors enjoyed music and the novelty of incandescent lighting. This space also featured booths for railroad exhibits and welcomed displays from Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee alongside those from twenty counties across Iowa, Nebraska, and Dakota. The 1890 Palace also offered a variety of artfully decorated “quiet nooks” with “original designs

worked out in corn” by three hundred “Sioux City ladies” who had labored over the decorations for two solid weeks.³⁹⁸ And, as in prior years, daily parades (three of which featured “King Korn”), “Indian pony and foot racing, squaw races, horse races and athletic sports” entertained visitors during the run of the festivities.³⁹⁹ At the end of September, Secretary of Agriculture Jeremiah Rusk visited the palace, expressing his “surprise at its properties and beauty.” Foreshadowing some of the imitators that the Sioux City model would inspire, he suggested reproducing the palace in Chicago in 1893 and “in connection therewith an exposition of the growing and milling of corn and the preparation of food therefrom,” so as to create “an opportunity to show foreign nations the great value of corn as a food product.”⁴⁰⁰



Image 3.7 / Corn Palace of 1890.

³⁹⁸ E.D. Allen, “Sioux City Corn Palaces,” November 22, 1913; SC 55 Corn Palaces-Misc; SCPM; Irish, *Sioux City's Corn Palaces*; Fitzgibbon, *Souvenir Album of Sioux City's Corn Palaces*; “Iowa's Big Corn Palace Ready,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 25, 1890; “King Korn's Pretty Palace Where the Fourth Annual Festival of the Mighty Monarch Is Being Held,” *The Daily Inter Ocean*, September 27, 1890.

³⁹⁹ *Official Program of the Fourth Annual Corn Palace Festival. Compliments of the Union Loan & Trust Company Sioux City Iowa*, 1890; SC 55 Corn Palace 1890; SCPM; “King Korn's Pretty Palace Where the Fourth Annual Festival of the Mighty Monarch Is Being Held.”

⁴⁰⁰ “Rusk Visits the Palace,” *The Daily Inter Ocean*, September 30, 1890.



Image 3.8 / Corn Palace of 1891.

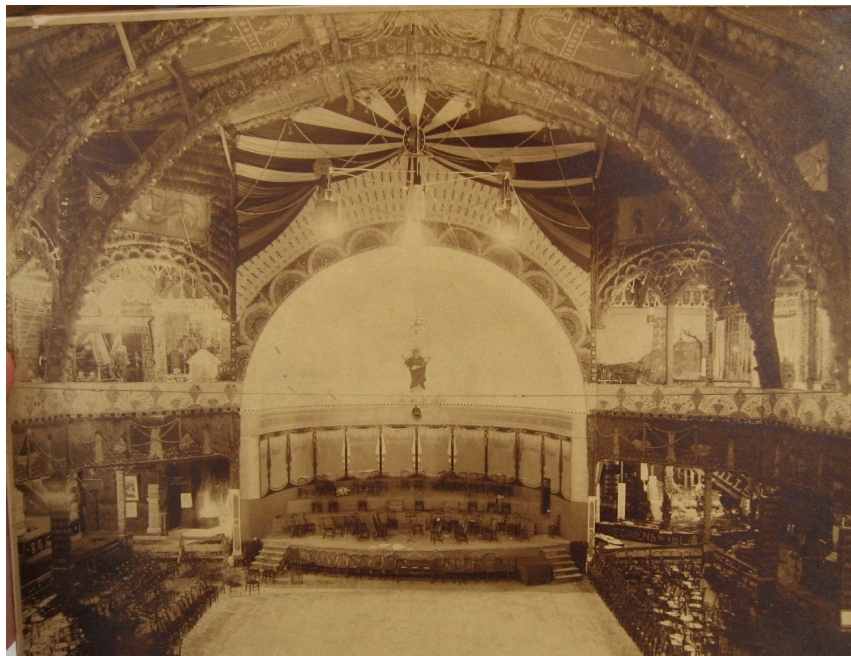


Image 3.9 / Interior, 1891 Palace.

Sioux Cityans' revelries culminated with the palace of 1891, the largest edifice by far. **[Image 3.8]** Constructed no fewer than 380 feet deep, 120 feet wide, and 200 feet high—large enough, in fact, to enable the city's new electric trolley to pass through—the central auditorium held 1,500 visitors and contained some 3,000 "red, blue, and orange

colored lights.”⁴⁰¹ **[Image 3.9]** As with previous years, teams of women—this year led by a “board of twenty lady managers”—were “in charge” of decorating booths inside the Palace.⁴⁰² And again, “[e]very square inch... present[ed] a magnificent glow of colors,” as “[c]orn of all colors [wa]s nailed on the walls in fanciful patterns, and... trimmed with borders.”⁴⁰³ Decorations in the main building included “[a] map of the State of Iowa” made with “50,000 kernels of corn,” a representation of Romeo and Juliet complete with “a white corn rope ladder,” and a vignette of the proverbial “Old Kentucky Home.”⁴⁰⁴ In addition, the ladies constructed a special area for the “Temple of Mondamin.”⁴⁰⁵ Replete with a “panorama” of scenes from “Hiawatha’s Fasting,” the so-called Temple illustrated the oft-circulated portion of Longfellow’s poem in eight separate sections.⁴⁰⁶ **[Image 3.10]** Local businesses like florists and electricians advertised their wares in stands arranged in the gallery surrounding the auditorium. **[Images 3.11-3.12]** Nearby, counties and states from as far away as California, Texas, and Louisiana showcased the products of their fields.⁴⁰⁷ The palace of 1891, however, was not merely limited to the nation’s political borders. Nodding to the relationships that city boosters hoped to cultivate around the Americas, organizers also featured “a comprehensive exhibit from Central and South America and Mexico.” It included “fruits, flowers,” wood, coffee and even “bananas on the tree.”⁴⁰⁸ International participants complemented these exhibits, including a “band of natives from Brazil,” dressed in their “Peculiar” fashion, and “The Great Mexican Military Band” which arrived with “56 Skilled Musicians.”⁴⁰⁹ The band,

⁴⁰¹ "Corn Reigns over All: And Sioux City Is the Loyal Capital of His Kingdom," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 12, 1891.

⁴⁰² Ibid. J.R. Kathrans, *Corn Palaces Thrilled All*, *Sioux City Journal*. October 3, 1937. SC 55 Corn Palaces-Misc, Sioux City Public Museum, Pearl Street Research Center, Sioux City.

⁴⁰³ "The Daily Inter Ocean," *The Daily Inter Ocean*, October 2, 1891.

⁴⁰⁴ "Corn Reigns over All: And Sioux City Is the Loyal Capital of His Kingdom." Beitz, "Sioux City's Splendid Corn Palaces," 43.

⁴⁰⁵ "Fifth Annual Festival Sioux City Corn Palace... with Mention of South America at the Corn Palace and the Mexican Military Band... and a Proclamation," 1891; SC 55 Corn Palace 1891, 1989.026.1, Folder 1891; SCPM.

⁴⁰⁶ Beitz, "Sioux City's Splendid Corn Palaces," 43.

⁴⁰⁷ "Corn Reigns over All: And Sioux City Is the Loyal Capital of His Kingdom."

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.; "Fifth Annual Festival Sioux City Corn Palace... with Mention of South America at the Corn Palace and the Mexican Military Band... and a Proclamation," 1891; SC 55 Corn Palace 1891, 1989.026.1, Folder 1891; SCPM.

⁴⁰⁹ "Dance Program, Corn Palace Ball, Music by Mexican National Band," October 8, 1891; SC 55, Corn Palace 1891, Folder 1891; SCPM; "Fifth Annual Festival Sioux City Corn Palace... with Mention of South America at the Corn Palace and the Mexican Military Band... and a Proclamation," 1891; SC 55 Corn

in fact, welcomed officials, citizens, and the civic leaders dressed as “King Corn” and “Queen Corn” to the opening parade.⁴¹⁰

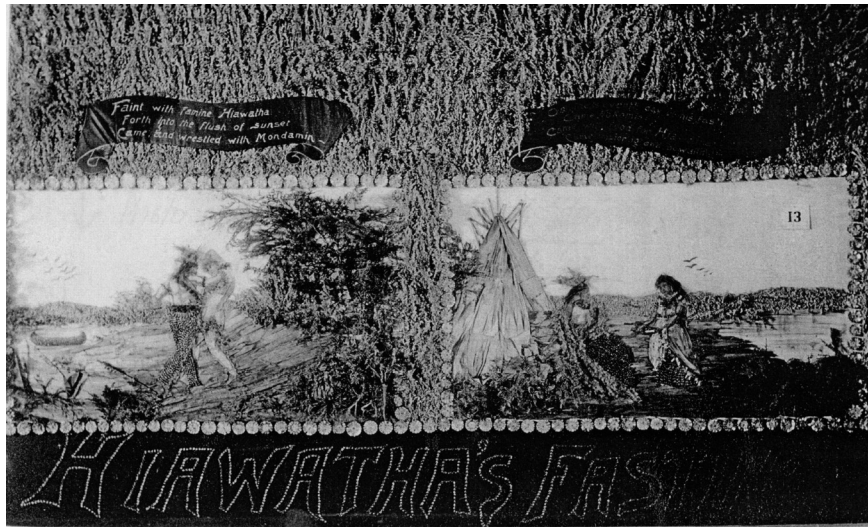


Image 3.10 / Panel, “Hiawatha’s Fasting,” 1891 Palace.



Image 3.11 / Booth, “Sioux City Electrical Supply Co.,” 1891 Palace.

Palace 1891, 1989.026.1, Folder 1891; SCPM; "Corn Reigns over All: And Sioux City Is the Loyal Capital of His Kingdom."

⁴¹⁰ "Given over to King Corn," *The Journal*, October 3, 1891 in SC 30, Folder 10, SCPM; Kathrans, *Corn Palaces Thrilled All*, *Sioux City Journal*.

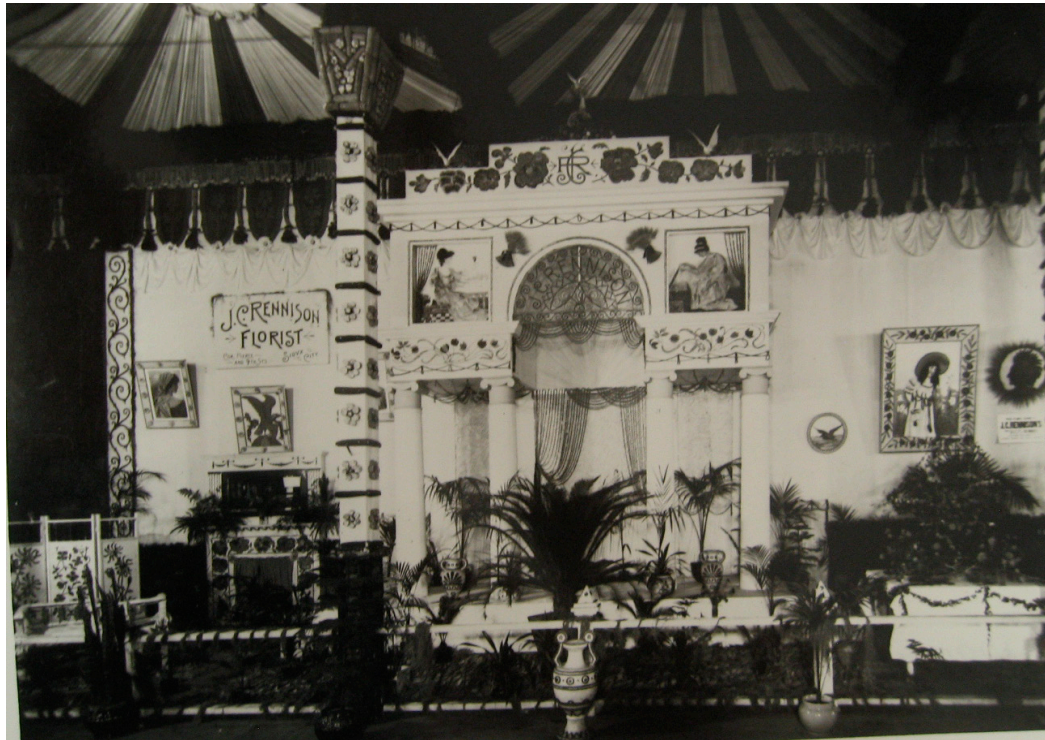


Image 3.12 / Booth, “J. C. Rennison, Florist,” 1891 Palace.

Sioux City’s aspirations for commandeering regional, national, and international trade by means of highlighting its corn producing capacity dissolved only when flooding in 1892 and the national panic of 1893 ended the city’s corn palace craze and opened the doors for nearby Mitchell, South Dakota to take up the iconic portrayal of American agricultural abundance as its own, which, after a fitful start, it maintains well over a century later.⁴¹¹ As one E.W. Irish later wrote, Sioux Cityans “had done some great things in the way of securing important improvements and they desired to do something to signalize these triumphs as well as to attract attention to the enterprising city and the magnificent country tributary to it.”⁴¹² And as “Old Timer” J.R. Kathrans recalled fifty years later, the palaces mattered because “We were not in the exact center of the great corn belt, but we were on the periphery and it was up to us to shout.”⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Mitchell’s Corn Palace appeared in 1892. For analysis of the Mitchell Palace in the twentieth century and a number of citations referring to its history, see Travis Nygard, "Oscar Howe and the Metaphorical Monarchy of Maize: Indigenism and Power in the Mitchell Corn Palace Panels, 1948-1971" (University of Pittsburgh, 2005), 11.

⁴¹² Irish, *Sioux City's Corn Palaces*.

⁴¹³ Kathrans, *Corn Palaces Thrilled All*, *Sioux City Journal*. 1.

SPECTACLES OF NATURAL ABUNDANCE

How are we to make sense of the stories that Sioux Cityans sought to tell about themselves and their region's "natural" potential by way of palaces and parades? How did their proverbial shouts render displays of their landscapes' productive capacity and their own industrial modernity as markers of civic progress? And might anyone have been shouting back, so to speak, through the kaleidoscopic din? What, in other words, are we to make of all this corn? Sioux City's five corn palaces, after all, were many things: spectacles of abundance, stories about certain humans' relationships with nature and with other cultural groups at a particular moment in time, physical spaces contingent on the human labor expended in drawing prospective emigrants, investors, and tourists, and contested cultural spaces. But in spite of such fertile terrain, research conducted on Sioux City's corn palaces has been limited. Most studies describe the palaces and analyze their significance in local histories.⁴¹⁴ In recent years, art historians Pamela Simpson and Travis Nygard have broadened the scope by examining the palaces' aesthetic and legendary precursors, the genre of grain festivals and crop art that they brought into wide popularity, and the ways in which building or decorating the palaces helped cities and participants construct their own identities.⁴¹⁵

My readings of the palaces expand on their work and move in new directions. At one level, this chapter argues that the creators of the 1887 Corn Palace and its subsequent reincarnations used corn to craft spectacles of "natural" abundance in order to publicize the surrounding upland prairie landscape's agricultural—and therefore economic—

⁴¹⁴ See for instance Beitz, "Sioux City's Splendid Corn Palaces."; Briggs, "The Sioux City Corn Palaces."; Cynthia Elyce Rubin, "The Midwestern Corn Palaces: A "Maize" Of Detail and Wonder," *The Clarion* (1983); Jeff Starck, "Corn Palace Tokens," *Coin World* 49, no. 2499 (2008); Dorothy Schwieder and Patricia Swanson, "The Sioux City Corn Palaces," *Annals of Iowa* 41 (1973). For a recently published coffee-table style book on the city's corn palaces and other regional imitators, see Rod Evans, *Palaces on the Prairie* (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 2009).

⁴¹⁵ See Simpson, "Cereal Architecture."; Nygard and Simpson, "Indians at the Corn Palaces: Race and Reception at Two Midwestern Festival Buildings." For Simpson's scholarship on regional corn festivals, see Pamela H. Simpson, "Turn-of-the-Century Midwestern Corn Festivals: Kiosks and Crop Art as American Icons," *Arris* 14 (2003). For her recent publication on corn as an artistic medium, see Pamela H. Simpson, "A Vernacular Recipe for Sculpture—Butter, Sugar, and Corn," *American Art* 24, no. 1 (2010). For Nygard's graduate scholarship on the Mitchell, South Dakota corn palaces and the intersections between grain palaces and modern agribusiness, see Nygard, "Oscar Howe and the Metaphorical Monarchy of Maize: Indigenism and Power in the Mitchell Corn Palace Panels, 1948-1971"; Nygard, "Seeds of Agribusiness". I thank them both for sharing their published and unpublished projects. Note, as of December, 2010, Simpson expects her book on corn palaces and butter sculpture, *Icons of Abundance*, to be forthcoming with the University of Minnesota Press in 2011.

potential. By so doing, they hoped to further Sioux City's participation in a market-oriented economy that was increasingly national in scope. The edifices they bankrolled and designed enabled residents and visitors to re-imagine the city's hinterland—which, not long before, had been an important borderland both among Indian peoples and between Indians and Europeans—as having been virgin land.⁴¹⁶ With small applications of labor, city boosters promised, farmers might transform the region's rich prairie uplands and river bottomlands into fields of corn.⁴¹⁷ Investors, they intimated, might likewise reap profits from investing in the city's infrastructure. By bedecking the city's series of fantastical, Moorish and Turkish-inspired buildings with the region's most dominant agricultural product, designers and decorators used a visual language of abundance to depict the region's newest occupants as peculiarly capable of utilizing its resources so as to satiate the postbellum nation's growing demands for corn-fattened meat and thereby place the aspiring metropolis on par with cities like Chicago and St. Louis.

Their displays of the land's potential, however, obscured as much as they sought to reveal. By building wooden structures in downtown business districts, covering them with brightly colored kernels of corn, and creating the illusion that King Corn's reign would benefit everyone affiliated with Sioux City, corn palace boosters and designers masked ongoing processes of Native land dispossession and obfuscated the roles of women's unpaid labor in an industrial economy.⁴¹⁸ At another level, then, this chapter also explores participants' contestations of corn palace organizers' racialized and gendered depictions of frontier closure and regional development. Indeed, a host of “socially peripheral” but “symbolically central” participants used the palaces and their

⁴¹⁶ In the nineteenth century, seeing landscapes as wealth and agriculture as something natural hinged on re-imagining landscapes as virgin. Jeremy Adelman and Steve Aron explain that although contests among colonial powers over access to North American trade created borderlands in which Native Americans had operated as “peoples in between,” as Anglo Americans moved toward and along the Missouri River region after the War of 1812, “American officials treated Indians as subject peoples” and “reinvented borderlands as virgin lands.” See Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (1999): 816, 828-829. See also Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*; Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. Sioux City boosters' manifestation of the idea that their surroundings were “virgin” is not unlike the combination of physical and imaginative removal that went into producing Yellowstone National Park as a wilderness, empty of human inhabitants, some fifteen years earlier. On Yellowstone, see Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*.

⁴¹⁷ For boosters' promotions of areas around Sioux City as being “made by nature for a railroad center” and, of course, destined to produce corn, see discussion of booster literature later in this chapter.

⁴¹⁸ They also elided agrarian discontent, which I explore more in the following chapter.

accompanying events to frame their own interpretations of the region's transformations.⁴¹⁹ On the streets of Sioux City and even inside the walls of the palaces themselves, individuals living on nearby Indian reservations and members of the town's ladies' organizations reasserted some of the more liminal cultural relationships that had characterized the region before boundaries had placed it wholly inside of the domestic United States.⁴²⁰ Although those negotiations were fleeting, they nevertheless illuminate the fragility of boosters' narratives about the teleology of regional development and abundance.

The effuse descriptions of the corn palaces and their accompanying events, part of a genre of historical recordkeeping in which archives across the western U.S. tend to be especially rich, require careful reading so as to avoid reinforcing the narratives that festival designers sought to impart. By examining the sentiments that the nation's first corn palaces were designed to convey with an eye towards the complex cultural contexts in which the celebrations were embedded—here, I include the ecological, political, technological, and social structures that, in some way, supported the festivities—not only can we explore how socially marginal participants inscribed their own meanings onto and within King Corn's realm, but we can also understand how the producers of Sioux City's corn palaces and the industries affiliated with the object of their celebrations naturalized their reliance upon corn in increasingly industrial systems of food production.⁴²¹

A HUNGRY MARKETPLACE

The idea for first corn palace was conceived within the context of an ongoing market revolution whose technological developments, rapidly growing urban populations, and new economic relationships were transforming the ways that Americans interacted

⁴¹⁹ See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen Press, 1986), 20.

⁴²⁰ No shortage of works point to the ways in which older borderlands spaces had facilitated intercultural exchanges and valued women's labor. See for instance White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*; Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, eds., *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-50* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael Lansing, "Plains Indian Women and Interracial Marriage in the Upper Missouri Trade, 1804-1868," *Western Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2000).

⁴²¹ For an example of the ways in which historical context enriches our understanding of ways in which "artful" depictions of the past framed master narratives and enhances our ability to see through those narratives, see Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*.

with their environments and with one another.⁴²² Following the Civil War, new modes of transportation and communication spread across the United States. Meanwhile, promises embedded in financial booms and the realities of periodic busts, the geographic reconfiguration of various subpopulations, and waves of new manufactured goods created milieus of excitement and anxiety. In short, the United States of 1887 was an utterly different space than it had been at the close of the Civil War. So, too, was Sioux City.

