

## *Prologue*

In 1881, Thomas and Elizabeth Tannatt said a final good-bye to Massachusetts and the eastern seaboard, where they had spent the majority of their lives, and moved west, as had so many American pioneers before them. Here, however, the similarities end, for the Tannatts undertook their journey in the years following the Civil War, more than a generation after the great migrations of the 1840s and 1850s. And unlike the agricultural and speculative motivations that drove pioneers during the first half of the century, middle-class travelers of the postwar era sought roles in the West as leaders, philanthropists, and community builders, opportunities that social and economic change wrought by war had rendered unattainable in many of their eastern hometowns.

The United States celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its independence in 1826, just a decade prior to the births of Thomas and Elizabeth in the 1830s. In the years that followed the country experienced an era of exceptional development and transformation as it grew from a young and largely agricultural nation to one perched on the brink of industrial explosion. The transportation revolution succeeded in connecting the eastern seaboard with the Ohio Valley and points west, and this shift of attention from the Atlantic coast to the heartland brought about a new sense of American pride and growth of a national spirit, witnessed in part by the 1828 presidential victory of “upstart” Andrew Jackson over incumbent John Quincy Adams.

The events of the century’s early decades disrupted many aspects of American society, in particular the class system, in place since the earliest days of colonization. Borrowed from the European model, the American social ladder included the wealthy at one end, the laboring poor, destitute, and enslaved at the other, and in between those loosely referred to as the “middling sort.” Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, this “natural” order remained largely unchallenged, for, despite the success of the few who did improve their social standing, the opportunities from which they benefited remained unavailable to the majority of the population.

The early nineteenth century’s transportation revolution produced a burst of technology, manufacture, and growth in the United States, all of which expanded in response to burgeoning national and international markets demanding large quantities of goods and services for rapidly expanding “consumer” populations. This era, often referred to as the Market Revolution, greatly upset the traditional class structure as it introduced the concept of upward mobility: the notion that individuals could move up the social ladder through diligence and hard work. “Ours is a country where men start from an humble origin, and from small beginnings rise gradually in the world, as

the reward of merit and industry,” declared Rev. Calvin Colton early in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This rhetoric appealed to members of the growing and expanding middle class: the “white collar” workers employed as bank tellers, clerks, bookkeepers, farmers, mechanics, and manual laborers who hoped to improve their social and financial situations, or at least lay the groundwork that would allow their children to experience upward mobility.<sup>2</sup>

The Market Revolution intensified the impact of capitalism on American citizens, for as historian Harry Watson has stated, “every new mill created opportunities for time clerks, bookkeepers, foremen, superintendents, engineers, and other management personnel,” and “the same was true for every railroad company, canal company, bank, insurance firm, or mercantile house that flourished in the new commercial environment.”<sup>3</sup> Simply put, the system of industrial capitalism that originated during the early decades of the nineteenth century created a need for a management tier theretofore absent in American society. The Market Revolution led to the creation of the American middle class.

These increased career opportunities and possibilities for social advancement did not, however, extend evenly throughout the population. The advent of the factory system and mass production adversely affected members of the artisan class, traditionally among the “middling sort,” who found their standing reduced from that of fine craftsmen to ordinary laborers and wage earners.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the northern concentration of factories and mills created an enormous discrepancy between the industrial capabilities of the North and the South and, as a result, hindered the development of a strong southern middle class. This lack of industrial strength would plague the South in the upcoming Civil War and lead to regional classifications and characterizations that endured into the late nineteenth century and beyond. Burton Bledstein has suggested that northern observers paid a great deal of attention to the ways in which the South lagged behind the North in industrialization, transportation, and immigration, noting that these discrepancies were magnified by the inadequacies of southern transit and port facilities and the preference of many European immigrants to avoid the South altogether.<sup>5</sup>

