

Aspects of Moral Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania

WILLIAM WARREN SWEET, the noted historian of religion in America, epitomized a popular view of America's moral fiber during the early national period in the following words: "The unanimous testimony of all religious leaders of all the religious bodies following the close of the [Revolutionary] war was that there was a rising tide of iniquities fast sweeping American youth to the brink of ruin; that the people were indulging in vices hitherto unknown among them . . . there was a 'lamentable decay of vital piety,' a prevalence of vice and a degeneracy of manners 'that called loudly for repentance and reformation. . . .'"¹

Independence created many changes and spawned many new ideas which gravely concerned religious leaders in the new Republic. Economic gains caused the upper classes to move away from spiritual interests toward the more mundane. The rationalism of French and English freethinkers led to the common-sense philosophy in America which questioned everything from the Deity to the devil. Deism, a logical outgrowth of rationalism, became prominent in America during its early history.

Troubled and perhaps threatened by the apparent degeneration of religion and mounting secularization of American life, certain individuals believed it their duty to reform society by reshaping America in "heavenly form." These reformers were convinced that they had an obligation to save their fellow man because they saw themselves as the guardians of mankind and the stewards of society. They attempted to bring America into the heavenly fold by eliminating beliefs and practices which they considered immoral and corrupt. A revival of piety and religion was necessary, they thought, and this could best be accomplished by spreading the "Protestant

¹ William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* (Gloucester, Mass., 1963), 53.

gospel” with its accompanying “Protestant morality.” These self-proclaimed stewards of society moved in that direction and generated a moral and religious reform movement in America known as the Second Great Awakening.² This movement was intense in Pennsylvania. Its leaders, convinced that virtue was declining in the Commonwealth, considered the growing popularity of sports and amusements as detrimental. To nineteenth-century moralists such diversions, by and large, were anathema because they ran counter to their social ethic of piety, industry, and productivity, and there were other causes for alarm.

Moral stewardship took two forms during the Second Great Awakening. The guardians of morality attempted to protect the moral and spiritual welfare of their fellow man through restrictive legislation. In some instances moralists were legislators themselves; in others, they persuaded lawmakers to adopt laws favorable to their cause. When legislation failed to achieve what reformers wanted or when it became ineffective, they formed organizations on the local, state, and national levels to inculcate their values on society.

The evangelical zeal of religious enthusiasts and the pronouncements of moralists had influenced Pennsylvania’s lawmakers, at least in part, to adopt the 1794 Act for the Prevention of Vice and Immorality. This statute forbade “worldly employment” or any kind of sport or diversion on Sunday, and outlawed cockfighting, cards, dice, billiards, bowling, shuffleboard, horse racing, or any other type of gambling.³

Although enacted during a time of religious fervor, the 1794 law had its antecedents in Pennsylvania’s religious heritage. The Society of Friends and Scots-Irish Presbyterians detested most sports and amusements. Both religious denominations despised idleness because it was incompatible with their social ethic of industriousness and productivity. Pietistic in outlook, each denomination while it held Pennsylvania’s political reins favored legislation to preserve the strict Sabbath and to suppress frivolous occupations. When the

² Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brother's Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, 1960), x-xiii.

³ James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801* (Harrisburg, 1896-1911), XV, 110-113.

Friends were in command during Pennsylvania's early history, they enacted one law to protect the Sabbath from secular activities and another for the suppression of idle sports and amusements.⁴ However, as Pennsylvania's population diversified during the eighteenth century, some sports became acceptable on weekdays and were even engaged in on Sundays. When the political power in Pennsylvania shifted to the Scots-Irish Presbyterians at the time of the Revolution, they deemed it necessary in 1779 to combine into a single statute the Sabbath observance law and the law against frivolous activities. The legislature re-enacted this blue law, with slight modifications, in 1786 and again in 1794.⁵

The 1794 law did little to improve the behavior of Pennsylvania's citizenry. Widespread incidents of Sabbath desecration and immorality, as defined by this statute, prompted Jacob Rush, president of Pennsylvania's Third District Court of Common Pleas, to denounce the violators. In an address to the Grand Jury of Luzerne County in August 1800, Rush stated: "So general, however, is disobedience to this law and so great the contempt of public authority, that a stranger passing through our country, would rather suppose we had a law *enjoining* sports and diversions on Sunday, under heavy penalty, than one *forbidding* them."⁶

In subsequent addresses to other grand juries, Rush informed the jurors that the legislature did not ban all sports in Pennsylvania, but only those associated with gambling. Playing for sheer amusement was permissible, but gambling, according to Rush, was immoral because it "tyrannises" the people beyond their control, reducing them to "poverty and wretchedness" within minutes.⁷ "The fatal effects of gaming extend beyond the grave," he declared. "The mind is deeply contaminated; and sentiments, the most

⁴ For an in-depth view of Pennsylvania's blue laws during the early eighteenth century, see J. Thomas Jable, "Pennsylvania's Early Blue Laws: A Quaker Experiment in the Suppression of Sport and Amusements, 1682-1740," *Journal of Sport History*, I (1974), 107-121.

