

CHAPTER 4

Performing Iconoclasm

In 1939, Grant Wood capped a half century of Colonial Revival fervor by picturing a myth of destruction as theatrical spectacle. *Parson Weems's Fable* represents a legendary episode from the life of George Washington, who, as a child, chopped down one of his father's beloved cherry trees (plate 11). When his mischief was discovered, the future president reportedly confessed, "I can't tell a lie, Pa; you know I can't tell a lie. I did cut it with my hatchet."¹ Wood prominently features the man who made this tale famous: Mason Weems, the first chronicler of the life of Washington. Looming in the foreground, Weems holds back a red curtain to reveal the confrontation between father and son. The real Weems had popularized the story of the cherry tree in order to illuminate Washington's character. During the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the anecdote attained the status of folklore, evincing the integrity of the founding father and, by implication, the moral character of his country.

While Washington's virtue is the painting's ostensible subject, Weems commands the scene. Like a carnival barker, Weems beckons us into the oddly stylized space, his left hand nearly touching little Washington's hatchet. But what, precisely, does he show us? Does Weems occupy our space, pulling back the curtain in *trompe l'oeil* fashion to reveal another picture? Does he exist in the same time as Washington, pointing to the precocious iconoclast apologizing for his actions? Or is he something of a stage manager, uncovering neither another painting nor the distant past, but rather a theatrical reenactment? What the picture offers, in this last view, is history as performance. Wood effectively represents the capacity of reenactment to bridge the past and the present, conjuring national myths in the process.²

Understood in this way, Wood's painting points us toward other twentieth-century reenactments of colonial history—in particular, performances of the destruction of the Bowling Green statue—and invites us to consider how they operate as representations. Why reenact iconoclasm? What do such phenomena achieve ontologically, as representations of an attack on a work of art, and epistemologically, as representations of Revolutionary-era iconoclasm for audiences many decades removed from the eighteenth century?³ Between 1909 and 1935, civic societies staged parades and pageants that prominently featured the statue. On a float, in a ballroom, and on a lawn, George III reappeared whole, as a version of the original monument, or in pieces, as faux fragments ready to be melted down again. Such performances built on a century of pictures that revisited the statue's destruction with varying degrees of accuracy and drama. In more than a dozen paintings and prints executed between 1776 and 1876, crowds surge about the base of the monument. Several of these images became the basis for reproductions that circulated widely during the nineteenth century and continue to be recycled today as book covers, digital projections, refrigerator magnets, and memes.

Collectively, this body of pictorial and performative representations achieved two remarkable things. First, and rather unexpectedly, they do not bring the King down. Artists and reenactors restored the monument to its pedestal, and, with few exceptions, they kept it there: none of this imagery culminates in a toppling of the sculpture. The statue tilts, leans, and balances in a state of suspended animation, but it rarely yields its pedestal. Insofar as George III remained standing, then, this imagery effectively restored a British monarch to a position of visibility. The significance of this restoration was not lost on those Americans who coveted the trappings of an English colonial past.

Second, these pictures and reenactments succeeded in canonizing Bowling Green as an American creation story. This happened gradually and haltingly. Despite historians' efforts, now and in the eighteenth century, to tie the fall of the monument to the rise of the nation, the first painting of the event posited something altogether different: an allegory of the 1848 revolutions in Europe. Completed by Johannes Adam Simon Oertel, a young Bavarian who sailed to New York in that eventful year, *Pulling Down the Statue of King George III* (plate 3) emerged from a context of radical politics and continuing unrest among the city's newly arrived immigrants. When the canvas later became the basis for a widely imitated engraving by John C. McRae, however, it ceded its original connotations to a narrative that passionately celebrated the iconoclasts as American patriots. The Centennial commemoration of 1876, and the Colonial Revivals that followed, propelled this image of the nation's body into the twentieth century. The New York story—originally just one incident of Revolutionary destruction among many—became an event of singular, national significance.

Creation stories require authors and guardians, and as such, they beg consideration of exactly whose stories are being told. Who and what gets remembered or forgotten in the process? Lost in the mythologizing of Bowling Green were the other monuments that animated the Revolutionary landscape of the 1770s—the sculpture of Pitt and the liberty poles—and the violence of cutting, chopping, striking, and razing that brought each monument down. Excised, too, were some of the people who energized this world: in particular, loyalists and people of color. At the same time, as more and more representations of Bowling Green began to appear, the iconoclastic crowd underwent a visual transformation: it grew larger and whiter, matching the actual audiences who performed and attended reenactments after 1900. Several factors, including sectional crisis and Colonial Revival identity politics, help explain this impulse toward racial homogeneity. Yet revisions of the Bowling Green story also turned on the first point above. That is, because the royal statue is always falling—because iconoclasm in these pictures is unending—the outcome of destruction remains unfixed and therefore open to cultural appropriation.

Joseph Koerner has suggested that “most of the time people live in iconoclasm’s aftermath, totemically preserving and neutralizing its gestures and settlements.”⁴ This observation is partly borne out by the efforts of nineteenth-century Americans to recover the fragments of Bowling Green and their attempts to realize a substitute for the lost king in the figure of Washington. Pictures and performances about the nation’s founding would continue to entangle the last American monarch and the first American president. But there was nothing neutral about reviving the royal statue and leaving it intact. By pulling down George III in 1776, and by remembering the event in countless historical texts, Americans marked their political independence from Britain. But by raising him again, in images and reenactments, they reproduced powerful ideologies of race, class, and gender.

Picturing Iconoclasm

Within the new United States and abroad, artists responded quickly to the destruction of King George III’s statue. The very first image amounted to a virtual resurrection. In September 1777, one year after Manhattan fell to British troops, the city threw a birthday party for the King that included a nighttime illumination fueled by one hundred candles and a grand picture of “the Statue of his Majesty on Horseback, crowned with Laurels, standing on a Pedestal, and several other Figures” that “much surpassed any Thing of the Kind before exhibited.”⁵ Probably a large transparency (a thinly painted canvas designed to be backlit), the display looked past the recent violence of iconoclasm, summoning a vision of the unsullied monument to project an illusion of uninterrupted colonial rule.

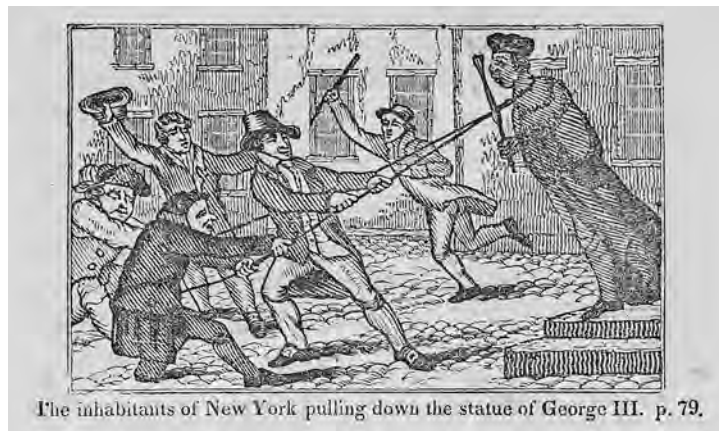


FIGURE 38 | “The inhabitants of New York pulling down the statue of George III,” from Charles Goodrich, *Child’s History of the United States Designed as a First Book of History for Schools* (Philadelphia, 1857). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

While this spectacle was ephemeral, another image of Bowling Green produced in the same year had both lasting power and a transatlantic audience. *La Destruction de la Statue Royale à Nouvelle Yorck*, a colored engraving published by Franz Xaver Habermann in Augsburg, Germany, formed part of a suite of four prints about Revolutionary Manhattan (fig. 1).⁶ As a *vue d’optique* or “perspective view,” the picture was intended for use with a zograscope, an optical device that translated the flat image into a three-dimensional illusion, thereby enabling observers to fancy themselves present at the event. The scene into which viewers imaginatively entered, however, was fictitious: the architectural setting is a confection; the statue appears as a pedestrian figure; and the iconoclasts are represented as a crowd of partially clad men of color.⁷ Four white laborers rush to their aid with tools. Meanwhile, spectators peer from windows and gather at a safe distance; their passive consumption of the iconoclastic act parallels the beholder’s own detached observation through the zograscope glass. Habermann’s geographical distance from New York helps to explain the picture’s factual inaccuracies; nevertheless, the artist knew enough about the British colonies to signal that this event had occurred within a slave society. In fact, more so than any other image of the statue’s destruction that followed, this one acknowledged the visibility of people of African descent in colonial Manhattan. In later pictures—and as Bowling Green came to signify a phenomenon of national self-invention—black figures would all but disappear.

No people of color feature, for example, in the earliest representations of Bowling Green that were included in popular nineteenth-century schoolchildren’s primers. In 1827, John Barber’s *Historical Scenes in the United States* pictured a white crowd lassoing a

pedestrian statue of George III and invited young readers to “describe the transactions at New York.”⁸ Thirty years later, Charles A. Goodrich included a similar scene in his *Child's History of the United States* (fig. 38). Appearing at a time when American history began to be taught regularly (alongside British history, which had long commanded an enthusiastic readership), such images shaped how several generations learned the history of Bowling Green.⁹

Arguably no single picture exercised more influence on popular understandings of colonial-era destruction than Oertel's *Pulling Down the Statue*, completed during 1852–53. Oertel represents iconoclasm as a human drama, even as a spectator sport. While the equestrian statue of the King commands the center, arising above the crowd, one has to search to find the iconoclasts, who tug at ropes and prop a ladder against the pedestal. The emphasis is less on the nature of destruction than the varied actions and reactions of the two dozen people encircling the monument. Moreover, and paradoxically for a painting about political disorder, Oertel's composition is stable and symmetrical. The figure of the King (erroneously garbed in ceremonial finery instead of Roman armor) crowns a large triangle that extends to encompass groups of cautious onlookers. An indigenous family at left, cast into shadow, is counterpoised at right by a bright crowd of white women, children, and elite and laboring men, most of whom turn inward to witness the scene. A similar rhythm of forms tracks across the middle ground. To the left of the pedestal, three white gentlemen calmly observe the attack; on balance, three youngsters tumble to the ground at right. Firelight, and the barest pinprick of a moon, charge the setting with a Romantic sensibility, and beyond the Green, figures stare like theatergoers in balconies from the windows of the building where George Washington was stationed in July 1776. Throughout, arms point and faces worry, expressing a range of responses. A laboring man, symbolically brandishing a flaming torch, gestures openhanded toward the ropes; his aristocratic companions raise their hands in alarm, signaling their political difference. Above the figural groups, centered in the space created by parting clouds, the head of the King inclines to the right, appearing to acknowledge the attackers, as the horse seems to rear in resistance. Their pyramidal form is echoed in the left background, where a half-dozen soldiers, identifiable by the red cockades in their tricorne hats, have clamored to the top of a battery wall. It is no accident that they, too, seem positioned atop a pedestal. By including this collective, Oertel presages the future (which had, of course, already happened): as the monarch goes down, the people arise to take his place.

Oertel's crowd is largely white, and, as such, this way of representing Bowling Green was both anachronistic and precedent-setting. Only one black figure appears on the grass, forming part of the group that falls to one side of the pedestal, as if anticipating the statue's collapse. He therefore occupies the most vulnerable position in the composition, an acknowledgment, perhaps, of the growing difficulties that African Americans faced in

northern states following passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850.¹⁰ Even so, his singularity is out of step with the substantial black populations of New York in both the 1770s and 1850s.

