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Will Mackintosh

University of Mary Washington, wmackint@umw.edu

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“Ticketed Through”

The Commodification of Travel in the Nineteenth Century

WILL MACKINTOSH

In February of 1815, a young man named William Richardson embarked on an arduous two-month overland journey from Boston to New Orleans. Like other ambitious sons of New England farm families in the early nineteenth century, he left home to find his fortune elsewhere. He made his way on a haphazard series of barely caught stage-coaches, horses borrowed and bought, ferryboats, and his own two feet. Long-distance travel, especially in the backcountry, was an improvisational affair, which put Richardson “in perpetual anxiety for [his] future welfare and success, which precluded every thought of past difficulties.” He worried constantly about finding food, lodging, and a passable route, and about losing his horse, his way, and his sanity. “To sum up the whole,” Richardson wrote from the banks of Lake Pontchartrain, “my journey has been tedious beyond description.” Thirty years later, now “one of the leading bankers and most influential citizens of Louisville,” Richardson left home for New York to embark on a long-desired visit to Europe. He and his wife were whisked up the Ohio, across the mountains, and down through Baltimore and Philadelphia to New York by a

Will B. Mackintosh is a visiting assistant professor of history in the Department of History and American Studies at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia. He would like to thank the Library Company of Philadelphia, the American Philosophical Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the New-York Historical Society, and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History for their research support. The incisive commentary of Mary Kelley, Bruce Dorsey, Joe Rezek, Sara Babcox First, Kevin Schlottmann, the participants in the McNeil Center Seminar, and the anonymous readers of the *JER* was also critical to shaping this article, and is much appreciated.

series of relatively comfortable and fast steamboats, stagecoaches, and railroad cars. Gone were the anxieties and tedium of thirty years earlier, at least for this prosperous traveler.¹

Historians of the early republic have described the difference between Richardson's two experiences as a "transportation revolution." The term was coined in 1951 by George Rogers Taylor, who used it to describe the effect that technological and financial improvements had on the commercial and industrial development of the United States between 1815 and 1860. The "core of [this] revolutionary change," according to Taylor, was "the cheapening and facilitating of the movement of goods and persons." It was carried forward by turnpikes in the 1810s and 1820s and by canals in the 1820s and 1830s. Steamboats were well established on eastern rivers, the Great Lakes, and the myriad branches of the Mississippi by the 1820s and swarmed their waters by the 1840s. The first viable commercial railroads appeared in the early 1830s, but they were mostly short- and medium-range carriers until large corporations, wielding impressive amounts of capital, began to consolidate the shorter lines into expansive and long-distance networks in the 1850s. These successive waves of technological and financial innovation made transportation significantly faster, much more reliable, and considerably more economical in the 1840s than it had been in 1815.²

1. E. Polk Johnson, *A History of Kentucky and Kentuckians; The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities*, Vol. 3 (Chicago, 1912), 1153; William Bell Wait, ed., *Travel Diary of William Richardson from Boston to New Orleans by Land, 1815* (New York, 1938), 19; William Bell Wait, ed., *River, Road and Rail: William Richardson's Journey from Louisville to New York in 1844* (New York, 1942). For more on Richardson's background, see Alfred Sereno Hudson, *The History of Sudbury, Massachusetts, 1638–1889* (Boston, 1889), 449.

2. George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York, 1951), 132, 15–105. More recently, scholars have harnessed Taylor's paradigm to produce valuable new insights into economic and political history; see for example, John Majewski, *A House Dividing: Economic Development in Pennsylvania and Virginia Before the Civil War* (New York, 2000) and John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001). For an overview of the historiography of the transportation revolution, see Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817–1862* (New York, 1996), 223–25.

The transportation revolution paradigm, with its focus on technology and infrastructure development, does an admirable job of explaining the very different material conditions of travel that Richardson encountered in 1815 and in 1844. But it does not capture the equally different lived experiences of travel that Richardson recorded at the beginning and in the middle of the century. Travelers at the beginning of the nineteenth century generally thought of their travel as something that they produced themselves, out of the raw materials of geographical knowledge, means of transportation, and provisions for the road. In order to execute his 1815 itinerary, Richardson had to know where to go, how best to get there, and what the current conditions along his route were. He also had to choose and acquire the means of getting to his destination, including transportation, lodging, and provisions. He acquired these raw materials for travel haphazardly and improvisationally as he went, and used them to construct a journey for himself that was as idiosyncratic as it was exhausting.

By the middle of the century, however, many travelers thought of travel as a service to be purchased. As the transportation revolution progressed, stagecoach, steamboat, and railroad companies increasingly obscured the materials, labor, knowledge, and relationships necessary to move travelers from place to place behind tickets and other market abstractions that represented travel itself as a finished product, a discrete purchasable commodity. As a result, in 1844 Richardson no longer had to engage in a tedious scramble for route information, local geographical knowledge, and fresh supplies to support his journey. Instead, in a booming marketplace for travel between the Ohio valley and the east coast, he bought tickets from stagecoach, steamboat, and railroad companies, which provided transportation from place to place as a unified economic transaction. Richardson knew little and cared less about the labor, capital, and knowledge that went into providing that travel, because those problems were solved by the businesses that sold him his tickets. Like many of his contemporaries, he evolved from being a traveler who produced his own means of travel to being a passenger who consumed those means produced by someone else.³

3. My theoretical frame is informed by Karl Marx's use of the terms "commodity" and "commodification." A commodity, for Marx, is a good that is produced by human labor but is possessed by the owners of the means of production rather than by the laborers who produced it. Furthermore, its value is at least partially

As historians of the early republic well know, travel was not the only economic activity whose scope, scale, and meaning were being reshaped by large-scale processes of commodification in the early nineteenth century. Twenty years ago, Charles Sellers's magisterial "market revolution" paradigm described a wholesale transformation of the American economy, and of American attitudes toward the economy, in the years after 1815. His analysis of the development of national markets in Jacksonian America showed how the production and distribution of a wide range of agricultural and handicraft products were increasingly controlled by a capitalist business elite rather than by individual producers. For Sellers and other historians of the market revolution, this spreading divide between production and consumption had important social, political, religious, and cultural effects in the antebellum period. More recently, Daniel Walker Howe's "communication revolution" paradigm has suggested that the rapidly expanding speed and scope of information flows gave birth to a continentally scaled society that slowly evolved a democratic and market-oriented political economy to match. But historians have tended to treat transportation as the handmaiden of these other paradigm shifts; for both Sellers and Howe, as well as for most historians who have built on their theories, reliable and inexpensive transportation was a material precondition for the larger social, economic, and political effects that they trace. Even Taylor himself was interested in the development of transportation insofar as it enabled the creation of a national economy.⁴

established by its exchangeability, which is to say its availability for sale in the marketplace, rather than purely through its utility. Commodification happens when a good becomes a commodity, when it becomes owned by capitalists and when its value becomes established by the market. In the case of travel, commodification happened when individual travelers ceased producing their own mobility and instead purchased mobility in a marketplace for travel from business organizations like stagecoach lines, steamboat companies, and railroad corporations. See Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago, 1959), 1–63.