In 1862, the Republican-controlled Congress had passed the Pacific Railway and Homestead Acts.⁴²³ The former granted enormous quantities of public land to railroad companies as incentives for completing a transcontinental line. The railroads, in turn, sought to sell their lands to settlers who, they hoped, would grow the crops that the railroads would carry to market. In response, private investors began to construct short lines radiating from local depots to the federally sponsored roads, connecting settlers and businesses to national markets and creating possibilities for future growth.⁴²⁴

Meanwhile, the Homestead Act allocated land in parcels far larger than what families would have required for sustenance alone.⁴²⁵ On such claims, farmers grew crops like wheat, corn, and potatoes with every intention to sell some of the fruits of their toil for profit.⁴²⁶ Their decisions to cultivate crops for markets reflected their perceptions of the need to raise the specie or credit required to purchase the modern agricultural

⁴²² The classic study of the market revolution in Jacksonian America is Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For that marking the three decades after the War, see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982; 2007). For analyses of how the market revolution transpired in agricultural contexts west of the Mississippi over the long nineteenth century, see Mary Theresa Sheahan, "Living on the Edge: The Ecology and Economy of Willa Cather's 'Wild Land': Webster County, Nebraska, 1870-1900" (PhD Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1999); Jeff Robert Bremer, "Frontier Capitalism: The Market Revolution in the Antebellum Lower Missouri River Valley, 1803--1860" (PhD Dissertation, The University of Kansas, 2006); Jeremy Neely, "Divided in the Middle: A History of the Kansas-Missouri Border, 1854--1896" (PhD Dissertation, University of Missouri--Columbia, 2004). Neely is especially clear in explaining why Kansas and Missouri settlers alike produced surplus corn and agriculture, in the shape we know as corn belt agriculture. On this topic, see also Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*; Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century*.

⁴²³ That same year, Congress also formed the Department of Agriculture and created a system of state agricultural colleges in the Morrill Land Grant Act. I explore implications of those acts in chapter five.

⁴²⁴ On the transcontinental railroad, see John Hoyt Williams, *The Great and Shining Road: The Epic Story of the Transcontinental Railroad* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); David Haward Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Penguin Press, 1999). For what using the railroad meant to Americans during its first years, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1986). See also Richard White's forthcoming book on how railroads transformed time and space.

⁴²⁵ Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness*, 55.

⁴²⁶ On favorite crops, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 100.

implements, fertilizers, and the consumer goods that their families could not make or procure on their farms. After the widow Emeline Guernsey moved from Pennsylvania to Iowa, for instance, she wrote of sending “our wheat to the river” in order to gain credit at her brother Erasmus’ store and also of buying improved wheat seed, ostensibly to bring better prices upon future sales. At the height of the Civil War, however, she noted sending her wheat to nearby Mitchell, in Dakota Territory, in order to take advantage of better prices. She would use the proceeds gained by utilizing new railroad technologies and accessing new geographies of capital to pay her taxes. Her decision, therefore, shows her awareness of how shifting market demands influenced the profits she might garner from her wheat.⁴²⁷



Image 3.13 / First Train to enter Sioux City, March 9, 1868.

While outcomes from these pieces of legislation varied according to the communities and states in which they were implemented, the growth of the rail industry enabled settlers like Emeline Guernsey to send greater quantities of western-produced goods, especially through Chicago, to eastern markets. The Homestead Act, meanwhile, was especially successful at stimulating settlement in the eastern Dakotas and in Nebraska—the regions that Sioux Cityans in the late 1880s aspired to exploit as their hinterlands.⁴²⁸ Together, railroads and expedient means to cheap lands encouraged farmers to expand the acres they put under cultivation. Sioux City, for example,

⁴²⁷ See EDG to WDG, December 16, 1861 and April 9, 1863, GFP, box 2, folder 20, HL; EDG to WDG, February 10, 1864, GFP, box 2, folder 21, HL.

⁴²⁸ While the Homestead Act was fairly successful in these areas, its reach in distributing lands elsewhere and in having settlers “prove up” their settlements was limited. This is because western aridity, railroad grants, and other systems of land distribution made the Homestead model less feasible. See Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 142-147. On Chicago, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 90-91.

welcomed its first train in 1868.⁴²⁹ **[Image 3.13]** Within a year, boosters had developed promotional materials in conjunction with their own new line, telling would-be emigrants that Iowa’s “great railroad system [wa]s rapidly being developed.” They puffed that land in their district was “capable of bearing the commerce of a continent.” From such documents, potential settlers would have learned that Woodbury, the county in which Sioux City was situated, was home to no fewer than 146,000 acres of loam-rich bottomlands “especially adapted to corn.” In the upland prairies around the city, they would have read, soil existed to a depth of one hundred feet. Water, timber, game, prairie chickens, and wild fruits, meanwhile, would be found in abundance.⁴³⁰ In response to such promotions, the pulse of Sioux City’s settlement quickened during the 1870s—as did towns across western Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas—as emigrants from New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Dubuque, and Galena and immigrants from Germany, Ireland, and various Scandinavian countries built up the population.⁴³¹

Boosters’ promises that available lands were perfectly suited to corn production point to ongoing effects of Civil War-era technological innovations. Wartime labor shortages had encouraged farmers to purchase and utilize labor-saving agricultural implements. At some point before Emeline Guernsey’s son William left to fight in the war, for example, one or both of them invested in a McCormick reaper, a machine that dramatically facilitated farmers’ abilities to harvest wheat for sale to distant markets.⁴³² While that machine was among the most well known of its class of implements, manufacturers churned out a host of other crop-boosting technologies. For corn producers, they produced new drills that promised to plant corn kernels in orderly rows

⁴²⁹ On railroad development in and around Sioux City between 1869 and 1882, see *History of Western Iowa, Its Settlement and Growth: A Comprehensive Compilation of Progressive Events Concerning the Counties, Cities, Towns, and Villages—Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers and Business Men, with an Authentic History of the State of Iowa*, 183-185.

⁴³⁰ Fulton, *The Free Lands of Iowa. Being an Accurate Description of the Sioux City Land District. With a General View of Iowa: Her Resources and Advantages*, 4-8. Item held by AAS.

⁴³¹ See entries found in *Iowa*. R.G. Dun & Co. Collection, 54, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School, Cambridge, MA.

⁴³² The topic arose in their correspondence because she seems to have been unable to make all payments on the machine during his absence. William suggests that he had been the official purchaser, however, insisting, “I was of age before I signed the notes.” The implication, therefore, is that she would not have been liable for the machine’s payments while he was away. In any event, she saw to its use during his absence. For correspondence about the reaper, see WDG to EDG, March 14, 1862; GFP; box 3, folder 23; HL. For notice about the reaper’s overdue payment from the McCormick company itself, look through letters to Emeline, in Box 2. I did not note the folder at the time I examined this item.

and at standard depths [Image 3.14]; corn planters like the “Jim Dandy,” which was advertised—courtesy of anthropomorphized corn-eating and corn-producing farm animals—as convenient, easy to handle, quick-turning, and eye-catching [Image 3.15]; cornstalk cutters, which would more easily take a field down for fodder at the end of the season; and corn shellers, which stripped dried kernels off the cobs in bulk, making for easier grinding.⁴³³ But because farmers had not yet standardized the height at which ears of corn would grow—a twentieth century innovation that would eventually enable mechanized harvesters to replace human labor and the practices of hogging down the corn—corn farmers could not use the same harvesting technologies for maize as they did for wheat.⁴³⁴ Even so, their decisions to purchase such implements to cultivate larger swaths of land hinged on significant cash outlays that, in turn, reinforced the market-oriented logic of growing more acres of crops.⁴³⁵



Image 3.14 / “VanDiver Corn Planter,” *The Prairie Farmer*, October 31, 1868, 137.

⁴³³ “Vandiver Corn Planter, Manufactured by Barlow, Wood & Co., Quincy, Ill,” *The Prairie Farmer*, October 31, 1868. See also Gies & Co., “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow. ... The “Jim Dandy” Check Row Corn Planter Is a Check-Rower and Corn Planter All Combined in One Machine... F.B. Tait & Co., Sole Manufacturers, Decatur, Ill. ...” [1870-1900]; ABE, Series 1, no. 27027, AAS.

⁴³⁴ Dial, “The Organized Corn Husking Contests”.

⁴³⁵ John A. Hopkins Jr., *Economic History of the Production of Beef Cattle in Iowa* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1928), 29.



Image 3.15 / The Jim Dandy Corn Planter, 1870-1900.

As technologies like railroads and agricultural implements combined with federal policies promoting land sales to increase the acreage that the nation's farmers' cultivated, their expanded tracts of cultivated fields generated larger volumes of corn. In Iowa alone, farmers planted nearly a million more acres to corn in 1872 than in 1866.⁴³⁶ Greater quantities of corn, however, decreased the crop's market value. During roughly that same timeframe, prices per bushel of Iowa corn dropped precipitously. In 1867, farmers received fifty-three cents per bushel. By 1872, that number had plummeted to eighteen cents. In 1878, prices fell again, to sixteen.⁴³⁷ Farmers striving to increase their profits, therefore, began feeding excess corn to hogs at increasingly intense levels. In later years, economists would identify the incentive for doing so as the corn-hog ratio; essentially, when the price a farmer receives for a given quantity of hog (say, 100 pounds) exceeds the price s/he receives for the bushels of corn required to produce that weight, it becomes more beneficial to send corn to market in the shape of a fattened animal. In the wake of low corn prices during the second half of the nineteenth century,

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ USDA, "Individual State Data for Iowa, 1870-2010," <http://www.nass.usda.gov/QuickStats/>. Data for price per bushel in 1866 and 1877 are missing, but while prices during intervening years varied, they never rose higher than fifty cents.

according to the early twentieth century hog historian Henry Clay Dawson, farmers switched their animals from diets of mixed grains and pasturage to a “full feed of corn for hard fattening and fleshing” for roughly a month before their animals became cuts of meat or tubs of lard. This switch to intensive corn eating, Dawson added, enabled the fat to “be piled up” economically “in as short a time as possible.”⁴³⁸ Some farmers may have even taken corn’s perceived ability to fatten animals to extremes, a contemporary agricultural writer noted, by feeding it to hogs as soon as they were weaned and until they were slaughtered.⁴³⁹

But farmers did not only ameliorate their surge in corn production by feeding their bounty to greater numbers of hogs. They also produced fatter animals by adapting southern farmers’ older practices to new market imperatives. Indeed, larger volumes of grain available for fattening farmers’ hogs—and the profits to be made by marketing heavy animals—created pressure among breeders to transform the very nature of the hogs doing the eating. For if an animal could not physically hold up the weight of the fat they were putting on, or put it on too slowly in relation to the volume of grain it was fed, it would be an unthrifty beast and, by an economic logic, unworthy of reproducing. Thus in the 1860s, farmers like Dawson began to breed the Corn Belt’s famous lard-type animals into being. These land whales needed to be able to stand under the four, five, or even six hundred pounds they put on their frame—a marked difference from Mrs. Mary Randolph’s antebellum advice as to a corn-fattened hog’s ideal weight. As these walking slabs of bacon and lard accelerated in popularity among the packers who stood to profit by processing the animals and compensated farmers accordingly, newly formed swine associations standardized the highly remunerative Poland-China hog and similar breeds. According to Dawson, the Poland-China type was “large-framed, [and] good-boned,” which meant that the animals could hold the weight that farmers sought to pile on. It was also “fairly quick-maturing,” which meant that they could be sent to market at heavier weights and at earlier ages than hogs that gained weight slowly and ate comparatively more corn. In sum, Dawson wrote, farmers widely adopted the Poland-China for its

⁴³⁸ Henry Clay Dawson, *The Hog Book: Embodying the Experience of Fifty Years in the Practical Handling of Swine in the American Cornbelt* (Chicago: Sanders Publishing Company, 1911), 199, 212.

⁴³⁹ Elliott W. Stewart, *Feeding Animals: A Practical Work Upon the Laws of Animal Growth, Specially Applied to the Rearing and Feeding of Horses, Cattle, Dairy Cows, Sheep and Swine*, 4th ed. (Lake View: Elliot W. Stewart, 1888), 137.

“excellent meat and lard developing qualities” and the fact that it was, overall, “vigorous, prolific, and constitutionally strong.” Moreover, he added, they were “unsurpassed feeders” when converting corn to fat.⁴⁴⁰

Unsurpassed feeders, however, could not exist without unsurpassed eaters. Urban consumers’ ongoing demands for lard, ham, and salt pork formed another dimension of the context in which Sioux Cityans decided that palaces bedecked in corn would be an ideal way to demonstrate their region’s productive capacity. Before the Civil War, generations of farm-based women had helped feed corn to hogs during the last weeks of their lives and had assisted or oversaw the process of cutting, preserving, and rendering the animals upon their slaughter. The corn-feeding wisdom that leading “literary domestics” like Mary Randolph, Eliza Leslie, Catharine Beecher, and Sarah Josepha Hale dispensed before the Civil War, for instance, remind us that many of their devotees would have helped raise and butcher their families’ hogs, “tried out” their own lard, and salted or pickled their own pork.⁴⁴¹ Beecher, an educational reformer and sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, not only articulated a preference for corn fed animals but also offered her readers “[d]irections for cutting up a Hog” and reminders that the “leaf fat” attached to “the kidneys” was “nicest” when used “by itself” for “cooking.” Conversely, she pointed, intestinal fat “which does not readily separate” should only be used “for soap grease.”⁴⁴²

Though it is likely these authors’ bodies of knowledge about corn-fed animals’ virtues arose from a combination of personal expertise and syntheses of the vernacular knowledge that their hired help or slaves might have known far more intimately than the literary domestics themselves, women around the country engaged in this work. The ladies of the Guernsey family offer a case in point. Emeline Guernsey, for example, raised hogs on her Pennsylvania farm in the late 1850s.⁴⁴³ Evidently, her mother Delia had done so as well, for Emeline’s sister, Amelia, observed that their mother had

⁴⁴⁰ Dawson, *The Hog Book: Embodying the Experience of Fifty Years in the Practical Handling of Swine in the American Cornbelt*, 40-47. On the Poland-China, see also “Origin of Domestic Swine,” in *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture: Animals. A popular survey of agricultural conditions, practices and ideals in the United States and Canada*, ed. Liberty Hyde Bailey (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911), 671-674.

⁴⁴¹ Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*.

⁴⁴² Beecher, *Miss Beecher’s Domestic Receipt Book: Designed as a Supplement to Her Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 3rd Ed., 31-32. For more on Beecher, see see Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity*.

⁴⁴³ EDG to WDG, September 12, 1858; GFP; box 2, folder 20; HL.

“worked too hard when [their parents] butchered” in February of 1847.⁴⁴⁴ During the late 1850s, Amelia left clues about how her own labor revolved around hog production. She wrote to Emeline of having to “fry cakes” to feed the many men her husband hired to work in the woods near their homestead in Stacyville, Iowa during the late 1850s. Those cakes, like other foods requiring copious amounts of animal fats, were almost certainly cooked in lard that Amelia herself had helped “try out” from animals they raised and butchered.⁴⁴⁵ Even as late as 1880, Emeline’s daughter, Sarah (“Sadie”) wrote of having produced a “thousand pounds of pork,” sausage, and “twelve gallons” of lard plus a “tin churn” and “six quart pail[s] full” during a single December butchering season.⁴⁴⁶

After the Civil War, however, waves of immigrants and a growing exodus from the countryside swelled city populations and made efforts like Sadie’s increasingly rare. Expanding numbers of city-dwellers meant that more women, in particular, were encountering and purchasing ready-made foodstuffs as consumers (or, for the middle and upper classes, were directing their hired help to do so) instead of personally transforming farm-raised animals or crops into the meals that their families would consume. Indeed, in 1867, New York butcher and author Thomas De Voe observed that the nation’s demographic shift meant that “[t]he producer is often hundreds of miles in one direction, while the consumer may be as many hundred in another, from the mart at which the

⁴⁴⁴ Amelia Donaldson Stacy to EDG, February 24, 1847; GFP, box 4, folder 39, HL.

⁴⁴⁵ Amelia Donaldson Stacy to EDG, February 11, 1858; GFP, box 4, folder 39, HL.

⁴⁴⁶ Sarah Guernsey Beebe to EDG, Decemebr 20, 18[80]; GFP, box 1, folder 9; HL. Other evidence shows women participating in the butchering and preserving processes, as well. Elsewhere in Pennsylvania, the farmer Christian Shank observed three of his neighbors, Mrs. Sandis, Mrs. Shreadly, and Henrietta Landis, helping their husbands butcher hogs during the winter of 1858-1859. After butchering, they and women in similar positions had to process hundreds of pounds of meat and fat at a time, because farmers like Shank butchered hogs weighing upwards of two hundred pounds and often killed multiple animals in the span of a day or two. See Christian H. Shank, *Diary and Account Book, 1858-1867*. Doc. 370, 8, 10, WIN. For references to the women’s efforts, see entries dated December 21, 1858 and January 20, 1859. Shank’s entry for December 17, 1861 showed three hogs totaling 871 pounds, while his January 21, 1862 entry showed that he butchered three more hogs weighing an impressive hogs 1195 pounds. Such production loads explain the contents both of women’s private receipt books and literary domestics’ advice regarding how to process large amounts of hog products. Sometime before 1840, for instance, the member of the Ohio-based Rappe family mentioned in chapter two saved receipts from the *Ohio Repository* giving directions “for curing 100 lbs of Hams or beef” and “To Cure Pork.” The latter instructed her to “Cut up the Hogs the same day theyay [sic] are killed” before pouring on the homemade “pickel” solution. See Receipts no. 166 and 167, *Rappe Family Receipt Book, Ohio*, ca. 1810-1840. Doc. 512, Manuscript Reading Room, WIN. For more on hog raising in Illinois (though, given the likelihood that more Illinois hogs were driven to market than on the eastern seaboard in the 1830s-1850s, without much of a discussion of how women helped process hogs at home), see Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie*, 103, 201.

productions were sold and purchased.”⁴⁴⁷ As the influence of railroads and agricultural implements on farmers suggests, a bevy of technological developments lay behind this distancing. Between the end of the war and the early 1880s, Chicago became the primary processor of the various forms of commoditized nature that would appear on the nation’s dining room tables.⁴⁴⁸ As railroads enabled Chicago to move greater quantities of natural resources from its hinterlands to the city, industrialists perfected systems that, among their other consequences, transformed the region’s growing glut of corn-fattened pigs—especially the big Poland-Chinas—into the products that consumers desired. Deploying economies of scale, immigrant labor, and the natural cold of the winter months, the city’s packers slaughtered, salted, smoked, steamed, packaged, and distributed pork products. The Chicago-based N.K. Fairbank & Co. started to produce its “refined lard” in 1863, for instance, while McFerran, Shallcross & Co. began to sell its cured hams to the public that same year.⁴⁴⁹ Similarly, the Underwood Company began to make its popular canned “deviled” ham for sandwiches and salads later that decade.⁴⁵⁰

Postwar growth in industrial animal processing, like farmers’ increase in cultivated acres, was tremendous. While McFerran, Shallcross & Co. cured 7,000 hams in 1863, it cured 375,000 only fifteen years later.⁴⁵¹ And according to *Harper’s Weekly*, whereas western slaughterhouses had processed 500,000 head of hogs in 1850, they were processing over five and a half *million* by 1873.⁴⁵² Though Chicago’s production far outstripped Sioux City’s, the western outpost started to contribute to these numbers that year. James Booge, for instance, who would become one of the Corn Palace’s promoters,

⁴⁴⁷ Thomas Farrington DeVoe, *The Market Assistant, Containing a Brief Description of Every Article of Human Food Sold in the Public Markets of the Cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 9.

⁴⁴⁸ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*. Note especially his chart labeled “Midwestern Hog Packing by City, 1850-1900,” (p 258) which clearly shows Chicago rapidly supplanting Cincinnati as the nation’s premier hog packer during the war, and its peak in the early 1880s, at which point Omaha and Kansas City began to take over significant percentages of the nation’s hog processing capacity.

⁴⁴⁹ N.K. Fairbank & Co, *Facts About Lard! 2nd Edition*, 1888. Pam. 2008.738, Hagley Museum & Library (HAG), Wilmington, Delaware; McFerran Shallcross & Co., “The Magnolia Ham Is an American Institution,” 1878. EC, TC, Box 7, Food L-S, AAS.

⁴⁵⁰ W.M. Underwood Co., *Taste the Taste and Some Cookery News* (1909), 9. For a brief corporate history of the Underwood Company, mentioning that its deviled ham appeared in late 1860s and was patented in 1870, see B&G Foods, “Get to Know Our Family,” http://www.bgfoods.com/underwood/underwood_about.asp.

⁴⁵¹ McFerran Shallcross & Co., “The Magnolia Ham Is an American Institution,” 1878. EC, TC, Box 7, Food L-S, AAS.

⁴⁵² “Pork Packing,” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 6 1873.

processed over 123,000 hogs when he opened his first packinghouse in 1873.⁴⁵³ New modes of automated animal slaughtering and processing—along with new breeds of hogs and growing numbers of people who would consume prepared products—thus combined to make Herculean on-farm lard-rendering efforts like Sadie Guernsey’s more rare than they had been during the antebellum years. The trend even played out in the Guernsey family itself: though Sadie and her sister Fannie settled with their husbands on farms after the Civil War, like their mother and grandmother before them, their sister, Emma Guernsey Flint, worked in a millinery shop in Fairmount, Illinois through the early 1880s.⁴⁵⁴ Given her occupation, therefore, we may presume that Emma Guernsey Flint bought all the pork, sausage, and lard she cared to use (or directed someone else to do so for her) following directions for identifying and purchasing cuts of meat like those found in De Voe’s own guide or in something like Juliet Corson’s *Practical American Cookery and Household Management*.⁴⁵⁵

And yet despite the growing distances between producers and consumers, a wide variety of recipes from the 1860s and 1870s—years in which this younger generation of Guernsey girls grew into women—suggest that Emma Guernsey Flint, like her mother and sisters and like generations before, would still have sought a great deal of nourishment from pork-derived products. They would have done so, however, in ways evoking the increasingly conspicuous modes of consumption which characterized the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁵⁶ Elizabeth Stansbury Kirkland’s *Six Little Cooks*, for example, displays the gratuitous—yet class conscious—reliance upon corn-fed pork products that characterized middle and upper-class postwar American cookery. Published in 1877, her text underwent at least thirteen printings. Its popular premise, though apparently overlooked by scholars, bound a collection of recipes inside a narrative

⁴⁵³ Sioux City Public Museum, "James Booge," http://www.siouxcityhistory.org/people/more0be0.html?id=36_0_2_0_M.

