

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Rip Van Winkle State and the Whig Party

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
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By
Caroline Clarkson

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The fundamental revisions made to the North Carolina Constitution in 1835, which based representation in the General Assembly on population and also took the power of selecting the state's Governor away from the General Assembly and gave it to the electorate, afforded the western region of the state the power to influence public office for the first time. One year after this Constitutional revision, the first Whig Governor was elected in North Carolina, and the stranglehold that eastern plantation owners had on public policy was broken. With Whigs from Western North Carolina in power, the needs of their constituents were addressed, and internal improvements gained a prominent place on the state's agenda. After a succession of Whig Governors from 1836-1849, North Carolina's infrastructure was improved, and economic conditions for many Western North Carolinians were better.

Historiography

A significant amount of research has been done on the American Whig Party's contributions to politics and public policy throughout the 1800s, but very little of it focuses specifically on Western North Carolina. Many of the scholars who have become experts on the Whig Party view it in light of its demise and see it as a precursor to the Republican Party. Other scholars view the Whig Party as having been successful at pursuing internal improvements that benefited the United States as a whole. While some scholars have applauded the Whig Party's focus on internal improvements, others have criticized the Party for not taking a stand against slavery earlier than it did. Secondary sources chronicling the development, success, and collapse of the American Whig Party are numerous, and regardless of the biases of these sources, nearly all acknowledge that the Party was powerful and influential in the United States in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Historian Michael Holt has a positive opinion of the Whig Party, and he supports his opinion with substantial evidence from Whig newspapers of the 1800s. In his book *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War*, Holt argues that the demise of the Whig Party deepened the divide between the North and the South by eliminating the moderate Whig Party that had served as a buffer between the two for years. In Holt's view, the collapse of the Whig Party played a significant role in American history mostly because it served to nudge the United States towards civil war.¹

Other historians, like Thomas Brown, assert that the Whig Party was only successful because it capitalized on opposition to Andrew Jackson's new brand of Jacksonian Democracy, which consolidated power into the hands of President Jackson. In his book *Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the American Whig Party*, Brown describes the Whig party as one that united *against* something ("King Andrew," as Whigs referred to Andrew Jackson) rather than *for* something. In Brown's view, the Whig Party was successful because it capitalized on distrust of President Jackson, and the Party subsequently crumbled because Jackson left office.²

Historians John Sacher and Daniel Howe both argue strongly that the Whig Party was successful because of its association with internal improvements, and both men use voting results from rural areas to back up their theses. Sacher's work has particular relevance to the topic of the Whig Party in Western North Carolina because his focus is on rural areas of the Louisiana bayou, which were in similar shape to Western North Carolina in terms of infrastructural development in the 1800s. Both regions were populated by isolated farmers who desperately needed bridges and passable roads if they were to ever make profit from their crops. Sacher

¹ Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

² Thomas Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the American Whig Party* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

attributes the collapse of the Whig Party to its nomination of Winfield Scott for president during the election of 1852. Scott's anti-slavery views lost the Whig Party countless votes in southern states, and Sacher believes this was the final blow to the Whig Party that killed it.³

Daniel Howe's views on the Whig Party are similar to Sacher's in that both historians name support of internal improvements as the Party's most attractive feature to rural voters. Sacher uses election results to prove that in underdeveloped areas heavily populated by subsistence farmers, the Whig Party was highly successful for several years. Howe's interpretation of the downfall of the Whig Party is very different from Sacher's; Howe blames the Party's demise on its refusal to take a strong anti-slavery stance sooner than it did. Howe believes that if the Party had taken a strong moral stand on slavery when the Republican Party did, it might have attracted voters from the Republican Party and maintained a longer political life.⁴

R. D. W. Connor's book *Ante-Bellum Builders of North Carolina* provides one of the most detailed accounts of the Whig Party's existence in North Carolina that is available to readers today. Connor's thesis focuses on the role the Whig Party played in the infrastructural development of North Carolina, with specific attention devoted to the ways the North Carolina Constitution of 1776 prevented state spending on internal improvements. Connor's thesis is strongest at pointing out the undemocratic nature of the Constitution of 1776 by using figures to illustrate the lack of proportional representation in the General Assembly. Connor's thesis is weakest in its lack of detailed illustrations of how the disproportional representation negatively affected the lives of Western North Carolinians.⁵

³ John Sacher, "The Sudden Collapse of the Louisiana Whig Party," *The Journal of Southern History* 65, no. 2 (1999).

