

Revolt, Religion, and Dissent in the Dutch-American Atlantic:
Francis Adrian van der Kemp's Pursuit of Civil and Religious Liberty

by

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the histories of the Dutch Republic and the United States during the Age of Revolutions, using as a lens the life of Francis Adrian van der Kemp. Connections between the Netherlands and the United States have been understudied in histories of the Revolutionary Atlantic. Yet the nations' political and religious histories are entwined both thematically and practically. Van der Kemp's life makes it possible to examine republicanism and liberal religion anew, as they developed and changed during the era of Atlantic revolutions.

The project draws on numerous archival collections that house van der Kemp's voluminous correspondence, political and religious writings, his autobiography, and the unpublished records of the Reformed Christian Church, now the Unitarian Church of Barneveld. With his activity in both countries, van der Kemp offers a unique perspective into the continued role of the Dutch in the development of the United States.

The dissertation argues that the political divisions and incomplete religious freedom that frustrated van der Kemp in the Dutch Republic similarly manifested in America. Politically, the partisanship that became the hallmark of the early American republic echoed the experiences van der Kemp had during the Patriot Revolt. While parties would eventually stabilize radical politics, the collapse of the Dutch Republic in the Atlantic world and the divisiveness of American politics in those early decades, led van der Kemp to blunt his once radically democratic opinions. Heavily influenced by John Adams, he adopted a more conservative politics of balance that guaranteed religious and civil liberty regardless of governmental structure.

In the realm of religion, van der Kemp discovered that American religious freedom reflected the same begrudging acceptance that constituted Dutch religious tolerance. Van der Kemp found that even in one of the most pluralistic states, New York, his belief in the unlimited liberty of conscience remained a dissenting opinion. The democracy and individualism celebrated in early American politics were controversial in religion, given the growing authority of denominations and hierarchical church institutions.

DEDICATION

To Kacie

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Historical Society, Lorenzo State Historic Site, Barneveld Free Library, Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library, New York Public Library, New-York Historical Society, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. I am deeply indebted to the staffs and research librarians at all of these institutions. In particular, I want to thank Brian Howard and Gerry Showalter at Oneida for graciously working with my copy requests and making it a manageable process. Central to the chapters on van der Kemp's religion activities in the United States were the records of the Unitarian Church of Barneveld. The Church was gracious in their support of my project. Discussing the project with members of the Church from the earliest stages of the project helped focus the chapters on the Church. Importantly, it also helped me to see the ways that what I was writing about still mattered a great deal. Nadine Thomas not only housed me for a week to look through the documents, but she also shared her love of history and interest in van der Kemp and the life of the Church. I am only writing a brief history of the Church, but Nadine has kept the history of the Church alive through her care and passion. I am forever indebted to all of her assistance. Much of my research came from the Microfilm Edition of the Adams Papers, so I must thank the Massachusetts Historical Society for their diligent work in the Adams Papers. My access to those papers, however, would not have been possible without the saving help of Arizona State University's Interlibrary Loan Staff, specifically William Fiscus, Roberta Rosenberg, and Danielle Schumacher, who helped me navigate the surprisingly treacherous adventure of getting the microfilm out of Tucson and to Tempe. The completion of this dissertation would have been less likely without the benefit of the Graduate College Completion Fellowship.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Much of the history of Francis Adrian van der Kemp can be summed up by an exchange between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams in 1816.¹ Writing from retirement at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson received a request to view his “Syllabus on Jesus Christ,” one of his most closely protected writings. Wary of letting the document be seen by those outside of his trusted circle, Jefferson wrote to John Adams and asked, “There is a Mr. Vanderkemp of N.Y. a correspondent I believe of yours, with whom I have exchanged some letters, without knowing who he is. Will you tell me?” Adams replied, “The Biography of Mr. Vander Kemp would require a Volume which I could not write.” After a detailed, if slightly exaggerated, explanation of the major events of van der Kemp’s life, first in the Netherlands and then later in the United States, Adams confirmed van der Kemp’s good character as a patriot, a preacher, a soldier, and fellow supporter of the American cause. He added, “He has written to me, occasionally and I have answered his Letters in great haste.”² Van der Kemp had corresponded with two of the major figures of the Revolutionary and early national era, had even struck them as worthy of interest, yet had remained somewhat out of their view. And he has, for the most part, remained out of the view of historians, even as attention has turned to that which van der Kemp’s life so exemplifies: the intellectual and personal connections of the revolutionary Atlantic.

¹ Born François Adriaan van der Kemp, his name was later Anglicized as Francis Adrian van der Kemp, a change van der Kemp embraced himself, although the majority of the time, he signed letters, “Fr. Adr. van der Kemp.” I have decided to use Francis Adrian van der Kemp throughout.

² Jefferson to Adams, 1 August 1816 and Adams to Jefferson, 9 August 1816, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, edited by Lester J. Cappon, Volume II, 1812-1826 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 483-487.

To gain a better understanding of who van der Kemp was, a different introduction to him is in order. In 1820, DeWitt Clinton explored the western district of New York. During one of his walks, he came upon van der Kemp and later dined in his home. Afterwards, Clinton wrote that van der Kemp cultivated “the Esteem of the wise and the good – and blessing with the vindications of his illumined and highly gifted mind, all who enjoy his conversation and who are honored by his correspondence.” He continued, “Thus my friend I have made a great discovery. In a secluded, unassuming village, I have discovered the most learned man in America.”³ In a similar vein, in 1813, three years before the Adams-Jefferson exchange, an eminent American statesman told his correspondent, who equaled, if did not surpass, his standing in the American republic, that they would surely go down together in the annals of human history. “[A]nd I know not,” the first wrote, “upon the whole, where to wish for better company.” Before he left the topic, the first man noted to the second, that if there was anyone else who would surely join him in history, “I wish to add Vanderkemp.” This, too, was an exchange between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.⁴

What to make of these varying descriptions? Which portrait drawn by Adams for Jefferson should we believe? Was van der Kemp a man equal to the historical significance of the two Americans—possibly the “most learned man in America”—or was he an interesting fellow who wrote too many letters? The discrepancy between van der Kemp as a leading Dutch or American scholar and as a pestering correspondent

³ DeWitt Clinton, “Hibernicus Letters,” September 1820, Folder: Van der Kemp, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, 1792-1828, 1903-1905, AHMC Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁴ John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 15 September 1813, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, edited by Lester J. Cappon, Volume II, 1812-1826 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 377.

reveals much about how history has treated him. Contemporary accounts of his history blended appreciation and regret. A common refrain was that van der Kemp had led an interesting and eventful life, but an imperfect command of English prevented him from gaining the fame that he was probably due. Van der Kemp was also seen, correctly, as an intellectual whose plans far exceeded the time he had to devote to them. Once, van der Kemp sent Adams an outline of a planned project on revolutions in the eighteenth century. Adams replied, “Lord! Lord! What a Coat you have cutt out? It would require an hundred Taylors for twenty years to make it up.”⁵ An outline was as much as van der Kemp accomplished on the project. A number of ambitiously conceived projects, including a complete history of the humanity of Jesus Christ, met a similar fate. The ones van der Kemp did complete often only made it through a small circle of correspondents, friends, and local publications.

Yet the smallness of the circle belies the impact of the writings. When van der Kemp actually finished a work, national figures such as John, Abigail, and John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Andrews Norton, DeWitt Clinton, John Jay, Robert Livingston, Josiah Quincy, and Samuel Kirkland served as audience, as well as prominent local friends such as Jonas Platt, Henry Dwight, and Morris Miller. Even when he lived in the Dutch Republic, van der Kemp was part of a small but prominent coterie that included Baron Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, Jean Luzac, Pieter Paulus, and Pieter Vreede. Van der Kemp conversed and debated with some of the most influential people in both the Netherlands and the United States.

⁵ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 19 December 1811, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Undoubtedly, a work on van der Kemp would easily win points for name-dropping, and his position as a human Venn diagram that interconnected with many significant historical actors seems to offer an intriguing figure for study. Nevertheless, van der Kemp has not fared well at the hands of historians. Instead of intensive studies, van der Kemp's historical presence has largely been as an anecdote. Resulting from his numerous relationships with more famous people, van der Kemp has always been good for a letter or pamphlet to bolster a point, but this has meant that his profile has largely been relegated to footnotes. His appearances in the body of texts have been, if anything, more unfortunate. Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, in his exploration of Dutch-American interactions during the American Revolution, cast van der Kemp as the annoying kid brother to the venerable and esteemed Adams. "Adams," Schulte Nordholt writes, "who was obviously the dominant partner, was not always nice to Van der Kemp but sometimes dealt rather roughly with him. Van der Kemp was as eager and subservient as possible."⁶ Much of the criticism of van der Kemp has been in connection with one of the greatest accomplishments in his life, the translation of the records of the New Netherland colony. While he put years of effort into the project, which led to his blindness, the results left much to be desired: the volumes were riddled with errors and impreciseness. Russell Shorto described the translations as "worse than worthless" and deemed their destruction in a 1911 fire a blessing "before it could further corrupt history." Schulte Nordholt took the destruction of the records and the inadequacy of van der Kemp's translations as a synecdoche for his entire life. He wrote, "This ultimate

⁶ Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, trans. Herbert H. Rowen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 303.

futility seems somehow characteristic of Van der Kemp's lifework. There is, in his life, when all is said and done, superficiality and sketchiness, much fire and little warmth, much glitter and little light."⁷

Even in works by scholars who have clearly taken a positive interest in van der Kemp, the Dutchman still appears as something less than historically worthy. Harry F. Jackson's biography of van der Kemp, *Scholar in the Wilderness*, remains the most detailed account of van der Kemp's entire life. When Jackson's book came out in 1963, it received scathing reviews, much of it aimed not at Jackson, but at the idea of van der Kemp as a figure worthy of study. Hugh Ripley, in the *Journal of American History*, commented, "Harry Jackson has committed an injustice by extending his treatment beyond the resources of his subject and the sources available to the writer," concluding, "Van der Kemp's finest hour came before he ventured to the New World."⁸ Milton M. Klein's review in the *William and Mary Quarterly* was just as acerbic as Ripley's. He wrote, "Jackson does not succeed in fixing Van der Kemp's place in the history of New York or the nation, but the biographer could not fabricate what the subject himself did not

⁷ Russell Shorto, *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 322; Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 303. Sources that have visibly seen van der Kemp's records confirm the issues with the manuscripts. See Arnold Johan Ferdinand Van Laer, "The Translation and Publication of the Manuscript Dutch Records of New Netherland: With an Account of Previous Attempts at Translation," *Education Department Bulletin: New York State Library Bibliography*, New York State Library, 46 No. 462, (Albany, NY) January 1, 1910, 5-28; E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary of State, Albany, NY: Part I: Dutch Manuscripts, 1630-1664*, New York State Library (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1865). In a conversation with Dr. Charles Gehring, the director of the New Netherland Institute, he informed me that all of the van der Kemp translations did not burn in the 1911 fire, but that the volumes that remained were indeed as poor as everyone thought. Dr. Charles Gehring, email message to author, 11 November 2013.

⁸ Harry F. Jackson, *Scholar in the Wilderness: Francis Adrian Van der Kemp* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963); Hugh Ripley, Review, *The Journal of American History* 51.2 (September 1964): 330-31, 330-31.

allow.” He added, “Professor Jackson has sought valiantly to make Van der Kemp’s career appear interesting and significant, but the subject himself has frustrated the biographer’s effort.”⁹ Since Jackson, scholarship on van der Kemp has been minimal, and those who have engaged his life have tended to focus on a specific area. Vivian C. Hopkins’s exploration of the philosophical debates between van der Kemp and DeWitt Clinton painted van der Kemp as the “Western Recluse” astride the “Governor,” while Howard C. Rice’s analysis of van der Kemp’s library emphasized the strangeness of “A Frontier Bibliophile.”¹⁰ Even Jackson’s characterization of van der Kemp as a “Scholar in the Wilderness” slips into the rhetorical trap of seeing life on the western frontier of New York as necessarily limiting. While certainly more positive, and indeed fairer to van der Kemp’s accomplishments, these portraits seem to confirm rather than reject Schulte Nordholt’s condemnation of van der Kemp as someone who lacks the requisite gravitas for historical study.

This study pushes back against the historiographical trend in studies of van der Kemp and attempts to provide a corrective to Adams’s “great haste” of answering Jefferson’s 1816 query. It favors the second of Adams’s descriptions of van der Kemp’s life, as one worthy of being placed in important conversations, and rejects the idea that van der Kemp’s marginality renders him unworthy of attention. Instead, van der Kemp’s presence as an observer, commenter, and critic of American politics and culture, one who never fully adopted the assumptions and points of reference that even founders as

⁹ Milton M. Klein, Review, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 22.1 (January 1965): 163-64, 164.

¹⁰ See Vivian C. Hopkins, “The Governor and the Western Recluse: DeWitt Clinton and Francis Adrian van der Kemp,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 105, no. 3 (June 1961): 315-333; Howard C. Rice, “A Frontier Bibliophile,” *The Colophon: New Series* 1, no. 2 (1935): 234-244.

disparate as Adams and Jefferson shared, allows us to see more clearly tensions and contradictions in the post-revolutionary moment. And the constant comparison of the Dutch and American republics that left van der Kemp not quite at home in either, also made him a useful lens through which to view the differing configurations of liberty and constraint that emerged in each nation.

This dissertation is not a biography of van der Kemp, as it does not endeavor to recover all of the details of van der Kemp's history and it spends little time on his personal life. Important parts of his work are also minimized—his interest in the Erie Canal—while others are completely left out—his impressive and persistent work on the natural history of North America. So while a full picture emerges of van der Kemp's life, this is not a complete chronicle. Instead, the project advances more modestly, seeking to illuminate the two most important themes of van der Kemp's life, religion and revolution. It uses the history of van der Kemp to explore the dynamics of those themes in the larger Dutch-American Atlantic world.

To begin answering Jefferson's question necessitates a brief recounting of van der Kemp's life. He was born in 1752 in Kampen in the province of Overijssel, the Netherlands. From birth, van der Kemp gravitated toward a life of scholarship. According to the narrative he later wrote for his son, van der Kemp claimed that when he was fussy as a child, only books could appease his petulance.¹¹ After a failed stint in the

¹¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Francis Adrian van der Kemp: 1752-1829: An Autobiography*, edited by Helen Linklaen Fairchild (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 7. Fairchild's edited copy of van der Kemp's autobiography, while frustrating at times in the way it frequently interrupts the narrative, nevertheless is an indispensable source for contextualizing the material. Although staggered throughout the volume, van der Kemp's autobiography does appear in full, and thus for ease of reference, the Fairchild volume is the copy of the autobiography used throughout this dissertation. Unedited copies of the autobiography are located, and were checked by the author, at the Buffalo and Erie Country Historical Society, the New-York Historical Society, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Dutch army, van der Kemp attended the University of Groningen in 1770. It was at this point that his life began to intersect with the broader history of his home country as well as that of his future home. Swept up in theological debates at school, van der Kemp, who always possessed an independent streak, soon ran afoul of local religious and school authorities by challenging the teaching of the dominant church in the Netherlands, the Reformed Church. His obstinacy resulted in his removal from the school, but the exposure to faiths outside the Calvinism of his parents inspired van der Kemp to seek religious instruction on his own. After a period spent exploring the scriptures and historical studies, van der Kemp emerged convinced of the benevolence of God and unconvinced of the divinity of Jesus Christ. This did not accord with the teachings of the Reformed Church. He was able to find a home among Mennonites, one of the more tolerant faiths in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam and later Leiden. But as soon as he settled in as minister for the Leiden congregation, van der Kemp became enveloped in the emerging political revolution known as the Dutch Patriot Revolt.

Inspired by the American Revolution, the Patriots set out to reform the political system of the Netherlands. They argued that it had become corrupted under the leadership of William V of Orange, the Stadholder, a powerful political figure in the Dutch Republic. In 1781, with the arrival of John Adams in the Netherlands, the Patriots, using the recognition of the American state by the Netherlands as a wedge issue, began a full-scale revolt. Van der Kemp published numerous pamphlets against the government and eventually took up arms in the locally organizing militia units. At the same time he aggressively asserted the importance of the American cause and became good friends with John Adams. The Patriot movement experienced impressive gains from 1784 to

1788, but international politics as well as internal divisions spelled the end of the movement—that, and the 26,000 Prussian regulars who made quick work of Patriot militia units, van der Kemp’s included. Van der Kemp’s actions resulted in his imprisonment and banishment from the Netherlands. With the help of Adams, he and his family immigrated to the United States in 1788.

Arriving at New York City on van der Kemp’s thirty-sixth birthday, the family began a series of western moves. They ended up in 1797 on New York’s western frontier, in the village of Oldenbarneveld in Oneida County. Despite labeling his existence in New York a “retirement,” van der Kemp then became involved in the political and religious environments of his new home. Locally, he became a judge and a supervisor for the new community’s roads. He also attempted to organize civil society in his locality through social and intellectual societies. Nationally, he engaged politicians, namely Adams, on the issues of the time including the developing party system, the French Revolution, democratic politics, wars, and the legacy of the American Revolution. He did so, however, always with an eye to the Dutch Republic, attempting to divine from the conditions of his former homeland what the future held for the United States.

Van der Kemp debated and exchanged his ideas about religion with many prominent religious thinkers. Similar to his political engagements, the exchanges between van der Kemp and Adams offer an impressive amount of detail into how both men thought about topics such as antitrinitarianism, atheism, tolerance, and the origins of the Earth. In those letters can also be found the personal beliefs of each man. Van der Kemp further solicited the opinions of religionists such as Andrews Norton, a Unitarian minister and professor at Harvard, and Thomas Jefferson. Van der Kemp, in fact,

convinced Jefferson to allow him to publish the prized “Syllabus on Jesus Christ.” Van der Kemp’s most important contribution, however, was the church he helped to found in Oldenbarneveld. He first organized a religious society that sought to correct what he saw as an imbalance of frontier life in Oldenbarneveld. Importantly, van der Kemp infused the religious society with the radical notions of individualized faith and a benevolent deity he had developed in the Netherlands, a feature that caused a great deal of consternation for the more orthodox residents of Oldenbarneveld and Oneida County. The society was short-lived as the people in the community wanted the security of a church with a more directed purpose, but the church retained much of van der Kemp’s theology, and the Reformed Christian Church emerged in many ways as a natural progression of the society. As the result of its heterodoxy, the Church faced constant recrimination and nearly closed on numerous occasions. It was able to survive those threats largely due to the leadership of van der Kemp, who remained actively involved in the Church until his death in 1829. The Church still conducts services to this day as the Unitarian Church of Barneveld.¹²

Contrary to Schulte Nordholt’s assessment, this project contends that there was more than enough light and warmth in van der Kemp’s life. Nevertheless it must be admitted that van der Kemp faced far more failure in his life than he did resounding success. Perhaps counterintuitively, this study argues that much of van der Kemp’s impact comes from the same failures that have been cited as evidence of his marginality.

¹² A fuller version of these events can be found in Jackson and Fairchild’s editorial insertions. Another useful source is Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Geslacht Boek, Anno 1609*, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society. The *Geslacht Boek* is a chronicle of the major events in the history of the van der Kemp family.

As Scott A. Sandage has pointed out, “The American who fails is a prophet without honor in his own country.” Americans have a tough time with failures, and so have historians.¹³ Van der Kemp’s failures came as the result of misunderstandings about a country he thought he knew so well. There may not have been an immigrant in the eighteenth century with a more positive vision of the American republic than van der Kemp. Forged in the tumult of his participation in the Dutch Patriot Revolt, a revolt partly inspired and driven by the American example, van der Kemp believed the United States surpassed the capabilities of his own Dutch Republic and pointed the way for republics in the new age. First formed in 1781, the image of America as the beacon of liberty for the rest of the world was a constant for the rest of his life. In 1824, five years before his death, van der Kemp wrote, “The State of Europe you Say, is declining I apprehend it can never recover its ancient lustre. It is doomed to fall as Asia – and commerce – and arts, Sciences, Liberty and Religion Shall fly to and find an asylum on the American Shores.”¹⁴ The disparity between his American dream and his American reality reveals much about the dissolution of the Dutch Republic and the creation of the United States.

Politically, van der Kemp’s story reveals the interdependency of the American Revolution and the Dutch Patriot Revolt even as it also demonstrates the distinctive paths those revolutions took. The Patriot Revolt and the American Revolution shared many of the same appeals to Enlightenment theories of natural rights and popular sovereignty

¹³ Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 18.

¹⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 6 March 1824, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 464, Massachusetts Historical Society.

while espousing a uniquely indigenous understanding of those theories. While the American Revolution emerged from its own history of rebellion and oppositional politics, it did not rival the long tradition of revolution inside the Dutch Republic. A movement to reject the permanence of a colonial status occurred in the Netherlands before England had established its first settlement in North America. As the Americans rapidly advanced to build something new, the Patriots divided over the proper balance of old and new. It was in the promise of newness and the inability of the Patriot Revolt to break from the past that van der Kemp based his assessment of the American victory. The United States, in his eyes, was to become everything the Dutch Republic had failed to become.

As soon as he arrived in the United States, van der Kemp's rosy view of Americans faced a considerable challenge. Namely, the fracturing of American politics into distinct parties caused van der Kemp to fear that the schisms that led to the failure of the Patriot Revolt had manifested themselves in his new home. Soon, he thought, the Americans would be added to a long list of failed republics that now included the Dutch. But American politics was an entirely new arrangement of relationships between the people, their representatives, and the state, and the emergence of parties led to stabilization as opposed to schism. As the French Revolution dramatically altered the meaning of concepts such as democracy and republic, the political terrain of the United States made a decided conservative shift. As Seth Cotlar notes, American democracy came to mean a positive good because it was not French democracy.¹⁵ Despite a stronger attachment to the Federalists, van der Kemp's original brand of Dutch radicalism matched much of the Republican argument. He favored more representation and did not

¹⁵ Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

possess the paralytic fear of the people so often espoused by Federalists. But as the 1790s went on, van der Kemp's political ideology made a similar shift toward conservatism. He did not abandon his attachment to democracy, but there was a discernible shift toward a politics of balance.

Van der Kemp held out hope that the United States would emerge from the current imbroglio between Britain and France unscathed and get back to the business of expanding the republic. Internationally, he desired a federal government large enough to preserve American prestige in the Atlantic world and assert independence from the competing interests of Atlantic powers. Domestically, he wished for a balanced federal presence to offset the passions of the people while preventing one group from gaining too much power. Locally, he demanded an increased governmental presence on the frontier of New York. Related to his desire for balance, van der Kemp felt that without connecting the western frontier to the rest of the United States, preferably via a canal, the area would soon descend into chaos. As a renewed war with Britain approached, van der Kemp assumed that with western New York as the focal point of the American offensive, the federal government would finally provide the needed support. His disappointment led van der Kemp to reconsider his relationship to institutional politics. Though he would continue to vote in elections and never ceased worrying about the future of the republic, the War of 1812 marked the end of van der Kemp's active involvement in American politics. He resolved to accept any form of government as long as it protected basic civil and religious liberty.

As van der Kemp's enthusiasm with politics waned, his commitment to the cause of religious liberty remained undimmed. Van der Kemp's experiences on both sides of

the Atlantic show that written constitutions and legacies of religious liberty spurred rather than resolved debates over the meaning of religious tolerance and freedom. The Dutch Republic and the United States shared an expressed commitment to religious freedom and the liberty of conscience. Compared to the nations that surrounded them, this commitment was indeed a rarity. But when seen through van der Kemp, the boundaries and limitations of that pledge become clear. In the Netherlands, the Reformed Church found a way to use its social power to establish itself as the public church of the Republic. The Reformed Church instituted a cultural connection between Calvinism and Dutchness and a political association with the Stadholder that brought about the outlawing of Catholic practice throughout the provinces. Protestant challenges to the centrality of Calvinism received a similar fate. Yet the Dutch federalism that allowed for a variety of political expressions also protected dissenting religious groups from facing the full wrath of the Reformed Church. The Dutch were able to practice tolerance without preaching it. The arrangement only worked when the tolerance was not publicly tested. When van der Kemp began to voice dissenting ideologies and refused to recant his position on reason over revelation, he broke the unspoken agreement. As a result, he was brought before the university tribunal and removed from the school. Expulsion from the university allowed van der Kemp to pursue his theological studies in private, but it also placed him forever on the outside of Dutch religion.

As with all things, when van der Kemp moved to the United States, he thought the situation would be different. Successful independence and an established, written commitment to religious expression fed into his assessment that liberty of conscience was the cultural norm in the United States. After he arrived in the United States, van der

Kemp continued his religious exploration and soon became convinced that while Jesus was an exemplary human and one of the greatest moral reformers in history, he was not divine. His antitrinitarianism led him to correspond with prominent Unitarians, both in the United States and the larger Atlantic world. It also put him in contact with others who sought to explore the nature of Christ, a number that included Thomas Jefferson. Van der Kemp's interactions with Unitarians and Jefferson revealed to him the marginalization of antitrinitarian beliefs in the United States. During his work with Jefferson, van der Kemp also discovered the reproach that came with publicly expressing those dissenting ideas. When van der Kemp sent pieces to be published in religious journals he was told that the subject matter prevented their printing. Even when appealing to Unitarian journals, van der Kemp found that his expression of antitrinitarianism was outside the pale of acceptability. Further, after van der Kemp convinced Jefferson to let him anonymously publish Jefferson's infamous, "Syllabus on Jesus Christ," both men agreed that England was the best place to issue the piece as the religious setting in the United States would never allow such a work the consideration it deserved.¹⁶ England, they concurred, had a more tolerant environment than America.

Opposition to van der Kemp's religious beliefs did not confine itself to print. From the outset, the United Protestant Religious Society and the Reformed Church both faced considerable opposition from the orthodox religions in the area. Under van der Kemp's direction, the Church was able to secure its presence in the community.

¹⁶ Van der Kemp to Jefferson, 4 June 1816, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/mss/mtj.mtjbib022469>; Jefferson to van der Kemp, 30 July 1816, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 9: Letters from Thomas Jefferson.

Challenge to the Church reemerged with the surge of evangelical religion during the Second Great Awakening. In the face of the challenge, the Church nearly collapsed. Van der Kemp, near the end of his life, stepped forward, once again recommitted the Church to its liberal principles, and in doing so secured the future of the Church. In order to survive, however, the Church had to forge a closer institutional connection with the Unitarian Church, sacrificing many of the democratic features of the Church. Yet of all the things in his life, the current existence of the Church as the Unitarian Church of Barneveld should be considered his greatest success.

What van der Kemp's experiences in publishing Jefferson's syllabus, founding the United Protestant Religious Society, and defending the Reformed Christian Church taught him was that religious tolerance was still an unrealized dream. He found that disestablishment did not translate to broad support of heterodox beliefs. In most of the states, the status of organized denominations and their insistence on uniform creeds and doctrine remained a powerful force. Even in New York, with its long history of religious pluralism, van der Kemp discovered that a multiplicity of denominations did not equate to an acceptance of deep differences. Where the government left the private sphere, orthodox churches stepped in to regulate behavior and curb dissent. As in the Netherlands, religious tolerance in the early American republic meant there was enough room to express one's beliefs, but not to fully practice them.

The pursuit of religious freedom and political revolution were the two most important subjects in the life of van der Kemp. When he arrived in the New York harbor, van der Kemp firmly believed that republican revolution and religious freedom were mutually supportive. That was a dissenting opinion amongst Dutch Patriots. Van der

Kemp was confident he could better pursue his reciprocal convictions in America. Experiences in the United States on the western frontier of New York, however, challenged his preconceived notions about religion and politics and the applicability of his ideas on a different continent. Part of van der Kemp's adaptation to America was the uncoupling of his politics and religion. The persistence of van der Kemp's religious dissent, when set against his conservative political turn, reveals that political and religious identities were not always one and the same. Democratization in one area, for example, did not necessarily correlate to democratization in another.

The difficulties van der Kemp encountered point to both his misunderstanding of the situation and to unique developments in the United States and larger Atlantic world. As he attempted to understand the contours of American republicanism, the impact of the French Revolution, and the War of 1812, so did everyone else in the United States. The American adjustments van der Kemp made offers a reminder that these were new ventures still being worked out and that the possibilities were vast. Nonetheless, as the country reacted to Atlantic events, the range of radical options severely narrowed and conversations about religion and politics operated within a different and more conservative framework than the one that had been opened during the Revolution.

The transatlantic experience of van der Kemp suggests that the American state was not the brave new world that he imagined. Ironically, he would have been better served preparing for a country more akin to the Netherlands that he left than the America of his thoughts. Politically and religiously, van der Kemp found too many of the same restrictions and impediments in the United States that compelled him to leave the Netherlands. When van der Kemp immigrated to the United States, he assumed that

victory had guaranteed political stability and religious freedom. Instead, he found disorder and harassment.

Van der Kemp's changing political and religious ideas lie at the center of this work. The dissertation is organized chronologically and split into three parts. Within each part, each chapter explores a unique moment in van der Kemp's life and attempts to associate the changes he made to those ideologies with the larger developments of the specific period during which those transformations took place. The individual chapters participate in distinctive historiographies. The compartmentalization of van der Kemp's life into these distinct periods allows for better tracking of the changes to his religious and political ideology. Taken together, the chapters testify to the scope of van der Kemp's involvement in the political and religious environments in both the Netherlands and the United States. Blending local, national, and international perspectives not only reflects how van der Kemp viewed the world around him but also allows van der Kemp to be representative of larger historical processes.

Part I (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) examines van der Kemp's life in the Netherlands, covering the years 1752 to 1788. Part I establishes the framework for the rest of the dissertation and its overarching themes of religion and revolution. Chapter 2 explores the development of van der Kemp's religious ideology in the unique religious environment of the Dutch Republic. The Netherlands, since its independence from Spain during the Protestant Reformation, had always based its identity as a land of tolerance and pluralism, despite the fact that the Reformed Church operated in many ways similar to a state church. Van der Kemp's experiences in navigating religious life in the Netherlands,

and the persistent resistance he received when trying to practice a theology outside the Reformed faith, point to the limits of tolerance in the Dutch Republic.

The third chapter chronicles van der Kemp's involvement in the Dutch Patriot Revolt. Van der Kemp emerged as one of the most vociferous voices opposing the Stadholderian government and what he saw as the usurpation of power and concerted attempt to strip the Dutch people of their liberty. He also became heavily invested in the success of the American Revolution and providing aid to America's minister in the Netherlands, John Adams. Van der Kemp was uniquely influenced by the American cause, and he invested the success of the Americans with everything he hoped to accomplish in the Dutch Republic. The American Revolution became the prism through which van der Kemp understood his own political dissent. When the Revolt failed and van der Kemp faced expulsion, he chose the United States as his new home.

Part II (Chapters 4 and 5) begins with van der Kemp's arrival in the United States in 1788 and extends until the beginning of the War of 1812. The fourth chapter investigates van der Kemp's political activity in the early American republic. It primarily explores van der Kemp's reaction to the growing partisanship between Federalists and Republicans and the dilemma of the French Revolution. Van der Kemp, drawing on his experiences with the French during the Patriot Revolt, viewed the French Revolution as a direct threat to the stability and prosperity of the American state. The combination of the political use of the French Revolution by American groups and the French invasion of the Netherlands in 1795 gave the matter added weight for the Dutchman, and convinced him of the necessity of political balance. Van der Kemp pressed Adams, who was president at the time, to consider the fate of the Dutch as the future for Americans. The chapter

suggests that van der Kemp's entreaties and Adams's own history with the Dutch Republic influenced Adams's decision to engage the French in the Quasi-War.

The fifth chapter addresses how van der Kemp attempted to adapt his religious ideology to the new American environment, with mixed results. Van der Kemp was able to accomplish a great deal in this period, during which he published Jefferson's "Syllabus on Jesus Christ" and founded the United Protestant Religious Society. Those successes were tempered by the fear of retribution for the views expressed in Jefferson's "Syllabus" and the need to reform the religious society to fit into a more orthodox mold. While not able to preserve the society against the community's desire for a church, van der Kemp was instrumental in creating the new Reformed Christian Church, imbuing it with the same liberal religious ideologies as the society. The Church, similar to the society, came under fire from the orthodox churches in town. As pressure mounted, van der Kemp resigned direction, hoping it was his presence that prevented the Church from advancing. Without van der Kemp, however, the Church collapsed, and van der Kemp organized a small gathering in his home every Sunday to continue liberal religion in the community.

Part III (Chapters 6 and 7) starts with the outbreak of the War of 1812 and finishes with van der Kemp's attempt to save his church in the 1820s. The sixth chapter considers van der Kemp's experiences during the War of 1812, which led to his disillusionment with American politics. The Madison administration was not prepared to fight the British during the war, and van der Kemp, his family, and their neighbors suffered the consequences. Divisions within the government created poorly fed, poorly organized, and poorly equipped troops. The conditions in the areas near van der Kemp oscillated between the chaos of a European bazaar and the horror of a war zone, replete

with half-buried bodies and entire units of the walking wounded. Van der Kemp witnessed political battles played out on the field of battle and became concerned that the legacy of the American Revolution had been lost. Van der Kemp thought he knew the rules of the game, but he found that American politics was something else altogether. Citing a necessary balance to guarantee religious and civil liberty, van der Kemp moved away from involvement in politics.

The seventh chapter explores the resurgence of the Reformed Christian Church after the War of 1812 and considers its place in the religious history of the Second Great Awakening. Once the Church found solid footing—obtaining a minister and erecting a house of worship—it faced a new challenge from evangelicalism and the rise of what historians refer to as the Second Great Awakening during the 1820s. Where the traditional understanding of the 1820s has been seen as Christianizing of the United States and a democratization of Christian faith, the Reformed Christian Church survived the era only by blunting its more democratic features and establishing a prominent connection with the larger Unitarian faith. When a group of evangelicals used the democratic structure of the Church to replace the current minister with an evangelical, van der Kemp stepped forward and declared the move as against the best interests of the Church. Van der Kemp helped block the move, but in doing so, discovered, in fact, that democracy worked against his initial designs to maintain an open and irenic organization.

This exploration of van der Kemp, his ideas about religion and politics, and the two republics that he called home adds to a growing body of scholarship on the relationship between the Netherlands and the America. It joins the chorus that asserts the two countries reveal much about the other. Though the bulk of the time will be spent on

the Dutchman's time in the United States, it will examine the commonalities and differences between the countries that helped to create van der Kemp's worldview. This study also offers a portrait of how an immigrant became an American at the same time that Americans were figuring that out for themselves. The picture is one of frustrating disillusionment, constant struggle, few successes, and yet an impressive and enduring hope for the eventual fulfillment of the American Revolution. Van der Kemp brought his family to the United States to pursue a better life than the one they could have had in the Netherlands, and he died still believing he had done just that.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGION IN THE DUTCH REPUBLIC AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY

In the cacophony of religious voices in the Age of Revolutions, Francis Adrian van der Kemp at first glance appears to strike rather gentle notes. He was not a millenarian fighting to bring God's kingdom into the temporal realm. His religious beliefs did not boast the emotional fervor of revivalism and did not support antinomianism. Though he participated in the scriptural debates that came out of the Protestant Reformation—the nature of baptism, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the power of the church in civil society—van der Kemp viewed these as mostly academic conversations. He saw them as distractions rather than critical components of the Christian religion, distinctions created not to unite but to divide Christians. According to van der Kemp, “the summary of the doctrine of Jesus” was to love God and to love one's neighbor with full sincerity.¹

That ideology would seem unthreatening to the Dutch Republic of van der Kemp's birth, which had seen the stabilization of the major religious disputes of the Reformation throughout the provinces by the early 1700s. More importantly, it would seem unthreatening in a country that prided itself on religious tolerance and toleration.²

¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Francis Adrian van der Kemp: 1752-1829: An Autobiography*, edited by Helen Linklaen Fairchild (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), 19.

² This image of the religious freedom of the Dutch people and their tolerance of other faiths has easily become one of the most identifiable elements of Dutch society. Benjamin Kaplan cites that “Around the world, Dutch society is famous for its tolerance, which extends to drug use, alternate lifestyles, and other matter about which most industrial lands feel a deep ambivalence,” which was an image of the Netherlands “already proverbial in the Golden Age” of the seventeenth century; Kaplan, “‘Dutch’ Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision,” in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, edited by R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 8-26, 8, 9. Similar

Van der Kemp's views, however, were controversial and, to some, dangerous. The opposition they provoked helps to further the ongoing reconsideration of toleration and tolerance. As Christopher Grasso notes, toleration requires legalistic backing while tolerance is simply a cultural value placed on dealing with members of society outside of normative religious affiliations.³ The founding document of the Dutch Republic, the 1579 Union of Utrecht, promised freedom of conscience throughout the provinces of the republic and toleration soon became a defining feature of Dutch society. The paeans to Dutch tolerance have increasingly come under some scrutiny by scholars of religious history, however. They assert that the Calvinistic Reformed Church, the favored church in the Netherlands, wielded far more power than has been acknowledged and ask how tolerance operated in the differing provinces of the Republic where the power of the church waxed and waned. Further, much of the toleration discussion has focused on the Dutch immediately following the Reformation, when religious persecution was widespread throughout Europe. The Dutch appear tolerant in comparison, but when we explore these debates in the years after the Reformation and in the context of the secular rationalism of the Enlightenment, as we do when investigating van der Kemp, the Dutch

comments about the legacy of Dutch tolerance can be found in Michael J. Wintle, *Pillars of Piety: Religion in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century, 1813-1901* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1987); Arie L. Molendijk, *The Emergence of the Science of Religion in the Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); and E. H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). A pervading theme in the entire collection *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* edited by Hsia and van Nierop is the legacy of toleration in the Netherlands. See also Jonathan Israel, "The Intellectual Debate about Toleration in the Dutch Republic," in *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, edited by C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, J. Israel, and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 3-36, 34.

³ Christopher Grasso, "The Boundaries of Toleration and Tolerance: Religious Infidelity in the Early American Republic," in *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America*, edited by Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011): 286-302, 287.

response to religious heterodoxy appears far more conservative and reactionary.⁴

Tolerance and toleration were not static in the Netherlands, nor were they universal.

Van der Kemp stood at the intersection of Dutch tolerance and Dutch conservatism. While van der Kemp escaped the harsh fate of many European religious dissidents on account of the unique religious situation in the Netherlands, he never gained acceptance and faced constant opposition throughout his life. What accounts for van der Kemp's marginalization is that in addition to the charity and love at the heart of his faith lay an unyielding support of individual conscience and a perception of the divine as not subject to any authority outside of God. One had to actively participate in the discovery of faith. Passivity and rote memorization were not elements of van der Kemp's religious ideology. Rejecting the determinative power of the church or clergy, he believed that the only person responsible for faith was the individual. When van der Kemp lectured that "it matters not, what Popes and ancient Fathers in council and Synods have decreed" he did not simply reject Catholicism and Calvinism, the two major faiths of the Dutch. He rejected the idea that he or any one else could determine the contours of belief, setting himself directly against established religions with doctrinal claims. Although the Netherlands did not have a state church that required membership, religious officials did not lack coercive power. The officials of the Dutch Republic considered van der Kemp's

⁴ See in particular, Joris Van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces: Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Also, Wiebe Bergsma, "Church, State and People," in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, edited by Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 196-228; Andrew C. Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Wiep van Bunge, ed., *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Wyger R. E. Velema, *Enlightenment and Conservatism in the Dutch Republic: The Political Thought of Elie Luzac (1721-1796)* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1993).

ideology an anarchical faith, and took measures to bring him back into the Reformed fold.⁵ Both religion and social order, they believed, required it.

Latent antinomianism was not the only element of van der Kemp's religious development that placed him at odds with many of the Reformed. Van der Kemp believed that one's faith should respond to one's reason. The religious man had to adapt to new information or new explanations of the sacred scriptures. As van der Kemp told his congregation at the beginning of one of his sermons, "adopt or reject my opinion – after an impartial Scrutiny."⁶ The same biblical criticism and personalized faith that led van der Kemp to reject the authority of churches and priests also led him to emphasize the importance of reason on matters of faith. In privileging reason over revelation, van der Kemp rejected the predestination of Calvinism, which was the faith of the Reformed Church. Removing man's ability to determine his own fate, through his decision to accept or reject religion, seemed to van der Kemp too pessimistic and inflexible. The grace of God, in his opinion, was meant for all, just as everyone possessed the reason to realize that fact. Whereas the Reformed Church sought adherence to particular tenets of faith from its members, and were prepared to enforce it where they could, van der Kemp sought to transcend religious differences. Van der Kemp's irenic desire for religious concord was a goal shared by other religious radicals of the Enlightenment in the Netherlands who hoped to find peace through reason and reasoned acceptance of

⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, "Lecture on the Subjects of Baptism," F. A. Van der Kemp Papers, VDK 1, Oneida Historical Society Manuscript Division, Box 83, Folder LEC.1 - Lectures - LEC.1-14/LEC.1-27, Lec.1-23. For accounts of the Netherlands see Van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord*.

⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, "Lecture on the Continued Obligation of Baptism," F. A. Van der Kemp Papers, VDK 1, Oneida Historical Society Manuscript Division, Box 83, Folder LEC.1 - Lectures - LEC.1-14/LEC.1-27, Lec.1-14.

difference. The opposition it provoked demonstrates the limits of tolerance even in the Netherlands. More specifically, it demonstrates that the question of how a sect defined its membership was often more provocative than questions of doctrine or theology.

All of these developments were intimately tied to the history of the Dutch Republic. The religious environment of the Netherlands cannot be separated from the impact of the Dutch Revolt, a war that spanned from 1566 to 1648.⁷ Not only did the Dutch people form the United Provinces of the Netherlands in opposition to Spanish control, but the Revolt was cast as a spiritual battle between good and evil. Clearly, in the eyes of the Dutch, they were the good, and good became synonymous with Calvinism. And, perhaps, ironically, good was synonymous with the rejection of Catholicism; Catholicism was not an expression of religious choice, but rather its negation. Benjamin Kaplan, in his assessment of the Revolt, argues that the religious outcome came to be even more important than the political. “For Calvinists,” he comments, “the Revolt was something far grander and more desperate: a struggle of good against evil, Christ against Antichrist. For them, fighting Philip was an act of piety on which depended their salvation, as well as their survival. They could admit no compromise or defeat.”⁸ While themes of political and religious freedom easily overlapped in the rhetoric of the Revolt, the notion that the Dutch fought not only for their own souls but also for those of all Protestants attempting to escape Catholic oppression gave the Revolt a particular religious intensity.

⁷ Israel, “The Intellectual Debate,” 3.

⁸ Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided By Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 108.

When it came time to organize a government around this religious vision, the Dutch ran into a thorny issue. All of the propaganda in the world could proclaim the Revolt as a victory of Calvinism, but Calvinists in the Netherlands could not change the fact that Catholics represented a majority of the population. Even as late as 1811, after centuries of consolidation by the Reformed Church, Catholics still represented 40% of the population. Tellingly, dissenters who represented neither Reformed nor Catholic affiliation made up nearly 20%.⁹ With such a large Catholic population, it was nearly impossible to cast the Revolt as solely a victory for a particular sect, and the rebels began describing their victories against the Spanish as victories for tolerance and the liberty of conscience. In order to appeal to the predominately Catholic provinces in the south and bring them into the fold, William the Silent downplayed the demands of Calvinists for religious exclusivity in the rebellious northern provinces.¹⁰ The Union of Utrecht in 1579, which declared Dutch independence from Spain, codified religious toleration alongside independence. It presented the explicit idea that part of what the Dutch fought for was the local independence to worship according to local beliefs, not those pressed upon them from afar. Article 13 of the Union guaranteed citizens freedom of conscience in all religious matters. It outlawed the creation of a state-protected faith and assigned to the individual provinces the decision about how to best carry out the proposition.¹¹ The

⁹ Wijnand Mijnhardt, "The Construction of Silence: Religious and Political Radicalism in Dutch History," in *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750*, edited by Wiep van Bunge (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 231-263, 248.

¹⁰ M. E. H. N. Mout, "Limits and Debates: A Comparative View of Dutch Tolerance in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, edited by C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, J. Israel, and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 37-48, 40.

¹¹ Article 13 of the Union of Utrecht is central to understanding the development of religious views and religious tolerance in the Dutch Republic after 1579, essentially gathering the same amount of attention as

appearance of a codified law that protected an individual's right to practice faith made the United Provinces a unique entity in early modern Europe. Willem Frijhoff points out that "It is the refusal—to a certain extent sacrilegious—to legislate in the religious domain, while everywhere else divine right was still called upon to impose limitations, which marked out the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century."¹²

The image of the Netherlands, largely cultivated by the Dutch themselves as they entered their Golden Age, as a region of religious freedom and a refuge for the religiously oppressed became a pervasive feature of Dutch identity in the early modern period. Whereas in other countries it was oftentimes impossible to discern the line between ecclesiastical identification and political alignment, Article 13 suggested a radically new relationship between the state and its citizenry that rewarded allegiance to the civic body regardless of faith. With the constant warfare of the Reformation and the reality of religious pluralism in the Netherlands, liberty of conscience and a focus on tolerance and toleration—even, most strikingly, an argument that the national state should not even have the power to grant religious privilege, but rather should leave the field of religious legislation entirely—appeared the most rational solution.

The practice of toleration in the Netherlands, however, was quite different than Article 13 had seemingly outlined. Article 13 seems to have outrun popular beliefs about

the first amendment of the U. S. Constitution. For specific discussions of the article, see Van Eijnatten, 18; R. Po-Chia Hsia, "Introduction," in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, edited by R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge University Press, 2002): 1-17, 2; Willem Frijhoff, "Religious Toleration in the United Provinces: From 'Case' to 'Model,'" in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, edited by R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge University Press, 2002): 27-52, 30-32; Kaplan, *Divided By Faith*, 24. Frijhoff, in his article, points out that the final draft of the Union of Utrecht, "owed much to young Oldenbarneveldt," the namesake of van der Kemp's future home in the United States, 38.

¹² Frijhoff, "Religious Toleration in the United Provinces," 31.

how best to manage religious diversity. While modern readers think of tolerance in terms of equality, early modern Europeans had a completely different conception. For them, tolerance was at best a begrudging acceptance or, more accurately, a refusal to use state power to force people to worship in a certain way. Many Protestants and Catholics argued that countries would suffer if dissidents were not brought within the fold of the state faith. Devastation and destruction awaited those communities who tolerated heretics in their midst.¹³ Tolerance, it was said, was “long a loser’s creed.”¹⁴ Even during the Enlightenment, when reason was supposed to curb the excesses of the religious fanaticism that plagued the Reformation era, tolerance was uneven and sporadic. Only a few religious groups, such as the Anabaptists, truly advocated religious tolerance as central to their creeds. Most groups only tolerated ideas that did not stray too far from the standard religious tenets.¹⁵

A fact on the ground separated the practice of religious diversity in the Netherlands from its practice in countries such as England: the Dutch Republic did not, and because of its demography could not, have a national church that required membership. The government could not force people to comply with a single faith. Tolerance in England, for example, operated through the established power of the Anglican Church and thus tolerance was not seen as indicative of Englishness. The same

¹³ See Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, “Introduction,” in *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe*, edited by Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 1-22, 3.

¹⁵ Grell and Porter, “Introduction”; Jonathan Israel, “Spinoza, Locke and the Enlightenment Battle for Toleration,” in *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe*, edited by Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 102-133, 102.

could not be said for the Dutch Republic where the multiplicity of faiths required tolerance for social concord and the governing documents of the union required toleration for religious dissidents. Religious tolerance, then, became the means by which Dutch officials had to govern the provinces if they wished to end the incessant battles over religion.

Just as practical concerns had eradicated a national established church, so could practical concerns promote the religious interests of those who provided the Revolt with its most powerful support. As Calvinism came to be associated with the victorious rebels, several provincial governments, namely Holland, rewarded the support of the church by making the Calvinism of the Reformed Church the public religion of the Netherlands. Since the Union of Utrecht outlawed state churches, Calvinism could not become the official church of the Netherlands. But, more importantly, the persistent opposition and power wielded by numerically superior Catholics prevented the Reformed Church from ever becoming a state church and coercing church attendance. The significant number of non-Calvinist Protestants in the Netherlands, many of whom, such as the Mennonites, possessed great wealth and political power, also blunted Reformed efforts.¹⁶ Federalism further stymied efforts to establish the Reformed Church as the authority of the Church varied across the provinces. Where Calvinism was weak, Catholics and other dissenting traditions had greater leverage over religious practice because political officials believed that concord rather than conflict should regulate the provinces. In fact, Article 13 of the Union of Utrecht should be seen as a reflection of

¹⁶ Charles H. Parker, *The Reformation of Community: Social Welfare and Calvinist Charity in Holland, 1572-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

these groups' ability to maintain their religious privileges throughout the United Provinces.¹⁷

As the public religion, the Dutch Reformed Church was the only religion practiced in public without any infringements.¹⁸ In an effort to consolidate their position, Dutch Calvinists outlawed Catholic practice throughout most of the provinces by 1581, a situation that would not change until after 1795.¹⁹ More importantly, only Calvinists could become full citizens of the Republic since only those in the Reformed Church could hold civil office.²⁰ As a result, the Reformed Church, both to secure political power and to defend the "true faith" of the Netherlands, made stringent requirements for membership. Communion was reserved only for those in good standing, but in an effort to spread the umbrella of the Reformed community, the Church covered a spectrum of believers through passive means. For example, there was an entire class of participants, known as *liefhebbers*, who were classified as sympathizers with the church because either they could not fulfill the membership requirements or wanted to reap the social benefits of the Church without the strict doctrinal duties.²¹ To be fair, the clergy married and baptized all but "the most vocal heretics, without discrimination," but from the end of the Dutch Revolt on, the Reformed Church persisted in its attempts to make Calvinism the

¹⁷ Mout, 40-41.

¹⁸ Christine Kooi, *Calvinists and Catholics during Holland's Golden Age: Heretics and Idolaters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁹ Kaplan, *Divided By Faith*, 109; Wintle, 10; Frijhoff, *Embodied Belief*, 46; Hsia, "Introduction," 2.

²⁰ Ernestine van der Wall, "Toleration and Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic," in *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe*, edited by Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 114-132, 117.

²¹ Parker, *Reformation of Community*, 14-15.

one faith of all of the Dutch provinces.²² One's membership, rather than one's inner adherence to doctrine, was what mattered.

In religious terms, the Dutch Republic was a house of mirrors. On one hand, with the favored status of the Reformed Church and the efforts to curb non-Calvinist practices, the Dutch Republic did not appear any different than other religious states in Europe. As Joris Van Eijnatten asserts, "The existence of various religious sub-cultures was regarded at best as an unforeseen and unfortunate result of the Reformation and the Dutch Revolt," and that the "Dutch Republic was an early modern confessional state like any other, with a public church, a dominant clergy, a state protective of certain confessions, and a religious discourse that in many ways presupposed the notion of religious uniformity." Yet the ambivalence of toleration cannot take away the fact that the Dutch did have a religiously pluralistic society unique in Europe. Article 13 and the everyday experiences within the provinces suggests that while religious interactions in the Dutch Republic did not achieve full tolerance, they did achieve what Willem Frijhoff describes as "coexistence."²³ In what Frijhoff terms the "ecumenicism of everyday relations," the Dutch went out of their way not to highlight religious difference or enforce any sanctions against Catholicism in order to achieve social concord.²⁴ Political and religious officials became highly creative in their attempts to ignore the obvious. Civil authorities, for example, would warn printers about upcoming raids by the Reformed Church on "heretical" material. The most poignant example of this creativity and of the remarkable

²² Parker, *Reformation of Community*, 99.

²³ Van Eijnatten, 3, 4; Frijhoff, *Embodied Belief*, 48.

²⁴ Frijhoff, *Embodied Belief*, 40.

fluidity of toleration in the Netherlands was the *schuilkerk*, or clandestine church. In the face of laws against practicing the Catholic faith, these clandestine churches were located inside homes or hidden within the central area of a city block. Everyone was aware of the *schuilkerken*, and everyone knew Catholics held mass, but an informal, collective agreement was made to maintain the fiction of Calvinist dominance. Kaplan notes that “In Amsterdam alone, Catholics had twenty of these illegal places of worship in 1700 and Mennonites six.”²⁵ Essentially, the Dutch, primarily through the *schuilkerk*, distinguished between private and public space and allowed non-Calvinists to privately worship the faith of their choice as their fellow citizens pretended not to notice. Further, since the Dutch Reformed Church was not a state church and did not require compulsory membership, no one of the Netherlands was forced to practice the Calvinist faith.²⁶ The separation between public and private space allowed the Dutch to reconcile freedom of conscience with the establishment of a public faith.

The history of tolerance in the early Dutch Republic left the Netherlands with a religious environment unique in Europe: a publicly dominant faith represented by the Calvinism of the Reformed Church with the concurrent reality of a multi-confessional state. And because of the federalism of the Republic, the situation varied depending on the power of Calvinists in the province. Therefore, tolerance remained a widely debated

²⁵ Kaplan, *Divided By Faith*, 174.

²⁶ The *schuilkerk* is discussed in full in Kaplan, *Divided By Faith*, 172-83. The fact that the Dutch Reformed Church could not force participation is cited by Joke Spaans, “Religious Policies in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic,” in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, edited by R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge University Press, 2002): 72-86, 85; Van Eijnatten, 69; Kaplan, *Divided By Faith*, 241; and Frijhoff, *Embodied Belief*, 60-64. Frijhoff describes public space as “where the Protestant confession can use its dominant status” and private space as “where each confesses what he wants,” 61.

issue, and by the time of van der Kemp's birth, as the more radical notions of the Enlightenment emerged in the Republic, discussions of tolerance reached a level that rivaled their urgency, if not their lethality, during the Reformation.²⁷ In 1752, the year of van der Kemp's birth, arguments about tolerance proliferated, but the unevenness of the practice of toleration in the Dutch Republic remained.²⁸ Before he immigrated to America in 1788, van der Kemp would experience firsthand the tension between public churches and private faiths.

The van der Kemps were long members of the Reformed Church, and John and Anna Catherine had Francis baptized in the church on May 7, three days after his birth. Adrian, his middle name, came from his uncle-in-law Adrianus 'S Gravezande, a preacher in the Reformed Church at Middelburgh.²⁹ Raised in the church, and showing a predilection toward a scholarly life, van der Kemp hoped to enter the ministry. First, though, van der Kemp tried to follow in his father's steps and joined the army. It was there that he was first exposed to the variety of religious ideologies and beliefs that existed outside the Reformed Church. He found that his tethering to the public faith was not as strong as he believed. His army companions "leaned to the side of the infidels, and my knowledge of the revelation was too defective not to be led astray."³⁰ Thus at a

²⁷ Van der Wall, 114-115.

²⁸ With the transition from the Reformation era to the Enlightenment, a major shift was that toleration no longer was widely seen as the consequence of divided loyalties, but as something that the United Provinces should strive for across the board. In fact, the proponents of tolerance argued that toleration, especially as it had been practiced, was not enough. Equality became the watchword of the eighteenth century Republic, a process that culminated in 1795 when all religious restrictions throughout the country were eliminated. See Van Eijnatten, 7-9; van der Wall, 115.

²⁹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Geslacht Boek, Anno 1609*, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

³⁰ Van der Kemp to John Lincklaen, 8 April 1816, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

young age, van der Kemp realized that a faith that came passively, a faith that he did not have a personal attachment to, was a precarious one. The realization did not turn his interests away from religion. On the contrary, after he quickly realized that military life was not for him, van der Kemp decided to attend college with the aim of fulfilling his father's wish to "devote me to the Church" and reapply himself to the Reformed faith.³¹

Van der Kemp entered college at the University of Groningen, a province where the Reformed Church had an established dominance.³² Yet the power of the church in Groningen, as everywhere in the Netherlands, was not encompassing, and during his schooling, van der Kemp was exposed to more persuasive authorities than the random soldiers who had earlier shaken his convictions. Van der Kemp read widely and attended lectures on the history of religion, ecclesiastical laws, the ancient languages, antiquity, and natural law.³³ At the conclusion of his third year of study, in light of his exposure to all of the religious information outside of the Reformed framework, van der Kemp not only questioned whether becoming a Reformed clergyman was the best path, but also whether the Reformed faith provided the best form of worship.

Almost from the outset of that third year, van der Kemp began to move away from the Calvinism of the Reformed Church. Among the paths he explored were the writings of the "Deistical school." Freely admitting that his attachment to the Christian revelation was "not imbued with a solid knowledge," van der Kemp found himself "dazzled and misled by their fair appearance," but soon realized that those "Authors were

³¹ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 10.

³² Israel, "Intellectual Debate," 9.

³³ Van der Kemp, *Geslacht Boeck*.

pleasing to the imagination” and “embellished by taste and brilliancy of wit.” As he delved further into his studies, he found that the Deistical writings were “sophisms” and his amazement emerged from not from the power of their arguments, but rather from van der Kemp’s “want of fixed principles.”³⁴ Van der Kemp kept reading, “perused all which had been written against Revelation in France and in England,” and found “so much bad faith – such glaring proofs of the immoral tendency of...these boasters” and “was persuaded, truth could not be on their side.”³⁵ In 1773, van der Kemp’s studying produced a conviction of the “historical truth of the Christian Revelation” and the existence “of the Supreme Ruler of the universe.” Throughout this process, van der Kemp also discovered that the “instructions received in my early age being too superficial” became “an obstacle” to his faith rather than a benefit.³⁶ One of the obstacles was the strict, disciplinarian God of the Calvinist faith and the Reformed Church. In his private explorations, van der Kemp did not find a God that desired to punish mankind and only select a limited number for salvation. Instead, the God of van der Kemp “shall be just – and he is wise and good.” He later told his friend John Lincklaen that in this period of his life, he had the epiphany that “if I do not obtain that portion of bliss for which I ardently hope” “it shall be so – not for the involuntary errors of the head but for the guilty transgressions of the heart.” God did not seek to punish, but to reward. “It is a Calvinist – so rigid – that I lament.” Predestination placed limits on God’s bounty that van der Kemp was not willing to entertain. He could find no justification for it in his studies, and

³⁴ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 13.

³⁵ Van der Kemp to John Lincklaen, 8 April 1816.

³⁶ Van der Kemp to John Lincklaen, 8 April 1816.

indeed found the opposite: that God's bounty was endless and meant for everyone. Ultimately, van der Kemp maintained, "whatever may be my future lot – it will...always...justify the ways of an intelligent and good Being."³⁷

Van der Kemp was troubled by the doctrine of Calvinism, but he was also troubled by the church's claim to public authority. The two problems compounded one another. In his researches, he could find nothing that justified the public position the Reformed Church had, especially in relation to other declarations of faith. The efforts of Reformed clergymen to consolidate both religious and political power made van der Kemp "enter the ranks of their opponents" and "joined [in him] a deep hatred of the clerical hierarchy and their continued usurpations."³⁸ "[T]rue religion," van der Kemp argued, "is not confined to a particular Sect." Van der Kemp cast aside the idea of an elect, asserting that however one might wander into the path of God, "we may at length arrive at the same good by a different course in our last days."³⁹ As a result, van der Kemp saw no divine authority in the role of priests. Priests were there to guide, to help others figure out difficult questions and persevere through arduous times. They were not meant to act as an arbiter of salvation. We "have but one God – and one mediator between God and men – the man J. C.," van der Kemp wrote, and the only means by which man needed to discover this truth was the Bible.⁴⁰ No clerical authority could

³⁷ Van der Kemp to John Lincklaen, 27 May 1817, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society; Van der Kemp to John Lincklaen, 8 April 1816.

³⁸ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 13.

