IN PURSUIT OF THE WEST:
UNITARIANS, LITERARY VENTURES, AND INSTITUTION BUILDING
IN THE OHIO VALLEY, 1830-1880

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ABSTRACT

Unitarians migrated to the antebellum West in small numbers. However despite their relative numerical insignificance, these optimistic men and women impacted many cultural building experiments in their new region. Unitarians traveled west to help shape the direction of the region, and by extension, the young nation as a whole. The Unitarian experience in literary ventures and institution building merit attention, both for the influence exerted in shaping the West, especially its intellectual and cultural aspect, and the relationship to Federalist refuge studies. These studies have neglected the ventures of former Federalists in the West, though this geographic chapter is imperative for understanding the retreat of Federalists into cultural institutions as a national phenomenon.
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Introduction

The Convention of Teachers assembled in Cincinnati, deeply impressed with the importance of organizing their profession in the Valley of the Mississippi, by a permanent association, in order to promote the sacred interests of education, so far as may be confided to their care, by collecting the distant members, advancing their mutual improvement, and elevating the profession to its just, intellectual, and moral influence on the community, do hereby resolve ourselves into a permanent body.¹

Historians have long realized the importance of intellectuals in shaping the cultural identity of their perspective regions. For antebellum America, however, while the role of intellectuals in the South and in New England is well documented, it has been less studied in the early Midwest.² Though the West was settled later, its identity was no less contested or self-consciously created. Given the mixture of many peoples in the Midwest the construction of a regional culture in the Midwest is a particularly interesting problem.

¹ “Constitution of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers,” Transactions of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers (Cincinnati: Kendal and Barnard, 1840), 143, Cincinnati Museum Center.
² Drew Gilpin Faust, A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), Faust’s work deals exclusively with a group of Southern intellectuals. However, her scholarship documents intellectuals in the South during roughly the same period as the existence of the earliest intellectual groups in the West. For studies of intellectual elites involved in literary pursuits in the Northeast see Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan, Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), and Bryan Waterman, Republic of Intellect: The Friendly Club of New York City and the Making of American Literature (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).
The West was settled by a variety of people from many places and walks of life. Such diversity brought both a new atmosphere and new conflicts. The region immediately took on an agrarian character, but also a mercantile one. However the economy of the new region was not the only place that conflict manifested itself. The understanding of the West as a contested terrain was most obvious in the religious realm. Religion contributed to, and in its most extreme forms dictated, the worldview of many antebellum Americans. Not surprisingly, religious denominations were anxious to establish footholds in the newly forming region, the West, centered on the Ohio Valley and the Northwest Territory. The most numerically significant groups of settlers came from the South, especially to the river towns and counties of the Ohio Valley. However, the river towns also saw a large influx of northern missionaries, who were swept up in the spirit of evangelicalism, which spread through New England rapidly during the 1830s. Missionaries from various denominations, most notably Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, competed for converts to bolster their numbers.

Missing from this depiction of the religious character of the West is another group, relatively untouched by the evangelical impulse, the Unitarians. There are a few obvious reasons for this omission. Unitarianism was founded as a denomination autonomous of the Congregational church in 1825, when religious liberals established the American Unitarian Association, so Unitarians lacked the infrastructure of other denominations established earlier. More importantly, Unitarians were a religious minority, and largely lived in a small area of the Northeast, which was concentrated on Boston. Though not typically considered for their

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3 Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955). Wright’s emphasis on the American origins of American Unitarianism insists on local factors shaping the course of Unitarianism’s development. By extension, the face of Unitarianism in the West was necessarily shaped by local factors as well.

missionary activities, the Unitarians too took part in the religious shaping of the West. During the 1830s, close to a dozen graduates of Harvard Divinity School travelled west to spread their religious spirit. Another handful followed to the West in the 1840s. These Unitarian ministers believed that the fate of the nation lay in the West, and that it was their duty to contribute to a religious character for the region; religion was necessary to ensure the prospect of a virtuous republic.⁵

The Western Unitarians contributed to the culture of their new region in primarily two ways, publication and institution building. First, the Unitarian view was expressed most fully in literary publications, the most significant of which was the *Western Messenger*, 1836 - 1841. Through the volumes of the *Messenger*, Unitarians were able to voice their concerns, passions, and hopes for the West. Various hands including three Harvard Divinity School graduates, Ephraim Peabody, James Freeman Clarke, and William Henry Channing, edited the magazine. The *Messenger* also bore the influences of many other Unitarians, ministers and laity alike. Though the *Messenger* has attracted attention from literary scholars, its value as a piece of self-conscious regional formation has yet to be thoroughly explored by historians.⁶

Second, Unitarians pioneered and perfected a classic model of antebellum American institution building in the new Midwestern cities, initially in the form of the literary society. Literary societies were not new. During the eighteenth century people in the settled areas of New England and the Mid-Atlantic began participating in literary societies and reading circles. Through such gatherings, people exchanged ideas and participated in shaping a new, “American” discourse. Literary societies and participation in the public sphere proved vital to

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information exchange that facilitated the creation of an American identity, one grounded in the concept of a unified, singular, common good. These societies accompanied the Eastern migrants West. Literary societies and reading circles proved a means to engage with others of similar means and cultivate a feeling of civilization on the frontier.\(^7\)

The political contest between Federalists and Republicans before 1815 was particularly intense, and literary societies were one way to bridge these political disagreements and participate in polite society, or simply to retreat from the passions of political conflict. Western Unitarians knew this, had seen it first hand in the lives of their parents, and often had experience in such ventures. In fact, many of the editors and contributors of the *Messenger* grew up reading literary magazines and engaged with literary societies during their childhoods and days at Harvard. These experiences taught Unitarians how to interact with others in society and how to accomplish mutual goals, even if the others involved in these pursuits were not Unitarians. Through literary societies and publications Unitarians could both disseminate their ideas and collaborate with others, setting an important precedent for other ventures emphasizing similar goals.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Kaplan, *Men of Letters*. Kaplan explores the concepts of citizenship and “men of letters” in the Early Republic. She is engaged with these ideas on a strictly Eastern basis, primarily located in Boston and New York. However, since her work focuses on the first decades of the nineteenth century, it offers important background for the formative years of many of the men who would go West in the 1830s.
Political affiliations and ideologies also factored into the Unitarian worldview that they brought West. Massachusetts Unitarians almost exclusively belonged to the Federalist Party in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and like other Federalists, they gravitated toward cultural forums after the demise of the Federalist Party. Given the Federalist affinity for the cultivation of the arts, it is not surprising that their children would turn to literature as the ideal, or at the very least an essential, building block of Western culture.\(^9\)

Closely connected to their literary pursuits were those involving education. Education offered a venue toward permanence in the form of institutions, and institutions served as a way to create and perpetuate favorable cultural forms in the West. Despite their small numbers, Unitarians left their imprint on many cultural institutions, some of which are still in existence today.\(^10\) These institutions include major universities, public school systems, and libraries. Countless others impacted the era during which they lived, including the Female Provident Society of Louisville. The impulse to create organizations for the betterment of society and improved quality of life manifested itself in the foundations of schools for the blind, asylums for orphans and the insane, and others to enfranchise women. Unitarians were active, for instance, in the U. S. Sanitary Commission branches in the Ohio Valley during the Civil War. Though important studies exist of Federalist “refuge” institutions created during the early nineteenth century, historians have yet to address the existence of such institutions in the West, neglecting


\(^10\) See Walter P. Herz, “Influence Transcending Mere Numbers: Unitarians in Nineteenth Century Cincinnati” *Queen City Heritage* 51 (1993), for an overview of the legacy of Unitarians in Cincinnati.
the ways in which Federalist influence endured in the antebellum period. Voluntary associations offered an avenue through which Unitarians could retain their ties to each other and to their eastern relatives. Associations also functioned as venues for intellectuals to exchange ideas and engage in dialogue with their fellow citizens. These forums allowed for the enduring legacy of Unitarians in the West.

The circle of Unitarians in the Midwest differs from that of the primarily self-contained intellectual circle that Drew Faust details for the South, yet clearly relates to such a tradition—perhaps in a more fluid way to deal with the realities of life in the antebellum West. The Unitarians of the West might better be termed pragmatic or liberal. While the Southern circle Faust describes was small and self-contained, the Western circles were constantly changing, incorporating new ideas and newcomers to the West. While the former Federalist literary societies shared with the southern intellectual circles a retreat from partisan politics, they differed in their embrace of civic improvement. However, while, it does not fit the Southern experience that Faust explains, the West also does not quite fall into the pervasive patterns present in eastern settlements such as Philadelphia and Boston. Only through blending these perspectives can we gain a better understanding of the West and those who migrated to populate it in the nineteenth century.

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11 Koschnik, “Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together.” Koschnik, like O’Donnell, is specifically concerned with eastern urban life, in this case Philadelphia. This study offers a model to understanding the role of association in cultural and political formation in an urban setting. Also see Neem, Creating a Nation of Joiners.

12 Brown, “The Emergence of Urban Society.” Brown’s article establishes the importance of family networks and community connections, as well as their transformation during the late eighteenth century. The weakening of these connections forced some people to look in other directions to strengthen interpersonal ties. Others used associations to augment their family connections. The urge to strengthen ties proved extremely important in the cultural formation of the West, especially in polite society associations such as the Semi-Colon Club of Cincinnati.

13 Faust, A Sacred Circle, Faust’s work serves as a useful model for the study of Western intellectuals.
The Unitarian pattern speaks to broader processes than simply religious competition. Religion lay at the heart of larger questions about the fate of the West and the young nation. The young Unitarians saw a chance for a new utopia in the West, a place to create institutions built off their eastern experiences and upbringings, while improving them and ensuring the positive growth of the nation. Yet, just as the region was contested religiously, so was the vision for the development of the region. The quest for recognition as a region on par culturally with the East led to two differing, though not mutually exclusive, viewpoints. Some residents wished to emulate eastern ways, recreating institutions, art and literary forms, and refined and respectable society. Others saw an opportunity to use their experiences as a model, one to build from and improve upon, to create better culture, society, and institutions. A third group combined the two visions and wished to improve eastern culture, serving as a model for all regions of the country.

The question of preeminence of region or nation was imbedded in these conflicting paths for development. The first path led to an admission of regional inferiority, perhaps hoping to eventually become part of one region and indirectly building to a national culture. The people who adhered to these ideas were part of the first generation of settlers, those who clearly lived in the shadow of the revolution. By the time of the arrival of the Unitarian ministers, a new ethos was in development. Western born men and women in the 1820s and 1830s recognized the promise of their region, and they conceived of it as the preeminent region in the country. The Unitarian ministers and their followers represent the third ideology, and the one that ultimately contributed most fully to the development of the region of the West. In essence these men and women combined eastern models with western realities, creating a sense of region while subordinating the region to the good of the nation. The Federalist
principles of the common good and virtue could be perpetuated through the creation of western institutions and culture, related to their counterparts in the East, but improved.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray, “The Story of the Midwest” in \textit{The Identity of the American Midwest: Essays on Regional History}, Cayton and Gray, eds., 7-17. Cayton and Gray highlight forces at work in Midwestern “regionality.” Though not specifically pertaining to Unitarians or Federalist ideology, they do provide important background about conflicting origins of settlers, importance of boosterism, ability to shape the region, and tension between region and nation. Also see Edward Watts, \textit{An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture} (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002).
Chapter One:

The Contest for the West

The puritan and the planter, the German and the Irishman, the Briton and the Frenchman, each with their peculiar prejudices and local attachments, and all the complicated and inwoven tissue of sentiments, feelings and thoughts, that country, and kindred, and home, indelibly combine with the web of our youthful existence, have here set down beside each other. The merchant, mechanic and farmer, each with their peculiar prejudices and jealousies, have found themselves placed by necessity in the same society.¹

“If Unitarianism is to thrive in the West it must be planted now, while the cities are young and grow with their growth,” wrote James Freeman Clarke in a letter to William Greenleaf Eliot in 1833.² Clarke had recently graduated from Harvard Divinity School and had settled in the growing city of Louisville, Kentucky. Eliot, also an HDS graduate, was on his way to St. Louis. The men recognized the growing urban nature of the West and the possibilities for religious growth to accompany that of population. However, unlike other denominations of the mid nineteenth century, Unitarianism flourished in cities, among the educated elites. Clarke was indeed correct, to establish a foothold in the urban face of the West, Unitarians needed to be present from the beginning. Urban spaces were part of the fabric of the West from its

¹ “National Character of the Western People,” Western Monthly Review, July 1827, 133.
earliest days, and in the 1830s, Unitarians rightly felt the rush to dig their heels in to Western ground.

The settlements in the Ohio Valley were composed of every facet of American society. The landscape fostered both rural and urban settlements, and while the vast majority of migrants to the Ohio Valley settled on farms and were engaged in agricultural activities, many also settled in towns that quickly became cities. Though the traditional view of the frontier dictates a small settlement that slowly grows into a larger one, and that the frontier is comprised mostly of farms, the Ohio Valley settlement proves that an urban element always existed. Migrants from cities in the East had little desire to settle and start farming. These professionals looked to the West for new opportunities, opportunities related to their existing skill sets. Doctors, lawyers, and merchants moved west to make their fortunes in new lands that offered an abundance of opportunity. Merchants especially stood to benefit from commerce and manufacturing prospects, and concentrated settlements, strategically located along trade routes like the Ohio River, helped facilitate this process. Many of these professionals learned their trades in the East and expected to replicate, to some degree, their Eastern experiences.

In politics, Westerners increasingly understood that they were a distinct people with distinct needs and a population that allowed exercise of political influence. The region produced a series of political candidates who legitimized this view and wielded considerable influence on the antebellum political stage, including Henry Clay and William Henry Harrison. Prominent residents of the Ohio Valley were also in correspondence with influential politicians. William Greene, a leader in Cincinnati’s business and legal community, as well as a member of the Unitarian church, corresponded with Daniel Webster during the 1830s and 1840s. Greene, an ardent Whig, seemed to have latent political motivations, but he was also extremely
interested in the political maneuverings in Washington.³ When John Quincy Adams’s son made a trip to Cincinnati, it was to Greene whom Adams wrote to procure an introduction for his son, Charles. Charles and his cousin, Josiah Quincy, were both active in Massachusetts politics and made the journey to the “new Wonder of the world, the region of the West,” in some part to better understand a region that had begun to wield national political power.⁴

Imbedded in the political rhetoric was also the conscious understanding of the creation of a new type of man, the Westener.⁵ During the 1830s and 40s the population composition began to change, from one primarily of residents born elsewhere, to one with residents overwhelmingly of Western birth. Westerners were beginning to exert their own nascent regionalism, and necessarily such regional feeling was informed by the origins of Western settlers. Given their sheer numbers, the northeastern migrants should not have exerted much influence in the formation of a Western cultural identity.⁶ However, this cohort perhaps played the most far-reaching role in identity formation of the West during the antebellum period. The willingness to accept the larger social changes that accompanied the beginnings of the “market revolution” in the Northeast led to the widespread acceptance of the emerging new social and economic order that helped establish the predominance of the middle class in the antebellum West.⁷ Experience in the East urged these people to be mindful of such changes and their

³ Daniel Webster to William Greene, March 9 and December 19, 1842. William Greene Papers, 1775-1888, Mss qG812 RM, Cincinnati Museum Center (WG/CMC).
⁴ John Quincy Adams to William Greene, May 1, 1844. WG/CMC.
⁶ New England was listed as the birthplace of only 3.3% of the population of Ohio in 1850, while the 7.4% claimed Southern birthplaces. By 1850, 62% of those residing in Ohio claimed birth in the Old Northwest, or the states of Ohio, Indiana or Illinois. See Etcheson, The Emerging Midwest, 2, and The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850 (Washington, 1853), ix.
implications. The understanding with which the transplanted northeasterners viewed the market and the consequent emerging social order further impacted the development of the region’s identity by legitimizing market forces in formative roles for the West. The West would be a region in which economic forces would play a prominent role, and this idea encountered little resistance from its residents.

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Among the hopeful migrants to the new cities of the West were a small number of young Unitarians, recent graduates of Harvard Divinity School, who felt called to be missionaries to the West in the 1830s. A small Unitarian presence preceded them, in the form of a Unitarian congregation and a college – Transylvania University – in Lexington, Kentucky. The first Unitarian minister of the 1830s cohort to travel to the West was Ephraim Peabody. In 1830, Peabody moved to Meadville, Pennsylvania, but by 1832 felt called to go further West, moving to Cincinnati to become the head of the First Congregational Church (Unitarian). In the 1830s Meadville was a Unitarian outpost.