⁵ An analysis of the 1779 blue law and its successors, the blue laws of 1786 and 1794 appears in J. Thomas Jable, "The Pennsylvania Sunday Blue Laws of 1779: A View of Pennsylvania Society and Politics During the American Revolution," *Pennsylvania History*, XL (1973), 413-426.

⁶ Jacob Rush, *Charges, and Extracts of Charges on Moral and Religious Subjects; Delivered at Sundry Times* (New York, 1804), 79.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 119-127.

hostile to its final peace and happiness, are harboured and indulged. The gambler is frequently tortured with paroxysms of rage against heaven.”⁸

The judge's words may have aroused certain segments of Philadelphia society. Fifteen hundred mechanics and twelve hundred manufacturers submitted a petition to the grand jury in 1802 decrying horse races. The petitioners asked the jury to remove this dreadful nuisance because it was injurious to their interests.⁹ Meanwhile, Philadelphia City Councils enlarged its crew of night watchmen in an attempt to reduce the increase in gambling and disturbances at taverns.¹⁰ The prevalence of gambling moved state legislators to act, and they responded in 1805 by declaring lotteries illegal. They hoped their action would reduce this form of “deceitful gaming” and “unlawful sales of chances and lottery tickets.”¹¹ Eleven years later, Pennsylvania lawmakers attempted to curb other types of gambling by enacting a supplement to the 1794 law which singled out cards and dice, as well as other forms of gambling as immoral. Those convicted of participating in such activities were to be fined \$500 and imprisoned for one year.¹²

Dancing was just as debauching in the eyes of some moralists. The appearance of many new dancing schools in Philadelphia during the early nineteenth century worried these reformers. At least fourteen dancing academies opened between 1800 and 1820.¹³ Most of them had French dancing masters who came to Philadelphia after fleeing revolutions in France or Santo Domingo. One master, Monsieur Epervil, attempted to popularize masquerade balls in 1808.¹⁴ His efforts were short-lived. After Epervil gave two of his three planned masquerades, the Pennsylvania Assembly declared that masquerades were nuisances and imposed stiff fines on their promoters.¹⁵

⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹ J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1884), II, 940.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 941.

¹¹ *Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1804-05* (Octoraro, 1806), hereinafter referred to as *Acts [or Laws] of the General Assembly*, 48-49.

¹² *Acts of the General Assembly, 1815-16*, 160.

¹³ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, II, 962-963.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 963.

¹⁵ *Acts of the General Assembly, 1807-08*, 49-50.

Restrictive legislation was intended, in principle, to suppress behavior identified as immoral, but such legislation, in actuality, accomplished little. The repeated enactment of laws governing immorality between 1794 and 1816 indicated the futility of legislation in regulating behavior. Had Pennsylvania society observed the 1794 statute, there would have been little need for these subsequent blue laws.

In order to obtain more positive results in molding attitudes and practices to their liking, the guardians of virtue introduced a new tactic, the moral and religious society. One of the earliest organizations of this nature was the First Day Society of Philadelphia, founded in 1791. This organization, using the Bible as its textbook, taught morality to youngsters until 1816, when it disbanded. Dr. Benjamin Rush, Bishop William White, and several other prominent Philadelphians organized a Bible society in 1808 "to check irreligion and promote the godly society which . . . Holy Writ set forth." Following the lead of these early societies, Divie Bethune, Robert Ralston, and Alexander Henry formed the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union in 1817. It began as a union of teachers to spread the word of God through Bible study and to open Sunday schools in and around Philadelphia. In 1821 the Union hired missionaries to form Sunday schools in distant places, and by 1824 the organization became national in scope, changing its name to the American Sunday School Union.¹⁶ The numerous moral and religious societies originating in Philadelphia indicated that the city was a breeding ground of moralism and reform. Anne Royall, visiting Philadelphia in 1824, noted twenty-six active organizations founded to promote and perpetuate religion and virtue,¹⁷ ranging from the nascent American Sunday School Union to the seasoned Magdalen Society. The latter organization was founded "to aid in restoring to their paths of virtue women who have been robbed of their innocence, and are desirous of returning to a life of rectitude."¹⁸ If Philadelphians refused to adopt and practice reform measures

¹⁶ Griffin, *Their Brother's Keepers*, 25-30.

¹⁷ Anne Royall, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners, in the United States* (New Haven, 1826), 209.

¹⁸ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, II, 1453-1454.

during the national period, it was not because the stewards of virtue were inactive.

Western Pennsylvanians also felt the need to suppress vice in these years. They formed vigilance committees called "watch and ward" societies. Several inhabitants of Elizabeth, a small town near Pittsburgh, organized such a society for the purpose of enforcing Pennsylvania's antivice and anti-immorality laws. They campaigned against gambling casinos, tippling houses, and riotous and disorderly assemblies. In 1809 Ebenezer Denny, chairman of the Pittsburgh Moral Society, urged ministers and parents to fight vice and immorality by reinstating the strict Sabbath.¹⁹ In order to keep children off the streets and out of trouble on the Sabbath, Denny's society gave lessons in spelling and reading on Sunday afternoons.²⁰ This emphasis on virtue and moral reform as manifested by such societies was due, in part, to the rapidly changing life styles in the Commonwealth.

