contrast, the Fillmores were, like the McLaurys, part of the Yankee diaspora that fanned out to northern New England and upstate New York before and after the Revolution and then pushed westward to the Great Lakes and—barring the occasional southern diversion—California and the Pacific Northwest. Many members of each family would stop and take root at each stage along the westering march, and at each stage urban opportunity soon began to exert a counterpull, but as long as new frontier resources beckoned, there was a Fillmore or a Maxey to answer the call.

The first American Fillmore, John, was a mariner who married in New Hampshire in 1701 and established his family in Beverly, Massachusetts. After his early death at sea, his wife remarried and moved with the children to Norwich, Connecticut. John’s younger son remained on the family’s Norwich land, but the older son, John junior, began his career as a seaman like his father. John junior’s children seemingly shared his broader horizons, and began the family’s march westward when service in the 1755-63 war with France exposed them to the opportunity that lay beyond New England’s northern and western borders. This time too, it was one of the youngest of the five brothers who remained behind to cultivate his father’s Norwich farm, though some of his offspring would subsequently join their uncles and cousins in Vermont or New York and move on westward with them. The oldest of the five brothers settled in New Brunswick, where his progeny participated generation by generation in the slow opening of Canada’s Maritime frontier. One line of these Canadian Fillmores, however, followed the logging frontier westward into Ontario and Michigan while another moved to the farmlands of northern Illinois and then on to Iowa, South Dakota, and Manitoba, on the one hand, and to Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and the Pacific Northwest, on
the other—a family trek that culminated only when some of the Oklahoma Fillmores joined that last great westward pilgrimage of the Okies to California in the 1930s. Two of the other prerevolutionary Fillmore brothers, along with one of their sisters and her family, settled in the Bennington, Vermont, area. Millard Fillmore stemmed from this migrant branch, and his relatives pushed the family westward from New York through the Great Lakes states to Montana, Colorado, and Kansas. The remaining brother’s line effectively halted its frontier advance in western New York State.

The Maxeys’ parallel procession westward began early in the eighteenth century when Edward and Susannah Maxey arrived from England to take up plantation land in Tidewater Virginia. Here the oldest of their six sons remained while the rest moved west to plantations in Virginia’s Piedmont. Once the frontier beyond Virginia’s boundaries opened in the turbulent years during and after the American Revolution, the next generation of Maxeys began to cross the mountains, encouraged in several instances by land grants received for revolutionary service. The first to leave Virginia was Jesse, one of the original Edward’s youngest grandsons. His father had settled twenty years earlier in southwestern Virginia under the shadow of the Blue Ridge, and now, in the early 1770s, Jesse with his young wife and infant son trekked down the Great Valley and across Virginia’s southwestern border to help create the first permanent colonial settlement in Tennessee. When, during the Revolution, settlers pushed farther west to the Cumberland Valley, forming a local government for themselves at the site of Nashville, Jesse was again among their number. Surviving a severe wound at the hands of the region’s native defenders, the “old Indian fighter” and revolutionary veteran lived to see his family well established as slaveholding planters on the rich tobacco and cotton lands of the Cumberland that he had fought to conquer.

It was the Georgia wilderness farther to the south that attracted Jesse’s younger brother Walter soon after the Revolution. Choosing to move within his wife’s kin group rather than follow his brother, the revolutionary veteran was able to exploit Georgia’s generous land lotteries to embed his growing family firmly among the plantation aristocracy of that new cotton frontier. About the same time, other Maxey cousins established a third family foothold across the mountains when they joined the great postrevolutionary Virginia migration that flowed into the Kentucky Bluegrass and then spilled over into the Barrens of southern Kentucky. And in 1804, the son of yet another of Jesse’s cousins chose yet another frontier, this one lying to the north, in the Virginia Military District of Ohio. It was probably no accident that Horatio Maxey moved his large family into free territory. Horatio’s father, converting to Methodism in the religious revival of the revolutionary years, had emancipated his slaves in 1788, and although three of his sons remained slaveholders, Horatio and his younger brother Bennett, along with a nephew and a niece, sought nonslaveholding lives for their families on the Ohio frontier.

