

*Comments*

*The proceeding was recorded as a "Historical Record" in the membership book updated 1902 through 1920. The author, William L. Curtis, wrote a history from 1834 –1847. This history was written after March 21, 1870; Edward Thomson's death. Curtis was at least fifty-one years old.*

*This work is timeless in that some of the stories are similar to those of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is also timeless in that we are invited into God's great story. As Saint Paul records in Ephesians 1:3-14, 2:6-10. In Christ, we are chosen, blessed, and destined, for God's good work before the foundation of the world. Questions for reflection and group discussion are written by Rex Stanforth, page six.*

*The folks seemed to call their preachers various names. It could be preacher, Reverend (Rev.), Father, or Brother (Bro.).*

*A scanned copy saved as an adobe document is available. Notes are inserted by an italicized bracket [bracket].*

*Historically there was a national financial "Panic of 1837." The prosperous Milan Canal era was 1839-1868. A peak year was 1847. Milan was the world's second leading wheat exporter. Odessa, Russia, was the leading exporter. Seventy-five Lake Schooners were built from 1841-1868 in Milan. (<http://milanarea.com/milancanal02.htm> sited) See other historical notes on page nine.*

*The opening comments were written on the cover page of the 1902 Membership Book.*

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Manuscript

The brick church was dedicated Dec. 11, 1892, by David H. Moore D.D., of Cincinnati, O, afterward one of the Bishops of the church.

Church interim remodeled, summer of 1911. Re-opened Sunday morning, Nov. 5 1911. New organ "opened" Sunday evening, Nov. 5, 1911.

The following historical sketch [by William L. Curtis] was found among the papers of Wm. Beers after his death, August 10, 1903.

"A Historical Sketch of the M.E. Church, Milan O."

In May 1834 while then a boy of 15 years I made my way on a Sabbath morning to the old yellow schoolhouse nearly opposite the M.E. meeting house to attend Methodist preaching.<sup>1</sup> I found a house full, listening attentively to the preacher, Rev. E.C. Gavit [Gaintt]. The Society I learned contained about 50 members and had a Sabbath School. I attended circuit preaching there for about three months quite regularly. The society then owned the lot on which the present church now stands. (Now used as a flowering mill with exterior, and steeple unchanged- 1903)<sup>2</sup> [And] we're building a small meeting house having the frame so nearly finished that I heard the Agent, a Bro. McKay, an exhorter, remark that "\$15 more will set the frame on its legs". But through the man's bad management, it was said, the frame never was raised, not any of the avails of the undertaking saved to the church, except the lot itself. I did not attend their much if any after July 1834 until the winter and spring of 1836. Old Father [L] Hill I think was preacher in charge and James Kellom [Kellam] was junior preacher. During the winter of 1836 there was a good revival. But after a time the society began to wane. An old schoolhouse which received the dirt of 70 to 100 pairs of little feet five or six days in the week and the seventh day divided between other denominations making the hours

unreasonable with other hindrances, fully demonstrated the worth of a comfortable church and regular preaching every Sabbath. From these and other causes the society continued to wane and so much so that I was told at one time circuit preaching was discontinued. I attended occasionally through the year 1836. In 1887 I was absent from the state. Part of 1838 and most of 1839

I attended and joined the class. There were about a half dozen faithful souls left. I think Wm. C. Heustiss [*Huestis*] was on the circuit in 1839. I often attended prayer-meeting when only three or four would be present. Sister Mary McMillen, Emeline Brase, Jane C. Patch, Milton Horton and Selah Robins were seldom absent. This was a dark time to these few though not without encouragement. A friend of Bro Heustiss, H.C. Colegrove, who had in other days in New York been an active member but had now gone far from God, was reclaimed and one or two others joined the little band. The conference of 1839 appointed Thos. Dunn and Wm B. Disbro [*Disboro 1941*] to the circuit which was then Norwalk Circuit [*Norwalk District, North Ohio Conference*]. In the winter of 1840 (Jan-Feb) old Father Dunn [*perhaps during 1837-1839*] appointed a two days meeting in Milan and spent some days preceding the meeting in visiting from house to house and inviting the people to come out to meeting which was not largely attended, but two or three joined the class. In the spring of 1840 the few consulted together about organizing a Sabbath school. We resolved to have one. We procured Dr. [*Edward*] Thomson, then Principal of Norwalk Seminary and whose praise was in all the churches to deliver and address upon Sunday Schools [*at*] which time we organized a Sabbath School. <sup>3</sup>