⁴ Daniel Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁵ R. D. W. Connor, *Ante-Bellum Builders of North Carolina* (Greensboro: The North Carolina College for Women,

My thesis will explore how the disproportional representation in the General Assembly before 1835 directly impacted the lives of North Carolinians by denying public funding for infrastructure in poor, isolated areas of the state that didn't benefit from the plantation system like the eastern part of the state did. My use of Census data will add new statistical figures to the topic of the Whig Party's impact in North Carolina, as will my focus on Western North Carolina, which has not specifically been analyzed. My thesis will illustrate clearly how different life was in terms of access to schools and roads for North Carolinians living in the eastern region of the state and North Carolinians living in the western region of the state.

Constitutional Changes

The North Carolina Constitution of 1776, which stayed in effect without revisions until 1835, put the bulk of political power into the hands of the General Assembly. The General Assembly had the power to appoint officials to the following state positions: judges on the Supreme Court, the attorney-general, the Governor, and seven advisors to serve the Governor.⁶ With so much power being granted to the General Assembly, it was important that those serving in the General Assembly were elected to represent the interests of the state as a whole. This was not the case, as representation in the Assembly was not based on population and each county, regardless of population, was given one seat in the Senate and two in the House of Commons.⁷ As R. D. W. Connor explains, this way of designating representation resulted in clear violations of Democratic principles: "In 1790, for instance, Brunswick county, with only 3,000 people, sent the same number of representatives to the Legislature, had the same voice in making the laws of the State and cast the same vote for governor and other State officials as Rowan county which

1930).

⁶ North Carolina Constitution of 1776, clauses 13, 15, and 16. Accessed through <http://docsouth.unc.edu>.

⁷ North Carolina Constitution of 1776, clauses 2 and 3.

had five times as many people.”⁸ In addition to the lack of fair representation in the General Assembly, only free men who owned at least fifty acres of land could vote for state Senators, and only free men who owned at least 100 acres of land were eligible to serve in the General Assembly.⁹ These Constitutional laws effectively created an oligarchy in North Carolina, where wealthy plantation owners dominated all three branches of government.

For the western region of the state, the North Carolina Constitution of 1776 virtually guaranteed that its concerns related to infrastructure and public schools would not be addressed by the General Assembly. In 1790, the first year the Federal Census was conducted, the majority of North Carolinians lived east of Wake County, making the eastern part of the state’s dominance over politics somewhat understandable.¹⁰ By 1830, however, a majority of North Carolinians lived west of Wake County, making eastern domination more unpalatable for westerners than ever before.¹¹ Western North Carolina’s population was growing steadily, but eastern plantation owners still maintained power over the state’s government and saw to it that their interests were addressed. For these eastern plantation owners who had access to navigable rivers and the port of Wilmington, and who could afford private schooling for their children, paying taxes to support infrastructure and the building of public schools was not on their agenda. For small farmers in Western North Carolina, however, the isolation they endured because of non-existent infrastructure, and the lack of options they had in terms of educating their children, were key issues they wanted the state government to address. Dissatisfaction with the 1776 Constitution was growing along with the population of western North Carolina, and in 1835 Amendments were ratified that shifted the balance of power away from elite eastern plantation

⁸ Connor, 20.

⁹ North Carolina Constitution of 1776, clauses 5, 6, and 7.

¹⁰ 1790 Census Figures. Accessed through <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1790.htm>.

¹¹ 1830 Census Figures. Accessed through <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1830.htm>.

owners and towards the majority of citizens.

