SUPPLYING ROCHESTER IN THE AGE OF THE ERIE CANAL:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE INVENTORIES OF CERAMIC AND GLASS
MERCHANT BENJAMIN SEABURY

by

Sara McNamara

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of the Arts in American Material Culture

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MERCHANT BENJAMIN SEABURY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................. vii
LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................... viii
ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... xi

Chapter

1 “NEW ESTABLISHMENT. BENJAMIN SEABURY, IMPORTER OF
   CHINA, GLASS & EARTHEN WARE” ................................................................. 1
   1.1 Historiography ....................................................................................................... 6
   1.2 Benjamin Seabury and Rochester, New York ..................................................... 12
   1.3 Organization ......................................................................................................... 14
   1.4 Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 16

2 “AT THE LOWEST NEW YORK PRICES ADDING
   TRANSPORTATION FROM ALBANY” .......................................................... 18
   2.1 The Early United States ...................................................................................... 20
   2.2 Western Cities and the Transportation Revolution ........................................... 22
   2.3 The Erie Canal .................................................................................................... 25
   2.4 Rochester, New York .......................................................................................... 30

3 “WHOLESALE OR RETAIL” ............................................................................... 40
   3.1 Shift in Business Practices ................................................................................... 41
   3.2 The Significance of New York ............................................................................. 48
   3.3 The Business Practices of Benjamin Seabury ...................................................... 50

4 “MERCHANTS, TAVERN KEEPERS AND OTHERS” ........................................ 60
   4.1 Summary of Inventories ..................................................................................... 61
   4.2 Seabury’s Customers in Rochester ..................................................................... 68
   4.3 Seabury’s Customers Beyond Rochester ............................................................. 77

5 “A GENERAL ASSORTMENT OF PRINTED, EDGE, ENAMELLED,
   AND CREAM COLOURED WARE” ............................................................... 82
   5.1 Willowware Cup Plate ......................................................................................... 82
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1  Accounts and Notes in the Seabury Inventories........................................ 68
Table 4.2  Total Account and Note Values in the Seabury Inventories ...................... 69
Table 4.3  Summary of the Tumbler Stock in Seabury’s Rochester Inventory.............. 77
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1  “Plate with a view of the Erie Canal,” Plate, Enoch Wood and Sons, Stoke-on-Trent, Burslem, Staffordshire, England, 1820-1846, transfer printed on cream-colored earthenware, 1934.248 Mable Brady Garvan Collection Yale University Art Gallery....................................................... 2

Figure 1.2  “View of the Aqueduct Bridge at Rochester,” Rawden, Clark and Co., in Memoir, Prepared at the Request of a Committee of the Common Council of the City of New York, and Presented to the Mayor of the City, at the Celebration of the Completion of the New York Canals, New York: W.A. Davis, 1825, TC624 N53c. Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection......................................................... 4

Figure 2.1  Erie Canal Commemorative, Plate, 1820-1835, Cream colored earthenware, Transfer printed (cobalt underglaze), 1989.1507 Collection of Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA...... 29

Figure 2.2  Map of Rochester in the spring of 1814, John Kelsey, Rochester, NY, United States, 1854 in John Kelsey, The Lives and Reminiscences of the Pioneers of Western New York (Rochester, NY: J. Kelsey, 1854). From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library. ................................................................. 33

Figure 2.3  Plan of the first aqueduct carrying the Erie Canal over the Genesee River at Rochester New York, Everard Peck, Rochester, NY, 1823. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library. ................................................................. 33

Figure 2.4  Map of the city of Rochester respectfully inscribed, Valentine Gill [?], United States, 1833[?]. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library. ......................... 37

Figure 2.5  Rare View of the First Aqueduct Carrying the Erie Canal over the Genesee River, Rochester, N.Y., 1820-1830. Compliments of the City of Rochester, New York................................................................. 39

Figure 3.1  Rochester Telegraph, Rochester, NY: June 14, 1827. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library. ................................................................. 53
Figure 3.2  Map of Rochester, Elisha Johnson, Rochester, NY, United States, 1834. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library. ......................................................... 55

Figure 3.3  The red circle, added by the author, highlights the approximate location of Benjamin Seabury’s storefront. Detail of Map of Rochester, Elisha Johnson, Rochester, NY, United States, 1834. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library. ......................................................... 56

Figure 3.4  Value of Inventories. This chart compares the contributing components to the values of Benjamin Seabury’s two businesses based on the inventories that were compiled in 1834 after his death. Prepared by author................................................................. 59

Figure 4.1  Line item count of the Seabury Inventories. Prepared by author......... 64

Figure 4.2  Item count of the Seabury inventories. Prepared by author. .............. 64

Figure 4.3  Material distribution in the Seabury inventories. Prepared by author..... 65

Figure 4.4  Crates of ceramic goods in the Seabury inventories. Prepared by author................................................................. 67

Figure 4.5  “Eagle Tavern, Rochester—Corner View,” Henry O’Reilly, United States, 1838. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library................................. 77

Figure 5.1  Cup plate view of front. Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, Cup plate, 1820-1842, Staffordshire, England, Pearlware, Lead glaze, Museum purchase, 1970.0434................................................................. 83

Figure 5.2  Cup plate view of back. Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, Cup plate, 1820-1842, Staffordshire, England, Pearlware, Lead glaze, Museum purchase, 1970.0434................................................................. 84

Figure 5.3  Plate (Cup plate), Staffordshire, England, 1859-1880, painted enamel on Earthenware, Private collection. View of front. Image by author...... 91

Figure 5.4  Plate (Cup plate), Staffordshire, England, 1859-1880, painted enamel on Earthenware, Private collection. View of back. Image by author...... 92

Figure 5.5  Ceramic Decoration by City based on the Seabury Inventories. Prepared by author................................................................. 95
Figure 5.6  Ceramic Use of the Stock in the Seabury Inventories. Prepared by author. ................................................................. 95

Figure 5.7  Rochester Ceramic Use by Decorative Type. Prepared by author. ...... 100

Figure 5.8  New York City Ceramic Use by Decorative Type. Prepared by author. 100
ABSTRACT

Benjamin Seabury was a ceramics and glass merchant operating in Rochester, New York and New York City from 1827 until his death in 1833. During this time, the United States was expanding rapidly, both geographically and demographically, which prompted a shift towards increasing merchant specialization, especially in larger cities where the population could support more merchants. Seabury’s only extant business records—two inventories—provide insight into how one merchant operating in New York City and Rochester New York navigated and combined complex business practices to build two successful businesses in two different cities.

Rochester, whose growth was due in large part to the Erie Canal, serves as a case study for developing business practices in other western cities. Seabury’s stock in Rochester is similar to his stock in New York City, indicating that western cities had access to the newest styles of goods. Thus, western cities were not hinterlands without taste. However, a close comparison of Seabury’s stock in Rochester and New York City further complicates this notion because there are distinct differences in the goods supplied to each city, especially with respect to the distribution of ware types. These nuanced differences reveal that there were particular market demands in western and eastern cities, though their differences were a matter of degree. The analysis of Seabury’s businesses serves as a case study of historical business practices and the ways in which savvy businesspeople adjusted to various markets.
Chapter 1

“NEW ESTABLISHMENT. BENJAMIN SEABURY, IMPORTER OF CHINA, GLASS & EARTHEN WARE”

Framed by a bold floral border around the rim, a scene of the Rochester aqueduct, or Broad Street Bridge, which carries the Erie Canal over the Genesee River, is immortalized on a blue transfer-printed plate by Enoch Wood & Sons (see Figure 1.1). The majestic stone aqueduct, depicted with nine arches and nine visible piers, is situated near the crest of a waterfall. It spans diagonally across the plate, drawing the viewer’s eye from the bank on the left to the large buildings adjacent to the canal and along the river on the right of the plate. In the foreground of this printed scene, a standing man reaches left toward the aqueduct, perhaps celebrating this 800-foot long behemoth for the engineering marvel it was. Beside him rests a seated man who appears to be sketching the Genesee River. Perhaps this man was admiring and capturing the natural waterfalls and powerful water flow of Rochester’s essential waterway. A third figure, nearly obscured by a border leaf, is visible on the left side of the plate’s bowl. He is riding his horse across the aqueduct, which reflects the important role that the Erie Canal and the Rochester aqueduct played in transporting goods and people in the nineteenth century. In an object, these figures emphasize the two waterways for which Rochester is known, and the plate is one embodiment of the American market for Staffordshire ceramics.
James Elliot, who was a member of the Erie Canal survey team, drew this scene as one part of a series of views along the Erie Canal in 1823. These drawings on paper in ink, wash, and pencil were adapted and engraved by Rawden, Clark and Co. of Albany, New York and were included in the “Geological Profile Extending from the Atlantic to Lake Erie.” This profile was a fold-out illustration in the 1824 monograph, *A geological and agricultural survey of the district adjoining the Erie Canal*. 

Figure 1.1  “Plate with a view of the Erie Canal,” Plate, Enoch Wood and Sons, Stoke-on-Trent, Burslem, Staffordshire, England, 1820-1846, transfer printed on cream-colored earthenware, 1934.248 Mable Brady Garvan Collection Yale University Art Gallery.
canal in the state of New York. Taken under the direction of the Hon. Stephen Van
Rensselaer. Part I. Containing a description of the rock formations; together with a
geological profile, extending from the Atlantic to Lake Erie.¹ The “Geological Profile”
was reprinted in 1825 on lightweight paper and was included in Cadwallader
Colden’s, Memoir, Prepared at the Request of a Committee of the Common Council of
the City of New York, and Presented to the Mayor of the City, at the Celebration of the
Completion of the New York Canals (see Figure 1.2).² This second printing became
the source image for Enoch Wood & Sons who manufactured a series of transfer
printed ceramics using three prints from the “Geological Profile.”³

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¹ “Patriotic America: Blue Printed Pottery Celebrating a New Nation,” The
Transferware Collectors Club, Winterthur Museum, and Historic New England, 2011,

² Cadwallader Colden, et. al., Memoir, Prepared at the Request of a Committee of the
Common Council of the City of New York, and Presented to the Mayor of the City, at
the Celebration of the Completion of the New York Canals (New York: W.A. Davis,
1825). Winterthur Library Collection of Printed Books and Periodicals; “Patriotic
America,” The Transferware Collectors Club, Winterthur Museum, and Historic New

³ There was no copyright law in England until 1842, so engravers were able to copy
designs with impunity. Print images were typically sourced from drawings,
watercolors, and paintings, but the illustrations for engravers of ceramic prints would
have been adapted from books and other print sources, as they were more accessible.
Elizabeth Colland “Sources of Design” in True Blue: Transfer Printed Earthenware
(East Hagbourne, Oxfordshire, UK: Friends of Blue, 1998), 26. Jeffrey B. Snyder,
Historical Staffordshire: American Patriots and Views (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2000),
29.
Figure 1.2  “View of the Aqueduct Bridge at Rochester,” Rawden, Clark and Co., in *Memoir, Prepared at the Request of a Committee of the Common Council of the City of New York, and Presented to the Mayor of the City, at the Celebration of the Completion of the New York Canals*, New York: W.A. Davis, 1825, TC624 N53c. Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

Enoch Wood & Sons was one of the largest Staffordshire potteries in the nineteenth century and one of the first to cater to the American market. Following the

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4 In the early 1790s, Enoch Wood partnered with James Caldwell to build a ceramic factory at Fountain Place in Burslem. In 1818, the partnership dissolved, and Wood was able to bring his sons in as partners. By Enoch Wood’s death in 1840, this factory was one of the largest ceramic manufacturers in Staffordshire, but in 1845 the business closed due to a downturn in the ceramic market and his sons’ desire to remove capital from the business. For more information see *True Blue: Transfer Printed Earthenware* (East Hagbourne, Oxfordshire, UK: Friends of Blue, 1998); Jeffrey B. Snyder, *Historical Staffordshire: American Patriots and Views* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2000), 29. and “Patriotic America: Blue Printed Pottery Celebrating a New Nation,” *The*
War of 1812, Staffordshire began decorating ceramics with patriotic American scenes, visages, and scenic views that were intended to appeal to American buyers. In fact, Wood produced fifty-eight American views, including the Erie Canal series with the scene of the Rochester aqueduct. 5 Many other Staffordshire potteries also made these types of patriotic scenes for the American market from 1815 to about 1860, but they reached the height of their popularity from 1820 to 1845.

These patriotic ceramics, especially those from named series, are highly desired by ceramic collectors and can be found in the collections of many major museums because of their beauty and perceived significance. While these types of transfer printed ceramics were mass-produced and were intended to directly appeal to the American ceramic market in the nineteenth century, they are not as ubiquitous as museum collections lead one to think. In fact, as historian and ceramics scholar Neil Ewins states, “little of what was exported from Staffordshire may be defined as supplying an American national ‘taste,’” and specialized prints were on the fringe of the market. 6 Their survival in so many museums and private collections reflects their early status as collectible items more than their prevalence or popularity. Nevertheless, as archaeological research has indicated, other types of Staffordshire ceramics were universally present in nineteenth century American households as the United States increasingly became the major export market for British ceramics.


5 Snyder, Historical Staffordshire, 115.

Refined earthenware like edged wares, dipped/mocha ware, and generic transfer printed ceramics were more common and therefore more broadly significant. To study these types of ceramics, it is helpful to look beyond extent pieces in museum collections. Business records like account books, inventories, and advertisements provide more accurate information about the most common types of ceramics used domestically than what existing museum collections suggest. One example of these useful and detailed resources is the surviving business records of the ceramic and glass merchant Benjamin Seabury. These records include two inventories of his stock in New York City and Rochester from 1834, taken shortly after Seabury’s death. These inventories provide a case study of business practices, consumer networks, and ceramic demand in the rapidly expanding inland markets during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, especially with respect to the Erie Canal. Though less visually appealing than collectable objects, these sources provide insight into the consumption patterns of middle-class Americans and reveal information about a more commonly shared experience, rather than the history of affluent individuals, politicians, and known makers.

1.1 Historiography

The early nineteenth century was a period of great transformation in the United States. Following the War of 1812, the young agricultural subsistence-based nation started to morph into the market-based economy that came to characterize the nation. This shift was hastened by a variety of factors including: the growth of the country (both geographically and demographically), increased demand for manufactured goods from rural markets, a growing middle class, and the development of manufacturing in the United States. This market revolution was made possible by major infrastructure
improvements like roads, canals, and later, railroads. The Erie Canal was one of the most significant of these projects and served to transform Western and Central New York from a sparsely populated and largely inaccessible area to a great grain-growing region, generating settlement and intercontinental trade from the North Atlantic to the Midwest by the 1830s.7

During this same period, business practices were evolving, especially in terms of the interactions between manufacturers, importing merchants, regional merchants, and local shopkeepers. Before the mid-1700s, American urban centers were too small to support merchants specializing in ceramics, which were traditionally the purview of general merchants. From 1815 to 1830, there was a radical shift in the way the distribution of manufactured goods was organized since, according to scholar Norman Sydney Buck, “the flow of goods from England to America became so voluminous that the older distributive system could no longer cope with it.”8 Specialized merchants who focused on a specific type of good to import, increased efficiency and expertise in good types. In ceramic importing, this resulted in “merchants exercising a far greater influence on the wares produced by manufacturers” supplying the


American market, especially since the American market for ceramics was vitally important to Staffordshire potters.\(^9\) The auction system also developed during this period, which resulted in the outgrowth of a different type of merchant: the jobber, who often competed against importing merchants. Excess goods from Staffordshire manufacturers were sold at auction, where jobbers would purchase these large lots and divvy them up to packages for the country trade. With the auction system, American merchants had less influence on what ceramic goods were available, but they could often purchase the goods more cheaply and did not have to deal with the risk and expense of shipping.