Like the black man, the indigenous family is represented ambiguously. It is probable that Oertel looked to contemporary depictions of Native people for their costumes; elements of the man's and woman's clothing resemble imagery in George Catlin's *North American Indian Portfolio* (1844), which went on display at the Broadway galleries of the American Art-Union during the late 1840s.¹¹ As a pastiche of various tribal costumes, Oertel's figures are neither portraits nor generalized representations of Manhattan's Native Lenape, but rather visual signs of a social category. In this regard they are not so different from the other people in the crowd, who similarly represent anonymous types, including laborers, loyalists, mothers, and soldiers. The presence of these indigenous figures in a painting about American history, however, is telling. Not only does this family turn away from the main action, thereby appearing to exit a scene that was connected in the popular mind to nation making; their withdrawal also conjures contemporary politics of indigenous displacement and ideologies of the "vanishing race." By the time that Oertel had arrived in the United States, the eighteenth-century motif of the "noble savage" had ceded to an antebellum ideology of Native disappearance. There was a measure of truth to this concern: Western contact had led to the decimation of some tribes through disease and warfare. The cultural belief that settler contact was endangering entire cultures helped support the passage of the federal Indian Removal Act in 1830, which forced thousands of indigenous people to reservations west of the Mississippi. Mid-nineteenth-century landscape and history painters, such as George Inness and Robert Walter Weir, registered these changes by locating Indians in the forested margins of their compositions, where they signified as ahistorical spectators beyond the arc of time and progress.¹² Seen within this context, Oertel's eighteenth-century figures embodied nineteenth-century premonitions of a vanishing race.

The manner in which Oertel pictured nonwhite actors at Bowling Green is significant, for his canvas—the first known painting of the event—became the basis for a successive chain of representations. These include a large engraving issued by John C. McRae in 1859, several prints based on McRae's example, a digital projection mounted at the New-York Historical Society in 2011, the illustrated covers of several recent history books, and media coverage about the removal of Confederate monuments.¹³ Yet the painting was in many ways an unlikely candidate for imitation and reproduction. It was executed by a newly arrived German immigrant unfamiliar with American history; it was an outlier in the artist's oeuvre (Oertel later specialized in animal and religious paintings); and it was neither exhibited nor purchased at the time of its creation. There is little in the painting's early history to explain the renown it would subsequently command.¹⁴

All of which raises some questions: What led Oertel to represent this scene? How did he arrive at the particulars of his composition? How did it signify at the moment of its creation, and when did it begin to function as an American creation story? The latter question is perhaps the most significant, for the answer jars our easy familiarity with the image. Although audiences today may assume that Oertel's picture has always been about American independence, it was in fact embedded in a mid-nineteenth-century history of European revolutions, and it addressed an expatriate audience still brewing for social change.¹⁵

The Eighteenth Brumaire of King George III

In 1848, at the age of twenty-five, Oertel emigrated from Bavaria in the company of a master engraver to whom he had apprenticed as a teenager. It was a heady time to leave Germany and an auspicious moment to arrive in New York. Across Europe, revolutions in the name of political and labor reforms had broken out during the early spring and would continue through 1849. Although the causes and activist groups varied from one region to another, the uprisings followed a decade of unrest during the 1830s, and they were widespread—originating in Sicily, erupting in France, and spreading throughout the Continent. In the German states, middle- and working-class protests centered on demands for national unity, democratic representation, freedoms of press and assembly, and constitutional reforms; students in Oertel's native Bavaria succeeded in forcing the abdication of King Ludwig I. While the insurrections produced lasting changes in some countries, in Germany and elsewhere they incited widespread repressions by military and monarchical forces, leading many to judge the efforts a failure.¹⁶

It is unclear whether Oertel sympathized with, or even participated in, the "March Revolution" in Germany (the historical record on his early life is slim), or how he was affected by the manifold economic and labor changes rattling the German states in the late 1840s. Whatever his reasons for emigrating, Oertel was not alone. He joined an exodus of tens of thousands fleeing destabilization in Europe, including German "Forty-Eighters," Irish families wrecked by the potato famine, and British Chartists, who had unsuccessfully pressed Parliament for an expansion of suffrage. Between 1840 and 1859, more than four million Europeans immigrated to the United States, three-quarters of them passing through the Port of New York. A third came from Germany. By 1855, more than half the population of New York was foreign-born, including ninety-eight thousand Germans. Many of them resided in a Lower East Side neighborhood that became known as *Klein-deutschland*. Others migrated to nearby communities, including Newark, New Jersey, where Oertel first settled upon his arrival.¹⁷

Immigration made New York the third-largest German-speaking center in the world and transformed the city's vernacular culture. Dozens of German-language newspapers kept immigrants apprised of continuing unrest in Europe and socialist activism in their adopted city. Skilled German tradesmen expanded New York's laboring forces, mobilizing a workers' rights movement during the 1850s. Often their rallies took them through the very streets and spaces that British colonials had traversed nearly a century earlier to rail against an altogether different set of injustices: Wall Street, Broadway, and the Commons, now City Hall Park.¹⁸ Lower Manhattan echoed again with the ritual sounds of radical protest.

This was Oertel's world: a thriving population of fellow Germans, many of whom remained preoccupied with the possibility of revolutionary change.¹⁹ If immigration reproduced familiar aspects of Oertel's homeland, however, in other ways his introduction to New York was disorienting. He arrived nearly penniless, "with one borrowed five-franc piece in his pocket" after "a tedious, trying voyage," and he wandered into a city that had grown from the small island settlement of 1776 to become the largest metropolis in America.²⁰ Crowded with native-born inhabitants and newcomers, Manhattan swelled with the infrastructure of massive ironworks, sugar manufactories, garment factories, department stores, naval commerce, and international trade. Gold, pried from the soil of California, gilded the vaults of New York's many banks. Bold advertisements papered the walls of commercial neighborhoods. Developers pushed ever northward, raising fashionable residences and laying out green spaces at Union Square, Madison Square, and Gramercy Park. The city was not without its crises: in 1849, a year after Oertel arrived, cholera killed five thousand people, and at Astor Place, class and ethnic tensions between immigrants and nativists escalated into a theater riot, leaving twenty-two people dead. Yet Manhattan was also eager to boast of its successes. By the time Oertel was completing his picture of Bowling Green, in 1853, a Crystal Palace had arisen to showcase American industry, intentionally rivaling London's Crystal Palace of 1851. Two years later, Walt Whitman would publish *Leaves of Grass*, a love song to the surging, multicultural city, championing its "turbulent musical chorus" enlivened by "all the lands of the earth." Others reached for metaphors to convey the hurly burly fortunes of New York: it was the "Empire City," the "modern city of ruins," the unstoppable "locomotive of these United States."²¹

This, too, was Oertel's New York. His fortunes matched its dizzying tumult. Although his descendants would later remember an artist frustrated by limited professional opportunities (and his own limits as a novice painter), other evidence suggests that Oertel quickly found his way into established artistic circles. In 1850, he exhibited two works at the American Art-Union (AAU), an organization that helped, in its short existence (1839–51), to position New York City as the national center of what was then contemporary American art.²² Oertel's *Lament of the Fallen Spirits* anticipated the religious focus of

his later work; a still life, *Grapes*, elicited praise for the “young German of extraordinary talent, and full of enthusiasm.”²³ As Oertel immersed himself in the Episcopalian church, working toward an eventual position as a minister, he found employment as an engraver for publishers of prints, periodicals, and banknotes.²⁴ He designed an award-winning medal for the Crystal Palace and displayed work at the Athenaeum of Brooklyn; in 1856, he was made an associate member of the vaunted National Academy of Design, contributing paintings and drawings to its annual exhibitions.²⁵ Critics continued to identify him as a foreign transplant—“he is an indefatigable German,” observed the *Home Journal*, an organ of high society—yet enthusiastically recommended his work.²⁶ Despite the crowded visual marketplace of New York, Oertel was attracting modest notice.

No doubt he was encouraged by the enthusiastic reception that fellow artists of German descent were garnering. Emanuel Leutze, a German-born, American-raised painter who returned overseas to the artistic center of Düsseldorf for much of his career, enjoyed unmatched fame around 1850. Leutze was celebrated in New York for his mammoth canvas *George Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851), which was prominently featured at the Stuyvesant Institute, but he had been a favorite of the AAU for years, exhibiting subjects drawn from British and American history and seeing his work translated into engravings for national distribution to the vast AAU membership.²⁷ Oertel surely took interest, too, in the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts (or Düsseldorf Gallery), which opened within a year of his arrival in an upper hall of a Unitarian church on the same stretch of lower Broadway as the AAU.²⁸ The Gallery soon became one of the city’s cultural highlights. Ambitious American artists had helped to turn the city of Düsseldorf into a destination for overseas training; American collectors admired the detailed style of the narrative paintings associated with the German school. The Düsseldorf Gallery stacked dozens of these pictures from ceiling to floor, and in short order, it influenced the content of exhibitions at the National Academy of Design and the buying patterns of local patrons.²⁹ Together with the example of Leutze, the Düsseldorf Gallery modeled success for a young German engraver retooling himself as a painter.

What Oertel saw on the walls of the AAU and Düsseldorf Gallery also mattered: namely, history paintings. While history painting in the United States never enjoyed the keen estimation that it commanded in Europe, it nevertheless experienced a high point during the 1840s and 1850s. Part of this surge was the result of practical marketing. In lieu of the large canvases that history painters such as Benjamin West and John Trumbull had contributed to spacious academy exhibitions in previous generations, antebellum artists created smaller pictures to appeal to middle-class buyers and to fit the dimensions of Victorian parlors. As the Grand Manner gave way to a newer category of “historical genre,” the subject matter, too, became less elaborate, concentrating on historical anecdotes and everyday people instead of heroic battles and exemplars of civic virtue. History

painting also received a boost from the national interest in the American past that began to emerge during the 1820s—marking the fifty-year anniversary of Declaration of the Independence and Lafayette’s return tour to the United States—and amplified over the coming decades as Euro-Americans eagerly chronicled their histories of colonial settlement. They founded state historical societies, made a patriotic holiday of the Fourth of July, and published voluminous studies, including George Bancroft’s *History of the United States* (1854–78) and Benjamin Lossing’s *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution* (1853).³⁰

Art critics responded in kind, urging painters to develop a national school of painting. Opinions divided over how to achieve this goal: some writers advised the cultivation of a vigorous style appropriate to the ambitions of an expansionist nation; others pressed for narrative scenes of the Revolution and celebratory episodes of the nation’s founding. Artists tended to pursue the latter recommendation. In addition to producing numerous pictures about the life of Washington, antebellum painters chronicled the New World arrivals of European explorers, the baptism of Pocahontas, the voyage of the Pilgrims, and the bravery of revolutionaries. Such images propelled a growing conviction in the exceptionalism of the American republican project. At mid-century, the imperatives of westward movement, coupled with a sense of Christian millennial destiny, empowered an American self-image of moral righteousness and supremacy.³¹

For a number of prominent nineteenth-century intellectuals, the promise of America was inextricably tied to a belief in Anglo-Saxon origins and superiority.³² It is little wonder, then, that alongside the rising interest in the founding era, Americans also avidly followed British political and religious history. The decades of Oliver Cromwell’s Puritan Reformers and the English Civil Wars, which Protestant Americans understood to be the historical catalysts for the manifest destiny of the nineteenth-century present, proved especially compelling.³³ American readers consumed Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *History of England from the Accession of James II*, purchasing four hundred thousand copies in 1848, and when *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* began publication in the 1850s it featured material lifted from British presses. In New York, Knickerbocker culture and the upper sort continued to model itself on English social customs, encouraged by rarified magazines like the *Home Journal*, even as Astor Place rioters charged city leaders with English elitism.³⁴ American painters took note of this surging Anglophilia. The same artists who revisited the American Revolution—including Leutze, Peter Rothermel, Daniel Huntington, and Richard Caton Woodville—also avidly pictured episodes from Tudor and Stuart history. Visitors to the AAU encountered pictures of both American and British history in abundance. Paintings and prints about the American Revolution and Mexican War promulgated ideologies of nationalism and empire building that were central to the mission of the AAU. Scenes of Lady Jane Grey, Walter Raleigh, and Shakespearean characters appealed to viewers conversant in English history and literature.³⁵



FIGURE 39 | Alfred Jones after Emanuel Leutze, *The Image Breaker*, 1850. Engraving. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-pga-07181.