³⁹ Van der Kemp to Lincklaen, 8 April 1816.

⁴⁰ Van der Kemp to Lincklaen, 8 April 1816.

deny or award salvation in any measure, or even help lay people determine religious truths.

In 1772, these two problems converged. Van der Kemp attended a course on “Ecclesiastical Laws and the Laws of Nature” taught by Frederick Adolph van der Marck. Van der Marck’s standing as a scholar was only rivaled by the controversy he gathered because of his beliefs in natural law rather than received theology and his incessant demand for intellectual freedom. He continually attacked the clergy in his lessons and in his public addresses, and he was accused of placing the capabilities of man over the Calvinist tenet of divine grace.⁴¹ To many citizens of Groningen, van der Marck’s assertions smacked of Arminianism, and the strong Reformed contingent put pressure on van der Marck to alter his lectures. The attack on van der Marck was both a contemporary worry on the part of the Reformed faith about the application of natural law to matters of faith, and a long-standing grievance between Reformed and Remonstrants in the Netherlands. Since the Dutch Revolt, Calvinists had been relatively successful in circumscribing the efforts of Catholics in the Republic, but reconciling the division between strict Calvinists and moderate Calvinists was another matter entirely. The moderate branch of Calvinists, the Remonstrants, attempted to move the church toward Arminianism while the strict Calvinists, now known as the Counter-Remonstrants, attempted to establish a more orthodox position. Furthermore, the two positions “escalated as a sub-text” for a political struggle brewing between the supporters of Prince Maurice of Orange and Johannes Oldenbarnvelt.⁴² Maurice, as stadholder of

⁴¹ Van Eijnatten, 269-71.

⁴² Israel, “Intellectual Debate,” 13.

the Netherlands, proclaimed a hereditary right to lead the United Provinces, advocated a continued war with Spain for the southern low country, and gained the support of the Counter-Remonstrants. Oldenbarnevelt, desiring a truce with Spain, was the pensionary of the States of Holland and received backing from the Remonstrants. These divisions also represented an ongoing argument about the proper place of sovereignty in the Republic. Maurice's support of the official place of the Reformed Church argued for a political establishment, with a hereditary ruler and state church, similar to the monarchical states surrounding the Netherlands. Oldenbarnevelt's supporters advocated the maintenance of political power at the federated, provincial level and to avoid a powerful centralized state.

The clash between the two groups ended in the widespread defeat of the Remonstrants, ultimately resulting in the execution of Oldenbarnevelt. In 1618, the Reformed Church called a national synod to be held in the town of Dordrecht. At the end of the famous Synod of Dort in 1619, the Reformed Church came under the power of the conservative branch of Calvinism and moved away from any flexibility in doctrine. It officially condemned the Remonstrant faith and declared anyone who expressed Arminian ideas a heretic.⁴³ Arminianism would continue to be a serious and even dangerous charge. Yet the religious nature of the Dutch Republic meant that Remonstrants never went away and its battles with Counter Remonstrants simply took on different guises over the years: figures such as Oldenbarnevelt came to stand for religious freedom and the Dutch dissenting tradition. It was no mistake that when van

⁴³ Parker, *The Reformation of Community*, 172-173; Israel, "Intellectual Debate," 12-13; Mout, 42-43.

der Kemp moved to America, the town he helped to found on the frontier of New York took the name Oldenbarneveld, a clear Americanization of the Dutch statesman.

In the 1770s, the van der Marck case was one of many persecutions in what came to be known as the Socratic War. The Socratic War stemmed from a novel written by the Frenchman Marmontel in 1768. The novel, *Belisarius*, appeared in Holland by 1768, in French, and by 1769, it appeared in Dutch and several other languages. In *Belisarius*, Marmontel delivered a powerful statement on the need for religious toleration. On the face, this would not seem controversial in the Netherlands, but Marmontel went a step further in his demand for religious toleration and issued a statement of belief in universal salvation. The Frenchman argued that all virtuous men, regardless of denomination or even if they were Christian, could not be denied salvation. To prove his point, Marmontel used the example of Socrates who was not a Christian, but whose virtue should be requisite enough to make him eligible for eternal salvation. This argument for universal salvation did not sit well with the Calvinists in the Reformed Church, and they launched a pamphlet war denouncing Marmontel, using Socrates as the key figure in the debates. The Remonstrants answered the Reformed pamphlets in kind, defending Socrates' salvation, launching the Socratic War.⁴⁴ The battle over Calvinism and Arminianism renewed once more, and the Reformed Church began to prosecute cases they considered to be the most pernicious. Van der Marck and his teachings on natural law and his defense of reason over revelation fit the bill. With the power of the

⁴⁴ A good description of the Socratic War can be found in I. Leonard Leeb, *The Ideological Origins of the Batavian Revolution: History and Politics in the Dutch Republic, 1747-1800* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 98-104.

Reformed Church in Groningen, it was only a matter of time before the two sides reached an impasse.

Van der Kemp took the accusations toward van der Marck as a personal affront. He began to publicly debate fellow schoolmates and even ranking citizens of the town in defense of van der Marck's teachings. Those debates soon singled van der Kemp out as one student corrupted by the teachings of van der Marck. In the eyes of the "nobility as well as gentry," van der Kemp "was... a reprobate old in sin though young in years."⁴⁵ The community leaders, with "condescending kindness," put pressure on van der Kemp to renounce his indictment of the clergy and be saved from a life of sin, even bringing in van der Kemp's uncle who, since the death of his father earlier in 1772, had taken over as van der Kemp's benefactor. More specifically, the townspeople wanted van der Kemp to disassociate from van der Marck. Van der Kemp soon realized that his professor was their main target; they were using him to fulfill "a deep rooted hatred towards Professor van der Marck."⁴⁶ It soon became clear that what the town council opposed was van der Marck's "insistence on natural law as the basis for toleration and human right." The case soon became a cause célèbre throughout the Netherlands as the debates on toleration once again came to the fore. Van der Marck was eventually convicted and forced to resign his chair at the university. His fate became fodder for both religious liberals and conservatives. Conservatives found much to fear in the popularity of van der Marck's natural law lectures, and the support he received across the Dutch Republic. The true threat was to the public faith that Reformed members placed at the heart of Dutch

⁴⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 14.

⁴⁶ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 14.

identity; if that was lost, the Republic would go with it. Opposing the jeremiads of conservatives, liberals, who favored the rationalist arguments of the Enlightenment, feared what van der Marck's conviction and firing would mean for religious expression in the Republic. Clearly, for them, the prized Dutch toleration should have prevented van der Marck's removal. Toleration was no longer sufficient for the Dutch Republic to prosper, religious equality needed to be the final goal.⁴⁷

Van der Kemp became collateral damage in the Socratic War. For his own actions during the van der Marck controversy, he became the target of a university tribunal populated with both faculty members and local clergy. Even before the van der Marck decision had been issued, the committee demanded that van der Kemp quit his lectures with van der Marck, purify his library, and begin a traditional course of university training.⁴⁸ There was still hope amongst those in town that van der Kemp could be saved from the heresy of van der Marck, but these faculty members and clergyman had no concept of van der Kemp's religious position, assuming that his beliefs were entirely from the contagion of van der Marck's teaching. They failed to realize that it was the coercive power that they wielded against van der Marck that helped convince van der Kemp that the Reformed clergy had no business interfering with personal faith. The clergy had an important role to advise and guide, but they had no authority to dictate. Despite van der Marck's own personal appeal for him to concede his position, van der

⁴⁷ Van der Kemp, *Geslacht Boeck*; van der Wall, 126-127.

⁴⁸ Pressure also came financially from van der Kemp's uncle, who, after the death of Francis's father in 1772, had taken over paying for the studies at Groningen. See Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 12-14; Harry F. Jackson, *Scholar in the Wilderness: Francis Adrian Van der Kemp* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 15-16.

Kemp flatly refused all offers “with disdain” and the tribunal removed him from the university.⁴⁹

Van der Kemp’s primary concern after the van der Marck affair was securing a living. In order to make some money, van der Kemp relented and decided to sell off some of his large library, which included a number of deist texts. To protect van der Kemp from further public scrutiny, a professor at Groningen, Paul Chevalier, purchased the entire collection of French deists.⁵⁰ With the profits from the book sale, the help of friends, and an economical diet, van der Kemp remained in Groningen. Eventually, through personal connections he made through extensive correspondence as well as the help of his friends at Groningen, van der Kemp garnered an opportunity to continue his studies at the Seminary of the Remonstrants at Amsterdam.⁵¹ Van der Kemp feared that by attending the seminary he would indirectly confirm the suspicions of the ill-informed accusers, so he declined the invitation. Instead, he appealed to Professor Heere Oosterbaan at the Baptist Seminary in Amsterdam for admission. Baptists in the Netherlands are probably more identified with their other name, Mennonites. Mennonites were a branch of Anabaptists, who after the failure of the Peasant Revolt in Münster in 1525 followed the precepts of Menno Simons to establish an independent and, importantly, peaceful, free church outside of political authority. But the stain of Münster

⁴⁹ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 14. Jackson makes a similar comment, 14.

⁵⁰ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 15. In Van Eijnatten’s account of this event, he seems quite skeptical of this story, 280. The account, however, appears in full in Jackson’s biography, 16.

⁵¹ Van der Kemp was also offered the job of “a civil employ at St. George Delmina on the African coast, on the recommendation of Professor van der Marck” as well as an opportunity to become the tutor for the young son of a Dutch gentlemen in the West Indies. Fearing the “inhospitable coast of Delmina” and being responsible for the education of a youth “when I was scarce to be trusted to regulate my own conduct,” van der Kemp rejected both offers. Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 17.

painted Anabaptism, no matter what form it took, with sedition.⁵² Despite the proclamations of peace, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands deemed the Mennonites heretics. What set the Mennonites apart was their opposition to infant baptism. Although there were a number of scriptural and social elements that separated Mennonites from other religious sects, it was the issue of baptism, and the refusal to baptize infants, that came to categorize the faith.⁵³ The emphasis on baptism and the proper role of baptism would become a common feature of van der Kemp's later sermons, but what first attracted him to the Mennonite congregation was their reputation "to be of extensive liberal principles."⁵⁴

By the late eighteenth century, the Mennonites had moved significantly away from the legacy of Münster and were one of the foremost proponents in the Netherlands of equality amongst religious faiths. They fully supported the freedom of conscience of all believers and began to establish independent churches throughout the provinces. In opposition to Calvinism, and in closer line with van der Kemp's developing beliefs, Mennonites rejected predestination, arguing that removing free will from the religious conversation in fact put God at the root of all evil in the world. Mennonite congregations in the provinces also rejected the civil role Calvinist placed at the heart of the Reformed

⁵² Klaus Deppermann, "The Anabaptists and the State Churches," translated by Ian Waite, in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, edited by Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen & Unwin: The German Historical Institute, 1984): 95-106.

⁵³ Alastair Hamilton, "The Development of Dutch Anabaptists in the Light of the European Magisterial and Radical Reformation," in *From Martyr to Muppy (Mennonite Urban Professionals): A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites*, edited by Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, and Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994): 3-14.

⁵⁴ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 17.

Church, asserting that God and God alone passed judgment. Mennonites rejected public office and refused to abide by any creed save that which they found in the Bible.⁵⁵ The tenets of the Mennonites made them a logical and rather fortunate congregation for van der Kemp after Groningen.

The seminary in Amsterdam was among the first colleges opened for the education and training of Mennonites in the Republic, and Oosterbann was instrumental in its establishment.⁵⁶ What drew van der Kemp to the Baptists, was the condition that he “could be admitted without compromising myself in any manner, without constraint to any religious opinions I might foster or adopt in future.”⁵⁷ Oosterbaen granted the request, and van der Kemp arrived in Amsterdam in 1773. Van der Kemp’s opposition to hierarchical authority, formed in three short years at the University of Groningen, meshed well with the dictates of Anabaptism. The fact that he required a promise from Oosterbaan for an environment where he could test his own faith without reprisal speaks to both the developing radicalism of his religious thought and also speaks to van der Kemp’s hesitation of being put in another compromising situation. As van der Kemp indicated to Oosterbaan, however, the central tenets of his faith were only beginning to crystallize, and a repeat of the events at Groningen was not exactly what he was looking

⁵⁵ Sjouke Voolstra, “‘The Colony of Heaven’: The Anabaptists Aspiration to Be a Church Without Spot or Wrinkle in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *From Martyr to Muppy (Mennonite Urban Professionals): A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites*, edited by Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, and Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994): 15-29.

⁵⁶ Jelle Bosma, “Mennonites versus Calvinists: A Comparative Study of Mennonite and Dutch Reformed Homiletics during the Enlightenment,” in *From Martyr to Muppy (Mennonite Urban Professionals): A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites*, edited by Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, and Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994): 175-186, 177.

⁵⁷ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 17-19.

for. What van der Kemp required of Oosterbaan and of the Baptist Seminary was simply room to think and explore.

Granted by Oosterbaan the freedom that he needed, van der Kemp set to work on researching Christianity. He felt that he was “armed sufficiently with the knowledge of ancient learning – Oriental language – Church and profane history and antiquities.”⁵⁸ He began with the “truth, that if the Christian Revelation is from God, then any one, even of the meanest understanding, with a sincere heart, *may, must* be able to discover God’s will, viz. what he is to do and to believe for his salvation.” He continued that the central tenets of faith should be the understanding “that a merciful God required from frail creatures sincerity of heart and genuine repentance; that to love Him and one’s neighbour was the summary of the doctrine of Jesus, the true characteristics of the genuine believer; and that it was the will of our Heavenly Father that all His children should be saved.”⁵⁹ Van der Kemp’s religion, then, only had the requirement of loving God and one’s neighbor and not any allegiance to a specific creed or formulary. He elaborated a bit more to his friend John Lincklaen. In remembering the heady years of the early 1770s, van der Kemp maintained that he “was fully convinced of the historical truth of the Christian Revelation. There had lived a Jesus – who was crucified and restored to life, and his 12 unlearned disciples brought about a revolution in the world – utterly impossible, without the intervention of the Supreme Ruler of the universe.”⁶⁰ The

⁵⁸ Van der Kemp to Lincklaen, 8 April 1816.

⁵⁹ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 19-20, original emphasis.

⁶⁰ Van der Kemp to Lincklaen, 8 April 1816.

cornerstone, however, was the simple statement: “The Almighty shall be just – and he is wise and good.”⁶¹

Van der Kemp conceded that there were simply elements of faith that were either hard to explain or were beyond basic reasoning. Such a belief could lead, as it did among Catholic theologians, to a belief in the need for Church teachings, in order to discern false from true revelation. In van der Kemp, however, this belief only reinforced his distaste for powerful members of the clergy who sought to control the thoughts of others through a dogmatic vision of religion. He later told DeWitt Clinton that this element convinced him of the sophistry of the deists. “We may humbly inquire always,” van der Kemp wrote, “while it is impossible to penetrate as to develop his wonderful creation – yet we may unravel a part...we may stand amazed at our present hallucinations – and even then we shall only see in part.”⁶² The only part that truly sustained, however, was the belief in a benevolent God. Years later, van der Kemp informed a friend, “I know – perhaps as any man living – the deceitfulness of our heart” as “I studied mine – during forty years – and could write a Book of its errors and meanderings.” But “Had I not believed in the Gospel – I doubt not – or many years past – I should have ended my existence – now I live in hope and...have far more received – than I deserved.”⁶³ But at that moment, what van der Kemp knew was that he found his faith.

⁶¹ Van der Kemp to John Lincklaen, 27 May 1817, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁶² Van der Kemp to DeWitt Clinton, 21 April 1823, Clinton Papers, Volume XI, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

⁶³ Van der Kemp to Lincklaen, 27 May 1817.

It was a faith influenced by his upbringing, his lessons from van der Marck, and even the short time he had spent with the Mennonites. Already criticizing the power of the clergy for what he saw as its “prerogative of opening the gates of heaven to a favorite, or kicking a damned one in the abyss,” van der Kemp recognized that a belief in God or in Jesus did not directly correlate to a specific belief in Calvinism, Arminianism, or Catholicism. Each was simply a possibility under the larger auspice of Christianity.⁶⁴ Van der Kemp even rejected the tutelage of Oosterbaen, “a man so learned, so pious, so generous” because he simply “could not submit: my heart revolted at the idea of such slavery.”⁶⁵ Wary of any outside influence, even that of his friends, to dictate his faith, van der Kemp resolved that only he could determine what he ultimately believed. Importantly, the religion that he found in his ardent studies was an idiosyncratic, individual faith derived from direct readings of the Bible, personal reflection, and an acknowledgment that as he continued to read, his beliefs might change. Van der Kemp desired to communicate his private exploration of faith with the larger community, challenging the Dutch division between private and public faith, and made “a public profession of my religious principles” in November of 1773.⁶⁶ Van der Kemp was baptized in the Mennonite faith that same month.⁶⁷ Afterward, he began attending classes at the Baptist Seminary, becoming a “candidate of the sacred ministry,” on

⁶⁴ Quoted in Jackson, 14.

⁶⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 19.

⁶⁶ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 20.

⁶⁷ Van der Kemp, *Geslacht Boeck*.

December 18, 1775. He accepted his first pastorate in the village of Huyzen in August of 1776, and secured a more permanent position at Leiden in November of 1777.⁶⁸

After all of his complaints and condemnation of clergy, it may strike an odd note that van der Kemp still wanted to become one of their number. The most obvious reason he chose to become a minister was that he needed to make a living and found that a life of scholarship and reflection suited him better than any other occupation. But that was not all that convinced him to continue on the path of ministry. Despite his castigations of the Reformed clergy, van der Kemp always sought to limit his opposition to their overreaches, not to their role in and of itself. He did admit that he believed that the origination of the “whole institution – was then rather a matter of convenience of decorum” and that the role of priests and minister was “not intended by the Apostles much less – by their master – as obliging Posterity.” But that did not mean that clergy were useless. People needed guides. People needed the clergy to contemplate religious questions and then have the clergy present them with the evidence of their research, and then the people would decide what to do with it. The clergy, in any religion, were “only Spiritual guides and within this circle I should yet wish their power and influence confined.” The use and desire for power was where van der Kemp directed his condemnation of the clergy. He worried when clergy received power, in any form, and attempted to use that power to restrict God’s salvation. As he told a friend later, “I would

⁶⁸ This chronology of events can be found in both van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 20-21 and Jackson, 24-25.

not entrust any clergyman on earth with power – while the best – in a body – shall abuse it.”⁶⁹

Van der Kemp immediately ran into controversy with his new congregation over his ecumenical beliefs and his refusal to accept formal authority as leader of the church. Shortly after taking over the pastorate at Leiden, members of the governing board demanded that van der Kemp submit to the “formularies and a creed, which all their former members had complied with.”⁷⁰ Van der Kemp refused, contending that the board had accepted his original declaration and that he should not have to submit to a new creed that forced him to attach himself to the faith of this specific church. He was more than willing to continue preaching at Leiden, but only with the understanding that the church acknowledge his freedom to preach what he wanted. Van der Kemp wanted no restrictions on his personal religion because he did not plan to put any restrictions on the faith of his congregation. He did not want that kind of power. At the beginning, only two members supported van der Kemp’s refusal to submit to the church creed, but as the debates dragged on and the board saw van der Kemp’s “unwillingness to give way one single hair-breadth,” the board relented. The request for a subscription to creed, however, was not only dropped for van der Kemp; instead “all submitted to annul forever the articles of subscription.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Van der Kemp to Benjamin Walker, 26 June 1817, Gratz Collection Box 281 Folder 76, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁷⁰ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 23.

⁷¹ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 23. Fairchild, the editor of van der Kemp’s autobiography, notes that, taking her information from *Dutch Life in Town and Country*, “To-day the Mennonites have no test, no church, no rite, no clergy, but fraternities, in which the minister is the ‘vroorganger’ or leader, though his education, social position, and general duties are like those of all Protestant ministers,” P. M. Hough, *Dutch Life in Town and Country* (New York, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1911), 243.

The controversy over the Mennonite creed served as a litmus test for van der Kemp's faith. It was telling that his desire for an individualized approach to faith was challenged even by one of the more liberal faiths in the Netherlands. It shows, once more, that tolerance had limits even in a place such as the Dutch Republic and in a religion such as the Mennonites. What troubled people about van der Kemp's ideology was that it was not tied to any identifiable denomination. This threatened both religious and political allegiance, and in the Dutch Republic where these allegiances were so precarious to begin with, van der Kemp's religious ideology provided a new threat to concord. Fortunately for van der Kemp, the Mennonite congregation accepted his demand for independence and he remained in the position until he resigned in 1787.

Van der Kemp's insistence on reason and research when it came to religion meant that his faith was in perpetual motion, adapting to new information as he encountered it, but the contours of his faith were more or less in place by 1777. He rejected the predestination and pessimism of his parents' Calvinist God and argued instead for a deity that was loving and whose gifts of eternal salvation were open to everyone, regardless of denomination or even Christianity. Judging from van der Kemp's autobiography, his religious development was the most important aspect of his life up until 1776. Besides basic biographical information and family ancestry, the years at Groningen and his religious epiphany at the Baptist Seminary in Amsterdam occupy all of the space. His religious ideology also shaped his life after 1776. In fact, van der Kemp's insistence on an active faith, one pursued rather than simply accepted, meant that faith was central to his identity.

But in 1776, across the Atlantic, a revolution had begun that would begin to take van der Kemp's attention away from the church and into the separate but linked realm of Dutch politics. Discontentment with the inefficient and hierarchical Dutch political system merged with revolutionary republicanism emanating from the British colonies, and a second Dutch revolt broke out throughout the provinces. Since the first Dutch Revolt, politics in the Netherlands had been a competing arrangement between those who wanted to invest the patronage system created by the family of Orange with monarchical power and the Holland-led Estates General, who favored a more republican style of governance. As the Dutch state began to tarnish after their Golden Age, frustration with the stagnation, and the division about who to support during the American Revolution, led to an outbreak of hostilities between advocates of more democratic practices in the Dutch government and those who backed the House of Orange. Not surprisingly, van der Kemp joined the effort of the rebels, who labeled themselves Patriots, and took up arms to protest the stadholderian government of William V.

After 1776, van der Kemp attempted to balance his role as preacher and revolutionary. Van der Kemp would preach in the morning and drill in the afternoon, but by 1787, his constant political activity overtook his religious commitment to the congregation, and he resigned from his post as the pastor of the Mennonites in Leiden. It was not an abandonment of religion, but a focusing of effort. For van der Kemp, the Dutch Patriot Revolt was not solely a revolution of politics, but also a movement to genuinely fulfill the promise made by Article 13 in 1579. In his eyes, to be successful, the revolt had to succeed in both the political and religious realm. The rejuvenation of Dutch politics and a return to the original principles of the Republic would

simultaneously guarantee a greater commitment to religious freedom. A victorious Patriot movement meant the creation of a Dutch Republic that would not be beholden to the Reformed Church and would not force believers to choose between public and private faiths. It would be a Republic that supported the liberty of conscience and allowed religious dissidents such as van der Kemp the freedom to pursue unique visions of religious practice.

CHAPTER 3

THE DUTCH PATRIOT REVOLT

After journeying through the minefield that was Dutch religion, Francis Adrian van der Kemp had finally found an amenable environment to express his dissenting religious ideology. Almost as soon as he discovered his Mennonite haven in Leiden, van der Kemp was swept up in the revolutionary fervor of his age. “Several circumstances concurred by which at this period,” van der Kemp wrote, “my political connections were renewed, and first in Holland, soon in the other Provinces.” “All the time, which I now could spare,” he continued, “I devoted to becoming thoroughly acquainted not only with the history and antiquities, but principally with the laws and constitutions of my country.”¹ Two of the “several circumstances” were events that would forever remain linked in van der Kemp’s understanding of the world: the commencement of the American war for independence and the genesis of the Dutch Patriot Revolt, or, as it later became known, the *Patriottentijd*.

The years 1777 to 1788 were the most momentous years in van der Kemp’s life. His support of the American Revolution and participation in the Patriot Revolt led to, among other things, his resignation from the pastorate of Leiden, a criminal trial, a commission in the Utrecht militia, and a brief imprisonment. As van der Kemp wrote, preached, drilled, fought, and got arrested, he also fell in love. During this same eleven-year period, van der Kemp met and married Reinira Engelberta Joanna Vos, daughter of the burgomaster of the City of Nijmegen. The two married on May 20, 1782, and in

¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Francis Adrian van der Kemp: 1752-1829: An Autobiography*, edited by Helen Linklaen Fairchild (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1903), 24, 41.

1783, Reinira gave birth to Jan Jacob, known as J. J. In 1785, Reinira delivered a daughter whom the couple named, Cunira Engelbartha, after Reinira's mother.²

Even before the protection of his family gave him cause, van der Kemp worried about the Revolt's prospects of success. From its inception, the Patriot Revolt struggled to consolidate competing factions in the Netherlands. Schism tore the movement asunder long before the Prussian army crashed through the Dutch borders on the side of the House of Orange and rolled over the Patriot militia units, including van der Kemp's. Van der Kemp questioned whether the divisions within the revolt could produce a society in which he and his family could thrive. After the Prussian invasion resulted in his brief imprisonment, van der Kemp decided that the Netherlands no longer offered the future he wanted for his family. By Francis's thirty-sixth birthday, the van der Kemps no longer lived in their native land, but were arriving in New York City ready to pursue, as many after them would, a better life in the new United States of America.

The Dutch Patriot Revolt was the first European answer to the American colonies' call of revolution. The Revolt officially began in 1781 and lasted until 1787 when the forces of the Stadholder regained control of the provinces. The actors in the drama can be divided into three rough groups: the Orangists, the Patriots, and the regents. The Stadholder during the Revolt was William V of Orange and his supporters were known as the Orangists. The Stadholder position was originally a series of local representatives in

² For the family timeline, see Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Geslacht Boek, Anno 1609*, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society. For additional information on Francis's marriage to Reinira, see Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Billet van Aegnevlinge wegens het Middel van Trouwen*, F. A. Van der Kemp Papers, VDK 1, Oneida Historical Society Manuscript Division, Utica, NY, Box 82, Box 1 - Bio.1 through GRE.2.11, Folder GRE. 2-1/GRE.2-11; GRE.2 Geneological Records, GRE.2-3. The *Billet* is a legal confirmation that van der Kemp belonged to the 30 guilder class and thus was eligible to marry Reinira, the daughter of a burgomaster.

the Netherlands granted special privileges but acting under the aegis of the Spanish monarch. With Dutch independence from Spain, the Stadholder over time became the exclusive privilege of the House of Orange and served as the top political and military official in the United Provinces. The Orangists who opposed the Patriots represented the reactionary movement to preserve the place of William V. The Patriots challenged the Stadholder's traditional ruling power and wished to replace the current system with a more representative one. The third group were the regents. The Netherlands was a republic of confederated powers; the regents held power within the individual provinces and thus within the States General, the only central governmental body. They had long jostled for power with the Stadholder. When the Stadholder died without an heir, the States seized control of the government and governed without any formal head in an effort to return privileges to local authorities in the provinces.³ The constitutional debates over the location of authority in the Dutch Republic occurred between the Orangist supporters of the Stadholder, the Patriots, and the regents.

The stadholderate had seen its power contested throughout the history of the Dutch Republic, but the more radical demands for democratic change and representative government presented an altogether new opposition. For much of the Revolt, the decentralized nature of the Dutch Republic and the overlapping levels of power and authority allowed the Patriots to advance their cause comparatively bloodlessly and in a

³ For a specific look at the stadholderate, see Herbert H. Rowen, *The Princes of Orange: The Stadholders in the Dutch Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Herbert H. Rowen, "Neither Fish nor Fowl: The Stadholderate in the Dutch Republic," in *Political Ideas and Institutions in the Dutch Republic*, edited by Herbert H. Rowen and Andres Lossky (Los Angeles: Williams Andrews Clark Memorial Library: University of California, Los Angeles, 1985): 3-31. For a broader look at how the stadholder function through the history of the Republic, see Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

sustained, yet piecemeal fashion.⁴ The Patriots spread their views with surprising effectiveness because of the new and rapid development of a political press. The impact of pamphlets and newspapers cannot be underestimated when analyzing the Patriot program and its relationship to the intricate layers of the Dutch political system. Print created a revolutionary community that could demand change on a national and local level, creating a unified, though divisive, sense of the nation: everyone argued that they were Dutch, that is, even if they argued over what that meant.⁵ The budding sense of nationalism combined with changing definitions of Dutch liberty to challenge established notions of Dutch freedom. Nothing was as dear to the Dutch as their liberty, and the idea developed by the Patriots throughout the Revolt that Dutch freedom could not be secured without an overhaul of the current system and the adoption of more democratic elements, such as popular sovereignty and the natural rights of the people, opened political fissures that would not easily close.⁶

⁴ Wayne Ph. Te Brake, "Provincial Histories and National Revolution in the Dutch Republic," in *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992): 60-90.

⁵ As in the American Revolution, print culture emerged as a key cog in the Patriot machine. For details on the Patriot's uses of print and its importance in nationalizing the Patriot movement, see Jeremy D. Popkin, *News and Politics in the Age of Revolution: Jean Luzac's Gazette de Leyde* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Nicolaas C. F. van Sas, "The Patriot Revolution" in *The Dutch Republic: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992): 91-119; Te Brake, "Provincial Histories and National Revolution." For a broader look at print culture, see Jeremy D. Popkin, "Print Culture in the Netherlands on the Eve of the Revolution," in *The Dutch Republic: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992): 273-291; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1038-1066. Though mostly concerned with Dutch colonial possessions and their path to nationalism, Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities is also helpful. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁶ Velema, Wyger R. E., *Republicans: Essays on Eighteenth-Century Dutch Political Thought*. Leiden: Brill, 2007), 139-157. Velema argues, against the standard historiography of Patriot ideology, that "within a short time span, the Patriot definition of liberty evolved from protection against arbitrary, especially

The Patriots' program was more than rhetorical. From 1784 to 1786, Patriots took control of several provinces and replaced existing political bodies with democratically elected representatives. The movement experienced so much success in Holland, the Republic's most powerful province, that the Patriots drove William V out of The Hague and established a Patriot cordon surrounding Amsterdam. Skirmishes between Patriot and Orangists troops resulted in a number of deaths. For the most part, however, the Patriot Revolt was characterized by its lack of bloodshed. While the Patriot forces took The Hague, the Orangists firmed up their control of loyal provinces and began to court the involvement of foreign forces. Though the Revolt originated in domestic causes, it ended in part due to foreign intrusion. With familial connections with the British Empire and his brother-in-law sitting on the Prussian throne, William V used foreign money and foreign armies to subdue the Patriots. At the end of 1787, Prussian forces crossed the border into the Netherlands and easily defeated the Patriot troops.

The abrupt collapse of the Patriots emerged from and revealed the internal divisions that had plagued the movement since 1784. The challenge to traditional authority made the Patriots and regents strange bedfellows, since the regents sought to limit the authority of William V while retaining their own local historic privileges. As the Patriots attempted to nationalize the revolt, the regents fell back on the current program of political decentralization, separating the movement into conservative and

single-headed, government to active and permanent popular sovereignty," 155. Further, Velema contextualizes the rapid transformation of the Dutch concept of liberty by pointing out that "rapid conceptual change was the rule rather than the exception at the time of the European and American revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Velema rightly points to the dramatic shifts in American constitutionalism from the end of the Revolution to the constitution. See Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

radical blocs. Further, Patriots were never able to gain the backing of the entire Dutch population, with some burghers refusing to expand the idea of citizenship to people they deemed unworthy. As the Orangist counter-revolution swept the provinces in 1787 and 1788, it became clear the Patriot Revolt had failed. Many Patriots fled the Netherlands.

The Patriot Revolt crystallized a debate about the proper location of sovereignty. As old as the Republic itself, the debate had re-emerged in earnest with the start of the American Revolution. Indeed, the people of the Netherlands had long been exposed, in newspapers and pamphlets, to the plight of the American colonists. As editor of the popular *Gazette de Leyde* and friend to van der Kemp, Jean Luzac covered American stories beginning in 1774, and even predicted that America would soon become an independent nation.⁷ In 1775, George III, invoking the agreement from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, asked William V for use of the Scots brigade, a unit of soldiers that had often been lent by the Dutch to the English to quell uprisings, but mostly was used a buffer in the southern Netherlands against an invasion from France. William V, as Stadholder, was the designated leader of the Dutch troops, but to order the Scots Brigade into the service of the British Empire, he had to have unanimous consent from the States General. Baron Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, regent of the States of Overijssel, stepped forward to cast a dissenting vote, citing the glory of the American cause and the fear of French invasion from the South. Lacking unanimity, William V was caught between his British sympathies and the procedures of the Dutch Republic. In order to avoid the problem, the Dutch made their answer to the British request for troops

⁷ For Dutch reception of the American Revolution, see Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, translated by Herbert H. Rowen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 264-66; Popkin, *News and Politics*, esp., 144-157.

so complicated, filled with a myriad of provisions and stipulations, that George III finally gave up, thus allowing the Dutch to maintain their neutrality.⁸

Dutch neutrality during the course of the American Revolution was a tricky business. Though it never reached the level of a concerted movement, challenges to the position of neutrality came from the beginning of the war and emanated throughout the Dutch Republic and its colonies. Aid to the Americans came from a variety of places. Newspapers sympathetically narrated the events and money came from enthusiasts such as van der Capellen, who sent 10,000 guilders in 1779. Dutch bankers and merchants continued to trade with American states.⁹ The island of St. Eustatius, the Dutch entrepôt in the Caribbean, quickly became the center for Dutch support of the American rebellion. It was in fact the Dutch who gave the first international acknowledgement of American independence. Sailing into St. Eustatius on November 16, 1776, the *Andrew Doria*, an American ship displaying the flag of the American Congress, received a salute from Fort Orange and its commander Johannes de Graaff.¹⁰ Though Dutch officials downplayed the salute, British officials remained unconvinced. The British knew that St. Eustatius, even before 1776, had emerged as one of the most important sources for supplies for the rebelling colonists. After 1776, despite protests from Sir Joseph Yorke, the British ambassador to The Hague, and even a directive from the States General prohibiting trade

⁸ Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 19-20; Friedrich Elder, *The Dutch Republic and the American Revolution*, in John Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Vol. XXIX, No. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1911), 17-35.

⁹ Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 29.

¹⁰ Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 41; Wayne Ph. Te Brake, "Dutch Republic and the Creation of the United States," in *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations, 1609-2009*, edited by Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis A. van Minnen, and Giles Scott-Smith (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009): 204-215, 205-206.

with the American colonies, smuggling continued unabated. Rice, indigo, and cotton made its way to St. Eustatius, at times exceeding the storage capabilities of the small Caribbean island, so that stacks of raw goods lay exposed to the open air. In return, Dutch smugglers shipped massive quantities of gunpowder to American shores. Wim Klooster notes that in the first half of 1775 Americans received 4,000 barrels of gunpowder from St. Eustatius merchants. Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt notes that on one day in 1777, ships from St. Eustatius docked in Amsterdam hauling “two hundred hogsheads of tobacco, six hundred to seven hundred barrels of rice, and a big quantity of indigo, all coming from America.”¹¹

Despite the subterfuge of smugglers and the outright opposition of Patriots such as van der Capellen and van der Kemp, the Dutch Republic officially retained its neutrality for most of the war. Yet the visible cracks in support of the Stadholder convinced John Adams to travel to Amsterdam from France to secure Dutch recognition of the United States as a sovereign nation. Adams also hoped they would give a sum of money to bolster the American cause.¹² The presence of Adams in the Netherlands on

¹¹ Wim Klooster, “An Overview of Dutch Trade with the Americas, 1600-1800,” in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817*, edited by Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 365-383, 377; Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 36. See also, Te Brake, “Dutch Republic and the Creation of the United States,” 206; Victor Enthoven, “An Assessment of Dutch Transatlantic Commerce, 1585-1817,” in *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817*, edited by Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 385-445, esp., 393-395, 400-401. It should also be noted that St. Eustatius served as the diplomatic hub for secret correspondence between the American Congress and their agent in the Netherlands, Charles Dumas, see Te Brake, “Dutch Republic and the Creation of the United States,” 207.

¹² For Adams’s efforts in the Netherlands, see John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 228-242; David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 242-273. Gregg L. Lint makes the argument that part of Adams’s success in his European diplomacy was his efforts to correct “European ignorance of the United States” which stood as “a formidable obstacle to peace and wider recognition of the United States as independent and sovereign.”

behalf of the Americans raised the status of the rebellion, but Adams quickly became frustrated with Dutch politics and his lack of progress. It was a combination of the Adams's persistence, the support of the Patriots, a British attack on the Republic, and a decisive victory at Yorktown that finally led to recognition in 1782. Adams was then welcomed in The Hague as the official ambassador of the United States and the Dutch Republic and the United States soon after signed a treaty, cementing a relationship that continued to pay dividends for the Americans after the Revolution.

The American Revolution played a vital role in the development of Patriot ideology. Though at this time the Patriot movement still resided at the fringe of Dutch politics, dissenters such as van der Capellen, Luzac, and van der Kemp formed their associations through their early support of the American Revolution. As van der Kemp wrote to DeWitt Clinton years later, "I defended the American cause with my pen and purse, when no distant thought lurked in my breast of visiting this country, when it required Some courage to take its Side against a powerful Court Party."¹³ The persistent connection between the American Revolution and the Dutch Patriot Revolt was not a feature unique to van der Kemp during the *Patriottentijd*. While the enthusiasm and vigor with which van der Kemp promoted the American cause was atypical, the American Revolution became for the Dutch Patriots a mirror to show their fellow countrymen the decay of the once-proud Dutch Republic. Though stalled by the intransigence of the Stadholder and his allies, the commonalities between the Dutch

Gregg L. Lint, "John Adams and the 'Bolder Plan,'" in *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, edited by Richard Alan Ryerson (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2001): 105-114, quote 106.

¹³ Francis van der Kemp to DeWitt Clinton, 9 January 1818, DeWitt Clinton Papers, 1785-1828, Volume VIII: 1818, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Republic and the United States created natural allies during the Age of Revolutions.

Comparisons between the two republics were a prominent feature of the time.¹⁴ Van der Kemp's involvement in supporting both movements speaks to the interdependence of the Atlantic revolutions while also revealing the ways in which these developments emerged from domestic causes.

Almost as soon as he turned his attention to revolutionary causes in 1777, van der Kemp became a passionate advocate for a national and democratic response to the crisis. One historian argues that in van der Kemp was “a core of radicalism.” Where others had a passion “for ideals of liberty and equality,” van der Kemp “went beyond them to the extreme, and with vehement intensity.”¹⁵ Van der Kemp, years later, admitted as much to Abigail Adams. After reading the history of his time during the Patriot Revolt, she wrote the Dutchman, “I believe my dear Sir you must have been an enthusiast in your Youth.” Van der Kemp responded, “[I]f unshaken – constant firmness – if glowing ardent feelings are Some of his traits – I am it yet, and would not change this apparent tumultuous State for the prudent calmness and Stoic composure of the cold – inanimate – calculating

¹⁴ In his famous assessment of the Age of Revolutions, R. R. Palmer brought attention to that brief epoch of Dutch revolt that occurred between the more famous American and French Revolutions. R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800: The Challenge*, Volume I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 324-340. The most sustained assessment of the relationship between the two events is Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*. See also, Elder; Te Brake, “The Dutch Republic and the Creation of the United States”; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Dutch Republic in the Days of John Adams, 1775-1795* (The Hague: Government Publication Office, 1976); Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, “Corresponding Republics: Letter Writing and Patriot Organizing in the Atlantic Revolutions, circa 1760-1792” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011).

¹⁵ Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 117.

being.”¹⁶ One of the most interesting elements of his work in the immediate years after 1777 is that van der Kemp reflected both the conservative and progressive elements of the early Patriot movement. Ideologically, the Patriots showed a predilection for fashioning their future exclusively out of the Dutch past. The Patriots seemed incapable of escaping Dutch history and a return to the former glory days of the Republic was a common theme. Orangists, too, relied heavily upon the constitutional and legal history of the Republic in order to defend the position of the Stadholder and the maintenance of the status quo, begging the question of whether these opposing groups represented differences of degree not of kind.¹⁷ Yet, for all of its conservativeness, there was something new about the Patriot Revolt. There was something that set it apart from the previous rebellions and brought it closer to the fabric of the American and later French Revolutions. Despite its failure and its limited bloodshed, the Patriot Revolt was indeed an attempt to significantly alter the course of the Dutch Republic. Though couched in

¹⁶ Abigail Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 10 April 1817, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 437, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Abigail Adams, 9 May 1817, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 437, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹⁷ I. Leonard Leeb, *The Ideological Origins of the Batavian Revolution: History and Politics in the Dutch Republic, 1747-1800* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973). It was the particular phantom of the Dutch Golden Age and Dutch hegemony in the Atlantic world that haunted the Patriot Revolt. Invocations of former glory and a desire to capture that greatness were significant elements of Patriot rhetoric and ideology. See Frans Grijzenhout, “A Myth of Decline,” in *The Dutch Republic: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992): 324-327; Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 21. Additionally, it must be noted that the Patriots and Orangists agreed about much in their sense of Dutch decline. There was a legitimate decline in the Dutch Republic, not simply in influence and economy, but even in population. Shockingly, the Dutch remained stagnant while populations surrounding the Netherlands grew rapidly. France went from 18 million in 1700 to 28 million in 1800 and the British grew from 9 million in 1700 to 16 million in 1800. The decline was not just relative for the Dutch in comparison to the other European countries. The net population for the Netherlands literally did not increase in the eighteenth century. E. H. Kossmann, “The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Dutch Republic: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992): 19-31, 19; Schama cites that from 1514 to 1622, the population increased by 397,000 whereas from 1680 to 1795 it actually decreased by 100,000, Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 26-27.

paean to the Dutch past glory, the Patriot Revolt incorporated many of the same revolutionary features as did its Atlantic compatriots. In particular, the Patriot Revolt initiated a national movement that went well beyond the historical debates between regents and the Stadholder.¹⁸

Van der Kemp blended the historicity of conservatives with the revolutionary confidence of breaking from the past. He invested his unique passion into researching archival material on Dutch constitutionalism and the history of the Republic. Van der Kemp's goal was to understand the current state of Dutch liberty and to ascertain the specific role of the country's founding document, the Union of Utrecht, as it stood in 1777. "My bosom glowed with the sacred fire of patriotism," he wrote. "[I]t seemed to me the period was fast approaching, if not already there, in which these sacred rights—long lost or neglected or made doubtful—for which the blood of our ancestors had been shed with such profusion, might be recovered."¹⁹ Despite invoking the "sacred rights" of the ancient Dutch past, van der Kemp did not confine his constitutional solutions to Dutch history. While others debated whether the Union of Utrecht had properly been executed or was still to be fulfilled, van der Kemp calmly acknowledged, "The Union of Utrecht was in many respects imperfect, and had never been intended for a constitution."²⁰

¹⁸ Marc Boone and Maarten Prak, "Rulers, patricians and burghers: the Great and the Little traditions of urban revolt in the Low Countries," in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, edited by Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 99-134, esp. 124.

¹⁹ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 41.

²⁰ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 41.

Van der Kemp expressed these ideas in a series of letters to his friend, Pieter Paulus, who had recently completed his own treatise on the legacy of the Union of Utrecht. In 1777, van der Kemp published the letters in a pamphlet to accompany Paulus's tract. The argument that van der Kemp set out in his *Aenmerkingen over de Verklaering der Unie van Utrecht (Observations on the Union of Utrecht)* was that as a constitutional document, the Union was insufficient to provide for a coherent political system. He went further and argued that the rights and responsibilities claimed from the Union, particularly those of the Stadholder, were in fact not part of the Union's original intention.²¹ Even several years removed from the Patriot conflict, van der Kemp still traced the primary issues of the Revolt to the inadequacy of the Union of Utrecht. Lamenting with Adams the fall of the Dutch Republic, van der Kemp argued that, among many remedies, "a more Solid compact – than that of the Union of Utrecht," would have gone a long way to preserving Dutch independence.²²

At the time that van der Kemp worked on the history of the Union of Utrecht, he also provided aid to Baron Joan Derk van der Capellen, the leader of the Patriot Revolt. Van der Capellen, a regent from the States of Overijssel who gained notoriety for his strident opposition to William V, began to draw the ire of fellow noblemen when he attacked the *drostendiensten*, a forced labor system that biannually required peasants to work for the regents. As the Overijssel regents sought successfully to remove van der

²¹ Francis van der Kemp, *Aenmerkingen over de Verklaering der Unie van Utrecht, door P. Paulus, in drie Brieven* (Leiden: L. Herdingh, 1783); van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 43. For contextualization of Paulus and van der Kemp's pamphlets, see Leeb, 119-120, esp. n. 44, p. 119.

²² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 2 April 1809, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 407, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Capellen from his seat in the States, van der Kemp supported van der Capellen in opposing the *drostendiensten*, publishing a series of pamphlets in 1779. The series, *Derde Brief over de Drostendiensten in Overijssel (Third Letter on the Drostendiensten in Overijssel)*, attacked the forced labor system and criticized any regent associated with it. Van der Kemp wrote that he found it his duty to instruct Dutch citizens on the history of the *drostendiensten* and to inform them about the character of van der Capellen. Once people learned of the situation, van der Kemp maintained, it would lead them to call for an end to this breach of liberty.²³ For the regents, the *drostendiensten* represented a system that reflected their power and standing in the province while for van der Kemp and van der Capellen it was another example of liberty being sacrificed at the altar of power.

Both in his work on the Union of Utrecht and the *drostendiensten*, van der Kemp focused on historical issues within the Netherlands in an effort to pinpoint where the Republic had gone astray. The conservative nature of mining the past for elucidation did not constrain van der Kemp's solutions for those problems. He believed that the liberty of the Dutch people, in all provinces, was compromised by the *drostendiensten* and the regents' usurpation of power. While he maintained that certain elements, such as the Stadholder, could be incorporated into a new political structure as long as it was balanced, he ultimately asserted that the "the nation at large ought to recover a real influence in the choice of their representatives."²⁴

²³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Derde Brief over de Drostendiensten in Overijssel, door een Heer uit Twente, etc* (Amsterdam: Conradi en Doll, 1779). It is noted in the *Autobiography* that the first and second letters are missing. For a broader context of van der Capellen and the debate over the *drostendiensten*, see Wayne Ph. Te Brake, *Regents and Rebels: The Revolutionary World of an Eighteenth-Century Dutch City* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing), 43-47.

²⁴ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 43.

The passions that made van der Kemp an effective ally of van der Capellen also caused him to run afoul of government officials. When van der Capellen protested the *drostendiensten*, it could be viewed as strictly a local matter for the province of Overijssel. Writing from the Holland province, van der Kemp nationalized the issue, and the States of Overijssel received multiple calls from other provinces to end the system. After publishing his criticisms on the Union of Utrecht and the *drostendiensten*, van der Kemp received encouragement from prominent political dissidents including van der Capellen and Luzac. “Now the ice was broken,” van der Kemp wrote, “and I was encouraged on every side to proceed.”²⁵ By the end of 1779, in addition to *Aenmerkingen over de Verklaering der Unie van Utrecht* and *Derde Brief over de Drostendiensten in Overijssel*, van der Kemp wrote several pamphlets on the life of van der Capellen. One of the pamphlets he published reviewed the admission of van der Capellen to the States of Overijssel and highlighted the regent’s attempts to regain his seat in the States of Overijssel.²⁶ The impressive output not only endeared van der Kemp to his fellow Patriots but also gained him the hostile attention of the Orangists and of regents frustrated with his repeated attack on their station. “I had incurred the odium of the Stadholderian party by my Observations on the articles on the Union of Utrecht between the United Provinces,” van der Kemp asserted, and the subsequent pieces only

²⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 43.

²⁶ The works on van der Capellen include *Jr. Johan Derk van der Capellen, Heer van der Pol. Beschreven in de Ridderschap van Overijssel Regent (Jr. Johan Derk van der Capellen, Lord of the Pol, Member of the Equestrian Order in Overijssel, Regent* (Leiden: L. Herdingh, 1779); *J. D. van der Capellen, Regent*.

furthered the ire of the Orangists.²⁷ Only a severe illness that left him in “a state of stupid lethargy” for six weeks slowed down his assaults, but once the sickness passed, van der Kemp returned to work.²⁸

With van der Kemp’s budding notoriety, the proponents of the Stadholder began to bestow attention upon him that he did not even deserve. Ironically, the piece that finally pushed the local officials to charge van der Kemp was one that van der Kemp only pretended to author. In 1780, Pieter Vreede, a Patriot and friend of van der Kemp’s, wrote and had published, *Lyric Song*, an ode in honor of the opposition to the restrictions of convoys by seven Frisian Patriots. In addition to the praise of the Frisians, Vreede attached a particularly excoriating assessment of the Leiden government.²⁹ Given the subject matter and the anonymity of the author, it is no wonder that local Leiden officials presumed van der Kemp to be behind the ode. Vreede and his publisher, fearful of retribution, fled the country. Convinced he could bear the brunt of the Stadholder’s forces, van der Kemp took responsibility for the publication. “Could I have done else?” van der Kemp rhetorically asked. “Could I betray a friend whose happiness was in my power? No! You [van der Kemp’s son, J. J.] would have blushed at such a father. He [Vreede] was married, and had already two children, and an amiable and accomplished

²⁷ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Memoir on the Use of Copper by the Greeks*, 1803, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 5: Memoir on the Use of Copper by the Greeks, 7.

²⁸ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 47.

²⁹ For more on Vreede’s ode, see Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 118.

wife; I was alone and could weather the storm.”³⁰ Through Leiden University’s Academic tribunal, the Orangists indicted van der Kemp on criminal charges.

The charges against van der Kemp attested to the gravity of the situation. Where his previous trial at the University of Groningen resulted simply in his removal from the school, the Leiden prosecutor hoped to imprison van der Kemp for life. It was widely rumored that the ode “was the pretext” of punishing van der Kemp for his previous dissents. The officials charged van der Kemp with “Scandalous and Seditious Libel, in which the government was in a malicious manner taxed and traded, and the High deliberations of the Sovereign brought to the cognizance of the Public, and this Stirred up to insurrection.”³¹ Van der Kemp steeled himself for the criminal process, which he noted later to his American friends, was “far more awfull [sic] than in this blessed country – No counsel is permitted to the accused during the inquisitional process.” His friends, still under the assumption that van der Kemp was the author, begged him to leave the country. They did so with good reason as the process that van der Kemp embarked upon was only the second of its kind in the history of the Dutch Republic.³² Knowing “in what high degree I was obnoxious to the court of the Stadholder, and how much fresh fuel I continued to collect to inflame its wanton rage,” van der Kemp’s friends managed to secure him asylum in Brussels. Even the court of Versailles offered refuge. Van der

³⁰ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 48. The circumstances of the trial are also covered in a preface in van der Kemp’s *Memoir on the Use of Copper by the Greeks*; Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 118; Harry F. Jackson, *Scholar in the Wilderness: Francis Adrian Van der Kemp* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 39-41.

³¹ Van der Kemp, *Memoir on the Use of Copper by the Greeks*, 7.

³² Van der Kemp, *Memoir on the Use of Copper by the Greeks*, 6-7.

Capellen pleaded with van der Kemp to leave the country as he would be a “useless victim.” The Overijssel Regent assured van der Kemp that the ode, while well written, “was not worth this sacrifice.”³³

It was clear from the beginning of the trial that the prosecutor intended to associate van der Kemp with many of the recent incendiary pamphlets and thus turn him into a cautionary tale for other Patriots. Van der Kemp endured almost nine hours of questions on the first day of the proceedings and declined to answer any questions not obligated by law. After a couple of sessions, Leiden officials attempted to postpone the trial as long as possible given van der Kemp’s refusal to incriminate himself. It took nearly two years and an appearance in The Hague at which van der Kemp “appealed to the Great Pensionary and all the Delegates of the eighteen cities, claiming loudly for justice, either by absolution or condemnation” before the trial concluded on January 28, 1782.³⁴ “I lashed the abuse of power,” he wrote, “wherever I met it, without mercy, even when threatened with incarceration.” “I gained more and more,” he continued, “the favourable regards of the first men in the State, and obtained unequivocal proofs of approbation from zealous and honest men in the Orange party.” To celebrate the end of the arduous proceedings, van der Kemp “published the whole legal process till its conclusion, with a preface and the Ode to prove its innocence.”³⁵

Despite the positive result, the trial the Orangists brought against van der Kemp revealed the desire of William V’s supporters to muffle the voice of the people. It was

³³ Van der Kemp, *Memoir on the Use of Copper by the Greeks*, 6-7; van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 49.

³⁴ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 53; van der Kemp, *Memoir on the Use of Copper by the Greeks*, 6-7.

³⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 53.

also a testament to the depth his resolve and unyielding support of the Patriot movement. Van der Kemp's trial marked his growing prominence as an enemy of the state. He took great pride in his ability to protect a friend, Vreede, whose family gave him much more to lose. He also relished the opportunity to expose the lengths to which the Orangists would go to silence dissent. Even during the criminal proceedings, van der Kemp remained at work collecting documents and printing more pamphlets. Though he still sought to illuminate the dark spaces of the Dutch past, there appeared in his writings a significant shift of focus. What changed was the rise of the American Revolution as a polarizing issue throughout the Republic. Van der Kemp's connection to the American movement dramatically altered after his first meeting with America's representative in the Netherlands, John Adams. Frustrated with French diplomacy and the meandering efforts of Benjamin Franklin, Adams decided to leave Paris and travel to Amsterdam. Adams had long pointed to the United Provinces as logical allies. His deteriorating relationship with both Vergennes and Franklin reinforced Adams's decision to solicit aid from the Dutch. Although he would later become the officially appointed representative, Adams initially went to the Netherlands to lay groundwork for Henry Laurens's diplomatic mission. When Laurens never made it to the Netherlands, Adams took over and began lobbying the States General. Whether it would have been Laurens or Adams, the purpose of the Netherlands trip was clear. The United States wanted to secure official Dutch recognition of the American state and, more importantly, to secure a substantial loan to stabilize the America war effort.³⁶

³⁶ A good account can be found in Ferling, 224-229.

On April 17, 1781, Adams invited van der Kemp to the Golden Lion “to spend the Evening and Sup with a chosen few of honest Americans.”³⁷ Though this was the first time the two met in person, van der Kemp had known of Adams for quite some time through their mutual friend, van der Capellen. As he later informed Adams, “I was compelled to revere the man, before I was honoured with the Embassadors personal acquaintance.” It was the work of “Van der Capellen of den Pol – my confidential friend inspired me with an irresistible desire to See and know that man, on whom he bestowed with profusion his enthusiastic encomiums, and Capellen’s opinion was then highly valued on the eastern Continent even among his enemies [sic].”³⁸ Inspired by his meeting, van der Kemp began to work on a collection of documents related to the American Revolution that he hoped would help convince his fellow Netherlanders of his own opinion. “I would be delighted to be of service,” he wrote Adams, “to demonstrate the simple fact of my interest in the humanitarian cause in America.”³⁹

Two days after their meeting, Adams took an unprecedented step and delivered a speech to the States General. It was unprecedented because, despite growing Patriot support, Adams addressed the States as a man whose country had not yet been recognized. Regardless, Adams presented his “A Memorial To their High Mightiness, the States General of the United Provinces of the Low Countries.” In the speech, Adams

³⁷ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 17 April 1781, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 20 June 1801, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 401, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 5 June 1781, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 355, Massachusetts Historical Society.

pressed his case that it was in the best interests of the Dutch to unite with the Americans. He noted that in their own Declaration of Independence, “[T]he People of America did not consider themselves as separating from their Allies, especially the Republick of the United Provinces” and still “preserved the same Affection, Esteem and Respect for the Dutch Nation in every Part of the World.”⁴⁰ Similar to van der Kemp and the other Patriots, Adams saw the United States and the United Provinces as natural allies, citing mutuality in “A Similitude of Religion,” “A Similarity in the Forms of Government,” and in “the Freedom of Inquiry, the Right of private Judgment.” With everything they had in common, Adams continued, “the Union is so obviously natural, that there has seldom been a more distinct Designation of Providence to any two distant Nations to unite themselves together.”⁴¹

As Adams addressed the States General, he knew he was tilling fertile ground. The more the Patriots popularized the American Revolution, the more the Dutch liked what they read. What made the cause such a pertinent discussion for the Dutch was that they saw much of themselves in the Americans. The connection between the Netherlands and the United States that appeared in pamphlets from van der Kemp and speeches from Adams used the history of the Dutch Republic to make their case. The Dutch possessed the first copy of the Declaration of Independence in Europe through the *Gazette de Leyde*. Upon reading it, they found it similar to their own declaration, the *Plakkaat van Verlantinge*, or Act of Abjuration, which formally separated the Dutch Republic from

⁴⁰ John Adams, “Copy of Memorial,” 19 April 1781, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 104, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴¹ Adams, “Memorial.”

King Philip II and Spain. Both documents cited the natural right of a people to revolt when their ruler violated inalienable rights and both listed grievances against their respective kings as justification to exercise that natural right. While it is unclear whether Thomas Jefferson actually turned to the *Plakkaat van Verlantinge* when writing, it is clear that when the Dutch read his Declaration, they certainly thought he had.⁴² Further, as the American war progressed, the political formation the United States adopted reflected the creation of the Dutch Republic in the sixteenth century. As states issued their own constitutions and later passed the only minimally centralizing Articles of Confederation in 1781, the national government seemed a copy of the Union of Utrecht.⁴³ When Adams declared to the States General in 1781, “The Originals of the two Republics are so much alike, that the History of one seems but a Transcript from that of the other,” he only confirmed what many already believed.⁴⁴

Van der Kemp did his part by refocusing his publishing efforts toward supporting the “humanitarian cause” of American recognition. His passion came from a visceral connection between the fate of the Americans and the possible future of the Dutch

⁴² For a comparison of the *Plakkaat van Verlantinge*, see Stephen E. Lucas, “The *Plakkaat van Verlantinge*: A Neglected Model for the American Declaration of Independence,” in *Connecting Cultures: The Netherlands in Five Centuries of Transatlantic Exchange*, edited by Rosemarijn Hoefte and Johanna C. Kardux (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994): 187-207. For Dutch reaction to Declaration of Independence, see Popkin, *News and Politics*, 151-153; Rowen, *The Princes of Orange*, 205; Schama, *Patriot and Liberators*, 60-61. What is remarkable, too, about the comparisons between the Declaration of Independence and the *Plakkaat van Verlantinge* is that both came after concerted efforts of reconciliation. Until the moment of declaration, both the Dutch and the Americans, for the most part, denied their attempts at independence, pledging fidelity to the monarchy only wishing for more local representation and local control. For the Dutch, see Rowen, *The Princes of Orange*, 12-14; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 162. For the American context, see Brendan McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁴³ Leeb, 119; Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 265-266.

⁴⁴ Adams, “Memorial.”

Republic. “I glowed with indignation,” he fumed, “when I became convinced that in the fetters prepared for the Americans, the slavery of my own country was a chief ingredient.”⁴⁵ Of the political works that van der Kemp did in support of the American Revolution, he most forcefully made his case in the collection that he mentioned to Adams: *Verzameling van Stukken tot de Dertien Vereenigde Staeten van Noord-America Betrekkelijk* (*Collection of Tracts Relative to the Thirteen United States of North America*).⁴⁶ The collection was van der Kemp’s major effort to inform Netherlanders why the American Revolution was being fought and why it mattered to them.