First Congregational Church was founded in 1830 by a small group of Cincinnati residents and ministered to by Charles Briggs, the Unitarian minister at Lexington, Kentucky. The Cincinnati congregation built its church on 4th Street, at the center of the growing city. Like the city’s population, the Unitarian numbers grew, from a few dozen at its founding in 1830 to more than 200 by the 1850s. Through his experience at Cincinnati, Peabody became increasingly convinced of the need for more Unitarians to come West, and this conviction led to the development of lifelong friendships.

One of these friendships was with James Freeman Clarke, a recent HDS graduate who accepted, partially due to the urging of Peabody, the invitation to minister to the First Unitarian

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8 In the 1830s Meadville was a Unitarian outpost.
9 These membership numbers are based on the signers of the initial covenant of 1830 and the Livermore Plan of Union, signed during the tenure of Reverend Abiel Livermore, 1850-1856.
Church of Louisville in 1830. Like the Cincinnati congregation, the Unitarian church was located in the heart of the city. It too was founded by a few dozen devoted residents, and like the Cincinnati congregation by the mid nineteenth century numbered over a hundred members. A half dozen other congregations would spring up prior to 1850, the most significant being the congregation in St. Louis. Another classmate of Peabody and Clarke, William Greenleaf Eliot, founded the Church of the Messiah in 1835, marking the foundation of the first Unitarian congregation west of the Mississippi River.¹⁰

The Unitarians arrived in cities of cultural competition. The West was a field of missionary endeavor and competing denominations. However, compared to Cincinnati, Louisville’s religious landscape less diverse, and by extension less contested. Where Cincinnati had twenty-five churches in 1831, there were only six were in Louisville the next year. The denominational split was more diverse in Cincinnati, where thirteen denominations were represented. Only one of these churches, however, was Unitarian, and though Unitarian numbers were growing, they did not keep pace with other denominations, nor did they keep pace with the population growth. By 1850, only eight Unitarian congregations existed in the Old Northwest, one each in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana, two in Missouri, and four in Illinois. By contrast, there were more than five hundred Baptist and Presbyterian congregations and over 1,500 Methodist congregations (the most of any single state in the Union) in Ohio alone. Even Roman Catholics constituted more than one hundred parishes in Ohio, with several dozen in the surrounding Western states.¹¹ Unitarians were thus a tiny and seemingly inconsequential minority in the greater West.

Neighborhoods also related to the struggle over public identity in early Cincinnati. In 1831 Cincinnati consisted of five wards, with Unitarians dispersed throughout a concentrated small city, though a grouping of Unitarian families lived on 4th Street. By 1851, when Cincinnati encompassed sixteen wards, Unitarians had concentrated in a new residential ward. According to the 1851 Cincinnati city directory, a large proportion of the members of the First Congregational Church lived in the sixth ward, a few blocks, located to the immediate west of the city center and was bounded on the south side by the Ohio River. Furthermore, many of the Unitarian congregation members continued to live on 4th Street, where the Unitarian church was located, separated from the sixth ward by less than four blocks. Some Unitarians lived in other parts of the city, but most lived within a few blocks of the church or of the sixth ward. One notable exception was Timothy Walker, cofounder of the College of Law, who lived in Walnut Hills, a neighborhood a few miles north of downtown where the college was located. Lyman Beecher, the great evangelical Congregationalist preacher, also resided in Walnut Hills, as it was the location of the Lane Seminary. Other prominent Cincinnatians who practiced other religious faiths did not live in the sixth ward in 1851, but rather chose to live closer to the city center, in the first ward and third wards.

Beecher recognized that the West held the key to the future of the nation, and the fate of the region – and thus the nation – lay in the fate of religious tradition, making adherence to true religion imperative in the West. Unitarianism for Beecher was a perversion of religion. His ire was not reserved exclusively for Unitarians either; in 1835 he wrote a treatise denouncing Catholics titled *A Plea for the West*. Beecher’s experience illustrates an important point: not

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1851), 45. Population differences explain some of the discrepancy in church numbers, but not all of it. In Cincinnati, with its population of 24,831 in 1830, there was one church for every 993 people. Louisville, with a population of 10,306, had one church for every 1717 people.

only was the West contested, but it was also a new geographic location for religious controversy between emerging Unitarian thought and the evangelical orthodoxy sweeping the country during the Second Great Awakening.

The Second Great Awakening was characterized by a shift from pre-millennial to post-millennial thought. The early evangelical spirit of the Awakening urged believers to return to God and acknowledge their sinful, depraved nature, and its adherents insisted that humans were unable to affect the world around them or their place within God’s order. This shifted toward a more optimistic understanding of God and humanity, primarily due to revivals that emphasized the preachings of Charles Grandison Finney. Finney argued that men and women could bring about the return of Christ through perfecting the world around them. This idea became known as post-millennialism.

Unitarians, however, had developed a liberal understanding of faith by the beginning of the nineteenth century influenced, like Finney’s revival understanding, by optimistic Arminianism. Unitarianism as a religious denomination grew out of the same faith tradition of Lyman Beecher – New England Congregationalism. Through a series of doctrinal disagreements, Unitarians ended up formally splitting from the Congregationalists and forming their own religious denomination in 1825 with the formation of the American Unitarian Association. One of the most basic divisions within the Congregational denomination began in the eighteenth century during the First Great Awakening, when a division between those who favored revivals and those who strongly disliked and distrusted them appeared. The liberal religious among the Congregationalists believed that Christian life actually served to affirm a “rational process of self-dedication.”\footnote{Ahlstrom, \textit{A Religious History}, 391.} The formal split surprised few, given that signs that the split was coming littered the religious debates in Boston for at least three decades prior. The
final nail in the coffin was the election of Henry Ware to the Hollis Professorship at Harvard Divinity School in 1805. This event served as the direct impetus for the ensuing Unitarian Controversy, and ultimately for determining the split between Unitarianism and the Congregationalist. Ware promoted a distinctly liberal view of religion, and a series of other liberal adherents were elected to other positions at Harvard University. Ware’s election started the process of establishing Harvard as the bastion of liberal religion, and the training ground of Unitarian ministers for decades to come.¹⁴

The “hallmark of Unitarianism,” and what Unitarians believed to be their and all of mankind’s salvation, was rationalism in religion.¹⁵ Through rational thought, one could derive an understanding of the nature of God, as well as justification for believing in the existence of the Supreme Being. Unitarians derived their name from the fact that one of the central tenets of the faith was anti-Trinitarianism, or distrust of the doctrine of the Trinity as being derived from scripture and thus not valid. In his history of the Enlightenment and specifically its impact in America, historian Henry May, depicts Unitarians as the true heirs to what he terms the moderate Enlightenment, the phase consumed with rationality, order, and morality, through the Unitarian insistence on rational thought, rather than the emotional emphasis in the practice of evangelical religion and conversion prominent in other branches of Congregationalism.¹⁶

Unitarians, as good followers of the rational philosophers – especially John Locke and David Hume – distrusted the senses, insisting instead that only through reason could one aspire to be closer to God.

Unitarian thought, however, appealed to a very specific group of people, and never gained widespread acceptance, even among the Boston elite. The faith was best received

¹⁴ Wright, The Beginnings of Unitarianism, 3, 278-280; Ahlstrom, A Religious History, 394.
among a small minority, the best educated in eastern Massachusetts. Education may have been one determining factor for receptiveness to the Unitarian message, but educational access also implied another host of socioeconomic defining characteristics. For the Massachusetts elite, Unitarianism was the religious counterpart to Federalism, and it came to function as a seemingly innocuous way to preserve favorable power dynamics for those of the Federalist elite after the demise of Federalism. However, such a political and entrenched social dynamic did not exist in the West, because the West lacked the well-established ideological differences of the longer settled Eastern regions of the early republic. However the fact that Unitarians migrated west from Boston and the surrounding areas meant that they carried with them the experience of the Unitarian elite. Unitarianism in the West necessarily took on a more republican, if not democratic, character to cope with the different nature of the Western environment, particularly the character of its settlers and society. Unitarians also did not lose touch with the roots of the faith in education. Educational pursuits and establishments sat at the center of the Unitarian mission to the West.

* * * * *

“Why did I come here? The character and prospects of the Western States invited me to cast my lot among them. They are as full of hope now as ever. Ten years hence – my influence and usefulness in Louisville would be vastly greater than if I was in Boston,” mused Clarke in his journal. The entry was concerned with staying or leaving Louisville, after “vivid descriptions of Transcendentalism in Boston have soured in [him] a strong longing after such communion.” Clarke’s reservations were not confined to him. Prior to Clarke’s arrival, Ephraim Peabody mused from his post at Cincinnati, writing, “they are getting along slowly with

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18 Louisville Journal, March 30, 1835. PC/MHS.
their church at Louisville. The great obstacle to the progress of Unitarianism there is I fear that worst of all obstacles – a disregard of religion itself.” Clarke pondered the question of remaining in Louisville and his impact there many times during his stay, and ultimately this entry spoke more to a lingering doubt than an actual threat of departure. He wrote the entry in 1835, five years before he would actually leave the city, and still with many marks to leave on his new home.

Other Unitarian ministers also doubted their mission, and expressed distress over their usefulness. The West seemed receptive to the Unitarian message, but only to a small proportion of its residents. Of William Henry Channing, minister at Cincinnati in the late 1830s, Clarke wrote, “he so doubts and distrusts himself,” which was a source of confusion, since Clarke heard from all others of the positive contributions Channing was making to Cincinnati. The work was slow and did not show immediate results, and a deep sense of frustration plagued many during their Western residence.

In a private letter later published in the *Western Messenger*, William Greenleaf Eliot, minister to the St. Louis Unitarian congregation, remarked,

> Nothing has pleased me more than the growing interest which I find here in the religious prosperity of the West. The eyes of all thinking men have long been opened to the truth, that the strength of the Union, both in number and in riches, will very soon be centered in our great valley; and it is now beginning to be felt, that the prosperity of the whole country hangs upon the question, whether the West shall be religious or irreligious, moral or immoral.²¹

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²⁰ Clarke to Anna Huidekoper, March 20, 1839. James Freeman Clarke Papers (Ms.N-2155.1), Massachusetts Historical Society (JFC/MHS).

²¹ “Correspondence. Extract from a Private Letter,” *The Western Messenger* June 1835, 1:1, 77.
Religion for Eliot, and many others, offered a model through which to discover the West and implement its creation. With great trepidation, Eliot pondered the religious destiny of the West. Religion was necessary for morality, and morality was necessary for the creation of a virtuous citizenry, something vital for the strength of the young country. More importantly for Eliot, the West functioned as a religious battleground, making the triumph of true liberal religion that much more important. With the widespread popularity of evangelical religious denominations like the Methodists and Baptists, the virtue of the West’s citizenry was in danger. Evangelical denominations represented the emotional path that defied rational thought; too much passion, misdirected, could lead the United States down a dangerous and depraved road. However, such fears did not undermine Eliot’s sense of optimism. He further explained his satisfaction with the progress of his “errand,” though admitting to the difference between reality and expectation, desire for progress and the actuality of his circumstances. The West, if nothing else, certainly offered room for hope.22

In this same letter written to the editor from Boston, Eliot mentioned that strength of Union would eventually be centered in the West, echoing the sentiment that many other missionaries to the West felt. More importantly, by implication, Eliot gave voice to a much more salient sentiment for Western intellectuals – that ultimately the development of a regional identity for the West would be the development of the identity of the consummate region, and thus consummate identity of the country; in essence, such a formulation was the means of the creation of a stronger sense of national unity and national, American, identity.23

22 “Correspondence. Extract from a Private Letter,” The Western Messenger June 1835, 1:1, 78; for the connection between morality and a virtuous citizenry, as well as the dangers of a lenient approach to these qualities of the ideal citizen, see Linda K. Kerber, Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).
23 “Correspondence. Extract from a Private Letter,” The Western Messenger June 1835, 1:1, 77.
Unitarian feelings about the mission to the West were mixed. Some ministers felt that a rational religion, like Unitarianism, would spread easily and without much human intervention. This would happen because rationality would appeal to people, and they would adopt such religious practices on their own. Others, however, felt a calling to minister to the West. In a letter to William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke explained,

I don’t understand you when you say that Unitarianism will spread just as well without our aid. I knew of no other good thing that will grow without human aid (except mushrooms, and Unitarianism has proved itself to be no mushroom.) It strikes me that we should aid it more than we have. I am, as you say, no apostle of Unitarianism – but I am grateful to it for the mental freedom it has granted me, and the higher atmosphere of religious feeling to which it has led me.24

Though the rationality appealed to these Harvard Divinity School graduates, Clarke doubted that others would not need a little guidance to see the light of Unitarianism. He felt called to help guide others toward an understanding and appreciation of rational religion.

Cultural contact between East and West was both necessary and a fact of life. Contact most often resulted from familial and friendly connections to the East. However cultural contact, especially in the form of letters and book exchange, also highlights the fits of loneliness and feelings of isolation the Western migrants felt, and their steadfast determination to keep lines of communication open. To this end, letters, manuscripts, books, and information circulated between the Western Unitarians and their Eastern counterparts, often with or without familial affiliation.25 Such information exchange indicates the desire of Eastern

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24 James Freeman Clarke to William Henry Channing, October 4, 1833. JFCC/HL.
25 Kaplan, Men of Letters, 3-4, 231-234. I argue that the men involved in the publication of the Messenger imitated these known methods of information exchange and forum creation, which they borrowed from their experiences growing up. Clarke even stated in his Autobiography that he grew up reading the Monthly Review, a publication based in Boston in which Kaplan is especially interested. Additionally, but continually strengthening lines of communication between the West and their Eastern relatives and
ministers like Peabody, Channing, and Clarke wished to replicate Eastern culture on a new canvas. However, it was not mere replication, but improvement, with a new vigor and in the Western spirit of freedom. Clarke claimed, after a visit to the Queen City,

Cincinnati is a young Boston. It is youthful in its spirits, its activity, enterprise, and freedom. I sympathize much with the character of its people. We do not freeze each other here in the West, we rather warm each other...plunged in this sea of Western life, I hardly care to keep up my acquaintances with Atlantic ways of thinking.\footnote{Clarke to Fuller, December 1833, in Thomas, Letters, 67.}

The West seemed a free and warm environment, in sharp contrast to the cold manner of life in the East. People were nourishing their own culture, impacted certainly by models furnished by other American regions, but with a warmth and honesty not found elsewhere.

Particularly enticing for men like Clarke, the West exhibited openness to new ideas without prejudice, an entrenched facet of Eastern life; though the Eastern migrants came with Eastern cultural baggage, the lack of preconceived public opinion in the West allowed new ideas, ideas that may not have survived in the East, to flourish. Clarke found this especially appealing because it allowed him full latitude in engaging with German philosophers without the disapproving eye of those around him; he found the inspiration for many of his sermons in the writings of Goethe, and though his Louisville congregation welcomed his messages, they would have met with resistance in New England by those who did not approve of Goethe’s ideas.\footnote{Thomas, James Freeman Clarke, 58-59.} The West offered the promise of a new utopia, a new “city on a hill” of American mythology.\footnote{Steven J. Ross, Workers On the Edge: Work, Leisure and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 3.}

In another letter, Clarke explained his motivations for traveling West:

You know why I came West. I thought that here was real freedom of thought and opinion, and that it was therefore a more favourable scene for the development of a
mind which wished to have the power to express individual convictions. I have so
found it. We are free to speak here whatever we think – there is no doubt of it. Public
opinion is not an intolerant despotism, for there is no thing such as Public Opinion.
The most opposite and contradictory principles, notions, opinion are proclaimed every
day. Every variety of human thought here finds its representative.29
Furthermore, the West proved a perfect opportunity to realize the republican values achieved
by victory in the American Revolution. Not only could migrants achieve a more perfect
civilization, any Western settlement began with a universal understanding of republicanism and
its value. Though settlement in the colonies proved a mixed experience for emigrants from
Europe and Africa, as well as the indigenous peoples of the Americas, settlers to the Ohio Valley
came equipped with a common vocabulary of rights and liberties, and the common experience
of the revolution. Furthermore, its citizens wanted to escape neither the emerging and
encompassing nationalism of the early nineteenth century nor the increasingly present
market.30 However, the lure of utopia, or a chance for utopia, perhaps was perceived by would
be settlers, but ultimately Eastern migrants encountered far different situations and
circumstances than they expected on the outset of their journeys.