Hence Oertel found instructive fodder at the AAU for his own venture into the practice of history painting. In fact, the modest size of *Pulling Down the Statue* approximates the dimensions of the smaller historical genres that were finding a place on gallery walls, suggesting that Oertel discerned a correlation between scale and marketability. One painting in particular might have made a strong impression on him: *The Image-Breaker* (*The Puritan and His Daughter*). Executed by Leutze in 1847, the picture was at the Düsseldorf Gallery in 1849 and reproduced by the AAU as one of its membership engravings in 1850 (fig. 39). It featured a Protestant iconoclast as antihero; having discovered his daughter praying to Catholic devotional objects, an enraged Puritan raises a determined fist above his head, preparing to smite the makeshift altar. While the subject expanded Leutze's



FIGURE 40 | William Camphausen, *A Castle Invaded by Puritans in the Time of Charles I*, reproduced from A. A. Turner and B. Fordsham, *Gems from the "Düsseldorf Gallery"* (New York: D. Appleton, 1863). Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago.

interest in British history, overt representations of iconoclasm were rare in antebellum art. The AAU touted the print as full of “energy and fire”; at least one critic concurred, finding it “concentrated” and “vigorous.”³⁶ Scholars have since understood *The Image-Breaker* in the spirit of 1848, interpreting it as Leutze’s timely critique of persecution.³⁷ Oertel could not have missed the 1850 engraving, for he debuted his own work at the AAU galleries in the same year.

Nor, it seems, did he overlook history paintings at the Düsseldorf Gallery. In addition to seeing pictures that could be read as German allegories of the recent European uprisings (and an unnamed picture that explicitly represented the 1848 revolution, according to the Gallery’s catalog for 1850), a painting of Cromwellian England might have caught Oertel’s eye, for it resembles his depiction of Bowling Green in striking ways: Wilhelm Camphausen’s *A Castle Invaded by Puritans in the Time of Charles I* (fig. 40).³⁸ As in Oertel’s painting, Camphausen presents a figure on horseback as the fulcrum of political disruption. To the left, three men gather in a group that closely matches Oertel’s arrangement of

three revolutionaries next to the Bowling Green pedestal; indeed, one of Oertel's figures plants his feet and raises an arm in a pose nearly identical to one of Camphausen's Round-heads. Similarly, at the right of both canvases, groups of three men and several women gather in the middle ground, including one who kneels with a child. Like Camphausen, Oertel fills the left foreground with a figural group detached from the main action—his Native American family approximates the place occupied by figures tending to an injured cavalier—and he positions a sympathetic group of soldiers on the wall in the left background. Beyond these evocative details, there is a comparable compositional logic, with a vacant space in the near center and a building fronting the right side. Although the details in *Pulling Down the Statue* do not precisely replicate those in *A Castle Invaded*, the correspondences are compelling enough to suggest that Oertel knew the earlier picture. Perhaps, in an effort to train his eye, he even sketched Camphausen's design at the Düsseldorf Gallery.

What we have in Oertel's picture, then, is something unexpected. Long assumed to be an original representation of the American Revolution—indeed, the originary painting for what would become an American origin story—the canvas instead has surprising connections to paintings about British history executed by artists in Germany. The context of its production in early 1850s New York reveals layers of references that are neither apparent at a glance nor discernible in its later reproductions as a convenient illustration of American beginnings. Thick with connections to an art world predicated on the circumstances of German immigration, *Pulling Down the Statue* therefore begs consideration of Oertel's intentions. What precipitated his decision to undertake a history painting about the destruction of a British monument at Bowling Green, and what did the painting mean in 1850s Manhattan?

Textual sources would have been helpful to Oertel. Bowling Green had become a staple in the guidebooks to New York that began to circulate during the antebellum decades; new to the city, Oertel may have availed himself of the most recent editions. Had he picked up a copy of *New York: Past, Present, and Future* (1849), he would have discovered an account of the “leaden equestrian statue of the King” flattened by “a body of the people, who had strongly imbibed the spirit of liberty”; had he encountered Daniel Curry's *Historical Sketch* (1853), he would have read yet another tale of the statue “dethroned at the receipt of the news of the Declaration of Independence by the Continental Congress.”³⁹ However simplified, these narratives of democratic rebellion must have resonated for an immigrant drawn to the United States, like other Germans, by promises of “kein König”: no king.⁴⁰

Further, it was an opportune time to attempt a painting about a notable moment in the city's history. New Yorkers, like Americans elsewhere, were turning an eye to their past during the antebellum decades. As Thomas Riley developed his antiquarian museum, the New-York Historical Society swelled with new members. Washington Irving, writing

as Diedrich Knickerbocker, cultivated a romance of old New York. Artists pictured the city in panoramas, architectural models, and urban views. Evacuation Day became an annual holiday.⁴¹ And while writers had narrated the story of Bowling Green, no artist had yet portrayed it in paint. Oertel's subject capitalized on local knowledge of New York, appealing to the sorts of patrons who supported the circulation of historical art about the American Revolutionary period.

At the same time, his subject matter had an obvious relation to the revolutions in Europe and resonance for immigrant communities. Many Germans in New York remained committed to social and political transformation. Joseph Weydemeyer, who founded a German-language newspaper called *Die Revolution* in 1852, organized hundreds of German American tradesmen to rally for labor reforms during the 1850s. Cabinetmakers unionized, tailors rioted, and the Turnverein—an influential gymnastics society comprising numerous Forty-Eighters—advanced the formation of labor cooperatives.⁴² Oertel's painting engaged such sensibilities, for even as it referenced an event from the American past, it conjured a political monument still in the process of falling, intimating an ongoing struggle to galvanize radical change.

The arrival of a Hungarian revolutionary hero in New York reenergized precisely such aspirations among a wide spectrum of the public, including civic leaders and immigrant groups. Lajos Kossuth, who had led a revolt against the Hapsburg monarchy in 1848–49, was greeted by thousands of people when he visited the city as a political exile in December 1851. An elaborate parade conveyed him from the Battery up Broadway to City Hall, skirting the ritual grounds of Bowling Green. Immigrant and labor groups proudly joined the procession, representing the “European Democrats,” the “Hungarian Society,” and the “Sons of Liberty,” the latter now composed entirely of “natives of Germany.” Kossuth, renowned as an orator of Pitt-like loquaciousness, excited his many admirers with passionate speeches that explicitly connected European uprisings to the American Revolution and praised the Declaration of Independence as inspiration for Hungary. Recalling the aspirations of 1848, when “the throne of despot after despot tottered and crumbled, as concession after concession was yielded to the uprisen people,” Kossuth avowed that Europe was yet “on the eve of a new revolution.” He praised the United States as “the living wonder of the world,” appealing directly to his listeners’ faith in American exceptionalism, in order to rouse support for Hungary.⁴³ The public fervor around Kossuth’s visit, and the parallels he drew between the American and European revolutions, may have incentivized Oertel to conceptualize a painting that invited a similar reading. Indeed, Oertel’s biographers would later claim a loose connection between the two men. Oertel may have even paid Kossuth a roundabout tribute in his painting in the form of the laboring man who brandishes a torch: his broad-brimmed hat resembles the style of the “Kossuth hat” popularized by the Hungarian during his American stay.⁴⁴

Oertel might have taken a further cue from another source not ordinarily tied to nineteenth-century American painting: Karl Marx. The German socialist, himself displaced from the Continent to London, continued to urge revolutionary action in his writings. Notably, his prophecies of imminent rebellion reached a New York audience through his role as a European correspondent for Horace Greeley's newspaper, the *New York Tribune*. The *Tribune* enjoyed a broad circulation among Americans sympathetic to progressive causes, including abolition and labor reform.⁴⁵ Marx's articles—published between 1852 and 1861 on issues of trade, elections, British Chartism, Italian insurrection, Russian imperialism, and Chinese unrest—brought the crises of the world to American readers, analyzing the interconnected economic conflicts that would trigger the “next uprising of the people of Europe,” their “next movement for republican freedom and economy of Government,” as he wrote in June 1853:

Since the commencement of the eighteenth century there has been no serious revolution in Europe which has not been preceded by a commercial and financial crisis. This applies no less to the revolution of 1789 than to that of 1848. It is true, not only that we every day behold more threatening symptoms of conflict between the ruling powers and their subjects, between the State and society, between the various classes; but also the conflict of the existing powers among each other gradually reaching that height [*sic*] where the sword must be drawn and the *ultima ratio* of princes be recurred to.⁴⁶

Were such assertions not suggestive enough for the likes of Oertel and his fellow immigrants, a now-famous essay by Marx—first published in German in New York—issued a call to arms. “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon,” appearing in Weydemeyer's *Die Revolution* during the spring of 1852, reminded readers of the conditions that had led to revolts across Europe, in particular France, and assured them that the revolutionary impulse was still ablaze.⁴⁷ It also presented a vituperative indictment of Louis-Napoléon, a grandson of Napoléon Bonaparte, who had been elected president of the Second Republic following the 1848 February Revolution, and who, in 1851, seated himself as emperor, following the precedent of his famous ancestor. Marx took aim at this logic of historical repetition. In language rich with references to phantasmatic doubles—shadows, ghosts, hallucinations—he skewered Louis-Napoléon's power as performative charade. “Men make their own history,” he famously began,

but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations

weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle-cries, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.

If the 1848 revolutions inevitably revived political rituals from the past, then so did the presumptions of a would-be king, this “caricature of the old Napoleon,” who pretended to speak for the people.⁴⁸

Marx’s insights regarding the representational work of imitation culminated in a remark that itself conjured a deeply reiterative process: he imagined a scene of iconoclasm. When “the imperial mantle finally falls on the shoulders of Louis Bonaparte, the bronze statue of Napoleon will crash from the top of the Vendôme Column,” Marx declared.⁴⁹ With a single sentence, Marx evoked a long history of monuments erected and destroyed at the Place Vendôme in Paris in the name of political succession. He also correctly forecast another round of destruction: in 1871, during the Commune, a new era of revolutionaries razed the column and its imperial sculpture.⁵⁰

Oertel, for his part, introduced a particular way of representing the King’s statue that would itself be reproduced and reified over the coming decades. In his retelling, as in later images, the monument does not come down. Wrapped in ropes, it balances in a state of suspended animation, never hitting the ground. It is worth underscoring that iconoclasm did not need to be represented in this way; many prints of royal statues deposed during the French Revolution show sculptures completely upended.⁵¹ By painting a statue that had yet to be overturned, then, Oertel evoked revolutions still to be realized, monarchs still to be pulled from their pedestals. In subsequent prints and reenactments, however, the presence of an unbroken king would signify differently.

“The Spirit of ’76”

Marx’s reflections on historical reenactment bear further consideration with regard to the return of George III in pictorial and sculptural form, for in 1859 John C. McRae executed a large engraving of Oertel’s painting that helped to position the image as a story of American beginnings, not German revolution (fig. 41). Two other artists had completed pictures of Bowling Green during the intervening years: William W. Walcutt, who painted a swirl of human commotion around a statue that teeters against the calm of a blue sky, and an anonymous engraver for *Graham’s American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art,*



FIGURE 41 | John C. McRae after Johannes Adam Simon Oertel, *Pulling Down the Statue of George III, by the "Sons of Freedom," at the Bowling Green, City of New York, July 1776*, 1859. Engraving. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

and *Fashion*, who offered a close-up view of white assailants from various social classes swarming the pedestal (fig. 42).⁵² Unlike these images, however, McRae's print exercised a measurable influence on later representations of the statue's destruction. Scrubbed of connotations related to 1848, it introduced changes that further complicated the agency of nonwhite actors in the crowd.

