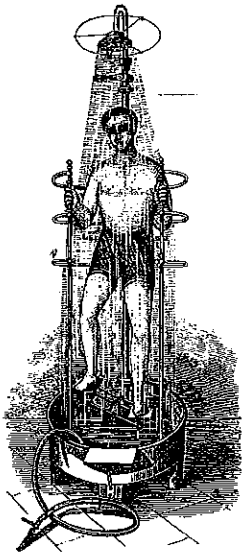


# 18 Cities and Progress



Indoor plumbing brought such novelties as this pedal-driven shower. It was advised only for those in the best of health.

It was a head-over-heels affair. The whole country was caught in its web. It was technology that had captured us. We Americans, in the 19th century, became fascinated with machines and scientific advances. We watched as they changed our old ways, and, mostly, we liked what was happening.

We fell in love with speed—with locomotives and steamboats and clipper ships.

We fell in love with American inventions—with John Deere's steel plow, Cyrus McCormick's reaper, Elias Howe's sewing machine, Charles Goodyear's vulcanized rubber, and Samuel Morse's electric telegraph.

We fell in love with indoor plumbing. And many of us fell in love with city life.

Back at the end of the 18th century—in 1790, when the first census was taken—95 percent of all Americans lived on farms. By 1820, 93 percent of Americans lived on farms or in rural villages. By 1850, it was 85 percent. Slowly, we were on the way to becoming an urban nation. Where do you live? Where do most Americans live today?

In 1790, only two cities—New York and Philadelphia—had 20,000 or more people. By 1860 there were 43 American cities of at least that size, and another 300 cities with more than 5,000 inhabitants.

**Technology** (tek-NOL-uh-jee) is the use of scientific ideas for practical purposes.

## Moon Madness

In 1835 the *New York Sun* put its tongue in its cheek and decided to see if its readers could be fooled. The paper reported that an English astronomer, Sir John Herschel, had discovered there was life on the moon. Quoting an article in the *Journal of Science*, published in Edinburgh, Scotland, the *Sun* ran Sir John's description of moon creatures with furry bodies and batwings. Other papers copied the story—and, yes, people were fooled. Scientists from Yale University came to New York to read the account. Finally, the *Sun* revealed there was no Sir John Herschel or *Journal of Science*. But by that time the *Sun's* circulation had leapt to 19,360, the largest in the world.

This is the city and I am  
 one of the citizens,  
 Whatever interests the  
 rest interests me,  
 politics, wars,  
 markets, newspapers,  
 schools,  
 The mayor and coun-  
 cils, banks, tariffs,  
 steamships, factories,  
 stocks, stores, real  
 estate and personal  
 estate.

—WALT WHITMAN,  
 FROM "SONG OF MYSELF"



One new idea led to another. Stewart's Department Store (top) was one of the first cast-iron buildings in America, and the invention of rolled sheet glass made its big windows possible.

New York, according to the poet Walt Whitman, was "million-footed." But that was only when New Yorkers hopped on one foot. A million people lived in New York. Philadelphia had 500,000. Cincinnati, known as the "Queen City of the West," had 160,000. New Orleans, "Queen of the South," had 169,000.

What were all those people doing in cities?

Most were working—making things, or teaching, or selling, or preaching. Many were new immigrants who stayed only a short time before they went off to look for opportunity elsewhere. They moved and then moved again; for Americans were a restless people, always searching for a better life.

We Americans became famous all over the world for "know-how." People in this country learned to use their hands and heads to make things, and make them well. In the 19th century the United States was becoming an industrial nation. Industry was helping cities grow.

If you've never been in a city before (and many 19th-century Americans had not), it's a mighty exciting place. Why, just look at that building over there—it must be six stories tall. You can get a stiff neck looking up that high! Do you think there is any danger it will topple over? It's the handsomest building in town—and it's a hotel. Step inside and you'll be in a big lobby, where trees grow in pots.

They say that some American hotels even have vertical railroads inside. (City folk call those vertical railroads "elevators.")

