One Rochesterian proudly explained that the commerce in his city was “like a whirlpool which draws everything to its centre.” But, however accessible it may have been, this “whirlpool” was neither a chaotic nor neutral space. The same bourgeois city builders who constructed the morphological and architectural armature of the sorted city also forged social codes that reiterated their belief that good urban order resulted only when everything and everyone was in their place within the public realm. Knowing one’s place, however, was not a static spatial concept. It involved the use of that space.

The rise of the middle class, including its repudiation of the lower classes, found strong spatial expression in the public space of downtown Rochester and Syracuse. During the second generation of settlement merchants and professionals commissioned showy buildings and manipulated the built environment to build economically productive and urbanistically aesthetic cities. The business rows and business blocks and the regulated sidewalks before them were not only part of the aesthetic renewal of the cities but also part of the social construction of a bourgeois cityscape. Gentrification was both an architectural and social process. The white middle class of merchants and professionals guided the physical urban landscape into a genteel social landscape that reinforced their own bourgeois class identity and aspirations.

The creation of class-based, racialized, and gendered spaces within the commercial district was both a social and physical construction of space that reflected the continued prominence of the white, male, merchant class in ordering the urban environment. Mills, warehouses, basins, shops, offices, and homes displayed the personal wealth of the merchant elites as well as their literal and figurative investments in the city. The aestheticized commercial district additionally showed that the merchants’ influence in the built environment extended beyond the authority over their own property and into the public realm of buildings and sidewalks within the com-
mercial district. The social gentrification of the commercial district showed how pervasively bourgeois culture infiltrated downtown, influencing even the social expectations of a proper use of public space.

The architectural refinement and social gentrification of the commercial district paralleled the merchant’s personal evolution of his own well-ordered landscape. The rise of the market economy, class consciousness, and religious revivals all inspired this new businessman to seek control of his environment. As the historian Paul Johnson concluded, Rochester businessmen “became resolutely bourgeois between 1825 and 1835”: “In 1825 a northern businessman dominated his wife and children, worked irregular hours, consumed enormous amounts of alcohol, and seldom voted or went to church. Ten years later, the same man went to church twice a week, treated his family with gentleness and love, drank nothing but water, worked steady hours and forced his employees to do the same, campaigned for the Whig Party, and spent his spare time convincing others that if they organized their lives in similar ways, the world would be perfect.” Self-discipline coupled with an active participation in the consumer revolution became a conveniently moralized bourgeois value. The archetypal bourgeois businessman brought his convictions to interventions in the built environment, but he did not do it alone. Intermarriage between merchant families and active participation in the Episcopal or Presbyterian churches forged a powerful “federation of wealthy families and their friends” which bound together the entrepreneurial community on a common class identification. This is the class whose “initial leadership in land ownership, occupational status, and religious and political office combined with education, advantageous marriages, and the perquisites of power to extend their control over local social, economic, and political domains.” The sorted, well-ordered citiescape was the product of their efforts.

Far from stopping at the functional and architectural sorting of the physical citiescape, the ordering impulse of the city builders extended physical ordering into the realm of social sorting. Believing that a well-ordered city was a sorted city, the merchant class melded architectural and behavioral norms to create a spatial culture that influenced how space was used in the most public of all city realms—the commercial district. From outside to inside, and cellar to attic, the functional uses of commercial space were invested with social expectations about their appropriate use. Just as the interiors of buildings became coded with social expectations, so, too, did the open streets and sidewalks. White males, middle-class females, African Americans, and Native Americans all used downtown public space, but
they did so differently. Guiding the social gentrification of the commercial district was the ever-present hand of the merchant city leader and his quest to create a genteel, bourgeois urban environment.

The spatial culture of the frenetic city—“everybody seemed to be there”—which had bombarded Nathaniel Hawthorne was actually far more orchestrated than it first appeared. As Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow have argued, architecture can be a “political technology” used to exert “control and power over individuals.” As a physical means to a social end, architecture “contributes to the maintenance of power of one group over another at a level that includes both the control of movement and the surveillance of the body in space.” In the case of Rochester and Syracuse that power was localized in the bourgeois merchant elites who dominated the physical production of space as well as its social construction. Women, minorities, and members of the lower classes who were on the sidelines of economic and political power were brushed aside from figurative ownership of the commercial district.

Social Sorting in Public Space

In some senses the entirety of the new city was in the public domain. Residents and visitors tramped over the new cities as if these overnight sensations were wide open—and in a sense they were. Gazetteers, traveler accounts, and gregarious residents took pains to describe the various buildings in town, pointing out what could be seen just by perambulating the streets. Sightseers used these sights to draw conclusions about the material and social advancement of the settlement. Not only were public buildings discussed but private ones, too, in essence making the private also part of the public sphere. These practices, according to the historian Miles Ogden, “meant that the city could be understood, and presented to the individual, as a public space open to the wanderings and gaze of the walker.” Similarly, Michel de Certeau reminds us that architecture and urban space were not absolute in controlling spatial experience. The very act of living—“walking, naming, narrating, and remembering the city”—could be a subversive “spatial practice [that] eludes urban planning.” But the new city’s proud accessibility was actually guarded by members of the bourgeoisie, who construed the notion of public space through their physical production and social construction of urban culture. Being in urban space and gazing on urban sights did not equal possession or entitlement to that space. Instead, the real standard of belonging to the public sphere was the right
to claim physical space and inhabit it. The constricted spatial experiences of white bourgeois women and racial minorities indicate that the popular figure of the liberated flaneur must have been a white male. In analyzing the movement and interaction of three social groups in the commercial district, it becomes clear that white males of various ages and social ranks had the greatest right to public space as befit their expected, if not executed, role in building the economy and culture of the city. At the other end of the spectrum of spatial freedoms lay the Native Americans, who were negligible producers or consumers within the mercantile economy and were, moreover, refused entry into urban society. White bourgeois females fit in the middle, experiencing spatial privileges as well as restrictions.

The consciousness of these different codes of comportment was captured by Edwin Scrantom, a member of the first white family to settle in Rochester. In 1856 he recorded his content assessment of the view outside his Buffalo Street store. The March day was pleasantly warm, the ice was thawing, and there was not an Indian in sight. As he was enjoying the urban milieu, Scrantom observed a difference between the sexes. Like himself, the men were relaxed, “standing all over in the sun.” The women, however, coexisted in a different tableau—they were a “circulating plenty.” In the new city’s idealized, ordered, hierarchical spatial culture the urban space was the same for all, but its urban practice was not.

**White Males**

At the apex of the urban spatial hierarchy, white men and boys had the greatest spatial options, enjoying even the most passive privilege of lollygagging about in public. Relaxing by the canal towpath that cut through the cities proved a popular past time. Erie Canal towns typically included low bridges that connected the halves of the canal-bisected community. The stone-arched Salina Street bridge in Syracuse was no exception. Its three-foot-high sidewalls were capped by a three-foot-wide coping that provided “a favorite lounging place for the lazy people of Syracuse.” Here boys and men waited to hitch rides on the passing boats, to steer travelers toward a particular inn, or just to watch the sights. Story has it that some loafers were known to fall asleep on the parapets and roll into the canal. The towpath also provided lounging spaces, where men relaxed in chairs pulled from their warehouse offices (Fig. 26).

A male’s prerogative to loiter in public was confirmed in the outdoor porches of the prominent hotels, which were already gendered spaces as-
sociated with male business, politicking, and socializing (Fig. 33). The hotel veranda, in particular, was a democratically opportunistic space for those males who ventured out to its rocking chairs and railings. According to one resident, the Syracuse House presented two types of porch sitters: businessmen of “leisure” who gathered to “discuss the news of the day and the gossip of the town”; and lowly poseurs whose vanity “led them here that they might be seen by the people passing by and be taken as guests of the house, as they were always picking their teeth.”

In a piece of local fiction a young mechanic seeking to establish a reputation for himself in Syracuse punctually appeared on the hotel veranda every night at six o’clock (Fig. 21). As the historian Richard Bushman has explained, “Genteel spaces had immense authority because being there—at the right moment in the right dress—identified a person as genteel.” Intentional landmark institutions such as the Syracuse House promoted the city at the same time that they reflected the hegemony of the business interests that ran it. The porch sitters clearly understood the message of the Syracuse House and used the setting to their own advantage. Considered inappropriate for women and minorities, public loitering was elevated to an art for men.

Inside the semipublic space of shops and hotels, white males also idled, unless one considers smoking a dynamic activity. Palmer’s tobacco store doubled as a Rochester political club whose paying members were entitled to smoke all they wanted of his stock provided they did so on the spot. Men used a similar strategy to claim the hotels’ public parlors. A hazy room filled with cigar-smoking men with propped feet was not a genteel space for women travelers, who were forced to retreat to their own rooms if no separate parlor was available. A new breed of gentleman also found the scenario oppressive. Complaining to his wife about living in a hotel, Timothy Cheney of Syracuse wrote: “I have got so tired of living in this off hand way this boarding & sleeping with Tom Dick & Harry I don’t believe in. I got sick of it. . . . Our Sitting Room after Supper is on the side walk or in Some Rum Hole. I am tired of loafing about in these Dens of poison and degraded places.”