We collected what we could of the scattered books of the former school and added a respectable library of new books and [*felt*] so [*choice*] of them that Bro. Colegrove and myself bought some 6 ¢ [*cent*] calico and a few faithful sisters sewed covers on to preserve the books. Our school opened encouragingly and flourished.—though we lacked what Sunday Schools often lack, pious teachers. We had over 100 scholars enrolled. The labor bore heavily upon a few but we bore it cheerfully. Many a Sabbath morning I went at 8 o'clock to the old school house and worked a full hour in making it ready for the school, working amid dust that would rival a threshing machine. Near the close of that year the M.E. SS. At Norwalk sent our S.S. an invitation to come to Norwalk New Years day to hear Dr. Thomson deliver a S.S. address, and after the address to take dinner. Among our teachers were 8 young ladies. Viz: [*They were*] Jane C. Patch, Cordelia Patch, Eliza Hall, Hanah Cherry, Mary Brainard, Maria Butman, Martha Butman, Thalia Fowler and Desdemonia Burt. The four latter were not professors of religion. There were Aaron Keeler and myself young men connected with the school. Being somewhat of a gallant I called on our lady teachers and got their consent to go. I failed to enlist my colleague in the enterprise. I engaged the best team in the village. Word was sent to Norwalk that we accepted their invitation. Just before New Year's Day a fall of snow brought music of sleigh bells but the attractions of the ball room elsewhere proved stronger than their promise to go with me and four unprofessors were not ready as I found to my chagrin when calling for them. The other four went but the severe weather prevented many scholars from going and when the Good ladies of Norwalk sought their guests from Milan at the close of the address but few were found. One Good lady of Norwalk, wife of Judge Sutton when not finding guests, said "Well I must go home and eat my roast turkey alone." The address was one of the best of that sainted man. The theme was "The Utility of Sabbath Schools to Promote the Religion of the Lord Jesus Christ," and its thrilling power stirred the soul to its depths. In the light of that discourse the task of digging wood out of the snow and sweeping and dusting did not seem onerous [*arduous*].

Wesley J. Wells and Cyrus Sawyer [*1840*] were our preachers at that time and a number were added to the church during their faithful labors. Their successors for the conference year of 1841 and 1842 were David Gray and Wm. B. Disbro. The society numbered about . . . [*80*] and our great need was a meeting house. From May until Nov. 1842 I was absent from Ohio, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nov. 1842 I attended a prayer meeting in the old school house after which a consultation was had about building

a meeting house on the ground where the church now stands. (Steeple Mill)<sup>2</sup> There were present H.C. Colegrove, Henry Tranger, Archibold Benjamin, Washington Wakefield, Ruben [Reuben] Patch, Milton Horton, Joseph Strickland, James W. Stokes, M.L. Curtis and perhaps some others. For two years there had been much talk of building but on this evening we talked to the purpose and scarcely without preliminaries resolved to build a church. The dimensions were not to be less than those of the old yellow school house with 10 feet posts and no cornice. There were two or three who were head-strong and stubborn and it seemed we must submit to them or adjourn in disgrace. Father Patch, Bro. Horton and myself urged a compromise and we finally agreed that we would not go in debt and that we would build the house 32 x 42 feet with 12 feet posts and a cornice if our means would permit. A committee on subscriptions was appointed and G.W. Wakefield and myself were appointed as a building committee and to myself was referred [sic] the plan and details and the work of laying out the frame. Permit me to advert to the discouragements of those times, the condition of trade and low prices of produce. Money was exceedingly scarce and out-door mechanics had little employment in winter. <sup>4</sup> The extacris [extras] of farmers were not great reading the price current of wheat 59¢ per bushel, corn 16¢, oats 8 to 10¢, flour 2.50 per bbl [bushel], pork 2.00 per 100 lbs., beef 3 to 4¢ per lb., eggs 5 to 8¢ per doz., butter 6 to 7¢ per lb. However we finished the building forward and on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Dec. 1842 little more than a month later than when we resolved to build... most of the timber and stone was on the ground and I began to lay out the frame. Instead of 12 feet posts I assumed the responsibility of making them 14 feet and framed a suspension roof and these "mistakes" (?) were kept from the "old fogies" until it was too late to rectify them. The weather was cold but we worked away and on Jan 25, 1843 the house was raised and the next day the lap studs put in and the frame stood complete. It rested on a good foundation wall. The citizens outside the church now came forward to help and foremost among them was Judge Choat. These friends professed to us that if we would add another bent in front for a portico and frame a belfry they would pledge themselves to raise an amount sufficient to pay for it. We accepted the proposition although it delayed our work considerable yet in due time the belfry was up and finished. Bro Benjamin was employed to do this additional work.

