

IN SEARCH OF A LOVING GOD: UNIVERSALIST CHURCHES IN NEW YORK,
1845-1865

To be presented at Unitarian Universalist History Convocation, Oct., 2010

Presenter: Avery M. Guest, 6518 51st Ave NE, Seattle, WA 98115-7741;

averyguest@gmail.com

My research tests three sets of hypotheses about which New York communities developed Universalist congregations between 1845 and 1865, a formative period for this denomination with innovative liberal theological ideas. Contrary to previous scholars, I support what I call the Modernization perspective, finding that the Universalists were primarily concentrated in non-farm, highly productive manufacturing communities. They were especially located along the route of the Erie Canal, the state's major highway. In addition, I find that towns with a strong Cultural Heritage base of New England migrants were especially apt to support Universalist churches. Modernization and Cultural Heritage relate in unusual ways so that the effects of a nonfarm economy are especially evident when the town's population had New England origins. On the whole, I find little support for the thesis that Universalism especially developed in areas that were located in New York's rapidly expanding Frontier.

INTRODUCTION

The westward expansion of the United States in the early 1800s was associated with a proliferation of religious movements, especially representing various forms of what is considered the Protestant Reformation (Ahlstrom 1975). These movements/denominations had a wide variety of perspectives on religious issues such as the nature of God, the moral character of humans, and the existence of the soul after physical death.

By the early 1800s, the American public had developed a much more tolerant view of religious differences than existed in most of the rest of the world (de Tocqueville 1835-40). Little state regulation of religious movements existed, and individuals could participate in religious organizations that best represented their theological and personal styles. In effect, the religious market could be viewed as analogous to pluralistic economies where various businesses compete independently with each other for customers (Finke and Stark 1992). Just as in the economy, institutional actors would win to the extent that they offered the best deal at the best price.

A number of the American religious movements such as the Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Presbyterians were imported from Europe and then expanded in the new land, but others such as the Mormons, the Seventh Day Adventists, and the Universalists (the

subject of this study) arose primarily as indigenous developments in the United States. Much of the existing historical scholarship on the development of the new U.S. religious groups has focused on the importance of key individuals and their ideas in recruiting members. While this approach is very valuable, I take another tack, asking how the social and economic conditions in geographic areas (the “social context”) influenced the strength of religious movements. Thus, I am interested in research questions such as how areal variations in the nature of employment, the degree of urbanization, and the ethnic composition encouraged interest by the public in the new religions.

An example of my approach is found in a previously published paper (Finke, Guest , and Stark 1996) that investigates the correlates of overall proportions of residential populations attending church across the approximately 900 towns of New York in 1855 and 1865,. Some have argued that the development of a modern urban industrial economy increases rationality in interpersonal relationships and leads to the decline of traditional mystical viewpoints such as those associated with religion (Warner 1993). In contrast, the previous New York study found that rates of religious attendance were higher in the urban than rural areas of the state. One important factor in this pattern was the existence of greater religious diversity in the urban than rural parts of the state, making more choices available to urbanites to match their religious beliefs.

In this paper, I take a more specialized focus on religion in New York State by focusing on one of the most liberal indigenous religious groups to emerge, the Universalists. I study for the 1845 to 1865 period the social and economic characteristics of the more than 800 towns in New York State that were related to the emergence of Universalist churches. My data are primarily drawn from the state censuses of 1845, 1855, and 1865 (Secretary of State 1846, 1857, 1867, 1877) that collected systematic data on religious denominations by town. The data collection in New York started shortly before the first national religious census in 1850, and provided information on relatively small town units of typically a few thousand residents while the national census concentrated on much larger, diverse county units (Land, Blau, Deane 1991). During the time period of this study, roughly 10 to 15 percent of towns in New York had a functioning Universalist church that was enumerated by census data collectors.

I view this study of the Universalists as part of a larger interest in the social forces that produce popular sympathy for what might be described as liberal religious groups. While a definition of “liberal” religion is not well accepted by the scholarly community, I believe that such groups embody some of the characteristics used by the theologian James Luther Adams in his definition (1976), including a belief that revelation and truth

are important but not immutably fixed, a willingness to discuss and tolerate different versions of the truth, a belief in a just and open world community, and an optimism about the potential of the human community. In short, liberal religion embodies most of the basic ideas of what has been described as the Enlightenment.

Three broad hypotheses will guide my analysis of the Universalists in New York State. First, I consider what might be called the Modernization perspective. This perspective argues that liberal religious perspectives will most likely develop in communities that are characterized by employment and economic structures that are compatible with Enlightenment ideas, especially urban-industrialism and a competitive economic system. Second, I entertain what is described as the Frontier hypothesis. This view argues that communities in their early stages of development often lack attachment to fixed or traditional ideas. The people in these communities have often migrated because they disliked the more traditional places they had left, and they are especially open to contemplating new ideas. Finally, I test the Cultural Heritage viewpoint that grows out of the observation that individuals develop their world views out of the social and ethnic groups that claim their membership. Some groups tend to emphasize ideas associated with the Enlightenment more than others. I do not mean to say that group sympathy to the notions of the Enlightenment is immutable, but it does differ among groups at any point in time.

DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSALIST DENOMINATION

In Christianity, the idea of religious universalism was discussed as early as the first few centuries after the death of Jesus, typically referring to the view that salvation is universal, occurring to all humans regardless of background and social characteristics (Bumbaugh 2001). In the United States, the Universalist denomination gradually emerged in the late 1700s in the Northeast, especially New England. The two key founders were John Murray (Cassara 1991) and Hosea Ballou (1902) who both preached from a Christian perspective that God loved all humans and was beneficent enough to promise universal salvation. Since the Universalist Church had no direct ties to European religious groups, it depended on active evangelism to recruit members of other denominations.

Universalism might be described as Calvinism stood on its head because, while agreeing with the Calvinists on the idea of one universal force or God, it rejected the idea that all humans were necessarily sinful and were selectively (almost arbitrarily) condemned to Hell (Bressler 2001, Williams 2002). Adherents were sometimes called the “no Hellers” because they rejected the notion that a literal domain of endless punishment existed. Murray was a Trinitarian Christian, but, as the denomination

expanded, a unitarian perspective dominated within a theology that emphasized the teachings of Jesus that focused on the reconciliation of humans with each other in a pattern of mutual love. The central statement of Universalist faith, the Winchester Profession of 1803 (Miller 1979), emphasized identity with the teachings of Jesus as broadly defined while also stating explicitly an “escape clause” to the effect that one could be a Universalist without subscribing fully to the doctrine.

The Universalists viewed their major religious opponents as the Calvinists who, at this time point, were generally quite dominant in denominations in the Northeast, especially the “regular” Baptists, the Congregationalists, the Dutch Reformed, and the Presbyterians. The Calvinists generally emphasized the evil in human behavior and believed that salvation was only open to individuals who had been specifically selected by God. The Universalists also differentiated themselves from the numerically important Methodists that generally espoused what might be described as Arminian viewpoints. Within the Arminian perspective, humans were basically evil but salvation was determined by individual action, especially the free will acceptance of Jesus as their saviour.

Early Universalist writings in the United States were based on an essentially literal reading of the Christian Bible, with the assumption that God presented a unified viewpoint that could be discerned by rational means. Justification for the theology came from arguing that the Bible advocated a religious theology and commitment in the same way they did (Ballou 1902, Smith 1839). Just as importantly, Universalists found little support in the Bible for major ideas of the Calvinists and Arminians. Over time, Universalist interpretation of the Bible became more symbolic, and critics (Smith 1844) attacked them for having a high proportion of atheists and agnostics.

Given the emphasis on the Bible, it might seem unreasonable to describe the Universalists as a “liberal” religion. Yet, their theological perspective was essentially consistent with humanistic perspectives that had emerged in the Enlightenment. They believed in the inherent potential for good in all humans, that humans could work together to improve continually the world, that individuals maximized their chances for salvation by helping others, that individual choices in religion had to be made by rational means, and that the meaning of the Bible could be determined by rational interpretation. The Universalists were comfortable with the idea of describing themselves as “liberal”; for instance, they named their first seminary in New York State as the Clinton Liberal Institute (eventually to become St. Lawrence University).

There are a number of good, fairly comprehensive histories of the early Universalists

(Bressler 2001, Cassara 1971, Eddy 1884-86, Marini 1982, Miller 1979). The literature is quite limited in regard to the role of community environmental and compositional characteristics in leading to the selective development of Universalist societies in the Northeast.

The Universalist denomination became quite important in New York state. Anecdotal histories are available (Paquette 2010, Sawyer 1852, Smith 1843, Stacy 1850), and the Universalists were enthusiastic in publishing about themselves in numerous newspapers and magazines. The first church was established at New Hartford in 1804, and records of the denomination indicate a rapid expansion of the denomination in various parts of the state in the first few decades of the century. Initially, the Universalists had a clear shortage of ministers, and much of the organizing was done by circuit riders. Part of the ministerial shortage may have been due to the fact that potential candidates were reluctant to leave the more settled, stable environments in New England. Another major problem was the lack of a seminary in New York State which was resolved by the founding of the Clinton Institute in 1842. In 1850, at the time of the first national religious enumeration by the Bureau of the Census (1853, 134), some 532 Universalist churches were reported. Massachusetts and New York were clearly the leading states with 123 and 114 churches, respectively.