It is unclear how Oertel's canvas found its way into McRae's hands, though it is possible they encountered each other through their mutual involvement with print publishers in Manhattan. During the 1850s, McRae completed several engravings that pictured interactions between British settlers and Native Americans; during the 1860s and 1870s, he turned to founding episodes of America and the life of George Washington.⁵³ McRae's interest in these subjects capitalized on the continuing representation of the American Revolution as a unifying force during the sectional crisis of the 1850s and the Civil War of the 1860s. One of the newest and most successful art journals—*The Crayon*, which began publication in 1857—had urged artists toward precisely this sort of nationalist fixation. Mary Louise Booth provided a further incentive to represent the American

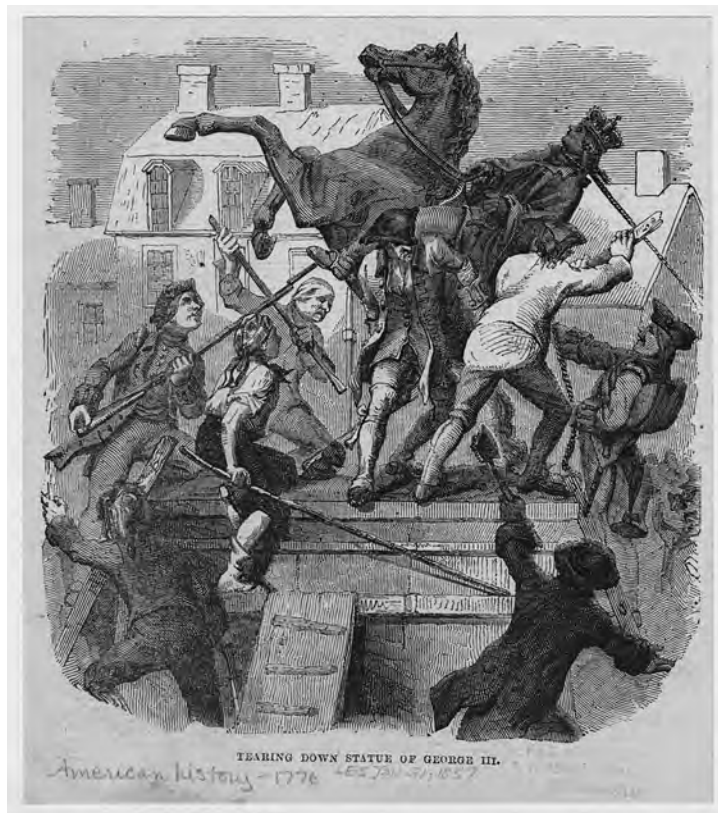


FIGURE 42 | *Tearing Down the Statue of George III*, from *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*, 1854, 562. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs: Print Collection, New York Public Library. Photo: New York Public Library.

past—specifically, New York’s—in her landmark history of the city, published the same year in which McRae issued his engraving after Oertel.⁵⁴

McRae remained largely faithful to Oertel’s composition—the dimensions of his large engraving even approach the size of Oertel’s modest canvas—but he introduced several changes that sharpened the drama.⁵⁵ The title alone signaled a narrative addition: *Pulling Down the Statue of George III, by the “Sons of Freedom,” at the Bowling Green, City of New York, July 1776*. The creative reference to the Sons of Liberty placed even greater focus on the crowd. Accordingly, McRae multiplied the number of people present at the scene, adding a cascade of figures scaling the pedestal. In the foreground, he leveled an iron railing to suggest the determination of the throng, and at right, he marshaled the chiaroscuro effects of engraving to highlight the group of well-dressed onlookers. McRae departed from precedent most obviously in the left foreground: the Native Americans have all but

disappeared, replaced by a new group of four individuals. McRae kept a version of the adult male figure but moved him backward into the crowd, where he became less discernible (the Native woman disappeared altogether). Likewise, the artist retained the pose of the boy but reoutfitted him in an approximation of colonial dress. McRae also filled out the form of a young man, hammer in hand, who is only partially visible in Oertel's painting, and he added the figure of a gentleman at the edge of the Green. In the space of the composition where Oertel's Native American family had prepared to leave the scene, this group rushes to join it, arms raised and tools in hand.

A promotional pamphlet for the print helped viewers make sense of this imagery. Printed by Joseph Laing—who had reissued McRae's engraving in 1875, no doubt sensing a market in the nationwide excitement that was building around the Centennial celebrations—the pamphlet bombastically celebrated iconoclasm as a patriotic necessity. The title page imagined the cries of the liberty boys: "We will be free! We will be free! Down with the statue! Down with the emblem of tyranny!" Inside, the text applauded the national consequence of New Yorkers' daring: "the spirit infused into the masses of the population by this act of democratic ardor and patriotism, may go far towards illustrating that characteristic of the Empire City, which has ever been so conspicuous in all movements for popular right and general advancement." Curiously, the writer endowed the King's statue with a certain degree of agency for its own destruction, describing a figure that "proudly pranc[ed] upon its steed . . . staggered the wavering, or overcame the doubtful, as they passed in their daily walks by Bowling Green."⁵⁶ He took greater pains, however, to credit the people responsible for bringing the monument down. An illustrated key labeled the major figures, including Peter Curtenius (an identification that squared with contemporary accounts) and Alexander Hamilton (which did not). It referred more generically to the Native American man as a "Mohegan Indian" and to the new gentleman as a "Knickerbocker." Notably, it named the tall figure as a blacksmith, Oliver Woodruff; the child as his son; and the young man as his assistant, Joseph Warner. The source of these identifications is not altogether clear. Blacksmiths had been among the New York workers leading the charge for labor reforms during the 1850s, and soldiers named Oliver Woodruff and Joseph Warner had served in the Revolution.⁵⁷

Elsewhere, however, the text intimates that these figures represent indigenous people. Referring to the left foreground, it praises "the enthusiastic populace, among whom are some natives in the country, aboriginal, cheering on the performance of the act."⁵⁸ This description invites a deeper reckoning with McRae's figural substitutions. From painting to print, Oertel's Native Americans have been reconfigured as laborers rather than wholly removed. Moreover, now they are eager participants in the statue's destruction, joining with white Americans in an imagined community. Possessed of names and determination, they seem to wield a political agency absent in Oertel's painting. Yet perhaps this

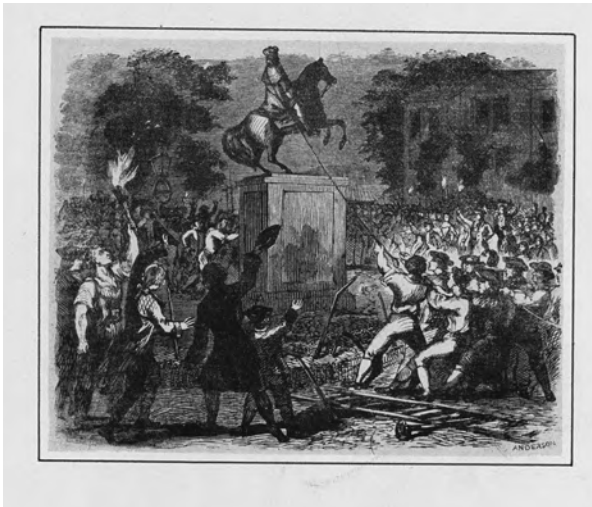


FIGURE 43 | Alexander Anderson, *Pulling Down the Statue of King George III*, after 1865. Wood engraving. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs: Print Collection, New York Public Library. Photo: New York Public Library.

agency is conceivable only when visual signs of indigeneity are restrained: after all, the text asserts a Native identity for these figures that the engraving merely glosses through its hint of darker skin and hair. Nor does McRae include indigenous costumes of the sort represented in Oertel. In fact, McRae has transferred the most obvious signs of Nativeness to the half-hidden man called the “Mohegan,” the figure with ceremonial headdress who stands in the background like a shadow, registering the very process of sublimation at work in the engraving.

Thus McRae not only celebrates iconoclasm as a founding moment of nationhood; through a series of figural displacements that conjure broader cultural vanishings, he delimits and normalizes it, like Oertel, as a history of and for Americans of European descent. In both the print and painting (and as rehearsed in many other history paintings of this era), the rise of a white democratic citizenry, signified by the group of men who occupy the plinth-like form in the background, requires the erasure of others. Black and Native American figures, when they appear at all in pictures of Bowling Green, occupy unstable positions or perform their own removal. In this regard, images of the statue’s destruction staged the forgetting of nonwhite Americans even as they posited the end of a royal America. Complicit in the images’ suppression of the material violence of iconoclasm—the injuries exacted on the surrogate body of the monarch—is an elision of the actual violence historically enacted on black and Native bodies.⁵⁹

McRae’s engraving, which as a print would have enjoyed a wider circulation than Oertel’s painting, exerted an important effect on representations of Bowling Green following the Civil War.⁶⁰ Alexander Anderson, a prolific wood engraver, clearly followed McRae’s example for an illustration published in 1884 to accompany an article about



FIGURE 44 | Samuel D. Ehrhart, "Our Uncrowned Kings," *Puck* 55, no. 1410 (1904). Photomechanical print. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-25829.

Revolutionary-era New York in *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, although he introduced some significant changes (fig. 43): his print omits all the women as well as the black and indigenous figures (Woodruff has become a brawny white laborer).⁶¹ Hence the statue's destruction—and the national polity that emerges in its stead—seems to be achieved wholly by a community of white men. Reaching a wide audience of magazine readers in the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction, the image offered an ideal of male brotherhood for a nation wrecked by sectional differences, imagining a halcyon time when Americans joined in common cause against a tyrannical enemy. To do so, it excises any distractions that could potentially expose the unrealized promises of the Revolution or recall the fact that many colonials equivocated about independence. In this picture, then, the King's statue is almost beside the point. It is the crowd that is important. Anderson looks backward in order to look forward, positing a way for white Northerners and Southerners to unite again in a homosocial imaginary.⁶²

Two decades later, another artist returned to McRae to make a point about class. In 1904 Samuel D. Ehrhart, a frequent contributor to illustrated periodicals at the turn of the nineteenth century, published a colorful lithograph in *Puck* titled "Our Uncrowned Kings" (fig. 44). The satirical image arrays two rows of monumental statues representing

laborers, including a cook, a waiter, a coachman, and a janitor. Each statue strikes a pompous attitude and attracts deference from the upper sort, who bow at their servants' feet. The figure at the center commands an end to this idolatry. Holding aloft McRae's engraving, a cherubic figure—the eponymous Puck—points to the statue of George III. Below, a caption urges action: "Where is the spirit of '76? This is what your forefathers did to King George." The comment proposes a cheeky sort of iconoclasm, one designed to restore a familiar social order, not to engender a new one. Yet like Anderson's engraving, or the antebellum caricature of Santa Anna atop the fountain, it suggests the expansive uses of Bowling Green for later generations.