The interior of the Mansion House in Syracuse during the 1820s was typical of the newer hotels. Inside was the office, a sitting room, and a dining room. In the public rooms newspapers were strewn about, and the walls were covered with local and statewide advertisements regarding elections, boat and stage fares, real estate opportunities, lectures, auctions, and stores. As part of the refinement of the commercial district, hotel interiors were similarly improved to provide even more plush settings for the
public rooms. The fitted-up barrooms in the new city hotels were entrenched as local gathering places for the city’s businessmen to drink and gossip. “In fact,” one pharmacist recalled, “a large number of business men of the street made it a rule to go there every day, and it was considered eminently respectable to do so.”

During the 1840s the Rochester Eagle Hotel upgraded its street-level rooms. The renovated first-story dining room, touted as “clean, fresh, inviting,” was accessible only by passing through the saloon, whose sofas, padded easy chairs, and fancy mirrors invited public—that is, male—repose. The men’s refurbished drawing room on the second floor connoted luxurious domesticity. It was outfitted with velvet cushioned sofas, ottomans, and easy chairs; marble tables graced floors covered by patterned Brussels carpets, and the walls sparkled with immense mirrors in gilt frames.

Each hotel developed its own reputation, in terms of the quality of its overnight lodgings and the status of its daytime customers. Sitting virtually next door to each other, the Rochester House and Clinton House served two distinct classes of white men. The Rochester House provided the meeting space for the town’s elite (Fig. 13). Augustus Strong recalled his introduction into select male culture in the great parlor of this hotel. There the Orion Club, a self-proclaimed “galaxy of stars,” gathered as a debating club. The society prided itself on being spartan and distinct from working class, drinking culture. It was also the home of the state’s canal weigh master and toll office, an institution whose import was reflected in its fine surroundings. If they were looking for measurable class distinctions, they needed look no farther than the Clinton House, the domain of the boat captains and canal men who were drawn to its Kremlin Saloon restaurant, reasonable rates for lodgings, and convenient location opposite the Erie Canal boat office.

Although it challenged the veneer of gentility, white male spatial privilege was so entrenched that even its lower-class version was nearly impossible to eradicate. Canal-side groceries and groggeries lacked the polite pretensions of a fine architectural setting or a moneyed clientele. Groceries might sell fresh food and canned provisions, but many were simply purveyors of liquor, earning the disgust of the moralizing middle-class merchant class, whose members had adopted sobriety as a businessman’s moral virtue. Both Rochester and Syracuse had a swath of rookeries, known colloquially as “Chicken Row” and “Robber’s Row,” whose ramshackle buildings catered to the lower-class resident and canaller. A self-appointed upright citizen explained the debauched origins of the name Robber’s Row:
“In former years the tenants in that Row seemed to strive with one another to see which would sell the most whiskey or ‘rot gut’ and get the most drunk, and rob their customers of all the money they had by them. Not long ago a dozen men were seen laying upstairs over one of these groceries, dead drunk. Hence the name of ‘Robber’s Row.’”

Drinking was a thorn in the side of the teetotaling merchants, who tried to wrestle the physical and social cityscape into polite submission. Temperance hotels offered them a sociable retreat. But the public consumption of alcohol was a particular problem along the canal for the simple reason that this was one of the most public spaces in the city, both for residents and for travelers. When, on election day, the Syracuse schoolgirl Augusta Rann and her girlfriend tried to go to the library beside the canal, they turned back, cowed by the presence of “quite too many men around the hall.” Edwin Scrantom’s disgust over election day drunkenness in Rochester in 1851 indicated the scene that had literally repulsed Rann: “Election all day in the City, for City Offices. Snowed all forenoon and rained all afternoon, what scores of inebriety, swearing, polluted, foul-mouthed creatures, calling themselves men, have thronged the polls and boards today, vomiting their votes and blackguardism, both polluted with liquor and bribes. Such are some of the shrines at which freedom is worshipped. Horrid desecration.”

By 1835 temperance reformers estimated that more than fifteen hundred liquor-selling establishments lined the route of the Erie Canal, a figure that results in an average of one tavern or grocery for every quarter-mile, and an 1843 canal excursionist noted that “at almost every lock and water place through the whole rout [sic] there are from 3 to 6 groggeries, and all these for the benefit of the travelling public. . . . ‘Rum, Gin, Brandy, Wine, Beer, Cider, Bread, Milk, and Groceries,’ meet the eye every few miles.” The inebriated visions that visitors came away with were far from the boosterish impressions city builders tried to implant with their institutions such as the Syracuse House hotel, only a stone’s throw from Robber’s Row.

The more alcoholic groceries doubled as social centers for the whites and, to a lesser extent, the Native Americans, who could not present themselves on the verandas or parlors of the great city hotels. As one English traveler in the Midwest noted: “A grocery is . . . in fact, a dram shop; and very often is entirely devoted to the selling of spirits. . . . I stepped into one of the stores, which was full of men lying about on the counters, or sitting in chairs, balanced on their hind legs, the legs of the sitter being thrown upon the counter.” The activity often spilled out to the towpath or sidewalks.
One disapproving observer noted that the scene was antithetical to the well-ordered landscape: “The everlasting ‘grocery’ forms a conspicuous object in these villages, and bands of squalid, blear-eyed Irish rowdies, with here and there a solitary Indian luxuriating in all the grandeur and pomposity of Indian drunkenness cluster around the doors.” All in all, the descriptions painted a scene quite different from the urban one espoused by the emerging middle class. The socially fluid space of the grocery and towpath accommodated a variety of users, but it was an unseemly place for bourgeois men and a completely unacceptable space for bourgeois white females.

Temperance efforts championed by a moralistic merchant class targeted the sites of alcoholic consumption. Bourgeois males and females attempted to rectify the situation by improving the conditions of the lower classes through judicious aid and moral example. Just as the Syracuse Company had rebuilt the Syracuse House as a beacon of enterprising urbanity to strangers, residents’ efforts to clean up the city socially were also embedded in the rhetoric of city building. When a Rochester newspaper urged, “Let these waters be pure; let the canal be a proud monument to the passing stranger, as well as of our public virtues as of our commercial enterprise [sic],” it was referring to the religious fiber of the canal community, not the clarity of the waters. The Erie Canal, narrated Herman Melville, “flows one continual stream of Venetianly corrupt and often lawless life.” Social reform promoted the city’s reputation as a moral society.

By definition the canaller was not rooted to the city but, rather, bobbed in and out, “a terror to the smiling innocence of the villages through which he floats; his swart visage and bold swagger are not unshunned in cities.” It is ironic that the canal landscape was so shabbily encoded in the socio-spatial hierarchies of the city, given that, without the canal, Syracuse would likely have remained a hamlet and Rochester’s growth would have slowed. The canal gave the economy the push it needed to move its residents up into the middling merchant classes. The transient canallers and the people who served them found themselves in an odd position; they were both morally suspect yet remuneratively valuable.

Nonetheless, the moralized merchants in the cities did try to shun the canaller. In 1825 the Sabbatarians’ attempts to close the canal entirely on Sundays failed, ironically, because of the implications for morality. The state legislature accepted the idea that canallers could be a disreputable lot yet concluded that, if they prohibited travel on Sundays, “vast numbers would
throng the canal above and below, and many persons from on board would resort to the taverns, grog shops and houses of ill-fame, that would soon abound in the vicinity of the locks, and most of the vices which degrade and debase mankind would no doubt be encreased \textit{sic} to a much greater extent than if the boats were permitted to pass."\textsuperscript{35} Transient sin, they decided, was better than docked sin. By 1841 Syracuse authorities had outlawed the sale of alcohol “in any street, square, basin, canal, or other public highway” within the city under the penalty of a twenty-dollar fine. Yet the reality of the canal landscape forced a compromise. The penalty acted more as a fee for license; moreover, alcohol could be sold “from the bars of packet boats on the canals, and to be drank therein.”\textsuperscript{36}

Architecture, however, could obliterate what social pressure could not. Across the state Christian reform groups commissioned churches for the canal zone. The Rochester Bethel Church was actually built over the site of Chicken Row, replacing the rookery near the courthouse with a Greek Revival mission church that further extended the civic district along Buffalo Street. Always attentive to the prerogatives of commerce, the congregation subsequently relocated in the 1850s to Sophia Street and sold their commercially valuable Buffalo Street lot.\textsuperscript{37} Robber’s Row in Syracuse also finally fell under the pressures of real estate development. The Rochester Arcade and Athenaeum buildings (the subject of the next chapter) were a similar social reclamation project that evicted undesirables from the commercial district without actually purging them from the larger city.

In their attempt to refine the social landscape of the canal, local leaders found themselves less powerful than they had hoped. The state actually controlled the canal and towpath and thus the property within the city’s municipal boundaries. As such, the frustrated city authorities and landholders were forced into the role of petitioners, requesting outside approval in the handling of local affairs. In 1830 Rochester’s leading businessmen, including Jonathan Child of Child’s Basin, joined with the elected municipal authorities to petition the state canal board to revoke the license it had granted for a shopkeeper to operate along the towpath next to the basin. Instead of the anticipated sturdy warehouse, he had erected a flimsy grocery. “The valuable property in the neighborhood is constantly exposed to fire [and] the citizens . . . are annoyed by mobs and collections of disorderly transient persons in and about the shops.”\textsuperscript{38} Although forced to go through legal channels, the merchants ultimately prevailed. Upon the expiration of the offending shopkeeper’s lease, the permit was rescinded.
Bourgeois Females

Urban life presented a different set of socio-spatial challenges for white middle-class females, who confronted cultural messages that the ideal urban landscape was a masculine one. While the emerging rhetoric of middle-class domesticity placed women securely in the home, surrounded by the buffer of familial privacy, the reality was that women frequently ventured into town and, indeed, had great freedom in where they went. Their experience of place, however, was distinct from that of their white male counterparts, who dallied about in public spaces.