The Universalists merged with the Unitarian denomination in the early 1960s to form the Unitarian Universalist Association, but, in the period of my study, there was clear opposition to the idea that they were simply Unitarians (Smith 1843). Appleton has described the major historical difference between them in this way, “Universalists believed that God was too good to condemn men while Unitarians believed that men were too good to be condemned by God” (Williams 2002, 86). Unitarianism represented a schism from the established Congregational Church on New England. A number of the early Universalist leaders and ministers had been Baptists (Smith 1843). The different denominational origins may have had implications for a strong rationalistic emphasis among the Unitarians while the Universalists (although clearly sympathetic to rational interpretations) had a more pietistic outlook (Morgan 1995).

NEW YORK STATE RELIGION

During the period of my study, New York was a fascinating environment, in terms of sociological, economic, and religious change.

While the very eastern towns of New York had been settled well before the American Revolution in the late 1700s, most of the rest of the state remained sparsely settled by the European-origin population before the early 1800s. The settlement of all parts of the

state was especially facilitated by the extensive development of inland human-made waterways that provided a means of moving humans, animals, and products. The best known was the Erie Canal, opened in 1825, that extended across the state from Albany in the east to Buffalo in the west, providing a central “highway”. Technological improvements in transportation were also important, such as the development of covered wagons that could carry personal belongings and were capable of dealing with the often rugged terrain (Borchert 1967). In effect, the state turned in a relatively short few decades from being a relatively unpopulated wilderness for Europeans to being, at least for the times, one of the most economically developed parts of the world.

As the state expanded economically, religious denominations were not far behind in their efforts to gain adherents. New York State’s government made virtually no effort to regulate the practice of religion. The general religious pluralism of the United States meant that a large number of denominations were eager to compete for the settlers in the state. Due to settlement patterns, the church strength of some of the denominations largely paralleled the location of specific ethnic groups. For instance, the Calvinistic Dutch Reformed Church was quite important in many parts of eastern New York, in proximity to the Hudson River, where Dutch immigrants had settled in the 17th Century. In addition, the diverse social and economic environment of the state seemed to encourage the development of new religious theologies such as the Mormons and the Seventh Day Adventists (Cross 1950).

In a study of 19th Century religion in New York State, Cross (1950) describes a “burned-over” district that roughly extended from Rochester in the east to the Pennsylvania border in the west. The state was “burned-over”, according to Cross, because the religious ideologies fiercely competed with each other much as fires might “burn-over” geographic territories.

Debates among representatives of different denominations were common, as were religious revivals. Cross (1950, 17-18) argues that the Universalists, in a perverse sense, may actually have increased the strength of opposition religious groups. As he notes, “More than the Catholics in western New York did the Universalists serve as this kind of foil for the evangelists, stimulating them to ever-more-heroic efforts. Thus, a thriving Universalist Church served a dual function, irritating the revivalists to action while providing a stimulus for alternate types of enthusiasm.” While the Universalists were not generally oriented toward revivals, one such episode apparently occurred in the mid-1800s in Madison County in the central Finger Lake Region (Robbersmith 2005)

HYPOTHESES

A major issue about the Universalists was whether they were symbolic of major social divisions of society that are commonly identified with the Enlightenment, a movement of the relatively well-educated that emphasized reason and optimism about the potential of the human community. In general, what might be called Modernization theory provides an interpretation of where historical movements associated with the Enlightenment might be found. For the purposes of this analysis, I have picked three indicators that seem relevant to Modernization theory; (1) the importance of farming, (2) the presence of an industrial economy, and (3) location in proximity to the Erie Canal. Given their religious views, one might superficially believe that the Universalists should be found most often in non-farming, relatively industrial communities on or near the Erie Canal.

An example of what I describe as the Modernization perspective is indicated by the sociological work of Fischer (1975, 1982) who argues that urban communities in the contemporary world are often most differentiated from rural communities by their high levels of tolerance of social behavior by others who are unlike themselves. The exact reasons for this are a bit ambiguous but a couple of important factors might be suggested. First, large places are relatively diverse in social characteristics and tolerance of others becomes a necessity when it is difficult for one social group to dominate the community. Second, large places tend to draw migrants from wide geographic areas, and these migrants increase the diversity of the community.

A common anti-Modernization perspective is the viewpoint sometimes known as the “noble savage” theory (Boas 1997, Ellingson 2001). While there are variations of this theory, it tends to view isolated, poorly educated, and homogeneous population as being peaceful, communitarian, and altruistic. According to this perspective, the “noble savage” lives in a close relationship with the almost holy natural world that has been disrupted by modern civilization. Even within a modern world, those who most fit the “noble savage” profile are idealized as the movie *Avatar* recently did.

The Universalists of the 19th Century have been portrayed most commonly as a primarily rural, small-town denomination with a membership of low educational levels. Williams (2002, x) reports that, in New England, “Denominational Universalism was the rural and small-town counterpart of seaboard Arminianism/Unitarianism....”. Holifield (2003, 18) comments about the Universalists, “Sharing some of the same complaints as the more literate Unitarians, they espoused a form of theological liberalism that appealed to small farmers and laboring people.” Cassara (1971, 5) reports that “...the greater number of Universalist churches were made up of the lower classes of New England

society.” Matlins and Magida (2006, 340) note ...”Universalism was initially an evangelistic, working-class movement with an uneducated clergy.”

In a study of the 19th Century Vermont, Roth (1987, 65) argues, “Despite their disagreement over issues like the necessity of conversion and man’s capacity for sin, Universalism and Methodism attracted primarily the same people: farmers and rural artisans.” However, Roth also argues that the Universalists within rural areas had a special appeal to the “intelligentsia” of the day.

Bressler (2001, 21) takes a more nuanced approach to the social base of historic Universalism. She contends:

“Yet, even though back-country New England certainly proved receptive to the notion of universal salvation, early Universalism was by no means only a rural phenomenon. Whereas the idea of universal salvation was widely preached to approving back-country audiences in the late eighteenth century, formally organized Universalism tended to arise first in the towns... Other towns in eastern Massachusetts, as well as larger urban centers like Philadelphia and New York, were also early homes to Universalist societies.”

While most previous claims do not support the Modernization perspective about the Universalists, I must quite frankly admit some possible ambiguities in interpretation. Some of the interpretations compare implicitly the characteristics of the historical Universalists with the historical Unitarians. In such a direct comparison, there is little doubt that the Unitarians would win out as more “modern”. For me, a more interesting issue is how the Universalists fare within the Modernization perspective relative to other religious groups and the general population. The Universalists may have appeared as “primitives” because the United States, although developing rapidly as a “modern” society, was still relatively agricultural and poorly educated. This question has not been answered empirically.

Hughes (1997) has produced one of the few empirical studies that actually investigates the types of communities that supported the development of Universalist denominations. A common theme of scholarship on Universalist history is the idea that the early growth of the denomination in the late 1700s was especially stimulated by the work of Rev. John Murray who largely preached in the more urban parts of eastern New England (Miller 1979). However, Hughes shows empirically that the primary community centers of Universalism at this time were located more in the interior of New England states. In interpreting the community causes of early Universalist development, Hughes tends to emphasize conflict over doctrinal issues within individual denominations (leading them to split off into Universalist congregations) and the actions of energetic Universalist evangelical preachers.

One of Hughes' most interesting empirical findings (1997, Map 1) is the heavy concentration of early Universalist congregations in close proximity to the Connecticut River which was a primary transportation link. However, Hughes does not identify proximity to major transportation in itself as having much link to the spread of religious ideas.

Evidence for the possible importance of waterways, including the Erie Canal, is found in Wuthnow's (1989) analysis of the types of European towns that provided the most support for various forms of the religious Reformation that challenged the dominance of the Holy Roman church in the 16th Century. Wuthnow notes that "trading" towns in comparison to "market" towns were unusually likely to identify with the Reformation. He notes that trading towns were often on major transportation waterways that exchanged goods with other towns while market towns tended to provide goods and services only for nearby populations. In addition, citizens in trading towns often had to negotiate exchange with other communities, forcing them to understand the point of view of others.

Wuthnow argues that the traders owed allegiance to no traditional authorities and were therefore willing to consider innovative religious perspectives. In contrast, merchants in the market towns were often indebted to local royalty or other traditional figures who tended to side with the established Roman Catholic Church. Such an argument might easily be applied in a comparison of towns along the Erie Canal relative to those located at some distance. Due to their exchange patterns, the Erie Canal towns would be more innovative in accepting a new religious viewpoint.

A Frontier model of Universalist church formation is quite evident in Cross' study (1950) of "enthusiastic" religion in what he describes as the "Burned-Over" district of Western New York State. Cross portrays the ill-defined Western part of the state (generally the area west of Rochester) in the first part of the 19th Century as a primarily rural, expanding frontier that was especially open to new religious ideas. In essence, he argues that the frontier brought diverse people and diverse ideas that encouraged new ways of thinking about religion. Within the frontier, older established denominations might gain a foothold, but dominance gradually shifted to the newer groups. This atmosphere was facilitated allegedly by the development of the Erie Canal in the 1820s, bringing new settlers, new ideas, commercial enterprise, and contact with innovative ideas from the outside world.

Cross names a number of sects, including the Universalists, who thrived in the frontier environment (1950, 16). He notes that a number of these religious groups practiced a "casual approach to conversion, lacking the planning and organization which the larger

churches utilized. But even if the missionary work was not systematic or adequately financed, it was remarkably effective.”