Lost in these prints is any hint of the class conflicts that Marx understood to animate the revolutionary efforts of the 1840s. Instead, through a process of pictorial adaptation and revision, the statue's destruction became a nonspecific sign of change, one that could be shaved of its historical particulars and repurposed to serve needs unconnected to the revolutions of 1776 and 1848. If Ehrhart's satire evokes the sentiments of Marx at all, it is in the words that frame the opening of the "Eighteenth Brumaire," when Marx, paraphrasing Hegel, writes that "the facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice . . . the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."⁶³

Centennials, Revivals, Englishness

What would Marx have made of the Colonial Revival, which introduced a new way of representing Bowling Green: namely, as a performative reenactment? Energized by the Centennial anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1876, the Colonial Revival generated a widespread appetite for reproductions of eighteenth-century British culture, from architectural forms to social customs. Driven by the interests of middle- and upper-class white Americans, it lasted through the 1930s, peaking at times of civic or national commemoration, including the centennial of Washington's presidential inauguration in 1889 and the bicentennial of his birth in 1932. Not coincidentally, this period also saw rapid escalations in immigration, industrialization, and urbanization, leading many scholars to interpret the Colonial Revival as an antimodern, reactionary defense of Anglo-American identities rather than as a merely nostalgic phenomenon.⁶⁴

Commemorations of the Centennial in 1876 renewed interest in the statue's destruction for a post-Civil War era. While celebrations took place nationally, the main event occurred in Philadelphia, where the Centennial International Exposition sprawled over hundreds of acres in Fairmont Park. Packed with buildings championing American industry and ingenuity, the Exposition also highlighted the material culture of the British colonies. Some exhibitors stressed the real thing, displaying collections of relics that

cultivated tangible connections to long-dead historical figures, but others represented the past through reproductions and reenactments. The New England states constructed pavilions that vaguely summoned the colonial period through a bricolage of architectural elements from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Philadelphia and at Centennial parties in other cities, women donned historical costumes to perform colonial baking, spinning, tea drinking, and rites of genteel sociability. No one destroyed any statues, but one reenactment bordered on the uncanny: a figure of Washington appeared to rise repeatedly from his coffin.⁶⁵ If this installation ghoulishly actualized the apotheosis imagery that had circulated since Washington's death, it was also an unsurprising product of a culture that had created a virtual "memory theater" of Washington over the course of the nineteenth century.⁶⁶

The Centennial did not invent colonial fantasy—antiquarians like Thomas Riley and John Fanning Watson had done their share to cultivate such desires during the antebellum decades—but it did help inaugurate a generational passion for English colonial life within a privileged sector of the American population. Scholars have referred to the progenitors of the Colonial Revival as the genteel or hereditary elite: wealthy, white Americans who identified themselves as guardians of historical culture. Allied into civic organizations, they sponsored the creation of museums, libraries, historical societies, and civic pageants, seeking to promote ideals of beauty, education, and, as one historian explains, "the vitality and picturesqueness of their own Anglo-American Protestant history and customs."⁶⁷ In New York, a sense of hereditary protectionism among the old money elite, coupled with an abiding interest in the city's past and contributions to national history, spurred local revival efforts. By the early 1890s, Manhattan counted several exclusive organizations for the descendants of English and Dutch settler families, including the Society of Colonial Dames and the Society of the Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York. The Dames commissioned new headquarters from one of the era's leading architects, requesting a precise imitation of the sort of dwelling that "belonged to affluent citizens before the Revolutionary War."⁶⁸ The Sons of the Revolution raised a new liberty pole at City Hall Park—a flagstaff capped with a gilded vane reading "LIBERTY"; nearby, they embedded a memorial stone in the pavement that remembered the five poles raised on the "ancient commons" while acknowledging the loss of life during the recent world war, honoring "all lovers of our country who have died that the liberty won on these shores might be the heritage of the world." Together with groups including the Genealogical Society (founded 1869), the Knickerbocker Club (1871), the Holland Society (1871), a local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (1891), and the Society of Iconophiles (1894), Colonial Revival societies spearheaded the preservation, documentation, and commemoration of city heritage. Their enthusiasm coincided with planning for several major centennials, including Washington's presidential inauguration (1889),

which included a public reenactment of the first oath of office and attracted more than one million spectators. More exclusive was a Centennial Ball, where descendants of the city's European founders led the opening dance.⁶⁹ *Harper's* had championed precisely such social and ethnic privilege six years earlier during the centennial celebration of Evacuation Day (1883). Acknowledging that New York had become "the largest Irish city in the world, and almost the largest German city," it nevertheless advised immigrants to "ponder the fact that, while British authority was happily expelled, the glorious British traditions of constitutional freedom remained, and are organized in new forms. It is the tradition of the English-speaking race that still dominates, as it has always controlled, our civilization."⁷⁰

Apparently, the time for subtlety had passed. The shameless boast of Anglo-American supremacy in *Harper's* offers a powerful reminder that histories are often written at the expense of the disempowered. Colonial Revivalists sought to protect a version of the nation's founding that idealized the contributions of Anglo-Americans above any other group—recent immigrants, people of color, the newly rich, the laboring poor. For such individuals, "British" was synonymous with the "English" upper class; the term designated a set of cultural associations instead of a political geography. Wielded in just such a way, it was meant to exclude those areas of the United Kingdom—Scotland, Ireland, and Wales—that decades of American nativism, anti-Catholicism, and fantasies of aristocratic gentility had constructed as different from England. The emergence of such beliefs was inseparable from—indeed, spurred by—the rapidly changing demographics of American life. A resurgence in Irish and German immigration occurred during the late nineteenth century; complemented by newcomers from China, Italy, and eastern Europe, in addition to nearly two hundred thousand African Americans migrating northward from the South, New York City grew ever more diverse in its population, workforce, languages, religions, and customs.⁷¹ Even as the Colonial Revival sought to remake the present in the image of a lost British culture, then, New York resembled its British past less and less.

The novelist Henry James surely spoke for like-minded members of his social class when, returning to Manhattan in 1904 after a long time abroad, he admired the city's "bigness and bravery and insolence" while voicing a sense of "dispossession." Visiting Ellis Island, James encountered "a drama that goes on, without a pause, day by day and year by year, this visible act of ingurgitation on the part of our body politic and social, and constituting really an appeal to amazement beyond that of any sword-swallowing or fire-swallowing of the circus." He struggled to find his compass among the "great swarming" of immigrant settlers in the Lower East Side, responding to what he called the "alien" presence in the city by longing for "the luxury of some such close and sweet and *whole* national consciousness as that of the Switzer and the Scot." In light of such comments,



FIGURE 45 | Heppenheimer & Maurer, *Pulling Down the Statue of King George III at Bowling Green, N.Y.*, 1876. Lithograph. Collection of the author.

James's praise for New York's "whiteness," its "charming note, the frankest of the signs you recognize and remember it by," seems especially charged.⁷² The writer was complimenting the bright buildings, which, he noted, had resisted the sort of grime that discolored industrial cities in Europe. Within a text that registers anxiety about immigration and national homogeneity, though, James's words read as desire for racial purity.

Such sentiments may also be discerned in the scenes of destruction at Bowling Green produced by artists during the Centennial era and the Colonial Revival decades. Consistently, the crowds in these pictures are double or triple the size of those represented by Oertel and McRae—gatherings evocative of the size of an expanding nation—and without exception, they are wholly composed of white figures. A lithograph produced by the New York printers Frederick Heppenheimer and Louis Maurer for a "Centennial Album" (1875) bears traces of McRae's setting, but now the mob is thick with gentlemen in their finery who scale the ladders and join the laborers tugging at the ropes (fig. 45). Here, iconoclasm is reimagined as a bourgeois revolution, mobilized and legitimized by the dominant social class. *Scribner's Monthly*—like *Leslie's*, a widely read periodical of the era—followed suit in 1876 with an elevated view that revealed a foreground busy with eager iconoclasts (fig. 46). Whereas the lithograph had pictured the statue portentously cracking off its base, however, the *Scribner's* illustration secures it back into place. Consuming the towering middle of the space, the statue projects a sense of majesty appropriate

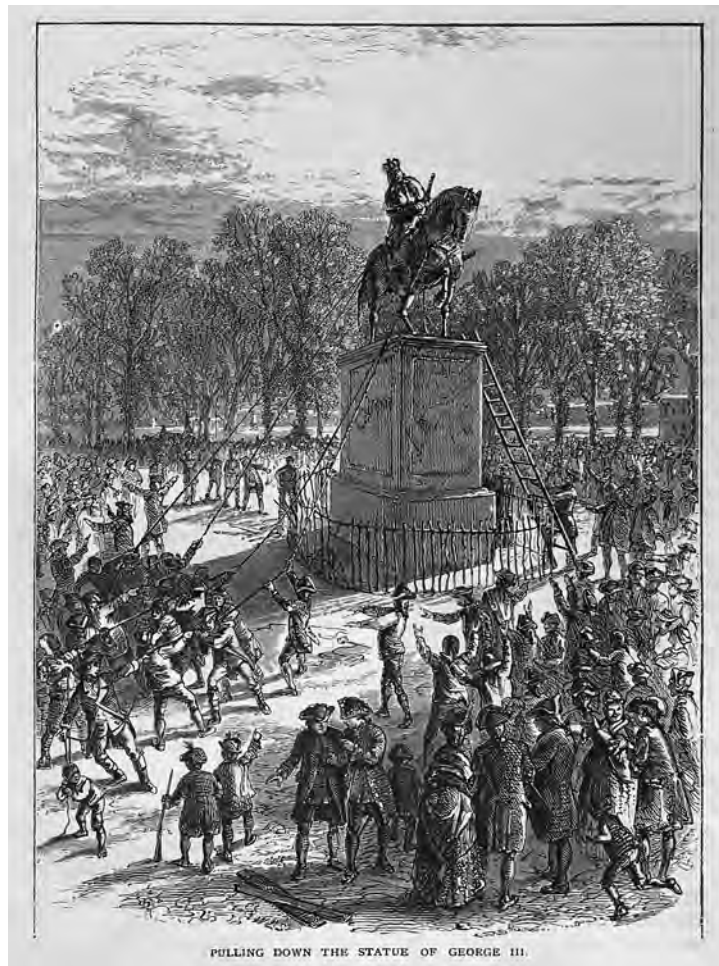


FIGURE 46 | “New York in the Revolution,” *Scribner’s Monthly*, January 1876. Courtesy of the University of Delaware Library.

to the figure it represents. The image cuts a noticeable contrast to another Revolutionary-era monument featured in the same article: a line drawing of the beheaded, armless Pitt. Whereas one monument remains a victim of iconoclasm, the other has returned, crown and all, to the public eye.⁷³ The King’s statue appears just as steadfast in a later *Scribner’s* publication—an illustration by Frederick Yohn that accompanied the serialization of *The Story of the Revolution* by Henry Cabot Lodge, a noted champion of Anglo-Saxon ideologies—though it fared less well in yet another *Scribner’s* imprint, a book on American history coauthored by the noted poet and abolitionist William Cullen Bryant (fig. 47). Unusually for nineteenth-century pictures of Bowling Green, “Taking Down the

FIGURE 47 | “Taking Down the King’s Statue,” in William Cullen Bryant and Sydney Howard Gay, *A Popular History of the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), 3:486. Courtesy of the University of Delaware Library.



King’s Statue” did not picture destruction in progress, but rather the gruesome aftermath, as bewigged gents and handsome laborers together convey the decapitated head to a cart that resembles the outlines of a coffin.⁷⁴

Despite their differences of medium and narrative, together these images suggest how a Colonial Revival elite had inserted itself into the story of Bowling Green, supplanting the common soldiers long credited with iconoclasm and, through the publishing and distribution networks of the illustrated press, expanded a local story to one of national significance. Moreover, the successful reproduction and circulation of imagery about Bowling Green worked to promulgate certain cultural histories of the Revolution above others; as JoAnne Mancini has observed, even as American illustrators gladly represented crowds assailing the body of the royal statue, they declined to revisit other gruesome

episodes of material violence, such as the tarring and feathering of British stamp collectors.⁷⁵ In the print culture of the Gilded Age, not all representations of the Revolution were created equal. Neither, apparently, were all iconoclasts. The anonymous white crowds in images of Bowling Green assumed a kind of visual priority at the expense of other, and potentially more incendiary, accounts of contemporary nineteenth-century iconoclasm: namely, the debasement and creative reuse of slaveholders' portraits by enslaved men and women in the Civil War-era South and the destruction wrought by American troops in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War (including the toppling of statues).⁷⁶

An anecdote published during the Centennial year suggests just how familiar and domesticated the act of destruction at Bowling Green had become. In Elsie Gorham's "Fourth of July at Hill Top," several youngsters reenact the Declaration of Independence. The matter of freedom succinctly decided, they turn to a gingerbread model of the equestrian statue and bash it to pieces:

And now out of the summer-house came tumbling pell-mell, John Hancock and Benjamin Franklin, Martha Washington and Thomas Jefferson, in wild haste to demolish with sticks and stones a gingerbread horse and rider that represented the statue of George III, which Tory pride had set up and which the sons of Freedom threw down when the Declaration of Independence was read in New York. The horse and his royal rider in crumbs, they all danced away together over meadow and knoll down by the brook-side, and on through the flickering woodlands, playing tag and hide-and-seek, till Aunt Isabel from the house porch rang them home to breakfast on strawberries and cream.⁷⁷

It is important that the actors in this pantomime are children. Gleeful with the creative anachronism of childhood play, they are at once the progeny and the custodians of a cultural imaginary in which iconoclasm now formed part of the national mythos. As readily as they declare their independence, they perform destruction.

