

Book Review

Nancy Beadie. *Education and the Creation of Capital in the Early American Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 368 pp. Hardback \$95.00.

Nancy Beadie has written a truly remarkable monograph of broad significance. Her book operates on several levels. In the first place, it is local history, telling the story of the founding and early operation of Genesee Wesleyan Seminary in Lima, a small town in western New York State, during the 1830s. Beadie uses this local history to illustrate a number of larger issues in the history of education, including why so many educational institutions were founded in the antebellum United States, how these institutions benefited their communities, how they encouraged democratic political participation, and how they related to American economic development. These historical issues in turn relate to the function of education in societies in general. Beadie's analyses and contributions are thoughtful, precisely formulated, and often highly original.

The author's work derives from her meticulous primary research on the seminary (a secondary school, not a professional school for ministers) and the community that created and fostered it. It is informed by her impressive familiarity with existing scholarship in many relevant disciplines: history, economics, sociology, and women's studies, in addition to the relevant scholarly literature in education. All of this, she integrates beautifully. When she finds a document, she knows what it can tell us about an outstanding scholarly controversy, but she is also familiar enough with the culture of western New York in the 1830s not to over interpret it.

Beadie can make short work of "common knowledge" about the early history of American education. For example, the expansion of antebellum education was not a result of industrialization or urbanization, she points out; most of it occurred in small agricultural communities like the one she holds up to examination. She is just as ready to reject the interpretations of other scholars when they do not square with her evidence. She expresses the desire to get beyond the concept of "class" in defining social groups, preferring to build her own models of social networking based on empirical evidence.

We might suppose that a factor in the encouragement of antebellum education was the desire to foster practical skills. How startling, then, to learn that when the newly created Genesee Wesleyan Seminary proposed to include manual training in the curriculum, it was

forced to back down and cancel the course. Local farmers and tradespeople feared that the students might compete with them. In any case, we must not project our own assumptions about practicality backwards in time. Beadie has drawn up a fascinating table showing which subjects were studied by women students and which were studied by men students. The physical sciences (then called natural philosophy) were mainly taken by women; classical languages (chiefly Latin) by men. Science was evidently regarded as a genteel accomplishment along with such feminine courses as music and drawing; Latin was a prerequisite to college needed by hard-nosed pre-professional young men.

Central to Professor Beadie's interpretation is the concept of "social capital." Social capital is the economically advantageous element of trust among people, enabling them to cooperate and consequently produce more efficiently. Both the founding of educational institutions and the educational process itself contribute to social capital. When we advise a young person to make friends in college because they will become contacts useful later in life, we are referring to a particular kind of social capital. Beadie argues that one reason why Lima competed with other towns for the site of Genesee Wesleyan was that the people entering their voluntary subscriptions believed that the academy would create social capital for their community. Today, public advocates of education are more likely to invoke "human capital"—the added value that an educated person provides the community as compared with an uneducated one, or perhaps "intellectual capital"—the economic value of ideas themselves. Beadie does not neglect to observe, however, that Genesee Wesleyan stimulated Lima's economy in tangible ways too. The need for faculty housing helped real estate values, the need to feed the students and heat the building helped local tradespeople. In the 1830s, cash was in short supply in Lima, for there were no banks nearby to issue currency (and the government did not then do so), so many academy backers fulfilled their subscriptions in kind, rendering services or supplying materials.

The founding of Genesee Wesleyan was (as the name would suggest) deeply bound up with the famous religious revival of western New York's so-called "Burned-Over District." Churches, like schools and colleges, contributed to social capital. Beadie is thoroughly knowledgeable about the religious history of her period. The local connection between denominational Christianity and education went all the way back to the founding of Lima in the 1790s. A brick schoolhouse, completed in 1803, had long been the focus of community life, used for town meetings and religious services as well as for summer and winter schooling. Beadie shows how its Methodist affiliation brought Lima's proposed academy support from members of

that denomination all over western New York, while at the same time the attractions of an academy prompted people in Lima to bond together in its support whether they were Methodists or not. The politics as well as the religion of the time came into play. When the state legislature granted the academy its first charter in 1833, the anti-evangelical Jacksonian Democratic majority stripped all reference to its denominational identity and gave the Methodist church no role in its governance. However, this imposition of secularism backfired. Angry citizens flooded the legislature with petitions, Methodists in western New York flocked to the new opposition Whig Party, and the legislature was forced to grant a new charter approving the academy's tie to Methodism.

Because I'm a historian rather than a social scientist I can appreciate what Professor Beadie contributes to antebellum U.S. history better than I can evaluate what she writes about social theory. But I can see how the founding of educational institutions like the one in Lima, New York, hoarded the social capital that in turn fostered the economic development and diversification of a previously agrarian society. In the course of writing a book on the social origins and functions of educational institutions, Nancy Beadie has made a signal contribution to understanding what historians call America's antebellum "market revolution."

Even while making her theoretical points, Beadie never loses track of the individual people in her narrative. She relates the story of Clarissa Pengra, a schoolteacher who had studied at Genesee Wesleyan, who left Lima and took the Erie Canal east from Rochester to Syracuse in search of a better job in the big commercial world. A tidy little illustration of the market revolution, one might suppose. But at the end of the book, Beadie lets us in on the sad outcome. Clarissa runs afoul of the economic hard times following the Panic of 1837 and ends up returning to little Lima, her hopes unfulfilled. In this way Beadie reminds us not to oversimplify human affairs, and not to imagine that either the social principles or the historical developments we study affect everyone in the same way.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY (UK) AND UCLA

DANIEL WALKER HOWE