



Ira, Vermont: Early Years of Family and Town

What do the early land records tell us about settlement and land ownership? What do various town and legislative records suggest about the town's political leanings? How and when did local government form and assume its present boundaries? What do the early church records indicate about the place and character of religion? And what part did Preserved Fish and his family play in these endeavors?

BY CHARLES FISH

In 1948 my distant cousin, Dr. Lester Warren Fish, published an arduous labor of love, *The Fish Family in England and America*. Family historians seldom minimize the importance of their ancestors. Lester found for us a Fish coat of arms, taken from an early-eighteenth-century memorial tablet in the English parish church of Great Bowden, Leicestershire, which he used as the book's frontispiece. Above the shield appears a long-beaked wading bird, perhaps a heron, and on the shield a fearsome fish, surely more than a match for any bird foolish enough to threaten it. The book's epigraph is this sentence of Edmund Burke: "He only deserves to be remembered by posterity who treasures up and preserves the history of his ancestors."

This is a noble sentiment, and Lester has indeed treasured up and pre-

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served, for which I am grateful. But I am moved less by family piety than by this record's invitation to reflect on life in the small Rutland County town of Ira. What began as a family story with the town as background nearly reversed itself, with the town asserting its independent importance for extended passages while still serving, in my telling, as preparation for the advent of Preserved Fish, my great-great-great-grandfather. The account stretches to the twentieth century but is densest with detail in the very early years. I found to my surprise that my first Vermont paternal ancestor was not among the original settlers nor was he the legendary frontier figure I had imagined since boyhood; or if he was legendary, it was a much different story of adventure and achievement. What follows is, in part, an exercise of the imagination in a new direction with the attendant pleasure of speculating about what has been. And because Ira, like all towns, was caught up from the beginning in the circumstances of the time, I found that this small drama of town and family could only be understood by looking at the wider context.

My brother, John, and I make a brief appearance in Lester's generous volume in a line of Fishes stretching back through Charles (our father), Bert, Henry, Enos, Preserved, and six more generations to John Fyshe, who was born about 1555 in England and is "our earliest established ancestor." Lester, ever ambitious, finds antecedents of the Fish family among the followers of William the Conqueror and, as Fisch, among the Saxon nobles of ancient Germany, but he cannot trace a direct line. Even stopping with John in 1555, this is an intimidating roster, although a lot of it is not much more than a list of names. With Preserved, however, there is more to be said, so I will start with him. I will also note that Lester apparently accepted without qualms the traditional emphasis on patrilineal descent, although he does point with pride to the maternal Carpenter line, that of Preserved's wife Abigail, "a prominent colonial family" (by virtue of which he and I can claim descent from the first cousin of the second wife of Plymouth's Governor Bradford.)¹

A close look at any historical record runs the risk of disenchantment. When I was a boy, Preserved hovered in my mind between hazy images of sturdy farmer and intrepid pioneer, straining against a primitive plow behind a team of oxen, his Kentucky rifle leaning against a nearby tree. Neighbors were distant, the forest dense, government nonexistent. The picture was prompted in part by the "Kentucky rifle," technically a smooth-bore musket, that came down in the family and is now in my attic, its flintlock mechanism replaced along the way by cap percussion. I like to think of it as Preserved's. The man I now see retains the vigor of my early imagining but not applied to plow and gun; and local government was firmly in place.

But what about this peculiar name, “Preserved,” the “ed” distinctly pronounced? When I tell people that I am descended from Preserved Fish, they think of salt cod and pickled herring; they laugh. Lester found twelve Fishes of this name, one of them a sailor, “captain of the Flying Fish, carrying pickled fish out of Portsmouth, and bound for Fishkill, N.Y.” My ancestor never set sail and was not a rescued “waif from the sea,” a rumor he probably enjoyed because he never corrected it. Lester suggests that the name “was no doubt chosen to convey the idea of divine preservation from danger in those pioneer times.”² I suspect that heavenly salvation was also intended. Casting doubt on the perceived significance of the name, however, is the alternation in some families, generation to generation, between Preserved and Served. Served was the name of one of my great-great-uncles.

Preserved Fish was among the “flood of immigrants who trebled the state’s population [to 85,341] between the start of the Revolution and Vermont’s 1791 entry into the Union,” drawn by the “magnetic allure of the land.”³ Born in 1770 in West Dighton, Massachusetts, he was as a boy “bound out” to an older brother, Matthew, in New Ashford, Massachusetts, to learn the mason’s trade, a legal arrangement whereby he worked for his brother in exchange for support and training. The first evidence we have of his ambition was his move in 1790 to Ira, some sixty miles north of the Massachusetts line in Rutland County. Ira at that time is estimated to have had 200-500 people.⁴ This act of independence and adventure had consequences for me, for Preserved and his descendants in my line made Ira and its environs their home down to my father, who grew up there but later moved on. The Ira farm of my father’s boyhood, later owned by his brother and sister-in-law, Clarence and Edith, was for me an ancestral marker, a way of placing myself in the world, just as, on my mother’s side, was the Lester-Williams farm in Rutland, the subject of my book, *In Good Hands: The Keeping of a Family Farm*.⁵

Preserved, then 19, arrived in Ira with little more, it is assumed, than his skill as a mason and a few tools. Preceding him to Vermont, to Clarendon, a town adjoining Ira, was the family of Jabez and Mary Carpenter of Rehoboth, Massachusetts, not far from West Dighton. That within a year he married their daughter Abigail suggests that he came north to seek a wife as well as his fortune. Frugal and industrious, he soon paid his brother the \$60 he owed him for leaving service and began to invest in land and mortgages, eventually becoming a “banker for Ira and surrounding towns.” He is said to have been “endowed with the ability to make money and the thrift to save it.” But that is only half the story, for he had absorbed two fundamental precepts of an emerging capitalist

economy: attach the interest of others to your own and use money to make money. Moving from farm to farm as opportunity arose and buying land to raise wheat, “He hired the work done and paid his men a certain percentage of the harvest, while he carried on his trade, and at one time he seemed to own half the town.” His career neatly exemplifies the competition and commercialism that existed in Vermont from very early on. When he died on October 10, 1849, age 79, of septicemia from an infection of the thumb, he was the town’s richest man. Ira was a small pond, but he was the biggest fish in it.⁶

As I delved into Preserved’s early life in Ira, five questions engaged me. What do the early land records tell us about settlement and land ownership? What do various town and legislative records suggest about the town’s political leanings? How and when did local government form, and by what steps did Ira become a recognized town and assume its present boundaries? What do the early church records indicate about the place and character of religion? And, where evidence exists, what part did Preserved and his family play in these endeavors? I will then move on to other and later events in the life of town and family. Missing are letters, diaries, and memoirs that would tell us more about life at home on the farm. The records we have are almost exclusively economic, political, and religious.

SETTLEMENT AND LAND OWNERSHIP

Jay Mack Holbrook’s book *Vermont’s First Settlers* lists settlement dates and population for Castleton, Poultney, Tinmouth, Clarendon, and Rutland starting in 1761, Castleton’s settlement date. Ira as a political entity did not yet exist, but its location in this cluster of towns makes the date 1761 a likely guess as to the arrival of the first men, and so it appears in S. L. Peck’s *History of Ira, Vermont*, the only book-length history of the town. The men may have come first to clear some land and build shelters, followed a bit later by wives and children. One of the early settlers, Daniel Giddings, “planted a half-acre of corn and in this small field killed thirteen bears.” More settlers moved in, more land was cleared, and no doubt more bears were killed. The record is hazy as to how they took possession, although as discussed below, there is evidence that at least some of them bought land from New York proprietors. Some may have been squatters, the act of squatting often more accurately described as “pitching before purchasing,” the general understanding being that such occupancy was legitimate until surveys could be made and the land purchased from the legal owner.⁷

On May 21, 1770, some nine years after Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire chartered the towns surrounding the land that became Ira,

Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden of New York granted a patent for 23,000 acres (called 20,500 acres elsewhere in the patent) to William Cockburn, Archibald Campbell, and their associates for a township to be known as Kelso, covering parts of present-day Ira, West Rutland, Clarendon, and Middletown Springs, according to Mary Greene Nye. (This is probably the same William Cockburn whom the Green Mountain Boys harassed for surveying along the Winooski River.) The land was to be divided into twenty-one equal parts for the twenty-one proprietors. Then, on November 16, 1772, New York's Governor William Tryon issued a private patent, not a township, to Henry Van Vleck and four others for land Nye identifies as in the neighborhood of Ira and Castleton.⁸

It is clear in the early deeds that some of the settlers were not squatters, that they obtained title from prior owners. New York is never mentioned in the deeds I examined—would it have been politically imprudent?—but there are intriguing allusions. Of the first sixty-nine recorded deeds (those of the first ten years of Ira as an organized town), twelve describe the grantor's land as a "right" or "share" or deriving from such, or refer to the grantor as the original grantee or even the original proprietor. Jeremiah Collins, for example, selling 100 acres to Rufus Colvin on March 11, 1783, describes the land as "being Part of the Original Right of George Shearman Junr. and John Collins."⁹

The list of fifty-two Ira men who took the Freeman's Oath in 1779 does not include any names found in the New York patents, which is not surprising since the proprietors probably intended to sell, not settle. But in addition to the references in the deeds to "original" grantees and the like, there are in the early records at least three episodes linking Ira land ownership to New York proprietors. First, in 1779 Joseph Wickwire submitted a "caveat" to the Vermont General Assembly against granting the petition of Nathan Clark and others for an Ira charter, declaring that the land had been "originally granted by the authority of N. York previous to any other grant on the date of the aforesaid petition."¹⁰

Second, in 1787 John Kelly submitted a petition to the General Assembly for lands not granted by the Province of New Hampshire or located in any other grant. These were mainly to compensate for lands now granted by Vermont to others but first obtained by him directly or indirectly from the Province of New York, among which were 1,000 acres in Ira that Kelly purchased from a Colonel Cleaveland who had received them as a New York military grant. (Two thousand acres in Middletown derived from the Kelso patent.) A John Kelly, perhaps the same man, also became involved in the Kelso lands, not as one of the original proprietors but as one of six listed on "A Map of the Township

of Kelso” (undated) found in the Cockburn Family Papers at the New York State Library. His listing on the map may have resulted from his purchase in 1771 from William and Catherine Cockburn of one-twentieth of the Kelso patent. Although Kelly’s story is only a detail in the history of a very small town, it is one of the many filaments that seductively radiate out to wider horizons. Kelly was politically adroit and a significant player in the land game. In his 1787 petition, he admitted that he had favored New New York’s claim to territory west of the Connecticut River but that he “aided, assisted and supported the interest of the proprietors holding under the New Hampshire charters,” of whom he himself was one. Although at the beginning of the Revolutionary War he “conceived the British government was right . . . he never acted against the United States either directly or indirectly, and is now firmly attached to the Union.” And apparently he tried to be of help as Vermont was negotiating terms for joining the Union. The acreage figures in the record are somewhat confusing, but from 1787 to 1791 Vermont apparently granted him some 138,000 acres.¹¹