4. The paradigm-setting works on the market and communication revolutions, and their relationships to the transportation revolution, are Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York, 1991), 70–102; and Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York, 2007), 203–42. Other works that have tended to see the transportation revolution as the economic base to the market revolution's

Notwithstanding the primary importance of developments in transportation technology after 1815, the transportation revolution was not merely the iron horse that the market rode in on. Rather, the experience of travel itself was reshaped by precisely the same processes of commodification that were remaking the rest of American society. Travel was increasingly provided by a capital-intensive service industry that produced a commodity for sale into an expanding market that served a nation that was growing both geographically and demographically. Travelers reacted to this new market for mobility with the same combination of elation and skepticism with which they greeted the expansion of markets more generally. The transportation revolution may have been an important material and economic cause of the growth of markets, but the experience of traveling the transportation revolution was shaped by the same evolving market habits of mind, that is to say, by the same separation between the acts of production and consumption, as were myriad other facets of American life.

A handful of historians have dug more deeply into travelers' changing experiences during the first half of the nineteenth century. Carol Sheriff's detailed study of the social impacts of the Erie Canal has shown that residents of the canal corridor were ambivalent and conflicted about the "progress" represented by the transportation revolution, even if they ultimately celebrated the mobility and prosperity that it brought. But in Sheriff's study the Canal serves largely as a conduit that brought this market ambivalence into its hinterland, rather than being a commodified experience in its own right. The importance of the changing experience of travel itself is most nearly appreciated by Lewis Perry, who wrote that "the conditions of travel became a test of the quality of civilization, and experience on the roads and waterways provided important symbols of intellectual endeavor" for travel writers who were interested in cataloging the radical changes in American culture after 1820. However, time spent on the road did not carry such weighty significance only for the intellectuals of Perry's study. They may not have articulated their sense of mo-

superstructure include Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville, VA, 1996); Majewski, *A House Dividing*; and John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (New York, 2010).

dermity as clearly as Tocqueville, Olmsted, or Thoreau, but nevertheless a large number of traveling Americans found their experience of travel reshaped by its commodification.⁵

Like the progress of the market economy itself, the commodification of travel happened gradually, partially, and unevenly throughout the nineteenth century and across the geographical space of the expanding nation, and individuals' access to commodified travel varied significantly with their race, class, and gender, as well as with the varying goals of their travel. As Taylor and others have pointed out, transportation development happened more quickly in the North and the Old Northwest than it did in the South and the Old Southwest. Development was most intensive along certain routes, like the Erie Canal corridor and Pennsylvania Main Line between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, which meant that traveling for business or pleasure between established urban centers was more likely to be commodified than was traveling to rural areas for trade, itinerancy, or migration. Traveling on the latest conveniences was usually not the cheapest means of mobility, meaning that commodified travel was more readily available to members of the emerging middle class than to poor and working people. Finally, as John D. Cox, Patricia Cline Cohen, and others have shown, access to new transportation technologies was profoundly limited by travelers' race and gender. Nevertheless, travelers slowly became passengers—consumers of travel rather than producers of travel—and as they began to think about travel as a commodity they invested their experiences with new expectations of affordability, reliability, and convenience.⁶

These market habits of mind led passengers to anticipate that commodified travel, purchased in the marketplace, would meet an ever-rising bar for speed, ease, comfort, reliability, and affordability. These inter-

5. Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River*; Lewis Perry, *Boats Against the Current: American Culture between Revolution and Modernity, 1820–1860* (New York, 1993), 8.

6. John D. Cox, *Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity* (Athens, GA, 2005); Patricia Cline Cohen, "Safety and Danger: Women on American Public Transport, 1750–1860," in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History*, ed. Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Ithaca, NY, 1992), 109–22. See also Amy G. Richter, *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005)

locking expectations worked together to open a new set of possible meanings about travel: that it could be a source of pleasure, recreation, and even liberation for a broad swath of the traveling public. Indeed, it is no coincidence that scholars have identified the first half of the nineteenth century as period of the "birth of American tourism," as the title of one recent study has put it. Historians of tourism have long pointed out that the transportation revolution provided the necessary infrastructure for the development of tourism, but attention to the commodification of travel suggests that it contributed more than just roads and railways. Indeed, it was precisely the passenger's consumeristic attitude towards travel that suggested the touristic possibility of the consumption of leisure, which laid the cultural foundation for the birth and growth of the domestic tourist industry that historians have identified in the early nineteenth century. People traveled for a wide variety of personal and economic purposes in the early republic, but the commodification of travel made recreational travel a cultural possibility for the emerging middle class. Indeed, it was precisely these middling sorts who were best positioned to take advantage of the transportation revolution, and were most influenced by developing market habits of mind. Most travelers and observers of travel saw the commodification of travel as a positive development, because it offered new mobility and built new expectations about the liberating possibilities of travel. But, at the same time, the imagined passivity of being a consumer of travel opened a new avenue of criticism of commodified travel, which would grow into a stronger critique of tourism as commodification spread across the nineteenth century.⁷

7. The phrase "the birth of American tourism" is borrowed from the title of a recent monograph on the subject: Richard H. Gassan, *The Birth of American Tourism: New York, the Hudson Valley, and American Culture, 1790–1830* (Amherst, MA, 2008). The literature on the origins of domestic tourism in the early United States has flowered in the past two decades, and while scholars have harnessed tourism to a wide variety of interpretive purposes, they generally agree that the roots of domestic tourism lie in the first half of the nineteenth century. See John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1989); Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1995); Beth Lynne Lueck, *American Writers and the Picturesque Tour: The Search for National Identity, 1790–1860* (New York, 1997); Cindy Sondik Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York, 1999); Eric Purchase, *Out of Nowhere: Disaster*

The commodification of travel, passengers' market habits of mind, and heightened expectations for recreational meanings of travel are all admittedly abstract concepts. In order to show their concrete effects on the lived experiences of travelers in the early republic, I will consider three examples. The first is William Richardson and his two journeys. The stark contrast between his journeys, separated by thirty years, shows the profound effects that processes of commodification had on travelers' experiences on the road. The second and third examples complicate the dichotomous picture drawn by Richardson's journeys. The second example follows Thomas McKenney on a single journey over a long distance in order to illustrate varying degrees of commodification over space and how individual itineraries often crossed market boundaries, and how travelers adjusted their market expectations as a result. The third example recounts the experience of a specific place, Trenton Falls, to show that travel providers responded to travelers' new expectations in a gradual and halting fashion in order to establish particular locations as destinations for recreational travel. In each case, I will read the relevant travel accounts with a special attention to the language that each traveler used to describe his or her journey, in order to show how the meanings they assigned to their travel evolved alongside their changing experiences of transportation technology. Taken together, these three examples show how travel was commodified in the first half of the nineteenth century, and how these processes of commodification invested travel with new expectations and new meanings.

and Tourism in the White Mountains (Baltimore, 1999); Charlene Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790–1860* (Charlottesville, VA, 2001); Theodore Corbett, *The Making of American Resorts: Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Lake George* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2001); Jon Sterngass, *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport, & Coney Island* (Baltimore, 2001); Thomas A. Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs* (Washington, DC, 2002). For a further overview of the historiography of domestic tourism in early America, see Sterngass, *First Resorts*, 349–58. For more on the relationship between the commodification of travel and the evolution of transportation in the European context, see James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800–1918* (Oxford, UK, 1993). For more on transportation technology and aesthetic and political liberation in early republican thought, see Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964), 11–33, 190–226; and David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 32–76.