In describing the Universalists, Cross notes (1950, 18), “This Yankee church, the rural equivalent of urban Unitarianism, entered the Burned-over District ...and developed rapidly only with the increased tide of hill-country New Englanders who migrated in the years following 1815. Its emissaries were rugged itinerants, who roamed isolated country regions trading blows in kind with their evangelistic opponents.”

Cross' study is full of interesting ideas and significant amounts of data, but the ideas are rarely tested with the available data.

While Cross and I both identify the Erie Canal as an important possible correlate of religious innovation, he sees its role more as an indicator of the Frontier, rather than Modernization. However, from the perspective of well-known historian Billington (1949), a major canal would not be an indicator of the frontier for a very simple reason: the frontier is believed to be an area of isolation or low integration with other parts of the society. The Erie Canal was, if anything, a major tool of social and economic integration. To validate Cross' Frontier theory, we need to test for the importance of other town characteristics that are usually identified with such perspectives. To this end, I am testing in this study for the possible effects of (1) the sex ratio (the ratio of males to 100 females), (2) the year of incorporation of the town, and (3) the amount of arable farm land per farmer. A high sex ratio (dominance of men) is often identified as an important characteristic of frontier communities (Melbin 1978). Newer communities, of course, should have more of a frontier character than older communities. Finally, frontier areas should be characterized by an abundance of farmland. Older settled communities in the Northeast often suffered from a shortage of agricultural land per farmer as the high fertility rates made it difficult for parents to provide adequate endowments for their children (Easterlin, Alter, and Condran 1978, Guest 1981).

In her study of the development of Universalism, Bressler seems to argue that a key correlate of support for the denomination should be location in longer settled areas, rather than on the frontier. Without providing any direct evidence, Bressler claims that the major social characteristic of strong Universalist areas was attachment to the family. As she notes (2001, 21), “...it is not surprising that Universalist teachings showed strength in areas where close and lasting family ties were more common than early independence. It was perhaps a natural tendency for those remaining in familiar—and familial—territory to envision the entire world in terms of a large family.” In the 19th Century United States,

a common practice involved migratory dispersal of families to the frontier, especially as younger generations came of age.

Another important factor in understanding the development of Universalist churches in New York may be the ethnic composition of the community, leading to what I call the Cultural Heritage theory. I test for the importance of three traits, the percentage of the population born in New England states, the percentage born outside the United States, and the influence of Dutch colonization in the 1600s.

Religious denominations attract individuals of specific ethnic backgrounds for a variety of reasons including family religious identification traditions and compatible world views. As Cross (1950, 323) notes, “The Universalists, like the orthodox Yorkers, were good Yankees. They had the tender conscience, the intense concern for the community, the preoccupation with a perfected society, long grown in the Puritan tradition. But their generously conceived heaven had room for sinner as well as saint.” The fact that so many old Yankee relatives and friends of “Father” Hosea Ballou became Universalists is no accident.

In contrast to the Yankee tradition, some areas of New York State identified much more with the somewhat different Dutch heritage. Of course, the Dutch had really been the first major European settlers in the 1600s in New York State, especially around New York City and the eastern part of the state, including the Hudson Valley. Indeed, the English Pilgrims to Massachusetts had left Holland in the early 1600s because they were afraid that their way of life was being corrupted by contact there. By the early 1800s, the Reformed Church, the leading religious wing of the Dutch, still had a strongly Calvinist orientation that would hold little sympathy for the ideas of the Universalists.

In a study of Universalists, we also need to consider the possibility that the concentration of the foreign born influenced the development of their churches. One of the most important early Universalist evangelists in the late 1700s was George de Benneville, an immigrant himself (Cassara 1961). A physician and lay preacher, he spread Universalism among the German immigrants of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and later around Philadelphia and New Jersey. However, it is also possible that the foreign born had little to do with Universalism. Cross (1950, 83) argues that the foreign-born in New York State in the early 19th Century had heritages that “denied them any potential interest in the isms of New England derivation, so their relationship to radical religion is a negative one...Antipathy between the two groups was nearly inevitable and would find expression in various forms.”

DATA SOURCES

The collection of comparative data on religious denominations in the United States began with the Census of 1850 and occurred periodically until 1936. The great bulk of the data was collected for states, counties, and major cities. While these data are invaluable for the study of religious development and change in the United States (Stark 1992), they are somewhat ill-suited for the study of how community environments affected religious involvement and strength. In general, political counties were the smallest ecological units in the national data collection, but especially in the 19th Century, slow transportation forced most individuals to make choices about religious affiliation within somewhat smaller areas.

The New York State censuses of 1845, 1885, and 1865 resolve this problem (Middleton 1905). They report data on religious denominations for typically smaller towns or townships. The State census of 1875 also collected data that were similar to those for previous censuses ending in 5, but unfortunately, the religious data were reported only to the county level. I have previously published from the 1855 and 1865 materials (Finke, Guest, and Stark 1996).

While New York State is not officially considered part of New England, the geography of town siting was very similar. In the colonial and early post-revolutionary period, farmers typically lived near each other in hamlets or small communities. They would then, during the day, till land in the surrounding areas. Towns were frequently constructed as governmental units on the basis of these farming hamlets.

The state census data for 1845 to 1865 vary some by year, but always contain information on the presence of specific denominational churches, including Universalists, in each town. From the census descriptions of data collection procedures, it appears that most of the information was obtained from local ministers. The Universalists in the 19th Century distinguished between churches and societies, which seems similar to the contemporary Unitarian Universalist distinction between a church and a fellowship. Since the census depended on reports of religious professionals, there was probably an underestimate of the number of functioning Universalist groups in the state, but the underenumerated groups undoubtedly had small memberships. Census offices in the United States rarely produce error-free documents, but they usually employ trained staffs that have high standards of data gathering. I have no reason to believe that census enumerators tried systematically to understate the number of Universalist congregations relative to other denominations.

The state census data also contain reports, by town, on key predictive characteristics such as occupation, school attendance, place of birth, manufacturing productivity, and the

organization of agriculture.

Other data sources provide information for this paper. I have been able to determine the year that townships were created. From maps, I can identify key geographical features such as location relative to the Erie Canal, to other Universalist townships, and general location in the state.

As a denomination, the Universalists were bad record keepers. The lack of effective national organization was well known and appeared to be viewed with some pride by many members who were staunchly anti-authoritarian. Publications such as the *Universalist Register* provided periodic denominational statistics, usually annual, such as names of congregations and ministers and numbers of members. It is difficult to determine the accuracy of these statistics and the frequency with which they were revised. In what is obviously a monumental effort, Karen Dau, contemporary historian of the New York State Convention of Universalists, has assembled (and kindly given to me) what appears to be a relatively complete database of all Universalist societies that existed in New York State. Before publishing this study, I need to compare directly the Dau data with those reported in the state census.

I have found large discrepancies in comparing census data on the Universalists, both national and state, with the official statistics of the denomination in the 19th Century. Thus, in 1855, the midpoint of this analysis, the New York State census reported 133 Universalist edifices or churches with their buildings. The New York state census officials for 1855 (1857, lxiv) noted that the New York State Convention records for the same year showed 218 societies, 178 meeting houses, and 128 preachers. While the discrepancy is noted by the census officials, no explanation is provided. I note that the number of preachers reported for 1855 by the convention (128) is quite similar to the number of church edifices enumerated (133), a reasonable pattern since enumerators were dependent on ministers for their data. While the differences are troubling, I would not assume that the Universalist records are correct. A reasonable viewpoint is that many of the so-called societies, enumerated by the denomination but not by the census, had only existed for very short periods of time or had only a handful of members.

STATE LEVEL RELIGIOUS PATTERNS

Using state and national census data for New York, I summarize in Table 1 some of the characteristics of the Universalists at various time points. The characteristics differ some by year, but the number of churches or organizations was a constant feature of statistical reports. The data in Table 1 show little long-term trend in Universalist strength was evident in the 19th Century. Two statistical peak years in terms of number of

churches, 1860 and 1890, were evident. The reasons for the bimodal pattern are unclear. The Civil War in the early 1860s must have led to some concern among those believing in a loving God since the military casualties were horrendous. The existence of little overall century-long positive trend in number of Universalist churches has to be considered a negative relative indicator for the denomination as the population of New York State and the total number of churches grew dramatically.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The number of Universalist churches declined rapidly in the 20th Century. By 1926, the number of Universalist churches was only about one-third the number in the mid-19th Century. The reasons for this decline needs to be studied quantitatively, a topic that I believe has not been broached. A central idea of many Enlightenment thinkers was that the use of reason and personal tolerance would diffuse to the mass population over time, but, if true, this did not benefit the Universalists.

The data on church seats and membership in Table 1 are much less complete than on the number of churches. Information on seats indicates that the Universalists had the most available capacity before the Civil War. The data on number of members suggests a wild downward swing between 1855 and 1865 and then a subsequent leveling off of membership. As previously pointed out, data on numbers of members should probably be viewed suspiciously since the Universalists were not generally obsessive record keepers.

The data from the state census permit tabulation of the inter-town stability of Universalist churches. To measure this, I have created a data set of 815 towns and cities with data for 1845, 1855, and 1865 that could be linked to the 1845 list of communities. Where towns were created out of already existing places, I have combined them to indicate their categorization in 1845. Since most towns only had one Universalist church at a single point in time, I have categorized all the 815 towns at each point in time on whether they had at least one Universalist church.