⁴⁵⁴ She worked there by at least April, 1881. She seems to have settled in Osage, Iowa by 1893. For more on her life, see GFP, box 1, folder 74, HL.

⁴⁵⁵ See DeVoe, *The Market Assistant, Containing a Brief Description of Every Article of Human Food Sold in the Public Markets of the Cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn*, 79-80; Juliet Corson, *Miss Corson’s Practical American Cookery and Household Management* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1886), 33.

⁴⁵⁶ On conspicuous consumption, see Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899). On its relation to food, see Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

concerning farm-raised “Aunt Jane’s” visit to see her sister and nieces in the city and Jane’s efforts to teach the children how to cook.⁴⁵⁷ While the narrative was aimed at increasing what one scholar has identified as the “kitchen literacy” of young, urban girls of means, the contents of its recipes contain an even more compelling story.⁴⁵⁸ Aunt Jane’s favorite “Junkets,” for example, were fried on a griddle “with a good deal of lard.” Lard also formed the necessary ingredient in Jane’s pie crusts, each of which called for one cup of it. Her chicken croquettes, too, were “fried in lard deep enough for them to swim in,” as were her short-cakes, doughnuts, and ginger-snaps.⁴⁵⁹

Here, fiction borrowed from real life. Kirkland, who authored the book, used Marion Harland’s expertise in supplying some of “Aunt Jane’s” recipes. Harland, the penname used by Mary Virginia Hawes Terhune, was another important nineteenth century domestic advisor. Born to slaveholding parents and raised in Richmond, Virginia, her southern roots and her texts’ regular incorporation of recipes for lard-dependent delights suggest that lard played an integral part in shaping her culinary preferences and habits.⁴⁶⁰ Her popular *Common Sense in the Household*, which was originally published in 1871, went through ten editions in less than a year and sold over one million copies. Tellingly, it contained recipes calling for lard in the preparation of codfish, halibut, salmon, shad, sea bass, trout, perch catfish, crabs, oysters, scallops, clam, chicken, pie crusts, mutton chops, pork chops, souse, sausage, fritters, eggs, vegetables, puddings, dumplings, doughnuts, crullers, shortcakes, gingersnaps, waffles, flapjacks, pones, breads, crumpets, muffins, and more.⁴⁶¹ Her 1875 *Breakfast, Luncheon, and Tea*, which was in print until 1900, called for lard when preparing fancier fare like breaded fish cutlets, lobster rissoles, lobster croquettes, oysters in batter, Swiss pates, croquettes, fried eggplant, oysters, muffins, breads, rolls, biscuits, and a dozen or more

⁴⁵⁷ This doubled plot created great fun for the little girls depicted in the book and generated an engaging story for young readers to follow. Elizabeth Stansbury Kirkland, *Six Little Cooks, or Aunt Jane’s Cooking Class* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910). I originally studied this text at Winterthur, but have also examined the digitized version available on Google. Searches on Jstor, Google, and ProQuest have not generated any scholarship about Kirkland.

⁴⁵⁸ Vileisis, *Kitchen Literacy*.

⁴⁵⁹ Kirkland, *Six Little Cooks, or Aunt Jane’s Cooking Class*, 207, 277-279, 264, 119, 223-224, 258-262.

⁴⁶⁰ I thank Mary Kelley for reminding me that Harland/Terhune “came to her lard early on,” the implication being that her family’s slaves probably taught her to use it or, if not, developed her taste for cooking with it.

⁴⁶¹ Mary Virginia Hawes Terhune (Marion Harland), *Common Sense in the Household* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1873; reprint, 1871). For statistics on 1871 text, see Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*, 17.

kinds of fritters.⁴⁶² Even as late as 1907, when the availability and promotion of fats and oils derived from beef and vegetable sources pushed lard out of fashion among middle class white women, a version of her *Tried and True Recipes* called for cooking in “four large spoonfuls of sweet lard” or “five or six great spoonfuls of sweet lard hissing hot in a frying-pan or doughnut kettle.”⁴⁶³

Corn-fed lard coursed through other ladies’ recipes throughout the postwar decades. Communally-created charity cookbooks, a different kind of source than the widely published books authored by literary domestics and a genre that affords glimpses of “popular” practices in Americans’ cookery methods, showcase additional evidence of lard’s ubiquity in the postbellum American diet. In 1874 and again in 1898, for example, ladies in the Paris, Kentucky Presbyterian Church publicized their reliance on lard for preparing many specialties. Mrs. Martin used “one dessert spoonful of lard” for her “Light Bread” rolls, while Miss Mattie Clay’s “Puffs” called for “a lump of lard about the size of a hen egg,” as did Mrs. Mary Webb’s “Corn-meal muffins.”⁴⁶⁴ Not to be outdone, nearby Ohio-based contributors to *Buckeye Cookery* circulated lard-laden recipes in their 1876 publication. These included Mrs. James Henderson’s “Apple Fritters,” which were dropped “in boiling lard in large spoonfuls with pieces of apple in each and fr[ied] to a light brown” before being “serve[d] with maple syrup” and Mrs. D.C. Harrington’s “Vanities,” a flour-egg mixture rolled out and fried “quickly in hot lard” and served with powdered sugar and jelly “for tea or dessert.”⁴⁶⁵ Indeed, of all foods, lard may well have been the defining element in American cookery during the 1870s and 1880s.

⁴⁶² Mary Virginia Hawes Terhune (Marion Harland), *Breakfast, Luncheon and Tea* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1875). For information on reprints, see "Breakfast, Luncheon, and Tea," Michigan State University, http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/books/book_31.cfm.

⁴⁶³ Mary Virginia Hawes Terhune (Marion Harland), *Marion Harland's Cook Book of Tried and Tested Recipes* (New York: International Publishing Company, 1907), 60-68.

⁴⁶⁴ Paris KY Ladies of the Presbyterian Church, *Housekeeping in the Blue Grass*. (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, 1898; reprint, 1874), 47-49.

⁴⁶⁵ *Buckeye Cookery and Practical Housekeeping. Compiled from Original Recipes*, (Marysville, Ohio: Buckeye Publishing Company, 1877), 34-35. Michigan State University’s “Feeding America” website states that while Estelle Woods Wilcox authored *Buckeye Cookery*, the ladies in the First Congregational Church of Marysville, Ohio were the original recipe contributors. According to the website, the text was edited, revised, and published for twenty-eight years. It appeared in at least thirty versions, in multiple languages, and for different regions of the country. See "Introduction: Buckeye Cookery, and Practical Housekeeping," Michigan State University, http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/books/book_33.cfm

But lard was not the only important corn-fed porcine product throwing its weight about American markets after the Civil War. Ham and salt pork also appear in works of fiction and in both advisors' and charity cookbooks. And like lard, they appeared with greater frequency and with fancier purposes in mind than before the war. The never-tiring "Aunt Jane," for instance, taught the six little girls how to make ham omelettes "*aux fines herbes*" for breakfasts, included cold boiled ham as part of a birthday party repast, and directed her charges to serve thinly sliced ham sandwiches (lest they be thickly sliced and therefore "savage") for their Centennial Fourth-of-July picnic.⁴⁶⁶ Harland, Kirkland's muse, observed, "we cannot dispense with hams." She turned to it, when elegantly sliced, as a quick and easy go-to luncheon, used it in soups, suggested it as an accompaniment to other meats or eggs, and wrote recipes directing how to prepare it minced, in pies, boiled, glazed, steamed, baked, roast, broiled, barbecued, and fried.⁴⁶⁷

Like lard, salt pork came from corn-fed hogs and carried fat. But it also enhanced flavor, and less a frying agent than an additive to other dishes, served different culinary purposes. After the Civil War, salt pork appeared both in humble and *haute cuisine* alike. Mrs. Higgins' recipe for "Yankee Baked Beans," for instance, which she included in an 1876 benefit cookbook for Chicago's Home for the Friendless, called for "a pound or two of fat salt pork."⁴⁶⁸ Likewise, to make Mrs. G.E. Kinney's "Cincinnati Cake," her contribution to *Buckeye Cookery*, she required "one pound fat salt pork chopped fine," along with brown sugar, cinnamon, citron, molasses, flour, brandy, and baking soda.⁴⁶⁹ By the same token, Miss Parloa's "Okra Soup," "Baked Fish," and "Potted Pigeons" also all relied on salt pork.⁴⁷⁰ As texts circulating among the nation's growing and increasingly urban population of middle and upper class families reveal, postwar consumers turned to salt pork less as a staple and more as a means to elevate other foods. Writing to ladies and professional cooks as the founder of the New York cooking academy in 1867, the nation's first school of French cookery, the venerable Pierre Blot explained that salt pork might be used with great success in soups, with beans, and in

⁴⁶⁶ Kirkland, *Six Little Cooks, or Aunt Jane's Cooking Class*, 205, 175, 123.

⁴⁶⁷ Harland), *Common Sense in the Household*, 129, 124.

⁴⁶⁸ Ladies of Chicago, *The Home Cook Book* (Chicago: J. Fred. Waggoner, 1876), 167.

⁴⁶⁹ *Buckeye Cookery and Practical Housekeeping. Compiled from Original Recipes*, 49.

⁴⁷⁰ Maria Parloa, *Miss Parloa's New Cookbook: A Guide to Marketing and Cooking* (New York: C.T. Dillingham, 1882; reprint, 1880), 91, 106, 154.

elegant dishes featuring fish, beef, mutton, veal, head cheese, poultry, game, vegetables alike.⁴⁷¹ According to Juliet Corson and other esteemed advisors, “larding” other meats with salt pork transformed ordinary or plain meat into the extraordinary. This technique involved inserting thin “even-size strips of fat salt pork” into the meat being prepared. To lard, one used a special needle to thread the fat into the meat about half an inch deep. The ends of the “lardoon,” sticking out many times over the surface, would form something like a herringbone pattern. Elegant dishes featuring fish, mutton, hare, venison, and fowl were all candidates for this technique. **[Image 3.16]** Daubing, too, which required inserting larger lardoons through the body of the whole dish being thus prepared, used salt pork for moisture, taste, and decoration. Borrowed from a “French” technique, it was an American nod to the widespread significance of *haute cuisine* and the rise of a class of conspicuous consumers. It was most frequently utilized for the very popular “Beef a la mode” dish. **[Image 3.17]** Barding, finally, replaced basting. With this technique, a large slice of fat salt pork was fastened to or tied upon poultry or game.⁴⁷² **[Image 3.18]**

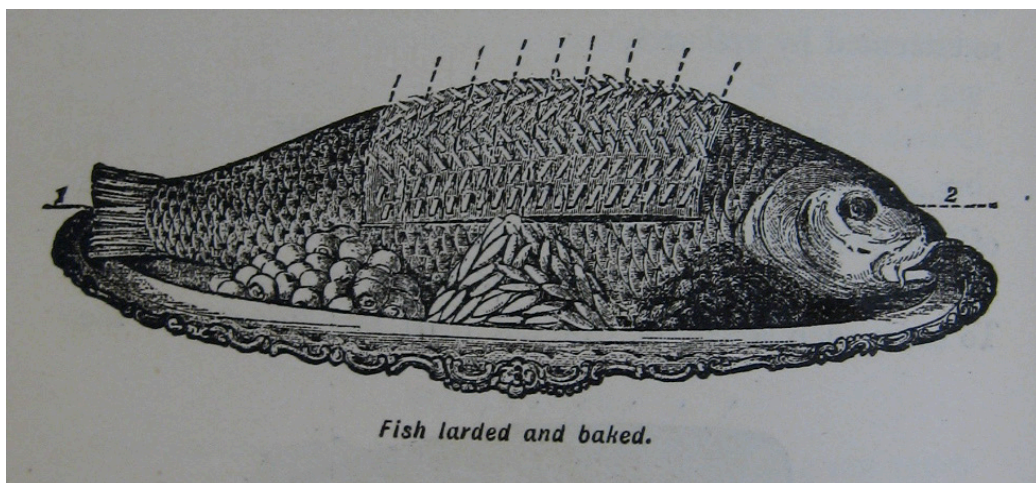


Image 3.16 / “Fish larded.”

⁴⁷¹ Pierre Blot, *Hand-Book of Practical Cookery for Ladies and Professional Cooks*. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1867), 70, 87, 85, 120, 140, 160, 163, 168, 195, 203, 234, 248, 281, 310. For an analysis of Blot’s significance, see Janice B. Longone, “Professor Blot and the First French Cooking School in New York, Part I,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 1, no. 2 (2001); Janice B. Longone, “Professor Blot and the First French Cooking School in New York, Part 2,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 1, no. 3 (2001).

⁴⁷² Corson, *Miss Corson’s Practical American Cookery and Household Management*, 48-49. For images, see pages 54 (fish larded), 64 (beef a la mode), 71 (barded hare with fat salt pork).

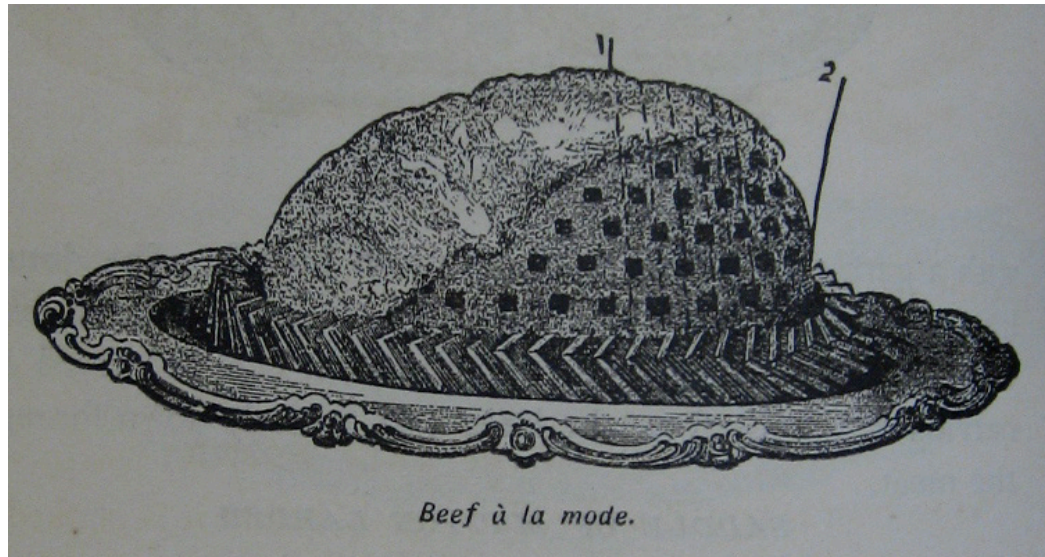


Image 3.17 / “Daubed Beef a la mode.”

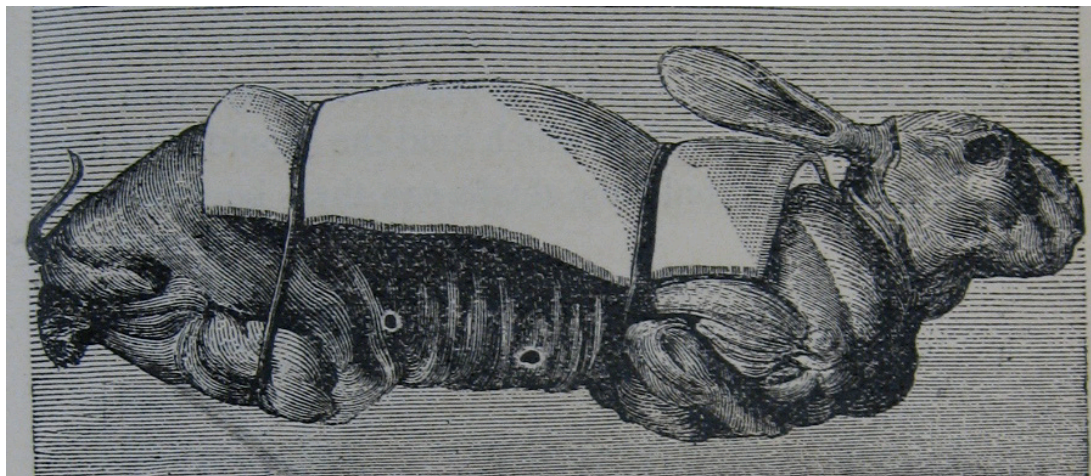


Image 3.18 / “Barded hare with fat salt pork.”

Such suggestions for using lard, ham, and salt pork reflect the robust postwar market for corn-fed pork products that Sioux Cityans like James Booge hoped to tap. As female, white, urban, middle-class consumers, in particular, subscribed to literary domestics’ ideals, and as they depicted their own culinary practices in community cookbooks, they circulated a tremendous amount of culinary wisdom, among which were suggestions and ways to use corn-fed pork products. And as consumers adopted and adapted the recommendations of their neighbors and advisors alike, their kitchen practices and their dining preferences strengthened markets for growing volumes of corn-fed foodstuffs. In turn, their demands influenced the agricultural and environmental transformations upon which those goods’ availabilities were predicated. This all took

place, however, as the work of housekeeping came to focus less on the production of food by personally transforming raw, farm “nature” into a day’s meals and more on the management of hired help and the production of food by relying on ready-made products. When multiplied millions of times over, therefore, Emma Guernsey Flint’s likely combination of needs and desires for pork products and her inability or lack of desire to produce those goods sheds a great deal of light on the question of why Sioux City celebrated its capacity to produce corn when and as it did.

THE SEMIOTICS OF CORN AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Consumer demands and the market revolution, however, cannot fully explain Sioux City’s decision to construct and decorate palaces in corn kernels. But if we look to trends in postbellum advertising, it becomes clear that farmers’ intensifying reliance on producing corn to generate the cash they required to negotiate the industrial marketplace delivered more than calories and flavor to urban consumers: they carried messages as well. As urban consumers no longer living on farms struggled to make heads or tails out of packages that purported to be composed of animals that used to have heads and tails—but which buyers, distanced as they were from those packages’ points of production, couldn’t verify as having been properly raised or prepared—producers sought to assuage consumers’ reticence by adding “natural” signposts. The Swift Company, for instance, alluded to the world of Emeline Guernsey and Christian Shank by decorating their lard label with images of a farmer with his knife and a cauldron.⁴⁷³ A G.H. Hammond advertisement for ham, sausage, and lard, the introduction notes, featured a sow bucolically nursing a litter of hungry piglets in a bed of straw.⁴⁷⁴ **[Image 3.19]** Though they appear antithetical to industrial mores and modes of production, such pre-industrial scenes reflected consumers’ uncertainties about new economic and geographic realities inasmuch as they offered as a visual representation of the kinds of clean, healthful hog-raising that former farm families might have recognized.

⁴⁷³ Vileisis, *Kitchen Literacy*, 83.

⁴⁷⁴ G.H. Hammond Meats, “What Is Home without a Mother?” c 1880. EC, TC, Box 6, Food D-K, AAS.



Image 3.19 / G.H. Hammond Meats, “What Is Home without a Mother?” c 1880.

The most common signs of nature, however, were lard and meat companies’ references to their pork products as having been produced from corn-fed animals. In these advertisements, corn in the animals’ diets functioned as a sign both of the seemingly “natural” practices related to raising hogs on farms and to the seasonal rhythms that those practices depended upon. Postwar market developments, therefore, shaped the cultural milieu in which yellow field corn acquired a new set of meanings, and in this space, the semiotics of corn-fed animals harkened to desirable qualities of purity and trustworthiness. The Napheys’ brand of “Philadelphia Leaf Lard,” for instance, promoted its product during the 1870s as “rendered from the best corn fed pork.”⁴⁷⁵ Other companies did so as well, and in this arena, a series of trade cards through which the N.K. Fairbank Company touted the corn-fed nature of its lard is especially revealing. Designed to ameliorate consumers’ concerns about the conditions before and in which hogs met with slaughterhouses and rendering facilities, the cards attempted to translate memories of or ideas about less-industrial modes of farm production in a new industrial era.⁴⁷⁶ They did so by inserting visual and verbal claims in each advertisement to the

⁴⁷⁵ Naphey Company, “Napheys' Philadelphia Leaf Lard,” c 1876. EC, TC, Box 6, Food D-K, AAS.

⁴⁷⁶ In the course of her research, Vileisis also encountered a number of the Fairbank tradecards, including that entitled “Corn makes me King.” By relying on humor and suggestions of authenticity to sell the product, she argues, the cards answered consumers’ concerns about the treatment of animals before their

extent that all of the Fairbank Company's hogs dined on corn. In repeating this statement, the company responded to and reinforced vernacular wisdom of the desirability of corn-fed hogs' products.

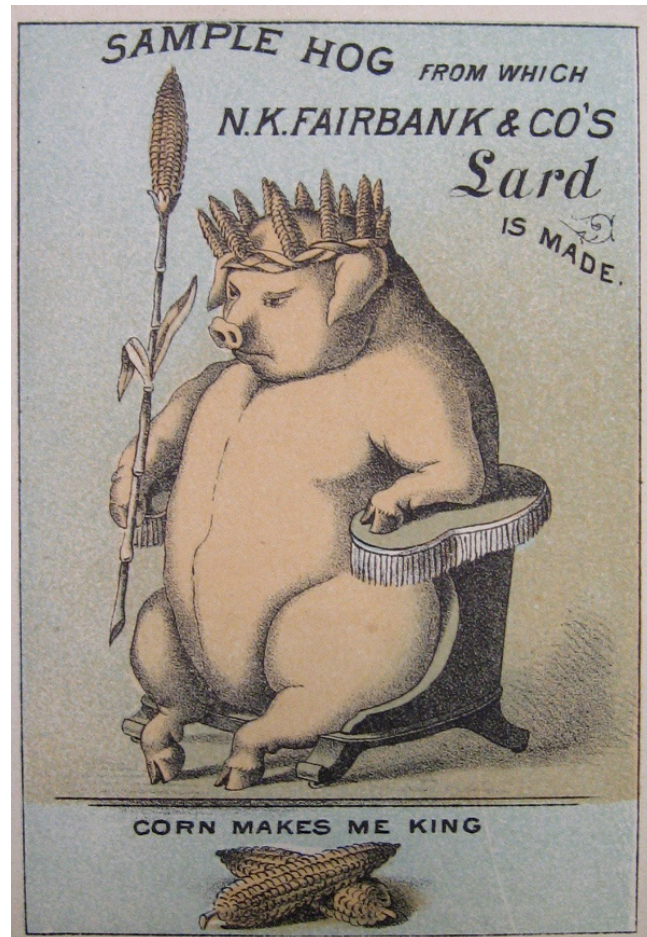


Image 3.20 / N.K. Fairbank & Co., “Corn Makes Me King,” c 1880s.