The exploitation of natural resources increased internal commerce, which, together with the expansion of domestic commerce, triggered a revolution in transportation which saw the proliferation of turnpikes and canals and the advent of the railroad. With raw materials flowing in unprecedented quantities into American cities, those centers grew rapidly after 1820. Economic development and the growth of urban centers went hand in hand. Immigrants of the first wave of mass migration from Europe following the Napoleonic wars tended to gravitate toward the cities. The net result was that American society experienced more sudden and drastic changes between 1820 and 1840 than it had during any comparable period of the previous two centuries. The emerging nation and Pennsylvania, the "keystone of its democratic arch,"²¹ endured the pains of a too rapid and uncontrolled expansion.

Settlers extended the boundaries of America's frontier and popu-

¹⁹ Solon J. Buck and Elizabeth H. Buck, *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, 1939), 446-447.

²⁰ Marian Silveus, "Churches and Social Control on the Western Pennsylvania Frontier," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, XIX (1936), 123-134.

²¹ Sanford W. Higginbotham in describing Pennsylvania's politics during the 1800-1816 period referred to Pennsylvania as "The Keystone in the Democratic Arch" because its voters consistently supported Jeffersonian Democrats. See his *Keystone in the Democratic Arch: Pennsylvania Politics, 1800-1816* (Harrisburg, 1952).

lated wilderness areas, requiring the mail to travel greater distances. In order to expedite its delivery, Congress passed the mail law of 1810 which ordered postmasters to deliver mail seven days a week. The Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia criticized the government for ordering mail delivery on Sundays. Sabbatarians and moralists petitioned Congress, but the War of 1812 impeded their efforts.²² Not only did the war interfere with the Sabbatarians' protests, it also gave rise to new problems which disheartened the proponents of virtue. Traveling, fighting, and moving military supplies and materiel on the Lord's Day pierced their hearts. They feared such activities might lead to far worse forms of Sabbath desecration. Then, too, reformers anticipated war veterans returning home with the profane, intemperate, Sabbath-breaking habits of the army camp reminiscent of those brought back by their Revolutionary War counterparts a generation earlier.

Moralists and Sabbatarians not only warned Americans of the debilitating effects of the 1810 mail law and the War of 1812 on their morals, but they also saw the rapid and unregulated growth of America's cities as another threat to virtue. To the moralists, the city was the seedbed of vice. Overcrowded living conditions and limited opportunities for employment created pockets of idle people in urban centers. In order to survive, many of them turned to crime, prostitution, gambling, drinking, and other sins. Having little or no conception of the Sabbath, many of the city's unemployed disregarded the Lord's Day completely. The Philadelphia Synod, in its report on the state of religion in Philadelphia, decried widespread "intemperance, profaneness, and Sabbath breaking."²³

The city's laboring population, however, worked long hours, six days a week. The Sabbath was the one day on which these people could "escape the daily grind." Many of these workers sought pleasure at dram shops and bars where revelry and gambling were common, especially on Sundays. By the 1820s these drinking houses had replaced the taverns as the social centers for the lower orders of

²² Frederick L. Bronner, "The Observance of the Sabbath in the United States, 1800-65" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard, 1937), 46-48.

²³ "Report of the Synod of Philadelphia, on the State of Religion Within Their Bounds," *Christian Herald*, IV, No. 9 (1817), 154-155.

society.²⁴ While some members of these socioeconomic classes spent the Sabbath in more salutary ways, visiting friends or taking excursions into the country, others patronized nearby amusement gardens.²⁵

Pleasure gardens, or vauxhalls, were popular with Philadelphia's inhabitants during the national period. These places provided open air entertainment in the form of concerts, illuminations, fireworks, drama, and special pageants, such as Fourth of July celebrations. The middle and lower classes were the vauxhalls' chief patrons, the modest admission prices being within the reach of many of Philadelphia's residents.²⁶ Henry Wansey, traveling through Philadelphia in 1794, observed tradesmen relaxing and enjoying the entertainment on a Sunday at Harrowgate Gardens, just north of the city.²⁷

In addition to providing Sunday entertainment, some pleasure gardens held balloon ascensions as special attractions. Balloon ascensions became popular after Jean Pierre Blanchard introduced this fad to America in 1793,²⁸ and reached a climax in 1819 when an aborted balloon ascension resulted in the destruction of Philadelphia's Vauxhall Garden. A crowd estimated at 30,000 had gathered to witness the highly publicized ascension of the French aeronaut, Monsieur Michel. Most of the spectators were outside the garden because the price of admission for this event was high. Vendors circulated through the huge crowd selling spiritous liquors, and many spectators were soon affected by the alcohol. Meanwhile the crowd grew impatient and unruly because, due to an undetected leak, after three hours the balloon was barely half inflated. No longer able to contain itself, the mob lost its composure and tore down the garden's fences, ripped the balloon to shreds, pilfered the

²⁴ John A. Krout and Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Completion of Independence, 1790-1830 in A History of American Life*, ed. by Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox (New York, 1927-1948), V, 386.