Father James McMahan and Thomas Cooper [1842] were our preachers this year and there was a good revival conducted mostly by Bro. Cooper. It commenced in February (1843) and continued until April. On the evening of March 8<sup>th</sup> 20 persons arose for prayers and the next night 25. The next night, Fri. the 10 there was general class and 19 joined the church. Elder Adam Poe had preached from "Let us therefore fear" etc. on the 23 of March two additional classes were formed making four in all. About 69 joined the church during this meeting. On Saturday evening Mar 25 Dr. Thomson preached and on Sunday at 8 A.M. conducted love feast and preached at 10:30. Theme God's Love to Man."O Ephraim how can I give thee up?" He preached again at 3 P.M. James I: 23 & 24. This day has never departed from my memory. On Sunday April 16<sup>th</sup> 40 persons received the ordinance of baptism, 18 of whom were immersed. About the middle of this revival a peculiar incident occurred that is fresh in memory. It had been the custom during the revival to assemble early in the evening so as to have a short prayer-service before preaching and the interest was such that the old school house would be full. On a Sabbath evening the house was packed and the prayer-meeting nearly through when in came about a dozen men on of them having a bass viola under his arm and with some difficulty they found seats. One of them went into the little cubby house used for a pulpit. Bro. Cooper was already in there and about to commence preaching. I saw the stranger whispering to Bro. Cooper, who soon got up and remarked "This gentleman informs me that he has an appointment here this evening to preach and claims that it was published two or three weeks ago. I had heard nothing of the matter and this is all I know about it, but since he has come and some with him to hear him I will give way that he may preach. Had a bombshell fell among us it would not have surprised us more. The stranger than got up and gave out a hymn and the man with the big fiddle and two or

three others sang it. He commenced to speak much embarrassed. His discourse was to prove Millerism true and the unaccountable fallacy of holding the scriptures in any other light. <sup>5</sup> He spent many investives [*investments*], mostly on the Second Adventists but his arguments would tumble down and he could only set them up to have them topple over again. When through he called on Bro. Cooper to pray but Bro. Cooper bowed himself excused and he attempted to say the Lord's Prayer but his tongue was balky from embarrassment he mangled it through and closed his meeting putting on his overcoat he took his leave. Bro. Cooper then arose and said "The evening is not far spent and we will have a short prayer-meeting. He then knelt down and prayed as though nothing had happened. But not so with old Bro. Ledyard. He went down on his knees and as he waxed warm and earnest he said "And O Lord, we pray thee that we may never hear such another mess of stuff" which called out several hearty "amens" all of which the stranger heard as he had lingered. It was said outside the door.



December 1843- December 11, 1892

There were class-meetings at 3 and 4 P.M and prayer-meeting in the evening. These were the dedicatory services.

Sometime during 1844 a wolf, not in sheep's clothing, but in female attire entered the flock. In appearance about 30, she was intelligent rather than handsome, self-confident, fluent in speech yet reserved in expressing herself. She was active in S.S., regular at preaching, class and prayer meetings. Zealous with a character above reproach. She opened a milliner store and had a flourishing business employing 6 or more girls as apprentices. She was liberal and soon gained the

During the spring of 1843 Archibold Benjamin was employed to put on the cornice, the roof and enclose the building. Its progress had to conform to our means. H.C. Colegrove was our S.S. supt; I was Sec., and Treas. And taught the Bible Class. There was held a camp meeting this year on the farm of Bro. Horton in August. This closed that conference year. There were then about 123 members. D.M. Conant and Darius Dodge were our next ministers.