Some of the cards suggest that corn feeding was a constant throughout the lives of the N.K. Fairbank Company's hogs. One tongue-in-cheek image depicts the practice as starting at the very beginning of life: as a sow nurses her young in a barnyard, the caption below reads “No swill milk here, nothing but pure corn juice.” In another, a wise corn-fed sow prevents *her* children from playing with “slop-fed” piglets. A third card shows a young piglet pocketing an ear of corn handed to him by his spectacled mother, as if for placing in his school lunch pail that day. Visually alluding to farmers' practices of fattening hogs on corn from young ages and harkening to older traditions equating

death “with a rather empty jocularly that glossed over the conditions of animals that became food in the newly emerging industrial economy.” Vileisis, *Kitchen Literacy*, 85.

humans, especially children, with pigs, the caption implies that N.K. Fairbank's Lard "will [in turn] fatten the [consumer's own] youngsters." Other cards continue the theme of corn-fattening: a fourth features a pair of young hogs shelling corn off the cob while their littermate opens his mouth to consume all that they make available. Still more depict weighty and "rich and sassy" corn-fed hogs benevolently donating ears of corn to skinny beggar runts. And in the *coup de grâce*, a truly obese animal sits upon a fringed, throne-like chair while holding a corn-tipped stalk and wearing a delicately braided crown of corn. Calling upon the Civil War imagery of "King Corn" in an era of industrially rendered land whales, "Corn," he states without equivocation, "makes me king." This, the Fairbank Company reinforced, was a "Sample Hog from which N.K. Fairbank & Co's Lard is Made." **[Image 3.20]**⁴⁷⁷

Other cards from the Fairbank Company's advertisements reinforced the refiner's attempts to link their product with consumers' ideas of the seasonal nature found on farms before slaughterhouses had rendered those cycles unfamiliar. The first card, labeled "Spring," referred to the birth of spring pigs and to hogs' habits of rooting in the woods. Here, the hog informs his future consumer that "I root for my living so hard" while "N.K. Fairbank & Co. wait for me to grow large & fat for their pure refined lard." **[Image 3.21]** Meanwhile, the "Summer" card spoke to consumers' and domestic advisors' disinclinations to eat fresh pork during this season. Associating heat with the spoilage of fresh meat, this hog—when "Summer comes with its heat"—sits fanning himself, stating that "my health I must carefully guard" in order to become Fairbank's "Pure Refined Lard." **[Image 3.22]** When "Brown Autumn appears with its harvest of ears yellow corn so solid and hard," the hog in the third card—depicted selecting choice ears from a field of corn, much like a farmer might do to fatten his hogs—joyfully waits "to be made into Pure Refined Lard." **[Image 3.23]** The winter card, finally speaking to the traditional packing and rendering season, features a pig sitting in a barrel. "Cold Winter at last," he tells his consumer, "can none of my pleasure retard" being made into Fairbank's "Pure Refined Lard." **[Image 3.24]**⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.; N.K. Fairbank & Co., "Corn Makes Me King." c 1880s. EC, TC, Box 7, Food L-S, 83-84, AAS.

⁴⁷⁸ N.K. Fairbank & Co., "Spring," "Summer," "Autumn," "Winter," c 1880s. EC, TC, Box 7, Food L-S, AAS.



Image 3.21 / "Spring," 1880s.

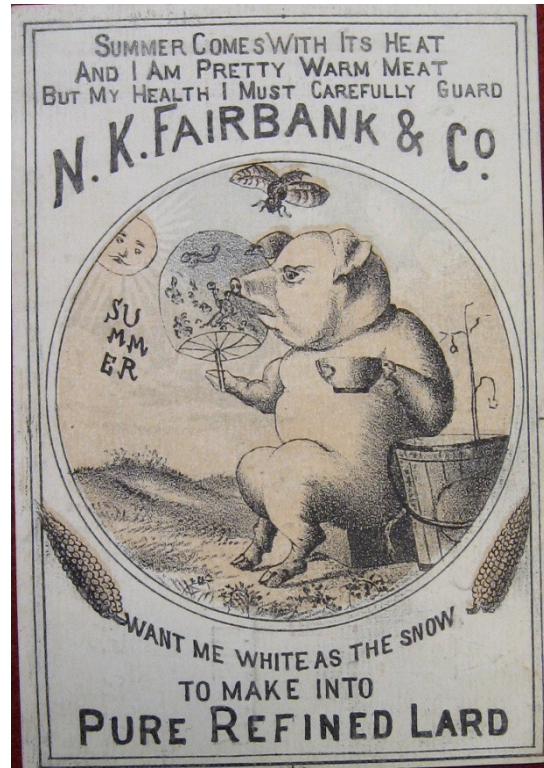


Image 3.22 / "Summer," 1880s.



Image 3.23 / "Autumn," c 1880s.



Image 3.24 / "Winter," c 1880s.

As these and other advertising trade cards reveal, the Fairbank Company advertised all of their lard as corn-fed and seasonally produced. But in alluding to those qualities, their dark humor masked the far less natural processes of industrial lard production. Congressional testimony left by N.K. Fairbank himself shows that consumers' skepticism of industrially produced foods like lard would have been well-founded.⁴⁷⁹ During the early years of lard refining, namely in the 1850s, he explained in 1888, industrial demand for lard oil, which was used in lubrication and burning, prompted producers to press large amounts of lard to extract the oil. This left excess stearine behind. Sensing a market for firmer-than-normal lard in Europe, one manufacturer bought the cheap stearine and mixed it with regular lard. This created a harder substance than the lard that a woman like Emeline Guernsey might have made at home. But because it kept well in warm weather, Europeans in hot climates desired it. And because the mixture proved popular overseas, Fairbanks himself copied this model when his business began, calling the product "refined lard." However, as Chicago's pork-packing businesses picked up both in volume and in speed, steam-driven packing encouraged packers to produce greater quantities of lard by including more than just the lard leaf or trimmings in their products. To bolster profits, "trimmings, heads, guts and everything went in" to produce what they called "Steamed Lard." Customers, Fairbanks explained, complained that this poorer quality "steamed lard" had a "hoggy" taste and smell. (In retrospect, their complaints were probably well founded, as this description contrasts rather unpleasantly with Catherine Beecher's earlier advice for cooking only with the sweet leaf lard while leaving that around the intestines for soap grease!) To ameliorate their mixture's poor quality, the Fairbanks Company boiled and skimmed off impurities from the lard they received from packers. Then they added cotton-seed oil, a newly discovered by-product arising from southern states' resurgent cotton interests. While this additive sweetened the flavor of the steamed lard, the extra oil made it too soft. In turn, the company added "oleo-stearine" to its lard to harden it. This was the product left behind after beef suet was rendered and pressed. (The suet oil, meanwhile

⁴⁷⁹ Domestic experts were also skeptical. In one *Good Housekeeping* article, the author identified lard-like products as "manufactured mysteries," and added that it was impossible to ensure "the animals that rendered it were healthy when killed." Lyle, "Cottonseed Oil in the Kitchen," 100; Vileisis, *Kitchen Literacy*, 79-80, 266.

went toward producing oleomargarine, which quickly became the bane of the butter industry.) In essence, Fairbanks reported, adding cottonseed oil to his product sweetened the lard that had had some of its “nicer” components removed, if we use Beecher’s terminology, while the oleo-stearine hardened the resulting lard/cotton-seed mixture.⁴⁸⁰

If we are to believe his testimony—which was translated into promotional materials—the company’s trade cards did not depict their practices with anything approaching accuracy. In the first place, the company did not purchase special Fairbank’s-only corn-fed hogs for its products. While most, if not all, of the hogs whose fat eventually ended up in their products had feasted on corn before being brought inside Chicago’s slaughterhouses, Dawson’s descriptions of hog raising and domestic advisors’ concerns over what they did or did not eat suggest that the animals would have probably eaten other foods before being fattened. More disturbingly, Fairbank’s own testimony articulated that the company accepted packers’ waste in bulk, after which they boiled, steamed, and skimmed the product and added cottonseed oil and oleo-stearine. Nor would the Fairbank Company have waited to render all of their lard in the winter, as their seasonal tradecards suggest. As we know, companies like theirs were able to make and market their meat and lard products year round by harvesting winter ice for use in the summer.⁴⁸¹ Indeed, as the reverse of one of the Fairbank Company’s own trade cards states, their lard was “always on hand” on the shelves of the Massachusetts grocer who used their products to bring business to his store.⁴⁸² Finally, the grotesquely humorous stories told about the hogs’ willingness to embrace death were a far cry from the struggle contained in award-winning “cartoons” printed by *Harper’s Weekly* in 1873. In those woodcuts, which reproduced three thirty-foot long drawings displayed by the Cincinnati Pork Packing Association at Vienna’s International Exposition, some sixty men

⁴⁸⁰ N.K. Fairbank & Co, *Facts About Lard!* 2nd Edition. 1888. Pam. 2008.738, HAG.

⁴⁸¹ In the late 1870s, meat companies like Swift and Armour began to harvest and store lake ice year-round in systems designed to keep dressed meat fresh for a week’s railroad journey eastward. The power of a newly harnessed winter and innovations in refrigeration technologies enabled the meat industry to ship both butchered pork and a great deal of western beef—the latter of which consumers preferred corn-fattened, unsalted, and unsmoked—fresh to eastern (and international) markets. Though eastern butchers struggled against the incursion, Chicago’s volume of trade contributed to an invigorated national demand for cheap, dressed beef finished on corn. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 235-247.

⁴⁸² N.K. Fairbank & Co., “The Slave of Grease (Verso),” c 1880s. EC, Unhoused Trade Cards, Food, AAS. The grocer advertised is A. & J.W. Flagg, Dealers in Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb, Poultry, Sausages, Lard, Butter, Vegetables, Etc., located at 218 Main St. Worcester, Massachusetts.

transform the “frightened hogs in the slaughter pen” into salted and rendered goods.⁴⁸³

[Image 3.25] Such hogs, it would seem, would have been far from eager to dive into Fairbank’s vats.



Image 3.25 / Detail from Ehrgott & Krebs, Lith., “Pork Packing in Cincinnati,” 1873.

But by using references to corn to activate a kind of seasonal sentimentality in the minds of prospective consumers, companies like N.K. Fairbank & Co. sought to appeal to growing populations of urban women who, finding themselves distanced from the origins of food production, sought assurances that the products they (or their hired help) were purchasing had some degree of similarity to those they might have made on farms a generation or two before. Patterns established within corporate advertisements, therefore, help us understand why Sioux Cityans celebrated King Corn as they did: for anxious consumers by the middle of the 1880s, corn signified familiar seasonal rhythms and reassuring, pre-industrial agricultural processes. But to stakeholders in agricultural communities and would-be metropolises, corn had become the key input in the process of changing soil and sunshine to meat and lard. For communities like Sioux City, corn had come to anchor and symbolize their civic progress—or promises thereof.

GRASSLAND TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE RETURN OF CORN-FED BEEF

Sioux City’s Corn Palaces were not merely displaying the region’s potential to feed the hogs that would fill consumers’ bellies or lubricate industrial machinery. They

⁴⁸³ *Harper’s* accompanied its reproductions of the images with a lengthy description of the industrial process of pork production. While “great care” was made to depict the men doing the slaughtering, they wrote, “the greatest care was bestowed upon the drawings representing the work done” regarding treatment of “the frightened hogs in the slaughter pen.” See “Pork-Packing,” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 6 1873, 778.

were also showing the nation the city's capacity to finish the western beeves whose cuts of meat were becoming the darlings of American tables. While fattening beef on corn was an established practice by the late 1880s—recall, for instance, D. Humphrey's 1847 instructions to his brother Joseph regarding feeding his cattle on shocks of corn—a combination of industrial developments and environmental changes in the northwestern territories combined to reinvigorate such practices.⁴⁸⁴ The 1880s were a time of reinvigoration because Texas ranchers had begun to ship their animals to eastern markets from new western outposts like Abilene, Wichita, and Dodge City at the close of the Civil War. But as those towns grew more populated and as local farmers protested and prohibited encroachments by disease-bearing Texas cattle, ranchers began to graze their herds farther north.⁴⁸⁵ Meanwhile, many homesteaders who emigrated beyond the Missouri River discovered that their new surroundings were far more arid than the eastern landscapes to which they had been accustomed. Raising livestock, which relied upon abundant mixed and shortgrass prairie resources and was less contingent upon the region's scarce rainfall than cash-grain agriculture, and shipping them—either to grain producing regions for fattening or directly from grasslands to slaughterhouses—produced greater profits than those garnered from cultivating corn or wheat.⁴⁸⁶ After Emeline Guernsey's brother Alfred relocated from Iowa to “the wild plains of Kansas,” for example, in an area which—not unlike the Omahas' whittled territory—“had been an Indian reserve,” he wrote that things were “settling very fast” and foresaw “[s]ome good chances for stock farms here.”⁴⁸⁷ By 1880, he was in Manhattan, Kansas. Reporting that his new city was constructing a railroad bridge “across the Kansas” river, he envisioned that the new ribbons of steel would greatly improve the region's access to national

⁴⁸⁴ D. Humphreys to Joseph A. Humphreys, March 19, 1847. Randall Lee Gibson Papers, Letter 57, GLC04501, GLC.

⁴⁸⁵ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 219-220. For a more interactive depiction of this process, see Jeremy Zallen, Erik Steiner, and Richard White, "Cattle Production in the American West: Number and Value of Cattle, 1867-1935," Stanford University, http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/viz.php?id=141&project_id=0.

⁴⁸⁶ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 213-214. Cronon discusses shipping them before fattening. For shipping them without further fattening, see Theodore Gerrish, *Life in the World's Wonderland Illustrated. A Graphic Description of the Great Northwest, from the Mississippi River to the Land of the Midnight Sun...* (Sioux Falls: 1886), 67.

⁴⁸⁷ Alfred E. Donaldson to EDG, n.d.; GFP, box 1, folder 22, HL.

markets and through that access, its prospects for future growth.⁴⁸⁸ And though Emeline's brother Sereno dismissed the possibility of such a geographic or financial move for himself, he was intrigued with how the expanding rail network would permit emigrants bound for "Montana and [areas] farther north" to access rich grasslands and thereby "keep [cattle] fat all winter with out any feeding."⁴⁸⁹ Around 1881, Emeline's daughter and son-in-law, Fannie and Will Orcutt, relocated from Stacyville, Iowa to Kimball, Dakota in response to such opportunity.⁴⁹⁰ Writing to his mother-in-law in the spring of 1882, Will reported "enclosing all my land [in Kimball] north of the Rail Road for pasture" and estimated that permitting others' cattle to access his grazing lands would bring him "about \$20 per month."⁴⁹¹ Eyeing other settlers' eagerness for land like theirs that fall, Fannie expected a land rush the following spring. "[S]ome around here," she wrote her mother, "are selling claims out two and three and more miles...for from one to two hundred dollars."⁴⁹²

The year-round cattle ranching in the grasslands that Fannie and Will Orcutt pursued, however, was short-lived. It depended both on the elimination of the buffalo and what historian Terry Jordan has described as large-scale "specialized overgrazing." This latter practice diminished the necessary return of nutrients to the soil and tipped northwestern landscapes out of ecological balance. As large numbers of animals trampled and compacted the soil, foraged selectively, cropped grasses closely to the ground—and crucially, stayed fenced in place—they reduced native prairie biomass, created arid microclimates, and caused soil erosion.⁴⁹³ These changes diminished grassland productivity. Whereas one steer had been able to survive on five acres of grassland in 1870, the same animal would have required fifty acres in 1880.⁴⁹⁴ Feeding

⁴⁸⁸ Alfred E. Donaldson to EDG, May 9, 1880; GFP, box 1, folder 22, HL.

⁴⁸⁹ Sereno E. Donaldson to EDG, March 30, 1882; GFP, box 1, folder 64, HL.

⁴⁹⁰ J. Will Orcutt and Fannie Guernsey Orcutt moved to Kimball, Dakota between February 27, 1881 and February 5, 1882. Before marrying, Fannie had been in the millinery business with her sister Emma in Danville, Illinois during the 1870s. She married Will by 1877 and returned to Stacyville by January, 1877. Will had run a store, but his customers' credit problems prompted him to get out of that business. They had been living in Emeline's house in Stacyville, but decided that they did not want to buy it from her. See letters from Fannie and Will Orcutt to EDG, c 1881-1882 in GFP, 1837-1957, Box 4, folder 16, HL.

⁴⁹¹ J. Will Orcutt to EDG, June 1, 1882; GFP, box 4, folder 21, HL.

⁴⁹² Fannie Guernsey Orcutt to EDG, October 24, 1882; GFP, box 4, folder 16, HL.

⁴⁹³ Terry G. Jordan, *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 10-11.

⁴⁹⁴ White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A History of the American West*, 223.

cattle year-round on Great Plains grasses, therefore, was “only briefly important.”⁴⁹⁵ As one Sioux City booster explained in 1886, ranchers had formerly “shipped [their cattle] direct from the range.” However, “the ranges have become so circumscribed and the cattle so numerous, that no man now thinks of furnishing cattle for the market without corn-feeding them. For some years past this has been so evident that the establishment of cattle yards here on a large scale became a necessity.”⁴⁹⁶ The winter of 1886-1887, which decimated cattle left to forage on rangeland, pointed western ranchers in that direction, as well.⁴⁹⁷ For Sioux Cityans, the ecological changes caused by overstocked ranges farther north and west proved fortuitous because growing demands for beef—recall the popularity of Beef *a la mode* when larded with salt pork—and the concomitant reduction of grassland capacity to fully fatten those animals prompted cattlemen to return to earlier practices of fattening cattle on corn before sending them to slaughterhouses.

The aspirations that the members of the Guernsey family circulated among themselves and especially the move that Will and Fannie Orcutt made to Kimball, Dakota, northwest of Sioux City, fit neatly into the emigration pattern that Sioux City’s boosters hoped that the city’s growth would stimulate. Lured by depictions of rich lands just waiting to be turned into corn, plentiful crops with which to fatten hinterland hogs and beeves, and easy rail access, farm families and would-be businessmen would have been loathe to ignore such prospects. By 1882, Woodbury County was home to an estimated 19,000 individuals, the population having doubled within the previous decade. Boosters anticipated yet more.⁴⁹⁸ Sioux City’s agricultural implement and grain dealers commanded an increasing volume of farm trade as the county and its surroundings became more populated.⁴⁹⁹ Their trade was vital to western cities’ prospects. Before

⁴⁹⁵ Peter Shannon et al., "Railroad Traffic in Nebraska from Selected Stations, 1883," Stanford University, http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/viz.php?id=255&project_id=0.

⁴⁹⁶ Gerrish, *Life in the World's Wonderland Illustrated. A Graphic Description of the Great Northwest, from the Mississippi River to the Land of the Midnight Sun...* 67.

⁴⁹⁷ David L. Wheeler, "The Blizzard of 1886 and Its Effects on the Range Cattle Industry in the Southern Plains," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (1991); Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 129-134.

⁴⁹⁸ *History of Western Iowa, Its Settlement and Growth: A Comprehensive Compilation of Progressive Events Concerning the Counties, Cities, Towns, and Villages—Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers and Business Men, with an Authentic History of the State of Iowa*, 182-183.

⁴⁹⁹ Growth, however, was far from linear. Like many towns, Sioux City suffered from weather-related disasters during the early 1870s. In December of 1875, for example, a credit researcher for R.G. Dun and Co. observed that “2 years of successive failure in crops have hurt many good men and has been especially

leaving Stacyville for Kimball, for instance, Will Orcutt wrote to his mother-in-law that the prospects for his own hardware store “all depend[ed] on the next crop.”⁵⁰⁰ As with Orcutt’s blunt statement, so too with Sioux City: the success of its businesses and the region as a whole rested as much upon potential emigrants’ perceptions of the region’s fertility as with their settlement of its surrounding areas and their successes in raising crops to feed to the livestock they sought to market.

And send to market they did. As records left by Emeline Guernsey’s extended family allude, when emigrants and immigrants followed railroads west in pursuit of new opportunities—buying claims, converting grassland to pasture or corn, and preparing hogs or cattle for market—they not only transformed physical spaces, but they also altered the landscape of capital and industry. The development of a national railroad infrastructure, along with a year-round, ice-driven slaughtering industry, meant that the comparative advantages that had theretofore set Chicago apart, namely “its transportation facilities, its concentrated market, [and] its closeness to western supplies of cattle,” were no longer “unique.”⁵⁰¹ As industries followed emigrants west, they looked for cities holding “more favorable conditions” than Chicago’s.⁵⁰² New western stockyards, serviced by railroads that funneled animals from pastures and fields directly into regional *entrepôts*, encouraged surrounding communities to deploy hired laborers and new kinds of agricultural machinery in order to produce the corn that would support animals’ gains in fat and flesh. And as new communities sought to ensure the means of their own social reproduction, they promoted the possibilities of transforming prairie nature to corn, hogs, and cattle. During the 1880s, Sioux Cityans envisioned themselves as beneficiaries of this geographic shift.

CONTAINMENT AND ALLOTMENT

Together, the close of the Civil War, the advent of the rail age, ranchers’ interests in grass feeding, consumer’ demands for corn-fattened lard and beef, and the arrival of Sioux City’s first packinghouse all signaled that the settlement of Nebraska and Dakota

hard on agri[cultura]l impl[ement] men.” See entry for E. W. Burdick, who dealt in Grain &c (Agl: Imp[lemen]ts & Pumps) in Le Mars, Iowa, December 8, 1875, in *Iowa*. 232z216.