The third New York link was the 1781-82 attempt by William Cockburn and Archibald Campbell to salvage their Kelso interests. On June 21, 1781, they submitted to the General Assembly a petition “For a Portion of Ira,” protesting against the assembly’s November 8, 1780, grant to Nathan Clark and associates of an Ira town charter (never issued, as discussed below). This was done, they said, despite Joseph Wickwire’s caveat at the time and an assembly committee report urging that Clark’s request be denied. Cockburn and Campbell’s petition bounced around in the assembly for a year until on June 21, 1782, it was referred to the October session and there the record stops. Most relevant to my purpose, however, are two assertions in the petition: “That the first [Ira] settlers went on under your Petitioners” and that the lands under the New York patent were “partly settled under the same, by your Petitioners.”¹²

Many of the Ira town documents suffered serious damage from dampness and mold in the previous town office, the former one-room school to which my father as a boy used to walk with cow manure between his toes, a boast of sorts that his mother emphatically denied. Now stored in five plastic bins in no fixed order, they include among other things chattel mortgages, dog licenses, personal property deeds, birth certificates, check lists, grand lists, and poll taxes. (In regard to requirements for voting, Vermont’s 1777 Constitution was “radical” in that the poll tax replaced the property tax.¹³)

The bins did not yield to my searches any information on the early occupancy of the land. Land sales after the organization of the town,

however, are preserved in conventional, sturdy volumes along with early town meeting reports, grand lists, poll tax lists, some vital statistics, and other records. To keep the task manageable, I restricted myself mainly to documents of the first ten years, 1779-89 (with occasional glimpses beyond), including the sixty-nine real property deeds, to see what I might learn. The earliest recorded real estate transaction is a twenty-year lease agreement of May 4, 1775, preceding by four years the town founding date of May 31, 1779, when the first town meeting was held. It is for one shilling per year, Nathan Lee to James Lee, probably relatives. The next recorded transaction is the earliest deed of sale, February 24, 1779. This deed, like the next one, dated October 2, 1779, conveyed property confiscated by the state for "treasonable conduct," James Claghorn acting as grantor in his capacity as "Commissioner of Sale of confiscated Estates in the probate District of Rutland in the County of Bennington" (as it then was). The traitor in the first deed was John Lee, the buyer Thomas Collins; in the second deed, the traitor was Joshua Matterson [Mattison], the buyer Lemuel [Elamuel] Roberts. Confiscation commissioners such as Claghorn served as part of a state effort to raise badly needed money for Vermont's militia by seizing and selling the real and chattel property of British "loyalists" in the Revolutionary War. This effort was more vigorously pursued in the western part of the state, where seventy properties were sold between March 1778 and February 1779, than in the eastern part, where in the same period only one was sold. Only two such Ira sales were recorded for 1779-89. The Governor and Council established the court of confiscation on March 26, 1778, having been "impowered" by the General Assembly to do so.¹⁴

Stories crop up and I will yield again to temptation to follow briefly the misadventures of John Lee in the 1778-79 legislative record. Lee's name appears eight times: as owner of one of several Clarendon properties ordered confiscated; as one of sixteen people from Clarendon who have left the state and "joined the enemies thereof"; as the occasion of a bond by another party to be forfeited if he does not cover town and state costs incurred in "maintaining and Bringing Up" John Lee's family (more below); as the owner of personal property confiscated and sold at "Publick Vandue"; as one of the "tories" in a trial mentioned in an expense account of the state official (Lee's trial lasted 5 ¼ days and cost £3.3.0, or three pounds, three shillings); as the owner of a confiscated cow sold for £8.8.0; as an owner of property that Col. Claghorn sold for the state. And finally, Lee appears in a "Certificate of John Collins" declaring that "for and in behalf of Thomas Collins," he has paid Claghorn £100 "Lawful money" for 200 acres and improvements forfeited to the state by John Lee for his "treasonable Conduct."

The property is described as “Lying in a goar of Lands between the Towns of Clarindon and poultney by the nam of Lee Hollow.” By this time, the “goar” (gore) was also known as the District of Ira; in fact, this is the only mention I noticed of the name “Lee hollow.”

The bond mentioned above in support of John Lee’s family was for £500, given by Samuel Whiteman, who signed with an X witnessed by Joseph Smith and James Lee. This Lee also posted a bond of £1,000 to be forfeited if he failed to support and bring up the families of William Suttan and Joshua Matterson. Friends and family apparently stepped in. Without this help, would the families have been destitute?

Traitor or not, John Lee’s story is a sad one, as is Matterson’s, which parallels it. Lee’s lone cow evokes a way of life far from luxurious, even more the list of other chattel goods including “one Wash Tub to Ebenezer Cole, £0.9.0” and “one old Broken Wheele to George Round, £0.2.0.” And nowhere in the story of his misadventures do we learn what he did or said that branded him a traitor.¹⁵

The deeds of 1779-89 and a bit later have three other features—the kind of money accepted, the social status of participants, and sale by vendue—that could lead to stories of broader scope, but I will confine myself to a summary, in some cases omitting detailed references.

Regarding money, suffice it to say that nearly all transactions were denominated in pounds, but silver money and Spanish milled and silver dollars also appear. Whatever class distinctions may have existed press lightly in these early deeds, although I assume that there were significant differences in the amount and quality of land owned.¹⁶ Buyers and sellers are usually identified only by name and legal residence (town, county, state). The first social or employment markers are found in 1782, with seller William Baker of Massachusetts Bay appearing as “Silver Smith” and buyer Lemuel Robarts [Roberts] of Ira, after six transactions without a designation, appearing as “Gentle man,” perhaps in answer to Massachusetts Bay presumption. Roberts liked it well enough to be again a gentleman some six months later. In later transfers he is twice a gentleman, once just himself, and once a yeoman. In this stretch of sales, he is the only person called a gentleman. The terms farmer and husbandman appear and, in 1793, Preserved is identified as “Brick Layer.”

Thirteen of the sales convey property bought at a vendue (vandue, vandu) or public auction (from the French *vendre*, to sell), but with one exception the vendue sales themselves are only referred to, not recorded. Lemuel Roberts, for example, sold land that was part of 200 acres he had bought at a “publick Vandu.” Nathaniel Smith sold 200 acres he had bought at a “Public Vandu held in Said Ira . . . it being my second bid.” Following the property description in a deed, seller Thomas

Obriant pledged “to warrant and Defend the above Granted Premises By Vertue of Vandue” and signed the deed with an X, “his mark.” These auctions were “public” in the sense that they were official actions of town and state, not private sales, the purpose being, in many instances, to collect taxes that were in arrears. James Smith, for example, deeded land that had “Sold at publick vendue by the Constable of said District to pay the Land tax for the year 1782 agreeable to Act of Assembly.” Asahel Joyner owned land “sold at vendue to pay a state tax Laid upon it.” In one 1782 vendue, the one recorded in Ira, many properties were bid off, most of them apparently by the owners just for the amounts needed to pay the taxes, typically between one and two pounds, sometimes less than a pound.¹⁷ The frequency of the vendue and its use as a sweeping tax collection measure indicate that land ownership could be a precarious investment, as of course it was. I cannot determine from the limited Ira record what class of owners lost their property by vendue. Often in the early years, Paul Gillies tells us, it was the proprietors who were the “victims” of the vendue, but later “it was the poor, struggling farm families who lost their homes and land for lack of funds.”¹⁸

Preserved Fish had been in town something less than three years when, on October 14, 1793, a month shy of his twenty-third birthday, his first recorded purchase appeared: perhaps fifty-five acres (the acreage is hard to read) for £120, from Rufus Colvin. (The grand list for 1792 included Preserved with a value of £18 out of a town total of £1,357.15.0, but this was probably personal property; the list almost certainly included both real estate and personal property then, as it did later.) Preserved’s last recorded Ira purchase was on September 24, 1842, the interest in a mortgage not otherwise described, for \$356 from Malachi Fuller. His first recorded Ira sale was on February 5, 1798, twenty acres, \$400, to Daniel Graves. His last recorded sale was on March 25, 1837, fifty acres, \$500, to Jonathan Russel II. A glance at the intervening years reveals Preserved as an active dealer, buying and selling.¹⁹ From 1793 to 1820, for example, he bought fifteen parcels and sold twenty-one. There were also transactions in other towns: eight or nine in Rutland, about a dozen in Clarendon, seven in Tinmouth, eleven in Middletown Springs. My Lester and Williams ancestors in Rutland attached themselves to a farm that was business and homestead, a gift of God and nature to be tended, written about, and handed down. The much thinner Ira history suggests that Preserved was a different breed. Land was like tulips, gold, or stocks: something to be traded for profit. According to Lester Fish, Preserved would move from farm to farm as he acquired them and at one time lived on one in Whitehall, New York. He is described as a “banker for Ira and surrounding towns, and de-

voted to many business enterprises.” His estate of \$45,079.95, after previous gifts to family worth \$20,000, included \$43,186.70 of notes, bonds, and mortgages owed by at least forty-two people. House, barn, and land of the home property were left to Abigail but were not valued in the accounting of assets. Curiously, she was to receive some personal property and \$500, but for the remaining personal property and the \$43,000 in paper no heirs were mentioned. This was not the will of a working farmer, listing as it did little in the way of farm equipment and only two animals, a horse (\$40) and a cow (\$12). His metamorphosis from bricklayer and pioneer to businessman was complete. But now I am brought up short by the remark of Preserved’s son, Bradley, that after starting in the mason’s trade, his father’s “principal business was farming.” Perhaps the word “business” is critical. Preserved’s buying, selling, and lending point to an enterprise quite different from the stereotypical family farm.²⁰

Preserved was the most active dealer in the family, but the land records are littered with the Fish name. In the ten years from 1829 to 1839, for example, there are twenty-three purchases by Fishes and twenty sales, and among the names are Russell, Served, Daniel, Hiram, Leicester, and Bradley, all sons of Preserved and Abigail. Poking around in the bins of Ira’s damaged papers, I came across the 1853 grand list, including personal and real property but excluding money in hand, a snapshot of the family fortunes some four years after Preserved’s death in 1849. Russell, Bradley, Enos, and Leicester appear, Bradley as the richest man in town with personal property including 202 sheep (\$550), public stocks or securities (\$2,550), debts due (\$1,800), and real estate (\$4,200). All four reported some debt due, none with debt owed. (The tax was one percent on the total value.) At his death in 1885, Bradley left an estate of \$120,000. His success was not surprising, for he was “perhaps the most thrifty of the Fish brothers, and they say he died holding the first dollar he ever earned.” Although there are grander ways of leaving this world, what could be more appropriate for a life of such legendary frugality?²¹

The drive to make money descended to the other children in varying degrees. Modest worldly success was enjoyed by Russell (Ira mason), Leicester (Ira farmer), Served (proprietor of Hotel Fish in New Haven, Vermont), Hiram (successful New York farmer), Harrison (West Haven, Vermont, farmer), and Betsy (mother of four). The one child who did not reach adulthood was Aram, who died at age 3. Leonard, at age 19, glimpsed something of life beyond Ira, and in 1815 outdistanced all his siblings in geographic reach, traveling to Missouri, where he ran a trading post near St. Louis. This was when the West was “so wild and

unsettled that vigilante committees were necessary for protection from Indians, horse-thieves and outlaws.” But after three years he returned east, settled in New York State, and prospered as a hotel keeper and farmer. The most conspicuous career was that of Daniel, who became a cattle dealer in New York and invested in real estate and other ventures, building a fortune of some \$250,000.²² There will be more to be said about Daniel. Alonso, the one brother who broke the mold, will also have some passages of his own, as will Enos by virtue of his lack of drama and his critical role as my great-great-grandfather.

