From New England to the Old Northwest: The American Odyssey of the Jeremiah Greenman Family

ROBERT BRAY
PAUL BUSHNELL

JEREMIAH GREENMAN was born in 1758 in Newport, Rhode Island, a third-generation New Englander, the descendant of seafaring folk from Massachusetts and Rhode Island—undistinguished in either name or economic position. After the barest sort of common-school training in the three R's, young Greenman was on the verge of deciding what to do with his life when the American Revolution broke out. He joined the Continental Army for the reasons that motivated many other young men of that day: patriotism and the lack of vocational skills. Greenman enlisted in the Rhode Island Regiment as a private in May of 1775 and served for the entire war. He rose steadily through the ranks, being promoted sergeant in 1777, ensign in 1779, first lieutenant in 1781, and regimental adjutant in 1782.

Unquestionably the war transformed Jeremiah Greenman, as it must have thousands of other American soldiers, especially the younger ones. The cardinal effect it had upon the lad from Rhode Island was to increase dramatically his expectations for the future. He had served long and faithfully, achieving at last the coveted status of commissioned officer. And he was certified as a competent and energetic officer, loyal and dependable. Furthermore, he had become a member, and probably knew he was a member, of an officer cadre that had all the trappings of a potential elite. The outward symbolism of his new status was strikingly manifested in his joining the Society of the Cincinnati at Saratoga Barracks in 1783, just before his discharge. Here was the basis of an aristocracy of worth within the infant democracy—a natural and rightful outgrowth, its members thought, of the political sentiments underlying the new nation. Greenman and others like him wished nothing so much as to continue their service to America by establishing themselves in a variety of civil and semi-civil careers they thought they had honestly earned through blood and loyalty and for which they were undeniably, even

©Northern Illinois University Press, 1976

Robert Bray is associate professor of English at Illinois Wesleyan University. Paul Bushnell is assistant professor of history at the same institution. The authors jointly conduct the American Studies program at Illinois Wesleyan. *They wish to acknowledge the support of the Newberry Library of Chicago, the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. This article, presented in slightly different form at the October, 1975, meeting of the Illinois State Historical Society, is adapted from the Introduction of the forthcoming* Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution: An Annotated Edition of the Diary of Jeremiah Greenman, *edited by the authors and to be published this fall by Northern Illinois University Press.*

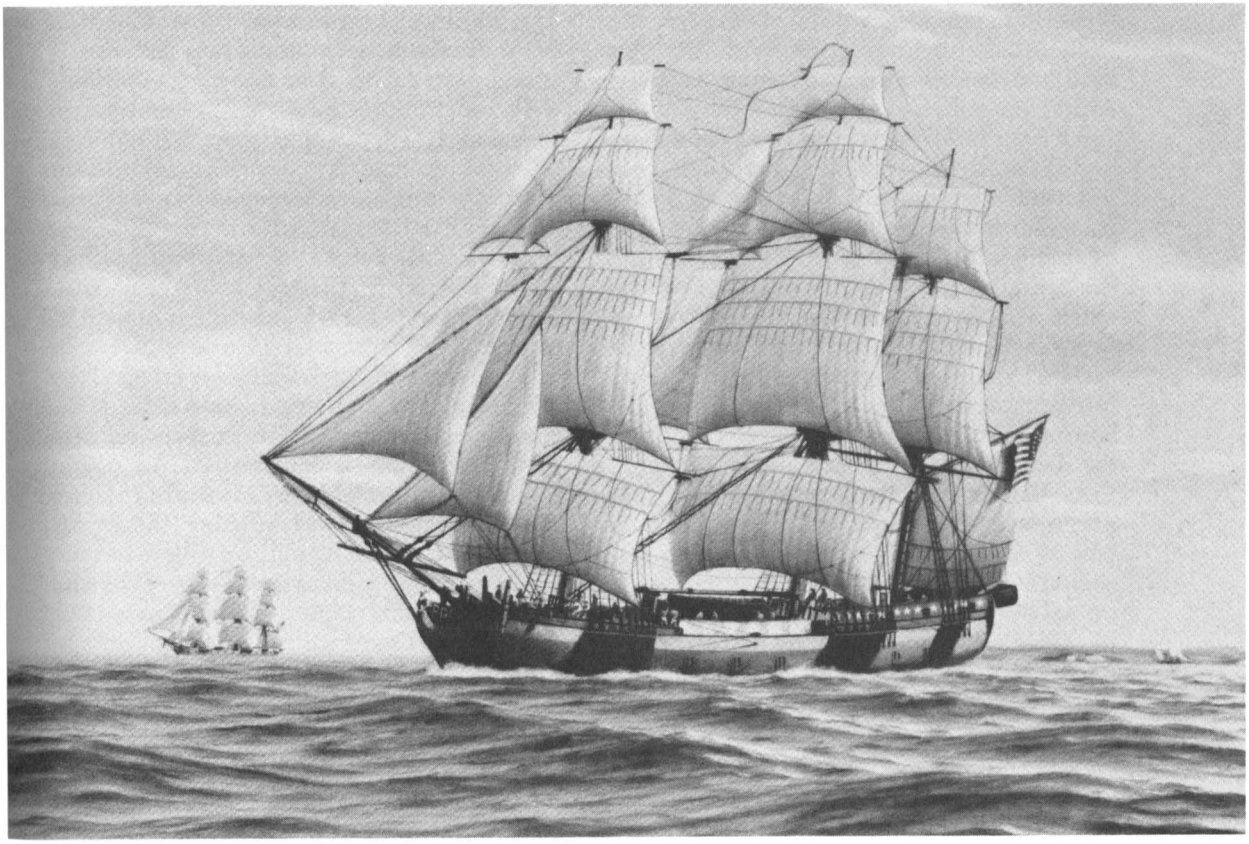
preeminently, qualified. For every officer of independent means there were a dozen or so who very much needed to make a life for themselves—needed, that is, a civilian stage upon which they might continue their progress towards self-sufficiency.