Figure 1: Map of William Richardson’s 1815 journey. From William Bell Wait, ed., *Travel Diary of William Richardson from Boston to New Orleans by Land, 1815* (New York, 1938), 16–17. Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.



On his trip from Boston to New Orleans in the late winter of 1815, Richardson faced an immediate problem: choosing the best route (see Figure 1). Apparently, he thought a sea route would be most expedient, and that his best opportunity for finding a ship bound for New Orleans lay in New York. However, after taking a stagecoach to New York, he “[w]ent to see Mr. Goodhues to ascertain if any vessel would depart soon for N. Orleans and receiving a negative answer took a seat in the Pilot stage for Philadelphia and crossed over the river to Pawlus Hook in a small boat.” He tried again in Baltimore, but found that “the ships are all blocked up with the ice,” so he “[t]ook a seat in the morning stage for Washington.” With his initial route plans in shambles, he sought guidance from his connections in Washington. “Call’d on Mr. Gove from whom I obtained information respecting route to N. Orleans,” Richardson recorded. Mr. Gove recommended an overland route through the Cumberland Gap and down the Natchez Trace to New Or-

leans, a route that was long and hard but evidently preferable to waiting for a ship, probably because of the winter weather and the unsettled condition of maritime traffic in the immediate aftermath of the War of 1812. Richardson settled on this route, though not without later regrets. In Abingdon, Virginia, right before his first encounter with what he called “wilderness,” he “[s]aw several gentlemen who had travelled the route I am going, and all gave those most dismal and discouraging description. I now regretted that I had not stopped in N. York and taken water, but here I am and must go on.”⁸

Richardson’s route to New Orleans was not determined in advance, and his decisions about which route to take were made while he was already on the road, through consultation with contacts in the cities and towns along his route. His ability to make social connections supplied him with the knowledge necessary to choose a route, and as a result, he made ad hoc progress, even along the relatively populated eastern seaboard. Once he turned west into the interior, he became even more reliant on information obtained from new contacts he made along the road. Richardson traveled with a Mr. Harris and a Mr. Paige, both of whom were traveling to or from homes in Tennessee and were thus able to guide Richardson for a portion of his journey. In Nashville, for example, he “[r]ose early and went to the Boat Landing to find a Keel Boat going down to N.O. but was disappointed.” This route, which would have entailed floating down the Cumberland, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to his destinations, would have been slower but almost certainly easier and safer than taking the Natchez Trace overland. His strategy for navigating the difficult and potentially confusing trails of the trans-Appalachian interior was to find travel companions with local knowledge. After his disappointment on the Nashville wharves, he “went to all the Public Houses to find company going my way; in this I was again disappointed. I now made preparations to set off alone and at 11, having got my necessary stores, started off, tho against the advice of all who conversed on the subject.” Luckily, after only two days’ ride, he found another travel companion, a “Mr. Brooks of Tennessee,” to help him navigate the difficult “wilderness” between Nashville and New Orleans.⁹

8. Wait, *Travel Diary*, 4, 5, 9.

9. *Ibid.*, 11. As a child in Massachusetts in the 1790s, Richardson had presumably achieved at least a rudimentary command of national geography from the wide range of texts of geographical literacy that would have been circulating in his

Cultivation of local knowledge also helped Richardson with smaller decisions along the road, as he regularly relied on local reports to determine his daily course. On March 25, he "[s]tarted early as we were told the Buzzard Roost Creek had fallen and could be forded." Two days later, he recorded that "[t]he waters were now so high the mail carriers said it was useless to start, so we concluded to stop till morning." In the absence of a marketplace for information, a journey was often just such a series of improvisations in response to unforeseen circumstances and changing conditions. Richardson gathered information and improvised on a daily basis, whether making large decisions about route and means of transport, or small decisions about whether to attempt to cross a swollen creek. He did not, and could not, purchase this information in the marketplace, for the simple reason that no marketplace for this kind of geographical knowledge yet existed.¹⁰

Richardson also negotiated his means of transport on the ground and in the moment. Having abandoned his original plan of traveling by ship, he decided to travel by stagecoach instead. He intended to travel directly from Washington to Staunton, Virginia, but he found that the stage had stopped running at Fredricksburg. He ended up in Richmond instead, where he "[m]ade enquiries respecting my route to Nashville; found the stage did not start until Thursday and that the distance before me is much greater than I expected." He made use of his time in Richmond by dining with a Mr. Williams, from whom he "procured letters to gentlemen at Abingdon, where I expect to leave the stage, and would want assistance in purchasing a horse." Richardson's plan to take the stage to Abingdon was once again optimistic; bad roads ended the line in Lexington, and from Lexington to Abingdon he proceeded through a combination of borrowed horses, bribed mail riders, and hired guides. At Abingdon, his letters introduced him to a Mr. Morris, "who assisted me in looking up a horse that would answer my purpose." This horse would carry him all the way to the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. Not only was Richardson in constant negotiation to purchase his means of transport, he also had to supply his own provisions. At Dobbins, Tennessee, for example, he "laid in some Biscuit and Pork, in addition to what I got at

community. See Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), 146–48.

10. Wait, *Travel Diary*, 12, 13.

Nashville, as I heard none to be had for 60 miles.” Richardson had to acquire both the information and the material means necessary for travel along the route, and in both cases, the uncertainty that he encountered forced him to make crucial decisions on the fly.¹¹

Although Richardson purchased the materials, supplies, and knowledge necessary for travel, his itinerary was not commodified because he negotiated purchases of individual supplies and discrete pieces of information with individual sellers along his route, rather than buying means and knowledge together in unified transactions. He bought the raw materials for travel rather than travel itself; thus he was, in a very real sense, the producer of his own travel. Equally significantly, he recorded his journey with assertive, active voice sentences that kept his sense of his own agency at the heart of his travel narrative.

By 1844, however, when Richardson traveled from Louisville to New York with his wife, the situation had changed dramatically (see Figure 2). Largely absent were the individual negotiations made along the route for directions, lodging, and transportation. Instead, Richardson recorded his trip as a series of transactions in which he bought *travel itself*, represented by slips of paper purchased in ticket offices. In each of these transactions, the transportation company, whether in the form of a steamboat packet service, a stagecoach line, or a railroad, supplied both the necessary geographical knowledge and means of travel in return for a fixed fee. Richardson’s narrative voice reflected his new status as a consumer rather than a producer; gone was the sense of assertive activity from 1815, replaced with a breezy passive voice tone that rarely presented Richardson in a position of control over his own travel.

Richardson and his wife departed Louisville on the mail boat *Pike* on the Ohio River. Their berths were not a stroke of luck like that which had eluded Richardson almost thirty years earlier; instead, the *Pike* was a packet boat that ran according to a fixed schedule. The Richardsons purchased tickets in advance expecting to be transported at a relatively fixed time to a fixed place. Although they changed modes of travel several times, each transfer was designed by the transportation companies specifically to eliminate any need for improvisation. Leaving the steamboat at Wheeling, they “seated [themselves] in the stage” for Cumber-

11. *Ibid.*, 6, 9.