The Amendments that were ratified in 1835 based representation in the House of Commons on a county's population and based representation in the Senate on the amount of taxes each county paid to the state. Governors were no longer appointed by the General Assembly but were elected by popular vote.¹² These constitutional changes are credited primarily to the work of David Lowry Swain, the representative for Buncombe County in the North Carolina House of Commons, who was later appointed Governor of North Carolina from 1832 to 1835. Before, during, and after he served as governor, Swain sought constitutional revisions that would benefit western counties. Before the Whig Party had been formally named and organized, Swain identified with principles that would later become the Party's platform, and as a western North Carolinian he advocated the expansion of the railroad and the improvement of public schools.¹³ Swain made a speech at the Constitutional Convention of 1835, as Henry Connor, one of the associate judges of the North Carolina Supreme Court, recounted: "Governor Swain outlined the policy of the western people. Internal improvements, education, general progress in the development of the resources of the State, and encouragement to immigration were the purposes of this strong, patriotic leader from the mountains."¹⁴ After the Whig Party was formed, Swain became an outspoken member.

As historian Joseph Gregoire de Rouhac Hamilton explained in 1915, the western region of North Carolina approached the Convention of 1835 with the following concerns:

The West, because its vital economic interests demanded it, desired a large extension of the activities of the State. It wanted highways and railroads

¹² North Carolina Constitution, Amendment 1, Section 1.

¹³ William Powell, ed. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 483-486.

¹⁴ Henry Groves Connor, *The Convention of 1835* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1908). Accessed through: <http://docsouth.unc.edu>.

connecting it with the East to furnish an outlet for its produce, an inlet for the outside products that it wanted, and as a means of communication with the outside world.¹⁵

Western representatives to the Convention of 1835 shared concerns particular to their region. The constitutional changes that Swain advocated and finally got proposed to the people on a referendum won the popular vote and they almost immediately had tangible results; in 1836 Edward B. Dudley, a member of the newly formed Whig Party, was the first governor in North Carolina's history to be elected by voters.¹⁶

Internal Improvements: Solution to the State's Problems

Discussion of internal improvements increased in local newspapers and suggestions for improvement projects were plentiful as emigration from North Carolina became noticeable in the early 1800s. Proposals included improvement of river navigation by smoothing sandbars and constructing dams, the building of canals, and the expansion of plank roads across the state. In addition to these suggestions, historian Allen Trelease writes, "...railroads were called for as the most practical invention of the age to lessen distances, end isolation, stimulate the economy, and in general usher in a new era of progress and prosperity."¹⁷ In 1828, members of the House of Commons held a meeting to discuss the building a railroad in North Carolina, and addressed the following statement to North Carolinians:

The same causes which have brought upon us our present difficulties, have not yet produced all their natural and deplorable effects. Cotton is now almost the only

¹⁵ Joseph Gregoire de Rouhac Hamilton, *Party Politics in North Carolina* (Durham: The Seeman Printery, 1916), 12.

¹⁶ "Elections," *New Bedford Mercury*, 19 August 1836, 1. *InfoWeb*. Web. 23 September 2009.

¹⁷ Allen Trelease, *The North Carolina Railroad and the Modernization of North Carolina, 1849-1871* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 12.

article which bears transportation. But it is much to be apprehended that even cotton will not long remain a source of profit in our present manner of conveyance. The states of South-Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, together with the Arkansaw and other territories, are well fitted to this article, and they are yearly filling up more and more with an enterprising population, who are pressing their production of cotton to a vast and incalculable extent. They possess navigable rivers, and they are acting upon the same policy of internal improvement as has been prosecuted by other states.¹⁸

North Carolinian legislators were becoming increasingly worried about their state's prospects as its neighboring states built up their infrastructure, and they predicted a dire future for the state if changes weren't made soon. As early as 1820, *Western Carolinian* newspaper lamented,

