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Anti-Urban Ideology  
as Reflected in Views on  
Sport, Exercise, and Health:  
*The American Farmer, 1819 - 1829*

by  
Jack W. Berryman  
University of Washington

The rural-urban conflict in ante-bellum America has received attention over the past years by scholars specializing in agricultural and urban history and it continues to be a most important topic for serious study. It is suggested that by focusing upon the *American Farmer* and the views expressed in it on sport, exercise, and health, we can acquire a more thorough understanding of the anti-urban ideologies as they existed. Additionally, by centering attention upon sport, exercise, and health, it becomes possible to delve into the

formative period of a long-lived rationale which identifies the inherent goodness of any sport which is conducted in the “open air” or in the “field.”

John Stuart Skinner, editor of the *American Farmer* from its inception in 1819 until its sale in 1829, typified the agricultural editor in his general preference for the country over the city. However, he realized the importance and necessity of an urban environment and suggested a mutual understanding between the farmer and the city dweller. Specifically, Skinner suggested the similarities between the ideals of the “yeoman farmer” and rural sports and encouraged participation in outdoor sports as an antidote for the negative aspects of residing and working in the confines of the city. The farm and rural life were associated with virtue whereas the city and the urban environment were linked to vice and moral corruption. Sport, exercise, and health, Skinner believed, were exceedingly important to the well being of every individual, but he stressed the positive qualities of “rural” sports over “city” sports. In addition, Skinner renounced town “pleasures” as “unmanly and enervating” in contrast to “rural” sports. Here, he encouraged young men to leave the “vicious haunts” of the city and adulated the country as the place “where blooming health exerts her gentle reign.”