Greenman was a case in point. Utterly without vocational skills when he entered the army, he learned in eight years of regimental life to keep rolls and accounts, to write as well as a middling scrivener, to give orders and take them, and to judge and manage men with more than a little ability. Those things he had developed at a considerable investment in time for himself and in money for the fledgling state. But now that the war was over, what was to become of his remarkable attainments? He was confident that America would eventually need his skills as she had needed them in the struggle for independence, but in the meantime he needed something to do. Many of his fellow soldiers were heading west in order to redeem congressional promises of bounty lands and to seek their fortunes. But Greenman chose to stay in Rhode Island. He settled in Providence, a town at the threshold of commercial greatness, where he thought he had the best chance of a livelihood.

His capital was largely what he had received as military severence pay, and with it he launched a career as a retail merchant. In autumn of 1784 he married Mary Eddy, from the prolific Providence Eddys—shipwrights, seamen, and shippers who dominated the west side of the town. Greenman soon became discouraged with trade, and after a year or so abandoned it completely. Some time in 1785 he turned to the sea. Late in the war he had started to study navigation, and now he began shipping on board Providence merchant ships in order to qualify for his mastership, or captaincy, in the United States Merchant Marine. By 1790 he was sailing several times a year from Providence as a shipmaster—apparently having found the civilian career that would provide social and economic security for himself and his family. But Greenman, no matter what else he turned to, never relinquished the dream of public service. In his two decades as a sea captain he sought a variety of governmental appointments, and circumstances appeared to favor his chances in the early 1790's. He saw with pleasure that General George Washington, his revered commander in chief, was the first President of the United States under the new Constitution, and he reasoned that Washington would lend a sympathetic ear to a deserving veteran. Then, too, Greenman's regimental commander, Colonel Jeremiah Olney, had become collector of customs for the Port of Providence, and had given Greenman letters of recommendation. Greenman's confidence was more than a little naive, but he was merely playing out the second act of a personal drama that was also being enacted on a national scale: the realization of a Republic of Virtue administered in the best meritocratic way by the mature Cincinnati, whose service was finally being rewarded by a grateful nation. In Greenman's case, however, the drama was one of progressive disillusionment, for he was unsuccessful in his quest for a government sinecure. Over a period of several years he attempted to reenter the army as a captain and company commander, to secure a lieutenancy in the refurbished United States Navy, and to serve as first mate on a federal revenue cutter. It was all to no avail.

Late in his life Greenman recalled, "Having devoted my youthful days to the service of my country I was deprived of the opportunity which young men generally possess of acquiring any mechanical art or perfecting my self in any profession."[1] Indeed, the war *had* trained him, and trained him well, for a certain range of professions, but they were of the sort that lay beyond his class. In a way, his was a classic eighteenth-century case of being educated out of his own world without being given the material means or social connections to enter the higher one where his expectations lay. To be sure, advancement was not supposed to work that way in a democracy, but America was not yet sufficiently developed to support an officer-professional class of any size.

The frustration of Greenman's revolutionary expectations probably accounts for



The Alfred, *first Continental flagship. Jeremiah Greenman, Revolutionary War veteran and captain in the merchant marine, applied for a commission in the infant United States Navy.*

his otherwise astonishing decision to remove to Ohio in 1805. The emigration is especially difficult to understand when one remembers that Greenman, as head of the family, had spurned the West in the 1780's, was by nature and long familiarity tied to the sea, and consequently had not farmed a day in his life. The most likely explanation for his decision was the increasing interruption of the sea trade—and thus Greenman's livelihood—by both the French and British during the Napoleonic Wars. Greenman still held his bounty land warrant for Revolutionary service, and it seemed that some good might yet come of it for his family, if not for himself. In 1783 he had seen no need to start over, for a life of bright promise was before him. In 1805, however, at age forty-seven, he had to admit that the survival of the Greenman family as a family dictated a new beginning.

The Greenmans left Providence for Ohio in autumn of 1806—by what route and means they traveled is not known. By October they had reached Marietta, at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers. The family consisted of Jeremiah and Mary, the sons John and Jeremiah, and the daughter Mary and her husband William Dunham and infant son. They carried their household possessions and "1,000 Spanish milled dollars" from the sale of their Providence homestead.[2] None of the Greenmans ever saw New England again.

It seemed perfectly natural for the family to head for Ohio—from its earliest territorial days a goal of many companies of

[1]Greenman pension declaration, July 24, 1820, Greenman pension file, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter cited as Greenman pension file).

[2]Town of Providence Deed Book, Vol. 31, p. 211, Providence City Hall, Providence, R.I.

New England emigrants. The Greenmans were following where thousands of their kind had already gone, beginning with the sturdy vanguard of the Ohio Company of Associates in the late 1780's. That group had done far more than open a new land to settlement: they had, with some success, transplanted an entire culture and mode of living—the New England mode—into the wilderness. Thus, when the Greenmans arrived in Marietta in 1806, they found a New England village that was the thriving commercial hub and county seat of Washington County.[3] Ohio Company lands in the area were solidly settled, and the frontier had already pushed farther west. Greenman, the aging Yankee skipper, nevertheless referred to the region as "the Wilderness of Ohio."[4]

No one knows why the family determined to put down in that particular place, for Greenman's bounty land warrant (two hundred acres for a lieutenant) was for land farther north in the United States Military Reserve, near Columbus.[5] Whatever their reason, the Greenmans settled near the village of Waterford, in Waterford Township, some twenty miles up the Muskingum from Marietta. For the sum of "four hundred dollars lawfill [*sic*] money," they acquired a farm of one hundred acres, described on tax assessment rolls as third-rate land and by Greenman as his "upland hilly farm."[6] In no sense was the farm a desirable one for crops. Indeed, it had been part of the "donation lands" given away by the Ohio Company in 1788.[7] Nevertheless, the sons were anxious to try even that hilly and rocky ground, and the place was to be the Greenman homestead for the remainder of the father's life.