The Tannatts’ story is a nineteenth-century middle-class study, and it is worth telling for many reasons. Thomas and Elizabeth represent a segment of the population often absent from historical study, since traditional scholarship has focused much of its attention on the accomplishments of history’s “great men,” and recent studies have been devoted in large part to the laboring poor and minorities. As a result, according to Melanie Archer and Judith Blau, “the middle class is the least studied segment of nineteenth-century American society.”<sup>6</sup> In recent years this neglect has become a regular topic of discussion, with historians taking one another to task for disregarding this

portion of the population. In his work on the development of the American middle class, Stuart Blumin addresses this lack of attention and reveals that problems associated with the identification and classification of a “middle class” plagued historians throughout the twentieth century and that mid-nineteenth-century writers and journalists opted to deny the very existence of an American middle class. According to Blumin, “writers of the nineteenth century ignored middling folk because they did not know how to deal with them” and also because the extremes represented by the very rich and the very poor, particularly in New York, Philadelphia, and other large cities, provided the sensationalism that appealed to the reading public.<sup>7</sup> “There are but two classes in the city—the poor and the rich,” wrote New Yorker James Dabney McCabe in 1868, and more than a century later, in 1984, Peter Buckley discussed the “two cultural axes” and the “two distinct idioms” at work during the city’s 1849 Astor Place riot. Neither addressed the presence of a nineteenth-century New York middle class; in fact, McCabe insisted that “the middle class, which is so numerous in other cities, hardly exists at all here.”<sup>8</sup> According to Sean Wilentz, however, “no study of New York workers, particularly not one that tries to analyze working-class beliefs as well as behavior, can leave these people out,” and he has insisted that “the middle class merits respectful study.”<sup>9</sup>

In his recent work on late-nineteenth-century New York, Sven Beckert opted to use the term “bourgeoisie” instead of “middle class” to identify his study’s focus on “a particular kind of elite whose power . . . derived from the ownership of capital rather than birthright, status, or kinship.” Use of “middle class” seemed unsuitable to Beckert as he interpreted popular usage of the term to “stand either for all Americans, past and present, who are neither extremely wealthy nor homeless, or for a distinct social group that corresponds somewhat with the European notion of the ‘petite bourgeoisie’—artisans, shop owners, and lesser professionals.”<sup>10</sup> For Maris Vinovskis, the term “middle class” is simply problematic, as “it refers not only to one’s occupational or economic circumstances but also to one’s goals and life style,” a combination that renders the term, as well as those encompassed by it, difficult to pinpoint and identify.<sup>11</sup>

These problems of identification have led historians and others to ask if the specific composition of the middle class is important enough to warrant concern and generate discussion, and the answer, according to Beckert, is a resounding “yes,” “because the confused use of the term ‘middle class’ has made it very difficult to come to terms with central issues in American history.” Beckert sees the term as “confused” because, by its inclusion of all except the very rich and the very poor, “the specific beliefs, gender roles, and politics of the nation’s bankers, industrialists, shopkeepers, artisans, and professionals have become . . . harder to grasp since they were all subsumed

into the great middle class.”<sup>12</sup> He suggests that by distinguishing among the various groups of nineteenth-century property-holding Americans the “confusion” of the middle class would begin to untangle. Bledstein has echoed Beckert’s sentiments, with the added proviso that “those who care about the working classes put understanding at risk by not taking an interest in the history of the middle classes, since these histories are intrinsically related.”<sup>13</sup>

The questions, concerns, and indecision that continue to plague contemporary historians and researchers did not seem to trouble members of the nineteenth-century middle class at all. These individuals knew precisely who they were. More accurately stated, perhaps, they knew who they were not. In colonial America, the “middling sort” developed through the efforts of tradesmen, merchants, and artisans who wished to distinguish themselves from the lower, or common, classes, composed of the nonpropertied, the poor, and the destitute. By the nineteenth century, as the concept of “rank” fell from favor, middling sorts became the “middle class” and, in American society, a lifestyle. According to Bledstein, the idea of “middle class” appealed to nineteenth-century Americans, for unlike Karl Marx’s “bourgeoisie” and “proletariat” (respectively, those who own the means of production and those who labor), “the middle-class person in America owns an acquired skill or cultivated talent” that was not looked upon “as a commodity, an external resource, like the means of production or manual labor.”<sup>14</sup> In sum, in mid- to late-nineteenth-century America anyone could aspire to the “middle class,” for rather than classifying the individual, it epitomized “a way of doing things, a display of selective *characteristics*, . . . [and] a matter of discerning emphasis and attention.”<sup>15</sup> Thomas and Elizabeth Tannatt knew they belonged to the middle class, and they spent their lives striving for the top rung of this social classification.