The Hudson-Fulton Celebration

In miniature, Gorham's precocious iconoclasts anticipated the role play that adults soon began to enact—minus the cream and crumbs, and with downright serious purpose. The Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1909 introduced iconoclasm as material for civic performance: a float representing "The Destruction of the Statue of King George III" formed part of a historical parade that was intended to display New York's political evolution from

colony to state.⁷⁸ But neither the parade nor the float functioned exactly as promised. The float displayed a fully intact model of the monarch, and if it thereby gave sculptural form to the not-yet-fallen statues pictured by so many nineteenth-century artists, it also problematically returned the figure of a British ruler to the streets of New York. In a word, it achieved nondestruction. As such, it vividly underscored the stakes of iconoclasm as historical narrative. Reenactment was inseparable from revivalism around 1900, and it served to advance a very particular kind of national story, one authored by the leaders of patriotic societies and grounded in the values of the Colonial Revival. Only fifty years had passed since Oertel painted his picture, but already its generative context of German revolution and transatlantic immigration had yielded to new priorities.

The Hudson-Fulton Celebration was the biggest party that New York threw during an era of elaborate pageantry.⁷⁹ Its commissioners included some of the most prominent names in the city, among them Carnegie, Morgan, and Van Rensselaer. These august figures were joined by Joseph Hodges Choate, a lawyer and diplomat who helped found the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Oscar S. Straus, Theodore Roosevelt's secretary of commerce and labor; and Edward Hagaman Hall, a leader of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society.⁸⁰ Such men represented the city's political and economic power, and collectively their involvement served to demonstrate the historic consequence of the Celebration. The officers and promoters of the Hudson-Fulton sketched ambitions that lay squarely in the purview of the Colonial Revival. Gustav Kobbé, a prominent opera critic and son of a German diplomat, suggested that the event would benefit "New York's foreign-born population" as well as its "native population" (meaning Anglo New Yorkers), who tended to be too "concerned with the present rather than with the past."⁸¹ The Celebration commemorated three hundred years of city and state history, starting in 1609, when the English explorer Henry Hudson sailed up what was then called the North River, and marking 1809, when the American Robert Fulton navigated the same river in his brand-new invention, the steamboat. Appropriately, the festival commenced with a lavish naval parade on the Hudson River before moving onto land in New York City and Albany for two weeks of speeches, concerts, illuminations, galas, children's performances, carnivals, and a flyby in an aircraft piloted by Wilbur Wright. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, an exhibition of American "industrial arts" attracted three hundred thousand visitors and lay the groundwork for a permanent exhibition of decorative arts in the American Wing.⁸²

The daylong parade that occurred on September 28, 1909—a grand production of historical memory, and a prime example of Pierre Nora's *lieu de mémoire*—was the result of extensive preparation. Organizers hoped it would exert a unifying effect by including "as many as possible of the nationalities comprising the cosmopolitan population of the State, so as to make them feel that the heritage of the State's history belonged to them as

well as to those more distinctively American.”⁸³ The goal was Americanization, in keeping with Progressive-era mandates of acculturation. The procession stretched over a hundred blocks, meandering south from the Upper West Side to Washington Square Park. It had to be long, because it was meant to survey four substantial periods of settlement and growth: the “Indian,” the Dutch, the British, and the American. Precisely how to represent this history was a matter of considerable debate among the planning committees. They considered whether to hold a theatrical spectacle in a contained space, like a park, or whether to make it mobile, like a parade. The result of these debates was a compromise: a “Historical Parade” of “moving models and living tableaux,” featuring stationary scenes on mobile platforms.⁸⁴

New Yorkers used a rich visual lexicon to describe the floats and their objectives for the parade. The “moving models and living tableaux” were also called “scenes” and “pictures,” and they were intended to teach history through a process of “visual unfolding.” The sequential nature of the parade format lent itself to this notion of unfolding. In theory, parades were both temporally and spatially linear: floats followed a chronological presentation, and they moved in single column. Ideally, this linearity would impose a rational order on the past, making it visually legible for people gathered on sidewalks and in viewing stands. Promotional materials for the Celebration worked to secure this impression of historical clarity. Pamphlets assigned each float a name, description, and position within the parade. A souvenir program reprinted watercolor studies of the floats, offering matter-of-fact explanations of the imagery, and spectators could purchase postcards and illustrated vignettes (fig. 48).⁸⁵ Such ephemera ensured longevity for the Hudson-Fulton well after the event had concluded. As the program advised, “The objective of the parade is to bring before the minds of the onlookers a picture of the main events which can properly be shown in tableau, and to depict the spirit of the time. To derive lasting benefit from a historical standpoint, the scenes, while still fresh in the mind, should be studied in some history.”⁸⁶ The description of the floats as “living tableaux” referenced the great popularity of tableau vivant performances in the United States from the antebellum period through the early twentieth century. Such productions required the participation of numerous people in costume who together enacted roles from canonical works of art and historical events. Tableaux vivants deliberately conjured something recognizable from cultural history, so that audiences could appreciate the aesthetics of a familiar image seemingly brought to life.⁸⁷ Moreover, they were designed to be still. They operated according to a logic of immobility rather than action.

This helps to explain a few things about the Bowling Green float. All the texts that described the float narrate an act of iconoclasm. In all the extant images, however, nothing appears destroyed. Rather, the equestrian statue remains upright and unharmed. Photographs show a group of costumed men standing around an imagined version of the lost

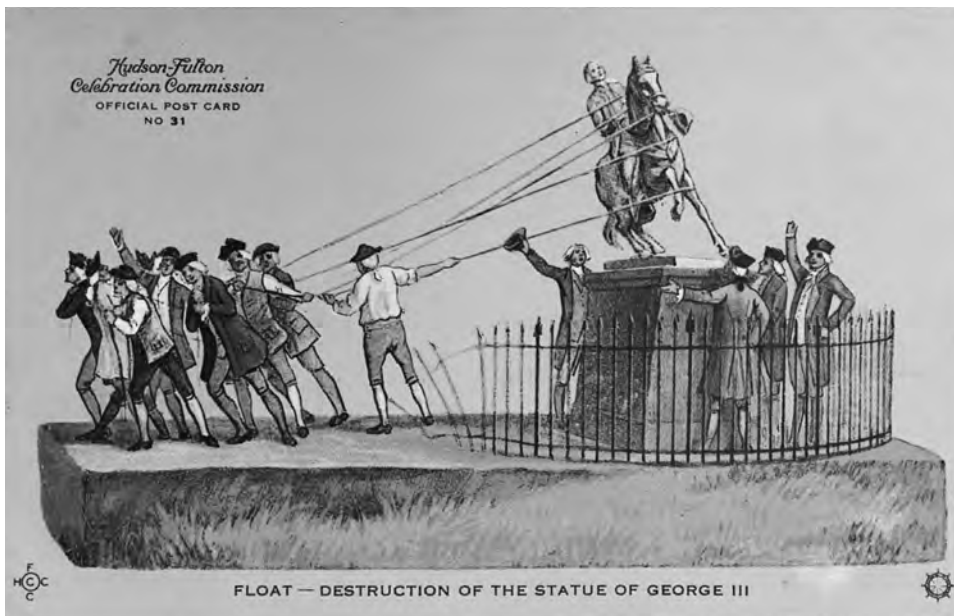


FIGURE 48 | “Float—Destruction of the Statue of George III,” commemorative postcard, 1909. Collection of the author.

original (fig. 49). Perhaps they were members of one of the prominent patriotic societies who staffed several of the floats.⁸⁸ A fence around the pedestal has been constructed to look trammled, recalling McRae’s engraving. Ropes encircle the body of the King and his horse, but no one seems especially eager to pull it down. Although it is hard to discern details in the photographs, many of the actors appear to face away from the statue, greeting the spectators.

By contrast, the postcard, and the watercolor study from which it was derived, show a statue leaning over and iconoclasts intent on their mission. Unlike the photographs, then, the latter images predict a destruction that has commenced but is not yet completed. This is precisely what appears in so many nineteenth-century prints and paintings of Bowling Green, and it is likely that the float’s designers availed themselves of such precedents. Perhaps they also looked to the practice of *tableaux vivants*. During the genre’s heyday, publishers circulated guidebooks and posters that illustrated scenes for performance. In one example, the destruction of the King’s statue features prominently.⁸⁹ As in the Hudson-Fulton pictures, a crowd surrounds the pedestal but has not yet demolished the monument.

One conclusion we can draw from this succession of images is that the Hudson-Fulton float, which posited but did not realize a statue’s destruction, was the culmination

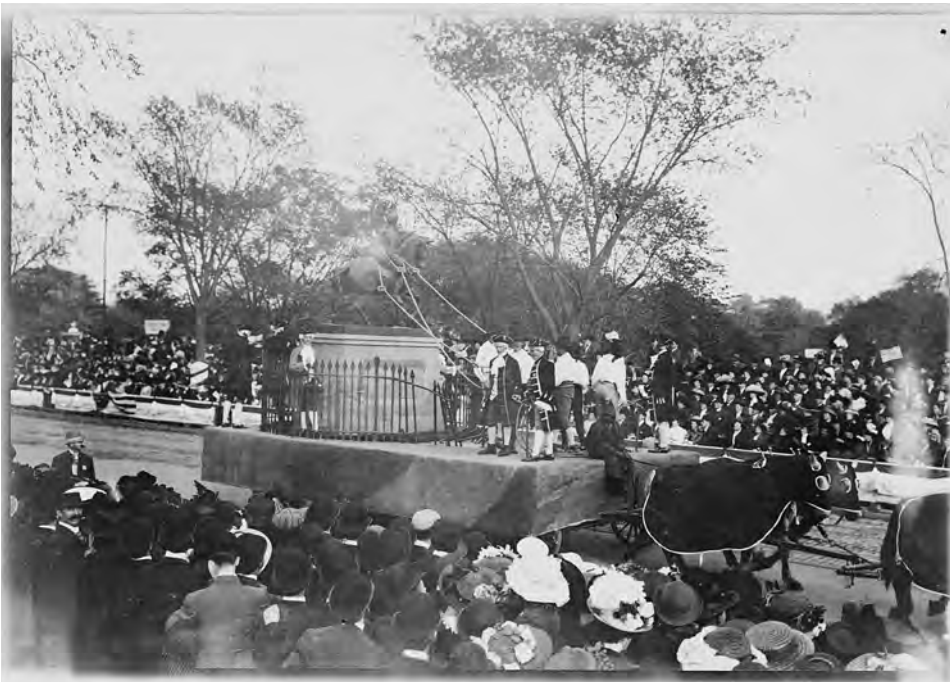


FIGURE 49 | “Destruction of the Statue of King George III,” photograph of float in the Hudson-Fulton Celebration, 1909. Collection of the Museum of the City of New York.

of nearly a century of visual representations about iconoclasm at Bowling Green.⁹⁰ This is one way of explaining how the reenactment of destruction operates; this particular performance of iconoclasm turned on a genealogy of depiction. The history it conveyed through the streets of New York was one of images: in other words, an art history.