The first year in Ohio was devoted to improving the Waterford farm. The family put up a log cabin and a log barn, sank and walled a forty-seven–foot well, acquired some livestock, and planted a few crops. There was plenty for the sons to do. But what of the father? In other circumstances his might have been the enviable position of living the life of a landed retired Revolutionary veteran and sea captain, but in Waterford Township the land was poor, the war was fast-receding in the national memory, and the captain had no sea to look out upon and curse or bless. It is not surprising that he was sometimes despondent. On his lowest days he was apt to remark, "I have not one Solitary friend or acquaintance that knows or ever heard of me."[8] That was an exaggeration, for Jeremiah Greenman was anything but antisocial, and before many months had passed, he was well known in Waterford. Thrice he was elected township justice of the peace—a post that gave him, between 1812 and 1816, a chance to perform the official service he so dearly loved.[9] Either at his farm or around the township he transacted the homely business of his office: performing marriages, witnessing lesser legal documents, and keeping the estray book of lost, wandering, or stolen horses.

But the family farm did not prosper and the Greenman capital diminished. The farm, in fact, was so poor that Greenman appealed to his son John to take it over. John Greenman answered his father's request, but soon discovered that the farm could not support both his own family and that of his father. Ultimately the farm was transferred to the younger Greenman son, Jeremiah, Jr. These were years of increasing poverty and loneliness for the elder Jeremiah. Through it all he managed to carry himself with more than a vestige of upright New England dignity, and it is probably not too much to say that because of that he won the respect of his neighbors. Captain Greenman, as he was known, became a regular feature of the Waterford landscape. He assiduously kept up his Masonic affiliation, and on important holidays he participated in the pomp and ceremony

[3]For a discussion of town-building on the Ohio frontier, see Ray Allen Billington, *Western Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 212–18.

[4]Greenman to the local pension agent (probably Levi Barber), Sept. 20, 1821, Greenman pension file.

[5]Clifford Neal Smith, *Federal Land Series . . . Volume 2: 1799–1835, Federal Bounty-Land Warrants of the American Revolution* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), pp. xi–xix, 70, 353.

[6]Washington County Deed Book, Vol. 9, pp. 458–59, Washington County Courthouse, Marietta, Ohio; Greenman pension declaration, July 24, 1820, Greenman pension file.

of the Mount Moriah Lodge[10] or with another and more exclusive fraternity: the Revolutionary veterans. The Ohio years were thus by no means empty ones for Jeremiah Greenman, though in truth he was a kind of displaced person. The life was not what he had wanted but one he accepted with a typical fatalism tempered by the hope that the family might prosper.

Documentary evidence about the common soldiers of the American Revolution is slight—particularly for those who slipped into the vast anonymity of the West. Nine times out of ten the biography of such as Jeremiah Greenman concludes with a death date, a will, and perhaps an obituary in the local newspaper. In Greenman's case, however, we are fortunate enough to have some late documents in his own hand, the only extant papers written by him between the penning of his journal during the war and his death in 1828. The documents are letters and court depositions submitted to the War Department in support of his Revolutionary War pension application. They were written between 1818 and 1821, and provide rare glimpses of Greenman in his later years and the domestic situation of the Greenman family in early rural Ohio.

In 1818 Congress authorized pensions for Revolutionary War veterans, and Greenman applied at once for an officer's pension of $20 monthly. He appeared at the court of common pleas in Marietta, swore the bona fides concerning his service, and attested that he was "in reduced circumstances" and stood in need of the assistance of his country.[11] Soon he was placed on the pension rolls and began receiving his allowance. This should have ended Greenman's correspondence with the federal government, and had it done so, he would have been richer and happier, but his biographers considerably impoverished. Instead, Greenman faced a classical bureaucratic miasma, which he did not satisfactorily clear up for almost four years.

The pension act of 1818 had not required substantial proof of the pensioner's reduced circumstances, but an act of May, 1820, did require such proof. The old soldiers were therefore compelled to return to court and submit a schedule of personal property and income; that schedule was to be reviewed by the secretary of war, who would decide the merits of each case.[12] Accordingly, Greenman had another day in court. He carefully listed his personal property—farm and household. And a curious enumeration it was! His list of household property gives a quaint impression of pioneer life, but also speaks sadly of the poverty of the Greenmans:

> One three feet Poplar Table, one Bureau, One light stand a portable writing desk, four Common Chairs, one pair of fire dogs, one pr of tongs & shovell, one looking glass 14 by 20 inches one Monumental Engraving of the memory of Washington 12 by 14 Inches, Six Silver Table spoons, six ditto of Teaspoons 3 old case Knives & forks, Ten volumes of old books and pamphlets on different subjects, two pewter platterzs, Six pewter plates, twelve earthen ditto, two earthern Teapots, one sugar bowl & cream pot five china cups & saucers, four Liverpool Ditto, one castor containing four glass pieces, five wine glasses, one earthen pitcher Two Iron Kittles 10 gals each one dinner pot, one Cake Oven without a cover one frying pan One Small Skillet One Small Spider, an old tin bake oven & several other articles too trifling to mention.