[North Carolina] has become, voluntarily, the tributary to other states, and has habitually yielded to their pretensions, until she is viewed with that contemptuous indifference which a want of personal dignity never fails incurring....She is ignorant of her own resources and passive under the neglect and obloquy of her sister states.¹⁹

The negative impacts of the non-existent infrastructure in North Carolina by the 1800s were being discussed publicly as early as 1820, and internal improvements were proposed by numerous sources. The railroad was considered the most technologically advanced and convenient way to travel and ship goods, but plank roads were easier and cheaper to construct. Beginning in 1850, the North Carolina Legislature began chartering plank roads; in 1852, the Legislature chartered 41 plank road companies in an effort to catch up to neighboring states in

¹⁸ James Mebane and Dennis Heartt, *Rail-road Meeting: August 1, 1828* (Hillsborough: D. Heartt, 1928). Accessed through <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/rrmeet/rrmeet.html>.

¹⁹ Aristides (pen name), *Western Carolinian*, 14 November 1820.

terms of infrastructural development.²⁰

As the need for internal improvements became a topic of public concern in North Carolina and as the state's Constitutional Amendments of 1835 gave the public the ability to directly elect its governor, Whigs began to win elections in North Carolina. Edward Dudley in 1836 became the first Whig governor to hold office in North Carolina since the party gained its official name, and his position as President of the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad Company was trumpeted during the campaign. He captured the majority of votes in the western counties. His opponent received the majority of votes in central counties, including counties along the Virginia border. In that same election, Whigs gained a majority in the North Carolina Senate.²¹ Tangible changes were promised by Governor Dudley at his inauguration, where he acknowledged that for a state that ranked fifth in population in the country, every type of internal improvement was needed, from schools to railroads. He also acknowledged that North Carolina had less banking capital than other southern states. By the time the Assembly's first term with Dudley as Governor closed, it had adopted a plan that satisfied Dudley, but not voters in the western region of the state who adamantly supported direct state funding of railroads: the state would fund two fifths of the construction of three railroad projects, all three of which would serve the eastern region of North Carolina.²²

Governor Dudley easily won re-election when the time came, but not before western Whigs voiced anger about how much the east had benefited from internal improvements and how little the west had gained. *Western Carolinian* newspaper made the case for westward expansion of the state's railroads by listing the growing number of cotton mills located in the west. About

²⁰ "Plank Roads," *North Carolina Standard*, 3 September 1851.

²¹ Hamilton, 30.

²² Burton Alva Konkle, *John Motley Morehead and the Development of North Carolina 1796-1866* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, 1971; originally published 1922), 171-176.

twelve cotton factories were operational in 1838, and more were being built.²³ Without improvements in Western North Carolina's infrastructure, cotton mill growth would be limited. Citizens from Greensboro and westward were publicly making their case for inclusion on North Carolina railroad lines by 1838.²⁴

National Success for the Whig Party

Due to the Whig Party's commitment to internal improvements and public schools, the Party was having successes across the United States as rural voters supported it in elections. In Louisiana, for example, the Whig Party dominated state politics for years, and historian John Sacher attributes its success to its addressing of every major issue the majority of Louisianans were concerned with at the time:

The state's sugar cane industry required a tariff to remain viable; its extensive network of rivers and swamps led to a strong interest in internal improvements; and New Orleans's role as an import-export center encouraged many to support a national bank. Louisiana's south-central sugar bowl region formed the backbone of the state's Whig Party, and its parishes provided Whig candidates with majorities in almost every gubernatorial and presidential contest from the party's formation in the 1830s forward... The Whig Party's program had little attraction for the cotton-growing, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Democratic party loyalists...²⁵

The Whig Party had a nearly identical experience in North Carolina, where most of the party's support came from citizens who were isolated by the lack of roads and bridges. As in Louisiana, the Whig Party received very few votes in North Carolina from cotton-growing plantation

²³ Aristides, *Western Carolinian*, 7 October 1838.

²⁴ Konkle, 184-186.