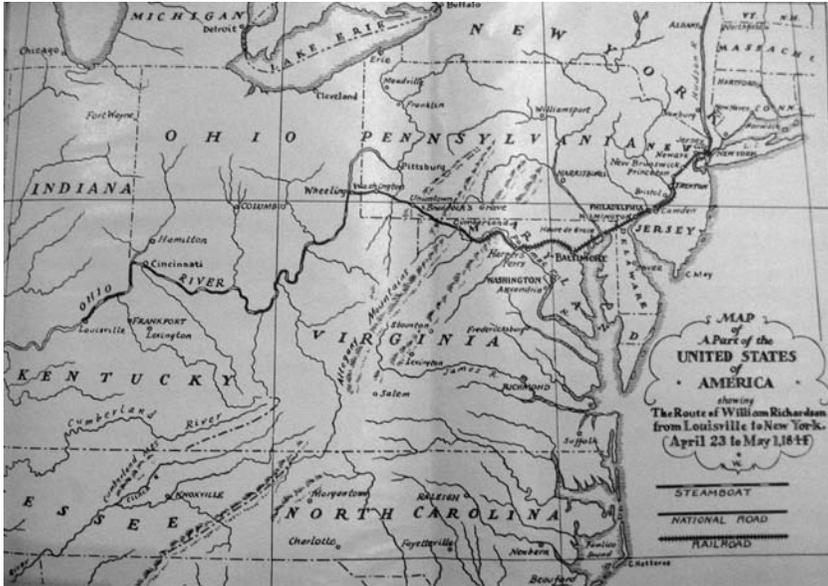


Figure 2: Map of William Richardson's 1844 journey. From William Bell Wait, ed., *River, Road and Rail: William Richardson's Journey from Louisville to New York in 1844* (New York, 1942), 10.

land, which was the western terminus of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Richardson was worried that the stagecoach would travel too slowly to make its connection with the train, but the two travel providers were running a tightly coordinated operation, and “[t]rue to their promise, the drivers pressed on and set us down in Cumberland just before the cars ‘whistle.’” No improvisation was necessary, because this clockwork coordination between forms of transit was included in their ticket price. Similar coordination was evident in the ferryboats that carried their train across the Susquehanna River, and also carried passengers to and from trains in New Jersey from both Philadelphia and New York. Richardson did not even mention the first boat ride; on his last morning in Baltimore, “nothing remained for us to do, after breakfast, but to repair to the cars for Philad. At 9 we started. Arrived at Phila. at half past four.” That Richardson barely mentioned the other transfers from train to boat and back was a testament to the seamlessness of the transition; in his earlier travels, as we have seen, river crossings were major undertakings that required extensive local negotiation. Thanks to the commodification of

travel, these problems of navigation were solved by the railroad companies that sold him his tickets.¹²

By 1844, Richardson's understanding of travel as a commodity was so thorough that he ended his account not with complaints about discomfort and anxiety but rather with a jaunty tally of the money spent on travel during each phase of the journey. "Expenses of our journey: from Louisville to Cin. One person \$3. From Cincinnati to Wheeling—\$5. Stage from Wheeling to Philad.—\$13. From Phila. to N. York—\$4." In his diary, Richardson broke his trip down into segments that did not match his physical experience on the road. He noted Philadelphia as a waypoint even though he traveled through without lingering, because he purchased a ticket for a new segment of his journey there. He did not similarly mark either Cumberland or Baltimore, despite the fact that he changed from stagecoach to rail car in the former place and spent the night in the latter, because he was carrying a multimodal "through ticket" from Wheeling to Philadelphia, purchased from the Baltimore and Ohio company. The practical tasks of navigation did not dictate how he remembered his trip; instead, he remembered it by how he had purchased tickets in the marketplace. An itinerary was no longer a series of trails to find, stagecoaches drivers to bribe, rivers to cross, supplies to secure, and shelter to be found. Instead, it was a series of market transactions in which Richardson purchased those services as part of a complete package that moved him from one place to the next. As a result, Richardson recorded his later journey as a pleasurable experience that he bought and paid for, rather than as an experience "tedious beyond description."¹³

Richardson's two trips were made at different chronological moments in the process of commodification, but individual itineraries also crossed the spatial boundaries of the patchwork marketplace for travel in a single historical moment. In 1826, Superintendent of Indian Affairs Thomas McKenney traveled from Washington, DC to meet with the Chippewa Indians at Fond du Lac in what is now Wisconsin. Although the trip there and back took less than five months, its distance meant that

12. Wait, *River, Road and Rail*, 8, 13, 15, 20.

13. *Ibid.*, 25. The Baltimore and Ohio company advertised "[t]hrough tickets from Philadelphia to Wheeling" for \$13 in 1849, which suggests that Richardson had purchased a similar ticket in 1844. See *American Railroad Journal* 5 (May 19, 1849): 319.

McKenney traveled under a variety of different conditions. The first and last legs of his journey, from Washington to Detroit and back via New York City, the Hudson River, the Erie Canal, and Lake Erie, were along some of the most intensively developed transportation corridors of the mid-1820s. However, while the route from Detroit to Fond du Lac via the Great Lakes had been traversed for centuries, it was still largely navigated by Native Americans, traders, missionaries, government agents, and self-styled explorers like Henry Schoolcraft and Lewis Cass. Comparing the two portions of McKenney's trip, with Detroit as the divider between them, shows how the commodification of travel restructured a traveler's expectations and experiences, and how such meanings could vary even within a single itinerary.

Upon his departure, McKenney wrote to a correspondent that "[i]n going over some of the grounds, I shall have to tread, of necessity, in paths which have been often trodden before," which would make his account uninteresting. "Indeed," he lamented, "it would be hardly possible to travel through a country, and especially over a public highway, which has been so often and so minutely described, as has so much of the way as lies before me, and between Washington and Buffaloe, by the way of the North river, &c. without recurring to places that every body knows by heart, and even in the order in which they have hitherto been written about." When traveling over this well-beaten ground, McKenney entrusted himself and his luggage to the series of stagecoaches, steamboats, and canal boats that "every body knows by heart." He did no inquiring or negotiating; instead, he moved smoothly from one conveyance to the next and from one "recurring place" to the next. As a result, he narrated his acts of travel in a wry, tongue-in-cheek passive voice, as if he were a parcel being carted. He sailed across the Chesapeake Bay to Frenchtown where, "as usual, at the very uncomfortable hour of midnight, where the baggage you know is shifted, with its owners, into stages for Newcastle, distant about fifteen miles, and where, at the hardly less uncomfortable hour of daybreak, we are again shifted from the stages into the steamboat on the Delaware." McKenney's tone underlined the passivity of his experience by humorously comparing passengers to mere baggage. He needed neither route knowledge of his own nor the equipment or supplies to conduct his journey. Instead, he purchased his trip in the marketplace of travel on the Baltimore wharves. Lest his audience mistake his tone of complaint for doubts about the benefits of such com-

modified travel, he closed his description of this leg of his journey by concluding, “[s]till this accommodation to the public is great.”¹⁴