Some Westerners also wished to engage with each other and create their own powerful
intellectual force. Only through such intellectual vibrancy could Westerners prove the
supremacy of their region, which caused the sentiment expressed by many Western residents to
ring true: “The West is different. The West is superior. The West will be the center of a great
culture.”31 Few doubted the West would become the zenith of American society, or that the
region formed in the shape of the rhetoric of republicanism would sustain and nurture the true

29 Clarke to Fuller, December 15, 1834, in Thomas, Letters, 86.
30 Cayton and Gray, “The Story of the Midwest” in Cayton and Gray, eds., The Identity of the American
Midwest, 10-12.
31 David Donald and Frederick A. Palmer, “Toward a Western Literature, 1820-1860” The Mississippi Valley
Historical Review 35 (1948), 415-417.
nature of American civilization; it was a region free from tradition but also open to change.32 During the antebellum period, Westerners created new ways to engage with others, and these forums opened paths for a more thoroughly Western consciousness. Westerners engaged with other Westerners in both an attempt to better understand their surroundings and the emerging Western character, and to guide what form that character would take.

Though the national hopes for the development of the West and the rhetoric of republicanism stood squarely on the side of the West, latent, and not so latent, divisions within and of groups proved disastrous for the emergence of the region in its hoped for utopian form. In the years immediately following the passage of the Northwest Ordinance, there materialized a division of visions for development between Jeffersonian Republicans and Federalists. Federalists wished for the paternalistic development of the region, under steady and vigilant guidance from the federal government. Jeffersonians, instead, believed the region should develop through democratic elections and the spirit of independent individualism. Ultimately both visions helped shape the path of development for the region by accepting individualism and using it to in essence create the conventions of Western society, but the bitter political divisions had other implications as well.33 Early on, the stage clearly was set to preclude the creation of the new region with a cohesive, monolithic vision of the common good.

The initial divisions between Federalists and Jeffersonians of the first decade of the nineteenth century gave way to an ostensibly united “republican” vision that rallied behind Jefferson, especially with the coming of the War of 1812. However, such a monolithic entity proved unrealistic in practice, and the emergence of the National Republican ideology strongly

affected the cohesive entity of “republicanism.” The West, as the most prominent developing region in the first half of the nineteenth century, functioned as a site of contention for the emerging political divisions within the “republican” party. Internal improvements seemed especially promising for Western settlers, who wished for access to people, ideas, and above all, the market. The national program of improvement ultimately failed, putting the onus on the states to develop such projects. The most appealing aspect of such a program for Western proponents of the Union came from the hope of uniting the states together in a more cohesive national state; the appealing moralistic aspect of the program, that which encouraged personal improvement, appealed to the Unitarians in their religious errand. However, many Westerners resented the idea of an increased federal presence in their lives and preferred to leave the national government out of any type of improvement project. Generally these Westerners identified with Andrew Jackson and the agenda he set forth for the Democratic Party. The West had a strong Jacksonian presence, countered by the Whig followers of Henry Clay. The Jackson followers of the West would not be disappointed, for the hopes of a national improvement project steadily disappeared in the second quartile of the nineteenth century.  

These intellectuals lived in a somewhat naïve world, not entirely in touch with reality. For all their optimism, there also existed realities about the environment of the West. Many of the missionaries settled in the urban centers of the West, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis, during the antebellum period. Though the cultural atmosphere of the cities impressed some settlers, and plenty of Western boosters existed, other settlers and visitors expressed less favorable sentiments. One of the most famous Western detractors was Fanny Trollope in her reminiscences titled Domestic Manners of the Americans. Her description of Cincinnati was

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especially scathing, complaining about the rampant pig problem throughout the city, and the odious smell which accompanied their presence. However, Fanny Trollope did grudgingly admit, “Though I do not quite sympathise with those who consider Cincinnati as one of the wonders of the earth, I certainly think it a city of extraordinary size and importance, when it is remembered that thirty years ago the aboriginal forest occupied the ground where it stands; and every month appears to extend its limits and its wealth.” Even the city’s critics had to acknowledge there was something to this region that was new and remarkable.

By the 1850s, travelers’ remarks proved much more complimentary across the board. Cincinnati and the West had become essential stopping points on tours of the United States for Americans and Europeans alike. And though the questions existed about the viability of the region as a cultural and intellectual center in the 1830s had not entirely disappeared, they had certainly changed. This change was due in large part to the efforts of a small group of Unitarians who lived in the Ohio Valley in the 1830s and 1840s. While fulfilling religious duties, young Unitarian ministers, their friends and congregants would work toward creating a more cohesive culture for the West, one that fostered a strong intellectual component.

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36 Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 54.
Chapter Two:
The Western Messenger: Engagement with Polite Society

In truth, there are many reasons which render a very general diffusion of literature impossible in America. I can scarcely class the universal reading of newspapers as an exception to this remark; if I could, my statement would be exactly the reverse, and I should say that America beat the world in letters. The fact is, that throughout all ranks of society, from the successful merchant, which is the highest, to the domestic serving man, which is the lowest, they are all too actively employed to read, except at such broken moments as may suffice for a peep at a newspaper.¹

For all her time spent reminiscing about her travels in the West, Fanny Trollope only found time to speak high praise about one individual, Timothy Flint. Flint was one of the earliest settlers in the West, and spent much of his life writing about his travels. He was also one of the early boosters of the region, as well as a founding member of the First Congregational Church of Cincinnati (Unitarian). It was for Flint that the word Unitarian remained absent from the congregation’s title until long after his death, primarily because he feared using the word “Unitarian” would alienate potential congregants, something that stood in direct opposition to the values of the faith. More interestingly to Mrs. Trollope was his editorship of one of the

¹ Trollope, Domestic Manners, 88.
earliest widely read regional publications, the *Western Monthly Review*. The journal was well received, and its success inspired other similar efforts.

In June 1835 a new monthly magazine was launched in Cincinnati, the *Western Messenger*. In a notice to the readership in the first issue, the editors announced their purpose, namely that “it ought to be the purpose of a western journal to encourage western literature.” The anonymous author of the piece went on to say “this is best done, by bringing those literary efforts which are worthy of notice, before the eye of the public, and by giving honor where honor is due, without waiting, till the critics of some distant region have found out that there is intellectual ability among us, before we utter words of sympathy and encouragement.”

Embedded in the seemingly straightforward sentences was a sense of frustration, but also of optimism. The editors and primary contributors to the *Messenger* had recently arrived in the West, and they hailed from prominent Eastern families. Those involved with the *Messenger* were anxious to prove the viability both of the West as a place of settlement and of their religious errand.

Almost immediately after setting up their congregations and working out the nuts and bolts of these endeavors, the three Unitarian ministers of the congregations of Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis began to collaborate on efforts to publish a new periodical. The periodical was meant to be a “first rate affair, and to combine literature and other miscellaneous matters with religious discussions...to have a Western air and spirit, a free and unshackled spirit and form.” There was some debate over the name for the periodical, but the

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2 “Western Poetry” *The Western Messenger* June 1835, 1:1, 60. Also see Part III of Watts, *An American Colony*, which deals with the shift from Eastern publication imitation to the development of a distinctly Western literature, as well as the tensions inherent within such a shift.

word “Western” was always part of the name. 4 Already, there existed recognition of the West as different. Another Eastern Unitarian migrant who also was educated at Harvard, James Handasyd Perkins, joined the ministers in this task. The four men would act as the primary impetus behind the founding of the Western Messenger; they envisioned the periodical to fill a need in the Western community by creating “a medium through which western Unitarians may communicate with each other, and make known their views to the world around them.” 5 Through this forum, Unitarians throughout the burgeoning Western settlements could share ideas and create a community. This intellectual community would sustain them, but also provide a means through which the intellectual Unitarians could grapple with their new region and their religious task; the men believed they could harness the optimism of the national spirit and use it to shape the West as a distinct entity, one that could and would outshine the others of the United States.

James Freeman Clarke lamented that “there is not a reading public on this side of the mountains,” but regardless, publications were not unknown in the West, and Eliot even indicated that those in St. Louis who might be predisposed to a publication like the Messenger already subscribed to many others as to make it unlikely they would take another. 6 Another Western resident noted, “the literature of our country would seem to be, at present, taking the lead of its Science.” 7 Such an assertion begs the question why these idealistic Eastern Harvard Divinity School graduates would embark on a project seemingly doomed to failure. However, 4 Peabody to Clarke, February 1835. PC/MHS. Peabody proposed the name the “Western Spectator” which elicited a negative response from William G. Eliot, who claimed that “Spectator” sounded “orthodox and indefinite.”

5 “To Our Subscribers” The Western Messenger May 1836, 1:10, 731.

6 Clarke to Fuller, May 12, 1835, in Thomas, Letters, 94; “Correspondence. Extract from a Private Letter” The Western Messenger June 1835, 1:1, 78.

those involved with the publication were no strangers to the venture, with Peabody and Perkins having experience with such things before arriving in the West. Additionally, the editors enlisted the help of Thomas Shreve and William Davis Gallagher, also Unitarians, experienced periodical men with years of experience under their belts, specifically in the West and in collaboration; most recently Gallagher and Shreve had collaborated on a publication similar in scope, though not Unitarian in nature, titled the *Cincinnati Mirror.* Since Shreve and Gallagher worked in other publications in the West, the men were able to offer invaluable guidance to the editors of the *Messenger* in the initial stages of their publishing venture. Peabody solicited the help of these “firm young men” early on in the process of finding a publisher. The men also were able to procure relatively inexpensive printing for the *Messenger* during its first year, undoubtedly appreciated by its backers. With the cost charged by Shreve and Gallagher, approximately 300 paying subscribers were necessary to support the magazine, which Peabody believed within the realm of possibility.

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Why did the *Messenger* need to be published? The publication filled a void. One of its early readers wrote to Clarke,

I like the style of the *Messenger.* It is less stately, ornate, elaborate than the Examiner and Northern periodicals in general. This is as it should be – Short, pithy, direct, written in the freedom of colloquy are the articles adapted to the majority of readers

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8 Gallagher was no stranger to the publishing world. He worked on a variety of “Western” periodicals during the life of the *Messenger.* In addition to the *Cincinnati Mirror,* Gallagher also collaborated on the *Western Literary Journal,* and perhaps most famously, the *Hesperian.* In each he also engaged with the question of literature in the West, and like the editors of the *Messenger* expressed frustration with the relative scarcity of Western literary culture. None of these periodicals lasted more than a couple years, the *Hesperian* achieving the most success, though never financially viable as a means to support a family.


10 Peabody to Clarke, January 26 and December 3, 1835. EP/AHTL.
in the great valley. This is a hurried population. They want time to listen to long yarns.\textsuperscript{11}

Publication figured prominently in the ventures of Unitarian ministry. Clearly the \textit{Messenger} appealed to a specific type of person, one with access to education and an appreciation for intellectual inquiry into new philosophical debates taking place around the world. The education level of the average contributor to the \textit{Messenger} implied a certain level of financial comfort, indicating that such a publication likely would not attract a broad, cross-socioeconomic status, subscriber base, but a rather exclusive and homogeneous one.

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, an unofficial alliance formed in Boston between liberal religion adherents, elite business interests, and Harvard College. Though Unitarians did not perhaps wish to pursue religion as an act of self-segregation, they did just that, cut themselves off from the majority of the population who adhered to more traditional forms of Calvinist religion.\textsuperscript{12} It is important, however, to note the relative scarcity of Unitarians in the West in the antebellum era, or really anywhere outside of a small geographic area in Massachusetts, heavily skewed toward Boston. Upon arriving in Louisville, Clarke found a civilization that was more suited for “atheism or ‘shouting Methodism’” than for the more intellectual Unitarian faith.\textsuperscript{13} Somewhat more optimistically, Eliot lamented “if Unitarian doctrines are not received in this western land, it will not be because men’s minds are unprepared for them, but because those whom God has sent will not go on their mission.”\textsuperscript{14}

Unitarian migrants from the East constituted a small minority of the religious landscape of the West, at best, and few Unitarians showed any interest in leaving their home outside of Boston.

\textsuperscript{11} T. Clapp to James Freeman Clarke, June 16, 1836. PC/MHS.
\textsuperscript{12} Cayton, “Who Were the Evangelicals,” 87.
\textsuperscript{13} John Wesley Thomas, \textit{James Freeman Clarke: Apostle of German Culture to America} (Boston: John W. Luce & Company Publishers, 1949), 54.
\textsuperscript{14} “Art. II – Unitarianism in the West” \textit{The Western Messenger} April 1836, 1:9, 601.
Even in small numbers, Unitarians presence in the West was, in the estimation of one scholar was “scarcely discernable,” Unitarians exerted influence in the creation of Western identity in the antebellum era well beyond their sheer numbers might indicate. These young Unitarians were idealists, and, perhaps somewhat naively, believed they could effect the creation of a utopia. They shared an understanding of the perfectibility of society that mirrored communitarian movements throughout the young nation.

The *Western Messenger* allowed the ministers in collaboration with others who felt strongly about the Western press and liberal religion to unite through the publication of abstract principles. It also allowed for Eastern family members to keep abreast of the accomplishments of their family members. In 1837, Samuel Osgood, another Divinity School graduate who helped with duties of the *Messenger* from time to time, related to Clarke “there is a deal of interest felt in your labors in the whole West. There is a very exaggerated idea prevalent of what has been done beyond the Mountains and of the facility of doing good there.” The *Messenger* sobered such hopeful attitudes while also providing details. Initially such a network was necessarily limited by already salient connections, most specifically those of kinship. The editors of and contributors to the publication were well connected to prominent Unitarian, and Northeastern more generally, families since most of them were directly related.

Between 1830 and 1840, no less than ten trained Unitarian ministers graduated from Harvard Divinity School and settled in the West. Their initials appear on the pieces scattered throughout the six-year run of the *Messenger*. These ministers, as well as other members of prominent Unitarian families from the Boston area, settled for varying lengths of time in the

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16 Osgood to Clarke, June 1, 1837. PC/MHS.
18 “Index” *The Western Messenger* June 1835, 1:1, 61.
major urban centers of the antebellum West, especially the cities where Clarke, Peabody, and Eliot ministered, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis. The Unitarian influence on cultural development and intellectual identity in these urban areas appeared strongly in the *Western Messenger*, and the magazine especially merits attention as a Unitarian organ specifically focused on the development of a cultural and intellectual identity for the emerging region as a response to the new circumstances encountered by the Eastern migrants.

The *Western Messenger* was first published in 1835, out of Cincinnati. The primary force behind its publication was the First Congregational Church in Cincinnati, which was Unitarian in character, though not overtly in name. The congregation was described as “very respectable in size and character” with the average number of attendants for worship numbering around 300 in 1831.¹⁹ The minister who acted as the primary editor for the first year of the *Messenger* was Ephraim Peabody, one of the venture’s most avid supporters. Peabody graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1830 and moved west to “spread literary culture and rational religion beyond the Alleghenies.”²⁰ He arrived in Cincinnati in 1832 and continued to tend to the Cincinnati flock until 1836, when poor health forced him to resign his post and his editorship of the *Western Messenger*. Peabody, however, remained actively involved with the *Messenger*, offering a variety of advice and articles for publication during its subsequent years. He also maintained an interest in the state of the Unitarian church in the West, often writing to his friends from his early stay.²¹

Reverend James Freeman Clarke and the Louisville Unitarian congregation, First Unitarian Church, founded in 1830, then took up the magazine at the request of Peabody.

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¹⁹ Ephraim Peabody to Harm J. Huidekoper, August 22, 1831. EP/AHTL.
²¹ Record Book, Volume 5, 2. First Unitarian Congregational Church Records, 1829-1980, Mss F527u, Cincinnati Museum Center (FUC/CMC); Peabody to William Greene, October 27, 1845. WG/CMC.
Clarke was also a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and part of the cohort who arrived West during the 1830s. Publication of the Western Messenger continued out of Louisville until Clarke, too, returned East in 1840. Clarke edited the magazine from the time of Peabody’s departure until 1839, at which time the publication’s editorship was taken over by the new Cincinnati minister, William Henry Channing, nephew of the famous Unitarian, Dr. William Ellery Channing. William Henry Channing, who graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1833 with Clarke and was a close friend of the Louisville minister, edited the publication, the daily operations of which moved back to Cincinnati with Channing’s editorial takeover, until his departure from the West for personal reasons in 1841, at which time the publication ceased to exist. The publication’s end coincided both with the departure of its editor but also with a national depression that no doubt made the magazine an untenable proposition.  