²⁵ Sacher, 222-223.

owners who had no interest in paying higher taxes to fund the building of roads and schools in areas too poor to build them with private funds.

Anti-slavery groups in the South during the 1800s were especially critical of the extreme wealth enjoyed by a handful of elite North Carolinians while the majority of citizens suffered. The low taxes that accompanied the wealth of plantation owners angered small farmers who could not afford to build schools and railroads themselves, and who needed the State to fund infrastructure. This anger was expressed in a book written by a North Carolinian abolitionist and directed towards “the non-slaveholding whites of the South” in 1857:

Too long have we yielded a submissive obedience to the tyrannical domination of an inflated oligarchy; too long have we tolerated their arrogance and self-conceit; too long have we submitted to their unjust and savage exactions. Let us now wrest from them the sceptre of power....²⁶

Even after the constitutional changes of 1835 took effect and Whigs supportive of internal improvements took office, dissatisfaction lingered for small North Carolina farmers in the mid-1800s.

Opposition to “King Andrew”

As early as 1830 the Whig Party had made a name for itself as the party that opposed Andrew Jackson and supported internal improvements. The first example of direct conflict between President Jackson and the Whig Party came in 1830, after Congress approved a measure to federally fund a major highway through Kentucky, and Jackson vetoed the bill. Jackson justified the veto in a message delivered to the House of Representatives on May 27, 1830:

If it be the wish of the people that the construction of roads and canals should be

²⁶ Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (New York: J.J. Reed, 1857), 28.

conducted by the Federal Government, it is not only highly expedient, but indispensably necessary, that a previous amendment of the Constitution, delegating the necessary power and defining and restricting its exercise with reference to the sovereignty of the States, should be made. Without it nothing extensively useful can be effected....²⁷

Jackson whole-heartedly opposed federal funding for internal improvements and instead believed the nation's focus should be on paying down the national debt.

Henry Clay, who represented Kentucky in both houses of Congress and served as Secretary of State during his lifetime, and who was a leader in the Whig Party, issued his party's response to Jackson's veto:

If anything could be considered as settled, under the present Constitution of our government, I had supposed that it was its authority to construct such internal improvements as may be deemed by Congress necessary and proper to carry into effect the power granted to it. For nearly twenty-five years, the power has been asserted and exercised by the government....This power, necessary to all parts of the Union, is indispensable to the West. Without it, this section can never enjoy any part of the benefit of a regular disbursement of the vast revenues of the United States....Yet we are told that this power can no longer be exercised without an amendment of the Constitution....²⁸

Henry Clay represented the view of the Whig Party, which saw internal improvements as the surest way to help a country's economy grow, which would, in turn, contribute to paying down

²⁷ Andrew Jackson, "Maysville Road Veto Message to the House of Representatives," in *Major Problems in the Early Republic*, ed. Sean Wilentz (Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 378-379.

²⁸ Henry Clay, "Henry Clay's Response to the Maysville Road Veto," in *Major Problems in the Early Republic*, ed. Sean Wilentz (Toronto: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 378-379.

the national debt. Conflict between Andrew Jackson, who Whigs called “King Andrew,” and Clay erupted frequently. As a testament to how most North Carolinians felt about government funding of internal improvements, it is important to note that throughout the 1840s, the Whigs were unquestionably the majority party in North Carolina.²⁹

Schools

North Carolina proved to be such a strong ally for the Whig Party because years of control of its government by wealthy plantation owners whose focus was to keep taxes low had made the state’s infrastructure and public school system nearly non-existent. The Whig Party’s advocacy of internal improvements appealed to those North Carolinians whose lives would have been greatly enhanced by roads by which they could bring their crops to market and by railroads by which to travel. Census data from 1840 illustrates how neglected the state’s public school system had been in the previous years: In Buncombe County in 1840, there existed one primary school and one grammar school. These two schools combined had an enrollment of 25 students. The total number of children between the ages of 5 and 15 in Buncombe County in 1840 was 2,534. Approximately one percent of school aged children in Buncombe County in 1840 attended school, a shockingly low percentage.³⁰

In contrast, it is interesting to study Census data from Wayne County, North Carolina in 1840. This county, located east of Raleigh, where cotton and tobacco plantations were common and private wealth was substantial, was home to 1,941 children between the ages of 5 and 15. The county had four grammar schools and six primary schools, with a total enrollment of 342 students. In 1840, approximately 18 percent of school aged children in Wayne County attended

²⁹ Thomas Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 162.

