Chapter 3 studies Cooper’s early novel The Pioneers (1826). So familiarly analyzed by the myth and symbol critics as an account of the conflict between “nature and civilization,” and by environmental critics as a depiction of man’s inherent greed and wastefulness, it becomes something more nuanced and historical when viewed with questions of the commons in mind. From this angle, Cooper’s novel, set in the 1790s, appears less a simple, mythic account of “man’s” transition from the state of “nature” into “civilization,” and more a carefully historicized account of how people distributed access to shared goods and constructed vernacular systems of social order, “fair play,” or “the peace,” on the frontier. In particular, it details how local actors reacted to the imposition of a top-down and more systematized (“modern”) legal system, engineered through the combined force of state/federal government and private capital.