Another way of understanding how this reenactment worked is to underscore the obvious: what the float delivered was not iconoclasm, but rather a failure to destruct. As a matter of practicality, of course, the model had to stay intact for the benefit of spectators along the length of the parade route. Maybe the costumed performers tore down the statue at the end of the parade and no photographer was nearby to snap a picture. But the fact remains that for the parade’s long duration, what audiences witnessed was neither iconoclasm nor its aftermath, but rather its prelude. Here the motionlessness of the tableau vivant is doubly meaningful: despite the promised destruction, the statue was still there. An icon of British authority remained insistently present on the streets of New York.

This awkward fact raised some representational conundrums for boosters of the Hudson-Fulton. At some level, they sensed that the promotional literature did not quite match the scenes on the floats, for they tried to deflect critiques by underscoring how



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First Float represents the Destruction of the Statue of George III, July 9th, 1776.
 Second Float represents Philipse Manor House in Yonkers erected in 1686.
 Historical Parade, September 28th, 1909, "Hudson-Fulton" Celebration, New York.

FIGURE 50 | Float representing the "Destruction of the Statue of George III," Empire P. & P. Co., commemorative postcard, 1909. Collection of Edward Levine.

difficult it was to achieve a convincing degree of mimesis. Kobbé, whose chronicle of the Celebration was otherwise largely sympathetic, suggested that such realism was achievable only on the stage of a theater, not in a pageant on wheels, and he belittled the floats as "ambulatory specimens of Coney Island sculpture."⁹¹

In retrospect, we may understand the disconnect between the parade's ambition and actuality as a problem of temporality. Instead of reprising the climactic moment of iconoclasm, the Bowling Green float imagined its prelude. Throughout the event, in fact, the parade confounded plans to depict historical time in a linear manner. Printed agendas for the event described a chronological sequence, so that the destruction of the statue in 1776 would follow an event of 1775 (namely "the exploit of Marinus Willet," a daring radical who seized firearms from British troops) and precede one of 1777 (publishing the state constitution).⁹² But this is not what happened. The floats got out of order. As one photograph demonstrates, a colonial house followed Bowling Green, when in fact it was scheduled to appear earlier (fig. 50). Some deemed the parade a failure as a result of such mistakes. "The student of history who might have depended upon [the floats] for instruction would have had his ideas of the early course of events on Manhattan sadly mixed," one critic complained. Even the banners announcing the titles of each float got mixed up.

Still, he allowed, “as most of us knew that . . . the reception to Lafayette occurred after the statue of George III was upset at Bowling Green, perhaps no lasting harm was done.”⁹³ Others found humor in the mix-ups. Tongue in cheek, Kobbé chronicled every problem of the lineup, quipping that that “the ‘Erie Canal’ and ‘Fulton Ferry’ were in line with ‘The Destruction of the Statue of George III’ and ‘The Capture at Stony Point’; while Washington took the oath of office as first President of the United States seven blocks ahead of Henry Hudson discovering the Hudson River.”⁹⁴

Such foibles proved embarrassing in 1909, but they are instructive in hindsight, for they illuminate how oddly space and time operate in reenactments of iconoclasm. What these writers suggest, to take their remarks more seriously than they were intended, is a confusion of time itself. As Rebecca Schneider has argued, reenactment carries a creatively interruptive power, for it never quite shakes the uncanniness that haunts the double. Like Joseph Roach’s corrupted surrogate, never fully capable of supplanting the original, the copy in reenactment betrays its own inadequacy. The parade of history gets out of sequence; the equestrian statue defies its own doom. In such instances, “time plays forward and backward and sideways across the imagined community of an otherwise spatialized national plot.”⁹⁵ In this regard, the statue’s nondestruction was not a mistake at all. Rather, its presence arguably gratified the aspirations—and absurdities—of a Colonial Revival that sought to return a semblance of all things British. After all, to display Englishness, a king was eminently useful. But to demonstrate Americanness, one had to displace him from view, or at least offer promises to that effect. For all the stillness of the floats, then, there was a much longer cultural motion at work in the parade.

The Hudson-Fulton did nothing to stop this process. In fact, it accelerated the pace of reiterative representations, even inspiring some New Yorkers to propose a new monument of George III for Bowling Green. The Daughters of the American Revolution quickly panned this idea, citing the “unpleasant incidents” that a new royal statue might incite. More appropriate, said one member, was a counter-monument: namely, “a replica in bronze of the group made for the Hudson-Fulton Celebration of the pulling down of the original statue.”⁹⁶ The novel suggestion would have produced a veritable *mise en abyme* of iconoclasm. While another respondent was more sympathetic, advising that there was “no reason why we should forget that this country was once a colony,” he observed that New Yorkers had “not done so much, as yet, fitly to honor our own heroes that we need to bother about putting back George and his horse in front of the Custom House.” He, too, preferred “a group representing the destruction of the King’s statue by the patriots.”⁹⁷

Neither proposal was realized, though around 1912 Charles MacKubin Lefferts responded to these debates with a watercolor drawing that projected what the royal statue might have looked like in 1776 (plate 9).⁹⁸ Spare and exacting, the image centers the monument within a space noticeably devoid of any people. It betrays no hint of the

statue's demise; indeed, it imagines that iconoclasm never happened, not unlike the vivid transparency that British loyalists raised in 1777 to celebrate the King's birthday. Even more curiously, Lefferts's drawing recalled a more recent addition to the urban landscape: Henry Kirke Brown's Washington monument. Lefferts depicted the King from the same flat angle, and at the same formidable height, that Washington commands in many prints of Union Square (fig. 37). This resemblance helps illuminate a further oddity in the Hudson-Fulton Celebration imagery. In the watercolor sketch for the Bowling Green float and the postcards reproduced after this study, George III holds a tricorne hat, not the British crown, thereby evoking nineteenth-century lithographs that show Washington politely greeting his legions of admirers.

Consciously or not, these artists reconstituted George III by way of a sculpture and pictures that themselves ghosted the lost equestrian statue. By the early twentieth century, then, George Washington and George III—at least in their equestrian guise, the form that for so many centuries connoted leadership and power—had been rolled into the same matrix of representation. No longer were they simply held in check against each other, with one arising and one falling, as was the case in earlier decades. Now they were inextricable signifiers of historical memory; like twins, one always bodied forth some part of the other.⁹⁹ National and local commemorations in the 1930s would bring this phenomenon to a crux.

Mimesis and Replication

Despite the protestations of New Yorkers who preferred to see a monument to iconoclasm raised at Bowling Green, George III kept coming back, dragging George Washington with him. Or perhaps it was the other way around. During national and state commemorations in the 1930s, including bicentennial celebrations of Washington's birthday, the statue of the King made several reappearances. Its resurrection marked the peak of the Colonial Revival in New York City as well as in Litchfield, Connecticut, a town that had staked its twentieth-century reputation on eighteenth-century life.

In 1932, following the worst economic depression the country had ever endured (though a decade of further entrenchment for the Colonial Revival), an attack on the equestrian statue featured as part of an evening's entertainment at a Manhattan society ball.¹⁰⁰ The occasion was an annual gala sponsored by the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects, an organization that supported the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, which trained artists and architects in the academic tradition. The location was among the city's ritziest: the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. The theme, "Old New York," honored George Washington's two hundredth birthday, an anniversary that was marked with festivities nationwide.

Like the Hudson-Fulton parade, the Beaux-Arts Ball was an impressive undertaking. The event remembered the same chronological periods, from Hudson's encounter with indigenous people to Dutch Manhattan, the Revolutionary War, and a concluding scene of national founding: Washington taking the oath of office. Ben Ali Haggin, who designed costumes for the Ziegfeld Follies, produced the four-act spectacle with the assistance of several women's patriotic groups. James Monroe Hewett, who taught mural painting at the Beaux-Arts Institute, supervised the construction of sets; Ted Husing, a broadcaster with CBS Radio, served as emcee, narrating scenes for the audience.¹⁰¹

The elaborate production required five hundred actors and attracted three thousand spectators, and in its costuming and casting it aimed for a degree of historical verity that surpassed anything the Hudson-Fulton had tried to achieve. Local department stores obliged by marketing "Belle of '76" costumes, and the society pages rewarded the best-dressed patrons with photo galleries and accounts of gowns that replicated originals worn by the likes of Martha Washington. As if this were not enough *vraisemblance* for one extravaganza, descendants of the city's founding families reenacted the colonial who's who, and two hundred troops from New York's National Guard regiment became Continental soldiers for the night. Kenneth Murchison, the chairman of the ball, represented George Washington in an outfit derived from the silk ensemble Washington wore to Federal Hall. Another participant, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, played his namesake, "Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, The First Patroon," in the most literal example of genealogical casting. Photographs of the costumed men sought to establish this authenticity by approximating the poses of sitters in colonial portraits. Unintentionally, though, the images indexed the material conventions of the modern photography studio—lighting, backdrop, focus—and in so doing betrayed the artifice that pervaded the whole enterprise of reenactment.¹⁰²

The destruction of the royal statue was the penultimate act of the pageant. Notably, it directly followed a scene that celebrated loyalty to George III: a toast to the king for the victory of the Seven Years' War (raised, incongruously, by Hewett in Ben Franklin guise). The iconoclasm scene reiterated a familiar presumption of causality, for it commenced with the Declaration of Independence at the Commons, tying destruction at Bowling Green to a matter of national consequence. The program described the reenactment melodramatically, cuing spectators on how to feel in response to a mobbing crowd. "The troops stationed in the lower city parade on the Common, and before them the entire civilian population, General Greene reads the Declaration. As he closes, bells ring out, cannon boom, and bonfires are lighted in every street. But this is not enough for the Sons of Liberty and their friends. The statue of George III still stands. With a rush, a frenzied mob surrounds it and soon brings it crashing to the ground among the huzzas of a throng drunken with their new patriotism." As the "excitement reaches its height," soldiers set off to battle British troops on Long Island.¹⁰³ A newspaper article was more

subdued (“The crowd gives itself over to patriotic hysteria, surges about the statue of George III and brings it crashing to the ground”), but its title was worth a million words: “City’s Birth Relived at Beaux-Arts Ball.”¹⁰⁴

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Here, as in so many other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century representations of the Revolutionary period, iconoclasm figured as a story of beginnings. The inclusion of George III’s statue as part of the spectacle—and its appearance as a prologue to Washington’s inauguration—vividly manifested the surrogative process that had been underway since the royal statue came down in 1776 and Congress proposed Washington as a substitute monument in 1783.¹⁰⁵ As Roach has observed, however, the most determined efforts of surrogation produce a visible excess, and indeed, the gala’s insistence on representational exactitude suggests an anxiety at the heart of their endeavor. “The costumes were true to the last detail,” gushed one reporter, “not a frill, puff or pannier was missing, nor were lacking any of the little accessories that were so important in that period.”¹⁰⁶ At the Beaux-Arts Ball, the descendants of Manhattan’s colonial elite anchored themselves to American history through a display that amounted to colonial minstrelsy.¹⁰⁷ There was no room for ambiguity in this performative reproduction. Nor was there a place for characters that might interrupt the construction of patriotic unity. To remember old New York in 1932, Murchison and his fellow reenactors had to forget the loyalists who populated the city in 1776 and claimed it as a sanctuary after British troops took Manhattan. Moreover, the exclusive emphasis on a cast derived from white colonial stock also meant that people of color played no part in this performance of nationhood.