⁵⁰⁰ J. Will Orcutt to EDG, May 28, 1880; GFP, box 4, folder 16, HL.

⁵⁰¹ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 257.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

hinterlands could very well ensure Sioux Cityans' industrial and civic aspirations. However, those markers of development do not offer a complete picture of the context in which Sioux City's corn palaces were born. Major dimensions of the milieu in which boosters promoted their autumnal landmarks have to do with the apparent containment of Native populations on reservations, the arrival of missionaries who set out to instruct the Omaha, Winnebago, and Santee in matters of religion, farming, and domestic labor, and new policies of allotment.⁵⁰³ Thus before we can fully return to our queries about the 35,000 bushels of corn adorning the palace of 1887, or the thousands of ears of yellow—and red, blue, and white—maize decorating the palaces thereafter, we must cross the Missouri River yet again and return to the Omaha reservation.

Recall, momentarily, the 1854 treaty that Joseph La Flesche and four other Omaha leaders signed while on a visit to Washington, D.C.⁵⁰⁴ By 1864, the Omaha had been living on their new reservation in the Blackbird Hills for nearly a decade. During these years, some, like La Flesche, had begun to turn away from buffalo hunting and towards Christianity and market-oriented agriculture. Many others, however, still engaged in traditional practices of hunting and farming. For decades, tensions appeared among different tribal factions.⁵⁰⁵ In 1864, Robert W. Furnas, who was then a Colonel but would, in time, become Nebraska's governor and—as we shall see—one of its greatest agricultural champions, became Commissioner for the Omaha tribe. Two years later, Furnas drove La Flesche to relinquish his position as a chief and leave the reservation, albeit for a short while.⁵⁰⁶ In the late 1870s, tribal knowledge of recent events involving the Ponca began to exacerbate longstanding differences among progressive and conservative Omaha in how to move forward with reservation life. Joseph La Flesche, having returned to the reservation after Furnas departed, was firmly in

⁵⁰³ Karl Aho and Forrest Wahl, *Santee Sioux – the People, the Land: A Comprehensive Plan, Part One*, (Nebraska State Office of Planning and Programming, 1974); Box 42, Santee Sioux – the people, the land 1974; Accession 75-92-E-7; RG 75; NARA-Central Plains; Reuben Snake, "Some Reflections on Being Winnebago," n.d. Box 44 A; Winnebago Accession 75-92-7; RG 75; NARA-Central Plains. For a bilingual source documenting 1880s-1890s missionary work on the Santee reservation, see *Lapi Oay*, Book 95, Winnebago Santee Agency, Vol. XVII, No. 12; Series 1, Winnebago Agency Subject Correspondence Files, 1900-1929; RG 75; NARA-Central Plains, Kansas City, Missouri.

⁵⁰⁴ See Chapter 1.

⁵⁰⁵ Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*, 71.

⁵⁰⁶ On Furnas' critiques of La Flesche, see R.H. Barnes, *Two Crow Denies It: A History of Controversy in Omaha Sociology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 24-27; Green, *Iron Eye's Family: The Children of Joseph Laflesche*, 30-34.

the former category. The Poncas' troubles began in 1868, when the Federal government had inadvertently given Ponca lands to the Sioux.⁵⁰⁷ To solve this problem, the government removed the Ponca to Indian Territory in 1876.⁵⁰⁸ Because La Flesche's mother had been Ponca, he and his highly educated daughter, Susette, journeyed to Indian Territory to learn about conditions among the Ponca.⁵⁰⁹ By early 1879, the Ponca were suffering greatly. Following the death of his son, the Ponca chief Standing Bear attempted to leave Indian Territory and return to Nebraska. Arrested after arriving at the Omaha reservation and subsequently held at Fort Omaha, Standing Bear and the Ponca became the focus of a federal investigation. General George Crook, who was unhappy with having been forced to arrest Standing Bear, urged Thomas Henry Tibbles, a former Kansas abolitionist and a reporter for the *Omaha Daily Herald*, to take action. Tibbles' efforts brought "Standing Bear vs. Crook" to court, which is when he met Susette La Flesche, who was acting as Standing Bear's interpreter.⁵¹⁰ While the trial ultimately freed Standing Bear from his detainment at Fort Omaha and facilitated the off-reservation movement of would-be "show Indians," what happened next held particular bearing on the fortunes of the La Flesche family, the Omaha people, federal Indian policy, and the 1887 Corn Palace.⁵¹¹

In the wake of the trial, Standing Bear became a *cause-célèbre*. The chief, along with Tibbles, Susette, and Susette's half brother, Francis, embarked on a lecture tour of the east. Susette, who resumed her role as Standing Bear's translator, dressed in buckskin and went by "Bright Eyes" when relating the plight of the Ponca.⁵¹² **[Image 3.26]** The foursome became popular among Boston reformers interested in promoting Indian citizenship and individual land ownership, a group that included Henry

⁵⁰⁷ Valerie Sherer Mathes and Richard Lowitt, *The Standing Bear Controversy: Prelude to Indian Reform* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 10, 113, 123-125.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 29-44.

⁵⁰⁹ Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*, 126.

⁵¹⁰ Mathes and Lowitt, *The Standing Bear Controversy: Prelude to Indian Reform*, 47-58. On Susette's initial work with him and their marriage in 1881, see Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*, 126.

⁵¹¹ On the trial, see Mathes and Lowitt, *The Standing Bear Controversy: Prelude to Indian Reform*, 63-82. On the relationship between Standing Bear's trial and the movement of "Show Indians" off reservations, see L.G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 63, 76.

⁵¹² Having attended school on the east coast earlier in her life, she was probably aware of potential audiences' heightened reception to performances of Native authenticity. On Indians "playing" Indian, see Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*.

Wadsworth Longfellow.⁵¹³ They also met Alice C. Fletcher, an ethnologist connected with Harvard's Peabody Museum who wanted to study Indians.⁵¹⁴ [Image 3.27] La Flesche and Tibbles eventually acquiesced to Fletcher's interests in studying the Omaha, and in the fall of 1881, permitted the ethnologist to travel with them to and around the reservation. Given Joseph La Flesche's longstanding belief that the Omaha could only survive inasmuch as its members adopted white settlers' practices, and given his concern about the possibility that the Omaha might lose their lands in a process akin to that which the Ponca had experienced, he envisioned Fletcher as an individual who could help the Omaha secure title to their lands.⁵¹⁵



Image 3.26 / Susette La Flesche Tibbles or "Bright Eyes."



Image 3.27 / Alice Cunningham Fletcher as a young woman.

⁵¹³ When Susette ventured to his Cambridge home, Longfellow is said to have exclaimed, "This could be Minnehaha!" Leon Stein, *Lives to Remember* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 58.

⁵¹⁴ For details of Fletcher's interactions with the La Flesche family, see Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*. For an interactive website featuring her diary while in Nebraska, see National Anthropological Archives, "Camping with the Sioux: Fieldwork Diary of Alice Cunningham Fletcher," Smithsonian Institution, <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/naa/fletcher/>.

⁵¹⁵ Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 97-98.

Fletcher spent that fall in eastern Nebraska observing Omaha life and customs.⁵¹⁶ By December of 1881, she saw that the Omaha were divided about the question of land ownership. In her words, there was a group “desirous of civilization,” of whom she saw Joseph La Flesche as a leader, and “one that clings to the past.”⁵¹⁷ In 1882, Fletcher sought to help the former group, comprised of roughly fifty male members, pursue allotment as a strategy to maintain their lands and avoid the fate of the Ponca.⁵¹⁸ Upon her return to Washington, Fletcher framed herself as an expert on the Omaha and helped amend and pass a bill ensuring that Omaha Reservation land would be allotted to members of the tribe before permitting excess lands to be sold to settlers. Passed in August 1882, the act “made most Omahas private landowners, changed their legal status, and created a breeding ground for tribal dissention.” It also, one scholar notes, “would...leave many Omahas landless.”⁵¹⁹

In May of 1883, Fletcher became the “Office of Indian Affairs special agent” in charge of allotment on the Omaha reservation. Observing that lands previously allotted but not patented to many in 1871 were on the flood-prone (albeit rich and easily cultivated) Missouri River bottomlands directly across from Sioux City, she encouraged them to move to the Logan Valley, fifteen or twenty miles west. She convinced many of the “progressives” to follow her there, and members of the La Flesche family were first among these.⁵²⁰ Joseph, she wrote, “became a pioneer. He left his farm of over forty acres near the bank of the Missouri and started afresh on the prairie some thirty miles away from his old home,” endeavoring to plant trees and crops and live among white men.⁵²¹ Fletcher later reported having “give[n] the best land to the best Indians I c[ould] find.”⁵²² But she knew that the move and practices of allotment were not widely embraced and was aware that she had not convinced the majority of the tribe to support

⁵¹⁶ Archives, “Camping with the Sioux: Fieldwork Diary of Alice Cunningham Fletcher.”

⁵¹⁷ Quoted in Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 99, 118.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 106, 101. While fifty-three Omaha men signed the petition that Fletcher sent to Congress on their behalf, some noted that they knew they comprised a minority among their people and only sought land titles for themselves. La Flesche expanded upon those demands and argued for the necessity of “law, courts, and citizenship” for the entire tribe. See Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians*, 70.

⁵¹⁹ Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 101.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵²¹ Fletcher, “The Omaha and Winnebago Tribes,” 845.

⁵²² Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 103.

allotment, as only one-third of the Omaha favored it. After a group of twelve families banded together in opposition to allotment, tribal police had to compel conservative Omahas to accept their allotments.⁵²³

With their assistance, Fletcher finished overseeing allotment among the Omaha by June of 1884.⁵²⁴ This meant that the patents granted by the General Land Office to 954 individual Omaha permitted the sale of 50,000 acres of reservation land.⁵²⁵ On the nearby Santee reservation, allotment in 1885 divided its 72,000 acres into 853 parcels while opening another 42,000 acres for sale and settlement.⁵²⁶ Begrudging the policy's implementation, conservative Omaha leaders criticized La Flesche, "denigrating his mixed-blood ancestry and calling him a troublemaker." And after half of the Omaha's tribal leaders drafted a letter of protest to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs against La Flesche, 150 members signed it.⁵²⁷ Yet like Emeline Guernsey's brother in Kansas, many of the region's settlers eagerly purchased this former reservation land and viewed the newly available acreage as a sign of their region's inevitable progress and prosperity.⁵²⁸

"MADE BY NATURE FOR A RAILROAD CENTER"

It was at this juncture that Sioux City, like a younger sibling striving to best its elder, sought to emulate Chicago as gateway to the Great West by proclaiming itself the unequivocal home of "King Corn." When set against an increasingly urban nation's growing demands for corn-fed animal products, Chicago's model of growth via the exploitation of its hinterland resources and the rise of railroads and slaughterhouses, a swelling regional livestock population, and Sioux City's own apparently contained Indian neighbors, business leaders and residents viewed their city's prospects through the rosiest

⁵²³ Ibid., 103-104.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 103.

⁵²⁵ The patents were for 76,810 acres. An additional 55,450 were held for the tribe's future generations. Ibid., 104, 109.

⁵²⁶ Karl Aho and Forrest Wahl, *Santee Sioux – the People, the Land: A Comprehensive Plan, Part One* (Nebraska State Office of Planning and Programming, 1974); Box 42, Santee Sioux – the people, the land 1974; Accession 75-92-E-7, RG 75; NARA-Central Plains.

⁵²⁷ Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 106.

⁵²⁸ The Omaha did not really profit from those sales. In 1885, 1886, 1888, 1890, and 1894 they permitted buyers to extend their time for repayment, ultimately permitting purchasers to use their lands for thirteen years before making any payments. Ibid., 109-110.

of glasses. During the middle of the 1880s, they envisioned—and proclaimed to all who would listen—Sioux City’s landscapes not simply as rolling prairies or rivers, but as so many acres of grazing lands, cornfields, and rivers of capital.

Booster literature appearing while the Omaha were going through the allotment process sheds a great deal of light on Sioux Cityans’ views of their town’s prospects. Much like the promotional materials released in conjunction with the city’s first railroad line in the late 1860s, publications during Sioux City’s booming 1880s represented the city as bustling and its surrounding landscape as fertile, proximate, and ready for the plow. The 1882 *History of Western Iowa*, for example, assured that the city, which was “made by nature for a railroad center,” would soon become the place for a strategic bridge into western Nebraska and for equally important routes into Dakota.⁵²⁹ In 1885, resident and booster George Searl even described Sioux City as “the Chicago of the Northwest.”⁵³⁰ Having airily explained how white settlement had appropriated “[t]he rich carpet of nature” from the region’s Native populations, Searle showcased Sioux City’s advantages for prospective residents and investors. In his mind, its proximity to promising hinterlands was chief among its virtues. While Iowa’s nearby “great corn fields are the wonder of the world,” he wrote, Dakota’s “luxuriant rolling prairies” and “inexhaustible pasturage” (precisely the virtues for which Will and Fannie Orcutt had relocated to Kimball) are “rapidly developing into a great empire of wealth.” Meanwhile, he added, railroads passing through town “are continually sending out immense volumes of merchandise and manufactured products, and returning with great loads of wealth, produced by three States and one Territory.” In short, he added, Sioux City “is the natural location for the metropolis of this immense empire...[and] there are greater things in store.”⁵³¹ **[Image 3.28]**

⁵²⁹ *History of Western Iowa, Its Settlement and Growth: A Comprehensive Compilation of Progressive Events Concerning the Counties, Cities, Towns, and Villages—Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers and Business Men, with an Authentic History of the State of Iowa*, 183, 188.

⁵³⁰ For Sioux City’s early settlement, see Geo. S. Searle, *Sioux City Iowa, Illustrated & Published* (Sioux City: C. C. Cochran, 1886), 1-6.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 1-2, 27, 29, 45.

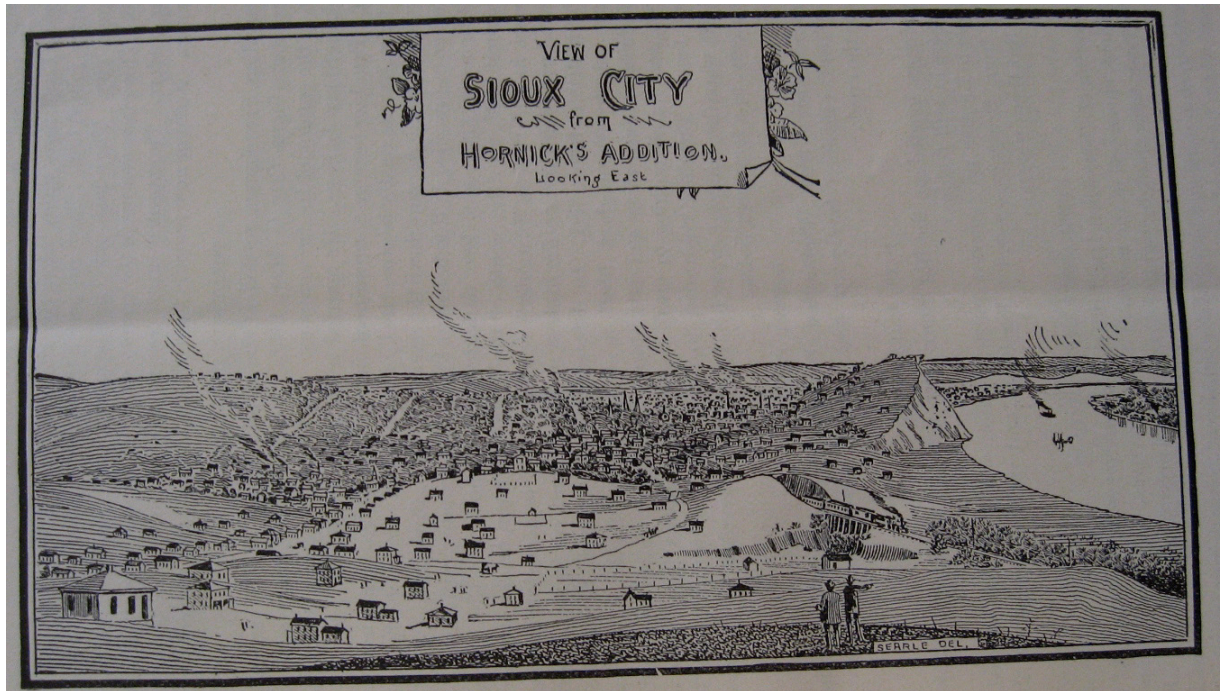


Image 3.28 / View of Sioux City from Hornick's Addition, Looking East, 1887.

That same year, fellow booster Theodore Garrish figured Sioux City even more prosaically,

“as a rugged, heroic sentinel, stationed at the natural gateway of the Central West, to render a double service: His right arm was flung eastward, giving direction to railway construction and also to streams of eastern capital flowing westward for investment... The left arm of this sentinel was stretched to the west-ward, across the broad, turbid waters of the mighty Missouri, far away over the measureless but fertile plains of Nebraska and Dakota, claiming their undeveloped resources as his own rightful heritage.”⁵³²

Emphasizing the city's capacity to feed a nation hungry for the products that its hinterlands might provide, Garrish explained that not only were “[t]he immense corn fields of the lands,... immediately tributary to this market,” but more importantly, “[t]he great cattle ranges of Wyoming, Dakota, and Montana lie to the west and northwest, and the matured stock are moved eastward to this market to be corn-fed and prepared for packing or for shipment to eastern markets.”⁵³³ In an appendage to an 1888 publication,

⁵³² Garrish, *Life in the World's Wonderland Illustrated. A Graphic Description of the Great Northwest, from the Mississippi River to the Land of the Midnight Sun...* 40-41.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 48-49. For an examination of cattle ranching, see Jordan, *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation*.

booster John Pierce emphasized the city’s strategic location and suggested that its size overshadowed cities like St. Louis, Kansas City, and Chicago.⁵³⁴ [Image 3.29]



Image 3.29 / Inset, Map of Sioux City, Iowa, Engraved and Printed for John Pierce, 1887.



Image 3.30 / Sioux City packing houses, 1890.

These boosters’ ideas, stemming as they did from the Chicago model and embedded in the growth of Sioux City’s population and its agricultural and banking sectors, converged around shared aspirations that the “natural” destiny of the new metropolis would be as the center of a corn-growing and meat-exporting empire. Yet rather than link the town’s potential for profitable meatpacking directly to the “nature” of the region, we must recall that far more than good prairie soil and rich river bottoms made this possible. For Sioux City, as with towns across the Corn Belt, its prospects for becoming the next Chicago hinged upon a series of Indian land cessions, the growth of a market economy, federally-initiated and privately capitalized infrastructure developments, and the consumer demands of an increasingly urban society.

SIoux CITY: 1887

As the organizing committees for the “Sioux City Corn Palace and Grand Harvest Jubilee Festival” made arrangements to fete King Corn in the fall of 1887, the city was

⁵³⁴ John Pierce, *The Coming City of the West. Sioux City Iowa. Safe and Sure Investments in a City of Marvelous Growth. Address* (Sioux City: 1888).

anticipating three portentous changes. First, residents were focused on a surge in their meatpacking potential. In September, *Harper's Weekly* reported that three Chicago meatpacking firms, including Armour, had "begun the construction of immense packing-houses in the city." The periodical, which enjoyed a vibrant national circulation, anticipated that Sioux City would be able to pack 1,500 beef cattle and 15,000 hogs a day.⁵³⁵ Advancements in transportation, it reported, had made the cost of sending "60 live hogs to Chicago from the Missouri River" equal to that of "sending the manufactured product of 150 hogs that distance."⁵³⁶ Although Armour did not, in fact, move into Sioux City until 1901, the city's packing prospects were indeed growing.⁵³⁷ James Booge, we recall, was slaughtering well over 100,000 hogs in 1873. He built a new plant in 1881, and in 1887, became instrumental in organizing the city's new Union Stockyards.⁵³⁸ For Sioux City's boosters, the prospects of additional packinghouses glittered with possibility, and promotional publications for its later corn palaces would further gild those spectacles with prints of the city's equally impressive meat packing facilities.⁵³⁹

[Image 3.30]

Second, Sioux Cityans were eagerly awaiting the completion of a bridge across the river to Nebraska. **[Image 3.31]** Anticipated as early as 1882, boosters hoped that the bridge would appropriate some of Omaha's trade and generate "a through line for trans-continental traffic and plac[e] Sioux City on one of the greatest arteries of commerce."⁵⁴⁰ Opened in November of 1888, the bridge did, in fact, prompt a "gradual influx" of new business from Northern Nebraska, thereby "stimulating...Sioux City trade." It also enabled at least one booster to look even more eagerly to the future: "When it is remembered that millions of acres of the most fertile prairie land that the sun ever shone upon is as yet untouched by the plow," he wrote, "it will be understood that boundless

⁵³⁵ "The Sioux City Corn Palace," *Harper's Weekly*, September 8 1887, 731.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁷ Sioux City Public Museum, "Sioux City Stock Yards,"

http://www.siouxcityhistory.org/commerce/mored617.html?id=13_0_8_0_M.

⁵³⁸ Museum, "James Booge."

⁵³⁹ A promotional publication issued for the 1888 palace included two images of local packinghouses. See J.M. Pinckney Book and Stationery Co., *Sioux City Iowa*. 1888. Geographical Files, Iowa, Sioux City, Library of Congress, Prints and Photos Reading Room, Washington, DC. See also Chas. Baldwin, *Sioux City, Iowa. Indelible Photographs* (Sioux City: Chas. Baldwin, 1890).