Traditionally, the scholarship on ceramics has focused on the manufacturers through the analysis of potters’ records and surviving objects. This type of work has centered on the concept that Staffordshire manufacturers made design decisions independently and had prophetic insight into consumer wants.\(^10\) Pushed largely by George Miller, there is more scholarship that is focusing on the consumption of ceramics as opposed to manufacturing processes. Rather than focusing on ware type, Miller has established that it is more useful to consider decorative groupings, as this is more in line with historical conceptualizations of ceramic values based on contemporary records.\(^11\) In 1980, the Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library hosted a conference on the marketing of ceramics in North America, and those conference


\(^10\) Ibid., 111.

papers, written by George Miller, Arlene Palmer Schwind, Regina Lee Blaszczyk, and Susan Myers, were published in the *Winterthur Portfolio*. This conference and subsequent publication dealt with the issue of preservation bias and focused on the more common ceramics used by the general population as revealed by business records. This methodology has greatly shaped this thesis, but most of their research centered on various geographic and temporal spans that do not coincide with this research. As a result, this thesis expands the scope of work done by Miller and others by applying it to a borderland region during the age of the Transportation and Market Revolutions.

Further ceramics scholarship examining American markets can be found in Neil Ewins’s work “*Supplying the Present Wants of our Yankee Cousins...*”: *Staffordshire Ceramics and the American Market 1775-1880*. Ewins examines the complex interactions between British manufactures, American merchants, and market demand, giving more credence to the influence of American demand on British manufactures through the close examination of business records. This type of research gives insight into the various ceramic goods that were shipped to the United States, but as Ewins acknowledges, “establishing what types of Staffordshire goods were sent to inland markets, compared to the east coast, is more problematic” as scholars have largely been forced to rely on vague advertisements in newspapers. Further scholarship by S. Robert Teitelman, Patricia Halfpenny, and Ronald W. Fuchs II combine the traditional manufacturing and style analyses while delving into business

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records concerning the American trade. These essays and catalog entries were published in *Success to America: Creamware for the American Market*, featuring the objects in the S. Robert Teitelman Collection at the Winterthur Museum.\(^{14}\) However this work focuses on the earliest transfer printed goods from the turn of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.\(^{15}\) Thus, Benjamin Seabury’s Rochester inventory provides a rare opportunity to closely examine the goods available to an inland market during the 1820s and 1830s.

This thesis serves as a case study that examines the marketing characteristics of the United States and Staffordshire business relationships with an emphasis on supplying consumer demand. While consumption studies have traditionally been within the purview of economics, their popularity is growing in other disciplinary fields. The study of consumption is now recognized to be an interdisciplinary topic, and it should “be considered as a complex, multivalent phenomenon, a manifestation of economic, social, cultural, historical, and psychological processes and effects.”\(^{16}\) Kariann Akemi Yokota in *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* provides an example of the intersection of history and consumption studies from a non-economic perspective. Yokota reflected on the United

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\(^{15}\) These ceramics were made for the American market when the technology was new and therefore more expensive, so the ceramic objects in this collection were mainly for a high socio-economic market. As the technology aged, the cost of transfer printed ceramics dropped and became more accessible to a wider consumer base.

States’ dependence on British manufactured goods and how it influenced the formation of the new nation’s identity, writing:

   By imbuing objects with national meaning, citizens of the United States aspired to standards of gentility that drew on a European aristocratic past while also embracing the democratic, liberal, and capitalistic values that would come to define the nation.17

This argument is specifically applied to the Federal Period of American history when the young nation was attempting to define an identity separate from its colonial ties to Great Britain. However, Yokota gives primacy to the power that British manufacturers gained through the increase in American purchasing, writing, “as America’s population increased, so would the power of Great Britain.”18 Rather than emphasizing manufacturers’ power over taste, this project emphasizes the agency of American merchants and consumers in defining and shaping market demands. Furthermore, this research is situated in the era following the Federal Period, commonly—though problematically—referred to as the Jacksonian Era. This portion of American history is characterized by the development of a new commercial landscape and cities were the “most vibrant, if volatile, aspects of democratic life.”19

This research fills a gap in the historiography of ceramic scholarship that focuses on consumption since most scholarship of this type is situated in the Federal Era. Specifically, it will serve as a case study of how a single manufacturer, Benjamin

18 Ibid., 63.
Seabury, applied various business practices in two drastically different cities, Rochester and New York City. In doing so, Seabury negotiated complex systems of exchange and consumption patterns to build successful, though short-lived businesses.

1.2 Benjamin Seabury and Rochester, New York

Little is known about Benjamin Seabury beyond the fact that he was a ceramics and glass merchant who operated in both New York City and Rochester in the 1820s and 1830s. The origins of Seabury’s businesses are unknown, but his business in Rochester opened in 1827, and his business in New York City likely predates this, though we are not sure when.20 While there are several individuals with the name Seabury who were involved with shipping as importing merchants and were operating as general merchants on Long Island, Seabury’s specific relatives and family history are unclear.21 Thus, the initial financial backing for his businesses is unknown. Nevertheless, there is evidence that his permanent residence was in New York City where he lived with his wife, Mary Elizabeth Seabury and their three young children, Charles, Benjamin, and Elizabeth.22 Unfortunately, Seabury died on October 25, 1833 “after a severe illness of a few days…in the 34th year of his age.”23


21 The surname Seabury was not very common, and a search through period newspapers like The New-York Spectator, The New-York Evening Post, and The National Advocate provide tantalizing possibilities concerning Benjamin Seabury’s kin network. Unfortunately, I was not able to verify any of these connections.

22 Commissioner of Records Surrogates’ Court, County of New York. “Petition for Letters of Administration, Benjamin Seabury, Deceased” filed July 23, 1842 (New
Following his death, inventories of Seabury’s stock in New York City and Rochester were compiled in 1834 at the bequest of his business partners, Joseph Weeks and Joseph Cheesman, both of New York City. In these inventories, Weeks and Cheesman are listed as “Special Partners” and Seabury was their “General Partner.” This terminology, combined with the fact that the inventories were taken at their bequest, indicates that they had a significant financial stake in Seabury’s businesses as investors. Weeks and Cheesman were importing merchants who also operated a ceramic retail and wholesale businesses in New York City and Buffalo. Weeks and Chessman may have provided the initial financial backing for Seabury to run his commercial enterprise, and they likely offered a great deal of credit to Seabury, who probably sourced the bulk of his English-made stock through their importing business.


24 As a general partner, Seabury had less impact on Weekes and Cheeseman’s business and was the beneficiary of their financial support. Weekes and Cheeseman’s role as Special Partners is likely analogous to today’s concept of both founding partners and investors.

In expanding his operations to Rochester, Seabury made a savvy business decision. Rochester, the seat of Monroe County on the southern shore of Lake Ontario in Western New York, was founded shortly after the American Revolution. With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, which connected the Great Lakes region with New York City, Rochester developed as an industrial city and transportation hub. This waterway connection was important because, by the turn of the nineteenth century, New York City was the largest city in the United States with the most manufacturers’ outlets, making it the most important port city for ceramic importation. New York City was vital not only for its high population, but also because it linked Atlantic trade to inland markets. The Erie Canal furthered the access of New York City to these inland markets. As a result of its location on the intersection of the Genesee River and the Erie Canal, Rochester developed as a borderland and thruway to westward expansion with a direct waterway connection between the Hudson River and the Great Lakes. Thus, studying Rochester and the Erie Canal offers insight into the developing nation during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Rochester was an attractive business prospect with its untapped and growing market. Perhaps Seabury was urged to open a shop there by his partners, who were hesitant to open another branch outside of New York City in a largely unproven market. Regardless, Seabury’s decision to come to Rochester was based on the future promise of development in the region and its easy access to points further west.

1.3 Organization

This project is guided by several key research questions: How is Rochester central to the story of the Erie Canal and the development of the United States? What role did the Erie Canal have in providing diverse ceramic and glass objects to the
American population beyond Rochester? What objects were available to the average person in the region? How do the items available to the population reflect their consumption patterns and their lifeways?

This thesis is organized into two sections. The first section is a historical background of the United States in the 1820s and 1830s with special attention to the changing business practices as well as the economic and geographic growth of the nation and upstate New York region in particular. Chapter two situates Rochester and its role as the first inland boom town within this historic context. As a result of the Erie Canal and growing western markets, Rochester was an attractive and relatively safe bet for a merchant looking to expand his business and increase his profit. Chapter three examines the various business practices that merchants employed in the United States before delving specifically into Seabury’s business in Rochester. Seabury filled a void in the consumer demand and operated at a large scale. Thus, he represents the shift from general merchant to specialized merchant, which characterizes the growth of cities and changing business practices of the nineteenth century.

The second section of this thesis is comprised of a detailed examination and comparison of the New York City and Rochester inventories. Chapter four is a macro-analysis of the two inventories, allowing for a comparison of Seabury’s differing business strategies in New York City and Rochester. I then examine the trade network Seabury was involved in using the accounts and names recorded in the inventory. This research provides insight into the movement of ceramic and glass goods in the expanding nation. This section adds to our understanding of Rochester as part of a larger network of trade and migration interconnected with the rest of the world and provides an example of the commercial strategies of a major regional merchant during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Finally, chapter five provides a
quantitative analysis of the ceramic goods that Seabury stocked in Rochester compared to what was stocked in New York City. This not only reveals the types of goods available, but the proportion of objects may indicate market needs and consumer preferences. This analysis complicates the common narrative that borderland cities were hinterlands without access or desire for fancy goods. Rather, these western cities did have access to higher quality goods, but there was less demand for them. Thus merchants, like Seabury, who were operating in western cities stocked goods for a broader range of consumer wants and needs than the more specialized merchants that operated in major seaboard cities like New York City.

1.4 Conclusion

The detailed inventories of Benjamin Seabury provide a window into the business practices and consumer demands of an emerging region. The comparison of his New York City and Rochester inventories reveals characteristics of the developing market economy during a period of cultural and economic transition in the United States. Seabury was acting as the major ceramic wholesaler and retailer in Rochester, utilizing the Erie Canal to transport imported goods from New York City through central and western New York into an expanding trade network in Ohio, Michigan, and beyond. By scrutinizing the objects within the inventories, one can glean insight into the consumption patterns of borderlands in comparison to the goods available in New York City.

While Seabury was operating in Rochester, his mercantile practices were unique in that city. He was the only ceramic merchant operating on a large scale in Rochester. He was able to develop a thriving business due to his early entry into this expanding market where he virtually maintained a monopoly over the ceramic retail.
Though his untimely death provides a specific and tight time span to focus on and inspect contemporary business practices, it limits insight concerning how merchants adjusted their business practices over time in developing borderland cities. The comparison of the two inventories displays the differences between the businesses in Rochester and New York City and indicates that Seabury was a savvy businessman. He adapted multiple business strategies and responded to the different needs of each region. However, in the grand scheme of ceramic merchants, Seabury was not unique or particularly innovative. Seabury was not an exceptional businessman. Instead, he should be considered an example of a common type of wholesale and retail merchant who speculated in growing western markets. Therefore, the true significance in studying his practices is that it provides an in-depth case study of a business model common in borderland cities in the nineteenth century, further illuminating the complexities of doing business in an era of tremendous expansion.
Chapter 2

“AT THE LOWEST NEW YORK PRICES ADDING TRANSPORTATION FROM ALBANY”

July 4th. At 4 PM embarked aboard the canal boat for Utica. This boat in nor [sic] more than from 12 to 14 feet in width and from 60 to 70 in length. There were two horses attached to it by a rope of 50 yards in length who drew it along at a rate of rather more than 3 miles an hour. We arrived at Utica [a] distance of 22 miles at 11 at night.26

The country through which we have passed today [Western New York] looks more like a newly settled country than any we have seen yet. The road for several miles passed at intervals over a causeway formed of rough logs on each side and a narrow strip of land partially cleared where we might see log cabins of the wildest construction and simplest forms, generally containing but one room....27

[July 15 arrive in] Rochester, 9 miles from Lake Ontario, said to contain 3000 inhabitants—it has sprung up entirely within the last 8 years and is rapidly improving.... It is a very busy place. There are several manufacturies [sic] and a great many mills erected just below the falls and supplied with water from above. The canal is to cross the Genesee River just above the town. They are now at work at the piers on which the aqueduct is to be constructed.28

- Diary of a young girl, 1822


27 Ibid.

These excerpts from a diary held by the University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library, Rare Books and Special Collections detail a young girl’s journey across New York State along the route of the Erie Canal in the year 1822. At this time, only some sections of the Erie Canal were open for transportation, namely the central stretch from Utica to Syracuse, but major construction on other portions was already underway. In the first excerpt, the young woman described the conditions of the canal boat that she rode on from somewhere near Herkimer to Utica, which she described as “the handsomest town we have yet seen.”\textsuperscript{29} She continued her journey on a different canal boat, the\textit{ Oneida Chief}, from Utica to Syracuse. As she travelled further west, she went beyond the central section of the canal that was open for transportation.