Greenman went on to declare that he and his "very much debilitated" wife had "about sixty dollars" to their name—and that accumulated only after two years on the pension rolls—and were reluctant to look to their children for subsistence. By that time the children were burdened with marginal farms and families of their own

[7]See the original Ohio Company plat book, Washington County Courthouse.

[8]Pension declaration, July 24, 1820.

[9]William Jennings, "Marriage Record of Washington County, Ohio," *Old Northwest Genealogical Quarterly*, 4 (1901). Greenman was an active justice of the peace during this period; for a record of the numerous marriages he performed, see Jennings.

[10]*History of Washington County, Ohio* (Cleveland: H. Z. Williams & Bro., 1881), p. 543.

[11]Pension declaration, April 16, 1818, Greenman pension file.

[12]Full texts of both acts may be found in *Debates and Proceedings of the Congress of the United States*, 15 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 2518–19, 16 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 2582–83.

to support.[13] Greenman concluded with a ringing sentence that makes concrete for the historian the crucial but elusive notion of his "revolutionary expectations": "And where [*sic*] it not for the leisure hours I spent while in the army in the study of Navigation under the pupilage of Major Genl Schuyler, at the close of the War I should [have] been plunged on the world destitute of employment or been obliged to have resort to some business ill becoming a person who for more than eight years had merited [?] the attention and approbation of the best men of his country."[14] Almost fifty years after the fact, Greenman had not forgotten his early expectations of transcending his origins through meritorious service and close association with "the best men of his country."

Unfortunately, the result of Greenman's second declaration was that he was stricken from the pension rolls.[15] Somewhere in the offices of the Department of War someone deemed him self-sufficient, the possessor of a competency—a fact that must have been news to the owner of the "upland hilly farm," with its two cows, two old horses, few sheep, and indifferent crops that he was unable either to plant or gather in his old age and infirmity. But with characteristic pluck Greenman appealed the decision of the pension examiner. In October of 1820 he wrote directly to Secretary of War John C. Calhoun. Greenman noted "with diffidence" that he supposed "eight years & seven Months service together with three wounds, received whilst in that service, & one of these rendering me incapiable [*sic*] of *hard* labour, that it would have some weight in the decision."[16] Here was typical New England understatement! The letter was brief and to the point, concluding with a reiteration of the plea that a continuation of his pension would give him "some degree of support, without throwing myself on the charity of my children."

The only thing that came of that letter was confirmation that his pension would not be reinstated. The decision seemed to Greenman to impugn his good name. Hence he took up pen again, this time writing to the county pension agent. By *indirectly* addressing Washington, Greenman was able to speak his mind and heart more frankly. And by now his was a righteous indignation: he spoke of his dejection as being more complete than at any time during the long struggle for independence; he noted how mortifying it was to be "proscribed by the Laws of that Country I had faithfully served 8 years."[17] A particularly sore point was the duhious nature of other pension claims when compared with his own:

> Amongst many I could mention, I will take notice of Mr. ———, whose farm joins the one I returned & is called superior to the one I reside in, his service . . . was of short duration, but long enough to come under the period of time allowed by Law to intitle him to a pension, but he hath frequently told Me that he was tired of the Service & that he had hired a substitute, & for all I know both receive the bounty of their Country.

Worse yet, "Mr. ———'s" estate had been adjudged about equal in value to Greenman's, yet only the former appeared to qualify for the pension rolls.

This last letter—or "lengthy rhapsody," as he called it—offers a poignant glimpse of the aging Revolutionary soldier. In an important sense it is Jeremiah Greenman's last testament, the final attempt by an unliterary man to use letters to let the world know that he well remembered what he had fought for, then lived for, and that it was not he but the country that was now forgetful.

His rude eloquence worked. Greenman was reinstated on the pension rolls in February, 1822, and he no doubt took pleasure from the thought that his pen was the instrument of conviction.

---

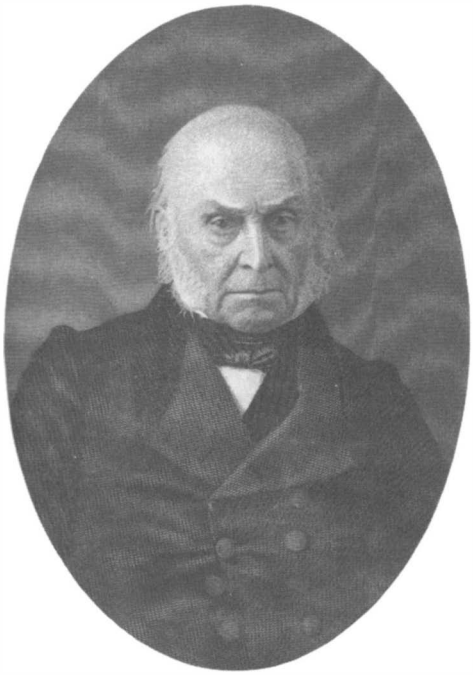
[13]Pension declaration, July 24, 1820.

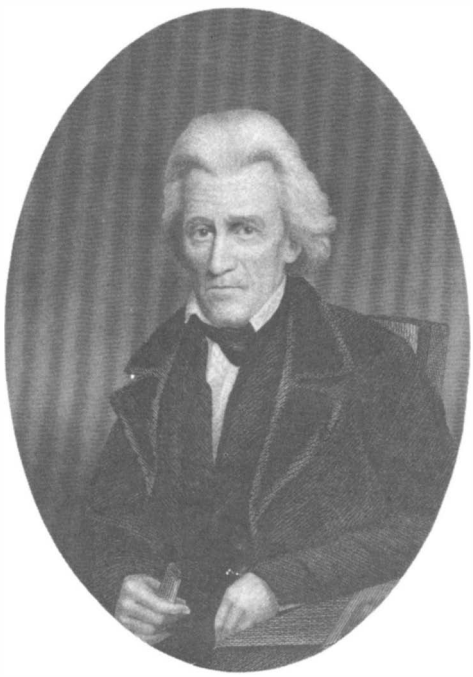
[14]*Ibid.*

[15]A note inscribed on his pension file reads, "off July 26, 1821." Greenman apparently had stopped receiving the pension some time earlier, however.

