

THE DAY NEW YORK FORGOT: THE LEGACY OF TRAUMA IN COLLECTIVE
MEMORY AS SEEN THROUGH A STUDY OF EVACUATION DAY

Cody Osterman

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Committee:

Andrew Schocket, Advisor

Rebecca Mancuso

ABSTRACT

Andrew Schocket, Advisor

On November 25 1783, the British evacuated New York City after occupying the city for seven-years during the American Revolution. As Washington and his troops marched into Manhattan to take command of the city, both those who fled New York, as Washington did in 1776, and those who endured the occupation joyously celebrated his return, which for them, marked the end of the Revolution. Each year from there on, the 25th of November was celebrated as a day that would later be titled Evacuation Day. This work analyzes how Evacuation Day was celebrated from 1783 to 1883. This study examines the reception to each year's Evacuation Day celebration through a rhetorical analysis of local newspaper coverage of the event and argues that traumatic memory is very fragile and unless well-cultivated fails to transfer to from generation to generation—replaced instead with meaningless ritual and bombastic spectacle.

To my parents, Howard and Cathy Osterman, without which none of this is possible.

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INTRODUCTION

If you had asked me before beginning this project what holidays are celebrated in late November, I, a lifelong New Yorker, would have promptly responded with Thanksgiving and then paused, wondering if the use of the plural “holidays” was a mistake. Amongst many other things including bagels, pizza, and a general desire to classify jogging as walking, New York City is known for its parades. Every year the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade is televised live, as is the Columbus Day parade. The annual Village Halloween parade is frequently televised, if not as a live and continuous broadcast then covered in local news. The annual LGBT pride parade and Puerto Rican Day parades are also very popular events on New York’s festive calendar.¹ Every time one of New York’s eight regional sports teams wins a championship, the victorious team parades on Broadway from the Battery to City Hall—a stretch aptly titled the “Canyon of Heroes.”² Parades are rituals in which heroes are immortalized.

I spent the first twenty-three years of my life living twenty-five miles from Lower Manhattan. I attended two Super Bowl championship parades and one World Series parade within the last ten years, and yet I had no knowledge of an annual parade and celebration that had taken place in New York for over a century.³ Despite both my proximity to New York and my scholarly interest in the American Revolution, I had never heard of Evacuation Day. For years I have been biking around lower Manhattan and Brooklyn Heights, stopping to read the plaques describing the Battle of Brooklyn and Washington’s subsequent retreat; yet not once have I come across a plaque or sign that discussed the legacy, or the historical significance of a

¹ In my household, watching the parades on TV became an annual tradition. However, attending the parade was

² See <http://www.downtownny.com/canyon-of-heroes> for more information about the history of “Ticker Tape Parades” in NYC.

³ In 2008, I pleaded with my father to let me skip school to attend the 2007 Giants Super Bowl parade emphatically claiming that such an event would never again occur in my lifetime. The Giants then won again in 2011 at which point I no longer needed my father’s permission to attend the parade.

holiday that at one time galvanized the citizens of New York. There is not even an acknowledgement of the day's commemoration. This absence of physical markers of Evacuation Day only became evident to me when I encountered a description of the 1794 Evacuation Day in Sarah Purcell's *Sealed with Blood*.⁴ How could it be that I had never heard of this holiday, read about it, or encountered any landmark that referenced it? How did this day vanish from the collective consciousness to the point that none of my friends or family, having lived in New York their whole lives, had never heard of it either?

From late August 1776 until late November 1783, New York was a city occupied by the British army, the stronghold of their forces throughout the American Revolution. In late November 1783, the British evacuated their last occupied city, New York. A procession led by Commander in Chief of the Continental Army George Washington and New York Governor George Clinton took possession of the city on November 25. In many ways this was the last act of the Revolutionary War. Many New Yorkers who fled the city amidst, or shortly after, Washington's retreat in 1776 returned to their homes after seven years—or what was left of them. For returning New Yorkers the day was one of mixed feelings, joyous exuberance about the conclusion of the Revolution and the ability to return home, as well as grief surrounding the memory of their evacuation from their homes. For those patriot supporting New Yorkers who stayed during the British occupation, the day functioned in a similar fashion; they were ecstatic that their foreign occupiers were finally gone while at the same time confronted with the legacy of their struggle during the occupation. Both sets of New Yorkers celebrated the evacuation of the British on November 25 with an impromptu parade and ceremonial lowering of the Union Jack and raising of the American flag at the Battery, while many Loyalists who lived in New

⁴ Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

York during the occupation fled with General Carleton. The day concluded with speeches and dinners held for Washington and his men. In the years that followed New Yorkers continued to commemorate the British exodus with annual celebrations on November 25, a day that decades later would be labeled Evacuation Day.⁵

Through a thorough examination of how it was celebrated, how it was used by political and social factions, and how, ultimately, the day lost its place on New York's festive calendar, this thesis argues that the collective memory associated with commemorative acts formed to mourn and heal from a communal trauma can easily dissipate if the memory of the day is not attached to the needs of each subsequent generation. This thesis examines how Evacuation Day transformed across the late 18th and 19th centuries—both how the day was celebrated, and what the public reception was to those celebrations—in an attempt to gauge how and why enthusiasm for the day ebbed and flowed across the century. This study examines the legacy of the trauma of the British occupation in the collective memory of New Yorkers at various points across the 19th century. Additionally, this thesis examines how the day became a platform for various groups throughout the century to exert political agency.

One of the most comprehensive studies of New York City during the American Revolution dates back to 1931, a monograph published by historian Oscar Theodore Barck. On the British evacuation, Barck wrote, "November 25, 1783, was a red letter day for patriotic New Yorkers. As the British troops withdrew from the Battery, and Washington's men marched triumphantly down Manhattan Island to the very heart of the city, thousands of Americans, who

⁵ This study will examine how changes in what the day was called reflected changes in the day's place in collective memory.

had drifted back to town after the news of peace, greeted the victors with open arms.”⁶ His flowery prose aside, Barck captured the significance of the British evacuation and what it represented for both those who endured the occupation and those who fled. He continued, “The scenes enacted were indescribable, for the elaborate ceremonies, parades, and banquets were supported wholeheartedly by those who had spent seven long years in exile.”⁷ Barck did not offer much detail about the day’s events outside of these broad generalizations.

There is very little scholarship on the celebrations that occurred on the day of the British evacuation in 1783—what little that has been written of the day, like Barck’s work, was cobbled together from articles published in local newspapers. Additionally the published letters of New York Governor George Clinton offer some insight into the logistics of evacuation and later the raucous celebration that ensued. Barck relied on one surviving newspaper source from November 26 1783, *Rivington’s New York Gazette*, as the sole source for his summary of the day. In the decades since Barck’s work was published, additional sources have been unearthed, but still not many.

There was a two-month delay between the signing of the Treaty of Paris in early September 1783 and the British evacuation in late November. During these two months British General Sir Guy Carleton orchestrated the evacuation of New York, a city that had been occupied for seven years and thus had significant military infrastructure that needed to be dismantled. In addition to the infrastructure, Carleton had to also orchestrate the evacuation of the city’s Loyalist population. Historian Maya Jasanoff noted that this was a logistical nightmare for Carleton. He had to plan for the roughly thirty-five thousand Loyalists in New York who

⁶ Oscar Theodore Barck, *New York City During The War For Independence: With Special Reference to the Period of British Occupation*, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, no. 357 (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1931), 220.

⁷ Ibid.

took the British government's offer to relocate them either to Britain or another British outpost, often Nova Scotia.⁸ Jasanoff also wrote that the size of the British military garrison stationed in New York, 20,000 men, was another logistical issue that needed to be addressed. In addition, Carleton had to communicate with Washington and Clinton so that there would be a seamless transition of power, leaving no gap for raucous activity including looting.

Carleton kept delaying the evacuation. In a letter to Washington, Carleton assured him that the evacuation would be finished by November 22.⁹ Later, Carleton told his men to prepare for evacuation on November 21. Washington, Clinton, and Washington's men rode down to Tarrytown on November 20, a city just north of New York, and waited for the official word from Carleton. Carleton again delayed. The following day Washington's procession, about 800 Continental troops, marched from Tarrytown to Harlem where they would await the final word from Carleton. Harlem held a bittersweet place in Washington's heart as it was the scene of his retreat from New York following his loss at the Battle of Long Island seven years ago that ceded control of the city to the British. Carleton's evacuation would finally be completed a few days later, November 25, 1783.

The British were to leave New York Harbor on seven ships and the transfer of power would be officially marked with a cannon fired at 1pm indicating the last of the British ships had left the harbor. At noon Washington, Clinton, and their soldiers would march into the city and when the indication that the British had departed was given, the British Union Jack would be lowered from its place atop the flagpole at Fort George and replaced with the American flag, followed by an official thirteen-gun salute. Only one small mishap occurred. British officers

⁸ Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 86.

⁹ New York (State). Governor (1777-1795 : Clinton) et al., *Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York, 1777-1795, 1801-1804* .. (New York, Albany, 1899), 282, <http://archive.org/details/publicpapersofge10newy2>.

greased the flagpole and cut the halyards, preventing the lowering of the British Union Jack. Evacuation Day lore has it that a young soldier named John Van Arsdale was able to put on a pair of cleats and climb to the top and remove the British flag and raise the American one.¹⁰ Van Arsdale's descendants would turn this action into legend and in doing so they would have the honor of raising the American flag above the Battery in the years and decades to come during evacuation celebrations.

While this struggle with the greased flagpole was happening, Washington, Clinton, and their troops marched down Queen Street (what is now Pearl Street) and then onto Broadway to their destination at Cape's Tavern where they were to spend the evening. Later that evening, Clinton hosted to a dinner for Washington and his troops at Fraunces Tavern, with thirteen ceremonial toasts offered. *Rivington's New York Gazette* noted that these toasts included "The memory of those Heroes who have fallen for our Freedom" and "May America be an asylum to the persecuted of the earth."¹¹ One citizen commended that "Thus was a happy day for the real friends of America and it was celebrated accordingly by old and young, particularly by those who had left the city at the commencement of the troubles and had now returned for the first time from an exile of eight long years."¹² These toasts demonstrate that New Yorkers saw this day as the last day in the long struggle for independence.

For the next week, similar celebrations of the British evacuation occurred throughout the city. An anecdote was published in the *New York Packet* on January 15th describing the emotional impact of the return from exile of so many New Yorkers following the evacuation. The anecdote was published anonymously under the pseudonym "Common Sense," and

¹⁰ James Riker, "Evacuation Day", 1783, (Printed for the author, 1883), 14, http://archive.org/details/ldpd_5684804_000.

¹¹ *Rivington's New York Gazette*, November 26, 1783.

¹² *A Toast to Freedom: New York Celebrates Evacuation Day* (Fraunces Tavern Museum, 1984), 9.

succinctly described the “conflict of afflicting passions” on Evacuation Day.¹³ The author elaborated “to see so many hundreds made immediately happy, by a safe return to their long forsaken homes, and others made wretched by having new habitations to seek...produced in the mind a disquieting compound of joy and pity.”¹⁴ Finally, on December 6, Washington and his troops departed from the city, and with them the festivities ended. Evacuation Day, though not yet called that, would be celebrated in the years that followed. However, the day did not have a good foothold in New York’s festive calendar or substantial popular support until it was used as a platform by the Federalists to support the ratification of the Constitution in 1787.

A decade removed from the British evacuation, the rhetoric of this toast, and the many others offered that day across the city, demonstrated that a strong sense of patriotism still surrounded the anniversary of the evacuation. In 1795, the *New-York Journal & Patriotic Register* published an article about how Evacuation Day was celebrated. This article included a printed list of all of the toasts that were made at a dinner attended by a company of former Continental soldiers. The first toast offered that day was to “The 25th of November, 1783; may every anniversary of this important day see the enemies of Republicanism turn their backs on the shores where they have been convinced that the *Arm of Freedom* is INVINCIBLE.”¹⁵ As well, this toast demonstrated that the day still held a strong emotional resonance for the soldiers of the Revolution and for the average citizen who endured a seven-year occupation in the name of liberty.

Starting in the 1820s, a generational divide began to emerge in which the older generations still felt an emotional connection to the British evacuation on the anniversary of their departure. However, the subsequent generations saw the day as nothing more than another

¹³ *New York Packet*, January 15, 1784.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *New-York Journal & Patriotic Register*, November 28, 1795 Emphasis is the original author’s/publisher’s.

holiday to celebrate—a day off. In 1820, John Pintard, a former Continental soldier and New Yorker, wrote to his daughter about the thirty-seventh anniversary of the British evacuation. He wrote that the day back in 1783 “restored our citizens to their desolated dwellings after a long & tedious exile of 7 years, during which many a patriot had died and left their remains in distant lands.”¹⁶ Pintard would later write that he felt it was a duty to honor and celebrate the day each year, to commemorate the casualties of war and the hardships of occupation. For Pintard’s generation, the day remained one of somber reflection. His rhetoric demonstrated that even decades later he still had a strong emotional and visceral reaction to the anniversary.

By the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the British evacuation, questions about the need to continue to celebrate the anniversary moving forward emerged. The *New York Spectator* published an article questioning why the day was celebrated beyond the first few years after the British evacuation. Regarding the continued observance of this holiday, the newspaper noted that “its observance should pass into an indefinitely extended anniversary, running down to the period of fifty years, few we believe of those who instituted it would have imagined, or willingly promoted.” Rather than embrace the memory of the day and continue to celebrate the holiday, the *Spectator*’s editors suggested that they “really hope that this day will be the last in which the city troops will be paraded, and the corporation punch bowl filled, in honor of the Evacuation.”¹⁷ Celebrations of the anniversary of the British evacuation were celebrated throughout the 19th century.

Once I discovered Evacuation Day, I had to determine if the holiday was intriguing simply as a historical oddity—a forgotten former holiday—or if the holiday was worth of

¹⁶ John Pintard and Dorothy C. Barck, *Letters from John Pintard to His Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833* (New York : Printed for the New-York Historical Society, 1940), 348, <http://archive.org/details/lettersfromjohnp723pint>.

¹⁷ *New-York Spectator*, November 28, 1833.

extensive study. Initially I thought the answer to that question would be that because parades were prominent forms of public communication and political engagement during the long 19th century, the day should be studied. This is true. Local and national celebrations were important events in which citizens could express political opinions and exert agency. Parades, festivals, and other larger public gatherings allowed community members to come together to discuss ideas, reflect on the past, and attempt to shape the future. Evacuation Day was just one day on New York's festive calendar and was not the only holiday that relied on a connection to the past or that employed a unifying set of national symbols and common imagery. Repeated exposure to these shared images and symbols helped foster a political culture in New York and across the nation. However, what interested me the most about Evacuation Day, and what convinced me that it was worthy of study, was its disappearance. I had never heard of Evacuation Day and yet it had been celebrated for over a century.

Similarly, the day remains a fascinating subject because for the generation of New Yorkers who endured the occupation or had some connection to the Revolution, the day remained deeply important on a personal level throughout their lifetime. Yet, for subsequent generations, the day did not hold any emotional resonance. This project is about that very transition—how popular support and enthusiasm for a day can increase, wane, or remain the same.

By extension, this project is about trauma and memory and how they both can help to infuse a day with meaning. So while the subject of this study is a holiday, mainly featuring a parade, at its core it is a study of how citizens publicly expressed their memories of distress. This project explores the reception for Evacuation Day across the 19th century US, and examines what additional factors led to the day being viewed more or less favorably.

This study relies heavily on primary sources, specifically local newspapers. The most consistent record I could find about how this day was celebrated each year came from examining the descriptions of the holiday from articles published before, on the day of, and following Evacuation Day each year in local newspapers. My primary method of analysis is rhetorical analysis. I examine the newspaper accounts each year looking for patterns regarding the day's popularity (or lack thereof) and try to match those patterns to the broader context of what was happening in both New York City and the nation as a whole. Performing a rhetorical analysis is always challenging as the intention of the author is not always clear but regardless of intention, the tone, diction, and often article length speaks volumes. Because newspapers did not start including titles or even bylines until the late 19th century, it is hard to track how particular writers covered the event from year to year. Instead, because newspapers of the period did tend to adopt a stance on issues, what I do is treat each article as indicative of the paper at-large and track changes in each paper's coverage across the century.

One methodological point to clarify is the partisan nature of local newspapers. Horace Greenly created the New-York Tribune in 1841. It was the most widely read Whig, and then Republican newspaper in nineteenth century New York City. James Gordon Bennett, Sr. Hi, established the New York Herald in 1835. The Herald was a staunchly Democratic newspaper, and the leading Democratic-leaning press outlet in New York during the Civil War. The New York Times was founded in 1851, by Henry Jarvis Raymond, a journalist and politician for the Whig Party, and later the Republican Party. The political leanings of these newspapers are not crucial when interpreting their descriptions of Evacuation Day but, nevertheless, should be stated.

In addition to newspaper articles, this study also uses occasional diary entries and personal correspondence from prominent New Yorkers as evidence of how the day was celebrated and what place it held for each respective author. One limitation of this study is the limited number of diary entries and letters I could find. As well, the diaries or personal correspondence found in archives are normally a self-selecting sample in that they are often from prominent New Yorkers such as former mayors or from members of New York's upper class—wealthier merchants like John Pintard or Mayor Phillip Hone. There are limited accounts of Evacuation Day that I could find from the perspective of the other social classes. Instead, I try when possible to infer how the masses celebrated the day from accounts published in the newspapers.

This study is dependent on an understanding of the class system in New York City throughout the nineteenth century. To this end, I employ Seth Rockman's definition of class when discussing the working class. Rockman defined class as "a material condition resulting from the ability of those purchasing labor to economically and physical coheres those performing it."¹⁸ Rockman employed class not to suggest that there was a shared identity, or politics amongst the various groups that formed the working class, instead he argued that which ties the working class together is their relationship to those who employed their labor, specifically their lack of agency. Where Rockman contended that amongst the working class there was little common identity or politics, I argue that among New York's upper class there was a unifying character. As this study will show, at multiple moments the upper class acted together, to either withdraw from the public eye, or in later to use Evacuation Day as a public platform to consolidate their class identity.

¹⁸ Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore*, ed. Cathy Matson, 1st edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 11.

I am not arguing that there was a total class purity that emerged where all members of New York's social elite acted or felt the same way. However, because the newspaper sources I employ treat New York's wealthier class as a unified whole, this study will refer to New York's social elite as a whole. As best as I can piece together from the sources, in many cases, a majority of New York's social elite did act together when it came to the ways they interacted with Evacuation Day. When I use the term "upper class" or "social elite" I am referring to the very wealthy New Yorkers who lived uptown whose families' wealth came from real estate or from the flourishing port and shipping industry. Many of these family names are familiar still today like Vanderbilt and Morgan. However, I am also referring to the Roach, Dodge, Masterson, and Cooper families that were prominent members of New York's social elite in the decades before the Civil War.

I rely on the work of Sven Beckert for this analysis. Beckert argued that by 1850 members of New York's upper class, although they had been fragmented on certain issues in the prior decades and had jockeyed with each other for social prominence, had begun to develop universal ideals among the group regarding the role of the upper class in maintaining order. Beckert contended that even though these families may have been fragmented they believed that it was themselves who should shepherd the greater New York City community. He argued that by 1870, the differentiation among New York's social elite had dissipated and instead was replaced by a "socially cohesive and self-conscious class."¹⁹

Although this project is principally grounded in primary source analysis, I still refer to secondary sources by other scholars. There are a limited number of secondary sources whose subject is Evacuation Day, the most influential of which is a journal article from historian Clifton

¹⁹ Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10.

Hood. Additionally, historian Brooks McNamara published a book on the history of public celebration in New York that does refer to Evacuation Day but overall the text is not that argumentative but reads more like a comprehensive guide.

Chapter one engages with scholars of the early republic who have written about parades, festivals, local politics and the creation of nationalism, such as David Waldstreicher, Simon Newman, Len Travers, and Sarah Purcell. Chapter two enters into conversation with scholars of the first half of the nineteenth century including Susan Davis, Sean Wilentz, and Amy Bridges who all have written about cities in the first half of the century. Chapter three examines the development of historical memory following the Civil War and thus is in primary conversation with Michael Kammen's scholarship in this field. In addition to Kammen this chapter is informed by Stuart McConnell's contributions to the same scholarly conversation. McConnell wrote a chapter in an edited volume on the memory of the Civil War that also featured scholars like Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, whose work has influenced chapter three. Chapter four is focused on the beginning of the Gilded Age and the end of the nineteenth century in New York, it draws from and builds upon the works of Sven Beckert and David Hammack who both explore changes to New York and other urban centers in the final decades of the 19th century.

Memory

Over the last few decades, historians, as well as scholars from other disciplines and those with interdisciplinary research areas, have engaged with "cultural memory." Historians and other scholars struggle to adhere to one definition of "memory" or "cultural memory" or "collective memory" when they employ these terms. Throughout this study when these terms are employed it will be using the framework that Astrid Erll outlines in the introduction to the volume on

memory she edited, *Cultural Memory Studies*.²⁰ She broadly splits memory studies into two levels, one that focuses on the biological memory of the individual and how that memory is shaped by the individual's cultural experiences, and second, into cultural memory of the collective.

It is this second level with which this study's definition of memory emerges. This is the memory of the people, in which "social groups construct a shared past." Here the term memory is not used to describe the biological function of memory, as a group cannot remember. However, this level of memory refers to the ways in which societies reconstruct a shared past. This second level or definition of "cultural memory" emerges from the works of Pierre Nora and Jan and Aleida Assmann. Nora's work established "sites of memory" as one of the fundamental structures from which scholars can ground their analyses of memory. He defined sites of memory as "where [cultural/historical] memory crystallizes and secretes itself."²¹ Udo Hebel took Nora's notion of sites of memory and used it to explore commemorative practices and performances in the United States during the nineteenth century. Hebel wrote of the growth of local, regional, and national festivities during the early republic. "Commemorations of specific occurrences of the American Revolution, celebrations of the birthdays or inaugurations of revolutionary leaders turned presidents, and ceremonies in honor of the ratification of the Constitution governed the festive calendar of the young nation."²² Evacuation Day fits nicely into Hebel's analysis of local parades and festivals as sites of memory in the early republic.

²⁰ Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 7.

²¹ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7, doi:10.2307/2928520.

²² Udo J. Hebel, "Sites of Memory in U.S.-American Histories and Cultures," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 53.