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The appearance of The Western Messenger signified more than the advent of a new publication, however. Its editors were ambitious. They believed that they could “make it the leading western Magazine.” This sentiment evolved without any foundation; the editors were new to the West, and other publications were well established. Still, the Harvard graduates seized what they saw as an opportunity. Peabody stated in a letter to Clarke, “We must try and get [the Messenger] into every villager in the West.” Others also supported the venture.

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22 For information about the history of the First Unitarian Church in Louisville, see Findling and Lavery, A History of the First Unitarian Church of Louisville; “To Our Subscribers” The Western Messenger May 1836, 1:10, 731-732; Clarke acted as both editor and publisher when the Messenger was based in Louisville. He claimed that the publishing facilities were actually better in Cincinnati than Louisville and cited this as the reason for the movement of publishing back to Cincinnati. Clarke to William Henry Venable, February 19, 1886, The Dolores Cameron Venable Memorial Collection, Ohio Historical Society (DCVMC/OHS); Record Book, Volume 5, 2. FUC/CMC.
23 Peabody to Clarke, January 26, 1835. EP/AHTL.
24 Peabody to Clarke, March 14, 1835. EP/AHTL.
Nathan Guilford, another Unitarian who had been involved with publishing ventures most of his life, seemed to think that the publication would be received by 500 paying subscribers.\textsuperscript{25}

The \textit{Messenger} serves as an important focal point for the emergence of intellectual culture in the Ohio Valley. The \textit{Messenger} existed for only six years, but its appearance marks the beginning of an engagement with print culture with the intent to create a community, and in essence to self-fashion an identity for a region. The state of literature and publication in the West seemed precarious at best to the young Easterners, but also malleable. An anonymous editorial in the first number of the \textit{Messenger} took a specific and defensive take on the issue, stating, “in a new country, from the necessity of the case, there are few whose time is entirely devoted to literary pursuits. Least of all are those found, who can give up their time and hearts to poetry. Men among us are yet living, not writing poems.”\textsuperscript{26} Though ostensibly the author merely pointed out the rigors and demands of life on the near frontier, the statement functions in another way as well; the insistence on the differences of ways people lived their lives indicates an early formation of an understanding of regional difference based on geography.

The author understands that Western settlers shared priorities, and the priorities clearly did not include writing poetry. This anonymous Westerner articulated the early stages of the formation of Western intellectual culture, based not on traditional intellectual pursuits, but the pursuit of something more transcendent, something of greater value, achieved only through habitation in the West, and through the shared values that resulted from such a venture.

The formulation of this shared set of Western values, with its emphasis far from literary pursuits, is not without irony. The \textit{Messenger} was conceived with a broad geographic base in

\textsuperscript{25} Peabody to Clarke, March 14, 1835. EP/AHTL.
\textsuperscript{26} “Western Poetry” \textit{The Western Messenger} June 1835, 1:1, 61.
mind. Peabody fully expected subscribers from the Ohio Valley region as well as the East.\(^{27}\) However, the publication also articulated a strong sense of the West; the editors intended the *Western Messenger* to be a regional publication that transcended region. Strong encouragement for an indigenous literary culture informed these sentiments, but involved a model of improvement necessarily based on that which flourished in the East. Thus Western settlers faced a dilemma of sorts – should Western culture emulate the culture that many left hundreds of miles toward the Atlantic, or should Western culture instead strive to create something new, or at least a vast improvement on the Eastern model? These questions got at the crux of conscious creation of regional identity and the plausibility of such an enterprise. Conversation circles drove the desire for another venue through which to debate and articulate these ideas and questions; it was only natural that such a venue would come through print.\(^{28}\) Western men and women would debate such questions, both in social settings and the realm of publication for decades to come, and such debates figured prominently among the pages of the *Messenger*, much to the delight of Western intellectuals.

The author of the editorial later insisted on the purity of poetry written by these Western men and women while they engaged in other pursuits. By purity, Westerners meant that their literary pursuits somehow transcended earthly aims of fame and fortune. Instead, Westerners wrote for the joy of writing and because they felt compelled to do so by their unadulterated, pure, surroundings. This purity somehow could substitute for, and even replace, the refinement present in the works of Eastern poets. In the way of purity, one of the striking qualities of the literary pieces published in the *Messenger* is the prevalence of nature imagery. One of the more prominent contributors to the *Messenger* was Ralph Waldo Emerson, and his

\(^{27}\) Peabody to Clarke, January 26, 1835. EP/AHTL.
belief in finding salvation through nature figures prominently in many of the pieces of the publication. Nature functioned differently in the Western mind, as the West was less adulterated by market changes and the early phases of industrialization, or more bluntly, the frontier and “untamed” wilderness were still close at hand during the antebellum period. Emerson escaped to western Massachusetts, the Western writers escaped to their backyards. Though the poetry of the west may not have numbered among the highly refined works dotting the shelves of Eastern bookcases, Western men and women simply did not have the time to focus energies so intensely on something not pertaining to the more basic needs of life on the near frontier. Instead, contributors to the Messenger stubbornly defended the unique and commendable qualities of their Western authors and poets. By enumerating the distinguishing qualities of Western poetry, the contributors to and readers of the Messenger began to debate and formulate the specific qualities of Western intellectual culture. The editorial then takes an odd twist; it ends with a statement that indicates that the amount of material concerning Western poetry actually exceeds the space allotment for printing. Not only did Western writers and the editors of the Messenger wish to encourage writing by Westerners, they wanted to also encourage writers to aspire to a set of standards; Western writing, it was hoped, would stand on equal footing with writing from other regions.

The nature of articles that appeared in the Messenger varied greatly in subject, though not as intensely in tone; though many people took the helm and contributed over the course of the magazine’s lifespan, the tone of an educated and rational, if not perhaps a bit self-consciously elite, writer appeared in each of the articles. Given that the magazine’s founders conceived of the publication as a Unitarian organ, it is not surprising that every volume included

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29 Cayton, Emerson’s Emergence, 58.
30 “Western Poetry” The Western Messenger June 1835, 1:1, 61-62.
31 “Western Poetry” The Western Messenger June 1835, 1:1, 68.
some discussion of religion and the ongoing evolution of the understanding of Unitarianism.

The Unitarian faith creating its status as an official denomination, broken off from the Congregational Church, occurred formally only a few years prior to the founding of the *Messenger*, in 1825, as the result of a long and contested battle over religious dogma.

Ultimately, the rift proved too much to overcome, and though the Unitarians and their Congregational brothers shared a common origin, vocabulary, and tradition, through the cracks an increasingly divergent religious culture made itself known. As a fairly young and numerically small denomination, Unitarians were able to engage in debates about religion and its place in society on relatively peaceful terms, at least in the early years. These debates took place from the safety of intellectual towers, and under the guise of learning. The forum for religious exchange stood at the base of the functions of the periodical, and through such exchanges, the contributors, editors, and readers were able to deal with topics of larger significance such as the state of religion, the fate of the West and of the nation during a tumultuous period of ideological strain.

More surprising is the remarkably singular tone and ideological outlook a product of multiple editors in various locations the *Messenger* takes on, especially in later issues. The publication, however, did not start with such a unified voice. In a letter published in the first issue, William Greenleaf Eliot expressed impatience with the slow process of preparing the first number for publication. Eliot also indicated that he knew nothing about the state of the *Messenger*, instead asking for information so that he could respond appropriately to the constant inquiries put before him by friends and others interested in the publication. Over

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32 Cayton, “Who Were the Evangelicals,” 86; Also see Wright, *Beginnings of Unitarianism*.
33 “Correspondence. Extract from a Private Letter” *The Western Messenger* June 1835, 1:1, 78.
time, the difference between editorial tenures became barely discernible, with a level of coherence about even the most difficult and divisive topics of the age.

One of the most interesting distinctions made by the pieces in the *Messenger* came from the ever-present antebellum debate concerning slavery. This debate was especially interesting given the publishing locations for the *Messenger* and the feelings of its editors. Clarke went as far as to write “the system of slavery colours everything.”34 The Northwest Ordinance established the Old Northwest as a land free from slavery, and settlers believed that “to own land was to be free of all forms of slavery, whether in the form of semifeudal obligations to landlords or more impersonal debts or taxes,” so not surprisingly residents of the West, at least north of the Ohio River, generally believed stubbornly in independence.35 Clarke, however, lived in Kentucky, which although part of the West, was not part of the lands that

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34 Clarke to Fuller, September 13, 1833, in Thomas, Letters, 62; What is striking about the personal correspondence of the men involved with the *Messenger* is how rarely they commented on slavery, or the environment of the cities in which they lived more generally. Slavery appears in no more than a half dozen letters of the more than 400 examined. Given the active slave trading and vehement attitudes toward slavery, blacks, and abolitionists in Cincinnati and Louisville, this is surprising. Additionally, the Unitarian men did not remark on the riots that took place in Cincinnati. Anti-abolitionist and anti-negro riots occurred in 1836, 1841, and 1843. Some of the men involved in the mob included members of the Unitarian congregation: William Greene, Timothy Walker, and John Foote. John C. Wright, publisher of the *Cincinnati Gazette*, the Whig newspaper edited throughout the 1840s by William Gallagher, also was listed among members of the mob (names taken from Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), Appendix A). Though many of the men listed in Richards’s Appendix A were prominent men of the city, many involved with the Semi-Colon Club and other new institutions of the city, all of these men appear in the “mob,” not as part of the “abolitionist” group. The West of the letters of these men is a calm, optimistic chance for utopia – not the riot-filled, slavery-ridden region of reality. This disconnect is stunning. For more about the Cincinnati riots, see Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing* and David Grimsted, *American Mobbing*, 1828-1861 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Though the contributors and readers of the *Messenger* supported the cause of anti-slavery, they were not the abolitionists generally assumed in scholarship concerning Unitarians. Instead, in the West, they tended to shy away from unnecessary confrontation – unless of course, one was taking part in the anti-abolitionist riots. During the 1830s, a request was made by the Anti-Slavery Society of Ohio for use of the First Congregational Church of Cincinnati “for the delivery of one or more lectures relative to slavery.” In a 13-7 vote, the members of the congregation (at least those twenty who voted) declined the request of the Anti-Slavery Society. This is remarkable, given the supposed anti-slavery, even abolitionist, sympathies of the congregation. See Box 1, Folder 4 of the FUC/CMC.

were free from slavery, dictated by the Northwest Ordinance. The experience of living with slavery impacted Clarke’s views. After staying with friends a few miles outside of Louisville for some relaxation, he wrote about his experiences with the slaves. “The negroes on this place are very cheerful and happy. I visit them in their cabins and talk to them... Yet the family all dislike slavery, and the children have all declared they will never own a slave.” Clarke went on to explain that the family he described thought of themselves as abolitionists. Though Clarke seemed at least somewhat convinced by their declarations of hatred for slavery, the fact remained that they owned slaves. Nearest the end of Clarke’s Louisville stay, he wrote to his future father-in-law that though he was included toward leaving Louisville anyway, there was another reason for his desire to depart – “the extreme inconvenience to which Anna will be exposed by the system of slavery...it is still always a matter of discomfort to be brought in contact with slavery. I should like to spare her the trouble.” Seeing slavery only strengthened his ardent opposition to the institution.

The Western Unitarian stance on slavery was at odds with its Eastern counterpart. Though Unitarians as a rule believed strongly in principles of abolitionism, the tone of the Messenger took a less caustic stance, indicating a more neutral, and regionally appealing, position of anti-slavery. In one piece, the author of the piece specifically formulated praise for an editor of another publication which "speaks of [Dr. Channing’s recent work] as a neutral ground, a point of union for those opposed to slavery, and also opposed to Abolitionism, agitation, and immediate Emancipation." This is problematic because Dr. William Ellery Channing advocated a position of anti-slavery but not abolitionism. However because of the geographic location of the West, and its precarious balance between slave and free, Unitarians...

36 Clarke to Anna Huidkoper, May 19, 1838. JFC/MHS.
37 Clarke to Harm Huidkoper, March 18, 1839. JFC/MHS.
38 “Art. VI – Channing on Slavery” The Western Messenger April 1836, 1:9, 614.
were forced to compromise strong political stances because they did not enjoy the isolation that their fellow Unitarians in Boston did from slavery and a pro-slavery population. Both St. Louis and Louisville were located in states that legally allowed slavery, and Cincinnati sat across the Ohio River from Kentucky, so though slavery was not legal in Ohio, one did not have to travel far to experience it first hand. Being in such close proximity to the institution helped more fully develop the Eastern transplants’ feelings about slavery.

Though the editors, contributors, and readers of the *Messenger* may not have agreed completely on the level of anti-slavery sentiment that the publication should articulate, the various groups involved in the magazine’s publication did agree fundamentally that slavery violated the moral code of humanity. Although always careful to acknowledge the various viewpoints concerning slavery present in the region during the period, the editors were equally careful to state specifically whom they wished to address on the topic. In a piece on the education of slaves, James Handasyd Perkins wrote:

> We would now speak to those that believe that the negro be in *kind* a man; that believe freedom to be invaluable as a means to intellectual and moral improvement; and that believe it every man’s duty to assist those property within his influence, to improvement, and therefore, to freedom. To all such we state but a truism, when we say that, if to the slave present freedom would be the means of improvement, present freedom is his right.\(^\text{39}\)

Addressing the slavery movement within the framework of improvement, Perkins argues that freedom for slaves is not simply a political issue, but rather a more basic moral issue on the condition of humanity. In striving to establish a republic based on equality, according to the Western Unitarians an equality in that all can strive toward improvement of the self, slavery represented a glaring inequality; by preventing slaves from attaining the education and freedom

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\(^{39}\) “Art. 11 – Slave Education” *The Western Messenger* May 1836, 1:10, 707.
necessary to pursue goals of intellectual and moral improvement, slave holders and other proponents of the institution necessarily also negated the ability of the slave to improve himself.

If the slave could not improve himself, he could not be a positive contribution to the republic, and as Emerson explained through his theory of radical individualism, only through the achievement of moral self-improvement could one engage positively in the shaping of the republic.\(^\text{40}\) By extension, one could not positively impact the shaping of any kind of identity, local, regional, or national, without actively seeking to improve oneself. In this way, all people who turned their backs on their duty to seek self-improvement through moral and intellectual introspection and engagement were slaves. If one thought of the African as a man, and Perkins clearly states this multiple times, then the African slave also was entitled to all the privileges of humanity, not the least of which was education. Education was the only remedy for such a paradox, and providing education for slaves – the only way through which slaves could find a way to liberty and understand its virtues – was incumbent upon slaveholders. Perkins further claimed, clearly a response to the criticisms that were sure to come, that he spoke on the behalf of those at the Messenger, not as abolitionists or agitators, but as Christians. Perkins goes on to acknowledge that the publication of such a piece would be unwise, even in New England, and even more so since from whence he writes sits on the cusp of slavery, but that being such a basic tenet of the Unitarian belief system, one must give such ideas voice so that they may be circulated and eventually prevail.\(^\text{41}\)

Perhaps idealists, Unitarians promoted education as the means of ending slavery. This is less surprising when considered in terms of the Federalist-benevolent program to better society.

\(^\text{41}\) "Art. 11 – Slave Education" *The Western Messenger* May 1836, 1:10, 708-709.
Through a comprehensive education of character, slaves could be fitted for freedom. Perkins articulated a program of gradual emancipation, though not through a conventional quota system, but rather through more optimistic, and realistically impractical, means; Perkins wished to raise the character of the negro race to make them fit for freedom and to allow slaves to worship God in perfect freedom. Though he did not wish to impress ideas of abolition, or the immediate end of slavery as an institution, Perkins did impress the urgent, immediate, need for the implementation of an education system that would allow slaves to become free, both in legal status and of intellectual and moral mind.