POLITICAL LEANINGS

Although I don't have for Ira's religious, social, and political history the rich material that Robert E. Shalhope so scrupulously gathered in *Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys* or P. Jeffrey Potash in *Vermont's Burned-Over District*, there is some evidence of Ira's leanings in the state's political conflicts as played out in the land title struggles and in the General Assembly. Because of overlapping land grants, faulty or missing surveys, and chicanery, the land titles of the so-called "ancient settlers" were often uncertain. Purchases made in good faith were sometimes challenged by later legal owners. In the March 10, 1785, Ira town meeting warning, an item asks that the town "take in to Consideration" an act of the October 1784 session of the General Assembly stating that people who occupied and improved land under "Supposed titles" and even those with no title at all and who were later dispossessed by legal action should be compensated by the legal owner for the value of the improvements. (Although on the agenda, the matter isn't mentioned in the minutes of the town meeting itself.) This is a reference to the so-called Betterment Acts whose tortuous five-year career in the General Assembly, 1780-1785, requires sixteen pages to summarize in an appendix to vol. 3 of the *Records of the Governor and Council*. The protracted struggle over compensation was a battleground between the so-called Arlington Junto, including Thomas Chittenden, the Allens, and Matthew Lyon, who favored full payment for the value of improvements, and a new group of politicians, including Isaac Tichenor of Bennington and Nathaniel Chipman of Tinmouth, who argued that this was unfair to the legal owners and would sometimes benefit occupants who were not innocent victims. The Junto's diminished power was reflected in the limited compensation of the version that finally passed in October 1785.²³

The appendix editor, E. P. Walton, notes that on October 23, 1784, one Betterment proposal was "passed in the negative," that is, defeated, with six practicing attorneys or judges voting against it and none for it, implying, I suspect, that wisdom lay with the opponents. Among them

were Tichenor and Chipman. Voting for the proposal were Lyon of Fair Haven and, of particular interest to me, Lemuel Roberts of Ira. But the disagreement was not just legal. In the list of members of the October 1784 session, Tichenor and Chipman are distinguished as Esq., Lyon as Col., Roberts as Capt. In contrast to the egalitarianism and unembarrassed self-interest of, say, Ethan Allen, a champion of the yeoman, gentlemen such as Tichenor and Chipman, Shalhope tells us, believed “eminence”—in property, education, judgment, morals—to be “absolutely indispensable to government.” As an officer under Washington, Chipman shared so unreservedly his commander’s opinion that “social hierarchy supported military hierarchy” that in 1778, when he feared that his creditors might ruin him, he resigned his commission. In short, the struggle was over more than mere self-interest, although it included plenty of that. It involved deep disagreements over who should rule, in what manner, and to what ends, matters well beyond the scope of this paper but admirably summarized by others.²⁴

Lemuel Roberts voted with the Junto. Were his views widely shared in Ira? Ira town clerk John Baker joined several other clerks on October 19, 1785, urging the assembly to repeal a recent title dispute act and to pass another, “doing more justice to the Antient settlers.” Miscellaneous election notes for the 1790s in the Ira records show votes for Chittenden for governor (one exception) and Lyon for Congress. Also indicative, Ira’s first town clerk and first representative to the General Assembly was Isaac Clark who, on January 18, 1779, in a ceremony noted in the Ira records, married Hannah Chittenden, third daughter of the governor, who performed the ceremony. Clark—captain, later colonel, and general—was “familiarily known as ‘Old Rifle’” and was said to be “not only a good fighter but a very zealous Republican of the school of Jefferson.” He eventually moved to Castleton and represented that town in the assembly, in 1796-99.²⁵

The intriguing fragments I have of Lemuel Roberts’s life entitle him to a paragraph of his own. He was one of the freemen who organized the town; he was an active player in the real estate market, the buyer of confiscated property in the earliest recorded transaction; he had an active military career; he organized one of the two petitions to the General Assembly requesting a town charter; he represented Ira in the General Assembly; and he was not above taking the law into his own hands. In “a mistaken zeal for the antient settlers,” probably a title dispute, Roberts and Noel Potter were charged with rescuing Charles Carr from a sheriff’s deputy, this in May 1784 while Roberts was a representative in the General Assembly. They petitioned the assembly for a pardon, mainly upon the grounds of their military service, Roberts having

been captured several times by the enemy and escaping a number of times “too tedious to mention” and Potter a “faithful soldier” and ever a “fast friend to the Liberties of mankind.” Roberts was good at escaping. On October 26 he and Potter were pardoned as recommended by an assembly committee of which Matthew Lyon was a member. This action led to a rebuke by the 1785-86 Council of Censors as an “infringement . . . upon the constitutional prerogative of the executive Council.” Furthermore, the offenders’ “former merit and present submission” might have been reasons for reducing the fines “but not for complete pardons, in crimes tending to the dissolution of government.” But rebuke had no effect on the pardon, nor did the so-called mass repealer action of the 1787 assembly to rescind a number of previous laws, for acts of pardon were exempt.²⁶

TOWN ORGANIZATION AND SHIFTING BOUNDARIES

When Preserved arrived in 1790, he came to an established political community. One often reads that because Ira never paid the state granting fees, it doesn’t have a land grant charter or other formal manner of incorporation (Readsboro is similarly bereft).²⁷ Behind this bald fact, there are stories and hints of stories. Ira’s irregular shape suggests that it began as a gore (an unincorporated area), it was so described by early residents, and the New Hampshire Surveyors General records show how it came about. The survey lines for the September 1761 New Hampshire grants for the then surrounding towns—Castleton, Rutland, Poultney, Tinmouth, and Clarendon—do not meet up, leaving a gap that became Ira. (Middletown Springs was a later creation.)²⁸

In 1779, the Ira settlers did what other settlers did in their time throughout Vermont—they formed a government. It is highly unlikely that in moving to Vermont, they were fleeing the confines of settled community life. I doubt that they were wilderness lovers. They were not escaping civilization; they were extending it. On May 20, a warning was issued for the first town meeting, to be held on the 31st to elect a moderator, clerk, and constable, and transact other business. I like to think of the political origin as autogenous, but the warning goes on to say, “as it is the advice of the Governor and Council and at the Request of 5 of the inhabitants of said town.” Apparently the townspeople were following some sort of official procedure, but they were proceeding without benefit of a charter. Speaking of the more usual procedure, Paul Gillies has remarked that the issuance of a charter might be thought of as conception and the first meeting as a quickening. Ira’s case would be more like a virgin birth.²⁹ The warning is for the “District of Ira,” but the word “town” also appears, and these words plus

“gore” will show up repeatedly in the record. The name Ira, by the way, is a puzzle. Ira Allen immediately comes to mind, but Esther Munroe Swift in *Vermont Place-Names* is in error in saying that his name appears in a land grant petition, October 12, 1780. This failed petition, by Lemuel Roberts and others, lists the petitioners, but Ira does not appear. He might have appeared on the prevailing petition by Nathan Clark and others, but the records do not list the other petitioners. (See below for a discussion of petitions.)³⁰

Nearly every man who took the Freeman’s Oath on May 31 was apparently of English origin, with names such as Clark, Lee, Wilder, Richardson, Mason, Baker, Wood, and White. (According to Lewis D. Stillwell, “Vermont’s population in 1791 showed 3 *per cent* of Scottish names and 95 per cent of English.”) The meeting was held at which were elected a moderator, town clerk, constable, three selectmen, three surveyors of highways, three men to lay out highways, a fence viewer, an overseer (of the poor?), and a hayward, whose duties varied but could include oversight of some cattle fencing and maintenance of a town pound where stray farm animals were kept. Captain Isaac Clark was elected town clerk and “to represent this town in the General Assembly till the first freemans meeting in this town” (the wording suggests that the organizers didn’t consider the first gathering a full-fledged freemen’s meeting). The General Assembly convened for the first time in March 1778. Isaac Clark doesn’t appear on a list of members until the October session of the following year, where he appears as a representative from the District of Ira, but an Isaac Clark is mentioned in March 1778 as a committee member. The main point is that for all of the commotion and confusion over a charter, Ira was represented at the the state level from very early on.³¹

Five petitions for grants of Ira land appear in the index to *Petitions for Grants of Land 1778-1811* (*State Papers*, vol. 5). Two are for private grants, two are related to earlier New York grants, discussed above, and one, that of Elemuel [Lemuel] Roberts and others, is for “a Township by the name of _____[name left blank].” We know from the legislative record that there was at least one other, that of Nathan Clark of Bennington and his associates, the most important because it was the one that received the approval of the General Assembly and the Governor and Council, but the petition itself has disappeared along with the list of petitioners. (Nathan Clark was “prominent in the controversy with New York” and father of Isaac Clark mentioned above.) Although you would probably keep an eye on him, I have grown fond of Roberts and therefore regret that his petition lost out; there is no record of legislative action. His petition is appealing in that the names of all thirty-nine of

the petitioners are given, and at least twenty-one of them (three more are uncertain) were among the first signers of the Freeman's Oath.³²

The General Assembly journal notes that the petition of Clark and others was filed on March 21, 1778, when Clark was speaker. His name comes up many times in the journals of the next two and one-half years, but not a word about his petition until on November 8, 1780, the assembly granted the gore known as the District of Ira to Clark and company, "provided all the settlers that are on said land or have made improvements not holding under some of the original Settlers be included." The next day the Governor and Council "Resolved that the Proprietors of the district of Ira, Granted to Nathan Clark Esqr. & Company, pay Fifteen pounds on Each Right, Allowing to each proprietor 300 acres, to be paid in Silver or other money equivalent on the first day of June next. The reservations to be as usual."³³ We have no way of knowing how the rights of the "original Settlers" would have been negotiated, and nowhere do we find the names of Clark's associates. (It is likely that his son, Isaac, would have been one.) Was there a rivalry with Roberts's group or did some people appear in both petitions, perhaps deciding that after two and one-half years of no legislative decision, it was time to try again? It was only a month after Roberts's submission that the assembly accepted Clark's. I would like to know what went on behind the scenes during that month, a story that may never be told.

