

# The Burned-over District

THE SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

OF ENTHUSIASTIC RELIGION IN

WESTERN NEW YORK, 1800-1850

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## PREFACE

**B**URNED-OVER DISTRICT was a name applied to a small region, during a limited period of history, to indicate a particular phase of development. It described the religious character of western New York during the first half of the nineteenth century. Time, subject, and area have thus all combined to confine the scope of this book. The study has nevertheless seemed rewarding, mainly because its implications transcend all three limitations.

The meaning expands in a geographical sense because this one area provides a case history in the westward transit of New England culture. Likewise, it is representative as a sample of the change from youth to maturity in a single section affected by continuing westward movement. The subject of religion has broader significance in this period and locality than might at first appear. This section was the storm center, and religious forces were the driving propellants of social movements important for the whole country in that generation. As far as time goes, this book is an illustration of the way in which the minds of one era help to form the destinies of succeeding generations. Neither the causes of the Civil War nor the origins of national prohibition, to cite only two prominent examples, can be thoroughly understood without reference to the Burned-over District.

Microcosmic study has definite advantages. This limited territory I have come to know intimately, perhaps thus achieving more careful analysis than I could have hoped for with a larger expanse. In

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the small theater of investigation, integrated treatment of cultural, social, economic, political, and ideological causations may be more satisfactory than in larger ones. My motivation, in any case, has been no glorification of the locality, no devotion to regional patriotics, and, most emphatically, no yen for antiquarian lore. Rather, I have tried by the microcosmic approach to produce a reliable and broadly meaningful bit of general American history.

My obligations in developing the volume are multitudinous. Professor Arthur J. May directed my attention to local history in my first excursion into the past of Rochester, New York. Dr. Blake McKelvey has more recently aided me in interpreting not only that city, on which he has written some of the ablest volumes of urban history, but also the whole of western New York. He has read and criticized the manuscript, entire. So also has Professor Louis Filler. Professors Arthur M. Schlesinger, Perry Miller, and Frederick Merk in courses at Harvard University greatly stimulated me to broaden my background for this work. Professor George H. Sabine and other officials at Cornell University were notably generous about time for research during my employment there, which was in a capacity that incidentally enabled me to travel extensively in, and greatly enrich my understanding of, western New York. Travels farther afield searching out sources brought rich acquaintanceships and fertile suggestions from a number of experienced historian-collector-librarians. I am especially indebted to Dr. Lester J. Cappon, Dr. Randolph G. Adams, Dr. Thomas P. Martin, Dr. Clifford Shipton, Dr. Clarence S. Brigham, Dr. R. W. G. Vail, Mr. Edward C. Starr, and Mr. E. R. B. Willis.

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**PREFACE**

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