

# Introduction

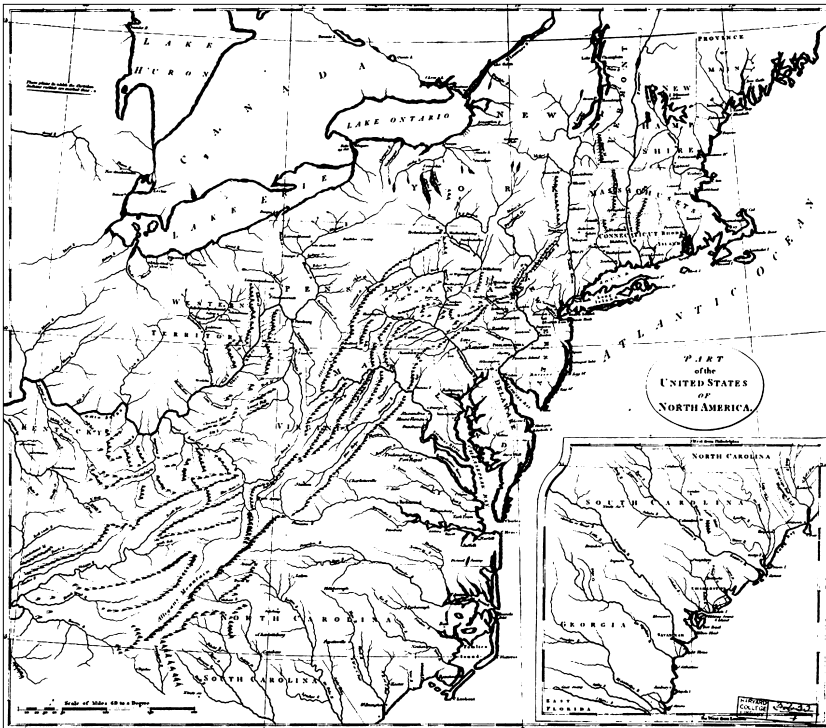
Travelers' accounts of early America depict a dynamic, ethnically diverse society shaped by an incessant mobility. Whether eager to trade goods or to share news from a nearby town, the traveler served as an information conduit. In a time when travel twenty to fifty miles from home brought contact with distinct differences, the traveler remarked upon architecture, plants, foods, and customs that went otherwise unnoted by the local populations. With senses heightened and habits disturbed, the traveler provided a keen, eyewitness view of early American society and recorded his or her findings in great detail and often with lively characterizations. For both men and women, travel offered opportunity for adventure and advancement. Families relocated with great dreams for their future, and for single, unmarried travelers, the new towns of the West promised new legacies. Migration signaled the possibility of a better life as courageous immigrants and brave pioneers headed into the wilderness and onto the frontier with ax and gun, on horse and in covered wagon. From such images, a powerful mythology developed of the inspired traveler settling the western frontier. And while Plymouth Plantation and the Oregon Trail remain important to our cultural history, there is another story to tell, another version of migration and travel in early America. Counter to the developing mythos of the pioneer who embraced the unknown and sought the uninhabited, the genteel female traveler often faced the frontier with a certain ambivalence. For this traveler, the benefits of migration did not

## 2 Introduction

initially outweigh the losses, and departing from familiar social networks—family, friends, church, and community—was cause more for anxiety than for celebration. As a result, the woman's narrative honestly conveys the difficulty of exchanging what was known and comfortable for what was unknown and unfamiliar, and thus portrays travel in all its frustrating glory. Notable for the accomplishments they record and the hardships they enumerate, women marshaled their resources and exerted admirable strength. With particular attention paid to how people interacted and how regions differed, women's travel narratives are a valuable source for understanding the process by which cultural values were transferred and transformed across the new nation. Determined and adventurous, women played a key role in this culture building and were quite simply integral to the settling of early America and the New Republic.

Women's travel narratives illustrate a range of responses from conventional genteel protests over rustic conditions to a genuine engagement and curiosity about their surroundings. The women who traveled west seeking new homes pragmatically scrutinized the frontier landscape, and the women who embarked on more leisurely journeys critically evaluated the social landscape. In each case, travel was a transformative experience for both travelers and the local inhabitants with whom they came in contact. From these encounters, we learn of gender and class distinctions and witness early American culture defined primarily by change and interaction rather than by a set of static ideologies. This dynamic quality underlay each journey as women reacted to these exchanges and negotiated new terrain. Accordingly, I have organized the following discussion to include women's commentary on the physical and the social aspects of travel and to address their concerns for civility and decorum.

This study covers the years from 1700 to 1830, a period framed by travel on horseback and travel by stage, with journeys north and south along the Atlantic seaboard and west onto the Ohio frontier. From the approximately fifty extant women's travel narratives from this period, published and in manuscript, this study closely examines more than twenty-five journals representing varied geographical and social perspectives.<sup>1</sup> These include the well-known 1704 journey of Sarah Kemble Knight<sup>2</sup> from Boston to New York and the lesser-known accounts of Sarah Beavis's 1779 journey to Ohio via Kentucky; Elizabeth House Trist's 1783–84 jour-



OVERVIEW MAP OF EARLY AMERICA. John Stockdale's 1798 map of the newly formed United States makes clear the vast spaces and formidable mountainous barriers that women faced as they traveled west onto the Ohio Frontier. John Stockdale, *Part of the United States of North America* (London: J. Stockdale, ca. 1798). Harvard College Library, Map Coll. (Pusey), MAP-IC, G3700 1798.S7.

ney from Philadelphia to Natchez;<sup>3</sup> Mary Coburn Dewees' 1788 journey from Philadelphia to Lexington in Kentucky;<sup>4</sup> Susan Edwards Johnson's 1801–2 journey from New Haven, Connecticut, to Fayetteville, North Carolina;<sup>5</sup> Margaret Van Horn Dwight's 1810 journey from New Haven to Warren, Ohio;<sup>6</sup> Eliza Williams Bridgham's 1818 travels through New England and New York; and Elizabeth Gilpin's 1830 round-trip journey from Wilmington, Delaware, to Johnstown, New York. By collecting these narratives into one study and drawing on primary materials so extensively, I am making them more accessible to students, scholars, and the general public. The detailed, energetic records of these early American women may surprise readers unfamiliar with this literary and cultural period. Scholars more familiar with the field will have a chance to consider a