No sooner did one Maxey clan secure a foothold somewhere in the West than they could expect to be joined by siblings, nephews, nieces, cousins, and second cousins. Since most Maxey lines retained some representatives in Virginia, news of settlement opportunities passed quickly along the family grapevine. Kentucky proved particularly enticing. By about 1800, children or grandchildren of all of Edward and Susannah’s sons had gravitated to one or the other of the Maxey settlement areas there. For many,
however, Kentucky proved more a staging area than a stopping place, as did Tennessee. By 1815, the first of the Kentucky Maxeys were following their second cousins north to free soil—in this case, Indiana. A couple years later, Jesse’s oldest son, like his uncle a Methodist convert, emancipated his slaves and moved his large family from Tennessee to southern Illinois. Within a year or two, one of the Ohio Maxeys was also exploring Illinois opportunity, and soon numerous other Kentucky Maxeys followed, part of the great surge of migration from the upper South into free territory in the decades after 1820. Their children and grandchildren pressed forward with the free frontier to Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Pacific Northwest or rejoined Maxey cousins farther south. Other Kentucky Maxeys, retaining their commitment to the “peculiar institution,” trekked to Missouri as early as 1819; a few of their offspring took the Overland Trail to California and Oregon while others flowed south to Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma. The speculative plantation frontier of the antebellum period lured Georgia and Tennessee Maxeys westward to Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Texas while a later, wilder Texas offered numerous Maxeys a refuge from the war-torn South. And finally, like the Fillmores, Maxeys of all stripes in the 1890s dreamt the frontier dream one last time in the Indian lands of Oklahoma.

A closer look at these migration histories suggests, first of all, the dominant role of patrimonial logic in so many of the Maxey and Fillmore moves. They migrated as family groups, and they migrated for land. The farm that Millard Fillmore’s grandfather pioneered in Vermont, for example, could provide a living for only the two youngest of his five sons, one of whom never married; the other three could hope to replicate their

In the many county atlases and histories published from the 1880s to 1890s, Americans could find idealized images celebrating the virtues of domestic life in the rural West. The owner of this California farm conveyed his own happy prosperity with images of his prize animals, contented children, and farm and domestic labors and signaled his social connections by including an image of visitors stopping to eat at his next frame house.
father's success only by moving to a new frontier. By moving after they had married and when their children were still young, they could expand cultivation as their family's needs and labor resources increased and with luck—the luck that eluded Millard's father and uncle—jointly earn farms for both generations. Moving together, or in chainwise fashion, permitted siblings to draw on one another for aid. Fillmore daughters and their husbands and children were an integral part of these sibling chains; a move west for Fillmore women seldom meant leaving all members of their parental family behind.

Indeed, the older generation itself often traveled west with their children and grandchildren, so that their wisdom and labor could aid the family in establishing its new farm and so that their children could assist them in their old age. Thus one of Millard's uncles first moved his young family from Vermont to Oneida County, New York, in 1790 and then, twenty-one years later when his oldest children were approaching marriageable age, transplanted the whole family again to new land in the western part of the state. This land proved able to support one son and his family; two other sons became ministers, and the fourth moved on to Michigan, where he was soon joined by the families of the three sons of his farmer brother, assorted other in-laws, and at least five cousins, siblings of the future president, some of whom then extended the chain to Minnesota.

It was family auspices like these that established the diverging lines of agrarian Fillmores on one frontier after another in the century and a half after 1750. The move from upstate New York to southern Ohio around 1818, the two moves from Vermont to different parts of Illinois in the 1830s, the extended series of frontier moves within the Maritimes, and most particularly the lengthy migration chain that led from New Brunswick in the 1840s all the way to California during the Great Depression—all exhibited the same patrimonial logic as the migrations within Millard's line. The Fillmores who followed the logging frontier from New Brunswick to Ontario to western Michigan in the 1840s and 1850s were engaged in a similarly structured cross-generational family project. Virtually all of these migrants grew up in large families of seven, eleven, or even fourteen children, and virtually all would raise similarly large families on the next frontier.

The Maxeys replicated these basic patrimonial patterns, though not without some distinctive southern accents. For one thing, the generous size of southern land grants gave many early Maxeys, both in Virginia and across the mountains, access to a level of wealth unmatched by most Fillmores, affording parents and some of their offspring the luxury of remaining behind in settled territory while other siblings, able to substitute slave or hired labor for the family labor they lacked, migrated on their own. Thus, for example, many of the initial Maxey moves from Virginia were made by young married couples rather than by older established families, as was common among the Fillmores.

Such moves were facilitated by a second distinctive southern feature of Maxey family strategy: the comparative complexity of the kinship system on which they could draw. Pairs of siblings married other pairs of siblings, and cousins often married cousins; kin relationships constructed in one generation were reaffirmed by new marriages in the next. Migrating Maxeys did not have to rely only on their immediate family for support; they could move within their far-flung networks of kin. Thus, although Edward Maxey
remained behind in Virginia when most of his siblings and numerous other kin headed west in the decades after the Revolution, the options for his maturing children in the 1830s and early 1840s were not confined to the weary lands of the Piedmont. Two of his sons joined first cousins in Mississippi, one sought out second cousins in Illinois, and three linked up with third cousins in Missouri; indeed, Patrick, the youngest of the brothers, married one of those Missouri Maxeys and moved on with his in-laws to new land on Missouri’s western border.