Implied in Perkins’s piece was a feeling of isolation. James Freeman Clarke also expressed feelings of intellectual isolation in a letter to Margaret Fuller, saying, “I stand among [the people of Louisville] but not of them, lonely in crowds. They do not understand me, nor I them. My courage is oozing out of the ends of my fingers. I think that, at this moment, a sentence of hanging would be rather a pleasant excitement.” Clarke wrote those words shortly after arriving in Louisville, and though perhaps the result of homesickness, they also betray a sense of extreme cultural difference. As in other regions of the country, fostering an intellectual culture also required a perceived lack of an existing one, as well as a perceived isolation from intellectual debates taking place elsewhere. Regional culture also created a

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43 “Art. 11 – Slave Education” The Western Messenger May 1836, 1:10, 710-712; Though Unitarians may have been progressive for their time, they still recognized and acted on differences between slave and free. In his journal, Clarke stated proudly, “I receive as a stipend about $600 per annum and fees. I have married two couples – attended 3 funerals, one of them a slave’s with a black audience. I think I was particularly happy in my address to them and they were very proud of having a white minister.” Journal, Louisville, February 11, 1834. PC/MHS.

44 Clarke to Fuller, August 12, 1833, in Thomas, Letters, 57.
barrier between the West and other regions by insisting on the unique and superior qualities of the West and Western mind. In the spirit of intellectual inquiry, many of the Eastern migrants sought to escape feelings of intellectual isolation.\(^{45}\) Through the reading of and participation in the publication of the *Messenger*, these men and women could escape feelings of “personal loneliness, social alienation, and intellectual futility” that seemed to pervade their lives.\(^{46}\) Each person potentially could bring something unique to the table, and through this dialogue a cohesive, if diverse and disorganized, regionality could emerge from the pages of the *Messenger*.

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Though the publication of the *Messenger* seemed well received, its subscription lists never numbered more than five hundred people. Furthermore, the majority of those on the subscription list lived in the West, though there were a substantial number east of the mountains as well.\(^{47}\) Regardless of subscription numbers, the *Messenger* reached an audience

\(^{45}\) Koschnik, *Let a Common Interest*, 75. Koschnik is concerned with Philadelphia society during a roughly contemporary period, but his commentary on the reasons for association, as well as who such associations appeal to, is salient when discussing a religious elite minority like the Unitarians.

\(^{46}\) Faust, *A Sacred Circle*, 2. Though Faust’s work deals with the intellectual in the South exclusively, many of her ideas relate directly to the feelings of Eastern transplants in the West during a similar period. Those involved with the publication of the *Messenger* shared the feeling of isolation Faust articulates for her circle of Southern intellectuals, though those in the West seemed to have the benefit of optimism denied Southerners during the decades immediately preceding the Civil War.

\(^{47}\) | Geographic Distribution of Subscribers |
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<tr>
<td><strong>City/Region</strong></td>
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The subscription list can be found in an undated bound volume. It is handwritten. PC/MHS.
whom received it with enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{48} Friends of the Unitarian mission West who resided in the
everly Unitarian areas of Boston supported the magazine through their subscription. Enough
Boston subscribers existed to merit a notice in the September issue indicating the name of the
publisher in Boston authorized as the agent of the \textit{Messenger} in that city.\textsuperscript{49} There were a few
notable exceptions to the typical geographic locale of the readers of the \textit{Messenger}. The most
famous subscribers and contributors were from the regions typically inhabited by Unitarians,
most frequently Boston. Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson both contributed original
pieces to the \textit{Messenger} and numbered among the subscription lists as one point or another.\textsuperscript{50}

James Freeman Clarke recalled proudly:

\begin{quote}
We were the first to publish any of Emerson’s poetry. We had a contribution from Dr.
Channing and an original poem of John Keats not before printed – [and] one which
Wendell Holmes sent me...Margaret Fuller sent me several pieces for the Messenger.
Among them were those signed S. M. F. (Sarah Margaret Fuller).\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

The level of fame of the contributors helped legitimize the publication, and the contribution of
Emerson and other later transcendentalists helps explain the claim that the \textit{Messenger} in fact
served as the inspiration for the famous transcendental organ, \textit{The Dial}.\textsuperscript{52} Whether the
\textit{Messenger} inspired Emerson, Fuller, and others to indeed emulate it in later years with their
own publication may never come to light fully, but clearly a connection between the two

\textsuperscript{48} T. Clapp to Clarke, June 16, 1836. PC/MHS. In this letter Clapp extols the merits of the \textit{Messenger},
praising its style and overall character, while also noting a gap in periodical literature which the
publication filled.
\textsuperscript{49} “Notice to Subscribers” \textit{The Western Messenger} September 1835, 1:3, 77. The readership of the
\textit{Messenger} is interesting since it was relatively fluid. This allowed for an imagined community that
transcended region even while insisting on the parochial nature of the publication. For more on smaller
circles, see Waterman, \textit{Republic of Intellect}; Faust, \textit{A Sacred Circle}; and Kaplan, \textit{Men of Letters}.
\textsuperscript{50} Herz, “Transcending Mere Numbers,” 17.
\textsuperscript{51} Clarke to Venable, February 19, 1886, DCVMC/OHS.
\textsuperscript{52} Venable made this claim in his comprehensive work on the literary culture in the West, titled
\textit{Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley} (Cincinnati: Clarke, 1887).
publications existed. If nothing else, the magazines shared contributors and subscribers, appealing in many ways to the same specific set of people. The most direct link between the publications came from the shared contribution of James Freeman Clarke and other Unitarian ministers to both periodicals.\textsuperscript{53}

Though readership circles were small, and geographically restricted to primarily urban areas, the \textit{Messenger} marked a turning point in cultural formation in the West. Furthermore the advent of the \textit{Messenger} on the literary scene in the 1830s also marked the point at which the people of the West established themselves as part of the movement to create a national literature. National literature, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, was not a luxury, but rather a necessity, capable of “sustain[ing] indigenous moral order.” Emerson also believed that literature had a social function, and that it was “an instrument by which the community’s moral sentiments and social cohesiveness might be fostered.”\textsuperscript{54} The West offered the perfect opportunity to test this theory, and the \textit{Messenger} contributed in this way to both a Western and national literary culture. No national literary culture could exist without the contribution of its various parts, and through the insistence on the development of Western literature, the editors, contributors, and subscribers to the \textit{Messenger} staked their claim to the legitimacy of their region as a integral and culturally valuable part of the whole, the nation. Yet they were also strengthening the national character by tying disparate peoples together from different regions through a cultural creation; regional literature, like a national one, was indeed necessary.

\textsuperscript{53} In a letter to William Henry Venable, William Davis Gallagher referred to the \textit{Messenger} as “James Freeman Clark[e]’s,” indicating the prominent role Clarke played in the shaping of the journal. Gallagher to Venable, February 3, 1886, DCVMC/OHS.

\textsuperscript{54} Cayton, \textit{Emerson’s Emergence}, 155.
Many Unitarians from both the Cincinnati and Louisville congregations contributed to the scope and character of the publication. Of the more regular contributors were the ministers of the respective parishes, Clarke, Peabody, and Peabody’s replacement, William Henry Channing, the nephew of the famous Dr. William Ellery Channing. Though the primary contributors to The Western Messenger were the ministers of the Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis congregations, being a minister of a congregation certainly did not function as a prerequisite to contributing to the fledgling monthly. Other prominent contributors included the highly praised Western poet, William Davis Gallagher, the sometimes minister of First Congregational Church in Cincinnati, especially during period of difficult recruitment to the Cincinnati pulpit, James Handasyd Perkins, and, prolific author and minister, Timothy Flint. Like the Unitarian ministers, both Perkins and Gallagher were born on the east coast and migrated to the west in their youth. However, even such a distinguished group could not generate the volume of material needed to furnish the scope to which the editors aspired. In one of the more eloquent pleas for contributions for publication, the editor waxed poetically that “even the printing Press cannot make ropes out of sand; a task we shall soon be compelled to set it, if our trusty contributors do not hasten to our relief.”

The Western Messenger failed for many reasons, not the least of which was the failure of subscribers to pay for their subscriptions. The publication was conceived a few years prior to the disastrous panic that gripped the United States starting in 1837. The Panic of 1837 persisted into the 1840s, with a startling second wave that began in 1841, which only exacerbated already dismal economic conditions. These economic dislocations affected the entire country, and the West was especially hard hit with the rampant land speculation. One merchant wrote in 1839,

55 “To Contributors and Others” The Western Messenger May 1836, 1:10, 729.
“Business is quite dull (in fact) with nothing doing yet, although we expect Louisville to revive again to her former proud standing.”  

Expectation might better have been described as desperate hope. Another family, finding “literally no bidders” for their tobacco crop, decided to ship it down river to New Orleans. Many prosperous Westerners, whom the *Messenger* targeted with its intellectual tilt, suffered at the hands of the Panic and its aftershocks. No one was insulated from its far-reaching effects.

Given the precarious financial state of many of the backers of the *Messenger*, the publication simply could not survive without paying subscribers. In an 1836 letter to Peabody, Clarke explained that he bore the financial burden of the *Messenger’s* publication on his own, a difficult burden for someone without regularly paying subscribers. Things seemed to look up in 1837, with subscription numbers increasing and accounts in order. Clarke seemed to think there might even be a small surplus of revenue at the year’s end. However, the Panic devastated such hopes quickly. There were some indications of a recovery in subscription numbers in 1838; in a letter to his future wife, Anna Huidekoper, Clarke wrote, “People are beginning to be sorry for discontinuing the Messenger and are sending me their names again. I get many letters of encouragement. One lately from a Quakeress in the State of New York was very pleasant. She “theed me in the kindest manner. I am in hopes that we shall be supported.”

So draining on the financial state of the periodical was this failure that in 1839 the editors issued a notice explaining the erasure of names from the subscription lists, and the

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57 Joshua Fry to John Speed, February 28, 1828. Speed Family Miscellaneous Papers (C/Sd), Filson Historical Society.
58 Clarke to Peabody, August 16, 1836 and February 21, 1837. JFCC/HL.
59 Clarke to Anna Huidekoper, January 10, 1838. JFC/MHS.
publication’s subsequent removal back to Cincinnati. Such difficulties plagued the publication from its outset and continued until its dissolution in 1841. However, though financial difficulties clearly factored into the publication’s failure, the editors could take pride in the fact that the publication did not fail for the less forgivable reason, a want of intellectual stimulation by its readers.

In addition to lapses in subscription payment, the Messenger suffered declines in contributions from friends of the publication. As early as 1838, Clarke wrote, “[g]ive my respects to your father and thank him for his articles. He is my only faithful contributor. I am afraid I shall have to write all the Messenger myself before long.” Clearly Clarke felt frustration at carrying much of the burden of the publication on his own, both financially and in terms of soliciting and producing material. In one letter, he went as far as to complain, “it takes me more time to write to my contributors to keep them at work, than to fill it up entirely myself.”

The Eastern ministers that returned East after a few years are the usual subjects of study for anyone researching The Western Messenger, and while there is no denying that Peabody, Clarke, and Channing played integral roles in the formation, development, and character of the magazine, the story does not die with their removal from the West. Ministers returned East for a variety of reasons, and though these have been assumed by most scholars to indicate the dismal intellectual environment of the West, others point to specific, personal, reasons for the departure of each minister, instead indicating a burgeoning intellectual culture that many were loathe to leave.

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60 “To Our Subscribers” The Western Messenger September 1839, 7:5, 359-360.
61 Clarke to Anna Huidekoper, May 19, 1838. JFC/MHS.
62 Clarke to Anna Huidekoper, June 8, 1838. JFC/MHS.
63 Habich, Transcendentalism, 153-155.
Though some debate exists about whether the publication failed because of the failure of its editors to stay in the West, or if the publication failed because readership circles simply could not support the venture, the general consensus seems to be that the magazine failed for a variety of reasons. Among these reasons, however, is absent that which was proposed early on, namely that the constant changing of ministers and editors ultimately resulted in the demise of the publication. Instead, Robert Habich cites a variety of other reasons including financial problems, lack of interest, and the changing nature of Unitarianism during the period.64 Though undoubtedly the ministerial editors guided the publication and shaped the overall tone, other contributors also played an active role, and those contributors who did and remained in the West ultimately were the ones who took up the yoke after the demise of the Messenger in shaping the nascent intellectual culture and identity of the region. Still, the contributors to the Messenger did draw some distinctions between the West and East. In one piece, Clarke admonished “Yankee Clergy” as though he was not one himself. Years in the West clearly altered his conception of himself, and even after he returned to Boston, he still felt a fondness toward the West for the rest of his days.65

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James Freeman Clarke referred to the Messenger in his later years as “a wandering star,” and indeed the Messenger did serve as a meandering beacon for proponents of Western literature.66 The publication and circulation of The Western Messenger represented the departure point for a larger movement, one that did not disappear with the publication, but

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64 Habich, Transcendentalism, 17.
65 Osgood to Clarke, June 1, 1837. PC/MHS; Clarke to Jane Pirtle, December 9, 1861. James Freeman Clarke Miscellaneous Papers, Filson Historical Society (CMP/FHS). In this letter, Clarke proclaimed he had two states, Massachusetts and Kentucky, and that he was as proud of Kentucky’s war efforts as of those of Massachusetts.
66 Clarke to Venable, February 19, 1886, DCVMC/OHS. Clarke also described the publication as “in its day...a rather respectable effort for the young people who wrote in it.”
instead gained steam and flourished in various arenas during the antebellum period. Those involved with the *Messenger* took up the yoke and more articulately developed ideas of culture and identity for the region in which they lived and believed. In 1841, the same year that marked the dismantling of the *Western Messenger*, another publication appeared on the Western scene, but instead of appearing with a notice urging the production of Western literature, the publication appeared with a notice proclaiming such literature’s appearance. William Davis Gallagher opened his anthology, titled *Selections of the Poetical Literature of the West*, with these sentences:

> A volume made up exclusively of the Poetical Literature of the West, will perhaps be received with a dubious shake of the head, by many worthy persons, and a wonder whether any good thing *can* come out of *that* Nazareth. And when it is found that such volume contains selections from about two score of writers, - all poets, of course, and *western* poets, too! – the wonder will perhaps be changed into downright amazement at the vanity of our pretensions, and the doubt become absolute incredulity as to any merit therein. Well – this must be even so. It is the tax which our present aim to show what we are, and what we have been, will have to pay upon our past modesty.⁶⁷

Gallagher went on to describe the character of the writers of poetry featured in his anthology, offering justification for their inclusion and an overarching framework for his work.

> Much the greater number of the persons selected from, are either western born or western educated, or both; and all of them who are now living, with a single exception, are citizens of this denomination of the Union...Of the productions generally, which make up the volume, this remark may be made: they look not, for their paternity, to men of either leisure, wealth, or devotion to letters, - but find it, some amid the din of the workshop, others at the handle of the plough, a third class in the ledger-marked counting room, and a fourth among the John-Doism and Richard-

Roism of an attorney’s office. For the most part, they have been the mere momentary outgushings of irrepressible feeling, proceeding from the hearts of those who were daily and hourly subjected to the perplexities and toils of business, and the cares and anxieties inseparable from the procuring of one’s daily bread by active occupation. Many of those who had contributed to the Messenger also contributed to Gallagher’s anthology. Included in the index of poems were the names Ephraim Peabody, James Freeman Clark, and James Handasyd Perkins, all of whom served in editorial capacities at some point for the Messenger. The urging of the 1835 editorial of the Western Messenger had come to fruition; Western writing no longer apologetically looked East. Instead these Western poets stood firmly in their commitment to independence and the freedom to create their own existence. Instead of apologizing for the necessity to perform labor to provide for themselves and their families, the Western poets celebrated the virtue of labor, and they celebrated the virtue of the region that allowed for their labors to help them fashion their own lives. Through his anthology, Gallagher planted his region, and the merit of its poets, on an equal, though distinctive, playing field with all others of those in the Union. A regional identity indeed had been formed, and Unitarians through intellectual exercise and literary publication precipitated the movement to create it.