[16]Greenman to Calhoun, Oct. 14, 1820, Greenman pension file.

[17]Added proof of his poverty appears in his statement that his debts, which he declared originally to be only $60, in fact amounted to $156. He further wrote,





Candidates in the 1828 presidential election—John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. Jeremiah Greenman was an impassioned Adams supporter.

One of the most conspicuous gaps in the Greenman record is the absence of political expression. We know of his loyalty to his country and his admiration for his Excellency, George Washington, but not of Greenman's stand in the early days of party strife between Federalist and Jeffersonian Republican. Did Greenman's own humble origins, implicit belief in liberty, defense of the rights of the people, and life as a yeoman farmer in the Old Northwest lead him into the camp of the Jeffersonian Republicans? Or did his love of personal freedom that stemmed from his New England roots, the discipline of the army, and the autocracy of the sea from a captain's stern perspective help to make him a Federalist? The pension correspondence is tactfully silent about matters of politics, but one surviving source, a lengthy obituary probably written by a member of the family, tells us how he stood in the presidential contest of 1828, when he was given the opportunity to choose between another military leader in the person of Democrat Andrew Jackson and National Republican John Quincy Adams.

For months prior to the election, Marietta and Washington County were afire with the contentious rhetoric and carnival antics of the Democrats. That party had plotted revenge since 1825, when the presidential election was decided in the House of Representatives because no candidate won a majority in the electoral college. Despite Jackson's plurality in the electoral college, Clay's supporters in the House delivered the Presidency to Adams. In 1826 the Jacksonians in the Marietta area went so far as to establish a second newspaper for the little town. Under the motto "*Vox populi* and no concealment," the upstart *Pilot* trumpeted the glorious cause of the people and Old Hickory, while maliciously taunting the

"You are very sensible, that men in general do not want their poverty Known, I declare to you in confidence that since the stoping [*sic*] of my pension that one solletary pound of Tea hath not entered my Cabbin & many other Articles of the necessaries of life which was the case long before the *18th March*" [date of passage of the pension authorization; the underlining (italics) is Greenman's]. These extracts are from Greenman to Barber, Sept. 20, 1821, Greenman pension file.

Whiggish sedateness—at least for the West—of the older *American Friend & Marietta Gazette.* And so it went right up to the election—the *American Friend* deprecating "Jacksonian levelling" and "mob-rule," the *Pilot* raucously proclaiming a "Western Revolution."[18]

The spring of 1828 brought parades, rallies, and grand barbecues, with which the Jacksonians hoped to warm the hearts of the voters. One Jacksonian chided the fastidious of the National Republicans and warned them away: "Those who fear to grease their fingers with a barbecued pig or twist their mouths away at whisky grog, or start at the fame of a 'military chieftan' or are deafened by the thunder of the canon [*sic*] may stay away."[19]

Politics had become a spectacle, and numbers of people were impressed. But not the seventy-one-year-old Revolutionary patriarch of Waterford; he would have none of the grand barbecues of the Jacksonians. To a man who had seen more than one wartime supper of boiled squirrel skin and brackish water, the scores of roast bullocks and rivers of whiskey must have seemed wretchedly excessive. Even if there was only a little he could do to stem the new political tide, he would do it just the same. Preparing to cast his vote, he dressed for what was probably his last trip to town; he followed the trail across the ridges and then down and across Wolf Creek to the main street of Waterford, where he found people gathered about the polling place. Perhaps it was then that he knew his duty: he had to speak to the voters. The stirring of his political convictions brought back unaccustomed strength and firmness to his voice as he urged the reelection of John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts. Greenman spoke, his obituary reported, "with the ardor of younger days—endeavoring to convince the ignorant and confirm the wavering."[20]

We can guess that he appealed to the essentially New England character of the Waterford citizens on behalf of virtues no less essential to the young Republic than to the society of the frontier. Could they of all people, with their tradition of the best doing the most in society, now turn the government over to the untutored and the indiscriminate? And could they, whose villages were patterned on the New England plan, now foreswear the mother region? The irony was that those were the same questions asked on the eve of the Revolution by earnest loyalists. Greenman clearly believed that to have been a very different case.

When he had spoken his mind, Greenman cast his vote and turned homeward. If he had lived to read the Marietta *Friend & Gazette* during the last week of November, he might have taken some consolation from the fact that in spite of Jackson's victory in Ohio, the official tabulation of the Washington County vote was 1,086 for Adams, and only 695 for Jackson.[21] But Greenman died at his home on November 15, 1828, of what his obituary called, in the medical vocabulary of the day, "a billious colic." Two days later many citizens of Waterford gathered to witness "another Revolutionary Patriot descended to the tomb." John Pitkin, pastor of a Presbyterian congregation in Beverly, a small town on the east bank of the Muskingum across from Waterford, preached a funeral sermon before "a large concourse of citizens and the Members of Mount Moriah Lodge."[22] Greenman was buried atop the highest knoll on his "upland hilly farm," and later the grave was headed with a sandstone marker. It carried this inscription opposite the weather side of its face: "Revolutionary Soldier—in memory of Jeremiah Greenman Esq an active officer in that army which bid defiance of

[18]See, for example, the article on "Jacksonian Mobs," *American Friend & Marietta Gazette* (Marietta, Ohio), Nov. 29, 1828. Samuel Eliot Morison called the election "the first presidential one that really smelled"; Robert V. Remini judged that it "set a record for the number of frauds and attempted frauds committed in a presidential contest up to that time," and "splattered more filth in more different directions and upon more innocent people than any other in American history." Morison, *Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 422; Remini, *The Election of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1963), pp. 182, 118.