²⁵ Bronner, "Observance of the Sabbath," 132-151.

²⁶ Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Cortlandt Van Dyke Hubbard, "The American 'Vauxhall' of the Federal Era," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB)*, LXVIII (1944), 154, 165.

²⁷ Henry Wansey, *The Journal of an Excursion to the United States of North America in the Summer of 1794* (Salisbury, 1796), 110.

²⁸ Lewis Leary, "Phaeton in Philadelphia, Jean Pierre Blanchard and the First Balloon Ascension in America, 1793," *PMHB*, LXVII (1943), 51.

vauxhall's liquor supply, and set fire to the pavilion, thus destroying the pleasure garden.²⁹

Incidents, such as the destruction of Vauxhall Garden, caused moralists to speak out against society's proclivity toward amusements. The stewards of virtue contended that such pleasures, especially when indulged in excessively, led man downhill to the drinking house, gambling hell, and worse.³⁰ Some moralists even drew a direct parallel between America's overindulgence in amusements and the panic of 1819. The Society of St. Tammany, in an address to its members on the causes of this financial crisis, listed as the culprits speculation, unethical brokers, and excessive shows and public exhibitions which drained the population of large amounts of time and money and adversely affected morals.³¹

The panic of 1819 ushered in many hardships. Most of society felt its terrifying pains. Businesses that did not fail tightened their purse strings; unemployment increased; banks foreclosed mortgages leaving many hapless victims without homes; bread and soup lines swelled; and disillusionment and discontent filled the air.³² America responded to these difficult times with a wave of humanitarianism. State governments encouraged benevolence and adopted legislation designed to provide relief for debtors. Philanthropists donated money to purchase food for the poor and to establish temporary shelters for the homeless. All levels of government advocated moderation and thrift.³³

Frugality was essential in Philadelphia, for the bitter winter of 1820-1821 intensified the severity of the depression, and the combined effects of both nearly crippled the city, leaving it ripe for reform. A number of citizens, worried about the morals of children, called for a public meeting in order to devise some means to deal with that pressing problem. At the meeting, a speaker deplored the "great number of idle boys who frequented the wharves on Sunday playing pitch and toss and other games destructive of morals. . . ."

²⁹ Joseph Jackson, "Vauxhall Garden," *PMHB*, LVII (1933), 294-295.

³⁰ Krout and Fox, *Completion of Independence*, 386-387.

³¹ Samuel Reznick, "The Depression of 1819-22, A Social History," *American Historical Review*, XXXIX (1933), 35-36.

³² *Ibid.*, 30-31.

³³ Krout and Fox, *Completion of Independence*, 214-216.

Several concerned citizens summoned all those interested in stopping this pernicious practice to meet in the mayor's office, but few attended that meeting.³⁴ In 1821 Zachariah Poulson waged a one-man protest against the gambling conducted at Philadelphia's Centre Square. He argued that apprentice boys learned to gamble there, and that this would lead inevitably to their destruction in later life. Poulson's complaints brought temporary relief, but two years later the gamblers returned, forcing Mayor Robert Wharton to issue a proclamation prohibiting the erection of tents and booths on Centre Square. The crafty gamesters circumvented the mayor's proclamation by moving their operations to Bush Hill.³⁵ While individuals and groups attempted to deal with problems arising from Pennsylvania's sudden expansion and population growth, state legislators tried to suppress horse racing and cockfighting, two activities which troubled moralists across the Commonwealth.

Many Pennsylvanians objected to horse racing because they detested the gambling and rowdy behavior which often occurred at races, and they resented the danger and inconvenience that racing horses caused on public thoroughfares. In 1817 the state government dealt with these problems in Philadelphia by banning horse racing on public roads in Philadelphia City and County and anywhere else in the County before an assembly of more than fifteen persons. Infractions cost violators fifty dollars and the forfeiture of their horses.³⁶ Three years later, the lawmakers extended the ban on horse racing to the entire state. Anyone convicted of racing was to pay a thirty-dollar fine and lose his horse, while those advertising or encouraging races were subject to fines of twenty dollars. Magistrates were authorized to sell the impounded horses at public auction and use the money collected, less 25 per cent for their fees, to assist the poor and to maintain public roads.³⁷

Disregard of the horse racing law in Delaware and Chester Counties aroused the wrath of Justice Darlington. Addressing a grand jury, the judge issued a vitriolic assault on this sport, point-

³⁴ John Bach McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 1883-1913), V, 536-537.

³⁵ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, III, 1844.

³⁶ *Acts of the General Assembly, 1816-17*, 122-123.