In doing so, van der Kemp allowed American voices to do most of the telling. The collection was, as the title indicates, an assortment of sources related to the independence movement in America. In another feature indicative of the Patriot movement, van der Kemp translated all of the items into Dutch, as opposed to the traditional Latin or French, so that the people of the Republic could read the documents. Some of the highlights contained in the *Verzameling van Stukken* were letters exchanged between Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut and van der Capellen; letters exchanged between Governor William Livingston of New Jersey and van der Capellen; the Articles of Confederation; the Constitution of Massachusetts; and a speech from John Hancock.⁴⁷ As one of the entries intimated, part of van der Kemp’s aim was to convince

⁴⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 44.

⁴⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Verzameling van Stukken tot de Dertien Vereenigde Staeten van Noord-America Betrekkelijk* (Leiden: L. Herdingh, 1781), Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁴⁷ Van der Kemp, *Verzameling van Stukken*.

his audience of “Evidences of the English tyrannical proceedings,” but he primarily sought to draw a sympathetic parallel between the two nations.

It was in the preface that van der Kemp expressed his own opinion. He mentioned to Adams, “[P]erhaps Shal [sic] the publication of the collection of American Papers, with a preface, containing a Paralel [sic] between America and the United Provinces, with Several Strictures, in favour of the first, against the last, render my ennemies [sic] an occasion to prosecute me at new.”⁴⁸ The most intriguing element about the preface is the conclusion van der Kemp reached when comparing the two republics. Van der Kemp came to the position that the republics were, in fact, not that similar. They shared a number of characteristics, but as he worked his way through the comparisons, van der Kemp maintained that the Americans always came out on top. “Would I compare the two states to one another in everything” he wrote in the preface, “the scale would lean toward the side of America.”⁴⁹ To those who claimed that the United States and its independence could not last, van der Kemp asserted that idea to be of “ignorance and bad faith.” Of particular importance was that the Americans had been able to secure independence for the people, “in which every citizen has a voice.”⁵⁰ In drawing inspiration for how to correct their own subjection under the rule of the Stadholder, the Dutch only had to peer across the Atlantic for a new blueprint for revolution. As he wrote later, in the preface of the collection, van der Kemp “had Shewn [sic] the intrinsic

⁴⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 26 November 1781, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 355, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴⁹ Van der Kemp, *Verzameling van Stukken*.

⁵⁰ Van der Kemp, *Verzameling van Stukken*.

Superiority of the Republic of the Thirteen United States, above that of the Seven United Provinces.”⁵¹ Van der Kemp’s writings after 1781 consistently juxtaposed the success of the United States against the failings of the Dutch Republic.

Van der Kemp reaffirmed his commitment to Adams later in 1781. In broken but improving English, he asserted to Adams, “If any man rejoice in the prosperity of the united States i wil [sic] hope that me shal [sic] not be denied a place amongst them.” Having read through the complaints and lamentations of the Americans, van der Kemp knew the Patriots had a long road in front of them. He wondered to Adams if the Patriots would be successful in rousing the population to their cause. He particularly feared the reprisal against van der Capellen for taking the lead in the movement. In the event that the revolt came to naught, van der Kemp avowed “But America wil [sic] be my asylum” granted that “the United States wil [sic] receive in their bosom – amongst their citisens, one of the Netherlands one who is born but not educated, who lived, although he detested it, amongst the admires of an Despotic aristocracy.”⁵² Adams reassured van der Kemp about the honor of the Patriot cause, hoping it would soon come into favor with the rest of the population, but he did not shy away from acknowledging the difficulty of sustaining a revolution. The American pointed out the necessity of men such as van der Kemp and van der Capellen “in critical seasons, to run great Risques Submit to great Sacrifice.” Adams finished the letter on a more positive note thanking van der Kemp for all of the effort he had put forth thus far, and expressed his “Respect for so able and intrepid an Advocate for Liberty.” Even after the recognition of America had been

⁵¹ Van der Kemp, *Memorial on the Use of Copper by the Greeks*, 7.

⁵² Van der Kemp to Adams, 26 November 1781.

secured in the Netherlands, van der Kemp offered his services to Adams and the United States, assuring the American he would be honored to aid the new country in whatever way he could. In van der Kemp's mind, there was no better person in the Netherlands to perform the task. "I am however persuaded," van der Kemp assured Adams, "that not one of my countrymen is more abdicated to the cause of America and more attached to your Excellency than I am."⁵³

As van der Kemp delved deeper into American politics and the aims of the American Revolution, the Netherlands also became more involved in the Atlantic revolutionary moment. Though the Dutch were officially neutral for most of the American Revolution, they were not inactive. Adams's arrival in 1781 was accompanied by revelations of extensive involvement of Dutch officials and merchants in the American Revolution. The most damning piece of evidence was the discovery in 1780 of a secret treaty negotiated between the Netherlands and America. In 1777, without any recognition or approval from either William V as Stadholder or the States General, Engelbert van Berckel, pensionary of Amsterdam and William Lee, the American agent in Germany, had mapped out an agreement in the event that America and England swiftly came to terms. That the agreement was only a draft between two parties lacking standing to negotiate the treaty made no difference to the British.

The British discovered the document in 1780 when they captured Henry Laurens, recently selected to be an official representative for the United States in the Netherlands. Fearful of being caught with compromising documents, Laurens attempted to destroy a

⁵³ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 27 November 1781, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 355, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 25 April 1782, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 356, Massachusetts Historical Society.

number of papers by throwing them overboard. The water did not destroy the papers, allowing them to be recovered by the British. Among the documents was the agreement between van Berckel and Lee.⁵⁴ In spite of repeated proclamations of neutrality, and claims of protecting a long-standing policy of “free ships, free goods,” it was no secret that the Dutch sought to regain some of the Atlantic trade that Britain had overtaken during the eighteenth century. Secret treaties and unregulated smuggling presented a way, however brief, for the Netherlands to challenge British hegemony. The threat to British interests in the Caribbean and the constant evidence of Dutch duplicity in dealing with Americans led the British to declare war on the Netherlands on December 20, 1780.⁵⁵

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War lasted from 1780 until 1784, and it was an utter disaster for the Dutch. Occurring largely in the Caribbean, the British made quick work of a Dutch navy that had long been neglected. In the first month of war alone, the British navy captured over 200 Dutch ships. St. Eustatius, the Dutch thorn in the British side, fell in early 1781 to British warships and the smuggling operations emanating from its ports all but stopped.⁵⁶ In spite of his repeated attempts to avoid war with the British, as Stadholder and leader of the Dutch army and navy, William V received the lion’s share of

⁵⁴ For accounts of the Laurens affair and the secret treaty, see Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 144-157; Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 62-63; Te Brake, “Dutch Republic and the Creation of the United States,” 207.

⁵⁵ For more on the role of the Caribbean in the American Revolution, see Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Edward L. Cox, “The British Caribbean in the Age of Revolution,” in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World*, edited by Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005): 275-294.

⁵⁶ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1096-1097.

the blame. Even more than the number of ships lost or finances squandered, the Anglo-Dutch War convinced many in the Dutch provinces that the decline the Patriots had been clamoring about was real. The Patriots capitalized on the disaffection to coalesce a base of support that transgressed the localized boundaries of the individual provinces.⁵⁷ The interprovincial appeal of the Patriots helped them to create an ideology that united Netherlanders through their collective identity as Dutch and, in a short amount of time, fashioned a nationalism that equated pro-Dutch with anti-Stadholder.⁵⁸ It was this identity, of a new and different Dutch nation, that the newly politicized Patriot press spread throughout the country.⁵⁹

The Patriots quickly put the national press to use and called for the recognition of the United States. The British had now become the enemy, and William V knew he had little standing to advocate the side of the Empire. The Patriots' dissent merged with historical opponents to the Orange family as well as merchants and bankers hoping to cash in on newly open American markets. The unrelenting support of the American Revolution and the sorry display during the Anglo-Dutch War combined to bring the fringe politics of the Patriots into the forefront, transforming their anti-British and anti-Stadholderian policies into a palpable ideology. The groundwork that men such as van der Capellen, Luzac, and van der Kemp laid in the late 1770s became after 1781 a legitimate oppositional party.

⁵⁷ Te Brake, "Provincial Histories and National Revolution," 86.

⁵⁸ Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 61-63; van Sas, "The Patriot Revolution," 97-98.

⁵⁹ Popkin, *News and Politics*.

The call for a concerted Patriot movement was issued on September 26, 1781 with the publication of the most influential Dutch pamphlet of the 1780s: *Aan het Volk van Nederland (To the People of the Netherlands)*. *Aan het Volk van Nederland* marked the beginning of the Patriot Revolt. Written anonymously, although the author would later be revealed as van der Capellen, *Aan het Volk van Nederland* set the stage for the Patriot Revolt and the major Dutch disputes of the 1780s. Telling of the rapid changes that took place in the Dutch Republic, van der Capellen addressed his pamphlet to “the people of the Netherlands,” the entire population that lived inside its borders, not just burghers or regents or Stadholders.⁶⁰ Van der Capellen directly aimed his vehemence at William V, accusing him of usurping power that belonged to all of the residents in the Republic. “These are the rights of the people,” van der Capellen wrote. “These are your rights, o people, o Netherlanders!”⁶¹ As one historian notes, *Aan het Volk van Nederland* performed a similar function as Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* in that it combined a disparate body of grievances and blended them into a directed attack on an identifiable enemy.⁶² Van der Capellen concluded the pamphlet by urging the people of the Netherlands to take back the rights that had wrongly been arrogated by the Stadholder, and if necessary, to do so by force. *Aan het Volk van Nederland* was a call to arms; it was a call for rebellion.

⁶⁰ Joan derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, *Aan het Volk van Nederland* (Ostend, 1781). Literature abounds on the context and argument of van der Capellen’s pamphlet. See Te Brake, *Regents and Rebels*, 40-43; Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 64-68; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1098-1100. Also helpful is the website created by Professor Arie Wilschut, Amsterdam University of Applied Science, <http://members.casema.nl/wilschut/ahvvn.htm>, 1998, accessed 27 January 2014.

⁶¹ *Aan het van Volk Nederland*.

⁶² Te Brake, *Regents and Rebels*, 42.

The impact of the pamphlet was felt throughout the Netherlands. The States of Holland banned the pamphlet, forbidding anyone to read it. Of course this meant that everyone scrambled to find a copy to read for themselves what the States had deemed “a certain very seditious and slanderous Libel.” The States even went as far as offering a sizeable award, 14,000 florins, “to him who should give the necessary Indications, by which the Author, Writer or Printer of the said Libel, or all those who may have had a part in it in any other manner.”⁶³ Had anyone taken the States of Holland up on their offer, they would have found van der Capellen to be the author and van der Kemp the publisher. Van der Kemp organized a distribution system that allowed the pamphlet to spread through all of the provinces in a single night, personally spreading copies around the streets of Leiden.⁶⁴ Van der Kemp described the situation as having an “effect [that] resembled an electric shock. It was literally spread through the principal cities as well as the country, and this is one single night.” He was further impressed that despite the hefty reward offered by the States of Holland, “and although I had employed several individuals...not one person betrayed his trust.”⁶⁵ Indeed, the failure to suppress the pamphlet was such that less than a month later, Adams, in Amsterdam, read the address in the *London Courant*. “The Press cannot be restrained,” Adams wisely mused.⁶⁶ The

⁶³ Quoted in John Adams to the President of Congress, 25 October 1781, *The Adams Papers: Digital Edition*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=ADMS-06-12-02-0028>, accessed 27 January 2014.

⁶⁴ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 54; Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 64; Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence* 118. Schulte Nordholt even mentions that until the identity of the author was identified as van der Capellen, van der Kemp was presumed by many as the prime suspect.

⁶⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 54.

⁶⁶ Adams to the President of the Congress, 25 October 1781.

point was partly guaranteed by the fact that van der Kemp “had constantly two, sometimes three presses at my disposal.”⁶⁷

In the wake of *Aan het Volk van Nederland*, the Patriots began to organize a national movement to address reforms in the Dutch Republic. The first order of business focused on pushing the government to recognize the sovereignty of the United States. The advocacy of the American Revolution in the writings of Patriots such as van der Kemp, the catastrophe of the Anglo-Dutch War, and the release of *Aan het Volk van Nederland* all combined to make the recognition of the United States into a national campaign. The Patriots capitalized on their newly politicized press system and reached out to sympathetic voices throughout the Dutch Republic. Van der Kemp was not alone in shifting his primary attention to American topics as the Patriots created a pamphlet campaign that pressed the Stadholder to officially recognize the United States.⁶⁸ The acknowledgment of the American state was the initial testing ground for the novel revolutionary process in the Netherlands.

For his part, Adams traversed the Netherlands pleading the American case while at the same time increasing his visibility at The Hague by upgrading his housing arrangements.⁶⁹ As important as any of the efforts, either from Adams or the Patriots, was the fact that international American war effort won decisive battles. One of the main hesitations on the part of the Dutch was that they did not have confidence that the

⁶⁷ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 58.

⁶⁸ Te Brake, “Provincial Histories and National Revolution,” 86.

⁶⁹ Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 160-161.

Americans could defeat the British. After Yorktown there was little resistance to be made against the argument that America would stand as an independent nation. Thus, on April 19, 1782, on the anniversary of Lexington and Concord, the Dutch Republic confirmed John Adams as Minister Plenipotentiary. In October of the same year, the Netherlands and the United States signed a treaty of amity and commerce. The lure of Dutch merchants and Dutch guilders to support the American cause represented the primary reason Adams travelled to the Netherlands in the first place. Van der Capellen personally gave 16,000 guilders to Adams. The American also secured a loan of 5 million guilders from Dutch bankers. America continued to receive Dutch support through additional loans in 1784, 1787, and 1788.⁷⁰ Moreover, Dutch acknowledgement of the American represented a significant victory for the Patriot movement and revealed the growing power of *het volk*.

Even after the recognition of America had been secured, van der Kemp continued to offer his services to Adams and the United States, assuring the American he would be honored to aid the new country in whatever way he could. In van der Kemp's mind, there was no better person in the Netherlands to perform the task. "I am however persuaded," van der Kemp assured Adams, "that not one of my countrymen is more abdicated to the cause of America and more attached to your Excellency than I am."⁷¹ No doubt easily aroused to passion, the depth of van der Kemp's devotion to the

⁷⁰ Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 29; Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 59.

⁷¹ Van der Kemp to Adams, 25 April 1782.

American Revolution regardless remains a powerful indication of, even at this early stage, his commitment to the United States.

Amidst these heady days, van der Kemp experienced another life-altering event. On May 20, 1782, van der Kemp and Miss Reinira Engelberta Joanna Vos married in Nijmegen.⁷² In a few short years, the couple had two children, a son and a daughter. Van der Kemp's growing family meant that he had more to worry about than just himself when he courted trouble. No longer would he be able to accept the brunt of the opposition's ire to save a friend. In response, van der Kemp was already building a contingency plan. That contingency, from the beginning, was America. Through his rigorous research into the American cause and his contact with John Adams, van der Kemp became convinced that the United States offered the brightest future for the nations of the Atlantic world. While clear that he did not intend to execute his plan unless pushed to the brink, it was apparent that by 1782, van der Kemp had an adopted homeland.

It is easy to forget, with all of the printing and the tribunals, that during this time van der Kemp was a preacher, preparing sermons every week in addition to his other activities. Van der Kemp harnessed the power of his pulpit in Leiden to not only promote Patriot politics but also to present the image of the United States he had been crafting in print. Often he blended the two, investing the American Revolution with a religious symbolism that promised a new and brighter future. Van der Kemp did not preach about

⁷² Van der Kemp, *Geslacht Boek*. Van der Kemp also shared the happy news with Adams, although his evolving command of English did not allow him to express it in such terms. He wrote Adams, matter-of-factly, "Moonday [sic] I Shal [sic] part to Nymegen in Gelderland – to consummate my marriage, and the month of Juin [sic] I hope to be in Friesland." Van der Kemp to Adams, 25 April 1782.

a millennial future promised by the United States. Instead he asserted that the righteousness of the American cause foreordained success and God's favor. Similar to his political work, the theme of many of van der Kemp's sermons was the grandeur of America and the need for the Dutch Republic to follow their example. In one telling example, he told his congregants in 1782:

In America the Sun of Salvation has risen, which will shine its rays upon us provided we so desire. Only America can revive our Trade and our Shipping. . . . America provides us again, if we dare look at it, a striking proof of *how Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people*. America can teach us how to resist the degeneration of National Character, how to check the corruption of morals, how to prevent bribery, how to choke off the seeds of tyranny and restore moribund Liberty to health.⁷³

Van der Kemp repeatedly invoked the image of America not merely as a companion republic but as the exemplar of revolutionary advancement. He did not hold up a mirror for the Dutch Republic to see its recent failings. Van der Kemp possessed a looking glass that revealed to Netherlanders something they had never been.

Van der Kemp's couplet on the righteousness of the American cause and the perfidy of the Stadholder's Dutch Republic easily led him to promote active resistance. In *Aan het Volk van Nederland*, van der Capellen, invoking the example of the American militia, called for the creation of military units independent of those forces beholden to the Stadholder. Wary of standing armies, van der Capellen finished *Aan het Volk van Nederland* with a call to arms: "Arm yourselves, all of you, and choose yourselves the ones who must command you." He continued, "Proceed with modesty and composure just like the people of America where not a single drop of blood was shed before the

⁷³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Elftal Kerkelyke Redevoeringen* (Leiden: L. Herdingh, 1782). Quote also appears in Jackson, 42-43 and Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 120-121.

English attacked them.”⁷⁴ Heeding the call, Patriots began forming their own militias in the separate provinces to stand against the armies of the Stadholder. The new militias, which the Patriots labeled Free Corps, were descendant from the *schutterij* who had traditionally operated as the town watch in urban areas. Where the *schutterij* had mostly served to maintain order and occasionally quell disturbances on behalf of the local government, the Free Corps became the military arm of the Patriot movement. Instead of putting a stop to uprisings, the Free Corps encouraged them. They helped to guarantee that the voice of the people would be heard.

Van der Kemp, who had entered the ranks of the military as a young man before discovering he would rather read than drill, volunteered his services to lead a local militia unit. While directing and organizing his unit, van der Kemp remained leader of the Leiden congregation.⁷⁵ On Sundays, van der Kemp preached in the morning, quickly gathered his things, then made his way to the militia to drill in the afternoon. The image of van der Kemp as a preacher and a soldier became so pervasive that later on in the Revolt, an Orangist cartoon appeared lampooning van der Kemp in the pulpit dressed half in his military uniform and half as a preacher.⁷⁶ The lampoon, however, was not terribly far from the truth. As van der Kemp used his pulpit to spread the romantic image of the United States and push for its recognition by The Hague, he also used the stage to incite

⁷⁴ *Aan het Volk van Nederland*.

⁷⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 86.

⁷⁶ “Explanation of the liberty-print of the present Cantzelhuzaaren,” in F. Muller, *Nederlandsche gescheidenis in platen*, Vol. 2 (1867). The cartoon was sent in a letter from Arend H. Huussen, Jr. to Harry F. Jackson on 26 April 1965. The letter is located in the Oneida Historical Society Manuscript Division, Utica, NY, Box 19-1986 MSS.1; VDK.1 VAN DER KEMP, F.A.; WAL.5-WALCOTT, W.D.; WAS.2-WASHINGTON, GEORGE, Folder MSS.1 VDK.1 Van der Kemp, F.A. - Miscellaneous MIS.1.1/MIS.1.5.

rebellion. In one particular sermon, van der Kemp, invoking the example of the United States, compared the current situation in the Netherlands to that of Israel and its rebellion against the rule of Rehoboam. Van der Kemp claimed, “America in our days validates and shows to other learned people the example of Israel and how the insolence of princes must be curbed and the Law of the People can and should be defended.”⁷⁷ As one historian pointed out, “If anyone was capable of politicizing the pulpit during the *Patriottentijd*, it was Van der Kemp.”⁷⁸

Not all of his parishioners were happy with his politicization of the pulpit and “regretted that I embarked so deep in that political gulf.”⁷⁹ The wariness of van der Kemp’s parishioners speaks to the role of religion in the Patriot Revolt. As van der Kemp had found in his youth, despite claims and even an article in the Union of Utrecht guaranteeing religious freedom, transgressing the authority of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands still resulted in reproach. Part of the reason the Leiden parishioners worried about van der Kemp’s notoriety was that as Mennonites, they were vulnerable. Van der Kemp violated a silent agreement between the Reformed Calvinists and other religions that as long as things were not heard, things were not seen.⁸⁰ Even when he stopped short of claiming a religious justification to rebel against impudent leaders, van

⁷⁷ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Elftal Kerkelyke Redevoeringen door Fr. Adr. van der Kemp, Predikant by de Doopgezinden Te Leyden* (Leiden: L. Herdingh, 1782). An assessment of the sermon can also be found in Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 120.

⁷⁸ Joris van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces: Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 280.

⁷⁹ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 53.

⁸⁰ Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided By Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

der Kemp still advocated the end of the Calvinist hold on the Netherlands. Directly speaking against the doctrine of predestination, van der Kemp proclaimed, “In this sense, the perfection of man is too boring if all is hopeless at the beginning.” He continued, “An end to all perfection is found in God’s exceedingly broad commandment.”⁸¹ With the Republic’s long history of religious turmoil, from the Dutch Revolt to the beheading of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt to the recent Socratic War, van der Kemp’s comments were far from benign. That they appeared in such a tumultuous political climate gave them an added importance. Van der Kemp used his increasing fame and reputation as a provocateur to articulate universal tolerance for all believers, a position he had held and defended since his time at the University of Groningen. For van der Kemp, the Patriot Revolt would only be successful if it combined the democratic reforms of the political sphere with reforms in the religious one.

Because the Reformed Church had attached its standing to the train of the Stadholder and further represented the established religious authority, it was an easy transition for van der Kemp to combine attacks on religious and political authority. Where the Patriots wanted to expand the political concept of burgher to include a greater body of people, several of the Patriots wanted to apply the same logic to the religious sphere. Indeed, one of the prerequisites for becoming a burgher was good standing

⁸¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, “3 Leerde over de Voortreffelykheid de wet Gods,” LEC.1-6, Folder LEC.1 - vdk papers - Lectures - LEC.1-1/LEC.1-13, F. A. Van der Kemp Papers, VDK 1, Oneida Historical Society Manuscript Division, Utica, NY, Box 83, Box 2 - GRE.2.12 through PAM.1; 1952 collection.

within the Reformed Church.⁸² The willingness to critique the Reformed Church in the same vein as the Orangists, however, was only shared by a small portion of the Patriots. Religion played an important role in advancing the Patriot cause, but it was a conservative vision rather than the aggressive bent of the Patriots' political ideology. As a result, the Dutch would not experience a religious upheaval as the French would a few short years later, and in many cases trended toward a greater religious tolerance.⁸³ But as pointed out by scholars of religion, tolerance is not necessarily religious freedom, and the reason that the threat to the Reformed Church never manifested was mostly due to the actions of Patriots such as van der Capellen who were able to quell some of the more radical ideas.⁸⁴

In 1783, van der Capellen helped to install Frederick Adolph van der Marck, van der Kemp's former mentor and himself a notorious advocate for religious toleration, at the university in Deventer. Van der Capellen hoped to create a revolutionary school to educate Patriots. He dismissed, however, the connection between religion and politics.⁸⁵ After van der Marck came to the school, a circle formed around him to discuss theological and political issues, and since he was present, the circle invited van der Capellen to join. He noted to the group that he did not feel it was right to discuss these

⁸² Ernestine van der Wall, "Toleration and Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic," in *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe*, edited by Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 114-132.

⁸³ Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 69-71.

⁸⁴ For overviews of Dutch tolerance, see C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, J. Israel, and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, eds., *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop, eds., *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, passim.

⁸⁵ Te Brake, *Regents and Rebels*, 92.

topics together. He wrote to a correspondent that he felt “it is half a century too early to introduce religious liberty in the Netherlands. ‘In our country it is dangerous to pursue both Ecclesiastical and Civil Liberty.’ The first must follow the second.”⁸⁶

The division within the Patriots ranks about the expansion of religious freedom reveals much about the failure of the movement to take a firm hold on the populace. For all of the rhetoric of inclusion and democracy, many Patriots could not envision a body politic that included the people that actually constituted the Netherlands. For example, despite the traditional role and identification as the religion of the Netherlands, Calvinists only represented a portion of the population. In fact, in a survey conducted in 1811, Calvinist adherents registered the same portion of the population as Catholics.⁸⁷ Yet when petitioned to incorporate Catholics into the class of burghers, a strident opposition arose to maintain the exclusive right of citizenship only for those associated with the Reformed Church.⁸⁸ Indeed, citizenship in the Netherlands had always been an exclusive privilege, and when Patriots murmured about opening the burgher class to the rest of the populace, many regents and citizens balked at the notion.⁸⁹

Politically, as the Patriots expanded their reform program to incorporate local issues, the regents who had been supportive of limiting the power of the Stadholder now faced the same challenge to their own authority. Given the choice between a negotiation

⁸⁶ Quoted in Van Eijnatten, 282.

⁸⁷ Wijnand Mijnhardt, “The Construction of Silence: Religious and Political Radicalism in Dutch History,” in *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750*, edited by Wiep van Bunge (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 231-263, 248.

⁸⁸ Te Brake, *Regents and Rebels*, 95.

⁸⁹ For an explanation of the precise definition of a burgher, see Maarten Prak, “Burghers, Citizens and Popular Politics in the Dutch Republic,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 30, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 443-448.

with Orangists and the Stadholder or opening the Pandora's Box of representative democracy, some of the regents opted to deal with the devil that they knew.⁹⁰ The same applied for burghers and guild members who, when faced with losing historical privileges, decided that revolution was not for them. Further, direct democracy remained out of bounds even for those Patriots who embraced the untested waters of local representation.⁹¹ The results of these decisions varied across the provinces, with some advocating radical solutions and others retreating back to traditional authority. Ironically, the decentralized structure of the Dutch Republic that allowed the Patriots to incrementally advance their cause worked against a cohesive and national platform of change.

Even as divisions appeared within the members of the Patriot Revolt, the Patriots experienced impressive gains. By 1785, van der Kemp “approached the end of my literary career” as he “was day by day deeper entangled in the political labyrinth, till at length it became utterly impossible to extricate myself if I had been willing.”⁹² Utrecht, van der Kemp's home, was the first province to move toward a democratic assembly, and it was here that the Patriots had their strongest support. From 1784 until the end of 1786, the Patriots, in particular the Free Corps, battled with the States of Utrecht over control of the province. In Utrecht, van der Kemp emerged as one of the main militia leaders, “unanimously elected Captain of the Provincial Drilled Society Propace et bello of Wyk

⁹⁰ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1108.

⁹¹ Van Sas, “The Patriot Revolution,” 107.

⁹² Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 86.

near Duurstede.”⁹³ The Free Corps units in Utrecht were able to put enough political and military pressure on the States of Utrecht that by the end of 1786, the States had abandoned the city. In their stead, the Patriots, over the protests of the old council who had fled to a nearby city, elected the first democratically elected town council in the Netherlands.⁹⁴ Van der Kemp noted, “Utrecht was thoroughly revolutionized; but it was a revolution constitutionally begun and finished without a shadow of disorder, without injuring any individual’s property, without spilling one single drop of blood.”⁹⁵ In September of 1786, the pressure in Holland was enough that William V and his wife Wilhelmina abandoned The Hague to the Patriots. By the start of 1787, the Patriots had an impressive display of support from many of the provinces, with the center in Utrecht, Overijssel, and Holland.⁹⁶

Despite the victories, the Patriots remained woefully divided. In the same period, 1784 to 1787, that the Patriots experienced their greatest advances, van der Kemp feared that they were pyrrhic victories. In 1784, van der Capellen died and the movement lost its leader. As his followers mourned, they disagreed about how to move forward. Even in Utrecht and the democratically elected council, van der Kemp bemoaned the schisms forming within the participants. “I joined openly the Democratic party prevailing in Utrecht,” van der Kemp wrote, “yet hoping, though it was hope’s glimmer in the socket,

⁹³ Van der Kemp, *Geslacht Boek*, 30. Van der Kemp also described the formation of the unit in his *Autobiography*, 87.

⁹⁴ Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 88-100; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1106-1107.

⁹⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 86.

⁹⁶ Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 105; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1107.

to save the whole by a timely reconciliation of all the dissenting parts.”⁹⁷ In December of 1785, he wrote to Adams, “So soon as I can persuade my wife to leave this place, I shall have the honour to ask for letters to America, though I fear that political affairs will not permit me so long a sojourn in this country, if I survive the hope of re-establishing liberty.” The next year did not show any signs of improvement, and van der Kemp once again appealed to Adams. “For four years,” he wrote, “the state of this Republic compared with the United States has made me wish to change my dwelling.” He questioned Adams, “Could I live honestly, with ease, dignity, and reputation, on a property of 16,000 or 17,000 florins, or 700 or 800 florins a year, in America?” Van der Kemp hoped “to persuade my wife to go, to be happy in a free country, and to find there fairer fortune for her children.” Adams replied that the transition would be a difficult one, but assured van der Kemp, “With the sum of money you mention, a Man and a Family may live in America: but it must be in a frugal manner.”⁹⁸

While van der Kemp fretted about the internal divisions, the broad success of the Revolt in the mid-1780s brought the Patriots further problems. As the Patriots succeeded in securing control of some provincial governments, outside forces, namely the British and the Prussians, increased their meddling on the side of the Orangists. Faced with the unattractive combination of internal schism and outside force, van der Kemp again contemplated leaving the Netherlands. He continued to question Adams about life in the

⁹⁷ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 88.

⁹⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 31 October 1786, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 369, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 1 December 1786, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 369, Massachusetts Historical Society.

United States. In 1786, van der Kemp lamented, “Things turn badly here, we have already arranged our domestic affairs...but to what purpose, since we are always in the same peril, the Provincial grievances still unredressed, and the troops whom we must watch night and day continue to patrol the flat country.”⁹⁹ The French promised to deliver support, but the ambassador in the Netherlands did not have the backing of the Crown. The Patriots were left to face the triumvirate of Orangists, British money, and Prussian regulars on their own.¹⁰⁰ Patriots, inspired by the American Revolution, were convinced that a properly regulated militia would be enough to counter the Stadholder’s forces, preserving the fragility of liberty from the rapacity of power. The Patriots lacked, however, one of the decisive elements of the American war effort: numerous and well-regulated French troops.

The end of the Patriot movement in the 1780s saw the return of William V of Orange and the purging of public offices, social clubs, and other organizations with any connection to the rebellious cause. Thousands fled the reactionary return to power of the Orangists and moved south into the Austrian Netherlands or sought refuge in France.¹⁰¹ Eventually, these disaffected Patriots would participate in the Batavian Revolution, a French-backed resurgence of the Patriot cause that resulted in the ousting of William V

⁹⁹ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 88; van der Kemp to Adams, 31 October 1786.

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Cobban, *Ambassadors and Secret Agents: The Diplomacy of the First Earl of Malmesbury at the Hague* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954).

¹⁰¹ Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 131-132. For the dénouement of the Dutch Patriot Revolt with particular attention to the fate of Patriot exiles, see also Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1114. For the rarity of van der Kemp’s immigration, see Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, 220-221, 300-307.

and a functional Patriot government. In the immediate aftermath, van der Kemp was the only Patriot to leave for America.

In the end, it was not van der Kemp who convinced Reinira to move to America, it was the Orangist counter-revolution. The counter-revolution was set in motion in 1786 when, on the death of his father, Friedrich Wilhelm II became King of Prussia. Friedrich Wilhelm II was an obstinate opponent of democratic politics and gave the Patriot Revolt the attention his father never did. More importantly, Friedrich Wilhelm II was the brother of Wilhelmina, Princess of Orange. When he became king, he looked for a pretext to help end the Revolt. The pretext came in June of 1787 when Wilhelmina, determined to return to The Hague, was stopped and arrested by the Gouda Free Corps outside of Schoonhoven. The troops released her, but the damage was done. Her brother deemed the act such an insult to his family that it demanded retribution, which came in the form of 26,000 Prussian regulars who crossed the border in September of 1787. By October, William V was back at The Hague and restored to power.¹⁰² Throughout the provinces, despite years of drilling, the Free Corps units, van der Kemp's included, offered no resistance to the Prussian troops. In van der Kemp's case, the city had been surrendered and evacuated in July 1787, before the Prussians even entered the Netherlands. Left in the city were van der Kemp, another militia commander, and an elderly gentleman whose health prevented his escape. As Orangists troops entered the city, van der Kemp became a prisoner. It soon became clear that van der Kemp's confinement had less to do with his military presence at Wij and more to do with his

¹⁰² Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 127-129; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1113-1114.

political writings. As van der Kemp was presented before the Orangist military commander in Utrecht, the commander “casting a contemptuous look upon me, said, ““You sir! with your delicate pen!.... You reap now the fruits.””¹⁰³

Van der Kemp remained imprisoned for twenty-four weeks. During that time, he resigned his commission as the pastor in Leiden. By December, the Orangist counter-revolution was complete enough that the local authorities no longer found van der Kemp a threat. Before van der Kemp could leave, however, he had to pay “for the losses incurred by the public during our usurpation, as it was termed, of the public administration, which sum was calculated at 45,000 florins.”¹⁰⁴ A few days before van der Kemp’s debt for the Patriot Revolt was paid, he received a visit from “an eminent civilian and partisan of the Stadholder.” After sharing a few drinks, the Orangist broached the subject that brought him to van der Kemp: he wanted to discover the authorship of “some publications which had given, at a certain time, great offence.” Van der Kemp offered which ones he had a hand in, and once the Orangist felt satisfied with the answers, indicated that he hoped van der Kemp “might yet be serviceable to my country” in an effort to reconcile Orangist and Patriot partisans. Van der Kemp adamantly refused: “My plan, sir, is unalterably fixed; if I am restore to liberty, as I ought to be, I leave instantaneously this devoted country.”¹⁰⁵ In reality, van der Kemp had little choice in the matter since he had been banned from the Province of Utrecht for life. He also later found out that if he had attempted to return to Holland, the government

¹⁰³ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 100.

¹⁰⁴ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 100.

¹⁰⁵ Van der Kemp, *Autobiography*, 100-101.

was prepared to arrest him and take him to Louvestein, a site that had been the home to a number of famous Dutch dissidents.¹⁰⁶

Van der Kemp gathered his family, carefully chose what belongings to take, and left the Netherlands. The family took extra precaution in travelling as they had all of the passports made out under Reinira's maiden name of Vos, although it took some cajoling to prevent Francis from identifying himself. The van der Kemps arrived in Antwerp on December 21, 1787, and Francis directly wrote to Adams. He informed Adams that, unsurprisingly, his wife had changed her mind about leaving the Netherlands. "Now fate is changed," he wrote, "my unhappy country is in fetters, the best have suffered the most." Van der Kemp received several offers of asylum after his imprisonment, but there was only one place he would go. While the prospect of living leisurely was now gone as the government confiscated most of his possessions, van der Kemp never wavered in his decision: "America, the object of my most ardent desires, will be our goal if we can live frugally in the country, and if your Excellency will deign to honour me with letters."¹⁰⁷ Adams complied and van der Kemp left with letters of introduction to many eminent figures in the United States, including Alexander Hamilton, George Clinton, William Livingstone, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington. In many ways, as van der Kemp departed his group of exile Patriots in Brussels and set off for New York, it was the culmination of a process he started in 1781.

¹⁰⁶ On Louvestein, see Leeb, 3. The guests to Louvestien included Hugo Grotius and Johan de Witt.

¹⁰⁷ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 29 December 1787, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 370, Massachusetts Historical Society.

What makes van der Kemp such an intriguing figure for exploring the Patriot Revolt is that he represents what was new and different about the 1780s. Van der Kemp helps to reveal the Atlantic connections of democratic revolutions and explain what made the Patriot Revolt radical. Tracing his political maturation shows the initial conservatism of the Patriot Revolt as well as its rapid replacement with a completely new political vision reflective of the era's democratic revolutions. Yet the Patriots were not prepared for a complete overhaul of the Dutch system, and many in their number grew frustrated at the continued restrictions. The two elements van der Kemp identified as the most important, participation by the people and a broader definition of religious freedom, were two that most Patriots, including van der Capellen, sought to downplay. It was no wonder that in his frustration van der Kemp turned to America.

More than an inspiration, van der Kemp viewed the new American republic as the model for the future Dutch Republic. After 1781, the majority of van der Kemp's efforts had focused on how to make the Patriot Revolt into the American Revolution. Van der Kemp consistently compared the efforts and progress of the Patriots to the actions of the Americans, and, more often than not, found his Patriots wanting. When he left the Netherlands in early 1788, van der Kemp left a long-existing experiment in republican government for an emerging experiment in the same. In hindsight, it was impossible for the American republic to live up to his lofty standards. But then neither did the Dutch Republic.

CHAPTER 4

AMERICAN POLITICS AND THE TURMOIL OF THE 1790S

In 1787, after over ten years of participation in the Dutch Patriot Revolt against the supporters of William V of Orange, Francis Adrian van der Kemp decided that it was best for him and his family to leave the country. Lending confidence to his decision was the fact that, after leading a Patriot militia unit in the village of Wyk bij Duurstede in the province of Utrecht, the Orangists arrested and jailed van der Kemp for nearly six months and upon his release, banned him from the province of Utrecht. Van der Kemp felt the pressure of being on the losing side of a revolt, but his activity during the Dutch Patriot Revolt had attracted men of influence who could provide asylum. Baron Robert Jaspar van der Capellen tried to convince van der Kemp to move with other disaffected Dutch Patriots to France while Prince Alexander Gallitzin, the Russian Ambassador to the Netherlands, invited van der Kemp to oversee a Russian colony in the Caspian Sea.¹ In reality, however, van der Kemp never really entertained the idea of going to Russia or to France. As his actions and writings during the Dutch Patriot Revolt had made clear, van der Kemp was predisposed to become an American.

¹ The account of van der Kemp's military activity can be found, most directly, in Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 1752-1829: An Autobiography together with Extracts from his Correspondence*, edited by Helen Lincklaen Fairchild (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1903), esp. 99-109; Harry F. Jackson, *Scholar in the Wilderness: Francis Adrian van der Kemp* (Syracuse University Press, 1963), 54-57; Jan Willem Schulte Nordholdt, "François Adriaan van der Kemp: How an Immigrant Changes from a Liberal into a Conservative" in *Dutch Immigration to North America*, edited by Herman Ganzevoort and Mark Boekelman (Toronto: The Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1983): 85-96. For a larger perspective on the Dutch Patriot Revolt, see Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813* (New York: Vintage, 1977). For the Gallitzin reference, see van der Kemp to John Adams, 4 October 1813, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 416, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Why America? Some elements of the appeal are obvious. The American Revolution had provided a catalyst for the Dutch Patriot Revolt. The Dutch Patriots and the Americans both cultivated a republican sense of liberty based on virtue, the fear of consolidated power, and, importantly, a sense of social decay and the overwhelming need for political regeneration. Both independence movements sought to spread political participation beyond a small cadre of elites, but thought that expanded participation was still only suitable for disinterested, virtuous men. In fact, it was the Dutch, before any other European country, who took the principles of the American Revolution as a model for social and political change, helping to catalyze the Age of Revolutions.² Nonetheless, after the defeat of the Patriots, America was not a common destination. Those Patriots who refused to remain in the Netherlands by downplaying their efforts in the late revolt overwhelmingly went to France. As the Dutch were winding down their first revolt, the French were just beginning theirs, and provided an appealing and close asylum.³

America, then, was not the obvious place for the van der Kemps to immigrate.

The reasons for moving across the Atlantic were both personal and ideological. Since

² For an broad look at the connection between the Dutch Patriot Revolt and the American Revolution, see R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800: The Challenge*, Volume I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 324-340. Simon Schama's *Patriots and Liberators* maintains Palmer's framework but explores the Age of Revolutions through the specific lens of the Netherlands. The best work on the direct connections between the American Revolution and the Dutch Patriot Revolt can be found in Jan Willem Schulte Nordholdt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, translated by Herbert H. Rowen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). Schulte Nordholdt's main point of argument is that the American Revolution did not cause the Patriot Revolt and continually emphasizes local conditions for revolt. For an American perspective, the republican synthesis offers a good counterpoint to the Dutch Revolt, and the collective emphasis on virtue, corruption, and political decay. The best works remain, Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

³ See Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*. For another perspective, Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

1781, van der Kemp had maintained a close relationship with John Adams. Upon release from jail in 1787, van der Kemp gathered up his family and made for Antwerp, where he wrote Adams, “America, the object of my most ardent desires, will be our goal if we can live frugally in the country.”⁴ Adams, in response, began gathering letters of introduction for van der Kemp and offering him advice on living in the United States. He told van der Kemp that “New York is the best Place to go at first,” although he warned him not to overestimate his understanding of the city’s Dutch-descended inhabitants: “be upon your guard among the Dutch People in New York,” Adams cautioned, “until [sic] you have prudently informed yourself of the State of Parties there.”⁵ For van der Kemp, however, America was not just a practical place of refuge, but an ideal. He wrote to Adams in his shaky English, “America wil [sic] be my asylum. If I am contraint [sic] to your a country...the United States wil [sic] receive in their bosom – amongst their citisens, one of the Netherlands one who is born but not educated, who lived, although he detested it, amongst the admires of an Despotic aristocracy.”⁶ He viewed the American Revolution as the fulfillment of what he could not accomplish in the Netherlands, and he convinced himself that only in America would he be able to live a life free of despotism and corruption.

This conviction, however, also predisposed van der Kemp to be, as Adams warned, “upon his guard” in America. America was as much a vision in van der Kemp’s

⁴ Van der Kemp to Adams, cited in *Autobiography*, 103.

⁵ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 6 January 1788, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Adams, 26 November 1781, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 355, Massachusetts Historical Society.

mind as it was a physical place, and when living in America forced him to reconcile the two, van der Kemp saw threats to the republic all around him. His heightened sensitivity to disorder made his new home of New York seem all the more dangerous. New York was “the most dynamic state in the newly independent American Republic” and by 1790 was outstripping Boston and Philadelphia in both population and commerce. From the Revolution through the ratification debates, the history of New York was one of rapid change, with its one consistency being a diversity that rendered its politics only more complex.⁷ As a new immigrant, van der Kemp had to balance his lofty expectations of his new homeland and navigate the labyrinth of New York’s social and political structure. The environment of New York tested van der Kemp’s attachment to idealistic imaginings of what life would be like in America.

Van der Kemp, however, was not alone in worrying about the fate of the United States. Even in the 1790s, the fragility of the American republic made all Americans question the stability of their new country. New initiatives or new policy directions

⁷ Quote from Alan Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 4. For information on New York from Revolution to ratification debates, see Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Linda Grant De Pauw, *The Eleventh Pillar: New York State and the Federal Constitution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); Stephen L. Schechter, ed., *The Reluctant Pillar: New York and the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (Troy, NY: Russell Sage College, 1985); Paul A. Gilje and William Penack, eds., *New York in the Age of the Constitution, 1775-1800* (Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992); Staughton Lynd, *Anti-Federalism in Dutchess County, New York: A Study of Democracy and Class Conflict in the Revolutionary Era* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962). The diversity of New York is, of course, a legacy from its Dutch colonial period. A wide range of studies have focused on the role that the Dutch colony of New Netherland has played in forging a multicultural society in America. See Jaap Jacobs, *The Colony of New Netherland: A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Russell Shorto, *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America* (New York: Vintage, 2005); Joyce D. Goodfriend, ed., *Revisiting New Netherland: Perspectives on Early Dutch America* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Joyce D. Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Patricia U. Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

elicited cries of betrayal and fed into a profound fear that the American republic might not work because America was so early into its experiment that it actually might not. Atlantic events added more weight to American decisions, and no event was of more importance or caused more consternation than the French Revolution. The revolution in France forced Americans to come to terms with how far they really wanted their revolution to go. The fragility of the republic, a fervent belief in republican virtue, a fear of unchecked democracy, and a vociferous opposition to France led van der Kemp to identify more with Federalist answers to the problems of the early republic. While van der Kemp was not as committed to some of the Federalist ideals such as the desire for aristocratic politics, a pessimistic view of human nature, and an emphasis on commerce over agriculture, he did support the broader Federalist goals of a more centralized government and an orderly conduct of society. More specifically, van der Kemp identified with an Adamsian version of the Federalist persuasion and its emphasis on mixed and balanced governance.⁸ It was balance, above all, that became his watchword for understanding the events of the 1790s.

Identifying with Federalist policies, however, did not a Federalist make. Even more than most participants in Americans' developing party system, van der Kemp

⁸ Adams's separation from other Federalists can be found in Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp 529-579; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005), 76; David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 2; Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 213-216. An argument that Adams's absence from the constitutional debates prevented him from ever fully understanding the sweeping changes brought about by the Revolution is found in Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 567-592. Namely, the argument provided by these accounts place Adams's unyielding stance on a balanced constitution at the heart of the separation from other Federalists. As democratic politics became of greater significance, Adams's arguments about the "mob" and his pessimistic view of human nature made him seem out of touch with the rapidly changing political scene. Van der Kemp would adopt much of Adams's stance on balanced constitutions.

loathed the growing factionalism of American politics. While others, either explicitly or implicitly, embraced the emerging party system, van der Kemp saw in these divisions the seeds of ruin.⁹ While he benefitted from missing the rancor that emerged under the Articles of Confederation and the subsequent debates over the new federal Constitution, van der Kemp throughout his life refused to allow factionalism to limit his friendships and intellectual connections. As Adams told him in 1819, “You have no Enemies. I have many, and have had more, among the mean insidious and dastardly of whom have been some of you confidential Friends and Correspondents.”¹⁰ This political independence

⁹ For general arguments about the emerging party system and the divisiveness of American politics, see Elkins and McKittrick; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*; Richard Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*; Lance Banning, ed., *After the Constitution: Party Conflict in the New Republic* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1989); Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, eds., *Federalists Reconsidered* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Linda K. Kerber’s *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* and Fischer’s *Revolution of American Conservatism* argue that Federalist party formation never truly formed until after the election of 1800 and the success of the Jeffersonians forced Federalists to drop much of their restrictive and exclusionary political arguments and find ways to appeal to the democratic elements of American society. See Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). Joanne B. Freeman’s attention to the role of honor in providing a template for the politicians of the early republic to find common understanding supports the argument of Kerber and Fischer, that “Only in hindsight did political divisions become so clear.” *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xix. Albrecht Koschnik offers a corrective for that view in “*Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together’: Associations, Partisanship, and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007). Koschnik points to the use of private societies in the 1790s as evidence that Federalists, though dismissive of partisan politics, were in fact actively involved in politicking. A national view of this phenomenon is found in David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Waldstreicher ties the growth of celebratory Americanism, in the form of parades, holidays, and private societies, to a tradition of nationalism that dates back to the colonial period. In a different vein, Saul Cornell shows how anti-federalism provided a coherent structure that many Republicans adapted to their own pursuits in the 1790s, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

¹⁰ The Adams reference comes from John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 21 August 1819, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In van der Kemp’s *Autobiography*, he mentioned meeting with Hamilton, Clinton, and Smith, shortly after arriving in New York. See also George Clinton to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 3 June 1789, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 7: Miscellaneous Autograph Letters; Francis Adrian van der Kemp

allowed him to entertain Federalists and Republican ideas concurrently. Van der Kemp supported an orderly, constitutional government as well as an agrarian vision for America's economic structure. He did not oppose democracy, or what he termed "genuine democracy," but argued that democracy had its place in the American system. It was only in light of the French Revolution, and the shifting nature of what was democratic, that van der Kemp began to worry about how much influence the French ideas on democracy would have on American decisions. As a result, he began to give more favor to the constitutional order than more radical, democratic expressions.

Van der Kemp's paralyzing fear of the French in the 1790s was the result of two major developments. The first, and most significant, was the recent history of the Dutch Republic. For van der Kemp, the lessons of Dutch history were essential. The importance of the Netherlands in the American political imagination of the immediate post-Revolutionary period has been overshadowed by the specter of France, but in approaching the quicksand of being a republic in a world of empires, the Dutch, van der Kemp believed, had much to teach young America.¹¹ The terror of the French

to Peter Van Schaack, 15 November 1793, Van Schaack Family Papers: Correspondence: V-Van Schaack, J., Box 3, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

¹¹ In the extended and voluminous correspondence that van der Kemp and Adams carried on from 1781 until Adams's death in 1826, a consistent theme was Adams's appreciation of his time in the Netherlands and the place the Dutch held in his memories. A sample of this sentiment can be found in an 1823 letter from Adams wherein he tells van der Kemp that "if JQ or any of my Posterity do not recognize the obligations of this country to Holland It will prove in them an ignorance, inattention, and ingratitude unworthy of their name." Adams to van der Kemp 4 February 1823, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society. Van der Kemp and his correspondence largely remain underutilized for the study of John Adams. In John Ferling's *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), Joseph J. Ellis's *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York: Norton, 1994), and David McCullough's *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), van der Kemp is at best a passing reference. Additionally, in the context of Adams's political life in the 1790s, the role of the Netherlands and the fate of the Dutch is barely mentioned. See Elkins and McKittrick, Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, and Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution*.

Revolution, affecting both van der Kemp's ancestral homeland and his new home, helps to explain how a Dutch radical became more conservative in his new homeland.¹² For van der Kemp, the French invasion of the Netherlands in 1795 ended the possibility of achieving the goals of the Dutch Patriot Revolt, but in the rubble of Dutch independence lay a lesson for Americans. Understanding the failure of the Dutch vision might, he hoped, ensure the success of the American.

The second development was van der Kemp's experiences on the American frontier. Moving to the western frontier of New York soon after arriving in America, van der Kemp placed the growth of the frontier at the forefront of his dreams of American prosperity. He believed that once the frontier had been filled with sturdy farmers and families, the United States would emerge as the power in the Atlantic world. But as van der Kemp came face to face with the men who actually inhabited the frontier, his confidence waned. He did not fear the will of the people, but feared that unchecked greed and a lack of order exposed the frontier to corruption, negating the benefits of an agrarian lifestyle.

These local fears are only fully understood within van der Kemp's larger Atlantic perspective. The reservations van der Kemp found on the frontier mattered because they coincided with the loss of Dutch independence and the growing threat of a French invasion in the 1790s. Knowing full well that his friend Adams shared his concerns, van der Kemp pressured him to take the Dutch into account when dealing with the French. The Dutch perspective that van der Kemp brought to bear on Adams during his presidency had an effect on how Adams measured the French threat and the means with

¹² Schulte Nordholdt, "François Adriaan van der Kemp."

which he presented the threat to the American people. By understanding van der Kemp's layered approach to the crisis of the 1790s, we can fully comprehend the severity of the threats to the American republic in the nascent years after the Constitution, a period when republics were falling in Europe and could very well do the same in North America. Van der Kemp did not cease believing that democracy had a place in politics during this period. Rather he became a constitutionalist who put his faith in a structured system that sought balance in political relationships above everything. His turn to more conservative ideas was, in fact, part of a larger movement of domesticating American politics and society in the 1790s. Ironically, van der Kemp's reaction to the French Revolution and his move away from radical democratic ideas made him more American.¹³

When van der Kemp stepped off the boat in New York City on May 4, 1788, his thirty-sixth birthday no less, he came in the wake of one of the most intense periods in American history. But van der Kemp remained exceedingly positive about his prospects in the new nation despite the turmoil. What shaped and buoyed van der Kemp's hopes for the United States was a trip to Mount Vernon. Van der Kemp entered the United States with letters of introduction to prominent American citizens, but it was his exchanges with George Washington, as well as a trip to see the future president on July 29, 1788, that helped to make van der Kemp's visions of his American future seem possible. Van der Kemp began the exchange modestly and in reverence, asserting to Washington that he only wanted to be able to tell his children that he had once conversed with the venerated Washington. Washington in turned welcomed van der Kemp, assuring

¹³ Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

him that he had long hoped that America would become an asylum for the “virtuous and persecuted part of Mankind.” Washington proceeded to draw a direct line from that vision to the Dutch Patriots. He “was particularly happy” of the prospect of more Dutch Patriots arriving, “with whose situation I am peculiarly touched, and of whose public virtue I entertain a great opinion.” Americans were to “be sober, industrious, & virtuous,” and “these are general characteristics of your compatriots.” That fact, he concluded, “would be a principal reason to consider their advent as a valuable acquisition to our infant settlement.” Coming from Washington, this was praise indeed. It also encapsulated everything van der Kemp had thought of his new home, reinvigorating his passions for doing his part to help America succeed. But in the middle of the heady idealism of the letters emerged the hesitancy that would become the standard fare of the Federalist period. All of this, Washington freely admitted, only would transpire if the people of the United States established a “good government.”¹⁴

After his meeting with Washington in 1788, van der Kemp settled his family in America. When van der Kemp decided to leave the Netherlands, he left behind a substantial amount of property and wealth, which the Dutch government confiscated and refused to release. He had originally planned to use those resources to provide a comfortable life for his family, but van der Kemp never saw a return of the investments. Instead, he found ways to make a living. Van der Kemp was able to remain independent

¹⁴ Quotes from George Washington to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 28 May 1788, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society. See also Francis Adrian van der Kemp to George Washington, 15 May 1788, 16 July 1788, 24 March 1789, and 9 January 1790, all in Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

through farming, the help of his son, favorable friends, and downsizing moves.¹⁵ Each move took the family farther west. The van der Kemps were not alone in their western migration. The population of New York State quadrupled after 1790, and by 1820, New York was the most populous state in the nation.¹⁶ The frontier of central and western New York became a focal point for this post-Revolution migration. These settlers attempted to make these lands anew, physically and metaphorically removing its previous inhabitants. But settlers, in order to justify possession of the land, continued to try to erase the history of Native peoples and the extent to which some still lived in the area. While some made the preposterous claim that the land was new, a more common action was to prognosticate about what could now be done to the land, about what benefits it would finally bring Americans in an effort to delegitimize what Natives had already done.¹⁷

Van der Kemp was no different. In 1792, he took an extended journey from Kingston, about halfway between New York City and Albany, to Lake Ontario.

¹⁵ Van der Kemp appealed directly to George Washington to be an intermediary with the Dutch government. Washington sent the case down to Thomas Jefferson, who wrote to van der Kemp that the United States did not have a minister at the Hague and that, while that immigration was encouraged, that it was not in the best interest of the country to interfere for items left behind. Thomas Jefferson to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 31 March 1790, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

¹⁶ Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 4.

¹⁷ Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 30-56; Alan Taylor, "Land and Liberty on the Post-Revolutionary Frontier," in *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic*, edited by David Thomas Konig (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 81-108; Joseph T. Glatthaar and James Kirby Martin, *Forgotten Allies: The Oneida Indians and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Milton M. Klein, ed., *The Empire State: A History of New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 257-268; Peter C. Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity: Economic Culture along the Upper Susquehanna, 1700-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 160-216; Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Eric Hindraker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

Experiencing the country for the first time, van der Kemp, writing a series of letters to his good friend and fellow Dutch Patriot, Adam Mappa, was exuberant about the possibilities of western New York.¹⁸ With the growing population and the abundance before his eyes, van der Kemp did not doubt that New York would soon dominate national and Atlantic commerce. There was work to be done, but van der Kemp did not foresee anything holding back the bounty of New York where “one acre often produces as much as three in any other part of the State.” If fulfilled, this future New York “will foster and protect arts and sciences” and be a place “where the tomahawk and scalping knife shall be replaced by the chisel and pencil of the artist, and the wigwam by marble palaces. Do not think that I dream, Sir!”¹⁹ “This is the country,” he implored Mappa, “in which I could wish that our families were transplanted.... Here we might soon forget the bustle of the great world, might secure our happiness...and leave a handsome inheritance to our children.”²⁰ America might be van der Kemp’s ideal new world, but it was to be filled not with its native inhabitants, but with old world transplants such as himself.

The hopes and the prosperity, van der Kemp knew, came at a price. His ability to freely move around the New York frontier came at the expense of the people the area was named after. The Oneidas had supported the Americans in the late war, and the Treaty of

¹⁸ The series of letters from van der Kemp to Adam Mappa, dating 15 July 1792 to 15 August 1792, titled “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa, On a Tour through a Part of the Western District of New York, in 1792” can be found in John F. Seymour, *Centennial Address, Delivered at Trenton, N.Y., July 4, 1876, with Letters from Francis Adrian van der Kemp, Written in 1792, and Other Documents Relating to the First Settlement of Trenton and Central New York* (Utica, NY: White and Floyd, Book and Job Printers, 1876), Town of Trenton Municipal Building, Barneveld City Hall, quote p. 50.

¹⁹ Van der Kemp, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” 55.

²⁰ Van der Kemp, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” 87.

Fort Stanwix in 1784, diminished the role of the Iroquois and moved the Oneidas into a favored position in dealings with the American government. The wartime devastation to the Oneida homeland as well as internal divisions about the future of the community had a dramatic effect on the Oneida people. Added duplicity from New York politicians brought about a cycle of the Oneida selling off large portions of their land, 5.5 million acres in 1788 alone. As Joseph T. Glatthaar and James Kirby Martin note, by the 20th century, the Oneida Nation, “which once called nearly six million acres its home, held only thirty-two acres of land.”²¹ Van der Kemp portrayed to Mappa the remaining vestiges of that struggle in his letters. Upon a large group of Oneidas outside of Whitesborough, van der Kemp informed Mappa “that they came to receive the corn from the State, which had been stipulated in one of the articles of the late treaty. But they soon changed this corn, certainly for a large part, by the merchants for money, which they changed again for chintzes, silk, hankerchiefs [sic], linen, &c.”²² What van der Kemp witnessed was both the long legacy of European-Native American trade as well as the immediate effects of the American Revolution. Native peoples were veterans of the consumer revolution that occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, but by 1775, most “Indian communities were economically dependent upon Europeans to some degree.”²³ But the level of dependency van der Kemp witnessed in the Oneidas reflected

²¹ Glatthaar and Martin, quote 314, 298-314.

²² Van der Kemp, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” 69.

²³ Quote from Calloway, 11. For more on Native communities and the effects of the consumer revolution, see James Axtell, *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Macmillan, 2011); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

the dislocation of a war fought on their homeland and an ally who was in the process of abandoning them in favor of incoming white settlers whose voracious appetite for land meant a steady profit for the federal government.²⁴ With a surprising perspicacity for Oneida history and the social environment of post-Revolution New York, van der Kemp closed his letter of July 19 with:

I must allow you a little rest before I offer you my rough sketch of the skirts of that noble tract, once the heritage of the Oneidas, now the object of ardent longings of Americans and foreigners, who, by every licit and illicit means, by extravagant praises and unfounded slanders, endeavour to secure this possession to themselves; while some squatters have fixed themselves here and there on its borders; a tract which, in population and wealth, must vie in time with any part of the Western District.

It was a situation that begged van der Kemp to ponder, “it may be justly questioned if the vicinity of their white neighbours is to them not rather a curse than a blessing.”²⁵

Sympathy did not change van der Kemp’s position that the land should welcome European settlers. In 1792, the same year that van der Kemp was making his rounds of western New York, a group of six Dutch financiers organized themselves under the collective body of the Holland Land Company, and purchased 3.3 million acres of land in

²⁴ For the Oneidas specifically, see Glatthaar and Martin. For attempts of the United States to remove Native peoples from western lands in the early republic see White, *Middle Ground*; Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderlands of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 2006); Calloway, *American Revolution in Indian Country*; Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: Norton, 2009); James Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: Norton, 2000); Susan Sleeper-Smith, “[A]n Unpleasant Transaction on this Frontier’: Challenging Female Autonomy and Authority at Michilimackinac,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 417-43; Rebecca Kugel, “Reworking Ethnicity: Gender, Work Roles, and Contending Redefinitions of the Great Lakes Métis, 1820-42” in *Enduring Nations: Native Americans in the Midwest*, edited by R. David Edmunds (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008): 160-81.