[19]Remini, p. 110.

[20]Jeremiah Greenman obituary, *American Friend & Marietta Gazette* (Marietta, Ohio), Nov. 29, 1828.

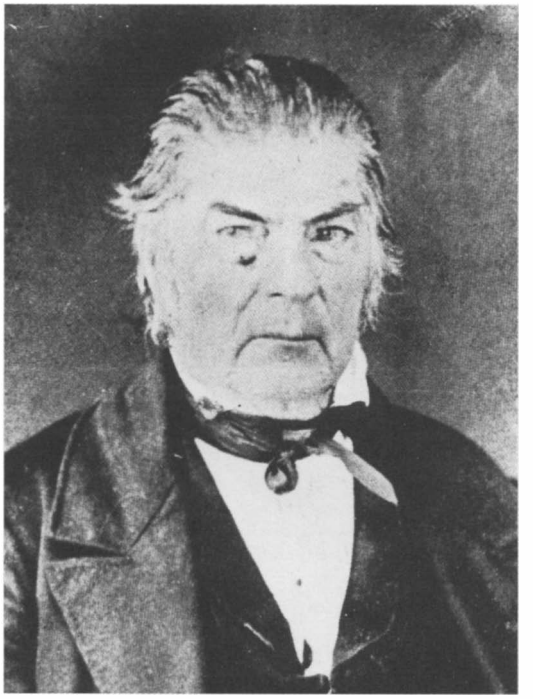
Britons [*sic*] power and established the independence of the United States."

For a century and half the grave has been carefully tended by successive owners of the farm. To the occasional pilgrim who journeys to the grave today, the site on a hill above Wolf Creek Mill Road looks much as it must have in the late autumn of the year 1828.

The death of the patriarch seems to have freed the next generation of Greenmans to make a new assessment of their lives and prospects in Waterford. Within a few months of the death of Jeremiah, the family determined to move westward, this time to the Illinois country, and their departure from Ohio was as complete and irrevocable as that from Rhode Island twenty-three years earlier.

The decision to go to Illinois must have been made before the organization of vigorous campaigns to solicit immigrants or before such books as John Mason Peck's *Guide for Emigrants* (published in 1831) had begun to influence those who were looking westward for new opportunities.[23] But the influence on the Greenmans was not literary so far as we know. Their reasons appear to be simpler and much more tangible: they wished to trade poor land in Ohio for the rich soil of Illinois, and they were influenced in their choice of settlement by other emigrants from Waterford.

The Greenman exodus proceeded in two phases. First, John Greenman, accompanied by Washington County neighbors who had relatives in Illinois, led his family from Ohio in July, 1829. The second party—the younger Greenman son Jeremiah and his family, his mother, and the family of his sister Mary Greenman Dunham—set out in June, 1830.



Dr. Isaac Baker

The John Greenman party traveled overland. "They camped and cooked by the wayside," as the story was passed down in the family, "and the journey, especially through Indiana, was slow and tedious. In places the sloughs were so bad that all the animals were required to pull one wagon through."[24] The worst, where the wagons went in up to their axletrees, was a place called "the Devil's Mush-pot." On August 29, John and his wife Ruth, together with their children and the family of Major Seth Baker, reached Blooming Grove (later Bloomington), a settlement in what became McLean County, Illinois.[25] One cannot help wondering why the Greenmans decided to come to the vicinity of Blooming Grove, for that area was so sparsely settled that it had fewer than six persons per square mile.[26]

The reason must have been that Seth Baker's brother, Dr. Isaac Baker, was already living there. He had come at least as

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] According to William V. Pooley, "To a considerable degree the farmers in the West were influenced by comparative land values"; land alone did not appear to be the Greenmans' primary reason for settling in Illinois, however. Pooley, *The Settlement of Illinois from 1830 to 1850* (1908; rpt. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1968), p. 45.

[24] The family's account of the journey comes from *Portrait and Biographical Album of McLean County, Illinois* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1887), p. 303.