Where travel was available for purchase in the market, McKenney expected it to work according to fair market rules. On his return trip, he purchased a stagecoach ride from Niagara to Lockport, on the Erie Canal, where he would transfer to a canal packet. Along the way, the driver of his coach became entangled in a dispute with the stagecoach operator, and he retaliated by abruptly quitting his post, abandoning McKenney at an inn ten miles short of his destination. McKenney “suggested to him the propriety of saving his employers from the consequences which must result from such a procedure, and not allow them to be injured in the public confidence by the obstinacy of one of the drivers,” but to no avail, and McKenney was forced to cobble together alternate arrangements. He was deeply offended by this breach of contract, because he was forced to improvise, to produce his own means of travel, when he should have been a simple consumer of the stagecoach company’s product. He paid grudgingly for the private wagon “after having paid my fare, of course, at Niagara, to the owners of the stages *for the entire route.*” Like many of his consumer contemporaries who were struggling to negotiate a new world of commodities, McKenney sought redress outside of the modern market economy. Rather than using the legal system to force compliance from the stagecoach owners, he deployed an older understanding of the market as a network of personal relationships and reputations in order to shame them into better behavior. He published the stagecoach owners’ names in his account, writing that he was “thus particular, that whoever may see this journal may avoid a line in which there is no security against being left by the way; and no redress against such a grievance, except by resort to the law, which, for my part, I wish to have as little to do with as possible.” He expected that travel purchased in the market would work according to market rules, and that as a consumer he would receive all the value he had paid for. And when his transaction failed, he chose to address that failure by questioning the entire market structure that undergirded it.¹⁵

14. Thomas Loraine McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes, of the Character and Customs of the Chippeway Indians, and of Incidents Connected with the Treaty of Fond du Lac* (Baltimore, 1827), 9–10, 14.

15. *Ibid.*, 435–37. As Charles Sellers, Harry L. Watson, James A. Henretta, and others have argued, economic actors like McKenney frequently turned to older systems of economic regulation based on personal acquaintance and reputation, especially when market systems of regulation broke down. See Harry L.

McKenney's high expectations of commodified travel, and the offense he took at its failure, appear in greater relief when compared to his trip between Detroit and Fond du Lac. On this leg of his trip, he and his fellow traveler Lewis Cass supplied themselves with the knowledge, equipment, and personnel necessary to travel to Fond du Lac. They arranged for canoes and barges, paddled by voyageurs and soldiers, to transport themselves, their party, and their baggage. The party had to rely on its own geographical knowledge, mainly supplied by Cass's extensive experience, to choose its routes and negotiate for transport. This absence of a market for travel made McKenney a much more active and improvisational traveler beyond Detroit, and his wry, passive tone was replaced by a sense of the command with which Cass and McKenney directed the members of the expedition to best meet the unpredictable challenges of traveling the upper lakes. This new commanding yet flexible attitude was apparent even before the party departed. McKenney and Cass had originally planned to send their baggage and their party ahead by schooner and to travel by canoe to meet them at Mackinac. On June 17, McKenney was prepared for departure, and he enthusiastically recorded that "[w]e shall proceed as soon as our supplies are off; unless we are detained by the non-arrival of our canoe, which, however, we expect hourly." By June 22, "our canoe not having arrived, we have chartered the schooner Ghent. The want of wind, or the having too much of it, from a wrong quarter, can alone delay us." McKenney and his traveling companions made decisions on the fly in this fashion throughout their trip, using their knowledge of local conditions to make new plans when old arrangements failed.¹⁶

This improvisation often took a democratic form, such as when choosing a camping spot in the face of an unexpected storm on an inlet of Lake Superior. "A council has been held," McKenney recorded, "and it is determined by the majority to be safest to cross over the river for the night." In cases such as these, the party did not purchase the knowledge necessary to execute their journey in the market, because such a market did not exist. Instead they pooled their common wisdom and experience and made a decision in light of the conditions and equipment available

Watson, "The Market and Its Discontents," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Winter 1992), 464–70; and James A. Henretta, "The 'Market' in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (Summer 1998), 289–304.

16. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes*, 116, 140.

to them while on the road. Such moments introduced significant uncertainty into their journey, but unlike during the incident at Lockport, McKenney made no complaint about changing plans or uncertain baggage because he had different expectations about the nature of travel outside the boundaries of the market. Whereas he was unable to countenance breach of contract and the resulting improvisation along the developing corridor of the Erie Canal, he accepted such uncertainty and addressed it creatively in the territory beyond Detroit.¹⁷

Nevertheless, McKenney looked forward to time when travel would be commodified on the upper Great Lakes. He had hoped to return to Detroit “in a schooner expected hourly from Green bay . . . but part of them concluded to fit up a canoe and come along in company. It was so arranged.” As was usual in this middle part of his trip, McKenney was unfazed by the need to make new arrangements, but at the same time he looked forward to the passing of this uncertain world. “Mackinac is really worth seeing,” he enthused to his correspondent at home. “I think it by no means improbable, especially should steamboats extend their route to it, that it will become a place of fashionable resort for the summer. There is no finer summer climate in the world.” McKenney had foreseen Mackinac’s golden future as a tourist destination under a regime of commodified travel. Its charms, about which he waxed poetic, would only finally be realized with the introduction of steamboat service as a reliable means of getting there, one that offered for sale the travel that he and Cass had supplied for themselves. Such commodification would make travel to Mackinac accessible to a wider public, and only then would it realize its destiny as one of the most important destinations for pleasure travel in the upper Midwest.¹⁸

Mackinac did eventually become the “place of fashionable resort” that McKenney predicted, and as he foresaw, regular commodified travel was required to develop it. This same process took place on a smaller scale, in a shorter period of time, at Trenton Falls. A series of dramatic cataracts located in a deep gorge in central New York State, Trenton Falls was triply favored to become a significant tourist destination. It was blessed with “a scenery altogether unique in its character,” and it was only fourteen miles from “the flourishing village of Utica, the great thoroughfare

17. *Ibid.*, 218.

18. *Ibid.*, 398, 397.

of this region," which became an important port on the Erie Canal upon its opening in 1825. Finally, Trenton Falls had an indefatigable promoter in the person of John Sherman. In 1823, Sherman built a small hotel at the falls that he called the "Rural Resort," where he lived until his death in 1828. He worked to promote Trenton Falls as a destination, by publicizing its wonders and instructing travelers on how to reach it in a slim pamphlet in the late 1820s. His son-in-law carried on his work through the 1850s and 1860s by expanding his hotel and hiring popular middle-class author Nathaniel Parker Willis to rewrite his pamphlet for a wider audience. As a result, Willis claimed that the "Rural Resort" had become "a first-class hotel at a 'Watering Place,'" and visitors agreed that the falls had gained "great celebrity, and [were] almost universally visited by travellers."¹⁹

In its first years, a visit to the "Rural Resort" required self-reliant travelers who were willing to improvise on the road. In June of 1825, the six women of the Bigelow party, who were traveling from Boston to Niagara in their own coach, turned aside from their planned route to visit Trenton, on "the advice of Mr Smith," a relative stranger with local knowledge about routes and destinations. This "deviation" left the party uncomfortable, because they were "entering a part of the country with which Oliver [the coachman] was unacquainted." One of the diarists recording the trip confided that "[t]his threw a new feeling of responsibility over us." As they proceeded, "[t]he country seemed to be growing more wild + solitary," and they feared that they could not "reach the falls of Trenton before night." Conditions worsened, and "an universal clamour arose from ladies + coachman against poor Smith." As the other diarist recording the trip recalled, "we had not proceeded far when disappointment and vexation at his misrepresentation almost tempted us to retrace our steps—yet a vague hope of something better carried us on till we were too much advanced to have gained anything by returning

19. John Sherman, *A Description of Trenton Falls, Oneida County, New York* (Utica, NY, 1827), 3; Nathaniel Parker Willis, ed., *Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive; Embracing the Original Essay of John Sherman, the First Proprietor and Resident* (New York, 1851), 12; Joseph Story and William Wetmore Story, *Life and Letters of Joseph Story, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, and Dane Professor of Law at Harvard University* (Boston, 1851), 460. Story's premature and exaggerated description was penned in a letter from Joseph Story to William Pettyplace, Esq., on July 10, 1825.