The 1819 edition of *The Whole Duty of Woman*, one of the first books published locally in Rochester, showed the disjunction between the ideal and actual use and users of public space. The whole duty of woman, according to the author, was to be virtuous within the confines of her domicile. And yet women obviously were not, thus etiquette guides instructed women how to behave in public. “Be not frequent in the walks, nor in the thronged parts of the city,” *The Whole Duty* warned; the exemplary woman “frequenteth not the public haunts of men; she inquirith not after the knowledge improper for her condition.”\(^{39}\) As the cultural historian John Kasson has pointed out, during the first half of the nineteenth century “segmentation of public and private life was rapidly increasing, the public arena was fraught with special concern as a problematic realm,” particularly for women.\(^{40}\) The bustle of city life inevitably included the random obtrusions of a male’s words, gesture, touch, or gaze. An 1827 letter between two prominent Rochester businessmen painted the picture of Rochester’s commercial district, a milieu unavoidably thronged by men: “Business goes on, and briskly... hammers clink, carts rattle, streetmen brawl, boys halloo, and cryers cry ‘hear ye’ &c. Lawyers and doctors are thick as ever. Idlers and dandies strut as usual. The theaters, museums, and pictures and other curiosities about as abundantly as formerly, and men ‘in the full fruition of unrestrained liberty’ pass to and fro, gathering substance and leaving ‘pomp and circumstance’ behind them.”\(^{41}\) The whole duty of women may have been to efface themselves from the masculine, urban environment, but it was an impossible charge for the urban resident.

Charitable work provided one socially acceptable excuse to be out in public. The Rochester Female Charitable Society was organized in 1822 in response to the social problems of the sick, poor, and depraved of all ages and both sexes who wandered the streets knocking on doors and importuning passersby for aid. In order to purge the “vicious” elements from the
streets, the Charitable Society drew up a plan of visiting districts and assigned members to become acquainted with the neighbors in their districts to assess accurately their levels of need and to distribute aid on the society’s behalf. Their system of personal inquiry and home inspection remained in place through the mid-nineteenth century and was copied by other cities, including Syracuse.

The domestic missionaries of the Female Charitable Society at first congratulated themselves on the efficacy of district visiting, convinced they had ferreted out the deserving from the undeserving poor. But in 1836 Mrs. Kempshall, whose husband owned a large mill on Child’s Basin, resigned from the charitable society after a difficult year. There were, she explained, “whole Districts appointed to females as visitors where no decent female should go” and where they dealt with “vile and degraded inhabitants.” Her district included the canal towpath, where she went almost daily to check on eight or ten families crowded together into two houses. Their depravity led her not only to abandon hope of getting loaned articles returned but made her fear that they would retaliate for any perceived indignities by burning the Kempshall’s house. Spurred by the resignation of fearful members, the society pushed for the creation of a workhouse where the poor would be sent to earn their keep. The subsequent construction of an orphanage and workhouse confirmed their sense of accomplishment. And, because they were confident that the deserving poor had already been succored, any street beggar was by default undeserving and could be ignored in good conscience.

In Syracuse the workhouse was seen as such an efficacious solution that the city passed an ordinance in 1849 which outlawed begging without written permission. The bourgeois cityscape had theoretically been socially cleansed. Ironically, this also meant fewer reasons for a woman to have business about town.

During the same period local authorities tried, with spotty success, to legislate decorum within the urban spaces under the corporation’s purview. To make the streets respectable, city ordinances sought to control indecent language and indecent or disorderly conduct in public. The new cities passed almost verbatim the same social policy ordinances. The transgressions included “any noise, disturbance or improper diversion” in the streets and squares of the city “to the annoyance or disturbance of citizens or travelers.” The extent of legislation, however, extended beyond the predictable rules against breaking the peace. City councils and village trustees further tried to legislate decency. Targeting the public nature of public space, they proscribed vulgar, profane, and obscene language and
conduct in any street, street corner, bridge, or public place, including the market halls that shouldered the commercial district. Even the common male privilege of swimming naked in the canal was prohibited during daylight hours. The bourgeois leadership both instigated and enjoyed the improved landscape. Their wives and children appear to have been the targeted beneficiaries of these morally uplifted streets, particularly those that were most intensively and commonly used, that is, those in the commercial district. The mention of travelers in the ordinances maintained public pressure for a genteel decorum that would reflect favorably on the brash new cities and possibly entice the right kind of gentrifying settler.

Middle-class white females developed a separate spatial culture within the shared physical space of the city. They shaped their urban environment through their own comportment. The way that they dressed, behaved, and moved while in public created a real but invisible female space—a mantle of private respectability—which made the city available to them. One nineteenth-century guide drew an analogy between manners and a fortress: “[Etiquette] is like a wall built up around us to protect us from disagreeable, underbred people who refuse to take the trouble to be civil.”

Although separated by thirty years, both *The Whole Duty of Woman* and *True Politeness for Ladies*, also circulating in upstate New York, agreed that women should build genteel walls around themselves so as to be as unobtrusive as possible in public. Proper comportment, *True Politeness* explained, required subdued conduct, dress, ambulation, and gestures. It urged ladies to dress plainly when going in public and reminded them that a dress worn for walking required a different style, material, and ornament than one worn for dinner. In the likely case that a woman encountered men on the streets, *Whole Duty* instructed her not to turn her head “to gaze after the steps of men” or to be so bold as to inquire of them where they were going.* True Politeness* established a hierarchy of greetings in order to avoid social gaffes. It reminded ladies that “the superior in rank and station should first salute the inferior” and that, by extension, “if you meet a gentleman in the street with whom you are acquainted, recollect that it is your province to recognize him before he assumes to salute you.” Should an inferior presume to salute a woman before first being acknowledged, he or she was to be gently ignored under the pretense that the lady supposed the greeting was intended for someone else. Any man or woman who would gauchely presuppose the right to be acknowledged on the street based merely on a previous introduction at a ball or tea was to be set straight with either a cold bow or, better yet, a complete lack of acknowledgment. As the guide ex-
plained, an introduction at a ball or at a friend’s house “does not compel you to recognize the person in the street,” nor, to be fair, does it “entitle you to future recognition by such person.” True Politeness was emphatic that under no circumstance was a lady to “boisterously salute” or, worse, shout out the name of a female acquaintance in public. To do so would compromise the privacy and decency of both ladies. Such advice was seconded in the training that Miss Araminta Doolittle gave her students at the Rochester Female Academy. Her student Alice Hopkins later recalled, “What she wanted was to make us all over into high-bred, courteous, cultivated, truthful women of society, well-dressed and, above all, without eccentricities, trained never to do anything especially to attract attention.” The ideal lady was an invisible one.

Purposeful walking was critical to navigating the public landscape. As suggested by the terms street walker or public woman, such rules of conduct were needed to permit a genteel woman to be out in public. Moralizing literature painted a picture of immoral women defined by the streets. The sentimental paean “Hymn for Female Penitents” published by a Troy authoress portrayed the fallen woman by her rambling habits: “Much hath she sinned—for many years hath walked, by night, the city’s street.” In the novella Life in Rochester Chumasero chose the suggestive name of “Eliza Streeter” for a naïve girl ruined after becoming the lover of a man whom she had met on the street. Phebe Davies, a seamstress of Syracuse, was sent to the Utica Insane Asylum by the orders of the county sheriff on the charge that she was a dangerous person to the community. Because her story is told by Davies herself, her transgressions are unclear, although it is indicative of her unconventional habits that when the authorities seized her she was found on the street “walking out for the benefit of my health.” By 1857 Syracuse authorities passed an ordinance directing that any woman “found loitering or strolling about the streets of the city, by day or night, without any lawful business” be fined ten to fifty dollars, the same fine charged to a convicted prostitute. Etiquette guides stressed the importance of continuous movement while on the street. True Politeness specifically recommended bowing, not curtsying, when acknowledging acquaintances, because that protective form of greeting would not interrupt the flow and grace of the stroller’s forward motion. Appearances were everything; females had great access to public space but only if they kept moving.