The other important definition and distinction that this study employs with regards to the term memory is the difference between cultural and communicative memory established by Jan and Aleida Assmann. The two terms differ in that cultural memory is the memory shaped by physical and metaphorical objects, like anniversaries, parades, festivals, and symbols. These do not have memories of their own, but what they do Jan Assmann wrote, is “trigger our memory because they carry memories which we have invested in them.”²³ This memory is what they call cultural memory and “unlike communicative memory, [it] exists also in disembodied form and requires institutions of preservation and re-embodiment.”²⁴ Communicative memory is non-institutional: it is based on the individual level and for this reason it exists for a limited time. According to the Assmanns collective memory “normally reaches no farther back than eighty years, the time span of three interacting generations.”²⁵ This study examines Evacuation Day over one hundred years, and in so it is very much in the time period in which the memory of the British occupation and evacuation is in collective memory. However, as this study will demonstrate, the memory of the British evacuation transitioned from collective to cultural memory far quicker than eighty years.

This study is primarily organized chronologically, to trace change in the observance of the Evacuation Day over time. The first chapter explores the years 1783-1820. The following chapter looks at the commemoration of the day from 1820 to 1860. The third chapter examines Evacuation Day in the 1860s and 1870s. The fourth and final chapter analyzes the 1883 centennial celebration of Evacuation Day and how it served a very different political and social goal for New York’s social elite. Although the chapters are organized chronologically, each

²³ Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Ansgar Nünning and Astrid Erll (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 110.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

chapter also examines the prevailing themes that intersected with Evacuation Day in that period. For example, the second chapter looks at how artisans and laborers used Evacuation Day for a political purpose while the fourth chapter looks at how various ethnic groups were allowed to participate in the centennial celebration.

In Chapter One, I argue that in the 1790s Evacuation Day became a political tool where larger debates about the future direction of the country were argued. This chapter also claims that Evacuation Day was, at the turn of the 19th century, part of a burgeoning popular political culture in which New Yorkers from across the social spectrum could participate. I examine the initial evacuation of the British in late November 1783. This chapter looks first at how the initial British evacuation was celebrated and then examines how it became a local holiday in the years that followed. The day transformed from a political tool for New York's elite to gain support for their competing political ideologies, to events in which average New Yorkers and New York's social elite could participate in much the same way.

In Chapter Two, I perform a detailed rhetorical analysis of local newspapers in an attempt to track how changes in how the day was titled, described, and promoted, were representative of broader changes in how important Evacuation Day was as the generation with memory of the occupation and Revolutionary period passed away. This transition, I argue, was not made successfully. Support for Evacuation Day declined between the first and subsequent generations of New Yorkers because the trauma associated with the day, which gave the day such emotional resonance to the initial generation, could not transfer to the next generations. Instead, the day was celebrated but it became an ordinary ritual, and thus interest in the day waned significantly. This lack of emotional resonance, in conjunction with the lack of funding for Evacuation Day allowed for the day to transition from a day where the public could participate, to an elaborate

militaristic affair dominated by volunteer militia regiments led by New York's social elite. This was the fate of Evacuation Day—to become a day of spectacle that passed each year without any emotional weight beneath the surface.

In Chapter Three, I examine how the Civil War and Reconstruction affected Evacuation Day. I argue that the resurgence of enthusiasm for Evacuation Day in 1865 demonstrates that the day served a social function when it became a space for New Yorkers to heal from communal trauma and to joyously celebrate. The speed at which this newfound enthusiasm for the day diminished at the end of the 1860s and during the 1870s suggests that a new connection between the day and the memory of the Civil War could not be forged despite its connection to war and trauma. This chapter demonstrates that the cycle by which support for the day slowly diminished in the first half of the century was very similar to the decline in enthusiasm for Evacuation Day after 1865.

Chapter Four examines the centennial celebration of Evacuation Day in 1883. The centennial celebration was a crucial component of a concerted effort by members of New York's social elite to tie themselves to the legacy of the Revolution, and in doing so isolate the new waves of immigrants from being able to engage with that memory. The memory of the Revolutionary era was contested across racial and class lines in which working class immigrants, primarily of Irish descent, could vie to link themselves to New York's Revolutionary past, an attempt to raise the group's collective social standing. Standing in their way were members of the semi-aristocratic upper class, which in many cases could trace their respective ancestries back to the Revolutionary era. Upper class men and women created fraternal organizations like the Sons of '83 and the Daughters of the Revolution, which in connection with John Austin Stevens of the New-York Historical Society could manage and control all of the official events

associated with the centennial. This was a battle over the memory of the American Revolution. I argue that the upper class successfully controlled and consolidated power surrounding the centennial celebrations, and in so doing restricted who had access to claiming a part of the city's past and strengthen the existing social hierarchy in the city.

The biggest irony associated with Evacuation Day is that it was a day established to commemorate the hardship of war and of a seven-year occupation. It began as a day in which each year New Yorkers could reflect on the past; and yet quickly various groups transformed the anniversary into a day of ritual and spectacle—and of course, today, the day is completely forgotten, seemingly erased from collective memory.

CHAPTER ONE: “SCENES IN STRONG REMEMBRANCE SET:” THE MEMORIALIZATION OF THE BRITISH EVACUATION, 1784-1820

The establishment of the United States of America stirred a collective urge for the celebration of common historical achievements and for the affirmation of the newly created collective identity.

--Udo Hebel, “Sites of Memory in U.S.-American Histories and Cultures” (53)

Evacuation Day is a unique subject of study. Once per year it intersected with the lives of New Yorkers of all classes and political persuasions. In the first few decades when the anniversary was celebrated, the day primarily drew its emotional resonance from the need for New Yorkers to heal from the trauma of the British occupation and the losses suffered during the Revolution. The holiday began as a day of celebration and remembrance but over the first twenty years its purpose was co-opted. Starting in 1787, the Federalists, supporters of a stronger national government, used the anniversary of the British occupation as a platform from which they could rally support for the ratification of the Constitution. Soon after, and throughout most of the 1790s, celebrations grew increasingly split along partisan lines. The day acted, in a sense, as a battleground for the competing ideologues to consolidate support for their political beliefs. Around the turn of the 19th century, the anniversary’s emphasis once again transformed, this time by the forces that were, across the nation, turning local events into part of the national political culture. The partisan driven festivities faded and the day became a local holiday that was part of the developing national popular political culture—while still being grounded in a sense of communal trauma for the generation that experienced the Revolution and occupation.

The traumatic memory that prevented Evacuation Day from being celebrated as an official and institutional holiday in 1784, 1785, and 1786, allowed for the day to become a platform for partisan politics starting in 1787. This chapter starts in 1784 and ends in 1820, examining changes in how the day was commemorated each year between that period and

analyzing how various parties used it, and what the popular reception for the celebration was each year. In doing so, this chapter will show how a traumatic event like the British occupation and the joyful exuberance of the evacuation operated in the collective memory of New York's populace. The traumatic memory of the day began to fade by the 1820s, making it possible for the day to become less about communal trauma and more about institutionalizing a national political culture and collective identity built on the memory of the Revolution. This transition was only possible when the City began to officially orchestrate the annual celebration and set aside money out of the city budget for its celebration. This era of partisan-driven celebrations faded only when a national popular political culture began to develop, of which Evacuation Day would become a local mainstay.

Historiography

There has been a recent wave of scholarship on the social and cultural history of this era, with a particular focus on the relationship between nationalism and public memory of the American Revolution. Historians like David Waldstreicher, Simon Newman, Len Travers, and Michael Kammen have produced the cornerstone works of this burgeoning historiography. Within the historiography, historians have disagreed regarding the extent to which this era of locally dominated political culture detracted from the creation of American nationalism or if American nationalism was inherently comprised of local rites and festivities that demonstrate a common symbolic language and set of myths. There is little argument that, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, political power was decentralized to some extent; still, a unifying ethos and new national symbolic language permeated the nation's public memory. This was especially true of how people celebrated Evacuation Day starting in the mid-1790s, after the

intense partisan divide that had come to dominate the annual anniversary celebration had begun to fade.

Waldstreicher argued that nationalism in this period was “a set of practices that empowered Americans to fight over the legacy of their national revolution and to protest their exclusion from that Revolution’s fruits.”²⁶ Waldstreicher claimed that nationalism was not, and has never been, a homogeneous and consensus driven entity. Instead, it was the intersection of competing ideologies (local, national, regional) existing simultaneously. He continued to contend that popular political practices emerged in Europe at this time, changing the idea of what nationalism was, both in Europe and in America. With this in mind he wrote, “The rites of nationhood are best understood in the context of this broad range of popular activities, often festive or celebratory, that constituted political action between elections.”²⁷ This essay is grounded upon Waldstreicher’s redefining of nationalism.

Similarly, Historian Simon Newman identified the post-revolutionary era in which there was a resurgence of power over political culture by regional and local interests, mostly in the sphere of public celebrations. He claimed, “Political culture, in short, followed power in reverting from national to local patterns, and many Americans celebrated their newly acquired independence and the formation of their proud new republic in local celebrations of essentially local events.” Newman argued “Evacuation Day was by far the most important date in the festive calendar of New York City.”²⁸

Travers wrote more specifically about celebrations of Independence Day but his argument about the importance of observing the holiday extends to Evacuation Day and the

²⁶ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 38.

growing relationship between festive and political culture more broadly. Travers contended that the Fourth of July served four roles for the growing nation. First, that, “As the Revolution receded into memory, the celebration of the Fourth of July mystically reconnected postwar Americans to an increasingly legendary past.”²⁹ Second, that the Independence Day fostered national identity and a collective mythos that exceeded local and regional concerns. Third, that the Fourth allowed Americans a regular and set day to reexamine how they understood the past. Travers wrote, “In this way, Independence Day rituals allowed Americans the flexibility to redefine the significance of their collective past (and thus of their collective present) as needed.”³⁰ However, Travers’ most significant argument and contribution to the historiography is what he identifies as the fourth (no pun intended) function of Independence Day. He argued, “The ritualized celebrations of the Fourth of July helped to mask disturbing ambiguities and contradictions in the new republic, overlaying real social and political conflict with a conceptual veneer of shared ideology and elemental harmony.” Travers eloquently established why festivities and political culture were intertwined and ripe for historical exploration: they offer historians a unique opportunity to examine ideologies, often cloaked in rhetoric, in very visible tangible ways. Travers continued “In the post-Revolutionary years, Americans with political and social axes to grind continually shaped and reshaped their comprehensions of the Revolution’s ideals, goals and achievements, often in competition with one another...Americans employed the rituals, rhetoric, and symbolism of Independence Day to minimize the conflicts and to assert the idealized (but dubious) unity of the American people.”³¹ Waldstreicher, Newman, and Travers

²⁹ Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*

all identified the era immediately following the revolution as one in which local festivities were a crucial space for shaping both the memory of the Revolution and the future of the nation.

Other works on nationalism, tradition, and political culture during the early republic are core parts of the historiographical framework that this chapter seeks to enter, including Francois Furstenberg's *In the Name of the Father*. Furstenberg specifically argued for the importance of civic texts in creating a unifying national identity for Americans. Furstenberg's argument applies to political culture and public festivals because for many Americans, during these public celebrations they could hear these words read aloud in a large group as opposed to in isolation at home, only furthering the unifying power of these texts.³² From a more theoretical perspective, all of the aforementioned scholars worked from Eric Hobsbawm's notion of invented traditions which he defined as "a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition."³³ He argued that these invented traditions bring with them a symbolic language that creates a social continuity between the past and present by implementing social and cultural norms in perpetuity. Hobsbawm also claimed that traditions are often invented for ideological purposes—something that is seen clearly by the era of partisan driven Evacuation Day celebrations in the early 1790s.³⁴

Additionally, historian John Bodnar, in his scholarship on the relationship between public memory, commemoration, and patriotism in the 20th century, also wrote about the origins of this relationship, which of course he traces back to the early 19th century. He contended, "no interest dominated the entire nineteenth century, but the nation-state was very influential in the aftermath

³² Francois Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation*, Reprint edition (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2007).

³³ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

of the American Revolution until the 1820s.”³⁵ Bodnar countered historian Robert Wiebe, who argued that early 19th century America lacked a strong “institutional core.”³⁶ Regardless of opinion, the level of influence exerted by the national government on public memory can be seen on a spectrum. What unifies these two historians is their common belief that public celebrations with connections to the revolution were some of the most influential sites of public memory during the early republic.

Memorialization, Trauma, And The Politics Of Constitutional Ratification

Establishing an annual tradition requires momentum. After seven long years in occupation and exile, many New Yorkers returned home in November 1783, celebrating the homecoming for nearly two weeks. The following year New Yorkers established the celebration of the British Evacuation, November 25, as part of the annual festive calendar. There was no official proclamation to celebrate the day from the state government, no suggestion printed in the newspapers in the days leading up to the 25th; yet, commemorations of the anniversary still occurred. Flags flew, church bells rang, and gun salutes fired. An article in the *New York Gazetteer and Country Journal* boldly proclaimed that every demonstration of joy was manifested which the great and glorious event could possibly inspire.”³⁷ The genesis of celebrating the anniversary of the evacuation was a natural one, stemming from a communal need to honor the traumatic memory of the Revolution and the occupation as well as to celebrate the joyous nature of having been under home rule for one year.

The anniversary of the British evacuation was celebrated in 1784; however, the trauma associated with Washington’s evacuation in 1776 and the seven-year British occupation loomed

³⁵ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 21.

³⁶ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Segmented Society: An Introduction to the Meaning of America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 7–8.

³⁷ *New York Gazetteer and Country Journal*, November 26, 1784.

large in the collective memory of New Yorkers. The term “evacuation” was still linked to the memory of Washington’s evacuation and thus the word was sparsely used in the newspapers. It is hard to describe how traumatic the occupation was for both the New Yorkers that fled and those who stayed behind. Two examples from the *New-York Packet* in 1784 demonstrate this continued association of the word “evacuation” with Washington’s 1776 defeat. Both articles are from June of 1784 and refer specifically to the evacuation of New York in the year 1776 and both discuss financial complications resulting from the British occupation. Similar examples of “evacuation” referring to the colonial evacuation of 1776 appear in newspaper articles from 1785 and 1786.

New Yorkers celebrated the British evacuation in 1784 as the *Gazetteer and Country Journal* reported; yet, overt public demonstrations in commemoration of the anniversary were very limited. The lack of public display and spectacle is understandable because unlike the joy that overwhelmed New Yorkers the previous year about the evacuation, the year that followed saw New Yorkers having to reconcile with the trauma and tragedy of the occupation. The *New York Journal and State Gazette* printed a telling description of the lack of fanfare for the holiday in 1784: “Thursday last, the 25th of November, was the *Anniversary* of our *Triumphant entry* into this city...yet, the important and ever-memorable period, passed away totally unnoticed and unregarded.”³⁸ The author specifically placed emphasis on the event using phrases like “triumphant entry” to argue that the celebration of this day should not be something to be dismissed, but should become a part of local heritage and tradition—something both to mourn and celebrate.

³⁸ *New-York Journal and State Gazette, December 2 1784*. The italics used for emphasis appears in the initial printing and is not my emphasis.

Additionally, in the same article the author made a very pointed critique of New York's social elite, many of whom did celebrate the anniversary of the evacuation on 1784, at gatherings that were similar to the prior year's celebratory dinners held at Fraunces and Cape Tavern for Washington and Clinton. The author described how many ordinary New Yorkers were isolated and excluded from these celebrations. "Surely the virtuous Whigs and Exiles," the author wrote, "passes no portion of 'the old British conviviality' which *prevailed* at Cape's tavern on Monday last."³⁹ A distinction was made between those who stayed and suffered under British occupation, notably the working classes, and those "Whigs and Exiles" who fled, only to return and exclude those who stayed behind from celebrating the evacuation. Differences in how the various social classes celebrated the anniversary would continue to be somewhat stark until the turn of the century when the development of a popular political culture served to slightly level these distinctions.

The trauma of the occupation resurfaced after the joy and exuberance of 1783 and 1784 leading to more private celebrations in 1785 and 1786. There are limited accounts of how the anniversary of the British evacuation was celebrated in those years. There are a few limited references to the anniversary in the local newspapers during those two years. One possible explanation for this lack of coverage is that the day was not celebrated publically in these two years. In 1786, the *New-York Packet* published a poem to celebrate the anniversary, an excerpt of which states:

That happy Day, when *Freedom's flag* display'd,
 Her sons triumphant, and her foes dismay'd,
 When exil'd Citizens returned home,
 Under fair Liberty's most sacred dome,
 When Independence bless'd our happy isle,
 And *true born* citizens were seen to smile—
 This glad era we should well remember,

³⁹ Ibid. The word "passes" appears in the original printing but the copy is a bit blurry.

This Five and Twentieth of November⁴⁰

Ironically, the poem states that New Yorkers should well remember and celebrate the anniversary of the evacuation. However, there were no articles that mention if or how the day was celebrated in either 1785 or 1786.

It is telling that this is one of the only published articles about the evacuation from 1786 that explores the legacy of the event, questioning if the Revolution was a success. The *Independent Journal* published an article that raised this question. “Upon an occasion of this nature, it may not be improper to suggest the following most important enquiry,” the author wrote, “Whether we have obtained the advantages from the late Revolution with which we flattered ourselves, and if we have not, whether something may not be done to accelerate our attainment of these blessings.”⁴¹ The author expressed doubt over the success of the American Revolution and used the memory of the British evacuation as a platform to do so. The anniversary of the British evacuation should lend itself to joyous feelings regarding the end of the war and instead, the author questions the success of the Revolution itself.⁴²

The increase in newspaper coverage, starting in 1787, coincided with an upward trend in popular support for the anniversary. Besides the militia review, the anniversary celebration in 1787 was an avenue to raise awareness and support for the ratification of the Constitution, specifically by Federalists who attempted to link the militia review with the memory of the liberation of the city by Washington’s troops, suggesting that a stronger centralized government with a standing army were made possible under the Constitution. 1787 marks the first year that the day’s celebrations included a review of the militia—something that would emerge as the

⁴⁰ *New-York Packet* November 24, 1786; Again I have kept the original emphasis as it was written. I have excerpted the poem—it is actually a few lines longer.

⁴¹ *Independent Journal* November 25, 1786

⁴² For more on this (the success or failure of the American Revolution), see Smith, Barbara Clark. *The Freedoms We Lost: Consent and Resistance in Revolutionary America*. New York: The New Press, 2010.

dominant element of the anniversary festivities in the years to come. “The 26th November, being the anniversary of the ever memorable evacuation of this city by the British troops in 1783, when the persecuted inhabitants re-assumed their long forsaken habitations, is to be celebrated by a general review of the militia, and independent companies, of the city and country of New York.”⁴³ This description would come to be the standard throughout the 19th century and 1787 marks the first year that the day’s celebrations included a review of the militia—something that would emerge as the dominant element of the anniversary festivities in the years to come. Additionally, this moniker “the anniversary of the British evacuation,” would begin to be the phrase used to title the anniversary in newspapers and in common parlance.

The Federalists used the day as a platform to dispel any qualms about the new law of the land.⁴⁴ For example, the *New-York Journal and Daily Patriotic Register* published articles about the fear that some citizens of Connecticut raised about the power of the “new Federal constitution.”⁴⁵ The article portrayed a need to “quiet the minds of the good people throughout the United States and more especially, in the state of Connecticut,” many of whom were afraid of the power given to Congress under the Constitution. The article described this fear of tyranny, an anti-Federalist position, as “well grounded” and portrayed a need to “guard against the possibility of danger in the future arising from the abuse of authority delegated by the Constitution.”⁴⁶ There was a fear by working class New Yorkers over the increased power of the new national government that was reflected in the newspaper reporting. Additionally, the newspaper descriptions of the specific festivities linked to the anniversary of the evacuation established how the Federalists used their toasts, knowing they were to be reprinted in the

⁴³ *New-York Journal*, November 26 1787

⁴⁴ Clifton Hood, “An Unusable Past: Urban Elites, New York City’s Evacuation Day, and the Transformations of Memory Culture,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 4 (July 1, 2004): 887.

⁴⁵ *New-York Journal and Daily Patriotic Register*, November 27, 1787. The term

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

newspapers, to describe that the new national government was simply the logical extension or spirit of a unified nation present during the Revolution.⁴⁷ This marked the beginning of a period in which Evacuation Day was a platform, first by the Federalists but later by the Democratic-Republicans as well to gather support for their ideologies and visions for the city and the nation.

There was a fundamental difference in 1787 and 1788 as compared with prior years. Much of the newspaper coverage simply depicted the anniversary's festivities as being very similar to the prior years but starting in 1787, the militia of the city paraded before large crowds and performed ceremonial gun firings. The use of the militia helped garner enthusiasm for the anniversary that could then be used by the Federalists to gain support for the constitution.⁴⁸ In the years following the initial British evacuation in 1783, celebrating the anniversary of the evacuation became a mainstay of New York's festive calendar and the connection with New York's militia would remain a crucial part of the celebration each year. However, it was not until the 1790s and 1800s that the event became a part of the larger popular political discourse.

The Anti-Federalists Strike Back: Partisan Politics, 1790-1800

A national popular political culture started to emerge in the 1790s—one rooted in three prior decades of communal resistance and rebellion. The constant that linked the developing political culture in each of the states was a unifying set of images, themes, and symbols—all of which were rooted in the memory of the Revolution. For example, historian Sarah Purcell writes, “New York City’s 1794 Evacuation Day aptly symbolizes what happened to public memory of the Revolutionary War during the 1790s. During that decade, Americans’ efforts to create national unity by commemorating the Revolutionary War changed along with the political

⁴⁷ *Independent Journal*, November 25, 1787

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, November 28, 1787.

context of their actions.”⁴⁹ The extent to which this new political culture helped to foster a national culture and project a sense of national unity is a point of debate among historians of the early republic; however, most historians agree that this decade marks the beginning of both a popular and partisan political culture.⁵⁰ This decade saw Evacuation Day celebrations grow to become much more inclusive—no longer limited to private engagements limited to New York’s social elite. Additionally, the increased support for commemorating the anniversary demonstrates that the traumatic memory that prevented many New Yorkers from celebrating the day in the years immediately following 1783 had waned, and was replaced with a desire to commemorate the day and honor its memory. However, in the early part of the decade, celebrations of the anniversary of the British evacuation, as well as many other festive holidays, were still very much divided along partisan lines.

Starting in 1790, there was a wealth of articles covering Evacuation Day published each year. 1790 marked a turning point in the history of Evacuation Day. Historian Simon Newman wrote that “Newspapers constituted the principal course of news and information for many American citizens and were vital to these festive occasions, for while many Americans were taking part in or watching these events, even more were reading about them in local or more distant newspapers.”⁵¹ Newspapers were necessary for establishing the importance of local rites and festivities. The analysis that follows relies heavily on examinations of the rhetoric employed by local newspapers in their increased coverage of Evacuation Day. This rhetorical analysis demonstrates how the day was celebrated, how memory was utilized in these celebrations, and the popular reception of the anniversary.