²⁵ Van der Kemp, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” quotes from 78, 71.

western and central New York.²⁶ Van der Kemp did not see the company as a threat, nor as creeping, old-world corruption, as Jefferson might have, but as a needed benefit for the area. The Holland Land Company was the latest in a long line of Dutch investors in American land, and van der Kemp was convinced they would only bring order and prosperity to the region. They would organize the land, dividing it into private plots perfect for hard-working farmers and their families, and hopefully convince some more Dutch settlers to immigrate into the region. The impact of new Dutch settlers combined with the recent Yankee migration from New England, van der Kemp felt, was the ideal combination for developing the region and would “render, in a few years, this county the envied sport to the oldest and best cultivated parts of the thirteen States.”²⁷

For van der Kemp, the emergence of the Holland Land Company in central New York also had decided social benefits. Van der Kemp had purchased 1,000 acres of land outside of Rotterdam in 1793 from the land patent of George Scriba. Resolved to live out his life on the shores of Oneida Lake, van der Kemp simply was not prepared for the isolation or the intermittent service of goods. One missed boat threatened the van der Kemps with weeks of inadequate provisions.²⁸ The flurry of land speculation by the Holland Land Company not only brought more people into the area, it also brought people the van der Kemps knew. Mappa, the recipient of van der Kemp’s portrayal of

²⁶ Paul D. Evans, *The Holland Land Company* (Fairfield, NJ: Augustus M. Kelley, 1924, reprint 1979), xii; Charles E. Brooks, *Frontier Settlement and Market Revolution: The Holland Land Purchase* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 13.

²⁷ Van der Kemp, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” 50. The positive impact of even a few Dutch families on the development of central and western New York is a recurring theme in van der Kemp’s letters.

²⁸ George Scriba Papers, NYSL, Manuscripts and Special Collections, SC10521, NYSL, Albany, NY.

western New York, became the Holland Land Company agent. The letters van der Kemp wrote to Mappa in 1792 doubled as a primer for Mappa to get acquainted with central and western New York before moving to the area. Other Dutch compatriots, such as John Lincklaen and Gerrit Boon, both land agents for the company, moved out to central New York. By 1800, van der Kemp had a local social network of Dutch colleagues and friends. Under the direction of Mappa, a tract of land from one of the Holland Land Company purchases became the new village of Oldenbarneveld. Mappa arranged for one of the housing plots to become the new home for the van der Kemps in 1797. There they remained for the rest of their lives.²⁹

The stability that the Holland Land Company purchases provided the family allowed van der Kemp to play a role in establishing these communities. Here was van der Kemp's vision of America: a group of Dutch families, supported by Yankee settlers, who would be able to reap great benefits from the land. Benefits, of course, would only come with order. Van der Kemp wrote Mappa that while they both "paid dearly for our visionary schemes of perfection," "here liberty blended by laws, and so much aristocracy rendered constitutional that neither the one nor the many can do wrong for a long time, and so much democracy saved as the keep the remainder from degenerating herself."³⁰ But events on the frontier from 1794 to 1795 chipped away at the optimism van der Kemp had in 1792. As both a government official for the state of New York and a leading advocate for the need for civil society and associations in these frontier

²⁹ Charles G. Girelius, "The Settlement," *Barneveld Sketches* (Barneveld, 1952), Town of Trenton Municipal Building, Barneveld City Hall; Evans, *Holland Land Company*, Brooks, *Frontier Settlement and Market Revolution*. Evans makes a point of the agents' generosity toward van der Kemp, calling it "quite devoid of any business sense, 74.

³⁰ Van der Kemp, "Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa," 67.

communities, van der Kemp felt the pressure of unruly citizens. The development of central and western New York did not turn out to be the performance of perfectibility that van der Kemp envisioned. The arias of 1792 quickly turned into complaints and lamentations.

In 1794, the people of Herkimer County commissioned van der Kemp to be an Assistant Justice of the Peace. He would hold the position for Herkimer County in 1794 and for Oneida County in 1798 and 1804. Notably, he held the position under both Republican George Clinton and Federalist John Jay.³¹ Initially, van der Kemp was hesitant to take the position. After reflection, he felt that his “particular Situation in an infant Settlement in the western parts” required him to take active part in forming civil society.³² Land disputes and assaults, usually involving drunken farmers, took up the majority of van der Kemp’s time as a judge. One man, Tom, received a lifetime ban from van der Kemp’s house at Oneida Lake because “he loves the rum more than his wife.” There were so many recurring problems at the local store run by John Jacob Mang and John K. Wirth that van der Kemp issued a blanket statement to Mang and Wirth: “If you consider yourself – or the store entrusted to your care, in danger – I shall – upon you[r] complaint and giving their names, on your oath issue a warrant, and oblige them to give securities for the peace and their good behaviour – and am willing to do what is justice

³¹ Civil Appointments, Civil Abstracts 1804-1807, Vol. I (A1848-78), Box 1 of 6, New York State Archives; Commissions, Miscellaneous, 1793-1797, Vol. 9., Secretary of State, New York, NYSA, Box 3 of 16, A-1854-78, New York State Archives; Commissions, 1798, 1810: Judges and Justices, Vol. 15, Sec. of State, NY, NYSA, Box 5 of 16, A-1854-78, New York State Archives.

³² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 9 December 1794, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 378, Massachusetts Historical Society.

you can require.” “It would be of help,” van der Kemp finished, “if there was on the spot a constable.”³³

So, van der Kemp tried another approach. Van der Kemp thought that an agricultural society might bring some needed order to the settlement. In February of 1795, van der Kemp gathered interested parties to discuss a “plan for the improvement of Agriculture in Western parts,” and on June 1, at Whitestown they held a “meeting of the convocation for the erection of a society of Agriculture and Nat. History.”³⁴ Van der Kemp delivered a speech at the meeting that outlined his vision of what the society could accomplish for this recent settlement. He was of the mindset that civic societies and a diffusion of knowledge would greatly improve social life on the frontier. With no landed aristocracy in America, civic associations would also give the men in the community a better understanding of what it took to become the new gentlemen of American society.³⁵ In the rise of William Cooper in neighboring Ostego County, for example, access to literature, participation in associations, and his mastery of taste and sociability were

³³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Messrs. Ming and Wirth, 3 January 1796 and 20 December 1795, George Scriba Papers, NYSL, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Folder 1, Box 1, SC10521, NYSL, Albany, NY; Jackson, 128-131.

³⁴ J. J. van der Kemp to John Porteous, 23 February 1795 and 16 April 1795, Porteous Papers: 1991.95.1-.76, Herkimer County Historical Society.

³⁵ For sociability and civil society, see David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997); Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forms of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

fundamental to his acceptance as a gentleman and in taking a leading role in social affairs.³⁶

In founding the Society of Agriculture in Whitestown, van der Kemp hoped to recreate the circumstances that led to Cooper's rise. He wanted to bridge the divide between enlightened citizen and market farmer, what van der Kemp termed the "enlightened farmer," a man in whom the salubrious effects of rural life were balanced with the reading of literature and classic texts. "Sometimes," he announced, "the enlightened farmer amuses himself with hooking the quivering fishes from a soft murmuring brook" and "sometimes delights himself under a majestic oak, with MILTON or OSSIAN." At night, the enlightened farmer, "studies a SIDNEY – a LOCKE – a MONTESQUIOU."³⁷ Reading these works, van der Kemp believed, would allow the farmers to overcome their individual interests to the greater benefit of the whole society. The pursuit of knowledge and the "improvements in different branches of knowledge in our state, is more than enough, to destroy all the suggestions of slothfulness and narrow-spirited men, more than enough, to surmount every obstacle, which any daring dastard may throw in your way." When they accomplished this, "every class shall be benefitted by your cares, by your experiments...and the state will consider you, as worthy members of a free Republic."³⁸ If not, van der Kemp warned, the state and, because of the growing

³⁶ Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 22-26.

³⁷ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Speech of Fr. Adr. Van der Kemp, at a Meeting, the First of June, One Thousand, Seven Hundred and Ninety-Five, at Whitestown, for the Institution of a Society of Agriculture* (Whitestown: Oliver P. Easton, 1795), New York State Library, 7. See also Jackson, 132.

³⁸ Van der Kemp, *Speech at Whitestown*, 11.

status of New York, the nation, were in peril. Neither could withstand what van der Kemp had been witnessing on the frontier.

Van der Kemp's celebration of rural virtues also resonated with what has been called the Jeffersonian persuasion. Steeped in a long tradition of Virginia planters, Jefferson viewed farming as the occupation that would preserve the spirit of the American Revolution and the virtue of the American people.³⁹ Van der Kemp, in his 1795 speech to the residents of Herkimer County, conceded that cities have their benefits and advantages, but that a virtuous life in the city was one of struggle. The vices and the threat of luxury too often prevented city residents from maintaining republicanism. Not so in the country. "In the country, our health is invigorated, the faculties of our soul are strengthened in the country." Literally, van der Kemp argued, the country can save virtue.⁴⁰ The track record proves it. The "greatest statesman; the fathers the creators of our republic, and so happy organized government" came from the country, which allowed the men present to join them in the declaration "*I too am a free American.*"⁴¹ Though the

³⁹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, edited by William Peden (New York: Norton, 1954), esp., 165; Elkins and McKittrick, 195-208; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 44-50; Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), esp. 14-15; Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*; Wilentz, *Rise of Democracy*, 15-20; Ari Helo, "Jefferson's Conception of Republican Government," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, edited by Frank Shuffelton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 35-46; Thomas Hallock, "Notes on the State of Virginia and the Jeffersonian West," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, edited by Frank Shuffelton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 47-60. The consequences of this agrarian ideal, and its hold on the American imagination, can be found most notably in Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the American Frontier," *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), Online Edition, University of Virginia, edited by Michael W. Kidd, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/turner/>, accessed 14 February 2014. ; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ Van der Kemp, *Speech at Whitestown*, 4-5.

⁴¹ Van der Kemp, *Speech at Whitestown*, 5-7; see also Jackson, 131-132.

country possessed all of these qualities, it was up to the men present to capitalize on these natural benefits. With its advantageous ports, New York City's emergence after the Revolution and its ability to provide the needed transportation network for frontier farmers made New York the desired emporium for all the surrounding states. According to van der Kemp, in 1795, that promise was being squandered, hence the need for the society. Of particular interest, and something van der Kemp warned about, was the consolidation of land in the hands of a few. This was not the path to industriousness; it was not the proper brand of republicanism. The benefits of the country and the natural wealth that New York provided these farmers could not be diffused if greedy individuals took more land than they could logically farm. "The prudent landholder," he maintained, "blends the public interests with his own, reaches in both his aim."⁴² The Lockean individualism did not, for van der Kemp, reach the common good. The virtuous member of a community was "he, who performs with the smallest herd the greatest work." "Not he, who personates the gentleman in a tavern, and spends lavishly," but "he, who pays with a scrupulous exactness, and spares a little cash, which he may call in by a sudden emergency or unexpected opportunity of employing it with usury, is the worthy, the recommendable and glorious farmer."⁴³

It was the duty of the Society to stop this degeneration and return central New York to the collective, republican ideal. The Society would be able to create a community of farmers, sharing their triumphs and lamenting their failures as a group.

⁴² Van der Kemp, "Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa," quote 59, 48-59.

⁴³ Van der Kemp, *Speech at Whitestown*, quotes, 9, 10, see also 7-11; Van der Kemp, "Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa," 58-59.

Farming was hard, but the Society could help alleviate some of that burden. In the same way that literary circles allowed people to join with one another as well as other circles around the country, the association could connect Whitestown with other New York agricultural institutions, strengthening their bonds as Americans as much as it strengthened their bonds as farmers. The key, of course, was the press. Printed material would allow them to forge a bond with other agricultural societies.⁴⁴ More practically, the farmers would be able to share new information. If one of them found a way to yield a bigger and better crop, he would now have a forum to share that method. The success would be for anyone who was a member of the society and would eliminate those “narrow-spirited men” van der Kemp had seen too much of as a judge.⁴⁵ The Society would be able to solve disputes among farmers and, importantly, provide a ready body of civic leaders for the infant settlements.

What van der Kemp experienced as a judge between 1794 and 1795 and his hope for order embodied in the Agricultural Society represented many of the problems governments in North America had regulating westward expansion. For most of the colonial period, government, whether British or French, braked western expansion and dissuaded settlement.⁴⁶ After the Revolution, those directing the American state

⁴⁴ Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters*; Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic*; Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, Larzer Ziff, *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print, and Politics in the Early United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

⁴⁵ Van der Kemp, *Speech at Whitestown*, quote 11, 9-13.

⁴⁶ White, *The Middle Ground*; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage, 2001); Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*; Griffin, *American Leviathan*; Peter S. Onuf, “The Expanding Union,” in *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic*, edited by David Thomas Konig (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 50-80; Bethel Saler, “An Empire for Liberty, a State for Empire: The U.S. National State Before and After the Revolution of 1800,” in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race,*

instituted an “empire of liberty” that embraced western expansion as a fundamental right. But as Eric Hinderaker notes, empires “were negotiated systems” where “individuals could shape, challenge, or resist colonialism in many ways.”⁴⁷ In the United States, the expansion of the American empire took on an added dimension under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. As opposed to the previous model presented by the British and French, in which territorial acquisitions perpetually operated as peripheries under the aegis of the metropole, the empire of liberty model adopted by Americans meant that once new additions went through the proper process, they would be full members of the empire; an odd design of empire without colonies.⁴⁸ Settlers had the potential to be future citizens, and thus had leverage in dictating how the frontier lands would be

and the New Republic, edited by James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002): 360-382.

⁴⁷ Hinderaker, xi. For more on how empires operate in different environments, see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); David Armitage *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J. H. Elliott’s *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted By Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North America History* (Durham: Duke University, 2006); Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (December 2001): 829-65; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009). In a similar context, the work of Mark von Hagen and Jane Burbank on the Russian empire challenges preconceived notions of empire and highlights the “moving target” of empire: Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ The terms “periphery” and “metropole” come from Immanuel Wallerstein’s, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). Stoler, in “Tense and Tender Ties,” explores the effects of empire without colonies, arguing that Americans have tended not to think of America as having an empire until the possession of colonies in the 1890s despite clear evidence of imperial formations from the start of the republic.

organized.⁴⁹ Federalists and Republicans alike worried about the fate of the trans-Appalachian west and scrambled to accommodate a movement that was quickly getting out of control. Where Federalists praised the role of the federal government in achieving these means, Republicans appealed to the ingenuity and foresightedness of the frontiersman. Where Federalists feared the excesses of democracy, Republicans celebrated the will of the people. This was also a battle fought not only in urban parades and partisan pamphlets, but also at the edges of the country, including the frontier of the Empire State.⁵⁰

Van der Kemp's concerns as a judge in 1794 and civic organizer in 1795 were about the power being placed in the hands of men he did not feel were ready for the job. It was easy to sit in New York City and applaud the efforts of men on the frontier, but it was quite another to stop the drunk frontiersman from damaging the boats of the merchant store. Republicanism was a delicate form of governance, and the disorder

⁴⁹ Of course, the expansionists found that this could not be done without the power of the state. The Native peoples who already inhabited the land proved to be more formidable than settlers had planned, and those settlers turned to the federal government to alleviate their ills. The result was a violent policy of expansion, as the army that initially was sent to remove squatters, turned course and applied the might of the state against Natives in order to protect the land rights of the squatters. In doing so, the squatters and the federal government dually declared Natives outside the pale of American citizenship, erecting a racial litmus test for admittance. Whereas subjecthood was strictly of matter of birth, as a voluntary act, citizenship possessed murkier qualifications. See Hinderaker, 261; Griffin, *American Leviathan*; Onuf, "Expanding Union"; Andrew R. L. Cayton, "Radicals in the 'Western World': The Federalist Conquest of Trans-Appalachian North America," in *Federalists Reconsidered*, edited by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1998): 77-96; Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*; Merrell, *Into the American Woods*; White, *Middle Ground*. On an expanded notion of the changes from subject to citizen, see Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Soldiers, Irish Rebel, and Indian Allies* (New York: Vintage, 2011); Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988). For race and American identity, the standard is Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 2003).

⁵⁰ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 157-164; Cooper, *William Cooper's Town*, 256-257. For Democratic-Republican societies in New York, Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763-1797* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

present at the edges of the United States undermined the virtue necessary to carry out the republican system. Many worried that the democratic expressions that shaped the frontier would eventually lead to anarchy and the end of the American experiment of self-governance. Even before he took the judgeship in 1794, van der Kemp was wary of the results. “I am less anxious,” he told Adams, “to trouble myself with the Sub-alterns.” But trouble himself he did, and the results were constant headaches caused by unruly settlers and the ultimate failure of his agricultural society. In his Whitestown speech in 1795, van der Kemp warned the crowd that he could not himself oversee the society, and without van der Kemp’s direction or energy to make the Society work, the idea languished.⁵¹ The problems with settlers continued, and van der Kemp grew frustrated. He lashed out to Adams that his wish was “to establish, if possible, Some order and decency in the court, where ignorance and Stupidity prevails.” By his refusal to continue his judgeship after 1798, van der Kemp believed that stupidity still prevailed in the county.⁵²

Much of this stupidity van der Kemp laid at the feet of the deleterious effects of national infighting. Van der Kemp warned, “Public good is your aim, and to obtain all your strength must be united – party-ship must never be allowed to poison your meeting. You “are all Americans,” and “this title is honorable,” “a curse on him, who introduces

⁵¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 28 August 1794, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 377, Massachusetts Historical Society; Jackson, 131-133.

⁵² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 3 October 1795, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 380, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Jay to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 3 April 1798, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 8: Miscellaneous Autography Letters.

another.”⁵³ He told his friend Peter Van Gaasbeck, who had been elected to political office, “Be independent My Dear and never such a Partyman that you dare not, when ever you See right on the side of opposition, vote with it.”⁵⁴ Captured in this statement to Van Gaasbeck and the exasperation in his letters to Adams were van der Kemp’s concerns of the 1790s. Partisanship, lack of proper authority, and the results of unbounded democracy became the biggest concerns van der Kemp had about the future of the United States.

What made van der Kemp’s local education on the frontier of New York palpable was its concomitant development with the French Revolution. The 1790s, especially at the national level, was a time of particular apprehension in America as the newness of the American state and the difficulty of independence were felt at every turn. Since even the seemingly mundane, such as what to call Washington in his role as head of the state, elicited worry and debate, it is no wonder that the bigger issues of the period took on an apocalyptic tone.⁵⁵ When the French began their revolution in 1789, it was met in America with nearly universal acceptance. Much of this had to do with Americans’ pride as the vanguard of an Atlantic revolutionary moment and what they saw as confirmation of their status as a chosen people, but from 1789 to 1792, the French Revolution was not much of a partisan issue.⁵⁶ After 1793 and the execution of the king, the French

⁵³ Van der Kemp, *Speech at Whitestown*, 14.

⁵⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Peter Van Gaasbeck, 19 February 1794, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁵⁵ Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*; Elkins and McKittrick, 50; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 13-20, 80-82.

⁵⁶ Elkins and McKittrick, 308-311; Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 254.

Revolution became incorporated into the partisanship of American politics, and remained at the forefront of national politics throughout the 1790s. With his Dutch background predisposing him to connect the developments on the frontier to larger Atlantic world, the threats of the intoxicated and unruly farmers became arbiters of larger divisions in American society. As events in France reached a fever pitch, hope began to give way to despair. Behind all of this was the declining independence of the Netherlands, the last of the European republics. Van der Kemp began to believe that unless the federal government took action, Americans would soon suffer the fate of his former homeland. In the confluence of these events, Adamsian arguments about balance and order began to make much more sense to the Dutch radical.

Unlike most Americans, van der Kemp had always been wary of the French. He knew that in 1790, “With regard to France, my ideas of this People are perhaps less favourable than those of Others,” but he “entertained Some doubts and Suspicions with regard of the consistency of their new-model’d government.”⁵⁷ Van der Kemp’s resistance to French influence and doubts about French actions had a history tracing back to the Dutch Patriot Revolt. What irked van der Kemp the most was the duplicitous way in which the French conducted their affairs with the Patriots. Despite making a show of public support, “no intermixture of complaisance and kindness towards France lurked in our Breasts,” as the French did little to aid the Patriot cause.⁵⁸ As most Americans applauded the French efforts, van der Kemp measured his response. He did not denounce

⁵⁷ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 19 June 1790, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 373, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁵⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 18 February 1812, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 413, Massachusetts Historical Society; Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, 124-132; Jackson, 50-51.

the revolution outright, calling it the “happiest opportunity” for the French people to preserve “their Rights and Liberties,” but worried that unless “the best part of the French people” “either it be an Democrat, Aristocrat or Royalist” “cannot unite, to overthrow that Set of Ruffians...then Paris will be utterly destroy’d.” The “horrors of universal confusion” would lead to “cruel dissentions and bloody massacre [sic] in France.” What could save France from “the horrors of universal confusion” was the “Rational blessings of a wel [sic] constituted government.”⁵⁹

The last statement reflected the influence of van der Kemp’s reading of Adams’s *Defence of the Constitution of Government of the United States of America*.⁶⁰ Adams shared the diffidence van der Kemp displayed toward the French. Adams and John Quincy were the only major American politicians to speak out against the French Revolution prior to 1793.⁶¹ The exchanges with Adams were van der Kemp’s national education in American politics. When van der Kemp first wrote Adams about the *Defence* in January of 1790, he generally approved of the work, but was skeptical about Adams’s support of hereditary offices. He chided Adams’s extended defense of the trial by jury, the “danger of a Standing army, and recommendation of the militia,” telling his friend that these served as “atonement” in the “eyes of Some jealous American” for Adams’s “often repeated inculcation – of perpetual rulers” and “hereditary magistrates.” Van der Kemp pushed Adams on the matter, pointedly asking to “See it explained – at large and defended.” The Dutchman wondered “will a hereditary Senat [sic] not

⁵⁹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 3 February 1790, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 373, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁶⁰ Ferling, 289-291; Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 567-592.

⁶¹ Cotlar, 71; Elkins and McKittrick, 312-313; Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, 90-93.

diminish, in time, the prerogatives of the president, and the privileges of the people?” Adams countered that both a hereditary Senate and a hereditary Executive “when controuled by an independent Representation of the People, is better than corrupted, turbulent and bloody Elections.”⁶² Adams’s larger point was not about a desire for hereditary offices in American government, but about providing a greater stability to the American framework. He worried that elections, and the popular passions that go along with them, would eventually get out of hand, resulting in “Corruption, Sediton and Civil War.” Without a proper balance between the three branches of government, no peace could be sustained, and hereditary succession was one way to make offices more secure. “Whether human Reason will ever get the better of all these Opinions...I know not,” Adams opined, but “I will never cease to preach my favourite Doctrine, untill [sic] I die.”⁶³

Van der Kemp found shared principles between him and Adams in their assessment of the French Revolution. “I dare guess,” van der Kemp wrote Adams in March of 1790, “to be not a great difference between our thought upon the Stability of and the degree of civil Liberty interring in last French Revolution.” In reading the *Defence* alongside the reports he was getting about events in France, van der Kemp

⁶² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 January 1790, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 373, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 27 February 1790, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Wood, notably, covers the reaction to the *Defence* in *Creation of the American Republic*. For a breakdown of how Adams put together the *Defence* and the specific context he was responding to, see Zoltán Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), esp. 155-164; Ferling, 287-290. For a good exploration of the rapid politicization of elections in the early republic, see Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*.

⁶³ Adams to van der Kemp 27 February 1790.

acknowledged the wisdom in Adams's long-term stability, which "may, at first view, be very disagreeable to Short-sighted – interested – or ambitious Americans."⁶⁴ Though van der Kemp granted that elections had the potential to become corrupted, he pressed on how a hereditary Senate would work in practice. Adams's reply was that when corruption made elections too dangerous, "another Convention must be called, who may prolong the Period of Senators from five years to twelve...or for Life." The same would work for the President if that election became too dangerous. Adams had no trouble with the direct election of Representatives, since they "are elected not only for Short Periods but for Small Districts and therefore do not interest and enflame the Passions of an whole Nation." More influential to van der Kemp, though, it was his connection of the dangers of unicameralism to the turmoil with the French government. Van der Kemp dropped the theoretical discussion of hereditary Senators, and shifted the focus to his "doubts and Suspicions with regard of the consistency" of France's new government. "[Our] government," he told Adams, "will be entitled to the highest encomiums" "if it Steers our weak vessel Safe through this dangerous canal."⁶⁵

Van der Kemp and Adams exchanged few letters from June of 1790 until 1793, but Adams's emphasis on constitutional order remained the main theme. Van der Kemp "wish[ed] that the French people may be free, may acquire a Sound Constitution" but

⁶⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 17 March 1790, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 373, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁶⁵ Van der Kemp to Adams 17 March 1790; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp 27 March 1790, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 26 May 1790, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 373, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 19 June 1790, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 373, Massachusetts Historical Society.

without it, “their Seeming Gigantic power will crumble in piles.” Importantly, van der Kemp began to distance himself from the more radical tendencies of the Revolution. “Not yet,” he wrote Adams, “I am an adept to their levelling System,” to which Adams replied that “The French Revolution is every day furnishing the world with fresh proofs of the Necessity of Checks and Balances, Unlimited Power is as dangerous in many as in one.”⁶⁶ In January, the executioner displayed Louis XVI’s head to the French crowd and by the start of the next month, war had been declared on England. As the Reign of Terror ratcheted up the tension by March, American reaction bifurcated into Republican and Federalists camps. Republicans supported and forgave much of the French Revolution, even as some became increasingly uneasy over its spiraling radicalism. On the other hand, Federalists used the radicalism of the French to appeal for the more stable trade with Britain, and saw in the French model a nightmare of unending disorder.⁶⁷ The controversy that surrounded the arrival of the new French ambassador, Edmond Genet, in 1793 and the imbroglio about John Jay’s negotiations with the British in 1794 became avatars for the domestic fight over the meaning of the French Revolution. The policy of neutrality developed by 1794 reflected more the hope of the United States than an outright policy, a reflection more of divided support than a stance of independence.⁶⁸ As

⁶⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 9 February 1793, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 376, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 19 March 1793, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁷ Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*; Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution*, 38-40; Elkins and McKittrick, 341-365; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 176-185; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 126-131; Young, *Democratic-Republican Societies of New York*.

⁶⁸ Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 91-99, 109; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 53-62; Elkins and McKittrick, 330-336, 375-376; Buel, 6, 40-51.

a result of those battles, and the clear lines of demarcation between the two groups, American politics began to show signs of party.⁶⁹

For van der Kemp, his reaction to the dilemma of the French Revolution had little to do with the pull of American partisanship. Regardless of his Federalist leanings, van der Kemp's opposition to the French stemmed from the French treatment of the Dutch Patriots. As Britain and Prussia lined up behind William V, France intimated to the Patriots that they would soon provide troops and assistance, neither of which ever came. As van der Kemp saw it, France never intended to make good on their promises, and used the Patriot Revolt to better position themselves against Britain. The result exacerbated the divide within the Patriot ranks and accelerated the downfall of the revolt. With France's deception and treachery toward the Dutch Patriots, van der Kemp worried that recent history was repeating. The growing factionalism between Federalists and Republicans would either allow the French to overthrow the American republic from the inside or initiate the same schismatic process that had brought down the Dutch Patriots. According to van der Kemp, the French "were the first in Europe – of Entangling another's affairs." American politicians were still only learning the international game of diplomacy, and it boded ill their first test was against "those versatile geniuses," the French. Van der Kemp still held a "great opinion of America" and "the Integrity [of] Congress," but worried that "American[s] Should be Seduced to Some rash Steps, by the cunning intrigues" of France, even harboring "a Suspicion, that too many are entangled by the intrigues of European Emissaries, whose boasted case for the preservation of our

⁶⁹ Elkins and McKittrick, 457; Young, *Democratic-Republicans of New York*; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 132-133.

Liberties and Independence conceals for them their unrelented endeavours to throw us into that abyss of confusion in which they are plunged.”⁷⁰ By late 1793, van der Kemp began to wonder how politicians could properly address the French threat and preserve the balance he and Adams desperately wanted, suggesting maybe even taking some steps to stem French influence in America. Hopefully, damping the impact of the French Revolution would “moderate, at least, the inconsiderate ardour for the Jacobins in Some of my friends.”⁷¹

In 1795, van der Kemp found an additional threat emerging from the French Revolution that escalated the arguments he had been making since 1790. The declaration of war issued by France on February 1, 1793 against England also included the Netherlands. In 1795, the French supported a Dutch-led invasion of the Netherlands and the ousting of William V and the Orangist party, and in its wake, the Dutch revolutionaries established the Batavian Republic.⁷² Though the Batavians tried in

⁷⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Peter Van Gaasbeck 19 February 1794, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 3 August 1793, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 376, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 1 February 1794, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 377, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 9 February 1793, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 376, Massachusetts Historical Society; van der Kemp to Adams 3 August 1793; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 23 November 1793, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 376, Massachusetts Historical Society; van der Kemp to Adams 1 February 1794. For the conservative effect of Jacobinism on American radicals, see Cotlar.

⁷² For a history of Batavian Republic, see R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800: The Struggle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 177-204; Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*, passim; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 1122-1127. The ease with which the pro-French troops defeated the Orangists made it seem that the whole affair was solely orchestrated on French terms, leading many historians to write off the Batavian Revolution as a non-revolution. Simon Schama’s focus on the events in the Netherlands as opposed to what the French thought was occurring in the Netherlands shows, there was in fact a fleeing moment, from 1795 to 1806, when the Batavians accomplished everything the Patriots set out to do. While the brevity caused most historians to dismiss the Batavian Revolution, it in fact established the structural framework for the Netherlands to

earnest to establish an independent government, they did so within the confines of French approval. As long as the Dutch did not bother the French, they maintained their freedom, but if the situation changed, the Batavians could not resist a French takeover. It was, as van der Kemp had described the situation of the 1780s, a “Shadow of Liberty.”⁷³

Van der Kemp worried as much, writing Adams that the “yet fluctuating State of European affairs – of France and Holland Specially” had occupied much of his time. He wished the Batavians “prosperity – civil and Political Liberty,” but he desperately wanted them to create “a Solid organised constitution.” He warned that if the Dutch left the matter “entirely to the good will – or convenience of an allied power” they would lose any semblance of freedom.⁷⁴ By 1796, van der Kemp’s confidence was on the wane, “knowing Scarce yet, where to Set my foot.” He listed for Adams a series of things the Dutch would have to accomplish in order to succeed, with the central issues being the establishment of a well-balanced constitution and an assurance that the French would not meddle in domestic affairs. He admitted to Adams that “there is yet So much wanting to compleat [sic] this collection of ifs – that I am yet very anxious about the issue.” Though he “never wish[ed] to return again in that once beloved Country” “I am and Shall remain a wel-wisher of the Dutch, and would rejoice, if they became a free, independent People,

become a nation-state, breaking the paralyzing federalism that had been the hallmark of the United Provinces. Schama, *Patriots and Liberators*.

⁷³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 1 March 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 417, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 3 October 1795, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 380, Massachusetts Historical Society.

and formed themselves a constitution.”⁷⁵ Here were the very issues he argued plagued the American republic—balanced government and French influence—being played out in real-time in his former home. The fate of the Batavians, van der Kemp believed, should interest any American concerned with saving the United States. Adams knew it as well.

It was in part this shared sentiment about the Dutch perspective, which convinced van der Kemp that Adams was the only man for the presidency in 1796. Van der Kemp would have voted for Adams anyway, but the measures van der Kemp took to help Adams win were telling. Cognizant of Jefferson’s pro-French stance, van der Kemp worried what a Jeffersonian presidency, given widespread American support of the French, would mean for the future of the American state. In a pointed letter in October of 1796, van der Kemp echoed Adams’s sentiment that the retirement of Washington set up Adams as the logical, and worthy, successor. But van der Kemp knew that not everyone felt this way, and asked Adams if he could get van der Kemp a place as an elector for the state of New York. He assured Adams that he would “pay the tribute, which every American owes to your meritorious character.” Adams was unable to secure the post and the Dutchman’s own efforts were to no avail, which upset van der Kemp. “Once – in my life – I begged of a man in place,” van der Kemp told Adams, “the favour to be classed among the Electors that I might deserve once more of a country what I believed me obliged to defend with my pen before I enjoy’d her favours.” “[B]ut,” he continued, “party Spirit perhaps in this plays her part.”⁷⁶ Thankfully for van der Kemp, Adams did

⁷⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 1 September 1796, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 382, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams 10 October 1796, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 382, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 10

win the election, but now it was up to Adams to try and put “our Interests” in “a well-moulded government” into practice.⁷⁷

In nearly every way, when Adams entered the presidency in 1796, his options were limited. One of his biggest problems was that he was not George Washington. Washington could forge compromises based on his popular appeal whereas many people found “His Rotundity” annoying. His Vice President was the leading member of an oppositional faction, and in the Federalist group, Alexander Hamilton wielded more power. Throughout his entire presidency, Adams tried to maintain a balanced approach, but fought a losing battle for control of his administration.⁷⁸ What limited his options even more was the loss of the Netherlands. Not normally considered among the nations influencing American decisions in the 1790s, the Dutch nonetheless played a major role in the development of the American republic. The most immediate consequence was monetary. The Dutch were the greatest source of loans in the Atlantic world, and once the Americans secured independence, Dutch money began to flow into North America. During both the Revolution and the Confederation period, the United States had stabilized its financial system with borrowed money from the Dutch. In addition to loans, the Dutch had been the greatest source of public credit, which allowed the infant republic now under the Constitution to establish itself in the Atlantic economy and borrow money

November 1796, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 382, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷⁷ Van der Kemp to Adams 10 October 1796.

⁷⁸ For Adams, see Ferling; Ellis, *Passionate Sage*; Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2001); McCullough, *John Adams*. For the Adams’s presidency in the Federalist period, see Elkins and McKittrick, esp. 529-537; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 209-238.

from other countries. Adams now had neither the ability to borrow money or establish credit through the Netherlands since the French “gorged [themselves] on [that] Dutch wealth” after 1795.⁷⁹

The presidential consequences of the loss of the Netherlands compounded Adams’s preexisting personal attachments. Though a good amount of the information about the Dutch came from van der Kemp, an equal, if not greater amount, came from Adams’s sons, John Quincy and Thomas Boylston. Both sons worked as American diplomats to the Netherlands, and sent their father letters about the state of European affairs from The Hague. A letter from Adams to van der Kemp at the end of 1796 revealed the interconnectedness between the Adamases, van der Kemp, and the Netherlands. The intent of the letter was to inform van der Kemp about the condition of their mutual friend, Jean Luzac, who still lived in the Netherlands. Nearly the entire Adams family joined together to let van der Kemp know that their friend, Luzac, had been removed from his position as a professor at the University of Leiden and ordered not to issue his paper the *Leyden Gazette*.⁸⁰ Luzac had been a critic of the French Revolution from the outset, and as the French encroached on Dutch territory in 1795, he used his university lectern to issue a scathing critique of French influences in the Dutch government, then translated the Latin lecture into Dutch and published it his paper. The

⁷⁹ Herbert E. Sloan, “Hamilton’s Second Thoughts: Federalist Finance Revisited,” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, edited by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998): 61-76, quote 64.

⁸⁰ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp 6 December 1796 and 19 April 1797, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The form of the letter is as follows: Adams wrote to van der Kemp personally at first, then quoted at length from a letter from John Quincy to Abigail, and then quoted more from a letter Thomas Boylston sent Adams.

Batavian Government banned Luzac from teaching modern Dutch history, citing his “aristocratic sentiments, and the outlook unfavorable to the French and Batavian revolutions.”⁸¹ As Thomas told his father, the “Anecdote which proves Something more” about the nature of the Batavian government “is the Dismission of Mr J. Luzac from his Professorship in the University and with a Prohibition Subjoined against his Superintendence of the Leyden Gazette.”⁸²

Thomas’s warning was one that van der Kemp took to heart. After hearing of the attack on Luzac in early 1797, the optimism expressed in his early letters about the Batavian Republic was gone. “Holland alas! will never recover its ancient Splendour,” van der Kemp lamented. The two biggest problems van der Kemp highlighted for Adams were the lack of a constitution and the threat of the French, neither of which the Dutch had any real solution for. “In their actual circumstances any constitution Seemeth to be desirable” and van der Kemp “Should have Supported it, however I might disapprove the whole.” If a constitution had been decided upon, then, maybe, van der Kemp thought “Industry and commerce would have recover’d by degrees.” But the Dutch did not show any sign of that progress because “At present they will be dictated by France.”⁸³ The Dutch fell further and further into the clutches of a foreign power, unable to direct their own future and achieve any real independence.

⁸¹ Jeremy D. Popkin, *News and Politics in the Age of Revolution: Jean Luzac’s Gazette de Leyde* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), quote 238, 215-248.

⁸² John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 6 December 1796 and 19 April 1797, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁸³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 30 December 1797, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 386, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Laid before Adams, in the fate of the Dutch and the entreaties of his friend, was a realpolitik lesson about what could happen to the United States. The reports from the Netherlands bore a warning that Adams could not ignore, and the perspective of the Dutch added a level of concern that pushed Adams toward a more militant stance against France. After the refusal of the American ambassador and the French decree on March 2, 1797 that treated American merchants as pirates, Adams called a special session of Congress.⁸⁴ He reassured the assembled men that he planned to continue to negotiate with the French, but that armed conflict was a real possibility, and America needed to address the deficiencies in the navy and in the militia.⁸⁵ To support his point, Adams submitted “dispatches from John Quincy Adams describing France’s brutal exploitation of her ally the Dutch Republic.” Some historians have argued that their inclusion was “unnecessarily provocative and served no direct purpose.”⁸⁶ The inclusion of those documents is only understandable when acknowledging Adams’s Dutch perspective. At the beginning of the speech, Adams acknowledged that America still had “abundant cause of gratitude” since “other states are desolated with foreign war or convulsed with intestine divisions.”⁸⁷ “France’s brutal exploitation of...the Dutch Republic” was not provocative, it was a warning. This, Adams was saying, was America’s future if they did not figure out a way to deal with the French.

⁸⁴ Elkins and McKittrick, 549-552.

⁸⁵ Adams, *Special Message to Congress*, 16 May 1797, Miller Center, University of Virginia <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3464>; Elkins and McKittrick, 552-553.

⁸⁶ Elkins and McKittrick, 553.

⁸⁷ Adams, *Special Message to Congress*, 16 May 1797.

More than ephemeral warnings or Federalist conspiratorial dreaming, the French threat was real, and the situation of the Dutch proved it. The Dutch were an ally, and their treatment at the hands of the French augured America's future if it too chose to ally. With the French army marching across Europe, negotiation was still the most viable option, so Adams sent an ill-fated trio to France, but he also prepared for war. He presented the American people with the choice of "support[ing] the government established by their voluntary consent and appointed by their free choice" or of "surrendering themselves to the direction of foreign and domestic factions." "For myself," Adams announced, "it is not for me to hesitate or abandon a cause in which my heart has been so long engaged."⁸⁸ All of this helps to explain why he forged ahead despite the disunity in his own cabinet and the populace at-large. The treatment of American officials and the naked demand for bribes that came to be known as the XYZ Affair exposed the American populace to the France that van der Kemp and Adams knew was there all along. Rumors of war abounded, and Adams's appeal for a military buildup was widely supported. The irony for Adams was that in the same moment that the American public had caught up with his positions on France, they ran wildly past him, and left him with little choice but to confront the French directly.⁸⁹

The Quasi-War, which only lasted from 1798 to 1800, had a significant impact on how van der Kemp and Adams assessed the future for the American republic. For

⁸⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 9 December 1794, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 378, Massachusetts Historical Society; Adams, *Special Message to Congress*, 16 May 1797.

⁸⁹ After the reveal of the XYZ dispatches in 1798, Adams had more problems preventing unwanted expansions of government. The most famous overreach of his administration were the Alien and Sedition Acts, which Adams expressed a fair amount of hesitancy over. Another gift from Congress was a military far exceeding that which Adams thought necessary to defend the republic, and the taxes that went with it. Both overreaches would eventually cost Adams the election in 1800. See Elkins and McKittrick, 590.

Adams, the war was fought to stabilize Franco-American relations and bring France to the negotiating table, which is why he abandoned the wave of anti-French support and appointed William Van Murray in 1799 to enter into discussions with the French.⁹⁰ Murray, joined by Oliver Ellsworth and William Davie, departed in November of 1799, and by the end of 1800, they had worked out the Treaty of Mortefontaine with France's First Consul and soon-to-be emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte. The treaty performed two functions, both symbolic. The first was the end of all previous agreements between France and the U.S., freeing America from the entanglements that had caused so much domestic friction in prior years.⁹¹ The second was that America had pushed back against French threats and remained standing, in the process helping to stem some of France's westward expansion.⁹²

Van der Kemp certainly felt satisfaction. In December of 1799, he gave Adams his "thanks with those of the best of this neighbourhood for the grand Sacrifices, which you made again to your country in Sending Ambassadors of peace to the French Nation – notwithstanding the disapprobation.... I knowed [sic] that Adams was not be Sway'd by

⁹⁰ Elkins and McKittrick, 643-658; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 271-273; Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 109-111.

⁹¹ Elkins and McKittrick, 689.

⁹² Admittedly, the more strategic victory in the Atlantic world over the French in this period came from the Haitian Revolution, which dramatically altered the course of diplomatic negotiations for France, but the sense of satisfaction derived from an American draw would only be overshadowed by another draw in 1812. See Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Laurent Dubois, "'Troubled Water': Rebellion and Republicanism in the Revolutionary French Caribbean," in *The Revolution in 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, edited by James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002): 291-308; Douglas R. Egerton, "The Empire of Liberty Reconsidered," in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, edited by James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002): 309-330.

frowns or Smiles.”⁹³ The French threat had not been eliminated, van der Kemp knew, but Adams had stemmed the tide of French radicalism and the possibility that Jacobinism would overrun the United States. Adams had sacrificed the presidency to do it, and though van der Kemp expressed regret that Adams would not be able to guide the nation for another term, he did not react to the possibility of a Jefferson presidency in 1800 the way he did in 1796. He did not beg to be an elector for the state of New York to ensure an Adams victory. The Revolution of 1800 did not seem to faze the Dutchman.⁹⁴ Van der Kemp’s placidity reflected the fact that the French threat that had vexed him so much in the mid-1790s was not the same threat in 1800. The French still worried him, but after 1800, van der Kemp believed that disaster would only occur if Americans let it, a confidence borne out of the Quasi-War. With that, van der Kemp turned to what he saw as slipping American morals. “I have experienced that American virtue and good Sense,” he told Adams, and it “had been overrated,” although he freely admitted that “my apprehensions originate from that I know not enough the Americans.” If they “are united

⁹³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 13 December 1799, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 396, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹⁴ There was only one pointed exchange between van der Kemp and Adams about the Jeffersonian presidency. In 1801, he asked Adams, “Do you apprehend an imminent danger under our present administration?” To which Adams replied, “of the present Administration I shall Say nothing, at present.” See John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp 30 January 1800, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 23 August 1800, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 398, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 1 September 1800, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 398, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 20 June 1801, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 401, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 13 July 1801, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

– if they will be independent, I care neither Bonaparte nor old England...but – if divided – a less force than either of them could master, would Subjugate them.”⁹⁵

After 1800, van der Kemp’s shifting focus was best represented by the completion of his *A Sketch on the Achaian Republic*. Van der Kemp had been working on the sketch in light of the French crisis and it encapsulated his long-standing concern about the French, his new fear of the deteriorating American condition, and his consolidated faith in the ability of balanced government. One item that compelled him to work on the sketch in earnest was his reading of a short work on the Achaean Republic, published in 1664, which the author composed “as a warning for the Dutch Republic.” Van der Kemp had the same designs for his sketch, but his warnings were not for the Dutch, but for Americans. “No people in my opinion can give us Americans So many instruction lessons...as the Dutch, this too you know better than I,” he penned Adams.⁹⁶ Adams concurred, writing, “The Dutch History as you Say should be instructive to us.”⁹⁷ The *Sketch of the Achaian Republic* was van der Kemp’s largest undertaking, and judging by how often he sent it out to his correspondents, one of his favorites.⁹⁸ It was the

⁹⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 23 August 1800, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 398, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 2 September 1800, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 398, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 September 1801, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 401, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 18 January 1809, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 407, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹⁷ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 16 February 1809, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁹⁸ Even as late as 1824, van der Kemp was sending the piece to his correspondents asking for opinions and critiques, and arguing that it could help Americans better understand their own legacy. See Francis Adrian

culmination of his learning during the 1790s, both on the frontier and in the Atlantic world.

The choice of the Achaeans was no mistake. First, whether Greek or Roman, all Americans found inspiration and elucidation in the classical age.⁹⁹ The more direct connection was that Americans had already encountered the Achaeans. In the Federalist No. 18, Madison used the republic to argue why a weak confederation of states was insufficient for a lasting government.¹⁰⁰ As opposed to Madison, van der Kemp blamed the fall of Achaea not on deficiencies with confederation, but on the inability to stop political factions from tearing the country apart and allowing a foreign usurper to take away their independence. Judging solely by the chapter list, “Civil dissensions and Foreign Intrigues” were the main causes of the Achaeans’ demise. Of the fourteen letters, van der Kemp devoted six of them to discuss that topic, a space that occupied over half of the sketch’s 252 pages. “As Soon the Nation is divided in factions,” van der Kemp wrote, it “cannot long repel the insidious assaults on her Liberty and Independence.”¹⁰¹

The reason that Achaea had its independence ransacked was its lack of a balanced government. In fact, van der Kemp explained, a closer examination of the Achaean

van der Kemp to John Quincy Adams, 12 September 1824, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 466, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹⁹ Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*.

¹⁰⁰ James Madison, “Federalist No. 18,” in *The Federalist Papers*, edited by Clinton Rossiter (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 118-123.

¹⁰¹ Van der Kemp, *A Sketch of the Achaian Republic in Letters to Col John Linclae by Junuis Brutus*, Oneida County Historical Society; MSS.1; VDK.1; F.A. Van Der Kemp Papers – History of the Achaian Republic; HAR1.1.

political structure revealed that “their general Government was highly Democratic only in appearance – and approach in reality to Some of the worst Species of Aristocracy.” The solution, of course, was a constitution that preserved balance through a separation of powers. No surprise given van der Kemp’s evolving position on government, but van der Kemp placed equal danger for corruption in all of the branches. The multitude, van der Kemp argued, are “fond of popular government” but always had to balance “betwixt Aristocracy and Democracy.” Essentially, the people were always caught in the middle of two masters, with any choice giving one power greater control than the other. “Of what an invaluable worth” van der Kemp concluded, “is a well constituted government, were the respective powers are balanced with Such exactness, that – when any unforeseen monstrous excrescencies appears they may be parred [sic] of without endangering the life of the Constitution.”¹⁰²

Since the sketch was to be a lesson for Americans, van der Kemp boldly started the sketch with a prefatory comment: “If you Spurn this warning – as frantic, and continue to dream of peace – without danger, and trample ungratefully upon blessings...then you Shall accelerate your Doom then even a Washington could not Save you from destruction.” Van der Kemp urged his audience to recognize their situation: “You will allow that it is not an imaginary danger – it is imminent – the naked Sword hangs over our heads on a hair.” “No Nation whatever, I dare assert, ancient or modern could vie with the Romans for the palm of victory in this career.” That is “provided you will not urge an exception in favour of the French. Too well instructed in this Roman School. Their Royal Masters were once famous for their finished workmanship in

¹⁰² Van der Kemp, *Sketch of the Achaian Republic*.

destroying the domestic peace of their Allies – in overturning their government.” Begun in the midst of the European crisis in the 1790s, the sketch not only reflected van der Kemp’s political transformation but also the paralyzing fear he felt about the French. It was the warning of a man who saw his former homeland lost to history, a history that too closely echoed that of the Achaeans. Unable to establish a proper constitution and slowly succumbing to the power of a foreign power who stripped the once glorious republic of its cherished and vaunted independence, the Dutch were the Achaeans:

Say not Sir! that I repeat a trite remark already Submitted to your view: is it my fault that Similar event require the repetition of the Same observation? And can it too often too loud be cried in the ears of them who Stand, which – notwithstanding its importance – is not attended too? Must you not excuse it in me, who Saw his native country fall thro Similar indiscretions, and who has the Same fears for his adoptive by Similar inconsiderate concessions.

All it took for the Achaeans and the Dutch was “One Single, in appearance indifferent concession to a potent imperious Ally.” That concession “obliges Soon to another – and another, till at last a tame compliance is replaced by a Servile Submission.”¹⁰³

The *Sketch of the Achaian Republick* reflected the intensity with which van der Kemp had approached the 1790s. He had not lost any of the passion that made him one of the radical Dutch Patriots, but the man in 1800 was not the same as the man in 1787. Nor was his situation the same. The frontier and the French had convinced van der Kemp that more authority and structure were needed in the federal government, and that democracy had to be balanced with order. “Do not blame me, as betraying my old Republican principles or that my zeal for the cause of Liberty is cooled, he warned his readers. “I glory yet in the name of an Independent free man and bare yet as violent a

¹⁰³ Van der Kemp, *Sketch of the Achaian Republick*.

hatred towards tyranny, in what garb She may appear, as in 1776.” Van der Kemp never stopped believing that “Genuine Democratic principles...are essential ingredients of a well-Regulated Government. It may with truth be asserted to be its foundation.” “[B]ut,” and here was the evolution, “it requires a well-ordained Superstructure.” The democracy van der Kemp had witnessed throughout the 1790s was not, according to him, true democracy. What van der Kemp learned in the defeat of the Dutch Patriots, in his dealings with frontiersmen, in nearly losing his independence a second time, was that structure mattered far more than labels. As he told his audience, “[O]ur civil and Political Liberty may be established, and preserved pure and undefiled from all encroachments under a well-regulated – and duely [sic] balanced monarchial government.”¹⁰⁴ Here was the epitome of his Adamsian shift: an acceptance that monarchy, if constitutional, provided a legitimate protection for liberty. It was not that van der Kemp preferred a monarch, because he did not, but that liberty could exist in that system. The irony, of course, was that in 1814, the Dutch achieved independence from France and established a constitutional monarchy under William VI and the Orange family. When asked by Abigail Adams about his opinions on the new government, van der Kemp replied: “I would prefer any monarchical form of Government, did I reside there – than to remain a Subject of the French empire – even if Bonaparte was out the question.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Van der Kemp, *Sketch of the Achaian Republick*.

¹⁰⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Abigail Adams, 15 March 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 417, Massachusetts Historical Society.

So how did van der Kemp go from one of the most outspoken democrats of the Dutch Patriot Revolt to toasting the King of the Netherlands? Part of the answer is that van der Kemp reflected a larger trend of Americans moving away from radical political solutions. As Seth Cotlar has shown, the radicalism of the 1790s had, by the election of 1800, been subdued under the umbrella of party politics. Parties “tamed the chaos of contending interests and opinions by channeling them” into elections and delegated the more radical elements of popular sovereignty to the fringes.¹⁰⁶ In other words, the democrats of the early 1790s were not the democrats of the 1800s. In many ways, van der Kemp’s political education in American republicanism followed a similar track. He experienced the disorderliness of the frontier in the face of an imminent threat from France, which forged a connection between the two. The answer to both was to find a balance, to find order for the disorder. In the post-1800 world, the intensification of party politics funneled the voice of the people funneled through their political affiliations, providing a structure to American democracy. The overall process of politics in the early 1800s suggests that van der Kemp’s solution of balance was not terribly far off from what occurred.

Van der Kemp was not the Dutch radical he had been in 1787, and it is wrong to treat him as such. Importantly, in his eyes, America had attained the goals of the Dutch Patriots. Living in America, his goal was no longer to achieve, but to secure. But in immigrating, he did not shed his Netherlandic ties, and it was his unique Dutch perspective that framed the events of the 1790s, for both himself and prominent friends such as John Adams. France had already robbed the Dutch of their independence and

¹⁰⁶ Cotlar, quote 208.

seemed likely to do the same to America. French invasion coupled with factionalism threatened to tear the American republic asunder. The image of America van der Kemp had cultivated was fading before his eyes. In the face of these fears, van der Kemp found a solution in a well-balanced national government grounded in a constitution. It was an American solution to a problem that had long plagued the Dutchman.

CHAPTER 5

RELIGION IN THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC AND THE CONTINUED PROBLEMS OF DISSENT

Upon immigrating to the United States from the Netherlands in 1788, Francis Adrian van der Kemp carried with him letters of introduction to an assortment of American luminaries. He also carried with him a stern warning from his closest American friend, John Adams. While van der Kemp prepared to depart the Netherlands, Adams informed the Dutchman that he needed to apprise himself of the political and religious terrain of the United States. “There are difficulties to be encountered in every Exchange of Country,” Adams warned, “and accidents may always happen.”¹ Despite only knowing van der Kemp for seven years, Adams knew enough about van der Kemp’s political and religious beliefs to cause him unease. Supportive of van der Kemp’s opposition of religious and political authorities in the Dutch Republic, Adams now feared how those qualities would translate in the new American republic.

Politically, Adams had more confidence in van der Kemp’s ability to adjust to the new landscape. As van der Kemp’s ideas about governance were copacetic to Adams’s own understanding of republicanism, Adams did not express any suggestion to the Dutchman outside of taking time to better grasp the situation in the United States. When it came to matters of religion, however, Adams repeatedly cautioned his friend to take care and be circumspect about expressing his beliefs. In particular, Adams worried that

¹ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 1 December 1786, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 6 January 1788, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

van der Kemp's predilection for religious controversy and obstinacy toward religious authority would be his undoing. He cautioned his friend, "to be prudent in regard of Theological matters in America – at your arrival."²

Prudence was never van der Kemp's strength. From his immigration in 1788 to roughly 1815, van der Kemp cultivated a network of religious dissidents. Van der Kemp's baseline conviction in a benevolent God never wavered, but his correspondence and discussions led him to adopt more defined positions on specific doctrinal issues such as baptism, communion, and the divinity of Jesus; positions that placed him well outside the orthodox beliefs of most Americans. Van der Kemp's antitrinitarianism, for example, while embryonic in the Netherlands, became a prominent feature of his beliefs after his contact with New England's Unitarians.³ Van der Kemp's antitrinitarianism also became the most publicly controversial feature of his beliefs after moving to America.

Yet it was his opposition to religious institutions and the power they wielded that brought about the most opposition. In a country searching for stabilizing cultural institutions, van der Kemp's attacks on churches presented, to some, a threat to the future of the United States. Adams's warning in 1788 proved prescient for the constant hostility van der Kemp faced as he attempted to implement his religious vision in the United States. While he tended to confine his extremist views—a kind of religious anarchism—to private letters, van der Kemp did fashion his vision into a religious society. Those

² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 January 1790, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 373, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³ Joris van Eijnatten notes that van der Kemp, as early as 1775, was working on antitrinitarian treatises. See *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces: Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), n. 234, p. 280. For his part, van der Kemp later claimed that he had not read any Unitarian writings while in the Netherlands, but only really began to explore the doctrine after moving to the United States. See Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Lincklaen, 8 April 1816, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

efforts, especially the history of van der Kemp's short-lived United Protestant Religious Society, speak to the complicated nature of religious tolerance in America and the limited space for heterodox ideologies in the early republic. What made van der Kemp's transition to an American religious environment so maddening was that he believed it was going to be so smooth. When he crossed the Atlantic, van der Kemp thought he left the indeterminate nature of Dutch religious freedom, of a public church and private faiths, for an American environment that guaranteed unlimited expression.

To his credit, the differences between the two countries were significant enough to make van der Kemp's initial optimism plausible. The most important difference came in the role of the church. From the start of the Revolution through the ratification of the Constitution, the American polity moved inexorably toward disestablishment. This occurred in a stroke at the federal level, with the First Amendment's religious establishment clause. At the state level, the trend was also toward disestablishment, although the mechanism and pace varied from state to state. Religious affiliation in the United States would be voluntary, in and of itself satisfying many of van der Kemp's prerequisites.⁴

Where Americans decided to break with state churches and obligatory attendance, the Dutch decided to have their cake and eat as many pieces as they possibly could all at the same time. Since the Union of Utrecht guaranteed liberty of conscience for all, an

⁴ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Mark A. Noll, *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002); Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Daniel L. Dreisbach, ed., *Religion and Politics in the Early Republic: Jasper Adams and the Church-State Debate* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

outright state church was impossible. Nonetheless, the Dutch placated the most powerful church, the Reformed Church, by giving it a favored status. The dizzying arrangement provided space for a multitude of religious expressions, but that space was either private—Catholic services, for example, were often led in homes or clandestine churches known as *schuilkerks*—or publicly narrowed. Toleration existed, but it was more often a begrudging concession to necessity than a progressive tenet.⁵ The United States also hosted a multiplicity of religions, but unlike the Netherlands, there was no Reformed Church that possessed enough power to hedge religious freedom.⁶ Pluralism in the Netherlands forced daily accommodations from Reformed officials and made toleration a necessity. In the United States, pluralism meant that each denomination had an implicit opportunity to protect a broad definition of religious freedom.

⁵ Van Eijnatten, *Liberty and Concord*; Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided By Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop, eds., *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) Wiebe Bergsma, “Church, State and People,” in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, edited by Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For a non-Dutch reference for tolerance as a reluctant act, see Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

⁶ In fact, there was a Reformed Church in the United States, but it had to compete for adherents the same as Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. For histories of the Reformed Church in America, see Randall H. Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978); Firth Haring Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson: Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of Revivals* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000); James W. Van Hoeven, ed., *Piety and Patriotism: Bicentennial Studies of the Reformed Church in America, 1776-1976* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976); James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984). Elton J. Bruins, “Americanization in Reformed Religious Life,” (175-90); James D. Bratt, “The Reformed Churches and Acculturation,” (191-208); and Herbert J. Brinks, “Religious Continuities in Europe and the New World,” (209-23); all three articles appear in *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement, and Cultural Change*, edited by Robert P. Swierenga (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 1985. For two accounts on Dutch identity, both in America and the Netherlands, see Judith Richardson, “The Ghosting of the Hudson Valley Dutch,” (87-107); Willem Frijhoff, “Dutchness in Fact and Fiction,” (327-58); both in *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America, 1609-2009*, edited by Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt, and Annette Stott (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

Another element that separated the American environment from the Dutch was the legacy of their respective religious histories. The United Provinces were forged in the midst of the battles of the Protestant Reformation. Dutch independence in 1579 was inseparable from a Calvinist victory over the evils of Catholicism. Further, as Calvinists, the Dutch viewed their existence as proof of God's favor and their status as part of the elect. The success of the Dutch Revolt also reflected God's judgment and disapproval of the Catholic Church.⁷ During the American Revolution, religion certainly played a significant role in how Americans viewed the conflict and defended the righteousness of their revolt. Despite the role religion played, Americans did not experience a reformation of religious principles.⁸ Americans did not dramatically shift from one distinctive form of Christianity to another. Independence did not parallel the rise of one specific confession and the rejection of another. American independence could be, and often was, couched as strictly political.

⁷ Kaplan, *Divided By Faith*; Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 68-89. For a more straightforward political narrative of the Dutch Revolt, see Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhart, eds., *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Willem Frijhoff, *Embodied Belief: Ten Essays on Religious Culture in Dutch History* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2002).