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68 Gallagher, Selections, 7-8.
Chapter Three:

New Forums for Civil Exchange and Western Permanence: Institution Building

The new and glorious Experiment in Humanity, then, commences here, on the broad fields of the North West...in the abiding faith that Progress is the order of man through the design of God...Let us labor to lay the foundations of institutions for the future, under which no man, of all over whom they may extend, shall suffer wrong at the hand of his brother.¹

William Davis Gallagher’s words echoed with many of his fellow Westerners. Clarke and Eliot admitted proudly that they travelled west to help direct this course of destiny. All three of these men were of Eastern birth, and all three helped imitate Eastern ideals and societal structure in their new homes. These men lived and worked in cities, urban spaces meant to replicate their Eastern models. Yet they could not. Like their forefathers during the colonial period, these men and those who assisted with their efforts simply could not replicate a culture. The Appalachian Mountains functioned in much the same way that the Atlantic Ocean had; Eastern migrants could maintain closer ties perhaps, but in many ways they were very much cut off from the lands of their birth. The West (Midwest) was, as Edward Watts rightly has called it,

the first American colony. Watts has additionally suggested that the creation of a culture for the Midwest was a conscious effort, one meant to overcome these colonial attitudes present both within and outside of the region.²

Western intellectuals, like those involved with the publication of the Messenger, realized that men in the East and South were also engaged in discussions about identity and region, and they had created models of the appropriate venues through which to discuss such issues. Increasingly, the men and women of the antebellum age turned to the public sphere to circulate knowledge, formulate ideas, and disseminate information.³ Engagement with the public sphere allowed people to unite along lines of similarity and interest, and consequently, to unite in the political and regional realms as well. People must have public forums if a coherent, comprehensive identity could come into being. The editors of the Messenger recognized this need for forums of public exchange, especially among relatively isolated individuals in the West. Such recognition on the part of these Eastern intellectual transplants had only one logical conclusion – the creation of a forum to facilitate such exchange, the creation of the Western Messenger.

The Messenger was not simply a forum for exchange since it was also tied directly to Unitarian beliefs. Unitarianism was a religion but also a belief system, and it functioned as a way to preserve a specific set of values among a specific type of people. Men who would believe in liberal religion and eventually would become Unitarians generally voted with the Federalist Party. With the demise of the Federalist Party, the Boston elites, the religious liberals clustered around Harvard, needed a way to interact with each other through an official forum.

² Watts, An American Colony, xiv-xvii. Also see Jon Butler, Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) for a lengthy discussion of the discontinuities between British and the emerging “American” culture in the colonies.
³ Kaplan, Men of Letters, 4.
Former Federalists, including Unitarians, began to focus their energies into new organizations, institutions, and publications that would allow them to continue to interact with people of similar means, both in terms of economic and social capital. Though the religion took on a kind of hegemonic function, it also included a positive side; Unitarianism “encouraged philanthropy, humanitarianism, love of education and learning, and a strong sense of civic concern.”¹ In essence, displaced Federalists channeled their energies into becoming better citizens.

A virtuous citizenry necessarily proved vital to the settlement of the West, and especially to the emergence of an identity and consciousness. The idea of cultivating civilization through the encouragement of the arts and literature was not a new thought either; the belief in the arts traveled with the Eastern migrants, a legacy of their Federalist connections back East.² Considering Unitarians saw one of the primary functions of their faith as scholarly transmission, and themselves as the bearers of intellectual culture in America, it is not surprising that their mark can clearly be seen in the foundations of various societies and literary journals, such as the Messenger. Through the spirit of liberal religion, adherents to the Unitarian faith, especially its leaders, were able to conceive of learned and historical societies, found benevolent agencies, edit journals and promote belles lettres.³

The concept of voluntary association, an idea that became increasingly widespread in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, affected Unitarians in many ways. Not only did Unitarians use the theory of voluntary association to perpetuate their own value system through institutions and publications, but the notion also affected how Unitarians organized

¹ Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, 400.
² Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 1-5. Unitarians almost exclusively belonged to the Federalist Party in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Given the Federalist priority in the cultivation of the arts, it is not surprising that their sons would turn to literature as the ideal, or at the very least an essential, building block of Western culture.
³ Cayton, Emerson’s Emergence, 117.
their congregations. As voluntary associations became more pervasive in American culture, the theories behind them also became more visible in formerly unknown areas. The change in congregation organizational structure in Cincinnati, as well as the contrast between the Cincinnati congregation’s organization and that of Louisville illustrates this idea. The initial organization of the Louisville Unitarian congregation in 1833 took the traditional form of the covenant. The language of the covenant reflected the church’s relationship with its orthodox roots, proclaiming a deep belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. In the words of the covenant, the members “desire[d] to use together all the appointed ordinances and means of Christian improvement, and so seek to grow in grace and live in Christian fellowship and brotherhood.” The Unitarian church in Cincinnati went through several organizing structures before settling on a new one in 1840. In stark contrast to the covenant of the Louisville congregation, in the Third Form of Union, enacted by the First Congregational Church of Cincinnati in 1840, members explicitly stated that

\[\text{Stated Meetings of this Association shall be held on the afternoon of the First Sabbath in each month, for the purposes of communing in the Lord’s Supper, joining in social worship, conversing, hearing addresses, or acting upon subjects of religion and philanthropy, and contributing, each according to his own conscience, to the charitable funds of the Association.}\]

The document indicates members viewed the church as an association, one that men and women joined voluntarily to worship God and promote His word to others. Rather than the conversion emphasis of many evangelical denominations, Unitarians emphasized the joining in voluntary association through a common understanding of their faith, demonstrating both a

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8 Record Book, Volume 5, 8, 18. FUC/CMC.
liberal understanding of religion as well as a break from popular revival figures of the day like Charles Finney.

In this spirit of voluntary association, Western Unitarians created forums for exchanging information and spreading liberal religion. However, in the early 1830s, they lacked the infrastructure to do so. The establishment of Unitarian congregations outside of Boston and a few other dense urban centers of the Eastern seaboard did not happen quickly, or without immense effort. Though many Unitarians recognized the need to establish western churches, few wanted to bear the burden of doing so. Enticing ministers to move West to tend to new flocks proved an arduous task, and often Unitarians in the West had to be content with mixed and infrequent preaching, or convert to a more successfully established denomination. The movement to create Unitarian congregations started in Marietta in 1830 with the efforts of Ephraim Peabody, the same minister who within a few years would take charge of the founding Cincinnati flock. Two other Harvard Divinity School graduates arrived by August of 1834, James Freeman Clarke and William Greenleaf Eliot, the future ministers of the Louisville and St. Louis congregations respectively. Though Unitarians never achieved the presence of other denominations in the West, by 1835, Unitarians had successfully established standing

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10 Eliot wrote a pamphlet titled *Religious and Moral Wants of the West*, which urged Eastern Unitarians to travel West and fulfill their obligation to their faith. He refuted popular Unitarian arguments against missionary activities, instead appealing to religious zeal and nationalism to spur Western settlement and Unitarian establishment – ventures in which Eliot, and others like him could use help – for “there are now, in the West, many places, in each of which there ought to be a Unitarian Church and Preacher.” See William Greenleaf Eliot, *Religious and Moral Wants of the West* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1837), quotation taken from page 20. By 1850, however, only a handful of Unitarian congregations existed in the Old Northwest, indicating that Eliot’s pleas apparently fell on deaf ears - see *The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, lvi.
congregations in three of the major urban centers of the antebellum West: Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis.  

Unitarians early on recognized the value of collaboration with other Westerners, regardless of their religious affiliations. These new Western residents built off their experiences in the East, where collaboration took place both on the basis of religion and class. Given the extreme religious minority of Unitarians, especially in the West, denominational cooperation, regardless of religious disputes, was vital. To this end, Unitarians were active in circles dedicated to promoting literature, the West, and education for the creation of a virtuous, republican citizenry. One such group was the Semi Colon Club, a small literary circle in Cincinnati. The Semi Colon Club was open to both men and women, and counted among its members many of Cincinnati’s most prominent citizens. Women such as the Beecher sisters, Catharine and Harriet, and Elizabeth Blackwell, who would later become the first female physician in the United States and was a member of the Unitarian church, were members of the group. Even those most thoroughly seemed in religious differences, ministers, came together in the common cause of literature. These men included James Handasyd Perkins, Lyman Beecher, and William Henry Channing. The group allowed Cincinnatians a way to bridge their differences, engage with agreeable company in social situations, as well as articulate common goals and the tenets they hoped would take root in the region in which they lived.

The Semi Colon Club was not officially connected to the Messenger. However, it shared many members, and it welcomed its out of town contributors when they passed through Cincinnati. James Freeman Clarke attended a few meetings, and he read pieces offered for publication in the Messenger on at least one occasion. The meetings were something he

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11 Habich, *Transcendentalism*, 28-31; Record Book, Volume 5, 17. FUC/CMC.
enjoyed, both for the company of others he considered his peers and the quality of writing that came forth from the presentation of pieces.¹²

Though the club was literary in purpose, it also necessarily carried a strong social component. The social nature of the group lingered in the memories of its members for many subsequent years. One member, another graduate of Harvard Divinity School, Christopher Pearse Cranch, recounted his experience with the Semi Colon Club in a letter to James Freeman Clarke, saying,

Last night I went to a Semicolon party at Mrs. Stetson’s. We had a glorious time. The pieces were good, and the music refreshing; and dancing – heavens! how they danced...It was one of the most delightful seasons of social refreshment I ever enjoyed. A perfect inundation of spirits, whose merry and sparkling utterances seemed to set afloat in mere kindliness, the most staid and old, who at first were prone to root themselves to the sides of the room in their chairs...I expect to enjoy these Semicolons much.¹³

Clarke’s sister, Sarah, had a similar reaction to the Semi Colon Club, and Anna Blackwell fondly remembered “the period when we were so often assembled in [William Greene’s] hospitable parlor.”¹⁴ The club’s gatherings engendered warm feelings among many of its members, allowing them to interact in a venue that brought together people with similar values and socio-economic status.

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¹² Clarke to Anna Huidekoper, March 20, 1839. JFC/MHS.
¹⁴ Sarah Clarke to Mrs. Peabody, February 21, 1837. JFC/MHS; Anna Blackwell to William Greene, August 18, 1844. WG/CMC.
The members of the Unitarian church, ministers and the laity alike, were members of various groups with one common thread – all were intended to better society, though society’s betterment could be broadly understood. The place of women in American society was one that many agreed could be improved, and women throughout the country began to exercise new power through the growing empire of benevolence. Unitarian women, and women in the West more generally, were not exceptions. One organization that both empowered women and sought to improve society was the Female Provident Society of Louisville (1840).\textsuperscript{15} Unlike the majority of other groups in Cincinnati or Louisville, the officers and managers of the group were all women. The Board of Council, however, was composed of men as the Female Provident Society required legal counsel. Membership lists included a number of Unitarian families, including the Pirtles, a family influential in the legal sphere of Louisville and founding members of Louisville’s Unitarian congregation. Like the Semi Colon Club in Cincinnati, the Female Provident Society was a forum through which Unitarians could interact with other prominent Louisville residents to further their mutual goals. The group was confined to the city, though it shared goals with other groups in other cities.

Unitarians contributed generously to the Female Provident Society despite their small numbers within the Louisville community. Clarke contributed thirty dollars from his own personal funds, and the church collected over forty-seven dollars for the society. The Unitarian church also hosted a juvenile concert that grossed more than one hundred thirty dollars for the Female Provident Society.\textsuperscript{16} There was only one Unitarian congregation in Louisville, and its membership lists included only a couple hundred people, yet proportionately its members

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{15} See Bruce Dorsey, Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) for more about women’s involvement in reform societies.\textsuperscript{16} First Annual Report of the Louisville Female Provident Society, April 1840 (Louisville: Prentice and Weissinger, 1840), 12-14. JFCC/HL.
\end{footnotesize}
donated very generously. The Unitarian church was the only one to host a benefit for the organization, and its collection contribution was behind only the collections of the large congregations of First Presbyterian Church and St. Paul’s (Episcopal).

The Semi Colon Club and Female Provident Society were groups that functioned within a confined geographic area. Forums that emphasized cooperation across the region were also important, and Unitarians were active members of them as well. One of the most influential of these groups was dedicated to education existed contemporaneously with the Messenger, the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers (WLICPT), founded in 1830.

Using the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers (WLICPT) as a lens, it quickly becomes apparent that to accomplish goals that affected the direction of the West, Unitarians had to collaborate with other religious groups. Though Unitarians participated on a significant scale given their small numbers in the Western population, Unitarians by no means constituted a majority of the organization’s membership. The object of the WLICPT was “to promote, by every laudable means, the diffusion of knowledge in regard to education, and especially by aiming at the elevation of the character of Teachers who shall have adopted instruction as their regular profession.”17 Among the collaborators in pursuing a comprehensive public school system was one of the Unitarians’ most vehement religious critics, Lyman Beecher. William McGuffey and John Purcell, Cincinnati’s Catholic archbishop, also were active participants in the WLICPT. From a few dozen members at its founding in 1828, the WLICPT grew to 216 by 1840. The initial group drew members from a few states that touched the Ohio River. By 1840 members also came from the territories of Iowa and Wisconsin, as well as Virginia, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Through the pursuit of goals couched in the

17 “Constitution of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers,” Transactions of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Western Literary Institute and College of Professional Teachers (Cincinnati: Kendal and Barnard, 1840), 143, Cincinnati Museum Center.
republican language of the common good, prominent Westerners came together; they worked
toward creating a national organization to promote their goals.

Like the Semi Colon Club its members were not drawn from a specific religious tradition.
Not surprisingly, all members professed a belief in a “Christian republic” and championed an
educational curriculum and system throughout the West that would further such a goal. The
annual report of 1836 made the organization’s purpose quite clear; “Education ought to be
universal...If you will make republican men, you must have republican Education.”18 Through
such language, the members of the WLICPT betrayed their Whig political beliefs, though clearly
their beliefs were not without support. The WLICPT held annual meetings, and with each year
their numbers grew.

In contrast to the local groups, the WLICPT did have some restrictions on membership
that related to gender. Interestingly, though the WLICPT held sessions about the state and
character of education for women, it did not allow women as members. No provision existed in
the organization’s constitution that expressly prohibited women’s membership, yet no woman’s
name ever appears on its rosters at the WLICPT’s annual meetings. Still, there were no religious
qualifications, seen clearly through the range of denominational traditions responsible for the
opening prayers of the annual meetings. Lyman Beecher, a Yale trained Presbyterian, delivered
the opening prayer in 1833. Ephraim Peabody, the minister at the Cincinnati Unitarian church
from 1832-1836, also delivered an opening prayer for the WLICPT. His turn came in 1834,
denoting an air of collaboration between the men regardless of the differences in their personal
religious convictions.

18 “Introduction,” Transactions of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Western Literary Institute and College of
Professional Teachers (Cincinnati: The Executive Committee, 1836), 6, Cincinnati Museum Center.
The Beecher family was especially active in the WLICPT. During the 1830s, Lyman Beecher served as the president of the Lane Theological Seminary, which was based in Cincinnati. Many of his children followed him for some period of time, and his sons Edward and Henry Ward Beecher both appear on the WLICPT’s membership rosters. Calvin Stowe, the husband of Lyman’s daughter Harriet, also appeared on the membership lists, which is not surprising given Stowe’s involvement in various educational reforms and the push for bilingual education in the city to meet the needs of the growing German population. At the 1833 meeting, Lyman Beecher delivered the opening prayer for the organization’s meeting. Stowe and Beecher were colleagues at Lane Theological Seminary. Other Beechers were active in education in the city, though not in the WLICPT. Catharine Beecher founded a school in Cincinnati specifically for women called the Western Female Seminary. Harriet assisted her sister with instruction at the seminary until her marriage to Stowe in 1836. Though the sisters clearly expressed an interest in education, they were excluded from the WLICPT.19

Another important member of the WLICPT was William McGuffey. McGuffey served as the president of Cincinnati College, Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and later at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. McGuffey was also the man behind the popular McGuffey readers, which were some of the first standardized textbooks to be used on a large scale in the United States. Though neither the Beecher family nor William McGuffey were Unitarians, they were prominent Westerners who also believed in the importance of access to education. Without the shared interest of these seemingly disparate peoples, education in the West would have suffered. Efforts of the WLICPT helped encourage standardization of education, as well as

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19 For more about women’s education during the antebellum period, especially women’s academies and seminaries, see Kelley, Learning to Stand and Speak. For useful information about Catharine Beecher, see Kathryn Sklar, Catharine Beecher: A Study in Domesticity (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976).
professionalize teaching efforts throughout the West. Like the Semi Colon Club and the
*Messenger*, the WLICPT brought together people from different backgrounds, political
persuasions, and religious affiliations to affect the realization of a community that fostered
intellectual rigor and nurtured impulses toward the betterment of society. Though each of the
groups had a strong social component, they also contributed to an emerging Western
consciousness in the antebellum period.