It would be a tedious excursion beyond the limits of this article to trace every step of the fees issue through the records of the assembly, the committees, and the Governor and Council. Highlights dimmed as intended action somehow never materialized. On October 20, 1783, for example, having considered expelling Ira, the assembly decided to permit continued representation until further notice because the district had been represented in the state's constitutional convention, it had been "generally represented" (in the assembly), and it had paid all state taxes. On October 24, 1790, the assembly threatened to regrant Ira, Bradford, and others in arrears if they didn't "shew cause" at the next session. But Ira continued to be represented, it didn't show cause, and on October 25, 1792, it was listed among the "organized towns" in connection with an act to pay New York \$30,000 to settle land claims against Vermont. Most revealing, with new information, is an October 31, 1792, committee report declaring that Ira had 14,800 acres and, with 300 acres per right, forty-three rights "exclusive of public rights." At £15 per right, fees would amount to £645 of which £216.16 had been paid, with £429.18.7 remaining. The state tax of £73.17.11 had been paid. No charter had yet been issued, the committee added. And no charter ever was. I thought that the last legislative attention to the matter was an

October 16, 1798, appointment of a committee charged, with a note of exasperation, to suggest “some method to enforce the payment of the granting fees,” this some nineteen years after the assembly and council had approved the Clark petition. But then, quite by chance, I came upon a secretary of state’s response to a legislative inquiry, saying that as far as he knew the fees had never been paid in full—this in 1854.³⁴

It is interesting to speculate as to what would have happened if a persistent challenge to Ira’s right to exist had been mounted in the General Assembly in the very early years after the town’s self-creation. With the passage of time, such an attempt would have been ever more likely to fail, and this for more than the practical difficulty. In a 1904 Vermont Supreme Court case, *Town of Readsboro v. Town of Woodford* (76 Vt. 376), brought to my attention by Paul Gillies, the ruling cited a decision declaring “that in public affairs, when the people have organized themselves under color of law into the ordinary municipal bodies, and have gone on year after year raising taxes, making improvements, and exercising the usual franchises of such corporations, their rights are properly regarded as depending quite as much on the acquiescence as on the regularity of their origin, and that the corporate standing of the community could no longer be open to question.”

Ira’s peculiar gore shape was to change four times to assume the boundaries it has today, nicely illustrating how geography shapes history. First was the formation on October 28, 1784, of a new municipality, Middletown, out of parts of Tinmouth, Wells, Poultney, and Ira, the name of which was changed to Middletown Springs in 1884. The petitioners had argued that “the mountains etc. around them are so impracticable to pass” that meetings were difficult.³⁵

Second was the decision in 1804 to “annex part of Ira to the northeast school district of Poultney,” with no record of the reasons why but probably for proximity of households and convenience of travel. A curious note in the act suggests that in one respect it was not what one would consider a complete annexation, for not only should the newly formed district “be entitled to all the privileges of the other school districts in the State,” it should also “be entitled to draw their respective proportions of school monies from the said towns of Poultney and Ira.”³⁶

Third was the 1854 annexation of the west part of Clarendon to Ira with no report in the assembly *Journals* of the reason why. But this proposal had been made at least twice before, in 1786 and 1790. The first petition argued that Ira, having lost a part to Middletown, was too small and inconveniently shaped for effective government and that the west part of Clarendon was cut off from the rest of the town by mountains. Two 1787 petitions of the same date objected to the proposal, disputing

the difficulty of crossing the mountains. One said that it was “not just nor politics to cut a good town in pieces to patch up a bad one.” The petition was dismissed.³⁷

Substantively the same division of Clarendon for the same reasons was proposed in 1790, but with many more Clarendon signatures and slightly fewer Ira ones, all of them apparently penned by one hand. This time, though, the proposal was to create a new town, the name left blank. The petition was set aside until the inhabitants of the towns could be consulted and until Ira paid its charter fees. Following a negative committee report, the assembly dismissed the petition in 1791.³⁸

The fourth and final annexation, in 1904, attached the north part of Ira to Castleton with no explanation in the legislative *Journals* as to why it was favored. Two early attempts that failed probably give us the reason, however. One, petitioned October 14, 1785, cited the high mountains that separated this area from the settled part of Ira. Approved by the assembly, the proposal was returned by the council, recommending it not become law until the matter of Ira’s fees was settled. Two years later, on February 26, 1787, the petition showed up again in the assembly, was referred to committee, then disappeared. Whether the proposal resurfaced from time to time over the next 117 years, I don’t know.³⁹

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Preserved was even quicker to thrust himself into politics than into land dealing. At age 21 he was elected one of two hay wardens at the town meeting of March 8, 1792. His youth shouldn’t surprise us. In such a small town the need to fill town offices was probably greater than the competition for them; but equally telling, Vermont’s population was very young. In 1794, Preserved was elected collector of town taxes and one of several petit jurors, and he appeared as a justice of the peace before whom the sellers of some land swore that it was their “free will and deed.” In 1795 and 1798 he was elected one of three selectmen. In 1800 he performed three marriages as justice. I have omitted some elections and actions, and because of the orthography and condition of the early records, I may have missed others.⁴⁰

This was just the beginning of Preserved’s political career. He is said to have served as justice of the peace and foreman of the grand jury for over forty years, giving rise to the by-word in Rutland, “A true bill, P. Fish, foreman.” Did this suggest that under his leadership grand juries tended to favor the prosecution? At some point Preserved as yeoman gave way to esquire; in fact he became known as Esquire or “Square” Fish. His daughter Betsy, when asked, “Whose little girl are you?” re-

plied, "I'm Square Fish's daughter, sir, and the only daughter too, sir." He represented Ira in the General Assembly from 1805 to 1810, from 1816 to 1821, and from 1824 to 1825, a total of fourteen terms, more than anyone else at least to 1880. Judging from the few times he appears in the assembly's *Journals*, I have to assume that most of the time he either maintained a wise silence or exerted his influence in the smoky back rooms. Despite this disappointingly low profile in the General Assembly, I still think of Preserved as this new man, a model American, enterprising, energetic, ambitious, growing up with the country, sure of the harmony of self-interest and the public good.

Preserved's political ambition, like his appetite for money making, descended unevenly to his children. Russell, Lester (Leicester on birth certificate), Enos, and Bradley served short terms in the legislature, as did four grandsons and at least two great-grandsons, one of them my grandfather Bert, who died in office and was replaced by appointment by his wife, Della Kelleway Fish. Enos held various local offices as, in West Haven, Vermont, did Harrison. It was Bradley, that genius of thrift, who outshone them all, holding every town office at one time or another and serving twenty-one years as clerk, a position that my cousin, Preserved's great-great-great-granddaughter, Alice Fish Raiche, held from 1981 to 1996.⁴¹

Before leaving the family's political affairs, I must mention an episode that shocked me when I first read of it but which may have been in keeping with contemporary practice. According to a story that came down in the family, Preserved, having caught a woman stealing \$1,500, tied her to a tree and whipped her.⁴² Was it his money? I first took it to be an arbitrary act of vengeance but now wonder if he was acting in his official capacity as justice of the peace. Whether he really was might depend on the number of lashes inflicted, the amount of money stolen, and the date. A statute of February 13, 1779, authorized a justice to punish theft with up to ten stripes if the value of the stolen property did not exceed twenty pounds. On February 17 a measure called for up to thirty-nine stripes for a theft of £6 or more, the whipper unspecified. I don't know how many times Preserved laid on with his whip. The amount of the theft, \$1,500, might have taken the case out of his hands, but the act of whipping, depending on the date, would not in itself have been out of keeping. The history of corporal punishment in early Vermont would take me too far afield. In brief, the first Vermont Constitution (1777) and all subsequent constitutions called for imprisonment and labor to make "sanguinary punishments less necessary," and in 1816 the General Assembly finally complied, forbidding whipping.⁴³

RELIGION

So far my record of Ira's early history and Preserved's new life in Vermont consists almost entirely of worldly concerns, and worldly concerns did indeed loom large. But Ira's settlers, like many elsewhere in the state, brought not only their desire for land on earth but hope for a happy hereafter. In the space I can spare for religion, however, it is no easy matter to relate the local to the regional or to draw the line between passionate conviction and conventional propriety. I will confine myself mainly to local evidence with only incidental references to such sources as T. D. Seymour Bassett's *The Gods of the Hills*. Although as Bassett tells us it was not until the twentieth century that a majority of Vermonters were affiliated with any church, political and church leaders in the early years were often the same, suggesting that church influence could carry some weight.⁴⁴

Such was the case at the establishment of the Ira Baptist Church in 1783. The founding minister was the Rev. Thomas Skeel, and among the thirty-nine original members (forty-two by one count) who had joined by the time he left in 1785 were thirteen men who had taken the first Freeman's Oath in 1779 (including the ubiquitous Lemuel Roberts) and twenty women, most of them apparently spouses of the male founders. That this church should have been Baptist isn't surprising given Ira's apparent democratic political cast. Though often striving to maintain strict discipline, Baptists insisted upon the independence of the local churches. There was no bishop, no denominational hierarchy, but according to David Ludlum, even more important for the Baptists' "reputed democracy" was the emphasis on "close communion," a fraternal equality despite the distinction between the "elect" and the unfortunate majority. Bassett tells us that Baptists usually had less property, income, and education than Congregationalists, and "From Pownal to Rutland the 'revolutionary stir' produced flocks of Baptists in Pownal, Shaftsbury, Wallingford, and Clarendon." Ira was right in the thick of things. The town had no Congregational church, which might have assumed some natural right to political leadership as was often the case in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. The Ira Baptists' acquisition of land, the construction of church buildings, and the purchase of a parsonage were all funded by private money. Settled ministers' lots were usually conditions of town charters, and Ira was never chartered. That the town's strong Baptist loyalty was apparently without significant challenge from other denominations suggests that a number of settlers may have arrived as a group, united by religious conviction as well as by land hunger, but I have no evidence of it aside from Bradley Fish's remark in *Hemenway's Gazetteer* that "Several families were settled within the present limits of

the town of Ira, before the Revolutionary War, whose religious sympathies were with the Baptists.”⁴⁵

Early church life was not without its struggles, however, and for that I will turn to the *Ira Church Records*, two bound volumes carefully preserved at the present church, which is the direct descendant of the first congregation. It is a thriving institution with 120 members as of this writing, about one-quarter from Ira, and among them are some of my cousins, the youngest eight generations down from Preserved. The church building, a handsome wood-frame structure built in 1852, sits at the intersection of Rte. 133 and West Road, the nearest site Ira has to a town center. Its stained glass windows, installed in 1905, distinguish it from many country Baptist churches. The first church building, the “Brick Meeting House,” also at this intersection, was erected in 1800 and originally served town and school as well. It is now the town hall and a community meeting place. The parsonage, not far away, was built in 1832 and is still in service.⁴⁶