⁸ Ruth Block, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 194-224. The rise of evangelicalism as a prominent mode of faith also increased the connection between the Revolution and millennial thought, but, importantly, did not fundamentally shift religious identification, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, eds., *The Bible in America: Essay in Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978). If anything, American religions had to secure themselves to the new state for fear of being ostracized. See Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

As van der Kemp found, however, while differences existed between the two countries, there were far more similarities than he would have liked. Namely, the struggle to define religious freedom and the limits placed on certain radical expressions of faith was reminiscent of the fight van der Kemp waged in the Dutch Republic.⁹ The governmental commitment to disestablishment did not mean an end to religious restriction. Instead, by dissociating state power from religious matters, the American state-builders created a vacuum that was quickly filled by growing and ambitious denominations. As religious choice entered the realm of individual choice, it also became exposed to the vagaries of public opinion and the persuasion of local populations. As in the Netherlands, religious freedom in the United States varied according to location, and was largely wrought on the level of towns and communities.¹⁰ Where van der Kemp pushed for a system of faith based solely on an individual's understanding of the Bible, rejecting any effort on the part of clergy or church officials to determine belief

⁹ American historians of religion often overstate the distinctiveness of the American situation. Pluralism, republicanism, and tolerance are often pointed to for the themes that single out American history, but all of those features can also be found in the Dutch Republic. See Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 1-5; Michael J. Wintle, *Pillars of Piety: Religion in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century, 1813-1901* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1987). For the American context, see Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*; Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). New York especially receives attention for its diversity and the connection between that diversity and religious tolerance. See Richard W. Pointer, *Protestant Pluralism and the New York Experience: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Religious Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); John Webb Pratt, *Religion, Politics, and Diversity: The Church-State Theme in New York History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion*.

¹⁰ At the outset, Oldenbarneveld did not have an official church, according to a survey completed by Reverend John Taylor, the majority of inhabitants were of the Presbyterian faith and that Church quickly formed a congregation. See Reverend John Taylor, "Journal of Rev. John Taylor's Missionary Tour through the Mohawk and Black River Countries, in 1802," in *The Documentary History of the State of New-York; Arranged Under Direction of the Hon. Christopher Morgan, Secretary of State*. Vol. III, edited by E. B. O'Callaghan (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1849): 1105-1150, 1114-15.

in any fashion, even the most democratic denominations in America resisted the elimination of all church authority.

The lessons of concord that van der Kemp learned in the Dutch Republic proved to be the most useful thing he brought across the Atlantic. Although America and the Netherlands had markedly different independence experiences, the disagreements over religious issues remained similar and their histories provide insight into the application of religious tolerance. The most striking difference between van der Kemp's religious activism in the Netherlands and the United States was how far his religious position moved away from his political one. Both ideologies adapted and changed to the new American environment, but whereas van der Kemp became more conservative toward political issues, his religious position continued along a liberal spectrum. The religious beliefs he adopted in Amsterdam in the 1770s were remarkably similar to the ones he repeated to Adams and Jefferson in the 1820s. Concurrently, the opposition to his beliefs in the Netherlands was similar to the opposition he faced in the United States. These were issues of faith and of eternity. They were also issues of the institutionalization of churches, and the role churches played in people's daily lives; issues that dated back to the Reformation.¹¹

What made van der Kemp's initial challenges to church authority so potent was that they occurred at a time when many Americans worried about the success of the experiment started by the American Revolution and recent ratification of the constitution.

¹¹ Catherine O'Donnell, "John Carroll and the Origins of an American Catholic Church, 1783-1815," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (January 2011): 101-126. For a broader look at Atlantic religions, see Linda Gregerson and Susan Juster, eds., *Empires of God: Religious Encounters in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Where republicanism stressed virtue and responsibility, moral behaviors usually assigned to religious instructions, it also provided an argument that attacked traditional authority and vested natural rights in the people.¹² The flurry of religious institutions and societies after the Revolution revealed the impact of this line of thinking and the importance of religion in the early republic. If anything, religious expression became more widespread after the Revolution than before.¹³ But the erosion of authority also argued that if people could create institutions, they had the concurrent power to destroy them as they saw fit. The attacks on authority that had been commonplace during the Revolution took on a different light in the American republic. No event played a bigger role in diminishing radicalism in America than the French Revolution. For many Christian Americans, the French Revolution, and the violence and disorder that occurred, represented the effects of atheism and skepticism. Eliminating irreligion from American minds, these Christians argued, was the only way to ensure that America did not become like the French.¹⁴

What occurred in the 1790s and early 1800s in the United States was a conscious attempt by Christian Americans to define the parameters of religious expression. By forging a connection between violence and disorder to specific religious ideas, these adherents argued that some notions and beliefs were un-American, and in fact threatened

¹² For a broad look at the effects of republicanism on traditional authorities, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1991). For religious examples, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (New York: Norton, 1982); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*.

¹³ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*. Butler argues that “the story of religion in America after 1700 is one of Christian ascension rather than declension,” *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 2. See also Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

the stability of the new nation. The tribulations of Thomas Paine and the negative reception of *The Age of Reason* in the United States offered proof of how seriously Americans took irreligion.¹⁵ Atheism was clearly out of bounds, but by 1800, so was the type of biblical criticism advocated by van der Kemp and reflected in the rationalism of Enlightenment thinking. Skepticism in any form implied a lack of faith not only in God, but in America as well. Not surprisingly, the acceptable definition of religion closely hewed to the creeds and rituals of the major American denominations, and those denominations continued to represent orthodox faith in the early American republic.¹⁶

What separated van der Kemp from orthodox believers was doctrinal as much as it was his challenge to their institutional authority. Van der Kemp's more explicit expression of antitrinitarian beliefs marked the most significant change in his ideology from the Netherlands to the United States. While he represented a far smaller and clearly

¹⁵ Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*; Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 1999); Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda, eds., *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). In *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, Butler argues that, "As the state's authority in religion faded, denominational authority expanded." He goes on to state that "By the 1850s some Christians bitterly demanded that the law recognize American's Christian and Protestant identity once again," 268. Even Hatch, despite his democratization thesis, notes a trend of hierarchy in most of the tradition he studies. Hatch cites the 1814 Baptist convention in Philadelphia "as a watershed even in their history," where elected leaders attempted to "centralize the amorphous collection of churches and associations," 93, 95. For the Methodists, Hatch admits, "It is easy to miss the democratic character of the early republic's insurgent religious movements. The Methodists, after all retained power in a structured hierarchy under the control of bishops," 9. The Christian movement, he notes, under the auspice of the Disciples of Christ, "grew into a major denomination only by practicing the kind of organization the reformers had once hoped to stamp out," 80. For Hatch cites, see *Democratization of American Christianity*.

more Dutch contingent, van der Kemp was part of a significant immigration of religious dissidents into the United States after the American Revolution. In his survey of English, Scottish, and Irish radicals, Michael Durey argues that the main religious critique brought across the Atlantic by this assortment of radicals was a directed attack on Trinitarian Christianity, which the radicals connected with the civil governments they opposed.¹⁷ Some feared that deism, at best, and atheism, at worst, would come to be standard for the American religious environment and that the American people would be left in a spiritual vacuum. Churches doubled down on protecting their interests against what they saw as the rising tide of irreligion, and took great pains to stamp out whatever they categorized as a threat to religious stability and the health of religious institutions. Their relative success resulted in religious doubt and the questioning of religious institutions becoming synonymous with irreligion and un-Americanness.¹⁸

What van der Kemp helps reveal is some of the ways this process took place. That van der Kemp practiced his faith in New York and not Massachusetts mattered a great deal. New York did not hold on to the vestiges of an established church as did Massachusetts, and was, by most accounts, among the most religiously diverse states in America. The efforts to control the definition of American religion and subsequently stem the perceived irreligious tide did not come top down from the state. Instead it came from the efforts of local denominations to limit liberal expressions of faith. In the aftermath of disestablishment, local denominations, capitalizing on previous hierarchical

¹⁷ Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 9.

¹⁸ Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*; Schlereth.

organization, took on the role of policing the religious behavior of their communities. Whether through social pressure or denying equal access to religious spaces, these religious groups sought to not only recruit adherents to their own causes, but also to prevent the expansion of anything they considered to be irreligious. What van der Kemp found was that, as in the Netherlands, the reality of pluralism created space for him to practice his liberal and heterodox beliefs, but that opponents to his religious views circumscribed that space wherever they could. Van der Kemp's commitment to liberal religious caused him to run afoul of local denominations, and made him question whether America was the beacon of tolerance it claimed to be.

Van der Kemp's first exposure to the Janus-faced nature of the American religious environment came shortly after he settled in Oldenbarneveld, New York. In 1803, van der Kemp created the United Protestant Religious Society (UPRS), a religious society that embodied his belief in rational, biblical learning. Its central elements were: No recognized leader or authority, the centrality of the Bible, the openness for anyone to address the society, and, most importantly, the ability for members to ask questions, challenge the speaker, and form their own individual ideas about religion.¹⁹ The UPRS was the purest incarnation of van der Kemp's religious ideology, and it only lasted for three years. By 1806, there was a push for a more structured religious presence in the

¹⁹ Descriptions of the UPRS services can be found in Harry F. Jackson, *Scholar in the Wilderness: Francis Adrian Van der Kemp* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 149; Charles Graves, *A Century of Village Unitarianism: Being a History of the Reformed Church (Unitarian) Church of Trenton, Oneida County, N.Y., 1803-1903* (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis Co., 1904), 3-11; Isaac B. Peirce, *Isaac B. Peirce Memoir*, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records, Unnumbered Box, 1858. Jackson points out that "The probability is that the Bible was read, commentaries were made occasionally by Van der Kemp himself, and itinerant preachers such as Reverend Taylor addressed them," Jackson, 149. The chronicle of Peirce, who joined the community in 1815, cites that "The first settled minister in this town was Rev. Fish a Trinitarian and Calvinist, and yet in his support all the Unitarians united, and continued their support to him while he remained in the town, which was a term of several years."

town, and the activities of the UPRS had been subsumed under the aegis of the Reformed Christian Church (RCC). The UPRS still operated in an official capacity as a religious society, but for intents and purposes, the UPRS had become the RCC. When, in 1811, the RCC ceased having a minister, van der Kemp attempted to revive the UPRS in its place, but he met challenges to his leadership and an overwhelming desire to let the society die and merge with the local Presbyterian Church. The short history of the UPRS, from 1803 to 1811, reveals the tensions that van der Kemp faced in getting his religious society off the ground and maintaining a space for liberal religion in the community. The adaptations that van der Kemp made to the organization and to his own practice of faith point to the reluctance of his fellow citizens to participate in an organization so amorphous and so heterodox.

The origins of the UPRS mirror the origins of the village of Oldenbarneveld. Oldenbarneveld had been crafted out of the land holdings of the Holland Land Company, and the initial inhabitants were largely from the Netherlands. The town, in fact, was named after Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, an infamous religious martyr in Dutch history who had been beheaded as the result of his vocal opposition to the Reformed Church and support for religious freedom in the Netherlands. Van der Kemp and the other town founders placed a high premium on the freedom of religious expression, and because they lived in an area dominated by Presbyterians, they sought to create a religious organization that stood opposed to that orthodox faith. The UPRS was founded by people “of different religious opinions, views and prejudices; yet they united under the above style as Protestants desirous of promoting by mutual co-operation good order, morality, and religion in their new relation to each other as neighbors and fellow settlers in a

wilderness.”²⁰ Important as well was that van der Kemp and the others were able to establish a liberal religious presence before the deluge of Yankee immigration from New England.²¹ The influx of New Englanders brought with it an inundation of New England culture, including the dominant presence of Congregational and Presbyterian Churches. With the union of Presbyterian and Congregational Churches in 1801, no group gained more from the religious environment of New York than did the Presbyterians. But the UPRS benefitted from disestablishment and religious statutes passed in 1784 that gave any religious group the right to organize.²² New York provided an environment in which the UPRS would have the right to succeed, and the creation of the UPRS is itself a testament to that openness. But as an organization designed to combat the pressure of orthodoxy, the Yankee immigration into central New York posed a unique problem for the UPRS. The transition from the UPRS to the RCC came in part from desires from within the group to create a more formal organization to stand opposed to the rising orthodox population.

The residents of Oldenbarneveld first met to discuss organizing a society in 1803. At first, the meeting was held by “a respectable number of the inhabitants of Oldenbarneveld & its environs,” but by September, the small group felt confident enough to issue the call to a broader portion of the community. On September 19, 1803, a group of forty-five men signed on to “be recorded and that he be considered as having agreed to

²⁰ Peirce, *Memoir*.

²¹ Beginning after the American Revolution but not reaching a peak until the 1820s and the building of the Erie Canal, New York’s population boom, registering 340,120 in 1790 and exploding to 1,372,812 by 1820, predominately came from New England. See David M. Ellis et al., *A History of New York State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 187-193.

²² Ellis et al., 195-196; Curtis D. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 17.

unite in the promotion and Support of the Society.” The “purpose of establishing a Religious Society” in Oldenbarneveld was that the men were “feeling anxious to aid every exertion made for Religious Instruction.” On October 22, 1803, in accordance with the acts passed by the New York legislature for the “Incorporation of Religious Societies,” the UPRS was incorporated in the town of Trenton in Oneida County.²³ Van der Kemp, whose name had been at the head of every document constituting the religious society, was voted unanimously, along with Jacob Hochstrasser, to “hold the Election for Trustees to the Society, and be the returning Officers.” The election reflected the pluralism of the UPRS. Two of the three trustees were Presbyterian. The first minister who had settled in the village, Reverend Peter Fish, was Presbyterian, but the UPRS frequently invited him to deliver sermons and “continued their support to him while he remained in the town, which was a term of several years.”²⁴ The latitudinarianism of the UPRS marked the services during these initial years, and it was the very type of society that van der Kemp had wanted.

The initial organization of the UPRS was short-lived. While the incorporation of the UPRS might have satisfied the county clerk and New York state law, it was not enough for many of the residents of Oldenbarneveld. Where van der Kemp wanted fluidity and a rotation of lecturers, most of the members wanted an established minister. In 1805, the residents of Oldenbarneveld decided that they wanted a church and began a concerted effort to create such an institution. That decision came after the visit of

²³ “Proposal for the Establishing a Religious Society in Oldenbarneveld,” 19 September 1803, Loose Papers, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; Incorporation of the United Protestant Religious Society, 22 October 1803, Miscellaneous Church Records, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records. The Incorporation was registered with Oneida County, and is located in Clerk of the County’s Office, *Book A of Societies*, 25 June 1804, page 30.

²⁴ Peirce, *Memoir*; Graves, 9-12; Jackson, 148-150.

Reverend John Sherman, who was in town visiting his brother-in-law, Joshua Storrs, a signee of the proposal to organize the UPRS. Not only was Sherman known in the community, he was also a proponent of liberal religion in a land of Presbyterians. Sherman was a Trinitarian and strict Calvinist until the late 1790s when he became a Unitarian. Instead of seeking a more liberal congregation, Sherman remained as minister of the Calvinist First Church in Mansfield, Connecticut, although he had an unofficial invitation to relocate to Oldenbarneveld.²⁵

During his visit, Sherman accepted an invitation from the UPRS to deliver a sermon. The members of the UPRS were so impressed with Sherman's candor and abilities that by August of 1805, they formed a committee to send Sherman a call to become the minister in Oldenbarneveld. Van der Kemp took charge and penned the letter to Sherman. In it, van der Kemp outlined the brief history of the UPRS and the desire of the community to commit themselves to some form of public worship. Acknowledging the social benefits of worship, van der Kemp noted without a religious presence, the community "felt a dreary waster, in that respect in our Situation, in these new Settlements."²⁶ He went on to mention that the design of the UPRS directly came from the multitude of faiths represented by the inhabitants of the village, but that because most of the residents had simply "imbued from our infantile years the religious opinions and prejudices of our fathers and teachers our Situation became more critical indeed, with a

²⁵ Jackson, 149-150; Graves, 16-17; Adam G. Mappa to John Sherman, 22 February 1805, Miscellaneous Church Records, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

²⁶ United Protestant Religious Society to John Sherman, 11 August 1805, Loose Papers, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records. Though van der Kemp's name does not appear in the letter, it is clearly in his handwriting.

view to agree in the choice of a worthy minister.”²⁷ Because the UPRS was such a unique hodgepodge of faiths and biblical understandings, van der Kemp felt that the desire for a minister simply for the sake of a minister was in error. Not only did van der Kemp feel that a minister might diminish the liberality of the organization, but there was also the logical concern of what kind of minister would best function with the UPRS. With the arrival of Sherman, van der Kemp found a minister compatible with the UPRS’s liberal ideology. As he told Sherman, “You arrived among us Rev Sir! and all our jarring opinions coincided in that Single wish, to obtain you, if possible, for our Minister.”²⁸

Though van der Kemp had faith in Sherman’s abilities, he made sure that Sherman knew what type of congregation was offering him a job. The heterodoxy of the UPRS made some of the more orthodox members uncomfortable, and van der Kemp’s prominent role in the society and now in the call for a minister meant that dissent would continue to be a dominant tradition. Van der Kemp wanted to make sure that Sherman would represent all of the faiths present in the UPRS. In the letter to Sherman, van der Kemp laid out the principles that the society was founded upon. He wrote, “[A]s Protestant Christians we hold fast, that the Sacred Scriptures are the only rule of our faith and conduct – without intervention of any human authority whatsoever upon this basis, upon these principles we desire, that you would accept our call.”²⁹ Religious tolerance, in name and practice, lay at the heart of the organization as it forged concord among

²⁷ UPRS to Sherman, 11 August 1805.

²⁸ UPRS to Sherman, 11 August 1805. See Graves, 13-14.

²⁹ UPRS to Sherman, 11 August 1805.

disparate beliefs. Orthodox religionists practiced alongside Universalists, Presbyterians alongside Unitarians.

The UPRS could not operate without a commitment to concord amongst its participants, and therein was van der Kemp's ultimate goal. If everyone respected the right of conscience, if no one deemed their ideas the only legitimate practice and recognized the possibility of numerous paths to God, then the UPRS would break down denominational barriers and return believers to a more simplified version of Christianity. But only openness and a devotion to free expression would make that viable. As van der Kemp told Sherman, "Not that one of us was weak enough to flatter himself, that you did exactly agree with his principles, not even with those, which he was wont to consider, your openness convinced us that you did no more wish to conceal your opinions, which you deemed Scriptural, than to obtrude these upon us." If Sherman was committed to these principles, then van der Kemp and the rest of the committee hoped "that in every opportune Season you Shall instruct us and our children – make them from their infancy acquainted with the value of living under the Gospel-dispensation."³⁰

When the residents of Oldenbarneveld invited Sherman to become their first minister, the strained relationship between Sherman and Mansfield was not his only controversy. In the midst of the negotiation over the Oldenbarneveld post, Sherman published *One God in One Person Only*, a lengthy critique of trinitarianism.³¹ William B. Sprague, in his *Annals of the American Pulpit*, claimed that Sherman's treatise was

³⁰ UPRS to Sherman, 11 August 1805.

³¹ John Sherman, *One God in One Person Only: and Jesus Christ a Being Distinct from God, Dependent Upon Him for his Existence, and His Various Powers; Maintained and Defended* (Worcester: Isaiah Thomas, 1805).

“the first formal and elaborate defense of Unitarianism that ever appeared in New England.”³² As a result, the publication aroused extensive debate, denunciations of Unitarianism, and stringent defenses of Calvinism. One of the harshest criticisms came from Reverend Daniel Dow and his *Familiar Letters*, which attacked both the beliefs and the personality of Sherman. Dow wrote to Sherman, “Dear Sir, if you would find any good that you have ever done, you must look back to the time, when you professed and preached those sentiments, which you now call errors; and if you would ever do any more good in the world, you must re-adopt those sentiments which you now discard.” Dow continued that although he rejoiced when Sherman denounced deism and joined the ranks of the trinitarians, he now regretted Sherman’s decision to once again advocate deism. Completely ignoring the legitimacy of Unitarianism, Dow remarked, “Though Satan hath greatly the advantage over you, yet we can still pray for you.”³³

Dow’s treatise came after Sherman had already become minister of the Reformed Christian Church, and van der Kemp quickly came to the defense of the new minister. Van der Kemp outlined for Dow the reasons the residents of Oldenbarneveld chose Sherman as their minister, finishing with the tenets of Sherman’s new congregation.³⁴

³² William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit; or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of the Various Denominations, From the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Five*, Vol. VIII: Unitarian Congregational (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865), 327. I came across this quote via Jackson, 153.

³³ Daniel Dow, *Familiar Letters to the Rev. John Sherman, Once Pastor of a Church in Mansfield: in Particular Reference to His Late Anti-Trinitarian Treatise* (Hartford: Lincoln and Gleason, 1806), 13, 49-50.

³⁴ Not surprisingly, Van der Kemp matched the vitriol found in Dow’s letter, informing Reverend Dow “Your voluntary confession ‘that you was surprised to know no more after you had read Mr. SHERMAN’ treatise to the end, than you did when you first began it,’ bears, at least, against you, an evidence strong as holy write, that, humanly speaking, there remains but little hope for your recovery from a mental disease, of which the last stage is far more advanced: otherwise you might have learned from Mr. SHERMAN candor and modesty,” Francis van der Kemp, *A Wreath for Rev. Daniel Dow, Pastor of a Church in Thompson*,

The dominant thrust throughout van der Kemp's response was not any specific defense of Unitarianism, but the fact that the people of Oldenbarneveld, many of whom did not agree with any of Sherman's beliefs, collectively and unanimously elected Sherman. He revealed that Sherman was open about his newfound belief in Unitarianism, and the members of the UPRS nevertheless requested that Sherman offer a guest lecture while in town. After receiving his message, the members of the society "scrutinized their own opinions" and came to their own conclusions about Unitarianism. Van der Kemp bluntly asked Dow, "Did you *never* examine, thoroughly, the arguments which support that religion, upon which all our hopes of immortal blessings are founded?"³⁵ Reminiscent of his own struggle while in the Netherlands over the true meaning of faith, van der Kemp appreciated Sherman's skepticism and desire to seek out answers. He was quick to criticize Dow for not pursuing a similar path to find his own meaning in faith and religion. Finally, he informed Dow that despite his prediction that Sherman would be ostracized in the religious community, Sherman "has arrived safe among us, and...has accepted an invitation of our religious society."³⁶

Oldenbarneveld had their minister, and now the members of the UPRS, who had long expressed disfavor with van der Kemp's nebulous structure, wanted a church to accompany their new reverend. Sherman accepted the position in February of 1806, and

Connecticut: On the Publication of his Familiar Letters, in Answer to the Rev. John Sherman's Treatise of One God in One Person Only, &c (Utica: Merrell and Seward, 1806), 5. The original *Wreath for Rev. Daniel Dow* was published anonymously, and revealed in a later letter to Adams. See Sprague, 327; Jackson, 153. For the Adams letter, see John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 5 February 1813, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁵ Van der Kemp, *Wreath for Rev. Daniel Dow*, 4, 7-8, original emphasis.

³⁶ Van der Kemp, *Wreath for Rev. Daniel Dow*, 19.

the UPRS almost immediately formed a committee to organize a church. On March 8, 1806, the “Committee for Organizing the Church” reported to the UPRS at large that a model had been decided upon, and the committee issued the articles to the rest of the UPRS. Upon the report, fifteen members “joined together and became Members of the Church agreeably to the Articles of Organization as reported by the said Committee.”³⁷ As Graves points out that “Though written in language which has quite an ‘orthodox’ sound, these ‘Articles of Association’ are remarkable for the careful manner in which they confer and guard the absolute freedom of the individual in religious matters.”³⁸ In every way, the articles of association replicated the ethos of the UPRS. The central tenet of the Reformed Christian Church, and the one most reflective of van der Kemp’s views, was Article 3. It read:

Liberty of conscience shall be preserved inviolate—Every member shall be maintained in his right of free enquiry into the doctrines of scripture; in publishing what he believes the scriptures to contain, and in practicing according to his understanding of his duty. This liberty shall not be abridged, as to his understanding and practice respecting the ceremonies, ordience [sic] or positive institutions of christianity.³⁹

One of the last articles set out the process of admission to the Church: “any person wishing to become a member, shall make known his desire to the consistor, the minister, elders and deacons, who shall, if the applicant be a person of good moral character, refer

³⁷ Proceedings of a number of Members of the Society of the United Protestant Religious Society of Trenton, 8 March 1806, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

³⁸ Graves, 22.

³⁹ Van der Kemp, *Wreath for Rev. Daniel Dow*, 21-22. The articles can also be found in “Chronicle of the Reformed Christian Church in Trenton,” Records of the Reformed Christian Church of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Oldenbarneveld Records. See also Graves, 23 and Jackson, 151.

his case for decision to the church at large.”⁴⁰ The last article issued the name of the new organization: the Reformed Christian Church (RCC).

While the RCC had replaced the UPRS as the main institution for liberal religion in Oldenbarneveld, the UPRS continued to function as a religious entity. There was little separation between the two groups, but it was the UPRS, not the RCC, that was incorporated with the state, and thus possessed the legal identity, so the UPRS continued to meet and issue proceedings. The distinction between the two groups would become essential in 1810. The RCC started out with a strong showing of support from the community and for the installation of Sherman, but as time went on, and as the Embargo of 1807 began to weigh on the local community, it became difficult to maintain Sherman’s pay. By 1808, Sherman sent a letter that if the situation was not remedied, he would not be able to continue as minister of the RCC.⁴¹ The committee met to find a solution to the problem, and decided to pay Sherman “in Cash and Produce of a merchantable and saleable kind.”⁴² The solution only worked briefly, and on February 6, 1810, Sherman submitted his six-month notice. Van der Kemp reported Sherman’s resignation to the rest of the Trustees, but assured them that “The members of the Church and Society of both Patent’s have resolved in a general meeting – to continue their religious meetings every Sabbath once a day at 11 o clock.” Van der Kemp informed the

⁴⁰ Van der Kemp, *Wreath for Rev. Daniel Dow*, 22.

⁴¹ John Sherman to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, Ephraim Perkins, and Benjamin Brayton, n.d., Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records. While the Sherman letter did not include a date, the initial response sent from the committee was dated in 1808. See Proceedings of a Meeting of the United Protestant Religious Society, 18 November 1808, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

⁴² Statement of Payment of John Sherman, United Protestant Religious Society, 1808, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

group: “Fr. Adr. van der Kemp John Mappa and Canfield Coe having taken upon them the charge of reading a Sermon. Luther Storrs and Jacob Hovy to Superintend the Singing. The Trustees have been further qualified...to provide that the Lord’s Supper be administered twice a year.”⁴³ Van der Kemp made the decision to continue religious services official at a combined meeting of the UPRS and RCC on March 4, 1810.⁴⁴ The Church essentially reverted to the UPRS.

The unanimity the congregation had expressed in March of 1810 about continuing services under the UPRS became a point of contention by November of that year. By November of 1811, unanimity was nonexistent in Oldenbarneveld. Part of the reason the society languished was the resignation of Sherman, but a more significant reason came from the opposition the organization had faced from the outset. The same members who had originally pushed van der Kemp toward the comfortable structure of a church now pressed him to end the society and join with the local Presbyterian Church for religious services. Van der Kemp refused to subsume the Society under the Presbyterian Church and its religious creeds. But the voices of dissent within the Society joined with a chorus of discord that had been issued from the Presbyterian Church since the Society’s founding. The Society’s and Church’s commitment to “liberal principles” and “liberty of conscience in all positive rites” had caused the “clergy in neighboring towns and settlements” to become “alarmed, and excited the Presbyterians in the town to oppose.”

It “was deemed a sin to hold any terms of intercourse or peace with the Reformed

⁴³ Trustees of the United Protestant Religious Society to the Congregation, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records. Copied in the Trustees’ report was Sherman’s letter of resignation, 6 February 1810.

⁴⁴ Joint Meeting of the United Protestant Religious Society and the Reformed Christian Church, 4 March 1810, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

Christian Church.”⁴⁵ During Sherman’s administration of the Church, residents of Holland Patent, another village in the town of Trenton, organized to join the RCC and have Sherman preach there part of the time with Oldenbarneveld being the dominant location. In Holland Patent, the members of the RCC shared a meetinghouse with the local, more orthodox, congregations. The shared space “soon became a source of great uneasiness and contention” and “Eventually the Unitarians were deprived of the school house to hold their meetings in.”⁴⁶ The members in Oldenbarneveld had more security than those in Holland Patent, but after the resignation of Sherman, the pressure to conform to orthodoxy compounded the difficulties of continuing the Society.

By November of 1810, the meetings of the UPRS languished to such a degree that it became difficult to even elect trustees. Van der Kemp continued to organize and hold meetings since it was “agreeable to Public Notice and in conformity to Law,” but at a meeting held on November 15 to choose a new Trustee of the UPRS, no one showed up. The brevity of the note and the sparseness of the announcement indicate van der Kemp’s frustration with his neighbors. Van der Kemp was the only one to sign the note, and he did so as “one of the Trustees.” His description of the meeting, in its entirety, was: “As no person either of the Church or Society was present the vacancy could not be filled up – So that there remain only two Trustees for the ensuing year.”⁴⁷ The next election was held on March 2, 1811, and only van der Kemp and fellow trustee Benjamin Brayton were present. They resolved to meet again in May for another election since the tenure of

⁴⁵ Peirce, *Memoir*.

⁴⁶ Peirce, *Memoir*; Graves, 32-33.

⁴⁷ Meeting to Determine a Trustee for the United Protestant Religious Society, 15 November 1810, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

the third trustee, Thomas Hicks, expired in June. The May meeting went as well as the March one, as it was not until June, and the expiration of Hicks's service, that another trustee, Ephraim Perkins, was elected. Unfortunately, that rousing success was curbed by the subsequent resignation of Brayton as trustee, which forced yet another election.⁴⁸

The never-ending cycle of elections wore on the members of the Society, and by October there were discussions of ending the Society altogether. Van der Kemp and Perkins, the only remaining Trustees held the next election on October 5. In yet another brief note, van der Kemp outlined the results of the meeting: "In consequence of resolutions passed Oct 5th 1811 by the proprietors of this house the election of a trustee to the united religious Protestant Society as warned to be held Oct 6th 1811 is deferred to a day without date."⁴⁹ The "consequence of resolutions passed" indicated that a number of people were present at this meeting and the deferment of the election to an unspecified time points to the growing call from those members of the UPRS intent on dissolving the organization.

Van der Kemp confirmed as much the next day when he wrote to his fellow trustee, Perkins. "After your departure last night," van der Kemp wrote, "I weighed coolly your observations which induced you to prorogue the meeting for the election of a Trustee – to an indefinite day and agree with you more fully, when I consider, after the

⁴⁸ Meeting of the Trustees of the United Protestant Religious Society, 2 March 1811, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; Benjamin Brayton Announcement of Trustee Seat for Ephraim Perkins, 12 June 1811, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

⁴⁹ Announcement of the United Protestant Religious Society, 5 October 1811, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

lawless transactions of last night.”⁵⁰ What appears to be the point of contention for van der Kemp was that in order to continue the Society legally, there had to be three elected trustees at all times. Van der Kemp viewed the indifference to the legal ramifications of not electing a trustee in the same light as the efforts to dissolve the society since “By leaving the Society – as we both expressed is – to die away its natural death.” Van der Kemp refused to let this measure stand. He told Perkins, “But Sir! As I can not in my actual Situation effect any good So it is equally impossible to the few or the many – to compell [sic] me, to unite with them in mischief – and this I Should deem my case by keeping a Torpid Silence.”⁵¹

Remaining silent was not possible for van der Kemp, and since he felt that “thro our inaction I consider myself, as effectually cooperating to its death,” the only solution he saw was to resign from his position as trustee and remove himself from directing the UPRS. Van der Kemp assumed that some of the inaction toward the Society had as much to do with his leadership as it did with opposition to the Society in principle, and he hoped that “by my resignation – as the only obnoxious person” those who opposed him would agree to carry on the Society. He told Perkins, “You are yet in your Strenght [sic] – in good repute – with considerable influence thro you uniform character – you might perhaps Succeed – when my name affords a pretext to oppose.”⁵² Ironically, through his resignation, van der Kemp received equal doses of the items he wanted for the Society and those he steadfastly refused to support. At a meeting conducted by Perkins on

⁵⁰ Van der Kemp to Ephraim Perkins, 6 October 1811, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

⁵¹ Van der Kemp to Ephraim Perkins, 6 October 1811.

⁵² Van der Kemp to Ephraim Perkins, 6 October 1811.

November 30, 1811, two new trustees were voted to fill the two current vacancies. The UPRS was now in compliance with the legal requirements of a religious society. At the same meeting, Perkins reported, “Voted also that the Trustees of sd Society be a committee to confer with the first Presbyterian society in Trenton – on the expediency & propriety of having a minister together.”⁵³

Without van der Kemp present to block the move, those members who felt the necessity of a more organized structure succeeded in moving toward Presbyterianism. One report noted that “A considerable number of the supporters of Mr. Sherman joined themselves to the Presbyterians; some removed to other parts; and this state of things continued between four and five years.”⁵⁴ For his part, van der Kemp practiced his faith in the only place he felt was fully accepting of his views: his home. As he told a minister from New England, “I continue to worship with my family in my house – and two or three – usually – sometimes four or five – do as best – since the house of public meeting was taken from us.”⁵⁵ The small contingent that supported van der Kemp more or less functioned as the UPRS until 1814.

Though van der Kemp never found the success he desired with the UPRS, he nevertheless maintained an active religious life. While his displays of piety had been relegated to his personal home, he continued to seek out opinions on religious matters. To alleviate his frustrations with the local religious environment, van der Kemp sought

⁵³ Minutes of the United Protestant Religious Society, 30 November 1811, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

⁵⁴ Peirce, *Memoir*.

⁵⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Abiel Abbot, 8 November 1812, Gratz Collection, Box 281 Folder 76, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In a letter to Adams in 1813, van der Kemp notes that he continued to practice faith in his own home. See, Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 20 June 1813, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 415, Massachusetts Historical Society.

out likeminded religionists to exchange ideas and debate theological matters. Adams forever remained van der Kemp's most consistent sparring partner, but van der Kemp also began to reach out to Boston Unitarians. Since an antitrinitarian ideology similar to Unitarianism was the significant American addition to his faith system and van der Kemp's relationship with Adams could secure him audience to Unitarians in Boston, correspondence with prominent Unitarian thinkers was a logical addition to van der Kemp's intellectual circle. Pondering the divinity of Jesus and carving out a national space for dissenting religious ideas sustained van der Kemp during the inactive years of religious life in Oldenbarneveld.

As van der Kemp had found out with the fate of the UPRS, in the precarious American religious environment, antitrinitarians faced an uphill battle. To attack the divinity of Jesus was to attack a fundamental principal of American religion. In a typical response to antitrinitarian writings, Reverend Daniel Dow told his opponent, "Though Satan hath greatly the advantage over you, yet we can still pray for you."⁵⁶ This line of thinking equated religious questioning with sin. The center of antitrinitarian thought in the United States was Harvard University, where in 1805 Henry Ware, a Unitarian, was selected as the Hollis Professor of Divinity. The selection of Ware ignited what became known as the "Unitarian controversy," a battle between traditional, Congregationalists and a growing number of liberal religionists who supported Unitarian beliefs. The Congregationalists largely abandoned Harvard to the Unitarians as they set up their own

⁵⁶ Daniel Dow, *Familiar Letters to the Rev. John Sherman, Once Pastor of a Church in Mansfield: in Particular Reference to His Late Anti-Trinitarian Treatise* (Hartford: Lincoln and Gleason, 1806), 13, 49-50.

orthodox divinity school at nearby Andover, Massachusetts.⁵⁷ What set Unitarians apart was their emphasis on human capability and reasoning. They believed in common sense reasoning. God had made religion so that humans could understand it, and even provided them instructions in the sacred scriptures.⁵⁸ What led many religious skeptics, including van der Kemp, to assert that Jesus was not of the Godhead was that they could find no justification for it in the scriptures.

It is important, however, not to simply conflate antitrinitarianism with Unitarianism. Unitarianism was a blending of several different strands of religious thought in the early American republic. As Conrad Wright points out, Unitarians combined features of “Arminianism, supernatural rationalism, and anti-Trinitarianism.” They believed that man had the ability to discern sin and salvation, and believed that God gave them the ability to do so. Finally, in a feature that did not emerge until after the Revolution, Unitarians added the determination that Jesus was a superior human being, but was not a part of God.⁵⁹ Unitarians were but one branch of a larger move away from rigid Calvinism and the “innate bent of all men...toward sin” and toward a more open Arminianism, which awarded human ability to determine right and wrong.⁶⁰ As the most vocal and formalized group of liberal religionists, Unitarians emerged as a serious threat to orthodox churches.

⁵⁷ Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 4-5; Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 3.

⁵⁸ Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*.

⁵⁹ Wright, 3-6; Howe, 4-7.

⁶⁰ Quote from Wright, 3.

Unitarians found a sympathetic advocate in van der Kemp. Much about the faith appealed to his religious sensibilities: the emphasis on common sense reasoning, its support of Arminianism over Calvinism, its rejection of doctrinal creeds, and its faith in human ability to divine the Christian revelation. The issue of antitrinitarianism, however, was not something van der Kemp found in his research while at the seminary in Amsterdam. It was his contact with the Harvard Unitarians, and reading the writings of Unitarians, that convinced van der Kemp that the divinity of Jesus was not a foregone conclusion of Christian faith. As he admitted to a fellow Dutchman, while in the Netherlands he “never in that time studied polemical Divinity – never had ready any Unitarian writings – the Scriptures were plain. Since I was in this western part – I perused nearly all, what is written on the this subject and do not regret it.”⁶¹ Van der Kemp still explored Trinitarian thought, but maintained, “Tho it can not satisfy me, it may do so others – and truth must bear investigation.”⁶²

In the western woods of New York, Unitarianism was neither a widespread religious option nor a popular one. Charles Graves proclaimed that van der Kemp and his friend and fellow Patriot, Adam Mappa, beat back orthodox religion with their determination and prolific influence. “Calvinism,” he wrote, “was establishing itself in the various settlements roundabout” and “The reason it failed to get a foothold in Oldenbarneveld was due most to the determination of Messrs. Mappa and Van der Kemp

⁶¹ Van der Kemp to Lincklaen, 8 April 1816.

⁶² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Ch. & G. Webster, 27 May 1812, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

that religious life in the village should be kept free from the tyranny of any creed.”⁶³

Orthodoxy was the most common religious form in western New York, and the adoption of liberal faith took a significant push. Van der Kemp was one of the key citizens of the village that provided support for implementation of the Unitarian faith from the start.

As opposed to Boston or Philadelphia, the western woods were a lonely place for an antitrinitarian, so van der Kemp utilized his connections with Boston Unitarians as a means to reassure the residents of Oldenbarneveld. In 1812, van der Kemp struck up an extended correspondence with one of the eminent Harvard Unitarians, Andrews Norton. Norton, “dubbed ‘the Unitarian pope,’” was the Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature at Harvard, and one of Unitarian’s most ardent defenders.⁶⁴ The initial matter that possessed Norton to reach out to van der Kemp was the mundane issue of Norton’s friend, Charles Eliot, beginning a journey to New York. Norton wanted to put him in contact with the notable people in the region. Norton had discovered that van der Kemp was a fellow advocate of rational religion and was interested in discovering the state of “rational religion” in van der Kemp’s part of the country. Norton thought Eliot could do the same for van der Kemp about the state of Unitarianism in New England.⁶⁵ This began a correspondence that lasted until a year before van der Kemp’s death in 1829.

The most surprising feature of the dialogue between van der Kemp and Norton was how much separated the two. Despite sharing a number of the same religious convictions, it became clear that van der Kemp never solely identified with the Unitarian

⁶³ Graves, 3.

⁶⁴ Howe, 13.

⁶⁵ Andrews Norton to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 17 May 1812, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

faith. He defended the right of Unitarians in the UPRS and RCC to practice faith as they desired, and never shied away from supporting the spread of Unitarianism and rational religion throughout the country. Van der Kemp felt privileged to communicate his ideas to someone as esteemed as Norton, but that never meant he accepted all of Norton's assumptions. They carried on a congenial correspondence, but of the two, it was van der Kemp who pushed the boundaries of what Norton felt to be suitable dissent. Some of the issues that came between them were simply differing interpretations of Biblical passages, but at the heart of their disagreements was van der Kemp's persistent distaste of congregationalism. At Harvard, Norton was in the midst of establishing Unitarianism as the dominant mode of religious expression in the area, and van der Kemp's refusal to grant the supremacy of Unitarians over other religionists frustrated Norton. Though the conversations never degenerated into vitriol, the more that van der Kemp harped on denominations as the root of religious apathy in the United States the less Norton entertained editing or printing van der Kemp's religious pamphlets.

At the beginning of their interactions, van der Kemp and Norton covered an impressive amount of Unitarian thought. In exchanging materials, they touch upon the major Unitarian figures in the United States and England, as well as the opinions of the opponents of Unitarianism and their attacks. Van der Kemp, of course, injected some of his Dutch theologians into the conversation, even sending Norton his copy of his mentor Oosterbaan's writings.⁶⁶ Van der Kemp and Norton exchanged books and notes on the

⁶⁶ The Unitarians appearing in the combined writings is rather remarkable, and includes Joseph Buckminster, John Kirkland, William Channing, and James Freeman. Van der Kemp and Andrews Norton also freely discussed the counterarguments of Jedidiah Morse. For a particular case, see Andrews Norton to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 21 December 1816, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical

merits of Unitarianism, always with an eye to establishing more congregations of Unitarians throughout the United States. They compared notes on the sermons of Unitarian ministers and other spokesmen; when James Freeman went to Baltimore to speak in front of “a number of very respectable gentlemen,” Norton noted that he did so on the promise that a number of them desired to form a “society of Unitarian Christians.”⁶⁷

But the topic that sustained their correspondence was doctrinal. Both men, throughout the exchanges, hoped for the spread of rational religion and the application of biblical criticism in matters of faith. Van der Kemp informed Norton that analysis of the bible “is the cornerstone of Sound Theology.” It and “the Study of Ecclesiastical Law – by which the throne of Hierarchy is sapped and mined and clerical pretensions and power humbled in the dust – are two powerful engines to destroy the usurped powers of heaven and replaced Spiritual Slavery with the Liberty of God’s Children.”⁶⁸ Though Norton avoided van der Kemp’s heightened imagery, he “rejoiced to believe – that in our country, individual religion will finally prevail; error and superstition being unsupported by human laws or human force; and not having in their power to bribe men to their service by the laws of an established church.” He continued that “Christianity will hereafter appear among us in her native loveliness and sublimity; and that we shall cease to worship in her stead those images the work of their own hands wh [sic] men have set

Society; and Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 28 July 1812, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁶⁷ Norton to van der Kemp, 21 December 1816.

⁶⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 15 October 1813, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

up in her temples.”⁶⁹ Biblical criticism and rational religion, for both van der Kemp and Norton, would save religion in the United States because both men fervently believed that once people encountered the scriptures, they would be convinced not only of Christianity, but of the particular brand being articulated by the two men.

Van der Kemp and Norton, however, pursued different ends. Norton wanted people to believe in Unitarianism because he thought it to be the true form of Christian religion. If they did not come to the faith, if they did not take personal responsibility for their faith, they would have no chance at salvation. Van der Kemp wanted people to believe in rational faith because he thought it was the best method of Christian practice. He did not automatically exclude the other pathways to God. Norton and van der Kemp went back and forth over van der Kemp’s willingness to accept other creeds and doctrines of faith. While not pointing to Unitarianism specifically, van der Kemp alerted Norton, “I supposed, that the Zealous Calvinists in Holland had reached the ackme [sic] of extravagance – but I find more zeal, than they pretended too, though invested with power, is at this side of the Atlantic.” He feared that religious training in the United States was “crammed down, till the Spirit of inquiry in them was appalled and totally Subdued, and they ready to Swear – in all – what the Professor proposed! What tenets for Protestant Christians in the most enlightened country on earth.”⁷⁰

The separation between the two men became clearer in their discussions of van der Kemp’s sermons. Hoping to spread his ideology beyond his epistolary network, van

⁶⁹ Norton to van der Kemp, 21 December 1816.

⁷⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 20 May 1813, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

der Kemp sent a series of sermons to Norton for publication. He thought that the lectures “may do good – if they promote a candid an able discussion of their Strenght [sic].”⁷¹

When Norton began to waver about publishing the lectures, van der Kemp implored him to correct any errors he found in the text. As “truth is our only aim,” van der Kemp informed Norton, “it matters not by whom it is brought to light.” Norton refused, contending that he had “been unable to read the Lectures on Baptism with such attention as I wished to do.”⁷² Norton quickly moved on, but the tension intimates Norton’s larger issue with van der Kemp’s ideology.

Examining the extant lectures of van der Kemp’s, it is clear that the radical measures advocated by van der Kemp in his sermons did not sit well with the Boston Unitarian.⁷³ The importance for understanding van der Kemp’s theology, however, does not rest in the specific arguments he was trying to make, but rather in how he presented the information and what he expected of his listeners. Throughout all of his sermons, van der Kemp was quick to point out that he offered only his personal understanding of the scriptures. He wanted, and hoped, that all of his listeners would examine the scriptures for themselves. Only then, van der Kemp thought, could they actually make a rational decision about the role of Christianity in their lives. While van der Kemp could come across rather harshly, asserting “that Baptism is necessary for every Christian” and

⁷¹ Van der Kemp to Norton, 15 October 1813.

⁷² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 26 July 1814, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society; Andrews Norton to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 19 January 1814, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society. Van der Kemp was even open to Norton bringing in another Unitarian theologian to debate about the nature of baptism, but Norton rejected the idea.

⁷³ A whole series of van der Kemp’s sermons are available at the Oneida Country Historical Society. See esp. “Lecture on the Continued Obligation of Baptism,” “Lecture on the usefulness of Baptism,” and “Lecture on the Subject of Baptism,” F. A. van der Kemp Papers, Oneida County Historical Society.

declaring “infant baptism, this superstitious conception,” those statements were always balanced with a warning “to explore my assertions at the infallible touchstone of reason and the S. S. and adopt or reject my opinion – after an impartial Scrutiny.”⁷⁴ Always conscious of his own winding journey to the Christian revelation, van der Kemp felt that he had no true authority to tell anyone else what they should believe. He presented an argument, and if others found the argument to be convincing, then that specific tenet was to be followed.

It was the idea that van der Kemp, as a preacher and religious official, had no true authority over his listeners that made van der Kemp’s dissent exasperating for Norton and a more serious threat to religious institutions in the early American republic. If, as Harry Stout claims, “America’s God was a jealous God,” denominations provided a temporal partner to the jealousy. As the state moved away from authority in religious matters and as denominations struggled to take up the mantle of religious guidance, rites such as communion and baptism that delineated between religious groups took on added importance.⁷⁵ Van der Kemp’s dissent on the role and indeed the right of a church or church official to deny salvation based on these rituals threatened the power denominations claimed in the era of religious disestablishment. In regard to his opinion on baptism, van der Kemp made it clear that it was not “indispensable for Salvation” and that the unbaptized have the same access to heaven as anyone else. “I love them as my

⁷⁴ Lec.1-14 “Lecture on the Continued Obligation of Baptism,” 2, 6, 1.

⁷⁵ Harry S. Stout, “Rhetoric and Reality in the Early Republic: The Case of the Federalist Clergy,” in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s*, edited by Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): 62-76, 71. For the continued importance of religious rites on a local level that also examines a locality near van der Kemp, see Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 23-26, 44-6; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 66-75.

Brethren,” he wrote, “ and deem them more respectable – nearer the entrance of the Kingdom of Heavens, than they, who have been baptized – even at an age of discretion because their parents and ancestors had given them this example, because their Parents guardians or teachers deemed it necessary.”⁷⁶

Baptism was the most frequent theme of van der Kemp’s sermons, but his opinion on who qualified for access to communion put him once again in a distinctive category—one that completely undermined any role of institutional Christianity or the proclaimed role of clergy in religious matters. Van der Kemp was a man who lived his entire life in societies in which multiple confessions—ranging from non-existent to orthodox—found harmony in daily life. Only when religious officials, churches, or creeds came into play did they find differences amongst one another. He asked, “On what pretext can anyone be repelled from the table of the Lord?” and he answered that no one could be denied access to the Lord’s Supper, even heading off the obvious critique:

But may some heavenly minded Soul say – and I shall not pass the objection, without considering it – if not one Christian may be excluded to participate in the celebration of the supper of our Lord then men of a suspicious of a bad character – Slaves of Sin may approach the Lords table – may share in the communion eat of the bread and drink of the cup. It is so M. H. [my hearers] even they have as perfect right to make use of the Lord’s Supper as he who stands justified in his own sight. Both stand and fall to their Lord.⁷⁷

It was denominations that erected these boundaries to God in an effort to gain power and prestige; it had little to do with Christian practice. As van der Kemp asked Adams, “[O]ur minds were So much in unison in religious principles – why Should any one hate

⁷⁶ Lec.1-14, 3.

⁷⁷ Lec.1-27 “The Scripture Doctrine of Baptism with Three Preliminary Lectures on the use of the S. S. and one on the duties of a Religious Life,” F. A. van der Kemp Papers, Oneida County Historical Society, 8.

another for that which ought to be their bond of union – it if was not lust of dominion?”⁷⁸

Van der Kemp argued that “the various Sects in Christendom placed, in their absurd theological crudities, So many Stumbling blocks in the way.” “How despicably would the Religion preached by the Divine Jesus promulgated by his Apostles be, if a few ceremonies could expiate the most heinous guilt, and reconcile the deep-depraved creature with a spotless, infinite perfect Being!”⁷⁹ If “ye fall short” van der Kemp informed his audience, “cover your faults by a double share of charity.” Without “charity the sincerest observance of ceremonial precept shall nothing avail you – charity is the bond of perfection – the summary of the gospel – the Christian characteristic.”⁸⁰

The damning critique van der Kemp provided in his lectures made him an enemy to anyone who had a vested interest in the business of souls. Even Norton, someone who agreed with much of van der Kemp’s thinking, distanced himself from van der Kemp’s denunciations of religious institutions and his anarchic beliefs regarding communion, vacillating on publishing van der Kemp’s lectures until the matter was dropped entirely. Boston Unitarianism was still in the midst of its opposition to Congregationalism, and printing a theology that starkly denied the righteousness of Unitarianism undermined Norton’s and other Unitarians’ case against orthodoxy. Van der Kemp and Norton agreed about many things, but when van der Kemp denied temporal authority to Unitarian clergy and churches, Norton changed the subject.

⁷⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 21 September 1813, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 416, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷⁹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, “Lecture on John V. 39,” 15 April 1804, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁸⁰ Lec. 1-15, 14.

Though Norton proved to be reluctant when it came to some of van der Kemp's more radical notions, there was someone who was a kindred spirit and welcome listener to van der Kemp's ideas: Thomas Jefferson. The man from Monticello possessed a maddening inconsistency in his writings on religion, offering fodder for any side of a debate of his religious beliefs. There is, however, a general consensus that Jefferson was religious, albeit in a different way than his contemporaries were willing to accept.⁸¹ He believed in God and reason in equal quantities, arguing that God granted man the ability to defend religion. He wrote, "That to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself, is the sum of religion."⁸² He did not, however, believe in the divinity of Jesus. Based on his own studies and his interaction with prominent Unitarians, namely Joseph Priestley, Jefferson adopted the idea that Jesus was human and not the Messiah.⁸³

Given Jefferson's beliefs, van der Kemp quickly found much to like. The first, and most important, element of their respective religious ideologies was that they were their respective ideologies and theirs alone. Jefferson argued that faith was a private matter, and hesitated to put his ideas into print or to speak publicly about matters of faith. Jefferson crafted his understanding of religion, of God, and of Jesus based on intense study of the Bible and a fervent belief in his own capacity for understanding. Van der

⁸¹ See, for example, Charles B. Sanford, *The Religious Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984); Edwin S. Gaustad, *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996); Paul K. Conkin, "The Religious Pilgrimage of Thomas Jefferson," in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, edited by Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia): 19-49; Eugene R. Sheridan, *Jefferson and Religion* (Monticello Monograph Series: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1998).

⁸² Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Waterhouse, 26 June 1822, quoted in Richard Samuelson, "Jefferson and Religion: Private Belief, Public Policy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, edited by Frank Shuffelton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 143-154, 147.

⁸³ Conkin provides a good discussion of Jefferson's denial of Jesus as the Christ, 34-35.

Kemp preached nearly the same process in his statement of faith to the Baptists in the Netherlands, and, like Jefferson, maintained this commitment to individualized faith for the rest of his life. Both criticized the role of clergy in the religious process, viewing them as too often an obstruction rather than an intermediary. Neither van der Kemp nor Jefferson was willing to accept direction for their beliefs nor dictate their beliefs to others, assuming that anyone who approached the Bible with rational inquiry would arrive at similar conclusions. They both disdained the sectarianism of denominations interfering with what they referred to as the “genuine and simple religion of Jesus.”⁸⁴

Doctrinally, Jefferson and van der Kemp also held remarkably similar ideas. Everything either man believed derived directly from an unwavering commitment to a benevolent God and a promised afterlife. They denied what Paul K. Conkin has termed the “Christian superstructure,” or the role of Jesus as the Messiah. According to them, Jesus was a great moral reformer, the first amongst men, but was not associated with the Godhead.⁸⁵ In a statement that could have been written by either man, van der Kemp wrote Jefferson, “I am persuaded of the existence of one all wise, powerful and a good Being, who can not possess any thing in common with what we call matter – much less any of the passions or attributes of frail mortals.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Thomas Jefferson to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 9 July 1820, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 9: Letters from Thomas Jefferson.

⁸⁵ Conkin, 20-21.

⁸⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Thomas Jefferson, 7 March 1825, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib025307>.

When Jefferson and van der Kemp first began to discuss religion in depth, Jefferson did not know who van der Kemp was.⁸⁷ In 1812, van der Kemp contacted Jefferson and asked him to provide notes on an article the Dutchman had written about Jefferson's debates with the French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. By 1816 the correspondence became consistent enough that Jefferson desired to know about the Dutchman. On August 1, 1816, Jefferson wrote to John Adams, "There is a Mr. Vanderkemp of N.Y. a correspondent I believe of yours, with whom I have exchanged some letters, without knowing who he is. Will you tell me?" Jefferson received a detailed description from Adams, who affirmed the worth of van der Kemp's correspondence. "A Gentleman here asked my Opinion of him," Adams wrote. "My Answer was, he is a *Mountain of Salt* of the Earth."⁸⁸ By the end of 1816, Adams confirmed to van der Kemp, "I believe I must endorse you over, or rather bequeath you as a Legacy to The Philosopher of Monticello" "Of the Evangelical Jesus The Philosopher of Monticello knows as much as you know, and has studied it with as critical Attention."⁸⁹

Even in his correspondence with others, van der Kemp found himself defending Jefferson's views and status as a proponent of religious freedom. In an exchange with

⁸⁷ Jefferson and van der Kemp had a brief interaction during Jefferson's tenure as Secretary of State when van der Kemp appealed to the Virginian to aid him in compelling the Netherlands to release his lands that had been confiscated during the Patriot Revolt. Under orders from George Washington, Jefferson denied van der Kemp's request.

⁸⁸ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 1 August 1816 and John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 9 August 1816, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, edited by Lester J. Cappon, Volume II, 1812-1826 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 483-487.

⁸⁹ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 20 November 1816, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Norton, van der Kemp told him “that Jefferson was the first, who taught that man was responsible to God alone for his religious opinions.” The disparagements “against Jefferson – the threadbare and pityful sarcasm – of one or twenty Gods” did nothing for the advancement of liberal religion and in fact hurt the cause of those who risked alienating such a powerful and persuasive ally.⁹⁰ What van der Kemp referred to was a comment Jefferson made in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Addressing the nature of religion in Virginia, Jefferson noted that religious freedom and the liberty of conscience had not yet been achieved, since heterodox thoughts were still punishable by law. State laws, he famously maintained, should cover only acts that did harm. “But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”⁹¹ In the heated campaign against Adams during the Election of 1800, the comment became the crux of a Federalist attack on Jefferson’s religious beliefs. Over a hundred pamphlets accusing Jefferson of atheism appeared during the campaign.⁹²

Frustrated by the calumnies, and equally frustrated by the inaccurate use of the Gospels to defend the Federalist argument, Jefferson began reaching out to some of his close friends, indicating a desire to express his long-held views on Christianity. Benjamin Rush, who seems to have taken it as a personal mission to convert Jefferson to a more acceptable form of Christianity, pressed Jefferson to complete the promised work.

⁹⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 12 May 1814, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁹¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, edited by William Peden (New York: Norton, 1954), 159.

⁹² Sanford, 1.

Jefferson warned him that the views he wanted to articulate would not satisfy those seeking to turn Jefferson into an orthodox Christian and a supporter of denominational churches. Rush insisted that was not his goal; rather, he explained, he wished for Jefferson to recognize the utility of proper religion in the cause of republicanism. Rush's entreaties, mixed with the tumult of the 1800 election and the social disruption that had been caused by partisanship, pushed Jefferson to corral his ranging views and organize them for an essay. But it was a pamphlet from one of Jefferson's mentors, Joseph Priestley, setting forth a comparison between Jesus and Socrates, that led Jefferson to pen his "Syllabus of an Estimate of the doctrines of Jesus compared with those of others."⁹³

While Jefferson and van der Kemp discussed the universal merits of religion in their correspondence from 1812 to Jefferson's death in 1826, in the early portion of their exchanges, it was the "Syllabus" that dominated the conversation. At issue was van der Kemp's desire to publish the syllabus. The discussion of the syllabus and the negotiation over the proper measures to take in publishing it reveal much about both men and about the status of radical religion in the early American republic. Van der Kemp first broached the subject with Jefferson in March of 1816, but his fascination with the syllabus dates to 1812, when on a visit to Quincy, Adams showed the Dutchman the "lately received...Syllabus" and "favoured me at last with its perusal for a few

⁹³ For an extended discussion of the events that led to the writing of the Syllabus, see Eugene R. Sheridan, "Introduction," in *Jefferson's Extracts From the Gospels: 'The Philosophy of Jesus' and 'The Life and Morals of Jesus,'* The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Second Series, edited by Dickinson W. Adams (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 12-23; Conkin, 35-36. For the discussion between Rush and Jefferson, see the holdings at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. In an extended correspondence between van der Kemp and Jefferson, Jefferson copied his letter to Rush for van der Kemp to read and attached the "Syllabus" along with it. Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 21 April 1803, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 9: Letters from Thomas Jefferson.

moments.” “I was Surprised,” van der Kemp wrote to Jefferson, “with this new point of view and deemed it deserving a full consideration. I requested a copy; this was peremptorly [sic] refused, as he was not at liberty to keep one for himself, and was resolved not to violate this Sacred truth.” Thus, van der Kemp wrote to Jefferson in 1816: “I now Solicit, to grant me the favour of the Same Sight...under what restrictions – you may please to command.” Van der Kemp planned two things for the “Syllabus.” The first was to include it in a biography of Jesus that he was working on, and the second was to “Send it to my Correspondents in England – for insertion in the Month. Rev. when it Shall open the way for its more full and impartial discussion.”⁹⁴ In his response, Jefferson approved the use of the “Syllabus” for both of van der Kemp’s projects, but he warned the Dutchman to use caution “lest it should get out in connection with my name; as I was unwilling to draw on myself a swarm of insects, who buz [sic] is more disquieting than their bite.” The only condition Jefferson gave van der Kemp for publishing the “Syllabus” was “that no possibility shall be admitted of my name being even intimated with the publication.”⁹⁵

Even in 1816, Jefferson was still wary of publicly attaching his name to the ideas espoused in the document for fear of reprisal. Van der Kemp, citing his own experience with tribunals and governmental investigations during his time in the Netherlands, commiserated with Jefferson and assured him that all of the proper precautions were

⁹⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Thomas Jefferson, 24 March 1816, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/mss/mtj.mtjbib022391>.