"I think any of you would be much better satisfied in this country," wrote Walter Maxey from Alabama to his "Dear Brothers and Sisters" in Illinois in 1820. "I think that I can make five dollars here easier than I or you can make one in your country. Trade is so much better . . . . There is a good deal of land in our country to enter and it would not be a hard matter to move from your country here . . . . I would assist any of the connection if they see proper to move to this country . . . . [Brother John] yet lives [in a nearby Alabama county]. He is building a mill but very probable the next time you hear from him he will be living here and they all appear willing." Although Walter’s hopes were doomed to double disappointment—not only did the Illinois kin remain in Illinois but John and his family soon left to join them—both his sentiments and his practical offer of assistance demonstrate the kinds of family soldier that fused the Maxey migration chains. Thus the same interrelated communities of Maxeys, Bondurants, Fords, and others who moved together from Virginia to Kentucky in the 1780s were to be found in southern Illinois or in Missouri a generation later.

Slavery gave antebellum Maxey migrations a third distinctive twist. There was one kind of Maxey move that almost invariably involved the more mature, often three-generation patrimonial family, even when other kin were already waiting at the destination: the move from slave to free territory. Perhaps so fundamental a transformation in the character of the family itself demanded the emotional support of its most intimate unit. More prosaically, slaves formed part of the patrimony, and any decision to strip the family of that patrimony depended on familial consensus. And once bereft of slave labor, migrating Maxeys were forced to rely on themselves to carve out their new homes on the new frontier and undoubtedly, like the Fillmores, timed their migrations to take maximum advantage of the labor of a maturing family. That certainly became the pattern for subsequent westward migrations among the northern Maxeys, in contrast to many among their southern kin. For example, William Maxey, the son of Jesse, the Tennessee pioneer, after converting to Methodism in his late forties, freed his slaves, sold his cotton mill, and moved his maturing family to Illinois in 1818. Here his eleven children prospered, but many among his numerous grandchildren repeated the family pattern after the Civil War, moving with growing or grown children and grandchildren to new farmlands in western Missouri, Iowa, Arkansas, Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Idaho, or Washington. Simeon’s experience is perhaps representative of this generation. Using borrowed money to purchase forty acres of government land in Illinois in 1853, he set out an orchard and began taking prizes for his fruit at agricultural fairs, his success interrupted only by Civil War service in his brother’s company. But with five teenage children to establish by the late 1870s, the arguments for re-investing family resources on new land in the West must have seemed compelling, and
he set out on an exploring trip west. He chose the flat Kittitas Valley in the center of the Washington Territory, where the approaching railroad and a series of bad winters that had devastated the cattle herds were forecasting the end of the open range. Here his family began homesteading in 1882, here they established the first of Washington’s famed commercial apple orchards, and here they were soon joined by other relatives, friends, and former wartime comrades.

Finally, the incredibly speculative character of the southern market in western lands in the decades before the Civil War encouraged among some Maxey lines one other distinctively southern pattern: frequent joint mobility shared by parents and their married children as the clan moved restlessly from one frontier to the next, using their joint labor less, perhaps, to construct a stable home than to marshal the capital to grubstake a speculative bonanza on the next frontier. Among the less successful players in this game was Simeon’s great-uncle Walter, the Alabama correspondent noted earlier. Among the most successful was Walter’s cousin William, born in Virginia in 1783, who moved with his parents, siblings, and mother’s kin in a complex, intertwining dance that took family members through the land lotteries of Georgia and the federal and Indian land booms of Alabama and Mississippi, prospering as planters and slaveholders seemingly inoculated against the Methodist conscience that plagued others of their kin. The dance culminated for William in 1840, when he sold his large eastern Mississippi plantation, cotton gin, and thirty slaves to his brother in a complicated transaction for twenty-six thousand dollars. Transferring his family and his business to Texas, he carved out, with his children, rich cotton plantations from the tangled lands of the Big Thicket and inspired other relatives to join them on the Texas trail.

But northern or southern, all of these Maxeys exemplified, just as did the Fillmores, the predominant pattern of migration that peopled so much of the American West: the patrimonial migration of kin-linked groups of large rural families, farmfolk or artisans, seeking to preserve a customary family economy by endowing the next generation with the bounty of newly opened public lands. They could, of course, have made other choices, as did Fillmores and Maxeys who remained behind when their kinfolk moved west. If a pioneering venture succeeded, a migrant’s children could reasonably expect to live out their lives in the new settlement, but some, at least, of the grandchildren of all but the most prosperous settlers would clearly face the renewed necessity of western migration if they were to maintain both living standards and the customary patrimonial strategy. But pioneering, it seems, was a habit or skill that had to be passed on from parents to children, an option that seldom seemed feasible or desirable unless there was immediate contact with previous migrant generations or relatives already in the West.

And as former frontier areas were drawn into the modernizing national economy, more attractive resolutions of the old rural dilemma of balancing population and resources was resolved with attractive options closer to hand. Nearby cities offered market incentives to improve the productivity of local farming. They diffused new ideas about family life and gender roles into their developing hinterlands, encouraging smaller families that placed fewer pressures on available land, and urban opportunity itself proved a potent lure to farmers’ children.