In the second excerpt, she describes the switch in transportation methods—traveling via rough roads—and the distinct change in scenery from developed towns to a “newly settled country” that was more wild than the eastern portion of the state.\textsuperscript{30} In the third excerpt, she described the young town of Rochester, recognizing that its rapid growth and economic promise was directly linked to the Genesee River and the Erie Canal. Within a few short years of this young woman’s journey, the canal was completed, and Rochester became a major trade stop. Her diary underscores the incredible speed with which Rochester grew and western markets developed in the early nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{29} Diary of a Young Girl,\textit{ The Erie Canal in 1822 Part I.}

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
2.1 The Early United States

Following the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783, the newly formed United States experienced various political, economic, and social changes in the process of becoming an independent nation. While perhaps cliché, it is accurate to characterize the change of the nation in a word: expansion. The United States swelled geographically, demographically, and economically in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Prior to independence, there was a long tradition of looking westward for settlement opportunities in territory occupied by Native Americans. American independence nullified the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which had impeded Euro-American settlement beyond the Appalachian Mountains in order to reduce animosity between settlers and Native Americans. When the newly formed United States ended British colonial control of the region, white Americans were no longer prohibited from claiming new territories or settling west of the Appalachian Mountains.³¹ Further land was soon opened to American settlement with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

Geographic expansion continued throughout the nineteenth century with acquisitions of new land, investments in transportation, and a growing population that desired fertile farmlands. By 1820, there were 23 states; after 1820, new states joined

the union at an average of one state every three years until 1890.\textsuperscript{32} Natural increase, territorial expansion, and immigration resulted in significant demographic expansion with a growth rate ranging from 32.7 to 35.9 percent for each decade from 1810 to 1860.\textsuperscript{33}

Furthermore, in the early nineteenth century, agricultural practices shifted from subsistence farming to surplus cash crop farming, with goods produced for an international market. War between France and Great Britain during the first decade of the nineteenth century provided the United States with the opportunity to make great profits. The United States remained neutral and supplied food to both nations until an official policy of neutrality could no longer be sustained and trade embargos were implemented to stop British aggression at sea. These embargoes failed to curb British hostility, so on June 18, 1812 the United States Congress declared war against Great Britain. During the war, economic relationships were largely dormant between the two nations, but they quickly resumed following the Treaty of Ghent in 1814. Indeed, from 1826 to 1830, just twelve years after the end of the war, 38.77 percent of U.S. imports by value were from the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{34}

From 1815 to 1830, the United States experienced a market revolution that was characterized by a growing middle class.\textsuperscript{35} During this time, seaport merchants,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Ewins, “Supplying the Present Wants,” 56.
\textsuperscript{33} Taylor, \textit{The Transportation Revolution}, 4.
\textsuperscript{34} Buck, \textit{The Development of the Organization of Anglo-American Trade}, 2.
\textsuperscript{35} Paul Johnson, \textit{The Early American Republic, 1789-1829} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 80.
\end{flushright}
importers, and exporters benefitted greatly from the reopening of legal trade between the United States and the United Kingdom. These larger merchants were also involved in banks and real estate, and they largely constituted the richest caste of American society. More significantly, however, was the growing population of wholesale and retail merchants, lawyers, accountants, clerks, and bookkeepers. These business people largely handled the paperwork and internal activity of the developing market economy. As historian Paul Johnson wrote, wholesale merchants who bought hardware, crockery, and sundry from importers or American manufacturers were “at the head of this new middle class,” and they played a central role in the distribution of these goods to most consumers by selling smaller lots to storekeepers. While the lives and individual contributions of those employed in these positions may not be celebrated and recorded with the same acclaim as those with greater financial resources and political clout, they exemplify a more representative lifestyle during this era. Studying the business practices and relationships within this cross-section of society provides greater insight to a larger breadth of American society. As a wholesale retailer and shopkeeper, Benjamin Seabury is just one of many examples of this developing middle class.

2.2 Western Cities and the Transportation Revolution

Though the population of the United States was predominantly rural in the nineteenth century, the urban population was rising significantly. In 1815, about 7.3 percent of the country lived in cities, but by 1860 the urban population had increased

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36 Ibid., 79-80.
37 Ibid., 80.
to 19.8 percent of the whole. Over half of the urban population lived in the six largest cities: New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, New Orleans, and Charleston—all of which were great seaports and centers of commerce. These cities were connected to the Atlantic Ocean, which was the major “highway” of the era, as overland travel was more difficult and expensive. Of the 8.4 million people living in the United States in 1815, only 15 percent of the population lived further west than the coastal states. Though the non-coastal population was comparatively small, western settlement was a significant economic force for the nation as a place for both agricultural and urban growth. Richard Wade in The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830 argued that towns were the “spearheads” of western settlement that were “planted far in advance of the line of settlement...[to hold] the West for the approaching populations.” In fact, most major cities in the (now) midwest had origins in the eighteenth century. Rochester is an example of one of these settlements as the first white migrants came to the region at the end of the eighteenth century even though significant white settlement of the region did not start until the

38 Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860, 6.

39 Ibid., 6.

40 While this statistic reflects the mainly coastal nature of the nation, it may underestimate the non-coastal population simply by disregarding the fact that many states that border the Atlantic Ocean have significant landmass that is far from the coast. New York State is a prime example of this as Western New York (including Rochester) is hundreds of miles away from the Atlantic Coast. Ibid., 3.


42 Chicago, Milwaukee and Indianapolis are notable exceptions to this statement. Ibid., 35.
early nineteenth century. Most western cities developed in borderland regions, which were areas “defined by any consequential social, political, or cultural divide”\textsuperscript{43} or “spaces at the edges of nations and empires.”\textsuperscript{44} In other words, borderland western cities, like Rochester, were areas of a multidirectional growth and change with noticeable cultural differences from coastal cities. To define them as frontiers would oversimplify the complex economic, social, and political development into colonial binaries and support outdated and racially charged conceptualizations about “civilization.”\textsuperscript{45} Nevertheless, western cities were different from coastal cities as they were younger, less populated, and more remote. These cities played a major role in shaping the character of an expanding nation and presented new opportunities that encouraged many individuals to migrate or immigrate from more established and heavily settled regions.

The economy of western urban centers was based on establishing and maintaining important trading centers where goods from major Atlantic port cities were sold. If commerce was the central nexus of western urbanization, then rivers and water transportation were the chief agents of this development as they provided easier and cheaper access to goods and people. As a result, most western cities were built on rivers. New infrastructure and transportation routes were developed to more easily connect remote areas to the more populated seaboard. However, commercial growth of


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 343.
these western cities in the early nineteenth century “was not so much the result of opening new markets as of exploiting established ones.”\textsuperscript{46} In other words, evolving technology and improved transportation did not \textit{create} the opportunity for western settlement, but rather enhanced it. Many western cities existed prior to canal and railroad access. However, transportation was key to increasing the human and commercial accessibility to western regions, which prompted rapid economic growth and prosperity. This phenomenon is especially true for the Erie Canal, which was built to create a water link between existing markets in New York City and the Great Lakes.

\textbf{2.3 The Erie Canal}

New York City’s population and volume of manufacturers’ outlets, along with its location that allowed access to inland trade through the Hudson River, effectively made it the nation’s most important port city for ceramic importation. The possibility of a canal across New York State to increase access to inland markets was discussed in the eighteenth century, but accomplishing such a feat was greatly impeded by political resistance to funding a major, unproven infrastructure project.\textsuperscript{47} The lure of riches and national significance meant that the Grand Canal was not long forgotten. In the early nineteenth century, there was an increased interest in constructing a man-made waterway across the state, despite the political, economic, and engineering challenges such a project would inevitably face.

\textsuperscript{46} Wade, \textit{The Urban Frontier}, 55.

\textsuperscript{47} Drago, \textit{Canal Days in America}, 162.
Jesse Hawley, a merchant who was bankrupted by the expense of shipping flour across the state, proposed a route for a canal from Buffalo to Albany in a series of essays that were published in the *Genesee Messenger* in 1807. Hawley opined:

The canal had best commence so near to the foot of Lake Erie as the current of Niagara River will admit by affording a draft on its waters, and run nearly parallel to that river a sufficient distance (perhaps some miles) to obtain a fall which will preserve it a current; thence winding easterly arid crossing the Tontawanta, perhaps a few miles from its mouth, by an aqueduct bridge; thence nearly due east, preserving the height of the Limestone ridge, and crossing Genesee River, also by an aqueduct bridge, and most probably above the upper falls; thence continuing its course and running near to, and probably into, the west branch of Mud Creek; pursuing its channel with improvements into, and thence down the Seneca River, to somewhere about the head of Jack's Rifts; thence leaving that river to the north and run along the foot of the hills and high grounds of Onondaga and Oneida counties, going south of their lakes, and discharge it into and mingle its waters with the Mohawk somewhere about Utica. 48

The Erie Canal largely follows the route he proposed. His essays included further detail concerning costs and benefits of such a canal, prompting the New York State legislature to consider the possibility of the project more seriously. The Board of Canal Commissioners was appointed in 1810 amid a great deal of public support for the project. However, the War of 1812 impeded the start of construction as New York State was exposed to attacks from Canada during the war, thwarting potential for internal improvements.

After the War of 1812, interest in the canal was revived once again. In 1817, Governor Dewitt Clinton gained controversial funding for the canal via the passage of the Canal Act by the New York State legislature after the federal government refused

to support the project. The survey of the canal route, proposing a 363-mile canal, was started that year, a decade after Hawley’s essays were published. As historians have noted, “the building of the Erie Canal was an act of faith, the demonstration of a spirit of enterprise by an organized government that has few parallels in world history.” SUPPORTERS OF THE CANAL ENVISIONED IT TO BE A SYMBOL OF LIBERTY AND INDEPENDENCE THAT PROMPTED DREAMS OF FUTURE PROSPERITY SUPPORTED BY A DEMOCRATIC STATE.

Proposing the Erie Canal was almost quixotic since undertaking a major infrastructural project in an underpopulated region was precarious. When the canal’s construction began, the state population was concentrated in the lower Hudson River Valley, while the villages along the canal’s route were in their infancy. Furthermore, there were no other canals in the United States that came close to the length of the proposed Erie Canal. Thus, there was no assurance that the canal would be a success. Furthermore, the Erie Canal required many locks and aqueducts, which were engineering challenges that other canals did not face; solutions for these issues had not yet been fully developed.

Despite these risks, the canal proved to be successful. In 1819, 75 miles of the middle section of the Erie Canal from Utica to Syracuse was opened for the transport of goods and people, and successive sections were opened in the following years. On


51 Ibid., 33.

52 Ibid., 33; *Diary of a Young Girl, The Erie Canal in 1822 Part I* in *Rochester History* 62, no. 3 (Summer and Fall 2000).
October 26, 1825, the entire course of the Erie Canal, from Buffalo to Albany was declared open though it took until 1827 to fully complete its construction.\textsuperscript{53} New York State invested $7.5 million to construct the canal, and this investment was repaid by directing the trade of the Great Lakes watershed to New York City.\textsuperscript{54} Traffic and toll revenue was impressive in the early years of its opening. The monetary fruits of the Erie Canal continued to grow throughout most of the nineteenth century despite multiple economic downturns and the development of railroads. In its first year of operation, the canal garnered over a half million dollars in toll revenue, and the next year it earned $750,000.\textsuperscript{55} The success of the Erie Canal was widely celebrated, including in ceramics that were made in England. One decorative transfer printed plate design included rim vignettes of canal boats and locks and a commemorative eulogy to Governor Clinton in the center reading:

\begin{quotation}
The Grand Erie Canal. A splendid monument of the enterprise & resources of the State of New York. Indebted for its early commencement & rapid completion to the active energies preeminent talents, & enlightened policy of De Witt Clinton, late governor of the State. (See Figure 2.1)

The flourishing of cities along the Erie Canal prompted a canal-building boom especially around the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, but none reached the same level of success or significance. In addition to its major economic impact, the Erie Canal promoted westward growth in the Ohio River Valley. This aspect of the canal was heralded at the “Celebration of the Completion of the Canal” where speakers
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{53} Drago, \textit{Canal Days in America}, 198, 205.

\textsuperscript{54} Johnson, \textit{The Early American Republic}, 66.

\textsuperscript{55} Taylor, \textit{The Transportation Revolution}, 34.
memorialized the civilizing impact of the canal with nationalistic pride stating that, in colonial times under England’s domain, “the vast fertile regions of the west, with which we have opened communication by our Canals, were doomed to be a perpetual wilderness.”

![Figure 2.1 Erie Canal Commemorative, Plate, 1820-1835, Cream colored earthenware, Transfer printed (cobalt underglaze), 1989.1507 Collection of Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.](image)

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56 Colden, Memoir, 8.
By the late 1820s, an average of 900 people a day arrived in Buffalo who aimed to continue further west before settling. Its role as an avenue for people and goods also meant that the Erie Canal supported the development of western New York. The canal’s impact on pre-existing and new towns was recognized immediately. One speech at the “Celebration of the Opening of the Canal” proclaimed: “Utica, Rochester, and Buffalo, now of importance, and commanding a great trade, were but a few years ago as new as any of those which are starting with a hope to rival the elder offsprings [sic] of the Canals.” The impact of the canal is still recognizable today. In fact, every major city in the state, excepting Binghamton and Elmira, resides along the trade route that was established by the Erie Canal, and the vast majority of the upstate New York’s population lives within 25 miles of the canal. Rochester is an example of one of the great industrial cities in New York whose development was intimately linked to the Erie Canal.

2.4 Rochester, New York

Western New York, land that was originally populated by the Haudenosaunee for hundreds of years, began to be settled by Euro-Americans from New England in the late 1780s. Oliver Phelps was the first to negotiate the purchase of land around the Genesee River from the Seneca, but the land was sold several times before Nathaniel Rochester (the namesake of the current city) along with William Fitzhugh and Charles


Carroll, purchased it in 1800 and 1802. The land was left unoccupied until 1812 when it was surveyed into village lots open for sale. In 1815, the first census of the village reveals the population was 331. The Map of Rochester in the spring of 1814 displays the small size of the village in its early years (see Figure 2.2).

After Albany approved the petition to grant charter to the village of Rochesterville in 1817, the population drastically increased over the next decade, a development linked to the construction of the Erie Canal. In 1819, the state sent surveyors to determine a canal route through the area. Figure 2.3 depicts a conceptual plan for the Rochester Aqueduct, which was needed to carry the canal over the Genesee River. Construction on the section of the Erie Canal around Rochester began shortly after the surveyors completed their work. By 1827, the population had reached


7669, and all the adults were not native to the village. In 1821, when Monroe County was established from portions of Ontario and Genesee counties, Rochesterville was named the county seat. In 1822, the “ville” was dropped, and Rochesterville became Rochester. Rochesterville was later granted a city charter in 1834 after the town leaders successfully petitioned the state legislature. Due to its location linking fertile farmlands to water transportation and the Genesee River’s suitability for mills, Rochester became a center for grain production, which earned it the nickname “Flour City.”

62 The population was mainly comprised of New England emigrants and immigrants from England, Ireland, and Scotland, with some people from Canada, Norway, and Switzerland. George W Fisher, *Early History of Rochester, 1810 to 1827, with Comparisons of its growth and progress to 1860* (Rochester, NY: George Fisher, 1860) from University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library Rare Books and Special Collections, 11.


64 Today Rochester’s reputation for horticultural excellence with various renowned parks and gardens has earned it the nickname “Flower City.”
Figure 2.2  Map of Rochester in the spring of 1814, John Kelsey, Rochester, NY, United States, 1854 in John Kelsey, The Lives and Reminiscences of the Pioneers of Western New York (Rochester, NY: J. Kelsey, 1854). From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library.

Figure 2.3  Plan of the first aqueduct carrying the Erie Canal over the Genesee River at Rochester New York, Everard Peck, Rochester, NY, 1823. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library.
The years during which the Erie Canal was constructed transformed western and central New York. Around 5000 men were needed to build the canal. Ten years into its operation 25000 men (and some women) derived employment directly from the canal as waggoneers, boatmen, and other related occupations.65 The livelihoods of thousands of more individuals, especially merchants, also depended on the canal. The majority of people around the Erie Canal were not native to New York, and they came from other states on the promise of good wages and reliable work.66 Some of these wageworkers aimed to be permanent residents of the region and integrated into the community by joining parishes and social organizations, but other canal workers were more transient.67 These workers were less enmeshed in the community, and they largely occupied the few blocks around the canal’s waterfront and business districts.68 This population supported taverns, brothels, gambling halls, and even organized crime, which created and perpetuated the trope of the dangerous waterfront and an upstate New York version of the “wild west.” Despite the perception of the danger on the Erie Canal, the cities along its route thrived. In 1832, there were already 1200 boats on the Erie Canal, and even while tolls were reduced, revenue increased.69 The

65 Drago, Canal Days in America, 283; Federal Writers’ Project, Rochester and Monroe County, 54.

66 Drago, Canal Days in America, 284.


68 Wade, The Urban Frontier, 219.

69 The immediate success of the Canal and the fact that it was “overwhelmed by more business than it could accommodate” led to calls for its enlargement while it was still in its infancy. Ibid., 210.
volume of trade and ease of transportation fostered settlement and the formation of successful cities throughout New York, including Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse.