## 4 Introduction

greater sample of women's travel narratives. In each case, the traveler's tale is set within a larger, more complicated context, one that bridges the explorer's promotion of America and the pioneer's appropriation of the West. In these narratives, readers will find bravado mixed with hesitation, as these women journeyed forth—for business, relocation, and pleasure—and told compelling stories about fording rivers, riding across mountains, facing hunger, encountering Native Americans, sleeping in taverns, and confronting slavery. I examine these narratives from a New Historicist perspective that considers gender, class, ethnicity, and social and political events, while also appreciating them as historical records, personal narratives, and literary texts that elucidate the transference of custom and the construction of gender in early America.

Despite the hundred-year gap between the time of composition and the date of publication for many of these narratives—Knight written in 1704 and published in 1825; Trist written in 1783–84 and published in 1990; Dwight written in 1810 and published in 1912—keeping a travel journal was itself significant. For as women took on the chronicler's role, they challenged gender assumptions and provided role models. Had they been published for a contemporary audience, moreover, these narratives would have challenged some authors' fictional portraits of women as either passive figures or as overtly civilizing agents. Instead, these women diarists and letter writers actively confronted new situations and negotiated unfamiliar social scenarios. The delay in publication may be explained by a changing appreciation of the travel narrative for its historical value and subsequent recovery efforts. Theodore Dwight's 1825 publication of Sarah Kemble Knight's 1704 journal resulted from his desire to celebrate an "American" literature and to remind the public that "documents, even as unpretending as the following, may possess a real value, if they contain facts which will be hereafter sought for to illustrate interesting periods in our history" (qtd. in Bush, 85). Moreover, only journals of renowned figures or commissioned reports would have been printed in these women's own time. Noting these gaps between writing and publication does not diminish the value of women's texts, but marks a change in viewing the historical record, with a more recent interest in reading a more inclusive, textured, and diverse account of early America. As these narratives bear out, a woman's observations held merit, no matter the delays in publication or the limitations of her audience.

That women traveled at all is significant, for travelers were largely a male contingent in early America, as women were more closely bound to the domestic arena, raising children and managing households. From 1750 to 1800, life expectancy ranged from thirty-four to thirty-eight years, as Stephane Elise Booth explains, so that during “twenty years of married life, the number of pregnancies a woman could expect ran into double digits” (7). Two-year birth cycles did provide a few windows for travel. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich reports that pregnant women who did travel were most likely to do so during the second trimester, when it was considered safest, and that by far the most excursions were taken during an “interim” period between the tenth and fifteenth month after birth. Ulrich speculates on the potential effects of these “weaning journeys” on both mother and infant, considering them “abrupt and traumatic” or “simply the ritual termination of an already waning stage” (*Good Wives*, 140–43). In many instances, weaning journeys provided women an important chance to renew connections with relatives and friends. Though travel while pregnant may have not have been comfortable, it was possible, as Nathalie Sumter, who was seven months pregnant with her third child, explained to her friend Mrs. Heron Hooper on July 22, 1809: “12 miles from Fredericksburgh. I never was so large with my other children the day before lying in as I am now, & the jolting of the carriage has given me pains which are very troublesome. . . . I think that when I get to Washington I will get myself Bled as a precaution, my size really alarms me” (34–35). Despite her fears, Sumter arrived safely, and her pregnancy was without complications. However infrequent or difficult, travel provided a worthy challenge for women, and a woman’s narrative, especially one as detailed as Sumter’s, brings a distinctive perspective to travel in early America. Sumter’s account lends support to what William C. Spengemann identifies as a key attribute of the eighteenth-century travel narrative: it provided “Americans the meaning of their unique historical situation” (38–39). Women thus took up this role of historian as they reported on town or tavern, filling pages about how they found them alternately entertaining and wanting.

In seeking extant women’s travel narratives, moreover, one finds a scenario that is the exact opposite of Reuben Gold Thwaites’s dilemma in his 1966 preface to volume 1 of his thirty-two-volume *Early Western Travels, 1748–1846*: “In planning for this series of reprints of *Early Western Travels*,

## 6 Introduction

we were confronted by an embarrassment of riches. To reissue all of the many excellent works of travel originally published during the formative period of Western settlement, would obviously be impossible. A selection had therefore to be made, both as to period and material" (11). More frequently, one identifies with Mary M. Crawford, who notes in her 1944 preface to "Mrs. Lydia B. Bacon's Journal, 1811-1812," "Practically all of the contemporary accounts of travel between the eastern seaboard and the West in the early nineteenth century were written by men. For this reason, it is interesting to find letters and a journal written by a woman at that time" (367).<sup>7</sup> As Crawford acknowledges, women's travel narratives offer a valuable perspective. Historians and scholars have done a great service by recovering these accounts. For doing so allows gender roles perpetuated by a literary canon once dominated by male authors to be reconsidered. Along these lines, Sharon M. Harris addresses issues of canon development and gender: "Those of us today who teach an expanded canon are familiar with the numerous and varied ways in which gender roles were inscribed in early America." Harris then underscores the importance of including early American women's writings: "But we cannot fully understand the *influence* of these structures without the inclusion of a variety of women's writings; only then will we begin to understand how women also abetted or challenged these gender inscriptions. Without women's opinions, we have only a partial picture of early America and, more dangerously, we run the risk of perpetuating our new but still partial picture as a universal one" ("Early," 225). Following this sentiment, by recovering and studying the woman's travel narratives, we see more clearly that early America was explored and settled by women, as well as by men, and that women's travel narratives warrant recognition for how they uniquely document the frontier experience and complete the historical record.