³⁷ *Acts of the General Assembly, 1819-20*, 20-23.

ing out that "times and places are appointed for these public and open infractions of the law—that crowds assemble to witness them, always composed, in part, of the idle, the dissolute, and the vicious—the free passage of citizens over the highways is often obstructed—and the scene not infrequently winds up with gaming, drunkenness, and breaches of peace.³⁸

However, proponents of the turf claimed that racing was necessary in order to improve the breed of horses. Responding to these advocates of the track, Darlington declared that racing was not "useful or necessary for the encouragement of better breeds of horses because . . . the tendency and practical effect of horse racing is noxious to the peace and good order of the community," but he did admit that the question of improving breeds of horses might be argued.³⁹ The judge concluded his address with a plea for magistrates and peace officers to enforce the laws against racing in order to remove from society this practice with its evil effects.⁴⁰

Neither legislative mandate nor Justice Darlington's moralizing could eliminate the attraction many Pennsylvanians felt for racing. "Gambling was in the blood of the times," wrote historian Carl Russell Fish.⁴¹ Americans took chances; they delighted in adventure. Many sought new homes in distant, unsettled places; others invested money in new and untested businesses. It was quite natural for people to bet on horse races, and this phenomenon was facilitated in Pennsylvania by the interest trotting matches generated during this period. In spite of the state-wide ban, most of Pennsylvania's larger cities had trotting courses and horse clubs by 1825. Philadelphia's Hunting Park course was one of the most famous tracks.⁴² In western Pennsylvania, trotting matches were popular in Pittsburgh. A large crowd witnessed a match at a Pittsburgh track held in conjunction with the Fourth of July festivities in 1826.⁴³

³⁸ Samuel Hazard, ed., *The Register of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1828-1836), XII, 188.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

⁴¹ Carl Russell Fish, *The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850*, VI of *A History of American Life*, 34.

⁴² Stevenson Whitcomb Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life, 1640-1840* (Harrisburg, 1950), 201.

⁴³ Harvey B. Gaul, "Minstrel of the Alleghenies," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, XXXIV (1951), 4.

The gambling atmosphere surrounding racing continued to trouble a virtuous segment of Pennsylvania's population. Several legislators, most notably Representative Samuel Bushfield of Westmoreland County, attempted to combat this form of behavior through stricter legislation. As chairman of the House Committee on Vice and Immorality, Bushfield introduced a measure designed to reduce, if not eliminate, betting associated with horse racing. In late November 1829, Bushfield complained that the Pennsylvania statutes regarding racing were not enforced throughout the Commonwealth, particularly in the Harrisburg area. He suggested that the Committee on the Judiciary System investigate the statutes in question and determine whether any amendments were necessary.⁴⁴ Bushfield's bill was referred to the Committee on Vice and Immorality despite petitions from the representatives of a number of counties requesting the legislature to liberalize the racing statutes.⁴⁵ The petitions, asking that "provision be made for the improvement of the breed of horses by encouraging trials of speed under proper regulations,"⁴⁶ were referred to the Committee on Agriculture. Meanwhile, on March 9, 1830, Representative Cornelius Sellers of Bucks County reported the findings of the Committee on the Judiciary System regarding horse racing. His committee found the laws "amply sufficient to prevent that pernicious practice." If magistrates could not enforce the laws already on the statute books, additional laws or alterations would not help.⁴⁷ Eleven days later on March 20, John Fuller of Fayette County gave the Committee on Agriculture's verdict on the petitions asking for the legalization of trials of speed. According to Representative Fuller, the committee considered the petitions and recommended that they not be honored because such trials were not necessary for improving the breed of horses and were "derogating from the true character and proper policy of Pennsylvania." Moreover, the laws prohibiting racing adopted by previous legislatures were necessary "to preserve the morals of its citizens and secure the prosperity of the common-

⁴⁴ Pennsylvania, General Assembly, *Journal of the Fortieth House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (hereinafter referred to as *Journal of the . . . House*), I, 85.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 252, 271, 290, 407, 449.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 252.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 698.

wealth."⁴⁸ Thus the horse racing question ended in a deadlock with no further legislation enacted by the Fortieth General Assembly.

Pressure to liberalize racing laws came partially from agricultural societies and the promoters of state and local farming exhibitions. Because racing was a big attraction, officials of agricultural societies and promoters used the track to lure people to their shows. They featured races under the guise of improving the breed of horses. State fairs, which had become permanent attractions around mid-century, and special expositions also used racing as a public drawing card.⁴⁹ A trotting match, billed as the main attraction at the United States Agricultural Society's fair held at Philadelphia in 1856, drew an enormous crowd.⁵⁰ The 1859 cattle show sponsored by the Pennsylvania State Agricultural Society also scheduled a race which the show's managers hoped would return handsome dividends. The event attracted many of Philadelphia's lower orders, most of whom had little or no interest in agriculture. A large number of rowdies, drunkards, and prostitutes attended, causing moralists to condemn the show as a "public nuisance."⁵¹ Some sponsors of trotting matches held their races on private courses and did not publicize them⁵² in order to keep vociferous spectators away. Racing thus continued to increase and grow in popularity in antebellum Pennsylvania, despite the denunciations of moralists and the efforts of legislators to outlaw the sport.