Thus the younger of the first John Fillmore’s two sons and his male descendants would remain in the Norwich, Connecticut, area as farmers and skilled workmen for five
generations. Family sizes soon dropped to fewer than four children, and out-migration, when it finally began, was to the growing cities of the region rather than to the West. The same generational pattern of fertility reduction and subsequent urban migration often in family groups appeared among the other branch of Connecticut Fillmores and among the Fillmores who were subsequently to remain behind in Vermont, New York, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. Some Fillmores, to be sure, found their way from Vermont and upstate New York to San Francisco and California in the boom years of the 1880s, several generations after their westering kin had departed, but this was new-style city-to-city relocation rather than a late revival of long-forgotten habits of pioneering. The federal patronage that relocated one Nantucket-born Fillmore to a position in the San Francisco Mint in 1863, and one of the Cincinnati branch to an Indian agent’s appointment in Oklahoma a generation later, created variants of the same pattern.

Indeed, by the middle of the nineteenth century, when the maturing of any new frontier was becoming a matter of years rather than decades, the logic of patrimonial family migration seemed to be fading even for the most migratory of the Fillmore lines. The march westward halted; the urban drift began. Where westering continued, it now generally took a different pattern. Young people exposed to urban influences might still choose to move west, and families—brothers and sisters, in particular—might still move together or in chains, but they were more apt to move before marriage, and it was urban rather than agrarian opportunity that they seemed to seek on the frontier. Millard provides one early Fillmore example of this alternate strategy. Then there was his cousin’s son who grew up on a farm near Buffalo, trained as a physician, and located in a Minnesota frontier town in the 1850s, and whose son, in turn, established his own practice in Kansas in the early 1880s; or the two sons of the Lake Champlain resort hotel owner, one of whom moved to Buffalo and then to newly bustling Zanesville, Ohio, in the 1830s and the other to Milwaukee a decade later; or even the farmer’s son from Fillmore Corners near Syracuse who found his urban frontier in the late 1850s in the new coal and iron boomtown of Scranton in the Pennsylvania mountains. Their aspirations were entrepreneurial rather than patrimonial, and the small families that they would establish in the West were testimony to the decidedness of their break with the past.

Northern Maxeys exhibited similar changes in strategy. Various stay-at-home Maxey lines in Missouri, Ohio, Indiana, and central Illinois all responded to new local opportunity with both reduced family size and urban migration. The Illinois land that Joel Maxey chose when he left Kentucky in 1827, for example, happened to be located near the future state capital of Springfield. The agrarian frontier, to be sure, lured one son, Nelson, west in 1847 to join a Kentucky cousin who had settled along the Arkansas River fourteen years earlier. Soon marrying one of the cousin’s daughters, he managed to resist the California gold that lured so many along the trail west from Fort Smith and instead turned south to Texas, to the booming cotton lands of the Brazos, where as a deputy sheriff he met a gunfighter’s death attempting to make an arrest in the tempestuous years after the Civil War. But remaining at home in Illinois brought both prosperity and a brush with history to his less adventurous brothers, one as an entrepreneurial farmer, the other as a Springfield politician and father-in-law of
Abraham Lincoln's law partner and biographer. One grandson would briefly try his hand at Nebraska farming, and another would die in California in 1866, but most remained in the new middle-class mold that the family had fashioned for itself as Illinois emerged from the frontier.

Southern Maxeys, by contrast, tended to persist much longer in the patrimonial mode. Fewer Maxey lines halted their westward march quite so decisively as did many of the Fillmores. Both the slower southern pace of antebellum modernization and the disruptions and destruction of the Civil War and its aftermath held out fewer incentives to southern Maxeys to abandon familiar family strategies. Families remained large, and well-cultivated kinship connections ensured that westering habits seldom died out completely in any Maxey line. Where they did, the predictable consequence of thinning patrimonial resources was a species of rural proletarianization that underlined just what was at stake in continued family access to ever newer Wests. For southwestern Virginia Maxeys reduced to coal-mine or stone-quarry labor by the late nineteenth century, for example, the West might still offer hope, but for proletarianized families like these it was now the workman's hope of jobs at quarries in Nebraska or at new coal mines in Arkansas or northern New Mexico, where one Maxey died in a mine accident in 1913.