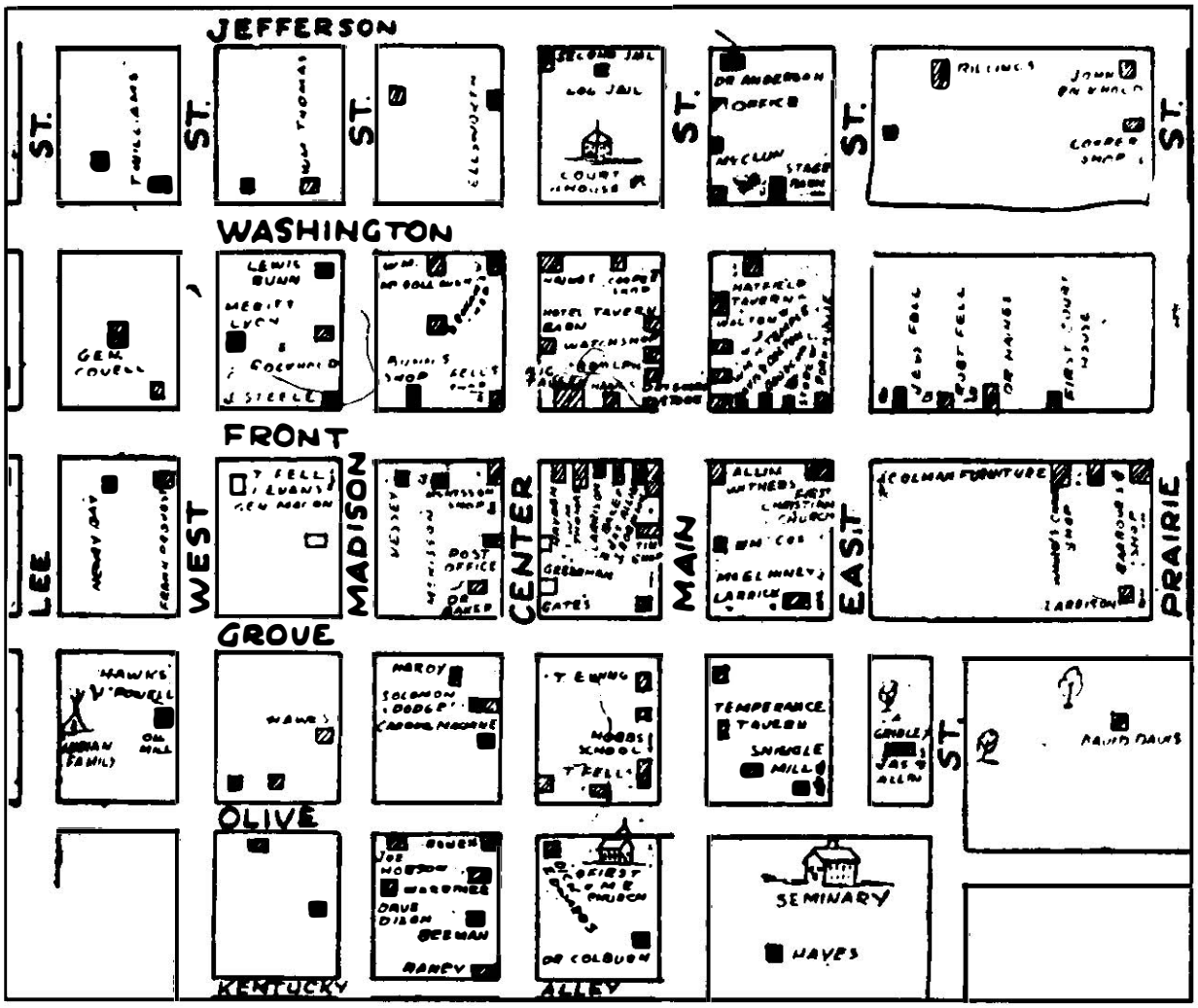
[25] E. Duis, *The Good Old Times in McLean County, Illinois* (1874; rpt. Bloomington, Ill.: McKnight, 1968), pp. 539–40.

[26] Pooley, p. 28.

early as July, 1827.[27] Dr. Baker, it seems, was the vital link in a movement of several families from Washington County, Ohio, to what is now McLean County, Illinois. Another Washington County family that settled in McLean County were the Gateses. In Waterford the estates of Timothy and David Gates had been appraised by members of the Baker family.[28] The name of a later Timothy Gates appears among names of heads of families in Blooming Grove; and the names of yet another Timothy Gates and Franklin Gates appear in a list of single young men of 1830 and 1831.[29]

It is clear that this early wave of settlers came to Blooming Grove at a most propitious time, while good land was still available. They were also fortunate in their friendship with Dr. Isaac Baker, who was experienced in both surveying and building, which he seemed to prefer over practicing medicine. Baker was one of the commissioners appointed by the legislature to lay out McLean County and the first lots on the original site of Bloomington.[30] He was also clerk of the court of county commissioners, was reported to have been recorder of deeds, and was later postmaster of Bloomington. Baker clearly

This 1838 map of Bloomington shows the locations of homes of members of the Baker, Gates, and Greenman families on Center Street between Grove and Front.



was a man who could be of help to newcomers taking up land claims and establishing homes. A sketch map of Bloomington in the 1837–1843 period shows Isaac Baker's name on property on the southwest side of Center Street, between Grove and Front, directly opposite properties marked Greenman and Gates.[31]

Of all the Greenmans, John was perhaps the most willing to try a new occupation. In Waterford he had been a deputy sheriff, an innkeeper, and finally a farmer. Upon his arrival in Blooming Grove in August, 1829, he rented a house and took up school-teaching. In the spring of 1830 he was involved in an unusual land transaction with James Allin, whose house (which Greenman had helped build) was the first in Bloomington. The transaction was reported by a county historian as follows:

> In the spring of 1830, Mr. James Allin offered Mr. John Greenman some money to enter the W. Half of the S. W. quarter of section four, township twenty-three, range two east, on condition that Greenman would deed to Allin a part of the east side of said land, amounting to about twenty acres, for the purpose of being used to lay out a town. The offer was accepted. Mr. Greenman entered the land, deeded a part of it to Allin, who gave it to the town of Bloomington.[32]

Why Allin chose this circuitous way to donate town land is not known, nor is the role of John Greenman mentioned in most other accounts. The same summer at the end of his school term, Greenman "cut logs, built a cabin between Washington and Front Streets, broke five acres of land, sowed it in wheat and fenced it."[33] His was the second house in Bloomington. Then, in July, 1831, Greenman sold his Bloomington property and moved south to a place near Waynesville.