The *Messenger*, WLICPT, Semi Colon Club, and Female Provident Society were part of a
conscious effort to create a type of community, based both on region, the West, and class
status. The groups functioned as a way to cope with the discontinuities between expectation
and reality in the West among Eastern migrants by offering a sense of community and shared
experience. However fleeting publications like the *Messenger* carved out only temporary
refuges and proved transient forums. Western intellectuals craved closer contact, and with the
immense population growth, the West could support more permanent forums of information
exchange and cultural formation. Westerners turned their energies away from fleeting
publications and toward what they hoped would be permanent fixtures of Western society. The
next phase occurred contemporaneously with the existence of literary societies and
organizations like the WLICPT, but it was different in the permanence expected; cultural change
came to the West in the form of institutions. Institutions served two purposes. First,
institutions could preserve a cultural footprint that those founding the groups wished to leave.
Institutions could also create a unique culture, imprinting on the West the cultural identity that
the early migrants so desperately wished to establish.²⁰

*Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 39 (2009): 471-495. Also see Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling:
American Reform and Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) for more about the
Unitarians did not disappear from the West with the disappearance of the Western Messenger. Though the Messenger marked an important phase in the development of the West, another, more physically visible phase was yet to come. Those who stayed in the West were perhaps not as famous as the early transcendentalists and perhaps were not as close to Ralph Waldo Emerson, but they put their energy into building institutions for the betterment of the region that they chose to call home, many permanently. Institutions were attempts to replicate Eastern ones at many times, but they also bore the influence of the Western experience.

One of the major blows to the Unitarian community was the loss of James Freeman Clarke in June of 1840 to Boston, shortly after his marriage to Anna Huidekoper. Much of Clarke’s reasoning for leaving was personal, a mixture of homesickness and Anna’s desire to be closer to her family. During his tenure in Louisville, Clarke attracted dozens of new members to the Unitarian church and helped create interest in the religious future of the region. Though Clarke was not convinced of his good works in the West, his congregants were. One member wrote, “Nothing could be clearer than that Mr. Clarke had made a permanent impression of the highest order on the people of Louisville.”

Clarke’s departure, however, was not entirely cause for sadness. For one thing, Clarke kept in contact with his Western friends for the rest of his life. Though Clarke left Louisville in 1840, and returned only briefly for short visits, he kept up correspondence with many of his former congregants. The Pirtles and Speeds were families with which Clarke kept in contact dislocating nature of changes in antebellum America and some of the impulses to deal with these changes.

21 Alfred Pirtle, “A Sketch of the Unitarian Church,” 53-55. AP/FHS.
until his death in 1888. In 1861 he wrote, “I often think of you all, my dear friends, who are [in Louisville]...What would I not give to come and spend a week or two with you!” During an 1852 visit to Louisville, Clarke and his wife stayed with Judge Henry Pirtle and his wife, and with them, visited Mammoth Cave in Kentucky.\footnote{Quotation taken from Clarke to Jane Pirtle, December 9, 1861, CMP/FHS; Alfred Pirtle, “A Sketch of the Unitarian Church,” 56. AP/FHS.}

Clarke corresponded with the Pirtles during the Civil War, offering to send supplies for the relief of the troops in Louisville. Given its proximity to the western war front, Louisville was a stationing point for both armies, and it was also where many injured or sick soldiers were sent to convalesce. Clarke indicated that his congregation sent supplies for the troop’s comfort to St. Louis and would like to do the same for those in Louisville. Louisville, and Kentucky more generally, was a border state that allowed slavery but stayed loyal to the Union. Not surprisingly, the enlistments from Kentucky were strong for both the Union and Confederacy. The Pirtles’ son Alfred fought for the Union. After the war, the correspondence continued. In 1870 it was Clarke to whom Jane Pirtle, wife of Judge Henry Pirtle and mother of Alfred, turned for encouragement for her son.\footnote{Clarke to Jane Pirtle, December 9, 1861. CMP/FHS.} Correspondence was a dialectic relationship, and Clarke’s experiences during his almost decade stay in Louisville impacted his later life.

Additionally, with Clarke’s departure, Louisville gained the presence of Reverend John Healy Heywood, a recent Harvard Divinity School graduate. Clarke’s permanent departure was anything but certain, and Heywood seemed to think he would be in Louisville “no more than two or three months.” Though Heywood did not know it at the time, quite the contrary as he protested, “I cannot remain permanently here or elsewhere in the West,” he would remain in

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22 Quotation taken from Clarke to Jane Pirtle, December 9, 1861, CMP/FHS; Alfred Pirtle, “A Sketch of the Unitarian Church,” 56. AP/FHS.
23 Clarke to Jane Pirtle, December 9, 1861. CMP/FHS.
Louisville for the better part of four decades and become a towering figure in Western Unitarian history.24

However, Louisville clearly was growing on him. He wrote to Clarke, “I have become much attached to the society here. How much kind feeling prevails among them. I never have received more kindness from any than from some of our friends here.”25 It was not until 1843, though, that Heywood was offered a permanent position as pastor of the Unitarian society, something never offered to Clarke.26 His impact on Louisville, despite his tenure’s precarious beginnings, was to be quite profound. According to one member of his congregation, “it is needless to speak about Rev. Heywood so greatly beloved – for, his memory will echo in our city forever.”27 During his time in Louisville, Heywood was involved in the founding of the public school system and served on its board for more than half his life. He also worked closely with the U. S. Sanitation Commission during the Civil War.

Another Harvard graduate who stayed in the West was James Handasyd Perkins. Perkins acted as the minister to the Unitarian church in Cincinnati for periods in the 1840s, after the departure of William Henry Channing. He was involved with the Messenger and was even related to some of the others involved with the publication. However, unlike the others who acted as editors of the publication at one point or another, Perkins remained in the West until his death in 1849. He worked tirelessly for the betterment of those who shared his community but could not help themselves. After his death, the First Congregational Church congregation was so moved that they issued a statement expressing their deepest condolences “in order to testify to the family of the deceased, to each other, and to the world, our sense of his moral

24 Heywood to Clarke, December 23, 1840. FUCR/FHS.
25 Heywood to Clarke, December 23, 1840. FUCR/FHS.
26 Records of the Unitarian Society, Louisville, Kentucky, 13. FUCR/FHS.
worth, and our high appreciation of his intellectual endowments, his social virtues, and his philanthropic labors.”

Perkins left his mark on Cincinnati by founding two of its largest benevolent institutions, the House of Refuge, erected shortly after his death in 1849, and the Cincinnati Relief Union, founded in 1848. Even after Perkins’ death, a Unitarian presence in the organization continued through the 1850s with Alphonso Taft, father of William Howard, on the board of the House of Refuge. The experience of the Cincinnati Relief Union was more typical of Cincinnati institutions and their relationship with Unitarians; though a Unitarian founded the institution, after establishing its permanence and influencing its future, an overt Unitarian presence often disappeared from view.

Another institution in which this shifting presence can be seen is the Cincinnati Water Works. Founded in the 1820s, the Water Works’ establishment was the result of collaboration by William Greene and Foote. The men founded the institution with the intention of enabling Cincinnati residents to obtain water, clearly a goal with the intention of improving the city residents’ quality of life. However, these Unitarians remained on the board for about thirty years, turning it over to others by 1851.

The Unitarian congregation of Cincinnati numbered thirty eight members at its founding in 1831. That number grew to 200 at the signing of the Livermore Plan of Union, a revised organizing document of the First Congregational Church, in the early 1850s. Still, given that the overall population of the city was 24,831 in 1830 and 115,438 in 1850, Unitarians constituted only small percentages of the overall population, never more than .17%. However Unitarians were involved in the civic structure of Cincinnati to a much larger extent than their small presence might indicate. In 1831, the Robinson and Fairbank Cincinnati directory divided city

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28 Loose piece, FUC/CMC.
institutions into two categories, “Monied Institutions” and “Scientific and Literary Institutions.” In the first category, Unitarians were officers in five of the nine institutions. In the second, four of the twelve had Unitarian officers.\(^{29}\)

The Unitarian presence in financial institutions should not be surprising. Many came from wealthy Eastern families, and had the means, education, and experience to run such institutions. Furthermore, the officer names indicate the predominance of five men, Samuel and John Foote, William Greene, William Goodman, and Charles Stetson. Of the five, two men, Greene and John Foote, were also involved as officers in other civic institutions in Cincinnati. William Greene served in various capacities with the public school system for decades, while John Foote worked closely with the Cincinnati Horticultural Society, serving on standing committees and contributing to their educational publications.

By 1851, the Unitarian presence in institutions shifted to some degree. No longer could Unitarians demand presence in more than half of a given type of institution throughout the city, primarily because though their numbers were increasing, they simply could not keep pace with the overall population increases in the Queen City of the West. Still, their continued influence in Cincinnati merits examination. In 1851, of the six courts of judicature based in Cincinnati (including the Supreme Court of Ohio), two had Unitarians on them. Three men, one of whom, Timothy Walker, was a Unitarian, founded the College of Law in Cincinnati. The others shared a similar value system; Edward King was the son of the famous New York Federalist Rufus King, and John C. Wright obtained political office as a Whig only to leave politics to run the Whig newspaper in Cincinnati beginning in 1835, \emph{Cincinnati Gazette}. The sphere of law in Cincinnati bore the seal of the displaced Eastern elites, and Unitarian presence on the courts, though

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\(^{29}\) Two of the twelve Scientific and Literary Institutions do not have officer lists, so the Unitarian presence could have been as high as officers in six of the twelve organizations. See \emph{The Cincinnati Directory for the Year 1831}, (Cincinnati: Robinson & Fairbank, 1831).
somewhat exceeding what their population percentages should have merited, fits into the larger picture of the civic structure, specifically what types of people exerted power.

In the financial realm, the Unitarian presence retreated from an important to a significant, though waning, presence. Of the six incorporated banks listed in the Cist Cincinnati directory of 1851, only one has Unitarian board members. Of the several dozen insurance companies, no more than three have Unitarian officers. Insurance companies expanded in Cincinnati, however, at a rate that perhaps matched, if not exceeded, the growth of the population as a whole. Companies also catered to specific segments of the population, Germans for example, offered only one type of insurance, the most common being fire insurance, or constituted a minor branch office of a much larger, often Eastern, firm. In 1831 these branch offices did not exist, with the exception of Aetna which was based in Connecticut, and insurance options were much more limited. The most heavily Unitarian financial institution, the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company was founded in 1830, and continued to exist through the 1850s. Unitarian names continued to appear without interruption on its board of directors throughout the period.

Similarly, Unitarians faded from the scientific and literary institutions of Cincinnati as well. Of the nine institutions in this category, Cist listed two as having Unitarian officers on their boards. However though the change indicates a decline, it still indicates a disproportionate influence on civic affairs that continued to be exerted well into the middle of the nineteenth century. Additionally, the numbers are strictly confined to officer lists and do not give any idea of the presence of Unitarian members in institutions that simply did not hold office.

30 It is somewhat harder to determine how much Unitarian presence faded because the 1831 and 1851 directories categorize the institutions differently. Cist also included a variety of other institutions but without any names attached to them, making analysis more difficult. See The Cincinnati Directory for the Year 1831, (Cincinnati: Robinson & Fairbank, 1831).
Though institutionally Unitarians may have disappeared gradually from the literary culture of Cincinnati, two Unitarian converts remained synonymous with Western literature. These men were Thomas Shreve and William Davis Gallagher, both involved in many publishing ventures, including that of the Messenger. Neither had grown up in the Unitarian church, but both had Quaker backgrounds. When Shreve noted the scarcity of Quaker congregations in the West he decided to look elsewhere for his spiritual concerns. By the late 1840s, Shreve had turned to another faith that subscribed to liberal religion, the Unitarian Church. Shreve never renounced his Quaker faith, quite the opposite, he affirmed it to his cousin Samuel Janney, saying, “I am and ever shall be in heart, as well as in name, a Quaker.” But at the Unitarian church in Louisville, he could listen to the sermons of Heywood, whom he described as “a pure-hearted Christian, who is in all essentials is a Friend.”

Gallagher, a prolific writer devoted to the Western cause, likely followed in Shreve’s steps for similar reasons. Gallagher and Shreve were close friends, and they collaborated on publications in Cincinnati during the 1830s, most prominently the Cincinnati Mirror. Shreve then moved to Louisville, and after a brief stint in Washington D.C., Gallagher followed. Without the help of these two Quakers turned Unitarians, the editors of the Messenger would have had

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31 Thomas H. Shreve to Samuel Janney, March 20, 1849, RGS/183, Samuel M. Janney Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College (SMJ/FHL). I would like to thank Glenn Crothers for sharing a series of letters between Shreve and his cousin, Janney, written in the mid nineteenth century.
32 Gallagher’s mother was a Quaker, and his close friend William Henry Venable made the claim that Gallagher was indeed a Quaker. However, Gallagher appears in the First Unitarian Church Records at Cincinnati, and he chose to have the funeral services at the Unitarian church when his children died of illnesses while he lived in Cincinnati. After his death, his funeral services were performed in Louisville by John Healy Heywood, the Unitarian minister at First Unitarian, and his burial services by George Thayer, minister of First Unitarian Church in Cincinnati. See William Henry Venable, “Our Western Whittier,” DCVMC/OHS.
to learn many painful lessons on their own, rather than benefit from the seasoned publishing veterans. The two remained friends and corresponded until Shreve’s death in 1853, after battling chronic health issues for the last few years of his life. It was Gallagher who wrote to Shreve of Shreve’s son’s safe arrival in Alexandria, knowing that Shreve heard from his son “very seldom.”

Both of these men called the West their home for large portions of their lives and were active members of many organizations. Gallagher specifically worked as an advocate for a literary identity of the West and a distinctly Western literature. Shreve felt just as strongly about the place of literature. The Messenger was but one of many attempts to fashion a literary identity, though it was perhaps the most widely read on a national level. Literature was recognized as a building block to a stronger region, identity, and ultimately respected place in the nation. Negotiating such a place proved difficult given the implications of sectionalism seen in the increasingly polarized North-South divide of the antebellum period, but Gallagher and Shreve did not want to resign their region to a subservient role within the nation.

Shreve and Gallagher shared another similarity, unsurprising given their religious sentiments. Both men worked avidly for the cause of emancipation, which was not without its dangers in the Ohio Valley. Gallagher recounted,

I think I edited the “Daily Messages” in Cincinnati about the year 1848; but the most I remember about this paper is, that I gave to its editorial columns altogether too Anti-Slavery (not Abolition) a tinge to make it acceptable to business men in Cincinnati who had commercial transactions with businessmen South, and that soon after publishing

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33 Thomas H. Shreve to Samuel Janney, June 6, 1852. SMJ/FHL; Robert Habich in Transcendentalism agrees with my understanding of the relationship between the editors of the Messenger and Gallagher and Shreve. Though the men were not Unitarian by birth, they clearly cultivated close friendships and shared similar belief systems. Gallagher and Shreve were both strong supporters of the Messenger.

34 See Watts, An American Colony, specifically Chapter Eight. Also, see Drew Gilpin Faust, The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) and Kerber, Federalists in Dissent.
the Address of the first National Constitution of the Anti-Slavery party of the United States, (which even the Cincinnati Gazette refused to publish,) the paper was almost kicked out of the stores on the river tier of Squares, and I made up my mind that I must leave the paper very soon, or the time would not be long before it would leave me (and my wife and babies) without anything to set. So I left it, and went back into the Gazette. 35

Gallagher clearly anticipated danger, even in the state of Ohio where slavery was illegal, and not without reason. In Illinois, also a free state, more than a decade earlier, in 1837, Elijah P. Lovejoy was murdered for the abolitionist views printed in his paper. Gallagher was able to write pieces that expressed vehement antislavery views, but he could not cross the line demanding immediate emancipation. Shreve, however, could. He also wrote pieces for well-circulating publications, specifically the Louisville Journal. What allowed Shreve to express more radical views was the fact that Shreve’s name never was attached to his editorials. To his cousin he voiced his true feelings, writing, “My heart, like thine, is deeply and earnestly interested in the cause of human freedom, and I have had the honor to be denounced as a rank abolitionist in this neighborhood frequently. I glory in the charge.”36 Shreve and Gallagher likely read the antislavery pieces in the Messenger with satisfaction. Western Unitarians and their friends espoused anti-slavery ideas, and though they did not work together in an organized group to bring about the institution’s end, they did share ideas and wrote pieces supporting their stances on the evils of slavery.