³⁰ 1840 Census Figures. Accessed through <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1840.htm>.

school, a percentage that seems high when compared to the statistics from Buncombe County.³¹ The disparity between educational opportunities in the rural mountains and educational opportunities in the wealthy east was obvious and problematic for those whose children bore the brunt of North Carolina's inattention to public schooling. Anger at this disparity prompted western voters to support the Whig Party in large numbers throughout the early to mid-1800s.

In 1839, the General Assembly was under Whig control in North Carolina and the issue of access to education was finally addressed. That year, the North Carolina Public School Act was passed by the General Assembly, and the State promised to provide half of the funding to build each public primary school if the school's county would supply the other half. The Act was ratified by all but seven of North Carolina's counties; Buncombe County ratified it, but Wayne County did not.³² In 1840, because of the Whig Party's work and the support of its constituents, the first public primary school opened in North Carolina, as *North Carolina Standard* reported:

The first free school in Rockingham county went into operation on the 20th of January 1840. This is probably the first free school commenced in the State. The entire county has been surveyed into districts, 8 miles long, and 4½ wide; two school Houses to be created in each. In a short time all the Houses will be completed and schools in operation in every district in the County.³³

Public education had finally found a place on the Legislature's priority list, and the Whig Party had brought about the most significant improvement in terms of access to education in the State's history.

³¹ 1840 Census Figures.

³² Charles Lee Smith, *History of Education in North Carolina* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888), 169. Accessed through <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/smith/smith.html>.

³³ "Rockingham County and Common Schools," *North Carolina Standard*, 12 February 1840.

Roads & Economic Impact

By 1853, even after years of Whig control of state politics, North Carolina's roads were still incredibly unsophisticated in their construction. Northern travelers to the state and to the South in general were surprised by how little money seemed to be spent on infrastructure. One traveler, a correspondent for the *New York Times* named Frederick Law Olmsted, described his journey through North Carolina in 1853. Olmsted described travelling by stagecoach the following way:

The road was as bad as anything under the name of a road can be conceived to be. Wherever the adjoining swamps, fallen trees, stumps, and plantation fences would admit of it, the coach was driven, with a great deal of dexterity, out of the road. When the wheels sunk in the mud, below the hubs, we were sometimes requested to get out and walk. An upset seemed every moment inevitable.³⁴

Olmsted's journey of fourteen miles took him four hours to complete. Recovering from the years of neglect to roads proved challenging and time-consuming for Whig governors; seventeen years after winning their first election, the state of roads in North Carolina was still atrocious.

Continuing his travels through the state, Olmsted talked with a local resident in Raleigh and described what he witnessed in the capital city:

I saw this day...three thousand barrels of resin, worth a dollar and a half a barrel in New York, thrown away, a mere heap of useless offal, because it would cost more to transport it than it would be worth. There was a single wagon, with a ton or two of sugar, and flour, and tea, and axes, and cotton cloths, unable to move,

³⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted, *Cotton Kingdom* (New York: The Modern Library, 1984; originally published 1853), 129.

with six mules and five negroes at work upon it.³⁵

Olmsted's account of North Carolina continues in the same way, with reports of suffering due to the lack of railroads and decent roads piling up. It is important to note that Olmsted was not an unbiased observer of the South; his travel accounts were published mostly for a Northern audience eager for evidence that slavery was having negative effects on the South. Nevertheless, Olmsted's claims of poor infrastructure throughout North Carolina are substantiated by other evidence.