There was certainly some stability in the existence of Universalist representation, but I was surprised at the degree to which turnover occurred. Of the 815 towns, 658 never had a Universalist church reported between 1845 and 1865. Of the remaining 157 towns with a Universalist church, 46 had a church reported only once, 49 had a church reported twice, and 62 had a church reported all three times. Another useful statistic is the relationship between having a Universalist church in 1845 and 1865. Of the 106 towns with a church in 1845, 61.3 percent still had a church in 1865. Of the 709 towns without a church in 1845, 5.7 percent had one in 1865. The last statistic suggests that the denomination did not spread much to other locales in New York during the 20 year period

of this study. Interestingly to me, the number of towns with a Universalist church in 1845 was exactly the same as the number with a church in 1865 (106). Unfortunately, I cannot determine with certainty from the state census data the instability of churches that was due to actual disappearance as opposed to bad enumeration. It is also possible that some Universalist groups moved back and forth between status as formal churches and informal fellowships.

While some (Cassara 1971; Maitlins and Magida 2006, 340; Owen-Towle 1993) have claimed that the Universalists in the 19th Century were somewhere between the fourth and ninth largest denomination in the United States, data from the state census of 1855 provide a more cautious conclusion, at least about New York. Table 2 shows selected characteristics, state-wide, of major denominations in 1855, certainly a period of relative strength for the Universalists. The state census of 1855 was the first to provide a variety of indicators for denominational strength.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

I have ranked the denominations by number of churches for those that had at least 80. Due to the frequent identification of the Universalists with the Unitarians, I have also provided statistics for the much smaller Unitarian denomination (16 churches, ranked 24th). The distribution of churches was quite skewed, with the Methodists, regular Baptists, and Presbyterians dominating in numbers. A second rank tier includes the Congregationalists, Catholics, and Dutch Reformed. Although the Universalists were ranked 10th, they were actually in a third rank tier, being close in numbers to the Union and Quaker denominations (also generally considered theologically liberal for the time period).

The other columns in Table 2 present additional information about the mean characteristics of churches. Since this paper focuses on the Universalists, I will primarily report on them in relationship to other denominations. Compared to the top seven denominations (the first and second tier), the average Universalist Church was relatively small in seats, attendance, and members. The small average membership especially stands out. At the same time, the Universalist churches were roughly comparable in seats, attendance, and membership with the Union, Quaker, and Christian Connection denominations (all considered relatively liberal).

For each denomination, I have also presented the ratios of attendance to seats and membership to attendance. While the meaning of these ratios may be debated, I believe (with absolutely no supporting evidence) that community members will view organizations as vibrant and important when they are “packed” at their services and

relatively high commitment is indicated by a high percentage of core members. Among the Protestant groups, the Universalists (along with the Unitarians) score relatively high on “packing” their churches. The lowest ratios are found for what were considered other liberal groups (or at least anti-Calvinist) groups of the time, Union, Quaker, Christian Connection, and Free Will Baptist. I distrust the data on communicants since different denominations have different standards, but the Universalists and Unitarians have the lowest ratios of communicants to attendees.

HYPOTHESES TEST FOR UNIVERSALISTS

The dependent variable in the analysis has three categories, whether the town never had a Universalist church in 1845, 1855, or 1865; whether the town had an enumerated church at one of the time points but not all of them; whether the town had a church at each point in time. My premise is that Universalism was strongest in communities where it appeared all three time points, but that lesser strength was still evident if a church appeared at least once.

Figure 1 shows a map of what I call “upstate” New York, indicating the location of Universalist churches between 1845 and 1865 (according to the state census materials). Towns are categorized by the presence of such a church. The darker colors indicate towns where a church was enumerated at all three dates between 1845 and 1865. The lighter colors represent towns where a church was enumerated at least once between 1845 and 1865. I have not included the counties around New York City, both to simplify the logistics of presenting a map and because the areas around New York City had very few Universalist churches. These areas were generally claimed by the Dutch in the 17th Century and continued to be pockets of representation for people of Dutch ancestry into the 19th Century.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Figure 1 indicates a great deal of geographic concentration among Universalist churches. Most noteworthy is a strong concentration of churches in a swath that extends across the state from Albany to Buffalo. Roughly speaking, this was the area of the Erie Canal. Within this Canal band, there is a particularly strong concentration in the central Finger Lakes region which was open to European settlement in the early 1800s, well before the Erie Canal was built. Among other features, the central Finger Lakes area attracted many New England migrants. Another major area of concentration occurs in very northern New York, east of Watertown, generally along the route of the St. Lawrence River, another major means of transportation in the state’s history. I would also mention another region of Universalist concentration in northwestern New York, in the area

known as the Genesee Valley. This area in the early 1800s became the “bread basket” of New York, in fact, of the U.S. northeast, being highly productive in producing grain products. While this area was generally agricultural, it was very dependent on export of products to other markets.

A cursory view of the map shows little concentration of Universalist churches as one moves west into what became the frontier region in the early to mid-1800s. Interestingly, there is some absence of Universalist churches in the very eastern section of the state, bordering Massachusetts which was a stronghold of Universalism. I believe that this primarily reflected the fact that the very Eastern part of the state had a strong Dutch influence.

I now turn to the quantitative hypothesis testing that is the heart of my analysis. My independent or predictor variables will primarily be drawn from data collected in the State Census of 1845, but I have also developed two other empirical indicators to test the hypotheses. A variety of measures are available in the three state censuses, but I have decided to focus on 1845 since it has good indicators of my concepts for the three major models or explanations of Universalist churches. In addition, the temporal causal order is much better for the 1845 than the 1855 and 1865 data. To keep the analysis manageable, I focus on only three indicators apiece of the three theories.

Modernization is indicated by three variables: The percentage of farmers among all persons who had an enumerated occupation, the monetary value per capita of manufacturing products, and degree of proximity to the Erie Canal. The monetary value of manufacturing was determined by adding together the reported sums in 19 categories. These include a variety of food, clothing, liquid, and metal manufacturing. Degree of proximity to the Erie Canal was based on categorizing towns into three groups: located along the Erie Canal, proximate to a township along the Erie Canal, and more peripheral in location.

The Frontier perspective is indicated by the year the township was incorporated, by the sex ratio of the population, and by the number of improved agricultural acres per farmer. Newly incorporated townships should be rapidly growing and changing; thus, they should be on the frontier. Another indicator, the sex ratio, indicates the number of men in the population per one hundred women. Scholars (Melbin 1978) have viewed the dominance of males in a population as an indicator of an unstable social structure that characterizes the frontier environment. Finally, the availability of agricultural land was an important factor in stimulating the westward migration. As geographic areas “filled up” in the more established areas, individual families dispersed and moved on because they

lacked the land resources to sustain a good standard of living (Easterlin, Alter, and Condran 1978, Guest 1981). The improved acres variable is based on reports in the 1845 agricultural census.

The Cultural Heritage theory will be tested by three variables that measure ethnic composition: the percentage of the 1845 population born in New England, the percentage foreign born, and the historical presence of the Dutch. The presence of the Dutch was measured by using a somewhat crude 1660 map that indicated the territory in New York claimed as part of the Dutch colony (Wikipedia 2010). Essentially, the claimed Dutch territory was focused on the Hudson River from its outlet to the Atlantic Ocean northward to settlements a short distance beyond Albany. The Dutch claim included all the territory east of the Hudson to the borders of the New England states, and a similar sized territory to the west of the Hudson. From this map, I coded towns in 1845 into those located on the Hudson within the Dutch claim, others that were within the Dutch claim, and other towns in New York. Early Dutch settlement focused specifically on the Hudson, and one would anticipate the least support for the Universalist ideas in those communities. At the same time, Hudson River location might have the opposite effect by the time of this study since it would encourage contact with the outside commercial economy, in much the same manner as the Erie Canal.

Categorical empirical relationships of the independent variables with the temporal strength of the Universalists are shown in Tables 3, 4, and 5. I have also included another variable, total population size, in the table for the Modernization variables. This variable is crucial because it seems rather obvious that large communities will have a higher probability of supporting any type of church than small communities. Many of the towns were so small in size that it would have been difficult for them to gather the resources to support any denomination much less multiple ones. At the same time, a population size might be considered an indicator of urbanization level since large places would be most likely to have dense, concentrated populations, although this was not a necessary relationship. Since population size is, at best, a modest indicator of Modernization, I have included it with similar variables.

My statistical methodology primarily involves relatively simple crosstabulations of characteristics against the presence of Universalist churches. The tables are set up so that percentaging goes from left to right. Differences in patterns may be determined by comparing percentages up and down. Thus, as an example, focus on the relationship of farm orientation with Universalist strength. In the towns where less than 50 percent of the workers were farmers, Universalists churches were absent 70.0 percent of the time.

However, in the towns where at least 80 percent of the workers were farmers, Universalist churches were missing in 88.0 percent of the environments. Stating the results in a more positive way, I find that in towns where fewer than 50 percent of the workers were farmers that 17.1 percent always had a Universalist church. In towns where at least 80 percent of the workers were farmers, only 3.3 percent had a constant Universalist church. The least farm oriented towns were 5.2 times more likely ($17.1/3.3=5.2$) to have a continuous Universalist presence than the most farm oriented towns. Clearly, nonfarm communities were a source of Universalist strength.