*Journeying to America: Motives and Perceptions*

While travel itself has long been equated with opportunity, travel to the New World promised wealth and assured heroism, as adventurers conquered nature and subdued native peoples. In 1616, for example, Capt. John Smith enticed his audience in *A Description of New England* with the

possibilities of “crossing the sweet air from isle to isle, over the silent streams of a calm sea, wherein the most curious may find pleasure, profit, and content.” In 1637, Thomas Morton described the bounties of New England in *New English Canaan* as “so many goodly groves of trees, dainty fine round rising hillocks, delicate fair large plains, sweet crystal fountains, and clear running streams that twine in fine meanders through the meads, making a sweet a murmuring noise.” By such accounts, the New World was embellished as a fertile land, unspoiled and pure, and available for acquisition and ready for settlement. These promotional tracts, often written as official reports, became a key voice for expressing curiosity with new lands. When Meriwether Lewis explored the Missouri River on June 8, 1805, he wrote elegantly of the surrounding landscape, “a rich, fertile, and one of the most beautifully picturesque countries that I ever beheld, through the wide expanse of which innumerable herds of living animals are seen, its borders garnished with one continued garden of roses, while its lofty and open forests are the habitation of myriads of the feathered tribes who salute the air of the passing traveler with their wild and simple yet sweet and cheerful melody” (170). For the explorer, such accounts, however exaggerated or embellished, sustained interest and encouraged funding. From the military records of Zebulon Pike, who charted the Mississippi River, Louisiana, and New Spain (1805–7), we learn about advantageous fort locations, diverse tribal populations, indigenous food sources, and other matters necessary for expansion and dominance. On October 5, 1805, after passing the Crow River, he recorded: “Had hard water and ripples all day; passed by some old Sioux encampments, all fortified. . . . At this place a hard battle was fought between the Sioux and the Sauteurs in the year 1800: killed one goose; distance advanced, eleven miles” (61). With these exploratory and military objectives, travelers sought valuable resources, new trade routes, and secure military posts. Largely commissioned reports, these accounts presented a yet unsettled frontier awaiting adventure.

Sharing a common intent to transform the frontier, men and women recorded their journeys with confidence inspired by discovery. Whereas men might have been motivated by dreams of glory, women often imagined the social complexities of settlement. In this regard, Annette Kolodny compares the woman’s urge to cultivate the landscape with the man’s

## 8 Introduction

desire to conquer it, so that “women claimed the frontiers as a potential sanctuary for an idealized domesticity” (*Land Before*, xiii). Karen R. Lawrence agrees: “Women writers of travel have tended to mistrust the rhetoric of mastery, conquest, and quest” (20). Brigitte Georgi-Findlay elaborates by addressing connections between women and travel writing: “Within the discursive frameworks of westward expansion, women were not only objects of representation and control but also participants in the exercise of control” (17). As women sought their own relationship to the frontier, therefore, they too altered their surroundings, both physically and socially. Less invested in aggrandizing their exploits than many of their male counterparts, women were nonetheless resolute and adventurous. Women did not necessarily rehearse exploration narratives bent on acquisition; instead they presented more nuanced reactions to the frontier by remarking on both the physical world and the intricacies of social interaction with an eye for custom and gender.

By contrast to travel narratives as empire-building texts, travelers interested in more pacific, scientific findings wrote about travel from a naturalist perspective largely inspired by Carl Linné’s *The System of Nature* (1755). Mary Louise Pratt notes that the Linnaean system significantly changed travel and travel writing with its “descriptive system designed to classify all the plants on the earth, known and unknown, according to the characteristics of their reproductive parts” (24). Consequently, travel writing began to include more extensive natural descriptions. From the pen of Harvard educated botanist François André Michaux, for example, we read of medicinal herbs, beautiful trees, and fertile soil, as on July 4, 1802, just outside of Greensburgh, Pennsylvania: “I had an opportunity of remarking several parts of the woods exclusively composed of white oak, or *quercus alba*, the foliage of which being a lightish green, formed a beautiful contrast with the trees of a deeper colour. . . . The soil of the environs is fertile; the inhabitants, who are of German origin, cultivate wheat, rye, and oats with great success” (153). Throughout his *Travels to the West of the Alleghany Mountains . . . 1801–1803* (1805), Michaux provides similarly precise descriptions, often depicting a lush landscape, with an occasional mention of other travelers and towns. This narrative style exemplifies Pratt’s observation that “travel narratives of all kinds began to develop leisurely pauses filled with gentlemanly ‘naturalizing’” that “could

form the main storyline of an entire account” (27–28). Combining description and data represented a deliberate shift toward a more didactic text, as Joyce E. Chaplin explains: “The impetus to make travel narratives into scientific writings composed in descriptive language was a reaction against earlier accounts that were quite the opposite” (72). Whereas earlier accounts insisted that travel be part of a “pilgrimage or crusade” to avoid being “unworthy” or merely an “aimless secularity,” as Chaplin elaborates, New World explorers set tangible, material goals and provided specific, empirical descriptions.

In addition to the explorer and naturalist, the leisured and migrating traveler alike recorded findings and provided information on the developing social and civic infrastructures as they passed through towns and cities, traveling on regular postal and trade routes along the eastern seaboard. Generally less proprietary, these travelers often expressed curiosity and delight as they described new locales, frequently combining description with advice to show how the travel narrative can both entertain and instruct, a valued eighteenth-century attribute. Scottish traveler Janet Schaw, for one, found travel quite stimulating, as on March 22, 1775, when she visited her brother in North Carolina: “I think I have read all the descriptions that have been published of America, yet meet every moment with something I never read or heard of” (151). On June 6, 1744, Dr. Alexander Hamilton recorded this entry about Philadelphia: “Att my entering the city, I observed the regularity of the streets. . . . The State House, Assembly House, the great church in Second street, and Whitefield’s church are good buildings” (189). By describing the “regularity of the streets” and the “good buildings,” Hamilton gives Philadelphia an ordered, well-mannered mien. Following the Treaty of Paris (1783) and the Louisiana Purchase (1803), travelers ventured west in increasing numbers and evaluated their surroundings with an eye for development. On January 9, 1784, Elizabeth House Trist assessed Pittsburgh’s locale: “The land is exceeding rich and abounds with an abundance of maple trees, from which they make quantities of sugar. . . . There are several wild vegetables that I wou’d give the preference to those that are cultivated: Wild Asparagus, Indian hemp, shepherd sprouts, lambs quarters, &cc—besides great abundance of Ginsang, Gentian and many other aromatick” (212).<sup>8</sup> Similar to writers of earlier exploration literature filled