. . . the remoteness also of the different settlement, and the ignorance of our driver in regard to the road, caused an anxiety that we could not overcome.” Luckily, however, the road flattened out, and “just as the last ray of day-light quitted us, we turned into a wild obscure looking road, cut through woods and fields of black stumps—it seemed to have no end—a glimmering light sometimes cheated us with the hope that we had reached Shermans. At length when we had begun to feel very dismal, a gate was opened for us, and we drove up to a large unfinished house, at the door of which stood Mr Sherman.”²⁰

The Bigelows’ happily ended misadventure in the wilderness shows how distant the marketplace for travel was from Trenton Falls in 1825. Like Richardson in Tennessee or McKenney at Mackinac, they were forced to solicit relevant knowledge on the ground and make snap judgments about its reliability. Not only did they need Mr. Smith’s directions, they also had to decide whether or not he was trustworthy in giving them. Although they initially found him to be reliable, they soon questioned their judgment. Unfortunately, they had no choice because information about getting to Trenton was scarcely available from any other source. Guidebooks were just beginning to become available for purchase by travelers in Europe and the United States in 1825, but the only guidebook that mentioned the falls in 1825 openly avoided giving concrete instructions about how to reach them. “Particular directions should also be obtained before setting out,” it advised, “as the nearest road is very devious, and the country is but thinly populated.” They would also not have been able to reach Trenton Falls without supplying their own transportation. The guidebook advised that “[i]t will be necessary to get a horse or carriage at Utica, as no stage coach runs that way; and to set off in the morning, as the whole day is not too long for the excursion.” Only those who had their own transportation or were willing to negotiate with locals in order to hire it could visit the “Rural Resort.”²¹

20. Mary Scollay Bigelow Diary, 1825: Voyage to Niagara Falls, Manuscript Collection, Ms. N-1841, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

21. Theodore Dwight, *The Northern Traveller: Containing the Routes to Niagara, Quebec, and the Springs; With Descriptions of the Principal Scenes, and Useful Hints to Strangers* (New York, 1825), 31. For more on early tourist guidebooks for New York State, see Richard Gassan, “The First American Tourist Guidebooks: Authorship and the Print Culture of the 1820s,” *Book History* 8 (2005), 51–74. More scholarship exists on early guidebooks in Europe, especially on those of

Travel to Trenton Falls began to be commodified soon after the Bigelow party's anxious expedition. Advice on getting to Trenton Falls blossomed in later guidebooks; one such publication advised in 1828 that "[d]uring the warm season, stages also leave [Utica] several times a day (fare \$1 going and returning) for [Trenton Falls]." This spare information was made more useful by the guidebook's extensive reproduction of stagecoach and canal packet schedules for Utica, which was, as Sherman had pointed out, "the great thoroughfare of this region." By the late 1820s, the information necessary to travel to Trenton Falls was available for purchase in the marketplace, and travelers became less reliant on local sources. Served by the combination of new guidebooks and new stagecoach lines travelers no longer needed local improvisation.²²

Along with the increasing availability of published information for travelers, significant investments were made in the transportation infrastructure necessary to transport visitors to the falls. As we have seen, stagecoach service was available from Erie Canal towns by the late 1820s. Regular service over these routes was itself an enormous advance over the hardscrabble improvisation performed by the Bigelows, although travelers throughout the 1830s and 1840s thought the road itself left something to be desired. One traveler in the early 1830s bluntly claimed

John Murray in London and Karl Baedeker in Leipzig; see for example John Vaughan, *The English Guide Book, c. 1780–1870: An Illustrated History* (London, 1974); Buzard, *The Beaten Track*; Esther Allen, "Money and Little Red Books: Romanticism, Tourism, and the Rise of the Guidebook," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 7, no. 2–3 (1996), 213–26; and Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750–1915* (London, 1997).

22. Gideon Davison, *The Fashionable Tour; An Excursion to the Springs, Niagara, Quebec, and through the New-England States: Interspersed with Geographical and Historical Sketches* (Saratoga Springs, NY, 1828), 131. John Disturnell's 1836 guidebook added information about a second stagecoach line that ran from Little Falls to Trenton Falls, following the route that provoked so much anxiety among the members of the Bigelow party ten years earlier. See John Disturnell, *The Travellers' Guide through the State of New-York, Canada, &c.: Embracing a General Description of the City of New-York, the Hudson River Guide and the Fashionable Tour to the Springs and Niagara Falls: With Steam-boat, Rail-road and Stage Routes, Accompanied by Correct Maps* (New York, 1836), 47. The knowledge of the falls contained in Disturnell's guidebook was available in more markets than its imprint would suggest; essentially the same guidebook was published in Britain under the title of *The Stranger's Guide Through the United States and Canada: With Maps* (Edinburgh, 1838).

that “[t]he road leading thither, although short, is one of the worst in America.” The next round of improvements came in 1851, when a plank road was opened from Utica to Trenton Falls. Willis’s promotional account bragged that the new road made Trenton Falls only two smooth and comfortable hours from Utica, which was by then served by regular railroad service. However, the plank road to Trenton Falls was subject to the same rapid disintegration that limited the utility and longevity of other plank roads. One visitor in 1867 captured both the advantages and the disadvantages of the plank road: “Sometimes we rolled along with delicious smoothness. Sometimes, where the planks had become uneven, we enjoyed some delightful tossings and bumpings.” When they were in good repair, plank roads made travel to the falls faster and more comfortable, which encouraged Sherman’s successor to make “very large additions to the building” to make it a structure of impressive dimensions with “all the luxuries of a first-class hotel.”²³

The arrival of the Black River and Utica Railroad at Trenton Falls in 1856 completed its antebellum development. Like many railroads built in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Black River and Utica was on shaky financial footing, but it made the trip to the falls smoother, quicker, and easier than it had ever been. According to a second edition

23. C. D. Arfwedson, *The United States & Canada, in 1832, 1833, & 1834*, Vol. 2 (London, 1834), 292; Newman Hall, “Notes of Travel in America,” cited in Charlotte A. Pitcher, *The Golden Era of Trenton Falls: Picturesque and Descriptive* (Utica, NY, 1915), 94; Willis, *Trenton Falls*, 12. Other examples of travelers complaining about the road include Frances Milton Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London, 1832), 297; Eliza R. Steele, *A Summer Journey in the West* (New York, 1841), 32; James Silk Buckingham, *America, Historical, Statistic, and Descriptive* (New York, 1841), 259; and Robert Playfair, *Recollections of a Visit to the United States and British Provinces of North America, in the Years 1847, 1848, and 1849* (Edinburgh, 1856), 49–50. Plank roads, which offered a smoother ride on a roadbed of heavy planks, were introduced into the United States in 1844. According to Pitcher’s 1915 popular history of Trenton Falls, the plank road arrived there in 1851, which means it must have been being finished when Willis penned his description; see Pitcher, *Golden Era*, 23. According to Taylor, between 1844 and the Panic of 1857, a “mania” for plank roads gripped the United States, with its epicenter lying in central New York State. According to George Rogers Taylor, the boom in construction resulted in “roads [that] were typically short, radiating out from larger cities into rich farming country and . . . act[ing] as feeder lines for railroads and canals.” The Trenton Falls plank road fit this model perfectly; see Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, 29–31.

