

Come Emigrate With Me: Vision and Reality on the Western Reserve Frontier

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Ye swains who are virtuous, healthy, and wise,
Who are possessed of activity and enterprise
Who from truth and sobriety never will swerve
Come emigrate with me to the Western Reserve.

With those lines, the first of 12, Western Reserve pioneer Colonel Eleazar Paine called to the adventurous entrepreneurs and enterprising husbandmen of Hartford County, Connecticut. In its entirety, the ballad, published in the Hartford newspaper in 1803, painted a vision of a countryside with beauty to rival paradise, as fertile as the rocky soils of New England could never be, and bordered by a great freshwater lake. Paine's Western Reserve promised milk and honey to a people living on land ravaged by revolution and war.

We know not if Paine's visionary promotion convinced anyone in Hartford to migrate into the Connecticut/Ohio Western Reserve. But we do know that in those early years of the nineteenth century, scores of New Englanders packed their wagons and journeyed west, spurred by hopes and dreams of opportunities promised by a fresh landscape that appeared reassuringly familiar. The intersections, as well as the disparities, between what these pioneers envisioned this new frontier to be and the realities of their lives provide insight on the spirit of post-revolution Americans and their restless compulsion to possess a wilderness.