Just as horse racing attracted gamblers and bred gambling, so too did cockfighting, but the Pennsylvania lawmakers experienced greater success in the implementation of legislation toward curbing the latter amusement. Samuel Bushfield, author of the ill-fated 1829 horse racing bill, led the attack to suppress cockfighting. He and several other lawmakers became disturbed when they learned that cockfighters from Philadelphia planned to battle a group of cockers from Harrisburg and Little York in early February 1830 in a match

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 737.

⁴⁹ John Rickards Betts, "Agricultural Fairs and the Rise of Harness Racing," *Agricultural History*, XXVII (1953), 72-74.

⁵⁰ Carl M. Cochran, "James Queen, Philadelphia Lithographer," *PMHB*, LXXXII (1958), 151.

⁵¹ "The Diary of Sidney George Fisher, 1859-1860," *PMHB*, LXXXVII (1963), 213-214.

⁵² *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, Aug. 8, 1843, 3.

involving high stakes. The victors stood to win a purse of \$5,000. Even more disturbing was the fact that the proposed site of this cockfight was near the state capitol building. Alarmed that such a vile activity would take place within earshot of the state house and concerned about the high stakes involved, Bushfield in late January 1830 proposed a bill to strengthen the laws governing cockfighting.⁵³

A strong believer in freedom and virtue, he thought that cockfights with their accompanying practices of gaming corrupted youth and in the long run threatened liberty because freedom was founded upon virtue.⁵⁴ Convinced that he was obliged to raise his voice against cockfighting and hoping to attract the support of fellow legislators, Bushfield addressed the House of Representatives on that topic. Reminding the House of its duties, Bushfield remarked:

The legislature is appointed to make good and wholesome laws for the regulation of the community—as the representatives of the people are bound to set out forces against all kind of vice, and horseracing and cockfighting are crimes of great magnitude. All kinds of vicious people attended them; some to bet money, some to satisfy criminal curiosity, and many to spend money which ought to be applied to the support of many of their families. Apprentices and the children of honest parents have their morals ruined by attending such gaming places; indeed they are often tempted to steal money to spend it in this way.⁵⁵

Bushfield hoped to eradicate cockfighting by increasing fines from three to one hundred dollars.⁵⁶ Several legislators heckled Bushfield while he spoke on this issue, sending him a message chiding him for wasting the legislature's time and the taxpayers' money.⁵⁷

In spite of this, the House referred the anticockfighting bill to the Committee on Vice and Immorality where Bushfield, serving as the committee's chairman, exerted influence on the measure. After two months of debate and revisions, the anticockfighting measure emerged from committee, passed both houses, and was signed into

⁵³ *Journal of the Fortieth House*, I, 332; *United States Gazette* (Philadelphia), Feb. 3, 1830, 2.

⁵⁴ *Pennsylvania Intelligencer and Farmers' and Mechanics' Journal* (Harrisburg), Feb. 8, 1830, 3.

⁵⁵ *Pennsylvania Reporter and Democratic Herald* (Harrisburg), Feb. 19, 1830, 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Pennsylvania Intelligencer and Farmers' and Mechanics' Journal*, Feb. 4, 1830, 3.

law by Governor George Wolf.⁵⁸ Supplementing the 1794 Act against Vice and Immorality, this statute prohibited cockfighting for money or other valuable considerations.⁵⁹ Because both the 1829 horse racing bill and the 1830 cockfighting bill were considered simultaneously by the Committee on Vice and Immorality, Bushfield might have compromised on one in order to get the other passed. If he compromised the racing measure, he still came out ahead. He lost no ground on that issue because it ended in a stalemate, while at the same time he was victorious with the anti-cockfighting law.

The suppression of gambling on these sports reflected the general movement in the United States to suppress vice during the first half of the nineteenth century. Another part of the moral reform movement was the crusade to preserve the strict Sabbath from violations other than sporting diversions.

The Sabbatarian movement attracted widespread support and exerted considerable influence in the thirty years preceding the Civil War, though its seeds had been planted during an earlier period. Similar to other antebellum reform movements, the Sabbath crusade was a reaction to the numerous internal problems which plagued the United States. From Andrew Jackson's inauguration in 1829 to the eve of the Civil War, the country struggled through thirty of the most trying and turbulent years it had ever faced. The slavery question intensified sectional hostilities; antagonistic political views crystallized and came to the forefront; disenchantment with capitalism and society's shortcomings led some individuals to experiment with communitarianism. The growing pains of the 1820s—the transportation revolution, the rise of industry, the unwieldy growth of cities, and the influx of immigrants—magnified and continually tested the fiber of the maturing nation. The numerous reform movements that swept through America during this era reflected the general discontent, disillusionment, and apprehension that settled over American society. Antislavery, temperance, communitarianism, millennialism, and Sabbatarianism imprinted American history.

⁵⁸ *Journal of the Fortieth House*, I, 409-410, 581, 612, 617.

⁵⁹ *Laws of the General Assembly, 1829-30*, 80-81.