In the fall of 1843, another voluntary movement was made by the citizens, chief among them was Hiram McMillen. Their object was to purchase a bell. On Sat. Nov. 18, 1843 the object was accomplished and the citizens gathered to hear the first sound of the bell. On Sunday Dec. 18, 1843, this house was opened for services S.S. at 9 A.M., preaching at 10:30 by old Father Gershom Pierce from text, "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off" Deut. 30:11

confidence of many. She secured cooperation and at Christmas started a fair, entertainment and supper in the new church. Older members opposed; the church was divided. The preachers were asked to stop the enterprise but they wisely held aloof, except to advise young America to respect the feelings of older members. At the appointed time the show began with a side-show in the school house. This was a fictitious Post Office conducted by the young ladies under the old 25¢ postal system. In the church were tables and counters where all could eat and buy all kinds of eatables and also Christmas toys. Admission was charged at the door and supper was 50 cents. The young ladies served at these tables and were instructed never to return change, but to simply thank the young men who gave the money. When one was caught this way he did not tell those coming later. At the Post Office an envelope containing blank paper or a cheap valentine was given for your money and no change returned. The affair was a financial success. They made about \$130 but the church could not agree to use the money. At last about a year later it was paid on a parsonage lot. The bitterness thereby engendered began to tell. Two prominent members asked for letters and left the church, one to enter the road of apostasy (A.W. Wakefield) the other (J.W. Stokes) to wander for years outside the church and finally drift to another church a few years before his death.

Estrangements, delinquency remissness in duty and indifference were the fruits of the fair. But this sister must not be charge with all the bad consequences that followed. Business depression came the next year. Town and church alike suffered. But Brethren! How priceless is union and brotherly love in the church! The woman above mentioned did no more in church matters. She had induced two prominent citizens an ex-judge and an ex. State senator to go on her not for several hundred dollars' worth of goods. One morning her store had evaporated, her friends were fleeced and the whereabouts of Miss Harriet B. Beard remains unknown.

Thos. Barkdull and Wm. C. Pierce were sent to us in 1844. They together united more talent than I ever saw on any circuit but they could not stay the reaction that had set in. In Sep 1845 my wife and I took letters, not however in consequence of these troubles, and removed from the place, keeping in touch with this church however for the next two years. Since 1847 the history of this church is better known by others than by myself. Only once since that time have I been within these walls.

There is but one member I think belonging to this church who was a member in 1834, Sister Mary McMillen. I knew her many years to be a worthy faithful and devoted sister, always present at preaching class, prayer-meeting and Sabbath school. Always something to give for all the wants of the church. Her door was always open to the care-worn preacher. May she ever have your warmest sympathy and tenderest care in her declining health. [*Milan Cemetery May 18, 1871?*]

Of Milton Horton let me say he was the main stay of the church through the darkest and most discouraging years of its history. He was always at his post a faithful member and model Christian.

Of those who labored here and now rest from their labor's let me speak briefly. Dr. Thomson afterward Bishop it is recorded that when he became aware that his wife and children could not reach his bed before he would be in the spirit land, in calmness and resignation he said "not my will but thine be done, O Lord." <sup>6</sup> Thos. [*Thomas (Brother-a preacher)*] Cooper fell a victim of cholera but as he lay down his armor to receive his crown he rejoicing bid adieu to earth, <sup>7</sup> Cyrus Sawyer shouted aloud the praises of God in death. Thos. Barkdall calmly fell asleep. Reuben Patch said to me on his dying bed. Our acquaintance has reached through many years. May it be consummated in the better world. Tobureas Benjamin, my mother-in-law death had no terrors, one cold autumn day we were summoned to her bed-side. She roused up and clasping our hands said "We shall soon strike hands in a better clime. Of others time fails me to speak.—William L. Curtis

Questions for reflection and group discussion. Rex Stanforth 4/15/2015

1. What do you find confusing about the article, or what questions do you have about the content?
2. What was your favorite part or story?
3. What was Milan like in the mid 1800's?
4. What was the church like in the mid 1800's?
5. What challenges did the church face?
6. How did Curtis and the other members of the church respond to those challenges?
7. What were the strengths of the church?
8. How did God use those strengths?
9. Discuss how the church responded to controversy and/or disagreement?
10. The article begins when Mr. Curtis was 15. Compare/contrast the role he played in the church to the role our youth play in the church today?
11. What can we learn from where the church has been that will help guide us when we look forward to where God might be leading us in the future, both as individuals and as a church?