This telling of the Tannatts’ story seeks to provide the largely undifferentiated nineteenth-century American middle class with a face and an identity. At the same time, this account sheds light on a chapter in American history that has been not only neglected but essentially ignored: the postwar lives of Civil War veterans and their families. It is a common misconception that, for northerners, few hardships resulted from the war, and that they were far outweighed by the wealth and opportunity to be gleaned at the expense of the devastated South. A renewed interest in scholarship of the period has challenged these perceptions, however, and recent studies reveal that—though certainly not to the extent experienced in the South—northern cities suffered severe, often permanent economic setbacks as a result of the war, and numerous New England towns, and their citizens, witnessed significant drops in the rate of industrialization and the accumulation of personal wealth.<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth’s hometown of Manchester, Massachusetts,

numbered among these, and its factories never recovered the productivity and success they enjoyed in the century prior to the war.<sup>17</sup> In addition, and in response to the prospect of greatly diminished opportunities, countless individuals, particularly young men, abandoned their northern hometowns in the postwar years to seek livelihoods elsewhere, thus accelerating township decline through population losses and the resultant reduction in birthrates.

Civil War scholarship has flourished without interruption since the war's end, and thousands of publications have chronicled the victories and defeats of such leaders as Ulysses S. Grant, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and Robert E. Lee. In recent years, research has focused on wartime reform and benevolent efforts and has added women's names to the list of Civil War heroes, among them Dorothea Dix, Harriet Tubman, and Clara Barton. It is surprising that this vast outpouring of scholarship has avoided inquiry into the long-term effects of the war on those who fought its battles and on the families who suffered and persevered with them. In 1989, Maris Vinovskis lamented that "we do not know much about the effects of the Civil War on everyday life in the United States . . . and almost nothing is available on the postwar life course of Civil War veterans."<sup>18</sup> In the past decade a few historians have undertaken this formidable task, and the Tannatts' story adds an important piece to this emerging scholarship on yet another segment of America's nineteenth-century middle class.

The story of Thomas Redding Tannatt and Elizabeth Tappan Tannatt begins more than a century before their births, across the Atlantic Ocean in the British Isles. Chapter 1 introduces Thomas's and Elizabeth's forebears and their reasons for migrating to North America, and reveals that while Thomas's roots extend deep into the houses of Scottish and Welsh gentry, Elizabeth's English ancestors enjoyed modest successes as "middling sorts." During the years following their migration, however, and for a number of reasons, the social standings of these families shifted, and as the Tappans rose to claim positions of prestige in their New England communities, the Tannatts experienced a decline in social status.

The chapters that follow examine the Tannatts' lives chronologically, and while their activities frequently intertwine, Thomas and Elizabeth are often discussed independently of one another. Chapter 1 examines their childhood and adolescent years, their educational experiences in the 1850s, and their marriage and relocation from New England to a distant military post in the Dakota Territory. Chapter 2 begins with the Tannatts' recall from the frontier in 1861, as hostilities erupted in the East. Their official Civil War experience ended in 1864, when Thomas suffered a severe head wound during the Battle of Petersburg, and chapter 3 examines his ensuing postwar restlessness and wanderlust that took the family first to the mining districts of Colorado and

then to Reconstruction-era Tennessee before returning them to Manchester in 1876.

By the mid-1870s, lack of professional opportunity, partly a result of the economic depression gripping the nation, forced Thomas to look far beyond New England and the East for his livelihood, and chapter 4 chronicles the early years of his association with railroad magnate Henry Villard. The opportunities Villard made available to Thomas not only led to the family's permanent relocation to the Pacific Northwest but helped restore in Thomas the sense of purpose he had sought since his separation from the army at the end of the Civil War. As Thomas negotiated with Villard and endeavored to reestablish himself professionally, Elizabeth took advantage of the family's sojourn in Manchester to become involved with several women's organizations emerging in late-nineteenth-century Massachusetts. From the late 1870s until her death in 1920, Elizabeth devoted a good deal of her time and energy to issues of reform, benevolence, and civic commemoration.