Well-to-do planting families could prove receptive to new kinds of domestic and educational aspirations, and the occasional Maxey planter's son was able to realize an entrepreneurial family style in a nearby town one, for example, became a leading Nashville manufacturer of tin and sheet iron and the city's mayor in the early 1840s, whereas another, after trying an Illinois law practice and the California goldfields, settled down to storekeeping, law, and politics back home in Kentucky. But more often, the limits of the local economy ensured that entrepreneurially inclined southern Maxeys, like their more patrimonial kin, chose to relocate to the frontier as they came of age, drawing on the family network to assist them in their search for urban opportunity in the West. Perhaps the clearest examples occurred in the family of William Maxey, one of those revolutionary veterans who settled in Kentucky in the 1780s. One of his older sons early moved his young family to the Boons Lick area of Missouri and then later in life removed with them farther west in the classic patrimonial pattern; several of William's other children settled into prosperous local farming back in Kentucky. But two of his sons took up the law, one went into local politics, and another became a cabinetmaker, and the next generation continued the family march into the professions and other urban occupations. Not even advantageous marriages into other planter families could secure this family's economic aspirations in Kentucky's Pennyville, however, and by the late 1840s one young lawyer was on his way to relatives in the Arkansas Valley, and his brother, a former teacher, was in the California goldfields. But it would be Texas where the family's entrepreneurial energies would particularly focus. Samuel Bell Maxey knew the area from service in the Mexican War and from glowing reports by earlier migrating in-laws. So in the summer of 1857, he and his father—William's youngest son—sold their joint Kentucky law practice and, with their households, set out by wagon through Arkansas and Oklahoma to the new boomtown of Paris in the Blacklands of northern Texas. Here Samuel Bell prospered in a legal and political career that brought him to a Confederate generalship and the U.S. Senate. An
uncle soon arrived, then an aunt's family left their Tennessee plantation to buy two thousand acres nearby; they were quickly followed by other young cousins—a lawyer, a doctor, a merchant—in an entrepreneurial migration that continued to dispatch young Maxeys westward along the kinship chain to Texas and Oklahoma for more than three decades after the Civil War. When James, a Civil War veteran three years out of law school, left Tennessee for Texas, a law partnership with his father's second cousin, General Maxey, was waiting; his distant Tennessee cousin Napoleon drew on kin in Illinois, where he read law, attended the old University of Chicago, and after a decade of Illinois practice moved with his family to Muskogee to become one of the first two lawyers admitted to the new Oklahoma bar.

Among the Fillmores it was the New Brunswickers, confined like many of the southern Maxeys to a slowly developing periphery of the new economic order, who most resembled them in their resistance to newer family strategies. The two families' migration streams would finally meet as the Canadian line projected the Fillmore patrimonial tradition of large farm families and westering habits through America's final farm frontiers—Kansas, Oklahoma, Idaho—to its sad end in the Dust Bowl trek to California. After three generations of internal colonization in the Maritimes, restlessness—probably induced by family involvement in the logging boom—seemed to strike several of the area's large Fillmore clans after the late 1830s, first sending one group of families to Ontario and later Michigan, then another to northern Illinois and, after the Civil War, points west. Perhaps their northern isolation had left them less prepared to take advantage of newer kinds of opportunity than were their distant cousins reared within the increasingly entrepreneurial communities of the Yankee diaspora. Indeed, at the very time that the first Fillmore moved west from the Maritimes, one of his brothers blazed the trail south to the milltowns of Massachusetts, a trail that many among the increasingly proletarianized subsequent generations would be forced to follow.

Finally, one other pattern of westward migration also becomes more visible in the historical record of both families by the middle of the nineteenth century: the reckless drift or adventurous quest of the young man who seemingly cuts loose from the family and lights out for the territory, on his own or with others of his kind. The frontier had always tempted the young in this fashion, though such rebels and free spirits are the most difficult for the genealogist to track. Jesse Maxey must have been such a one in his prerevolutionary youth, as surely was Elisha Maxey who, orphaned early, found his way in his early twenties from Tennessee to Stephen B. Austin's young Texas colony on the Brazos. But now there were added inducements. For one thing, the constant series of mineral discoveries that began in 1849 proved a powerful solvent of family bonds, extracting young men from their families' patrimonial strategies and seemingly rewarding those least hampered by the inflexibility of immediate family responsibility. Gold could be integrated as a resource into the family economy, to be sure, whether by using a grubstake from the goldfields to re-endow the patrimony back East or by establishing a new family line in the West. Two young Maritimers from separate Fillmore branches returned home from California prosperous enough to establish substantial patrimonial families of their own; entrepreneurial Maxeys from Illinois (two), Kentucky, and Tennessee established urban families on similar gold rush foundations.
Another drifted back from California to family farming in Missouri, and yet another made the transition from miner to prosperous commercial farmer and family man in California’s Santa Clara County. But others, like the California-bound Maxey, recently widowed, who left his young children with various relatives back in Indiana and was never heard from again, or like the Fillmore father and son of New Brunswick stock who disappeared into the goldfields of the Black Hills in the 1870s, document the disruptive potential of the lure of western wealth.

Other factors also conspired to weaken or supplement family direction of westward migration in the latter decades of the century. Civil War service diverted northerners as well as southerners from planned life paths, and postwar offers of soldiers’ homesteads beckoned veterans west to the chancy fortunes of the semiarid plains. The ever more rapid pace of settlement and development compromised the ability of many families to adapt old patrimonial strategies to new circumstances at the same time that the expansion of railroads and natural resource extraction created western wage-earning opportunities largely independent of the agricultural sector to which family pioneering had proven so well-adapted. Even the farming frontier found it easier to dispense with a family work force in this new capitalist era of machinery, hired labor, and speculative homesteading for future sale, as the phenomenon of the single female homesteader attests.