⁴⁹ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 93–94.

⁵⁰ Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*; Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*.

⁵¹ Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 3.

Starting in 1790, the festivities that were held to celebrate the anniversary now began to include both public and private components. The coverage of the seventh anniversary of the British evacuation in 1790 was more detailed than prior years. The *New-York Journal & Patriotic Register* described the day's festivities as being "celebrated with all the joy and satisfaction that the recollection of so pleasing an even could inspire." The article also portrayed the military procession that marched down to the battery, led by Col. Bauman and Capt. Stake's troops. The evening included "A celebratory dinner offered to the military at Corre's Hotel," followed by an "elegant display of Fire-Works, which gave universal satisfaction," according to the *Journal*.⁵²

In the early 1790s, celebrations of the British evacuation were very much divided along partisan lines. For example, just after the anniversary of the British evacuation in 1791 the *New-York Journal and Patriotic Register* published an article about the anniversary stating that it "was observed as a day of rejoicing by a number of select companies of the *Old Whigs* of New York." The article labeled the day's festivities as "auspicious." The article also highlighted how the Tammany Society and Columbian Order, groups whose members were mostly of Federalist veterans, convened to toast to "Patriotism" but also to see their celebration apart from their Republican opponents by discounting the importance of the evacuation, having described it as a "chop-fallen retreat."⁵³ The guests of the Tammany Society celebration were called "militia officers" and "respectable citizens."⁵⁴ It is unclear what specifically is meant by the term "respectable citizens;" however, it can be read as a marker of both political and social affiliation,

⁵² *New-York Journal & Patriotic Register*, November 29, 1790

⁵³ *New-York Journal & Patriotic Register*, November 26, 1791 I've put "patriotism" in quotes here because it was their own self described term but it carries with it some political undertones.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

in which upper-class Federalists were labeled as respectable, by the publisher of the newspaper as counter to the Antifederalists.

The anniversary had begun to gain such popular enthusiasm that starting in 1791 the Common Council of New York, New York City's local government, appropriated funds from the annual budget for the celebration festivities. The appropriated money was designated for a public dinner for the military officers and high-ranking citizens. As well, the money went towards supplies needed to equip the militia for the parade and gun firing display. Funding for the holiday would continue in 1792 and 1793, cementing its place in the annual budget of the Common Council for much of the 19th century.

The festivities became a tradition that usually included some sort of military presence, but other than the typical newspaper accounts of private dinners and military displays it is unclear how common people participated in these rites. In the days before the anniversary in 1793, an anonymous author going by the pseudonym "An Old Whig" contributed an article to *Loudon's New-York Packet*. The "Old Whig," simply asked that ship captains dress their ships in New York harbor with appropriate fanfare in support of the annual evacuation celebration. He continued to make the argument that if the city government, "the Corporation and militia officers," had taken the necessary arrangements to celebrate the anniversary, then these efforts should be matched and "seconded by every good citizen."⁵⁵ The early 1790s saw separate celebrations of the evacuation, divided along social and party lines. Clifton Hood argued that as much as the Republicans tried to alter the association of these celebrations with the privileged and social elite, they failed to do so.⁵⁶ These distinct events would collapse into a singular celebration in the years to come. This does not mean that partisan differences vanished, but that a

⁵⁵ *Loudon's New-York Packet*, November 22, 1793

⁵⁶ Hood, "An Unusable Past," July 1, 2004, 890.

popular political culture that was seen to be above partisan politics was about to emerge. As Sarah Purcell described, the celebration of the evacuation in 1794 displays how uses of Revolutionary memory as fixtures of a popular political culture began to change in this decade.⁵⁷

Starting in the 1790s there was a clear rhetorical shift towards being more inclusive of national level politics even though the nature of the event remained local. This supports the claim that even local festivities, starting in the 1790s, saw a turn in focus towards establishing a national feeling of patriotism, even when partisan politics ran rampant. Both *The Daily Advertiser* and *American Minerva* reported that the day was celebrated “with the usual demonstrations of joy” in 1794.⁵⁸ As in years past, all of the reporting on the holiday described a parade led by various military/militia groups down the streets to New York’s battery. Both *The Daily Advertiser* and *American Minerva* used rhetoric which describe the day’s events as “martial, orderly, and elegant” in appearance. This level of order, one article published in *American Minerva* claimed, “must have afforded the highest satisfaction to every Lover of his country.”⁵⁹ The toasts offered at Hunter’s Hotel where the military officers ate and drank after the festivities supports this as well. They first toasted “the day,” followed by “the United States,” and “the late American Army.”⁶⁰ These initial toasts were focused mostly on the national level; only later did they toast “The Corporation of the City of New York” and “the memory of those who have fallen in the Cause of Freedom.”⁶¹ The rhetoric of the evacuation anniversary had begun to change. All of the major New York newspapers also marked that the day “brought to their minds [“their” refers to every citizen] ‘Scenes in strong remembrance set.’”⁶² The

⁵⁷ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 94.

⁵⁸⁵⁸ *The Daily Advertiser*, November 26, 1794; *American Minerva*, November 27, 1784.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *American Minerva*, November 27, 1784.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. The phrase “scenes in strong remembrance set” is a line from Robert Burns’s 1786 poem “Home.” Burns was a popular Scottish poet of the era.

newspaper coverage as well as the festivities themselves tried to summon a sense of national memory that also evoked a sense of patriotism that existed above partisan politics and social divisions.

The coverage of the evacuation celebration in 1795 suggests that while the public festivities of the event may have been unified, and on the surface above the political fray, the private celebrations were still very much divided along partisan lines. The *New-York Journal & Patriotic Register* reported that the toasts offered in the “Old-Coffee-house” employed Republican rhetoric.⁶³ For example, the first toast offered was to “The 25th of November, 1783; may every anniversary of this important [word unclear] see the enemies of Republicanism turn their backs on the shores where they have been convinced that the *Arm of Freedom* is INVINCIBLE.” The second toast was to the country “may fear never influence us to betray her interests—may we never permit the ignominious surrender (to our bitterest foe,) of those rights and privileges for which our ancestors have bathed our soil in blood.” Here we can see a direct reference to the reasons for which ordinary Americans went to war. Those offering the toasts claimed that those privileges which were secured by blood would be lost if their political opponents were victorious. The ninth toast attacks Washington’s Federalist policies stating, “May the President of the United States regain in retirement, the confidence and affection he has lost by listening to the suggestions of the enemies of his country.” The fourteenth toast offered a specific example of a grievance that the Democratic-Republicans had regarding the stronger centralized government. It was offered to “Our BRETHREN IN ARMS, the Citizen-Soldiers of America—may they never suffer the existence of a standing army.”⁶⁴ The rhetoric employed by the newspaper writers, and in the toasts themselves, displayed the divisiveness of the political

⁶³ Republican refers to the Democratic-Republican Party under the First-Party system in the 1790s.

⁶⁴ *New-York Journal & Patriotic Register*, November 28, 1795

landscape and the desire to use the memory of the American Revolution to support political positions. Partisan divisions would remain a part of the discourse surrounding the annual evacuation celebrations until the turn of the nineteenth century.

The idea of separate partisan toasts and festivities waned, as the new century grew closer. Unlike in 1796 and 1797 when the newspaper accounts of the annual celebration depicted a split along partisan lines, including printing the list of toasts offered at the evacuation celebration held for members of the Society of St. Tammany, coverage of the 1798 and 1799 anniversary celebrations did not mention gatherings by the Tammany Society or Columbian Order.⁶⁵ Instead, the newspapers described a unified population with phrases like “pleasure seemed to gleam on every countenance, and the day was spent in a manner truly becoming so important an event.”⁶⁶ The decade was one full of intense political and social division. Portrayals of the British evacuation celebrations demonstrate just how fractured New York was for a brief moment. This division led, in many cases, to separate festivities and celebrations based on political affiliation. Those political affiliations matched social affiliations and thus much of the coverage depicted the rise of groups like the Tammany Society, which attracted Federalists, “Old Whigs,” and more broadly speaking members of New York’s military and social elite. However, as the new century dawned, so too did an era of a unified political culture in New York and across the nation.

Public Participation And Popular Political Culture 1800-1820

The dawn of the nineteenth century brought with it a dramatic change in how Evacuation Day was celebrated. Starting in 1801, the anniversary became a day of popular entertainment that served both to increase popular enthusiasm for the day and to bring New Yorkers of all

⁶⁵ *New-York Journal & Patriotic Register*, November 29, 1796; *The Albany Register*, December 4, 1797

⁶⁶ *Commercial Advertiser*, November 26, 1799

classes into contact with each other. This was a stark difference from the earlier celebrations that were more divided along class lines. In 1801, *The New-York Evening Post* ran advertisements for an annual play to celebrate the anniversary of the evacuation. This would become commonplace and many plays would be run on the anniversary of the evacuation. These plays were often set in the colonial era or during the Revolution. For example, the 1801 play was titled “The Popular Tragedy of Bunker Hill; or, The Death of Warren.”⁶⁷ In addition to a play, in 1807 a theater advertised that it was holding an unveiling for a painting of Washington with the inscription “Evacuation of New York, November 25, 1783.” The theater advertised that the evening’s entertainment would also include a popular opera titled “Miss in Her Teens or the Medley of Lovers” as well as a “scenic representation of the glorious of events of the day [the British evacuation in 1783].”⁶⁸ These were very much public events with attendance by citizens of all social strata—a marked difference from the closed-door private celebrations that dominated the anniversary celebrations in the prior years.

Though much of the newspaper coverage suggested that on the surface the annual festivities commemorating the anniversary repeated every year with little change, the rhetoric employed by these newspaper writers and publishers suggested a more popular or inclusive set of celebrations was occurring. *The American Citizen and General Advertiser* published a particularly memorable and stirring tribute on the anniversary of the evacuation in 1801. It described the British occupation as a “pillage of our citizens” and describe the evacuation as the “immense wickedness leaving, or rather *beaten* from our shore.”⁶⁹ In 1802, the *Morning Chronicle* wrote of the anniversary celebrations, “The entertainment was in a very elegant style, the company in excellent spirits, and a number of patriotic and complimentary toasts drank, in

⁶⁷ *The New-York Evening Post*, November 25, 1801

⁶⁸ *The New-York Evening Post*, November 25, 1807

⁶⁹ *The American Citizen and General Advertiser*, November 25, 1801

respect to the heads of departments and in honor of the day.”⁷⁰ The day was becoming more inclusive in nature, with a more pronounced public component to the annual celebration.

As those who were alive during the colonial period, the American Revolution and occupation of New York began to lessen in numbers, the day remained very much a crucial local holiday for New Yorkers, but the extent to which the anniversary of the evacuation served as an annual space where citizens across political and social divisions could exert political agency is hard to gauge from newspaper accounts alone. Clifton Hood contended that the event became a “ritual of unity” that celebrated patriotism and concealed any social or political divisions.⁷¹ I contend that his claim is correct, especially when reading countless descriptions of the anniversary celebrations that echo the *New-York Morning Post* from 1811, which published an article stating that all patriots would rejoice in the anniversary of the evacuation.⁷² The celebrations, specifically the parade grew in grandeur and spectacle during the first decade of the nineteenth century. The *Mercantile Advertiser* remarked in 1814 that the parade had between 12,000 and 15,000 spectators.⁷³ In all the years of the anniversary being celebrated, the official parade marching was restricted to elected officials and members of the military. Ordinary New Yorkers in large numbers attended these events and the first two decades of the nineteenth century brought with it increased public participation through the theater and other public events. However, despite the growing attendance of these celebrations, they were transforming into sites of spectacle. Because of this increased spectacle the day would experience a “crisis of transmission” in the decades to come.

⁷⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, November 27, 1802

⁷¹ Hood, “An Unusable Past,” July 1, 2004, 891.

⁷² *New York Morning Post*, November 25, 1811

⁷³ *Mercantile Advertiser*, November 26, 1814

Conclusion

The British evacuated New York City on November 25 1783. The subsequent celebration lasted two weeks, ending when Washington and his men departed New York. The trauma associated with Washington's evacuation in 1776 and the seven-year occupation held a firm place in the collective memory of many New Yorkers. The newspapers still used the word "evacuation" in reference to the 1776 evacuation. In 1784, November 25 was observed as a day of commemoration; however, the few descriptions of how the day was celebrated printed in local newspapers referred only to social gatherings, dinners and drinks, attended by New York's upper class. There was little mentioned about if or how ordinary New Yorkers observed the day. The average New Yorker was more likely to have experienced significant trauma during the Revolution and occupation and thus the process of healing required more time. November 25 was celebrated in much the same way in 1785 and 1786. The following year marked a pivotal moment in Evacuation Day's young life as a holiday—the day became a perfect platform to raise awareness and gather support for the ratification of the Constitution.

In the first forty years of the event's history it had undergone some changes, most importantly becoming a more public event starting in the mid-1790s. The anniversary had become a tradition and in doing so fell into a very familiar pattern of annual events including a military parade, and private dinners and toasts, many of which would be recorded and printed in the newspapers. The event became more elaborate and part of what historians of the Early Republic have called the development of a popular political culture, especially after the turn of the century. This transition was made possible when the trauma that prevented New Yorkers from establishing the anniversary as an official holiday in the years immediately following the

British evacuation had dissipated substantially, allowing the day to be transformed away from partisan driven festivities that had dominated in the interim.

After the turn of the century average New Yorkers participated and celebrated the evacuation in many of the same ways that members of New York's social elite did—they attended public performances of plays produced for Evacuation Day. Before the transition to public forms of entertainment as a mainstay of Evacuation Day celebrations, there was little known about how average New Yorkers participated in the festivities. Newspaper accounts indicate that there were great numbers of people in attendance at many of these parades but outside of attendance, it is unclear if these events offered New Yorkers a chance to exert political agency. Regardless, it is clear that the anniversary of the evacuation employed rhetoric and symbols that helped foster a sense of patriotism and national identity among New Yorkers even though the event itself never gained much traction outside of New York and its neighboring cities. Even during eras where there was intense partisan division amongst New Yorkers to the point that they would hold separate celebrations for the anniversary, the fact that they were unified in celebrating a common event helped foster a sense of local and national identity released from the trauma of seven-years of British occupation.

**CHAPTER TWO: “MOST OF THEM ARE NUMBERED WITH THE DEAD”:
DECLINE IN ENTHUSIASM FOR EVACUATION DAY, 1820-1860**

Born in New York in 1759, John Pintard was a member of the wealthier merchant class. He was college educated, but had not finished his studies at Princeton when he left to join the Continental Army following the evacuation of New York by Washington in 1776. As did many, he returned to New York in 1783 after seven years in exile. He lived in New York and remained part of its upper class for the rest of his life. Pintard wrote many letters to his daughter Eliza Pintard Davidson between 1816 and 1833, which have been collected and published. The rhetoric John Pintard employed in his descriptions of Evacuation Day demonstrates how powerful and resonant the anniversary was to him still, even 35 years after his return from exile. In an 1820 letter to his daughter he wrote, “This is the 37th Anniversary of the evacuation of this city by the British forces which consummated the American Revolution, a day that restored our citizens to their desolated dwellings after a long & tedious exile of 7 years, during which many a patriot had died and left their remains in distant lands...”⁷⁴ 37 years after the British evacuation, the day still meant a lot to Pintard.

The anniversary of the evacuation resonated with Pintard, just as it did for many of his generation—those who experienced the pain of war and the trauma of occupation. Pintard’s father was Colonel Abraham Brasher, a Continental army officer who died shortly before the British evacuated New York in November of 1783. Pintard wrote that his father “did not live to see what he so ardently looked for, the glorious termination of our struggle to achieve the emancipation of America from the yoke of G. Britain.”⁷⁵ In contrast, the generation after Pintard—those without direct connections to the Revolution, occupation, or evacuation—had a

⁷⁴ Pintard and Barck, *Letters from John Pintard to His Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833*, 348.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

very different relationship to Evacuation Day. They did not have the same emotional connection to the day that Pintard's generation did; for them, the day was simply an annual part of New York's festive calendar, a ritual that had been established in reaction to the need to heal a communal trauma, one which they themselves did not feel. Instead, for them the day was an annual ritual, celebrated only because tradition dictated they do so.

Created to both to celebrate victory and to help heal from an arduous seven-year occupation, Evacuation Day celebrations did not carry the same emotional weight for citizens one generation removed from the event the holiday commemorated. This chapter opens in the 1820s and closes on the eve of the Civil War—examining a tremendously turbulent fifty-year period in the history of both New York and the country at large. By 1820, thirty-seven years since the first Evacuation Day, many of the generation either who experienced the seven-year British occupation of New York or who fled after Washington's evacuation in 1776 had died.⁷⁶ Those who were still alive could speak to the trauma of occupation and the joy of returning from exile. For them; the day still carried significant emotional resonance. However, the younger generation became increasingly disconnected with the events commemorated through this annual ritual.

This chapter examines the rhetoric employed to describe Evacuation Day by both individual citizens in letters and diary entries and the rhetoric used by New York City's local newspapers. I argue that changes in rhetoric including the switch to formally labeling the day "Evacuation Day" demonstrate how the day's emotional significance faded for the post-Revolution generations. The shift from labeling the day the "evacuation of this city by the British" to "Evacuation Day," a more lighthearted designation, signifies that the day was transitioning from a day of somber reflection and collective healing to a day of ritual celebration.

⁷⁶ The day was not called "Evacuation Day" until the 1830s—more on this rhetorical shift later in the chapter.

In addition, I argue that enthusiasm for the event waned even though in the 1820s and 1830s it offered New York's working class a place to exert political agency. The day had lost both popular and financial support; the city government stopped allocating funds for the day. This allowed New York's social and military elite to seize power over the day's festivities. In the years leading up to the Mexican American War, the main feature of the celebration became a military display by New York's elite volunteer militia regiments. In the years following the Mexican American War, New Yorkers, specifically writers for the local newspapers, began to question why Evacuation Day was even celebrated at all. On the eve of the Civil War, Evacuation Day's future as New York's local revolutionary holiday was tenuous at best.

Historiography

At the turn of the nineteenth century, parades and public festivals would continue to be important spaces for exerting political and social agency and for the formation of a unifying national culture, grounded in the memory of the Revolution. Parades were both entertainment and a public battleground in which partisan and social political groups could compete. Historian Susan Davis argued that public enactments, such as parades, were not simply an extension of social forces but instead were “part of the very building and challenging of social relations.”⁷⁷ She wrote that in the nineteenth-century city “parades were used to define what society was or might be.”⁷⁸ Her work also entered the scholarly conversation on historical memory when she described how these parades in Philadelphia used images, symbols and references to the shared cultural past and used them for present needs and goals. She established that parades and public ceremonies were a part of public communication—creating a contested space in which not all

⁷⁷ Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (University of California Press, 1986), 5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

groups could participate equally. She wrote, “Conflicting social relationships shaped the range of public possibilities, institutions, places, and events. This conflict infused parades with meaning, parades, which, in turn, were part of the contests shaping the public sphere.”⁷⁹ She concluded, “Parades, though ephemeral, were more than entertainment: As communication they were ways of influencing perceptions and ideas, and, as such, important social actions.”⁸⁰ Davis extended the historical conversation on parades and public ritual, of scholars like Newman, Travers, and Waldstreicher, into the longer 19th century.

Sean Wilentz’s *Chants Democratic* asserted that the Market Revolution, especially in conjunction with the opening of the Erie Canal for New York specifically, began to fundamentally alter the nature of the inter-class relations for the working or artisan class. New York, he demonstrated, had a thriving small-scale artisan craft maker class that by the 1820s and 1830s had begun to change. This change occurred when some master craftsman began to embrace the notions of laissez-faire market capitalism and subcontract out much of their labor instead of staying within the local artisan class structure. This move towards market capitalism eroded what Wilentz calls a sense of “artisanal republicanism” in which craftsman across the range of craft looked out for the collective interests of the class rather than the interests of the individual. He wrote, “an urban variation of the Jeffersonian social theme of the virtuous husbandman emerged, one that fused craft pride and resentment of deference and fear of dependence into a republican celebration of the trades.... The crafts themselves reputedly respected individual abilities but also stressed mutuality and cooperation.”⁸¹ This notion of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁸¹ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850, 20th Anniversary Edition* (London, UK; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 94.

artisan republicanism and class solidarity is key to understanding the way that we can look at public celebrations, specifically parades, to watch the erosion of this solidarity over time.

Amy Bridges' *A City in the Republic* tackled similar terrain to Wilentz's monograph but more specifically explored how these changes in the economy of New York affected the political culture and the rise of machine politics and political wards. She also focused on the members of the upper class and how they seemingly retreated from public life. Bridges contended that because the police force and firefighters were growing more professional there was less influence by the upper class. However, I disagree that this means the upper class retreated from public life. In fact the changes in Evacuation Day celebrations, most notably the rise of elite military regiments and of theater performances as an addition to the day's festivities point to an increase in the public nature of upper class New Yorkers. She, like Wilentz, focused on the local artisanal associations and how they asserted political agency. She wrote that in the antebellum period, New Yorkers began to develop a new set of values and customs based around living in an "industrial, ethnically heterogeneous society."⁸² She built on the work of Eric Hobsbawm in connecting the beginning of the industrial revolution to a social revolution that changed the character of social and political relations in New York City.

Thomas Chambers' recent monograph on battlefield tourism and historical memory offered an interesting point of comparison between memory sites in urban centers like New York and Boston and battlefields like Saratoga and Yorktown. Chambers wrote of the use of memory in the early national period that, "the kind of historical memory that many Americans desired strayed far from the dull speeches of elected leaders, whether in 1881 or 1825. Americans preferred less instructive, more personal commemorations and a good show, either in the form of

⁸² Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

evocative landscapes or exploding fireworks.”⁸³ Chambers highlighted a difference between the “official” memory found in the speeches offered at formal events of commemoration and the more personal memories that Americans found when walking in an evocative location.

Chambers offered a great snapshot of how memory can be transmitted and reconfirmed when passed between generations when he wrote, “only community-based interaction with place involving common rituals and commemorations results in durable memory that can be reenacted and reconfirmed in future years.”⁸⁴ He drew on the language and work of Halbwachs here, but nonetheless, Chambers offered a mode of thinking regarding the staying power of collective memory.