The church covenant appears in the *Records* in two versions—November 13, 1783 and July 7, 1784—with no explanation given; but the change in tone and, possibly, doctrine may indicate a struggle in the church. Both emphasize belief in one God, the Bible as God’s word and the only guide to faith and practice, original sin, baptism by immersion, the Lord’s supper (communion), keeping the Sabbath free of unnecessary labor, family prayer, helping the poor, cooperation, and settling disputes between members in the church, not at law. But where is predestination, a fundamental belief in strict Calvinism? Neither version explicitly mentions it, but the second describes more dramatically Adam and Eve’s fall from “moral nitude” through which their posterity “came into the world totally morally depraved” and unless redeemed by Christ will suffer “endless punishment.” More tellingly, whereas the first version promises salvation to those who believe in Christ, the second says that to be saved, one must, through the agency of the Holy Ghost, be born again, evidence of which is repentance and good works. This may not be quite predestination, but it does put salvation beyond human control with no indication of why or under what circumstances the Holy Ghost will act. The shift from the first covenant, in which one can be saved through belief, to the second, which requires the aid of the Holy Ghost, suggests a move from a Free Will position to something less under human control.⁴⁷

This may be relevant to what I found as I reviewed the records to the end of 1799, which appear to include minutes of the actions of a leadership group and the membership as a whole. On one occasion an apparently secular matter came to the attention of the church. Brother Obrian

complained that Brother Allen “had Neglected fulfilling his Obligation to him in a Certain Matter.” On another it was voted to judge whether work done on the Sabbath was “of Necessity or not.” On yet another it was “Voted to Reject Sister Cole from our fellowship for Refusing the Government of the Church.” But by far the most common challenge was to deal with members who doubted aspects of the faith or actually subscribed to erroneous matters of doctrine. Sister Carpenter didn’t take communion at a recent service because of “the trials in her own mine [*sic*].” The most revealing case was that of George Shearman Jr., who was alleged to “hold forth that all men would be happy in Eternity Dying in what Circumstances so ever.” This was the “Universal Principle” or “Universal System,” in short, Universalism. Although the record is hard to follow, from August 25, 1785, when the charge was first brought against Shearman (and eventually others), the church labored with him for about a year to persuade him of his error before finally ejecting him from membership. As it says in Titus 3:10, “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.”⁴⁸

Universalists believed in the eventual reconciliation of all people with God, and of course they joined the Free Will Baptists in rejecting the strict Calvinist belief in predestination in which God himself is regarded as the author of sin. The action against Shearman followed the adoption of the second covenant. Was that document adopted as part of an effort to stamp out a growing heresy in the congregation? As is so often the case in these early records, political and religious, there are stories of which we have only hints. A more precise theological discussion would have been helpful. Tantalizing as the uncertainty may be, we are left with the fact that these land-hungry but religious pioneers were not theologians, and it is asking too much to expect nice distinctions and labeling.⁴⁹

Despite these difficulties in the church, I haven’t found evidence in Ira of the social and moral disorder supposedly widespread at this time in Vermont. Either the town’s small size made for greater cohesion than in more populous towns or allowed it to escape the observer’s notice. In next-door Clarendon in 1785, for example, John Clark found “vice predominant and irreligion almost epdemical.”⁵⁰

Unlike the opinions of the man I call the founder of my mother’s line, Rutland’s Henry Whitlock Lester, whose writings tell us something about his views of religion, politics, and the life of a farmer, Preserved’s opinions must be deduced from his actions. His only writings to come down to the present are his will and, perhaps, those mortgages. I see my mother’s line as the poetic side, leaving behind many pages of reflection and reminiscence. Preserved and Abigail’s monument in Ira’s Riverside

Cemetery, its letters fading as the stone erodes, bears an epitaph probably not of their composition and, I suspect, only partly expressing their thoughts on life and death.

Raised from the dust on that eternal plan
That fashioned dust into the shape of man
Behold a world of sin, vanity, and pain,
Then close my eyes and turn to dust again.

Who knows, perhaps in Preserved's dying hours, the septicemia raging in his veins, his life work may have come to seem but sin, vanity, and pain. I am pretty certain, though, that this was not the spirit in which he carried out his vigorous undertakings. A successful, industrious man might suffer pangs of conscience and anxiety about his immortal soul at church on Sunday and in the lonely hours of the night, but it is likely that his daylight hours would be given to getting and spending, although with the Ira Fishes, more of the former. And I wonder, too, about the absence of any mention of salvation in the epitaph. I imagine that for such an earth-bound man, despite subscribing publicly to the conventional religion, the real world was the world of wheat and mortgages. My skepticism is challenged, I must say, by the fact that Preserved and Abigail joined the church during a revival, a "powerful awakening," in 1808, which drew 225 new members, a number so large as to suggest that some people came from other towns. He did not abandon his financial prudence at the church door, however, for in 1819 he and Abigail transferred their membership in the Ira Baptist Church to the one in Middletown because he thought he was assessed too much for maintenance. Did the passions of the revival last a lifetime? Was he truly devout? I don't know. This is not the ink-stained side of the family.⁵¹

Russell Fish was for many years church choir leader, and Bradley, though not a member of the church, supported it; but the stories of Daniel and Alanson are not to be passed over so lightly. On his death in 1880, Daniel left an endowment fund of \$2,000 to pay the salary of the minister (Russell had also contributed to it). This may have been in amends for whatever it was that had caused the church to expel him when he was twenty years old. We don't know his offense. We do know that Jason Newton was expelled for joining the Freemasons, a fate that Preserved, also a Mason, escaped during the 1820-40 Anti-Masonic movement. (According to Bradley Fish, there was even a Masonic lodge in Ira with thirteen members, including Preserved.)⁵² Silas Haven was excluded for playing cards, Harriet Mann was forgiven after confessing her fault in "attending a place of midnight revelry and dissipation," and Thomas O'Brian "was arraigned before the church for having his children sprinkled." The church has survived to the present time, but while

the requirements of faith have persisted, discipline appeared to ease long ago, for in Cooper and Peck's list of members with their reasons for leaving the church, no exclusions are mentioned after June 7, 1845. Daniel was the only Fish to be expelled.

The offense of sprinkling was probably an improper form of baptism (performed by whom?), a severe departure from the Baptist practice of full immersion, summer and winter, in Ira Brook. Of one baptism we read that "As they were buried in the cold icy stream, fit type of the river of death, while the snow-flakes fell thick and softly upon the scene, so may the blessings of God's divine love fall into the hearts of those dear ones, who have this day given themselves to him in an everlasting covenant." Since Preserved and Abigail joined the church by means of baptism on December 11, 1808, they received the blessings of divine love in the same icy manner. The Ira church still practices full immersion but not in the coldest weather and not always in the brook.⁵³

Of all the brothers who survived to adulthood only Alanson deviated from the path of worldly endeavors, unique in the family in his "aspirations for the higher learning." In 1830, at age 18, he entered Middlebury College. His four years there coincided with the temporary success of the controversial revivalist preacher Jedediah Burchard.⁵⁴ Although how the religious ferment affected him can only be a matter of speculation, in 1831 he was baptized in Ira but had his membership immediately transferred to the Middlebury Church. He graduated in 1834, was licensed to preach at Ira, and in the fall of that year entered Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, then the principal school in the country for the education of Baptist ministers. Among the requirements for admission were "genuine piety" and some proficiency in Greek, Latin, and mathematics. I wish I could have overheard Preserved and his other sons as they talked about Alanson's acquisition of the ancient languages and other matters literary and historical. Were they contemptuous of this useless learning? Did they admire it as central to the religious tradition of which their local church was a part, a church that commanded their public respect and support? Or were they an instance of something I came to see in my own lifetime: relatives puzzled by what it really meant, this higher learning without obvious practical use, but something to be proud of nevertheless because it was in the eyes of the great world "higher," difficult of attainment, and a sign of social progress in the family?

During his vacations Alanson preached at the Ira church and to an informal association in Chelsea, Massachusetts, that soon became a Baptist church. On graduation from Newton in 1837, he became the Chelsea minister. It was a promising start for both pastor and church.

The meetinghouse was dedicated and Alanson was ordained on the same day in 1838. It was not to last. Ill health forced him back to Ira in June 1840, where he died a month later at age twenty-eight. He left a wife, Eunice Whipple Fish, but no children. His tombstone carried a verse addressed to his widow, its message more hopeful than Preserved and Abigail's epitaph.

Loved one, treasure of my heart,
Fare thee well, 'tis hard to part,
But we soon shall meet again,
Soon we'll roam the heavenly plain.

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul.—Heb. 6:19⁵⁵

I think of this doomed man in the context of his ten brothers and sister. Omitting Aram, who died at three, their average lifespan was just shy of seventy-eight years, and they had a total of forty-two children. It's as if the place and time called for a constitution and spirit more robust than Alanson's, as if the genius of the family lay in pursuits more grounded in the heavy realities of this world, in farms, land, mortgages, stone walls, procreation, and, if necessary, a whipping post.

TOWN AND FAMILY CONTINUED

I leave religion now to turn to Enos Clark Fish, the tenth of Preserved and Abigail's children, born in 1809, whose extended treatment here is justified mainly by the fact that he was my great-great-grandfather. His career was not illustrious. We are told that "He was a man of great physical strength and powerful voice, indicative of a strong personality and inflexible will." He lived his entire life on the farm where he was born, and he was thought not to have spent a whole month away from town in his entire seventy-eight years. There are a few accomplishments on the active side of the ledger. He served as representative to the legislature and as commander of the Ira company of the Vermont militia, earning him the title of captain, by which he was known the rest of his life, although he never saw action. With two fellow selectmen, "he engineered the affairs of Ira through the troublous times of the War between the States, with great credit to himself." ("Troublous" here may describe the nation, not the town, for we are not told how Ira was agitated.) I might mention, by the way, that my line of Fishes have a lean military history. On an urgent request during the War of 1812, Preserved offered five dollars to men to go to the battle of Plattsburgh. Some set off, including Russell and Leonard, but the battle was over before they got there. The Civil War drew many men from Ira as from other Vermont towns, but my ancestors kept their distance, and except for militia man Enos, there wasn't a serviceman in my line until my brother, John.

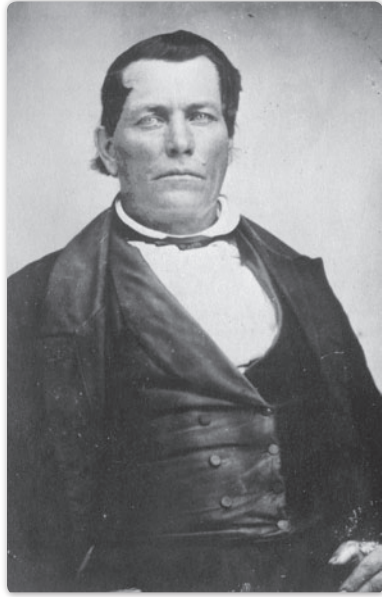
Of Enos's domestic matters we know more. His monument in the Ira cemetery has four sides, one for himself and one for each of his three wives. His first wife, Marsha Chapman, bore him seven children in nineteen years and died soon after. She was a small woman, not weighing one hundred pounds, perhaps worn out by work and children. His second wife, Elvira Morton, produced no children but was a kind and beloved stepmother. Nine months after her death in 1867, Enos married the widow Jane Flagg Bateman, who came to the marriage with a son and daughter of her own and produced another child, George Washington Fish (about whom more a bit later). Enos died in 1888, Jane nineteen years later in 1907.