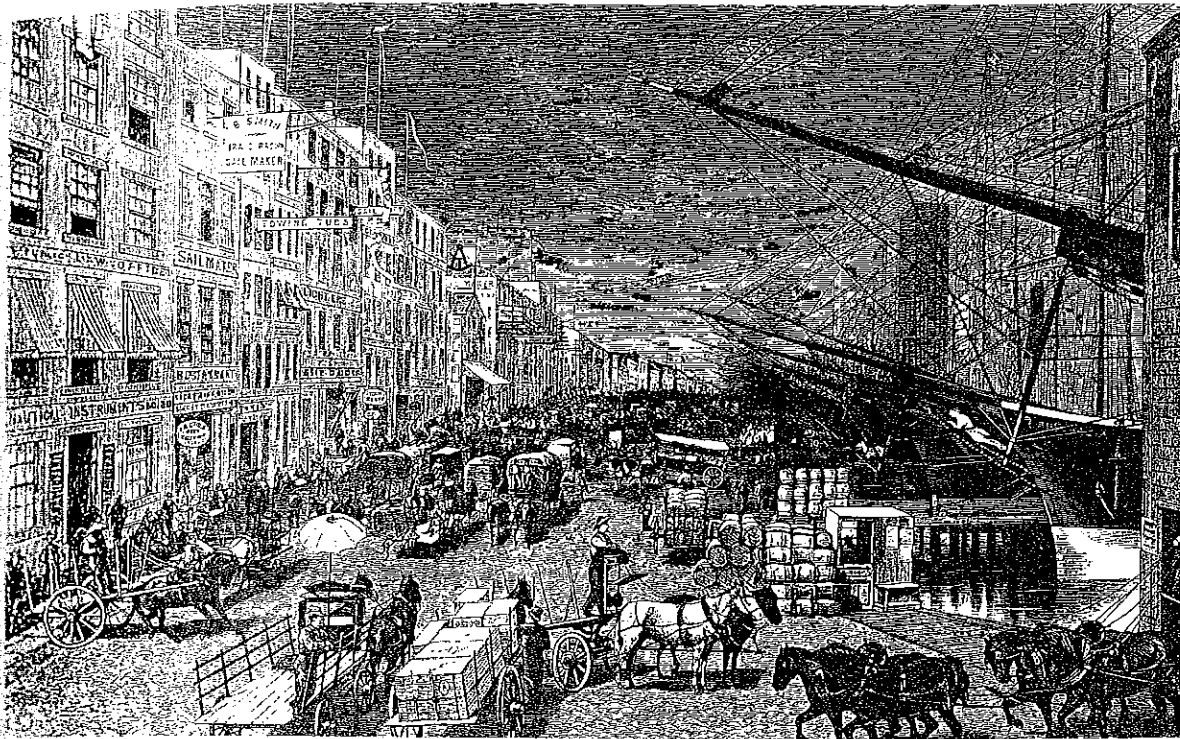
Boston's Tremont House, built in 1829, is the finest hotel in the country. It has eight "bathing rooms" in the basement. Cold water comes into the baths from rooftop tanks that collect rain. Now listen to this: the Tremont House basement has eight water closets (someday they'll be called toilets) for the 200 to 300 guests.

New York's Astor House Hotel, built in 1836, has running water above the first floor. (It is the first public building to try that.)

And in New York, A. T. Stewart's Department Store, six stories high and built of white

marble, has 400 clerks and big glass windows to show the splendid merchandise sold inside. It is a new idea—a store that sells almost everything you could want. People visit New York just to see Stewart's store.

Soon cities all over the land have their own versions of Stewart's and the Astor House.



Of course, every city has a newspaper; some have five or six or more. Newspapers are changing the nation. In 1830 there are 1,000 newspapers in America. Mostly they are sold by yearly subscription—at about \$8 a year. That's a lot of cash; most people can't afford to read a paper. That is, until 1833, when Benjamin Day publishes a newspaper, the *New York Sun*, that sells for a penny. Two years later he is selling nearly 20,000 copies of the *Sun* every day—and lots of advertising, too. James Gordon, newly arrived from Scotland, soon follows with the even more successful *New York Herald*, and Horace Greeley with the *New York Tribune*.