Critiques And Rhetorical Shifts

Celebrations of the anniversary of the British evacuation continued in much the same way in the 1820s as they had in the prior two decades. In 1820, *The American* ran an advertisement for the unveiling of a new statue to correspond to the anniversary’s celebration as well as the evening’s performance of “The Glory of Columbia.”⁸⁵ In 1821, Pintard wrote to his daughter that the evacuation was “celebrated with increasing splendor. The Militia Officers dine together & in the evening are to attend the Theater.”⁸⁶ Similarly, *The Albany Gazette* reported that despite poor weather the parade was brilliant and widely attended. As well it listed the evening’s festivities as having included a “sumptuous dinner at the city hall,” fireworks, and a theater performance.⁸⁷ In 1821, the *Evening Post* described the feeling of the populace on the anniversary as filled with “spirit and glee.” However, it did offer a pointed critique of the custom

⁸³ Thomas A. Chambers, *Memories of War: Visiting Battlegrounds and Bonefields in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁵ *The American*, November 25, 1820

⁸⁶ Pintard and Barck, *Letters from John Pintard to His Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833*, 109.

⁸⁷ *The Albany Gazette*, December 1, 1820

of having a publicly funded dinner for the militia and social elite. The paper claimed, “Our public funds can ill afford to bestow one or two thousand dollars on ostentatious and splendid dinners to be eaten by our good aldermen and assistants, for the good and glory of the city. It has been customary we know, but ‘it is a custom more honored in the breach than in the observance.’”⁸⁸ This observation gets at the heart of the issue of whether the tradition of celebrating the evacuation had in fact become an empty ritual or if it held a deeper meaning. That same year John Pintard wrote that it was “a duty to pay this tribute of respect,” referring to honoring Evacuation Day. For Pintard the day’s events remained important—carrying significant emotional resonance. However, the author of the *Evening Post* article on the day’s festivities in 1821, did not hold the day in such high regard.

An interesting rhetorical shift in the phrasing used to title the anniversary celebrations began to occur in 1821. Whereas the older title indicated a trauma still associated with the occupation and evacuation, the newer title suggested some distance from that trauma and that this event was now celebrated out of obligation to serve the past instead of a emotional necessity to reflect on past trauma. Some newspapers like the *New-York Spectator* still described the anniversary as “the anniversary of the Evacuation of this city, by the British army” while other papers like the *Evening Post* and the *Spectator* simply titled it the “anniversary of the Evacuation” or the “anniversary of the Evacuation of New York.”⁸⁹ This rhetorical shift towards the less formal title carried with it a change in tone. The diary entries of George Templeton Strong, a student at Columbia College in the 1830s, demonstrate how this change in rhetoric altered what the day meant for younger New Yorkers. Strong wrote in 1835 that Evacuation Day

⁸⁸ *The Evening Post*, November 27, 1821

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*; *The Evening Post*, November 27, 1821; *Spectator*, November 28, 1823.

was glorious in that “it allows us to kick up our heels all day at our leisure.”⁹⁰ The following year, when Columbia College did not cancel classes on Evacuation Day that in itself speaks to how the day had waned in significance Strong wrote angrily, “Diabolical outrage! They are not going to give us ‘Evacuation Day’—horrible! We shall have to take it.”⁹¹ This faux umbrage on Strong’s part demonstrates how younger generations did not take the event seriously, just as the changing of rhetorical moniker used to describe the day changed, to signify nothing more than a day off. Initially, Evacuation Day was titled “the evacuation of this city by the British,” a clunky title, because the newspapers needed to a clear distinction between Washington’s evacuation from New York in 1776 and the British evacuation in late 1783. By 1835, there was no trauma associated with Washington’s evacuation of New York and the subsequent seven-year British occupation. The day could now be called the “anniversary of the Evacuation.”

By comparison, when John Pintard wrote to his daughter in 1832 about the anniversary of the Evacuation, his writing was impassioned and he was able to convey how much the day still meant to him and how he understood that the day did not mean as much to those who did not have direct experience with the Revolution and occupation. He wrote that “none except the survivors of those who took part in that day, 1783, can enter into the joy & feeling of our exiled citizens on that auspicious occasion, an event that consummated the Am. Revolution.”⁹² Later in the letter Pintard wrote “never can I forget the tears of joy that I shed as we paraded thro’ the city from the Bowery to the old Fort, & saw the last of the British forces leaving the shore.”⁹³ Pintard shared his dissatisfaction with the fact that the day had begun to wane in significance; he wrote, “for a few years past it [Evacuation Day] has been intermitted, but is again revived, I hope never

⁹⁰ George Templeton Strong et al., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, Abridged edition (Seattle: Univ of Washington Pr, 1988), 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹² Pintard and Barck, *Letters from John Pintard to His Daughter, Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833*, 376.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

to be overlooked again. Forgotten it cannot be, for it is part of our national history. How much did this state & city especially suffer during the revolution.”⁹⁴ There was a clear difference in the fervor with which the day was celebrated depending on age and generation.

The rhetoric of toasts that were printed in the newspapers suggested that once again there was a concerted effort to extend the scale of the day’s significance from a purely local event to a national one. Whereas a decade or more before, the toasts were very much about the evacuation itself and healing the trauma caused by seven years of occupation and exile, the toasts in 1822 were of a larger scale, including toasts to Washington, “The heroes and Patriots of the Revolution. Most of them are numbered with the dead. They rest in peace and their memory is cherished,” the sitting President Monroe, Jefferson and Madison, and others. Only one of the thirteen toasts was directed at the local level, to the governor of New York.⁹⁵ Since, as the toast so aptly put it, “most of them are numbered with the dead,” the opportunity came to make the anniversary less about trauma and relief and more about memory and legacy.

The day did not entirely lose its local significance even as the enthusiasm for the anniversary waned. The *New-York Spectator* described how the event still remained of local importance in 1827. The article stated:

The return of this day is always interesting and animating to our citizens. It is our peculiar festival; and at its return each year, we may pause to contrast the appearance of the city and its population when the exiles first returned, with its existing condition; and estimate the advances it has made during the year that has elapsed since the last recurrence of the anniversary.⁹⁶

According to the newspaper coverage, the day served as an annual day of reflection—a day to look back on the prior year and measure the growth of the city over the past year. The question for historians is how to measure this sentiment when compared to how insignificant the day was

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *Albany Argus*, November 29, 1822

⁹⁶ *New-York Spectator*, November 30, 1827

to someone like George Templeton Strong. The following year the *Evening Post* described the anniversary as having “somewhat fallen off from that ceremony and festivity with which it was formerly observed.”⁹⁷ There were many attempts to link the anniversary to the War of 1812 as well as to scale its rhetoric to a national level. These tactics worked to a certain extent but as two generations had passed the memory of the occupation and initial evacuation in 1783 faded and became replaced with myth and lore. The 1820s would not mark the end of the celebrations but would mark a definitive change in what the celebrations would mean for New Yorkers moving forward.

Evacuation Day was going through a crisis of transmission. The emotional significance of the day for those of the older generation like John Pintard was not transferring to members of subsequent generations like Strong. For younger generations of New Yorkers Evacuation Day seemingly meant very little. No source more drastically highlighted the issue at hand more aptly than the *New York Spectator* in its coverage of the semi-centennial celebration in 1833. The newspaper published an article that offered a scathing critique of the notion of celebrating the British evacuation at all. It stated:

It is not surprising that the deliverance of our city from the occupation of a hostile force should have been to the citizens a subject of rejoicing—nor that the return of that day on the succeeding year should have been marked, and even celebrated with grateful emotions; but that its observance should pass into an indefinitely extended anniversary, running down to the period of fifty years, few we believe of those who instituted it would have imagined, or willingly promoted. It is celebrated as a day of triumph, whereas it only commemorates our humiliation. If by any glorious achievement of our city ancestors, this deliverance had been obtained, there would have been at least *some* reason for its commemoration. But the British were not expelled by valor, but departed voluntarily, and in pursuance of a treaty of peace... Instead of republishing, from year to year the memory of the captivity in which we were held, ought it not rather to be a matter of regret that our city was enthralled so long! We really hope that this day will be the last in which the city troops will be paraded, and the corporation punch bowl filled, in honor of the Evacuation.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ *Evening Post*, November 25, 1828

⁹⁸ *New-York Spectator*, November 28, 1833.

The *New York Spectator* followed through on its hope for the rest of New York and did not report on Evacuation Day celebrations in 1834 or 1835. There is limited newspaper coverage of these two years, which lends credence to the argument that the fifty-year anniversary did help to lower popular support for Evacuation Day. There was such a lack of enthusiasm for the anniversary over these two years that in 1836, the *New York Spectator* exhorted the citizens of New York “to remember the 25th of November.”⁹⁹ Evacuation Day truly was in the midst of a crisis of identity, importance, and resonance with the next generation of New Yorkers.

Artisans, Laborers, And Social Elites

Annual celebrations in New York including Evacuation Day and July 4 were established as traditions and part of the annual calendar due in part New York’s social and military elite and to its growing artisan class. The height of participation in Evacuation Day festivities by the artisan class occurred in the 1830s. In the 1820s and 1830s artisans stood for “an entire moral order, based on the interlocking concepts of independence, virtue, and citizenship.”¹⁰⁰ Artisans tried through public demonstration to halt the transformation of social order that they saw emerging as New York and the rest of the nation became more industrial. Industrialization threatened their class standing and they hoped through public demonstration they could offer a critique of capitalism in its Market Revolution form.

Local holidays like Evacuation Day allowed for local artisans to exert political agency and show solidarity across the trades. Phillip Hone, former mayor of New York, wrote of Evacuation Day in his diary entry from November 1830. Hone described the day’s festivities and offered specific details about the participation of the local trades and societies. He wrote:

⁹⁹ *New York Spectator*, November 28, 1836.

¹⁰⁰ Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 94.

Among the trades and societies the most prominent were the fire department with their beautiful engines... the printer... the butchers on horseback, to the number of three hundred, in leg-of-mutton sleeves; the cartmen on horseback in white frocks; a steamboat with her steam up and machinery in motion.¹⁰¹

The *New York Evening Post* published an article following the 1830 celebration which stated that it was “the most splendid piece of pageantry of the kind ever witnessed in this city, with the exception of the Canal celebration referring to the celebration of the opening of the Erie Canal in 1826].”¹⁰² The crowd was so large for the celebration in 1830 that the newspapers noted that the platform where the crowd stood collapsed under excessive weight.

The fiftieth anniversary was quite a spectacle with President Monroe speaking to the crowd. Scottish writer Thomas Hamilton, in his book written from his observations of America, *Men and Manners in America*, wrote about the 1833 Evacuation Day celebration and noted that it contained “a procession of the different trades.”¹⁰³ It just so happened that Hamilton was in New York for the fiftieth anniversary of the British evacuation and thus this event may have been celebrated with more pomp and circumstance than the prior few years. After the grandeur of the 1830 celebration, there is little newspaper coverage of the 1831 and 1832 celebrations suggesting a lack of celebration or mass attendance. Hamilton described the increased majesty of the procession of trades. He wrote:

Butchers on horseback, or drawn in a sort of rustic arbour or shambles, tastefully festooned with sausages. Tailors, with cockades and breast-knots of ribbon, pacing to music, with banners representative of various garments, waving proudly in the wind. Blacksmiths, with forge and bellows. Caravans of cobblers most seducingly appareled, and working at their trade on a locomotive platform, which displayed their persons to the best advantage. And carpenters too,—but the rest must be left to the imagination of the reader.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Philip Hone and Bayard Tuckerman, *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851* (New York, Dodd, Mead, 1889), 25, <http://archive.org/details/diaryofphiliphon01honeuoft>.

¹⁰² *New York Evening Post*, November 27, 1830.

¹⁰³ Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America* (Edinburgh [etc.] W. Blackwood [etc.], 1833), 59, <http://archive.org/details/menmannersinamer02hami>.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

With some fantastic prose, Hamilton offered the most detailed account of how the artisan trades participated in the Evacuation Day festivities and how they hoped to stem the tide of the Market Revolution.

The election of William Henry Harrison in 1840, a Whig, brought with it a change in public support for the artisan class. By the middle of the century the participation of these artisan groups in the local parades and festivities, including Evacuation Day, waned. In particular the orchestration of Evacuation Day celebrations had been seized by New York's social elite, leading to more and more elaborate military unit demonstrations and increased spectacle during the parade. New York's social elite used the increasingly growing number of volunteer military units as a way to jockey for social standing. Participation in local festivals and celebrations was a chance for New York's working or artisan class to exert political agency and lobby against the increasing industrialization of market capitalism. By the mid 1840s to early 1850s, those chances were gone.

Becoming "Evacuation Day"

Evacuation Day parades became more elaborate in the first half of the nineteenth century. Starting in the 1830s and 1840s the participation in the parade by artisans and working class groups had waned, replaced by a substantial increase in the number of military units that marched. This increase in military units comprised mostly of elite volunteer units comprised of young aristocratic men. Historian Clifton Hood described what marching in the parade meant for these men. The members of these regiments "competed fiercely over the precision of their marching and the elegance of their uniforms in a rivalry that employed masculine display, national symbols, and wealth to legitimate the city's changing upper-class and define its

boundaries.”¹⁰⁵ These men transformed the Evacuation Day parades, making each year longer and more extravagant. They used the day as a platform to jockey for social position amongst themselves in front of an audience of both their peers and the working classes that they sought to differentiate themselves from. Rather than exclude themselves from the public eye, these young upper class men stepped into the public light for the entire city to see in order to flaunt their social status. Hood described this transition into the public eye as a way to “transform parade spectators into an audience and implicate them in a rite of competition that would affirm their own power.”¹⁰⁶ After their public display was over, the members of these groups would then return to private social gatherings later in the evening, further asserting their authority and social class identity over the increasing number of German and Irish immigrants that comprised of the working class. The members of these volunteer regiments used the Evacuation Day parade as a platform to affirm their social standing amidst the changing makeup of New York City’s population in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The *New York Herald* was quick to identify this new trend in 1840 and subsequently and dismiss it. The article stated:

It would be, perhaps, invidious to single out any of the superb military corps that paraded, where all displayed such a high state of efficiency and discipline, yet still the Light Guard and the German Corps appeared to receive the highest encomiums from all the military martinets on the ground. We are happy to add that not the slightest accident occurred, and we did not see more than one staff officer dismounted and heard it said not a single soldier was knocked down during the firing.¹⁰⁷

It is a matter of interpretation as to the level of sarcasm we should read into this description of how elaborate the military display was during the 1840 celebration, but these volunteer regiments made up of New York’s upper class including the Light Guard and the German Corps,

¹⁰⁵ Clifton Hood, “An Unusable Past: Urban Elites, New York City’s Evacuation Day, and the Transformations of Memory Culture,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 4 (July 1, 2004): 895.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *New York Herald*, November 26, 1840.

gave the social elite an annual opportunity to publically display their social status. Introducing this new element of the annual festivities solidified the transition towards ritual.

Commenting on the spectacle became more commonplace than attempting to connect the day to the memory of the evacuation and Revolution. In 1841, multiple newspapers critiqued the increased spectacle of the anniversary celebrations. The *New York Spectator*, in its article published on the day before Evacuation Day, sarcastically wrote that “Tomorrow the big cannons are to speak in thunder, the drums to pour forth their martial roll and the pipes to squeak...All in commemoration of the day when the Britishers took their long and last farewell of our beloved city, at the close of the Revolutionary war.”¹⁰⁸ The article also described the banners as “gaudy” and the author wrote a postscript that stated, “We trust that no future book-maker from aboard will quote this paragraph as a specimen of American grandiloquence...”¹⁰⁹ The writers of the *Spectator* seemed to be poking fun at the increased spectacle of the Evacuation Day celebrations and in some ways even questioning their importance.

By 1840, most newspapers had moved to titling the day “Evacuation Day,” a rhetorical shift which distanced the day from the trauma of its founding. This moniker was first made popular years earlier by the local theaters, which advertised their plays, to be performed on the anniversary as being on “Evacuation Day.” By 1840, most newspapers adopted the title in their own published articles about the day. This again is a symbolic. In 1842, the New York Museum advertised in the *New York Daily Tribune* that, “Extensive preparations are being made to celebrate Evacuation Day.” The museum was to hold nine performances on Evacuation Day including an Ethiopian Dancer and some “graceful jugglers.”¹¹⁰ A few days later, the paper labeled the parade as the “Military parade” and described it as “very large and imposing.” The

¹⁰⁸ *New York Spectator*, November 25, 1841.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *New York Tribune*, November 24, 1842

local papers all employed a rhetoric that emphasized the ritualistic nature of the day. The *Tribune* wrote, “the evening was honored by the usual demonstrations. The day was fine, and its festivities enjoyed by large numbers of citizens.”¹¹¹ Similarly, George Templeton Strong’s diary entry from Evacuation Day 1842 captured the loss of interest for the holiday. He wrote that over the past decade the event had lost its appeal, stating, “Its glories have departed and nobody thinks about it now.”¹¹² Years earlier Strong was also disillusioned with the holiday and mocked its significance but then he was a college student and perhaps less mature. Here almost a decade later he wrote that both he and the population in general had lost interest in the event, a statement corroborated by various newspaper reports. Despite the *Tribune* stating that a large number of citizens enjoyed the day in 1842, in the early years of the decade Evacuation Day was dominated by upper class ritual and thus popular support for the day’s festivities continued to wane.

Mexican American War

The military had become an important part of the anniversary celebrations, so much so that when the Mexican American War began in 1847, the elite military units that normally paraded down Broadway were not available for the celebration and their absence was duly noted.¹¹³ On the eve of the War, Evacuation Day was, by all accounts, primarily a military ritual. Little was reported in the newspapers about celebrations that did not in some way include a military parade or celebratory dinner for current and former officers. Because of this, the day was celebrated very minimally during the war. This would mark the first time that a lack of Evacuation Day celebrations would be specifically noted in local newspapers.

¹¹¹ Ibid., November 26, 1842.

¹¹² Strong et al., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 72.

¹¹³ *New York Evening Post*, November 24, 1847.

The Mexican American War would last for two years and in these years the celebration of Evacuation Day would be substantially smaller in scale and spectacle. Even after the war, the impact of those lessened celebrations can be read in the *New York Herald* from 1848. One article described the anniversary in 1848 as simply “an ordinary day.” The article also portrayed the lack of military presence, “though the number was so few that many were disappointed, and little interest was manifested for the occasion.”¹¹⁴ In addition the *Herald* concluded its coverage of the day’s events having declared that “old things have passed away, and their interest seems lost, however important, the object commemorated.”¹¹⁵ In similar fashion, the *Herald* noted that the celebration in 1849 was so small and insignificant that it would have been better if there were not a celebration at all. The *Herald* then grappled with the waning of enthusiasm for the anniversary. “Why there has been a falling off in recent years, it is difficult to determine,” the *Herald* published in 1849, “but the fact is by no means creditable.”¹¹⁶ The inability for the first generation of Evacuation Day celebrators to transmit the feelings of trauma, pain, and overall resonance to the following generations doomed Evacuation Day in the 1840s. The 1850s would not be much better.

Drawing On The Memory Of The War Of 1812

The *New York Evening Post* remarked of Evacuation Day in 1850 that “this day has always been celebrated with more or less display, by the citizens, but chiefly by the military.”¹¹⁷ This one sentence encapsulates how Evacuation Day celebrations changed over the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1851 the *New York Herald* titled its article recapping the year’s

¹¹⁴ *New York Herald*, November 26, 1848.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, November 27, 1849.

¹¹⁷ *New York Evening Post*, November 25, 1850.

Evacuation Day celebration “Evacuation Day—Veterans Corps of 1812.”¹¹⁸ This connection to the War of 1812 was a continued effort to tie these veterans with the legacy of Evacuation Day. The article described the day’s festivities as including a procession with surviving veterans, totaling four companies of soldiers. The paper also contained accounts of the lives of Abraham Brower and Charles Crowley, both living officers of the War of 1812. The paper printed the story of how the British following the battle of Queenstown took Brower as a prisoner of war and how they also took Crowley captive after his boat was seized near Georgia. There was a concerted effort to reinvigorate Evacuation Day by linking it to the memory of the War of 1812 by the publishers of local newspapers.¹¹⁹ This is seen in the *Herald*’s coverage of Evacuation Day the following year. In 1852 an article published by the *Herald* stated that “Martial display was dispensed with in a great measure.” In addition the author, wrote, “The Veterans of the war of 1812, 1813, and 1814, assembled at their headquarters.”¹²⁰ The *Herald* also noted that there were many local military companies that marched in the parade, including the Fourth Ward Jolly Fellows, the O’Connell Guard, and the Hayward Guard. To close the article claimed, “upon the whole the people were happy and contented and our citizen troops showed a front which places the idea of a second evacuation beyond the reach of probability, as a second invasion would be impossible.”¹²¹ This is an interesting conclusion in that it marks a return to rhetoric of trauma. By even mentioning the possibility, regardless of how remote a possibility it was, of a second evacuation and invasion, the paper once again tried to link the display of military prowess with a sense of security. Through both this increased rhetoric and link to the veterans of the War of

¹¹⁸ *New York Herald*, November 29, 1851

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, November 27, 1852.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

1812, the newspaper publishers tried to bring back some passion for Evacuation Day by deliberately using the memory of war.

Articles published by both *New York Weekly Herald* and the *New York Daily Times* in 1853 employed rhetoric clearly targeted at what the respective authors viewed as diminishing enthusiasm and public support for Evacuation Day and by extension for celebrating the memory of the American Revolution. The *Herald* opened its article writing, “Evacuation day was yesterday celebrated with a parade of the Veteran Corps of the War of 1812.”¹²² The article continues to address directly the memory of the American Revolution more broadly and the British evacuation specifically. The article claimed, “The display, however, which this day used to call forth in times gone by, has somewhat diminished, in these days of utilitarianism. As we advance, it is perceptible that less and less item is devoted to the public celebrations of the eventful days of the American Revolution.”¹²³ Later in the same article the author tried to appeal to the emotional ties to the memory of the evacuation and the Revolution, stating “On the 25th of November, 1783—now just seventy years ago—was enacted the last scene of the revolutionary struggle...and on the same day Gen. George Washington made a public entry into this city, amid the welcome shouts of an emancipated people.”¹²⁴ Employing strong and powerful diction, the author hoped to reconnect its readers with the memory of the Revolution. Invoking Washington’s name and image was crucial to re-linking the day with a sense of both local and national patriotism—once again imbuing it with a sense of purpose. Similarly, the *Times* wrote of the day “From 1783 to 1853 is the Scriptural measure of a man's lifetime. As the years have run by, the descendants of the veterans who marched in so gallantly that day with Washington, have ‘celebrated’ the anniversary of the event, and successive generations will doubtless follow so

¹²² *New York Weekly Herald*, November 26, 1853.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

good an example.”¹²⁵ Again, the paper invoked Washington’s name and the memory of both the American Revolution and the British evacuation but also of prior Evacuation Day celebrations. The article boldly declared that the day would continue to live on, even when popular enthusiasm for the day had waned, perhaps in an attempt to reinvigorate the day for future years.