## 10 Introduction

with botanical descriptions, Trist indicates her increased appreciation for and familiarity with indigenous plants. As both settler and explorer, Trist evaluates the landscape for its agricultural promise and social possibilities, as when she describes standing on Grants Hill overlooking Pittsburgh and notes that “if the country which is mountainous was cleared, it would be beyond description beautiful . . . and, was there good Society, I should be contented to end my days in the Western country” (213). In its present state, Pittsburgh lacked a civic core, what Trist calls “Society,” and so she qualifies her approval and notes her desire for social engagement. For Elizabeth Gilpin, a visit to New York drew contrasts to Philadelphia, as on September 22, 1830: “I was very much struck with noise and bustle and business like air of the streets, very different from the quietude and stillness of Philadelphia, and it appears to me much more like an European city than any place I have seen in America” (6).<sup>9</sup> Travelers such as Hamilton, Trist, and Gilpin thus exemplify again and again what Joyce E. Chaplin identifies as “fixed portraits,” wherein the travel narrative provides “description of character and social customs” (77). In noting regional differences and offering advice, travelers engaged in a type of cultural commerce by suggesting “improvements” and pronouncing judgments as they recorded their observations of early America.

Considering this range of a traveler’s motives—from the overtly imperialistic to the empathic observer—women offered yet another perspective, one that often fostered community and guided social discourse. In their role as cultural purveyors and shapers, women assessed and evaluated while modeling appropriate behaviors. So guided, they could endure rustic conditions and limited social contact. Charged with this moral imperative, women’s confident proclamations mixed with moments of discomfort and uncertainty, reactions that complicated notions of a unified, orchestrated westward movement. For though economic possibility spurred them as it had previous generations who crossed the Atlantic, Elizabeth House Trist, Sarah Beavis, Margaret Van Horn Dwight, and Elizabeth Van Horne, among others, hesitated before the open spaces and sparsely populated landscape to question just how they would adapt to their new surroundings. Travel west of the Ohio River proved especially challenging, as women struggled against the particularly fluid boundaries between settlement and frontier. Annette Kolodny has in fact called for a

reformulation of the term “frontier” to mean a borderlands, “that liminal landscape of changing meanings on which distinct human cultures first encounter one another’s ‘otherness’ and appropriate, accommodate, or domesticate it through language” (“Letting Go,” 9). For many travelers, this contact was initially disorienting, and they used the travel narrative to process their reactions in narratives entitled “A Journal of a Trip” or “Travel Diary,” wherein they wrote as much about their feelings of displacement as their wonder for the landscape and the natural beauty of mountains and valleys. Women thus viewed the western territories with an idealism tempered by pragmatism. Margaret Van Horn Dwight, for one, was clearly unimpressed when she surmised halfway along her journey, “We have concluded the reason so few are willing to return from the Western country, is not that the country is so good, but because the journey is so bad” (36–37).<sup>10</sup> Travelers were often not fully prepared for the physical hardships, let alone the social deprivation, yet as the woman’s travel narrative makes clear, perseverance and determination prevailed.

Women’s accounts, in turn, often reflect an anxious impatience for familiarity. Without the conventional layout of a town, distinctions blurred. There could be no “good part of town” or “best room” without the civic structure to reinforce hierarchy. The woman’s journal, in this respect, countered assumptions that migration guaranteed a movement toward a better life. Stephane Elise Booth addresses similar concerns and finds that “many women who came to the Ohio frontier complained of the isolation and the breakdown of the social network that had given them needed support in their previous situations” (188). Rather than representing an idealized freedom, therefore, relocation meant social restriction and intensified domestic labor. Instead of immediately embracing the frontier for its anticipated rewards, these women resisted the conditions that seemed to threaten their identity. Fondness for the wilds of the West developed gradually. For these earlier travelers, it was often not their first impulse nor inclination to abandon their urban, genteel preferences. To their credit, women’s travel narratives honestly express conflicted responses of both the presumed colonizer and the reluctant pioneer. Desire to recreate a familiar world thus clashed with the realities of a wholly new social and physical landscape.

## 12 Introduction

Whether venturing north and south along the eastern seaboard or westward into the frontier, women imagined new identities within different social orders. Elizabeth Bohls, in fact, finds that travel for women can be “destabilizing in ways that generate both anxiety and, at times, exhilaration. Geographic displacement seems to loosen the grip of familiar cultural orderings just enough to let them glimpse alternatives” (17). In this regard, travelers wrote about their experiences as an act of preservation, to set their journeys on paper; and, to various degrees, they found the landscape both inspiring and cumbersome, so that compromise and adjustment were often given space equal to that of observation and speculation. Bruce Greenfield elaborates on the relationship between traveler and text: “By means of his journal, the traveler writes himself into and out of the unknown country; by means of his narrative, he makes his journey a significant event” (19). Travel narratives thus help travelers place their experiences within a larger cultural and historical context. For the early American female traveler, the narrative may have initially been more reporter’s log than reflective journal, but the very act of keeping a record represents a significant entry into the larger discourse of travel exploration.