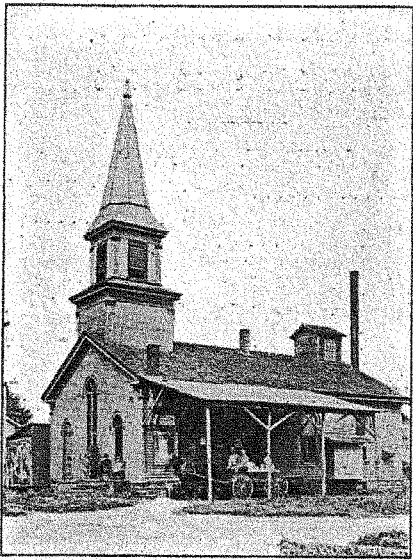
Other questions for reflection and discussion. Take note of Mr. Curtis' last page written perhaps thirty-five to forty years after recorded events. (Pastor Dale)

1. What impact did Mary McMillen, Milton Horton, and Reuben Patch have on William Curtis' life?
2. Mr. Curtis lists preachers (Rev., Father, Brother, Bro.). What impact did they have on himself and the church?
3. What impact did Dr. Thomson, Thomas Cooper, and Cyrus Sawyer have William Curtis?



## Endnotes

- 1 The Old Yellow School House (1824) was located on the corner of present day Huron and Church Streets. The Presbyterians and Methodist met in the school until respective building were built. The school was later moved and remodeled in 1850 when the Union School was built. It was in use in 1879. *History of the Fire Lands Comprising Huron and Erie Counties, Ohio 1879*, pg. 462-464.  
In 2015 The Law Offices of Vickie Ruffing, occupies the property at 16 West Church Street.
- 2 References to “flowering mill” and “Steeple Mill” appear to be editorial updates by the person who rewrote William Curtis’s history. If they were originally written by Mr. Curtis, he would have been at least seventy-three. The brick Methodist Church was dedicated December 11, 1892.



CHURCH USED FROM 1843 TO 1892, NOW  
KNOWN AS THE STEEPLE MILL . . .

The church and property were sold after 1892. The building was deconsecrated and repurposed as a grain mill; hence the “Steeple mill.” Advertisers' Hand Book... Containing a List of Flour Mills ... *Milan*—G. L. Sayles (The *Steeple Mill*)—Steam. <https://books.google.com/books?id=IUM9AQAAMAAJ> (sited 3/26/2015) 1912 - Flour mills . . .

The property for the Methodist Meeting House / Church was located at current day address of 11 West Church Street. A former motel repurposed as the “Gatherings” occupies the property.

### The Steeple Mill

<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/OHERIE/1999-07/0933432136> From: <Brooke433@aol.com> Subject: Re: [OHERIE-L] M E church in Milan, Date: Sat, 31 Jul 1999

10:42:16 EDT A frame church was built on the south corner of Lot 41, facing on Church Street . . . The building continued to be

used until the brick church was built about 1890-1891. After this the old church was sold and used as a mill for grinding feed, when it was known as the Steeple Mill. It was recently torn down and a motel occupies the site today.