Key predictors will be identified by a simple measures of association, the statistic Gamma. This statistic ranges potentially between values of +1.0 and -1.0. A positive value suggests that the two characteristics in question vary in a direct relationship so that values with a high score on one variable are associated with a high score on the other variable. A negative value indicates that the two characteristics vary in an indirect relationship so that a high score on one variable is associated with a low score on the other variable. Values of 0.0 indicate that one can predict nothing about characteristics on one variable from characteristics on the other variable.

There is no consensus logical standard on what is an “important relationship”. For lack of any other standard, I employ the terminology of Davis (1971, 49) who describes values of Gamma between -.10 and +.10 as negligible. Those between .10 and .30 (whether negative or positive) are described as “low”. Those between .30 and .50, regardless of sign, are termed “moderate.”

TABLES 3, 4, 5 ABOUT HERE

The Gamma values in the data tables indicate relatively clear conclusions about support for the various theories. Both the Modernization and the Cultural Heritage theories fare moderately well. The Frontier theory does not.

In regard to the Modernization perspective, Table 3 shows that the presence of Universalist churches is greatest when the percentage of farmers is low and the town is located on the Erie Canal or an adjacent town. The towns in the lowest category of farming were more than twice as likely to ever have a Universalist church as the towns in the highest category of farming (28.0 vs. 11.6 percent). Towns on the Erie Canal were more than twice as likely to ever have a Universalist church as those that were not close (24.5 vs. 11.7). However, the overall difference in Universalist presence is small between towns on the Erie Canal and those that were adjacent. The Gamma values for these two crosstabulations approach what I have categorized as a moderate relationship. There is also a pattern for towns in the lowest category of manufacturing productivity to have the

lowest representation of Universalist churches, although the differences among other categories of manufacturing activity are quite small.

One of the strongest pattern in the crosstabulations occurs for population size, with large places between somewhat more likely to have Universalist activity (Gamma=.40). The influence of population size partly reflects the fact that larger places tend to have non-agricultural economies, but is also a result of the fact that larger places simply have more population numbers to support a church of any denomination.

Unfortunately, the state census data fail to provide good measures of educational attainment by town, a statistic that would also be interesting with the context of the Modernization thesis, especially since some (Cassara 1971) have argued that Universalism had a special appeal to the poorly educated. The 1845 census does provide data on the average daily attendance among pupils enrolled in school. Tabulation of this by the presence of Universalist churches showed very little relationship, although it was in the positive direction (school attendance was related directly to the presence of Universalist churches).

Support for the Cultural Heritage theory is evidenced by two patterns. First, the ever presence of a Universalist church rises clearly with the percentage of the population born in New England. In towns where over 15 percent of the population was New England born, the percentage ever having a Universalist church (27.3) is over 4 times as great as in the towns where less than 5 percent are New England born (6.3 percent). Moreover, location relative to Dutch claimed land is quite crucial. The differences in Universalist presence are small between towns that were not Dutch claimed and Dutch claimed towns on the Hudson River. However, more peripheral "Dutch" towns away from the river had hardly any Universalist representation (3.6 percent). The foreign born composition of the town shows little pattern in its relationship with Universalist presence.

Regardless of how one reads the Frontier tables, there is little support for the Cross perspective. The strongest pattern (Gamma=-.17) appears for the sex ratio, but it is contrary to the hypothesis. The most strongly male areas of the state were least likely to support the Universalists.

MODERNIZATION AND ETHNICITY

Clearly, Modernization as represented by the development of a non-farm economy and Cultural Heritage as represented by the legacy of New England origins mattered substantially in the development of the Universalist denomination in the early to mid-19th Century. However, clarification is needed on how these variables worked in relationship to each other. Of course, other variables also correlated with the presence of Universalist

churches, but these were among the most important.

Actually, the farm economy and New England origins related in an unusual way or interacted with each other so that the effect of one could not be fully assessed without understanding the influence of the other. When towns had few New Englanders, they failed to support the Universalists, regardless of whether they were farm or non-farm oriented. When New Englanders were well-represented in towns, the non-agricultural areas (in comparison to the farm areas) were most likely to have a Universalist church. In other words, the appearance of Universalist churches depended heavily on having both New England cultural heritages and a non-farm economy. Another way of stating the pattern is to note that the non-farm areas primarily supported the Universalists, but only when a sympathetic New England cultural orientation had developed.

To demonstrate this, I crosstabulated the relationship of the farm economy variable to the presence of a Universalist Church within categories of New England origins. In this case, the dependent variable is simply a dichotomy between ever having or not having a Universalist church in 1845. Since there were extremely few townships with the highest level of farm economy and the highest level of New England origins, I have merged with each other the top two categories of New England birthplace percentages (in Table 4).

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The results are best understood through graphical presentation, as shown in Figure 2. The vertical axis on the left shows the percentage of towns with a Universalist church in 1845 at various combinations of farm economy and New England ethnicity. The figure shows a pattern that is somewhat consistent with the previous crosstabulations. Within each level of New England origins, the percentage Universalist increases as one moves away from a farm economy. Within each level of farm origins, the percentage born New England generally increases the Universalist percentage. However, the effects of farm economy are quite weak on percentage Universalist among the communities with the lowest percentage of New England born. Or another way to state the pattern is that the farm economy variable makes a large difference in determining presence of a Universalist church when the community has at least moderate levels of New Englanders.

At the risk of overwhelming readers with statistics, I refrain from presenting tables that show the relationships of location on the Erie Canal, manufacturing orientation, and New England heritage. Nevertheless, they show a very similar pattern to that in Figure 2. Location in proximity to the Erie Canal and a manufacturing orientation mattered in identifying towns with Universalist churches, but their effects were mainly evident when the town also had a strong New England heritage. Just scoring high on Modernization or

high on New England orientation was not enough to encourage the formation of Universalist churches.

COMPARISONS WITH CONGREGATIONALISTS AND EPISCOPALIANS

A potential problem with my tests of the Modernization, Cultural, and Frontier theories is that the correlates of Universalist church presence may be similar to the correlates of having any church. In particular, all types of churches may be disproportionately located in Modern and New England-heritage areas. In such a case, my study would not identify any factors that were unique to the formation of Universalist churches.

To explore this, I analyze whether selected community characteristics that were key for the Universalists also help understand the presence of Congregational and Episcopal churches. While the Universalists were clearly an anti-establishment movement, the other two denominations represented more traditional heritages. The Congregationalists had developed as the establishment church of New England's largest state, Massachusetts. By the time of this study, the more theologically liberal Unitarians had split from the Congregationalists, leaving a denomination with the dominance of pro-Calvinist theology. The Episcopalians had developed as the establishment church of England, maintaining a heritage of the theology and ritual of the Catholic Church but partaking of aspects of the Protestant Reformation. Episcopalianism could be viewed as the religion of many high status citizens in the Eastern Seaboard and, unlike the Congregationalists, did not especially depend on a New England base.

I have selected for analysis of church presence one key characteristic from each theoretical domain, farm orientation for Modernization, date of township formation for the Frontier perspective, and the presence of New Englanders for the Cultural heritage perspective. To keep the analysis from becoming overly complicated, I will focus only on the patterns in 1845. The patterns are shown in the three panels of Figure 3. The dependent variable is the percentage of towns that have churches of each denomination.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

While the denominations clearly differed in their distributions by town characteristics, readers may have some difficulty in interpreting the figure because the Congregationalists and Episcopalians had more presence in all communities than the Universalists. The figure needs to be read with the following two major criteria: first, does the presence of a church in a specific denomination increase or decrease as the community characteristic changes; second, how steep or rapid is the change in church presence in various community categories.

Let us review separately the patterns in the three panels. Taken together, the patterns in the three panels suggest that the three denominations had distinctive ecological bases. However, the Universalists were, overall, the least distinctive of the three denominations.

Farm Orientation: Not surprisingly, the Episcopalians were hardly represented in highly agricultural areas; they were a nonfarm denomination. The Universalists were also a nonfarm denomination, but to a lesser extent than the Episcopalians. Finally, Congregationalists showed little orientation toward the farm or the nonfarm economy, although relatively speaking they were much more farm oriented than Episcopalians and Universalists.

Born in New England: In the case of this variable, the Congregationalists stand out. They were heavily dependent on towns having a large percentage of New England migrants. As I have previously shown, the Universalists were also New England oriented, but they had “broken free” of their origins to a much greater extent than the Congregationalists. Finally, the Episcopalians were least often present in New England origin towns.

Incorporation Date: Again, the Episcopalians stand out. They were highly concentrated in the “old” towns. In other words, they were predominantly a denomination of spatially established towns, rather than the frontier. The pattern for the Congregationalists is not especially differentiated in terms of town incorporation, although they were least often found in the newest towns. Finally, as we reported above, the Universalists showed little variation by town incorporation; they were not a product of the frontier.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE?