Rochester, even in its early years, defined itself by the Genesee River and the Erie Canal. The course of the canal as it passes through Rochester was romantically described in the 1827 city directory:

“The grand Erie Canal, after curving along the declivity of the mountain ridge from the N.W. passed through the middle of the village, crosses the [Genesee] river in a splendid aqueduct, and thence runs along the eastern bank up the stream about eighty rods to a small ravine, through which it resumes its course eastwardly.”

The course of the canal and its intersection with the Genesee River is evident in the 1833 map of the city (Figure 2.4) and an early view of the Rochester aqueduct (Figure 2.5). This intersection formed the heart of the city, and it became the center of development and business. Buffalo Street, now Main Street, ran from Canandaigua to Buffalo and was the main road around which settlements were established. As the map displays, Buffalo Street is perpendicular to the river and the canal runs parallel to it before bending to the northwest. Settlers of Rochester recognized that “together with the vast water power, [the Genesee River] conspire[d] to give the village its commanding position for trade, by the lake, the river, and the canal.” This location connected Rochester with New York City and markets in the mid-west and Canada, which made it an important shipping center and allowed the city to thrive and grow.

70 Ely, A Directory for the Village of Rochester, 85-86.
71 Ibid., 86.
72 Ibid., 86.
Due to the success of the canal, Rochester was the nation’s first inland boom town. With an unprecedented tenfold increase in population in a single decade, people migrated to Rochester seeking business opportunities, construction jobs, or land. In response, two to three hundred new houses were built each year during the town’s early years while the canal was under construction. Rochester solidified its prosperity by becoming a center for flour production and canal boat construction. Rochester—and Monroe County, in general—also acted as a connecting point between the east coast and mid-west settlements since many individuals utilized Monroe County as a temporary stopping point before continuing further west.


74 McKelvey, Rochester: A Brief History, 6.
Benjamin Seabury was one of those drawn to Rochester after it was evident that it would be a successful and important canal port. He did not establish his business until 1827, ten years after the village of Rochesterville was incorporated and two years after the canal was fully opened for transportation. By 1827, Rochester was well established and organized with many formal religious and educational societies.75

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75 For a full list of these organizations societies see Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester*, 104-113. For an analysis on the impact of these organized societies in
The city already supported 74 merchants, 89 clerks, 84 grocers, and a wide array of tradesmen. However, none of the merchants or shopkeepers seemed to have specialized in ceramics and glass to the extent that Benjamin Seabury did. Thus, Seabury’s decision to establish a business in Rochester was a calculated move to both fill the needs of a market and gain entrée into a growing region. Though it may seem to the contrary, it was not a high-risk endeavor because he established his business after the canal and Rochester were already proven to be a successful. Yet, Seabury came early enough that he did not face a great deal of competition. Other merchants and shopkeepers sold some ceramics and glass, but since they were not specialists, they did not have the same variety or access to the latest goods from New York City as Seabury.

Merchants like those already established in Rochester and in smaller trading towns and cities played a vital role in distributing products to rural consumers through retail stores and public markets. Most were unspecialized and dealt with a variety of imported manufactured goods, tropical products, and local staples. As a result, understanding mercantile practices, networks, and stock provides insight into historical communities. Seabury, as a specialized merchant who brought a large city business model to the young Rochester, likely had a great influence on expanding Rochester’s access to a variety of ceramic and glass goods. Nevertheless, Seabury was

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not a unique or extraordinary individual. He worked within the business systems of the era to build a successful enterprise. A close examination of Seabury’s inventories provides insight to the common application of commercial practices by merchants in the 1820s and 1830s. Furthermore, comparing the New York City inventory with that of Rochester reveals how his business methods were adjusted to be successful in both areas as the needs and wants of these markets differed.

Figure 2.5  Rare View of the First Aqueduct Carrying the Erie Canal over the Genesee River, Rochester, N.Y., 1820-1830. Compliments of the City of Rochester, New York.
Chapter 3

“WHOLESALE OR RETAIL”

I've got a mule and her name is Sal
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal
She's a good old worker and a good old pal
Fifteen years on the Erie Canal

We've hauled some barges in our day
Filled with lumber, coal, and hay
And every inch of the way I (we) know
From Albany to Buffalo

Chorus:
Low bridge, everybody down
Low bridge cause we're coming to a town
And you'll always know your neighbor
And you'll always know your pal
If you've ever navigated on the Erie Canal

Get up there Sal, we've passed that lock,
Fifteen years on the Erie Canal
And we'll make Rome before six o'clock
Fifteen years on the Erie Canal

One more trip and back we'll go
Through the rain and sleet and snow
And every inch of the way I (we) know
From Albany to Buffalo

Low bridge, everybody down
Low bridge for we're coming to a town
And you'll always know your neighbor
And you'll always know your pal
If you've ever navigated on the Erie Canal.

- Low Bridge, Everybody Down or Fifteen Years on the Erie Canal, ca. 1900
This folk song, which dates to the early twentieth century, is a nostalgic reminiscence on the time in which transportation on the Erie Canal was flourishing. From the opening of the canal in 1825 through the 1880s, mule barges characterized boom towns across the Empire State. The humble mule and human team understates the major infrastructural achievement of the canal, but the tune reflects the predominate narrative that the canal created markets and made New York State an incomparable economic powerhouse. While this narrative is oversimplified, the Erie Canal was undeniably part of the atmosphere of shifting business practices and changing distribution systems that impacted the young nation, especially western cities.

3.1 Shift in Business Practices

The turn of the nineteenth century was a period of great transition in the United States brought on by a variety of factors including the growth of the country, both geographically and demographically. This growth led to increased demand for manufactured goods like ceramics, which influenced England’s ceramic exportation. By the 1830s, America had replaced continental Europe as the largest share of the Staffordshire potteries’ export markets. In fact, the United States was the largest customer of Staffordshire ceramics, receiving 40 to 50 percent of exported wares from Staffordshire every year from the end of the War of 1812 to the eve of the Civil War. During this same period, business practices were shifting, especially in terms of

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interactions among manufacturers, importing merchants, regional merchants, and local shopkeepers.

In the eighteenth century, orders to Staffordshire manufactories came mainly from British merchants who then exported to the United States. Contact between British manufacturers and American importers were rather limited, a relationship that continued into the nineteenth century.80 Before the mid-1700s, American urban centers were too small to support merchants specializing in ceramics, therefore ceramics were sold to customers by general merchants who were supplied by British exporting merchants or agents of Staffordshire manufacturers.81 These general merchants supplied the wide material needs of local markets, including textiles, dry goods, and sundries. As a result, pottery was only minor portion of their overall commercial practices. General merchants in cities also played an important role in the distribution of goods to rural areas through the practice of wholesaling to country merchants. These country merchants were mainly general merchants, though they typically supplied a smaller population with a greater geographic expanse. For the most part, country merchants did not have a role in the selection or importation of

80 When there was direct contact between the English manufacturer and the American importer, it was likely initiated by the American, which became more common as the nineteenth century progressed. Direct contact between ceramic firms and Americans would have been established through common personal and business connections. These claims are largely based on primary evidence from Wedgewood’s accounts in the research conducted by Neil Ewins, but they can be reliably applied to Staffordshire manufactories in general. Most ceramic manufacturers were smaller with less international trade, contacts, and initiative than Wedgewood, so they would be less likely to initiate direct contact with American markets. Ewins, “Supplying the Present Wants,” 111.

81 Ibid., 4.
specific ceramic goods from England. As urban centers grew, markets became large enough to support specialized merchants in ceramic and glass. Ceramic importation and sale became the purview of these specialized merchants in cities. These specialized merchants built close business ties with Staffordshire manufacturers, which gave the merchants more power over design decisions by influencing manufacturers to modify products to suit American needs and desires.  

Wealthy Americans, from the colonial era into the nineteenth century who wanted more control over the type and style of ceramics they used to adorn their homes and display their taste may have relied on personal or business connections to supply their needs rather than select from the general merchant’s wares. They may have utilized familial connections in England to acquire the latest goods that were available in London shops. Other options included the employment of a broker, who acted as an intermediary for the principal, or the employment of a factor or commission merchant, who acted as an agent to transact business for someone else.  

Both brokers and factors had similar functions—intermediaries who could more specifically fulfill the commercial desires of consumers—with only a slight variation in the technicalities of their business practices. While these types of arrangements gave consumers more control of the ceramic wares they would receive, it was more


83 Buck, The Development and Organization of Anglo-American Trade, 10-17.

84 A broker solely acted as an intermediary for a principal and usually worked in specific articles. A factor, also known as a commission merchant, would both act as an intermediary and would transact business and sell goods under his own name. Buck, The Development and Organization of Anglo-American Trade 1800-1850, 10-17; Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 11.
expensive and was not how the majority of ceramics made their way into the hands of American consumers.

By the early nineteenth century, there was a well-ingrained distribution structure between British and American merchants. According to scholars Glenn Porter and Harold Livesay, despite “wars, conquests, political upheavals, and religious conflicts [that] had repeatedly upset the social equilibrium, the nature of the market, the methods of production, and the means of transportation and communication had remained relatively static,” meaning that the system of distribution remained dominated by a network of sedentary merchants. Manufactured goods were imported to the United States by the importing or exporting merchant’s capital or credit. The general merchants or specialized merchants who dealt directly with customers then received goods from these importing merchants and sold them to customers, often extending credit as well.

As the nineteenth century went on, this structure shifted. English manufacturers moved to replace merchants as the main wholesale distributors for a wide variety of exported manufactured goods. This trend not only applied to English ceramics but also English textiles, especially cotton, and other industrial products. American importers and English manufacturers relied on more direct trade links, moving away from the use of middlemen. As a result, American importers became more specialized in the goods with which they worked. English manufacturers actively


86 Ibid., 3.
sought to understand and were faster to react to market demands. In some cases, Americans travelled to England to examine goods or contact manufacturers directly while Staffordshire manufacturers travelled to America to conduct market research.87

Despite what Livesay and Porter claim, wars and political upheavals did affect market practices beyond causing temporary impediments to business transactions. The War of 1812 had major repercussions on trade between the United States and Great Britain due to various wartime embargoes. During the war, large quantities of manufactured goods were warehoused in the United Kingdom for future shipment to the United States in anticipation of peace.88 When the wartime embargoes ended, British manufacturers shipped goods directly to American commission houses without waiting for specific orders. This business practice presented a higher risk to manufacturers, as there was no guarantee that there was a market for their goods. Furthermore, this resulted in a surplus of goods and the development of the auction system to sell bulk goods in major American port cities.89 The auction systems led to the development of a new type of merchant, the jobber, who often competed against importing merchants. Jobbers would purchase large lots at auction and divide them into packages for the country trade. With the auction system, American merchants had less influence on what ceramic goods were available; in fact, jobbers often had little to no contact with Staffordshire potters. However, jobbers were successful because they

88 Miller, “Marketing Ceramics in North America: An Introduction,” 4
89 The auction system existed prior to the War of 1812, but it was mainly used as a fast way to reduce excess, damaged, or low-quality stock.
could often purchase the goods more cheaply and did not deal with the risk and expense of shipping.90

From 1815 to 1830, there was a radical shift in the distribution of manufactured goods from England to America because of the drastic increase in material demands of American markets. This increasing volume of trade between the United States and the United Kingdom, pushed by American growth, meant that merchants were able to abandon their earlier all-purpose trade in order to specialize in a single line of goods. Specialization of this type was only possible with relatively large and condensed markets. Specialized importing merchants increased the efficiency of commercial practices and acquired an intimate expertise with a single good type, though they were more vulnerable to changing market demands.91

This specialization resulted in importing merchants having a greater influence on manufacturers, especially since the American market for ceramics was, vitally important to Staffordshire. Conducting business in distant markets without knowledge of the specific needs of consumers presented risks not previously encountered with local markets. Manufacturers gambled supplying products that went unsold if they did not match market needs or wants. As a result, Staffordshire agents began to realize the

90 Auction prices were often lower than retail, and sometimes they were even lower than the cost of production. As a result, auctions provided goods to American customers at a lower cost than American importing merchants could. British manufacturers were often willing to incur a loss in their sales in the United States with the ultimate goal of impeding the development of American manufacturing. This is especially true in the case of textile manufacturing, but can also be applied to ceramic manufacturing. Buck, The Development and Organization of Anglo-American Trade 1800-1850, 147-9.

91 Porter and Livesay, Merchants and Manufacturers, 9.
benefits of directly marketing and advertising to the American population. In response, manufacturers developed a type of market research to reduce their risk and improve their odds of success. In practice, Staffordshire agents working in the United States forged links with customers and investigated matters of design to determine the taste trends in the American market. The firm of J. & G. Meakin, Hanley provides an enlightening case study of this practice.92 A partner in this firm, George Meakin, spent months in New York State to establish an outlet, meet customers, and develop a better understanding of market tastes in order to operate more successfully in the American market. Through these outlets, Staffordshire manufacturers developed “a greater understanding of ceramic preferences…and [merchants] had a role in determining what was produced to meet popular taste.”93

While market research decreased the risk to Staffordshire manufacturers, it did not fully eliminate it as agents could not learn everything about the local markets they visited for short periods of time.94 Thus, local merchants still displayed the best understanding of local consumer demand. The changing business methods that increasingly prioritized supplying American taste “brought importer and manufacturer into direct contact, enabling the importer to exercise greater control on the source of the goods, and articulate their precise demands.”95 British agents often had an


93 Ibid., 94-5.

94 Agents were limited both geographically and by their ability—or lack thereof—to establish useful contacts.

95 Ewins, “Supplying the Present Wants,” 82.
importation advantage over Americans because British importers could undervalue goods undergoing customs review by not including the manufacturer’s profit. American importers, on the other hand, were forced to show invoices and their cost of goods, which included the manufacturer’s profit. In other words, English manufacturers that exported goods had an advantage because not only could they remove the expense of the middleman, but they could also manipulate the reported value of the goods they sent the United States. At the same time, the auction system seriously interfered with the practices of importing merchants by drastically undervaluing goods, and the jobber and the importing merchant were placed in direct competition. Jobbers were dependent on the goods available in auctions, which limited their selection but reduced their expense. Importing merchants, however, had the advantage of increased autonomy and control over the ceramic goods and styles selected to provision American consumers. Despite these challenging economic circumstances, Benjamin Seabury and his partners, Joseph Weeks and Joseph Cheesman, were able to establish a business model that allowed them to thrive in both New York City and Rochester, NY.

3.2 The Significance of New York

Following the American Revolution, New York City was established as a powerful economic center and commercial port in the trans-Atlantic trade. This dominance continued to grow into the mid-nineteenth century due to the geographic advantage of a well-protected port, a historically developed mercantile structure with

established international relationships, and the large urban population. Moreover, its location also allowed for easy access to inland trade. The Hudson River was used to carry goods north to Albany, and the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 linked the city to the Great Lakes and markets in Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan. By the 1850s, the bulk of Staffordshire exports were handled in New York City.