As women began to contribute to travel literature, moreover, they faced barriers more literary than physical. Even if women could envision themselves in new roles as settlers and explorers, they were stymied by presumptions of authorship and literary domain. In Amanda Gilroy’s discussion of women’s travel writing in England (1775–1844), she notes that even as the number of women travelers increased and they “produced some of the most significant travel texts of the period, they had to negotiate with the normative assumption that the travel writer was male and with the symbolic association of women and home” (5). Mary Suzanne Schriber reminds us that “gender is always in play in women’s accounts of travel” and is in fact a “matter of performance” (6). Sara Mills elaborates on the relationship between gender and land: “There is not such clear-cut division between male and female writers, but . . . socially-determined spatial relations are negotiated with differently because of class, race, and gender and one’s access to certain discursive structures” (20). The very mobility of women moreover counters Jürgen Habermas’s strict delineation of public and private spheres as gender allocated. Instead, women travelers illustrate what Elizabeth Maddock Dil-

lon observes in relation to her larger study of gender and liberalism: “Women are not in the least absent from the public sphere of desire: rather, their presence there is significant in both cultural and political terms” (7). Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, in turn, find women travelers often stereotyped as “eccentric and adventurous.” Consequently, such images contributed to a “standard against which many women travelers measure themselves and it has set the discursive boundaries for women writing about their travels” (3). To correct this perception, Foster and Mills explain that women’s narratives are informative in other areas and describe proper traveling clothes and “problems relating to physicality,” such as “how to walk in soaking wet skirts, or how best to keep cool in high temperatures” (9). Notably, the early narratives are bereft of such personal descriptions, focusing instead on external conditions. Gender thus figures into these narratives in terms of style and content. Interestingly, women both adhere to and reject these strictures, for though they may be writing in the style of the travel narrative, their assertive voices and adventurous contents suggest new identities.

By contrast, nineteenth-century travelers often used the travel narrative for self-reflection. In this sense, as Rebecca Hogan notes, journals and diaries “may be exemplars for others, give the diarist a sense of the shape and contour of his or her life and self, set the record straight or give a perspective on a period of history. The important idea here is that a diary embodies both self-creation and self-discovery” (“Diarists,” 11). Sharon M. Harris marks another key aspect of women’s writings: “One of the most significant and necessary ways of approaching early American women’s writings is to understand the production of these texts as self-creating acts” (“Early,” 225). So engaged, the female traveler constructed her narrative and modeled her adventures, which contributed to cultural change. For Janis P. Stout, modern travelers express a distinct confidence: “In making their departures, women assume the role of subjects in their own stories rather than objects sought and exchanged by men” (3). Travel as a means of self-assertion is a layered affair, as Marilyn Wesley suggests: “The trope of women’s travel is an innovative, contradictory, and dynamic response to the recurring tension between imposed ideological stasis and gendered freedoms” (xiv). Following these sentiments, travel is associated with freedom, with the open road serving

## 14 Introduction

as a metaphor for personal transformation. Certainly, for women who traveled for relocation onto the Ohio frontier, the journey was often a test. Success depended on their willingness to adapt in these dynamic territories. For them, the frontier was a fluid boundary, one that absorbed disparate projections, and the travel narrative was well suited to portray such transitory states.

Although the frontier appeared open for settlement, the territory had long been contested. Decades before these women arrived, the Seven Years' War (1754–63) created conflicts among tribes, including the Miamis, Delaware, Wyandots, Shawnees, and Mingos, as they each attempted to ward off the European invaders. Following the Revolutionary War, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 established the framework, as Emily Foster explains, for the “governance of the territory,” with each “six-mile-square township made up of thirty-six sections of 640 acres each” (68). In addition, W. Stitt Robinson provides this definition of frontier: “areas of limited population, containing approximately from two to six persons per square mile . . . a geographic setting near unoccupied regions, usually endowed with available land and other natural resources capable of prosperous development” (xiii). The frontier thus appears as both a physical and an ideological construct. It was, moreover, fast becoming a commodity; Douglas R. Hunt describes the Harrison Frontier Land Act of May 10, 1800, which allowed settlers “to purchase public lands on credit” at the cost of two dollars per acre. By 1805, lands along the Great Miami River were being sold by private dealers for \$6.50 per acre, but credit was required (173–74). Native Americans were systematically displaced as waves of emigrants moved in, so that by 1800, Ohio had an Anglo population of approximately 42,000, and by 1810, it was 231,000 (Hunt, 375). Generally speaking, migrating travelers expressed a sense of entitlement to these lands, evident in their assumptions of ownership and in their lack of concern for indigenous peoples. Despite providing details about accommodations and travel conditions, for example, travel accounts virtually ignore the Native American’s plight. For that matter, women’s narratives rarely explain why the women were heading west, except for the general purpose of setting up a new home, and they do not go into detail about real estate ventures, land rights, or financial issues. Men more often handled these affairs, but the women’s

lack of reference is notable. Such omissions also underscore the travel narrative as a log of progress that marks a journey between familiar and imagined landscapes. The traveler's values are often driven by what has been left behind rather than by an appreciation for what lies ahead. Inadvertently, it communicates the emotional tensions that accompany anticipation, but foremost, the travel narrative testifies to the frontier as opportunity.

Key legislation reinforced this perception. Edward Watts marks Thomas Jefferson's *Report of a Plan of Government for the Western Territory* (1784), the Land Ordinance of 1785, and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 as collectively revealing "the development of a progressive imperialistic agenda: a plan for erasing, appropriating, classifying, and rebuilding the region in a way that could not and would not challenge Eastern control of the nation" (10). More specifically, the *Report on Government for Western Territory* (March 1, 1784) reads in part: "Resolved that the territory ceded or to be ceded by Individual States to the United States whensoever the same shall have been purchased of the Indian Inhabitants & offered for sale by the U. S. shall be formed into distinct States bounded in the following manner as nearly as such cessions will admit. . . . That such temporary government shall only continue in force in any state until it shall have acquired 20,000 free inhabitants, when, giving due proof thereof to Congress, they shall receive from them authority with appointments of time." Passed on July 13, 1787, the Northwest Ordinance, or "An Ordinance for the Government of the Territory of the United States, North-West of the River Ohio," claims: "Be it ordained by the United States in Congress assembled, That the said territory, for the purposes of temporary government, be one district, subject, however, to be divided into two districts, as future circumstances may, in the opinion of Congress, make it expedient." With their confident, almost doctrinal language, these legislative acts forthrightly present the land for sale, in definite parcels and under specific conditions. Given these larger political intentions, the eastern traveler was a type of missionary, bearing civilization to the frontier. True, the travelers' journals reveal only initial reactions, laden as travelers were with disorientation, but travelers' assumptions also bear out Watts's observation of a desire to "build an empire which would expand the nation yet preserve the supremacy of the coastal metropolis" (10). In addition, L. Scott

## 16 Introduction

Philyaw finds that “the simple legislation of the Ordinance of 1784 proved inadequate to solve the nation’s problems in the northwestern territories” (101). And like Watts, Philyaw finds a distinct prejudice on the part of “most congressional delegates” in their “attitude that the underdeveloped West should be kept in a state of dependence, similar to what the thirteen states had recently escaped” (96–97). The women in this study followed suit when they criticized frontier life as substandard, physically and socially, even as they steadfastly pursued a westward direction that would radically change their lives.