Sabbatarians looked askance at European immigrants whose Old World customs posed a constant threat to the sacred Sunday and whose settlement in densely populated cities exacerbated already overcrowded conditions, adding to the unsavory moral atmosphere. Although crowded conditions often bred vice and immorality, Sabbatarians tended to worry more about European customs than the immigrants, especially Roman Catholics, brought with them rather than the unhealthy climate immigrants helped to create. They were particularly concerned about the Continental Sabbath which featured Sunday afternoon frolic and revelry following the morning church services. Sunday afternoon concerts and theatres held in public gardens were favorite entertainments of these immigrants. Germans introduced the beer garden, a popular rallying point for conversation, singing, drinking, and other conviviality on Sunday afternoons. Irish Catholics also regarded Sunday afternoons as a time for recreation and festivity.⁶⁰

Sunday drinking, loafing, and gaiety drew sharp criticism, but some of the strongest objections came from merchants and vendors who operated their businesses on the Sabbath. They contended that such behavior disrupted their operations.⁶¹ In spite of these businessmen's opposition to Sunday drinking and revelry, Sabbatarians did not solicit their support, for the merchants were also desecrating the Sabbath.

Although Sabbatarians expressed concern over the immigrants' customs and behavior, the revolution in transportation troubled them the most. As America's transportation network expanded, canal and railroad companies and merchants, whose shops were located along their routes, found it unprofitable and often disastrous to halt operations on the Sabbath. Economics overruled religious zeal. The enterprising capitalist gained a distinct advantage by operating on Sunday; he attracted business at the expense of his Sabbath-abiding competitors.⁶²

The opening of the Pennsylvania Canal in 1835 alarmed moralists

⁶⁰ Bronner, "Observance of the Sabbath," 143, 160-161; Carl F. Wittke, *We Who Built America, The Saga of the Immigrant* (New York, 1940), 131, 146; William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York, 1963), 28, 38-41.

⁶¹ Leland D. Baldwin, *Pittsburgh, The Story of a City* (Pittsburgh, 1937), 272.

⁶² Bronner, "Observance of the Sabbath," 127-175.

who feared the Canal would violate the Sabbath. Their fears were justified since shortly after its opening petitions reached Harrisburg asking the legislature to liberalize the laws so that boats might operate on canals seven days a week. The petitions were referred to the Senate Committee on Vice and Immorality, chaired by David Fullerton who in June 1839 gave the committee's verdict. In a six-page document he presented an historical defense of the sacred Sabbath from the Old Testament prophets down to evangelists of his own time, concluding his presentation with a scathing denunciation of canal and railroad companies and other advocates of the secular Sabbath.⁶³

With public officials like Senator Fullerton clamoring for a strict Sunday, the Sabbath crusade attracted new converts and regained some of the momentum it had lost during the late twenties and early thirties. The panic of 1837, similar to most other economic depressions, moved many people toward prudence and virtue, thus contributing, at least in part, to the rejuvenation of the Sabbatarian movement. The biggest contributors to this renewed zeal, however, were the Philadelphia Sabbath Association, founded in 1840, and the revival of religion which swept through Pennsylvania during the 1830s and 40s.⁶⁴ This religious awakening spread to many Protestant denominations. Although the revival focused chiefly on doctrinal matters, it promoted Sabbath observance, thus furthering the movement.⁶⁵

The antebellum Sabbath crusade reached its zenith during the mid-1840s, with the Lord's Day Convention held at Baltimore in 1844 reflecting its recharged vigor. John Quincy Adams presided over the convention's 1,700 delegates, a body which adopted numerous measures aimed at safeguarding the Sabbath.⁶⁶ Pennsylvania responded to Sabbatarian enthusiasm at this time. Displeased with

⁶³ Pennsylvania, General Assembly, *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Session of 1838-9*, I, 1226-1232.

⁶⁴ Bronner, "Observance of the Sabbath," 183-184.

⁶⁵ William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America* (New York, 1944), 117-119; William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism* (New York, 1959), 31, 42-43; Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York, 1965), 53-55, 62; John B. Frantz, "The Return to Tradition: An Analysis of the New Measure Movement in the German Reformed Church," *Pennsylvania History*, XXXI (1964), 314-316.

⁶⁶ Bronner, "Observance of the Sabbath," 183-184.

the mounting desecration of Sunday in their Commonwealth, several members of the General Assembly summoned a two-day State Sabbath Convention to meet in Harrisburg at the end of May 1844. On the first day of the convention, Representative Charles A. Black moved that a committee be organized to prepare an "appeal to the religious community in regard to desecrating the Sabbath by professing Christians."⁶⁷ This resulted in an eloquent report which warned that "if the Sabbath be not consecrated to religion, it will become an occasion of increased moral corruption. If it lead not to the closet, the bible and the sanctuary, it will lead many to the bar room, the horse race, and the theatre." The committee's findings ended with the words "we implore the people of this great Commonwealth to "REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY."⁶⁸

Despite such appeals canal companies continued to operate on a seven-day schedule, arousing the Reverend James Coffey of Hollidaysburg to summon a convention in 1846 to deal with the problem. Two hundred and eight delegates representing six religious denominations met at Hollidaysburg to protest the operation of canals and other businesses on the Sabbath. These men held the entire Commonwealth in contempt because Pennsylvania had hired out its roads and canals on the Sabbath to place the earnings in the state treasury. Sabbatarians feared that Pennsylvanians would lose their social and civil rights without a holy Sabbath, for these rights rested upon religious knowledge and moral principles which would be abandoned without a sacred Sabbath. The convention resolved to encourage the enforcement of laws previously enacted, so that "public faith" and "private virtue" might be preserved and that "national prosperity" might be guaranteed.⁶⁹ The Hollidaysburg Convention experienced the same difficulties and frustrations that earlier Sabbath conventions had—much talk and little action. It was one thing to proclaim Sabbath preservation, but quite another to enforce it.