The technological advancements in transportation allowed merchants and fine goods to reach a wide assortment of individuals regardless of their geographic locations. In major cities like New York, jobbers often filled the gap between specialized merchants and general-purpose retailers. Jobbers in New York City purchased ceramics from auctions and selling houses and then extended credit to country merchants who were less able to purchase goods at auction. Jobbers often advertised “packages made up for the country trade” in newspapers. As a result, jobbers played an important role in the distribution of ceramics to rural markets.

Despite the prominence of jobbers during this time period, Benjamin Seabury and his business partners operated using a different business model to supply the needs of the country market. Seabury was able to serve country consumers by removing the jobber as a middleman. He also had more direct contact with importing merchants, his partners, which gave him greater control over the ceramics he supplied.

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97 Ewins “Supplying the Present Wants,” 87-8; Porter and Livesay, Merchants and Manufacturers, 19; and Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860, 7.

3.3 The Business Practices of Benjamin Seabury

Throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century, trading practices among Staffordshire manufactures and American merchants were mixed. British merchants continued to act as middlemen, but by the 1830s manufacturers began sending directly to American dealers.\(^9\) According to the 1834 inventories, Benjamin Seabury was the general partner to Joseph Weeks and Joseph Cheesman, who were the special partners in New York City.\(^10\) With this business arrangement, Weeks, Cheesman, and Seabury linked western cities to the major ceramic import port in the nation. They were able to successfully navigate a shifting business atmosphere of the 1820s and 1830s, and they established successful ceramic and glass businesses in both New York City and Rochester, NY—each of which served two very different markets. Paul Johnson claims that religious revivals in central and western New York in the nineteenth century drove changing business relationships, which reflected the shift from a mainly agrarian subsistence economy to a more capitalistic market economy.\(^11\) While this may be true of some businesses in the region, Seabury did not have any obvious religious or social connections in Rochester, which Johnson claimed were necessary for success. Instead, Seabury operated a less personal business in Rochester and was successful by outcompeting smaller merchants.

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\(^9\) Ewins, “‘Supplying the Present Wants...’,” 79-80.

\(^10\) Inventory of the Estate of Benjamin Seabury, New York City and Rochester, NY, 1834, manuscript (Wilmington, DE: Winterthur Museum Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera).

From the early 1820s, Weeks and Cheesman were involved in Atlantic trade, and they received various goods and crates from ships that carried manufactured dry goods from Liverpool, one of the largest ports in the United Kingdom. From 1822 to 1824, they received at least ten shipments of dry goods, coal, crates, and other manufactured products from various British firms through Liverpool.\(^\text{102}\) During this time, Weeks and Cheesman were also involved in the shipment of agricultural products of plantation slavery from Guadeloupe and North Carolina. For example, in the September 17, 1824 issue of The National Advocate the Schooner George Pickett of Elizabeth City, North Carolina brought molasses from Guadaloupe to Weeks and Cheesman.\(^\text{103}\) They also took other shipments from Elizabeth City of agricultural products like cotton, sugar, rum, and wheat, but by the late 1820s, Weeks and Cheesman seem to have specialized in the importation of ceramic goods from Staffordshire through Liverpool, which was the main exporter of Staffordshire ceramics. In the 1826 edition of Longworth’s American Almanac, New York Register and City Directory, “Weekes & Cheesemen [sic]” are listed as operating a crockery store at 229 Pearl Street in New York City. Similarly, Joseph Weekes is listed as a merchant working and living on Pearl Street.\(^\text{104}\) These records indicates that, as the decade progressed, Weekes and Cheesman became more specialized and focused on importing, retailing, and wholesaling ceramic goods.


\(^{103}\) “Arrived,” The National Advocate, New York City, September 17, 1824.

At some point, Benjamin Seabury became the general partner of Weekes and Cheesman. As the 1834 inventories of his businesses indicate, Seabury operated storefronts in both New York City and Rochester, which were likely supplied by the goods obtained in Weekes and Cheesman’s Atlantic trade practices. While Seabury’s business retailed goods, he was also involved in wholesale distribution of ceramics in New York City and in the west. From 1827 to 1834, Seabury operated as the largest ceramic merchant in the Rochester region. In various Rochester newspapers, other merchants advertised some ceramics in their stock, but there were no other specialized ceramic merchants in Rochester at this time. In the 1827 city directory, when the population of Rochester neared 8000, there were 74 merchants and 42 merchant stores listed, but none specialized in ceramics. By this time, Rochester was large enough to support a significant merchant community some of which were specialized, but it still lacked a dedicated ceramic and glass storefront. Later that year, Benjamin Seabury recognized this promising business opportunity and filled that void. In the summer of 1827, Seabury published an advertisement for his newly established business of imported ceramic and glass in the *Rochester Telegraph*, which read:

New Establishment. Benjamin Seabury, importer of China, glass, & earthen ware, Has now on hand and will continue to receive through the season at his Store on Exchange st. between the canal and Buffalo st. a general and complete assortment of all articles in this line of business, consisting of Burnish, Gilt and Luster China Tea-Sets, Cut and Plain Glass Blue Dining Setts, Together with a general assortment of Printed, Edge, Enamelled, and Cream Coloured Ware. This Ware is direct from

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105 Tradespeople like coopers, shoemakers, and tailors comprise most of the specialization in Rochester. Some merchants were specialized various materials like leather goods, looking glasses and frames, and books. Ely, *A Directory for the Village of Rochester*, 114 and 116.
the Manufacturies [sic] without any Commission to the Importer or Jobber, and will be sold WHOLESALE OR RETAIL at the lowest New York prices adding Transportation from Albany. Merchants, Tavern keepers and others wishing to purchase will find it to their advantage to call and examine for themselves. 106 (See Figure 3.1.)

Figure 3.1  

This advertisement, the first print proof of Seabury in Rochester, provides a great deal of insight into his business practices. 107 Seabury’s shop location “on


107 This advertisement, repeated several times in local newspapers, is the only publically facing indication of Seabury’s businesses in Rochester. He was not listed in
Exchange st. between the canal and Buffalo st.” was important because Buffalo Street was the center of the earliest settlements in Rochester and accessible from all wards.\textsuperscript{108} An 1834 map of Rochester shows how Seabury’s shop location, nestled near the intersection of the canal and the Genesee River, provided easy access to shipping channels (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3). Furthermore, the shop’s vicinity to Buffalo Street was advantageous because it allowed an easy approach for both pedestrians and other means of land transportation.

Seabury advertised that his wares were “direct from the manufacturies [sic] without any commission to the importer or jobber.” The inclusion of this statement was intended to draw in customers as it indicated Seabury’s greater control over the type and style of goods supplied through the reduction of intermediaries and their associated fees. The advertisement also indicated the breadth of Seabury’s target market since he was operating as a both a retailer and wholesaler. Seabury was also specifically reaching out to individuals who may have wished to buy in bulk— specifically merchants and tavern-keepers, who often operated significant businesses along canals. Thus, Seabury was aiming to supply ceramic and glass stock to general merchants in western regions of New York and even further west into Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{108} Ely, \textit{A Directory for the Village of Rochester}, 86.
\end{flushright}
Figure 3.2  Map of Rochester, Elisha Johnson, Rochester, NY, United States, 1834. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library.
Unlike jobbers, Seabury did not obtain his stock through auctions. Instead, his partnership with Weekes and Cheesman provided a more direct link to Staffordshire manufacturers as the general partner of Joseph Weekes and Joseph Cheesman. Thus, Seabury had more control over the goods sent to the rural market than many other types of merchants. This aspect of Seabury’s business practice may have contributed to his retail success in western markets because he held a greater diversity of ceramic goods than a local general merchant was able to stock.
Following Seabury’s death in 1833, his partners arranged for detailed inventories of his businesses in Rochester and New York City to be taken. Tens of thousands of items and hundreds of open accounts were recorded, giving insight into the consumption patterns and networks of exchange in which Seabury was involved. The combined value of Seabury’s two businesses as recorded in the inventories was over $53,000 dollars, or approximately $1.3 million dollars in 2017 dollars. While the New York City business had a greater amount of stock on hand, Seabury’s Rochester store had a higher value because of the amount of open accounts (see Figure 3.4). After Seabury’s death, Weekes and Cheesman continued to operate in Rochester at the same location, reflecting the profitability the business.

109 The author, using the sums determined by the auditors in 1834, calculated the value of the inventories. The values may be slightly elevated as some of the discounts (usually a reduction of 10% on a group of items) were disregarded in line item calculations. Furthermore, the values of the goods listed in sterling pounds were converted to USD using the conversion rate average of 1833 and 1834, where £1 = $4.72 from Lawrence H. Officer, “Dollar-Pound Exchange Rate from 1791,” Measuring Worth, 2017, web, accessed October 23, 2017, http://www.measuringworth.com/exchangepound/. The conversion value to 2017 USD was also calculated by the author using data from Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, “Consumer Price Index (Estimate) 1800-,” web, accessed November 29, 2017, https://www.minneapolisfed.org/community/teaching-aids/cpi-calculator-information/consumer-price-index-1800.

Indeed, Seabury’s businesses were well established in Rochester and New York City for several years. His large stock and ample customer base indicates that he could have had continued success for years. Unfortunately, his untimely death prevented him from either increasing his success or failing in the unstable markets of the 1830s and 1840s. However, his death did provide rich evidence for historians as it led to the creation of two detailed inventories that serve as a snapshot into his business practices. A closer comparison between these two inventories in the following chapters will reveal more characteristics of the two markets that Seabury supplied.

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{111}}\] Due to an unstable financial situation, including the shuttering of the Second Bank of the United States, 1833 was a difficult year for many merchants. The high amount of stock that Seabury held at the time of his death may reflect financial difficulties. Perhaps he had so much stock because he overestimated regional demand. Alternatively, Seabury may have held so much stock because he had enough spare money to buy cheaply and wait for the promise of higher returns. Nevertheless, the fact that his partners retained possession of the business in Rochester indicates that it was well-situated for continued economic success.
Figure 3.4  Value of Inventories. This chart compares the contributing components to the values of Benjamin Seabury’s two businesses based on the inventories that were compiled in 1834 after his death. Prepared by author.
Chapter 4  

“MERCHANTS, TAVERN KEEPERS AND OTHERS”

Two stacks of yellowed paper reinforced with contemporary conservation paper sat before me in the reading room for the Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera in the basement of the Winterthur Library. Boldly printed in a gothic style font, the word “Inventory” was clear in the center of the cover page. I leaned over the first stack in order to discern the names written in faded ink and determined that I was looking at a “true and perfect Inventory of all the Goods, Chattels, and Credits, which were of Benjamin Seabury late of the City of New York.” This inventory was filed in Monroe County in January of 1834, and the recapitulation on the cover page indicated that his property and business were valued at $32005.84. The high value surprised me almost as much as the fact that the inventory was 35 pages long. After turning a few pages, I came to the list of goods organized in many columns and rows. Reading a few of the rows, I realized this was more than a simple list of items and their values. Instead, the appraisers took the time to record basic descriptions of much of the stock. The unusual level of description in the inventory excited me.

After briefly perusing the first stack of papers, I moved on to the second slightly smaller stack—here there were only twenty pages. This inventory was similar in organization and content to the first, but it recorded the property of Benjamin Seabury in New York City. This inventory also included relatively detailed descriptions of the ceramic stock. In comparing these inventories, I realized that they
represented two different stores located across an entire state from each other, and Benjamin Seabury was the proprietor of both of them. These inventories offered a unique opportunity to examine the business practices of a single merchant and the goods available to two different markets.

The analysis of these two inventories began with transcribing each line item into a spreadsheet. Doing this allowed a critical comparison of the differences between Seabury’s business in New York City and his business in Rochester. The stock held in each city provides insight to the goods available to different consumer markets. Furthermore, the inventories recorded the open accounts in each city, which allowed a partial reconstruction of the consumer network Seabury supplied. By utilizing these inventories as the basis for analysis and supplementing this research with other primary source records like city directories and newspapers, I have been able to reconstruct one forgotten man’s businesses.

4.1 Summary of Inventories

At the time of his death in 1833, Benjamin Seabury was operating two successful businesses in New York City and Rochester. They were linked, but the comparison of the two separate inventories reveal some key differences between the regions’ market demands. Since there are no known extant daybooks, we cannot know what or how much people purchased, so the list of open accounts provides only a partial picture of regional consumer behavior. Nevertheless, we can infer a great deal about his role as a merchant in both Rochester and New York City by analyzing and comparing information that is present in the extant inventories. In Rochester, Seabury supplied the more varied material needs of a smaller, more isolated community with less access to merchants than individuals living in or near New York City. Though he
still acted as a specialized ceramic merchant in Rochester, he also supplied a significant amount of non-ceramic goods. While in New York City, Seabury acted as an even more specialized merchant who focused almost solely on ceramics. As a result, Seabury filled an important role by combing several aspects of business, including importing, retailing and wholesaling in both cities. In fulfilling all of these mercantile roles, he became a significant supplier of manufactured goods to a growing western market.

Though the Seabury stocked similar item in both cities, the Rochester and New York inventories display distinct differences. Seabury’s New York City business was valued by appraisers to be worth approximately $19500, which made it smaller and less monetarily valuable than his business in Rochester, which was valued closer to $33600. (See Figure 3.4). Also, the Rochester inventory (35 pages) is almost double the length of that of the New York inventory (19 pages). Rochester’s greater length is due to the fact that there was double the amount of line item entries in that inventory (see Figure 4.1). The Rochester inventory had 820 line items, and the New York City inventory had 404 line items. With 553 ceramic line items in the Rochester inventory, Seabury stocked a greater variety of ceramic wares than in New York City where the inventory shows only 303 ceramic line items. Also, thirty percent of the line items in the Rochester inventory were glass or some other material such as tin. In fact, there was double the amount of diversity of glassware and twelve times the diversity in non-ceramic and glass objects in the Rochester inventory compared to the New York City stock. Seabury likely stocked a greater variety of goods in Rochester than

\[112\] Each line entry represents a different good that was stocked.
he did in New York City because he fulfilled a different mercantile role in each market.

Though the Rochester business had a greater variety of goods, Seabury’s New York City business stocked more objects. The stock recorded in the New York Inventory totaled 63051 items while the Rochester stock totaled 61598 items. The New York business had almost 10000 more ceramic items than the Rochester business, but the Rochester business had thousands more glass and non-ceramic objects (see Figure 4.2). Eighty-four percent of the New York Inventory was comprised of ceramic objects, but only 70 percent of the Rochester stock was ceramic (see Figure 4.3). This reinforces the fact that Seabury operated as more specialist ceramic merchant in New York City.

113 These figures were calculated by adding the amount of all line item objects, so the actual stock total would have been higher as bulk crates were not included. Also, many line items included multiple objects like tea sets and pitchers with matching ewers. These line items were calculated as singular items; in other words, 12 cups and saucers were counted as 12 items though they would in fact be 24 individual objects. Since the item counts of both inventories were calculated in the same fashion, the sums determined can be reliably compared. Furthermore, calculating the item totals in this fashion best reflects how the inventories were recorded and how the stock was totaled by the appraisers, so it is accurate to period conceptualizations of Seabury’s business and stock.
Figure 4.1  Line item count of the Seabury Inventories. Prepared by author.

