Social Networks in Alexandria and Newport

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General: While there is no agreed checklist of central institutions in American social history, the focus on the four dimensions of 1) religious institutions, 2) occupation, 3) family, and 4) neighbors echoes in many respects the "trust networks" that Charles Tilly identifies as central to the social fabric of nineteenth century America and the emergence of democratic politics. Tilly cites in particular the development of trust networks, "grounded in migration, ethnicity, religion, kinship, friendship, and work."[1] "Neighbor" may be a partial surrogate for "friendship" (a daunting task to determine for the whole of a nineteenth century city) while also incorporating manifestations of migration and ethnicity without restricting the analysis to the foreign born who were a small part of Alexandria's social make-up but a large part of Newport's.

Scale: the physical size of a city is an important determinate of the scale of networks. Alexandria and Newport were small cities, with populations of about 20,000, both spread out over an area 15 city blocks by 15 city blocks. And they were walking cities: a young healthy resident of Alexandria or Newport could have walked from end to end of their city in either direction in about 20 minutes.

Religious institutions as the locus of interaction: The churches and synagogues of nineteenth century America were significant institutions in all locations. Alexandria and Newport were small enough that every religious institution could serve the whole of the city. Records survive for Alexandria's 12 white churches and Beth El synagogue. These institutions became even more central to the life of the city in the late 1850s as a religious revival got underway and the crisis over slavery deepened. Religious institutions became important venues for the slavery debate. During the Civil War they became focal points of social control for the occupying Union Army. While African-Americans could not vote and the records of the Alfred Street Baptist Church and Roberts Memorial Chapel (Methodist) have not survived, those debates would have echoed in a profoundly meaningful way in these, the most important institutions of the city's free and slave black populations.

Newport had 15 churches (the first synagogue was not organized until the late 1890s), many organized around ethnic and linguistic communalities. Perhaps no religious institution in the city was more central to the social fabric of its adherents than the Church of the Immaculate Conception which held first mortgages on the homes of many of its Irish members. As the depression of the 1870s deepened, many of those Irish Catholics lost their homes and the church was declared bankrupt.

Occupation as a locus of interaction: Alexandria was a commercial town, specializing in the sale of wheat, coal and black lives; Newport was an immigrant town and an industrial town, specializing in steel and iron production. Enterprises in Alexandria were smaller than in Newport, but most occupations, even those in Newport's industrial settings, were craft based. Laborers made up only 15 percent of the 3453 residents of Alexandria reporting occupations in the 1860 federal census and precisely the same percentage of the 6225 Newport residents reporting occupations in the 1870 census or in proximate city directories.

Most of the employed in both these walking cities were in relatively small and defined occupational groups which may have facilitated knowledge of others in their trade. Of the 58 specific occupations identified in the two cities, only twelve had more than 50 practitioners. The list of those populous occupations was virtually the same in the two cities: traders and dealers, clerks, blacksmiths, boot

[1] Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 80.

and shoe makers, carpenters and joiners, machinists, painters, tailors and dressmakers. Alexandria had more sailors and cotton mill operators; Newport had more stone and brick masons and many more iron workers. The Swift Rolling Mill employed 610 men on the eve of the Great Depression of the 1870s and was the largest employer by far in either city, but within that labor force the craft theme was still clear. Mid nineteenth century steel and iron production was structured around work teams, each with the full range of required skills, essentially engaged in a system of decentralized contract labor. Moreover, all 610 of those men shared the fact of their employment in the Swift Mill which was the subject of the labor strike which convulsed the city on the eve of its municipal election. They too would likely have known and interacted with one another in new and important ways.

Family as a locus of interaction: In an age before welfare by government, the family was the welfare unit. As Steve Ruggles has shown, the mid-nineteenth century remained the age of the multigenerational American family in some important respects. His research across the US in 1860 finds 80 percent of those over 65 living with their children or next door to their children; another 10 percent lived with other relatives. Only 11 percent lived alone and less than one percent in alms-houses or homes for the aged.[2]

Percentages no doubt differed in even small cities like Alexandria and Newport, but cross generational family ties were common in the US born populations of both cities, and especially among the white population of Alexandria: a slow growing, overwhelmingly Virginia born, population in which individuals interacted across generational connections. Newport's immigrant population, especially the Irish and the Germans, was growing quickly, and featured high levels of intra-group interaction, with ethnic clubs and societies preserving linguist, cultural and religious affinities.

Neighbors as a locus of interaction: Neighborliness took on different dimensions in the two historical cities: based in industrial Newport in the interaction among households in sequentially developed "additions" consisting, in the main, of small houses on densely packed small properties. Irish and German neighborhoods became clearly defined. In Alexandria, home ownership was much less common and rented accommodation prevailed. There, in this even more densely packed commercial city, with half of the city blocks occupied by five or fewer families, interactions between boarder and tenants prevailed.

[2] Steve Ruggles, "Multigenerational families in nineteenth-century America," *Continuity and Change,* 18 (2003): 139-65.