



DeWitt Clinton and Amos Eaton: Geology and Power in Early New York

David I. Spanagel

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David I. Spanagel explores the origins of American geology and the culture that helped give it rise, focusing on Amos Eaton, the educator and amateur scientist who founded the Rensselaer School, and on DeWitt Clinton, the masterful politician who led the movement for the Erie Canal. *DeWitt Clinton and Amos Eaton* shows how a cluster of assumptions about the peculiar landscape and entrepreneurial spirit of New York came to define the Empire State.

Spanagel sheds light on a particularly innovative and fruitful period of interplay among science, politics, art, and literature in American history. New Yorkers' romantic views of natural majesty and ideas about improving the land influenced scientific ideas and other features of contemporary culture. The life of Amos Eaton provides a lens through which readers gain fresh awareness of scientific knowledge, economic planning, and cultural values during the first half of the nineteenth century. Scientists of the time were fascinated by questions such as: How old is the earth? When did time begin? How might the passage of time have shaped and reshaped the original landscape?

In the United States, New Yorkers of the mid-1820s mounted the most concerted effort to find answers to these large questions of natural history. Both geographic conditions and historical forces led Amos Eaton and his wealthy patron Stephen Van Rensselaer to open the Rensselaer School at Troy, New York, in 1826. Eaton thus gave America its first generation of professional scientists, many of whom formed professional organizations and standards of practice still active today.

Deeply researched, this book will interest historians of nineteenth-century American arts and science, politics, and technological development.

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