⁵⁴⁰ Pierce, *The Coming City of the West. Sioux City Iowa. Safe and Sure Investments in a City of Marvelous Growth. Address*. Item held at AAS.

possibilities lie before Sioux City in grasping and handling the business...of the country North and West.”⁵⁴¹

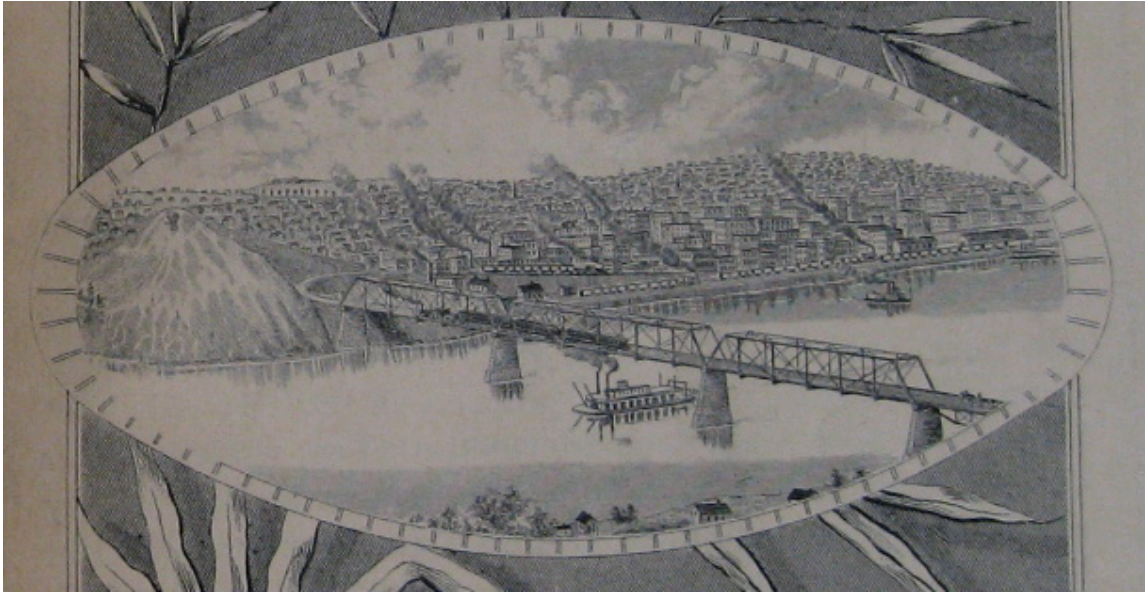


Image 3.31 / Bridge across the Missouri, cover image, *The Coming City of the West*, 1888.

Third, the recently passed Dawes Act—thanks in part to Alice Fletcher’s efforts with the La Flesche family and the Omaha—would soon open additional lands in the vicinity of Sioux City to future settlers. Although Fletcher herself had reported in 1887 that the Omaha were already “doing very badly” and “seem utterly at a loss how to get along” just a few years into allotment, adding, “[t]hey don’t seem able to work the land themselves,” she used her experience with the Omaha to help shape both the debates about and the final form of the 1887 Act. This implemented allotment in severalty to tribes around the nation. Part of the policy’s fallout became apparent in July of that year, when she was chosen to oversee allotment among the Winnebago, who lived just north of the Omaha and west of Sioux City. For her, the news signaled “[a] great triumph!”⁵⁴² For Sioux Cityans, this would mean that the region’s “excess” Indian lands, once allotted, might be sold to settlers eager to grow crops across the banks of the Missouri. Promotions for the 1888 corn palace, for instance, directly linked “[t]he opening of the Sioux Reservation...which is now permitted by law,” to the city’s prospects for growth. According to one guide, this “opens to settlement one of the richest tracts of land in the

⁵⁴¹ *Sioux City, Its Growth, Interests, Industries, Institutions and Prospects*, (Sioux City: 1889), 12, 19. Item held at AAS.

⁵⁴² Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916*, 113-117.

world, all of which is naturally tributary to Sioux City.”⁵⁴³ A year later, another booster predicted, “[T]he opening of the Sioux reservation will add 11,000,000 of fertile acres to Sioux City’s territory—an empire of itself.”⁵⁴⁴

SPECTACLES OF AGRICULTURAL ABUNDANCE AND NATIONAL PROGRESS

Sioux City’s businessmen and ladies’ organizations started to prepare for the nation’s first corn palace one month after Fletcher was chosen to begin allotment among the Winnebago. A number of artistic precedents influenced the form in which their plans took shape. As art historian Pamela Simpson explains, ancient fables of abundance—like the Land of Cockaigne and the gingerbread house of Hansel and Gretel lore—may have had some bearing on Sioux Cityans’ ideas of how to represent their abundant harvest.⁵⁴⁵ Even so, the aesthetics introduced at nineteenth-century international expositions, she points out, probably exerted more influence. In 1851, exhibitors at London’s Crystal Palace first utilized the “trophy” style of display in which pyramids of goods stacked upon each other focused the visitor’s gaze on exhibitors’ piles of plenty. Subsequent expositions popularized this genre in the United States. At New York’s 1853 Crystal Palace, pyramids of soaps and cigars showcased the productive capacity of American manufacturing.⁵⁴⁶ The state of Iowa adapted this style at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, encasing slices of its fertile soil in glass so as to better showcase the literal roots of its agricultural productivity.⁵⁴⁷

These expositions also introduced an artistic genre of manipulating edible substances into physical interpretations of historical figures or events. American and French confectioners at the Crystal Palace, for example, used chocolate, marzipan, and sugar paste to construct elaborate displays of well-known spaces and historical events.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴³ Ellis, *Columbia's Letters to Uncle Sam. Columbia; the Guest of the World's Corn King, Whose Palace Is the People's Hall, Which Sits Directly under the Star of Empire*, 12.

⁵⁴⁴ Sioux City Bureau of Information, *Sioux City: The Corn Palace City of the World. Its Growth, Interests, Industries, Institutions and Prospects* (Sioux City: Perkins Bros. Co., 1889), 19.

⁵⁴⁵ Simpson, "Cereal Architecture," 273-275.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ Karal Ann Marling, "The Origins of Minnesota Butter Sculpture," *Minnesota History* 50, no. 6 (1987).

⁵⁴⁸ While such sugar art stretched back to the Renaissance, the genre enjoyed a resurgence in Europe and the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Simpson, "Cereal Architecture," 273-275., On chocolate and confectionary at the Crystal Palace, see also Horace Greeley, *Art and Industry as Represented in the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace...* (New York: Redfield, 1853), 271-272.

The Centennial Exposition, meanwhile, featured the work of an Arkansas farmwife who transformed a slab of her state's butter into the figure of a sleeping maiden. More familiar to consumers than marzipan, it elevated a farm product to an art form. It also exalted a farm wife's productive capacity.⁵⁴⁹

Alongside those aesthetic predecessors, lithographers' anthropomorphic representations of leading agricultural commodities had familiarized Americans with the visual nature of King Cotton and King Corn since the Civil War.⁵⁵⁰ Following the Union's victory, Americans inspired by the visual possibilities of corn and cotton began to use these crops, along with other agricultural products, as artistic mediums in carefully crafted representations of regional progress and postwar national unity. At least one example of this domestic agricultural aesthetic debuted at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. There, the state of Kansas (over whose "plundered" destiny Senator Sumner had, in 1855, sought Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's council) presented an eight-foot high liberty bell decorated in grains and an apple-covered miniature of the U.S. Capitol.⁵⁵¹ **[Image 3.32]** Advertisements picked up on this trend of agricultural Americana as well. In 1884, for instance, the Moline Plow Company launched its "Flying Dutchman" plow. One of the company's trade cards for this product featured a well-to-do farmer sitting comfortably atop his rig while lightly driving two horses. Turning prairie soil with ease and planting corn and wheat in their wake, the man and his team trot forth into the sunlight. Above, "King Corn" and "Queen Wheat," the leading figures of "American Royalty," smile down upon the farmer's progress from their thrones set aloft in the adman's ether.⁵⁵² Though it is likely that the card's creators hoped to convey the idea that farmers who used their plow would find it easy, comfortable, and

⁵⁴⁹ Marling, "The Origins of Minnesota Butter Sculpture."; Pamela H. Simpson, "Butter Cows and Butter Buildings: A History of an Unconventional Sculptural Medium," *Winterthur Portfolio* 41, no. 1 (2007): 3-5. Simpson explains that Caroline Brooks, the butter artist, actually had been molding and sculpting butter for the better part of a decade before the Centennial Exposition, and that she continued with her art into the 1890s. Thus her fame predated her performance at the 1876 expo and led to an encore in 1893, where she was joined by other butter artists.

⁵⁵⁰ See chapter two.

⁵⁵¹ Simpson, "Cereal Architecture," 275-276.

⁵⁵² Shober & Carqueville Litho. Co., *American Royalty. King Corn. Queen Wheat. Moline Plow Co. Moline, Ills. ...* c. 1884; ABE, Series 1, 27060, AAS. For Moline Plow Company history used to date the Flying Dutchman tradecard, see Ralph W. Sanders, *Vintage Farm Tractors: The Ultimate Tribute to Classic Tractors* (Minnesota: Voyageur Press, Inc., 1996), 144.

efficient, this display of Americans' hopes for reconciliation served as a precursor to Sioux City's celebration of its potential contributions to the nation's tables. [Image 3.33]

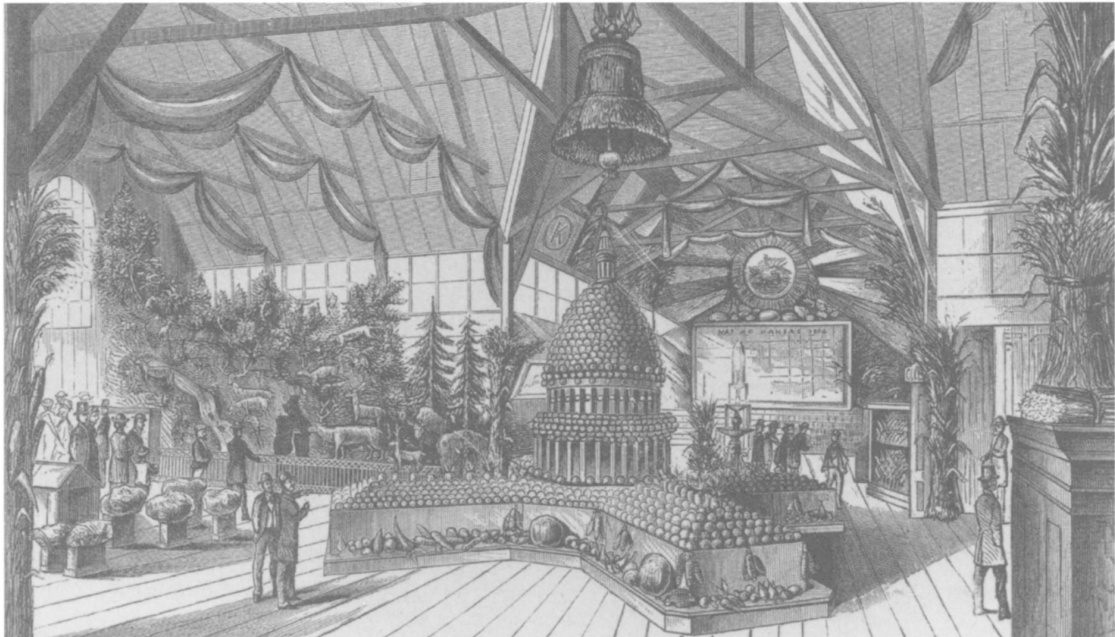


Image 3.32 / The Kansas Liberty Bell and U.S. Capital Dome, Philadelphia, 1876.



Image 3.33 / "American royalty. King Corn. Queen Wheat. Moline Plow Co. Moline, Ills.," c 1884.

Similar expressions of patriotic agricultural artistry appeared at the World's Cotton and Industrial Exposition between December of 1884 and the summer of 1885. To showcase Nebraska's prospects, none other than Robert Furnas, the Omaha agent

whose conflicts with Joseph La Flesche had prompted the chief to leave the reservation in 1866, the state's first governor, and now, the state's official commissioner for the New Orleans exposition, utilized no fewer than seventy-five distinct types of corn in crafting the state's exhibit.⁵⁵³ With this bounty, he helped organize a thirty-five foot tall replica of the Statue of Liberty decorated entirely in Nebraska grains and crowned in golden corn. White and yellow ears of corn formed the pedestal of the statue. Featuring a torch lit with an electric light, a six-foot diameter globe, and a large map of the United States, the state's display literally illuminated the world and, as one newspaper surmised, "reveal[ed] the ambitious town of Lincoln in bold relief, as the geographical center of the United States."⁵⁵⁴ **[Image 3.34]** By a similar token, a panel in another part of Nebraska's display depicted the sun auspiciously rising on Nebraska's soil; samples of its corn, wheat, rye, barley and oats formed the rays radiating outward.⁵⁵⁵

Given the precedents that other states had established in Philadelphia less than a decade before, proud displays should not have been unexpected in New Orleans. Nevertheless, one part of Nebraska's exhibit irked Minnesota and other neighbors. For the Nebraska display at the Cotton Exposition, a Lincoln-based sculptor named Mrs. S.C. Elliot created a panel twenty feet tall and thirty-five feet wide from plaster-of-Paris. She decorated it, not unexpectedly, in kernels of corn. Given the context of the *cotton* exposition, however, others were shocked at her choice to decorate it in large corn letters proclaiming, "Corn is King." The display also featured a bust of "King Corn" for good measure.⁵⁵⁶ **[Image 3.35]** Nebraska's bold display, Furnas later wrote, affronted the cotton, sugar, and tobacco-growing states whose booths were located nearby. Representatives for Colorado, Illinois, Kansas and Dakota responded to Nebraska's displays by constructing their own "huge artificial ears" of corn, as if to showcase their

⁵⁵³ Charles J. Murphy, *Lecture Delivered by Charles J. Murphy (Commissioner for the State of Nebraska, U.S.A.) before the National Society of France, at the International Congress of Millers, Held at Paris, in August, 1889, on American Indian Corn (Maize) as a Cheap, Wholesome, and Nutritious Human Food* (Edinburgh: R. Grant & Son, 1890), 8.

⁵⁵⁴ "Nebraska at New Orleans," in Robert W. Furnas, "Scrapbook," 1884-1885, 6; RG 1, SG 10, Box 23; NESHS.

⁵⁵⁵ "The World's Fair. More about the Great Show—Nebraska's Exhibit—Curiosities, Etc.," *Higginsville (Mo.) Advocate and Frank Leslie's Illustrated*, February 21, 1885, in Robert W. Furnas, "Scrapbook," 1884-1885, 3, 47-48; RG 1, SG 10, Box 23; NESHS.

⁵⁵⁶ Edward L. Wilson, "Corn Is King [Nebraska Section, Government and States Building] Photograph," 1884-1885. Accession 1982.127.65, HNOG.

states' similar capacities for growing the golden grain.⁵⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Nebraska's statement attracted the special attention of Minnesota, whose own display lay next door.⁵⁵⁸ Given the nature of its own postwar bonanzas, that state had designed an exhibit to showcase wheat. Responding to Nebraska's heady claim, Minnesota dismissed Corn as "King," because, it wrote, "the saying's old / It is the wheat that brings the gold." To that derisive couplet, Nebraska's exhibit organizers echoed the observation made by George Doty—that cotton bales made "sorry meat"—quipping that while Minnesota's wheat mills "may make bread for us to eat," "what," they queried, "is that without the meat, / That is assured with much less toil, / By raising corn from out of the soil."⁵⁵⁹

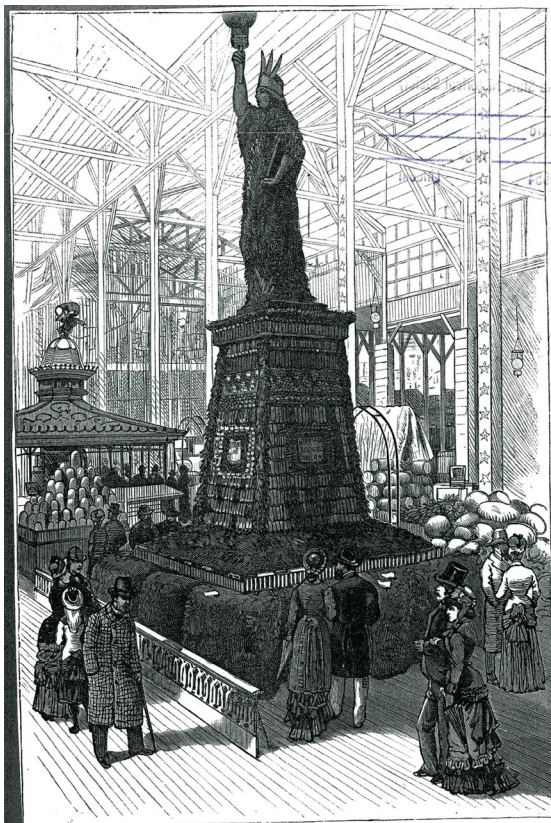


Image 3.34 / "The Nebraska Exhibit at the World's Fair in New Orleans—A Model, in Cereals, of the Bartholdi Statue, 1885."

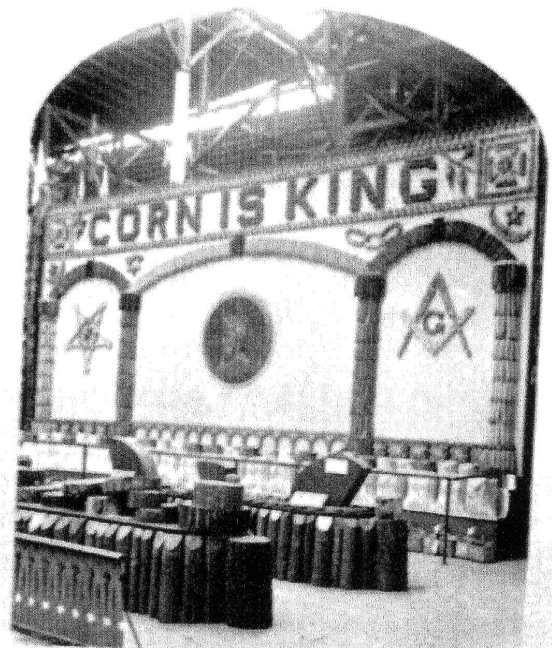


Image 3.35 / "Corn is King," Nebraska Exhibit, New Orleans, 1885.

⁵⁵⁷ Robert W. Furnas, *Corn Is King! Corn: Its Origin, History, Uses, and Abuses, Delivered before the Cass, Adams, Kearney, Seward, Johnson, and Clay County Agricultural Societies, Nebraska* (Lincoln: Journal Company, State Printers, 1886), 5.

⁵⁵⁸ "The World's Fair. Nebraska Exhibits Are Varied and Well Arranged, Attracting Marked Attention," "New Orleans, Dec. 17, *Republican*," and "Nebraska's Exhibit" in Robert W. Furnas, "Scrapbook," 1884-1885, 7, 10; RG 1, SG 10, Box 23; NESHS.

⁵⁵⁹ "Corn is King," *Lincoln News*, in Robert W. Furnas, "Scrapbook," 1884-1885, 18; RG 1, SG 10, Box 23; NESHS. On Doty, see chapter two.

In spite of these jovial regional rivalries, participants at the New Orleans exposition shared an interest in promoting national agricultural development in a postwar, post-Reconstruction nation. Indeed, in 1881, Furnas had received an ear of corn from the Mississippi farm run by Jefferson Davis, the Confederacy's former president. After planting it on Nebraska farmland, where he observed that it "doubled in size," Furnas returned a sample to Davis, who, in 1885, replied that he was pleased with the improvement.⁵⁶⁰ Given that the ideals and practices of agricultural improvement enabled a former Union officer and the ex-President of the Confederacy to find common ground less than two decades after the Civil War, we would do well to consider the cultural work of agriculture on par with the racially exclusive conciliatory narratives that scholars have identified as having promoted postwar harmony.⁵⁶¹ I suggest, therefore, that we use Sioux City's corn palaces and the cultural productions that they, in turn, inspired as a way to explore the narratives that would become integral to a postwar nation: that a closed frontier and agricultural abundance would serve as the foundations for domestic peace and prosperity.

WAR WHOOPS, STOCKING-LESS RACES, AND 152 BUSHELS PER ACRE

But behind every narrative lies a counter-narrative. In no uncertain terms, boosters designed the palaces to represent Sioux Cityans' abilities to turn the resources of its hinterlands into cuts of meat or tubs of lard fit for dining room tables across the continent. To this end, they used the trains sent to the 1888 Republican convention and the 1889 Presidential inauguration to display the city's growth and to suggest their region's corresponding political and economic significance. They also courted easterners capable of investing in the region's land, displayed their modernity via colored gas globes and electrical lights, and brought in foreign entertainers and trading partners so as to articulate the city's capacity to become a central player in regional, national, and international business.⁵⁶² In every possible way, Sioux City's five corn palaces

⁵⁶⁰ "Confederate Corn," Nebraska State Historical Society, http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/timeline/confederate_corn.htm.

⁵⁶¹ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵⁶² On the significance of international markets in encouraging western agricultural cultivation and stock raising during the 1870s, see James Macdonald, *Food from the Far West, or, American Agriculture: With*

advertised the region's human and environmental capacity to satiate the nation's new demands.

The idea of a closed frontier was crucial to Sioux Cityans' ability to make these claims. Though not yet articulated as Frederick Jackson Turner would do so in Chicago in 1893, Buffalo Bill Cody's troupe was already performing popular understandings of the stages of (white) Americans' mastery of the continent.⁵⁶³ In Sioux City in 1887, boosters and palace organizers solicited specific kinds of performances by local Indians in order to authenticate their depictions of Sioux City's capacity to send the region's bounty across the nation. By design, Indian participation was supposed to showcase the idea that the region was indeed safe for settlement and the tasks related to transforming prairie soil and sunshine into food. Inspired by the ideas about anti-modern Indian agriculture contained in Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, stories of Indian savagery recounted in dime-novels, and the memories being reframed as history in Cody's Wild West Shows, corn palace organizers attempted to incorporate performances of a historic, "savage" Indianness as the foundational contrast to their modern white civilization.⁵⁶⁴ In 1887, after all, they sought to feature an Indian War Dance in which the "noble red man" would perform "samples of his savage life." Intervention by the War Department, however, may have forced Sioux Cityans to settle for Native participation *sans* war dances.⁵⁶⁵

Special Reference to Beef Production and Importation of Dead Meat from America to Great Britain (London and Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1878).