By 1840 the nation has 138 daily papers and 1,141 weeklies. Readership is growing at an even faster rate than population. Now, everyone seems to be a newspaper reader.

Some people complain that the penny papers are vulgar and trashy, but there are newspapers for every taste. They are wildly popular and help spread information and democracy, too. (Everyone can afford to read them, not just the rich.) They are part of the excitement of city life.

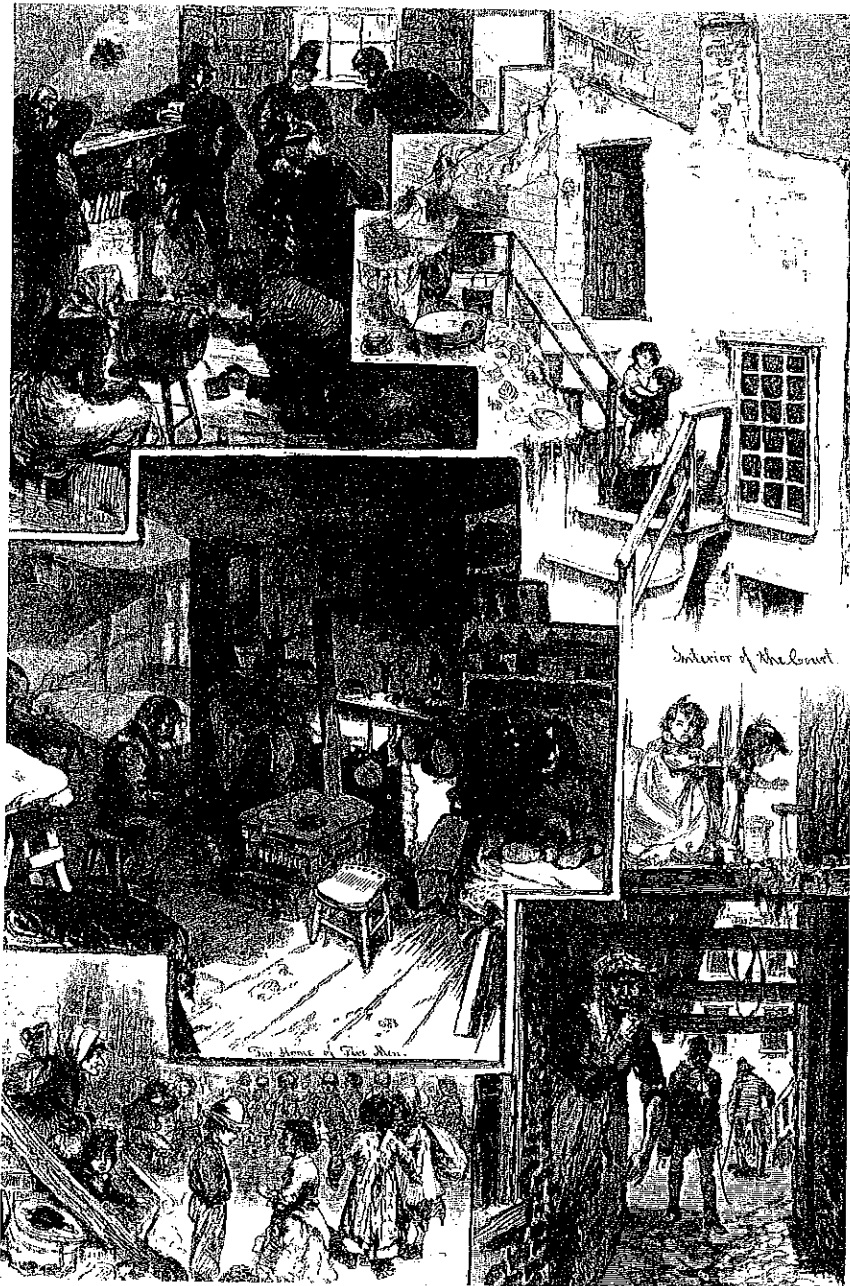
Farm life is quiet; city life is not. In America you can have your choice.