⁹⁵ Thomas Jefferson to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 25 April 1816, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 9: Letters from Thomas Jefferson.

taken in sending the document to England. Jefferson had little hope that the “Syllabus” would receive a fair treatment in England, but noted, “We know it could not here. For athlo’ we have freedom of religious opinion by law, we are yet under the inquisition of public opinion.”⁹⁶ Van der Kemp remained optimistic about its reception in England, but fully agreed with Jefferson that the “Syllabus” had no chance for publication in the United States. “The Liberty of the press is pretty unlimited there – and in it nothing is ridiculed.” Citing Jefferson’s worries, van der Kemp agreed, “Here it would be foolishness to try it, as bigotry and intolerance, tho they might not Succeed in persecuting the publication openly, would decry him at least an Atheist, and endeavour to expose him to the insults of a fanatic Rabble.” “When this I intend Something for the Public – I Send it to my friends in England,” van der Kemp wrote.⁹⁷

Van der Kemp arranged to have the “Syllabus” and Jefferson’s original letter to Rush published in the October 1816 volume of the *Monthly Repository*. He assured the English audience that both documents “bear the stamp of candour and that of profound research.” The editor of the *Monthly Repository*, Robert Aspland, was a bit more effusive with details about the origin of the “Syllabus” and the identity of the author. Aspland informed his readers that the work came from “an eminent American statesman, whose name we are not at liberty to mention, but who will probably be recognized by

⁹⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Thomas Jefferson, 4 June 1816, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib022469>; Thomas Jefferson to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 30 July 1816, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 9: Letters from Thomas Jefferson.

⁹⁷ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Thomas Jefferson, 8 September 1816, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib022575>.

such of our readers as are acquainted with the characters of the leading men in the American revolution.”⁹⁸ By March of the next year, Jefferson received word about the editor’s note, and his initial nonchalance toward the first public printing of his closely guarded “Syllabus” vanished completely. He wrote to van der Kemp, “I learn with real concern that the editor of the Theological Review possesses the name of the author of the Syllabus. Athlo he coyly withholds it for the present, he will need but a little coaxing to give it out and to let loose upon him.” “I shall receive with folded arms,” Jefferson continued, “all their hacking & hawing. I shall not ask their passport to a country, which they claim indeed as theirs but which was made, I trust, for moral man, and not for dogmatizing venal jugglers.” Van der Kemp immediately sent a reply reassuring Jefferson that the editor did not have his name: “The Editor of the Theol. Rep – does not – did never possess the name of the author of the Syllabus. The Original, as I informed you, remains [with] me.” Jefferson, calmed by van der Kemp’s assurances, agreed that Aspland’s note “was like those of our newspaper editors who pretend they know everything, but indiscretion will not tell us, while we see that they give us all they know and a great deal more.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, Vol. XI (CXXX): October 1816, 573-576. For a history of the *Monthly Repository*, see Francis E. Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

⁹⁹ Thomas Jefferson to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 16 March 1817, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 9: Letters from Thomas Jefferson; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Thomas Jefferson, 30 March 1817, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib022803>; Thomas Jefferson to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 1 May 1817, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 9: Letters from Thomas Jefferson.

As for van der Kemp's own study of Jesus, the Dutchman never did write a full biography. He did, in a manner remarkably similar to Jefferson, produce an outline of his intended work and send it to his correspondents. Van der Kemp titled the work, "Memoirs respecting the person and doctrines of J. C. compiled from S. S."¹⁰⁰ There is much that van der Kemp's "Memoirs" shares with Jefferson's more famous "Syllabus," but Jefferson's outline was far more polemical than van der Kemp's. The conclusions that Jefferson placed at the end of his outline clearly marked his religious position. He denied any relationship between Jesus and the Godhead, he argued that Jesus "corrected the Deism of the Jews, confirming them in their belief of one only god," and, finally, that Jesus, not the Jews, taught about the "doctrine of a future state."¹⁰¹ Van der Kemp, on the other hand, approached his work as an unbiased history of Christianity. He outlined a history of the development of Christianity from "the heathen world before the Christian era" through the life and times of Jesus. Namely, van der Kemp sought to find the elements of Christianity that predated the appearance of Jesus and to learn which aspects came in response to Jesus's teachings. The goal was to determine whether the "fundamental part of the Christian Revelation," which van der Kemp described as "the divine mission of Jesus – not his person – character" could be proven from this history.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 4 November 1816, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 434, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 10 November 1816, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 434, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to DeWitt Clinton, 9 January 1818, DeWitt Clinton Papers, 1785-1828, Volume VIII: 1818, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

¹⁰¹ Jefferson to Benjamin Rush, 21 April 1803. For a fuller discussion of the content of Jefferson's "Syllabus," see Conkin, 37-41; 145-146; Sanford, 102-140.

¹⁰² Van der Kemp to Adams, 4 November 1816; van der Kemp to Adams, 10 November 1816.

In the section where van der Kemp planned to discuss the character of Jesus, a main portion was to be a “Consideration of his forbidding to declare himself the Messiah.” Where van der Kemp explored Jesus’s doctrine, he noted that the result was “Pure Theism.” Though intended as a straightforward history from evidence in the Bible, van der Kemp clearly favored similar conclusions as Jefferson.¹⁰³

Van der Kemp never completed the “Memoir.” He told Adams by September of 1816 that “It Shall not be in my power to accomplish the task – as I think it ought to be given upon a far more extensive Scale.” Despite urging from Monticello to focus solely on Jesus and excise the broader history of Christianity, van der Kemp did not believe that would do justice to the topic. In February of 1817, he informed Jefferson that the project was more than he could handle.¹⁰⁴ A compelling reason for not writing the work on Jesus, however, reflects the same reasons Jefferson hesitated in printing his own studies. In the same letters that van der Kemp complained about the magnitude of his design, he complained more about how the work would be received. To Jefferson, van der Kemp argued that “the high opinion I foster of our countrymen notwithstanding” there were “So many prejudices to be encountered – So many preconceived opinions – imbued from infancy – to be conquered.” Adams asserted to van der Kemp that his desire for truth would have little effect on how the work would be received since “Factions and Parties tarnish all Characters.” Finally, van der Kemp informed Adams that the word from the

¹⁰³ Van der Kemp to Adams, 4 November 1816; van der Kemp to Adams, 10 November 1816.

¹⁰⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 2 September 1816, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 434, Massachusetts Historical Society; Thomas Jefferson to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 24 November 1816, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 9: Letters from Thomas Jefferson; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Thomas Jefferson, 2 February 1817, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib022735>.

Netherlands was that “my large Sketch is not to be encouraged in Europe, as the present cabinets do not wish those principles developed.”¹⁰⁵ Van der Kemp did not complete the work for the same reason that Jefferson became so worried when he thought the editor of the *Monthly Repository* had his name. Both men feared what the backlash would be if the broader public knew their true beliefs. They feared a situation that Adams had described to van der Kemp years earlier: “Suppose I should publish, what I fully believe...do you think I should walk the streets without having my brains beat out?”¹⁰⁶

Van der Kemp neither faced the fate of severe head trauma feared by Adams nor the tribunal persecution he had suffered in the Netherlands. Nevertheless he did face significant opposition to his efforts to implement his religious ideas. Where van der Kemp believed that concord could be achieved through a democratic exploration of a variety of religious creeds and convictions, he found that denominational identities mattered and that there was limited space for heterodox interpretations. The lessons of the UPRS were what made van der Kemp cagy about publishing documents expressing his true religious beliefs in the United States. They were what made him sympathetic to Jefferson’s effusive concern about the “Syllabus” being traced back to Monticello. America had disestablished denominations from government, but it did not remove these groups from power. Indeed, by removing the role of government from structuring religious practice, states left that function to the individual groups, and it was the

¹⁰⁵ Van der Kemp to Jefferson, 2 February 1817; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 14 August 1816, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Van der Kemp to Adams, 2 September 1816.

¹⁰⁶ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 26 December 1813, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

established and institutionalized groups that took the reins. To be sure, the unique construction of the American religious environment provided van der Kemp more space to explore his ideas than he had experienced in the Netherlands. The religious tolerance he experienced in New York was not the defense of the liberty of conscience he had expected, but rather a begrudging religious tolerance that inherently came with a society that possessed so many different faiths.

It was a tolerance, in fact, reflective of the history of the Dutch Republic. That van der Kemp felt the need to privatize his faith was reminiscent of the religious situation in the Netherlands where Catholics and other groups practiced their faiths in secret. The carryover from the Dutch to the American religious environment suggests that some of the issues that van der Kemp faced in adjusting to the United States were a continuation of the debates that had been waging amongst Protestants since the Reformation. Van der Kemp faced persecution in the Netherlands because he refused to acknowledge that the Reformed Church had all of the answers to salvation. He refused the same right to local Presbyterian Churches in the United States, and while they did not have the authority to order a tribunal to investigate his conduct, the members of those Churches found ways to stifle van der Kemp's practices. The efforts of the Presbyterians in the early years after 1800 portended a much larger fight against evangelicals in the 1820s. In the meantime, van der Kemp resolved to practice in his own home and to limit the number of people that truly knew his religious beliefs.

CHAPTER 6

VAN DER KEMP AND THE WAR OF 1812

When he traveled the western district of New York in 1792, Francis Adrian van der Kemp stood in awe of the potential. He wrote his fellow Dutch expatriate, Adam Mappa, a series of letters describing what, for van der Kemp, was an untapped American resource. He dreamed of connecting the cities with the hinterland by digging canals throughout the western district, a preview of the future Erie Canal. Van der Kemp couched his vision as a challenge to his fellow Americans to fulfill the promises of the American Revolution.¹ When New Yorkers finally did conquer time and space in 1825, van der Kemp was there to commemorate the event in a speech to the gathered crowd in Trenton. Attempting to capture an ebullient snapshot of the day, van der Kemp drew a line directly from the success of the Revolution to the uniting of the waters. “All this,” he exclaimed, “was the fruit of our glorious revolution.”² By connecting the completion of the Erie Canal to the legacy of the American Revolution, van der Kemp attempted to elide the events of recent memory. In particular, he, along with many others, attempted to forget the War of 1812.

In the 1790s, van der Kemp’s republican vision of the United States, as expressed in his description of western New York, underwent a momentous change. The radicalism

¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Adam Mappa, 15 July 1792, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa, On a Tour through a Part of the Western District of New York, in 1792” in John F. Seymour, *Centennial Address, Delivered at Trenton, N.Y., July 4, 1876, with Letters from Francis Adrian van der Kemp, Written in 1792, and Other Documents Relating to the First Settlement of Trenton and Central New York* (Utica, NY: White and Floyd, Book and Job Printers), Town of Trenton Municipal Building, Barneveld City Hall, quote 58.

² Francis Adrian van der Kemp, “Address of Dr. Francis Adrian Vanderkemp at the Celebration at Trenton, Oneida Co. on the 26th of October, 1825,” *Utica Sentinel and Gazette*, 15 November 1825, Oneida County Historical Society, Manuscript Division Box 19-1986 MSS.1; VDK.1 VAN DER KEMP, F.A.; WAL.5-WALCOTT, W.D.; WAS.2- WASHINGTON, GEORGE.

of the French Revolution and the divisiveness of American politics checked his initial optimism. Yet, by 1800, he maintained hope that with the French threat diminished by the efforts of John Adams in the Quasi-War, New York's prosperity and potential could be fulfilled. These hopes, however, would be subsumed under the continued Atlantic upheavals between France and Britain and van der Kemp's republican ideology gave way to a begrudging acceptance of individualized democracy.

While phantasms of canals and unlimited access to trade pervaded his account of the trip, tucked in at the end of one letter was a hint of the conflict that would lead van der Kemp to eschew American politics altogether. On August 1, 1792, he reported to Mappa that as his group traveled to Oswego, they came upon a fort within American territory, garrisoned by a British unit. Van der Kemp rightly stated, "it ought to have been surrendered many years before to our government, in conformity to the treaty of peace," but noted, "I should not have dared to assert that from our side all its articles had been religiously observed." As the group moved on, van der Kemp dwelled on the British unit he met at Oswego. Though the British presence was minimal, he still considered it an "act of hostility."³

Though the fortifications' condition suggested to van der Kemp that the British intended to abandon the forts soon, the supplies within the fort troubled the Dutchman. "I saw nevertheless in this paltry despicable fortress seven barrels salt, taken from an American bateau, by an American runaway, now a British custom house officer." Aware of the porous nature of the Canadian-American border soon after the Revolution, van der

³ Van der Kemp to Mappa, 1 August 1792 and 10 August 1792, "Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa," 110, 111.

Kemp nonetheless knew that the supplying of British forts by American-turned-British traders was an ominous sign. “This practice,” he wrote Mappa, “could not be continued, if the whole country was settled, even if the post was not surrendered; as Americans could not, neither would bear much longer such an indignity.”⁴ Van der Kemp’s prescient announcement to Mappa in 1792 bore fruit in the second decade of the nineteenth century. The War of 1812 in many ways was fought because Americans could not suffer “such an indignity.”

When war came, van der Kemp joined many New Yorkers in adamantly opposing the decision. The crux of van der Kemp’s dissent was not that the war was fought but that the war was fought so poorly and chaotically. He severely chastised the Madison administration’s prosecution of the war, but he saved the harshest denunciations for the actions taking place in New York. Van der Kemp lived less than one hundred miles from the front lines of battle, and resented the fact that an inept, poorly led, underfed, and underfunded American military was the only thing protecting him from the British. He couched these fears, as always, in the shared fate of the Dutch Republic. “No nation on earth,” van der Kemp wrote John Adams, “has So long enjoy’d uninterrupted So many eminent blessings – but I scarce know any nation except perhaps the Dutch – So ignorant So insensible of these blessings.”⁵ The civil war that waged on the western edge of New York in the 1810s convinced van der Kemp that the internecine conduct of the 1790s was

⁴ Van der Kemp to Mappa, 10 August 1792, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” 111.

⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 October 1811, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 412, Massachusetts Historical Society.

not a temporary byproduct but rather a lasting feature of American politics.⁶ The inefficiency and squalor that marked the campaigns in New York eroded the republican dreams van der Kemp brought with him across the Atlantic in 1788.

That the War of 1812 challenged van der Kemp's faith in the American experience mirrored the indeterminate nature of the war. As Gordon Wood has stated, the War of 1812 "is the strangest war in American history."⁷ The nearly three years of battle changed little while destroying much. The most famous battle occurred after the war had been concluded. On its face, it seems as if the War of 1812 had been fought for nothing. Yet the War of 1812 is also the source of several of America's most enduring myths and symbols. The War of 1812 provided the burning of Washington, DC, a secessionist plot, and the future national anthem. Despite defeat on the ground and in the oceans, moreover, the draw achieved by American diplomats in Ghent allowed the narrative of the war, over time and with constant tellings and retellings, to become a decisive victory and proof of American permanence. It became, in the eyes of some, a second war for independence.⁸

Historians have been quick to point out the failures of the Madison war-time administration as well as the fact that the United States, regardless of fervor, were in no

⁶ The notion of the War of 1812 as a civil war comes from Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Vintage, 2011).

⁷ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 659.

⁸ Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Donald R. Hickey, *Don't Give Up the Ship!: Myths of the War of 1812* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War that Forged a Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004); Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

position to wage a war. Divisions within the government as well as a traditional mistrust of a standing army prevented the United States from fielding a respectable military to fight what many Americans considered the greatest military machine in the world.⁹ With little chance that America could be successful against the British Empire, there seemed minimal incentive to seek war.

Why, then, did the war occur? British impressment of American sailors and the Orders in Council, which attempted to block American trade from European ports, threatened both the financial and political stability of the United States.¹⁰ Americans' desire for western lands—freed of Indian control and British meddling—also mattered, as did desire to annex Canada. War Hawks such as Henry Clay demanded action for pride and expansion. This group, born after the Revolutionary generation, believed that war would reinvigorate the American spirit.¹¹ Some historians suggest that the opposition of Federalists left Republicans no choice but war. With the failure of economic and diplomatic coercion, the intransigence on the part of Federalists forced Republicans to do

⁹ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*; Hickey, *The War of 1812*; Harry L. Coles, *The War of 1812* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Roger H. Brown, *The Republic in Peril: 1812* (New York: Norton, 1971); J. C. A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Jon Latimer, *1812: War with America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Reginald Horsman, *The War of 1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); Bradford Perkins, *Prologue to War: England and the United States, 1805-1812* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

¹⁰ Hickey, *Don't Give Up the Ship!*, 12-47; Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962; Bradford Perkins, ed., *The Causes of the War of 1812: National Honor or National Interest?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962).

¹¹ The most expressive argument that the War of 1812 was primarily about the desire for land is Louis M. Hacker, "Western Land Hunger and the War of 1812," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 10 (March 1924): 365-395. For a direct rebuttal, see Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1925). A good historiography for the debate over causes is Perkins, ed., *The Causes of the War of 1812*, 1-7.

something about British intrusions into American affairs. After exhausting all peaceful solutions, Republicans had to declare war in order to preserve the United States.¹²

The profusion of reasons for war, each seemingly insufficient, mirrors the divisive environment in which the conflict was fought. The vote for war was one of the closest in American history and split along party lines. With the Revolution of 1800, Republicans controlled both sections of Congress and secured the war vote 79 to 49 in the House and by a margin of 19 to 13 in the Senate. Every Federalist opposed the war while 81 percent of Republicans supported it.¹³

For Republicans who supported the war effort, the dignity and existence of the United States were at stake. British impressment was not just the act of moving bodies from one ship to another, but, as Alan Taylor asserts, “an act of counterrevolution” that “threatened to reduce American sailors and commerce to a quasi-colonial status.”¹⁴ To understand the War of 1812 is to understand that the United States still operated within an intellectual framework that sought to legitimate American independence.

Van der Kemp considered the French to be a greater long-term danger than the British. Van der Kemp was not alone. As pointed out by contemporaries, Americans

¹² Richard Buel, Jr., *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle Over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970). Buel, Jr. argues that the internal machinations of Federalists “rather than British actions, was the *critical* factor propelling the Republicans to declare a war in 1812,” 2. For more on the formation of the Federalists as an oppositional party, see David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalists Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

¹³ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 133; Hickey, *Don't Give Up the Ship!*, 42; Buel, Jr., 153.

¹⁴ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 4. Brown's *Republic in Peril* also makes a strong argument that the reason for waging war was an ideological commitment to the benefits of republicanism.

had reason to go to war with either France or Britain. It was Great Britain whose presence on all sides of American jurisdiction suggested that it was only a matter of time before the Empire gained its colonies back, but France also had designs on reestablishing its empire in North America. Though the sale of Louisiana in 1803 represented an international announcement that Napoleon had refocused on European affairs, it did not mean he had abandoned his colonial dreams.¹⁵ By refocusing on the continental dilemma, Napoleon did not forgo interfering with Americans and American commerce as American grievances against France often echoed those complaints lodged against Britain. Moreover, intra-European conflict dramatically affected Americans' calculations about war. The War of 1812 was a renewal of the Atlantic clashes that had been ebbed and flowed since the 1770s.¹⁶

Van der Kemp's assessment of France's threat had much to do with events in the Netherlands. In 1795, France propped up the Dutch-led Batavian Republic, but van der

¹⁵ Laurent Dubois, "'Troubled Water': Rebellion and Republicanism in the Revolutionary French Caribbean," in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, edited by James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002): 291-308; Douglas R. Egerton, "The Empire of Liberty Reconsidered," in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, edited by James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002): 309-330; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 17.

¹⁶ An important feature of the War of 1812 was the insignificance of American concerns from the British perspective. France, not America, was the focus for British affairs during the majority of the war period. The defensive measures of British policy in America is suggestive of this and the notion, widespread in Britain, that much of the American activity leading up to 1812 was an effort not to wage war but to secure accommodations from the British. See Latimer, *1812*; Pierre Berton, *The Invasion of Canada, 1812-1813* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980); Kate Caffery, *The Twilight's Last Gleaming: Britain vs. America, 1812-1815* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977); George Sheppard, *Plunder, Profit, and Paroles: A Social History of the War of 1812 in Upper Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Britain and the American Frontier, 1783-1815* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1975); C. J. Bartlett and Gene A. Smith, "A 'Species of Milito-Nautico-Guerilla-Plundering Warfare': Admiral Alexander Cochrane's Naval Campaign Against the United States, 1814-1815," in *Britain and America Go to War: The Impact of War and Warfare in Anglo-America, 1754-1815*, edited by Julie Flavell and Stephen Conway (Gainesville: University Press of Florida): 173-204.

Kemp and many others noted that Dutch control of the government was contingent upon French approval. Whenever the French decided it was in their best interests to end the Batavian Republic, they would. After little over a decade of rule, the French decided the Batavians had run their course. In 1806, Napoleon collapsed the Batavian Republic and created the Kingdom of Holland with his brother, Louis Napoleon, at its head. Louis Napoleon ruled the Netherlands as King until 1810, when Napoleon, convinced that his brother had not subdued the Dutch enough and that their intransigence made them a dangerous liability in the conflict with Britain, removed Louis Napoleon and annexed all of the Netherlands into the French Empire.¹⁷

Even before the French officially terminated Dutch independence in 1810, van der Kemp experienced the effects of Napoleon's tightened grasp on the Netherlands. In 1808, van der Kemp noted to Adams that his communication with friends in the Netherlands had all but stopped. Upon immigrating to America in 1788, van der Kemp's correspondence with Dutch friends and relatives had been subject to search and at times confiscation. At one point, shortly after 1788, when van der Kemp tried to send a letter to Peter Vreede in Brabant, the local burgomaster confiscated the letter noting the "Government intercepted all Letters of any Suspicious nature." When Vreede asked what made the letter suspicious, the burgomaster informed him that it was "written in a mysterious way – and dated from Esopus!" Vreede informed the official, "Good god! Burgomaster – Esopus is a village 3000 miles from here on the American continent – my

¹⁷ Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813* (New York: Vintage, 1977); Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

friend [does] not even think upon your miserable revolution.”¹⁸ Despite Vreede’s efforts to convince the burgomaster of the opposite, clearly van der Kemp did care about events in the Netherlands, and as a result, his letters continued to be confiscated. The situation was fluid until 1810, when the letters stopped arriving at all. “Since a year my Dutch Correspondence is entirely Stopt [sic] – no Letters – from France or Holland reach us.” The fear van der Kemp expressed in the letter actually compelled Adams to inquire, “Are you frightened lest Bonaparte should conquer the United States?” Van der Kemp reaffirmed his stance that another challenge to American sovereignty was the logical result of European machinations.¹⁹

The remonstrance from Adams to van der Kemp illuminated small but significant differences in how the two understood the situation. The first and most obvious difference was that van der Kemp was far more concerned about an attack than Adams, and lent more credence to a French invasion than a British one. In contrast, Adams felt that France, not England, was the nation fighting for its own existence and that “Britain is carrying her Arms all over the Globe and conquering every Spot that is worth having every place that can yield any Profit.” In 1810, Adams related to van der Kemp that much of his reverend’s annual Thanksgiving sermon concerned France and England. The

¹⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 3 August 1808, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 406, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹⁹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 3 August 1808; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 15 August 1808, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 14 December 1808, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 406, Massachusetts Historical Society. The situation with van der Kemp’s correspondence continued throughout the war, and began to affect his British correspondents as well. At the beginning of the war, van der Kemp wrote that he had trouble sending books to his British friends as “all intercourse being now – so unhappily broken” “till peace between us and that Nation is restored.” See Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Le Roy Bayard, 22 December 1812, Gratz Collection, Box 281, Folder 76, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

minister, Adams wrote, “represented Bonaparte as the great oppressor, the Destroyer of Nations, the Universal Despot and the English as a Nation to be pitted [sic] as fighting for their existence.” “I perceive by your Letter my Friend,” Adams chided van der Kemp, “you agree with my Parson rather than with me.” Van der Kemp granted, “Brittain [sic] is yet a more Powerful nation” and “grasps at every objects She can reach,” yet maintained that “in filling up Some Striking features in the resemblance of both Portraits,” he and Adams differed; a difference van der Kemp understood because the situation was “viewed by us from different parts.” Of the two, Adams held a more rational view of the threat. As the events leading up to 1812 unfolded, van der Kemp, while retaining his skepticism of France, admitted that Britain posed the greater threat. Regardless, in the years leading up to the war, Adams and van der Kemp shared a belief that America was still in a tenuous position when it came to deciding between France and Britain. In a statement that reflected the core belief they shared, Adams noted, “But I know not which is best. My system is to trust neither, but prepare to defend ourselves and assert our Rights against both.”²⁰

Discussions about preparing the United States exposed the second and more significant difference between Adams and van der Kemp. Van der Kemp wanted immediate action while Adams defended neutrality. Assessing the situation and diagnosing American weaknesses, the Dutchman argued that the American government had to do something to prepare for the impending war. From 1810 to the declaration of

²⁰ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 30 November 1810, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 9 February 1811, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 411, Massachusetts Historical Society.

war in 1812, van der Kemp repeatedly exhorted Adams that the American government seemed to be doing anything but adequately defend the country. Republican embargoes devastated the American economy, its only success being the resurgence of Federalists as an opposition party, while politically, Congress passed a series of laws that did little to curb British or French transgressions.²¹

Van der Kemp felt that something had to be done, but in the march to war, the Madison administration prepared for little. A long-standing fear of a standing army combined with the persistent belief in economic sanctions convinced Madison that building up the military was the surest step to the war he wanted to avoid.²² But more than neglecting the army, Republican Presidents had systematically dismantled the very thing that Van der Kemp argued was needed. The navy that Adams had built up to wage the Quasi-War was one of the many government cutbacks made by Republicans. At the start of the war, the navy had seventeen ships.²³ As a defender of republicanism, van der Kemp joined the chorus that cautioned against a standing army, asserting that an army that exceeded “what imperious necessity commands, must be viewed with a jealous eye by every lover of his Country.” Yet when it came to a navy, van der Kemp asserted, “No

²¹ The failure of the embargo is a consistent feature of accounts of the War of 1812. For specific examples, see Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 115-119; Horsman, *The War of 1812*, 11-14; Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 19-21. Economically, the embargo was even worse. From 1807 to 1808, American exports dropped from \$108,000,000 to \$22,000,000 in a year. Revenue fell precipitously from \$16,000,000 in 1808 to \$6,000,000 in 1814, see Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 21; Hickey, *Don't Give Up the Ship!*, 29-30. In New York, the federal government's efforts to enforce the embargo on the porous border between New York and Canada resulted in skirmishes between militia units and smugglers. One attack on Lake Champlain ended with the three militiamen dead, see Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 117.

²² Stagg, 126-127.

²³ Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 90-91.

navy can endanger our Liberty.”²⁴ Van der Kemp’s emphasis on the benefits of a robust navy was not confined to the current American situation. In debating with Adams what caused the downfall of the Dutch Republic, the necessity of a navy to protect the ocean-going commerce of the Netherlands was a common theme. Adams argued that what prevented the Netherlands from defending itself was the “close connection between the House of Hanover and the House of Orange,” which led “Dutch Policy to depend upon the Protection of the English Fleet.” Van der Kemp concurred with Adams that “Nothing but a Sufficient navy to protect their declining commerce” could have saved the Dutch.²⁵ Tying the fate of the Dutch in with the future of Americans, both van der Kemp and Adams lamented that if the insufficiency of the navy was not corrected, it would spell doom for the United States. Adams bemoaned to van der Kemp in February 1809, “Oh my Country! Beware! lest you Suffer English or French Intrigues to render a Naval Power unpopular in America.” In April of the same year, van der Kemp wrote, “without a Navy I fear – our Political independence Shall Soon be gone.”²⁶

While van der Kemp and Adams agreed a navy was needed, they divided over the urgency with which the neglect should be addressed. Van der Kemp felt that it should be an immediate action, and further, he believed that an aggressive move to build up the navy would deter the insults Americans faced in the Atlantic. Here was the lesson van der Kemp thought he and Adams had gleaned from the Dutch experience in the

²⁴ Van der Kemp to Adams, 3 August 1808.

²⁵ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 16 February 1809, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 2 April 1809, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 407, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁶ Adams to van der Kemp, 16 February 1809; van der Kemp to Adams 2 April 1809.

1790s and early 1800s: inaction was as good as surrender. “[I]f we had followed a System of preparing to defend ourselves,” van der Kemp argued, “and assert our rights against Both – we were Safe – we might defy both...and Supply the whole world with what they wanted.”²⁷ His optimism about the effects of a bigger naval force aside, van der Kemp’s assessment followed many of the same lines as the ideology that led to the embargo. Jefferson, Madison, Adams, and van der Kemp all based their assumptions on the primacy of American trade and neglected the vagaries of the European conflict. Whereas Jefferson and Madison felt that the sheer volume and need for American trade in European ports would exact concessions, van der Kemp argued that if the United States used the navy to protect the notion of “free ships and free trade,” a notion the Dutch invented, then the volume and need for American goods would offset attempts by either France or Britain to attack American ships.

By 1811, van der Kemp laid the blame for the imbroglio almost entirely at the feet of the Madison administration. “I am apprehensive,” van der Kemp wrote to Adams, “that the morals of our Nation are already more corrupted...or I am entirely mistaken, or it is not longer the Nation, as you with Such an energetic vehemence described it to us in 1780.”²⁸ By 1811, van der Kemp saw “few real Patriots” in the United States, and he was “highly apprehensive, that without Seven Stripes – they Shall not learn wisdom – neither eventually be Saved – as thro fire.”²⁹ Van der Kemp’s concern came from what he

²⁷ Van der Kemp to Adams, 9 February 1811.

²⁸ Van der Kemp to Adams, 2 April 1809.

²⁹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 12 June 1811, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 411, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 October 1811, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 412, Massachusetts Historical Society.

blithely referred to as Madison's "many Political Sins": the appointment of Alexander Wolcott to the Supreme Court, the appointment of Joel Barlow as minister to France, the invasion of Florida, and the Cadore Letter. The two appointments, in the eyes of van der Kemp and others, were the result of political cronyism as opposed to aptitude. Van der Kemp objected to the invasion of Florida because Spain, in its battle with Napoleon, was "Struggling for their Liberties, their Independence" and the United States "So wantonly, So unmanly assaulted" them in Florida.³⁰

Of the "sins," it was the Cadore Letter that had van der Kemp particularly incensed. The Cadore Letter was France's response to the passage of Macon's Law Number 2. The law, which replaced the ineffective Nonintercourse Law, essentially argued that when either Britain or France dropped their opposition to American commerce, the United States would lift nonintercourse with that country. Napoleon, figuring he had nothing to lose by feigning agreement with Macon's Law, moved toward accepting the American proposal. The Duke of Cadore sent a letter to John Armstrong, the American ambassador in France, outlining French agreement with some but not all of the changes required by Macon's Law. Madison used Cadore's letter as a sign that France was yielding, even in the slightest, to American desires, and the president declared nonintercourse against Britain.³¹ The overt duplicity of France toward American decrees and the meek acceptance on the part of Madison convinced van der Kemp that Madison simply lacked the ability to lead the United States through the crisis. Van der Kemp

³⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Morris Miller, 15 July 1812, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society. For an explanation of the invasion of Florida, see Pratt, 60-125.

³¹ Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 54-55; Buel, Jr., 110-111; Perkins, 248-249.

argued, “With an effectual navy America would not have been insulted by Gr. Br. Trampled upon by France – with insolent mockery – been freed from the deep humiliating necessity of cajoling alternately the one and the other.”³²

While Adams agreed that the United States needed to address deficiencies and that a navy would not greatly threaten American liberty, he vigorously defended Madison’s desire for peace. He did so, however, because he felt that in attacking Madison’s inaction, van der Kemp was implicitly criticizing Adams’s commitment to neutrality as president. When van der Kemp mentioned Madison’s political sins, Adams demanded to know, “Pray what are those Sins?” Adams wrote van der Kemp that he did not “know of no more more Sins committed by Madison than by Washington Adams or Jefferson,” adding that “In Adams’s Fall W. Sinned All.” In fact, Adams continued, “The Government of the United States from 1789 to 1811 has been but a Company of Engine Men. Their constant Employment has been to Spout cold Water upon their own Habitation...to prevent its being Scorched by the Flames from Europe.” Adams drew a direct line of America’s commitment to neutrality from Washington through his own administration and continued by both Republican presidents.³³ Adams felt keeping the United States out of war had been one of his greatest accomplishments as president, and to assert that Madison’s faults at governing rested with his desire to preserve neutrality, van der Kemp undermined Adams’s presidential success.

³² Van der Kemp to Adams, 12 June 1811.

³³ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 4 April 1811, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

While van der Kemp agreed with Adams that preventing a full-scale war with Britain or France in the 1790s had been a “Supereminent blessing,” he refused to see these as the same policy. For van der Kemp, Adams had protected the rights of Americans through enlarging the navy and delicately challenging the French in the Caribbean whereas Madison had let America’s honor be continually challenged by European powers.³⁴ Adams rejected the nuances van der Kemp saw in the approaches to neutrality. He viewed Madison’s efforts to avoid war as maintaining the balance that Adams so desperately sought in American governance. “Without a Ballance [sic],” Adams wrote van der Kemp, “all is Despotism.”³⁵ Even after war had been declared, Adams told van der Kemp, “We must keep the Engines and Bucketts [sic] always ready and shall be very happy if with all our Vigilance We can preserve our Buildings from the Scortching [sic] Flames.”³⁶ It was a statement that in retrospect proved quite ominous.

The impressive range of blame van der Kemp expressed to Adams in the years leading up to war represented a unique blend of local concerns and Atlantic fears. Van der Kemp balked at British presence in the United States because it had a direct impact on his community. If, as Adams argued, the impetus for war would come from British actions, van der Kemp knew that with the proximity of Canada and British troops, he and

³⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 19 December 1800, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 399, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 28 December 1800, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁵ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 20 February 1811, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁶ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 15 July 1812, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

the other western New Yorkers would bear the brunt of the action. Yet the British threat was inexorably connected with the doings of the French. Americans were caught in the long history of conflict between the French and British, a battle that was now being waged through the proxy of American sailors and ships. In that context, van der Kemp believed the French had always represented the greater threat. Since his Patriot days, van der Kemp had felt the French were destined to ruin the republics of the world. His constant mistrust of the French colored his larger perspective of the early decades of the nineteenth century. These two competing but equally persuasive visions united in van der Kemp's assessment of Madison. American action against either the British or French would have satisfied at least one of van der Kemp's concerns, but to his eyes, Madison did nothing. Instead he fostered a situation in which an attack from either Britain or France was possible.

The differences between van der Kemp and Adams about the war resulted in minimal conversation about the topic after war had been declared in June 1812. Van der Kemp and Adams had been correspondents for quite some time, and the Dutchmen knew the limits of his friend's tolerance. With clear disagreements about both the conduct of the war and the actions of the government leading up to war, the topic would only result in bickering and a frayed relationship. Instead, the two compartmentalized their disagreements about the war and narrowed in on the abundant similarities they shared when it came to personal theology, religious toleration, and the seeming lack of tolerance in the United States. Typical of their conversations from 1812 to 1815, Adams stated, "In the Heavenly doctrine of Christianity, reduced to its primitive Simplicity, you and I agree, as well I believe, as any two Christians in the World," and warned van der Kemp

that his religious writings would have orthodox religionists “think you, no Friend to the Peace and Order of the Churches! No Orthodox Clergy will correct you. No! No! They will call you Deist! Perhaps Atheist! certainly No Christian!”³⁷ The heterodoxy of their religious opinions, and the fear of reprisal if either let too many know their deepest convictions, led Adams to lament, “Is there a man in his Sense, now upon our Globe, who dares to Speak his mind? Is there a Country in which he could do it, without Persecution and Martyrdom?”³⁸ Clearly, for both, the United States was not that country. For all of its benefits, neither van der Kemp nor Adams believed America to be at the forefront of any expansion of religious tolerance. If anything, the religious environment of the United States was too similar to its European counterparts.

The war that waged around them bore little on the men’s religious discussions. The War of 1812, for Adams and van der Kemp, was not a war with religious overtones. It was a political and military war. The Constitution had far more bearing on the matter than did the Bible. Both van der Kemp and Adams separated persecution when it came to the politics of war and persecution when it came to matters of religion.³⁹ While they might write of the war as a battle for the future of the American republic, it was the

³⁷ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 21 September 1813, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 416, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 4 October 1813, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 5 February 1813, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁸ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 26 December 1813, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁹ For an example, see Adams to van der Kemp, 15 July 1812; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 December 1812, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 414, Massachusetts Historical Society.

political identity of the United States as an independent nation that was under threat, not America's morality. In fact, when van der Kemp invoked the connection between religion and the war, it was in the negative. "What do you Say," van der Kemp asked a fellow New Yorker, "to our Governor's pathetic exhortation to fast and pray?" "[N]either our fasting Shall Save our country" he continued, "as long as I see no Navy."⁴⁰ The Republicans' error was not that they declared war, but that war had been declared without adequate preparation. Unlike many, van der Kemp's opposition to the "war of aggression" was not a blanket fear of republican violence: "had our Government dared to take an independent Natural Station – had it foreseen in our own defence by a Navy," then war "might have been avoided."⁴¹ In the Netherlands, van der Kemp had intentionally mixed politics and religion, preaching against the Stadholder in the morning and drilling with the Patriot militia in the afternoon. Religion and politics took divergent paths in his understanding of the War of 1812.

The increase in religious conversations and the decrease in discussions of the war in the correspondence between van der Kemp and Adams did not mean that van der Kemp stopped worrying about the war effort. He simply stopped writing Adams about it.

⁴⁰ Van der Kemp to Miller, 15 July 1812.

⁴¹ Van der Kemp to Miller, 15 July 1812. For a general look at the War of 1812 and American religion, see William Gribbin, *The Churches Militant: The War of 1812 and American Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). For the connection between violence and the War of 1812, see Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anit-Jacobinsim to Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. Chp. 4. Cleves points out that "At the heart of this great body of opposition lay the allegation, made by religious and political speakers alike, that the United States was waging an offensive war," 161. Van der Kemp certainly fit into that category, and also supports Cleves's argument that underneath opposition to the war with Great Britain was a fear that war inherently meant a union with Napoleonic France, see Cleves, 165-175. Van der Kemp, however, did not seem to fear the Jacobin violence in the War of 1812 as he had in the 1790s. Rather, van der Kemp's concern about union with France and his desire for peace came from the unpreparedness of the American military not the violence of American citizens.

Van der Kemp, after all, lived near the frontlines of the action. Adams did not face the possibility of an invading army. As van der Kemp learned when he toured the area in 1792, the line between the British Empire and the American republic on the frontier of New York was negligible. The situation had not discernibly altered by the start of the new century.

The delineations between British, American, and Canadian that became clear in the nationalist attitudes that followed this period obscure the threat to those who lived on the frontlines of those confrontations.⁴² The outcome of the war could mean a revolution in identity and affiliation. Identity on the ground, however, drastically differed from an imperial identity. Leading up to the War of 1812, trade between New York and Canada was crucial to the economy of borderlands inhabitants, and as political officials debated the ownership of goods, people on the frontier continued to trade.⁴³ Despite what officials in the American or British governments claimed, goods did not have a nationality. They could nevertheless influence whom one identified with and there was fear on both sides of the lakes that whoever provided the best access would gain the loyalty of the people. Intertwined borderland economies and distance from major imperial centers resulted in mixed loyalties.

⁴² For the American situation, see Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 696-700; Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*; Porterfield, 176-207; Eliga H. Gould, "The Making of an Atlantic State System: Britain and the United States, 1795-1825," in *Britain and America Go to War: The Impact of War and Warfare in Anglo-America, 1754-1815*, edited by Julie Flavell and Stephen Conway (Gainesville: University Press of Florida): 241-265. For the Canadian nationalism, see Latimer, *1812*; Pierre Berton, *Flames Across the Border, 1813-1814* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2001); Sheppard, *Plunder, Profit, and Paroles*. Sheppard notes, however, that while an increase in Canadian nationalism was the result of the war, it came much later in "the 1840s when the detrimental aspects of the conflict were less apparent," 9.

⁴³ David M. Ellis, et. al, *A History of New York State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 138-139.

It was the very indeterminacy of the New York-Canadian borderlands that made Canada an appealing target for American expansion. Since the Revolution, American citizens and political officials had viewed Canada as an embryonic American state. The argument went that with continued pressure from American republicanism, Canadians, who were republicans-in-waiting anyhow, would rid themselves of the British Empire and join the revolutionary cause. What gave this theory traction was the significant Loyalist population that had immigrated to Canada after the American Revolution. Many of these people were American born, and the hope was that the ties of proximity and mutuality would override the ties of empire. The other significant population in Canada was French Canadian, whose loyalty was just as ambiguous as the exiles'.⁴⁴ But as the years pushed the Revolution further from the present, those dreams of annexation turned to fear of invasion. For an American offensive, Canada was as much a prize as it was a buffer against Britain.⁴⁵

The fear of an invasion from the North was not unfounded. Just as Americans had attempted to consolidate the western frontier in the years after the Revolution, the British government desired to see the Mississippi Valley, from Canada to Louisiana, unified under the Crown.⁴⁶ For some British officials and subjects, Canada would be the

⁴⁴ Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Knopf, 2011); Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 72-75.

⁴⁵ Reginald C. Stuart, *United State Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Era of Expansion: 1800-1848* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969).

⁴⁶ J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Britain and the American Frontier, 1783-1815* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1975).

avenue through which the Empire reclaimed the former colonies.⁴⁷ Of course what made the visions of a British invasion palatable was that Americans populated them with nightmarish Natives. The British walked a tightrope in the years after the Revolution of maintaining allegiance from Native tribes while attempting to exert some control over their actions. Americans felt that the British intentionally stoked the ire of Native tribes against American settlers and that, sooner or later, a combined British-Native attack would occur.⁴⁸

The symbiosis between the Canadian colonies and the nearby American states further manifested itself in the economics of the region. Goods normally imported by the Empire from the United States after 1783 met a strong challenge from Canadian goods after 1800. As the value of the West Indies declined, Canada rose in prominence as a supplier of goods for the British. Where Madison and Jefferson presumed that Britain depended on American commerce, Canada began to offset the loss of American goods. The growth and value of Canada undermined the effectiveness of the American embargo and the mounting threat of a British-backed Indian Confederacy pushed many Americans to view the malleability of the New York borderlands as a liability. Securing the New

⁴⁷ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 45-72.

⁴⁸ Of course, another event in the chronology leading to the War of 1812 was the effort from Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa to mould an Indian Confederacy in the Northwest. Indeed, one of the most famous battles, the Battle of Tippecanoe, occurred prior to the declaration of war. See Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 125-127. For a broader exploration of American attempts to conquer the western frontier, see Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

York frontier and incorporating Canada, its people and its economy, was a major impetus for Madison's declaration of war.⁴⁹

The mutual interest in the area between Canada and New York made that region the focal point of the War of 1812. Both sides assumed that Britain would win any war at sea, making the New York borderlands the most strategic location for any land incursion. Much was at stake for all of those involved, and the conduct of the war effort exacerbated the pressure on those living on or near the frontier. As the march toward war reached a state of near inevitability, van der Kemp made a visit to Sackets Harbor, some eighty miles from Oldenbarneveld, to view the military preparations. He would have been better off speculating from home, as the sights of the harbor bore little resemblance to preparations of any sort, military or otherwise. "The place," van der Kemp informed Adams, "had more the appearance of a crowded European fair, than that of a well-regulated – fortified camp. Every one went in and out at pleasure – friend and foe." He reported that the "great deal of confusion" led to "the immediate expectation of an attack by an Superior force."⁵⁰ The matter did not improve as the war officially commenced. Despite the importance of the New York frontier, there was still little work being done to secure and protect American landholdings. In July of 1812, van der Kemp wrote Morris S. Miller, "If an invasion takes place – the brunt of the battle is our lot. Our Settlements are, generally in an infant State. Large numbers of our farmers are beginners. Their fair

⁴⁹ Stagg, 14-47.

⁵⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 12 March 1812, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 413, Massachusetts Historical Society.

prospects are blasted, when compelled to leave their homes, their wives, their children without aid.”⁵¹

Van der Kemp’s letter to Miller struck at the heart of what made the war in western New York so maddening for locals. The general agreement that invasion through New York into Canada held the key to victory did not result in the resources necessary to accomplish the goal. The confusion van der Kemp experienced during his trip to Sackets Harbor mirrored the disorder of both Albany and Washington. Since America lacked not only the navy that van der Kemp desired but also an established army to initiate a full-scale invasion of Canada, much of the war was to be fought by the state militias. Republicans lauded the militias as the bulwark of American liberty, and felt confident that a small regular force, reinforced by volunteer units, would be enough to take Canada.⁵² The reliance on state militias, however, immediately created problems. Several states in New England, citing a lack of Constitutional authority on the part of Madison to send state militias outside of state boundaries, refused to send units to the New York borderlands. Since Massachusetts had the best-organized and most effective militia in the country, New England obstructionism was detrimental to the war effort.⁵³ With the best militia in the country staying home to protect its borders and coastline, it is no wonder that Adams in Massachusetts was less worried about the war than van der Kemp in upstate New York.

⁵¹ Van der Kemp to Miller, 15 July 1812.

⁵² Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 77.

⁵³ For the organization and deployment of state militias, see C. Edward Skeen, *Citizen Soldiers in the War of 1812* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999). For the larger scope of Federalist obstructionism, see Banner and Buel, Jr.

Madison's war plan got a major boost when he received the support of New York's Governor Tompkins and the use of the New York state militia. On April 10, 1812, Congress approved the use of 100,000 militiamen to prepare for the war. New York's quota was 13,500, and Tompkins set about fulfilling the quota.⁵⁴ There were, however, already 1,600 militiamen from the western districts who had been called into action by Tompkins prior to his compliance with Madison's request. Van der Kemp "expected, that our 1600 men Should have been deducted from this Quota: we were Surprised that it was not so." Frustrated with Tompkins's denial of the existing service of western New Yorkers, van der Kemp cheekily wondered, "[W]hy is our Governor So partial in his favours to the Western and eastern Districts? Are we more Zealous in promoting the public welfare than our Brethren at both sides of the Hudson, to make us enlisted to this exclusive privilege?" Not only did Van der Kemp feel that New Yorkers were left to fight the war for the rest of the country, but that western New Yorkers were particularly overrepresented. "Do not Say that our proportion in the draft of the 100,000 Detachment is really taken from the militia of the whole State. It is So, but the Burden of the Long falls always to our Share."⁵⁵ The burden fell to the borderlands inhabitants because, unlike eastern New Yorkers or even militiamen from other states, desertion yielded no results. Desertion was so commonplace throughout the war that shortly after the commencement of hostilities, Madison had to issue a blanket pardon for any deserter that returned to service.⁵⁶ Not that western New Yorkers exclusively held out and fought

⁵⁴ Skeen, 21, 98.

⁵⁵ Van der Kemp to Miller, 15 July 1812; Latimer, 57-59.

⁵⁶ Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 76.

the fight till the bitter end, but the strategic abandonment of war service during planting time was not the luxury of a farmer whose fields might be overrun with British troops if he did not defend the frontier.

Tompkins's support of Madison's efforts should not be taken as the support of his fellow New Yorkers. When Tompkins pledged the state to the war effort, his call met with at best a mixed response. To be sure a number of men rushed to volunteer their service to the cause, but New York was also a state with a significant Federalist population and antiwar sentiment. Tompkins attempted to balance these concerns by appointing Stephen Van Rensselaer, a prominent Federalist, to command the units at the Niagara front in July of 1812. Van Rensselaer insisted that he appoint his own officers, including his more experienced cousin, Solomon. The volatile mixture of Republicans and Federalists, federal and state military units, all with overlapping authorities, was as dangerous as could be imagined. The militia units proved ineffective in battle: indeed, during the attack on Queenston, many of the 1,800 members of the New York militia refused to leave state grounds to attack the British. The quibbling between the different authorities reached a fever pitch.⁵⁷ There was not enough action to place all of the blame that swirled around the New York borderlands. The American experience on the New York frontier during the first years of the war was an unmitigated disaster.

Part of the reason that the efforts in New York turned out so poorly was that the federal government never committed the funds that the troops needed. Not only did Americans attempt to fight the war before establishing a military, they also wanted to

⁵⁷ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 180-190; Skeen, 98-101; Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 86-90.

fight the war on a budget. Coupled with the persistent fear of a standing army was the Republican desire to reduce the size of the federal government, and the War of 1812 tested the commitment to both principles. The New York militia, one of the better-organized state units, was woefully supplied. Men lacked guns, shoes, proper clothing, food, and other articles necessary to carry on a war, including wages for the militia members. War had been declared on June 18, and by June 28, 1812, Governor Tompkins filed a complaint with Henry Dearborn, commander of the American forces: his troops needed guns and equipment.⁵⁸

The situation in New York did not progress as the war raged on, and Sackets Harbor, which grew into the major American military depot during the war, became even worse. When compared to the town's condition by 1813, van der Kemp's assessment of Sackets Harbor in early 1812 appears positively glowing. There were not enough rations of alcohol in the entire United States to numb what the people witnessed at the harbor, but that did not stop the men from trying. By 1813, 6,000 soldiers tried to live in the ill-equipped village, turning the entire area into one bloody and muddy mess. The water at the harbor was punished as people dumped latrines and refuse into the streets, which the rains carried down into the water, and the boats emptied their waste into the lake as well. Army bakers, with no other options, had to draw their water from the harbor and baked fecal matter into the bread they served the soldiers. As a result, soldiers died by the hundreds, and their weary compatriots buried them in shallow graves, leaving a lasting reminder of the war's inefficiency.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Skeen, 72; Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 180-186.

⁵⁹ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 330-332; Latimer, 266-268.

The conduct of van der Kemp's fellow New Yorkers made a bad situation worse. The ineptness that the US military brought to the war effort was matched by the ubiquity of smuggling. For many of the borderland inhabitants, survival and, if possible, profit, mattered much more than national loyalty. The smuggling effort across the New York-Canada borders undermined the war effort for both armies. While American soldiers forced down fecal-bread, American grain went across the Atlantic to feed the British army. In New York, American officials found it easier and safer to turn a blind eye to the trade occurring throughout the borderlands. Many Canadians and Americans showed little concern for the ideological and political battles around them. Northwestern New York operated as a smugglers' paradise throughout the War of 1812. Smuggling became so disruptive that Madison again attempted an embargo in 1813 to stem the tide. It too failed to halt illicit activity.⁶⁰ Even before and continuing throughout the war, trade between New Yorkers in the western district and Canadians was not only more convenient, but also decidedly cheaper. As Alan Taylor notes, in 1812, "seventy-five cents to transport a barrel of flour one hundred miles by water, compared to five dollars over the same distance by land."⁶¹

The ubiquity of smuggling revealed the porous nature of national boundaries. Many of the residents in these borderlands did not alter their daily routines and continued to trade with the same merchants they had prior to war. Simply because a declaration from Washington now proclaimed their trade to be legal one day and illegal the next did

⁶⁰ Latimer, 240-243; Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 167-175; Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 290-293; Sheppard, 155-170.

⁶¹ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 186.

not mean that they agreed. It was what made the battle for the hearts and minds of these inhabitants so important, and also why, as the war dragged on, the fighting became exceedingly vicious. Towns went up in flame and plundering, by soldiers, American citizens, and Canadian subjects, became a regular aspect of any military offensive.⁶² Some New Yorkers feared that as time went on, and as the military disasters piled up, the republican attractions of American citizenship would not be enough to preserve the current boundaries. Experiences during the war pointed to the balance of power resting with the country that could provide adequate resources.

When van der Kemp first protested the war to Adams, part of his argument against the actions of the Madison administration was that they prevented the United States from establishing the necessary control over trade, particularly in an area as vulnerable as western New York.⁶³ Van der Kemp alluded to these problems in his correspondence with Adams, but his concerns about the difficulties of connecting western New York with the rest of the country date back to his travels in 1792. In his letters to Mappa describing the western district, van der Kemp assumed that the area would be made rich with canals and that soon he would “see the markets of New York, Albany and Schenectadi [sic], glutted with the produce of the West.” “Go on then,” van der Kemp continued, “and dig canals through the western district and be not afraid.”⁶⁴ The canals would not only provide the means for the state of New York to capitalize on its growing share of American commerce, but would connect the western district to the rest of the

⁶² Sheppard, 101-102.

⁶³ Van der Kemp to Adams, 9 February 1811; van der Kemp to Adams, 12 June 1811.

⁶⁴ Van der Kemp to Mappa, 15 July 1792, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” 55, 56.

country. The British troops van der Kemp encountered in his 1792 travels offered a stark reminder that the possession of western New York was still in flux.

Prior to the declaration of war, van der Kemp was convinced that American trade would eventually win over the support of Canadians. Cheaper American goods were a “potent lure...to Canadians, who now must purchase many articles at three and four times the capital higher from Quebec, than they may obtain these from the State of New York.” “Can you not see,” he implored, “the furs and other valuable produce of Canada brought hither through the canal?” He continued: “the day is now fast approaching” that the Canadian borderlands “shall be peacefully surrendered, and the American stripes unfurled on this bulwark.”⁶⁵ Van der Kemp maintained his opinion that the lure of American commerce would soon turn the Canadian borderlands into an American haven, which was why he denounced Madison’s invasion plan. Had the United States negotiated with Canada as opposed to invading, van der Kemp argued “our Flag would have been respected – our commerce effectually protected, our alliance courted Sincerily [sic].” “But,” he continued, “the die is cast.”⁶⁶

Van der Kemp was not alone in fearing that the lack of a canal connecting the western part of the state would result in the annexation of the area by the British. Plans for a canal uniting western New York to the Hudson had been debated in the state since the early 1800s.⁶⁷ In early 1812, DeWitt Clinton and Gouverneur Morris visited

⁶⁵ Van der Kemp to Mappa, 1 August 1792, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” 83, 98; Van der Kemp to Mappa, 10 August 1792, Van der Kemp to Mappa, 1 August 1792, “Letters from Francis Adrian Van der Kemp to Col. Adam G. Mappa,” 111.

⁶⁶ Van der Kemp to Miller, 15 July 1812.

⁶⁷ Though van der Kemp’s travels through the region and explicit designs for a canal date back to 1792, the general idea is typically credited to Jesse Hawley. See Merwin S. Hawley, “The Erie Canal: Who First

Washington in their capacity as members of the New York State Canal Commission. They were interested in discussing federal help in financing the canal since, they argued, a canal would reduce the dependence of western New York on Canada for supplies.⁶⁸ In 1810, Clinton, in a passage reminiscent of van der Kemp's 1792 assessment, wrote that Canadians were begging to become Americans. "The difference," Clinton wrote in his journal, "between the American and British side, in every attribute of individual and natural improvement, must strike the most superficial eye. It is flattering to our national pride, and to the cause of republican government." He continued: "The politics of Upper Canada are tempestuous. A great majority of the people prefer the American government, and on the firing of the first gun would unite their destinies with ours."⁶⁹ In the tumult of 1812 and due to a resistance from federal officials to fund internal improvement projects that only benefitted one state, the two New Yorkers were unsuccessful in their bid. Added to the casualty of federal funding was the confidence they had previously expressed about the Canadian situation. American losses and rampant smuggling completely reversed the opinion of who would be most affected by trade.

Suggested Its Construction," 14 March 1882, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, Mss. B00-3. DeWitt Clinton took his own journey to the area as a member of the official Canal Commission in 1810. In addition to describing the viability of a canal through the region, Clinton gathered and read as many pamphlets from the area he could, one of which was van der Kemp's 1795 proposal for the agricultural society at Whitestown. Clinton remarked that the speech was "abounding with bad style, but containing some good ideas." DeWitt Clinton, "His Private Journal – 1810," *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton*, edited by William W. Campbell (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849): 27-204, quote 194.

⁶⁸ Stagg, 81-82.

⁶⁹ Clinton, "Journal," 126.

In a report prepared by Morris during the war for the New York State Legislature, he presented a dystopian future for western New York if the canal project was not soon undertaken. Morris noted, “When Produce shall have reached Oswego it will be cheaper to take it thence to Montreal than to Albany” and that “Montreal will furnish them with a ready Market in british money, at british Prices, so long as Britain shall find it for her Interest to encourage the Intercourse.” A canal could change all of that by reducing prices and enticing Americans and Canadians to begin sending produce east to New York City instead of west toward Montreal. “The Welfare of our Western Counties can, according to the humble Comprehension of your Commissioners, be safely trusted only to our own Markets.” The grimmest possibility, however, was that without a canal uniting western New Yorkers with the rest of the United States, the Americans on these settlements might lose faith in the nation. With the constant flow of British goods, these settlers would be hard pressed to overcome the ties that bound them to the Crown. Morris worried that if the canal “be abandoned, the flood tide of settlement may turn to an Ebb fatal to that Country.” “Such as have already settled there, on fertile farms in convenient situations, may continue to toil for british merchants; and accommodating, by Degrees, their Sentiments to their Connections, feel at last, with Sorrow and Surprise, that british Hearts beat in their American Bosoms.”⁷⁰ No wonder that at the end of 1812, van der Kemp feared that the war “shall cost us a treasure of wealth and blood.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Gouverneur Morris, “Report on the Canal to the new York State Legislature,” Draft, DeWitt Clinton Papers, Volume 24, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

⁷¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Le Roy Bayard, 22 December 1812, Gratz Collection, Box 281 Folder 76, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The malaise van der Kemp felt at the beginning of the war did not diminish. The frustrations he cited in the build up to war were compounded by the performance of the New York militia and the illicit activity of his fellow citizens. The refusal on the part of the federal government to help fund a canal to connect western New York with the rest of America reinforced van der Kemp's feeling that New Yorkers had been left to fight the war on their own. As troops continued to march back and forth across Oneida County, as events on the lakes provided no reason for hope, and as war continued to be waged throughout the Atlantic world, van der Kemp's frustration neared despondency. The political situation in New York offered no relief, and in fact the concern van der Kemp expressed over the inadequacy of the troops was made worse by divisions within the state political parties. Though much of the focus on wartime dissent centered on New England, New York had a significant antiwar opposition.⁷² The support offered by Governor Tompkins and Republicans was met with equal resistance on the part of Federalists. Joining forces with Federalists were those of varying political allegiances who denounced the war and advocated peace. The divisions, which persisted into 1814, denied needed supplies to the troops and Tompkins's political appointments.⁷³

From the outset, Federalists held antiwar rallies and sought to dethrone Republicans from national and state offices. DeWitt Clinton, a peace Republican, ran against Madison in the election of 1812, while Stephen Van Rensselaer challenged Tompkins in the 1812 gubernatorial race. For his part, Clinton ran a Janus-faced

⁷² For a focus on New England politics and the antiwar movement, see Banner and Buel, Jr. For an assessment of the situation in New York, see Harvey Strum, "The Politics of the New York Antiwar Campaign, 1812-1815," *Peace & Change*, 8, no. 1 (April 1982): 7-18.

⁷³ Sturm, 9-10; Ellis, et. al, 144-145.

campaign. He attempted to woo the support of peace Republicans by claiming that he would prosecute the war with more efficiency than Madison. To secure antiwar Federalists, Clinton denounced the war as unnecessary and aggressive.⁷⁴ The elections in the western district were particularly divisive. One newspaper in Utica reported that supporters of Madison charged the “friends of peace” with “the crime of high treason.” The paper described the actions of Republicans as “disgraceful, intemperate, and slanderous,” and hoped that from the strong antiwar showing in Oneida County, “The remaining friends of Mr. Madison will be able from the result, to form a pretty accurate opinion of the temper and feeling of the good citizens of this district on the subject of his ruinous war, and the disastrous and disgraceful consequences that have thus far resulted from the imbecile manner in which it has been conducted.”⁷⁵ The election in Oneida County sent to Congress the antiwar candidate Morris Miller, who also happened to be van der Kemp’s correspondent and recipient of most of van der Kemp’s antiwar frustrations. Madison and Tompkins both held on and won their respective elections, but war opposition did result in substantial Federalist gains. In New York, war opposition gave Federalists a majority in the Assembly, and they proceeded to contest Tompkins at every turn.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ New York Republican Party, “Printed Circular Respecting Clinton’s Nomination for the Presidency,” DeWitt Clinton Collection, Letters to DeWitt Clinton, Volume V: 1812-1814, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York; Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 100-105.