- 3 Dr. Edward Thomson, MD, D.D., L.L. D.; 1829 MD – University of Pennsylvania, 1831 Methodist ministry Norwalk District / Circuit Ohio Conference, 1838 Principal of Norwalk Seminary- Norwalk District, Michigan Conference, 1844 First President of Ohio Wesleyan University, 1864 elected Bishop of Methodist Church  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Thomson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Thomson) (accessed 3/26/2015)



- 4 An interesting comment in that the Milan Basin Canal 1839-1847 was prosperous. However, Mr. Curtis might have remembered the Panic of 1837, the culmination of a speculative boom, causes a six-year depression with numerous bank failures and widespread unemployment. Martin Van Buren (1837-1841), Democrat, was the eighth American President. [http://www.softschools.com/timelines/us\\_presidents/timeline\\_2/](http://www.softschools.com/timelines/us_presidents/timeline_2/) (accessed 7/15/2015)

- 5 The Millerites were the followers of the teachings of William Miller who, in 1833, first shared publicly his belief in the coming Second Advent of Jesus Christ in roughly the year 1843.
- 6 Edward Thomson (October 12, 1810 – March 21, 1870) Thomson died in Wheeling, West Virginia. He was buried at Oak Grove Cemetery in Delaware, Ohio.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Thomson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Thomson) (accessed 6/25/2015)
- 7 Perhaps cholera in Milan 1851.<http://historicalresearchpartners.blogspot.com/2013/02/the-history-of-milan-ohio-milan-canal.html>. In 1849, a cholera epidemic struck Ohio. Eight thousand died in Cincinnati alone. Cincinnati residents took the Mad River Railroad from Cincinnati to Sandusky. More than eleven percent of the town's entire population died. Most were buried in a mass grave, Cholera Cemetery.  
[http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Cholera\\_Cemetery?rec=2688](http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Cholera_Cemetery?rec=2688)



## Other Historical Notes

### Methodist Circuits –

1. The history of Methodism was local Class Meetings with a lay person, a class leader” in charge. The Preacher was a “circuit rider” who visited a number of “class meetings” or appointments forming a circuit.

The Ohio Conference of 1816 established the Ohio District, the Western Reserve, of which there was a Huron Circuit. Thomas Jeffery pastored a “class meeting.” In 1817 the Huron Circuit was divided and the Alfred Brunson formed the Huron Port Circuit. There were twenty-four appointments covering 200 miles which took four weeks on horseback to cover. One of these appointments was Milan Township, Thomas Jeffery’s in Milan Township. *Centennial Souvenir 1816-1916*

It is not certain how many charges, appointments, were on the 1831 Norwalk Circuit. The village expanded from the 1820-1830 Wilcoxson Street limits. A parsonage was built was built (March 21) 1850 on Broad Street.

The village population in 1840 was 500 and 1,300 in 1850. Forty-nine homes were built 1849-1850. *History of Huron and Erie Counties, Ohio 1879. Pg.462-464*

In 1825 a class was formed in the village of Milan. It was part of the Huron Circuit from the County of Huron (The Fire Lands- and County seat) In 1831 Milan became part of the Norwalk Circuit. Listed as the Norwalk and Milan in 1834 and 1840. In 1847 it was the Milan Circuit. From 1853-1858 Milan was organized as a station (a single charge, appointment) with a parsonage. In 1859 Milan was on a circuit with Huron and Enterprise. In 1863 it was Milan, Berlin Heights, Chapel, and West Berlin. *Milan Township Methodist and Methodism in Milan 1816-1834.*

Milan was on the Portland District 1825-1833 and the Norwalk District 1834-1835, the Ohio Conference. The Norwalk District was in the Michigan Conference 1836-1839. Milan was in the Norwalk District 1840-1847, the Elyria District, 1848-1849, the Tiffin District 1850-1852, and the Sandusky District (1853-1911) all within the North Ohio Conference.

2. The United States Presidents (1834-1847) were Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, and James Polk
3. The Lockwood Temple <https://firelands.wordpress.com/genealogies-table-of-contents/genealogy-lockwood/> (accessed 3/26/2015) George built the *Lockwood Temple* between 1845 and 1849, as part of the . . . Millerites. The site was the Henry Lockwood block on the west side of Milan square. The location was next to the Methodist Church (1843-1892). The “Temple” was repurposed many times and finally torn down in 1993.
4. 1830s – Second Great Awakening is the religious revival movement  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_history\\_%281820%E2%80%931859%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_United_States_history_%281820%E2%80%931859%29)
5. Milestones: 1830–1860: Diplomacy and Westward Expansion. During this crucial period, the United States pursued a policy of expansion based on “manifest destiny,” the ideology that Americans were in fact destined to extend their nation across the continent.  
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860> (accessed 7/15/2015)