Figure 4.2  Item count of the Seabury inventories. Prepared by author.
Figure 4.3  Material distribution in the Seabury inventories. Prepared by author.

While Seabury operated retail stores in both New York City and Rochester, he was also involved in the wholesale distribution of ceramic goods, especially in New York City. When Seabury opened his business in Rochester in 1827, he advertised that his wares were “direct from the manufacturies [sic] without any commission to the importer or jobber, and will be sold wholesale or retail.” He continued to sell goods wholesale and retail during the duration of his business in both New York City and Rochester. In New York City, Seabury seems to have received shipments of ceramics from English manufacturers through his partners Weekes and Cheesman, which he then distributed to customers in New York State and beyond. The customers who received crates of goods from Seabury were probably other merchants who did not

114 *Rochester Telegraph*, June 14, 1827.
have the links or the scope of business to more directly receive goods from England. Thus, in New York City, Seabury had a diverse business approach, simultaneously acting as a partner to importing merchants, a specialized merchant, a retailer, and a wholesaler.

Seabury’s role as a wholesaler is evident in the 1834 New York City inventory. The appraisers recorded several pages of “full packages of sterling goods,” which totaled to 131 crates of ceramic goods from England. One sixth of these crates (n=22) were labeled for shipment to directly to his business in Rochester while other crates were labeled for different wholesale customers or were unlabeled. The Rochester inventory also had a significant stockpile of shipped crates (n=110) that had likely passed through Seabury’s business in New York City before being forwarded to Rochester using the water transportation path created by the Erie Canal.

The ceramics in these crates had three general purposes: tableware (diningware), teaware, and chamberware. The prevalence of goods in these crates varied between Rochester and New York City, indicating the slight difference in the market needs Seabury supplied in each region (see Figure 4.4). While tablewares

[115] The appraisers who recorded the inventories included the codes and numbers that were written on the crates. All of the crates were numbered, but not all were labeled with a code. These codes were largely comprised of a string of letters, many of which seem to be initials, like “MRY,” “PLW” or “DWS.” Sometimes the code included full names, as was the case with “EKBC Nicoll.” These codes likely indicate the intended recipient of the crate. Many of the crates were labeled with some variation of Benjamin Seabury’s initials including, “B+S Rochester” and “BSR HW.” It is reasonable to assume that crates labeled thusly were intended for Seabury’s business in Rochester. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine specifically who most of the other labels signified or where the crates were intended to be sent. It is likely that Seabury sold to merchants outside of Western New York including regions closer to New York City like upstate New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and the like.
comprised the highest percentage of crates for both cities, and Rochester was supplied with more crates of chamberwares than New York City. In contrast, there was double the number of teaware crates in the Empire City than Rochester. This drastic difference in teaware crates indicates that Seabury either supplied a greater demand for teawares to the coastal market than the inland or he opted to specialize in teawares in New York City. Though there was enough of a demand for some wholesale teaware distribution around Western New York, these luxury ceramics were a smaller part of Seabury’s business than in New York City.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table</th>
<th>Tea</th>
<th>Chamber</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>NYC</strong></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rochester</strong></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4  Crates of ceramic goods in the Seabury inventories. Prepared by author.
4.2 Seabury’s Customers in Rochester

Though both of Seabury’s enterprises had comparable values and amount of stock, the Rochester business was appraised to be worth about $14000 more than the New York business. The major cause of this disparity lies in the value of open accounts and bank notes on hand. The inventories record a total of 374 listed accounts and bank notes, 73 percent of which were associated with his Rochester business (see Table 4.1). Of these accounts and notes, there were 35 repeated names, so Seabury supplied at least 339 unique and established customers.\textsuperscript{116} There were more open accounts (n=279) than bank notes on hand (n=95), which reflects the common economic practice of buying on credit. While New York City was far more populous than the Rochester area, Seabury served more individuals and businesses in Western New York than he did in New York City.

Table 4.1 Accounts and Notes in the Seabury Inventories

<table>
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<th>Rochester</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The greater number of accounts in the Rochester inventory shows that Seabury’s activity in western New York was the most economically productive aspect

\textsuperscript{116} The actual number of individuals and companies that comprised Seabury’s consumer network would have been higher as these inventories do not include the years’ worth of customers who did not have standing accounts at the time of Seabury’s death. As a result, it is unknown how many customers and businesses Seabury supplied, but it was certainly higher than the 374 accounts and notes recorded.
of his business. The value of 101 accounts and notes in the New York City inventory equaled about $10000 while the value of the 273 accounts and notes recorded in the Rochester inventory totaled almost $23000, which was well over double the value of Seabury’s New York City accounts (see Table 4.2).\textsuperscript{117} This shows that Seabury was a more wide-reaching merchant in western New York than he was in New York City, likely due to the lack of competition in the regional market where he filled a void early in Rochester’s history. Whereas individuals had many businesses to choose from to purchase ceramics in New York City, there was a dearth of other retail options in Rochester and none seemed to have the same expanse of ceramic stock that Seabury supplied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rochester</th>
<th>New York City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Value*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>12027.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6405.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>573.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self and Partners</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3851.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>22857.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All values and averages are in 1834 USD.

\textsuperscript{117} Included in the Rochester sum is the $3795.10 account under Seabury’s name and the $56 account under one of his business partner, Joseph Cheesman. Seabury had an account valuing $1492.75 in the New York City inventory also. This means that Seabury was wholesaling to himself. Even disregarding these accounts, the value of accounts in Rochester still far out valued those in New York City.
Interestingly, the overall average value of the accounts was higher in New York City ($101.58) than it was in Rochester ($83.73). While the average value of the business accounts for both Rochester and New York City were comparable ($87.74 and $90.13, respectively), the average value of the individual accounts was $22 dollars higher in New York City than in Rochester. (See Table 4.2.) This indicates that, compared to individuals in western New York, individuals in New York City purchased more valuable goods, ordered more items, or both. Perhaps, fancier and more expensive goods were in demand in New York City; or perhaps Seabury served a wealthier clientele there, whereas in Rochester he served the entire economic range of customers in the region. While more could be gleaned about consumption patterns from a daybook, this inventory does reveal a difference between individual consumption patterns of Seabury’s customers in New York City and Rochester.

However, there were nine individuals and companies—including Seabury himself—that had open accounts in both Rochester and New York City. The businesses and individuals that held these accounts in both cities seem to be mainly situated in Rochester. For example, Blanchard and Patterson were merchants in Rochester with stores on Exchange Street and North State Street. They had an account balance of $60.58 in New York City and $15.90 in Rochester. There was also a note from Blanchard and Patterson recorded in the Rochester inventory that was worth the same amount as their New York City account, so it is likely that the note in

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118 *Charter and Directory of the City of Rochester: Also Statisticks, Population, City Officers, Publick Buildings, Institutions, Fire Department, &c. &c.* (Rochester: C. & M. Morse, Publishers, 1834), 20, 72.
the Rochester inventory was used to pay their bill from the New York City store.
Perhaps Seabury was wholesaling to Blanchard and Patterson from his New York City business and used his own Rochester business as an intermediary. This would indicate that business people in Rochester conflated Seabury’s businesses in both Rochester and New York, utilizing them in the same fashion even though Seabury himself operated them slightly differently.

Most of the dual accounts reflect higher expenditure in New York City than in Rochester. Myron Strong, member of a prominent Rochester family, held open accounts in both cities. His account in New York ($101.99) was five times the value of his account in Rochester ($19.30). Perhaps Strong ordered specific, higher-end wares from Seabury’s New York business to be sent for his personal use in Rochester. Other prominent families in the region ordered ceramic and glass goods from New York City for their personal use. For example, the Garbutt family of Scottsville ordered ceramic items from New York City through a different middleman than Benjamin Seabury. Timothy S. Tussam on behalf of R. Caudewater wrote to Phillip Garbutt concerning “some articles of China, short in your last bill.”

Tussam assured Mr. Garbutt:

I have packed the articles in a box and shipped them on board Sloop Commerce for Albany the 13th June. I regret that the mistake had occurred, but hope they may be received in good order, and season and prove the pattern wanted.

119 Timothy S. Tussam, “Letter to P. Garbutt,” June 18, 1829, manuscript from University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Garbutt Family Papers A.A21 Folder 2.

120 Ibid.
From Albany, this shipment continued to Rochester, likely on the Erie Canal. This 1829 correspondence between Mr. Garbutt and his contact in New York City reflects a common pattern of business and goods exchange between Rochester and New York City. Seabury undoubtedly fulfilled a similar middleman role to many customers in Rochester, satisfying their specific orders using his more specialized stock from his New York City business when his more general stock in Rochester did not suit his customer’s wants. By 1834, Phillip Garbutt had an open account with Seabury, so at some point, Seabury either replaced or supplemented the Garbutt family’s earlier ceramic supplier.

Though other merchants supplied similar wares, Seabury was the major ceramics merchant in the city. General store merchants sold some crockery, but it is possible that these merchants stocked their store with goods that they purchased at wholesale prices from Seabury.\(^{121}\) Twelve general merchants or grocers operating in Rochester have been identified in Seabury’s accounts.\(^{122}\) The average value of these merchant’s accounts with Seabury was $72 though there were some outliers that far exceeded this amount. McKnight and Bristol’s account was worth $229.20, and Benjamin Fish’s account balance was $171.64. In the city directory, both of these individuals were listed as merchants who operated storefronts on State Street and

\[^{121}\text{It is also possible that they purchased ceramics for personal use from Seabury.}\]

\[^{122}\text{These individuals and their occupations have been identified by cross-referencing Seabury’s inventory with the 1834 Rochester City Directory and advertisements from a variety of digitized newspapers from Rochester. There are many other identified merchants listed in Seabury’s accounts, but they are not included in this group as they operated businesses that would not have been involved in the redistribution of ceramic goods, so they were only purchasing goods for private use.}\]
Buffalo Street, respectively. These high balances indicate large-scale purchases and the increased likelihood of wholesale ceramic redistribution. Smaller general store merchants in Western New York rarely had accounts balances that were as high as those in Seabury’s inventory. John Jones was a merchant on the corner of Buffalo and State Street in Rochester, and some of his customers overlapped with Seabury. Jones’ account books and cash books from 1833 reveal that his daily sales ranged from $20 and $120, and he typically had only one or two hundred dollars’ worth of cash and notes on hand. In contrast, Seabury had $361.13 in cash on hand and $3638.20 worth of notes on hand in Rochester at the time of his death and the recording of the inventory. Other daybooks of country merchants—including Enoch Ensign of Batavia, B. Todd & Son, and an unknown merchant from Geneseo—from nearby cities that date to the early 1830s were more similar to Jones’ business records than Seabury’s. Most accounts were under twenty dollars, and the merchants sold ceramics less frequently and on a much smaller scale. Thus, these merchants

123 Charter and Directory of the City of Rochester, 40 and 63.

124 Ibid., 55.

125 John Jones, Account Books and Cash Books Volume I, 1833-1836, manuscript from University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, CY45.

126 Day Book Volume I (Geneseo [?], NY: 1831-1832) manuscript from University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, CY97; Chauncey and Co. Doolittle, Account Book (Buffalo, NY: 1851-1873) manuscript from University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, CY15; Enoch Ensign, Account Book, (Batavia, NY: 1835-1857) manuscript from University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, CY64; B. Todd, B. & Son, Account Book (Day Book), (1834-1844) manuscript from University of Rochester Rush Rhees Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, CY 76.
operated as general merchants in and around Rochester, which is a direct contrast to how Seabury operated as a larger scale specialized merchant in the region.

As the preeminent ceramic and glass dealer in Rochester and the surrounding area, Seabury supplied a wide variety of businesses beyond those of the general country merchant. The individuals and businesses recorded in Seabury’s account inventory reveals the breadth of the Rochester economy, while also reflecting the major impact the Erie Canal had on the economic development of the region. As scholar Carol Sheriff recognized, the individuals whose livelihoods depended on the canal and who “worked to keep New York’s 3400 canal boats in motion represented virtually all segments of society,” and many others like farmers, blacksmiths, and craftsmen also contributed to the canal’s operation. Seabury directly supplied (or his goods were used by) many of these individuals from various levels of society. Jonathan Child, the son-in-law of Nathaniel Rochester and first mayor of Rochester, held a significant account with Seabury ($82.74). Child operated a forwarding business, which organized shipments of goods from the manufacturer or producer to the final point of their distribution. His business was headquartered in the Marble Building on Exchange Street in Rochester, and it was extremely successful. In fact, Child owned and operated the largest line of boats on the entire Erie Canal. Jacob Gould, the second mayor of Rochester and a toll collector for the port of Rochester,


128 Charter and Directory of the City of Rochester, 28.

129 McKelvey, Rochester: A Brief History, 14.
was another one of Seabury’s customers. With the first two mayors of the city as customers, Seabury’s business was evidently well-known in the city and provided for the demand of the city’s elite along with the needs of the general populace.

Other individuals and businesses in Rochester dependent upon on the Erie Canal like ship captains, boat builders, and canal toll collectors comprised a significant amount of Seabury’s customer base. With the increased movement of individuals around the area due to the ease of transportation on the canal, taverns, public houses, and boarding houses were important businesses to house temporary visitors and transient workers. The operation of the canal required the labor of thousands of semi-skilled wage earners from the early canal diggers to the later boatmen. Taverns and hotels were important recreation and boarding places for these workers. It was a widespread belief, based in observed and reported behavior as well as prejudice and stereotype, that these workers were a threat to civilized society due to their reputation for widespread drinking, bawdiness, and fighting.

As an astute businessman, Seabury recognized the prominence of taverns and the great potential of their proprietors as a customer base. He published an advertisement directly encouraging them to visit his business when he first established himself in Rochester, writing “Merchants, Tavern keepers and others wishing to

130 Charter and Directory of the City of Rochester, 44
131 Sheriff, The Artificial River, 98.
132 For more information about period stereotypes of canal workers and the resulting effort to mitigate the negative impact of transient workers on society, see Paul Johnson, A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, NY, 1815-1837 and Carol Sheriff, The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862.
purchase will find it to their advantage to call and examine for themselves.”