The following year the *Tribune* employed rhetoric that implied that its own attempts to reinvigorate popular support for Evacuation Day over the last two years with impassioned diction may have worked. One article published compared the day’s celebration to the prior few years, writing:

For several years past, this day, to the shame of our civic and military authorities be it said, has passed comparatively unnoticed—no other recognition being made of the even than the firing of a salute from the Battery, and perhaps the parading of one or two companies. But on Saturday last...our patriotic fires had been kindled anew, and that an event so important in American history as the Evacuation of New York by the British was not to be passed without a becoming celebration.¹²⁶

The *Tribune* dedicated three columns to a description of the day’s events including a list of each of the eleven regiments that marched in the parade. The article also made sure to mention the presence of War of 1812 veterans who attended ceremonial dinners sponsored by the city’s common council following the day’s parade. At the dinners there were of course various toasts made, the most prominent of which was offered by Alderman Waneman who “responded in a speech of much animation and patriotic enthusiasm...He contended that such a day should be held sacred as a holiday for the people, not only of this State and this generation, but by the people of the whole country, for all time to come.”¹²⁷ Once more there was an increase in attention paid to using rhetoric that raised Evacuation Day to the national level and connected it specifically with the memory of the Revolution.

¹²⁵ *New York Daily Times*, November 26, 1853.

¹²⁶ *New York Daily Tribune*, November 27, 1854.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* I could not find the Alderman’s first name.

In all of these accounts, there was little mention of the crowd or of the participation in the parade by any group outside of the military. One of the only direct mentions of the crowd was published in an article by the *New York Daily Times* in 1854 which stated that the veterans of the War of 1812 were “loudly cheered during their march—all heartily joining in paying a tribute of respect to the men who, by their deeds in arms had secured to us the freedom fought for in the war of the Revolution.”¹²⁸ Similarly in its description of the celebration in Brooklyn, the article described how “The Veterans were received with much attention as they posed through the streets and they seemed well pleased with the attentions paid to them.”¹²⁹ There were limited references to crowds in the newspapers and yet, even when one was published it was done in the service of the larger desire to raise enthusiasms for the day by linking it to the legacy of the War of 1812.

Growing sectional tension throughout the nation had little effect on Evacuation Day. The *New York Herald* wrote of the 1856 celebration, “it is to be regretted exceedingly that our citizens do not pay more attention to the national holidays, and appropriately celebrate the events that give them their significance. It begets kindlier feelings between the different sections of the country, and does more for the perpetuity of the Union than all the buncombe speeches made during a political campaign.”¹³⁰ Descriptions of the day’s events in both the *New York Daily Tribune* and the *New York Daily Times* did not discuss the event in relation to the larger political climate of the nation. They both simply listed the military brigades that performed in the parade and discuss the impact of the semi-poor weather on the day. This was a missed opportunity to use a local holiday to help soothe the issues the nation was facing.

¹²⁸ *New York Daily Times*, November 27, 1854.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *New York Herald*, November 26, 1856.

One poetic statement was a clear declaration against the increasing sectional tensions bubbling beneath the surface of American life. Historical memory, the members of Cincinnati Society hoped, could be the ties that bind the states together during this increasing tumultuous time. The *Times* reported on a dinner held by Sons of Cincinnati in which it listed the toasts offered at this dinner, many of which include direct references to the memory of the Revolutionary past. The first toast was to “The Memory of Washington—His glorious example will stimulate us to persevere inviolate those exalted rights and liberties of human nature for which the patriots of the Revolution fought and bled.” The second toast was to the memory of the deceased memory of the Society and the tenth toast was to “The Memory of a Warren and of Marion of Sumpter and Lincoln, Massachusetts and South Carolina—They stood side by side in the Revolution—the glories of the past are the bonds of the Union.” The third toast was to the memory of the 25 of November 1783.¹³¹ Despite these hopes by members of the Sons of Cincinnati, the memory of the Revolution could not prevent the nation from eventual fracture.

Evacuation Day celebrations were increasingly lackluster in the final years of the decade.

In 1858, the *New York Herald* wrote:

Formerly, this day was observed with a good deal of spirit, as commemorating an event that interested all classes of Gothamites; but of late years the observance, beyond the annual parade of the soldiers, has not amounted to much, owing doubtless to the dying out of the old race of Knickerbockers, within whose memories the event took place, and the neglect of their descendants, to whom a local historical circumstance was of but little account.¹³²

This was a clear critique on the part of the *Herald* of the ability for the memory of the day to transfer from one generation to the next. The day had no meaning, other than the fact it has become an annual ritual. The following day, the *Herald* further commented on the celebration, “this even has made the day memorable for all time, and the old fashioned Gothamites used to

¹³¹ *New York Daily Times*, November 28, 1856.

¹³² *New York Herald*, November 25, 1858.

celebrate its annual return with great *éclat*. There were military parades, the firing of guns, ringing of joy bells, public feasts and other demonstrations, to show the delight of the New Yorkers on the anniversary of Evacuation Day.”¹³³ The article went on to critique that much of the splendor associated with the day was gone and that even City Hall refused to celebrate the day like it had in year’s past. By printing about the way Evacuation Day used to be celebrated newspaper publishers hoped that this would reinvigorate interest in the day; but as the Civil War approached, nothing could be done to spark interest in the anniversary.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that there was a lack of ability of the traumatic memory to be passed down to subsequent generations. Over the fifty years that this chapter examines, popular support for Evacuation Day celebrations diminished as the generation who experienced the occupation and Revolution passed away without successfully communicating to subsequent generations the importance of celebrating the holiday. Instead, for the subsequent generations, the day became increasingly ritualized and this lack of popular support both by the populace at large and financial support from the municipal government, allowed New York’s social elite to cease control over the holiday, amplifying the turn towards ritual through an increased militia presence. This is seen in changes in how the day was described as having been celebrated in local newspapers as well as in the rhetoric employed to label the day, with the day transitioning to becoming “Evacuation Day”, away from the “Anniversary of the British Evacuation.” Popular support for the day had waned to such a degree that in the 1850s multiple newspapers suggested that the day was of no value and should not be celebrated. The only constant that remained from prior years and decades was the presence of the military. As the nation was on the brink of

¹³³ Ibid., November 26, 1858.

disunion, not even the memory of the Revolution or of the War of 1812 could muster significant enthusiasm for Evacuation Day.

CHAPTER THREE: “OCCUPATION DAY?” EVACUATION DAY DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Twenty-one days after the election of Abraham Lincoln, New Yorkers celebrated Evacuation Day on November 25 1860. Unbeknownst to them, the following year would be radically different as the nation was about to plunge itself into a bloody and grueling civil war. Over the first half of the nineteenth century, popular enthusiasm and municipal support for Evacuation Day diminished significantly. However, the day continued to be celebrated up until the eve of the Civil War.

In 1860, when the Civil War began New York was a city of split allegiances, often divided along class and racial lines. Following the outbreak of the war, New Yorkers were generally quite supportive of the war effort despite the fact that much of the city’s importing and exporting trade dealt in southern cotton crops. However, because of how heavily reliant the City’s economy was on Southern cotton, there were many, including Wall Street bankers, merchants, and those in the shipping trade, who encouraged reconciliation with the South as quickly as possible. As the casualties of war grew, New York’s economy began to suffer significantly and the Mayor Wood, a Democrat, helped to lead opposition to the war throughout the city, calling for peace with the South. In 1860, New York City had 800,000 residents, approximately 200,000 of which were unskilled laborers of Irish descent.¹³⁴ Racial tensions grew in intensity as unskilled jobs disappeared during the wartime recession in New York. Unskilled Irish workers often blamed the city’s African American population for their economic misfortune.

¹³⁴ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 852.

Racial and class tensions came to a head when the National Conscription Act was passed in 1863. Riots broke out over four days in July 1863, as the draft was very unpopular among the city's predominantly Irish working class. Members of the working class were angry with the African American New Yorkers who they saw as to blame for the war. As well, they were angry at the upper class, mostly Republican members of New York's quasi-aristocracy for being able to dodge the draft when it was their political party who defended the war efforts rather than the lower-class supported Democrats.¹³⁵ In addition members of the working class were angry that the upper class began to profit from the war effort once the cotton trade was re-opened, by selling lower quality uniforms to the Union army, which the lower class soldiers had to pay for themselves. Even after the draft riots were quashed by federal troops, tensions were very prominent in New York, so much so that in the 1864 election the Copperhead party was able to successfully achieve a majority of votes for Lincoln's opponent, former Union General McClellan. McClellan doubled Lincoln's votes in the city, 73,716 to 36,687.¹³⁶ Yet, Lincoln carried the state due to support from New York's Republican-heavy upstate areas.

The dominant anti-war sentiment found in New York during the Civil War is useful in understanding how Evacuation Day was celebrated during the Civil War and in the period of Reconstruction. It is understandable that the events of the Civil War and the need to heal from communal trauma did not infuse Evacuation Day with more meaning during this time because the war was not widely supported in the City and often seen as a mistake, especially by the working class. Over the first half of the nineteenth century the day had become so widely associated with New York's upper class and social elite. The support of the war by those very same members of New York's social elite only furthered the disconnect between the working

¹³⁵ Edward K. Spann, *Gotham at War: New York City, 1860-1865* (Wilmington, Del: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

¹³⁶ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 852.

class and Evacuation Day. It makes sense then that following the slight revival of enthusiasm for Evacuation Day in 1865, the day once more declined in popular significance until the centennial celebration in 1883.

This chapter examines the impact that the Civil War and the decade of Reconstruction had on celebrations of Evacuation Day. How would the memory of colonial occupation, trauma, and eventual triumph function in a divided nation? Would the memory of the Revolutionary era become a crucial part of the post-Civil War reconciliation process? Or was Evacuation Day doomed to become a relic of the past?

In this chapter, I argue that the same forces that served to decrease popular support for Evacuation Day in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, namely the increased militarization and ritualization of the day's events were amplified during the Civil War. Evacuation Day was not celebrated at all during the Civil War and although the day was celebrated with much fanfare in 1865, this spike in enthusiasm for the day coincided with the end of the Civil War. In the years between the end of the Civil War and the centennial celebration, Evacuation Day would once more be of little importance to New Yorkers.

“Occupation Day?” Evacuation Day During The Civil War

If there was any doubt that the trauma associated with the British occupation of New York and the joy following their evacuation had been lost with the memory of past generations, the *New York Times* account of Evacuation Day in 1860 cast that doubt aside with its strong rhetoric and commentary on the legacy of the day itself. The *Times* article stated, “The day which we celebrate as Evacuation Day might, with equal propriety, be termed Occupation Day.”¹³⁷ The British evacuation ended a seven-year period of exile and occupation in which

¹³⁷ *New York Times*, November 27, 1860.

many New Yorkers were forced to flee their homes and abandon all of their property, while those who stayed behind endured the brunt of an occupying army. The very notion that the *Times* could conflate the joyous memory of the British Evacuation with the memory of the seven year occupation by writing that the day which commemorated the end of that occupation should be called “Occupation Day” demonstrated that the words “evacuation” and “occupation” were no longer charged with the same traumatic energy for this current generation as they had been for the earlier generation.

The use of the word “occupation” to describe the feeling of New Yorkers on Evacuation Day as being “occupied” with the burden of needing to celebrate the event demonstrated how little the event meant to New Yorkers. In prior years, many New Yorkers did not consider the day a burden to honor; for New Yorkers like John Pintard it was a duty to commemorate the day with pride each year. The same article also stated that most New Yorkers “who are fond of participating in the pride, pomp and circumstance of our general training days, find the anniversary so much a day of occupation that they are compelled to forego the indulgence of a peripatetic patriotism.”¹³⁸ Once more, the article’s author was quite clear that meager festivities in 1860 were not an abnormality but commonplace, writing, “It is not a matter of surprise, therefore, that the occasion now-a-days never passes off with great éclat.”¹³⁹ In the 1850s various local newspapers questioned why the day was ever even celebrated in the first place. Now, in 1860, the *Times* described the day as burdensome and without even the wondrous spectacle of prior years.

The coverage of the 1860 Evacuation Day established that the memory of the occupation and evacuation that the day was initially established to commemorate had fallen by the wayside,

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

leaving behind only a time-occupying annual ritual that did not garner enthusiasm from New Yorkers. The *Times* was eager to once again question the importance of the anniversary. The *New York Herald*, in its coverage of Evacuation Day was typical of years past, with little questions asked regarding the day's meaning, importance, or historical lineage. The *Herald* published an article that stated that the "event proved very attractive to a host of spectators, who appeared on the balconies of the fashionable residences in the vicinity, and a plebeianic mass making up the sidewalk committee."¹⁴⁰ On the eve of the Civil War, the future for Evacuation Day looked very grim. Not only had the day's meaning been questioned, but also the memory of the event the day was to commemorate had been publically mocked using the same rhetoric that for an earlier generation was emotionally charged.

The following year, after the initial notion that the Civil War would be a quick conflict dissipated, support for Evacuation Day weakened substantially. In similar fashion to how the day was not celebrated with much splendor during the Mexican American War, the Civil War would take its toll on Evacuation Day. The roots of the holiday's death came from years of increasingly military dominated festivities that did not ground the day in the memory of the British evacuation. In 1861, the *New York Herald* published an article on November 25, the day of the parade, which described the day as to be celebrated in "the usual becoming manner."¹⁴¹ This phrase can be read as once again expressing malaise for the standard military fare that had befallen Evacuation Day. The article also mentioned the history of Evacuation Day, comparing the grandeur and enthusiasm with which the day was celebrated in the past with its present state:

In former years the 25th of November was considered one of the greatest days of the year by the inhabitants of New York; the military paraded in full Continental costume, cannon were fired, drums beat, the joy bells pealed forth, and the there was a general holiday

¹⁴⁰ *New York Herald*, November 27, 1860.

¹⁴¹ *New York Herald*, November 25, 1861.

throughout Manhattan Island; but things have changed, and now we are content with a mere military display of a few hours in lieu of the grand display of other days gone by.¹⁴²

This sentence can of course be read two ways, first to describe the general change and lack of enthusiasm for Evacuation Day over the last two decades. Or it can be interpreted as having meant that because of the Civil War there was a lack of military participation and in general less fanfare for the day. Regardless of which interpretation the author intended, the holiday would continue to lose significance and support during the Civil War as the display of military spectacle which had come to dominate the day over the past few decades could not be mustered during a time of war.

Some publications remained optimistic about the war effort, specifically the *New York Daily Tribune*, which published an article the day before Evacuation Day with an hopeful forecast for the anniversary. The *Tribune* hoped that the “gaping seams in the ranks” of citizen soldiers that normally populate the annual parade would instead offer a chance to reflect on the memory of those soldiers that the Union had already lost. The article stated “many who have in years gone by united with our citizen soldiery in celebrating this anniversary now lie stiff and stark upon the battle-plain... The parade of today will recall to mind the remembrance of brave officers, who, at their country’s call, went forth to do battle in defense of the Union.”¹⁴³ The *Tribune* speculated that this need to remember the fallen Union soldiers might reinvigorate the Evacuation Day celebration in 1861.

The serious nature of the war limited popular enthusiasm for anniversary in 1861. The *Tribune*’s account of the day’s festivities claimed that even though the war had limited the number of military men who were available to participate in the parade the display was “more

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ *New York Daily Tribune*, November 25, 1861.

imposing and creditable than many anticipated.”¹⁴⁴ However, the same article also described a general lack of passion for the day’s events, which it credited to the seriousness of the war. “It could hardly be expected this year to receive more than a passing notice,” the article claimed.¹⁴⁵ The article concluded by stating that regardless of how elaborate and ornate the festivities might have been it created “hardly a ripple of curiosity” because the issues facing the nation at large were preoccupying the collective consciousness of New Yorkers.¹⁴⁶ However, the *Herald*’s description remains the most apt, “things have changed.”¹⁴⁷ It became increasingly difficult to celebrate Evacuation Day, the end of the Revolution for New Yorkers, while at the same time fighting a new war. Evacuation Day was a holiday created to heal communal trauma but now New Yorkers were in the midst of a new, bloodier trauma. Those who wanted to see Evacuation Day return to its prior glory saw that the bloodshed associated with the present trauma of the Civil War as potentially a new infusion of significance for the day—a new communal trauma.

Things had changed for both New York and the nation by November 1862. There was no Evacuation Day celebration in 1862. The *New York Daily Tribune* reported on the absence of celebration. The *Tribune* was the only paper to run a story mentioning Evacuation Day in 1862. The *Tribune*’s article stated that the celebration was “practically abandoned this year, and no military or civic cognizance of the memorable event was taken except by the Veterans of 1812.”¹⁴⁸ The *Tribune*’s article described New York as desolate, with “a few flags displayed here and there, the firing of a single salute on the Battery.”¹⁴⁹ The article placed blame on the city government whose decision to not publicly fund the holiday back in the 1850s led to an increase

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., November 26, 1861.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ *New York Herald*, November 25, 1861.

¹⁴⁸ *New York Daily Tribune*, November 26, 1862.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

in military dominance of the event. This in turn, during a time of war, led to minimal civilian festivities in celebration of the anniversary. The lone article about the 79th anniversary of Evacuation Day ended quite aptly, stating, “Yesterday was the first time in our national history that this great occasion passed unnoticed, and we hope, for our national pride and honor, that it will be the last.”¹⁵⁰ While the *Tribune* hoped that 1862 would be the only year the day was not celebrated, the following year its hopes were again unfulfilled.

Once more rhetoric suggesting that the day was a relic became more prominent in 1863. The day before Evacuation Day in 1863, the *New York Daily Times* dedicated three lines in its “Local News” column to announcing the celebrations to occur the next day. The following day, the *Times*’ article described the day as being “appropriately noticed” by New Yorkers.¹⁵¹ The word choice of “noticed” is an interesting one, implying that the day was not celebrated but instead simply acknowledged as some sort of vestige of a prior era. The *New York Daily Tribune*’s account of the day made a bold claim regarding the nature of the holiday. Its article stated:

There never was any common sense in making it [Evacuation Day] a holiday at all. Had the day the peace treaty was signed, or some day commemorating a victory been so selected, it might have secured popular approval. But no one cares what day the British troops left New York, since peace had been made, and everything settled long before.¹⁵²

This was the second time in a few years’ time that a prominent newspaper questioned the very meaning of the holiday, and why it had been celebrated for over seventy years. The *Tribune*’s claim that the day had no real meaning discounted the trauma of New York’s seven-year occupation by the British and the memory of the Revolution. By arguing that the day was not significant, the *Tribune* made it quite evident that the memory of the occupation and subsequent

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ *New York Daily Times*, November 25, 1863; Ibid., November 26, 1863.

¹⁵² *New York Daily Tribune*, November 26, 1863.

evacuation no longer resonated in the slightest with New Yorkers. The *Tribune's* article also contained a joke that is evidence to this loss of meaning: “the day passed off this year in a quieter manner than we have ever before known. In years past the day had been looked forward to like with same enthusiasm that a young boy looks forward to school, with ‘his shining morning face.’”¹⁵³ The fact that the *Tribune* was willing to make a joke about the event also demonstrates that the memory of the event and the trauma had been lost—similar to the way that George Templeton Strong reflected on Evacuation Day in the 1830s when he was a student at Columbia College, simply as a day off. Could this apathy towards Evacuation Day simply be a byproduct of the Civil War’s impact on the nature of morale driven festivities? This is a possible explanation; however, I believe it to be more than just the fault of the war. The war just brought all of the misgivings regarding the annual holiday to the surface as support for Evacuation Day had already declined significantly in the 1840s and 1850s. The problem was not just that the Civil War was raging, but that the memory of what made the day worth celebrating and honoring had failed to transfer from prior generations. Instead, the current generations only saw Evacuation Day as a boring tradition, dominated by military spectacle.

In 1864, there was no parade, outside of a very small procession of the veterans of the War of 1812. A tiny article published by the *Daily Tribune* reporting on Evacuation Day noted that “very few of the vessels in the harbor were decorated with the National flags” even though all public buildings including City Hall displayed the flag.¹⁵⁴ The *New York Herald* tried to raise interest for the eighty-first Evacuation Day celebration, writing in its announcement article a few days before the holiday that the celebration would consist of a “national salute of thirty-five guns

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ *New York Daily Tribune*, November 26, 1864.

from the Battery.”¹⁵⁵ The only way Evacuation Day would survive the Civil War was if its meaning transformed in scope—from a day of local celebration to a day of national importance. This change from a local emphasis to a national became increasingly more evident in the following years Evacuation Day celebration.

Enthusiasm and popular support for Evacuation Day was briefly resuscitated in 1865. Whereas in the prior year the day passed with little fanfare and minimal coverage by local newspapers, in 1865 there was both tremendous popular support for the day’s festivities and by extension the holiday received ample coverage in the local newspapers, including on Evacuation Day itself, being featured as the front-page story in the *New York Daily Tribune*. This sudden resurgence of enthusiasm was without a doubt related to Lee’s surrender at Appomattox in April of 1865. Evacuation Day then became a day of celebration for the end of the war as opposed to a day to celebrate the memory of the American Revolution.

The *New York Times* published an article the day before Evacuation Day in 1865 that employed rhetoric and drew on the memory of past celebrations to raise support for the coming holiday. Subtitled “How the Day was Celebrated in Former Times,” the article detailed the brief history of the day stating that “in the days of Washington and the earlier presidents, Evacuation Day was a solemn holiday for the citizens.”¹⁵⁶ “Solemn” was an interesting word choice in this case because it could be read to mean “formal” or it could be read to mean “serious” and “with great sincerity.” By drawing on the memory of how the day was previously celebrated and the meanings it used to carry, the article suggested that the holiday demanded more appreciation and thought—not just as a ritualistic event but as a day of significant meaning. The opening paragraph of this article concluded with a statement regarding the future of Evacuation Day and

¹⁵⁵ *New York Herald*, November 23, 1864.

¹⁵⁶ *New York Times*, November 24, 1864.

the desire to see it returned to its former glory, especially seeing that the war was just about over. It stated “It is to be hoped that the occasion will be observed with some of that joyousness and bonhomie customary in days gone by, when a gigantic war had not swept away so many landmarks and traditions of the past.”¹⁵⁷ Despite the hopes of this article’s author, Evacuation Day would not return to its former glory until the centennial celebration in 1883 although the 1865 celebration was a significant improvement on the prior years.