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The WLICPT, Semi Colon Club, and Female Provident Society marked an important early phase of development of institution building. All three were groups that had some semblance of permanence. Though the members of the group did not know it, these groups were fated for

35 Gallagher to Venable, August 13, 1881. DCVMC/OHS.
36 Thomas H. Shreve to Samuel Janney, March 20, 1849. SMJ/FHL.
short-lived existences, a few decades or less. However, they did have a lasting impact on other ventures and influenced the course other institutional projects took. Financial institutions such as the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company and the Cincinnati Water Works, as well as betterment institutions including the Cincinnati Lyceum and the Cincinnati Relief Union marked the next step in the process of institution building. However, though these institutions had Unitarian founding influences, except in the case of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company, Unitarians did not remain involved in the Western institutions they helped found. There existed, however, a noticeable exception to this idea, educational pursuits, some rooted very early in the region’s settlement. Education was broadly defined. Some organizations were to educate others about the region and its history. Others were for the education of children, both male and female, in a public school system. Even anti-slavery and abolitionist groups of which Unitarians were part espoused education of slaves and former slaves as a goal of their societies. Education clearly was the key to understanding the Unitarian mind of the nineteenth century.

The Unitarian men and women who stayed in the West helped found institutions to preserve the history and culture of the region. From the region’s earliest days, its residents began to write the history of the region and its people. In Louisville, Mann Butler, an early member of the Unitarian church, became famous for his historical writings about the region, especially of Louisville and Kentucky. However, the impulse to document the region’s history was not confined to individual efforts. In Ohio, the men founded the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio in 1831, the same year as the founding of the Virginia Historical Society, and in 1844 the Cincinnati Historical Society was formed. These two societies shared

37 Alfred Pirtle, “A Sketch of the Unitarian Church,” 42. AP/FHS; In 1834, Butler published A History of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, an early example of documenting Kentucky’s history.
the purpose of preserving the history of the West, thus promoting and creating a consciously formed facet of the Western identity. The two societies later merged and the new society, which retained the name the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, was headquartered in Cincinnati, at the time the cultural capital of the West. The purpose of the society was to “research in every department of local history; the collection, preservation, and diffusion of whatever may relate to the History, Biography, Literature, Philosophy, and Antiquities of America – more especially of the State of Ohio, of the West, and of the United States.”

Unitarians involved in the organization’s founding included James Perkins and John Foote. In fact, of the six officers of the Cincinnati Historical Society founded in 1844, half were Unitarians. William David Gallagher was also a founding member of the group, and delivered its annual address as its president in 1850. The address, titled *Facts and Conditions of Progress in the North-West* clearly meant to establish the West as an autonomous and important region within the young United States. Gallagher thought of himself as Western, despite his Philadelphian birth, and others also dedicated themselves to this new mindset, and their new “city on a hill.”

The Filson Club, an organization similar to the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, was founded in Kentucky in the 1884. However, given that its founding took place following the Civil War, the organization encountered some challenges unknown to the Ohio organization’s founding – namely how to create a forum through which former Confederates and Union supporters could interact on a civil level. Fortunately, the Filson Club had a useful model in the literary societies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of its early members had even been part of these groups in their younger years. The Filson Club

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continued the tradition of the literary society in allowing peoples of differing opinions to come together in a common cultural space.

Many Louisville Unitarian families were Union supporters during the Civil War. Kentucky did not formally secede from the Union, but it did legally allow slavery, putting it in a somewhat precarious situation during and after the war. The laws passed during the Reconstruction period punished Kentucky as if it had seceded, at least in the minds of many of its residents, and consequently following the war Louisville saw a profound set of changes. Louisville residents began to orient themselves South, as the “gateway to the South,” rather than as part of the West as they had adamantly defended during the antebellum period. The politics of the city witnessed a similar shift, following the lead of other Southern states by becoming strongly Democratic. Former slaveholders and Confederate sympathizers dominated the city’s leadership, including a chain of unbroken Democratic mayors from 1863-1896. The shift to a Democratic mayor following the Emancipation Proclamation is especially interesting given that prior to 1863, mayors were all strong Union supporters and members of the Whig, Know-Nothing, or Union Parties beginning in the mid-1830s.

However, the Union sympathizers did not leave Louisville or simply disappear from socially prominent positions. Instead, like the Federalists before them, Unionists retreated into cultural institutions, such as the Filson Club. This is not to say that Confederate sympathizers were not active in the city’s cultural formation and perpetuation – the founders of the Filson Club were equally divided along the lines of Northern and Southern sympathies – but in these venues Unionists and Republicans found a place that they could carve out for themselves in the midst of a changing culture in Kentucky. Gallagher was perhaps unique in that he was also a member of the Filson Club. Though not a charter member, his membership began just a year after it’s founding, in 1885.
Though the organizations are no longer at their original locations, both still exist. The Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio went through many name changes, and no longer has an active club associated with it that meets to discuss items or ideas of interest. Instead, the organization now exists only through the Cincinnati Historical Society Library at the Cincinnati Museum Center. The Filson Club, now the Filson Historical Society, has fared better, in that it still sponsors events and lectures that are in line with the intentions of its founders. Like the Cincinnati counterpart, the Filson Historical Society also includes a library, and together the two libraries publish a large regional journal dedicated to the history of the Ohio Valley, aptly named, *Ohio Valley History*. ⁴⁰

Educational institutions, both the public school system and colleges and universities, bore the strongest mark of the displaced citizenry. From their earliest days in the West, Unitarians were involved with their development and upkeep. In the late 1830s, John Vaughn, a member of the Cincinnati congregation, served as superintendent of the Sabbath School. ⁴¹ Clarke was asked to be the Agent for the Louisville city schools in 1839. He relayed the duties as “to oversee the schools, and keep accounts of the numbers of scholars...and report to the city council.” Additionally, Clarke expected it would “do good to the church indirectly” so accepting the offer would benefit more than himself. ⁴² Clarke’s intended, Anna Huidekoper, responded favorably to such an offer, writing, “I am glad that you have become engaged in the schools in your city. It can hardly fail to be of service to your church besides being in itself an interesting

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⁴¹ Clarke to Anna Huidekoper, March 19, 1839. JFC/MHS.
⁴² Clarke to Anna Huidekoper, May 17, 1839. JFC/MHS.
occupation – I don’t see but that you find plenty to do in Louisville – if you leave, it will not be for want of works.”

Education was something that many people from all backgrounds recognized a need for in the West. As early as 1831, a prominent physician, Dr. Charles Caldwell most noted for his interest in phrenology, lamented that if the quality of Western education did not improve, especially higher education, that “all Western pupils of generous ambition, and who can command the means, will repair to the eastern schools. Western teaching will become a mockery.”

In Cincinnati, Unitarian congregation members Nathan Guilford stood at the forefront of the movement to create a public school system. In Louisville, Mann Butler established the first public school, and Unitarian minister John Healy Heywood was integral in the foundation of the public high schools, for both boys and girls. Butler also served as president of Louisville College, later the University of Louisville. Similarly, in St. Louis, William Greenleaf Eliot was one of the driving forces behind a system of public education for the city’s children.

The public school boards of both Cincinnati and Louisville featured Unitarians for the better part of the nineteenth century. Many school board presidents and superintendents were Unitarians. Heywood was especially active on the Louisville public school board, and a series of prominent Cincinnati residents served on the city’s school board. Unitarians insisted on educational access for boys and girls, as well as former slaves and the children of immigrants. This was keeping in line with the Unitarian emphasis on the equality of all souls, regardless of sex or place in society. The liberal attitudes toward spirituality and religion were carried into

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43 Anna Huidekoper to Clarke, June 7, 1839. JFC/MHS; Alfred Pirtle referred to Clarke as “a factor in the educational circles in the city.” See Alfred Pirtle, “A Sketch of the Unitarian Church,” 49. AP/FHS.
44 Charles Caldwell to Lunsford P. Yandell, January 2, 1831. YF/FHS.
their beliefs about education.45 Though the debate about bilingual education was especially contentious in Ohio, members of the WLICPT worked for its realization and preservation for the sake of the dozens of German immigrants who settled in the Ohio Valley region, especially its river towns.

One way to see the Unitarian influence on education in the Ohio Valley is to look at the foundations of some the regions major institutions of higher education. Cincinnati College, the College of Medicine, College of Law, and College of Dentistry in Cincinnati (later combined into the University of Cincinnati, except the College of Dentistry which ceased to exist in the 1920s), the College of Law, College of Pharmacy, and University of Louisville (the law school has been absorbed by the University of Louisville, but the College of Pharmacy moved to Lexington and became part of the University of Kentucky), and Washington University in St. Louis all had founders with strong Unitarian faiths.46 For these institutions, the founders insisted on a non‐sectarian religious orientation to facilitate a higher level of education. This was especially true for Washington University, whose name was initially conceived as Eliot Seminary, a thought that greatly vexed the St. Louis Unitarian minister, William Greenleaf Eliot. The non‐sectarian foundation enabled a liberal understanding of religion and freed the institutions from the dangers and confines of orthodoxy.

The College of Law in Cincinnati was co‐founded by Timothy Walker, a Harvard graduate, and a man described by Ephraim Peabody as “quite a Unitarian.”47 Additionally Walker edited and contributed to a series of publications, primarily those concerned with the law. Other Unitarians figured prominently in the legal profession in Cincinnati, including the

45 See Wright, Beginnings of Unitarianism, for more about Unitarian theology and its development.
46 See “To those concerned,” ED/FHS. Diehl’s father was active in the founding of the Louisville College of Pharmacy in 1870 (in his Encyclopedia of Louisville, John Kleber goes so far as to write that he was the only founder) and its activities until his death.
47 Peabody to H. Huidekoper, August 22, 1831. EP/AHTL.
brother of Christopher Cranch, Edward. This concentration of Unitarians in education institutions and professional life, including the organizations that began to pop up through the nineteenth century, also perpetuated the place of Unitarians in the landscape of the West. Many continued the prominence their families had known in the East, and such prominence allowed them to continue to be active in their city’s and region’s cultural development. Activity meant an indelible mark of Unitarian thought on the cultural institutions of the West.

Unitarians also kept true to their understanding of dissemination of information through publication as essential to community building. As with Timothy Walker, others involved in establishing various educational institutions in the Ohio Valley also contributed, edited, or published journals related to their professional interests. One of the Louisville College of Pharmacy’s founders, Conrad Lewis Diehl, a Unitarian, wrote reports on the “Progress of Pharmacy” until only a few years before his death in 1917. These reports were published in the journals of the American Pharmaceutical Association.48

The small Unitarian presence in the West also worked to shape one of the nation’s most influential persons of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, William Howard Taft. The Taft family was a prominent one in Cincinnati. William’s father, Alphonso Taft, was one of the wave of New England migrants in the 1830s who came to the Ohio Valley to practice law. Alphonso was a Unitarian during his life and raised his children in the church. William, unlike his siblings, continued to follow his father’s religion in adulthood. Alphonso Taft served as the first president of the Cincinnati Bar Association. He also served as Ulysses S. Grant’s Attorney General and Secretary of War. He was active in the legal scene in Cincinnati, especially the educational standards and professionalization of the field. To this end, in addition to working to

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48 “To those concerned,” ED/FHS.
establish and then chair the Cincinnati Bar Association, Taft was also a trustee of Cincinnati College.

Even in death, Unitarians and non-Unitarians found a way to inhabit the same space. The burials of prominent residents of Cincinnati and Louisville were the final engagement with polite society. Both cities were home to large, garden-style cemeteries, built in the late 1830s. These cemeteries were modeled after Mt. Auburn Cemetery, located just outside of Boston, and founded in part by Unitarians. The cemeteries, Mt. Auburn, as well as Spring Grove in Cincinnati and Cave Hill in Louisville, were conceived as burial grounds for all people and not affiliated with any single religious denomination. Of the influential men and women who occupied civic spaces and offices in Cincinnati and Louisville during the nineteenth century, many were buried at Spring Grove or Cave Hill.

Conclusion

Unitarians traveled west in the early nineteenth century filled with hope and optimism about the fate of society and the American people. They had models to build upon from their upbringings to interact in polite society, models meant to negotiate the fall and subsequent displacement of Federalism and its supporters. Though Federalism disappeared as a political force in the first decades of the nineteenth century, its ideological base continued to appeal to a significant portion of the population, concentrated in New England. The ideology lived on in the form of publications and institution building in the northeast, and from this experience Unitarians shaped their new reality in the West.

The West neither conformed to the preconceived notions of the young idealists from the East nor forced the men and women to completely alter their expectations for their new region. Instead the experience of the West both shaped its residents and its residents left indelible marks on the form society would take. The Eastern migrants published magazines like the Western Messenger to create forums of polite exchange that would engage their fellow Westerners.

When published forums proved transient and inadequate, the Unitarians turned their energies toward voluntary associations. Most specifically, Unitarians became active in benevolent organizations and institution building, though they also enjoyed social clubs, like the Semi Colon Club, meant to reinforce a sense of shared community with other Western residents.
These groups contributed to the worldview of the Westerners by allowing them to understand their new society and how to navigate its waters.

Ultimately the West as a region in the mid-nineteenth century came about by the articulation of its prominent “men of letters” by determining what it was not. Understanding their new region was important for many reasons. A concrete sense of what their community was reflected a better understanding of themselves and their place within that community. Additionally, understanding the West meant that the Eastern migrants made an impact on the direction the region took. Since many assumed the West would be the region that the country would look to in coming years, this represented no small feat. Clarke wrote, “I really think that the genuine Kentuckian is the model of what our national character will one day be. He has the enterprise, coolness, sagacity of the north, and the warmth, frankness and generosity of the South.” Clarke noted an amalgam of the best traits of the various American regions, but he also implied that in their combination they created something new and exciting. The West was new, and it was different, but not for the reasons that its early founders originally thought or suggested. Instead, the West deserved an identity all its own for precisely what it could be defined against. While the Northeast retained the identity grounded in the exploits of its early Puritanical settlers and nurtured its emerging capitalist preeminence, the West lacked such a defined religious tradition, and the region clearly could not compete with the East for its economic advantage, though it would try. This is not to say that the West was a stranger to engagement with such identifying qualities, but rather that they took shape much differently, in accordance with the difference in prevailing ideology at the time of settlement. While the migrants to New England adhered to Puritan theology almost uniformly, the migrants to the West encountered a religious battleground. No religion emerged preeminent, every

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1 Clarke to Anna Huidekoper, May 19, 1838. JFC/MHS.
denomination staked their claim, and sunk in their teeth. While Easterners, with their easy access to resources – both of labor and natural geography – set up networks of economic change that transformed the economic landscape of their region, and the country as a whole, during the antebellum period, Westerners looked East for inspiration but also a model of what not to do.

Similarly, the West was not South. Though this may seem a foregone conclusion, in the late eighteenth century, a political alliance seemed on the cusp of fruition between the South and fledgling West. The proximity of Western lands to the South, and the population base, especially hailing from Kentucky and Virginia, worked in favor of an ideological and political alliance between the regions. Through the first part of the nineteenth century, the more egalitarian ideological prevalence of Jeffersonian ideals in the South appealed to many Westerners, who lived in a region of frontier. However, the insistence of Southerners on the persistence of the institution of slavery, worked against such an alliance, and ultimately led to the disintegration of any lingering latent hopes of such. Additionally, the lack of population centers led Southerners to articulate ideas about their region through different means. Rather than engage in literary ventures and institution building, Southern elite intellectuals primarily engaged only with each other through personal correspondence, making a widespread regional understanding on intellectual terms virtually impossible.\(^2\) In contrast, Westerners engaged in forums that allowed for more people to give input about the fate of the region. In an atmosphere of political meanderings and religious battles, the intellectual elites and everyday settlers of the West alike, forged an identity for their region.

Defining the West by what it was not, however, does not do justice to the complexity of the emerging regional identity or regional consciousness. Andrew Cayton argues, “Regional

\(^2\) Faust, *A Sacred Circle.*
identity – the creation of an imagined community – requires a strong sense of isolation. And the Midwest is not, strictly speaking, isolated. It is in the middle.”

However, no region of the United States has ever functioned in isolation, and the Midwest was not always the middle. The editors of the *Messenger* certainly did not view their homes as happening to be located in the middle of a country with no distinct qualities – no, these men knew that where they lived had something unique to offer to the young country, that something simply had to be articulated and shared.

Though the legacy of the West has not been the pivotal one that the Unitarian ministers believed it would be, today’s Midwest is a region impacted by its history. The region’s culture has lost much of the hopefulness of its early residents, and few believe today that the fate of the United States lies with the region. While closely connected to the East and South, the Midwest today is not simply a replication of either or an amalgam of the two. The utopian model the Unitarians hoped would come to fruition for their new region did not materialize, but much of the infrastructure of the civic structure of Cincinnati and Louisville still exist.

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