This strategy was somewhat successful since, of the nine “principal publick houses” listed in the 1834 Rochester City Directory, Seabury supplied two of them with their glass and ceramic needs. H.H. Crane, the proprietor of Eagle Tavern on the corner of Buffalo and State Streets (see Figure 4.5), had an open account of $132.48 with Seabury. J.L.D. Mathies, the proprietor of City Hotel on Buffalo Street near Elizabeth Street, also purchased goods from Seabury and had an open account worth $52.54. Beyond these major public houses, Seabury also supplied smaller public and boarding houses. For example, William McCracken, an innkeeper on the corner of State and Brown Streets, had an account valued at $26.23. These tavern and inn-keepers may have been particularly interested in wares that Seabury wholesaled, especially objects like tumblers for serving beverages. In Rochester, Seabury stocked 7088 tumblers, or about 50 gross. Seabury stocked so many tumblers that it comprised 28.5 percent of his glass stock, 59.8 percent of his metal wares, and 11.5 percent of his total stock (see Table 4.3). In contrast, Seabury stocked only glass tumblers in New York City, amounting to 5.8 percent (n=3659) of his total wares in that city. Evidently, Seabury supplied the demand of Rochester and western tavern and innkeepers for wholesale tumblers that were made out of glass and sturdier metals like tin. His customer base in New York City was different, so he did not stock as many tumblers. Tavern keepers in New York City probably went to a different merchant for their material needs while

133 Rochester Telegraph, June 14, 1827.

134 Charter and Directory of the City of Rochester, 2.

135 Ibid, 62.
Seabury was the main supplier of ceramic and glass goods for the entirety of the Rochester market.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 4.5 “Eagle Tavern, Rochester—Corner View,” Henry O’Reilly, United States, 1838. From the collection of the Local History & Genealogy Division, Rochester (NY) Public Library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceramic</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass</td>
<td>3691</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal, etc.</td>
<td>3139</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7088</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 Summary of the Tumbler Stock in Seabury’s Rochester Inventory

4.3 Seabury’s Customers Beyond Rochester

Though most of the customers recorded in the Rochester inventory were likely from Rochester and other nearby settlements, Seabury also served customers further
west in the Great Lakes region. His access to markets in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and the like would not have been possible without the Erie Canal. The canal played a critical role in the development of these markets because “it opened a route capable of carrying heavy cargoes cheaply and efficiently” into the continent’s interior.\textsuperscript{136} Overland trade routes moved more slowly, required more labor, and cost more, which restricted freight to valuable and durable items; therefore, navigable water routes like the Erie Canal and lake passage were the only practical methods for commercial trade in the early nineteenth century. Settlers in these western borderlands recognized and eagerly anticipated the role the Erie Canal would have in expanding the region’s economy. Months before the opening of the canal, editorialists in the \textit{Detroit Gazette} proclaimed, “the great canal of New York will, when completed, afford us a cheap transportation of our surplus produce to the great commercial emporium of America.”\textsuperscript{137}

The canal’s impact on Seabury’s overall business is evident when the wider range of his business network is examined. Seabury’s business partners, Weekes and Cheesman established a dual business structure prior to Seabury’s arrival in Rochester, with their main operation at 229 Pearl Street in New York City and a western outpost in Buffalo.\textsuperscript{138} By 1826, Weekes and Cheeseman advertised “a very extensive and splendid addition to their former stock of China, Glass, and Earthenware” directly to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item[137] Ibid., 220.
  \item[138] \textit{Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser}, September 16, 1826.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
western markets. They published advertisements for their Buffalo store in other western newspapers like The Erie Gazette, The Sandusky Clarion, The Detroit Gazette, and The Michigan Sentinel. These advertisements reveal that these businessmen were intentionally appealing to the demands of rapidly growing western markets that were made more accessible with the advent of the Erie Canal. Seabury likely modeled his business practices after Weekes and Cheesman when he established his branch operation in Rochester.

These businesses in Rochester and Buffalo were undoubtedly supplied with stock from New York City that was shipped on the newly opened Erie Canal. Indeed, in the spring of 1832, Poole and Cheesman—the successor to Weekes and Cheesman in Buffalo—advertised that they “will receive their spring orders on the [season] opening of the Canal.” Though Seabury did not directly advertise that he was using the canal, it would have been the only cost-effective way to transport his stock. Therefore, he supplied Rochester by transporting goods on the Erie Canal, and his business in Rochester acted as a waypoint for trade with markets further west in the same way that Weekes and Cheesman’s business in Buffalo operated.

Rochester was not the end of the line for Seabury. Not only was he linked to his business partner’s activities in Buffalo, but Seabury also had his own customers in that city. For example, Doolittle and Co. of Buffalo held a large account with Seabury’s Rochester business, with the balance of $170.25 in 1834. Chauncey

139 Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser, August 19, 1826.

140 Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser, September 16, 1826.

141 Buffalo Patriot and Commercial Advertiser, May 29, 1832.
Doolittle operated a general store in Buffalo that mainly sold grocery items, dry goods, and textiles.\textsuperscript{142} This high account balance indicates that Doolittle was buying a large number of objects from Seabury to resell at his business in Buffalo. Though Seabury was a general partner, he also competed with Weekes and Cheesman for a share of various western markets.\textsuperscript{143}

Seabury’s business network extended further west beyond Buffalo. The appraisers of Seabury’s Rochester inventory indicated four companies and individuals were situated in Ohio and Michigan. It is likely that Seabury supplied more than these four businesses from territories and states on the Great Lakes, but the lack of consistent labeling in the business record makes it impossible to determine what percentage of Seabury’s customers were further west than Rochester. The accounts of the four known western businesses—The Clyde Iron Company of Ohio, A. Pier of Ohio, H.B. Holbrooke of Michigan, and Medad P. Parker and Co. of Detroit Michigan—totaled $549.75. This sum is 2.4\% of the Rochester total account while these businesses only comprise 1.4\% of the total accounts recorded. It is likely that there were even more as of yet unidentified customers in western markets, so Seabury’s business strategy was already proving to be successful by the time he died.

\textsuperscript{142} The daybook from Chauncey Doolittle and Co. records the transactions from 1851 to 1873 though most of the records are from the 1850s. While there was no ceramic and glass for this period, it is likely Doolittle sold some ceramics earlier, prior to the increased specialization of merchants in Western cities. Doolittle, \textit{Account Book}.

\textsuperscript{143} While there may have been some competition between Seabury and his partners, it likely had a limited impact on the businesses. There were many customers to share, and the cooperation between these men is far more significant.
Seabury, as a resident of and merchant operating in New York City, would have been well aware of the progress and benefits of the canal to business practices. He could have operated a moderately successful business in New York City wholesaling to country merchants without expanding to another storefront. However, Seabury recognized an opportunity to directly link his New York City business with one in Rochester that was made possible by the drastic reduction of shipping costs due to the opening of the Erie Canal. His business in Rochester acted as both a waypoint in shipping and an opportunity to exploit an expanding market. He entered the Rochester market in 1827, after the Erie Canal was established and the population was large enough to support his specialized ceramic business. Nevertheless, he arrived early enough that he was able to maintain a veritable monopoly over the ceramic and glass market in the direct Rochester vicinity. Simultaneously, he competed with other importers in cities further west. While timing was key, Seabury’s business acumen and decision to supply the broader needs of western markets also contributed to his success. These diversified business practices are evident through the differences in Seabury’s stock in Rochester and New York, which reflect the tastes and demands of these two regions.
Chapter 5

“A GENERAL ASSORTMENT OF PRINTED, EDGE, ENAMALLED, AND CREAM COLOURED WARE”

5.1 Willowware Cup Plate

Two birds flying high,
A Chinese vessel, sailing by.
A bridge with three men, sometimes four,
A willow tree, hanging o'er.
A Chinese temple, there it stands,
Built upon the river sands.
An apple tree, with apples on,
A crooked fence to end my song.\(^ {144}\)

- Willow Pattern Legend

The components of the chinoiserie scene in this rhyme describe the willow pattern, which can be seen on a cup plate in the Winterthur collection (see Figure 5.1). A house or temple situated in a landscape full of various trees, the largest of which is a willow, dominates the right side of the plate. A pathway leads down from the house to a crooked fence at the bottom of the design. A bridge with three figures standing on it is above and to the left of the fence. A fourth figure can be found in the boat that is travelling on the water above the bridge and below the island on the top right of the composition. At the top of the scene, two graceful birds are swooping toward one

\(^{144}\) There are several versions of this rhyme describing the components of the Willow pattern based on a Chinese tale. “Willow Pattern Legends,” International Willow Collectors.
another. The central imagery is bordered by repeated scrolls on a diaper-patterned background around the rim of the plate.

Figure 5.1  Cup plate view of front. Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, Cup plate, 1820-1842, Staffordshire, England, Pearlware, Lead glaze, Museum purchase, 1970.0434
The willow pattern was the first under glaze transfer printed pattern developed in Staffordshire, and by 1814 it was the cheapest pattern. American importing merchants would order crates of willowware from Staffordshire manufacturers. This example of a willowware cup plate also presents a rare example of an importers mark (see Figure 5.2). There are two parts to the inscription on the base. Impressed in a circular border are the words, “FOR SALE AT THE CHINA GLASS & EARTHENWARE HOUSE.” This border encloses the shop’s address, “Pearl St. No

Figure 5.2  Cup plate view of back. Courtesy, Winterthur Museum, Cup plate, 1820-1842, Staffordshire, England, Pearlware, Lead glaze, Museum purchase, 1970.0434
243 New York.” George Tredwell, a commission merchant operated a crockery store at this address in the 1820s and 1830s.\footnote{145} This store was only a few doors down the road from Weekes and Cheesman’s—Seabury’s business partners—store at 229 Pearl Street.\footnote{146} Like Tredwell, Weekes and Cheesman were also importing ceramics from Staffordshire like transfer printed willowware for the American market including Benjamin Seabury and his customers. In fact, the willow pattern was one of the only transfer print pattern identified by name in the Seabury inventories, likely because of the significant price differential (see Appendix A).\footnote{147} Seabury ordered crates of willow-patterned goods to stock his Rochester store, which indicates not only that it was common but also that it could be easily sold.

5.2 Staffordshire Ceramics and American Demand

From the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century, the rapid expansion of the American market had a significant impact on the manufacture of English ceramics. The early nineteenth century marked a period of increased prosperity and growth of the middle class in the United States.\footnote{148} With this prosperity came a change in American domestic life, which prompted an increase in


\footnote{146} Longworth’s American Almanac, (1826), 307.

\footnote{147} The only other transfer printed pattern identified by name in the inventories is the wild rose pattern.

\footnote{148} Johnson, The Early American Republic, 75.
consumption. In terms of ceramic products, this shift meant that there was an increased demand for individual place settings of matching dishes. Furthermore, increased division between living spaces and bedrooms meant that there was a need for various types of ware in different kinds of spaces in the household. Not only was the population of the American market increasing, but so were Americans’ ability and desire to buy more manufactured ceramics.

Because the American market was so large, Staffordshire potters took into account American preferences. This strategy allowed Staffordshire ceramic manufacturers to maintain predominance through a series of changes in style preferences. The development of American manufacturing prompted English manufacturers to respond to American tastes. While there was a wide array of manufactured goods created in the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, there was a dearth of long-term factories established until the second half of the nineteenth century.

Staffordshire’s ability to retain dominance in the ceramics market is due to the low prices of their wares and the price fixing agreement upheld by many manufacturers. In the first half of the nineteenth century, ceramic production

149 By 1835, the American market consumed over 40 percent of the ceramics exported from England. Ewins, “Supplying the Present Want,” 7.

150 By adapting to American market demands, English ceramic manufacturers were able to maintain its dominance in the market even as American manufacturing was developing. Ibid., 17.

151 Ibid., 11-12.

152 By 1846 there were 42 signatories on the price-fixing agreement, which accounted for one third of the potteries, and at least that many potteries were involved in the American market. Ibid., 15.
exceeded demand, which meant that ceramic prices dropped at a faster rate than other commodities.\textsuperscript{153} In 1808, Staffordshire potters met to prevent destructive price-cutting and determine standardized pricing.\textsuperscript{154} The 1814 list has been described as the “most important price fixing list to emerge from this period.”\textsuperscript{155} It served as a guide for auction bidding and probate inventory valuation in the past, and it provides historians with insight into the comparative cost of various ceramics. The price fixing lists established not only the base price of ceramics, but it also delineated the standard discounts on products.\textsuperscript{156} The 1814 list was revised and updated as late as 1846 (see Appendix A). These price fixing lists record the decorative terminology and product sizes used by ceramic manufacturers. As a result of these price-fixing agreements, products sold by the numerous Staffordshire potters were standardized in size, shape, decoration, and cost. To effectively compete in an oversaturated market, manufacturers found it necessary to introduce new designs and appeal to the tastes of discerning markets.\textsuperscript{157}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153} Miller, “Marketing Ceramics in North America: An Introduction,” 4.
\item \textsuperscript{154} George Miller, “George M. Coates, Pottery Merchant,” 40.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 40.
\item \textsuperscript{156} From 1780 to 1814 Staffordshire potteries offered standard discount of 5 percent for breakage and 5 percent for cash payments. As time went on, manufacturers offered increasing discounts to gain an advantage over their competitors. From 1816 to 1830 the average discount was 28.85 percent, and from 1832-1842 it was 39.8 percent. Miller, “A Revised Set of CC index Values,” 3-4.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Potters could also gain a competitive edge by offering larger vessel sizes for the price of a smaller vessel. This led to a difference in the “trade” size and the actual size that can be measured on existing objects.
\end{itemize}
Many discussions of differences in taste between the British and American market revolve around the idea that America was a dumping ground for excess goods. However, British exporters who sent surplus inventory to American markets without guaranteed buyers risked not selling goods or selling them at a loss. The in-depth examination of the business records of ceramics manufacturers and merchants done by scholars like Miller and Ewins further complicates the narrative of American taste. The supply of goods in the American market was determined by what consumers would buy, which was a complex negotiation of ceramic prices and decorative desires. Invoices of orders made by American importers reveal what merchants believed they could sell. This thesis makes an intervention in the scholarship, noting that western markets did have access to and demand for some of the higher quality wares that were more prevalent in eastern cities. Benjamin Seabury’s inventories, where his stock on hand was recorded, reflect his nuanced understanding of various markets based on the types of goods he believed that he could sell in Rochester and New York City.

5.3 Ceramic Type Analysis

Based on decoration and form, the price-fixing lists provide the best insight into how ceramic differences were conceptualized in the nineteenth century. Collectors, curators, and archaeologists have developed a system of ceramic identification and connoisseurship based on ware type. They have typically divided earthenware vessels with cream-colored bodies into consecutive categories like creamware, pearlware, and whiteware. However, in the nineteenth century, ceramics were divided by ware type with respect to porcelain, stoneware, and earthenware, but earthenware with cream-colored bodies were distinguished based on their decoration. Creamware as a category of ceramics has a long lineage. Makers, merchants, and
consumers of the period referred to it with other terms like cream colour, CC ware, and Queensware. In contrast, the term pearlware, used to define the cream-colored earthenware with a clear lead glaze that has a blue tint, was not a period term; as scholar George Miller notes, “it has become a pigment of our imagination.” The term was created by collectors and historians who study ceramics based on the Josiah Wedgewood’s term “pearl white,” which other potters called “China glaze.” The general narrative of English ceramic development claims that pearlware replaced creamware as an evolution towards imitating Chinese porcelain. By studying period terminology and historical business records, it is evident that “China glaze and pearlware did not replace creamware: decoration replaced creamware.” Thus, there is greater benefit to analyzing contemporary business records based on decorative type than ware type since this is more in line with period conceptualizations of ceramics.