I have focused on the presence of churches as a measure of denominational strengths in towns. But it is possible that the distribution of Universalists attendees and members is skewed so that the actual human involvement is not well measured. It could be, for instance, that Universalist churches in agricultural areas are unusually large in population participation, even though Universalist churches are less often found in these types of areas than others. Unfortunately, the state census provides no relevant data for 1845, but more detailed data (analyzed in Table 2) are provided for Universalist churches by town for 1855.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

To investigate this issue briefly, I have calculated Table 6 where breakdowns of Universalist human involvement are shown for the four categories of farming economy that have been previously used. There are multiple ways of measuring actual human

involvement in the Universalist denomination; I have opted for two approaches. One is investigating the characteristics of Universalist churches in 1855 when they are subdivided by the degree to which the town is agricultural. Using this approach, Table 6 shows the average attendance, seats, and the proportion of filled seats (attendance/seats). Another strategy is calculating the total population of towns in each category of agricultural orientation, regardless of whether they have a Universalist church. Using this approach, Table 6 also provides information on the average attendance, average seats, and average communicants per thousand population for these grouped categories. As an example, I find that 3.8 persons per 1,000 attend a Universalist church in the most agricultural towns, regardless of whether the town actually has a Universalist church.

Using the first approach, the results are quite clear. Non-farm towns have the highest average attendance, highest average number of seats, and highest proportion of filled seats. There is a generally strong gradient across the types of towns. For instance, average attendance is almost five times as great in the least agricultural towns compared to the most agricultural (417.0 to 84.2). Indeed, the average Universalist church in highly agricultural communities had a quite small attendance base (84.2)

Using the second approach, more mixed results are obtained. There are clear differences among the types of towns, but in all comparisons the weakest Universalist support is found in either the most agricultural or the least agricultural towns. In terms of attendance and communicants, the most agricultural towns have the lowest Universalist commitment of all four farm economy categories.

While the evidence from Table 6 is more mixed than in the case of the analysis of number of churches, it is clear that the most agricultural communities had the least involvement with the Universalist denomination.

DISCUSSION

The major contribution of this research is demonstrating that the development of the Universalist denomination in the early 1800s in New York State can be explained well by a combination of Modernization and Cultural Heritage theory. The Universalists in New York State were clearly tied to their New England heritage. Nevertheless, given towns in New York with strong New England heritages, the Universalist churches most often appeared in the non-agricultural areas. In other words, the Universalists were really just an extension of Enlightenment ideas. Liberal religion appears in the early 1800s where we would expect it.

One should be careful in interpreting these results to mean that liberal religious movements will dominate numerically in environments where the Universalists were

found disproportionately. The fact is that the Universalists in New York were actually a relatively small denomination, even though the state was one of their strongest in representation. Even within the least agricultural parts of the state, only small proportions of the residents could be found at Universalist churches on Sunday.

Residents of more urban communities may actually be quite diverse in their religious denomination affiliation, as has been demonstrated previously (Finke, Guest, Stark 1996). Urban type people may have many more religious choices before them than rural, agricultural people. Religious choices in the urban environment may depend on a variety of factors including family background, identification with Enlightenment ideas, and access to sources of information. In fact, conservative religious movements may be quite strong in urban environments (Fischer 1972).

Personally, I believe that the Universalists in the early 1800s represented a liberal theology. However, it is possible that the theological message was interpreted somewhat differently in various types of places. For instance, Joseph Smith, a small town boy from Vermont and New York State with some family background in the Universalist denomination, integrated some Universalist ideas into his development of Mormon theology which is usually not considered, at least in the 21st Century, to be high on the liberal dimension (Griffiths 2008, Kutzman 2007). Some of these ideas included the potential salvation of all persons and the non-existence of a literal Hell. I was also interested to read recently the autobiography (1843) of Stephen R. Smith, a prominent organizer of Universalist churches in New York State. He notes that Universalist congregations had a strong orientation to providing material aid to poor members of their congregations, an idea that also seems evident in Mormonism.

There are some troubling aspects of applying Modernization theory to the historical development of Universalism. The most important is the fact that the Universalists declined dramatically in church strength in the early 1900s as New York State hit its stride as an urban, industrial society. Clearly, an important future research topic is a quantitative study of the numerical decline of the Universalists.

Hopefully, the research in this paper will put to rest forever the idea that the Universalists were primarily a bunch of country bumpkins. But the relationship of country life to Universalism could profitably be explored more extensively. Note that the Figure 1 map of New York State showed that the Genesee Valley (in the northwest), the wheat basket of the United States in the first part of the 19th Century, was also an area of considerable Universalist strength. Indeed, maps and other data on agriculture in New York State at the time show that the denomination was clustered in some crop areas but

not in others. This topic requires more quantitative investigation, but agricultural statistics from the state census indicate intriguing patterns. Universalist churches during the period of this study were disproportionately represented in wheat growing and sheep raising areas, and were disproportionately underrepresented in hog and cattle areas. An interesting literature on political radicalism in agricultural areas finds somewhat similar patterns (Paige 1975; Lipset 1971). While a variety of explanations are entertained in this literature, a key argument is that wheat and sheep areas are oriented to export, leading to contact with and tolerance of other ideologies. In addition, wheat and sheep areas are highly susceptible to market fluctuations in prices. The inability of these types of farmers to control prices leads to a receptiveness to new ideologies and an antagonism to traditional authority structures.

REFERENCES

- Adams, James Luther. 1976. "Guiding principles for a free faith", Pp. 12-20 in Max Stackhouse (ed.), *On being human religiously: selected essays in religion and society*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ahlstrom, Sidney E. 1975. *A religious history of the American People*. Garden City, NY: Image Books.
- Ballou, Hosea. 1902. *A treatise on atonement*. Boston: Universalist Publishing House.
- Billington, Ray Allen 1949 *Westward expansion*. New York: Macmillan.
- Boas, George ([1948] 1997). *Primitivism and related ideas in the Middle Ages*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.
- Borchert, John R. 1967. "American metropolitan evolution." *Geographical Review* 57: 301-32.
- Bressler, Ann Lee. 2001. *The Universalist movement in America, 1770-1880*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Bumbaugh, David. 2001. *Unitarian Universalism: a narrative history*. Chicago: Meadville Lombard.
- Bureau of the Census. 1853. *Report of the Superintendent of the Census for December 1, 1852*. Washington: Robert Armstrong.
- Cassara, Ernest. 1961. "Introductory note". *Journal of the Universalist Historical Society* 2: 171-187.
- _____. 1971. *Universalism in America: a documentary history*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- _____. 1991. "The new world of John Murray: a character study". *Unitarian Universalist Christian* 46: 9-26.

Davis, James A. 1971. *Elementary survey analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Cross, Whitney R. 1950. *The Burned-Over District: the social and intellectual history of enthusiastic religion in Western New York*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press.

de Tocqueville, Alexis. 1835-40. *Democracy in America*. London, England: Saunders and Otley.

Easterlin, Richard, George Alter, and Gretchen A. Condran. 1978. "Farms and farm families in old and new areas: the northern States in 1860". In Tamara K. Hareven and Maris A. Vinoskis (eds.), *Family and population in Nineteenth Century America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Eddy, Richard. 1884-86. *Universalism in America*. Boston: Universalist Publishing House.

Ellingson, Terry (2001). *The Myth of the Noble Savage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark. 1992. *The churching of America, 1776-1990: winners and losers in our religious economy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Finke, Roger, Avery M. Guest, and Rodney Stark. 1996. "Mobilizing local religious markets: religious pluralism in the empire state, 1855-1865." *American Sociological Review* 61: 203-218.

Fischer, Claude S. 1975. "Toward a subcultural theory of urbanism," *American Journal of Sociology* 80: 1319-1341.

_____. 1982. *To dwell among friends: personal networks in town and city*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Griffiths, Casey Paul. 2008. "Universalism and the Revelations of Joseph Smith," Pp. 168-187 in Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (eds.), *The Doctrine and Covenants, Revelations in Context: The 37th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Lectures*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book.

Guest, Avery M. 1981. "Social structure and U.S. inter-state fertility differentials in 1900." *Demography* 18: 65-486.

Holifield, E. Brooks. 2003. *Theology in America: Christian thought from the age of the Puritans to the Civil War*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hughes, Peter. 1997. "The origins of New England Universalism: religion without a founder." *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* 24: 31-63.

Kutzmark, Tim. 2007. "Angels in America: The Foundations of the Mormon Faith". Unpublished sermon, Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading.

Land, Kenneth C., Glenn Deane, and Judith R. Blau. 1991. "Religious pluralism and

- church membership: a spatial diffusion model.” *American Sociological Review* 56: 237-49.
- Lipset, S.M. 1971. *Agrarian socialism: the cooperative commonwealth federation in Saskatchewan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marini, Stephen A. 1982. *Radical sects of revolutionary New England*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Matlins, Stuart M. and Arthur J. Magida. 2006. *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing
- Melbin, Murray. 1978. “Night as frontier”. *American Sociological Review* 43: 3-22.
- Middleton, J.H. 1905. “Growth of the New York State census.” *Publications of the American Statistical Association* 9: 292-306.
- Miller, Russell E. 1979. *The larger hope*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association.
- Morgan, John C. 1995. *The devotional heart: pietism and the renewal of American Unitarian Universalism*. Boston: Skinner House Books.
- Owen-Towle, Tom. 1993. *The gospel of Universalism: hope, courage, love*. Boston: Skinner House Books.
- Paige, Jeffrey. 1975. *Agrarian revolution: social movements and export agriculture in the underdeveloped world*. New York: Free Press.
- Paquette, William A. 2010. “Universalist churches in Western New York State”. *The Mayflower Quarterly* 78: 48-56.
- Robersmith, Adam. 2005. “An unusual interest: Universalism and revivalism, assimilation and liberation.” Unpublished paper. Berkeley: Starr King School for the Ministry.
- Roth, Randolph A. 1987. *The democratic dilemma: religion, reform, and the social order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1790-1850*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Sawyer, Thomas J. 1852. *Memoir of Rev. Stephen R. Smith*. Boston: Abel Tompkins
- Secretary of State. 1846. *Census of the State of New-York, for 1845*. Albany, NY : Carroll & Cook.
- _____. 1857. *Census of the State of New-York, for 1855*. Albany, NY : Van Benthuyesen.
- _____. 1867. *Census of the State of New-York, for 1865*. Albany, NY : Van Benthuyesen.
- _____. 1877. *Census of the State of New-York, for 1875*. Albany, NY : Weed, Parsons.
- Smith, Matthew Hale. 1844. *Universalism examined, renounced, exposed*. Boston:

Tappan and Denny.