Although he provided the critically important service of fathering his son, Henry Clay Fish, who became my great-grandfather, Enos's impress on the public and financial affairs of his time was so light that Lester must resort to praising the absence of anything bad. "Enos was content," we are told, "with the education afforded by the local schools and to pass a long and peaceful life in beautiful Ira Valley, encircled by the emerald hills which he loved." And, in a delightfully strenuous effort, this: "There is very little to record in the life of Enos Clark Fish, but perhaps few have passed an entire lifetime under the searchlight of small-town intimacy against whom no charge of dishonorable act could be brought. And this was true of Mr. Fish." The absence of evidence is evidence of absence.

His will, though, excites a more emphatic rhetorical flourish: "In all the annals of the Fish Family perhaps a stranger will never was made than that of Enos C. Fish." It was strange in the very uneven allocation of his estate. One-third of all real and personal property was left to his wife, Jane. The other two-thirds went to his and Jane's son, George, and George's heirs, should he have offspring to inherit. And only if George should die without children, would "all of my estate" (what would have been George's portion, I assume) pass in equal amounts to the other five children—Clarissa Lincoln, Enos C. Fish Jr., Philetia Fish, Emily Blaisdell, and Henry C. Fish—and to their heirs. I fear that my great-grandfather and his siblings were left short, for George Fish did in fact marry Gertrude Potter, and they had one son, Clayton Enos.⁵⁶

The bulkiest of the lot in the group photograph (see illustration 2, page 61, below: back row, far right), Enos obviously raised the average weight of the brothers, but his image also tempts me to assume that he was a certain kind of man. Thanks to the work of Alan Trachtenberg, however, I now think twice before assuming that a portrait tells us something "real" about the subject's character. I am brought up short by Trachtenberg's theoretical cautions about interpreting photographs.

He contrasts the simplistic “old” idea, common in but not limited to the nineteenth century, that formal portraits are a “revelation” of character, with the “new” idea of “unknowability.” Some of the sources of this interpretive dilemma are not historically new. They include observation by the pre-photography philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel that “how the face looks is an act rather than a sign.” Because the subject of a portrait can put on a face, so to speak, and assume a posture, “How is one to tell what is ‘natural’ and what is staged, a performance rather than an ‘expression’?” (Family snapshots of more recent times, as distinguished from posed portraits, are said to offer viewers the “alternative of storytelling” in which they reminisce, recall, and invent.)



Enos Clark Fish (1809-1888). Undated photograph. Courtesy of the author.

What can I say, then, in discussing this and the other photographs in this essay, all posed? If these are “expressive artifacts,” can I determine what my ancestors wished to express? Although they are “enigmatic” and opaque, I may still be able to speak of them as “events, actions, performances, communications,” a meaning “developed in the *function* of the picture, in its particular social use by particular people.” And it should be added that the theoretical trail blazed by Trachtenberg has no inherent end. The interpreter himself is subject to interpretation, a potentially endless engagement cut short only by practical necessity. Perhaps that is no bad thing in an essay already so personal as well as historical.⁵⁷

But at the least, in the light of Trachtenberg’s remarks, I can speculate about Enos’s photograph as an act, a deliberate presentation of features chosen by somebody—Enos himself, his wife, his children, the photographer? I cannot be certain that it is a studio photograph—there is no studio backdrop—but the clothing suggests a special occasion, an attempt to project something more considered and significant than a casual take of, say, a domestic moment. The outer coat spreads widely, its buttoning days long past. He did not try to conceal his mid-

riff swelling prominently against a dark waistcoat, suggesting that he may have considered it a sign of prosperity. He is seated or standing erect, well dressed, clean shaven, neatly shorn despite one tuft of hair protruding behind his right ear, and unsmiling (composed expressions were easier to hold for the long exposures of the time). He is looking slightly to one side of the camera as if to indicate that he is contemplating other matters perhaps more serious than having his picture taken—this, I admit, is pure speculation. In short, the picture may not tell me what Enos was really like, but it does tell me, if I read it right, how he wanted to be perceived, or how others wanted him to be—as a sober, self-respecting man of substance.

And now a few more remarks about Preserved's era before turning to generations within reach of childhood stories and personal memory. One year after Preserved's arrival, the first federal census of Vermont in 1791 found that Ira had 312 people. It was a town on the way. The figures for the next two centuries, however, reflect the experience of many small Vermont towns and provide a skeletal framework for the experiences of my ancestors, the ones who stayed and the ones who sought their fortunes elsewhere. The population peak from 1791 to 2010 was 519 in 1810. In 2010 the number was 432.⁵⁸

Preserved found a wife to match his own capacity for hard work and productivity. Abigail Carpenter came of good breeders, having been the oldest of twelve children in her father's second marriage (he had nine children by his first wife), and she must have been strong, for in twenty-three years she gave birth to eleven sons and one daughter, all but one of whom, a son, lived to adulthood. Like her husband, she lived to seventy-nine, dying in 1852. Despite the prevalence of childhood diseases and the fate of some families to lose child after child, there were many instances of large families in Vermont. The luster of Preserved and Abigail's fecundity, in which I take a silly pride, is dimmed a bit by that of some of their neighbors. Jason Newton, for example, "married three times and raised seventeen children, and at one time the Ira school had nine children each from his family, Wilson Carpenter's and Preserved Fish's." Lewis D. Stilwell tells us that Vermont's population was young, and "reproduction was going on at an astonishing rate."⁵⁹

In some respects my family line is a downward arc. Preserved and Abigail set the bar high for height, bulk, and number of progeny. I am a mere five feet seven, 160 pounds, father of two. "Preserved was a very large man," we are told, "tall and powerful, as was one of his younger sons, Capt. Enos Fish, and in fact his ten sons averaged six feet in height." In 1865, when eight of the sons gathered for a reunion, their average weight was 192 pounds.⁶⁰ It was on this occasion that the earli-

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Seven of Preserved and Abigail Fish's sons, 1865. Courtesy of the author.

est surviving family photo in my line was taken (one of the eight is missing), and if what it projects was in fact the case, it is hard to imagine a band of brothers more emphatically of this world. With the exception of Alanson, whatever of whimsy or theoretical reflection that may have come down to me had not yet entered the bloodstream.

Or so I imagine. What does it mean to say that the brothers are “emphatically of this world”? Trachtenberg looms and inhibits. I must speculate. Perhaps off camera they were playful or ostentatiously devout or bitterly at odds with one another or worried about their weight or careless of dress or indifferent as to how succeeding generations would remember them. This was almost certainly a studio photograph, a collaboration between the men and the photographer (see the elaborate background at right and left). They could have been posed in informal or comical postures, and all could have smiled. That there is only one faint smile (far left, first row) suggests that they wanted to appear to be serious men, although a slow shutter speed and bad or missing teeth might be part of the explanation. They could have held Bibles. Hands on shoulders, perhaps at the photographer’s direction, suggest friendship. If girth was a cause of embarrassment, they could have been posed to minimize it. These were not everyday work clothes. And although uncertain, it seems likely that to have gone to the bother

of the occasion, they probably expected that this portrayal of themselves would be passed down to following generations, as indeed it has been. The picture may be enigmatic, as Trachtenberg would have it, and there is no way I can filter out my own opinions as to the symbolic significance of these details. Considered as an action or a performance, however, the photograph lends itself to this interpretation. If as viewers we were to insist on certainty, we would be condemned to silence.

At this point, personal memory enters the story. George Fish, born in 1871, was still alive when Lester's genealogy was published in 1948. And, in a conflation of the generations, when he died in 1964 at age ninety-two, I noted in my diary that I had met him in 1958 at a family gathering. "He had white hair," I recalled, "a handsome, wrinkled face, and a big white mustache." He sat in a chair in the kitchen while my parents and I stood in attendance as one might before an ancient, honored patriarch.

Aside from this meeting, it was my father's memories that give me a faint sense of a personal connection with Enos's time. Unfortunately, in the egotism of youth, I didn't press for details. He would speak now and then of Enos's daughters, Aunt Clarissy (Clarissa Eliza) who died at eighty-eight in 1921 when he was about ten, or of Felichy (Felicia Hemans) who died at eighty in 1919. Curiously, there was not much about his grandfather, Henry Clay Fish, who died at seventy-eight in 1922, but what there was is at odds with what I imagine Henry wanted to project in his photograph. It is a studio portrait and he is dressed in a well-cut, three-button suit, white shirt and tie, and a waistcoat on which a thin, bright chain appears, probably a watch fob. He is seated in a large straight chair every inch of which is curved and coiled in ornate exuberance. Against the dark background of the chair, which rises above his head like a throne, his neatly cut and combed white hair softly glows. A high forehead, a well-formed nose, deep-set eyes, high cheekbones, and the hint of a smile on his thin lips complete the picture of a firm but gentle handsome face, the first ancestral face in which I can see my father. He sits erect but at ease, one hand on a thigh, the other casually draped off the arm of the chair, his legs crossed. He apparently intended to suggest a certain refinement that I find far removed from the coarse burliness of his uncles and his father, Enos. This is a gentleman at ease in dignified repose. This is the man who, in vindication of Trachtenberg's warnings, was so harsh, so mean to his daughter-in-law, my Grandmother Fish, that she threatened to leave home. My father said that he remembered pleading—he was then a little boy—"Take me with you, Ma, take me with you."

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I wonder if domestic cruelty led to the dissolution of Henry's first marriage, to Betty Bliss, a union that I am grateful to say was at least close enough to produce one child, my grandfather, Bert Sheldon Fish, in 1866. (Another son, Marcus Henry, was born of the second marriage, to Emeline Griggs Wilkinson, in 1886.) Bert died of pneumonia in 1936 when I was four months old. Of his father, my father had little to say, although perhaps more than I had the patience and good sense to listen to. That filial affection may have been muted is suggested by a remark of my mother's when I was young. She said that when Bert died and the family grieved, she knew for the first time that my father had loved him.



*Henry Clay Fish (1844-1922).
Undated photograph. Courtesy
of the author.*

I turn to Bert's photograph for whatever clues it offers, remembering that photographs can lie. Remarkable in its own way as those of his ancestors, his portrait suggests a dimension of country life beyond the daily toil with land and animals. Does it represent an authentic aspect of his character? Was it an attempt to portray a conception or dream that he had of himself? If portraits told the truth, we would have here three stages in family evolution and local social life from Enos the dour man of the soil, to Henry the kindly gentleman, and on to Bert the dandy, a sporting sort of fellow. But they were all men of the soil, all farmers. In America farmers can be gentlemen, but we know that Henry's portrait is misleading. Bert's makes me chuckle. What appears of his jacket looks well cut. A bold tie, knotted with a flourish, hangs casually open around the collar of the white shirt. The eyes look straight ahead, and I detect a faint smile as if to say he knew full well that he was putting on an act with the sleekly parted hair and, above all, with that dashing mustache, its ends so finely waxed. This was not the mustache of the cow barn and hayfield. But perhaps it was Bert as handsome man about town that persuaded Della Kelleway in 1897 to marry him when he was thirty-two, she sixteen.