The same *Times* article from 1865 was fixated on the reverence with which the author believed the day was celebrated in the past. In what might seem otherwise as an insignificant detail, the author discussed how in the past business were closed on Evacuation Day. The idea that business remained open on Evacuation Day in the 1860s demonstrated how irrelevant the day was for most New Yorkers. The article claimed that in prior years “Shops and public offices were closed, divine service was held in the churches, and substantial dinners were served up on the domestic board. The afternoon was devoted to parades... The honest citizens of these ancient days were wont to dress themselves in their best doublet and hose.”¹⁵⁸ The customs of the past, according to the article, were honest and sincere. Later in the article, the author claimed that the day was not always historically dominated by the military procession but at one point also had “a large civic procession” and “the streets of the city were constantly alive.”¹⁵⁹

There was hope that 1865 could be the year to alter this downward trend and once again restore the day to its rightful place of significance on New York’s festive calendar. The article boldly proclaimed that Evacuation Day “only fell behind the national holiday—Fourth of July—in rank, being considered fully as important by New-Yorkers as even that historic day itself.” The article blamed the War for Evacuation Day’s decline. “But the war, and its intense

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

excitements, its battles and sieges, its marches and retreats, its sad reverses and glorious victories,” it stated, “caused the public mind to lose that veneration for Evacuation Day which was previously entertained for it.”¹⁶⁰ The article’s author was upset that the day has been lost and that there was such a lack of “veneration” for the day that “the business men of the city do not feel called upon to sacrifice that most important day to join in celebrating the anniversary.”¹⁶¹ The author of the *Times* article hoped that 1865 could be a turning point in the history of Evacuation Day.

If popular support for Evacuation Day was to return, the day would have had to become a day of national importance not just a local one. The *New York Herald*, in a November 23rd article preceding the 1865 Evacuation Day suggested that following the Civil War there was no place for local holidays only national ones. Its article offered a brief history of how the day used to be celebrated, even calling it “a kind of second edition of the Fourth of July.”¹⁶² Despite Evacuation Day’s former status as second only to the Fourth of July, the *Herald* suggested that there was no need for the day. The *Herald* blamed both the municipal government and its lack of proper funding for the past decade of Evacuation Day celebrations and the Civil War for diminished interest in the holiday. However the rhetoric employed suggested that most of the blame was attributed to the war. The *Herald*’s article stated, “The exciting scenes of the last four years rendered all parades and celebrations, excepting the national day, nearly unnecessary, hence Evacuation Day has become almost obsolete.”¹⁶³ The *Tribune* also recounted the tale of John Van Arsdale and his infamous climb to the top of the liberty pole at the battery to remove the British Union Jack after the British troops greased the flagpole and cut the halyards down. Other

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² *New York Herald*, November 23, 1865.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

newspapers also described the lore of Van Arsdale and the flag incident during this year and the years to come.

The day took on two specific meanings in 1865: first, to preserve and celebrate the memory of the Revolution and the honor the trauma of New York's seven year occupation; and second, to celebrate the Union victory and honor the memory of the fallen Union soldiers. The *Herald* argued that Evacuation Day should be treated with the same respect as July 4. Evacuation Day "did not receive that enthusiastic attention which the day deserved." The *Herald's* article also contained a "variation" on the Van Arsdale liberty pole legend. This is contrary to the claim the *Tribune* published in the aforementioned front-page story, which was that the day was "celebrated with all the pomp and pageantry which the secondary importance of the holiday deserved."¹⁶⁴

In the aftermath of the Civil War the reunited nation would look to its shared communal past as cornerstone for unifying America. The *Tribune's* cover story also offered an interesting claim regarding the nature of historical memory, specifically that because the events of the recent past (the Civil War) the memory of other more dated events was being lost. "We have been making history so very fast during the last five years, grand events deserving of commemoration have been thronging by as so rapidly, that ere long we shall find ourselves obliged to relinquish many of our old holidays and replace them with more momentous anniversaries."¹⁶⁵ This quote foreshadowed the importance of creating a new memory culture, based on the memory of the Civil War that would ultimately be crucial in healing the wounds of the splintered nation.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ *New York Daily Tribune*, November 25, 1865.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, Reprint edition (New York: Vintage, 1993).

However, the *Tribune*'s cover story did not suggest the elimination of Evacuation Day in favor of a more recent commemorative day. Instead the *Tribune* advocated that Evacuation Day should remain a part of New York's local culture, assuming it could become more relevant to the needs of the day. The article contended that many "old customs will be given up, and the stress upon our time will have to be very great, before New Yorkers will vote unanimously for the erasure from the calendar of holidays, of their time-honored local attraction, which they and their fathers so long celebrated under the name of Evacuation Day."¹⁶⁷ The idea that Evacuation Day would remain a part of New York's festive calendar, however, did not mean that no changes that would needed to take place to ensure the day's continued presence. The *Tribune*'s story suggested that the day had to also become a national celebration and not just a local one. The article claimed that the original meaning of the day is "but mistily understood to have something to do with re-embarking red-coats." The article posited that there had to be a link between the legacy of Washington and his generals to that of our "more recent and terrible war" if the day was to remain significant. In a stroke of brilliant prose, the article boldly stated that "the dead are not affected by time; and as long as we can think of the Country's Savior and its Father, and the soldiers slain in the Revolution and for the Union as a common, living brotherhood, we must think of Evacuation Day as having a national as well as a local significance."¹⁶⁸ Evacuation Day was once more reinvigorated with energy and enthusiasm, giving New Yorkers a place to once again pay tribute to a communal trauma. However as the contradictory reports from the *Herald* and the *Tribune* implied, although popular enthusiasm for the day grew in 1865, this was more in reaction to the day's newfound communal significance and less in reference to the historical memory of New York during the Revolution.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Evacuation Day After The War's End

Evacuation Day had taken on new meaning after the Civil War. It served to unify the citizens of New York in the aftermath of a war that bitterly divided the city. In 1866 the *New York Times* published an article the day after the holiday, recapping the day. The article described this new feeling. The day, according to the *Times*, “meant something more than the mere calling to mind of one event in our history.”¹⁶⁹ The *Times* tried to convey a sense that the trauma and joy that spawned the first Evacuation Day celebrations were very similar to the pain and elation that the nation experienced as the Civil War ended. Linking the past and the present with statements like “the first celebration of Evacuation Day was the expression of joy for dangers passed, and that an enemy had been beaten [word unclear] the celebration now means something more” were attempts to reinvigorate the day. Additionally the *Times* article described the parade and the day’s festivities as being “of the people,” implying that the day had a unifying factor, not simply attracting those military men who would march in the parade.

Evacuation Day was celebrated with a newfound interest and local enthusiasm in 1867. The *New York Tribune* argued that the “celebration by the military was worthy of the occasion. The parade was one of the finest the city has witnessed for many years.”¹⁷⁰ Descriptions of the event published in the *New York Times* concurred. In its article on Evacuation Day the author claimed that “The parade deserves to be chronicled as one of the most successful made by the Division [of the national guard] for some years, both in point of numbers and in the soldierly appearance of the several regiments.”¹⁷¹ The majority of articles on the holiday focused on the

¹⁶⁹ *New York Times*, November 27, 1866.

¹⁷⁰ *New York Tribune*, November 26, 1867.

¹⁷¹ *New York Times*, December 1, 1867.

size and glamor of the parade and military procession with little attention paid to the historical component of the day.

In 1867 there was an increased reliance on history and memory in articles published by the *Tribune*. The *Tribune* published articles that focused on the history of the British evacuation. The surge in historically driven rhetoric in these articles suggested that one tactic to begin to heal from the horrors of the Civil War was an enlarged reliance on a shared American mythos. In its preview of the parade, published the day before, the *Tribune* stated that the day “has always been observed with becoming ceremonies in this city” and that the day marks “the last act if an enemy who had fought hard to subdue a handful of patriot soldiers.”¹⁷² This article drew heavily on the history of the Revolution and the British occupation as well as the folklore of the initial Evacuation Day. The article’s author wrote “we need not dwell upon the tyranny and injustice of the British soldiery in New York during the Revolutionary struggle, nor upon the fashionable dissipations of the English officers during that somber period in the city’s history.” Later in the article the author proclaimed that “the legends of that occupation will yet enrich our literature with poetry and fiction.” This article concluded with a recounting of the Van Arsdale story, framed again as an example of the “arrogance of power and their [the British soldiers] chagrin of defeat.”¹⁷³ These articles demonstrated that increasingly the newspapers found it important to include the history and lore of Evacuation Day when publishing articles about it.

The history of Evacuation Day was minimal for most New Yorkers. Writers and publishers like those at the *Tribune* sought to change that. The *Tribune*’s article on Evacuation Day opened with the history of the day and employed charged diction and rhetoric. The author—having seen the history of the day fall by the wayside in the prior two years and replaced with a

¹⁷² *New York Tribune*, November 25, 1867.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

need to heal from the trauma of the Civil War— tried to relink the Evacuation Day to the initial British occupation and evacuation. The *Tribune*'s article boldly stated “When, on the 25th of November, 1783, the British army set the seal to its humiliation by abandoning its last foothold in the new-born nation, it gave to the city which by that act it freed from an irksome domination, a holiday, to be remembered with patriotic pride and celebrated with pomp of arms, while that city cherishes the recollection of its disenthralment.”¹⁷⁴ The author would do this throughout the article. Even when describing mundane details like the weather, the article stated that “The skies were as gloomy as the brows of the British when they fled down to the Battery.”¹⁷⁵ The *Tribune* was not alone in its attempt to relink the history of the British anniversary with the holiday.

The *Herald*, like the *Tribune*, was trying to tap into a need for historical memory in the aftermath of the War. The *Herald* opened its column on the 1867 Evacuation Day celebration with a treatise on the importance of foundational memory and myths. “In all ages, all peoples have had certain commemorative days in their annual cycle which were set apart and distinguished from other days to be honored and observed in a special manner because of their connection with some event of importance, the occurrence of which, formed an epoch in a nation’s life.”¹⁷⁶ The authors and editors for both papers had to be aware of the lack of popular enthusiasm for Evacuation Day both during the war and in the decade leading up to it. They saw Evacuation Day as a place to heal and to unify—even though it was a local holiday, it, like other local holidays across the nation, could share a common history and set of unifying myths.

As many had claimed before this, the *Herald* argued that Evacuation Day was an important part of both the national and local memory. The *Herald* attempted once more to ask the citizens of New York to draw upon the traumatic memory that had passed down from

¹⁷⁴ *New York Tribune*, November 26, 1867.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *New York Herald*, November 26, 1867.

generations, even though it acknowledged that “As time passed and the city extended its limits and increased its population some of this display of rejoining diminished, although it has always been, and still continues to be, marked as deserving national as well as local memory.”¹⁷⁷ The article posited that “Of this day, November 25, 1783, we yesterday celebrated the eighty-fourth anniversary. While the events to which this war such a glorious sequence were yet fresh in the memory of the inhabitants, and those who had shared in the privations and hardships which were endured during the long night of British occupation.”¹⁷⁸ This column by the *Herald* as well as the articles written by the *Tribune* demonstrated a concerted effort by newspaper publishers to rekindle the interest in the history and memory of the initial British evacuation. New Yorkers had seen the day been brought back to life in 1865 following the end of the Civil War, but that was a day that offered a chance to heal from that most recent trauma. Evacuation Day had returned the following year but was mostly a vehicle for elaborate military parades and ceremonial displays. Instead, these publishers sought to bring back the original spirit of the day but employing historical anecdotes like the Van Arsdale myth, and charged rhetoric regarding the Revolution and the nation’s founding, in the hopes that these elements would rekindle the flames of memory.

The *Herald* and the *Tribune* both claimed in 1868 that significant time had passed since the Civil War and that it was once again appropriate for Evacuation Day to have been celebrated. Both the *Tribune* and the *Herald* published full-length columns on the day. The *Herald* did not mention the history of the event or draw upon the memory of the past in its article, instead filling its column with details about the forthcoming parade and which regiments and divisions would be participating therein. The *Herald* published an article which claimed that “It is also expected

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

that a number of gentlemen, distinguished in military and civil life, will be present.”¹⁷⁹ There would continue to be a presence from New York’s social and military elite, regardless of popular turnout. The *Tribune*, however, tied the day’s festivities to the Revolution as well as the Civil War, it argued:

The time-honored ceremonies attendant on Evacuation Day have for some years past been greatly neglected by our citizens. This was more especially the case during the late Rebellion, when instead of pondering over this history of the War of Independence, our Boys in Blue, emulative of the glorious example set them by the heroes of ’76, were absent fighting the battles of their country... Now that the War of the Rebellion is a thing of the past—as much a matter of history and of pride as is the glorious War of Independence, Evacuation Day is to be again fittingly observed.¹⁸⁰

This was, of course, a common defense for the lack of enthusiasm for Evacuation Day over the past decade. Nevertheless, the goal was to link the memory of the Revolution to the defense of the Union, thus creating a lineage of historical memory, of which Evacuation Day would be a part. The following day, the *Tribune*’s recap of Evacuation Day was not as flowery, outside of the opening “‘Evacuation Day, when the British ran away,’ was duly celebrated yesterday by a brilliant parade of the military and Fire department.”¹⁸¹ This marked the first time that the Fire Department marched in the parade, but other than that, the day was lackluster. The *Tribune* claimed later in the article that “there was not much enthusiasm manifested by spectators, but their seldom been a more brilliant parade.”¹⁸² This quote seemingly embodied the how difficult it was for New Yorkers to find Evacuation Day as a relevant and important part of New York’s festive calendar. Even with a spectacular parade, brilliantly orchestrated processions, and fine weather the day had lost its traumatic associations and the seeming resurgence in 1865 had more

¹⁷⁹ *New York Herald*, November 25, 1868.

¹⁸⁰ *New York Tribune*, November 25, 1868.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, November 26, 1868.

¹⁸² *Ibid*.

to do with the end of the Civil War than a resurgent admiration for Evacuation Day and the memory of the Revolution.

Despite a resurgence of popularity and support for Evacuation Day in 1865, the day struggled to hold a prominent role and garner popular support and enthusiasm amongst New Yorkers. In what had become an annual tradition, the *Herald* published a column the day of Evacuation Day titled “How it is to be Celebrated To-Day.” In this column, the author offered hope that the “old time-honored way of celebrating it [Evacuation Day]” would be revived.¹⁸³ Evacuation Day was at a crossroads. There were those who hoped the day would be celebrated with the same fanfare as in the past while at the same time there were others who saw that in order for the day to be relevant to New Yorkers in the era of Reconstruction, the day would need to change. A few days before Evacuation Day in 1869 the *Times* announced that the year’s parade would be “the same in part as that of the American troops when they entered the City eighty-three years ago.”¹⁸⁴ Mirroring the path that Washington’s troops marched down was an attempt to link the present with the past. However, even with proper newspaper coverage, measures like this one would not be enough to sustain enthusiasm for the day.

There was a revival in interest for Evacuation Day in 1869. In its full-length column on Evacuation Day the *Times* again noted that it is “essentially a New-York holiday; though for many years past it has passed over without crating a ripple on the surface of our Gothamite society.”¹⁸⁵ This same article, before detailing the intricacies of the parade and the participating regiments, did mention the notion of a shared historical memory, “It is a cheering sign that there is a growing tendency to revive the memory of a day which is so glorious in our national

¹⁸³ *New York Herald*, November 25, 1869.

¹⁸⁴ *New York Times*, November 23, 1869.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

annals.”¹⁸⁶ The *Times* may have been overzealous in describing the recent Evacuation Day celebrations as a “revival” but at the same time, being that just a few years prior there was no parade, perhaps “revived” was the right word. Evacuation Day was indeed alive but had once again fallen into the same routine of a grand military display without popular enthusiasm for the day or grounding in historical memory or shared trauma. The end of the 1860s saw a “revival” of Evacuation Day celebrations but the event still lacked resonance for New Yorkers—instead the day once more became a day of ritualistic spectacle.

The 1870s Mirrors the 1850s

Little changed regarding how Evacuation Day was celebrated in 1870. The *Times* published an article on November 25 describing the history of the day, and its significance to local history. Like in 1869, a concerted effort was made by the *Times* in its preview of Evacuation Day column to describe how in past decades “the citizens closed their shops, and jollity reigned, and loyalty to the Union received new life.”¹⁸⁷ This article drew a clear difference between the ability of Evacuation Day to foster emotional resonance among New Yorkers in the past with how it was simply an excuse for an elaborate parade in 1870. New Yorkers, in 1870, felt so little real affect for the day that they did not close their shops or take off from work to celebrate. In comparison, the *Times* published in its “How Evacuation Day was Celebrated” column the following day that businesses were closed in celebration of Thanksgiving but not for Evacuation Day.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ *New York Times*, November 25, 1870.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, November 26, 1870.

With little difference from year to year, Evacuation Day diminished in significance once more in the 1870s. In 1873 the *Times* described the festivities as “not particularly brilliant.”¹⁸⁹ Each year the same toasts were offered while the dwindling number of War of 1812 veterans participated in the parade: “Evacuation Day used to be celebrated with a great deal of pomp, but in recent years the Veterans of 1812 have been the only ones to do it honor.”¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, there was little mention of if or how the day was used to commemorate the Civil War veterans. In 1878 the *Times* remarked that “probably not one person recalled” that it was Evacuation Day until the Seventh Regiment paraded by.¹⁹¹ The day had completely lost its deeper significance that it had regained briefly following the end of the Civil War. The newfound importance and need for shared experience quickly dissipated and by the end of the 1870s the day was as of little importance as it was in the 1850s. The only parties interested in Evacuation Day in the 1870s were veterans of the War of 1812 and those with colonial lineage like David Van Arsdale, who was given the honor of raising the flag above the battery on each evacuation day as his ancestor John Van Arsdale did in 1783. For all other New Yorkers the day was seemingly non-existent.

Conclusion

On the eve of the Civil War celebrations of Evacuation Day had been waning in importance since the end of the Mexican American War. In the 1850s multiple newspapers questioned why the day was even celebrated in the first place—as a day of importance it had been lost, instead replace by military driven ritual and increased spectacle. Celebrations of Evacuation Day in the 1860s followed a similar trajectory; in 1860 the day did not gather much popular support. Whatever support the day had in 1860 had lessened significantly throughout the

¹⁸⁹ “Evacuation Day,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1873.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, November 26, 1876.

¹⁹¹ “Evacuation Day,” *Ibid.*, November 26, 1878.

war years. However, in 1865 the day was celebrated with passion that had not been matched in decades. This was due to the end of the Civil War and the day could once again serve the needs of New Yorkers to heal from a communal trauma. In the years following the war the day precipitously decreased in scale and spectacle despite hopes from newspaper writers and publishes that Evacuation Day would be an important tool in unifying the nation, creating a new sense of nationalism grounded in a shared historical past. Attempt to tie the day back to its historical origins failed to reinvigorate support for the day and over the decade the holiday returned to its normal routine of grand military display and little deeper resonance for New Yorkers. This is the pattern Evacuation Day had fallen into before the war and would be the same pattern following the centennial celebration in 1883. Holidays grounded in communal trauma lose significance quickly. New Yorkers could not sustain a holiday built on memory and trauma, like Evacuation Day.

CHAPTER FOUR: RACE, CLASS, AND MEMORY: NEW YORK'S EVACUATION DAY CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Unlike the 1870s, when Evacuation Day was celebrated with little enthusiasm and was predominantly a military affair, the centennial celebration was the largest and most extravagant in the day's history. The centennial Evacuation Day celebration became a primary battleground where New Yorkers of differing social classes attempted to link themselves to the memory of Revolutionary New York. The memory of the Revolution was contested across racial and class lines in which lower-class immigrants, primarily of Irish descent, could attempt to raise the group's collective social standing by linking themselves to New York's Revolutionary past. Standing in their way was the semi-aristocratic upper class, comprised of New Yorkers that in many cases could trace their ancestry back to the colonial era. Upper-class men and women created fraternal organizations like the Sons of '83 and the Daughters of the Revolution, which in connection with John Austin Stevens of the New-York Historical Society, managed and controlled all of the official events associated with the centennial. This was a battle over the memory of the American Revolution and of Revolutionary New York. In this chapter, I argue that the upper class successfully controlled and consolidated power surrounding the centennial celebrations, and in so restricted who had access to link themselves with a part of the city's past, strengthening the existing social hierarchy in the city.

The Evacuation Day centennial was the last of the centennial Revolution holidays.¹⁹² New York wanted to make this day the most glamorous of them all. Historian Brooks McNamara wrote that, "New York resolved to make the hundredth anniversary of its own special holiday

¹⁹² The centennial celebration of the ratification of the Constitution was still to come but in terms of events which had direct links to the Revolutionary War, the Evacuation Day centennial was the last one.

[Evacuation Day] an unforgettable patriotic event.”¹⁹³ Similarly, historian Clifton Hood wrote that the 1883 centennial parade “was both the largest Evacuation Day gala ever staged and the last big one. Over a million people attended, including President Chester A. Arthur, several cabinet officers, and eight governors. Twenty-five thousand troops marched in the parade, while a marine pageant featured 300 warships, private yachts, and other vessels.”¹⁹⁴ Beyond the spectacle that both of these historians described with poetic prose, the centennial celebration offered the chance for New York’s business and social elites to control the festivities for their own financial gain as well as to reaffirm the existing social hierarchy and to create celebrations which highlighted the social progress and civic harmony of the era. Despite much criticism from newspapers like the *Irish-American* and *John Swinton’s Paper* for promoting values of harmony when class and racially based disparity was commonplace throughout the city, the centennial was described as a smashing success in the newspaper coverage that followed the anniversary. This was so much the case that Stevens and his fellow organizers sought to reestablish the holiday in the years to come in an effort to preserve their ties to the Revolutionary past.

Historiography

This chapter stands in conversation with scholars of memory and of the Gilded Age specifically New York during the Gilded Age. The secondary source that this chapter is most directly in conversation with is *The Monied Metropolis* by Sven Beckert. In this monograph Beckert tracked social and political changes from 1850 until the tail end of the nineteenth century in New York, arguing that the “self-conscious upper-class” consolidated power in the second half of the nineteenth century in a more distinct way than in any other locale. The city’s

¹⁹³ Brooks McNamara, *Day of Jubilee: The Great Age of Public Celebrations in New York, 1788-1909* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 147.