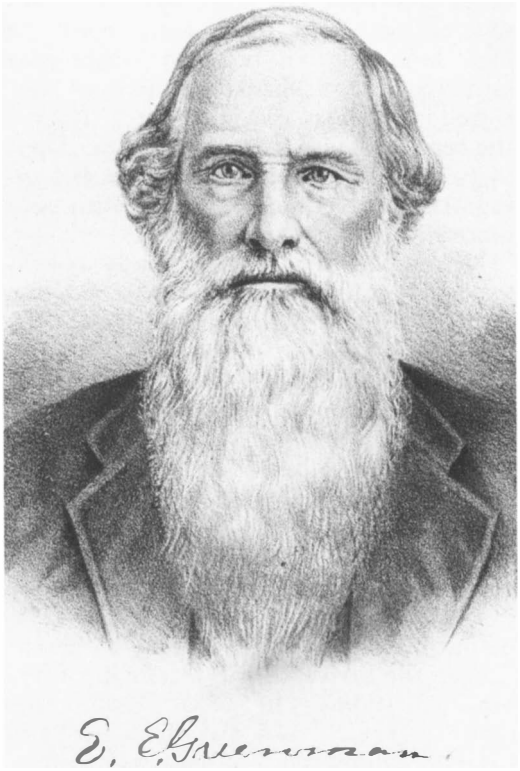
Meanwhile, the second family contingent, led by Jeremiah Greenman, was preparing to leave Ohio. Jeremiah sold the Greenman property—"except so much as is now enclosed for a grave yard"—to a local speculator.[34] Then, because an overland journey would have been too difficult for his aging mother, he loaded all the family possessions on a flatboat and began the trip to Illinois. They went by flatboat to Cairo and then by steamboat up the Mississippi and Illinois rivers to Pekin. From Pekin, they traveled by oxteam to Waynesville.[35]

With the arrival of the Jeremiah Greenmans in Illinois in 1831, Washington County, Ohio, had supplied McLean County, Illinois, with at least six families: the John Greenmans, the Seth Bakers, two Gates families, the William Dunhams, and the Jeremiah Greenmans.

Times were hard in Waynesville for both Greenman sons. Through autumn, 1831, nearly everyone in the vicinity suffered with the ague; John Greenman died in October. That winter was one of the most severe within the memory of early settlers, although the Jeremiah Greenman family survived without much suffering because they were able to have their corn ground at a nearby mill. By late 1831, the family, including John's widow Ruth, had left Waynesville and were living in the Old Town Timber area. In 1832 Jeremiah acquired 220 acres in neighboring Padua Township; and in 1833 Ruth returned to Bloomington, where, later that year or in 1834, she married Dr. Baker, then a widower. Her son, Esek Eddy Greenman, was reared in McLean County and eventually settled in Leroy.[36]

Widow Mary Eddy Greenman lived on in Padua Township and drew the Revolutionary War pension of her husband until

[31] Duis, pp. 539-40.
[32] Washington County Probate Records, Vol. 2 (p. 418), Vol. 4 (p. 194), Washington County Courthouse.
[33] John H. Burnham, *History of Bloomington and Normal* (Bloomington, Ill.: J. H. Burnham, Pub., 1879), pp. 18–19.
[34] Duis, p. 206; *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington), May 4, 1872, p. 4.
[35] *Daily Pantagraph* (Bloomington), July 5, 1931, p. 19.
[36] Duis, pp. 539-40.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 540–42.
[34] The phrase comes from Washington County Deed Book, Vol. 22, pp. 302-03, Washington County Courthouse.
[35] Duis, p. 746.
[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 541–42, 746–47.



Esek Greenman

she died in 1839.[37] By that time her grandchildren had moved to the front of the scene. Her sons, John and Jeremiah, thought of the War of 1812 and not of the Revolution when they remembered war. War for the grandsons would mean the Civil War, whose bounty lands would be the plains of Kansas and beyond. Two of the grandsons served in Illinois companies during the Civil War; Henry Clay Greenman was killed, and Jeremiah III was wounded.

Two generations of Greenmans have passed before our view, from the American Revolution to the new era of the frontier. The Greenmans were common folk who seem to have expected, and believed they had a right to expect, that the land would yield them a place with a good and steady competence; but the land could hardly have fulfilled many of their dreams. No member of the family achieved any special degree of prosperity or prominence. There is a discernible continuity in their politics; they seem to have preferred Henry Clay in the years after John Quincy Adams; and when the Republican party emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, one of the known family Democrats joined that party. In matters of religion they were not intensely denominational, but seemed to favor character and virtue in a tradition familiar to many Americans. They mastered no trades, though they tried a great variety of them. It must be admitted that failure was well known among them.

The Greenmans apparently believed that America held out a prospect of material success within which to anchor whatever other hopes they entertained. The heights they reached were the sacrifices they made during wartime—not just those of the elder Jeremiah, but of his grandsons during the Civil War. Yet those achievements as soldiers were never matched in civilian life. Through their efforts as individuals, however, they did establish a new way of life in a new land as midwesterners. If the New England flavor of their lives diminished, there is evidence that the values of those origins were not entirely lost; in such matters as concern for education that heritage clearly showed through.

There remains an inconclusiveness in any conclusions about the Greenmans, for many of the documents that would enable us to study and more completely portray the lives of such plain folk are lost. Nevertheless, the odyssey of Jeremiah Greenman helps to illuminate the lives of his descendants, stimulates our admiration, and aids our understanding of common folk among the founders of the new West. The Greenmans of our early society, and others nameless, still deserve the attention and approbation of the best men and women of their country.

[37] Mary Eddy Greenman died March 12, 1839; her will, along with some pension family data, was privately printed in Milo Custer, *A Few Family Records: No. 7* (Bloomington, Ill.: n.p., 1922).