Smith, Stephen R. 1839. *The causes of infidelities removed*. Albany: Grosh and Hutchinson.

Smith, S. R. 1843. *Historical sketches and incidents illustrative of the establishment and progress of Universalism in New York State*. Buffalo: Steele's Press.

Stacy, Nathaniel. 1850. *Memoirs of the life of Nathaniel Stacy, preacher of the gospel of universal grace*. Columbus, PA: Abner Vedder.

Stark, Rodney. 1992. "The reliability of historical United States census data on religion." *Sociological Analysis* 53:91-95.

Warner, R. Stephen. 1993. "Work in progress toward a new paradigm for the sociological study of religion in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1044-1093.

Wikipedia. 2010. *Dutch colonization of the Americas*. Internet.

Williams, George Huston. 2002. *American Universalism*, 4th Ed. Boston: Skinner House Books.

Wuthnow, Robert. 1989. "Towns, regimes and religious movements in the Reformation," Pp. 34-56 in Eugene D. Genovese and Leonard Hochberg (eds.), *Geographic perspectives in history*. New York: Basil Blackwell.

TABLE 1: Trends in Universalist Strength, New York State, 1845-1936

Year	Churches	Edifices	Seats	Members
1845		112		
1850	113	114	55270	
1855		133	55570	4570
1860	148		52080	
1865		124	41846	3929
1870	124	120	41610	
1875	115	113	41978	9651
1890	168	147	44600	8526
1906	127			10761
1916	104			9175
1926	68			
1936	45			

Notes: For years ending in 5, data are from the NY State Census.

Edifices refers to actual building structures

Seats refers to the number of people who could be seated in pews

Members refers variously to "members" or "communicants"

TABLE 2: Characteristics of Religious Denominations, New York State Census, 1855

	Churches (1)	Seats/Ch (2)	Attend/Ch (3)	Com/CH (4)	A/S (3)/(2)	C/A (4)/(3)
Methodist Episcopal	1391	370.6	162.2	91.9	0.44	0.57
Baptists, Regular	757	407.3	168.4	108.1	0.41	0.64
Presbyterian	625	481.5	225.1	129.4	0.47	0.57
Episcopal	346	456.0	227.5	95.3	0.50	0.42
Congregational	301	451.5	188.2	86.2	0.42	0.46
Catholic	291	606.8	935.0	832.4	1.54	0.89
Dutch Reformed	260	585.6	269.6	116.1	0.46	0.43
Union	152	335.0	114.6	52.1	0.34	0.45
Quaker	134	333.6	74.5	39.9	0.22	0.53
UNIVERSALIST	133	301.4	135.8	34.4	0.45	0.25
Lutheran, Evangelical	100	392.2	208.3	139.6	0.53	0.67
Christian Connection	85	340.6	115.6	65.9	0.34	0.57
Baptists, Free Will	81	338.4	120.7	59.5	0.36	0.49
Unitarian	16	546.9	322.2	64.1	0.59	0.20

Note: Seats/Ch=Average number of seats per church
Attend/Ch=Average attendance per church at a service
Com/Ch=Average number of communicants per church
A/S=proportion of seats filled at a service
C/A=proportion of communicants in relationship to attendance

Table 3 : Relationship of Modernization Characteristics to Universalist Church Presence, New York State Towns, 1845-1865

	Chr. Present			Total
	%Never	%Sometimes	%Always	
<i>Manuf. P.C.</i>				G=+.18
Less than 9	87.6	9.6	2.8	100.0 (250)
9.0-17.9	78.1	11.8	10.1	100.0 (237)
18.0-26.9	75.3	15.8	8.9	100.0 (146)
More than 27.0	79.1	9.3	11.5	99.9 (182)
<i>Pct. Farmers</i>				G=-.29
Less than 50	72.1	10.3	17.6	100.1 (68)
50.0-64.9	76.6	9.0	14.4	100.0 (111)
65.0-79.9	76.7	15.4	7.9	100.0 (331)
More than 80.0	88.3	8.3	3.3	99.9 (300)
<i>Erie Proximity</i>				G=-.31
On Canal	75.4	12.8	11.7	99.9 (358)
Borders Touch Town	78.9	15.7	5.4	100.0 (166)
Not Close	88.3	7.9	3.8	100.0 (291)
<i>Pop. Size, 1845</i>				G=+.40
Very Small	91.5	7.5	1.0	100 (199)
Small	84.4	10.0	5.7	100 (211)
Medium	79.0	13.3	7.6	100 (210)
Large	67.7	14.9	17.4	100 (195)

Notes: G=Gamma

Numbers in Parentheses indicate total towns in row

Table 4: Relationship of Ethnic Characteristics to Universalist Church Presence, NY State Towns, 1845-1865

	%Never	Chr. Present %Sometimes	%Always	Total
<i>Pct. Born N.E.</i>				G=+.31
Less than 5	93.7	3.7	2.6	100.0 (190)
5.0-9.9	79.8	13.0	7.2	100.0 (208)
10.0-14.9	77.6	10.8	11.7	100.1 (223)
Over 15	72.7	18.0	9.3	100.0 (194)
<i>Pct. For. Born</i>				G=+.10
Less than 3	83.5	10.6	5.9	100.0 (303)
3.00-5.99	77.1	13.2	9.8	100.1 (205)
6.00-8.99	87.7	7.0	5.3	100.0 (114)
Over 9.0	76.2	13.5	10.4	100.1 (193)
<i>Dutch Land</i>				G=+.50
On Hudson	83.7	4.7	11.6	100.0 (43)
Not on Hudson	96.4	1.8	1.8	100.0 (110)
Not Dutch Claimed	77.9	13.4	8.6	99.9 (662)

Table 5: Relationship of Frontier Characteristics to Universalist Church Presence, NY State Towns, 1845-1865

	Chr. Present			Total
	%Never	%Sometimes	%Always	
Town Formed				G=-.01
Pre-1800	80.8	9.8	9.4	100.0 (255)
1800-1812	80.1	12.1	7.8	100.0 (206)
1813-1825	81.9	11.6	6.5	100.0 (199)
Post-1825	80.0	12.9	7.1	100.0 (155)
Sex Ratio				G=-.17
Less than 100	77.9	11.5	10.6	100.0 (217)
100.0 to 102.9	75.6	14.4	10.0	100.0 (180)
103.0 to 105.9	82.4	9.4	8.2	100.0 (159)
More than 106	85.7	10.4	3.9	100.0 (259)
Improved Land				G=+.05
Less than 35.0	86.2	6.9	6.9	100.0 (203)
35.0-49.9	75.8	15.9	8.3	100.0 (277)
50.0-64.9	80.2	12.1	7.7	100.0 (182)
More than 65.0	82.0	9.4	8.6	100.0 (139)

Table 6: Measures of Universalist Support by Town Farm Orientation, 1855

	Of Towns with Universalist Churches			Of 1,000 Population in Each Town Category		
	Avg. Attend.	Avg. Seats	Seats/Attend.	Attendance	Seats	Commun.
Pct. Farmers						
Less than 50	417.0	788.3	0.53	4.6	8.6	1.2
50.0-64.9	166.8	432.5	0.39	8.0	20.7	1.5
65.0-79.9	99.5	355.6	0.28	6.7	23.9	1.9
More than 80.0	84.2	296.0	0.28	3.8	13.4	0.8