Thus when John Jefferson Maxey left Missouri for the West Coast in 1862 after the death of his father, family planning undoubtedly guided his initial steps. He probably traveled with his sister’s family and in Oregon found a home with relatives who had emigrated a couple years earlier. But a political quarrel with his uncle forced him out to earn a living on his own as a farm laborer and miner, drifting down to California and marrying along the way. Quarrels with their stepfather probably launched two of his second cousins, ages twenty-one and twelve, on a similar odyssey from Missouri to the wage earners’ frontier in the Pacific Northwest a couple decades later. Yet family still had a way of reasserting its claims. Recall Millard Fillmore’s black-sheep cousin, Henry Glezen, who lived a scandalous life in the Minnesota Indian trade but nevertheless drew siblings and cousins to settle nearby once the area opened for white settlement. Or consider Henry’s sons, reared by their divorced mother in near poverty on the Minnesota frontier. One ran away early, later surfacing in Montana, but the other, after drifting across the plains from Minnesota to Texas to Colorado and working here as a railroad checker, there as a mule driver or miner, finally married, entered the real estate business, sent for his mother, and put down roots in Kansas City to found the still thriving Unity School of Christianity and to pioneer in radio evangelism. Even the young Illinois Fillmore who rode with the U.S. Cavalry in the Indian wars of the 1870s later settled down to raise a family in the Washington Territory.

For eight generations the frontier was an integral part of Maxey and Fillmore family strategy. Maxeys and Fillmores were loggers in Michigan and fur traders in Minnesota, ranchers in Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado, miners in Arkansas and California, fruit growers in Washington, planters throughout the South, doctors and lawyers in boomtowns across half the nation, and farmers everywhere. Their histories, and those of countless other westering old-stock American families, illustrate the complex ways in
which family logic influenced who moved west, with whom, at which stages in their life cycles, where they chose to settle, and what kinds of communities they formed, as well as how the opportunity they encountered in the West shaped subsequent family choices.

Patrimonial strategies undoubtedly peopled most agrarian frontiers, demanding successive generational migrations of young, growing families moving within chains of neighbors and kin in the hope of maintaining the linkage between land that could support the family and the large family that alone could provide labor to work the land. Their dominant form of movement was what might best be termed *colonization*, the uprooting and transplantation of significant segments of a family line, often in conjunction with a larger group of relatives and kin, from an older agrarian region to a newly opened one—the functional equivalent of Bailyn’s “provincial” trans-Atlantic migration stream. *Colony*, it might be noted, was a term employed by nineteenth-century frontier folk to describe both highly organized settlement ventures and clustered family settlements. Formal colonization schemes were a feature of virtually every newly developing western region throughout the century, whether organized by land or transportation companies, by religious groups, or by voluntary organizations. But even they relied on colonizing families for their main recruits.

Consider the patrimonial logic of colonization. A farm family with growing children could sell its farm, developed with their common labor, perhaps to an older child who would remain behind, perhaps to a stranger. The family could then invest the profits and its own joint labor—its greatest resource—in cheaper western land, providing farms for the remaining children as they came of age. The migration might occur all at once, or different family members might migrate in stages, some staying behind to earn money and others going ahead to prepare the way. It often made sense for the older as well as the younger generation to head west. Parental wisdom and labor were a critical part of the human capital that the family economy could muster; the parental presence helped keep the children within the cooperative circle of the family, and the children embodied the parents’ best hope for a secure retirement. Friends and neighbors often migrated together, turning the wider community into a portable resource that could be carried along rather than left behind and creating chains of linked communities stretching across the nation.

In theory such colonizing families and friends could continue together westward in stages generation after generation. An infant might make her first move with her parents and grandparents when she was still in her mother’s arms; as a young bride she might move again with her husband, child, parents, and siblings and move one final time when herself a grandparent. “I had been reared to a belief and faith in the pleasure of a frequent change of country,” one southern autobiographer recalled. A move could fail, of course, and all hope of perpetuating the patrimony vanish. Individual children might drift away on their own. The family might be fortunate enough to acquire land enough for more than one generation, permitting members to break the cycle of colonization. Or—and this occurred increasingly over the course of the nineteenth century, as we have seen—the character of local opportunity could change, tempting families to abandon the logic of patrimonial conservation and venture into the world of enterprising individualism. Parents with sufficient resources might decide to remain in place to enjoy
the fruits of a developed society; children might take their inheritance in the form of an education preparing them for entrepreneurial or professional life or in the form of capital or credit that would enable them to relocate—on the frontier as readily as in the more developed parts of the country—without the necessity of relying on the pooled labor of the family or the support of a colony. And the West itself changed. By the 1830s, the quickened pace of western development was multiplying urban opportunities for those of an entrepreneurial bent. In the South, frontiersmen with capital could substitute slave for family labor, and everywhere it became increasingly easy for an individual with funds but no family to hire the labor and buy the machinery necessary to establish a farm or a business outside the context of formal family colonization.