of Willis's promotional guidebook published in 1865, travel time from Utica to the falls had been reduced to an hour. An 1869 Canadian guidebook claimed that a traveler leaving Albany at seven o'clock could be at "the Trenton Falls Station, a little after noon," with two simple transfers at Utica and Trenton. This guidebook urged visitors not to miss "one of the most picturesque and lovely spots on the continent," precisely because it was so easy to access. "As these Falls lie only about seventeen miles off the line of railway," the guidebook opined, "with a branch railroad right up to them, they ought not to be passed without a visit." The railroad made access to Trenton Falls faster, cheaper, more comfortable, and simpler to negotiate, which cemented its position as a tourist destination.²⁴

According to Willis's exuberant prose, gone were the days when "[t]he naturalist, the artist, or those who sought salubrious air with domestic comfort and quiet, turned aside at Utica from the confused throng and din of the great thoroughfare; and taking a private conveyance, or the public stage-coach, neither of which were free from annoyances, found themselves, after two or three hours' ride, at Trenton Falls." Now, "[i]nstead of the old mode, the visitor to Trenton Falls takes at Utica the cars on the Utica and Black River Railroad, and in forty minutes is within a mile of the hotel, to which comfortable coaches are ready to carry him." Not only was the railroad quick and comfortable, compared to the old regime, it also required less active involvement of the travelers in the conduct of their own travel. Willis especially touted the "system of checking baggage" in which the traveler, "on arriving at the hotel, gives the check to the porter, with the number of his room, and he has no further trouble. On leaving the hotel the baggage is checked, the check given to its owner, who retains it till it is rechecked at Utica for other

24. *The All-Round Route Guide: The Hudson River, Trenton Falls, Niagara, Toronto, the Thousand Islands and the River St. Lawrence, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec, the Lower St. Lawrence and the Saguenay Rivers, the White Mountains, Orland, Boston, New York* (Montreal, 1869), 27; Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive* (New York, 1865), 12. Willis's original 1851 promotional essay, encompassing Sherman's pamphlet, was republished in expanded editions in 1865 and 1868. The Black River and Utica Railroad was incorporated in 1853, and its track was completed as far as the Black River in 1855, but it was in default and foreclosure by 1858; see Henry V. Poor, *History of the Railroads and Canals of the United States* (New York, 1860), 236.

destination[s].” In this scheme, travelers purchased an even more complete package of travel services than Richardson had in 1844. Not only did the travel they purchased include both the knowledge and the means to get to Trenton Falls, their ticket price also included baggage services that removed from them any responsibility for their own luggage. With the arrival of the railroad, the expanded hotel, and the “system of checking baggage,” travel to Trenton Falls was thoroughly commodified.²⁵

With the full integration of Trenton Falls into the network of commodified travel, the resort there came into its own as a tourist destination. In November of 1856, *The Ladies' Repository* published “A Letter from the Falls” from “our schoolmaster,” who had used the summer school holidays to whirl “off for the first time in his busy life to see the glorious sights and sounds which his geography has forever so temptingly been dinning in his ears.” He had “a rapid transition” to Trenton Falls—“yesterday the springs, to-day the falls”—on the railroad. “After a pleasant ride” along the Mohawk River, he wrote, “we arrived at the point from which Trenton Falls are reached and another rail road ride of sixteen miles, and a stagecoach jolting of one, brought us to the public house, situated amid the lovely scenery about the Falls.” Thanks to the convenience of the railroad, Trenton Falls was not a side trip for the schoolmaster; rather, it was a stop on the main route between Saratoga Springs and Niagara Falls. He purchased his complete itinerary in the marketplace, which made it a simple transfer rather than a detour that required complicated preparations. Similarly, Bayard Taylor, a well-known travel writer who visited the falls in 1860, boarded “the Black River train” at Utica and “[i]n an hour I was put down at the station, where omnibuses were in waiting to carry us to Moore’s Hotel, a mile distant.” Like the schoolmaster, Taylor’s travel to Trenton Falls was a seamless experience, worthy of narration in the passive voice, and made so by the purchase of guidebooks and well-orchestrated railroad service. Indeed, with omnibuses ready and waiting to meet the train, he was carried to the hotel’s very doorstep without requiring any agency of his own. Although it may have made for a worse adventure story, Taylor’s arrival at the hotel was much less anxious than the Bigelows’ search for “a glimmering light” on “a wild obscure looking road.”²⁶

25. Willis, *Trenton Falls: Picturesque and Descriptive* (1865), 85–86.

26. “A Letter from the Falls,” *The Ladies' Repository* 25 (Nov. 1856), 164–68; Bayard Taylor, *At Home and Abroad: A Sketch-Book of Life, Scenery and Men* (New

In the fall of 1867, another story in *The Ladies' Repository* offered an even more vivid example of commodified travel to Trenton Falls. This story, which followed its narrator on a hot July week to the Catskills, the Hudson valley, and Trenton Falls, laid bare the seamlessness of commodified travel. Waiting to depart on the train from Albany, the narrator remarked, "How many were travelling! in and out, a perpetual stream of humanity. Some armed cap-a-pie for travelling, with 'ticketed through' on their dress and their faces, others looking unconcerned, and unburdened by shawls or carpet bags. Happy beings! but then they could not be going to Trenton Falls." The trip began with an efficient sorting of the travelers from the nontravelers. The real travelers were readily identified by "shawls" and "carpet bags," and by a certain appearance of being "ticketed through." In other words, the travelers could be identified by markers indicating that they were about to enter into a machine-like travel infrastructure that would lead to being set down in a happier place, for pleasurable purposes.²⁷

During the transfer between trains at Utica, the narrator consulted her guidebook: "Utica, so the guide book tells me, is a flourishing city and the great thoroughfare of this region." While observing its hustle and bustle, she was startled by a local man who volunteered interesting information about a nearby bridge. She described this informant as "an animated guide book," who, "not only giving information, but also desirous of gaining it, inquired" whether she was going to Trenton and if she was meeting friends, and provided advice about hotel accommodations at the Falls. After leaving Utica, the narrator developed more questions about traveling to and staying at the falls, but "[o]ur guide book had left us." The narrator clearly expected her travel to Trenton Falls to be commodified, because she would procure the geographical information necessary to travel to Trenton Falls by purchasing a guidebook rather than by seeking it out as she went. Indeed, this expectation so strong that when she actually acquired information from a local informant, she described him as "an animated guide book." Rather than understanding the guidebook as a commodified version of asking directions along the road, she

York, 1862), 397. For more on Taylor, see Larzer Ziff, *Return Passages: Great American Travel Writing, 1780-1910* (New Haven, CT, 2000), 118-169.