¹⁹⁴ Hood, “An Unusable Past,” July 1, 2004, 899.

elite staged unimaginably elaborate social events to reaffirm its class status through displays of bourgeoisie spectacle. Beckert contended that “no other site of inquiry promises such rich insights into when, how, and why an upper class formed as a cohesive group with a shared identity.”¹⁹⁵ *Power and Society* by David C. Hammack is the other main secondary source with which this chapter engages in scholarly conversation. Hammack discussed the role of historians and the power they can exercise through interpretation. Hammack claimed that the historians of the era, as this chapter will demonstrate, used connections between the existing population with a lineage dating back to the colonial period to strengthen the social hierarchy against the waves of incoming European and Irish immigrants. More generally, Hammack’s work focused on the distribution of power among the social classes of New York at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Additionally, historian Clifton Hood argued that Evacuation Day and New York’s class structure were very much linked, stating “Evacuation Day was associated with elites throughout its history.... elites frequently turned to historical memory to proclaim their identities, mark their boundaries, or communicate their vision of the social order.”¹⁹⁶ Hood’s essay remains the only systematic analysis of Evacuation Day. Hood wrote another influential article about the social hierarchy in New York at the end of the nineteenth century. This piece argued that “distressed with the modern city of industry and immigration, some late-nineteenth century historians invented an imagined city known as ‘Old New York’ that idealized colonial New York” which “...gave elites a sense of identity in a turbulent time.”¹⁹⁷ Hood wrote about the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time when power was consolidated in history-making

¹⁹⁵ Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 4.

¹⁹⁶ Hood, “An Unusable Past,” July 1, 2004, 884.

¹⁹⁷ Clifton Hood, “Journeying to ‘Old New York’ Elite New Yorkers and Their Invention of an Idealized City History in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 6 (September 1, 2002): 699–700, doi:10.1177/0096144202028006002.

organizations like the New-York Historical Society and the Society of '83. These organizations sought to re-interpret the history of colonial and revolutionary New York in a way that re-affirmed the social and ethnic hierarchy.

Preparing For The Centennial

A cursory quantitative analysis of the prominent New York City newspapers from 1883 demonstrates just how much coverage the centennial Evacuation Day celebration received. This increased coverage was to be expected because the centennial was, as the Joint Committee on the Centennial Celebration described, “a day of imperial grandeur and influence.” Whereas in the prior decades newspapers would only discuss Evacuation Day on the week of the holiday, totaling on average five unique mentions of the phrase “Evacuation Day” in a given year, in 1883 the phrase Evacuation Day appears throughout the calendar year. In 1883, the *New York Times* alone used the phrase 119 times; similarly, between the *New York Tribune* and the *New York Sun*, there were 102 uses of the phrase. While in the prior decades it was rare to see Evacuation Day mentioned outside of the month of November, in 1883, the hundreds of newspaper articles started using the phrase as early as January.

New York’s social elite had witnessed a slew of centennial celebrations starting in 1876. All of these Revolutionary centennial celebrations were organized in order to reinvigorate a sense of national pride by tapping into the deep-rooted historical memory of the Revolution. By 1883, Boston and Philadelphia had already held centennial Fourth of July celebrations—New York’s only “Revolutionary struggle” to celebrate in a similar fashion would be Evacuation Day and thus “New York resolved to make the hundredth anniversary of its own special holiday an unforgettable patriotic event.”¹⁹⁸ The Joint Committee was initially given a budget of \$20,000

¹⁹⁸ McNamara, *Day of Jubilee*, 147.

from the City in support of the celebration. The centennial would not differ from prior celebrations of Evacuation Day in types of events featured for the holiday, such as a parade, various dinners and banquets, fireworks, and speeches. What would be different was the scale of the day's events.

The city's largest newspapers started in 1883 to report on debates over mundane details regarding the planning of the centennial, which were never discussed in public in earlier years. As early as January 23, the *Times* published accounts of the centennial's special planning committee. In one article, the *Times* mentioned that there was debate over what day the event should take place, as the 25th of November was to fall on a Sunday.¹⁹⁹ The fact that these issues were reported demonstrates just how important the centennial was to be for New Yorkers. John Austin Stevens, a leading figure at the New-York Historical Society, was a prominent member of the Committee of Arrangements, the committee in charge of planning the centennial anniversary of Evacuation Day. In similar fashion to the early articles published by the *Times*, the *Tribune* published a small column reporting that the Society of the Cincinnati, a fraternal organization of veterans dating back to the Revolution, had reached out to Stevens and the Committee to request that it be a part of the planning process for the centennial.²⁰⁰ Stevens was committed to linking the centennial to the memory of the colonial era and the Revolution. An article published in the *Times* in May noted that Stevens "suggested that the Governors of the 13 original States be invited, with their respective staffs to participate in the celebrations. He thought the State military organizations in this City would be willing to unite in a grand military display on that day."²⁰¹ The Executive Committee would continue to meet and to plan for the centennial;

¹⁹⁹ *New York Times*, January 23, 1883.

²⁰⁰ *New York Tribune*, March 17, 1883.

²⁰¹ *New York Times*, May 8, 1883.

however, between May and September the *New York Times* did not publish much, if any articles regarding the centennial.

Funding the centennial was a vast undertaking. Evacuation Day was not an official city holiday and thus initially funds were not appropriated for the day in the annual budget. However, quickly, the city offered \$20,000 to fund the celebration. Planning for the centennial was in full swing by October. Publications regarding the upcoming holiday began to reappear. For example, the *New York Times*, on October 3, published the announcement of the Executive Committee stating that the ceremony was to include “the dedication of the Washington Monument at the Sub-Treasury, a dinner by the Chamber of Commerce, and a meeting of the Historical Society.”²⁰² At this point it was still unclear if there was going to be a parade as the city had not yet allocated any funding for the parade and because the day was not a legal holiday. This appears to be posturing on the part of the *Times*, as it was almost certain that regardless of budget, there would be a parade, just as there had been nearly every year for a century. In fact, the *Times* reported weeks earlier that the plan for the parade was to have the parade route mirror the march of Washington’s forces into the city a century earlier.

In late October as the city was voting on whether to appropriate an additional \$15,000 in the city budget for the day.²⁰³ The following day, the *Times* published a letter to the editor written by Stevens. In this letter Stevens implored the Joint Committee’s case that the day be declared an official city holiday and for the appropriations of more funds from the city’s budget. Stevens wrote that “to celebrate the even in a manner commensurate with its historic importance and with the wealth of this great City would demand the expenditure of a sum only to be had by

²⁰² Ibid., October 3, 1883.

²⁰³ Ibid., October 21, 1883; Ibid., October 23, 1883.

legislative appropriation.”²⁰⁴ By November, the city legislature had appropriated \$20,000 out of the city’s budget but this sum was still not enough and the Executive Committee continued to plead the public for additional funding in the local papers. For example, the *Times* reported on November 14 that a fund had been started the day before to raise funds and that within the first 24 hours the fund had raised over \$1000 and in one week’s time the planning committee had received nearly an additional \$7000.²⁰⁵ In the days leading up to the centennial there would continue to be articles in the local papers about the need for more money; however, the day would go on as planned.

Historical Memory

Evacuation Day was a larger fixture in the cultural consciousness of New Yorkers in 1883 than in prior years. As the months drew closer to the celebration, there was a marked increase in the historically charged rhetoric and anecdotes used in the local newspapers. This rhetoric was employed in an effort to spark interest in New York’s colonial and Revolutionary history—a task that would not be easy. John Austin Stevens, secretary of the New-York Historical Society in 1883, wrote the Report of the Joint Committee and the historical introduction that accompanied the report. In the introductory note to the report, Stevens claimed that the “the original intention of the Historical Society” in preparing for the centennial was to “awaken public interest in this important, but hitherto neglected part of our history.”²⁰⁶ More than any other American city, in 1883 New York was a heterogeneous community made up of

²⁰⁴ JOHN AUSTIN STEVENS TRUTH HERMANN WUNDERLICH & CO, “Letters to the Editor.: The Evacuation Day Celebration. the Newburg Medal. the Whistler Etchings.,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1883.

²⁰⁵ “The Evacuation Day Parade.: Preparations for a Grand Demonstration on Land and Water.,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1883; “No More Places in Line: Evacuation Day’s Great Procession Now Filled Out. Some of the Organizations That Will Parade--the Programme of the Water Display Decided Upon.,” *New York Times*, November 21, 1883.

²⁰⁶ Joint Committee on the Centennial Celebration of the Evacuation of New York by the British et al., *Report of the Joint Committee on the Centennial Celebration of the Evacuation of New York by the British, Monday, November 26th, 1883* (New York : J.J. Little, 1885), 4, <http://archive.org/details/reportofjointcom00join>.

many racial and ethnic groups. It would be a challenge to bring the greater New York community together in support of a semi-forgotten holiday. An article on the centennial in the December 1 issue of *Harper's Weekly* concurred with the difficulties of rallying New Yorkers behind their shared history. The article suggested that “New York has always shown a certain indifference and negligence” regarding local history because of the “Dutch temperament of the early settlers” and because of the “mixed and cosmopolitan character of her subsequent population.” The article’s author imagined a scenario in which, on the day of the centennial celebration “a large part of the crowd will gaze upon the pageant of the celebration of Evacuation Day and wonder what Evacuation Day was.” In this same hypothetical, *Harper's* suggested that the “electric national appeal of great national anniversaries, which brings homogeneous communities to their feet with pride and joy, will be wanting here [in New York during the centennial].”²⁰⁷ Stevens’s goal of reinvigorating the public with spirit for Evacuation Day and the memory of the Revolution was a challenge.

The publishers of *Harper's Weekly* were less optimistic than Stevens about the possibility of succeeding in making the centennial Evacuation Day celebration a grand unifying moment based in shared patriotism for New York’s local history. *Harper's* suggested that because of the nature of New York’s population the centennial would fall on deaf ears regardless of how much historically driven coverage was offered by the local newspapers. It is of course difficult to gauge the audience reception of newspaper and magazine articles and thus it is hard to gauge the claim that *Harper's* made in this article. New York always had a troubled history with Revolutionary patriotism. Yet, the letters and reports of the Executive Committee do not reflect this history—instead painting a picture of New York as being fervently patriotic both during the

²⁰⁷ *Harper's Weekly*, December 1, 1883. Although this issue is dated as December, the article concerning Evacuation Day notes that it was written in the days leading up to the centennial.

Revolution and during the Civil War, which it wasn't.²⁰⁸ Writing to Mayor Grace, Edward De Lacey, secretary of the New-York Historical Society, wrote that "when she [New York] became one of the United States, and up to this hour, not one of them, in peace or in war, whether foreign or civil, has been more loyal to the Union and given it greater and more unstinted support than New York."²⁰⁹ Another report of the Joint Committee, by author John Austin Stevens, described the importance of Revolutionary memory for New Yorkers:

New York holds in grateful memory the illustrious men who secured the independence of the States by the counsel and their arms, and cherishes measureless attachment the Union that brought together the discordant fragments of the Seaboard Confederation and welded them into a national empire whose power and population now stretch from seas to sea across the continent.²¹⁰

Clearly there was a divide between what *Harper's* suggested was the place of historical memory for New Yorkers and that which the Historical-Society suggested. *Harper's* claimed that because of the heterogeneous nature of New York, historical memory would not be a useful tool in gaining public support. Stevens and the Historical-Society believed that regardless of the makeup of the community, historical memory could be employed successfully. It is more likely that the opinion of *Harper's* was more reflective of the broader populace of New York. However, the point that this debate raised regarding the ability to foster a sense of local and national history as important to identity would become increasingly difficult in the coming decades of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As the centennial celebration grew closer, there was a substantial increase in connections between the centennial celebration and the initial British evacuation. Many of the local newspapers reported on the efforts to link the centennial to the initial evacuation. For example, in

²⁰⁸ See chapter three for more information on New York's support for the Union during the Civil War.

²⁰⁹ Joint Committee on the Centennial Celebration of the Evacuation of New York by the British et al., *Report of the Joint Committee on the Centennial Celebration of the Evacuation of New York by the British, Monday, November 26th, 1883*, 28.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

a September 18th *Times* article titled “The Parade on Evacuation Day” stated that “the troops which will parade on that day shall, as nearly as possible, go over the same ground that was traversed by Washington’s forces on the day they entered New-York 100 years ago.”

Additionally, the *Times* reported that the endpoint of the parade’s path would also be “as near as can be at the same place that Washington dismissed his soldiers.”²¹¹ About one month later, in a more detailed article regarding the total plans for the centennial festivities, the *Times* remarked that “one of the most interesting points along the route is the old Francis Tavern, at Pearl and Broad streets. It was in this building that Gen. Washington took leave of his officers on Dec. 5, 1783, and in the same building the room may still be seen in which the Chamber of Commerce was organized in 1768.”²¹² In early November the *Times* published an entire article titled “The Old Francis tavern: Washington's Leave-taking of his Officers 100 years ago.” For this article, the *Times* interviewed an older man who recounted the history of Washington and Fraunces Tavern. The old man said, “It was in this identical room, 100 years ago, that Washington shook hands with and bade good-bye to some of the men who had fought by his side through the long and hard struggle for liberty.” The local newspapers clearly saw the upcoming centennial as fodder for articles related to Revolutionary New York.

Another example of historically charged rhetoric came from the Mayor who issued an address suggesting that the centennial be celebrated as an official holiday even though the day did not have the designation. This emotional imagery and diction were designed to gather support for the centennial. The mayor’s address proclaimed:

The centennial anniversary of that act which finally separated the American colonies from Great Britain will occur on Sunday the 25th of November. The ceremonies which were observed in this City on the 25th day of November, 1783, were practically

²¹¹ *New York Times*, September 18, 1883.

²¹² *Ibid*, October 16, 1883. Notice the spelling difference here that was mentioned earlier. The contemporary spelling is “Fraunces.”

ceremonies of laying the corner-stone of the brother-hood of States which today extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific and is the home of fifty millions of united, industrious, and prosperous people.... A just appreciation of that even would lead to the observance of each recurring anniversary if the day as one of rejoicing, not only among those whose ancestors participated in the momentous events of the war, of which the military ceremonies of the 25th of November, 1783, formed the closing scene, but among those—and the children of those—who have since then found upon these shores a refuge from extractions and acts of oppression by rulers of foreign countries... It seems most eminently fitting that we mark this hundredth anniversary by such as joyous commemoration as will evince our heart-felt appreciating fi the wisdom and patriotism of the noble men through whose sacrifices we hold and enjoy these inestimable blessings.²¹³

The political and social elite hoped that the day could foster a sense of community amongst New Yorkers, both those whose ancestors were Revolutionaries and those who had immigrated more recently.

In the days before the centennial celebration, the lack of public spirit for Evacuation Day because of the city’s growing heterogeneous population was an issue. A *Times* article, aptly titled “No Public Spirit,” attempted to link the construction of the foundation for the Statue of Liberty with the coming holiday—in that garnering public support for their funding was a challenge. This editorial sharply criticized the citizens of New York for their lack of support for both, opening the article with a bold declaration that it was “highly discreditable to the great City of New York that it should be so difficult as it is, to raise money for any serious public work.” Later in the article the author pleaded with New Yorkers that “this generation must set the example to future generations of Americans in the matter of celebrating the only centennial of Evacuation Day that we shall see.” The author then compared New York to Boston and Philadelphia in terms of being able to raise money for their respective centennial celebrations. “It is true, nevertheless, that in smaller cities...there is more public spirit manifested than there is in New York,” the author wrote. In a similar fashion to the author of the aforementioned *Harper’s Weekly* article,

²¹³ “Centennial Evacuation Day.: Mayor Edson’s Proclamation--a Parade of Steam-Boats.,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1883. *New York Times*, November 10, 1883.

the author of this *Times* editorial suggested that the issue maybe due to the “mixed and heterogeneous character” of the population. It suggested that the “main difficulty is that the City is so big, its citizens are so strange to each other, and there is so little of the feeling of a community interest, that it is difficult to arouse what may be called a general enthusiasm, no matter what the rallying-point may be.” To conclude, the editorial the author wrote that the “bigness of a city arrests the growth of a healthy public spirit.”²¹⁴ Clearly there was some dissent among the various newspapers, and sometimes within the same newspaper, regarding the assumed support, or lack there of, for the coming centennial.

As Evacuation Day grew closer there was optimism and hope regarding the success of the upcoming celebration. The day before Evacuation Day the *Times* published an article that was extremely positive, writing, “there is fair promise that the one hundredth anniversary of the evacuation of the City of New York will be celebrated with pomp and dignity.” The *Times* was confident that among the parade, the unveiling of the statue of George Washington on Wall Street, and the pageant of steam-boats the day would be so memorable as to “fix the centennial celebration in the minds of the generation of young people now coming upon the stage of action. For it should never be forgotten that the observance of anniversaries of important historical events ought to be prepared with a view to their perpetuation as well as for present purposes.”²¹⁵ The *Times* was assured that the centennial would be successful in linking the present day with the memory of the Revolution.

On the eve of the centennial celebration the presence of historical memory was significant throughout the city. Multiple newspapers published articles that drew strongly on the historical memory of the evacuation in 1783 and Revolution. These articles served to familiarize

²¹⁴ “No Public Spirit,” *New York Times*, November 22, 1883. *New York Times*, November 22, 1883.

²¹⁵ “Evacuation Day,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1883.

those who were unaware of local history with the significance and importance of Evacuation Day and to garner enthusiasm from those who may have been familiar with the day but did not understand how traumatic and thus important a day it was for New Yorkers. The *Times* published an article that drew upon the trauma associated with the occupation, and later evacuation of New York by the British in 1783. The author wrote:

It is impossible for us who have never known the privations and the humiliation of freemen suffering under tyranny, to conjure up, even in imagination, the exultation and joy of the day when the emblem of British sovereignty disappeared and the army of the oppressor retired before the army of deliverance... It [New York] had suffered much. It had made great sacrifices. It had endured with deep indignation the presence of a foreign foe. And now it gave itself up with a mighty exultation of spirit to a welcome of the day which has ever since been memorable in the annals of the Republic....It is well that we celebrate this most stirring and important event. It should be commemorated in order that the fortitude, trials, and triumphs of the founders of the Republic may, in the language of Washington, 'be remembered with admiration and applause to the latest posterity.'²¹⁶

Similarly, the Sunday before the centennial—the actual Evacuation Day—the *Tribune* published a full-page spread titled “The Story of the British Evacuation,” packed with the history of the British occupation and subsequent evacuation of New York, a map of New York city as it was in 1783, and information regarding the following day’s celebration. The purpose of this full-page spread was to “quicken the fancy and help the comprehension” of the events surrounding the British evacuation.²¹⁷ The article reprinted addresses by Governor Clinton upon his arrival back to New York in 1783, toasts offered at Cape’s Tavern during the celebration 100 years prior, and even a full-length anonymous poem from 1783 written to celebrate the evacuation. The article also contained an itinerary for the following day’s events and some more information about the artist creating the statue of Washington that was to be unveiled on Wall Street at the centennial. The *Tribune* published an article which claimed that even though many of these documents which date back to 1783 may have been “couched in the elevated and more or less unparseable

²¹⁶ *New York Times*, November 26, 1883.

²¹⁷ “The Story of the British Evacuation.,” *New York Tribune*, November 25, 1883.

language of the period, it may be worth while to reproduce.”²¹⁸ Another article published the same day by the *Tribune* stated that New York was “originally a centre of patriotic resistance to British misrule” and that Evacuation Day was “the supreme event of its [New York’s] history.” The *Tribune* suggested that even if only for one day New Yorkers “should reflect upon the vicissitudes and sufferings of the New York of the Revolution.”²¹⁹ All of this rhetoric was clearly designed to elicit a feeling of trauma and communal history among New Yorkers who otherwise may not have shared a sense of community rooted in local history.

The Centennial

After months of planning, countless committee meetings, and an endless battle for funding, the hundredth Evacuation Day was celebrated on November 26th—a day that featured gloomy skies and “steady, drenching, chilling downpour.”²²⁰ Despite the awful weather, the streets of New York were “alive with people,” according to the *Times*. Similarly, the *Tribune* wrote of the weather that it “could not quench the patriotic ardor of the spectators.”²²¹ The day began at daybreak with chimes rung from the bell on Trinity Church and ceremonial gunfire from atop Castle William. The *Times* proclaimed that the “spirit of the day seemed to pervade everybody.” All along the parade route, as well as through out the city, the streets were lined with American flags, streamers, and all things red, white and blue. The *Times* described the scene:

Car drivers decorated their horses with flags, elevated railroad engines were draped with bunting, boys paraded the streets proudly carrying the American colors, the sound of the

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ “The Last of the Centennial Days,” Ibid.

²²⁰ “After a Hundred Years: The Day Which Saw the Last of the Foe. Celebrating New-York’s Great Centennial. the City Decked and Filled with People and the Day Honored with Processions, Festivity, and Enthusiasm, Upon Which Untoward Weather Has Little Effect.,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1883.

²²¹ “Centennial of Evacuation.,” *New York Tribune*, November 27, 1883.

tin horn was heard extensively, and everything bore token of the fact that the City was saving a most elaborate holiday.²²²

“Rain, drizzle, drip from 10 o’clock in the forenoon till far into the night,” wrote the *Tribune*; yet, it proudly proclaimed that New York’s patriotism was “rain-proof.”²²³ The *Tribune*’s article claimed that the “sidewalks were covered with sight-seers,” while the *Times* wrote that for every person who was driven away by the rain, two more quickly replaced him or her. “It is doubtful,” the *Times* wrote, “if ever before in the history of the City so many persons came together as flocked the streets” on Evacuation Day. The *Tribune* estimated that forty thousand people marched in the military procession and that there were between 2,000 and 3,000 onlookers in the immediate vicinity of Wall Street for the unveiling of the statue of George Washington.²²⁴ Among those estimated 40,000 people were President Grover Cleveland and governors from seven surrounding states—all of whom rode in the leading carriages of the day’s parade.

The street parade was the most popular of feature of the centennial celebration but the parade of steamboats up and down the East River was also highly regarded according to both the *Tribune* and the *Times*. The *Tribune* described the marine exhibition as “imagination had painted a stately procession of water craft, bedizened with thousands of flags and streamers, moving regularly and smoothly over the route.” As the *Tribune*’s article aptly stated, “these were the celebrations of the masses” and “the crowd evidently reasoned that besides the excitement of the parade some warm pulsations of patriotic ardor thrilled their hearts.”²²⁵ The day was not a legal holiday; however, like the mayor suggested in his address from a month earlier, most businesses including the Stock Exchange were closed.

Of all of the events and subsequent festivities associated with the centennial, one of the

²²² “After a Hundred Years.”