The smaller families that broke free of patrimonial logic to take entrepreneurial advantage of the new modernizing economy thus had less dependence on the frontier, but its burgeoning cities and resource speculation could still beckon both young folk leaving home to establish new families of their own and more mature families relocating for a better life. And for those trapped in the hard logic of the proletarian family, the West increasingly in the course of the nineteenth century meant jobs, particularly transient jobs for single migrants whose remitted wages could support family members left behind or free young people from the burden of family demands, even if at the price of long years isolated from the world of the family itself.

**The Diversity of Domestic Landscapes in the West**

For all their regional and temporal variation, these family strategies for western settlement still rested upon a basic domestic consensus derived from the western European tradition. But as young Volley Maxey, for one, tragically discovered on a summer day in 1872, there were other familial traditions, other family logics, that also played major roles in shaping the nineteenth-century West. Born and raised in a small kin-linked settlement on the northwestern Texas frontier, the six-year-old was playing with his toddler sister and a couple of other children around the woodpile where his widowed Indiana-born grandfather was chopping wood when suddenly his playmates’ mother urgently called them back to the cabin. She had seen a raiding party of Comanches, who for generations had supported the family bands in which they lived through raiding and trade in horses, cattle, and captives. Her warning came too late. Volley’s grandfather and his two playmates were killed, his baby brother died in his mother’s arms, and he and his sister were abducted by the raiding party. When his sister tired and began to cry, she was soon killed. Volley, known to his captors as “Topish,” lived three years with them, until the final stages of Comanche resistance to reservation confinement. Horseback, the chief of one of the Quahada bands, traded him and several other young captives to the Quaker agent at the Fort Sill reservation in return for captured Comanche women whom the army was holding. Volley’s reintegration into white society was not easy; he had forgotten all his English; he ran from the soldiers when he first saw them; he was rude and, by his family’s lights, uncivilized. As an adult he drifted beyond the family’s ken.

Maxeys and Fillmores were seldom forced to experience quite so immediately the clash between their family strategies and other family traditions they encountered in the West. Theirs was, after all, the dominant pattern in the region’s evolving domestic
landscape. Their family system, as Congress had early recognized, ensured the motive and the demographic means to maintain a continual frontier flow, and along with their herds and their household effects, they carried westward their domestic ideology and the power of the American state, which they used to shape the new institutions and law that their family regime required. Family practices different from their own were often central to the critiques they leveled against other groups: to their perceptions of Indians as savage, Chinese as depraved, Mexicans as loose and lazy. Thus family life was irrevocably transformed for the Native Americans who encountered Maxey or Fillmore Indian fighters in Tennessee or Texas or Wyoming and for the African Americans whom Maxeys took west as slaves or sold before their own departure. But it was similarly if more subtly influenced also by the Fillmore Indian agent who sought to impose federally dictated family policy in Oklahoma and by the Maxey judge who coped with the Mormon family system in Utah. In Minnesota Henry G. Fillmore lived and worked within an Ojibwa-French mixed-blood community that soon acquired a German cast; his son made his first money in a Colorado community similarly shaped both by mixed-bloods and by expansionist Hispanic settlers from farther south. Maxey and Fillmore forty-niners undoubtedly confronted Chinese in the California mines. A Fillmore in Cincinnati married a German pioneer’s daughter; a San Francisco kinsman took an Irish wife.

Such alternative family traditions were inevitably forced to adapt as they confronted the economic changes and institutional pressures set in motion by the main currents of American westward penetration. But they also proved surprisingly successful in using family as a defensive instrument to ward off some of the consequences of unwanted change and to preserve enclave cultures, particularly in cases where their family strategies rested on an agrarian patrimonialism strongly defended by religion or geographical isolation.

Thus the rural Hispanic families of northern New Mexico after the American takeover in 1846 drew strength from the communal economies of the extended family piaza that constituted the basic units in their settlement system. They could evade many of the consequences of American governmental and ecclesiastical pressures by retreating into the networks of kin that defined their daily world, effectively converting local justice of the peace courts, communal land rights and community water-control associations, and religious sodalities into alternative forms of local ordering, and hiving off new colonies northward into Colorado as population grew or land was lost to Yankee claimants. For old elites throughout the former Mexican territories, intermarriage with incoming Yankees proved an important tactic in maintaining status and at least partially assimilating the newcomers to accustomed ways. Over the longer term there were real limits to the autonomy of the family. Anglo inheritance laws, Anglo control of land claim courts, and Anglo access to the expanding sectors of the national economy, for example, steadily subverted Hispanic landownership throughout the Southwest, dissolving the vital link between the family and its patrimony. The proletarian niche that increasing numbers of native Tejanos and immigrant Mexicans occupied in later-nineteenth-century Texas involved such family adjustments as more households headed by single persons, more children in the work force, and smaller household size. Nevertheless, even when, at the end of the century, the land of the New Mexico and
Colorado plazas was proving inadequate for many a family’s support, creative family strategies of seasonal male labor migration channeled the adaptation and helped preserve the distinctive core of community culture.