The Syracuse teenager Augusta Rann adopted just such a continual “maneuvering” as her spatial strategy. She was an intensely peripatetic girl, whose walks took her not only through the Syracuse commercial dis-
strict but also miles up to the Salina saltworks and over to the Geddes Idiot Asylum. While out on the street, even if simply promenading, Augusta took care to appear as though she had a destination in mind. Far from loitering, she was not available for conversation or even an exchange of glances. Her diary is peppered with accounts of ignoring people, especially male classmates, while out on the street.62 “After school went to the bookstores with Miss Lathrop . . . just as we were passing Johnson’s grocery who should I see but J.M. I did not let him know I saw him, for fear he would think I came down the street just to see him.” The characters might change, but the avoidance techniques remained the same. “After school went uptown to the P.O. and to the library with Gertrude King. Albert B waited on the stairs until after I came down, but I did not look at him, he went along before us, when we went uptown, and he looked back pretty often.” Young Rann was, of course, looking around while trying to appear not to. “Went up throughout the city with Orissa Roach saw no one worth seeing,” she complained more than once; “Promenaded a long time, but saw no one else.” 63

It would be wrong to ascribe young Augusta’s eyes-forward, feet-moving approach to enjoying the city strictly as an adolescent behavior. Her spatial strategies were not only sanctioned in the bourgeois manner books but were echoed in older women’s comportment in the city as well. Alcesta Huntington of Rochester similarly hustled about town as a teenager and an adult.64 The stakes could be high. When Sarah Littles was accused of murdering her husband near the Rochester falls, she presented an alibi showing she was a reasonable and decent woman who, incidentally, was nowhere near the scene of the crime. The evening in question Sarah had walked widely through the city, passing in and out of several urban districts, ranging from her mother’s house to the south, to running errands in the commercial district in the center, heading toward a friend’s room in the milling district to the north, and back home again through the commercial district.65 Throughout her stroll—with one exception—the irreproachable Littles always had a destination in mind and thus a purpose to her walk. The one time she seemed aimless was indoors, and even then it was unacceptable—the dressmaker Mary Farrell threw her out of the shop for loitering.66 The purposeful rambles of Rann, Huntington, and Littles all point to the relative freedom that white middle-class females enjoyed in the city. Their behavior during their rambles, however, points to a common strategy of using movement to maintain the mantle of privacy when on a public street. While out in public, a lady must appear to have a goal and must keep moving.
Social mores discouraged women from sitting out in public, where it would be difficult to avoid contact or observation. If a lady wanted to stop, she had to find a proper retreat from the public. A foot-sore Augusta Rann sat with her aunt in the women’s parlor of the train station as they awaited her uncle. Alcesta Huntington buried her head in the decorous *London Industrial News* in the second-floor reading room of the Rochester Athenæum. The space, the seriousness of the reading matter, and her posture buffered her from most public scrutiny. Reading traditionally provided a genteel illusion of busyness. A Syracuse resident recalled that during the 1820s the Syracuse Book Store “was the headquarters for the better class of village loungers, the intellectual folks in their idleness.”

In terms of genteel respectability, sitting in a hotel’s public parlor was nearly as bad as lolling about its front veranda. During the 1830s one Troy mother worried greatly about her young daughter’s comportment while traveling through the state: “She is making herself very conspicuous . . . she is very young and wants a great deal of council. I hope you will never let her be in the public parlor without you or Harriet are with her, I am afraid that she will get to be a forward girl, and that I could not endure.”

During the refinement of the new cities during the 1830s and 1840s, hotel owners began to carve out gender-segregated spaces that delineated the public-private, male-female distinctions. For example, after the Rochester Eagle Tavern was rechristened the Eagle Hotel, it was upgraded to provide a ladies’ parlor on the second floor, safely above the men’s first floor bar, dining room, and a courtyard smoking platform, and far from public scrutiny. These designated women’s parlors were semipublic spaces intended as bastions of sequestered and passive female entertainment. One young traveler noted that all hotels had rocking chairs placed out on the large wooden verandas, but she herself sat indoors in the parlor overlooking the bustle on Rochester’s streets. The Syracuse House hotel impressed the traveling Miss Leslie in 1845, who noted its high style and fine accommodation to privacy: “While in Syracuse in 1845 Miss Leslie took apartments at the Syracuse House, a very spacious and very fine hotel at a corner of the great square. A large portion of this house was so arranged as to give each guest a commodious parlour with a small chamber opening into it—a most excellent plan. Those parlours (of which I had one) were all very handsomely furnished in city-like style; and the bedrooms were light, airy, and of comfortable size. The drawing-room opened on the balcony, from which was a fine view of the square, with the canals and bridges.” Indeed, a resident’s engraving of the Syracuse House showed women en-
sconced in the upper balcony while the men gathered at street level (Fig. 20). Far from posing on the hotel’s veranda, genteel ladies modestly withdrew. Although Michel de Certeau and Walter Benjamin suggest that the simple acts of “walking, naming, narrating, and remembering the city” are liberating spatial practices that permit the individual to claim space, the navigational strategies of white bourgeois women show constricted access even as they walked and looked. Not only were ladies expected to control their level of engagement with the public and public space, but they were also expected to regulate the public’s physical and visual access to them.

**Native Americans**

Not surprisingly, Native Americans were at the bottom of the social and spatial hierarchies in the public space of these new cities. For all the white rhetoric of civilizing the savage, no one meant for it to happen on the white man’s turf, including the public streets. Native Americans were typically presented as having no place in the white villages and cities. And yet, no matter how it dismayed many whites, Native Americans were part of the early-nineteenth-century cityscape.

Separate spatial cultures divided Native Americans and whites and clouded their ability to understand the way the other used city space. As one white Rochesterian saw it, just coming to town was their first failing. “These indians were completely demoralized,” Edwin Scranton wrote; “they refused to range the forests with their wandering brethren.” What was worse to him was their urban comportment in the city. They dressed poorly, entered private buildings without knocking, and, finding no welcome in most public buildings, took their business outside, selling goods and even eating on the street. An illustrative instance of spatial miscommunication was a French traveler’s interpretive error. Finding a papoose slung on a tree in Rochester in 1818, he supposed it to be abandoned and rescued the bundled child from its perch and headed back to his lodgings at the Ensworth House. A commotion ensued as the father and mother materialized out of the undergrowth where they had been eating and demanded the return of the child.

Urban spatial practices were, of course, only part of a larger culture in which the two groups collided. The question asked by the white James Hall could have as easily been posed by a Native American: “How shall we deal with a people between whom and ourselves, there is no community of language, thought or custom—no reciprocity of obligations—no common
standard, by which to estimate our relative interests, claims, and duties?" As the historian Bernard Sheehan has pointed out, the abstraction of savagism reduced the irreconcilable differences of the Native Americans into a comforting formula. Savagism, he adds, raised “a barrier against understanding [and] set men at odds with reality.” The spatial culture of the Native Americans challenged the sense of order and propriety of the whites.

A Seneca ceremonial site just west of the Monroe County courthouse became memorialized by white Rochesterians as a benchmark of social progress over savagism. In 1813, on the fifth day of a nine-day Iroquois ritual, the Seneca strangled, burned, and ate one or two white-furred dogs as an act of purification. Some acculturated Iroquois linked the white dog sacrifice to Christian theology. One Oneida defended that eating the dog flesh “was a transaction equally sacred and solemn, with that which the Christians call the Lord’s feast. The only difference is in the elements, the Christians use bread and wine, we use flesh and blood.” But white New Yorkers were having none of it. The sacrificial act confirmed the white’s view of the Seneca as savage and was the single event of the nine-day festival on which the whites focused. Although the Iroquois ritual persisted elsewhere, after 1813 they never held it in Rochester again. The merchants’ construction of new commercial buildings and a canallers’ mission church on Buffalo Street commandeered this ritual site and neatly advanced their goals for a socially and physically ordered cityscape. It was with great satisfaction that local chronicler Henry O’Reilly recalled that “the wild spots where these pagan rites were performed only twenty-six years ago has been transformed for the purposes of civilized man, and is now surrounded or covered by some of the fairest mansions and the noblest temples of Western New-York.” Building over the site was one way to make the ceremony, and by extension the Indians, disappear from the urban landscape.

The idealization of separate spaces was drawn in Barber and Howe’s 1841 illustrated gazetteer. In the foreground of the Rochester Buffalo Street view stood the shops that had leapfrogged past the courthouse, but the caption made no mention that this had even been the site of the ceremony, nor did the section acknowledge a historical or contemporary Indian presence (Fig. 16). In the 1851 edition the authors added a new, sensationalist illustration of the pagan “Indian Worship” that had occurred on the same spot on Buffalo Street. This added section symbolically sequestered the Iroquois to the back of the book. Barber and Howe similarly erased the Onondaga from Syracuse. There were no signs of a Native American legacy,
let alone presence, at the hub of Clinton Square (Fig. 17). Instead, the Onondaga were isolated to their own illustrated section on the contemporary Onondaga Reservation.  

Although they had been dispossessed from the land, Native Americans continued to be a presence in the cities. Whites interpreted Indian behavior in town, however, without considering the effects from that dispossession. Many descriptions of the local Indians simply suggested that they were an improvident lot. In 1826 a Frenchman scorned “in the vicinity of Rochester dwell some miserable Indians who could raise an abundance of food but prefer to neglect their fields and beg at the door of every household.”  

Such accounts described the outcome but not the cause of white infiltration into Native American lands and practices and, in doing so, damned the Indian for their inappropriate response to a changing landscape. In his 1819 address Governor DeWitt Clinton noted the difficulty of the Indian situation in New York State. Based on his observations that the closer Indians came to whites, the more they “receded from virtue” or even died, Clinton concluded that “their departure is essential to their preservation.” Clinton’s view that Native Americans were neither appropriate figures in the urban landscape nor improved by contact with white urbanization was repeatedly echoed in the recollections of the Native Americans the settlers had seen in town. Whites increasingly saw Native Americans as an exotic and debased, yet safely dying, race.

Drunkenness was a recurring trope. Edwin Scrantom invoked the memories of a “gang of vagabond natives” who were a frequent sight in Rochester, typically drunk and laid out on the pavement with silent, mortified wives sitting sentry beside them. These sights were not tucked away, far from the public eye and daily experience of the white residents, but were, rather, part of Rochester’s most public streets in the commercial district. Scrantom proceeded: “I have seen such a scene on Exchange street. . . . I have witnessed such scenes on Buffalo street. . . . I have seen them repeated oftener in a low place . . . on State street [and] Back of the Arcade was the great place in early days for Indian ‘drunks.’” The Indian transgressions were doubled in such a public scenario. Rochester had its share of white drunks, but they usually found comfort in the privacy of grog shops and were typically only arrested during the night, either when they were caught passed out on the streets after closing hours or when they were ejected from taverns for unruliness. The lack of accommodating interiors contributed to the Native Americans’ ungenteel uses of exterior spaces.

