In the spring of 1837, people panicked as financial and economic uncertainty spread within and between New York, New Orleans, and London. Although the period of panic would dramatically influence political, cultural, and social history, those who panicked sought to erase from history their experiences of one of America’s worst early financial crises. The Many Panics of 1837 reconstructs the period between March and May 1837 in order to make arguments about the national boundaries of history, the role of information in the economy, the personal and local nature of national and international events, the origins and dissemination of economic ideas, and most importantly, what actually happened in 1837. This riveting transatlantic cultural history, based on archival research on two continents, reveals how people transformed their experiences of financial crisis into the “Panic of 1837,” a single event that would serve as a turning point in American history and an early inspiration for business cycle theory.

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The Many Panics of 1837

People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis

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To

Michelle and Allan Lepler
It became evident that a dark cloud hung over the business atmosphere. Unexpected failures every day took place. Some attributed the thick-coming evils to the removal of the deposits, others to interrupted currency; some to overtrading, and some to extravagance. Whatever was the cause, the distress was real. Mr. Draper’s cotton became a drug in the market; manufactories stopped, or gave no dividends. Eastern lands lost their nominal value, and western towns became bankrupt. Ships stood in the harbor, with their sails unbent and masts dismantled. Day laborers looked aghast, not knowing where to earn food for their families. The whirlwind came; it made no distinction of persons. ‘It smote the four corners of the house,’ and the high-minded and the honorable fell indiscriminately with the rest. Well may it be asked, Whence came this desolation upon the community? No pestilence visited our land; it was not the plague; it was not the yellow fever, or cholera. Health was borne on every breeze; the earth yielded her produce, and Peace still dwelt among us.

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Abbreviations

ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

AAS American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA
BA The Baring Archive, London, United Kingdom
BBLOC Baring Brothers Papers [Microfilm], Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
BOEA The Bank of England Archive, London, United Kingdom
CBLARC Citizens’ Bank of Louisiana Records, Louisiana Banking collection, Mss. no. 539, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA
HNOC Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA
LOC Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LARC Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA
MCNYHS Manuscript Collections, New-York Historical Society, New York
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Abbreviations

NARA  Entry 117, Bankruptcy Records, Act of 1841, United States District Court for the Southern Federal District of New York, National Archives at New York City

NOCA  Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, New Orleans, LA

NONA  Clerk of Civil District Court, Notarial Archives Division, New Orleans, LA


RAL  The Rothschild Archive, London, United Kingdom

UNO  Historical Archives of the Supreme Court of Louisiana (Mss 106), Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA

PERIODICALS


NOTA  The True American (New Orleans)

NYH  New York Herald

PIC  Picayune (New Orleans)

NAMES OF FIRMS, BANKS, AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

BOE  Bank of England

BUS  Second Bank of the United States


NBER  National Bureau of Economic Research

NMRS  Nathan Mayer Rothschild & Sons