²²³ “Centennial of Evacuation.,” *New York Tribune*, November 27, 1883.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

most noteworthy was the fact that James Riker, who traced his ancestry back to Captain John Van Arsdale, the soldier famous climbing the greased flagpole in 1783 to rip down the Union Jack and raise the American flag, was given the honor of raising the flag, recreating the scene of his ancestors and raising the American flag at Ft. George in the Battery. This may seem like an innocuous detail to focus on but the idea of Revolutionary legacy would become very important in the aftermath of the centennial when Stevens and other New York elites would use the revival of Revolutionary patriotism to consolidate their power over New York's historical memory. Riker was a "historian" and genealogist of the era.²²⁶ He published an entire work on the history of Evacuation Day for the centennial titled "'Evacuation Day' 1783, Its Many Stirring Events: with recollections of Capt. John Van Arsdale." Riker's text was an example of the desire of many of New York elite's to trace their own roots back to the Revolutionary era and to form special organizations of those who could trace their roots back to Revolutionary New York. In writing this history—actually more of a personal genealogy—of Evacuation Day, James Riker exerted power over the collective memory of Revolutionary New York. Riker wrote:

Our memorable revolution, so prolific of grand and glorious themes, presents none more thrilling than is afforded by the closing scene in that stupendous struggle which gave birth to our free and noble Republic. New York City will have the honor of celebrating, on the 25th of November, the hundredth anniversary of this event, the most signal in its history; and which will add the last golden link to the chain of Revolutionary Centennials.²²⁷

The use of the verb "link" was important here. Although it can be read simply as flowery prose used to connect New York's Evacuation Day centennial to other cities revolutionary centennial celebrations, it can also be read as indicative of the desire for many of New York's social elite to

²²⁶ I put historian in quotes here because Riker's version of events falls more in line with a family history than a "history."

²²⁷ Ibid.

link themselves to the memory of the Revolution and by extension deny new immigrants and other non-Anglican ethnic groups access to the collective memory. Riker later wrote:

With the expiring century has also disappeared the host of brave actors in that eventful drama! Memory, if responsive, may bring up the venerable forms of the "Old Seventy Sixers," as they still lingered among us two score years ago; and perchance recall with what soul-stirring pathos they oft rehearsed "the times that tried men's souls." But they have fallen, fallen before the last great enemy, till not one is left to repeat the story of their campaigns, their sufferings, or their triumphs. But shall their memories perish, or their glorious deeds pass into oblivion? Heaven forbid! Rather let us treasure them in our heart of hearts, and speak their praises to our children; thus may we keep unimpaired our love of country, and kindle the patriotism of those who come after us. To-day they shall live again, in the event we celebrate.²²⁸

Denying these newer residents a connection to the collective memory cemented their status as outsiders, and lower class residents. This class struggle, whose battlefield was memory, would continue after the centennial as Stevens and others created organizations to further connect the city's residents with their Revolutionary history. These organizations included the Society of '83—later renamed Sons of the Revolution—as well as the Daughters of the American Revolution and Colonial Dames of America. Hood noted that these groups restricted their respective memberships to "descendants of Revolutionaries."²²⁹ This connection to Revolutionary history allowed the existing social elite to deny both lower class immigrants as well as those immigrants who financially could be considered upper class entry into their preexisting social spheres.

The Irish And Evacuation Day

One of the largest immigrant populations in New York was the Irish. The Irish were represented during Evacuation Day as they contributed multiple carriages to the parade.²³⁰

However, the organizers of the parade did not want to cause any controversy as the Irish paraded

²²⁸ Ibid., 4.

²²⁹ Hood, "An Unusable Past," July 1, 2004, 900.

²³⁰ "Irish on Evacuation Day.," *New York Times*, November 12, 1883.

so they ordered the Irish to “parade by ones and twos, and to disperse themselves among the crowd so that they would be unnoticed.”²³¹ The *Irish-American* wrote that Stevens and the other organizers of the centennial were members of the “shoddy aristocracy” of New York. Similarly the paper accused these organizers of being “Anglo-maniac snobs.”²³² Both the *Times* and the *Irish-American* reported that on Evacuation Day the Irish flag was removed from in front of the Produce Exchange. Additionally it was reported that the leaders of the Produce Exchange invited the British Ambassador to a celebratory banquet on the holiday and at the celebration, they toasted to Queen Victoria’s health.²³³ The *Times* wrote that Evacuation Day was a “momentous event in Irish” history in that it cleared the way for self-government. Clearly the *Times* was trying to ease tensions and remain neutral in this conflict. Yet both the *Irish-American* and the *Times* reported on the notion of “Anglo-mania” among New York’s elite. The *Sun* was the boldest in its take on the notion of Anglo-mania when it published an article which wrote that a “trace of Tory blood is coveted by the aspiring aristocrat.” Unlike when the Loyalists were forced into exile and “despoiled of their possessions” the *Sun*’s article stated that they “have become the leaders of fashion and the exemplars of our most luxurious society.” The *Sun* boldly proclaimed, “to be mistaken for Englishmen is their highest and fondest ambition.”²³⁴ This notion of Anglo-mania was inherently linked to the desire by Stevens, Riker, and others who could trace their lineage back to the colonial era to use their English lineage to link themselves to New York’s colonial legacy.

²³¹ “A Cautious Parade.,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1883.

²³² *Irish-American*, December 2, 1883.

²³³ *Ibid.*, December 6, 1883; “The Irish and Evacuation Day,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1883.

²³⁴ *New York Sun*, November 25, 1883.

Revolutionary History After The Centennial

A month after the centennial Stevens, in an effort to build on the infrastructure and network of social elites he had created in the planning of the holiday, formed the Society of '83. According to the *Times* the genesis of this idea came from a suggestion at one of the ceremonial dinners held on Evacuation Day. “Stevens has prepared a roll to which signatures of representatives of New-York in 1783, and of Revolutionary families residing in the City will be solicited for the formation of the society.”²³⁵ The *Times* published that the roll had space for 250 signatures—clearly an exclusionary organization. As well, the *Times* reprinted the roll in its entirety. The most telling line of the roll came after the list of names that read “our object being to celebrate the regeneration of our City, to promote good feeling among ourselves and to keep alive a pride in our City and the patriotic spirit of our fathers.”²³⁶ This line demonstrated how the group’s exclusionary nature limited those outside of the group from being allowed to engage with the memory of the Revolution.

At the first meeting of the Society of '83, “a commission on admission was appointed consisting of Johnston Livingston, Edward F. Delancey and William Jay.” All of these members were descended from prominent New York families during the Revolutionary period.²³⁷ In June of 1884, the Society of '83, now called the “Sons of the Revolution” celebrated the Battle of Bunker Hill. The *Tribune* published an article which stated that “the Sons of the Revolution, an organization of descendants of Revolutionary soldiers celebrated the anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill by a dinner at Washington’s old headquarters at Broad and Pearl Sts.”²³⁸ The Society of '83 tried to engage with the memory of the Revolution and by reporting on them,

²³⁵ “The Representatives of 1783.: A New Society to Grow Out of the Evacuation Day Celebration.,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1883. *New York Times*, December 24, 1883.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *New York Tribune*, January 2, 1884.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, June 18, 1884.

newspapers like the *Tribune* aided them in their efforts to spread enthusiasm for the past. Historian Clifton Hood argued that hereditary organizations rose in the aftermath of the centennial because they allowed upper-class New Yorkers to use history and memory to position themselves “as stewards of American history,” above the increasing number of migrants to the city from southern and eastern Europe.²³⁹ Hood is correct. By limiting its membership to only those descended from prominent Revolutionary families, the Society of ’83 established a system that limited the ability of others to draw upon the memory of Revolutionary New York.

The rise of heredity organizations like the Sons of the Revolution, the Colonial Dames of America, and the Daughters of the American Revolution was very much linked to the same Anglo-mania that imposed restrictions on the Irish New Yorkers abilities to claim Evacuation Day as part of their shared history. In August the *Times* reported that the Sons of the Revolution met and declared that the purpose of the organization was to halt the “steady decline of the proper celebration of our national holidays.”²⁴⁰ If this were the case then it would seem counterproductive to limit admission to this organization only to those with Revolutionary ancestry. It is more likely that, like Hood argued, “the revival of Evacuation Day was part of a larger project to idealize the historical memory of colonial New York.”²⁴¹ Instead, the *Times* contended that the “Society of the Sons of the Revolution was organized to perpetuate the memories of the men who, in military, naval, or civil service, helped to achieve American independence.”²⁴² The Sons of the Revolution would try their best to further prevent the memory of Revolutionary New York from fading in last decade of the nineteenth century; however, its exclusionary nature would lead to its failure.

²³⁹ Hood, “An Unusable Past,” July 1, 2004, 901.

²⁴⁰ “Sons of the Revolution.,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1884.

²⁴¹ Hood, “An Unusable Past,” July 1, 2004, 901.

²⁴² “Sons of the Revolution.,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1884.

Conclusion

The Evacuation Day centennial and subsequent rise of hereditary organizations such as the Sons of the Revolution were part of a concerted effort by many of New York's social elite to reaffirm their own social position, to limit access to their upper-class social sphere, and to limit the ability of new immigrant groups to take on the history of New York as their own. Sven Beckert wrote that in the 1880s "upper-class New Yorkers ventured to create a class-segmented public sphere."²⁴³ John Austin Stevens, as representative of New York's upper class, was successful in making the centennial celebration the biggest public festival in the history of the City; however, he and his fellow socialites were not as successful in sustaining Evacuation Day's revival or continued interest in New York's Revolutionary history. They were, however, successful in creating a segmented public sphere. In the long history of Evacuation Day, the same criticism that preempted its earlier decline in collective enthusiasm would resurface in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The *Times* published an article in 1888 that wrote that the actions of Washington and his troops in the British evacuation were not "specifically heroic" and thus did not warrant sustained enthusiasm.²⁴⁴ Outside of the Irish, no immigrants tried to link themselves to New York's past through Evacuation Day and thus by the second decade of the twentieth century the day had faded from the annual calendar. However short Evacuation Day's resurgence in the late nineteenth century may have been, it serves an important case study for the conflict over national identity and collective memory that would dominate the early 20th century. Evacuation Day was a holiday built on a shared collective memory and a need to heal a wound shared by all members of the community—across all class lines. Evacuation Day's failure to remain relevant was directly tied to the exclusionary nature of its late nineteenth

²⁴³ Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 267.

²⁴⁴ *New York Times*, November 25, 1888.

century revival. Evacuation Day would never again receive another concerted effort at revival, although it was briefly celebrated in 1983. As a native New Yorker myself, I had never heard of Evacuation Day until I moved to Ohio. Perhaps that is the most ironic part of Evacuation Day's history is that a holiday built on shared memory no longer lives in the collective memory of its citizens.

CONCLUSION: ONCE A GLORIOUS HOLIDAY

The final Evacuation Day was not 1883. After the centennial's success Stevens and members of the newly formed Society of '83 attempted to make subsequent year's celebrations as memorable. They were not successful. Enthusiasm for New York's revolutionary past would continue to decrease as the nineteenth century drew to a close. The exponential growth in immigrant population during this time thwarted Stevens' plans to ensure the social standing of those with Revolutionary lineage. Immigrants from eastern and southern Europe simply did not have any interest in the nation or the city's Revolutionary past. And by the time the U.S. entered the First World War, in alliance with Great Britain, it seemed rather silly to continue to celebrate the British evacuation.

Evacuation Day continued to fade further as the century progressed. In 1924 the *New York Times* published an article titled "Evacuation Day Was Once A Glorious Holiday Here," in which the author claimed that the holiday "flourished for more than sixty years...yet at length it sank into the sands of time."²⁴⁵ That year the *Times* published a full page article on the history of Evacuation Day, noting that the "only memory of Evacuation Day" being honored that year would be a small dinner at Fraunces Tavern held by the Sons of the Revolution.²⁴⁶ A cursory look at the mentions of the phrase "Evacuation Day" in the *Times* after 1925 demonstrates how sparse the day was discussed through most of the twentieth century—there were 80 mentions of the phrase from 1925-2015, less than one a year.

This study has examined how Evacuation Day was celebrated for nearly a century, trying to understand how is it that a day which flourished for more than sixty years faded into obscurity over the following sixty. In seeking to answer this question this study has uncovered how

²⁴⁵ "Evacuation Day Was Once A Glorious Holiday Here," *New York Times*, November 25, 1924.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

traumatic memory and an event designed to commemorate the end of a shared traumatic experience functions and transitions from generation to generation.

Regardless of its contemporary decline in importance, Evacuation Day was once as glorious local holiday, one that captivated New Yorkers for more than half a century. In order to examine how this holiday faded into obscurity this study employed a methodology that consisted of examining newspaper accounts of the days leading up to, of, and after Evacuation Day each year. This methodology served two functions: first, employing this methodology allowed me to track how the day was celebrated each year as well as to analyze the popular reception to the year's celebrations. This approach enabled me to examine how changes in rhetoric over time were linked to changes in the emotional resonance that the day carried. For example, in the years immediately following the British evacuation, the word "evacuation" was so charged with traumatic memory—linked to Washington's evacuation seven years before hand—that it was barely used in local newspapers. Thus accounts of how the day was celebrated were very limited, as were the celebrations.

Second, this methodology also made it possible to track how the broader changes happening both in New York and during the nation were reflected in Evacuation Day celebrations. For example, at the turn of and throughout the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the Evacuation Day parade was a platform where local artisans and craftsman could exert political agency and try to thwart the broader changes looming from the industrial revolution. Additionally, this employing this methodology gave me the opportunity to identify how small changes in the day one year snowballed into larger changes in years to come. One such example of this was how the increased presence of the militia, at first drew larger crowds for Evacuation Day; but later, as the traumatic memory of the British occupation and of the

Revolution began to wane, the presence of the militia was the main attraction of the day's festivities. Each year the militia display wowed crowds but over time, military pomp too faded and with it general support for the day until it reached a low at mid-century during the Mexican American and Civil Wars.

In tracking the holiday from its origin through its various declines and attempts at resuscitation, Evacuation Day acts as a lens through which to better understand how broader trends and changes in American culture on the national level both influenced and were influenced by local events. Evacuation Day acts as through-line of the long nineteenth century. Identifying changes in how the day was celebrated and how the day's meaning changed over time serves as a unique map both for the trajectory of a holiday built on trauma and of the nineteenth century as a whole. Evacuation Day began as a holiday grounded in shared local trauma, both of the horrors of war more generally and of the British occupation. It slowly transformed from a shared experience to an institutionalized ritual whose initial meaning could not be conveyed with the same passion and resonance to subsequent generations.

In the years following 1783, the day was established as a day of local celebration, of remembrance, and collective healing. Following the first few years of celebration, the day was first used in 1787 to gather support for the ratification of the new Constitution. The 1790s saw the day become a battleground in the divisive partisan politics of the era—with each side holding separate celebrations. At the turn of the nineteenth century, enthusiasm for the holiday increased as a more popular political culture developed around the nation—all while still being grounded in a sense of communal trauma for the generation that experienced the Revolution and occupation. However, the traumatic memory of the occupation and joyful exuberance of the evacuation began to fade in the first decades of the nineteenth century as the day became less

about communal trauma and more about institutionalizing a national political culture and collective identity built on the memory of the Revolution.

In the 1830s and 1840s Evacuation Day underwent a crisis of transmission in which the trauma, that for the first generation of Evacuation Day celebrators was so powerful, could not be transmitted to the following generations with the same sense of emotional resonance. Instead the day became very much ritualized—for many just a day off. This decline in popular enthusiasm for the day also gave way to an increased presence of the military during the annual festivities, specifically the volunteer militia led by members of New York’s social elite. The domination of the festivities by the militia became what Evacuation Day was most known for—a spectacle of finely ordered regiments marching down to the battery. That is of course until those men needed to be called to fight in the Mexican American war. Evacuation Day was not celebrated in 1846 for this very reason. No one seemed to mind that the day was not celebrated or that it returned in 1848. The day held no significant meaning for New Yorkers, to the point that during the 1850s the local newspapers would begin to question why the day was celebrated. What for the prior generation was a day to be remembered, preserved, and never to decline in importance, had done just that by the eve of the Civil War.

If popular support for Evacuation Day waned significantly both as a result of, and during the Mexican American War, the Civil War would have a similar but even greater negative effect on support for the holiday. The day was not celebrated in 1862, and in 1863 the *Tribune* questioned why the day was ever celebrated.²⁴⁷ The day was celebrated very briefly in 1864; however, in 1865 interest in the day was again of popular relevance. Whereas in the prior year the day passed with little fanfare and minimal coverage by local newspapers, in 1865 there was both tremendous popular support for the day’s festivities and by extension the holiday received

²⁴⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, November 26, 1863.

ample coverage in the local newspapers, including, on Evacuation Day itself, being featured as the cover story in the *New York Daily Tribune*. This sudden resurgence of enthusiasm is without a doubt related to Lee's surrender at Appomattox in April of 1865 and the end of the war.

Evacuation Day then became a day of celebration for the end of the war as opposed to a day to celebrate the memory of the American Revolution. The *Tribune* published in a cover story on Evacuation Day that the day was “celebrated with all the pomp and pageantry which the secondary importance of the holiday deserved.”²⁴⁸

Evacuation Day had taken on new meaning after the Civil War. It served to unify the citizens of New York in the aftermath of a war that bitterly divided the city. In 1866 the *New York Times* published an article the day after the holiday, recapping the day. The article described this new feeling. The day, the article described, “meant something more than the mere calling to mind of one event in our history.”²⁴⁹ The *Times* tried to convey a sense that the trauma and joy that spawned the first Evacuation Day celebrations were very similar to the trauma and elation that the nation experienced as the Civil War ended. Linking the past and the present with statements like “The first celebration of Evacuation Day was the expression of joy for dangers passed, and that an enemy had been beaten [word unclear]. The celebration now means something more” was an attempt to reinvigorate the day.

Between 1870 and 1883 popular support for Evacuation Day once again faded, comparable to that which occurred in the 1840s and 1850s following the Mexican American War—people began to question the day's importance and once more ritual took the forefront instead of shared communal trauma. New York's social elite marginalized the Irish in their attempts to participate in Evacuation Day celebrations. The holiday was not an important fixture

²⁴⁸ Ibid., November 25, 1865.

²⁴⁹ *New York Times*, November 27, 1866.

in the cosmopolitan city until the centennial in 1883 when it would once again be an important part of New York's festive calendar. The centennial celebration became the primary battleground where New Yorkers of differing social classes would attempt to link themselves to the memory of Revolutionary New York. The memory of the Revolutionary era was contested across racial and class lines through which lower-class immigrants, primarily of Irish descent, could vie to link themselves to New York's Revolutionary past, an attempt to raise the group's collective social standing. Standing in their way were members of the semi-aristocratic upper class, who in many cases could trace their ancestry back to the colonial era. Upper-class men and women created fraternal organizations like the Sons of '83 and the Daughters of the Revolution, which in connection with John Austin Stevens of the New-York Historical Society, could manage and control all of the official events associated with the centennial. This was a battle over the memory of the American Revolution and of colonial New York. The upper class successfully controlled and consolidated power surrounding the centennial celebrations, and in so restricted who had access to claiming a part of the city's past and strengthened the existing social hierarchy in the city.

The centennial was the last great Evacuation Day celebration. A day that began as tribute to the painful and traumatic seven-year British occupation, as well as the joyful exuberance of the end of the Revolution, over the course of a long century faded from the collective memory—first in importance and then almost entirely as a holiday. However, it remains a valuable subject of study to determine how an event so powerful and resonant waned in importance over a few generations. Through this study, we learn about the nature of trauma and of collective memory. Additionally, examining Evacuation Day serves to demonstrate how historical and collective memory can be used to serve specific ideological functions—as with John Austin Stevens and

the desire of members of New York's social elite in the late nineteenth century to link their own lineage back to the Revolution as a way of distancing themselves from new immigrants and the new strain of wealth in New York. By studying how an event could mean so much and so little to different people—i.e. John Pintard and George Templeton Strong in the 1830s and 1840s—we begin to understand how fragile memory is and its larger socio-cultural function. Besides the memory of the occupation and evacuation, Evacuation Day's annual festivities offered many the chance to participate in political culture and to exert agency over the changing nature of the state and the nation. Studying this local holiday reveals how quickly things were changing in the lives of nineteenth century New Yorkers. However, perhaps the most valuable contribution of this study is to improve our understanding of: ritual, trauma, historical memory, and the struggle for one generation's trauma to transfer to the succeeding generations.

This study of Evacuation Day is in many ways an examination of the relationship between trauma and memory, specifically how commemorations of trauma transition from days of emotional significance and reflection to days of ritual and repetition, and tradition. As a native New Yorker, during the time it took me to complete this study I often found myself thinking about if or how the anniversary of the September 11 2001 attacks would lose emotional significance in the coming decades. It has been fifteen years since the attacks on September 11. In terms of Evacuation Day, that is the period when for people like John Pintard, the trauma was still so visceral and each year the anniversary allowed for somber reflection and commemoration. Does that mean that in one or two more decades school children will be asked to take a moment of silence during homeroom on September 11 but any other commemoration or reflection on the anniversary will, for them, only be ritual? Can traumatic memory be passed down from generation to generation? Another contemporary example which seems to suggest that no,

traumatic memory cannot be passed down, is contemporary Germany. For decades following the end of World War Two it was ingrained in the German collective consciousness never to let extreme nationalism rise again, that something like the Holocaust can never be allowed to happen again. And yet, in Germany as well as in other parts of Europe, nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments have once again started to rise, making the world question if the trauma associated with the Holocaust and World War Two have, like Evacuation Day did for George Templeton Strong, disappeared—instead replaced by ritual and tradition. For historians or scholars of memory, this study offers a smaller-scale example of how traumatic memory functions in collective memory and how emotional resonance is very difficult if not impossible to pass down to subsequent generations.

Additionally, this study is valuable to scholars of the nineteenth century, as Evacuation Day intersected with the lives of New Yorkers every year and thus by examining the popular reception for the anniversary scholars of both nineteenth century New York and of the nineteenth century more broadly can look to Evacuation Day to see how differences of race and class manifested themselves in how the day was celebrated and received. Scholars of political culture may look at how Evacuation Day served as a local extension of the national popular political culture that began to emerge in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. As well, those same scholars may be influenced by how Evacuation Day transitioned away from being a platform for political engagement and instead became a tradition celebrated each year without much underlying purpose behind it. Most of all, this study enters into a broader conversation with scholars of memory on the ways in which traumatic memory has a very short life. Ask New Yorkers today about Evacuation Day and unless they watched the Daily Show segment on the holiday from November of 2011, they are most likely to have no idea what you are talking about.

That of course is the great irony surrounding Evacuation Day—a day built on shared traumatic memory failed to remain in the collective memory of New Yorkers.

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