Because of the lack of infrastructure, the economic situation in North Carolina was dire for isolated, rural farmers with no access to markets, and the state's population was declining as many of these impoverished citizens moved north and west to improve their lives. The 1830s was the period of the heaviest migration for North Carolinians, as James Patton explains in "Letters from North Carolina Emigrants in the Old Northwest, 1830-1834":

...thirty-two of the state's sixty-eight counties actually lost population, and the increase for the whole state during the decade was only 2.5 percent, despite the fact that North Carolina had one of the highest birth rates in the nation. Indiana and Illinois were especial beneficiaries of this migration. Richer soil and better transportation facilities made farming more profitable in those states than in North Carolina...³⁶

Life for many North Carolinians in the "Rip Van Winkle State" by the 1830s was so bad that they began moving away in search of better economic opportunities.

Beginning in 1835, railroad companies were chartered in North Carolina in an effort to improve the lives of North Carolinians and stop emigration from the state. With the leadership of

³⁵ Olmsted, 141-142.

³⁶ James Patton, "Letters from North Carolina Emigrants in the Old Northwest, 1830-1834," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47 no. 2 (September 1960): 263.

Governor Edward B. Dudley, a Whig, in 1838 the Legislature voted to fund a railroad that connected Raleigh with several cities in Virginia.³⁷ Western North Carolinians were largely unaffected by this line of track, and it took until 1848 for the Legislature to charter a railroad that would connect the coast of North Carolina to Charlotte. Governor William Alexander Graham, a Whig, took credit for this railroad, and when it was completed in 1856, it stretched 223 miles.³⁸ In 1854, the North Carolina Legislature chartered a railroad company that would finally impact the lives of citizens living as far west as Asheville. That year, the Legislature chartered the Western North Carolina Railroad Company, which was to connect Salisbury to Morganton and Morganton to Asheville. Bannister, Cowan & Company, self-described “real estate and financial agents,” described manufacturing prospects in North Carolina in their publication, *The Resources of North Carolina* in 1869, in an attempt to attract investors. Their description of the Western North Carolina Railroad follows:

The western extension of the N. C. R. R. is making rapid progress; it has already reached Morganton, and it will be completed to Old Fort, at the eastern foot of Swananoa Gap, by the end of August. It is then to go through Swananoa Gap to Asheville, and from Asheville, southwestward, through Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Cherokee Counties, to Ducktown, Tennessee. A branch of this road will run from Asheville down the valley of the French Broad River to Paint Rock, on the Tennessee line. Work is now going on near Old Fort, at the eastern foot of the Blue Ridge.³⁹

By the early 1870s, Western North Carolina was accessible by train, and industrial forces were

³⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, 6 May 1836.

³⁸ *Proceedings of the General Meeting of Stockholders of the North Carolina Rail Road Company* (Greensboro: Patriot Office, 1851).

³⁹ Bannister, Cowan & Company, *The Resources of North Carolina* (Wilmington: New York and Wilmington, 1869), 83.

making plans to capitalize on the region's resources.

The expansion of the railroad to Western North Carolina ushered in the industrial revolution to the previously isolated region. For an area with an abundance of raw materials, manufacturing was profitable. Richard Barentine, Chief Executive Officer of the International Home Furnishings Marketing Association in High Point, North Carolina, summarized the impact of the railroad on the North Carolina furniture industry in an interview conducted in 1999:

When the railroad was finished, then lumber started being shipped out of here as the principal cash crop. In the 1870s and '80s that was about all we were doing here. As a cash crop, it didn't take the southern entrepreneurs and the northern entrepreneurs long to figure out that we ought not to be shipping lumber. We ought to be shipping furniture. So, in about 1880 — almost simultaneously in other parts of North Carolina — mass produced furniture started being made. I believe this city dates it [to] about 1888 as the beginning [the year] of mass produced furniture. So, in the '80s, it must have been a wonderful time in the South, particularly in this part of the South because a large idle workforce was put to work. The quality of life — the standard of living — immediately was ready to change because people had jobs.⁴⁰

Manufacturing jobs were created by the extension of the railroad to Western North Carolina, and industrial work provided income for those unable to make a living farming.⁴¹

The tourism industry also flourished in Western North Carolina after the completion of the railroad. As early as 1859, Henry Colton, a naturalist and geologist, encouraged North

⁴⁰ Richard Barentine, *Oral History Interview with Richard Barentine, January 28, 1999*. Interview I-0068. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007).