Yet all was not bleak for Sabbatarians in Pennsylvania. The

⁶⁷ *Pennsylvania Telegraph* (Harrisburg), May 29, 1844, 1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Proceedings of the Sabbath Convention at Hollidaysburg*, Sept. 23, 1846 (Philadelphia, 1846), 4, 6, 14.

actions of officials in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia to enforce Sunday laws vigorously must have pleased the proponents of the strict Sunday. The movement in Pittsburgh resulted in the enactment of stronger Sunday legislation for Allegheny County. The state legislature granted the burgesses and mayors of the cities in Allegheny County the same power as the justices of the peace had in sentencing violators of the 1794 blue law. In addition, it increased the penalties for violating that act. Fines were raised from four to twenty-five dollars, and prison sentences for those unable to pay the fines were set at from ten to thirty days.⁷⁰ Sabbatarians were not as successful in Philadelphia, though local efforts there were just as diligent. Robert T. Conrad, a Sabbatarian, was elected mayor in 1854 and initiated a campaign in favor of the Sabbath. He ordered the police to arrest all violators of the 1794 blue law and condemned those who worked or sought amusements on the Lord's Day. Conrad criticized the publishing of Sunday newspapers and lashed out against Sunday operations of inns, oyster houses, and beer gardens, which he planned to shut down. Clergymen and moralists applauded Conrad's efforts, but his actions, evidently, were unpopular with the electorate, for it voted him out of office at the next election.⁷¹

As fewer and fewer people listened to the Sabbatarians' call and as the American economy recovered from the depths of 1837 and prosperity returned, the Sabbath became less observed in the late 1850s. Travel on that day was commonplace. Urban dwellers in increasing numbers patronized concerts, beer gardens, shooting galleries, bowling halls, and billiard rooms on Sundays. Parades, spectacles, displays, and other events held on the Sabbath gave urban residents one of the few outlets they could afford. When Jenny Lind appeared, Sabbath or no Sabbath, the American populace, particularly city inhabitants, flocked to hear her.⁷² Even court decisions, at least in Pennsylvania, tended to reflect a liberal attitude by the close of the fifties. In 1859 the Pennsylvania Supreme Court reversed a lower court decision which had convicted James

⁷⁰ *Laws of Pennsylvania, 1855*, 321-322.

⁷¹ Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia, A History of the City and its People* (Philadelphia [1912]), II, 320.

⁷² Bronner, "Observance of the Sabbath," 247-263.

Nesbit of violating the Sunday law when he drove his horse and carriage to church.⁷³

Pennsylvania Sabbatarians had their last opportunity, sparked by the 1857 financial crisis, to implement their ideals before the Civil War. Just as the earlier economic depressions brought gloom and despair, so, too, did the panic of 1857. Evangelists attributed the depression to the Lord's vengeance against man's creation of a secular and materialistic society. Although the panic was not a direct cause of the religious revival which followed in 1858, it furthered an awakening which was widespread on a national level.⁷⁴ In Philadelphia, it was chiefly a minority movement featuring noonday prayer meetings at churches and the YMCA. Businessmen and other commercial personnel attended. Newspapers praised the YMCA for giving young men a religious experience.⁷⁵ But just as this phase of the moral reform movement gathered momentum, the Civil War broke out, cutting it short of its goal.

By mid-century a moral question much greater than either personal morality or Sabbath observation divided the country. The antislavery crusade usurped all other reform movements forcing them into dormancy during the 1850s, except for a few sporadic attempts by die-hard Sabbatarians. As the Civil War approached and a nation divided on the slavery issue prepared for the inevitable battle, one could look back to 1800 and note numerous vast and significant changes which molded Pennsylvania society during those sixty years. Not only did the physical and economic features of Pennsylvania society change, so too did its manners and morals. Activities hitherto taboo were openly indulged in despite the futile cries and admonitions of obstinate moralists.

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⁷³ Commonwealth v. Nesbit, 34 Pa. 398 (1859).

⁷⁴ Arthur C. Cole has indicated that the closing of theatres and amusements during the 1857 depression caused many persons not normally attracted to religion to attend prayer meetings in stores, shops, cellars, and abandoned theatres, thus becoming involved in the religious awakening of 1858. See his *Irrepressible Conflict, 1850-65*, vol. VII of *A History of American Life*, 252-253.

⁷⁵ Russell E. Francis, "The Religious Revival of 1858 in Philadelphia," *PMHB*, LXX (1946), 66, 71, 76.