Writing themselves into the frontier thus proved challenging, and their records underscore the difficulty of their journeys while highlighting the spiritedness of their attitudes. For many, keeping a journal was as much for documentation as for solace. As such, the travel narrative captures an interesting intersection between assumptions about women’s behaviors and women’s actual responses. Counter to stereotypical, often fictionalized images of passive women, their resourcefulness testifies to their adaptability and strength. Admirably so, their fortitude and stamina sustained them. It is interesting in these accounts how often the “travel” frame is disregarded, or at least deviated from, in order to discuss social behaviors—but then travel has never been just about marking distance. It involves experiencing, comparing, and contemplating. One of the most striking features about women’s travel narratives is their immediacy. Reactions are not necessarily crafted to promote exploration or expansion but are instead realistic about the trials and rewards of travel. Rather than simply arrive and clear ground, women evaluated potential for sociability and speculated on compatibility. Could they transport familiar, genteel ways to a new location? Would doing so require radical readjustment, for them and the frontier? The woman’s travel narrative acts as a sounding board for such speculations, whereby cultural expectations inform the woman’s commentary on frontier conditions, regional differences, and social institutions. Travel allows for such perspectives and subsequent pronouncements, and the narratives bring the woman’s voice more fully into the historical, national record.

In addition to marking physical spaces, therefore, the woman’s travel narrative illustrates how cultural values were transferred across the new nation. The weight of this transfer is especially apparent regarding gen-

der, for even while women were expected to act from principles of virtue and generosity, they often ventured into areas where genteel codes were strained if not made irrelevant by struggles for survival and rudimentary conditions. Travelers such as Trist, Bacon, and Dwight thus served as ambassadors of sorts, expected to bear the mantle of “American virtue,” a role they found burdensome at times. Still, in this New Republic founded on republican values tempered by sympathy, women were expected to preserve and to promote these values. In their discomfort with the crude and rustic and in their preference for the refined and the graceful, these women impressively negotiated rugged land and restrictive cultural expectations to voice their concerns and to mark their journeys.

#### *Virtue, Politics, and Gender in the New Republic*

Gender identity was, moreover, significantly shaped by the politicizing events of the eighteenth century. The Revolutionary War, for example, inspired women to act outside of their accepted gender roles by boycotting British goods, attending spinning bees, and sheltering patriots. Women who had been accustomed to subordinate roles suddenly found themselves commanding households and aggressively protecting home and family in the guise of both Columbia and Minerva. Although most early American women would not have considered themselves political figures, especially if “political” is defined by public actions, their lives exemplified significant change. Sara M. Evans observes: “Women who perceived themselves as uninterested in politics were quickly caught up in political thought and conversation” (48). Rosemarie Zagarri agrees that the “events of the day eroded the strict separation between public and private spheres. Because politics so directly affected their fates, women could be excused for probing into a traditionally male realm” (*Woman’s Dilemma*, 85). Moreover, as Carla Mulford observes: “The writing of history might have been considered anti-authoritarian and ‘masculine,’ but, because of their newly acquired roles as cultural monitors, women could appropriate the tradition of history writing to themselves” (*Dictionary*, xxiii). In this spirit, Abigail Adams, Esther Edwards Burr, Hannah Mather Crocker, Judith Sargent Murray, and Mercy Otis Warren, among others, engaged in the public debate over this New Republic with intelligence and passion.

Two seminal collections, *American Women Writers to 1800* (1996), edited by Sharon M. Harris, and the *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Women Prose Writers to 1820* (1999), edited by Carla Mulford, testify to the woman's avid interest in social, literary, and political issues. With over ninety entries in the Harris volume and fifty-nine in the Mulford edition, it is clear that women's active involvement was elaborate and expansive. Harris notes, for example, that women were significantly engaged "with the philosophical issues of the era, including the appropriate political order for a new nation" (*American*, 17). These writings and profiles are also important reminders that reading women's narratives requires an appreciation for what women valued rather than what might have been expressed. To do so avoids what Frank Shuffleton calls "mindlessly presentist impositions upon the past" (96). Despite women's keen interest, they were not always a welcomed party; as Linda Kerber points out, "The newly created republic made little room for [women] as political beings" (*Women*, 11). Still, women who may have resisted Mary Wollstonecraft's manifesto *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) found themselves stepping outside of gender specific roles within this revolutionary political and social climate. In this regard, their perspective is especially valuable, for, as Kerber finds, "the early Republic does look different when seen through women's eyes" (xi). If there was a gendered view, what did these women see, and how did they approach travel and migration differently? How if at all was their perception different based on gender, religion, class, region, or ethnicity? Would they favor virtue over pleasure as they refigured the manners and civility of the new nation? How would a generation of women taught to honor patriarchal power vested in monarchy situate themselves within this new civic structure? And, how would they transfer these values onto the frontier? As the following chapters bear out, women experienced the frontier and wrote about their travels quite differently than men and with a particular eye for relationships between social classes.