Furthermore, the Indian wives sitting sentry were forced into humili-
ating public scrutiny. Scrantom observed: “I have seen the squaws mani-
manifesting the deepest mortification for their condition, and their feelings find-
ing vent in long drawn sighs, as they sat near their prostrate relatives with
their heads bowed and covered from sight in their blankets. To go near a
squad of prostrate Indians, stupefied with drunkenness, and stand and look
at them, was to inflict great pain and uneasiness upon these patient squaw-
watchers.”94 The compromised women’s attempts to fend off the gawkers
exacerbated the cultural dissonances. Unlike the white females who were
instructed to freeze leering offenders with icy indifference, the Native
American women showed their displeasure “by many signs of the head and
hands; the most potent of which was the sudden turning of their hood faces
towards their intruders, and then turning their backs upon them, as they
took a few steps forward.”95

Indian drunkenness threatened the bourgeois social order in other
ways as well, by undermining the prerogatives of the white merchant’s role
within drinking culture. The semblance of social equality in which work-
men drank with their employers actually reiterated the dominance of the
employer, since it was done at his bequest, at his workplace, as his treat. In-
dian drinking fell outside this socially sanctioned form of class-affirming
leisure. After temperance took hold in the gentrified community, drinking
culture changed in ways that further degraded the Native American’s social
reception. Drinking was becoming politicized as part of working-class cul-
ture in opposition to the middle class. Native American drinking thus un-
derscored their cultural distance from the abstemious bourgeois merchant
class.96 In 1849 a Syracuse ordinance was passed prohibiting the sale of in-
toxicating drinks to any “Indian or squaw, apprentice, servant or child.”97
This ordinance notably omitted the white merchant elite, thus signaling the
hierarchies of alcoholic space and privilege in the gentrifying city.

By midcentury the increasingly rare accounts of Native Americans in
the cityscape more often described Indians who capitulated to the bour-
geois hierarchies of urban space. Far from claiming space for themselves,
they made but a fleeting figure upon it. As one traveler described it, “the
streets of Rochester were animated with buyers and sellers . . . and, amid
the crowd of the European race, Indians might be seen in their white blan-
kets, and with their uncovered, long, black, shaggy hair, passing in and out
of the shops.”98 Hardly fixtures, these people passed in and out of the shops
and kept on the move in what was probably a hostile environment. Much
like the bourgeois women, Native Americans had adopted a similar spa-
tial strategy: they kept moving.
And yet, even in their movement, the Native Americans were still seen as derelict in their comportment. Far from having the purposeful gait of a proper girl running errands, they were typically described as straggling. Mrs. Elisha Sibley recalled the Indians she saw during the earliest days of Rochester as “straggling bands and hunters [who] were constantly passing through the woods about us.”99 A generation later the same perspective was echoed in Thomas Wharton’s 1830 description of Syracuse: “along the Tow-path were straggling groups of Indians of the Oneida tribes.”100 Another traveler commented on the Oneida she saw shortly before reaching Syracuse: “the last remnant of the once powerful tribe of Oneidas is yet lingering in this neighbourhood.”101 The straggling that whites observed may well have been the result of the Native American’s spatial disenfranchisement; there were few places to pause in the city. Alvin Fisher’s 1845 painting Remnant of the Tribe illustrated the observations of one Erie Canal traveler near Syracuse: “We have passed several squads of . . . Indians carrying baskets, brooms, hunting apparatus, &c. I could not but think of their once numerous hordes, now no more, save a few scattered remnants of their wandering tribes, having scarcely a spot which they can call their own.”102 Whereas white males pulled out benches in front of the groceries for their own comfort, the Native Americans avoided making the same spatial claims on the public path. As befit an unwelcome visitor, they kept in motion. The spoken and tacit standards of proper urban comportment created standards that marginalized Native Americans and sorted them from the white landscape. Loitering was a privilege that extended only to white males; all others needed objectives and destinations.

There were few exceptions to their spatial disenfranchisement. Despite the mercantilist aspirations, currency was in short circulation, and merchants were forced to trade in goods, not cash. Periodically, Native Americans provided unusual relief. Annuity payments, issued by the federal government for Indian land concessions, put hard cash into Native American hands, making them suddenly welcome customers in a cash-strapped community. One early Syracusan remembered, “on pay day it was almost impossible to get inside the store for the crowd of Indians and squaws who brought their government money for him to take care of. At these times the numerous papooses, strapped on frames, leaned up against the store front, much as bulletin boards do now.”103 The welcome wore out when the money was gone.

Another exception involved the agreement between Native Americans and whites that there was money to be made in the commercial district by
torquing race relations to mutual advantage. In Syracuse the Onondaga women and children carved out a special niche in the town fabric at Phinney’s Museum on the edge of Clinton Square. Phinney and the Onondaga realized the commercial potential of his Indian visitors. He permitted the Onondaga liberal access to his museum because the sight of the women and children “gayly dressed, with scarlet blankets, feathers, beads, and trinkets” enjoying the music and displays created its own attraction. “The sight of them in the windows and about the buildings draws strangers to enter, for the sake of seeing them more at leisure than they could do passing in the streets.”\textsuperscript{104} In turn, the Onondaga pandered to their audience, dressing brightly and picturesquely to gain tips from the visitors.\textsuperscript{105}

The exclusion of Native Americans from the urban landscape was both a technique and proof of the merchants’ dominance in framing urbanization in terms of their own economic and cultural colonization. They repeated that the best proof of the Indians’ loss of entitlement to the land itself was the fact that they had enjoyed first rights to the land but had failed to do anything with it. In contrast, white settlers had constructed bona fide cities with active commercial and manufacturing economies. This “myth of the second creation” meshed neatly with the culture of improvement which dominated the mercantile settlement of the hinterland.\textsuperscript{106} Such a theory was argued by J. C. Myers, who traveled through Rochester and Syracuse in the late 1840s.

When we reflect on these highly cultivated regions, bespangled with the most flourishing cities, towns, and villages, whose foundations were laid by people still living, and which region already numbers a population greater than the whole of the aboriginal hunting tribes, who possessed the forest for hundreds of miles around, we soon cease to repine at the extraordinary revolution in the history of those tribes, however much we may commiserate the unhappy fate of the disinherited race.—Because here now the noble enterprise of the white man has so changed the aspect of this region, that upon every hand attractive beauty meets the eye; and here now far and wide the aboriginal forest has lost its charms of savage wilderness, by the beauties of cities, towns and villages, and the intrusion of railroads and canals.\textsuperscript{107}

By midcentury the suppression of Native Americans in the city permitted white residents to recall the Indian presence as a somewhat colorful element of everyday life. Indians dramatized the efforts of the pioneers, and their eradication was a measure of urban civilization. Fifty years after his family moved to that first log cabin, Scrantom wrote, “the transition certainly is wonderful, from a ‘Howling Wilderness’ with one log hut, sur-
rounded by Indians,—who are always as uncertain as wild beasts, and more
to be dreaded,—to a city of fifty thousand inhabitants.”

Spatial privilege clearly depended on one’s race, gender, and class. White males created their own space in the public realm, both casually, by dragging out benches to the towpath for impromptu drinks, and officially, by constructing emporiums for business as well as verandas and saloons for male sociability. The walking of white women and Native Americans throughout the cities, and especially the commercial district, did not result in any equivalent authorship of space that white males enjoyed. Their claims upon space were fleeting and therefore weak. The physical, public spaces allocated to bourgeois white women were shaped not by but, rather, for them by white male society, and those spaces were either ephemeral or secluded. Native Americans had even fewer spatial options. It would be romantic to hold the notion that the “gaze” of these minority flaneurs was enough to liberate them from the governance of the social construction of urban space. Rather, their very exclusion from full participation in public space itself reiterated the power of those who excluded them. Certainly, each social group had its distinctive spatial practices that complicated the meaning of public space, but the heavy hand of bourgeois coding colored spatial practices and social reception.

Social Sorting within Commercial Buildings

The ordering impulse that had guided the architectural refinements of the commercial buildings extended to social ordering inside as well. Although it was not regulated by municipal ordinance, the ever-present hand of the merchant guided the process of building consensual spatial norms that distributed below-ground, street-level, and upper-story tenants and clients. Men and women, consumers and producers, whites and people of color, were virtually slotted into particular spaces and roles within the new commercial blocks. By going inside the buildings and settings of the commercial district, we see the extent to which architecture ordered people in space and framed social expectations. Being semipublic spaces, these shops and offices were theoretically open to the public, an expectation compounded by their very presence in the commercial district. But, much as the district’s sidewalks and streets were commercially conditioned public space, so, too, were the shops privatized public space.
Cellars

Cellar establishments were largely the territory of men and boys. Physical, economic, and cultural considerations all played into the gendering of these below-ground quarters. Many cellars were simply dank storage facilities encountered by stock boys such as the fictional William Brown, who was described in the 1848 novella *Life in Rochester*. Instructed by his Exchange Street employer to “put on a ‘tick apron, and go down into the cellar with a basket, and clean up the rubbish on the bottom,” the dispirited clerk “stooped down at the bottom of the damp, earthy cellar, and scraped together fragments of hoops, decayed bits of boxes, broken bottles, and mouldy wisps of straw.”109 Other cellars were converted to public businesses, with varying degrees of finish. Proprietors typically chose cellar shops for their cheapness. Rochester’s D. H. Ray’s barbershop, the Kremlin Saloon, and a private employment agency (called an intelligence office) all needed to be near the customers circulating through the commercial district, but, as the providers of services, not the sale of goods, they did not need to entice customers with displays. Nor did they court female customers where decorum would require architectural amenities within a public setting. In fact, barber Ray advertised that he would attend to ladies in their homes rather than expect them to descend into his shop. Wholesalers also operated from cellar locations, where male clerks waited on male customers in simple settings. The availability of goods and the efficiency of shipping, not fashionable or ephemeral over-the-counter experiences, mattered to jobbers.110 An advertisement for a Buffalo Street business almost incidentally included the image of a respectably top-hatted, top-coated man coming up out of the cellar shop next door (Fig. 34).