⁵⁶³ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin at Its Forty-First Annual Meeting, Held December 14, 1893* (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, 1894); Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 51-53.

⁵⁶⁴ On the cultural work of dime novels, see Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America*, 2nd, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1998); Shelly Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). On Buffalo Bill in the United States and abroad, see Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*; Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005); Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular Culture* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*.

⁵⁶⁵ Although I searched for correspondence between Winnebago and Omaha agents and the Bureau of Indian Affairs at the Central Plains branch of the National Archives, specifically regarding letters or contracts permitting Indians to perform at the palaces, I found nothing. I suspect that they will be in correspondence files located in the College Park branch of the National Archives. For reference to the potential dance and war department intervention, see "*Sioux City Journal*, Oct. 8, 1887, 1, quoted in Nygard and Simpson, "Indians at the Corn Palaces: Race and Reception at Two Midwestern Festival Buildings." However, as I note above, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* of the same date reported that the dance was performed with 225 Winnebago Indians. See "Jubilee of King Corn: Unique Celebration Now in Progress in Sioux City, Ia."

In spite of that regulation, organizers found other ways to display their interpretations of Indians' ostensibly savage pre-reservation lives. Parade structures were central to this narrative. In the event's opening parade, the presence of War Eagle's descendants (quite likely produced through his daughters' marriages with the French-Canadian trapper, Theophile Brugier) introduced the narrative of regional progress from savagery to civilization. The Indian warriors, women, and children who followed that display—individuals who lived on reservations just across the river—thus helped depict and frame a past upon which all of Sioux City's recent glory had been built. Euro-American parade participants appearing thereafter built upon the Indians' embodiment of the region's history to showcase how they—as cowboys, land scrapers, stock yard riders, members of ladies' organizations, and businessmen—had transformed the region into the bustling metropolis and productive hinterland. The order of the parade, proceeding from a timeless past to a modern present, thus followed the same logic that would organize displays of the world's civilizations at the 1893 Chicago Exposition's Midway.⁵⁶⁶

Other examples of Sioux Cityans' use of Indians to narrate the idea of frontier closure and the advent of white civilization abounded. The "squaw races" and "Indian foot races," for instance, also depicted a primitive Indian past upon which the modern present improved, particularly when juxtaposed against races involving the newfangled bicycle, coded early on as a dangerous vehicle fit only for masculine use.⁵⁶⁷ In a similar manner, the *Hiawatha*-themed decorations on the walls of various palaces—and by

⁵⁶⁶ On the hierarchies embedded in the Midway's spatial orchestrations, see Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 38-71. On the use of parades in establishing American nationalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). On the class struggles encapsulated in early nineteenth century parades, see Susan Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). By contrast, Mary Ryan argues that the non-confrontational physical makeup of nineteenth century parades, especially towards the middle and latter half of the century, enabled participants to engage in a kind of democratic performance "without ever encountering one another face to face." This, I suggest, is what the various working class groups involved in the Sioux City parades sought to accomplish. See Ryan, "The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order," 137. But Indians, as Fred Hoxie reminds us, also had parade traditions. Crow warriors, for instance, would parade through a village to celebrate their achievements, and when Crow villages moved from one place to another, they would proceed in long columns organized by social structure. See Frederick E. Hoxie, *Parading through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805-1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵⁶⁷ On bicycles, see Ellen Gruber Garvey, "Reframing the Bicycle: Advertising-Supported Magazines and Scorching Women," *American Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1995).

extension, the ladies' "Mondamin luncheons" and the creation of a men's "Mondamin Club"⁵⁶⁸—used the allusions to timeless, passive, and female-centered Native modes of corn cultivation embodied in Longfellow's poem alongside representations of modern bridges, railroads, and the practice of feeding corn to hogs in order to articulate narratives of white, masculine, civic progress. By the same token, the gradient of red corn giving way to white atop the palace of 1890 predated the kind of ethnologically-charged aesthetics that historians Robert Rydell and L.G. Moses have identified in later expositions. In Buffalo, New York in 1901, for example, architectural features utilizing "harsh, bright" (savage) colors like red gave way to higher and more exalted (civilized) colors like "pale yellow" and "bright ivory."⁵⁶⁹

But even as palace organizers sought to display their city's modernity by building temples to corn and staging parades to honor Sioux City's progress from an ostensibly uncultivated, uncivilized Native space to peaceable, modern, agricultural epicenter, they also showcased the possibilities that the region's Indian populations might *become* participants in that narrative of progress. The recently passed Dawes Act meant that between seven and eight hundred Nebraska Indians were preparing to become citizens in the fall of 1887.⁵⁷⁰ And just weeks after the first corn palace closed, about sixty Omahas, including Joseph La Flesche and "[a] number of Winnebagoes" voted for the first time. Some of these men reportedly rode as many as thirty miles to do so.⁵⁷¹ For the likes of Alice Fletcher, reservation agents, and missionaries, La Flesche continued to embody the ideal acculturated Indian man. Only a few years after he had abandoned his farm for unbroken prairie soil further west, and merely a week after he "crowned the long years of his varied life by casting a vote as a citizen of the United States," she wrote, "he lives in a

⁵⁶⁸ According to Nygard and Simpson, Sioux City's ladies "hosted 'Mondamin luncheons' where every course was a form of corn (e.g. corn soup, corn fritters, corn-fed beef, corn pudding), the luncheon space was decorated with corn stalks and husks, and the entertainment included songs about corn and a recitation of the Hiawatha poem. A Sioux City men's group named the Mondamin Club organized supporters of the Corn Palace." See entries in *Sioux City Journal*, Sept. 24, 1887, 3, August 5, 1887, 3 and Feb. 1, 1891, 3. Citations and excerpt from Nygard and Simpson, "Indians at the Corn Palaces: Race and Reception at Two Midwestern Festival Buildings."

⁵⁶⁹ Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*, 145-146; Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*, 125.

⁵⁷⁰ "The Indians in Nebraska," *Friends' Intelligencer*, September 24, 1887.

⁵⁷¹ Fletcher, "The Omaha and Winnebago Tribes."

comfortable house under cultivation, a thousand young trees growing, and is winning a place among the foremost farmers of the country.”⁵⁷²

Participation in the Corn Palace events by “progressive” Indians like Joseph La Flesche, whose corn was deemed both prize-worthy by his county and notable enough to merit President Cleveland’s admiration, thus validated the possibility that policies of allotment, mechanisms of religious reform, and instruction in agricultural labor would collectively whiten Indians and bring them into the twentieth century. For this reason, it is not surprising that the *Christian Advocate* emphasized that, at the 1887 corn palace, “[t]he Indians of the Omaha and Winnebago Agencies exhibited corn that averaged 152 bushels to the acre, and 70 pounds to the bushel; they showed the longest ear to be seen, 16 inches.”⁵⁷³ Whether or not it was true, the paper probably hoped that such numbers would convince skeptics of missionaries’ efforts that their work was accomplishing much “civilizing” work among the Indians. Nor was a later recollection—that the Winnebago had raised and sold “the most varied and beautiful colors of “Squaw Corn”” for use in decorating the palace, and that for their efforts they received “a dollar a bushel” for “this beautiful corn”—out of place.⁵⁷⁴ Although corn palace organizers had invented ways to depict the region’s ostensibly savage Native past as the yardstick against which Sioux City’s civilized modernity would be measured, the *Sioux City Journal* reported that corn palace committee members “were pleased with the Indian exhibit in the Palace and want to encourage...their efforts to flow with the tide of civilization and become useful people instead of savages.”⁵⁷⁵ A year later, their recruitment of two days of performances by the Santee Reservation band—and their ad hoc decision to retain them for two more days—served as additional evidence of their belief in Indians’ civilizable nature and the region’s capacity to become even more civilized. As components of a corn palace spectacle that anchored the prospect of agricultural abundance to the region’s future, performances of

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Editor, “Rolling over the Continent.”

⁵⁷⁴ Museum, *Sioux City Corn Palace*.

⁵⁷⁵ *Sioux City Journal*, Oct. 9, 1887, 1, quoted in Nygard and Simpson, “Indians at the Corn Palaces: Race and Reception at Two Midwestern Festival Buildings.” Given tensions among government agents regarding displays of Indians in the late 1880s, however, it may have simply been more convenient for corn palace organizers—who would have desired Indian participation in corn palace events to attract visitors—to fall into line with commissioners’ demands that greater weight be placed on Indians’ efforts at acculturation.

Native peoples' mastery of Western music, like their demonstrations of high acre yields and sizeable ears of corn, mattered because they showed that the region's Indians might well attain the markers of civilization which the Dawes Act impelled and—through their disappearance as “Indians—thereby permit greater regional and national advances.

But organizers' carefully orchestrated displays of the Indians' pre-reservation savagery and their on-reservation steps toward civilization have to be weighed against participants' actions, which we, in turn, must read with a critical eye. The Indian question was not wholly settled as of 1887, in spite of organizers' attempts to assure one another (and visitors) that the region's ostensibly savage frontier history had been bounded by time and space and that processes of acculturation and assimilation were shaping indigenous people as productive future citizens. As the Ghost Dance religion spread during the next few years and as events at Wounded Knee would shortly reveal, the *threat* of Indians acting “out of place” was yet real in Americans' imaginations. One wonders, therefore, whether the “genuine, old-fashioned aboriginal war-whoop” offered by “one warrior on horseback” during the opening parade of the 1887 Corn Palace was thrilling precisely *because* it may have stimulated the observers' imaginings of a savage frontier past.⁵⁷⁶ What if an outbreak *did* take place at the city's celebration of King Corn? What would that mean for the narrative of frontier closure, for the city's ability to send its products to the nation, or for the nation's future?

While we cannot fully answer those suppositions, we can use the warrior's whoop—a reminder that the region's Native populations might not have seen themselves quite as domesticated or as contained as its white settlers would have liked to believe—as a lens into the lives of the men, women, and children who used the spaces of the festivities to their own ends.⁵⁷⁷ Performing white impressions of uncivilized Indianness at the 1887 corn palace and thereafter was one way that Indians might have made the Corn Palace events serve their own needs. Such strategic performances were not uncommon; “Bright Eyes,” we recall, had managed to perform a particular kind of

⁵⁷⁶ Nygard and Simpson cite the *Sioux City Journal* reporting that in the opening parade, “One warrior on horseback, “put everyone under lasting obligation by ever and anon giving forth the genuine, old-fashioned aboriginal war-whoop... and they cheered him for it heartily.”” See *Sioux City Journal*, Oct. 5, 1887, 1, quoted in *Ibid*.

⁵⁷⁷ For a recent analysis of Luther Standing Bear's strategic whoops while performing abroad, see Ryan E. Burt, ““Sioux Yells” In the Dawes Era: Lakota “Indian Play,” The Wild West, and the Literatures of Luther Standing Bear,” *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010).

Indianness to attain specific political ends less than a decade before. This anonymous whoop, moreover, poses a likely link to the category of performers other scholars have identified as “show Indians.”⁵⁷⁸ In the 1880s, entrepreneurs like Buffalo Bill Cody, the organizers of Kickapoo Medicine Shows, and P.T. Barnum discovered that audiences across the United States and Europe would pay good money to see performances featuring authentic Indians. During this decade, these savvy marketers capitalized on Indians’ abilities to enter or leave reservations “as they pleased,” a policy that Standing Bear’s 1879 trial had established.⁵⁷⁹ In 1885, Sitting Bull, one of the best-known participants in the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, agreed to tour with Buffalo Bill Cody. Within a year’s time, he became one of Cody’s most famous performers, a hugely interesting (and therefore profitable) reminder for white audiences of the epitome of Indian rebellion and savagery.⁵⁸⁰ In the late 1880s, however, commissioners in the Indian Bureau sought to limit the degree to which Indians performed savage pasts. Part of the commissioners’ crackdowns included an effort to gather data on the Indians who had left reservations for performance employment during the second half of the decade.⁵⁸¹ Robert A. Ashley, the agent staffing the Omaha and Winnebago reservations, reported that between 1884 and 1889, no fewer than twenty one Winnebago Indians had found employment with the operator of a patent medicine show, while another twenty one Omaha had worked for P.T. Barnum, the Kickapoo Medicine Company, and a foreign employer.⁵⁸²

It is likely, therefore, that professional show Indians formed some number of the “warriors,” “squaws,” and children appearing in and about the 1887 corn palace.⁵⁸³ While it is unclear whether these participants were paid for singing and whooping, as were the show Indians then traveling with Cody in Europe, participating in Sioux City’s corn palaces afforded these individuals additional opportunities to benefit by getting paid

⁵⁷⁸ Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*; Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*; Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.

⁵⁷⁹ Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*, 63.

⁵⁸⁰ Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 170-181.

⁵⁸¹ Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*, 66, 73-74. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 184-185.

⁵⁸² Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*, 75.

⁵⁸³ For evidence that Cody hired women and children, see Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 169; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 364-365.

for their corn or being able to sell handicrafts to visitors. In a context where limited government rations comprised the majority of the foods that Omaha, Winnebago, or Santee families would have been able to consume, the opportunity to earn additional cash would have been of no small occasion. But their displays also created space for other kinds of remuneration, like being able to display their riding prowess or preserve their singing and dancing traditions. Louis Warren argues that participation in off-reservation performances like Cody's Wild West offered show Indians "an otherwise unthinkable mobility" and enabled participants to preserve prohibited social dances like the Grass Dance and the Omaha Dance.⁵⁸⁴ Being in the streets of Sioux City, finally, afforded participants the chance to learn more about settlers east of the Missouri.

By a similar token, we might also look more closely at the "squaw races" that appeared in the 1887 Corn Palace and its subsequent iterations. In 1887, one reporter took particular interest in the fact that the Winnebago women participating in the races "shed enough of their wardrobes to give them easy locomotion, a few being without stockings and all without shoes."⁵⁸⁵ We could, of course, attribute that incident to a case of leering on the part of a white man towards Native women who, by Victorian standards, were less than fully clothed. Alternatively, we might explore how participation by Winnebago women in these races retained meaning both within and outside of the corn palace settings. Because running had been the most effective means to conduct trade, warfare, and intertribal communication before Europeans introduced the horse to the Americas, strong running traditions existed among Indigenous peoples north and south of the equator.⁵⁸⁶ Although scholars of Indian running histories have not directly written about the Winnebago, one cites an 1862 "track meet" among the geographically

⁵⁸⁴ Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 163-164, 186-191, 211; Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933*; Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 361-363. The Omaha dance, Hoxie explains, was a dance where participants gifted their belongings to others. It appeared antithetical to government agents assigned to dole out cash or other goods and intent on instilling lessons about how farm labor was the best means toward financial security. See Hoxie, *Parading through History*, 211-212.

⁵⁸⁵ *Sioux City Journal*, Oct. 5, 1887, 1, quoted in Nygard and Simpson, "Indians at the Corn Palaces: Race and Reception at Two Midwestern Festival Buildings."

⁵⁸⁶ In North America, runners were important members of (at least) the Seneca, Comanche, Blackfeet, Crow, Arapahoe, Zuni, Cree, Mandan, Ojibwa, Mesquakie, Sauk, Kickapoo, Osage, Creek, Kansa, Pima, and Mohave cultures. For Indian foot-racing, see Joseph B. Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books, 1988), 68-89.

proximate and linguistically related Mandan.⁵⁸⁷ But what did participation in such races mean? For young male Hopi runners attached to Indian boarding schools in the early twentieth century, by comparison, adapting their running heritage to school competitions enabled them to “challenge[] white American perceptions of modernity” and assert dimensions of “Hopi agency” and “cultural philosophies of running.”⁵⁸⁸ Indeed, across the twentieth century United States, athletics became an important sphere through which Indians confronted with assimilation and acculturation grappled not simply with a single race or game, but with larger meanings about “race, religion, culture, and family.”⁵⁸⁹



Image 3.36 / Susan La Flesche (foreground in white) and Hampton University students modeling “Indians of the Past” and “Indians of the Present,” c. 1886-9

In some cases, acts of running were explicitly about gender. Among the Navajo, the Apache, and various tribes in California, young women ran as a part of traditional puberty rituals.⁵⁹⁰ Widespread evidence of women’s running games, female participation in track meets, and records of their competition in activities like lacrosse and bareback

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 80-81.

⁵⁸⁸ Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, "Hopi Footraces and American Marathons, 1912-1930," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2010): 78.

⁵⁸⁹ See for instance Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 112.

⁵⁹⁰ Peter Nabokov, *Indian Running: Native American History and Tradition* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1981), 139-142.

horseracing, especially before marriage, suggest that the Winnebago women involved in “squaw races” attached to the Corn Palace may have run for glory among themselves.⁵⁹¹ We would do well to reconsider their status of being *en deshabelle* in such light. As anyone who has ever worn an ill-fitting shoe or a chafing sock can imagine, racing barefoot and with fewer outer (or as in the case of stockings, under) garments would have permitted contestants to run with less hindrance and to have a better chance of winning. Even the leering reporter acknowledged the same. At the same time, shedding shoes, stockings, and other items of clothing would have also thrown off cumbersome restrictions about domestic comportment. Given that missionary women were active among the Omaha, Winnebago, and Santee during the 1880s, and deducing that the female racers were probably more youthful than wizened, it is likely that they would have come into frequent contact with the behavior reforms impelled by missionary schools. Indeed, Indian youths’ experiences at boarding schools frequently began with clothing substitutions and haircuts.⁵⁹² Shedding those externally imposed layers, even for a brief time, would have enabled the racers—particularly those less aligned with the La Flesche family’s “progressive” stance—to reassert less-colonized identities. **[Image 3:36]**

Whooping and shedding layers of reservation life might not have been the only ways in which Omaha, Winnebago, or Santee participants offered alternative narratives to corn palace visitors. In fact, they used the medium of corn to reverse the story. Recall, for a moment, that it was colorful varieties of Omaha and Winnebago corn, not those cultivated by white settlers, which bedecked the palace walls and made their fabled splendor visible for miles around.⁵⁹³ What did it mean that the organizers of the “Sioux City Corn Palace and Grand Harvest Jubilee Festival,” creators of a spectacle designed to tell the nation a compelling story about all that white settlers had done in the name of progress, were decorating King Corn’s crown—and indeed, his entire palace—with an agricultural product not of those farmers’ creation, and thereby antithetical to the older

⁵⁹¹ For Native women running, racing, and playing lacrosse, see Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage*, 80, 83, 22-26.

⁵⁹² For an excellent discussion on meanings attached to reforms of the bodies and practices of Pueblos, Hispanos and Anglos in New Mexico during these years, see Pablo Mitchell, *Coyote Nation: Sexuality, Race, and Conquest in Modernizing New Mexico, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For a discussion of missionary work among the Omaha, and Susan La Flesche’s roll therein, see Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*.

⁵⁹³ Museum, *Sioux City Corn Palace*.

narratives embedded in “improved” forms of corn like the “King Philip” variety? What did it mean, moreover, that the Indians displaying their corn at the 1887 Palace had selected their seeds and cultivated their lands so well that, if we believe the religious papers advertising the Indians’ successes, they harvested no fewer than 152 bushels per acre and that their ears were commended by the President himself? Even if that quantity was an exaggeration, it suggests that at least some Indians were doing well for themselves. In any event, such measurements trumped the thirty bushels per acre yield that the average Iowa farmer attained that year. Not until 2002, in fact, would Iowa harvests average that much corn on an acre of land.⁵⁹⁴ Indeed, as Joseph La Flesche’s son Francis reinforced while working with Alice Fletcher in the early 1900s, the Omaha had their own long traditions of cultivating corn in river bottoms.⁵⁹⁵ Their success in raising corn in and around Sioux City should have come as no surprise. And yet published comments expressing admiration for the Indians’ achievements suggest exactly the opposite: that their successes, to some extent, destabilized (if not undermined) some of the depictions of settlers’ own accomplishments.

Thus although boosters designed the corn palaces’ architecture, facades, parades, and races so as to articulate the idea of a closed frontier and an acculturated Native population, and in turn, reify the palaces’ narrative of civic progress and the city’s ability to use prairies to send meat and lard across the country, there was something uncanny, perhaps even uneasy, in the whoops that Indian participants released, the items of clothing that they shed, and the corn that they sold. Much as the frontier might not have been quite as bordered as Sioux Cityans desired, their own corn palaces encompassed a more discursive space than they probably anticipated.

“MAIDENS OF THE MAIZE” AND THE LABOR OF TRANSFORMING “GOD’S GREEN EARTH”

Space for transgressive narratives existed elsewhere within the palaces, though this reality might have been a surprise for the male organizers who originally requested

⁵⁹⁴ For bushels per acre statistic, see Editor, “Rolling over the Continent.” For Iowa yield statistics, see USDA, “Individual State Data for Iowa, 1870-2010.” Granted, individual farmers might have cultivated specific acres so intensively as to attain such high yields, and as future chapters show, the USDA’s acre yield contests in the early 1900s encouraged farmers to engage in this kind of competition as a means to raise the nation’s average yield per acre. But even if it was just one Indian working one acre of land, 152 bushels per acre in 1887 was an astronomical achievement.

⁵⁹⁵ Fletcher and LaFlesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, 269-271.

the ladies' decorating assistance. Though we can assume that male architects and tradesmen designed and crafted the wooden understructures, Sioux City's women's organizations, as journalists detailed, provided indispensable labor for the tasks associated with decorating each of the city's five corn palaces. Twelve ladies organizations, encompassing as many as 150 women, helped decorate the palace of 1887.⁵⁹⁶ The next year, volunteers broke into groups of half a dozen each, and if numbers from the first palace held steady for the second, this would have entailed more than twenty such groups.⁵⁹⁷ It is entirely possible that the number of decorators contributing to the 1888 palace was even larger, for no fewer than 269 ladies volunteered to craft the 1889 palace, while 300 worked on the decorations in 1890.⁵⁹⁸ By 1891, popular enthusiasm required an entire "board of twenty lady managers" to oversee all of the volunteers' activities, no small task considering the forty clubs then assembled.⁵⁹⁹

From boosters' perspectives, the ladies' high levels of participation would have narrated the city's progress from wilderness and savagery to civilization in much the same manner as the parades' ethno-historical order, the palaces' architectural features, and their electric lights. Like the descriptions of schools, churches, and opera houses appearing throughout booster literature, the plethora of civic-minded female decorators provided prospective emigrants and capitalists with flesh-and-blood evidence of the city's gentility and its prospects for social reproduction.⁶⁰⁰ The ladies' creative use of materials taken straight off the land—captured in observers' gaping wonder at their abilities to "deftly fashion[] the products of "God's" green earth into bowers of beauty;"⁶⁰¹ to "produc[e] the most astonishing as well as beautiful effects;"⁶⁰² to "charm the eye and call forth exclamations of wonder,"⁶⁰³ and otherwise "fashion nature's raw material into

⁵⁹⁶ Simpson, "Cereal Architecture," 271; Editor, "Rolling over the Continent."