The early 1880s found the Tannatts firmly established in eastern Washington Territory, a region known as the Inland Empire, and chapter 5 focuses on their civic involvement in the towns of Walla Walla, Farmington, and environs. This period witnessed Thomas's election as mayor of Walla Walla and Elizabeth's role in the establishment of the region's first Woman's Christian Temperance Union chapters. It is clear that these years represent the happiest in the Tannatts' lives, as they provided them not only with their first permanent home but also with a great deal of fulfillment and satisfaction. Finally, chapter 6 chronicles the Tannatts' "retirement" years, though this should not suggest that the couple withdrew from active participation in civic and community affairs. Rather, these years witnessed Thomas's tenure as a member of the board of regents of Washington's land-grant college, the Washington Agriculture College and School of Science (now Washington State University), his growing interest and dedication as an orchardist, and Elizabeth's involvement as a founding member of the Spokane chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Thomas's entry into the business world during the postwar years coincided with the development of the American corporate system and the emergence of the middle manager, another feature of the nineteenth-century middle class. Historian Alfred Chandler has suggested that modern management techniques originated with the growth of the railroads, which "caused entrepreneurs to integrate and subdivide their business activities and to hire salaried managers to monitor and coordinate the flow of goods through their enlarged enterprises."<sup>19</sup> In *The Visible Hand*, Chandler reveals the tier system that resulted from this experiment in corporate organization and its placement of executive officers and their staffs on a top tier, with a number of autonomous divisions located on the tiers below, each dedicated to a specific

function, such as manufacturing, selling, and purchasing.<sup>20</sup> Thomas certainly participated in this “integration and subdivision” through his affiliation with Colorado mining conglomerates and, more particularly, during his association with Villard’s transportation empire in the West. The positions Thomas filled were typical of those undertaken by nineteenth-century middle-class professionals, and as the details of his personal experiences will make clear, the value of these middle managers to the corporations and conglomerates that hired them was immeasurable.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, the concept of community volunteerism gained momentum in the mid-nineteenth century with such middle-class organizations as the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (founded 1865), the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (1874), and the Daughters of the American Revolution (1890). Through the efforts of the middle-class membership base of these organizations and others like them, benevolent societies, reform movements, and commemorative efforts became an important aspect of American culture. As historian Don Harrison Doyle has suggested, however, “the expansion of local public institutions sprang from two interlocking concerns: community leaders’ growing interest in the safety and aesthetics of the town’s physical order, and nineteenth-century reformers’ interest in the control of moral behavior through manipulation of the environment.”<sup>22</sup> These concerns, united in a community’s dedication to “grow” its region both physically and economically, separated the emerging midwestern and frontier middle classes from their established urban counterparts.

Recent attention to the nineteenth-century middle-class has generated a series of new questions about its formation and development across the country. Historians now ask whether or not the middle class was “created equally” and how its advent and involvement in rural, agricultural, and frontier regions differed from that found in the urban centers in the East. In his epilogue to *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, Blumin asks whether “big-city social patterns and identities [were] replicated in any way in smaller communities,” wondering, “Can we speak of class, and more specifically of the middle class, in small-town and rural America?”<sup>23</sup> Doyle answers these queries in the affirmative in his study on nineteenth-century Jacksonville, Illinois, and at the same time clearly differentiates between the rise of a middle class in established, eastern urban centers and the arrival of a middle-class to rural and frontier areas. Doyle suggests that the difficulties of community building separate the various aspects of the middle class, since “the problem of building new communities was social as well as economic.” Members of the rural and frontier middle class, for instance, dealt with “the early difficulty of defining status and leadership in an unformed social structure,” issues long resolved in the established East. Doyle further

asserts that “for community leaders and property-owners, the problems of social disorder were ultimately intertwined with the overriding concerns of promoting the town’s economic future.”<sup>24</sup> And despite the assertion of Archer and Blau that “the success of organized philanthropy, consumer products, and leisure institutions . . . was less applicable to rural populations,” these cultural traits and social and economic issues set forth by Doyle as defining Jacksonville’s middle-class at midcentury do apply to the Tannatts and the late-nineteenth-century eastern Washington frontier.<sup>25</sup> In Walla Walla, Farmington, and other Inland Empire towns and burgeoning cities, middle-class Washingtonians clearly and purposefully used their professions, their associations, and their affiliations to develop and shape the social, political, and economic characteristics of their communities and to create unique places for themselves within them.