27. N. T. Munroe, "Days of Exodus, No. III," *The Ladies' Repository* 37 (Dec. 1867), 411-17.

understood her local informant as anthropomorphic print. By 1867, this narrator's expectation that geographical knowledge would be purchased in print in the marketplace was so strong that she interpreted people as purchased books come to life.²⁸

Although the "animated guide book" had abandoned them, the narrator's party did not lose their way, because the transportation system was so tightly integrated that omnibuses awaited their arrival at the train station. In the midst of this seamless transition from one mode of transit to the next, the narrator paused to reflect on her fellow passengers' reaction to being carried along by this well-oiled transportation machine. "I have always noticed [a] peculiarity while travelling," she mused. "People seem to trust themselves to railroads and steamboats with perfect recklessness, but no sooner are they obliged to enter a somewhat rickety stage coach or omnibus, than they instantly begin to think of peril to life and limb." She might have found it peculiar that travelers made irrational decisions about which modes of transportation to "trust themselves" to, but she did not find it remarkable that either way traveling required giving up control to the larger technological and corporate structure of commodified travel. By 1867, at least for travel to commodified destinations like Trenton Falls, and at least for the relatively elite writers and readers of *The Ladies' Repository*, travel was a convenient if passive affair. The commodification of travel enabled ever-greater mobility with ever-greater ease, but taking advantage of it required giving up the illusion of control over your own movement.²⁹



The passivity at the heart of commodified travel that *The Ladies' Repository* failed to remark upon created a profound sense of ambivalence among a distinct minority of travelers in the early republic. The three preceding examples show that most travelers saw distinct advantages in

28. *Ibid.*, 413. The guidebook to which she referred in Utica was likely the second edition of Willis's *Trenton Falls, Picturesque and Descriptive*, because the description of Utica as "flourishing" and "the great thoroughfare of this region" was taken verbatim from Sherman's 1827 *Description of Trenton Falls*, which Willis reproduced in its entirety.

29. *Ibid.*, 413.

becoming passengers, because travel purchased in the marketplace met their heightened expectations for speed, ease, comfort, and affordability, and because they saw new recreational and liberational possibilities for travel as a result. William Richardson was able to enjoy his journey to New York in 1844, freed from the tedium of his earlier travels. Thomas McKenney looked forward to regular steamboat service to Mackinac, so that tourists could enjoy its ideal summer climate. Nathaniel Parker Willis celebrated the coming of the railroad to Trenton Falls, because more visitors could appreciate its scenic wonders. But all these glowing possibilities contained the seeds of a critical objection to commodification's effects. If passengers were fundamentally consumers rather than producers of travel, then they were rendered passive in the face of commodified travel's geographical and experiential limits. This passivity called into question the point of their travel; if passengers were going to be whisked quickly and easily over conventional routes, then what was the point of traveling at all? A small but growing number of travelers in the early republic registered this objection and sought to distance themselves from commodified travel, but by doing so they implicitly acknowledged the process of commodification that they decried.

Traveling through Alabama in the early 1840s, Louis Tasistro used the language of romanticism to express skepticism about commodified travel when he wondered "[h]ow much is lost of nature's grandeur and loveliness to him who catches but a passing view of either as he hurries along in a stagecoach—leaving rail-road cars, from which absolutely nothing is seen, out of the question." Commodified travel may have speeded Tasistro's journey, but it left him isolated from his surroundings. "The beauties of Nature are to be appreciated only by him who courts companionship with her," Tasistro declared, and hurrying along in a stagecoach or a railroad car did not count as courtship. The nostalgic sentiments of adventurers and authors like Tasistro would have made little sense to William Richardson, who celebrated efficiency over courtship. Thus it was that when Tasistro found himself in the wilds of the deep south twenty-five years after Richardson's difficult journey down the Natchez Trace, he gladly took advantage of an hour's delay of the stagecoach on a fine spring afternoon to walk ahead along the road, "too happy of an opportunity to escape, even for so short a time, from the confinement I had hitherto been obliged to undergo." Commodified travel made travelers into passengers, and insulated them from "the out-

door affairs of the broad world.” It made traveling easy, quick, and inexpensive, but it also made it isolated and in a sense unreal.³⁰

Chemist and mineralogist Frederick Hall saw similar limitations to commodified travel on his “ramble over the Western States” in May of 1837. He had the “intention to travel by public conveyances—the canals and steamboats, the stages and rail-road cars.” It was a wise intention; his route led him westward across Pennsylvania through Pittsburgh and into Ohio. This corridor was one of the most intensively developed in North America, because it had lately been improved by the Pennsylvania Main Line of Public Works. This technological marvel could have made his journey westward much smoother and easier than it would have been even a decade earlier. But it also made travel along its route into a commodity so easily purchased as to be not worth recording. On second thought, Hall decided that the “public conveyances” would limit his observations. As Hall himself put it, “what could I learn of the outdoor affairs of the broad world confined in this straight-jacket mode of journeying? Shut up in a long dark prison, and moved over the land with lightning speed, how could one gain a knowledge of the structure of the ball on which he was running a John Gilpin race?” Charging along in such a prison was a fool’s errand, Hall implied, by comparing it to a “John Gilpin race.” John Gilpin was the subject of a famous 1782 comic poem by William Cowper, in which Gilpin found himself mounted on a series of uncontrollable steeds and carried at high speed around the countryside outside of London, much to the amusement of his spectators. Comparing the passengers of commodified travel to the subject of Cowper’s gentle ridicule emphasized not only their lack of control but also the foolishness of their haste. Hall preferred to travel more slowly, under his own direction, so he could “learn of the out-door affairs of the broad world.” As a result, he rejected his initial plan and instead “purchased a strong horse, and a strong, but light, open wagon.” Pennsylvania’s advanced transportation technology had so fully commodified travel through the commonwealth, and so thoroughly changed the meaning of that travel for a scholar like Hall, that he rejected it altogether.³¹

30. Louis F. Tasistro, *Random Shots and Southern Breezes: Containing Critical Remarks on the Southern States and Southern Institutions, with Semi-serious Observations on Men and Manners* (New York, 1842), 101.

31. Frederick Hall, *Letters from the East and from the West* (Washington, DC, 1840), 39–40. See also William Cowper, *The Diverting History of John Gilpin*:

Thus, the market habits of mind that enabled the commodification of travel also contained the seeds of its most enduring critique. The market forces that made travel easily accessible could also decrease its value, because travel that had been commodified for the easy consumption of passengers and tourists could also be passive and superficial, and as a result it was perhaps not worth the benefits it offered in speed, cost, comfort, and simplicity. To be sure, this critique was a minority opinion in the nineteenth century; most travelers and observers of travel celebrated the possibilities of commodified travel and the touristic practices it enabled. But this line of criticism would become more powerful as commodified travel spread across the continent and as tourism became an increasingly popular form of travel. Indeed, the spirit of Tasistro's and Hall's objections is echoed by twentieth-century observers like Daniel Boorstin, who drew a sharp distinction between valiant travelers and sheep-like tourists in his seminal 1961 work on social theory, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*. "The traveler was active; he went strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience," Boorstin explained. "The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes 'sight-seeing.'" While observers like Boorstin point out the power of dichotomous ideas about travel in the present day, historians can see that both the promises and pitfalls of modern travel lie in the processes of commodification that remade the geographical and experiential face of travel in the early republic.³²

Shewing How He Went Further Than He Intended, and Came Safe Home Again (Boston, 1906).

32. Daniel Boorstin, "From Traveler to Tourist: The Lost Art of Travel," in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York, 1961), 114.