Virtue was, moreover, central to these values, as it encouraged a benevolent attitude, especially toward subordinates. Within a democracy, virtuous actions seemed particularly noble, as they arose from a natural sense of the good. Mary Kelley finds, "Virtue was defined most broadly as a selflessness in which individual desires and interests were secondary to

the welfare of the body politic. It was made the linchpin for social and political institutions” (60). Virtue was thus posited as both a moral and a civil code, serving as a guide for personal behavior and patriotic action, especially in contrast to corrupt British mores and actions. For Lester H. Cohen virtue was, in fact, the “genius” of republicanism, “a quality of human character and conduct that manifested the confluence of personality and public behavior” (481). This emphasis on public behaviors as a reflection of virtue weighed especially heavily on the female traveler, who found herself in situations in which there was little context for civility. Nevertheless, women were considered “better equipped than men to withstand moral corruption and promote virtue,” as Richard Godbeer explains, which cast them “as guardians of public as well as private virtue” (295). Ennobled, and so pressured, women were elevated and yet judged by these expectations.

As genteel women, they sought to create social structures built on virtuous intentions and decorous behavior, a desire with both philosophical and social ramifications. These intentions were complex, for, as Philip Gould points out, the “republican language of ‘virtue’ was layered densely with gendered meanings during the transitional era of the early republic. ‘Virtue’ signified not only the tenets of classical republicanism and liberal individualism but also the precepts of affect, benevolence, and pious, universal love that descended in large part from eighteenth-century Scottish Common Sense philosophy” (*Covenant and Republic*, 62). Displays of virtue thus reflected class, gender, and education. Joyce Appleby, in turn, describes a distinctly American sensibility in that “republican polarities of virtue and corruption, disinterest and interestedness, public spirit and private ambition, participation and passivity, structured the world of politics [and] provided a language for discussing all actions in the public realm” (22). The term “virtue” also carried economic and political implications; Carla Mulford distinguishes between virtue “aligned with broad political and mercantile goals of sincerity and honesty in politics and business” and that which “signaled specific behaviors of citizens, women in particular, whose personal relations should be unquestionably pure in motive and free of lasciviousness” (Introduction, xiv). Virtuous actions thus permeated social codes, and virtuous sentiments appeared key to American democracy, for they allowed differences between class,

## 20 Introduction

religion, and gender to be suspended for the common goal of independence. Andrew Burstein offers yet another component: "Sensibility was a critical device in the promotion of patriotic sentiment and in the idealized conception of republican politics" (*Sentimental*, 288). Sentiment, sympathy, and virtue thus guided republican action, and for women to act otherwise would have been deemed unpatriotic. The Revolution, in turn, aggrandized the woman's role as a noble representation of the republic. Building on what David S. Shields calls the "hallmarks of the bluestocking world," women of the New Republic elevated "feminine sympathy into a political principle" (*Civil*, 120). In fact, for Elizabeth Barnes, "sympathy was to be the building block of a democratic nation" (x). Women were inspired by these democratic impulses to settle new lands and travel to new sights, while at the same time cautioned to remain within certain boundaries.

Clearly, education would become essential to elevating a woman's status and allowing her to participate in this virtuous campaign. Nina Baym elaborates: "Manifestly, ignorant women could not instruct others; hence the need to educate them" (23). Regarding nineteenth-century print culture, Sharon M. Harris notes, "Essays advocating female education were always welcome at the *New-York Magazine*, as was true for most early periodicals" ("*New-York Magazine*," 347). Charged with moral and civic edification, women took on active roles as educators, challenging male-centered academe. Even so, Mary Kelley describes the lag in education, whereby "New England's public schools generally excluded girls until the latter half of the eighteenth century, and even then offered them only a separate and lesser education" (57). Evidence of female education was thus noted with interest, as when Elizabeth Gilpin wrote from Troy, New York, on October 21, 1830: "We then visited Mrs. Whilhard's School or Academy for Young Ladies, which is in great repute as a place of education. They have a number of professors or teachers, and once a year a grand public examination" (30).<sup>11</sup> Such educational opportunities encouraged female participation in the larger political debates, while promoting women's role as moral instructors.

Understandably, the dramatic events of the war evoked impassioned responses, and women reacted with sentimental and sympathetic language. Concerns over family safety paralleled those for national security,

for, as Shirley Samuels points out, “An anxiety about disorder within the family is often exhibited in the early sentimental or domestic novel,” and the “family as a model for the nation [becomes] an instrument of social control” (17). Jay Fliegelman also remarks on these connections: “The problems of family government addressed in the fiction and pedagogy of the period—of balancing authority with liberty, of maintaining a social order while encouraging individual growth—were the larger political problems of the age translated into terms of daily life” (5). When Lydia Minturn Post wrote to her husband on October 3, 1776, about the “sorrowful” and “dreadful” fate of Nathan Hale, her patriotic sentiments illustrated this New Republican discourse: “I cannot write this without weeping. . . . So likely, so young, so brave” (qtd. in Harris, *American*, 296). In Mercy Otis Warren’s *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*, she dramatizes the “outrage of innocence in instances too numerous to be recorded” and relates a particularly gruesome act of “wanton barbarity of the soldiers of the King of England, as they patrolled the defenceless villages of America” (327). Warren then narrates a tale of tragic circumstance about a woman from Elizabethtown, New Jersey, who, “sitting in her own house with her little domestic circle around her and her infant in her arms . . . shrouded by the consciousness of her own innocence and virtue,” was suddenly “shot through the lungs” by a “British barbarian.” The violence continued in a blatant display of disregard for person and home: “A hole was dug, the body thrown in, and the house of this excellent lady set on fire and consumed with all the property it contained” (327–28). Not only was this act cruel, but, as Warren explains, there were political undertones, for the absent husband, Mr. Caldwell, was apparently being persecuted for his “zeal for the rights, and his attachment of his native land” (351). Warren’s tale shows the struggle between British exploitation and American virtue. This lady’s innocence and the unsolicited nature of the attack, in turn, exemplify an attribute of sympathy that for Julia A. Stern gives “expression to the latent, reprobated social and political impulses of those Americans who do not ‘count’ in the language of the Founding.” According to Stern, “such literature emanates from a feminized zone of imagination highly critical of republican ‘disinterest’” (*Plight*, 6). The Caldwell murders underscore British cruelty, and Warren’s account emphasizes the emotional loss by evoking

## 22 Introduction

the sentimental voice. Thus, while Lydia Minturn Post laments that “war is a weariness,” she finds the struggle “a noble endeavor . . . the cry of humanity against oppression, usurped power, insolence, and rapacity” (qtd. in Harris, *American*, 298). For Post and Warren, virtue, democracy, and sympathy are essential components for imagining this new nation, as they respond passionately to the political and social upheavals of the time.