The formal distinctions of gendered retail space were clearly rendered in a midcentury advertisement for Case & Mann’s dry goods store on State Street, immediately north of the Four Corners. The owners architecturally and spatially created two distinct business environments on the double-wide lot, and their advertisement showed both retail and wholesale operations (Fig. 35). In what was clearly the cellar, with a stair descending and no windows visible, the wholesale department was well suited for business. The walls were lined with stocked shelves, and display cases encircled the cast-iron columns. The interior was not glossily furnished. Its lighting fixtures were plain, there were no ceiling decorations, the floor was strewn with crates and boxes of goods, and there was no seating. Here in the basement utility prevailed where all the customers and clerks were men. In
contrast, the retail department on the first floor was an airy space. A row of fluted cast-iron columns ran down the length of the shop floor, supporting the high ceiling above. Gaslight chandeliers hung from ornamental rosettes. The sidewalls and the base of the columns were built up with substantial rows of shelves and cases holding the store’s wares. Counters and stools provided comfortable seating for the ladies, who were waited upon by male clerks. Presumably, large plate-glass windows illuminated the scene from the outside.

At the other end of the cellar spectrum were the seedy cellar establishments—a type that left little evidence in the historical record. One source for the nineteenth-century perception of such places, however, comes from local authors. In the popular pulp press authors developed stock “places” just as they developed stock characters. In these fictionalized settings basements contained things dark, perilous, cheap, concealed, and generally unfit. The big showy business block, one local author warned, could be misleading. In John Chumasero’s *Mysteries of the Rochester* a group of debauched young men, drinking, gambling, and planning crimes, gathered there “in one of the basement stories of a lofty store on ——— street, in a room well guarded from intrusion being the back part of a recess, designed especially for the ‘exclusives,’ and bearing upon its door the ominous and impolite word ‘private.’” Similarly, in his *Life in Rochester* Chumasero set the course for the hapless Eliza Streeter’s downfall to prostitution when she innocently entered an intelligence office in a Buffalo Street basement. As an attorney and Monroe County judge, Chumasero was in a unique position to evaluate the foibles of human nature. As a resident of Rochester, he was able to situate these characters into familiar urban spaces.

**Street Level**

The dry goods rows that Syracuse and Rochester merchants forged provide a quick introduction to the functional, architectural, and social sorting impulse that underlay the construction of the new nineteenth-century cities. Functionally, dry goods merchants clustered within the commercial district to form a subdistrict dedicated to selling fabric, sewing notions, shawls, and household goods. In Syracuse of 1844, for example, of the thirteen dealers who dealt only in dry goods, ten were located on Salina Street. A generation later a Syracuse newspaper reported that the confluence of transportation options created “peculiar advantages offered to dry goods dealers that the latter are centering here, and, in consequence, there is consider-
able competition, though rather healthful to the people than otherwise as yet." The evolution of dry goods rows reflected the merchants’ understanding that the benefits of a critical mass of retail customers outweighed any sales lost to the nearby competition. It also indicated the identical valuing of pedestrian, horse, and canal traffic to the totality of retail and wholesale operations.

Architecturally, merchants competed through the construction of large and stylish stores. Responding to the proliferation of dry goods selling in the area, around 1850 Colonel Vorhees extensively refurbished his Empire House hotel on the corner of Clinton Square along with the attached Empire Buildings on North Salina Street. The cupola-capped four-and-a-half story Empire Hotel, with its enticing rows of uniform shop fronts, was converted to advertising copy by one of its dry goods tenants (Fig. 24).

The “great Empire” with lofty spire
Towers towards the skies,
Her wide spread wings, to the breeze she flings
Her name o’er earth it flies.
Her spacious halls and corridors
The strongest nerve will charm,
In richest taste and elegance
She’s carrying off the palm.

Within these ornate new buildings merchants incorporated elements of an ordered aesthetic, luxurious domesticity, and public transparency which particularly sanctioned them as public spaces fit for bourgeois women.

Merchants appropriated the emerging rhetoric of domesticity which had placed women in the private home and converted it to public commercial practice. Store “parlors” featured patterned carpets on the floor, framed pictures on the walls, upholstered furniture, and elegant gas fixtures suspended from plaster ceilings. The inflated domestic scenario included families of men, women, and their accompanying children. The Rochester Music Store was so decorously outfitted that it was used for the traditional purpose of a parlor for the untraditional reception of Tom Thumb and his bride (Figs. 35, 38). The prevalence of shop interiors, as opposed to facades, in midcentury advertisements reiterated the growing importance of the setting as much as the product in selling the idea of commerce. In many images the stocks are obvious yet subordinate to the furnishings, space, and refined characters that sanction the tableau. These
domesticated spaces were touted as respectable, indeed plush, commercial parlors that became sanctioned spaces for females downtown.\textsuperscript{117}

Instead of being private parlors, however, the commercial “parlor” required public transparency. The large plate glass windows displayed not only the goods but also the interactions inside. In 1850 a Rochester landlord advertising shops for rent in his Emporium Building drew attention to the plate glass windows, which “furnished light that is hardly to be surpassed,” and to the large interior mirror, which reflected “to the front street what is going on both above and below.”\textsuperscript{118} The public’s visual consumption of the goods began at the sidewalk, but commercial enticement was only part of the reason. The sheer visibility of the interior protected it from the negative associations that coded the darkened and secluded cellar businesses as unsafe, or at least improper, places for genteel females (Figs. 35, 36). Visibility sanitized social interaction and thus permitted personal contact among the mixed-gender, mixed-class clerks and shoppers. Clarity and visibility of the setting, the goods, and the people were paramount to respectability.\textsuperscript{119}

Night lighting further sanctioned public space for female use. During an evening ramble through Syracuse in 1845, a female traveler and her companions were struck by the number of women out and about: “the chief streets presented a long line of light from the brilliancy of the store-lamps, the brightest I had ever seen. We saw numerous ladies engaged in shopping in these well-lighted stores; preferring, I suppose, for this purpose, the cool of the evening.”\textsuperscript{120} The light within and without the stores was part of the genteel setting of visibility.

The protective scrutiny of visibility was also invasive as it pushed both the shoppers and the clerks into the public sphere of commodified observation.\textsuperscript{121} The pressure of continual performance prompted complaints from retail clerks:

The modern spirit of competition has induced a numerous class of tradesmen to adopt a plausible but fictitious appearance of traffic—a practice which, we may readily suppose, does not diminish the hard lot of assistants. No leisure moment, consequently, must be devoted to other than the business of the shop—no intervals of rest are permitted in the absence of persons to purchase. An \textit{appearance} of business is enforced; the hurry and bustle of a thriving trade is exhibited; in lack of other duties, articles must be packed and repacked; ribbons again and again rolled—every specious means, in short, is put into operation to impress the public with an opinion of extensive traffic.\textsuperscript{122}
Freeman Hunt, however, concurred with the practice: “put on the appearance of business, and generally the reality will follow.” People and goods dressed the stage artfully prepared by architecture and furnishings.

The shop floor was a social and spatial web of male and female, white and people of color, and wealthy and working-class relations. The relationship between the male clerk and female customer was a socially sanctioned form of contact but not one without its own perils. Clerks ingeniously or disingenuously found ways to entice the customer to purchase more. Larry Jerome, a Rochester clerk at Wilder & Gorton (the predecessor to Case & Mann’s dry goods store) was remembered as a wily fellow. Recalled one friend: “I remember one day when a lady whose husband had just died came into the store to buy some mourning goods [and] Larry waited on her and he very sympathetically asked her about her recent affliction. While the poor women was telling him she naturally began to cry. Larry burst out into tears, also, and the two of them wept together all the time the woman was in the store, and by the way, Larry sold that woman twice the amount of mourning goods she would have needed if all her family had died at one time.” Such sales tactics, coupled with the plushness of Gorton & Wilder’s fancy dry goods store, contain the seeds of the turn-of-the-century department store environment, which, as the social historian Susan Porter Benson has shown, “confronted the customer with a dazzling array of merchandise in a setting designed to break down her resistance to spending money and to exploit her sense of her class position and personal attractiveness.” Perhaps these bourgeois perils helped redeem the idea of female shop clerks. Writers reconciled themselves to women shop clerks by conceptualizing certain businesses and tasks as more female than male. The press advocated female shop clerks, particularly in retail dry goods stores, on the grounds that women were better at the tasks of tasteful folding and conciliatory and polite conduct to customers, and superior in all matters of taste in dress. “Measuring off calicoes and tape is too light a task” for men, the article concluded.