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They had three children, Guy Bert, Clarence Clay, and Charles Kelleway, my father, the youngest, born in 1911 (died 1982).

I once thought of my father as the transitional figure of my line, the man who left Ira and the family farm (although he once tried to buy a farm for himself) for a life of varying ambitions that eventually led to a successful insurance business and respected village life in Essex Junction. To my boyhood imagination, the break seemed greater than it was. His ancestors divided between those who settled down in the life they were born into and those who moved on, geographically or in occupation, responding to an urge fostered by the dynamism of American society from the beginning. It's as if my father—a whimsical notion, this—had inherited in some measure the enterprising genes

of his first Vermont ancestor who, no Daniel Boone, left Massachusetts with others not to escape civilization but to bring it with them, to establish an ordered society hospitable to buying and selling, to capital and labor, to the wonder of secured loans.

The question of change, its character and magnitude, sends me back to the beginnings of the town and the course of events over time. Rutland Regional Planning Commission maps suggest the role topography played in the history of the town, showing little prime agricultural soil, much extremely hilly terrain in the Taconic range, and a preponderance of land with no public roads although a number of private ones. In a succession familiar elsewhere, families first produced much of their own clothing, growing flax for linen and raising sheep for wool, both practices to shrink under the pressure of commercial transitions nationally and beyond. Sheep were eventually replaced by dairy cattle. As in most Vermont towns, various local businesses and industries soon sprang up and flourished. In this tiny population were found potash production, taverns, blacksmith shop, boot and shoe shop, carding mill, sawmills, tannery, hattery, carriage and wagon shops.



*Bert Sheldon Fish (1866-1936).
Undated photograph. Courtesy of
the author.*

Most of these enterprises as well as the larger farms were concentrated in the valley along Ira Brook and what is now Vermont Route 133, in valleys pushing back into the hills, and in the Route 4A area in the far north of the town. Geography imposed limits, but it was a human invention that doomed most of these small industries. We are told that, “When the railroads came, or soon after, these rural enterprises disappeared almost as if by magic.” (The ancestor of the Rutland Railway was chartered in the 1840s.) According to Bradley Fish, in 1873 the town had a lime manufacturing business, two blacksmiths, one carpenter, three masons, one wheelwright, and one milliner. Smith and Rann say that in 1886, “The only industry of any importance is the lime kiln of A. E. & S. W. Day, which was started about fifteen years ago.” A few businesses came and went over the following years, but that railroad revolution—cheap manufactured goods brought in from afar—was just an early stage of a profound change that continues to our own day in many towns as most commercial activity has migrated to the larger centers.⁶¹

Although Ira is now mainly a residential spoke to the commercial hub of Rutland, the spirit of enterprise still manifests itself. Among current businesses are a horse farm, dairy farm, beef farm, two alpaca farms, sugaring, logging, salsa making, custom sawmill, three construction companies, radio communications, used car dealership, gun shop, and dog grooming. (The salsa business and one of the alpaca farms are owned by cousins of mine on parcels of land carved from the Fish homestead.) Ira’s schools have gone. The tangible evidence of community life most meaningful to me, because so close to the West Road farm of my ancestors, is the cluster of four buildings at the intersection of West Road and Rte. 133: the town hall, the church, the new town clerk’s office, and, sadly worn but evocative of the intensely local life of the past, the former clerk’s office, its first incarnation the one-room school in which many Fishes learned their ABCs.

Of our many small towns, Ira is one of the smallest, a microcosm. A smaller unit still is the family. My Uncle Clarence and Aunt Edith sold their cows in 1963, and sometime later ran a riding stable for a number of years. Several of their children and grandchildren have farmed in Ira and elsewhere in the years since. In the division of the homestead, the farmhouse was sold and is now woefully neglected. On nearby parcels my cousins live comfortably in their new homes.

Preserved was nothing if not a practical man. He would have followed business wherever it took him, and he would have little sympathy for my feelings when I look at the sad, old house and the vacant space where the barn once stood. You have to move on, he would say. There are opportunities ahead.

NOTES

¹ Lester Warren Fish, *The Fish Family in England and America: Genealogical and Biographical Records and Sketches* (Rutland, Vt.: The Tuttle Publishing Company, 1948), ix, 1, 123-124. Of major importance to Lester and other writers because of his first-hand knowledge of early town and family history is Bradley Fish, Preserved's son and Ira Town Clerk. Abby Maria Hemenway's account of Ira consists almost entirely of Bradley's report. See *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer* (Claremont, N.H.: The Claremont Manufacturing Company, 1877), 3: 778-784. Also of interest are W. G. Cooper, ed., assisted by Simon L. Peck, *History of the Baptist Church of Ira, Vermont, AD 1783-June, 1925, Inclusive* (Rutland, Vt.: The Tuttle Company, 1925); S. L. Peck, *History of Ira, Vermont* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1970), first published in 1926; H. P. Smith and W. S. Rann, eds., *History of Rutland County, Vermont* (Syracuse, New York: D. Mason & Co., 1886). Other gazetteers include Zadock Thompson, *Gazetteer of Vermont*, Part III of his *History of Vermont, Natural, Civil, and Statistical* (Burlington, Vt.: Chauncy Goodrich, 1842); John Hayward, *A Gazetteer of Vermont Containing Descriptions of All the Counties, Towns, and Districts in the State* (Boston: Tappan, Whittemore, and Mason, 1849); Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer and Business Directory of Rutland County, Vt., for 1881-82* (Syracuse, N.Y.: The Journal Office, 1881 [sic]). Following initial full citations, references will be abbreviated. *State Papers of Vermont* appear as *SP*. For current information about the town of Ira, see <http://www.virtualvermont.com/towns/ira.html>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ira,_Vermont; and, especially, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Ira-Vermont.html>. I received help from the Brooks Memorial Library of Brattleboro, Rutland Free Library, Bennington Museum, Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, New York State Archives, Michael Sherman, Gregory Sanford, Paul Gillies, Ira Town Clerk Karen Davis, Assistant Clerk Alta Johnston, Carol Fish Long, and Eleanor Fish. In quoting sources I have kept as found the irregularities of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Russell Fish, for example, often appears as Russel and George Sherman in Bradley's account was Shearman in the early deeds.

² Fish, *Fish Family*, ix.

³ Michael Sherman, Gene Sessions, P. Jeffrey Potash, *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont* (Barre, Vt.: Vermont Historical Society, 2004), 75, 625. See chap. 3 for a summary of the period.

⁴ Fish, *Fish Family*, 122. For a map showing Ira's population about 1791, see Lewis D. Stilwell, *Migration from Vermont* (Montpelier and Rutland, Vt.: Academy Books, 1983, a reprint of Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Historical Society, 1948), following 94.

⁵ New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.

⁶ Fish, *Fish Family*, 122-123, 127, 129-131, 149-150. For early commercialism see P. Jeffrey Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District: Patterns of Community Development and Religious Activity, 1768-1850* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 14, 49.

⁷ Jay Mack Holbrook, *Vermont's First Settlers* (Oxford, Mass.: Holbrook Research Institute, 1976), ix-x; Peck, *History of Ira, Vermont*, 8; Smith and Rann, *History of Rutland County, Vermont*, 21-22. For a more detailed account of pitching, see Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District*, 30-31, and Paul Gillies, "The Proprietors: Dividing Commonage Into Severalty" (Tenth Annual Vermont Judicial History Seminar, 2004), 15-16. This article is a helpful discussion of the origin of town government in the experience of the proprietors and their successors.

⁸ Mary Greene Nye, ed., *SP, 7, New York Land Patents 1688-1786* [in Vermont] (Montpelier, Vt.: Rawson C. Myrick, Secretary of State, 1947), 136-140, 401-404. Smith and Rann, *History of Rutland County, Vermont*, 51, say that the Kelso patent was for 21,500 acres located only in Tinmouth. Hemenway's *Gazetteer* (3: 404) describes New York land grants in Rutland County and mentions Ira in connection with the Van Vleck grant, not Kelso. For Cockburn and the Green Mountain Boys, see Sherman, et al., *Freedom and Unity*, 89.

⁹ *Ira Town Records*, 1: 104-105. Because some town records are impossible to read, some figures, such as the number of deeds, though close, are approximate.

¹⁰ *Manuscript Vermont State Papers* (Vermont State Archives, Middlesex, Vt.), vol. 21, p. 62.

¹¹ Nye, ed., *SP, 5, Petitions for Grants of Land, 1778-1811* (Brattleboro, Vt.: The Vermont Printing Company, 1939), 382-385; Walter H. Crockett, ed., *SP, 3, vol. 3, Journals and Proceedings of the State of Vermont* (Bellows Falls, Vt.: The Wyndham Press, 1928), 303, 315-316; Franklin H. Dewart, ed., *SP, 2, Charters Granted by the State of Vermont* (Bellows Falls, Vt.: P. H. Gobie Press, 1922), 311-312; Cockburn Family Land Papers 1732-1864, Box 10, Folder 42, Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library, Albany. The Cockburn to Kelly sale is recorded in *Record of Deeds*, Book 20, Page 300, New York State Archives, Albany; E. P. Walton, ed., *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont*, 8 vols. (Montpelier, Vt.: J. and J. M. Poland, 1873-1880), 3: 442-443, with editors' notes as found. For more on Kelly, see Edward P. Alexander,

Revolutionary Conservative: James Duane of New York (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938). My search of the Ira records and various inquiries in New York failed to produce specific evidence of any sale between a New York proprietor and a prior owner of property conveyed in the Ira deeds I have examined.

¹²Nye, ed., *SP*, 5, *Petitions*, 285-286; Aaron H. Grout, Secretary of State [no editor], *SP*, 3, vol. 2, *Journals and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the State of Vermont* (Bellows Falls, Vt.: P. H. Gobie Press, 1925), 116.

¹³Sherman, et al., *Freedom and Unity*, 107.

¹⁴*Ira Town Records*, 1: 106, 52, 42. Sherman, et al. *Freedom and Unity*, 110. Walton, *Records of the Council of Safety and Governor and Council*, 1: 248-249.

¹⁵Nye, ed., *SP*, 6, *Sequestration, Confiscation and Sale of Estates* (Rawson C. Myrick, Secretary of State, 1941), 16, 38, 56, 267, 312, 323, 345, 395 for Lee; 16, 57, 345, 410 for Matterson.

¹⁶Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District*, 52 and elsewhere.

¹⁷*Ira Town Records*, 1: 100-101, 101, 57, 64, 71, 54, 126-131.