Mormons migrating from the East similarly constructed a distinctive and enduring society for themselves in frontier Utah resting on the family practices that lay at the core of their religious belief. The Mormon family system was in many ways a logical extension of the patrimonial American family in which it was rooted, and if patrimonial logic yielded to religious fervor in fueling the initial exodus to Utah, it probably played a coequal role in supporting subsequent Mormon colonization throughout the intermountain West. It was doctrine and not economic logic, however, that saw in marriage and childbirth the divine plan for hastening the millennium and in polygamy a path to heavenly exaltation. Life in the Mormon West, accordingly, was fundamentally shaped by early and almost universal marriage, often undertaken without a secure economic base, by very high fertility, and by the practice of plural marriage, which by one recent estimate framed about a third of the men’s lives, two-thirds of the women’s, and half of the children’s. By 1890 this self-confident society could no longer resist federal pressure against polygamy, but its religiously sanctioned patriarchal familism, marshaling family and community resources for both agriculture and trade, remained at the core of its expanding settlement region.

The commitment of various European immigrant groups to their own versions of patrimonial logic planted yet other sets of enduring family cultures in the West. It was long a cliche of western history that immigrants, in contrast to native-born Americans, lacked the skills and resources needed for frontier settlement and that if they entered farming, they did so as “fillers-in” on settled land vacated by the westward-moving native-born. Apparently, as the case of the Irish canal-diggers seemed to suggest, only as proletarian migrants in work gangs of single men could immigrants readily make their
way to the West. Certainly the mining towns, lumber camps, and cities of the West always drew more than their share of foreign-born families as well as single workers. But most nonsouthern agrarian frontiers settled after the onset of mass immigration in the 1830s likewise attracted disproportionate numbers of immigrants, either directly from Europe or from older-settled areas to the east. In 1850, for example, when 9.7 percent of the American population was foreign-born, newly settled Wisconsin with 36 percent of its population born abroad was the most heavily immigrant state in the nation; forty years later, almost 43 percent of recently settled North Dakota’s population was foreign-born.

The immigrant pioneers came mainly from Germany, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Britain, the old German colonies in Russia, and even parts of Ireland and Slavic central Europe, products of a predominantly peasant emigration rooted in the old dilemma of growing families and limited land. They were confronted with the same local options as their American counterparts—entrepreneurial transformation for some, proletarianization for most—and when improved trans-Atlantic communication and transportation brought the new lands of the American West within reach, many made the same conservative choice: to move in order to preserve the family system, rather than to change the family in order to stay. The artist Albert Bierstadt encountered a “very picturesque” train of such immigrant families lumbering westward across Nebraska in 1863. “They had,” his companion noted, “a large herd of cattle, and fifty wagons, mostly drawn by oxen... The people themselves represented the better class of Prussian or North German peasantry. A number of strapping teamsters, in gay costumes, appeared like Westphalians... All the women and children had some positive color about them, if it only amounted to a knot of ribbons, or the glimpse of a petticoat... Several old women, of less than the usual anile hideousness of the German Bauerinn, were trudging along the road with the teamsters, in short blue petticoats and everlasting shoes... In the wagons all manner of domestic bliss was going on... Many mothers were on front seats, nursing their babies in the innocent unconsciousness of Eve... Every wagon was a gem of an interior such as no Fleming ever put on canvas, and every group a genre piece.” There is no little irony in the recognition that Bierstadt’s luminous archetypal painting of American wagons moving west probably owes much to this immigrant encounter.

The same familial tradition that motivated their emigration lent such immigrant pioneers their greatest strength. With more restricted access to information than the American-born, they tended to migrate within even tighter chains of neighbors and kin, forming clustered communities whose self-segregation within the social walls of linguistic, religious, and cultural difference, buttressed by their control of local schools and government, encouraged the perpetuation of patrimonial values long after they had waned within other western family traditions. As Yankee families like the Fillmores brought their westward march to a halt, immigrants took up the slack, and by 1880, when the foreign-born comprised just over 14 percent of all farmers nationwide, their proportions among the farmers in the predominantly northern-settled states of the post-1840 frontier ranged from 65.5 percent in Minnesota, 60.5 percent in Wisconsin, and 58.4 percent in Dakota to 26 percent in Washington. Even in southern-settled and relatively immigrant-poor states like Kansas, Colorado, and Oregon, they significantly