Virtue could also be used as a pretense for asserting superiority, whereby travelers espoused a proprietary, somewhat condescending attitude submerged in virtuous sentiment. In Mary Louise Pratt’s discussion of travel literature in the 1780s and 1790s, she notes sentimentality as “a powerful mode for representing colonial relations and the imperial frontier.” Travelers who adopted this mode would have seemed patronizing. This attitude, Pratt adds, sparked debates over the very style of travel writing: “the two main tensions being between ‘naïve’ (popular) and lettered writing, and between informational and experiential writing. Stylistic debates as to relative values of ‘embellishment’ and ‘naked truth’ often reflected tensions between the man of science and the man of sensibility, or between the lettered and popular writer” (87). Women’s travel narratives exemplify these tensions, as they can be both didactic and embellished, informational and imperialistic. A woman’s reactions to her surroundings and to the underprivileged thus reflected both how she was expected to respond and the cause of her basic discomfort. Sharp criticism might cause others to fault her benevolence. Indifference to the less fortunate might signal an uncharitable spirit. Virtuous reactions were tested when fundamental comforts were not met and safety not secured; as with explorers before them, disorientation often provoked these women. Still, as genteel women, they were expected to act accordingly. Unlike the sentimental novel or the public essay, which simply reinforce genteel values, women’s travel narratives describe the clash between ideology and reality, one of their most interesting qualities. Adaptation was not instantaneous. Instead, women resisted what was unfamiliar. They did not always romanticize the wilderness, or rhapsodize over open spaces, but reacted to the uncertainty of the frontier with the animated, at times cantankerous testimonials of easterners transplanted to a new land. Despite their complaints, these determined women were strong enough to prevail over rough territory and in crude conditions. They did not back away from their

opinions or falter in their visions of a new home in a transformed wilderness, and in doing so they exemplified patience and endurance, two virtues that signal strength.

Charged with concern for the greater good and expected to act with virtuous intent, genteel women travelers were at times stymied by the rustic incivility they encountered. Some tried to explain the lapse as a problem of religious training, while others saw it as an economic failing or even simply a lack of taste. This incivility challenged the women's ability to be generous and sympathetic. While the end to colonial rule suggested a more egalitarian social structure, it did not prove a seamless transition for the genteel traveler, who recoiled at the crude manners and impoverished conditions found on the frontier. David S. Shields elaborates on this incongruity: "Though the American Revolution dissolved the legal ties binding the colonies to England, it did not break their dependence upon metropolitan manners or insulate them from the international market in fashionable goods" (*Civil*, 308). Bridging these gaps in manner and style would require more than a treaty, as the simplicity associated with republican values attempted to gain favor over more elaborate, decadent, Anglo-European taste. Even so, women were expected to take on the role of "Republican Motherhood," which Linda Kerber finds "altered the female domain [and] justified an extension of women's absorption and participation in the civic culture" (*Toward*, 61). The genteel female traveler who fretted about a lack of social boundaries was caught between acting as a gracious, maternal figure and expressing her honest preference for propriety. Genteel women were supposed to act from principles of virtue and sympathy, and yet when they were faced with uncomfortable situations, their graciousness was strained. In dealing with these moments when expectations meet realities, women's travel narratives are surprisingly revealing; they show the limitations of virtue that affirms class status rather than expressing benevolent intentions.



The traveler's tale is indeed a rich source for understanding early American customs and manners. As travelers exchanged goods along with information, their records focus attention on the everyday transactions of early American life. To understand how early Americans lived on a daily

basis, the travel narrative is essential. For unlike the history, tract, or sermon, the travel narrative does not aim to espouse a particular message, but offers a collection of entries that in the end describe a journey, and that may or may not convey a coherent, overall meaning. To focus specifically on women's travel narratives shows how the very act of travel or migration appeared from a domestic and gendered point of view. As their accounts attest, women often found travel in this five-mile-an-hour world enlivening—if also, at times, exasperating. And as I had been accustomed to reading the nineteenth-century pioneer's journal against a larger nationalist backdrop that depicted a rugged individualism, I was initially uncertain how to read an early American woman's travel narrative filled with repetitive details about road conditions, accommodations, food, and other travelers that seemed to undercut this grand westward movement. Gradually, as I began to see the world through these female travelers' eyes, I understood a different narrative—relocation, while it eventually may have had benefits, initially meant a loss of social connections and urban pleasures that the journey over rugged terrain with nights spent in rustic taverns only exacerbated. The frontier was foreign territory both geographically and socially. From women's records, a complicated view of travel emerges that challenges prevailing assumptions that migration was predominately male driven and fundamentally rewarding. Instead, we learn that women were integral to settlement and that migration, while potentially satisfying, was fraught with mixed emotions.

The following discussion addresses the physical, discursive, and social aspects of women and travel in early America. Chapter 1 situates the woman's travel narrative within the larger genre of exploration literature and discusses the influence of aesthetic theories on travel writing. Chapter 2 builds on this discussion by providing the physical context of travel itself by discussing the public house and travel conditions. Chapter 3 focuses on the woman's travel narrative as a record of class encounters by looking at journeys along the eastern seaboard and onto the Ohio frontier. Chapter 4 examines the relationship between women's travel narratives and other early American literary genres, such as the novel and poetry, and explores how these genres influence each other in the telling of travel stories. Chapter 5 concludes this study by looking at how women captured their experiences differently in letters and travel narratives. The

rich epistolary archives from this period complement the woman's travel record and show how place and perspective can significantly alter how experience is represented. Inserting the primary source prominently into this investigation gives the woman's travel narrative additional value as historical artifact and social document. Altogether, this book argues that women and their travel narratives made a significant, vital contribution to the migration and settlement of early America and the New Republic.