¹⁸Paul Gillies, "The Vendue: The Exercise of Geo-Catharsis," *Vermont Bar Journal* 32 (Spring 2005): 6. While often hard on the poor and contributing, in Gillies's words, to the "irresistible force of capitalism [that] ground down the weak and unproductive," the vendue also "benefited residents and eliminated the interests of nonresidents" and conveyed good title along with the sale, all of which contributed to "progress" (6, 8).

¹⁹*Ira Town Records*, 2: 197, 8; 5: 383; 2: 392-394; 5: 255.

²⁰Fish, *Fish Family*, 123, 129, 130-131. Bradley Fish, in Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, 3: 781.

²¹Fish, *Fish Family*, 123, 228.

²²*Ibid.*, 153-155, 172, 215-216, 221-223, 246, 212-213, 152-153, 206-207, 168-172.

²³Robert E. Shalhope, *Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys: The Emergence of Liberal Democracy in Vermont, 1760-1850* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), passim. Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District*, passim.

²⁴*Ira Town Records*, 1: 29. Walton, *Records of the Governor and Council*, Appendix E, "Conflicting Titles to Land in Vermont, and Measures of Relief," 3: 341-356. Crockett, *SP*, 3, vol. 3, *Journals*, 65-66. For the political struggle, see Shalhope, *Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys*, 182 ff., and 135 for Chipman's commission; and Sherman, et al., *Freedom and Unity*, 123-126. For a detailed treatment focusing on the action of so-called mobs in the context of struggles over the rule of law and the role of lawyers, see Gregory Sanford, "The Rutland Court Riots of 1786," May 25, 1999 (<https://www.sec.state.vt.us/media45951/tlkcourt3.pdf>).

²⁵Crockett, ed. *SP*, 3, vol. 3, *Journals*, 192. *Ira Town Records*, 2: 30-32, 34; 1: 114 (marriage). Walton, *Governor and Council*, 1: 121 and note.

²⁶Crockett, ed. *SP*, 3, vol. 3, *Journals*, 88, 93. Paul S. Gillies and D. Gregory Sanford, eds., *Records of the Council of Censors of the State of Vermont*, (Montpelier, Vt.: James H. Douglas, Secretary of State, 1991), 70, 79.

²⁷D. Gregory Sanford, ed. and comp., *SP*, 19, *Vermont Municipalities: An Index to Their Charters and Special Acts* (Montpelier, Vt.: James H. Douglas, Secretary of State, 1986), 3.

²⁸Albert Stillman Batchelor, ed., *State and Provincial Papers of New Hampshire*, 26, *The New Hampshire Grants* (Concord, N.H.: Edward N. Pearson, Public Printer, 1895), 79, 386, 355, 493, 99.

²⁹*Ira Town Records*, 1: 2-3. Gillies, "The Proprietors," 2.

³⁰I also find no evidence for Swift's assertion, taken from Child's *Gazetteer* (144-145), that Benning Wentworth may have chartered the town about 1761 and that the charter may have burned up in the Vermont State House fire of 1857. Swift, *Vermont Place-Names: Footprints of History* (1977; reprint, Camden, Maine: Vermont Historical Society and Picton Press, 1996), 397-398. Child's writer may have drawn on Bradley Fish's remark in Hemenway's *Gazetteer* (3: 781) that John Mason told him that Ira's charter "was at Montpelier and may be there now if not burned with the Capitol," although Bradley doesn't mention Benning Wentworth. Vol. 26 of the *State and Provincial Papers of New Hampshire*, cited above, which purportedly lists all the grants in Vermont, makes no mention of Ira.

³¹*Ira Town Records*, 1: 1-3. Stilwell, *Migration*, 78. Crockett, *SP*, 3, vol. 1, *Journals*, 75, 10.

³²Private petitions of Samuel Campbell and others, June 2, 1778, Nye, *SP*, 5, *Petitions*, 16-17. Also in Nye, *SP*, 5, see Richard Bentley and others, October 23, 1778, 42-43; Elemeul Roberts and others, October 12, 1780, 183-184 and note. Nye says that Clark's petition was for the same land as Roberts's. The index to the *Papers of the Surveyors-General of Vermont* and the appendix to *Charters* both erroneously state that Roberts's petition was granted. Franklin H. Dewart, ed. *SP*, 1, *Index to the Papers of the Surveyors-General* (Rutland, Vt.: The Tuttle Company, 1918), 86; Dewart, *SP*, 2, *Charters*, 307.

³³Crockett, ed. *SP*, 3, vol. 1, *Journals*, 13, 180-181; Walton, *Records of the Governor and Council of the State of Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt.: J. & J. M. Poland, 1874), 2: 59.

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³⁴ Grout, *SP*, 3, vol.2, *Journals*, 204; Crockett, ed., *SP*, 3, vol. 4, *Journals and Proceedings of the State of Vermont* (Bellows Falls, Vt.: The Wyndham Press, n. d.), 221; Crockett, ed., *SP*, 4, *Reports of Committees to the General Assembly of the State of Vermont* (Bellows Falls, Vt.: The Wyndham Press, 1932), 72-74, 203; Marlene B. Wallace, ed., *SP*, 3, vol.8, *Journals and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the State of Vermont 1797-1799* (Montpelier, Vt.: James A. Guest, Secretary of State, 1978), 260; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Vermont 1854* (Montpelier, Vt.: E. P. Walton, Jr., 1855), 661-662.

³⁵ Crockett, ed., *SP*, 3, vol.3, *Journals*, 22, 104-105.

³⁶ *Acts and Laws Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont 1804* (Bennington, Vt.: Haswell and Smead, 1805), 49-50.

³⁷ *Acts and Resolves passed by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont 1854* (Montpelier, Vt.: E. P. Walton, Jr., 1854), 57; Edward A. Hoyt, ed., *SP*, 8, *General Petitions 1778-1787* (Montpelier, Vt.: Howard E. Armstrong, Secretary of State, 1952), 253-255, 310-313; Crockett, ed., 3, vol.3, *Journals*, 291.

³⁸ Edward A. Hoyt, ed., *SP*, 9, *General Petitions 1788-1792* (Montpelier, Vt.: Howard E. Armstrong, Secretary of State, 1955), 228-231; Crockett, ed. *SP*, 3, vol. 4, *Journals*, 245.

³⁹ *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Association, 1904), 412; Crockett, ed., *SP*, 3, vol. 3, *Journals*, 170-171, 202, 295.

⁴⁰ Stilwell, *Migration*, 96. *Ira Town Records*, 2: 5, 11, 41, 16, 43-44, 42.

⁴¹ Fish, *Fish Family*, 126, 212, 152-154, 172, 229-232, 238, 246, 228-229; John M. Comstock, ed., *A List of the Principal Civil Offices of Vermont from 1777 to 1918*, a revision of Deming's *Vermont Officers* (St. Albans, Vt.: St. Albans Messenger Co., 1918).

⁴² Fish, *Fish Family*, 150.

⁴³ Allen Soule, ed., *SP*, 12, *Laws of Vermont, 1777-1780* (Montpelier, Vt.: Howard E. Armstrong, Secretary of State, 1964), 37-38, 80. The limit of thirty-nine was imposed to stay shy of the biblical limit of forty. See Bishop Xrysostom (Walter P. Snyder), Ask the Pastor, "Thirty-Nine Stripes," August 12, 2006, <http://xrysostom.blogspot.com/2006/08/thirty-ninestripes.html>. (Gregory Sanford called my attention to this website.) The biblical origin, however, didn't stop the General Assembly from raising the limit to 100 lashes for "riots, disorders, and contempt of authority" (Soule, *Laws*, 50). For the constitution of 1777, II, 35, see Gillies and Sanford, *Council of Censors*, 15, passim; for the end of whipping, see William G. Slade, Jr., ed., *Laws of Vermont of a Publick and Permanent Nature . . . to 1824* (Windsor, Vt.: Simeon Nye, 1825), 29: 217.

⁴⁴ Bassett, *The Gods of the Hills: Piety and Society in Nineteenth-Century Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Historical Society, 2000), 261. According to Randolph Roth, "By the mid-1830s, Vermonters were the most churchgoing people in the Protestant world. Eighty percent attended church regularly." Many of them, however, were not full members. "Can Faith Change the World? Religion and Society in Vermont's Age of Reform," *Vermont History* 69 (Symposium Supplement, Winter, 2001): 7. See also Shalhope, *Bennington and the Green Mountain Boys*, passim.

⁴⁵ Cooper and Peck, *History of the Baptist Church of Ira, Vermont*, 16-21; Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 92; Bassett, *The Gods of the Hills*, 72, 16, 13, 18 130; Peck, *History of Ira*, 38-39; Bradley Fish, Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, 3: 781-783.

⁴⁶ For historical context and much helpful information, see the following: Bassett, *The Gods of the Hills*; Roth, "Can Faith Change the World?"; Henry Crocker, *History of the Baptists in Vermont* (Bellows Falls, Vt.: The P. H. Gobie Press, 1913); Cooper and Peck, *History of the Baptist Church of Ira, Vermont*; Bradley Fish, Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, 3: 781-83; Sheila Charles, *The History and Archeology of the Ira Town Hall Site, Ira, Rutland County, Vermont* (Montpelier, Vt.: State of Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, 1990); Curtis B. Johnson, ed., *The Historic Architecture of Rutland County* (Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont State Register of Historic Places, Division of Historic Preservation, 1988).

⁴⁷ "Covenant," *Ira Church Records*, first version, 1-2; second, 10-11. Both cited as later typed by a parishioner.

⁴⁸ *Ira Church Records*, 55, 48, 50, 21; Shearman, 18-23.

⁴⁹ For a helpful summary of these theological disputes with their social and political ramifications, see Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 26 ff.; Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Edith Fox MacDonald, *Rebellion in the Mountains: The Story of Universalism and Unitarianism in Vermont* (Concord, N.H.: The New Hampshire-Vermont District of the Unitarian Universalist Association, 1976).

⁵⁰ Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 20.

⁵¹ Fish, *Fish Family*, 129, 148, 125.

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⁵² Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, 3: 783. For a brief summary of antimasonry in Vermont, including the Baptists' hostility to Masonry, see Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, chap. 4.

⁵³ Fish, *Fish Family*, 125, 168-172; Cooper and Peck, *History of the Baptist Church*, 37-38, 24-25, 29-30, 30 ff., 53 ff.

⁵⁴ Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District*, 178-182.

⁵⁵ Fish, *Fish Family*, 240-243.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 229-232.

⁵⁷ Alan Trachtenberg, *Lincoln's Smile and Other Enigmas* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 85, 80, 84, 113, chap. 4 passim. Michael Sherman directed me to this study.

⁵⁸ For the Vermont context of population changes, see Stilwell, *Migration*, and Hal S. Barron, *Those Who Stayed Behind: Rural Society in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), passim.

⁵⁹ Fish, *Fish Family*, 123-127, 148; Stilwell, *Migration*, 96.

⁶⁰ Fish, *Fish Family*, 127.

⁶¹ Peck, 15-19; Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, 3: 784; Smith and Rann, *History of Rutland County*, 634.