⁴¹ Holland Thompson, *From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), 69-73.

Carolinians to take the train to Morganton and then ride by stage coach to Asheville for a relaxing vacation in the mountain. His description of Asheville follows:

The elevated situation of this table-land, its bracing atmosphere, fertile soil, and excellent water, all combine to make it a region of interest to any one who would seek refreshment for a care-worn body, or a place whereat to while pleasantly away the hot summer months. Besides, this section embraces elevations of land higher than any other in the eastern portion of our Union, which fact should be an inducement to all to visit there, and a source of pride to North Carolinians. The White Mountains of New Hampshire have been, for years, a place for resort and recreation; why should not the Black Mountains of North Carolina, with a climate certainly more agreeable, and a view equally as good, be so now?⁴²

After the railroad was completed, making travel to the Appalachian Mountains more convenient, tourism transformed the region. By 1900, the Southern Railway Company was promoting travel to Asheville and the Appalachian Mountains in its pamphlets. One description of Asheville found in the company's literature follows:

Asheville has as many facets as an exquisitely cut diamond. It is a place of curious and charming anomalies--anomalies that blend, one with another, in a way so natural as to be a source of constant delight to the beholder. It is modern, yet primitive; it is quaint, yet conventional; it is softly- beautiful, yet ruggedly picturesque; and it has all urban facilities with all rural advantages.⁴³

Along with the expansion of the railroad to Western North Carolina came rapid industrialization and increased tourism. After the railroad was completed in the early 1870s,

⁴² Henry Colton, *Mountain Scenery* (Raleigh: W. L. Pomeroy, 1859), 15.

⁴³ Southern Railway Passenger Traffic Department, *Asheville: The Ideal Autumn and Winter Resort City* (Washington, D.C.: Passenger Traffic Department, 1900), 3.

Western North Carolinians had job opportunities in tourism, cotton mills, and factories for the first time.

Legacy of the Whig Party in North Carolina

The Amendments made to the North Carolina Constitution in 1835 set in motion a series of events that would fundamentally change the State's infrastructure, public school system, and economic condition. Beginning in 1835, eastern plantation owners lost their domination over state politics, and a more democratic system of government was established. These changes to the Constitution allowed direct election of the Governor, and the first man elected to that office in North Carolina was a Whig. The Whig Party included internal improvements among its top priorities, and this affiliation with infrastructural development can be credited with much of the Party's success. All across the United States in the Antebellum Age, the Whig Party posed an electoral threat to Jacksonian Democrats and championed the funding of infrastructure in order to strengthen the economy.

The North Carolina Legislature, controlled by the Whig Party for several years, voted to fund plank roads, canals, railroads, and public schools over the course of multiple sessions. In 1838, the North Carolina Public School Act was passed by the Whig Legislature, in what at the time was the single greatest achievement in guaranteeing education to children across the state. 1848 was an important year in the development of North Carolina as well, as the Legislature and the Whig Governor pushed forward a series of charters for plank roads and railroads that, when completed many years later, would end North Carolina's long run as the Rip Van Winkle State. Most of the issues addressed by the Whig Party in North Carolina were specific to or especially pressing in Western North Carolina, where the terrain did not allow for large farms or plantations and where government aid to infrastructure was badly needed in the early 1800s. The Whig

Party's success came to an end as the Civil War began, and it would never regain its place as one of the most powerful political parties in the country. Despite its sudden demise, the Party's success across the United States helped build railroads, plank roads, and schools that the nation would benefit from long after the Whigs were gone.

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