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Origins and Conflict

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ability or knowledge, they admitted the value of experience and of demonstrated success. They could thus justify hiring an engineer without choosing between professional skill and proprietary responsibility. Especially could they indulge in this ambiguity if the person hired had gained his experience as a proprietor-engineer in the first place. By the late 1790's, Loammi Baldwin had got a considerable reputation in New England for building the Middlesex Canal; men repeatedly called on him to make surveys for millraces, petty canals and river improvements, bridges, and turnpikes. In all these cases, his immediate role was that of the engineer-surveyor called in as an independent professional; the reputation which had got him these jobs he had gained while acting as a proprietor-engineer. Appeals to Baldwin sometimes brought him to projects that relied most of the time on the technical knowledge or improvisation of proprietors. Thus, Samuel Blodget called Baldwin in at times of serious need, but also acted himself as engineer for "Blodget's Canal" at the Amoskeag Falls in New Hampshire.²⁰

The confusion between types of engineers became a less serious problem in the years between 1800 and 1815. After the canal projects of the 1780's and 1790's were finished or abandoned, after the first attempt to dig a Chesapeake and Delaware Canal failed in 1806, the building of internal improvements subsided for a time. Typical of the projects actually pursued seems to have been the reconstruction of the South Hadley Canal on the Connecticut River. This canal had first been built by a group of proprietors incorporated in 1792; one of this group, Benjamin Prescott, had directed construction. After 1802, the canal had to be rebuilt. This time technical supervision fell to one Ariel Cooley, who arranged to keep the canal in repair in exchange for a permanent share in canal tolls.²¹ Through contracts like this and like that made between Sullivan and the Middlesex Canal, the proprietary standard still governed the work situation of "engineers." Local works like the South Hadley Canal continued to be built after 1800, and states like New York and North Carolina undertook plans or even occasional surveys for large projects; but it was only in 1816 that new work made the engineer problem serious. When that time came, the problem involved both a search for engineers in general