The dry goods emporiums created the misleading semblance of a broad welcome and actually implemented measures that privileged the bourgeois shopper over others. The urban historian Gunther Barth has described the emergence of the department store as creating an egalitarian space that “opened up the possibility of equal access to consumption,” including the visual absorption of the displays, if not actual purchase, of the goods. But architectural, financial, and social practices within stores tempered one’s welcome. The first-floor retail space at Rochester’s Burke, Fitzsimmon,
Hone & Company was sorted into increasing degrees of luxury the farther back one went. Anyone might stroll in for an inspection, whereupon a shopper would be greeted with bolts of prints and gingham in the front, but she would have to be comfortable running the gauntlet of clerks before luxuriating in the high-cost silks protected in the back. Similarly suited up for a dry goods store, Rochester’s Emporium Building featured a fifty-foot gallery “for a shawl or fancy goods room” accessed by two flights of impressive semicircular stairs. The mezzanine gallery literally and figuratively elevated the more precious stocks above the rabble and casual touch.\textsuperscript{128}

Cash could be the great equalizer but only if one had it. The Syracuse Empire Block merchant at the “Red Sign” seemed to call all types of customers: “Fall has come; Winter is coming, To the ‘Red Sign’ all are running,” and specifically beckoned, “Walk in ladies . . . Come, Farmers.” He promised more than a shop filled with goods to please a variety of customers. His doggerel seemed to promise a great democratic opportunity of shopping for a diverse population, provided “your pocket now with cash is filled.”\textsuperscript{129} This Syracuse merchant ran a cash business: not credit, not trade, not barter. As the visitor Lois Freeman rhapsodized, whatever one desired could be found in Syracuse, that is, “every thing for Money.”\textsuperscript{130} The one-price, cash system had gained currency as a sales tactic in the large metropolitan dry goods stores such as A. T. Stewart’s in New York City and Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia as a management tactic to cope with the quantity of customers and questionable price-setting skills of the salesclerks. It was also a system that benefited customers who were part of the cash economy, typically white, urban, and middle- or upper-class.

In theory the open-front retail businesses were open to all, but a closer investigation shows that the commercial modus operandi of shopkeepers within their storefronts were not as transparent as their inviting glass windows. Architecture combined with cultural practices to create commercial spaces with varying degrees of public reception and sorting.

The absence of a one-price system in most stores meant that shopkeepers set a price based on their reading of the customer—one’s shopping experience depended on the legibility of one’s social status (Fig. 37). In Life in Rochester Chumasero bared the tricks of conniving storekeepers. In his quasi-fictional exposé, the good-hearted William Brown is apprenticed to the dastardly Swindlem Skinflint, a provisioner on State Street. There Skinflint instructs the fifteen-year-old in the art of shaving due bills, or making a profit by discounting the scrip that was a common form of currency among the mechanic and manufacturing classes of the city. Skinflint
schools the boy in the way to read his customers and then adjust prices accordingly. “Customers,” explains Skinflint, “are divided into two classes, cash customers, and due bill customers. To cash customers we sell at cash prices, but due bill customers, we charge one third more.” When pressed on the way to tell the difference, he explains:

> When you see a man come in with a bold step, and ask for goods, as if he didn't care whether you had them or not, or whether he would be suited with them, even if you did have them, you can safely set it down as a fact, that that man is a cash customer, and has got the money in his pocket. But a man who comes to trade out his due bills don't make the same appearance, by any means. There is a kind of uncertainty and timidity in his air, countenance, and voice. . . . Now these fellows have got a notion that they get shaved in this due bill trade, and that consciousness will leak out, in spite of all they can do. . . . But women show it a great deal plainer than men, and a great many of our customers are women.¹³¹

And then, to show the way it was done, the calculating Skinflint sits back and awaits customers. To the plainly dressed, leisurely paced man who enters, Skinflint sells fresh butter for a shilling. To the hurried mechanic, Skinflint increases the price of the butter to fifteen cents. When he protests, Skinflint counters with a pot of rancid butter for a shilling. Next, Skinflint sizes up a modestly dressed women of thirty carrying a basket on her arm as another vulnerable target and sells her the fresh butter for fifteen cents; she is obviously distressed by the price but, as he anticipated, does not challenge him.

Downtown stores were in theory open to all, but in reality each customer’s experience was based not only on his or her cash supply but also on gender, class, and race. The shell of the store alone did not discriminate, but social practice did. Commercial architecture was hardly a socially neutral space.

*Upper Floors*

Businesses not requiring a street-level presence located to the less expensive upper floors of the business rows. Here tradespeople and professionals carved out smaller pockets of gender and race. Directed toward white parents seeking to launch their sons into the world, Hazen’s 1837 *Panorama of Professions and Trades* presented normative, generalizing views of the distinction between showy street-level stores serving a white-collar public that included women and the utilitarian upper-story workshops of the largely
male, blue-collar world. A comparison of the bookseller’s store with a lithographer’s workshop shows that the retailer’s need for transparency and visibility, architectural embellishment, and public access lessened in artisanal workshops, where women were rare (Figs. 36, 40).

Certainly, the white male was the main presence in the commercial district, as employer, employee, and customer, and he was well represented in the upper-story offices of the business blocks. Even Chumasero’s unflattering depiction of the greedy lawyer Daniel Grab upstairs, “in the back room of a dark, dusty, smoky law office, on Buffalo Street,” tapped into the popular assumption that professional men kept their offices upstairs. Augustus Strong was introduced to adult, male, white-collar, professional culture at his father’s newspaper office in an upstairs business row. Working in the counting room of the Rochester Daily Democrat, the sixteen-year-old Strong learned the trades of double-entry bookkeeping, proofreading, taking telegraph reports, collecting bills, and running an office. The counting office, Strong explained, “was at that time the place of exchange for all Western New York.” Equally important, he was immersed in the concentrated male commercial culture of the office. There, within what Strong called his “habitat,” men discussed a wide range of topics: wheat crops, political elections, modern inventions, and religious philosophies. These set-aside spaces became training grounds for the next generation of the mercantile city’s economic, social, and political elites. The business publisher Freeman Hunt explained the spatial metamorphosis of the American young man’s environs, “Just at the time that he was beginning to feel some interest in his studies, because he was beginning to understand them, he was cut short of any further instructions, and turned into the counting-house, to sigh for the green play-ground.” It could be a nearly round-the-clock spatial transformation. Edwin Scrantom recalled sad nights as a fourteen-year-old clerk after literally moving into his employer’s newspaper office, where he had a “fellow apprentice and not a brother for a bed-fellow.”

By training young men for business, the ubiquitous mercantile college reiterated the gendered cast to the commercial district. Syracuse boasted four separate male business colleges, all renting quarters in the upper stories of the new business blocks, including the Italianate Pike Block on South Salina Street (Figs. 29, 41). Eastman’s Model Mercantile College operated from the upper stories of Reynolds Arcade during the 1860s, from where it promised to “qualify young men of ordinary ability to take charge of a set of books in any establishment.”

The privacy of the upper stories also provided a protective privacy for
the women and African Americans who plied their trades in the commercial district. For all the focus on inhibiting and regulating women on the street, the fact remains that women were participants in the commercial center not just as window shoppers or customers but also as shop clerks and entrepreneurs. In Hazen’s *Panorama of Professions and Trades*, which admittedly was directed toward males, women showed up as workers in five trades—millinery and dressmaking, textile weaving, stitching in bookbinders, and clerking in confectioneries and jeweler shops. Although Hazen should not be taken as the definitive statement on female employment, his attempt to present the typical types and settings of trades provides one normative view of the woman’s place in the economic milieu of the city. Women’s choices, it seemed, were either in the seclusions of the domestic arts or as window dressing burnishing life’s little luxuries.

Self-employed businesswomen typically plied their trades in the less-expensive privacy of the upper floors, whose remoteness discouraged the random contact from impromptu window shoppers and the invasive glances of men. To be a street-level shop clerk was risking bourgeois sanction. In 1838 a New York newspaper decried that “the habit of employing girls in stores is becoming too fashionable. . . . It violates the natural mediety of the female character and strips it of the coy reserve which constitutes its chief loveliness.” The “retirement of the domestic circle, and not the busy walk of commerce” was the “legitimate sphere of women,” and one who transgressed against that position where nature placed her would loose her “caste” and endanger her virtue.

In Chumasero’s novella a simple immigrant girl, a stock character, stitched away in the classic “stock space” for respectable working women—the back room of the sputtering Mrs. Toddlecum’s millinery. Making his point of female seclusion, Hazen’s millinery shop was shown without windows or doors (Fig. 39). Business directories carried several advertisements similar to Mrs. C. C. Van Every’s millinery in Rochester indicating her shop was “upstairs” on State Street, where “a call is respectfully solicited.” In real life the Rochester seamstress Mary Farrell protected the respectability of herself and her State Street shop by enforcing its privacy. Located above a millinery and fancy goods store, which provided a thematically appropriate base, and situated on the second story, which offered respectable isolation, Farrell further protected her business by evicting loiterers. In throwing out a female browser, Farrell explained, “I said I would not allow them to sit in the shop and talk together; I don’t allow any one to visit in my shop.”