⁷⁵ *Utica Patriot*, December 22, 1812, Vol. 10, No. 513, Utica, NY, New York State Library, Manuscript and Special Collections, Utica, NY, *Utica Patriot* 1806; 1812-1815; *Utica Patriot and Patrol*, 1816, Newspapers, Vol. 593a.

⁷⁶ Strum, 10-11.

For his part, van der Kemp was no supporter of Tompkins. Lamenting the partisan splits in state politics, fearing that the divisions would allow the British to gain a foothold on the American side of the northwest borderlands, van der Kemp did not curb his condemnations of Tompkins. Deriving from his criticism of Tompkins's handling of the state militia, and the overreliance on western districts troops, van der Kemp felt Tompkins acted, not in accordance with his beliefs, but with his politics. It was no secret that Tompkins was a steadfast supporter of Madison's policies, and van der Kemp worried that his livelihood was being sacrificed for political gain. When word spread of a possible presidential run for Tompkins in 1816, van der Kemp complained to Adams, "If this State must provide one – a King – a Platt – a Clinton or any other one, whose little finger is bigger than the Soul and body of the manikin."⁷⁷ Where in the 1790s van der Kemp had faith in the leadership of Adams and generally supported the conduct of Americans, all of his optimism for the future of the United States greatly suffered during the War of 1812. There was little about the situation that encouraged van der Kemp about American success. In late 1813, exasperated, he asked Adams, "What Shall I Say about the convulsions, which threaten to Shake the political world to its centre – indeed – I am apprehensive my eyes Shall not again See a durable peace." Of course Adams did not help matters, remarking to van der Kemp, "I write nothing to you, of the political

⁷⁷ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 13 January 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 417, Massachusetts Historical Society. See also, van der Kemp to Miller, 15 July 1812; Ellis et. al, 139; Harry F. Jackson, *Scholar in the Wilderness: Francis Adrian Van der Kemp* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 208-209.

Ecclesiastical or military state of the World. We have little Influence in Either.”⁷⁸ It was a sentiment with which van der Kemp was slowly beginning to agree.

1814 offered both the apex and nadir of van der Kemp’s wartime experience. The year started out poorly for van der Kemp and the rest of western New York. The summer of 1813 had witnessed significant American victories, including the Battle of Lake Erie, which gave Americans control of the lake. In October, the American victory at Battle of Thames also saw the death of Tecumseh and the end of the drive for an Indian Confederacy. But those victories occurred outside of the Lake Ontario region and the New York border. As troops were being diverted to Sackets Harbor, the commander at Niagara on the British side, George McClure, felt he did not have the resources to protect Fort Niagara. In December 1813, he ordered his men to evacuate. Upon evacuation, McClure ordered the fort and the nearby town of Newark to be burned.⁷⁹ The British, incensed at the burning of Newark, conducted retaliatory raids throughout the Niagara area, burning buildings and farms to account for burnt Canadian buildings and farms. The British troops even made it as far as Buffalo, which they too set on fire.⁸⁰ By the start of 1814, the British troops moved out of the Niagara district, but in their wake, they left nearly 12,000 residents without homes.⁸¹ In response, van der Kemp and Mappa

⁷⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 4 October 1813, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 416, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 31 December 1813, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁷⁹ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 240-255; Pierre Berton, *Flames Across the Border*; Richard V. Barbuto, *Niagara 1814: America Invades Canada* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

⁸⁰ Ellis et. al, 140-141.

⁸¹ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 257.

organized a relief society to aid those in the Niagara area. They pledged themselves “to receive and forward any gifts, for the relief of the suffering inhabitants on the Niagara frontier, and request the co-operation to this charitable end of the Washington Benevolent Society, and Masonic Lodge.”⁸²

Yet, in a sequence that foreshadowed much of van der Kemp’s year, the horrors of Niagara were accompanied by a positive turn. Early in January, as van der Kemp organized the relief society for the people around Niagara, he received word that Madison had decided to send peace negotiators to Europe to engage the British. “God’s blessings on the Peace Negotiators!” van der Kemp wrote Adams. Noting that John Quincy Adams had been among those selected by Madison to represent the United States, van der Kemp continued, “May the Son be So Successful as the Father – So their country Shall be indebted to them – as their benefactors.”⁸³ The instant confidence van der Kemp received upon hearing about the chance for peace did not last long. By February, he quizzed Adams about Madison’s motives. “Tell me with one word, if you can do it with propriety, under the Sacred promise of Secrecy, if you believe – that our Administration is Sincere in the present negotiation – do wish peace – on a perfect reciprocity.”

Although Adams did not think that “a perfect reciprocity” could be accomplished regardless of Madison’s feelings, he defended Madison, writing, “I do believe, that ‘Our

⁸² *Utica Patriot*, January 25, 1814, Vol. 11, No. 570, Utica, NY, New York State Library, Manuscript and Special Collections, Utica, NY, *Utica Patriot* 1806; 1812-1815; *Utica Patriot and Patrol*, 1816, Newspapers, Vol. 593a.

⁸³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 14 January 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 417, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Administration, is Sincere in the present Negotiation' that they 'do wish peace, on a perfect reciprocity.'”⁸⁴

The prospects of peace took another turn in early 1814 as the British began to turn back the Napoleonic tide. British troops entered Paris in March and by April, Napoleon had abdicated the throne. While van der Kemp certainly supported the ousting of the French dictator, a specter that had been haunting him since 1795, the end of the French challenge in Europe meant that for the first time in the War of 1812, the British could focus on the American war. Experienced soldiers of the European campaign made their way across the Atlantic, and by the end of the year, there were nearly 40,000 British troops in America.⁸⁵ The increase in British forces in America yielded almost immediate gains, and in the most notorious sequence of the events during the war, British troops dined in the White House and then set the city on fire when they left.

The burning of Washington occurred in late August, and van der Kemp received word of the destruction by early September. “Alas! city of Washington!” he wrote Adams. “This would not have happened under your administration!” Van der Kemp called for Madison’s resignation, citing that he “is too good natured or too weak – to controul the whole entrusted to his care.” Adams responded to van der Kemp, “According to your rule, Washington Adams Jefferson and Madison ought to have resigned the reigns [sic],” but van der Kemp would not relent. His next letter directly compared Adam’s conduct during the Quasi-War to Madison’s actions during the War of

⁸⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 5 February 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 417, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 19 February 1814, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁸⁵ Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 183.

1812. “Permit me to renew the assertion,” he defended, “that Washington – America’s capital, would not have been taken – by a handful of men, when J. Adams was President, and G. Washington appointed by him Commander in Chief.”⁸⁶

The effects of the British incursion did not spare the New York frontier, as the British attempted to gain the advantage in the area. Needing more troops, Governor Tompkins drafted into service a number of the state militia units in September of 1814. Among the units drafted was the Oneida County militia, a number that included van der Kemp’s youngest son, Peter. Van der Kemp wrote that Peter had “declined to volunteer” at the beginning of the campaign, “but was determined to go at his country’s call.” Peter’s decision to uphold the militia call “caused Some painful emotions to his Mother and Sister” while van der Kemp “approved highly his conduct.” Unfortunately for Peter, the militia situation had not drastically improved since the start of the war. Van der Kemp reported that “Here too is all confusion” and that orders and counter orders negated each other, with “Numbers of waggons [sic] – passing and returning with their load countermanded by expresses.”⁸⁷ The threat increased in October as the British could be seen in Sackets Harbor, and as Peter made his way to the harbor, van der Kemp noted that his unit and the other members of the New York militia were “chiefly without arms and I doubt, that there is a Sufficient Supply.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 12 September 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 419, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 23 September 1814, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 5 October 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 420, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁸⁷ Van der Kemp to Adams, 12 September 1814.

⁸⁸ Van der Kemp to Adams, 5 October 1814.

As Peter van der Kemp marched toward combat, the militia situation in New York went through a significant change. Governor Tompkins, worried that the militia only brought in the indigent, sought to create a state army and use the militia in reserve. The state legislature passed a law on October 24 establishing a state army with 12,000 men with reserve units that made a standing force of 20,000 men. The funding for this army, however, was not to be taken up by the state. Instead the federal government would pay for the troops.⁸⁹ Opponents of the move, van der Kemp among them, denounced the creation of the state army as conscription. With the prospect of another year, conscription had been considered at the federal level but had been rejected. At the state level, however, several states along with New York tested out state armies.⁹⁰ In van der Kemp's reading, Peter was no longer a member of the militia called to protect republicanism. Now he was a member of a national army whose service came at the demand of the president.

Of all of Madison's and Tompkins's political sins, it was the creation of the New York state army that most enraged van der Kemp. Unable to contain his anger, he seethed to Adams, "My Son is yet at the Harbour – and I See him again – in his native State – doomed to conscription – and the constitution violated by them, who had Sworn to be its Guardians."⁹¹ Van der Kemp also drafted a pamphlet in opposition to the law, entitled *An address to the citizens of Oneida, on the subject of the late law of this state, for raising 12,000 men, by classification of the militia*, which he signed "By an Exempt."

⁸⁹ Skeen, 151.

⁹⁰ Skeen, 150-151; Hickey, *Don't Give Up the Ship!*, 343.

⁹¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 11 November 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 420, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Promising his readers that he did not desire to stir up partisanship during such a trying time, he warned, “But while you do not close your eyes on foreign hostility, look on the internal danger that threatens the subversion of freedom.” Van der Kemp opposed the creation of the state army because he deemed it a “law of *conscription* disguised under the mild and deceptive name of *classification*.” He felt that if he did not speak out, if he did not “rouse you, my Fellow-Citizens, from that deadly torpor,” then it would soon become too late to remove the law. Invoking the role of the militia in the Revolution, and citing the American grievance of a standing military, van der Kemp proclaimed that the law meant “to supply the national government with twelve thousand recruits; and for this purpose, we are to be doomed to a degradation to which only one despotism ever reduced its wretched subjects.” “Liberty is always sweet and alluring,” van der Kemp concluded, “tyranny is odious and hateful.... Your fathers did as you are now advised to do, and soon they acted with unanimity.”⁹²

As the events of 1814 unfolded, van der Kemp constantly invoked the memory of the American Revolution in juxtaposition to the War of 1812. His enthusiasm for the former matched his disapproval of the later. The actions of the New York legislature and his opinion of the state army made him wonder if Americans deserved the liberty won by the Revolutionary generation. Of the conscription, he wrote Adams, “If my

⁹² Exempt, *An address to the citizens of Oneida, on the subject of the late law of this state, for raising 12,000 men, by classification of the militia* (Utica: 1814), *The Making of Modern Law*, Gale, 2013, accessed 9 December 2013. Although the pamphlet was anonymous, van der Kemp’s biography, Harry Jackson, notes that van der Kemp was indeed the author of the pamphlet. See Jackson, 213-214. Van der Kemp took ownership of the pamphlet in a letter to Colonel Benjamin Walker. In the letter, van der Kemp discussed at length the pamphlet he was working on, and in a postscript, noted that “Mappa was of opinion the Signature of an Exempt was preferable – if my name is preferred – upon maturer consideration you are at Liberty to use it.” Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Benjamin Walker, 31 October 1814, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection, Gratz Mss. Case 8, Box 19, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

fellow-citizens Submit to this – they do not deserve the Liberty acquired by their fathers blood – they deserve a Master.” Van der Kemp felt that Americans took their freedom for granted, just as the Dutch had done. He told Adams, “[T]he glorious deeds of the Heroes of 76 – the example of an Adams had been for me an innocent lure – to throw my offspring in Slavery – when I meant to Save it from the fangs of European Despots.”⁹³ Van der Kemp considered the creation of the state army an attack on his individual liberty. He was not willing to sacrifice those liberties “for whose preservation I crossed the Atlantic—I will live or die a free man.” “I would not live a Slave,” he wrote.⁹⁴

Despite his determination, van der Kemp was pessimistic regarding the conduct of his fellow citizens. Even if the United States made it through the war, van der Kemp wondered about the country that would be left. As he crafted his pamphlet, he planned for the worse. “If the People will bear this and Submit,” he told a friend, “then it is foolishness to attempt to Save it – then we must try and be quiet – do as well as we can – and Speak well of the Devil – that he may not hurt us – but then my Son Shall not remain in Such a devoted Land.”⁹⁵ Peter returned from his service at Sackets Harbor, but van der Kemp was not convinced that he had “yet recover’d from his campaign.” “I shall be surprised,” he mentioned to Miller, “that the bayonet could force him again in the ranks – even if you would guarantee his wages.”⁹⁶

⁹³ Van der Kemp to Adams, 11 November 1814.

⁹⁴ Francis van der Kemp to Morris Miller, 14 December 1814, quoted in Jackson, 215; van der Kemp to Adams, 4 October 1814.

⁹⁵ Van der Kemp to Walker, 31 October 1814.

⁹⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Morris Miller, 3 January 1815, Columbia University Manuscripts, X973 C72 Collection, Volume 10, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

The alternating highs and lows that constituted van der Kemp's life during 1814 continued as the despair of conscription was met by word that progress was being made in the discussions at Ghent. Even as he plumbed the depths of a United States without the liberty fought for during the Revolution, van der Kemp held out hope for peace. Though he feared the developments during 1814, van der Kemp also knew that the end of the war could bring equilibrium to the country. Even though the British army was gaining in the war and despite the failure of the United States to achieve their main goal of invading Canada, both sides were weary, and the desire for peace outweighed the desire for gain. The Treaty of Ghent famously returned the two nations to the status quo antebellum, but Americans, in securing a draw, considered the war a victory. The enthusiasm was such that wartime dissent was rewritten as treason. The considerable victory at the Battle of New Orleans, where the American did stand toe-to-toe with British regulars, further cemented the myth of the War of 1812 as a glorious victory.⁹⁷

Van der Kemp was no different in quickly reading the end of war as the greatest victory for which Americans could have hoped. He did not lionize the war by any means, but his dissent, most visibly seen in his standing disagreements with Adams, did not have the same invective. The issue of the state army faded away, and van der Kemp once again entertained a positive future for the United States. While still apprehensive, in March of 1815, van der Kemp wrote, "I have now at least hope, that I Shall lay down my head in peace." He repeated the outlook later in May, writing, "I hoped – to lay down my

⁹⁷ Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 417-423.

head in peace, and blended this hope with dreams of happiness – which should have been bestowed on both Continents.”⁹⁸

Yet for van der Kemp, an equal share in what made the possibility of peace lasting after the War of 1812 were the events in the Netherlands in late 1813 and early 1814. As the pressure mounted against Napoleon throughout Europe, he scrambled to find enough soldiers to fulfill his grandiose plans. In order to do so, Napoleon conscripted forces throughout his empire, including in the Netherlands, which helps to explain van der Kemp’s vociferous opposition to the state army of New York and his interpretation of the law as a draft. The conscriptions began in 1811 and were met with fierce resistance in the Netherlands. Rebellions continued in many of the provinces, and as Napoleon’s defeat in Russia resonated throughout Europe, the Dutch exerted more control over their own affairs, until in 1813, at the request of the people, the Prince of Orange returned again to Dutch shores. In 1814, the former Dutch Republic became the Kingdom of the United Netherlands.⁹⁹ When van der Kemp received the news in early 1814, he, naturally, wrote to Adams. He told Adams, “Fill the glass to the brim and empty it till the last drop – now you rejoice with your friend on the reestablished ancient Dutch Government – My friends rule once more – The Almighty make them prosper and confound their enemies, and humble them in the dust.” Van der Kemp dreamed that if Adams had been president, “I would beg him...to Send me immediately on an

⁹⁸ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 March 1815, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 422, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 May 1815, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 423, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹⁹ Schama, 622-647; Cornelis A. van Minnen, *American Diplomats in the Netherlands, 1815-50* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993); Gerald Newton, *The Netherlands: An Historical and Cultural Survey, 1795-1977* (London: Westview Press, 1978), 47-50.

extraordinary mission – to congratulate the Government and renew the alliance, and treaty of commerce, which we owe to you.” Van der Kemp was “persuaded that no Individual – how far my Superior in talents – could be So Successful.”¹⁰⁰

John and Abigail joined their friend in rejoicing about the independence of the Dutch. But, they asked him, what did the change from republic to monarchy mean for the Netherlands?¹⁰¹ The answer van der Kemp offered reveals the political transformation he had undergone since his immigration to the United States. It also offers evidence that after the tumult of the War of 1812, as long as balance could be maintained, van der Kemp cared little for political matters. Dutch independence and the acceptance of a king rested on a constitution and a balanced government. Van der Kemp, along with many of his Dutch compatriots, came to consider a king with a written constitution the lesser of evils. The old form of government in the Dutch Republic, he wrote, “was too full of defects” and with the overlapping areas of power, only a small portion of the country possessed true freedom, “while the whole mass of the Nation was actually excluded even from a Shadow of influence – during the time of the Republic.” In restoring the ancient Dutch government, van der Kemp went back to the very beginning of the Republic right after the abjuration of Philip II. At that moment, he argued, the Dutch possessed their greatest amount of liberty, which afterward had slowly

¹⁰⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 9 February 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 417, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹⁰¹ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 2 May 1814, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Abigail Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 23 February 1814, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 417, Massachusetts Historical Society.

been chipped away. “It was only a Shadow of Liberty,” he wrote John, “which was enjoy’d by the mass of the Nation.”¹⁰²

After the loss of independence under the rule of Napoleon, a distant ruler who cared little about the Dutch people or their liberties, accepting a king at this point made sense, particularly one responsible to the local population through a written constitution. Especially, van der Kemp pointed out, a king from the House of Orange as “What house could be with more propriety be vested with the Sovereignty [sic]...and – if this House provides a wise constitution – then a greater Share of Liberty may fall to the lot of every Inhabitant.”¹⁰³ What van der Kemp carried into his assessment in 1814 from his Patriot days was an unwavering opposition to subjugation and unrestricted authority vested in one body. To both Abigail and John, van der Kemp expressed the same opinion about the future of the Netherlands as a kingdom. He wrote Abigail, “I would prefer any monarchical form of Government, did I reside there – than to remain a Subject of the French empire – even if Bonaparte was out the question.” To John, “I was not afraid of a constitutional king – but would not bear the controul of an unlimited arbitrary master.”¹⁰⁴

The message van der Kemp defended to the Adams family was the same he issued to the gathered crowd in Utica in March of 1814 when he delivered an oration “Commemorative of the Glorious Event of the Emancipation of the Dutch from French Tyranny.” Fashioning a complete history of the Dutch people from the 14th Century to the current incarnation, van der Kemp traced, with an extreme amount of bias, how the

¹⁰² Van der Kemp to Abigail Adams, 15 March 1814.

¹⁰³ Van der Kemp to John Adams, 1 March 1814.

¹⁰⁴ Van der Kemp to Abigail Adams, 15 March 1814; Van der Kemp to John Adams, 1 March 1814.

Dutch “panted, even in the cradle, for their liberty and independence.”¹⁰⁵ The scope of the oration was the struggle to define, secure, and then protect the liberty that was the birthright of the Dutch. Drawing heavily upon his own experience during the Dutch Patriot Revolt and the American Revolution, van der Kemp presented a picture of the Dutch as the forerunner of American independence. Indeed, van der Kemp connected the two countries directly through the New Netherland colony, but the greater connections he made were ideological and institutional. What prevented the ancient Dutch from securing a lasting freedom, he wrote, was that “No constitution was framed, by which the rights of the weaker were secured against the usurpation of the stronger.” Further, there was no George Washington to “cement these heterogeneous masses into one harmonious system.” Throughout the history van der Kemp painted for his audience, what allowed the Dutch to enjoy the fruits of liberty were “judiciary, independent of their potent Counts” where “No citizen could be dragged from his home to a far distant court.” Also, “The cities were not exposed to arbitrary taxes” and received representation through the provinces.¹⁰⁶

As van der Kemp continued his history lesson, he began to chart the ways in which the nobles and specifically the Stadholder encroached on those freedoms. The issue after independence from Spain was about balancing power between rulers, both national and provincial, and the people. Van der Kemp noted that with the disjointed organization of the Republic, “It was impossible, in a republic of such heterogeneous

¹⁰⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, *Oration, Delivered on the 11th of March, 1814, at the Presbyterian Church in the Village of Utica, Commemorative of the Glorious Event of the Emancipation of the Dutch from French Tyranny* (Utica: Merrell & Camp, 1814), New York State Library Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library.

¹⁰⁶ Van der Kemp, *Oration*, 5, 6, 7.

materials, to prevent clashing interests from clogging the wheels of government” and it was partisanship within the Republic that “proved often more injurious to the Dutch, than their foreign wars.”¹⁰⁷ In the tumult of the Age of Revolutions, after the failure of the Patriot Revolt, foreign nations, France in particular, exposed these divisions and stripped the Dutch of the any of the freedoms they had enjoyed. By ridding themselves of French usurpation, and in establishing a constitution, van der Kemp hoped the Dutch found the balance between power and liberty. In considering the new king, van der Kemp told the audience “He can, he will succeed in blessing the Dutch nation with such a constitution.”¹⁰⁸

The *Oration* and van der Kemp’s personal comments to the Adamses reveal the evolution of van der Kemp’s political ideology. A staunch critic of the Stadholder while in the Netherlands, van der Kemp defended the Patriot Revolt as a republican revolution of governance in the Dutch Republic. After the defeat of the Patriots, van der Kemp came to America fully believing that what had been lost in the Netherlands had been won in the United States. What van der Kemp had not counted on, however, was the continuation of the Atlantic wars. His experiences during the French crisis in the 1790s and the war against Britain in 1812 significantly altered how he understood liberty. Van der Kemp, along with many Federalists, came to mistrust the unchecked democratization of American society. That mistrust, however, can only be understood in the Atlantic dimensions of the early republic. For van der Kemp, the pressures placed on the United States from 1790 to 1815 eerily resembled the recent history of the Dutch Republic. He

¹⁰⁷ Van der Kemp, *Oration*, 21, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Van der Kemp, *Oration*, 31.

feared that in allowing European powers to exert influence on domestic affairs, Americans were fomenting their own destruction. As the War of 1812 went on, van der Kemp not only felt but also saw the destructive power of a British empire concentrated on returning the United States to its former colonial status. The response of the United States to this direct threat left much to be desired, and as the war went on, van der Kemp witnessed the greatest threats to a republic—personal avarice, the isolation of western New York, and the creation of a standing army—develop only miles away from his home.

By the end of the war, the lesson that van der Kemp drew from the conflict was that democracy compelled him to defend individual and not collective interests. If the people did not care to defend the rights of all Americans, as they smuggled goods across borders and passively accepted a standing army, van der Kemp found himself focused on securing the life and liberty of his family. Reflecting on his political journey, van der Kemp informed Adams, “You are thoroughly acquainted with my Sentiments about Liberty equality and fraternity – If civil and Religious Liberty is Sanctioned and Security – justice impartially executed – and an impregnable bulwark raised against any foreign influence – I do little care about the form of Government, although that of your Defence would be my choice.”¹⁰⁹

Yet, after the commencement of the War of 1812, van der Kemp participated in the collective reimagining of recent American history. While van der Kemp never rewrote the war as a great American victory, the horrors and the conflicts that had made up his life during wartime evaporated after the declaration of peace. The state army came

¹⁰⁹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 13 November 1823, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 463, Massachusetts Historical Society.

to naught, and after the end of the war, the construction of the Erie Canal began in earnest. Van der Kemp's western New York would soon be connected to the rest of America, never again relegated to its own devices, and the state would finally be able to capitalize on the bounty that van der Kemp had witnessed back in 1792. Certainly what aided van der Kemp in his revisionist account was that he turned away from political struggles and focused on matters closer to home, such as the protection of his church and the defense of religious liberty. In separating his political activity from his religious activity, van der Kemp also cemented a dramatic change from his time in the Netherlands. Where political and religious freedom had been synonymous in the fight for Dutch freedom, as an American, van der Kemp considered them reinforcing, but ultimately separate developments.

Excising politics from his life allowed van der Kemp to move on from the troubles of the War of 1812. Whereas in 1814, van der Kemp bemoaned the future for the United States, by 1821, he was able to write, "I am full of apprehension for Europe, it had its time – the cup of all blessings may finally become America's heritage."¹¹⁰ A dramatic reversal from his comments during the war, but it was one in concert with his fellow countrymen. Although thoroughly tested during the War of 1812, van der Kemp emerged on the other side once again convinced in the endless possibilities of the American republic.

¹¹⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 24 February 1821, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 451, Massachusetts Historical Society.

CHAPTER 7

THE REFORMED CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

After the end of the War of 1812 and the stabilization of life in central New York, Francis Adrian van der Kemp hoped to settle into a peaceful retirement. Swearing off an active role in government, van der Kemp turned his attentions to other pursuits, namely the resuscitation of the Reformed Christian Church (RCC) in Oldenbarneveld. The nature of warfare and the depression in central New York had prevented the parishioners from funding their minister, and religious society in the village stagnated in 1811. Van der Kemp tried his best to keep the Church operating, even fending off a challenge to dissolve and merge with the local Presbyterian Church, but eventually the sporadic attendance forced van der Kemp to conduct meetings in his home. In 1815, with postwar confidence, the revival of the American economy, and the recent arrival of Reverend Isaac Bliss Peirce, the RCC reorganized. It has not stopped conducting services since.¹

The success of the RCC, however, was not a foregone conclusion. Some of the issues that threatened the life of the Church, such as constant shortages in minister pay, which forced Peirce to accept lumber in lieu of money, and a congregation that grew slowly, were indicative of religious life in a small village. The adaptations of the parishioners and the willingness and firm desire of Peirce to remain a minister in the area

¹ For the best history of the church, see Isaac B. Peirce, *Isaac B. Peirce Memoir*, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records, Unnumbered Box, 1858; Charles Graves, *A Century of Village Unitarianism: Being a History of the Reformed Christian (Unitarian) Church of Trenton, Oneida County, N.Y., 1803-1903* (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis Co., Boston, 1904).

helped to solve these practical issues.² But the most persistent impediment to the future of the RCC came from the opposition of other religious groups in the area to the Church's attachment to liberal religion. The town of Trenton, of which Oldenbarneveld was the largest village, hosted a number of different Protestant denominations, reflecting the religious diversity that had been a hallmark of New York, but no group faced more discrimination than the members of the RCC. The emergence of revival in the area threatened the RCC's liberal identity. Van der Kemp was determined that his church, and the religious pluralism it represented, would weather the storm.

Although the RCC was a small group, about thirty members in 1815, its location in Oneida County, New York, renders significant its resistance to revivalism. In central and western New York, the religious revivals of what historians have termed the Second Great Awakening were unparalleled. Although historians' understanding of the geographical spread of religious revivals has expanded since Whitney Cross exclusively focused on central and western New York—a region he labeled the “Burned-over District”—these regions of New York were the epicenter of the Second Great Awakening. It was an area where Lorenzo Dow was rumored to have converted “a hundred sinners in a single three-hour meeting.” From 1815 to 1818, western New York registered eighty different revivals; its closest rival was the entire state of Massachusetts, which boasted only sixty-four.³ By 1826, the line between revival and religious services

² Peirce, *Memoir*.

³ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), quotes, 10, 10-12; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Curtis D. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); David

was blurred to the point that one could scarcely tell what separated a revival meeting from a normal church service, making the Church's adamant opposition to the revivals even more pronounced.

In Oneida County, the rise of revivals in the region often parallels the emergence of Charles Finney. Finney emerged in the post-Revolutionary era as the spokesman for a new era of American religion, one based on the rejection of traditional authorities, the direct participation of the common man, and the subversion of denominational differences. In short, as Nathan Hatch claims, Finney spearheaded efforts to facilitate the democratization of American Christianity.⁴ It was the efforts of Finney and in particular the beginning of the Oneida revivals in 1825 that brought religion of the heart to a fevered pitch. Finney's "New Measures," which argued for immediate conversion, emotion in faith, and the importance of revivals, transformed American religion and made evangelicalism the dominant mode of religious expression.⁵ Theologically, Finney helped complete an extended transformation from the Calvinism of Puritans to the

L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1850* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); Glenn C. Altschuler, *Revivalism, Social Conscience, and Community in the Burned-Over District: The Trial of Rhoda Bement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Judith Wellman, *Grass Roots Reform in the Burned-Over District of Upstate New York: Religion, Abolitionism, and Democracy* (New York: Garland, 2000).

⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁵ Paul Johnson argues that Finney's 1831 revival in Rochester, NY "more than any other event, marked the acceptance of an activist and millennialist evangelicalism as the faith of the northern middle class." Johnson, *Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 5. Finney articulates his vision of Christianity, and the importance of revivals and evangelicalism, in both his publications as well as his autobiography. See, Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Charles Grandison Finney, *The Autobiography of Charles G. Finney*, edited by Helen Wessel (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishing, 1977). For more context on Finney and his role in the spread of evangelicalism, see Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996); David L. Weddle, *The Law as Gospel: Revival and Reform in the Theology of Charles G. Finney* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1985).

Arminianism of democratic Americans. To the ears of Finney's listeners, what this translated to was that the "New Measures" offered individuals a say in their religious fate. Where Puritans placed emphasis on the role of God in salvation, Finney shifted the focus to man.⁶ For Americans, who were beginning to push for democratic expressions in politics, in culture, and society, Finney's religious approach hit the right notes. No longer would clergy dictate doctrine from on high. Rather, religion would be forged in the fires of revivalism and the populist opinions of the common man.

A central component for the revivals' extraordinary intensity in western New York was the twin movements of migration and markets. While van der Kemp and the other Dutch immigrants formed the core of society in Oldenbarneveld, they were soon joined and then outpaced by the migration of Yankees from throughout New England. Importantly, few of those Yankees were Unitarians, who mostly remained in the Boston area where they were beginning to exert social dominance. Instead, most migrants were members of oldline denominations such as Presbyterians and Congregationalists. The history of Old Lights and New Lights during the First Great Awakening suggests that revivalism was a common New England response to social upheaval.⁷ The New Englanders who moved to the frontiers of New York, then, were a group predisposed to religion of the heart.

The market revolution that emerged after the War of 1812 provided such an upheaval. After 1815 markets transformed the lives of small farmers from subsistence to

⁶ See William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1959); Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer, eds., *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 171-183.

⁷ Cross, Ryan, and Curtis Johnson all emphasize the importance of New England migration in creating the unique conditions for evangelicalism in New York.

surplus and “dissolved deeply rooted patterns of behavior and belief.”⁸ The formation of the Erie Canal, for example, not only brought more people to western New York, but also created new businesses that dramatically altered personal relationships. The people who came to work on the canal shocked the more reserved church-going population with their immorality, irreligion, and a seemingly otherworldly ability to consume alcohol.⁹ The only thing the Yankees knew about their new neighbors was that they were assuredly destined for hell. The former face-to-face interactions that had characterized previous business and personal relationships were replaced with dealings with distant and impersonal markets. The rapid industrialization and commercialization of the market revolution threatened social stability in upstate New York, including for the New England migrants. Further, in a country that had separated the church from the state, those who believed that only morality provided a solid base for social progress had no overt governmental support to coerce behavior.

Instead, religion became one of a multitude of responses to social change. In response, Finney and other revivalists created a religion aimed in part at competing in a marketplace and replacing the coercive power of the government with inner constraints supplied by faith. Revivals were for many participants profound religious experiences, but the theatrics and commercial appeal of prayer meetings and inspirational salesmen should not be discounted. In Oneida County, as Mary Ryan points out, “young men and women responded to the novelty and uncertainty of their positions with anxious,

⁸ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5.

⁹ W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

enthusiastic, and intense religious experiences.” Part of the message delivered by preachers was that the newness of the world could be controlled through human initiative. Millenarianism was a major feature in the revivals, and convinced converts that they could exert change outside of the meetinghouse. The efforts of reformers ranged from temperance to antislavery.¹⁰ The fact that places such as van der Kemp’s village of Oldenbarneveld did not rival the size of Utica, Buffalo, or Rochester, only reinforced the impact of revivalism, the promises of social change, and the intensity of believers’ confidence that they could bring about the second coming. In the face of these sweeping

¹⁰ Ryan, 102. Several theories abound for why western New York became the focal point for the Second Great Awakening, many of them trying to locate the core development for revivalism across America. Some scholars argue that revivalism was a response to the dislocations brought on by rapid industrialization and commercialization and that western New York was particularly hit because of the development of the Erie Canal. Within that scope, there are competing visions for forms of social control. Paul Johnson offers that among the genuine religious fervor, there was also a more pragmatic approach taken by workers and employers to bring order to the region. He bluntly states that scholars should not ignore the “simple, coercive fact that wage earners work for men who insisted on seeing them in church” and that evangelicalism, especially an emphasis upon temperance, offered employers “the means of imposing new standards of work discipline and personal comportment upon themselves and the men who work for them, and thus they function as powerful social controls,” *Shopkeepers Millennium*, 121, 138. Mary Ryan concurs with Johnson’s analysis that evangelicalism provided a form of social control for middle-class revivalists, but she places the linchpin with changing gender roles. Women significantly outnumbered men when it came to conversions, and as the heads of morality in traditional family structures, brought their children to church with them. Those children then became the next generation of evangelicals. The Second Great Awakening, she argues, “centered around such issues as the religious status of the offspring of church members and the role of women in public worship,” 12. Further, she sees the greatest transition in religion not to be the rise of worker discipline, but the creation of a “more decidedly privatized and feminized form of religious and social reproduction” that formed between “evangelical mothers and converted children,” *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 102. Finally, a third theory comes from Curtis Johnson who argues that scholars have too long ignored fundamental changes in religious ideology that cannot be fully explained by economic or gender relationships. He maintains that the rise of republican individualism was coupled with a more central shift from Calvinism to Arminianism, a move from a theological outlook that emphasized the depravity of man and the salvation of only a predetermined elect to a religious framework that rejected the idea of predestination and argued that man, through good works, had a certain amount of influence over his own salvation. As he argues, “Arminian theology fit well with expanded suffrage for both subscribed to the notion that humans were responsible for their own destiny,” *Islands of Holiness*, 46.

changes, these enthusiastic religionists saw themselves as building “islands of holiness,” as the defenders of the faith “in the midst of an evil and hostile world.”¹¹

The geographic location of Oldenbarneveld, its proximity to the Erie Canal and the fact that it experienced these same waves of dislocation, makes it an interesting counterpoint to the standard histories of religion in the burned-over district. The traditional way historians have understood these religious transformations, both in the burned-over district and outside of it, has been to emphasize the democratic features of the movement. Finney and others, they argue, represent the religious alternative to Jacksonian democracy and its requisite emphases on individual rights, challenges to traditional authority, and apotheosis of the common man.¹² Even when approached strictly through thought and theology, the focus remains on the replacement of established structures and ideas with decentralized approaches grounded in an individualized understanding of faith.¹³ In addition to developing a democratization model, historians have emphasized the distinctiveness of the American situation, especially in regard to tolerance. Because the United States opted to uncouple religious sects from governmental power, it opened the door to a splintering of religious organizations, doctrines, and practices, from Mattheis to Mormonism.¹⁴ It also meant that no one denomination would exert control, reinforcing the pluralism that had always

¹¹ Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 22.

¹² The dominant model remains Hatch’s *Democratization of American Christianity*. Hatch’s thesis, however, is largely reflected in many of the works that address the early national period.

¹³ Esp, Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*.

¹⁴ Wilentz and Johnson, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); David L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1850* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).

been a part of the American experience and lending credence to the connection between American faith and religious tolerance.¹⁵

The stalwart band of believers in Trenton and the battle they waged against revivalism offers a reconsideration of the traditional themes of democratization and tolerance in American religious history during the early national period. First, the overwhelming Dutch influence of its founding and the pivotal role the Dutchman van der Kemp played in securing the Church's future questions the distinctiveness of "American" religion.¹⁶ The fundamental doctrines of faith emerged not from Boston, but from Amsterdam, where van der Kemp forged the tenets of his own faith and attempted to implement them in an American environment. The history of religion in the United States has largely been drawn as a domestic affair—or an Atlantic one with American

¹⁵ For an argument emphasizing a multiplicity of faiths is the representative theme for the history of American religion, see Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). For an argument directly connecting the experience of diversity with a necessity for tolerance, see Richard W. Pointer, *Protestant Pluralism and the New York Experience: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Religious Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

¹⁶ For an exploration of other Dutch communities in New York during the Second Great Awakening, see Firth Haring Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson: Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of Revivals* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000). Fabend focuses on the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in America, which was a faith that van der Kemp parted from early on in his life. The Dutch in these churches, however, did experience the same dilemma that van der Kemp faced in adjusting to the new American environment. In fact, Fabend sees the larger story of the Dutch Reformed Church, and the Dutch parishioners in them, "of eventual and inevitable Americanization, for in the fast-changing world of nineteenth-century America, Dutch efforts to maintain their own and their church's Dutch roots and cultural identity eventually became futile, and both church and people ended by adapting to the conditions of the changing times," 6. Fabend sees Americanization as the central process to the loss of a distinctive Dutch identity in America, and defends it by pointing out that Anglicization of the American colonies and the view of the Dutch as foreign others, which only reinforced a Dutch identity amongst those in America. For other accounts of this process see Elton J. Bruins, "Americanization in Reformed Religious Life," (175-90); James D. Bratt, "The Reformed Churches and Acculturation," (191-208); and Herbert J. Brinks, "Religious Continuities in Europe and the New World," (209-23); all three articles appear in *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement, and Cultural Change*, edited by Robert P. Swierenga (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985). For two fascinating accounts on Dutch identity, see Judith Richardson, "The Ghosting of the Hudson Valley Dutch," (87-107); Willem Frijhoff, "Dutchness in Fact and Fiction," (327-58); both in *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America, 1609-2009*, edited by Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt, and Annette Stott (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

origins.¹⁷ The role of revivalism has slanted the history of the Second Great Awakening to focus on developments within the United States. When viewed solely through evangelical and revivalist lenses, the model convincingly shows American origins, but this assumes that revivalism stands as the definitive American expression of faith. The history of the RCC in the 1820s shows that revivalism had competitors for space in the religious marketplace. Unlike many Christian branches that emerged and failed during this period, the rationalist, liberal faith of the RCC found a message that not only separated it from the Finneys of the world, but also offered enough of an appeal to survive.¹⁸

That appeal in the end came from a combination of van der Kemp's intentions and the arrival of a more expressive form of Unitarianism and a stronger connection with Boston Unitarians. Where van der Kemp designed the Church to encompass a multiplicity of religious approaches, survival necessitated a centralization of church organization under a common Unitarian creed. The process of becoming Unitarians was the most significant result of the confrontations during the 1820s. It was, ironically, the

¹⁷ See Hatch; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978). In recent years, however, there has been a decided trend stressing the Atlantic connections and downplaying a strictly "American" interpretation. In their edited volume on the history of evangelicalism, Mark Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk note that "evangelicalism has never by any stretch of the imagination been a strictly national phenomenon," 6. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Linda Gregerson and Susan Juster, eds., *Empires of God: Religious Encounters in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Catherine O'Donnell, "John Carroll and the Origins of the American Catholic Church, 1783-1815," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (January 2011): 101-126.

¹⁸ For an example of this larger process in America, see James D. Bratt, ed., *Antirevivalism in Antebellum America: A Collection of Religious Voices* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

move away from democratic religious ideals and toward a more structured approach that guaranteed that the RCC would survive in the new religious marketplace.

Prior to the revivalist challenge in the 1820s, the RCC had been fully functioning for only a short time. Before van der Kemp could salvage the Church in 1826, however, he had to get it reorganized after an interregnum from 1811 to 1815. There is some confusion in the Church records about what the congregation did during this period. The official chronicle of the Church reports that after the first minister, John Sherman, resigned in 1810, the organization reverted to its previous form as a religious society, known as the United Protestant Religious Society (UPRS). The society was the brainchild of van der Kemp. He organized it around liberal principles, requiring no expression of faith other than a belief in God. It was, in every way, his answer to orthodox religion. After a year, in October 1811, the UPRS “annulled their charter & ceased to exist.” But there is no record of the annulment. What seems to cause the confusion is that the religious society never officially ceased functioning even when the RCC began in 1806. In fact, the Church operated under the incorporation of the religious society until 1885, when it was officially reincorporated as the RCC. So when the chronicle reports, “An interregnum of 5 years occurred in the ministry of the Church, during which Some attempt was made to hold lay services,” it was a reflection of the Church’s status, not necessarily the status of the UPRS.¹⁹

¹⁹ “Chronicle of the RCC in Trenton,” *Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY* Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; “1960 Name Change,” Miscellaneous Church Records Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records. Charles Graves’s history of the Barneveld Church also notes these discrepancies and cites the annulment date at October 6, but cites that there were official meetings held until late November. See Graves, 39.

Once the Church collapsed, van der Kemp pressured the group to continue despite the lack of a minister, but a significant group in the society opposed his efforts and wanted to merge their congregation with the local Presbyterian Church. Van der Kemp adamantly opposed the union, as he saw in the merger the death of his religious vision. The greatest threat he felt was that the congregation sacrificed the openness of the religious society for the security of a more rigid structure. Van der Kemp's prior experience with Calvinists and the spiritual requirements and covenants in the Netherlands had long ago led him to reject the centralizing control any church tried to exert over the spiritual lives of its congregants. As he told Adams in early 1811, "no man can be more averse than I am – from Subscribing articles of faith – either in church or State."²⁰ Van der Kemp resigned from directing the UPRS—which is where the records argue the annulment occurred—and began practicing in his home.

What appears to have happened was that van der Kemp's home meetings became the de facto UPRS, and those who wanted the security of the Presbyterians simply joined that congregation. In a telling conversation with Reverend Abiel Abbot, President of the Drummond Academy in Newbury, Massachusetts, van der Kemp related, "I continue to worship with my family in my house – and two or three – usually – sometimes four or five – do as best – since the house of public meeting was taken from us." Not one to simply stop there, van der Kemp went on, "I pity those machinations, but regret the State of this neighbourhood – and growing generation – But as you observed – the Lord reigns – and the Gospel affords a Safe asylum – unhappy are they – who – instruments of His

²⁰ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 28 March 1811, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 411, Massachusetts Historical Society.

displeasure – bring destruction upon others – and finally themselves.”²¹ From 1811 to 1814, van der Kemp almost singlehandedly kept those religious principles alive. The work paid off. When the liberal religionists first organized themselves as the UPRS in 1803, there were fifty-one people present to submit their names. After Sherman’s departure and the arrival of Peirce in 1814, the fruit of van der Kemp’s labor preserved thirty of those members.²²

The first step to reconstituting the Church was finding a minister who fit its liberal creed. In 1814, those needs were met with the chance visit of Isaac Bliss Peirce. Peirce, a divinity student from Rhode Island, was on a visit with some friends in nearby Utica. Upon hearing that Sherman, whose Unitarian tract *One God in One Person Only*, Peirce had read and greatly admired, lived in the area, Peirce organized a trip to Trenton to meet the author. During their meeting, Sherman introduced Peirce to van der Kemp, which resulted in an invitation for Peirce, who “was a licensed Reader in St. Paul’s Church,” to preach that night.²³ Based on his sermon, “the liberal minded Christians in this vicinity,” “Influenced by a deep impression of the invaluable blessings of the ministration of the

²¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Abiel Abbot, 8 November 1812, Gratz Collection, Box 281 Folder 76, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Reflecting in 1816, van der Kemp told Thomas Jefferson that his previous experiences in the Netherlands and a stern warning from Adams before he immigrated “not to meddle with topics of controversy” were “Solemn enough, to make me avoid that rock.” For the most part, he wrote, “I Steered free,” “with one or two exceptions,” Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Thomas Jefferson, 4 June 1816, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series, Series 1, General Correspondence (1651-1827), Library of Congress, American Memory <http://hdl.loc.gov/ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib022469>. See also Graves, 39-40; Harry F. Jackson, *Scholar in the Wilderness: Francis Adrian Van der Kemp* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963), 156-157. It is also of note that in Peirce’s memoir, he notes at the outset, “Of the first three Trustees chosen two were Calvinists, and remain so (1828) both are now Deacons in the Second Presbyterian Church.” Peirce, *Memoir*.

²² Peirce, *Memoir*.

²³ Peirce, *Memoir*. For Sherman’s tract, see John Sherman, *One God in One Person Only: and Jesus Christ a Being Distinct from God, Dependent Upon Him for his Existence, and His Various Powers; Maintained and Defended* (Worcester: Isaiah Thomas, 1805).

Gospel,” offered a year-long position for Peirce to become their minister with the promise of successive years if funding could be secured.²⁴

Peirce fit the liberal requirements of the Church, but he lacked an important element: ordination. With Peirce already a divinity student, with existing credentials, ordination should have been a smooth process, but the difficulty in getting Peirce into the Oldenbarneveld pulpit revealed important elements of the RCC that set the stage for the developments in the 1820s and reinforced the important role that van der Kemp continued to play in Church matters. Before an ordination could take place in Oldenbarneveld, Peirce, as a Unitarian, had to be officially ordained in that faith. With no Unitarian Church in the area, and Oldenbarneveld not expressly a Unitarian Church, the clergy in Boston emerged as the only viable option to conduct Peirce’s ordination. The distance between the two places naturally made a joint ceremony impossible. The solution was to have Peirce go to Boston first, possessing the official invitation of the RCC “since only the church can grant him [Peirce] to the power to be minister,” and to conduct the local ordination on his arrival in Trenton. In the midst of these negotiations, when Peirce needed the Trustees of the Church to write to the ministers in Boston approving the ordination, he strongly suggested that “Judge Vanderkemp being known to the Clergy in Boston had better sign the letter missive—if not as an Elder as a committeeman.”²⁵ Van der Kemp’s lengthy correspondence with John Adams and

²⁴ Trustees of the RCC to Isaac B. Peirce, 6 November 1814, quoted in Graves, 41.

²⁵ Isaac B. Peirce to Trustees of the RCC, 15 December 1814 and Isaac B. Peirce to Trustees of RCC, 7 January 1815, Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

Andrews Norton made his character and opinion of high worth to the Boston clergy, and acted as the requisite seal of approval to carry forth with the Peirce ordination.

Before this could be completed, however, the Unitarians in Boston had to clear up a few issues. Namely, they had to ensure that the RCC was not already associated with another denomination nor had “pledged itself to any party or mode of faith.” The Unitarian association in Boston hoped that the Church “applies to us to ordain you, on the ground of being a Christian Church, without specifying whether they hold Unitarian or any other view of Christianity.” The association also requested “any written constitution or articles of faith” “to lay before the council of ministers.”²⁶ That the Unitarian association had to clarify what denomination or articles of faith the RCC ascribed to is a powerful indication that at its reconstitution in 1815, the Church was not explicitly Unitarian.

The confusion over this point is twofold. First, while the RCC represented all of the heterodox religious beliefs in the village, not just the Unitarian ones, it had a prominent connection to Unitarianism. Its first two ministers, Sherman and Peirce, were both Unitarians and many of the prominent members, such as van der Kemp, identified with an antitrinitarian brand of religious practice. At this time “Unitarian” had come to be an umbrella terms for anyone with antitrinitarian beliefs, so it became second nature to group the New Yorkers with the larger groups that reflected those ideas.²⁷

²⁶ Peirce to Trustees of the RCC, 7 January 1815.

²⁷ William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit; or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of the Various Denomination, from the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Five*, Vol. III (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1865), ix-xxi; Sydney E. Ahlstrom and Jonathan Sinclair Carey, eds., *An American Reformation: A Documentary History of Unitarian Christianity* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998); Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

Oldenbarneveld, however, was not Boston or Philadelphia. The congregation formed in Philadelphia in 1796 and the association of Unitarian churches in Boston, not to mention its affiliation with Harvard University especially after the schism in 1803, gave an institutional structure to Unitarianism neither possessed nor desired by the RCC.²⁸ The second reason for the obscurity is that in writing the history of the Church in 1858 and then 1904, its chroniclers had deemed it a Unitarian Church from the outset. In reality the explicit identification with Unitarianism was a product of the conflicts of the revivalist 1820s, which was then read back into the history of the Church.²⁹

The articles the Church sent to Boston were apparently good enough as they allowed for Peirce's ordination on February 16, 1815 in Boston and on March 19, 1815 in Oldenbarneveld. At the ordination in March, Peirce and the Trustees of the RCC, including van der Kemp, affixed their names to the "Articles of Association Between the Members of the United Protestant Religious Society and the RCC." These were the same articles the Church and Sherman had agreed to in 1806 when first forming the RCC, and exhibited the liberal tenets of the Church and the democratic nature of their fellowship.³⁰ After signing the articles, the agreement between the Church and Peirce was sent to Utica

²⁸ Elizabeth M. Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism, 1796-1861* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988). It is important to note that Geffen's argument about the Philadelphia congregation, which was the first congregation to expressly identify themselves as Unitarian, focuses on the fact that their development was distinctively European, not American.

²⁹ See Graves; Peirce, *Memoir*; Miscellaneous Church Records, Part I, 1960 Name Change.

³⁰ "Articles of Association Between the Members of the United Protestant Religious Society and the RCC," Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; Peirce, *Memoir*; "Chronicle of the RCC in Trenton."

to be printed in the local paper to publicly announce its principles to the area.³¹ The first article asserts that the Old and New Testament “contain a Revelation of GOD’s Will to mankind; and that they are, in matters of Religion, the *only* standard of doctrines and rules of practice.” The second article continued along this theme: “We acknowledge that no *other confession* or *test* of Christian fellowship and standing in the visible Church of GOD *ought* to be established [sic].”³² These two articles, clearly, were aimed at separating the Church from the orthodox denominations in the area.

Van der Kemp had long been suspicious of orthodoxy and often pointed to reliance on strict religious creeds as having a deleterious effect. His opposition to the Synod of Dort, which had reinforced the pessimistic Calvinist doctrines of predestination and man’s total depravity, led to a lifelong hatred of any strictures placed on faith. In America, the Westminster Confession of the local Presbyterian and Congregational Churches—which had united in the Plan of Union of 1801—reflected the same views on man’s depravity and predestination as the Synod of Dort.³³ For van der Kemp, these

³¹ Isaac B. Peirce to Trustees of the RCC, 21 June 1841, Records of the RCC, Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records. This letter is in fact a part of a series of correspondence between Peirce and the Trustees over his cessation as minister in 1841. What appears to have happened was that Peirce took a leave of absence, during which time the church replaced him with another minister. What is important for this conversation is that when Peirce argues that his leave of absence did not constitute a resignation, he cited his installation as pastor in 1815 and noted that the Trustees “carried this act of the church and Society to be inserted in a public paper, in the Village (now City) of Utica, called the Patriot.”

³² “Articles of the RCC, in the Town of Trenton, Oneida County, State of New-York,” Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

³³ For the Synod of Dort, see R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop, eds., *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Andrew Pettegree, “Coming to Terms with Victory: The Upbuilding of a Calvinist Church in Holland, 1572-1590,” in *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620*, edited by Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, and Gillian Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 160-180. For a focus on the Dutch Reformed Church in an American context, see Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1978); Randall H. Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); James W. Van Hoeven, ed., *Piety and Patriotism: Bicentennial Studies of the Reformed Church in*

types of confessions were antithetical to the practice of religion and even led to a degeneration of faith. Instead of active inquiry into the gospels or other matters of faith, confessions forced the religious to adopt and repeat doctrines “till the Spirit of inquiry in them was appalled and totally Subdued, and they ready to Swear – in all – what the Professor proposed! What tenets for Protestant Christians in the most enlightened country on earth!”³⁴ “If Christians,” he told John Adams, “could be induced to discard Theology and adopt nothing but the plain doctrine of our Divine Master nothing – as What they understood at the first glance – nothing as what the untutored understanding of a Sincere man could not conceive...we all Should Soon be in union of faith.” Instead, he opined, they “persecute one another with a deadly hate” which “would ere long be rooted out, was it not continually fomented by an interested Clergy.”³⁵ Not allowing people to pursue their own faith individually gave undue power to clergymen who had no right to say what was and what was not religion. “Blessed by God! that church and State are here Separated” he told Adams. But he noted to his old friend that danger still lurked where power and religion crossed paths. “Angels – in human bodies, ruling a dominant church – with the controul of largesses and fines would become persecutors.”³⁶

America, 1776-1976 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1976); Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson*, esp., 20-31. For a discussion of the Westminster Confession, particularly in light of its position prior to the Finney revivals, see McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 19-25; Hamrick-Stowe, 26-33.

³⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 20 May 1813, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

³⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 4 October 1813, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 416, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁶ Van der Kemp to Adams, 4 October 1813.

The Church in Oldenbarneveld certainly did not have to worry about any largess, but religious persecution came in many forms, one of which, for van der Kemp, was preventing the right of inquiry. In order to guarantee that it would not fall under the temptation of becoming a “persecutor,” the Church adopted Article III, the most important and most liberal of its articles. It read:

Liberty of Conscience shall be preserved inviolate. Every member shall be maintained in his *right* of free inquiry into the doctrines of Scripture; in publishing what he believes the Scriptures to contain, and in practising according to his understanding of his duty. This liberty shall *not* be abridged as to his understanding and practice respecting the ceremonies, ordinances, or positive institutions of Christianity.³⁷

Here was a church that in one sense presumed nothing about an individual’s faith and left it solely to that person to define it, without imposed rites, creeds, or ceremonies. No one, not the minister, not an elder, not a deacon, could interfere with the personal right of determining faith. The congregation as a whole, however, did have the authority. In Article IV, the Church, while vesting “executive authority of the Church...in the Minister, the Elders and Deacons,” guaranteed the right to anyone to “have *the liberty* of referring his cause for adjudication to the body at large.” Power was to come from the entire religious body, not from a single, limited authority.³⁸

The RCC was arguably the most democratic church in the entire burned-over district. This did not mean, however, that its democratic nature was celebrated in the area. Almost immediately after Peirce had been ordained as the new minister, the other religious denominations in the town took what steps they could to prevent the RCC from

³⁷ “Chronicle of the RCC in Trenton.”

³⁸ “Chronicle of the RCC in Trenton.”

re-establishing itself. When the vitality of fellowship returned with Peirce's ministry, the area where the Church was most exposed was its physical structure. When the Church first formed in 1806, all of the religious organizations in the town pooled their resources to erect a house of worship. Even at this time, religious tolerance was not the order of the day, as the common meetinghouse "soon became a source of great uneasiness and contention. The popish cry of heresy was loud and long" and "the Unitarians were deprived of the school house to hold their meetings in; although they built it, in common with the majority who arbitrarily deprived them of their rights."³⁹ Since this tactic worked one time, the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in Trenton decided to try it again in 1814. Barely a month passed from the time Peirce preached his first sermon to the time the Church Trustees received a letter about their right to the worship commons. The committee in charge of the decision "conversed with the members of each church" and found "that the house cannot be occupied by three churches." As to why the RCC was the odd man out, the committee maintained that the Presbyterians and Congregationalists "deem it their duty not to abstain from public worship and they cannot agreeably to their profession meet with Mr Peirce conscientiously with sentiments of Esteem." The action was hardly a surprise since from the outset the Presbyterian Church "deemed it a sin to hold any terms of intercourse or peace with [the] RCC."⁴⁰ Long before the arrival of Finney and the fervor of revivalism, the orthodox religious denominations deemed the RCC outside the pale of acceptable religious activity, and did

³⁹ Peirce, *Memoir*; Graves, 7; Jackson, 148-150.

⁴⁰ Unknown to the Trustees in Oldenbarneveld, 4 April 1815, Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; Peirce, *Memoir*; Graves, 43-46.

so because of the liberal, rationalist faith of believers such as van der Kemp. The rhetoric of these early confrontations, particularly the orthodoxy's denial of the liberal religionists to individually define their faith, set the stage for the larger conflicts in the 1820s.

Three months after being informed that the shared house of worship was no longer open to them, the leaders of the Church began to make plans for erecting a building of their own. Fortunately for the congregation, van der Kemp and his lifelong friend and fellow Netherlander, Adam Mappa, knew where land was to be found. While New Englanders had begun to populate the region in waves, the region had started out as a Dutch enclave and those Dutch families still held considerable sway. Oldenbarneveld was crafted out of the holdings of the Holland Land Company, whose local representative just happened to be Mappa. Mappa convinced the company to donate a parcel of land to be used as a "house or building of Public Worship." Having secured the land, the men quickly organized an association that was independent of the Church to manage the property. The articles of the association left no doubt as to the purpose of the agreement: "Art XXIV The RCC shall be allowed the free use of the house at all times and without expense, when they have a minister to lead the public worship. This article shall ever remain unalterable, anything else in this instrument to the contrary notwithstanding."⁴¹

Securing an exclusive religious space for the Church, however, did not stop the attacks. Anything that the Church tried to do in the way of fellowship, whether it was the weekly services or a special lecture, prompted the orthodoxy in the Trenton to throw up

⁴¹ "Articles of Agreement or Subscription for the purpose of erecting and completing a church edifice in the village of Oldenbarneveld, 15 Nov 1815," Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; "Indenture of the Church Property, 21 June 1816," Miscellaneous Church Records, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

barriers. “[E]very exertion is made to obstruct our course,” van der Kemp wrote fellow antitrinitarian Andrews Norton. “[E]ven the organising of a Scotch-Presbyterian Church in our village.” In 1820, a woman from Canada came to town and ran into van der Kemp on her way through. She praised the “elegant church” in the town, which led van der Kemp to ask “of what denomination Madam?” “I am informed,” she told van der Kemp, “it is of that people – who deny our Saviour. I told her She was misinformed – and She acquiesced, that it might be so.”⁴² Despite the objections, the erection of the specific church edifice for the RCC meant that liberal religion would remain a potent threat to the orthodoxy in Oldenbarneveld. It also meant that when the Finney revivals burned through Oneida County, the RCC would be a constant target.

In the immediate years after Peirce’s arrival, van der Kemp maintained an active involvement in Church business. When the subscription for building the Church came up, van der Kemp gave twenty dollars. He added ten more dollars to the subscription after Reverend James Taylor, the pastor of the Unitarian Church in Philadelphia, donated fifty dollars. Since the RCC sold pews in order to raise more money—van der Kemp had purchased one—van der Kemp informed the Church that his and Taylor’s donations were to purchase pews “for the free use of any of our Church members” and so “that strangers who might visit the Lord’s House, be accommodated with Comfortable seats.”⁴³ Van der Kemp’s insistence that every member of the Church pursue his or her own path to faith

⁴² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 27 January 1815, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 25 September 1820, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁴³ “Articles of Agreement or Subscription for the purpose of erecting and completing a church edifice in the village of Oldenbarneveld, 15 Nov 1815”; “Donations to the Church,” Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part II, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

led him to donate a considerable amount of religious tracts and pamphlets to the Church. He reached out to other groups, mostly Unitarians, to secure more resources. Naturally, Boston and Philadelphia became common supporters of the Oldenbarneveld congregation, but with van der Kemp's network of correspondents, gifts came in from across the Atlantic as well. Van der Kemp organized "considerable" donations from the London Unitarian Book Society to "aid us, in diffusing the light of Gospel truth." When there were not enough psalms and hymnals for the church, van der Kemp reached out to Reverend Robert Aspland, pastor of the Unitarian Church in Hackney, England, who gave the congregation enough books so everyone could have a copy to use during worship.⁴⁴

Van der Kemp had also served in official leadership positions—as a deacon and as a standing secretary during the initial reorganization—and often worked on ad hoc committees when the congregation needed him.⁴⁵ Once things began to settle, van der Kemp cut down on his Church activities. He still attended services and went to meetings, and his youngest son, Peter, was elected as a deacon in 1818, but the majority of his energy was spent on translating the documents of the New Netherland colony, a job he did not complete until 1825. 1825 also marked van der Kemp's return to active Church business. His return, while aided by the completion of the translation project, came primarily in response to the threat of the revivalism and the arrival of Charles Finney. It

⁴⁴ Peirce, *Memoir*; "Acts of the Ordaining Council of Boston, 16 February 1815, Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

⁴⁵ "Minutes of the RCC," Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

was at this moment that, with the RCC on the brink of extinction, van der Kemp came forward to help stem the tide of religious enthusiasm.