This troubling dialectic of elision and precision also characterized a reenactment in Litchfield, Connecticut. In July 1935, a crowd of costumed townspeople gathered around huge cauldrons on the historic Wolcott property to melt down George III all over again. As in other reenactments, the organizers aspired to a high degree of imitation, reprising the people and events that famously produced the lead bullets used against the King’s troops. In important ways, however, Litchfield departed from precedent. Whereas earlier performances had only aped destruction, this one achieved it, and then some.

Connecticut historians had already begun to stake local claim to the story of the King’s statue. In 1926, for example, an illustrated map representing “The Commonwealth of Connecticut” used a vignette of the monument on its Bowling Green pedestal to signify Litchfield.¹⁰⁸ The town’s reenactment in the 1930s likewise formed part of a broader effort: the Connecticut Tercentenary, a months-long celebration of the state’s history. Imagine the Hudson-Fulton expanded across a broad geography and timeline: in small towns and the state capital, committees organized lectures, exhibitions, school programs, and publications. An experienced director of centennial festivals, Albert R. Rogers, came on board to oversee planning. In addition to urging that pageants “be going on somewhere in the state during all the summer season,” he sought to highlight “Old Time Customs”

(including, disconcertingly, stocks and whipping posts) and recommended parades honoring particular groups, such as “Old Families” and “All-Nations” (the latter “to show their contribution in the building of America”). Rogers demonstrated an inclusive approach to cultural history in a Hartford theater production he called *America’s Making in Connecticut*, a show designed “to depict and emphasize what the foreign born and their descendants, who make up the population of Connecticut, have done for the upbuilding of this state and nation.”¹⁰⁹

The Tercentenary committee in Litchfield had different objectives. The town was nationally renowned as a gem of Colonial Revival re-creation. Twenty years earlier, it had embarked on a comprehensive plan to remake its colonial landscape in a highly idealized version of gentry material culture.¹¹⁰ The Tercentenary occasioned more artifice. Through processions and pageants, Litchfielders could showcase the town’s aesthetic character while accentuating its contributions to state and national history. The local newspaper summoned all hands on deck: “As the most beautiful and one of the most historic towns in the state, Litchfield owes it to herself and the rest of the state to uphold the dignity, the tradition and the charm that has always been hers. It is an obligation that every citizen should feel to such an extent that he will make it active and not allow it to remain passive.”¹¹¹ People got busy. Over the course of a week in late July, Litchfield hosted a half dozen events, including an antiques exhibition and a tree-planting commemorating the state’s revered Charter Oak.¹¹²

The event that attracted the most press was a “pantomime portraying the melting-down of the pieces of the lead statue into bullets by the ladies of Litchfield.”¹¹³ Initially, things did not go as expected. Rain drenched an eager crowd of hundreds and forced rescheduling. Whereas critics had mocked such snafus at the Hudson-Fulton parade, Litchfield residents turned their situation into a parable of royal fortitude: “Tuesday afternoon George’s statue worked out its own salvation; from Jupiter it requested a storm to prevent its ‘melting down.’ The rains descended; George remained intact; gentlemen’s collars and ladies’ ruffles melted down. The angry Sons of Liberty called for Iris, but Jupiter would have no rainbow; thunderbolts leapt from his hand; George’s death sentence was postponed.”¹¹⁴ However humorously, the explanation credits a degree of agency to the monument, or rather to its mock remains. It was a short-lived resistance, though; the pageant resumed the next morning with the arrival of lead pieces on an oxcart, reprising Henry Chichester’s delivery of the fragments in 1776. Three dozen men, women, and children in colonial costume then proceeded to mix the pieces into the cauldrons. One observer emphasized that the reenactment “took place on the very spot where the incident occurred during the Revolutionary War,” as if spatial correspondence lent further legitimacy to the performance. Moreover, he added, “the bullet moulds used were copies of the original in the possession of the New York Historical Society”—the very same mold



FIGURE 51 | Reenactment of the melting of the statue of George III, Litchfield, Connecticut, July 1935. Connecticut Tercentenary Commission Papers. Courtesy of the Connecticut State Library.

that was attached to the memory of Peter Curtenius—"and the ladle was a replica of the original now in the Litchfield Historical Society." Speakers recited lines from historic documents, complementing the aura of authenticity, and musicians played Colonial Revival tunes.¹¹⁵ In another feat of parallelism, the Litchfield committee chairman wrapped up the pageant by reading a cable from the British mayor of Litchfield, England, that applauded the reenactment. The chairman himself admitted that "probably many were hurt by the bullets here made" but insisted that "time had healed the wounds thus inflicted, and today we look to England for help in preserving the peace of the world."¹¹⁶

This was at best a tepid admission of the violence that had leveled the equestrian statue at Bowling Green, brought the fragments to Connecticut, and produced the bullets to kill British soldiers. The chairman acknowledged no history of discord with Britain in the Revolutionary past; instead, he cited Litchfield's part in the war to affirm the strength of a common Anglo identity in the present. Photographs of the reenactment affirm this sense of congeniality. Women feature prominently in each image, reprising the roles

historically ascribed to Wolcott's wife and daughters. One photograph shows girls clasping hands, preparing to dance on the manicured lawn of the Wolcott homestead; another, ladies smiling as they wave ladles through the steam arising from a cauldron (fig. 51). Men and boys in these pictures assume a passive role that is altogether rare in representations of Revolutionary iconoclasm: they are bystanders. Only their grins introduce a note of disharmony, a mirth perversely at odds with the fact of deadly ammunition about to be served up from soup pots.

Whether there was in fact any molten lead in the cauldrons—a rather dangerous prospect for a cheery afternoon's performance—is another matter. Somehow, though, the event produced enough reproduction bullets to be sold as souvenirs. The originals had torn through bodies; the replicas went home in cradled hands. Sanitized and domesticated, iconoclasm had become commodified. Indeed, it became collectible: a number of the Tercentenary bullets, together with the mimic ladles, entered the collection of the Litchfield Historical Society, where they were documented with the same kind of care accorded to real fragments of the statue of George III at other repositories.

Does it matter that the actual fragments claim an indexical relationship to Bowling Green—and that the reproductions exist to commemorate a commemoration, as it were? We are a long way here from Bowling Green, from Pitt's pedestal on Wall Street, and from the London workshop out of which the statues emerged. Yet the remains of reenactment pose quandaries of their own. Are they relics, too? Are they any less historically resonant than the fragments of Wilton's statue or the ladle that stirred the lead back into liquid? Might they not be even *more* revealing of the representational processes through which iconoclasm became a national creation story—that is, through processes of visual depiction and performative reenactment?

One way to understand the peculiarity of these reproduction bullets is to consider an actual fragment: a small piece of the King's statue preserved an hour's drive from Litchfield at the Wilton Historical Society (fig. 29). It is a confusing object, for it seems to have doubled back on itself (the result, presumably, of years spent beneath layers of shifting earth); traces of gilding appear out of place, on the hollow interior of the form, instead of the exterior surface. Time, in effect, made a fold of the fragment. However accidental this process may have been, it beautifully prefigures the strange phenomenon of the Litchfield reenactment. "Any time-based art," Schneider has suggested, "encounters its most interesting aspect in the fold: the double, the second, the clone, the uncanny, the *againness* of (re)enactment."¹⁷ The bullets molded in 1935 were only ever replicas; inert and immobile, they could do no bodily harm. Yet because they point back toward the devastating consequences of the statue's destruction, they effectively summon the violence of iconoclasm that was evacuated from so many other reenactments of 1776. Even if they only glance the contours of this history, moreover, they return us to the sheer materiality of

iconoclasm: the gilded idol on its pedestal, the lead coveted by rebels, its transubstantiation into ammunition, its explosion through a gun. To put it in the punning terms that reiteration invites, they reveal what destruction boiled down to.

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Between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, visual and performative representations helped create an origin story out of Bowling Green. If this process began with a painting resonant with the radical strokes of contemporary European revolutions, it climaxed in a place determined to reenact its present in the conservative mold of an American past. As pictures reproduced ever more socially homogenous crowds, pageants and parades of Revolutionary iconoclasm dissembled a political distance from an English culture and King that elite Anglo-Americans never fully left behind. With few exceptions, every re-presentation of Bowling Green left the statue standing, visible, present. Performing destruction was having one's cake and eating it, too: a way to affirm American political independence and yet to reify a fantasy of English cultural identity.

The show went on. Artists continued to paint the occasional picture of Bowling Green after the 1930s.¹¹⁸ In 1976, the Bicentennial celebrations inspired another round of reenactments. At Bowling Green, a "symbolic beheading of George III" revisited the fate of the royal monument.¹¹⁹ In Wilton, the King lost his crown a second time. During an Independence Day parade, a float of George III and his horse rolled down the street to applause until it reached a low underpass at the Wilton High School. There the crowd "yelled 'Off with his head,'" according to a reporter, "and off with his head it was." Although some onlookers were understandably surprised, the decapitation was choreographed. The float's designers even won a prize for best in show.¹²⁰ With humorous fanfare, Wilton thereby reinscribed its place in a national history of the Revolution, not unlike Litchfield in 1935. To do so, of course, it had to overlook the fundamental irony of reprising an act of destruction that did not in fact occur in the town.

Origin stories, as the Wilton parade suggests, are elastic enough to bend to the needs of new generations. This is as true in the new millennium as it was in 1776, 1876, and 1976. Americans continue to conjure Bowling Green to commemorate the past in novel ways and with new media. Where parades and pageants summoned the attention of crowds in the early twentieth century, today digital technologies have assumed this function.

When the New-York Historical Society reopened its doors following a major renovation in 2011, it installed an enlarged, digital version of Oertel's painting in its foyer. For several years, it was one of the first things one saw upon entering the building. At a glance, it pinpointed an American origin for the city, skipping the "Indian," Dutch, and English periods that the Hudson-Fulton Celebration had been keen to highlight. Moreover, like so many nineteenth-century pictures of Bowling Green, it positioned New York within a national history of the Revolution. And whereas the nineteenth century imagined this

scene as a still life, the twenty-first century set it into motion. By moving in front of the screen, visitors triggered sensors that activated the image. A dog romped playfully on the grass, the statue crashed down, and the indigenous boy walked across the foreground. Fittingly, for a new millennium attentive to historically underrepresented groups, the digital animation recovered the visibility that the Native American child lost 150 years ago, when McRae omitted the figure and most of his family from his reproduction of Oertel's painting.

In 2017, the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia upped the ante of this digital reenactment. The museum's introductory gallery immerses visitors not in the story of the Boston Tea Party, nor Lexington and Concord, nor any of the other traditional starting points for histories of the Revolution. It presents Bowling Green. Across the walls of a semicircular room that envelops the viewer, a video projects a scene of Lower Manhattan complete with a statue that looks every bit the image of Lefferts's Colonial Revival watercolor drawing. A yelling crowd materializes and, in keeping with the museum's effort to present an inclusive story of the Revolution, women and people of color feature among those pulling and jeering at the gilded King. We seem to be right there with them, as if filling a gap in the crowd. The statue begins to fall toward us. The screen goes black. In a distant echo of the soundscape of 1776, we hear the thud but do not see the impact.

This is iconoclasm for a new century, an era raised on the realism of virtuality and moving images. Yet what these digital productions share—with one another and with the long history of representing iconoclastic violence—runs much deeper than the special effects. Not only do they map the spatial and temporal distance that this narrative of destruction has traveled in becoming an origin story—uptown from colonial Bowling Green to a museum on the Upper West Side, and beyond Manhattan to other cities in the United States—they also point toward a future of continued reenactments. For if you watch awhile, the videos culminate in destruction. But watch some more, and the statue goes back up on its pedestal, ready to glisten and tumble, all over again, and again, and again.

Where will it turn up next?