The scanty record indicates that African Americans were supposed to
be even more invisible than white women and that African-American storekeepers tended to avoid the publicity of the street level. African-American businesses kept a low profile to avoid conflicts, even though many white residents of these upstate cities prided themselves on their abolitionist stance. Syracuse and Rochester were stations on the underground railroad, and black and white residents together developed refuges to thwart the southern bounty hunters. The upstairs Buffalo Street newspaper offices of the abolitionist Frederick Douglass held a secret compartment for hiding fugitives. In 1839 the Syracuse House hotel was the site of one dramatic slave rescue, in which African-American employees at the hotel initiated Harriet Powell’s escape from her overnighting owners. In 1851 there was another prominent Syracuse rescue in which citizens broke into the jail to spirit off a fugitive slave captured by U.S. marshals.

Nonetheless, the racial tensions of daily life led many African-American entrepreneurs to minimize their public presence. In 1817 the fugitive slave Austin Seward opened a meat market in Rochester; a year later he built a two-story shop house in East Rochester and began a dry goods business. Seward set up several businesses in Rochester, always balancing the shopkeepers’ need for a good location against the economic costs of such a move. Whereas residents typically looked at building as a sign of progress, as a black Seward was targeted for his ambition and had his shops torn down. Seward nonetheless continued in business and eventually invested in the most prominent business locations right near the Four Corners, first at the Rochester House and then on Buffalo Street across from the county courthouse. “We began to look up with hope and confidence in our final success,” Seward remembered, but a suspicious fire around midnight thwarted his plans. “My store was on fire and a part of my goods in the street! . . . The building was greatly damaged and the goods they rescued nearly ruined. Now we were thrown out of business.”

By midcentury there were several black-owned businesses in the central core business district of Buffalo Street, including a sail-manufacturing company in a loft, a doctor’s office in an upper story of a business block, and several basement barbershops, including Bennett Jackson’s barbershop under the Monroe Bank. Active abolitionists also worked downtown. Frederick Douglass operated his newspaper the North Star (in 1851 the name was changed to Frederick Douglass’ Newspaper) from an upper story in the Talman Block on Buffalo Street catty-corner from the Four Corners. Har-
riet Jacobs similarly ran an antislavery reading room on an upper floor in the Talman Block.\textsuperscript{146} Given the small percentage of blacks in the city, it seems likely that black businesses received white patronage. Nonetheless, none of these businesses opened directly onto the street, a move that provided the safety of privacy as well as less expensive quarters.

Personally, African-American leaders found a mixed reception within the social landscape of the commercial district. Douglass lectured weekly one season at the popular Corinthian Hall owned by William Reynolds, “who, though he was not an abolitionist, was a lover of fair play and was willing to allow me to be heard. If in those lectures I did not make abolitionists, I did succeed in making tolerant the moral atmosphere in Rochester.”\textsuperscript{147} It was at best an ambiguous toleration. Invited to a printer’s reception in the Irving House hotel in 1848, Douglass was blocked at the dining room door by the hotel keeper, who claimed it was “a violation of the rules of the society for colored people to associate with whites.”\textsuperscript{148} An awkward vote by the assembled printers gave Douglass the majority, and he was invited in. “It was a painful, as well triumphant hour.”\textsuperscript{149}

Lower-class blacks faced greater hostility, even as they contributed to the economic vitality of the city. In 1842 the Rochester shop clerk Lindley Gould snickered about a trick he had played on an illiterate black man Andrew Wilbur, whom he called “Black Jack.” Wilbur came into his store seeking a written order and unwittingly left not with the fifty-cent order to take on to the next errand but, rather, an “order requesting Mr. Squires to kick the nigger out of the shop.”\textsuperscript{150} The white merchants who tried to regulate the commercial, visual, and social tenor of the downtown were not a monolithic class when it came to race relations, yet it seems possible that the sequestered black landscape of their fellow entrepreneurs suited even the liberal elites, who were looking literally and figuratively to whitewash and smoothen any rough edges of the cityscape.

\textit{Top Floor}

Assembly halls inserted into the top floors of the business blocks reiterated the pattern of privatized public space which characterized the commercial city. Landlords faced particular challenges in renting out the inconvenient rooms at the very top of the stairs. Instead of carving out low-rent offices, they often configured the top floors into special-purpose open halls appropriate for large groups whose necessity for meeting space outweighed the inconvenience of the ascent. The landlord’s economic decision carried bourgeois social overtones. Fraternal, religious, political, temperance, and
civic groups rented space in these large halls and thus in theory represented
the kind of responsible citizenry bent on self-improvement and civic par-
ticipation that would gentrify the new city’s physical and cultural landscape. Once again, commercially conditioned social space worked toward a bour-
geois vision of the good city.

Halls developed particular reputations and had the power to cast favor
on the events as well. Rochester’s Monroe Hall specialized in temperance
societies, with five different temperance societies regularly scheduled for
evening meetings and the ladies’ Washington Society electing daytime
meetings. The Rochester Odd Fellows Hall similarly hosted five different
groups meeting on five different evenings. The confluence of available
rooms, convenient location, proximity to work, public separation from the
private domestic hearth, and a business atmosphere made the commercial
center an attractive locale for social organizations. The temperance-focused
nature of many of the groups lent a respectable air to sociable evening out-
ings in a city where taverns offered the more common nighttime diver-
sions. The time pulse of these spaces also contributed to the social gentri-
fi cation of the commercial district. In the evening, when business shut
down, the halls opened up, drawing a crowd into the streets and buildings.
Also used for political conventions, student examinations, mechanics fairs,
agricultural society banquets, literary society meetings, halls became part
of the public sphere of civic citizenship.

Yates, Top to Bottom

During the second half of the nineteenth century the increased capi-
talization of manufacturing and commerce resulted in vertically integrated
businesses within single, large business blocks. Although it was architec-
turally similar on the outside to the multi-tenanted 1850 Pike Block, the
1865 Yates Block was organized internally as a single-business enterprise
(Figs. 29, 42). It encapsulated the new trends in architecture, manufactur-
ing, and commerce. Having worked in Rochester and Utica, Alonzo C.
Yates opened up a clothing store in a rented Syracuse shop in 1851, ex-
panded into the adjoining store in 1856, and purchased the entire build-
ing in 1857. Yates made his fortune in men’s ready-made clothing, a busi-
ness that ballooned during the Civil War, when uniforms were needed.
Between 1863 and 1865 Yates constructed a new building specifically suited
for manufacturing and selling men’s ready-made clothing. Located on
North Salina Street across from the Empire Block, the building fit into the evolution of dry goods row from a place selling the materials for clothing into a place selling the completed item. Both in style and internal organization the Yates Block summarized the urban, architectural, and socio-spatial ordering of the era.  

The five-story, fifty-foot wide, Italianate exterior received the expected platitudes due “that ornament to our city.” Yates was locally famous for his grandiose architectural tastes, having become “fascinated with the castle style of architecture during his first tour of Europe” and later purchasing an 1852 Gothic Revival home designed by the prominent architect James Renwick. But the inside of his business block also garnered attention: “No one who has not visited this great palace of art and industry can form the faintest idea of its vast proportions, its clerks, salesmen and operatives. One can scarcely conceive where a market can be found for such immense quantities of clothing of every kind, quality, style and fashion; from the rough garments of boatman and dither to the elegant and costly apparel of the nabob and dandy.” Cast-iron columns replaced partitions between the double-wide shop floors, making one great room but also “ornamenting and relieving the appearance” of the interiors. The interior sorted activities and people by floor, yet all were linked vertically—visually by illuminating skylights and light wells, and audibly by speaking tubes (Figs. 43–44). The first floor was dedicated to the retail trade, where under the globe lamps were tables piled high with heaps of men’s clothing; a few female shoppers are depicted in images from the era, but the clerks and clientele were typically male. Environmental expectations had risen even for the men now, and in the rear of the floor was “the cozy office and counting-room, and a real boudoir in appearance.” The second floor was the general wholesale room for piece goods and trimmings. Women were again outnumbered by the male jobbers, who made the bulk of the purchases, although the shawled and headdressed females were all accompanied by escorts, whose own dress and stovepipe hats similarly encoded them as members of the bourgeois class. The third floor was divided into a cutting room with men and boy operatives and a salesroom for coarse garments catering to a male clientele. The fourth floor was the great wholesale room, where Yates joked that he sold clothes “by the thousand, cord or ton.” Instead of an open sales floor, low dividers separated the stocks. Women would have few reasons to enter a wholesaling space, and the single one depicted in the illustration seems to be accompanying the top-
hatted gentleman. The fifth floor held the manufacturing room, where female operatives were hidden from public view as they stitched in neat rows under the watchful eye of male supervisors.

The Yates Block manifested multiple aspects of the sorted city. The building participated in the specialization of dry goods row. The exterior was part of the architectural refinement of the era. The interior progressively refined the sorting by activity and gender and did so in an orderly way: “And yet in this great establishment there is such a perfect system, such exact attention to the regulations and such a prompt obedience to the established order of business, that there is no noise, no confusion, no apparent haste, no unpleasant jostling or interference; but everything moves on with the regularity of a great machine, and with an ease and quietude that would not disturb a parlor.”

Lastly, the richest man in Syracuse, Yates himself was heralded by the business community as embodying the urban patron through his construction of an ornament to the city, employment of locals, and the example of his personal habits. “It is in this way that prosperous business men are the real benefactors of the community.” A relief of a bespectacled man, Yates perhaps, crowned the parapet of his building, beholding the city below. Metal store tokens imprinted with image and slogan of “the old man with specs” doubled as advertisements and small change, further circulating Yates through the city. This was a merchant who claimed public space in a manner larger than life.