Finney has long stood as one of the foremost figures in the history of American religion. The themes that emerged out of the Second Great Awakening—the challenge to traditional authority, a populist surge on the part of the laity, and a “democratic hope” and “passion for equality”—reflect the themes of Finney’s “New Measures.”⁴⁶ Even as historians stress the complexity and breadth of the post-Revolution religious activity, they repeatedly invoke Finney as an exemplar. In New York, the importance of Finney takes on added significance. Local preachers filled out the ranks and even played prominent roles in the Oneida revivals, but Finney was the catalyst, and it was Finney’s methods and his adaptable theology that provided the structure for New York revivals moving forward.⁴⁷

The Oneida Revival that began in 1825 marked the first large-scale meeting of Finney’s young career. It was also the series of revivals that led to Finney’s emergence on a national stage. Formerly a lawyer in Adams, New York, in 1821, Finney experienced an intense religious awakening. Up until that point, Finney had been known throughout the town as a passive Christian, although he did regularly attend meetings at the local Presbyterian Church under the direction of George Gale. After some tepid meetings, Finney took it upon himself to discover whether the Christian dispensation was

⁴⁶ Hatch, 9-11.

⁴⁷ Cross; Johnson, *Shopkeepers Millennium*. Ryan attempts to downplay the leadership role of Finney in the Oneida revivals, arguing that the revivals “should be examined, then, not as the spontaneous outburst associated with Finney’s arrival in the mid-1820s but as part of this undulating wave of evangelical fervor,” 79. In his biography of Finney, Hambrick-Stowe concurs with Ryan pointing out that Finney “worked in Oneida County from late 1825 through the summer of 1826 essentially as a member of an evangelistic team of preachers, most of them settled pastors of congregations,” 50.

true or false. He pored over his Bible and “received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit” which “descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul.” Finney was born again, and determined that he was born again to preach the Gospel. “Nay,” he wrote, “I found that I was unwilling to do anything else.”⁴⁸ Finney immediately met with Gale to begin his religious training, and in 1824, he received his license to preach. Notably, though part of Finney’s legacy was his refusal to brook denominational politics, he put himself “under the care of the presbytery as a candidate for the gospel ministry,” and “never dreamed of commencing his work as a preacher apart from the orderly processes of Presbyterian polity.”⁴⁹ When Finney came to Oneida County in 1825, he came as an officially licensed preacher of the Presbyterian Church.

Finney set himself apart not because of his separation from the institutional structure of orthodoxy, but because of his challenges to orthodox theology. These challenges came forward as a plain-spoken interpretation of trending religious ideas rather than a reformation of religious thinking. Arminian ideology was nothing new, but as Curtis Johnson argues, “the gradual Arminianization of Calvinism” transformed Calvinism into a religion palatable for the new democratic American republic.⁵⁰ Finney’s religious conversion reflected this larger trend, and convinced him of two things. One, that humans had a choice whether or not they were to be saved. As Finney wrote of his own experience, “never had the truth been in my mind that faith was a voluntary trust

⁴⁸ Finney, *Autobiography*, 21; Hambrick-Stowe 1-3.

⁴⁹ Finney, *Autobiography*, 46; Hambrick-Stowe, 22.

⁵⁰ Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 44.

instead of an intellectual state.”⁵¹ The crucial element here, and one that separates Finney from the rational religion of Oldenbarneveld, is the role of the heart. Finney believed that faith and feeling were indispensable elements of religion. It was not enough to know God or think about religion: one had to feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. In order to minister, a man must “preach the Gospel as an experience, present Christ to mankind as a matter of personal encounter.”⁵² Otherwise, “his speculations and theories will come far short of preaching the Gospel.”⁵² The emotional impact of these conversions, and the nearly immediate conviction that often came with them, was also central in allowing the converted to lead benevolent lives after their encounter with the Holy Spirit. While perfectionism would be more expressly articulated later in his career, from the outset Finney believed that in order for people to better the temporal world, they had to go through a similar conversion experience.

The second element of Finney’s faith was that revivalism provided the best vehicle to accomplish salvation. Finney’s brand of revivalism attempted to blend the immediacy of conversion with a cyclical regeneration of religious activity. Finney’s New Measures depended on “preaching, prayer and conference meetings, much private prayer, much personal conversation, and meetings for the instruction of earnest inquirers.” The doctrine preached at these meetings “insisted upon the voluntary moral depravity of the unconverted, and the unalterable necessity of a radical change of heart by the Holy Spirit and by means of the truth.”⁵³ To achieve immediate conversions, Finney began to

⁵¹ Finney, *Autobiography*, 17.

⁵² Finney, *Autobiography*, 51.

⁵³ Finney, *Autobiography*, 66.

institute methods to pressure attendees to convert. The “anxious bench” where a sinner would sit alone on a seat in front of the entire crowd while the preacher exhorted the person to repent and the crowd prayed for his or her soul became a common feature of the New York revivals. Finney also personalized the revival by addressing people in the crowd by name. The meetings would last for days, both in the houses of worship, and also in private meetings throughout the towns.⁵⁴ But Finney knew that many of his listeners would not maintain the fires of faith once the heat of the revival died down. Since backsliding was a part of human nature, Finney argued for constant revival and constant meetings as necessary to shock congregations back onto the road to salvation in a way that regular meetings simply could not.⁵⁵

What is ironic about Finney’s revivals was that as they went on, the less democratic they became. By 1830, when Finney conducted one of his biggest revivals in nearby Rochester, he had gone through a series of major controversies about his techniques and theology. The national attention he received from the conduct of the Oneida revivals brought Finney invitations to preach from a multitude of congregations, but it also brought him into conflict with leading lights of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, such as Lyman Beecher and Asahel Nettleton. At the New Lebanon Convention in Boston, Finney and other Oneida revivalists debated the orthodox clergy over the conduct of the revivals. Finney more than held his own against some of the best religious minds in orthodox religion and gained some broader legitimacy for

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 48-49.

⁵⁵ Hambrick-Stowe, 34-40.

revivalism.⁵⁶ But after the New Lebanon Convention, Finney began to temper his mode of presentation in an attempt to smooth some of the rougher edges. The attempts at respectability after Oneida shifted the appeal of revivalism from the lower to the middle class. As Paul Johnson writes, the Rochester revival “marked the acceptance of an activist and millennialist evangelicalism as the faith of the northern middle class.”⁵⁷ Emotionalism still remained a major part of Finney’s theological, but Rochester and Oneida were distinctly different revivals, and even in the 1830s, religion in Utica reflected the class developments in Rochester rather than a continuation of the revivals in 1825 and 1826.⁵⁸

The 1825 revival in Oneida stood at a democratic crossroads. Taking place at the outset of Finney’s career, Oneida was a transition point from the backcountry revivals seen at Cane Ridge to the middle-class revivals at Rochester. For Finney and the Oneida pastors that joined him at New Lebanon, the revival marked the most democratic expression of revivalism in New York. What makes the history of the Finney revivals so intriguing for van der Kemp and the RCC is the remarkable synergy when it comes to religious ideology. There was much about the Church and the theology of its founders that should have appealed to reformers such as Finney. Both Finney and van der Kemp stressed an individualization of faith and placed the role of the believer above or at least on par with the role of any church. Neither Finney’s revivals nor the RCC rejected any participants based on denominational affiliations and did not press any expression of

⁵⁶ Hambrick-Stowe, 60-73.

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Shopkeepers Millennium*, 5. For more on the refinement of the Rochester revival, see Cross, 168-169; Hatch, 199-200; Hambrick-Stowe, 113.

⁵⁸ Ryan, 96-104.

creedal fidelity. Finney and van der Kemp celebrated the separation of church and state, generally ignoring political developments as long as they did not infringe on religious expression.⁵⁹ Importantly, both fit the democratic mold historians apply to the religious forms during this period.

But never did the twain meet. From its origins as the UPRS in 1803, orthodox members targeted the RCC and its members, and this situation only grew in intensity as Finney made his way through Oneida County. For the men and women of the RCC, the rise of revivals and the spread of evangelical faith represented a direct threat to their religious freedom and the latest in a long line of attempts to firmly establish an orthodox religion in Oldenbarneveld. With the explosion of the Oneida Revival, these adherents feared that the orthodox churches would finally possess the power and social pressure necessary to drive liberal religion out of the area. The debate between the two groups, waged in newspapers and pamphlets, reveals much about the state of religion in Oneida and the nature of tolerance and democratization in the burned-over district. The ultimate success of the Church offers a glimpse into what it took to survive in the religious marketplace of the American republic.

Finney arrived in Oneida County in 1825 to perform the double duty of visiting the family of his wife, Lydia, and attending the Presbyterian synod meeting held in Utica. On a chance meeting with his former tutor, George Gale, who was preaching in nearby Western, Finney was invited to stay with the Gales and preach in some local meetings.

⁵⁹ For van der Kemp, this was a position that became more pronounced after the War of 1812. Prior to that, van der Kemp was deeply concerned about political developments, but interestingly, not often in regard to religion. In an 1823 letter, van der Kemp wrote "If civil and Religious Liberty is Sanctioned and Security...I do little care about the form of Government," Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 13 November 1823, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 463, Massachusetts Historical Society. For Finney, see Hambrick-Stowe, 89-93.

Though he originally intended simply to observe the meeting, upon witnessing the state of religion in the group, Finney could not resist speaking out. “God,” he wrote in his memoirs, “inspired me to give them a terrible searching.” Thus began a series of revivals that lasted well into 1829.⁶⁰

In order to better communicate and spread the word of revival, a committee of clergymen was formed to “receive communications from ministers and others, respecting the late revivals of religion in this county,” which were publishing in 1826 under the title, *A Narrative of the Revival of Religion, in the County of Oneida Particularly in the Bounds of the Presbytery of Oneida, in the Year 1826*.⁶¹ Reverend Oliver Wetmore provided the chronicle of the meetings that took place in Trenton. In 1825, Wetmore lamented that religion was in “a very low and deranged state.” Beginning in December, the fervor picked up and by March conversion “were frequent,” “in most cases were deep,” and those who converted “remain steadfast.” Wetmore reported that prayer-meetings had been the most successful course for conversion, and that some “Christians have been compelled to remain in some instances agonizing in prayer, till almost the breaking of day...until their peace was made with God.” The message delivered by Wetmore and other revivalists in the town followed the model Finney had created in Adams. They stressed “the atonement, total depravity of the heart, and the duty of immediate repentance and reconciliation to God.” However, reflecting the Arminian

⁶⁰ Finney, *Autobiography*, 108; Hambrick-Stowe, 47-50. Cross argues that “Only in the fall of 1829 could the ‘moment of delirium’ in Utica be pronounced finally passed.” He does admit, however, that 1825 to 1826 marked the height of the revivals, 153.

⁶¹ Reverend John Frost, Reverend Moses Gillet, and Reverend Noah Coe, eds., *A Narrative of the Revival of Religion, in the County of Oneida Particularly in the Bounds of the Presbytery of Oneida, in the Year 1826* (Utica: Hastings and Tracy, 1826).

changes present in Calvinism, they pointed “out the great guilt of sinner in making excuses,” exhorting them that they had the power to accept God’s salvation. “The opposition to the revival,” Wetmore informed the committee, “has been great; but not from those attached to our congregation. Deists, Universalists, and many of the Unitarians, have endeavoured to bring the revival into disrepute.”⁶²

In Oldenbarneveld, of course, the RCC represented all three of those appellations, so there was little question to whom Wetmore referred in his report. In the hottest fires of the revivals in 1826, the congregants from Oldenbarneveld fired their return salvo, represented by the pamphlet, *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest*, written by Church elder Ephraim Perkins.⁶³ While the response was the work of Perkins, it reflected the opinions of many people in the Church, especially that of van der Kemp. What van der Kemp, Perkins, and other members of the Church objected to most strenuously was the elimination of free inquiry. Where Wetmore saw the expression of God’s work in the day-long prayer meetings, van der Kemp and Perkins saw coercion and a strategic use of peer pressure. Even Perkins’s long title reflected the view of the RCC. He labeled his view as that of the “Asserters of Free Inquiry, Bible Religion, Christian Freedom and Civil Liberty.” Perkins accused the revivalists of supporting “the Establishment of Hierarchy, and Ecclesiastical Domination over the Human Mind” on direct orders from “Rev. Charles Finney, ‘Home Missionary,’ and High Priest of the Expeditions.” Though a rambling

⁶² *Narrative of the Revival of Religion.*

⁶³ Ephraim Perkins, *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest, A. D. 1826 Between the ‘Holy Alliance’ for the Establishment of Hierarchy, and Ecclesiastical Domination over the Human Mind, on the One Side; and the Asserters of Free Inquiry, Bible Religion, Christian Freedom and Civil Liberty on the Other. The Rev. Charles Finney, ‘Home Missionary,’ and High Priest of the Expeditions of the Alliance in the Interior of New-York; Head Quarters, County of Oneida,*” by Ephraim Perkins, a Layman of Trenton (Utica, 1826).

potpourri of letters, passages from other sources, and intercessions from Perkins, the overwhelming message of the pamphlet is a defense of the right of the RCC to practice faith as they saw fit. The refusal on the part of the evangelicals to accept this right, coupled with the pressure to accept the a rigid faith, however labeled, led Perkins to assert that “the purport of which seems to be ‘not thy will but *mine* be done.’”⁶⁴

Perkins argued that Wetmore’s pamphlet effectively claimed there was only one true form of Christianity. While non-evangelicals were denounced as “‘enemies of the Gospel’ – ‘vipers’ – ‘devils’ – and by as many other epithets...as ingenuity and sectarian hatred can invent,” even those orthodox religionists who questioned the techniques of the revivals were decried “as being ‘mere nominal Christians.’”⁶⁵ In *A Calm Review*, a pamphlet written in support of Perkins, the author pointed out, “Deists, Infidels, Universalists, Socinians and Unitarians and sometimes Episcopalians, have been all classed together and swept away with the same unsparing besom.”⁶⁶ The impact of these assertions should not be discounted in a society where irreligion and atheism could bring down a national figure such as Thomas Paine. Liberal religion was not seen as just a threat to orthodox faith, but a threat to the future and stability of the United States. The connection between Americanism and traditional Christian denominations was in the

⁶⁴ Perkins, *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest*.

⁶⁵ Perkins, *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest*.

⁶⁶ *A Calm Review, of the Spirit, Means and Incidents of the Late ‘Oneida Revival,’ As Exhibited in Various Presbyterian Societies* (Utica: Dauby and Maynard, 1827), Unnumbered Box of Records, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

process of being forged, and Wetmore was attempting to move antirevivalists to the fringes.⁶⁷

Religious identification mattered, and it was better to be a Unitarian than an atheist, but not by much. In the contest between the revivalists and the RCC, the categorization of the Church as Unitarian set the terms of the debate. Wetmore identified the Unitarians as the greatest perpetrators, and Perkins, as an avowed Unitarian, in part took up the defense on behalf of Unitarianism. He wrote that “it was not the design” of his piece “of proselytizing” but rather that he wrote “in defence of the great and general principles of freedom of conscience, civil and religious liberty, and the common decencies...which bind together and uphold civilized society.” But, he noted, “If the tenets of or characters of Unitarians are brought forward more prominently than those of many other denominations, it is because the outrages perpetrated against their principles as Christians...have been more gross, pointed and unprovoked than against any other denomination.” In citing the other denominations under attack, the only other one he mentioned were the Episcopalians.⁶⁸ As the pamphlet moved on, the line between liberal religionist and Unitarians blurred so that at times it appeared to be a defense of the Unitarians in Oldenbarneveld rather than an address to all believers in rational religion. In a response to Perkin’s piece, Wetmore claimed the “main object of the pamphlet appears to be to promote Unitarianism, and in doing this render conspicuous the

⁶⁷ For this development prior to the War of 1812, see Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁶⁸ Perkins, *A 'Bunker Hill' Contest*.

Unitarian Society in Trenton.”⁶⁹ The pamphlet war waged between Perkins and Wetmore quickly narrowed to identifiable participants, and became a war between the Presbyterians and the Unitarians of Trenton.

In the end, for Perkins, it all came down to free thought and the right of religious expression. While evangelicals “deny us the Christian name, and hold us up to the public as objects of horror and detestation,” “surely it is madness and presumption in them, to treat us as though they thought we were destitute of rational sensibility.” Perkins invoked van der Kemp, a man whom even Wetmore acknowledged as an “honourable exception” among the Unitarians, as representative of the “professing and regularly worshipping Christians” that the Presbyterians “denounce as a ‘nest of vipers’ and ‘a den of devils.’”⁷⁰ Whether Wetmore knew of van der Kemp’s more radical religious beliefs is unclear, but Perkins certainly did. The sentiments of *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest* reflected a message van der Kemp had been espousing for some time. In a letter to Andrews Norton, van der Kemp outlined the importance of critical thinking and historical investigation when it came to matters of religion. “Biblical criticism,” he asserted, “is the cornerstone of Sound Theology – by its cultivation error is driven from its last asylum by it the pure doctrine of Jesus shall appear in all its lustre.” He added to it the “Study of Ecclesiastical Law,” arguing that by pursuing both, “the throne of Hierarchy is sapped and mined and

⁶⁹ *Narrative of the Revival of Religion.*

⁷⁰ Perkins, *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest; Narrative of the Revival of Religion.*

clerical pretensions and power humbled in the dust.” These “two powerful engines” would “replace Spiritual Slavery with the Liberty of God’s Children.”⁷¹

A third pamphlet, published in response to the Perkins-Wetmore debate, repeated the position of the RCC. The anonymous author stated, “It is not only the right, but the duty of every intelligent being not only to examine for himself, according to the light which is given him, whatever mode of faith is proposed for his adoption.” The author maintained that “unless the world will more readily lend an ear to *their* favourite tenets,” the revivalists intended to denounce any opposition as unchristian.⁷² In the eyes of van der Kemp and other members of the Church, what the revivals achieved was not opening up faith to individual beliefs, but rather replacing one authoritative hierarchy with a new one.

Both van der Kemp and Perkins objected to challenges to rational religion on principle, but they saw a greater danger in the works of Finney and local Presbyterians when it came to religious hierarchies. The success of the revivals and the rise of the “benevolent empire” concurrently meant an accumulation of power and money, resources that could create a de facto state church even in a country designed to prevent that very thing. This threat of power was especially true for oppositional voices in a small village in the heart of that empire. Power, van der Kemp believed, echoing the republican arguments of the American Revolution, made it impossible for people in any situation to act fairly and frequently led to abuse. But religious power, power that “presumes to be

⁷¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Andrews Norton, 15 October 1813, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society.

⁷² *A Calm Review*.

invested with the prerogative of opening the gates of heaven to a favourite, or kicking a damned one in the abyss” exacerbated the issue.⁷³ The benevolent empire, in the hands of Perkins, became a means “not only to *sustain* the orthodox faith, but to render it *dominant*, and to place it under the *exclusive* patronage of government.” “The influence exercised” by the Presbyterian and Congregational hierarchy touched “distinguished and rising statesman” who were beginning to make a habit of speaking in front of the central society in New York City in order to “be applauded” and spread his name across the state “whenever he becomes a candidate for public office.” Perkins cited the immense funds pouring into the orthodox churches and religious societies sponsored by those churches. The amount of money collected by these organizations “is some fifty or sixty thousand dollars per annum—equal or superior to that of some of our state governments.”⁷⁴ With the volume of funds funneled into one denomination, the Presbyterians would not need the power of the state to exert religious dominance.

As social pressure and public opinion replaced the role of church establishment, the growing power of Presbyterians meant danger for not only Oldenbarneveld, but also for any dissenters of evangelicalism.⁷⁵ As van der Kemp knew from his days in the Netherlands, disestablishment and religious persecution were not mutually exclusive.

⁷³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 5 May 1813, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 415, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁷⁴ Perkins, *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest*. See also Bratt, *Antirevivalism in Antebellum America*, 58, n. 5. Bratt notes that Perkins is not exaggerating the amount of money brought in by Presbyterian and Congregational churches.

⁷⁵ A good example of the growing power of the Presbyterian Church to dictate belief and behavior comes from the “social control” thesis of Paul Johnson. Johnson argues that “Revivals provided entrepreneurs with a means of imposing new standards of work discipline and personal comportment upon themselves and the men who worked for them, and thus they functioned as powerful social controls,” *Shopkeeper’s Millennium*, 138.

Putting standards of religious freedom in founding documents did not make it so, and if one church, whether the Reformed Church of the Netherlands or the Presbyterian Church in America, gained too much power and privilege, it would be able to dictate the parameters of religious belief. The RCC had already experienced this when the local Presbyterian Church refused to let it share the public meetinghouse, and the Finney revivals offered further evidence of this attempt to establish orthodoxy. As the revivals went on, and as they began to appeal to the middle-class entrepreneurs of Oneida County, employers refused to let their hired help ride with them to church “unless they would agree to go to the Presbyterian meeting.”⁷⁶ In Trenton, religious choices were fast becoming a decision between Presbyterianism or nothing at all.

No measure received more criticism from the members at Oldenbarneveld or provided more evidence of Presbyterian tyranny than the personalization of sin. During a revival session, the preacher would single out a local member, name some of “his known qualities or habits,” and then add to those “certain other offensive or ludicrous habits which he has not, and thereby bringing the finger of scorn or of pity to bear directly upon him.”⁷⁷ The author of *A Calm Review* noted that they had “been accustomed to hear villages, streets, houses and individuals singled out by name and held up to the surrounding audience as a spectacle to be operated upon by the rough cleaver of a coarse operator.” The result of which was that “the unhappy subject...was either driven by resentment into a passionate opposition to the whole system, or by fear and perplexity driven into the system itself by a blind surrender of all the reasoning faculties of his

⁷⁶ Perkins, *A 'Bunker Hill' Contest*.

⁷⁷ *A Calm Review*.

mind.”⁷⁸ Adam Mappa, van der Kemp’s good friend and prominent member of the RCC, was one of those individuals called out by name during a revival in Trenton, at a meeting he did not even attend. The preacher told the gathered audience that because of his beliefs, Mappa was doomed to hell and so were those who supported him. “God smite that wicked man, that hardened sinner, who never prays,” the preacher exhorted. He “has embraced a lie, and is leading multitudes that entrench themselves behind him, down to hell.”⁷⁹ The message, as received by the members of the RCC, was the opposite of any democratic form of religion. They were told that there was only one way to practice religion, and if they did not repent and repent immediately, they were doomed to eternal damnation.

The accusations, the threat of perdition, and the pressure applied by the Presbyterian Church were not without effect. Ironically, because of its broadly democratic structure, the RCC was particularly susceptible to a revivalist challenge from within. Though Peirce asserted that the “violent onslaught of the orthodox to destroy the RCC in this town” “was met by a firmness and Christian spirit that amazed them,” he selectively ignored the attempt to remove him from his pulpit.⁸⁰ The discussions that emerged over the possibility of a new preacher was the culmination of revivalist efforts against the RCC and the efforts of members such as Perkins and van der Kemp to save the Church. It was the greatest threat the Church faced in its history. It was also the

⁷⁸ *A Calm Review*.

⁷⁹ Perkins, *A 'Bunker Hill' Contest*.

⁸⁰ Peirce, *Memoir*.

moment when van der Kemp reasserted his leadership of the Church and addressed the future of liberal religion in Oldenbarneveld.

Sometime in the fall of 1826, at the height of the religious fervor, a majority of the congregants, using the structure of the Church, succeeded in their petition to obtain a new minister. By the end of October, a committee with van der Kemp at its head had been convened to make plans for the new minister's ordination. What made the call for a new preacher so dramatic was that the new preacher, a Reverend B. Chase, was to be ordained "as an Evangelist."⁸¹ The democratic nature that had allowed for the challenge to Peirce's ministry to emerge in the first place was to be tested. Though it only represented "a small majority," the organization of the Church and the right of majority rule meant that the ordination was to go through. In fact, because of the agreements between Peirce and the Church, Peirce was obligated to not only attend the ordination, but also to perform the services. A group of members petitioned van der Kemp and the other members of the committee to relieve Peirce of the "unpleasant dilemma of performing a solemn act contrary to his own wishes, and to his particular view of propriety" and save "him from the embarrassments in which he is placed." The group was clearly opposed to Chase as the new minister, asking that Peirce "not be compelled to surrender his judgment to the will of a small majority of a church meeting." While they did not do anything to stop the ordination, it was apparent that they did not think it was in the best interests of the Church. With the pamphlet war between Perkins and Wetmore so close at hand, knowing that a strong minority in the Church fervently

⁸¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp, John Sherman, and Timothy Powers to John L. Powell and Rowland Briggs, 8 November 1826, Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

opposed evangelism, this group of congregants worried about the future “peace & prosperity of the Church.”⁸² Surely when Peirce referenced the ““violent assault...made upon Trenton”” and noted that the orthodoxy “left not a stone unturned,” this was what he meant.⁸³

The Church faced a dilemma that challenged their commitment to the democratic structure of their founding articles. Article III guaranteed the “*Liberty of Conscience*” but Article IV vested ultimate authority of the Church with the body at large. The majority, however small, wanted an evangelical.⁸⁴ Article III demanded that antirevivalists maintain their opposition while Article IV compelled them to accept the vote of the Church and the likelihood of becoming an evangelical congregation. Here, then, was a test of democratization for the RCC, but not in terms of egalitarianism and tolerance that typically comes with democratization arguments. Democracy posed an apparently insurmountable problem as individual conscience collided with majority rule. Since an evangelical in the pulpit and the Oneida revivals burning throughout the region would likely be the end of liberal religion in Oldenbarneveld, the decision about Chase’s ordination dictated the future of the RCC.

With evangelical denominations prospering throughout the country and having particular success in the Oneida area, an evangelical in the pulpit presented a serious

⁸² Rowland Briggs, William Rollo, Solomon Coombs, Ansel Fox, John L. Powell, and Nathan Morgan to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, John Sherman, and Timothy Power, 31 October 1826, Scrap Album, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

⁸³ Peirce, *Memoir*. For example, Perkins related a story about a funeral sermon Peirce tried to deliver, but the orthodoxy dissuaded people from attending “because a heretic was to preach, and exertions were made to prevent them from performing that duty, which we all, as members of the same great family, owe to the memory of the dead,” *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest*.

⁸⁴ Chronicle of the RCC.

dilemma for the RCC. As the Finney revivals gained popularity throughout the region and the RCC became a specific target for reform, the future for liberal religion in Oldenbarneveld appeared dim. That was not what van der Kemp wanted, and in his seventy-fourth year, he knew this might be his last chance to preserve the vision of religious practice he had moved to America to pursue. The response of the Oldenbarneveld Church to the revivals had been to be patient and wait out the initial fervor, throwing cold water on the fires of revival. Perkins had appealed to his fellow antitrinitarians to embrace “in the calm dignity of truth” in the face of orthodox challenges. The author of *A Calm Review* noted the case of an anti-revivalist preacher who went to a congregation in turmoil, and after speaking out against the enthusiasm, “‘*There were few if any instances of awakening and conviction after this period.*’ Such was the effect of pouring a little oil upon the agitated waters.”⁸⁵ The RCC, however, did not have the time to wait out the tide of awakening, and Peirce, for all of his positive attributes and energy, had proved ineffectual in calming down his congregation.

Into this void stepped van der Kemp. As the original architect of the UPRS and a founding member of both iterations of the RCC, he may have been the person in Oldenbarneveld most invested in maintaining liberal religion. As head of the committee to organize the ordination of Reverend Chase, van der Kemp was also in a position to produce a reversal of fortune. Joining van der Kemp on the committee was another who had a vested interest in continuing liberal religion in the town, the first minister of the RCC, John Sherman. After weighing the “matter calmly & dispassionately in all its bearings,” van der Kemp announced to the congregation in early November the

⁸⁵ Perkins, *A 'Bunker Hill' Contest; A Calm Review*.

resignation of all of the committee members. Speaking in front of the entire congregation, van der Kemp informed them that while he respected the decision and “that though we should be happy in other circumstances to carry into effect the vote which has been passed by a majority of nearly or quite two to one,” the committee “are unanimously and decidedly of opinion, that neither the welfare or this church nor the real benefit of Mr Chase would be attained by his ordination here, under existing circumstances.” Van der Kemp cited “the opposition to his ordination by its Minister, by a respectable minority of the church & society, and without the concurrent aid and approbation of the consistory or officers of the church,” as the main reasons why, in good conscience, he could not organize the ordination of a minister that created such a controversy in the Church body. Van der Kemp took great care in his announcement to defend the right of Reverend Chase to preach and “wish[ed] well to him and his family,” but the import of his message was that the best interests of the Church lay in not having an evangelical at its head.⁸⁶

Van der Kemp ended his announcement on a note that intimated the lack of confidence he had moving forward. He had spoken his piece, but whether or not the congregation would follow remained to be seen. In order to preserve what liberal spirit he could, van der Kemp told the crowd to sacrifice their personal feelings for the better of the Church and to have “confidence in us as their friends” that they had done the same in arriving at the decision. “[H]ave fervent charity one towards another,” he begged them, and “by all means...avoid the least iota of party spirit” and “dwell together, as we uniformly have done for 20 years...in perfect love & harmony.” Doing so would afford

⁸⁶ Van der Kemp, Sherman, and Power to Powell and Briggs, 8 November 1826; Francis Adrian van der Kemp, John Sherman, and Timothy Power to John L. Powell and Rowland Briggs, 12 November 1826, Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

“a most happy and forcible illustration to the world around us of the power of those primitive principles of Christian doctrine, which we have adopted, with one consent, as the growing of our faith & hope.”⁸⁷

The irony of van der Kemp’s exhortation opposing Chase’s ordination on the grounds that Chase was an evangelical, was that van der Kemp expressed the “party spirit” he asked others not to adopt. In resigning from the committee, van der Kemp expressed the view that individual conscience trumped majority rule. Further, he was making an argument that revivalism and the Church as it had originally been structured could not coexist. In doing so, van der Kemp adapted some of market-based techniques of his opponents. He used his personal prestige and standing in the community to try and sway believers to his side; van der Kemp made a sales pitch for the greater benefits of liberal religion. A man that even Wetmore referred to as an “honourable exception,” van der Kemp’s warnings were not taken lightly. Even his plea for unity reminded the Church of the history they had together, and that the ordination of Chase threatened to sever whatever amount of unity they still possessed. Van der Kemp presented the issue as a stark choice between either remaining a bastion of liberal religion or succumbing to the strictures of orthodoxy, and there was little doubt on what side he fell.

Van der Kemp’s speech had the desired effect. It cooled the passions that had risen up, and reminded the congregation of the principles that had originally brought them together. In the end, the Church chose to continue the fight against orthodoxy. Chase never became minister of the RCC, and the move by van der Kemp galvanized the Church and the rest of the community. Peirce described the ordeal as revealing “the

⁸⁷ Van der Kemp, Sherman, and Power to Powell and Briggs, 12 November 1826.

power of truth and the blessing of GOD” and asserted that it made “the Unitarian ‘Society...firmer, more earnest, and more prosperous. It has gained accessions in number and in zeal.’” Perkins declared that “The only effect, which the conduct of Presbyterians...has had on us, has been to build up the Unitarian society, to advance its best interests, and to bring numbers into the pale of our church.”⁸⁸ The first new member of the Church joined July 16, 1826. From July 1826 to May 1827, the Church added eleven members to the thirty who joined in 1815. By the end of 1858, the congregation had more than doubled its 1815 total, registering sixty-five full members.⁸⁹

Securing those gains, however, brought about a subtle, but ultimately decisive, shift in how the Church positioned itself against the orthodoxy in the region. In a response to the orthodox reaction to *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest*, Perkins wrote another pamphlet, which he directed right at the Presbytery of Oneida County. In it, the position of Unitarian-Presbyterian battle that underwrote the first response became the dominant theme of the letter. Perkins quoted a long passage from orthodox minister, Lyman Beecher, which cited a growing fear in the orthodox community: a united effort from Unitarians to “excite all the prejudices in their power against Calvinists and denounce their doctrines as damnable by agonizing prayers.”⁹⁰ The RCC had begun the first forays into this territory, but had done so largely on their own. What dramatically changed from

⁸⁸ Peirce, *Memoir*; Perkins, *A ‘Bunker Hill’ Contest*.

⁸⁹ Record of Baptisms, Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part II, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; Names of the Members of the RCC, Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; Peirce, *Memoir*.

⁹⁰ Ephraim Perkins, *Letter to the Presbytery of Oneida County, New-York, and Their ‘Committee, the Rev. John Frost, Rev. Moses Gillet, and Rev. Noah Coe,’ ‘Appointed to Receive Communications from Ministers and Others Respecting the Late Revival, in this County,’* by Ephraim Perkins, ‘A Plain Farmer’ of Trenton (Utica: Dauby and Maynard, 1827), Unnumbered Box of Records, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

A 'Bunker Hill' Contest to A Letter to the Presbytery of Oneida County was the referencing of Boston and the greater connection between Unitarians throughout the country. Perkins cited a “letter from Boston, that the orthodox clergy in that nation are trying the revival skill, and ‘the definite prayer of faith’ on Harvard University.” He argued, “To guard their hearers against the inroads of Unitarians seems to be the object of highest solicitude with the orthodox clergy in most parts of the country at the present day.” Perkins ended the letter by attaching “An Unitarian Creed” from the *Christian Register*.⁹¹ Where his first article had been a universal defense of liberal religion, *A Letter to the Presbytery of Oneida County* was an explicit defense of the RCC as a Unitarian Church.

As a result of the turmoil that nearly brought ruin upon the Church, members such as Perkins began to look for outside support, and found the most obvious solution in their long-standing affiliation with Unitarians. That connection, however, became far more expressive after 1826. In 1831, Perkins addressed a letter to Reverend Henry Ware at Harvard University, the same Ware who set off the debate over Unitarianism at Harvard in 1803. In the letter, Perkins appealed to Ware to provide the RCC with some support from Harvard. Specifically, Perkins wanted aid for Peirce, who, he noted, was “isolated and alone for such a length of time” and had suffered greatly during the minister controversy. “It is doubtful,” Perkins wrote, “whether many men could be found who would have sustained themselves more fully in the confidence of this, or any people situated as he has been.” What Perkins wanted was for “Mr. Peirce to attend the annual

⁹¹ Perkins, *A Letter to the Presbytery of Oneida County*.

meeting of the Unitarian Association,” since Peirce “could be benefitted by a few Sabbaths more than were supplied here.”⁹²

The trip was apparently refreshing for Peirce as he finished out his tenure as minister in Oldenbarneveld, even staying in the town after he had been relieved of that duty. In 1834, the RCC sent official delegates to the ordination of Reverend Albert C. Patterson in Buffalo. The delegates “represent the church in the Ecclesiastical Council in Buffalo, in the vestry of the First Unitarian Congregational Society.”⁹³ Where before 1826, opponents had always conflated the RCC and Unitarianism, the members had made note to cite the multiplicity of creeds represented by the Church and its acceptance of a multitude of beliefs. After 1826, while still accepting of heterodox beliefs, the RCC in Oldenbarneveld became synonymous with the Unitarian Church of Oldenbarneveld within the Church itself, making it a point to note connections with Boston and other Unitarian congregations. As important, Unitarianism became the image and identity that the Church projected into the religious marketplace to attract congregants.

In the religious marketplace, promises of salvation often trumped the pursuit of religious knowledge. There was an inherent indeterminacy on the part of van der Kemp’s theology and in the liberal religion of the RCC. Where Finney addressed his meetings with a vivid and unwavering conviction, van der Kemp only felt comfortable presenting his beliefs as the learning of one individual. What separated van der Kemp from Finney was van der Kemp’s acceptance that he could be wrong. Finney’s message was entirely

⁹² Ephraim Perkins to Reverend Henry Ware, March 1831, Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY, Part I, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records; Peirce, *Memoir*.

⁹³ Minutes of the RCC.

about certainty and the immediacy of spiritual baptism where van der Kemp knew what he knew and never assumed to dictate the views of another. Finney's demand for immediacy and visible proof of conviction meant that tolerance had little place in revivals. Despite Arminian adaptations to Calvinism, the revivalist never doubted that Presbyterianism was the one, true faith. Van der Kemp's theology, on the other hand, was predicated on the acceptance of religious difference. In a disagreement over the rite of baptism, van der Kemp acknowledged that even after both of the disputants pored over the Bible, it was likely that they would continue to disagree, but, he wrote, "I do not consider it after all impossible, that I may have espoused the wrong side of the Question."⁹⁴ As he told Adams, "I do not fear, that we Should much disagree, and if we did, neither of us would doom the other to eternal fire." "Heaven," he argued in another letter, "can contain numberless individuals besides Calvinists." Van der Kemp "Shudder[ed] at the idea of Such a God" that would be so punishing.⁹⁵ Yet in the market, Finney's God of fire and brimstone who still allowed for human to chose salvation outpaced van der Kemp's universally benevolent deity. Believers were willing to take responsibility for their own faith, but they were unwilling to accept full responsibility. Where Finney preached a faith that even oldline Calvinists were familiar with, van der Kemp's position that every individual needed to find what faith best represented his or her beliefs struck many as too radical. Traditional beliefs still mattered, especially in a country trying to establish a tradition of its own. Further, Finney's guarantee of salvation

⁹⁴ Van der Kemp to Abiel Abbot, 8 November 1812.

⁹⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 6 October 1815, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 427, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 7 December 1812, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 414, Massachusetts Historical Society.

upon conversion was far more comfort for listeners in the burned-over district than van der Kemp's trust in access to the afterlife. The success of the Finney revivals did not alter van der Kemp's beliefs, but they shifted the direction of his Church.

In moderate but significant changes in its principles, the RCC had to become more expressive of a single denomination in order to preserve its place in the religious environment of the early American republic. The shift to a more pronounced identification with Unitarianism achieved the goal of consolidating the image of the Church to the outside world, but it also allowed a system of external support that the Church needed. The revivals did not stop in 1826 and the threat of revivalism and evangelicalism was still a significant factor in the life of the Church. With van der Kemp passing away in 1829, its most vocal and prominent defender of liberal religion was gone, and the Church moved to secure a support that had always been part of the Church. By the 1820s, Unitarianism had established its faith and corporate identity on the American religious landscape. Unitarianism utilized the congregational system and hierarchy that helped the orthodox churches spread awakenings throughout the country. The connection within this emerging Unitarian system helped the RCC become incorporated into a larger religious body through local and national meetings. Moving forward, though the Church remained an island in orthodox waters, it no longer felt "isolated and alone."

The RCC and its affiliation with Unitarianism still placed it outside of acceptable religion in the eyes of the revivalists, but it offered the church in Oldenbarneveld stable ground to build upon. The RCC achieved stability not through democratization, but rather by adopting the organizational features of their orthodox opponents. The Church in Oldenbarneveld had started out the most liberal and most democratic in the region, but

in order to survive the revivalist challenge, it had to blunt its more democratic edges and adopt a stricter denominational style.

The history of the RCC, sitting in the middle of the burned-over district, presents an alternative narrative to the history of the Second Great Awakening. Where historians have viewed the expansion of religion as the democratic expression of a religious marketplace, the members in Oldenbarneveld found democracy and tolerance provided its greatest weaknesses. The limits put on the RCC force us to reconsider themes of democratization and tolerance, and remind us of the continuing importance of religious identity and denominations in the early American republic.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

On April 30, 1829, Francis Adrian van der Kemp wrote to a friend that the next Monday, May 4, “is my 77 anniversary and the 41 of my arrival in this country.”¹ Ever since 1788, van der Kemp had jointly celebrated his birthday and the anniversary of his arrival in the United States. On his seventieth birthday and thirty-fourth year as an American, he wrote DeWitt Clinton, “Saturday is the High festival – the day of my arrival in this happy Land.”² In 1825, four years before the forty-first anniversary, van der Kemp crossed the meridian of having lived longer in the United States than his native Dutch Republic.

Van der Kemp’s confidence in the American future belied the frustration and disillusionment that constituted much of his American experience. The dreams that he carried across the Atlantic in 1788 and continued to celebrate on his birthdays never manifested on American shores. Van der Kemp’s experiences with American politics and religion convinced him that the hopes he carried with him across the Atlantic in 1788 remained a dream deferred. The legacy of the American Revolution had yet to be fulfilled in the first decades of the American republic, and would not be done so “without Some interruptions – Some convulsions.” Yet van der Kemp retained hope that Americans would eventually capitalize on the gifts given to them. “It is not presumptuous that we Shall arrive at the ackme [sic] of glory,” he wrote. With the “State

¹ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Unknown Recipient, 30 April 1829, Gratz Collection, Box 281 Folder 76, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

² Francis Adrian van der Kemp to DeWitt Clinton, 3 May 1822, DeWitt Clinton Papers, Volume 10, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

of Europe” declining to the point that he felt “it can never recover its ancient lustre,” “arts, Sciences, Liberty and Religion Shall fly to and find an asylum on the American Shores.”³ There was still every chance that America would take up the mantle of civilization and become the country van der Kemp had envisioned when he still lived in the Netherlands.

Van der Kemp’s failure to merge his Dutch dreams with his American life nonetheless helps to reveal the similarities and differences of the Dutch-American Atlantic. Van der Kemp’s support of republican politics and expansive religious freedom during the Dutch Patriot Revolt placed him in a unique position to advocate for the American Revolution. When his revolt failed, the success of the Americans convinced him that the United States had become the type of republic the Dutch should have been. Further, when van der Kemp immigrated to America, he assumed that he had left the turmoil of the Atlantic revolutions behind him. As political instability in the Atlantic world and partisanship in the United States began to reflect the recent history of the Dutch Patriots and as religious institutions began to exert social pressure over the proper expression of American faith, van der Kemp questioned the immediate success of the Revolution. When the America he envisioned clashed with the America he actually lived in, van der Kemp found a situation similar to that he had left in the Netherlands.

Van der Kemp assumed he had left behind the indeterminate nature of Dutch religion, of public churches and private faiths and hollow commitments to tolerance. At the very least, van der Kemp did not dream that in America his ability to practice faith as

³ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 10 June 1821, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 452, Massachusetts Historical Society; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 6 March 1824, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 464, Massachusetts Historical Society.

he saw fit would be constrained by the state or marginalized to the fringes. In short, van der Kemp thought he moved to a country where tolerance was the norm. Early on in his transition from Dutch exile to American citizen, van der Kemp encountered resistance to his religious practice. Entering the country in the aftermath of the Constitution debates, van der Kemp underestimated the divisiveness and fragility of the American republic and the measure to which radical ideas became viewed as destabilizing and a direct threat to the future. The shift toward Ariminianism in the United States mirrored several elements of van der Kemp's belief in a benevolent, forgiving God, the same view that the Reformed Church in the Netherlands deemed a threat to stability, but it was his denial of church authority and opposition to evangelicalism that placed him outside the religious pale in America. Van der Kemp's unique brand of Christianity encountered similar resistance in the United States as it had in the Dutch Republic. Van der Kemp found that his openness and willingness to debate established beliefs was outside the pale for even some of his fellow religious dissenters. The difficulties and fears he encountered when he attempted to publish Thomas Jefferson's "Syllabus on Jesus Christ" confirmed to van der Kemp that America was not the religious asylum that he preached about in the Netherlands. It was not yet the fulfillment of religious freedom promised, in his view, by the American Revolution.

Despite the disappointment, van der Kemp pressed on. He founded a religious society that reflected his core beliefs of liberal religion and pluralism. And when it transitioned to a church, van der Kemp made sure the new Reformed Christian Church was also a beacon of heterodoxy in a land of orthodoxy. The element that appeared to be the most troubling was his acknowledgement that the beliefs of others were equal to his

own. Summed up at his funeral by Isaac B. Peirce, minister of the Reformed Christian Church, van der Kemp “kept the faith of Jesus in his enlightened understanding cherished by the Sacred dictates of conscience he conceded to others their equal rights to differ from him, with a cheerfulness, that to the eye of bigotry might at times have appeared the offspring of indifference.” “But where religion was concerned nothing was to him was indifferent.”⁴ Van der Kemp’s doggedness and unrelenting dedication to liberal religion paid dividends as his leadership saved the Church on more than one occasion. In doing so, however, van der Kemp had to sacrifice his more radical and democratic religious ideals. To obtain stability, the Church curbed its heterodoxy and adopted a uniform identity as a Unitarian Church. Still liberal by American standards, it was not the Church van der Kemp originally founded.

The determination van der Kemp applied to his religious beliefs did not correlate to his political commitments. Van der Kemp came to the United States with a resume as one of the more radical proponents in the Dutch Patriot Revolt. He advocated for more democratic measures and better representation for the Dutch people at all levels of governance. Unlike some of his fellow Patriots, when van der Kemp invoked *het volk*, he meant the entire population of the Netherlands and not just those deemed acceptable for the traditional definition of Dutch citizenship. Arriving in the United States, van der Kemp found that his Dutch democracy was not the same as American democracy. As the country split into Federalist and Republican camps, the former espousing a more conservative vision of America while the latter utilized democratic rhetoric, van der

⁴ Isaac B. Peirce, “Funeral Sermon,” Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 2: Address and Funeral Sermon.

Kemp found himself on the side of the Federalists. The more van der Kemp dealt with Americans, especially the individuals he encountered in western New York, the more he became convinced that balance should offset some of the rampant democratization. He feared, in a way he never expressed in the Dutch Republic, that too much democracy would descend the country into chaos.

Van der Kemp was not alone in his conservative turn. In addition to his familiarity with unruly Americans in western New York, the French Revolution dramatically altered van der Kemp's understanding of politics. Indeed, the radical nature of the French Revolution redefined what it meant to be democratic in the United States, and as van der Kemp became more conservative, so did the country around him. For van der Kemp, however, the danger from the French came from more than beheadings and de-Christianization campaigns: it came from a threat to American liberty. Van der Kemp saw the threat in the French treatment of the Dutch. As the French invaded the Netherlands, set up what he considered merely a puppet government, and stripped away the liberty of the Dutch people, van der Kemp witnessed the potential future for the United States. Unless they could find a way to correct the passions of partisanship that typified the Federalist era, van der Kemp feared that the future of the Americans lay in the fate of the Dutch.

Even after the upheavals of the 1790s subsided, van der Kemp worried that the emergence of defined political parties would expose Americans to the same internal divisions that spelled doom for the Dutch Patriots. As the War of 1812 approached and the British became a substantial threat to American sovereignty on the seas and on its western borders, the apprehension van der Kemp felt in the 1790s resurfaced. It was a

fear made all the worse because van der Kemp lived in the center of the war zone. The significant divide between Federalists and Republicans hampered the war effort, and the troops, a number that included van der Kemp's youngest son, Peter, never received enough supplies. Witnessing the disaster and destruction of the borderlands of New York and Canada, van der Kemp placed most of the blame at the feet of James Madison for inadequately preparing the nation for war. As the war dragged on, van der Kemp shifted the source of blame to the American political system. By the time that peace finally came, van der Kemp was so disillusioned with American politics that he swore off any future participation.

The interdependence between the United States and the United Provinces of the Netherlands stood at the center of van der Kemp's American disenchantment. The repeated celebrations and the measure of years since he became an American testified to the duality of van der Kemp's identity, downplaying the fact that van der Kemp always remained a man of two countries. As he constantly noted, his American life began in 1788, but it was one profoundly shaped by the previous thirty-six years in the Netherlands. Van der Kemp affirmed his commitment to the United States on February 28, 1789, less than a year after his arrival, by becoming a U.S. citizen. He took "the oath of allegiance to this State and abjured all allegiance to all and every foreign King."⁵ It was an oath van der Kemp took seriously. Even after the stabilization of Dutch affairs thawed his feelings toward the Orangist government, van der Kemp never regretted leaving his adopted home. After the Dutch rebellion against Napoleon and the creation

⁵ Jonas Platt to J. J. van der Kemp, 25 May 1810, F. A. Van der Kemp Papers, VDK 1, Oneida Historical Society Manuscript Division, Utica, NY, Box 82, Box 1 - Bio.1 through GRE.2.11, Folder Cor.1: Cor.1-1/Cor.1-9 - Correspondence.

of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1814, a friend offered van der Kemp the chance to live out his final days in the Netherlands. “You can not hesitate about my answer,” van der Kemp wrote to Adams.” While he desired to visit and say a final goodbye to his friends, van der Kemp affirmed, “no gift of honor or lucre could – if I know myself – could gain my acceptance.” Yet, he confessed, “I am pleased – in not being forgotten.”⁶

The glimmer of recognition revealed that even though van der Kemp left the Netherlands, the Netherlands never left him. Once he crossed the Atlantic, van der Kemp never seriously entertained the idea of returning to the Netherlands, but he always viewed his experiences in the United States through a Dutch lens. Despite having numerous connections in the Boston area, van der Kemp, supported by the advice of John Adams, chose New York for his future home. In doing so, van der Kemp engaged in a symbolic act of connecting his Dutch identity to America by moving to the region formerly inhabited by the Dutch colony of New Netherland. The historical Dutchness of the region expressed the duality at the core of his identity. It was no mistake that after frequently moving around New York unable to find a satisfying location, the van der Kemps established a permanent home on a parcel of land secured by fellow Patriot Adam Mappa, carved out of the holdings of a Dutch land company, in a village they named Oldenbarneveld after a famous Dutch statesman and religious martyr. Van der Kemp and the original residents of Oldenbarneveld united their Dutch past with the Dutch past in America. New Netherland and the Netherlands combined to forge a new settlement in the early American republic, an American town with deep Dutch roots.

⁶ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to John Adams, 4 November 1816 and 10 November 1816, Microfilm Edition of the Adams Family Papers, Reel 434, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Van der Kemp was not alone invoking the future legacy of Dutch and American interactions during the Age of Revolutions. In addition to the Dutch families who shared in the establishment of Oldenbarneveld and other Dutch enclaves in western New York, prominent Americans fashioned an American future built in part by Dutch hands. George Washington favorably looked upon the Patriot Revolt, and upon its collapse, hoped that America would become an asylum for such likeminded people. Philip Schuyler admitted that it was because of van der Kemp's "Character both as a public and a private citizen, of your sacrifices and sufferings in a cause which did honor to its votaries" that he felt it his duty "on every Occasion to render you and your family services."⁷ One of the loudest proponents of the legacy between the Netherlands and the United States was John Adams. Adams had his own personal history with the Dutch people, but his life-long friendship with van der Kemp provided him with a permanent reminder of those bonds. When tallying his life's accomplishments, Adams consistently put his efforts in the Netherlands in the top four. In a discussion about revolutions in the recent past, Adams noted to van der Kemp, "[I]f my name ever did deserve to be remembered, I mean, in my Negotiations in Holland in 1780, 1781, and 1782." Adams's efforts in the Netherlands was among a small numbers of events that he claimed were "of more critical difficulty, and more actual and eventful importance, than any other Efforts in my whole life."⁸

⁷ George Washington to Francis Adrian van der Kemp 28 May 1788, Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society. See also Francis Adrian van der Kemp to George Washington 15 May 1788, 16 July 1788, 24 March 1789, and 9 January 1790, all in Van der Kemp Collection, New-York Historical Society. Philip Schuyler to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 23 December 1794, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Archives, A69-66, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Papers, Volume 7: Miscellaneous Autograph Letters.

⁸ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 2 May 1814, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 29 May 1814, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp

Near the end of his life, Adams repeated his attachment to the role of the Netherlands in securing America's future. He also lamented that in the years since the Revolution, the Dutch had largely been neglected in public remembrances. As the distance from the Revolution increased, the Americans who had welcomed the van der Kemps to America began to die and their memories of Dutch involvement died with them. Adams wrote to van der Kemp with the "hope the Knickerbockers in America will be excited to assert the dignity of their nation." "I modestly blush for my Nation," Adams continued, "when I consider the sangfroid the nonchalance with which they have received the manifold testimonys [sic] of the esteem confidence and affection of the Dutch towards the United States and the low estimation in which we have held the importance of their connection with us." Adams maintained that the treaty between the Netherlands and the United States had been a turning point in the American Revolution and hoped that "in some future day it may be thought of more importance."⁹ Even beyond their contribution to the American Revolution, Adams asserted, "Justice to the Hollanders for their Merit in propagating Letters Science, Navigation Commerce, Patriotism, Liberality Tolleration [sic] has never been done."¹⁰

This study of van der Kemp seeks to fill in some of those gaps Adams pointed out. What makes van der Kemp's story unique is that it emerges from a period

Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁹ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 3 January 1823, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁰ John Adams to Francis Adrian van der Kemp, 22 August 1818, Francis Adrian Van der Kemp Collection, 1781-1829: Letters of John Adams and John Quincy Adams, 1781-1829, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

sandwiched between the two most prominent moments in Dutch-American history, New Netherland and the late nineteenth-century wave of Dutch immigration.¹¹ Further, van der Kemp represented a rarity in the Dutch diaspora after the failure of the Patriot Revolt in that he immigrated to the United States.¹² By the time van der Kemp arrived in the United States, the Dutch presence in America had already begun, in the words of Judith Richardson, a “process of ghostly aboriginalization.” Similar to the ways white Americans elided the history of Native populations as central to the region but forever representative of the distant past, the Dutch were at once integral to the development of New York but long since absent from the landscape.¹³ Forever ensconced in Washington

¹¹ The historiography on New Netherland continues to expand, as does the investigation of the transition of New Netherland to New York. For some examples, see Jaap Jacobs, *The Colony of New Netherland: A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Donna Merwick, *Death of a Notary: Conquest and Change in Colonial New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Joyce D. Goodfriend, ed., *Revisiting New Netherland: Perspectives on Early Dutch America* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Joyce D. Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). For accounts of the chronology of Dutch-American relations, see Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch in America, 1609-1974* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975); Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt, and Annette Stott, eds., *Going Dutch: The Dutch Perspective in America, 1609-2009* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); J. W. Schulte Nordholt and Robert P. Swierenga, eds., *A Bilateral Bicentennial: A History of Dutch-American Relations, 1782-1982* (Amsterdam: Meulenhof International, 1982); Robert P. Swierenga, ed., *The Dutch in America: Immigration, Settlement, and Cultural Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985); Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis A. van Minnen, and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations, 1609-2009* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

¹² For the rarity of van der Kemp’s immigration see Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, trans. Herbert H. Rowen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 220-221, 300-307. As a whole, Dutch immigration to the United States was rare. As Robert P. Swierenga points out, “Dutch *non*-immigration rather than immigration is the salient fact.” He notes that “less than 300,000 Netherlanders emigrated overseas from 1820 to 1920.” Robert P. Swierenga, “Exodus Netherlands, Promised Land America: Dutch Immigration and Settlement in the United States,” in *A Bilateral Bicentennial: A History of Dutch-American Relations, 1782-1982*, ed. J. W. Schulte Nordholt and Robert P. Swierenga (Amsterdam: Meulenhof International, 1982).

¹³ Judith Richardson, “The Ghosting of the Hudson Valley Dutch,” in *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America, 1609-2009*, ed. Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt and Annette Stott (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 87-107, quote 107.

Irving's Knickerbocker tales, the Dutch were a ubiquitous feature of New York's cultural landscape, but always ascribed a passive role. They haunted but never altered.

The early history of Oldenbarneveld and van der Kemp's role in its development helps us to recognize the continued role of the Dutch in the creation of the United States. The Dutch and Dutch Americans continued to build, shape, and reshape the American landscape and along with it, American culture. Van der Kemp was not a Dutch specter stalking the western frontier of New York but rather a fulcrum between the impact of the Dutch past and advancement of the Dutch American future.

The Dutch-American legacy of van der Kemp's life carried on well past his death. It could be seen through the life of his oldest son, John Jacob, who became the highest-ranking American official for the Holland Land Company. The same organization that provided the van der Kemps their permanent home continued to physically and financially shape the American continent. The legacy can also be seen in the Reformed Christian Church. Surviving the evangelical assault in the 1820s, the Church continues to hold services to this day as the Unitarian Church of Barneveld. Celebrating its history of openness and rationality, the Church has retained the liberal spirit that van der Kemp initially envisioned.

Despite the repeated failures that made up much of his American life, the success of his son and the hopeful future of the Church allowed van der Kemp to remain relatively positive about the future of the United States. Surrounding the moments of despair, van der Kemp did find serenity in his American situation. He wrote DeWitt Clinton, "My circumstances are very straightened – but the generous supply of a worthy Son, and the rigid economy of an Excellent wife and Daughter supplies in all my wants."

“[W]hat can I reasonably wish more than contentment at home, and affectionate esteem abroad from these with whom I the honour to be acquainted.”¹⁴ Even as he was going blind attempting to translate all of the New Netherland records for the State of New York, van der Kemp’s contentment allowed him to exude a positive outlook. “I do not mourn,” he wrote, “though I feel the full weight of the burthen, that I am nearly blind – this would be unthankfulness having possessed the blessings of sight nearly 76 years.” With a firmness that would compromise the quality of the translations, van der Kemp pressed on, writing Clinton, “My health remains firm but I am nearly blind – so that reading has become already a highly difficult task – and yet – I will not give up.”¹⁵

The commitment that van der Kemp expressed to Clinton speaks to the blend of stubbornness and principle that was the Dutchman’s hallmark. More importantly, it reveals that van der Kemp’s American dreams were inextricably connected with the history of the Dutch-Atlantic. Beginning with his interactions during the Dutch Patriot Revolt, van der Kemp was confident that the success of the American Revolution had uniquely positioned Americans to permanently secure their rights and liberties. The frustrations and struggles van der Kemp experienced in adapting to the early American republic, however, convinced him that the legacy of the American Revolution had yet to be fulfilled. As he did in the Netherlands, the desire to capitalize on the hope of political

¹⁴ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to DeWitt Clinton, 26 January 1818, DeWitt Clinton Papers, Volume 8, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

¹⁵ Francis Adrian van der Kemp to DeWitt Clinton, 29 January 1828, DeWitt Clinton Papers, Volume 15, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York; Francis Adrian van der Kemp to DeWitt Clinton, 29 September 1823, DeWitt Clinton Papers, Volume 11, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

stability and religious freedom compelled van der Kemp to write, publish, worry, and argue for his new home.

Van der Kemp's seventy-seventh birthday and forty-first commemoration of becoming an American on May 4, 1829 was to be his last celebration of those two events. Van der Kemp died four months later on September 7, 1829. In a final act of poetry, it came one year to the day that he lost his dear wife Reinira.¹⁶ Van der Kemp's continual celebration of his American anniversary testified to his commitment to the dream of the United States he created in the Netherlands back in 1781. But the invocation also served as an enduring reminder that the America of his dreams and the reality of his situation were never one and the same.

¹⁶ "Record of Deaths," *Records of the RCC of Trenton, NY* Part III, Unitarian Church of Barneveld Records.

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