⁵⁹⁷ "The Pride of the Hawkeye Sioux City's Corn Palace and Grand Exposition and Festival Open," *Omaha Daily Herald*, September 25, 1888.

⁵⁹⁸ Irish, *Sioux City's Corn Palaces*; "King Corn's Pretty Palace Where the Fourth Annual Festival of the Mighty Monarch Is Being Held."

⁵⁹⁹ "Corn Reigns over All: And Sioux City Is the Loyal Capital of His Kingdom."; Simpson, "Cereal Architecture," 271.

⁶⁰⁰ See for instance Ellis, *Columbia's Letters to Uncle Sam. Columbia; the Guest of the World's Corn King, Whose Palace Is the People's Hall, Which Sits Directly under the Star of Empire.*

⁶⁰¹ Museum, *Sioux City Corn Palace.*

⁶⁰² Editor, "Rolling over the Continent."

⁶⁰³ "The Pride of the Hawkeye Sioux City's Corn Palace and Grand Exposition and Festival Open."

so many and so widely different bowers of beauty”⁶⁰⁴— reinforced the Corn Palace organizers’ attempts to display the city’s mastery over its hinterland resources. It also reinforced Victorian ideals of separate, gendered spheres: while men constructed homes and worked outside them, women tended to domestic comforts and remained within its protective domains. By design, the corn palace was a kind of civic home, a careful depiction of settlement and genteel society.

But what about the mindsets with or in which the decorators expended at least some of their efforts. Mightn’t they have envisioned a different purpose to their labors? Much as we require additional context in order to understand why Winnebago women raced through the city’s streets without their stockings or why a warrior whooped in front of the Sioux City crowds, we would do well to delve more deeply into the avid participation evinced by Sioux City’s ladies. Although white, female corn palace decorators remained firmly ensconced in celebrations of regional progress by way of agricultural development—thus explaining panels like “Sioux City Never Sleeps” or hogs decorated in corn—they used many of the spaces and panels inside the Corn Palaces as canvases (much like the Arkansas housewife’s butter artistry in 1876) on which to insist upon the centrality of women’s domestic labor within these narratives of progress. Their mothers and grandmothers, we recall, had helped fatten and process the meat and lard that would have sustained families through long, hard winters. They would have also tended chickens, milked cows, worked garden plots, washed clothes, preserved fruit, baked bread, and bore and raised the children whose labor was crucial to backcountry living. But because most women’s domestic labors were not remunerated with wages as were men’s, nor were they as visible, their efforts wielding spatulas, frying cakes in hissing hot lard, and starching aprons or collars did not figure into the narratives extolled by the cowboys, stockyard riders, and businessmen parading about town. Given this reality, Sioux City’s ladies’ organizations engaged in a decorating revolution from within, so to speak, so as to seek public recognition for the contributions that they and their female forerunners had made to regional and national progress. By highlighting spaces of domestic labor and by placing a primacy on displays of contemporary female

⁶⁰⁴ "Corn Reigns over All: And Sioux City Is the Loyal Capital of His Kingdom."

domestic leisure, they showed how white women had been and, they believed, would continue to be participants in and shapers of regional development.

Their creative aspirations fit into the rise and fall of a particular “aesthetic moment” between 1870 and 1895. During these two and a half decades, “female visionaries and artists” like Candace Wheeler and Celia Thaxter encouraged the movement’s middle-class followers to make their Gilded Age homes inspired, escapist spaces for an individual’s spiritual contemplation. To enhance such experiences, women shaped private nooks and decorated with imaginative, often “oriental” designs and references to traditionally female arts. In form and in substance, scholars contend, this aesthetic moment was anti-masculine, anti-militaristic, and in the eyes of some, culturally “subversive.”⁶⁰⁵

Descriptive and photographic documentation of the Corn Palaces’ interiors demonstrate that Sioux City’s lady decorators embraced this aesthetic. Each year, the tasks associated with decorating the interiors were broken down into much smaller scales, at which point individual decorators worked out their own imaginative interpretations of civic progress. After the ladies formed groups and chose leaders, each selected a different project on which to focus. According to one observer, “One group took a booth, another a section of ceiling or sidewall.” Within those groups, “[e]ach worker took also a portion of the space assigned to her group, and worked out such design as her fancy dictated.” In this way, “rough parts” turned into “beautiful columns” while “corn, grains and husks,” when applied to the ceilings, “charm[ed] the eye and call[ed] forth exclamations of wonder.” The walls, meanwhile, “were divided into panels and decorated with...anything that the fancy of the person in charge dictated.”⁶⁰⁶ In other words, lady decorators enjoyed freedom to craft their own representation’s of Sioux City’s progress. In 1887, for example, someone observed that Mrs. E.D. Allen, the wife of the architect hired to design the first palace, had personally “so covered a pillar as to

⁶⁰⁵ See Karen Manners Smith, “The Aesthetic Moment: The Feminization of Art in Late-Nineteenth-Century America,” *Reviews in American History* 27, no. 3 (1999): 453, 456-458; Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age*, 87. For additional scholarship on the shifting value placed on “oriental” goods in American culture, see Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*; Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁶⁰⁶ “The Pride of the Hawkeye Sioux City's Corn Palace and Grand Exposition and Festival Open.”

make it a perfect Corinthian column.”⁶⁰⁷ That Mrs. Allen was able to receive credit for her individual creation resonated with contemporary values attached to introspective autonomy. By the 1890 and 1891 palaces, if not sooner, there may have even been contests among different ladies’ groups (and perhaps bragging rights at stake among individuals) for the most spectacular transformations of farm products into figures of contemplation and beauty. One student of corn, for instance, has suggested that the members of the city’s Lilac History Club received “first place” for the library they crafted from the grain.⁶⁰⁸



Image 3.37 / Interior, 1888 Corn Palace.

Although groups and individuals worked independently on smaller sections within the larger palace, contributors worked together to emphasize the centrality of domestic spaces and domestic arts to the city’s narrative of civilization. Even where they created identifiable panels celebrating the transition from past to present, as in the log cabin with sweep, bucket, and well, or the “Old Kentucky Home” (from which, in this

⁶⁰⁷ Editor, "Rolling over the Continent."

⁶⁰⁸ Fussell, *The Story of Corn*, 315. The accuracy of her claim that this belonged to the 1890 palace is dubious. Pamela Simpson also suggests that the Lilac History Club’s exhibit was part of the 1891 palace. See Simpson, "Cereal Architecture," 271. In addition, the Sioux City Public Museum also cites a *Sioux City Journal* description of an 1891 Lilac History Club entry in Sioux City Public Museum, "1891 Corn Palace," http://www.siouxcityhistory.org/cornpalace/more6ead.html?id=35_0_5_0_M.

idealized vision, the city's pioneers had earlier journeyed), the ladies emphasized the significance of the home and of women's activities within the processes of settlement and development. Photographs from inside the 1888 palace, for instance, showcase a female-centered display of domestic progress. In a sitting room replete with a hearth, clock, china cabinet, and artfully swagged curtains of corn, all of these material signs of economic security revolve around a spinning wheel, a proverbial symbol of both women's work and American independence and progress. **[Image 3.37]** Though no longer used during the 1880s or 1890s, the spinning wheels that had spun homegrown fibers into clothing still symbolized American independence and evoked positive associations with the project of nation-building.⁶⁰⁹ Similarly, American production of china porcelain had recently come to signify another dimension of American national progress.⁶¹⁰ Without women's domestic labor, these decorators suggested, frontier families in Sioux City and around the nation would not have advanced into their present state of civilization.

Another room in that year's palace centered on a like-minded hearth scene. More richly appointed than the former, it exemplified the Gilded Age domestic aesthetic. Here, drooping fronds of what may have been sorghum or broom corn frame two folding, vaguely oriental fans, which in turn sit atop a decorated hearth. A corn-studded sickle, evoking harvesting traditions that McCormick's reaper had long since supplanted, rests prominently in front of the hearth. Corn-encrusted furniture and an easel with corn-covered canvasses suggest that the room's designers were familiar with the finances and leisure required to create such art. Fabric swagged under the ceiling and an entire "rug" made of corn round out the room. **[Image 3.38]**

⁶⁰⁹ On the significance of homespun in displaying revolutionary political sentiments, see Michael Zakim, "Sartorial Ideologies: From Homespun to Ready-Made," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (2001). On the use of objects like spinning wheels to write history, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001).

⁶¹⁰ John Kuo Wei Tchen argues that Americans used these U.S.-made china sets to help demonstrate their continental destiny. A porcelain tea set (featuring the heads of a "Chinaman" and a "spruce looking negro") made in America by a German immigrant and showcased at the 1876 Exposition, for instance, "exemplified the sense of mastery Americans felt in the arts of civilization." Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*, 57-58.



Image 3.38 / Another Interior, 1888 Palace.

Photographs and descriptions from later palaces provide additional evidence of the pride that Sioux City's women took in depicting the material contributions of women's domestic labor and the symbolic importance of their leisure. In 1891, the Lilac History Club "adorned" its library with "a portrait of Dante, a winter scene, and a country maid with an apron of flowers," all in corn. A small table nearby featured "quill pens of cane and oat straw, a corn lamp, a gourd inkwell, and several corn husk blotters."⁶¹¹ Because owning and utilizing such a library or reading room would have required the luxuries of physical space, money, and time, this display of conspicuous leisure reinforced the corn palaces' narrative about the city's high degree of civilization. It did so, however, by placing feminine spheres and allusions to the class-contingent Gilded Age goals of personal contemplation at its center. **[Image 3.39]**

⁶¹¹ Fussell, *The Story of Corn*, 315.



Image 3.39 / Lilac History Club library, 1891 Palace.

Other evidence that the ladies placed the construction of domestic spaces at the heart of their decorating agendas abounds. A town history explained that the “lady organizations” had replicated “beautiful reception rooms and ceilings and side walls decorated as in frescoe, or wall paper...and on the walls would hang pictures made from the different cereals, entire as also their frames. The furniture in these rooms would be entirely covered with grains of different colored corn and other seeds. The floors would also be made to imitate carpet, matting, or oil cloth, and chandeliers would suspend from

the ceilings all covered with nature's grains."⁶¹² Like china cabinets, hearths, easels, and libraries, these reception rooms—replete with wallpaper, artwork, and chandeliers—pointed to the city's narrative of progress. But they did so by highlighting ideals that more readily-recognized symbols of buffalos, Indians, or Mondamin did not convey.

The Sioux City women were not alone in their insistence of the importance of domestic spheres and domestic labor within narratives of agricultural development. In her 1885 poem, "Walls of Corn," the poet Ellen P. Allerton asserted that the crop's highest purpose was found in the social progress that its sale facilitated. Inspired by her own surroundings in Hamlin, Kansas, Allerton extolled that the sky-high walls of corn growing upon "the rich and bounteous land" did more than hold "a great State's wealth." More importantly, it embodied the means for supplying materials of domestic concerns: "Meat for the healthy," "balm" for the ill, "pearls" for the "tresses of ladies fine," "Shoes for the barefooted," "Clothes and food for the toiling poor," "Luxuries rare for the mansion grand" and "Things of use for the lowly cot." The corn that farmers raised on prairie soil, she insisted, raised the cash that mattered, in the end, only in so much as it stimulated growth and elevated citizens' standards of living.⁶¹³

These domestically centered narratives comprised a kind of hidden visual language that frequently confounded male observers. While newspaper reporters covering the corn palaces readily identified symbols like buffalo, maps of Iowa and the United States, or figures of Ceres, they found themselves at a loss while describing domestic scenes. They offered, at most, that the ladies' efforts had produced "the most astonishing as well as beautiful effects,"⁶¹⁴ that "[t]he interior decorations surpassed anything before seen or heard of in Sioux City,"⁶¹⁵ and that they had "fashion[ed] nature's raw material into so many and so widely different bowers of beauty."⁶¹⁶ Sioux City's corn palace decorators, however, used corn as an artistic medium for the purpose of emphasizing women's domestic contributions to the shared goals of agricultural and national progress. And in some cases, they were quite explicit. "This is the maiden,"

⁶¹² Museum, *Sioux City Corn Palace*.

⁶¹³ Ellen P. Allerton, *Annabel: And Other Poems* (New York: John P. Alden, 1885), 36-37.

⁶¹⁴ Editor, "Rolling over the Continent."

⁶¹⁵ Fitzgibbon, *Souvenir Album of Sioux City's Corn Palaces*.

⁶¹⁶ "Corn Reigns over All: And Sioux City Is the Loyal Capital of His Kingdom."

decorators of the 1891 palace reminded visitors in text and imagery, “That milked the cow with the crumpled horn.”⁶¹⁷ [Image 3.40]

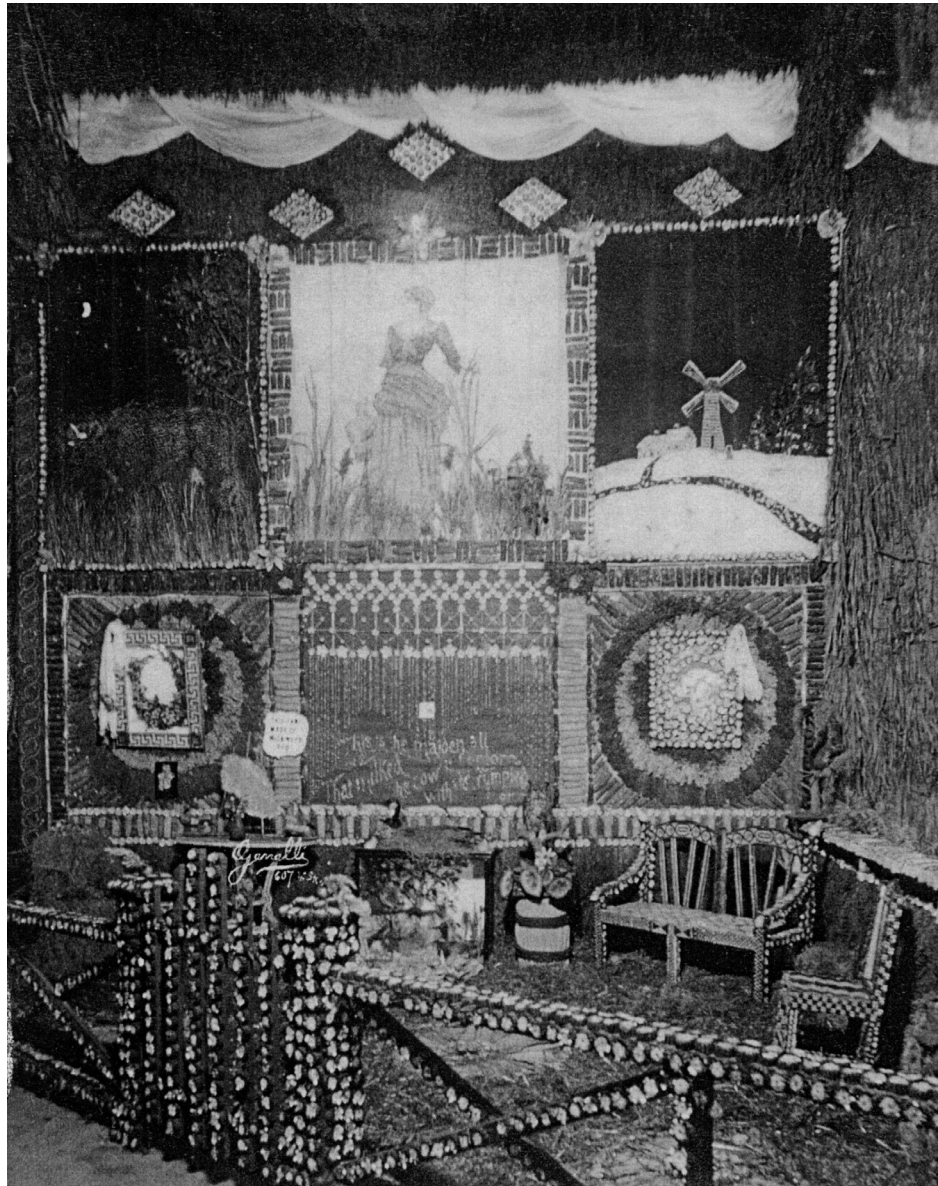


Image 3.40 / Interior: Sitting Room, 1891 Palace.

As Virginia Scharff reminds us, that poor Mrs. O’Leary is said to have left the lantern in the cowshed which has been immortalized as having caused Chicago’s Great Fire of 1871 speaks both to the possibility that O’Leary was “presumably” in the

⁶¹⁷ In full, the quote reads: “This is the maiden, all forlorn, that milked the cow with the crumpled horn.” Decorators used this excerpt from the children’s nursery rhyme “This is the House that Jack Built” to insist upon the importance of women’s work in dairying. For image, see “Photo #8299, Interior: Sitting Room.” Entertainment & Amusement – Expositions & Exhibitions, Sioux City Corn Palace, Sioux City, Iowa, 1891, Box F-9, Location s 48/2/8, SHSI.

cowshed late at night “to do...overdue milking” and at a much larger level, to the fact that women’s unpaid domestic labor like milking was “ecologically transformative.”⁶¹⁸ Thus while the goals of the women who helped decorate Sioux City’s corn palaces were not wholly divorced from the larger narrative about the region’s transformation from savagery to civilization, and while their position as non-voters reiterated their own marginal political status, these “Maidens of the Maize” crafted their own niche within that narrative.

CORN PALACE LEGACIES

Sioux City’s five corn palaces did little to make the city the long-term hub of commerce and industry that boosters anticipated. In fact, attendance at the Palace of 1891—though the building was the largest and grandest of them all—suffered from the effects of unseasonably poor weather, and revenues fell short. Lacking the funds they needed to pay workers to take the palace down, and confronted, as the next chapter explores, with low corn prices around the nation as a result of overproduction, palace organizers finally auctioned the building off to one H.H. Buckwalter, who put his sheep to the task of eating the decorations while he and his son salvaged the rest of the materials.⁶¹⁹ If the image of animals meandering over wooden boards and through piles of bunting in search of the corn that the city had used to narrate its hinterlands’ capacity for fattening livestock brings our attention back to the realm of the material, the flood of 1892 and the Panic of 1893, which ensured that Sioux City’s corn palace days were over, reinforce that for all that the boosters’ carefully structured narratives sought to accomplish, they were subject to the vagaries of weather and the market. They were also, this chapter contends, subject to participants’ counter-narratives.

Even so, these edifices stimulated a host of imitative cultural productions elsewhere in the United States and abroad. And as farmers’ practices of cultivating the crop on increasingly large scales for use in an industrial economy and for profit solidified, and as reincarnations of Sioux City’s palaces in the shape of corn kitchens arose as near to Sioux City as Mitchell and Chicago and as far away as Paris, Edinburgh,

⁶¹⁸ On Mrs. O’Leary’s cow and the environmental work wrought by women’s domestic labor, see Scharff, “Man and Nature! Sex Secrets of Environmental History,” 11-14.

⁶¹⁹ Museum, “1891 Corn Palace.”

and Copenhagen, King Corn's reign in American culture appears to have shifted again. Between the 1890s and the early 1900s, memories of the manners in which Sioux City's socially marginal participants had re-presented the Corn Palaces' narratives of frontier closure and modernity fell by the wayside. Instead, imitative nationalist celebrations of King Corn's benevolent reign—the products of new kinds of collaboration among the agricultural associations and government officials who would take great interest in enhancing corn yields and measuring profitable acres; the corporations who would invent new ways to send corn products to dining room tables around the nation; and the individual boosters and domestic advisors who would call upon U.S. citizens and foreign nations to expand their manners of corn consumption in times of national need—would script new narratives about the ways in which modern methods of corn production and consumption had brought the nation far beyond the days of Pocahontas and plantations. In economically-motivated distortions of memory not unlike those embedded within the designs of Sioux City's palaces and festivities, a new generation of corn improvers and boosters would hire white women to show modern uses for products of the annual crop, black women to perform as corn-preparing Mammy figures, and Indians, time and again, to perform their formerly “savage” ways as markers of white farmers' own progress.⁶²⁰ Thus for all that King Corn's late nineteenth century displays of abundance showcased, his reign obscured growing social inequalities. As one Charles “Cornmeal” Murphy would write to Robert Furnas in the fall of 1890, “I know all about the True inwardness of the Sioux City corn Palace business, they are gotten up principally by land speculators & city lot dealers to attract people to the City & not for the benefit of the Farmers whose interest they care but little about.”⁶²¹ As Murphy's letter intimates, and as chapter four makes clear, the King Corn that Sioux City's organizers and their imitators celebrated was constructing a postbellum reign analogous to the practices of land and human (ab)use which had sustained King Cotton's realm.⁶²²

⁶²⁰ On Aunt Jemima's role at the Paris Corn Kitchen of 1900, for example, see following chapter. For an example of a request for Indians to parade as vestiges of history, see M.C. Worrall to F.T. Mann, April 11, 1927; A119, 047 Publicity Fairs and Expositions; Series 4: General Correspondence Relating to all Functions of Winnebago Indian Agency and Sub agencies; RG 75, NARA-Central Plains.

⁶²¹ Charles J. Murphy to Robert W. Furnas, November 23, 1890; RG 001, SG 10, box 7 (microfilm roll #8399), NESHS.

⁶²² I am indebted to Louis Warren for this observation (and many others) when he gave this chapter a generous early reading at the 2010 Western History Dissertation Workshop, held at UC Davis.