5.3.1 Ceramic Decoration

In analyzing Seabury’s inventories, this research has adapted the system of defining ceramic goods based on the decoration groups that were delineated by George Miller in *Classification and Economic Scaling of 19th Century Ceramics*. Miller defined four ceramic groups based on their value as illustrated in the

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Staffordshire price fixing lists. These decorative groups are organized by increasing decoration and expense.\footnote{161}

The least expensive decorative group is the undecorated “CC” ware. After 1820, CC wares tended to be utilitarian forms that were made for use in the kitchen or chamber. CC ware was rarely decorated and it was typically produced in a narrow range of forms. The second decorative group was minimally or simply decorated, which required little skill on the part of the ceramic worker. Examples of this type of decoration include edged, sponge, banded, and mocha. Miller’s third group of decoration was painted wares. These ceramics were hand painted with floral motifs, Chinese landscapes, and geometric patterns. The fourth group was transfer printed ceramics, which was a process for underglaze decoration that allowed for exactly matching pieces. When this process was new in the 1790s, transfer printed goods were three to five times more expensive than CC wares, but by the mid-nineteenth century, transfer printed wares were only one and a half or two times more expensive than CC wares.\footnote{162} At first, transfer printing was only possible with cobalt derived blue hues, but a wider variety of colors including brown, black, purple, red, and green were developed as the nineteenth century progressed.

While the price of painted ceramics generally lies between the second and fourth decorative groups, there is a large range of skill and quality of what the artist produced. Thus, the very best painted ceramics were some of the most elite ceramics

\footnote{161} This general trend held true until the mid-1850s when there was a change in ceramics taste. Plain white ironstone became popular and was more expensive than transfer printed ceramics.

\footnote{162} Miller, Classification and Economic Scaling, 9.
available, but they were rare in the United States where instead simple, stylized motifs were more in demand in the United States. For example, the “Persian” style, popular from the 1830s through the 1860s, was a boldly painted flower and leaf design that utilized a bright pallet of red and green with black stems (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4 for a later example of Persian decoration). Persian painted tea sets, bowls, chamber pots, and other forms were listed in Benjamin Seabury’s Rochester and New York City inventories. In fact, this was one of the only painted wares that was further described by its style.

![Figure 5.3 Plate (Cup plate), Staffordshire, England, 1859-1880, painted enamel on Earthenware, Private collection. View of front. Image by author.](image)

For this research, two decorative groups were added to better represent the full swath of decorated goods described in Seabury’s inventories. The first of these additional groups was lusterwares, which are characterized by a metallic glaze. The second additional group was the ceramic wares that were only defined by their color, which included yellow ware and black or blue wares. These two groups were not very common in the two inventories, comprising only 1.3 percent of all ceramics across both inventories.

\[16^4\] These black or blue wares may be a reference to jasper ware, which is actually a type of stoneware. However, there was not enough description in the inventory to clarify this. Furthermore, there was such a little amount of it that it does not have a large impact on the statistical analysis of the inventories.
By analyzing the ceramics based on decorative groups, the similarities and differences between Seabury’s Rochester and New York City stock become evident (see Figure 5.5). The entire suite of ceramic decoration was present in both cities, which shows that Rochester and other western cities had access to all levels of ceramic goods. However, the varied distribution of these decorative groups within the two inventories indicates that Seabury prepared for a different degree of demand for various decorative ware types in each region. The amount of transfer printed wares—the predominant decorative group—was virtually the same in both inventories, comprising 52.1 percent of the stock in New York City and 54.5 percent of the stock in Rochester.

However, disregarding transfer wares, Seabury determined that his market in New York City required more expensive decorated wares; thus, there was over double the number of painted wares in the New York City inventory than in the Rochester inventory. Conversely, the Rochester market desired a greater amount of undecorated or simply decorated. Almost one third (30.3 percent) of the Rochester ceramics were identified to be undecorated CC ware or coincide with Miller’s second decorative group, the simply decorated wares. In contrast, these two decorative groups only comprised 20.6 percent of the New York City inventory. This difference in ceramic decoration distribution in the inventory indicates the Seabury was prepared to supply a slightly different market demand in each region.

While it may be easy to claim that consumer taste in western cities was less developed than that of consumers in cities like New York, these inventories prove otherwise. The uncivilized frontiersmen trope was a common depiction of Americans in early nineteenth century literature because, as Kariann Yakota noted, the “rough and ragged backwoodsman (usually from the South or West) provided more
interesting fodder for their [English and European] publications than East Coast elites who had made it their business to emulate European mores.” While Yokota delineated the origin of this trope and reason for its popularity, she maintains the stereotype that eastern cities were more refined than western cities. This research shows that consumer markets in western cities did have access to all types of fancy wares just as New York City had access to all varieties of plain wares. Thus, western markets were not necessarily less refined than eastern cities. Instead, these types of cities were different, but that difference was a matter of degree and not style. The difference in distribution of decorative types in these two inventories may reflect more than regional tastes. Rather, this difference could be explained by the fact that as the main ceramic merchant in Rochester, Seabury was supplying a larger range of customers from various socio-economic groups than he was in New York City. Furthermore, this research introduces Rochester into the discussion of style and taste whereas previous scholarship on the region has focused on religious revivals and infrastructure development.

165 Yokota, Unbecoming British, 239.
Figure 5.5  Ceramic Decoration by City based on the Seabury Inventories. Prepared by author.

Figure 5.6  Ceramic Use of the Stock in the Seabury Inventories. Prepared by author.
5.3.2 Ceramic Use

Examining the intended use of the ceramics listed in the inventories provides further insight to how Benjamin Seabury perceived the difference in market demands between Rochester and New York City (see Figure 5.6). Rather than analyzing each of the approximately 40 different ceramic forms listed in the inventory, these forms have been grouped into their intended use in the household. Dining and serving wares including plates, dishes, tureens, salts, and over 20 other forms fit within the tableware group. The tea group includes the pots, cups, and accessories for drinking tea and coffee. Chamber wares include basins, ewers, chamber pots, and other items that aided with hygiene related activities in the chamber. Housewares, both utilitarian and decorative, comprise the final group and have the smallest presence in the inventory. Forms within this group include the items that do not fit into the other groups as they were intended for use in other areas of the house, including toy sets, jars, and vases.

Tableware comprised the majority of ceramics in both inventories—in terms of both the amount of goods and the variety of forms (see Figure 5.6).166 This means that tableware was also likely the type of good that Seabury sold the most of in both cities. Significantly, over 87 percent of the ceramics in the Rochester inventory were tableware while the same forms account for only 57 percent of the New York City inventory. This thirty percent differential is mirrored in the teawares, which account for 39 percent of the New York City stock and 9 percent of the Rochester stock. Evidently, Seabury supplied different consumer demands in these two cities. Seabury’s customers in Rochester and further west did not desire as many teawares as

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166 Though there was more variety of forms within the tableware category, which not only contributed to the higher amount of objects, but it also meant that more tableware was desired and able to be sold than other form types.
his customers on the east coast. Teawares are more of a luxury good than tablewares, which may be why there was less of a demand for them in the Rochester market.\textsuperscript{167} However, it is important to note that Seabury still stocked several thousand teawares in Rochester. Therefore, consumers in western cities did have access to luxury goods, just not to the same extent as customers in eastern cities.

\subsection*{5.3.3 Ceramic Decoration versus Use}

Looking at the variables of decoration and use independently reveals some information about the market characteristics in each city, but examining these variables together as a ratio is even more revealing (see Figure 5.7 and Figure 5.8). For both cities, transfer print was the most common decorative style for tableware.\textsuperscript{168} The transfer printing technology allowed for identical sets, which is useful for multi-piece dining services. In both inventories, plain and simply decorated wares were present for the table and chamber, but not for teawares. Teawares were unnecessary luxury objects that were meant to be conspicuously elegant with more fashionable decoration. As a result, they were not commonly made in plainer decorative types. Both Rochester and New York City were almost exclusively stocked with painted or printed teawares. Interestingly, there were few painted ceramics outside of the teaware category. Figures 5.7 and 5.8 show that the trend lines of the painted ceramics type

\textsuperscript{167} For more information on the position of teawares and the performance of tea drinking as a self-conscious statement of luxury see Kariann Akemi Yokota, \textit{Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation}, 98-100.

\textsuperscript{168} The prominence of transfer printed tableware in the inventories is to be expected since, as isolated variables, transfer print and tablewares were the most common groups in the inventory.
(see the green lines) peaked for teawares and fell drastically for both table and chamberwares in both inventories. Painted wares varied greatly in their level of decoration, so perhaps New York stocked fancier painted teawares than Rochester, but we cannot fully determine this from the inventory. Nevertheless, the fact that the vast majority of painted goods in both inventories were teawares indicates that painted wares were considered fancier. Furthermore, the fact that the teaware decorative trends were the same for both cities also indicates that Rochester and New York City had similar style desires for their tea ware, even as a greater amount of tea ware was stocked for New York City.

Comparing the trend lines of the printed ceramics in Rochester and New York displays a distinct difference. (See the purple lines in Figures 5.7 and 5.8.) In Rochester, printed chamberwares were more common than undecorated (CC) chamberwares, and painted teawares were more common than printed teawares (see Figure 5.7). The opposite was true for New York City (see Figure 5.8). The consumers that Seabury supplied in and around Rochester had a greater demand for decorated—and thus fancier—chamberwares than his consumers in New York City. Additionally, consumers in New York City had a slightly elevated demand for printed teawares than

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169 Much of the teawares in the inventory were part of crated goods, so it is hard to isolate the individual object’s cost. However, comparing other forms within the inventory reveals a difference in the price of painted goods in the two inventories. A good example of this is the price of painted and plainly decorated jugs. In Rochester, the average cost of a jug was 10 cents in both of these decorative groups. However, in New York City, a painted jug cost on average 12 cents and a plainly decorated jug cost only 7 cents. Keeping in mind that it was an added expense to ship goods to Rochester, the higher price of painted jugs in New York City indicates that those jugs were of higher quality than the painted jugs in Rochester, which reflects a slight distinction in the market demands of these two cities.
those in Rochester, as indicated in the goods Seabury stocked. This speaks to Seabury’s role as a specialist ceramic merchant who stocked a wide variety of ceramics to fill the needs of all strata of society, though he adjusted to the different market needs in each city.

This comparison of decorative type and use type for the goods in both inventories clearly displays that the stock in Rochester and New York City was more alike than it was different. This demonstrates that consumers in Rochester were aware of and had access to the same types of decorative wares as consumers in New York City. However, the slight differences in the goods that Seabury stocked for both cities reveals that the two regions had distinct demands and varied needs. Seabury’s businesses excelled—for the short time he was alive—because he recognized these subtle differences and adjusted his businesses practices by acting as a specialized ceramic merchant in New York City and a hybrid specialized-general merchant in Rochester. As a result, he was able to successfully cater to both markets.
Figure 5.7  Rochester Ceramic Use by Decorative Type. Prepared by author.

Figure 5.8  New York City Ceramic Use by Decorative Type. Prepared by author.
Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Though not much is known about Benjamin Seabury as an individual, the reconstruction of his business practices using newspaper sources and the two inventories reveals that he was a shrewd businessman. By the age of 34, Seabury operated two successful businesses, one of which, the Rochester branch, seemed to be on the verge of expanding. There is evidence that he was nurturing business connections in markets even further west, which were easily accessible following the opening of the Erie Canal. Seabury’s success in Rochester was due in large part to the fact that he was the only specialized ceramic merchant in that city. After his death, Seabury’s partners continued to serve and exploit the customer base that Seabury established, essentially proving the strength and value of the business he created in Rochester.

While Seabury is notable because he was able to navigate an evolving economic atmosphere by adapting various forms of contemporary business practices, he is not exceptional. He did not create an entirely new business system, but that does not mean that Seabury was unimportant. In fact, this study of Seabury’s business practices is important because they were not exceptional. He was resourceful and savvy, which helped him to become a moderately successful businessman. Not everybody had the skillset necessary to build successful businesses like Seabury, but many did. Thus, Seabury should be considered an example of a resourceful merchant who speculated in growing western markets by modifying various business practices.
The true significance in studying Seabury’s inventories is that they provide an in-depth case study of a business model common in borderland cities in the nineteenth century.

This research expands the historiography of ceramics scholarship and consumption studies with its focus on a western city in the 1820s and 1830s. Using a methodology established in Marketing Ceramics in North America conference and publication that focused on ceramic merchants’ business records, this study utilized a more limited array of records with the purpose of recreating a business network and determining differences in consumer demand. This model and the information gleaned from the Seabury inventories can be useful for future comparative studies.

Furthermore, Seabury’s inventories provide a snapshot of the material world of middle-class Americans. Though not as glamorous as the high-style ceramics found in many museums, these inventories reflect the goods that were more commonly available, and therefore more influential on people’s everyday lives. Understanding the specifics of ceramic demand in different markets is a difficult task to accomplish. As Neil Ewins reflects:

It now seems increasingly unreasonable to argue that any specific type of ware was exported to only one particular market. It is feasible that even the most blatantly adapted wares—those with printed American imagery—were at certain times passed off on the British market. So where does this leave the notion of diverging demand? A more modified view would be that the difference that existed between Britain and the United States had more to do with the volume of wares being sold rather than with their type.¹⁷⁰

This research on Benjamin Seabury’s businesses similarly complicates the narrative of ceramic demand within the United States. While there are undeniably distinctions among regional markets, as is reflected in the analysis of the Rochester and New York City inventories, it is important not to over-conflate these differences. Variations of ceramic demand should not be considered absolute differences. Both Rochester and New York City had access to the same array of goods. As Yokota postulates, “material dependence on imported British goods fostered a larger, pan-regional culture” across the United States.\footnote{Yokota, Unbecoming British, 72.} The similarities in the ceramic objects recorded in the inventory indicate that New York City and Rochester had comparable consumer demands and associated cultural practices.

However, it would also be just as inaccurate not to recognize the distinctions in the ceramic demands between markets in Rochester and New York City. The subtle differences of Seabury’s stock in the two cities reveals that the two cities did not share identical demands, and Seabury catered to the different needs of each. To consider western cities associated with infrastructural developments like the Erie Canal as examples of “expanding western hinterlands,” as Yokota wrote, underestimates the complexity of social and economic relationships in borderland regions and the access that settlers in this region had to sophisticated manufactured products.\footnote{Ibid., 233.}

Rochester serves as a useful example of the changing business atmosphere in western cities. This research exemplifies how merchants adjusted their commercial strategies to suit various market needs and changing conditions. Benjamin Seabury,
like many other merchants, deftly applied various business practices to achieve success by managing two interdependent yet individual businesses in two distinct cities, Rochester and New York City, during the 1820s and 1830s. He negotiated complex systems of exchange to build successful, though short-lived businesses.
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Appendix A

PRICES OF CC, EDGED, AND TRANSFER PRINTED CERAMICS BASED ON THE STAFFORDSHIRE POTTERS’ PRICE FIXING AGREEMENTS

This chart is derived from George L. Miller, *Classification and Economic Scaling of 19th Century Ceramics* (Ottawa, Ontario: Parks Canada, 1974) and is based upon the price fixing agreements established by Staffordshire Potters.

The Prices are given in English Pence per dozen.

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* The Willow pattern is differentiated from other transfer printed patterns in the 19th century price lists. In this chart the price of Willow transfer printed (W) items is followed by the price for other transfer prints (O) in each form category.
Appendix B

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