Notes: Avg. Attend.=average attendance in towns with Universalist church

Avg. Seats=average seats in towns with Universalist church

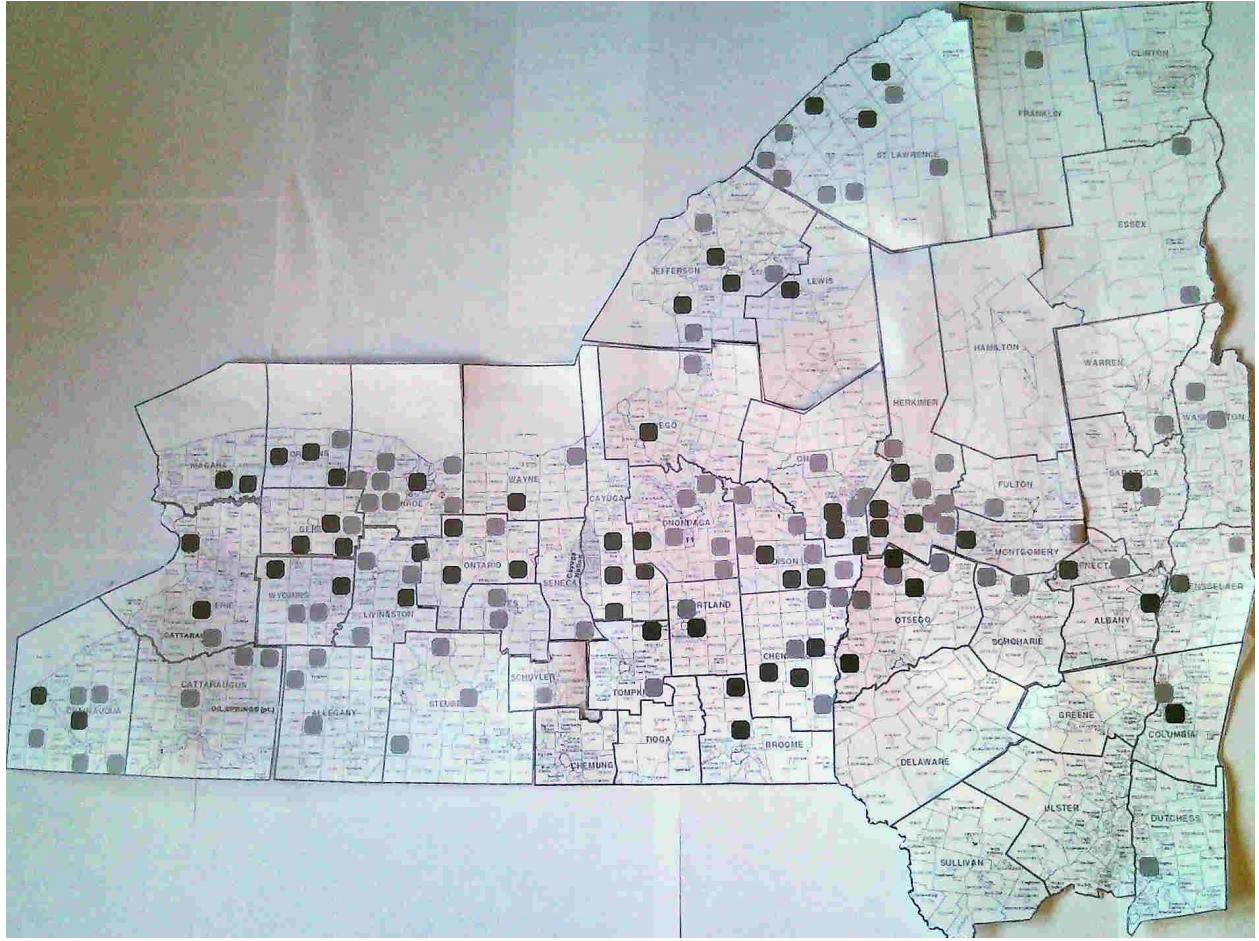
Seats/Attend.=proportion of seats filled in towns with Universalist church

Attendance=attendance at Universalist churches per 1,000 population for all towns

Seats=seats at Universalist churches per 1,000 population for all towns

Commun.=communicants at Universalist churches per 1,000 population for all towns

FIGURE 1: UNIVERSALIST CHURCHES IN UPSTATE NEW YORK, 1845-1865



Notes: (1) Counties in "downstate" area are not shown; very few Universalist churches
(2) Darker markers indicate towns where Universalist churches were reported in census at all three time points; lighter markers indicate towns where Universalist churches were reported only at some time points.

FIGURE 2: Farm Importance and Universalist Church Presence, 1845

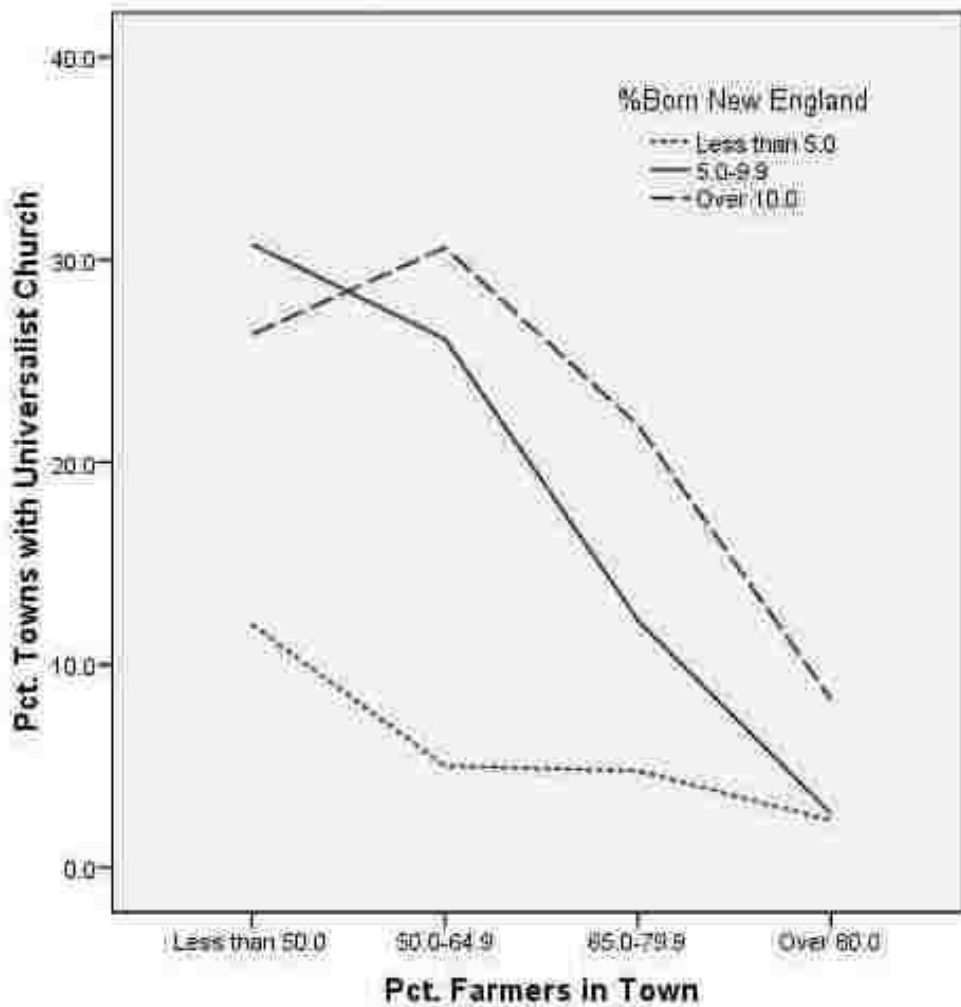
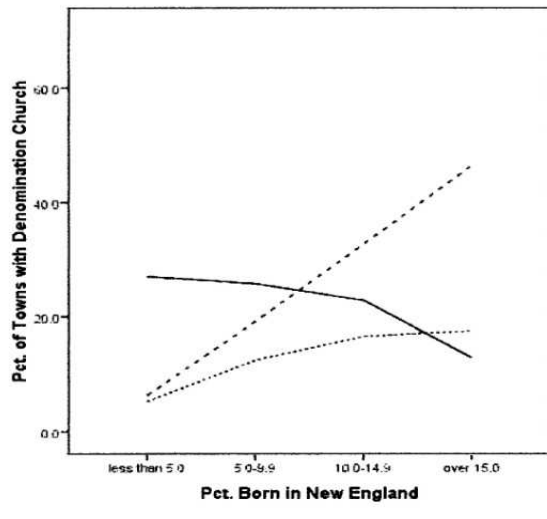
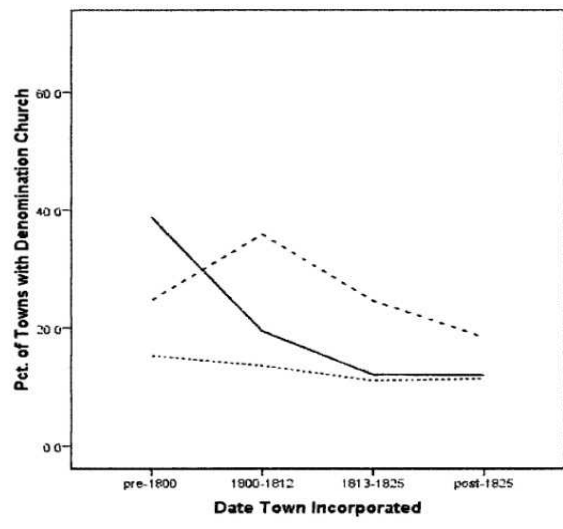
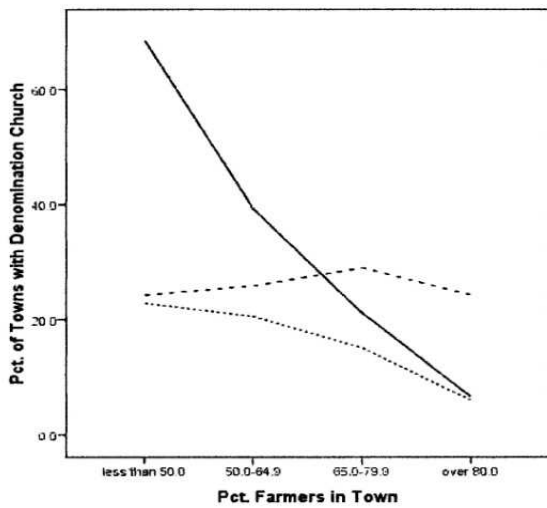


FIGURE 3: Town Characteristics and Denominational
Church Strength,
1845



-- Congregational
— Episcopal
... Universalist