But building cities quickly means there is little time for planning—and that sometimes leads to trouble. Have you ever heard

New York's bustling waterfront at South Street. You can visit the restored seaport there today, tall ships and all.



Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune* wrote the famous words "Go west, young man." He ran for president in 1872 but lost to Ulysses S. Grant.



"The typical tenement...has no light from the open air, no ventilation....On its steps play the pale, unhealthy children who...still swarm in these horrible dwellings."

adults talk about the "good old days"? Well, they weren't as good as some people think.

Crime was an awful problem in the 19th century. Most American cities didn't have uniformed police, but they did have street gangs, pickpockets, and robbers.

There just weren't enough rooms for all those people who were moving in; the cities were overcrowded—and dirty. Boston had a good sewage system, but most cities didn't.

Waste water from baths and sinks went into open street gutters. Pigs roamed city streets, and so did rats. Chicago had almost no indoor plumbing (until after 1860). No one understood the importance of cleanliness, so disease was a terrible problem. Whole neighborhoods were sometimes wiped out by cholera and other deadly diseases.

And then there was fire. Most city buildings were wooden and built close together. If a fire was ignited—*whoosh*—a city could burn down.

It was December of 1835, and cold; New York's fire hydrants were all frozen. So the city's firemen could do nothing but watch when a fire got

The traffic on Broadway in New York was terrifying—and the dirt, garbage, and horse manure in the street almost as distressing—so Mr. Genin, the hatter, built this bridge in 1852 at his own expense.

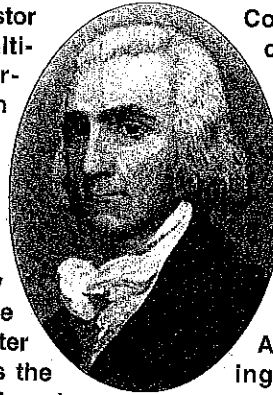
started. Soon most of New York was ablaze—700 buildings turned to ash. That happened in more than one city.

For all that, America's cities were full of good surprises. An Englishwoman visiting America in 1834 (her name was Harriet Martineau) was amazed to hear a concert of Mozart's music in Cincinnati, Ohio.



### The Richest Man in America

John Jacob Astor arrived in Baltimore from Germany with seven flutes. If he could sell them, he thought, they would get him started in the New World. They did. When he died, 64 years later (in 1848), he was the richest man in America and he owned a whole lot of Manhattan Island (which is the center of New York City). Astor started by selling furs and musical instruments, and soon had a shop in New York. Besides that, he was buying and selling goods to Indians at frontier outposts. He began importing guns, ammunition, and wool. That wasn't all: he acquired a fleet of ships and sent some of them off to China. He controlled most of the Pacific



Coast fur trade. He created a trade network linking Britain, New England, the Pacific Coast, and East Asia—and he did it long before others thought globally. Then Astor began buying real estate. He

was soon called "the landlord of New York," and he became super-rich. He said he was sorry he hadn't bought all of New York.

**W**hat was he like? He was tight. It took the artist John James Audubon six trips to see him before Astor would pay the \$1,000 he had promised for Audubon's masterpiece, *Birds of America*. He told Audubon he didn't have any cash. But he did found some libraries, and he gave money to colleges and a few other worthy causes.



New York City's terrible fire of 1835

A few years earlier, she was told, the only sounds there were "the bellow and growl of wild beasts."

Most Americans were sure they were in the best possible place in all the world. They knew that if the farm or city where they lived didn't work out, they could move on: to a new city sprouting in the wilderness, or to a new frontier. America's land was so vast that much of it was still unmapped. That added to its allure. It seemed limitless, and so did the opportunities it offered. Those new cities were fascinating, but it was land of their own that most Americans wanted.